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AN INSCRIBED CLOTH FROM A MUMMY

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An Inscribed Cloth from a Mummy

The Allard Pierson Museum at Amsterdam possesses (inv.no. 8130) an inscribed band from a mummy purchased at an auction in 1936 but still unpublished. The narrow strip (74 cm. long; 4 cm. broad) of rather coarse linen bears the following text which has been written with a thick brush:

Ψενθμεσιῶς νεώτερος Ὀσίριδι
 “Psenhmesios junior for(?) Osiris.”

Recently several inscribed bands from mummies have come to light (cf. PLBat. XIX, Leiden 1978, 131ff. and Appendix E; Archiv 26, 1978, 45ff.). Judging by the name¹ of the deceased also this band originates from the Panopolite nome from which nome a considerable number of mummy-labels originates. In all probability this text has to be dated to the IInd century A.D.

The only remarkable feature of this text is the mention of Osiris who is regarded as sovereign of the realm of the death (cf. Lex.d.Äg. IV, Wiesbaden 1982, Sp. 623ff.). He appears regularly on Greek funeral texts mostly in the formula δοίη σοι Ὀσίρις τὸ ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ (cf. G. Ronchi, Lexicon theonymon rerumque sacrarum et divinarum ad Aegyptum pertinentium IV, Milano 1976, 851ff. For some Greek versions of Egyptian prototypes, see J. Quaegebeur, PLBat. XIX pp. 251ff. Cf. also W. Burkert, Ancient Mystery Cults, Cambridge (Mass.) - London 1987, 25f.). The i-stem declension is for the name Ὀσίρις more often attested than oblique cases in -ιδ- (cf., e.g., Archiv 16, 1956, 108; SB VIII 10056. Cf. F.Th. Gignac, Grammar II, Milano 1981, 56f.). It is not absolutely clear which meaning the dative has in the present text.² It probably indicates that the deceased is/will be in the company of Osiris.

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¹ Psenhmesios = the son of Thmesios (= a goddess of birth). Cf. W.Spiegelberg, Ägyptische und griechische Eigennamen aus Mumienetiketten der römischen Kaiserzeit, Leipzig 1901, 53 s.n.. A. Ranke, Die ägyptischen Personennamen, Glückstadt 1935, does not mention this name. The name appears on the mummy-labels SB I 5434, 5450; V 7733 (= CEML nos. 1726, 1733, 1780) ἀπὸ Βομπῶν (cf. A. Calderini - S. Daris, Dizionario II.1, Milano 1973,54; Supplemento I, Milano 1988, 82); in PLBat. XIX 36,1 (a mummy-label from the Panopolite nome) and in P.Bour. 41a,9 which papyrus originates from Panopolis (cf. BL II.2, 36).

² It certainly cannot depend on an intended ὑπηρετεῖν, since if that verb appears in a religious formula on a mummy-label it is constructed with the accusative (= “jmd bedienen, jmdem an die Hand gehen”) and not with the dative (= “Dienste leisten, Arbeit verrichten für jmd”). Cf. J. Quaegebeur, loc. cit., 252f.