



# Clad in Eternity: An Osirian Linen Shroud of the Twenty-First Dynasty

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## ABSTRACT

The linen sheet SR 4/2373 = JE 46951 of the Chantress of Amun Tayuheret has its length decorated with a large image of Osiris in his form as king of the afterlife with his royal insignia. This type of sheet was widely used by the priests and priestesses of Amun during the Twenty-First Dynasty. The sheet, which is today on display in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, was found in 1881 in the Deir el Bahari Royal Cache TT 320, also known as DB 320. Similar to parallels of the same period, this sheet was used as the penultimate layer that was found wrapped around the mummy of the priestess who was likely a first degree relative -wife and/or sister- of a High Priest of Amun and who served a high position in the Khenrt/Khnrtwt, an important priestly institution of the said period. The current work is an original publication of this linen sheet.

## Introduction

Linen sheets similar to the one here studied were given different terminology from Osiris sheets to Osiris-Cloths. As such a linen sheet was used as a cover and had a picture of Osiris, we found that the term 'Osirian shroud' is befitting the object here discussed and we would therefore use it through our work. The shroud here studied has not been previously published and is studied here for the first time.

Similar shrouds of the same period were studied by Aly Abdalla, who published twelve specimens found in the Bab el Gusus tomb (Abdalla, 1988). In addition, other researchers worked on earlier linen shrouds that were decorated with funerary texts, and others worked on linen sheets of the same period or on the manufacture and the characteristics of Egyptian linen. (Caminos, 1970; Elsharnouby, 2014; Hallmann, 2015; Al-Gaoudi and Aly, 2021).

The researcher's initial aim was to publish other previously unpublished Osirian shrouds of the Twenty-First Dynasty that are kept in

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a storeroom in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. However, these were darkened by time and the accumulation of dust in the glass cases and were therefore not suitable for photography.<sup>2</sup> These were discovered in the Bab el Gusus tomb and hence belonged to lesser ranks of the priesthood of Amun. We here recommend restoration for these Osirian cloths to avoid further deterioration.

### **The owner of the shroud:**

The shroud here studied belongs to the Lady of the House Tayuheret, whose name means “She of heavens” (Kees, 1964, p. 47). Her burial assemblage was found at the Royal Cache in 1881 (PM I<sup>2</sup>, 664) and she is the owner of the coffin CGC 61032 = JE 26196, given coffin set number TG 914 on Aston list. On the coffin, which was dated to the early Twenty-First Dynasty (Niwiński, 1988, p. 62; Aston, 2009; p. 222; Stevens, 2018, p.114), Tayuheret carries the title Smayt n Imn-Ra nsw nTrw Chantress of Amun, King of the Gods (Daressy, 1909, p. 172-3). The coffin was usurped from the Chantress of Amun Hatet (Maspero, 1889, p. 578; Elliot Smith, 1912, p. 105; Aston, 2009; p. 222). No papyrus has been attributed to the lady whose shroud is here discussed (Aston, 2009; p. 114).

The family lineage of Tayuheret is rather ambiguous. Early researchers believed that she was the daughter of the priest of Amun Khonsumes and the Chantress of Amun Tentamun, (Elliot Smith, 1912, p. 105) likely confusing her with one of her namesakes whose papyrus is in Leiden Museum (Niwiński, 1989, p. 311). More modern researchers suggested that she was a daughter of Isetemkheb (A) (Naguib, 1990, pp. 134, 148-9) who is a wife of Pinedjem I, (Naguib, 1990, p. 134) in which case Tayuheret would also be

the daughter of the latter and consequently a sister of Masaharta (Naguib, 1990, p. 155, Table 3.3.4). It is also probable that she was a wife of Masaharta based on the similarity of their coffins (Gauthier, 1914, p. 262-3; PM I<sup>2</sup>, p. 664; Naguib, 1990, p. 148-9; Dodson, 2012, p. 53) in addition to being his sister. However, as there is no solid proof of this theory (Kitchen, 1973, p. 68; Niwiński, 1988, 44), the suggestion is often followed by a question mark (Gauthier, 1914, p. 262-3; Naguib, 1990, p. 155, Table 3.3.4). Kees believes that she was the wife of Masaharta because she held the title wrt xnrwt n Imn-Ra usually held by wives of the High Priest of Amun and because she was buried at the Royal Cache TT 320 (Kees, 1964, p. 47). Lack of evidence, along with the fact that there were four ladies with the name Tayuhere (Niwiński, 1988, p. 62, 107, 115, 136, 174)<sup>3</sup> amongst the priesthood of Amun-Re certainly contributed to the confusions. A lady of the same name Tayuheret is documented as the mother of the Chantress of Amun Ta-Wdjadt-Re on the latter’s papyrus (Niwiński, 1988, 46). However, it is not confirmed if the two ladies are one and the same person (Niwiński, 1988, p. 46).

In the light of the dating of the burial of the lady here discussed to the early Twenty-First Dynasty and to the location of the burial in the Royal Cache, Tayuheret was likely a close relative -wife, sister, or daughter- to a High Priest of Amun. We would therefore be inclined to the view that this High Priest is Masaharta with the likelihood that Tayuheret was his wife and sister. Brother-sister marriage was a common practice within the top level of the priesthood of Amun during the Twenty-First Dynasty to confirm legitimacy to the High Priest and to ensure a

<sup>2</sup> SR 7/23470 (1/14397), SR 7/23450 (1/14377), SR/7/23464 (1/14391), SR 7/23466 (1/14393).

<sup>3</sup> Coffin’ sets numbers 22, 64, 167, and 397.

future heir to the post through marriage to a priestess of 'royal blood' (Naguib, 1990, p. 134).

The fact remains that the burial of the lady is dated to the early Twenty-First dynasty, and that she enjoyed a rather high status judging by the fact that she was buried in the Royal Cache and that the face and hands on her coffin -now removed- were most likely once gilded (Maspero, 1889, p. 578; Dodson, A., 2012, p. 62).

### Description and commentary on the shroud:

The linen shroud SR 4/2373 = JE 46951, was first seen by Maspero on 29 June 1886, when he opened the double coffins containing the mummy of Tayuheret (Maspero, 1889, p. 578). The shroud was placed beneath the outermost layer of linen covering the body of the priestess. It measures 145 cm in length and 80 cm in width.<sup>4</sup> Due to the delicate condition of the linen, the museum management allowed us the photographing of the shroud in its place of display. (fig. 1)

The shroud is fixed to the back of the showcase with its left and lower edges tucked behind the lining of the case, (fig. 2) leaving only the upper and right edges visible. This reveals that the right and upper edges have selvage to prevent raveling of linen and that there are no fringes on the upper edge. It is likely that there are fringes on the lower edge as it is the case in other parallels, (Abdalla, 1988, 162) however, with the shroud's current fixed location, this remains a matter of speculation. Fixed in the top right corner of the shroud is found one of the six cords used to fasten the shroud around the mummy. (fig. 3) These usually came in three sets fixed to the right and left edges, with one set at the

top corners of the shroud, one in the middle, and the third at the bottom corners (Abdalla, 1988, 162). These six straps were used to fasten the shroud around the mummy (Ikram, and Dodson, 1998, 163). In the middle of the right edge, part of the material is torn in the location where another cord was once fixed. (fig. 4) Parallels of the shroud help us confirm the places of the six cords used in fastening the shroud around the mummy (Winlock, 1926, p. 28, fig. 33). The figure of Osiris and the accompanying text are written in red color.

### The text:



*Wsir nbt pr wrt hnrwt n 'Imn-R' nsw ntrw  
&zyw-hrt m3'-hrw*

Translation: the Osiris Lady of the House, the Chief of the Harem of Amun-Re King of the gods, Tayuheret, True of Voice.



*Wsir nb nhh hk3 dt ntr 3*

Translation: Osiris lord of eternity, the eternal ruler, the great god.

### Use and symbolism of mummy Linen:

The phase of wrapping the mummy was a crucial step in the embalming process as it carried a blend of practical and magical significance. Firstly, it protected the deceased body from outside harm, while also representing the hiding of the sacred 'image' which the body has become in a similar approach to hiding the sacred images of gods (Ikram, and Dodson, 1998, p. 153). This notion follows ancient Egyptian belief that the dead body is deified in its form as a

<sup>4</sup> According to the museum register as we were not allowed to examine the shroud closely.

mummy, and that wrapping was essential to maintain this divinity (Riggs, 2014, 87). Additionally, the use of wrappings emphasizes the notion of healing that is reflected by the use of the word *wt* for both bandages used in medical context when treating a wound, and mummification context for the mummy wrappings (Riggs, 2014, 94). In other words, the outcome of the mummy wrapping process is that the body is protected, healed, and divine, therefore illegible to be born anew.

It is of much significance therefore to note that the Osiris shrouds were made of new coarse thick sheets of linen (Ikram, and Dodson, 1998, p. 153, 162-3) especially woven for the burial (Winlock, 1926, p. 25), in contrast to other linen used in the embalming that was used in the life of the deceased and reused by his embalmers. This is revealed in some New Kingdom funerary texts (Erman, 1907, p. 137; Ikram, and Dodson, 1998, p. 153), and is noticed from the darning and mending that is occasionally found on mummy sheets indicating that they were old clothes or sheets that were reused for wrapping the mummy (Winlock, 1926, p. 25, fig. 29). The use of new cloth for this particular item in contrast to other reused linen therefore carried significant symbolism. With the deceased being assimilated to Osiris who was associated with resurrection, the deceased aspires to be born anew from his Nut within whose womb he is enfolded and resurrect in the world of eternity. Thus, the shroud enfolding the body gives more emphasis to the idea that the deceased, assimilated with Osiris, is enfolded within the womb of his mother Nut, with whom the coffin is identified (Raven, 2005, p. 51).

Inscribed royal and private linen shrouds that were used to cover the mummy wrappings appeared from the Seventeenth Dynasty (Caminos, 1970, pp. 117-121; Abdalla, 1988,

p. 162; Munro, 2010, 66) and more broadly during the Eighteenth Dynasty (Ikram, and Dodson, 1998, 153; Munro, 2010, 66-7). They sometimes contained extracts of the Book of the Dead and were exclusively found in uninscribed tombs, likely used as an alternative to avoid duplication of the texts (Niwiński, 1989, p. 29, 31; Munro, 2010, 66). The shroud of Thutmosis III follows the same rule even though the tomb was decorated, as the shroud was painted with extracts of the Book of the Dead and texts of the Litany of the Sun, while the tomb had representations of the Amduat and the figures of the Litany of the Sun (*Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 133533*,

<[Totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm133533](http://Totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm133533)> Accessed on 11/11/2021), thus avoiding repetition. The shrouds were thus considered as a supplementary surface for additional funerary texts (Niwiński, 1989, p. 31-2). However, we believe that even though these linen covers are different than the type here studied, they may have paved the way to the use of funerary inscriptions and depictions on the mummy linen sheets.

A prototype of our Osirian shrouds may be detected in small, inscribed pieces of linen that were placed above plain uninscribed linen shrouds covering the outside of coffins in some New Kingdom tombs, such as in the Deir el Medineh tomb of the workman Sennefer (Bruyère, 1929, p. 42-3, fig. 28, Pl. II-III). The found specimens were made in the size of a handkerchief of about 40 by 50 cm and were inscribed with the name and title of the deceased Osiris who is depicted seated in front of a table of offerings (Bruyère, 1927, p. 11-12, fig. 3; Bruyère, 1929, p. 43, 47-8, fig. 28, Pl. II-III).

During the Twenty-First Dynasty this type of a shroud was often decorated with an image of Osiris drawn in black or red with a text providing the name and titles of the deceased Osiris. Some shrouds contained the text

without the figure of Osiris (Abdalla, 1988, 160-1). This was the penultimate layer covering the mummy that was covered by another plain sheet of linen of finer quality, called *xrt kheret* by ancient Egyptians, as the outermost layer that covered the mummy which was encircled by a double band of linen (Winlock, 1926, p. 25; Abdalla, 1988, p. 162; Ikram, and Dodson, 1998, pp. 162-3; Riggs, 2014, 93).

The images of the standing Osiris on the linen shrouds recall the opening depictions of the adoration to Osiris on papyri, particularly those of the Twenty-First Dynasty where he is sometimes represented standing holding the *HqA*, *nxAxA*, and occasionally the *wAs* scepters in variation to earlier opening depictions where he was mostly represented throned (Naville, 1912, Pl. XI; Niwiński, 1989, Pls 3a, 11a, 32a, 43a, 17a; Quirke, 2013, p. 3.). As mentioned above, the relationship between the linen shroud and the Book of the Dead can be traced to the Seventeenth Dynasty.

Three types of decoration are found on the Osiris shrouds, standing Osiris with the atef crown, the deceased in front of Osiris, and a line of text with no image of Osiris (Abdalla, 1988, p. 157). The former two types were accompanied with texts. Our shroud belongs to the first of those three categories, a standing Osiris with an Atef crown holding the *ḥkꜣ* and *nhꜣḥꜣ* scepters.

The image of Osiris on the shroud represents the deceased identified with the divinity, turning him and the god into one entity (Winlock, 1926, p. 25; Abdalla, 1988, p. 163), an interesting identification considering that the deceased here represented is a woman. This practice has become customary during the Twenty-First Dynasty, when the priestesses of Amun played an important role in the cult of the god thus gaining special social status and independence that enabled

them to have their own funerary papyri unlike earlier priestesses who shared papyri with their husband. Of the significant factors that led to the independence of priestesses were the socio-political changes of the period that led to decreased security in Western Thebes (Niwiński, 1989, 34-8; Dodson, 2012, pp. 39-82; Payraudeau, 2020, 45-93), a change that forced the elite to abandon the custom of having a family tomb where the husband and his wife were buried and where the wife's funerary furniture was lesser in size than her husband's. These changes resulted in collective tombs for the priests of Amun where each individual has his or her limited burial space (Stevens, 2018, p.180-1). Subsequently, priestesses had their own funerary papyri and were represented in the form of Osiris and identified with the god on the Osirian papyrus sheaths (Enany, 2021) and on other funerary items such as on their mummy shroud. The spread of inscribing the image of the god on the shroud serves the circumstance of the period effectively. With the tombs lacking decorations, the inscribed shroud would substitute images of the god that were inscribed on the walls of earlier tombs.

### **The Title *ḥnrt*:**

The owner of the shroud holds the title *wrt ḥnrt n 'Imn-Rꜥ* on her shroud but not on her coffin as it was usurped from another priestess. The title *ḥnr(t)* is frequently translated as a concubine (Blackman, 1921, p. 15), or a woman of the Harem (Wb III, p. 297, p. 15). The term *ḥnr* refers to a place, a group, as well as a member of such a group. The term *pr-ḥnrt* was also used for the place and was translated as a 'place of seclusion', and its residents *ḥnrt* or *ḥnrtwt* as 'the secluded ones' (Raven, 2005, p. 8; Redford, 2012, p. 50). However, in recent years the translation of the term *ḥnrt* as a Harem and a

Harem member, has become a matter of debate regarding its significance.

The main reason for such debate, is that the translation Harem does not reflect the precise meaning of the word as it gives implications related to seclusion and isolation which was not the case in the Ancient Egyptian situation in comparison to the Turkish Harem (Onstine, 2005, p. 7; Roth, 2012, p. 2). In addition, the term Harem carries a sexual connotation that is not reflected in literary or iconographic sources related to the functions of a *hnrt* (Onstine, 2005, p. 7). On the contrary, evidence points out that the members of the *hnrt* were likely a blend of vocalists and dancers (Teeter, 1993, p. 76; Onstine, 2005, p. 8).


The term has been used since the Old Kingdom to designate groups of female and male dancers, singers, and musicians performing in a funerary and ritualistic context (Nord, 1981, 137-145; Teeter-Johnson, 2009, p. 42). Therefore, Del Nord suggested the term ‘musical performers’ for the Old Kingdom *hnr* to avoid the unjustified sexual meaning involved in the term ‘Harem’ (Nord, 1981, p. 145). Ward suggested ‘troupe of singers and dancers’, similarly avoiding the word ‘Harem’ as members of the troupe may well be male or female (Ward, 1981, p. 71). The term will continue to be used for similar groups of performers during the Middle Kingdom (Ward, 1981, p. 68).




During the New Kingdom, we notice the existence of two institutions, the royal *hnrt*, and the divine *hnrt*. while the former refers to the private apartments of the royal women that appeared due to foreign influence resulting from the imperial expansion (Ward, 1981, p. 68), the latter refers to the location, profession, and the individuals of the group of women called *hnrwt* who performed musical priestly functions for specific gods or

goddesses (Blackman, 1921, p. 15-6; Al-Ayedi, 2006, p. 265, 271; Onstine, 2005, p. 8). These musical functions included singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments (Müller, 1977, col. 815). The title here discussed belong to members of the divine *hnrt* to which the highest title held was that of *wrt hnrt* which was sometimes held by the top royal ladies such as queens Ahmos-Nefertari, Nefertari and Princess Bentanat daughter of Ramses II (Onstine, 2005, p. 7).

In spite of the more modern approach of translating the term as a musical performer (Nord, 1981, p. 145; Coulon, 2018, 321) and the term *hnr* as a musical troupe (Onstine, 2005, p. 7), or “sacred musical corps” (Naguib, 1990, p. 136) the misnomer still remains to be dominantly used for reasons of convenience. However, we will follow Onstine’s example and use the term “*hnr*” and Khener through our work to refer to this musical institution.

Up until the early Twenty-First Dynasty, the title *wrt hnrwt n 'Imn-R* was normally held by the wives of the High Priest of Amun (Kitchen, 1973, p. 431; Naguib, 1990, p. 136; Broekman, 2002, p. 14), and was sometimes combined with the epithets *hryt qr hryt špsyt* (Kitchen, 1973, p. 430). It is apparent that during the Twenty-First Dynasty, the Khener institution had some changes in its administrative structure with the introduction of higher ranks in *the hnrwt qf wr.t hnr.t tpt nt 'Imn (R nsw ntrw)* the Chief to the Principle of the First Harem of Amun (-Re king of the gods) (Kitchen, 1973, p. 430; Stevens, 2018, p. 176, 247, 251, 302; 348, 350).

As of the pontificate of Pinedjem I, the *hnrt* troupe of the priesthood of Amun-Re at Thebes was divided into four divisions, each carrying the name  *s3* (Teeter-Johnson,

2009, p. 26) and headed by a  *wrt* *hnrwt* who were supervised by two other levels in the hierarchy of priestesses,  *wrt* *hnrwt* *tpi* and  *hrjt* *wrwt* *hnrwt* *tpjt*, (Gauthier, 1931, p. 111; Müller, 1977, col. 815). The latter was usually a privilege to the wives of the high priests of Amun (Müller, 1977, col. 815; Naguib, 1990, p. 181). The division of the *hnrt* into four divisions was likely a result of the expansion in the size of the *hnrt* organization during the Twenty-First Dynasty to include a larger number of priestesses in comparison to the New Kingdom where we notice the absence of such divisions (Onstine, 2005, p. 7).

This hierarchy enables us to have a better understanding on the position of the owner of the shroud here studied who enjoyed a top management position only two steps away from the top of the ladder. However, although being of apparent high status that allowed her to be buried in the Royal Cache, she did not hold the highest rank of the *hnrwt* but held the title *wrt hnrwt*, indicating that she was head of one of the four divisions of the Khenert. Additionally, Tayuheret held the title *šmꜣyt n imn*, chantress of Amun on her coffin now in Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Niwiński, 1988, 115). This title was not necessarily held by all members of the *hnrt* but was frequently held by priestesses who were *wrt hnrt*, an indication that they were promoted in rank from being chantresses up the ladder (Onstine, 2005, p. 8). This might indicate that Tayuheret died before she reached the higher ranks of the Khenert. Her mummy had strands of white hair (Elliot Smith, 1912, p. 105), indicating that she was not a young woman at death. If she were the wife of the High Priest Masaharta who died without an

heir (Kitchen, 1973, p. 4), it is likely that her inability to produce an heir affected her promotion as it was suggested that providing the future heir for the pontiff was a significant factor when choosing the wife of the High Priest of Amun to be of 'royal blood' (Naguib, 1990, p. 134). It is also likely that her promotion was hindered by the relatively short pontificate of her husband that is believed by some scholars to be between three to ten years (Kitchen, 1973, p. 22, Dodson, 2012, p. 53; Dodson, 2012, p. 53; Payraudeau, 2020, 71).

### Concluding comment

The custom of adding inscriptions to mummy shrouds is traced back to the Seventeenth Dynasty. Extracts of texts continued to be written on mummy shrouds during the Eighteenth Dynasty. By the Ramesside Period, small linen sheets in the size of handkerchiefs were placed on the place of the chest over a larger shroud that covered the coffin. During the Twenty-First Dynasty, theses developed to be linen sheets inscribed with the image of Osiris and covering the mummy of male and female members of the priesthood of Amun Re.

The shroud here studied belongs to a member of the Khenret who served as the head of one of the four divisions of this musical troupe. The extended size of the Khenret of Amun Re during this period lead to changes in its hierarchy allowing for the creation of new titles. The title *wrt hnrwt* is thus used differently by the owner of our shroud than it was used in earlier dynasties when it was held by the top lady of the *hnrwt*. Tayuheret was rather a head of one of the four divisions of the institution, a post that must have its own glamour allowing her to have a burial in the Royal Cache of Deir el Bahri.

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## Figures

*Fig. 1 The Linen Shroud SR 4/2373 = JE 46951 on display*



Photo by Sameh Abdel-Mohsen EMC photographer

*Fig. 2 Left and lower edges of Shroud SR 4/2373 = JE 46951 tucked behind the lining of the case*



Photo by Sameh Abdel-Mohsen EMC photographer

Fig. 3 SR 4/2373 = JE 46951  
Cord of the top right corner

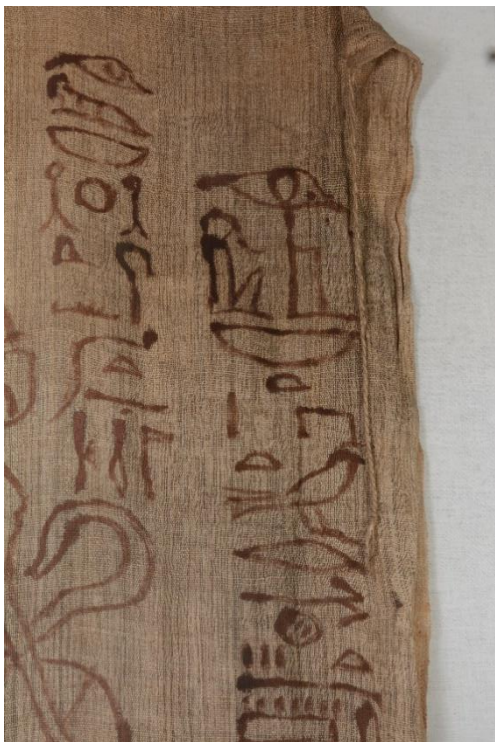


Photo by Sameh Abdel-Mohsen EMC photographer

Fig. 4 SR 4/2373 = JE 46951  
Torn material in location of missing cord



Photo by Sameh Abdel-Mohsen EMC photographer