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Rosalind Hall

“The Cast-Off Garment of Yesterday”. Dresses Reversed in Life and Death [avec 2 planches].

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# «THE CAST-OFF GARMENT OF YESTERDAY» : DRESSES REVERSED IN LIFE AND DEATH

by

Rosalind HALL

*For J.*

A recent examination <sup>(1)</sup> of the fine pleated linen dress from Asyût now in the Louvre (E 12026) has revealed the previously unattested fact that this garment is preserved inside-out. The rolled skirt and sleeve hems are clearly visible on the present exterior of the garment. This unexpected phenomenon has led me to an examination of all the surviving dresses from the Old and Middle Kingdoms known to me (the present tally being twenty) <sup>(2)</sup>, with the results as listed in Table I. I have also noted some later dresses which are inside-out : for example, a Dynasty XXV dress, from Mond's 1924 excavations of the tomb of a chantress of Amûn at Sheikh 'Abd el-Qurna, now in Brussels (E. 6205) <sup>(3)</sup>, and a Coptic child's tunic now in Cambridge (Fitz. T. 27). It is evident that whilst the practice is by no means consistent, it occurs often enough to represent a deliberate as opposed to a random action on the part of the Ancient Egyptians.

A brief description of the Louvre dress may help to elucidate the reasons governing the practice of placing an inside-out garment in a funerary context. The dress (Pl. XXXVIII) forms the only salvageable example of « plusieurs » found in the coffin of an unsexed burial in Tomb 13 at Asyût, by the 1911 IFAO Expedition under the direction of Émile

<sup>(1)</sup> My grateful thanks are due to Dr. J.L. de Cenival, Conservateur en chef of the Musée du Louvre, Paris, who afforded every facility for my examination of the Asyût dress in May, 1984. He generously allowed me to remove a thread sample for fibre analysis, and supplied me with a photograph of the dress within twenty-four hours! His staff were equally accommodating with their time and assistance.

<sup>(2)</sup> Dr. Peter Lacovara and Ms Leslie Smith, respectively of the Egyptian and the Textile and Costume Departments of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, have generously provided the latest

information on newly discovered dresses in their museum. Dr. Lacovara found and registered the three « new » dresses and Ms Smith examined the hem turnings for me. I owe a debt to them both. Professor P. Munro has most kindly supplied me with photographs and information on the unpublished « dress » of *Nywtj* which he discovered in his Hannover/Berlin Expedition at Şaqqâra in 1982.

<sup>(3)</sup> I am grateful to Mr. Luc Limme and Mr. C. van Winkel of the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire for allowing me to examine this dress in September, 1984.

Chassinat <sup>(1)</sup>. There were a total of four anonymous burials in Tomb 13, and the funerary equipment took the form of a battle-axe, a wooden walking stick, and a fine wooden female figurine <sup>(2)</sup>. The axe is certainly of a type usually ascribed to the First Intermediate Period <sup>(3)</sup>, as are the accompanying red pottery bowls, the granite and diorite vases, and the alabaster vases found in the two wooden toilet boxes.

The dress comprises three pieces of material joined together by seams (see pattern layout on Fig. 1). The total length is 139 cm and the maximum width, when folded, is taken at the hem as 55 cm. The bodice is made from two equal-sized pieces of material, in total 167 cm long by 48 cm wide, formed to cover the chest and shoulders, and extending laterally into the sleeves which measure only 16 cm at the wrists.

The two sides of the bodice are juxtaposed in the centre to produce a V-shaped neckline at both front and back of the garment. These openings were fastened by means of strings of twisted flax which pass through the selvedge of the material as single strands. Each strand would then be doubled, and the two strands twisted together <sup>(4)</sup>. Only one string, of 14 cm, is preserved, which is to be found on the (original) front lower left side of the bodice. However, no detailed examination of the back of the dress was possible due to the present mounting of the garment for display purposes. The ornamental fringes, issuing from the selvedge at the (original) right side of the bodice and at the point of attachment to the skirt section, are now on the inside of the dress.

The lower section of the dress is made from a single piece of material 115 cm long by 110 cm wide, sewn along the two shorter sides, so that the seam was on the right (now left as reversed) side of the garment. The technique of an antique seam <sup>(5)</sup> is clearly visible here. The rolled hems at the wrists and skirt are secured by whipping stitches in coarse thread.

<sup>(1)</sup> Chassinat-Palanque, *Une Campagne de Fouilles dans la Nécropole d'Assiout*, p. 162-4, and pl. XXXIII. On display at the IFAO Centenary Exhibition in Paris, and illustrated in the accompanying catalogue: *Un siècle de fouilles françaises en Egypte 1880-1980*, Paris, 1981, p. 135, cat. No. 134.

<sup>(2)</sup> The battle-axe is now in the Cairo Museum (Unaccessioned), the walking stick and the figurine in the Louvre (E 11984 and E 12003 respectively). For illustrations of the axe and figurine: Chassinat-Palanque, *ibidem*, pl. XXXI and XXXII.

<sup>(3)</sup> Kühnert-Eggebrecht, *Die Axt als Waffe und Werkzeug im alten Ägypten*, p. 107 (Type E-F/2); tafel III, 8.

<sup>(4)</sup> Compare the well-preserved ties on the Gebelein dress: Hall, «A pleated dress from a Sixth Dynasty tomb at Gebelein now in the Museo Egizio, Turin», in *JEA* 70, 136-9; and pl. XXII, XXIII and fig. I.

<sup>(5)</sup> For sewing and darning techniques used on Egyptian textiles: Hall, «Stopfen und Nähen», in *LdÄ* VI, 66-7.

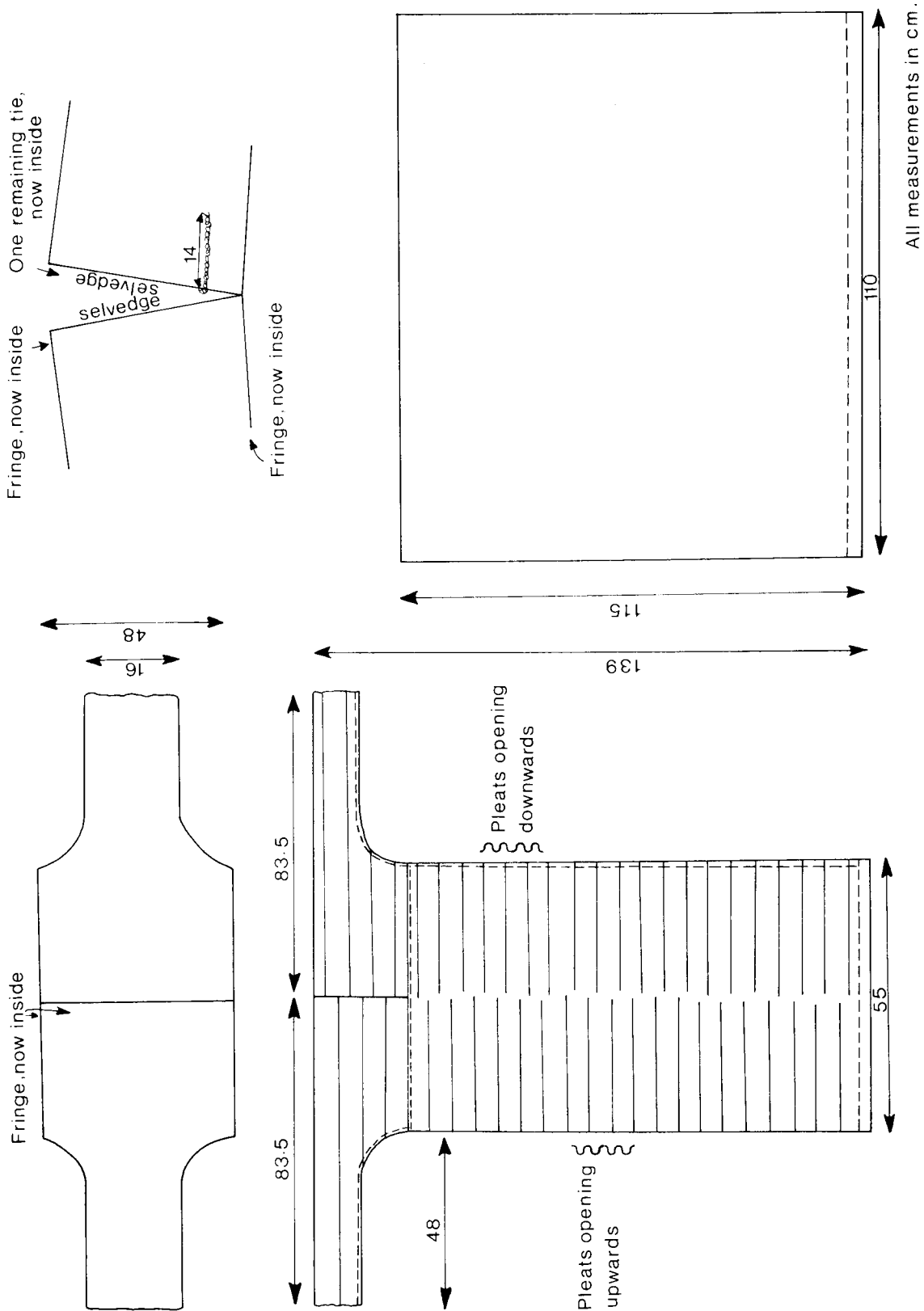


Fig. 1 : Pattern Layout of Asyut dress, Louvre E 12026.

The garment is pleated overall, although the pleating is now lost from the sleeves, with straight, regular accordion pleating, approximately 10 mm in width. It was obviously pleated horizontally after having been folded in four<sup>(1)</sup>, as the four panels have pleats opening alternately upwards and downwards. The disposition of the pleats in the bodice follows that in the skirt, and the pleats were stitched together at each side of the dress by a seam which was evidently sewn in after pleating the material.

The fabric is rather thickly woven and somewhat stiff, owing both to materials exuding from the corpse<sup>(2)</sup>, and also to chemical compounds used in the pleating process<sup>(3)</sup>. A thread sample from the dress was secured for fibre analysis, which was undertaken by the Department of Textile Industries at the University of Leeds<sup>(4)</sup>. Examination in the scanning electron microscope (see micrographs on Pl. XXXIX, A-B) indicated that the material was flax fibres, in a plain weave, and that these fibres were remarkably clean and well-preserved. The weft is much thicker than the warp, making for quicker weaving and better cover.

The dress dimensions suggest a made-to-measure garment, and together with the disappearance of pleating in the sleeves and the presence of possible perspiration staining under the armpits, the evidence is for a dress worn by the owner during life. The dimensions certainly indicate a male owner, a fact substantiated by the battle-axe and walking stick found as grave-goods.

Depictions of people wearing such garments on the monuments of the Old and Middle Kingdoms are extremely rare. But an example, albeit sleeveless, occurs in a cattle driving scene in the Tomb of Amenemhēt (No. 2) at Beni Ḥasan<sup>(5)</sup>. Examples of horizontally pleated long cloaks are slightly more common<sup>(6)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> A point noted by Mrs. Riefstahl on the Boston dresses : Riefstahl-Chapman, « A Note on Ancient Fashions », in *Boston Museum Bulletin* LXVIII, (1970), 247.

<sup>(2)</sup> For similar substances on the Deshasheh dress UC. 31183 : Hall-Barnett, « A Fifth Dynasty Funerary Dress in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology : its Discovery and Conservation », in *Textile History* 16, (1985), 5-22.

<sup>(3)</sup> Staehelin, *Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen Tracht im Alten Reich*, p. 14. For references to pleating techniques : Staehelin, « Plissee », in *LdÄ* IV, 1060-1.

<sup>(4)</sup> I am most grateful to Dr. M.C. Dobb who undertook this analysis for me in May, 1984. In addition to his report, he kindly provided me with a series of splendid micrographs, two of which are illustrated in this article.

<sup>(5)</sup> Main Chamber. North Wall. Newberry, *Beni Hasan I*, pl. XIII.

<sup>(6)</sup> Tomb of Dḥutiḥotp II (No. 2) at El Bersheh. Outer Chamber. Right hand wall. Newberry, *El Bersheh I*, pl. VII. Tomb of Ukh-ḥotp (CI) at Meir. Hall. Lower part of the North Wall. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir III*, pl. XXXV.

The very narrow wrists of the Asyût dress certainly indicate that the easiest manner to remove such a garment would simply be by pulling it up over the head, and then over the arms and hands in an inverted position when it was free. The laundering and storage of dresses inside-out was likewise a sensible habit. Washing and drying of garments was more likely to have been undertaken inside-out. The pleating would have been performed, probably by hand <sup>(1)</sup>, on the inside of the material, and the then still inverted garments stored in the linen chests.

Subsequently some of these dresses would have been transported to the tomb. Possibly the actual garment worn by the person at death (« yesterday » — see below) was also washed and transported, a practice occurring in Modern Egypt <sup>(2)</sup>. Garments in a funerary context may be worn and much darned, but they also invariably display regular folds as if taken from a box, and are newly laundered — « straight from the wash » — as Petrie noticed at Deshasheh <sup>(3)</sup>. This practice is attested in many contemporary primitive cultures <sup>(4)</sup>. In this connection it is of relevance that the Book of the Dead is always written on fresh rolls of papyrus.

Textual evidence for the use of worn garments in a funerary context is not abundant, but I may refer to two fairly clear texts. In Spell 61 of the Coffin Texts (de Buck, vol. I, 258) it is said of the dead : « You are dressed (*wnh·k*) in the pure garment of Ptah, in the cast-off garment (*sfh*) <sup>(5)</sup> of Ḥathor ». A second, more precise piece of evidence occurs in the Theban tomb of Neferḥōtep (Sh. 'Abd el-Qurna No. 50), from the reign of Ḥaremḥab. The lamentation for Neferḥōtep's widow <sup>(6)</sup> ends with the words : *t³ š³ p³kt mr wnhw sdr m sfh n sf*, « She <sup>(7)</sup> who was rich in fine linen, who loved clothes, lies in the cast-off garment of yesterday ».

It seems possible that in Ancient Egypt reversion of the personal property of the deceased took place as a mark of respect. This practice survived into Modern Egypt,

<sup>(1)</sup> Riefstahl, « An additional footnote on pleating in Ancient Egypt », in *Newsletter ARCE*, No. 92 (Winter, 1975), 28-9.

<sup>(2)</sup> W.S. Blackman, *The Fellāhin of Upper Egypt*, p. 111.

<sup>(3)</sup> Noted in his unpublished first-hand account of the discovery : W.M.F. Petrie, « MSS Journal », 28 December 1896-9 March 1897, p. 47-50, original in the Griffith Institute Oxford, copy in the Petrie Museum.

<sup>(4)</sup> Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of*

*Death*, p. 94; 108.

<sup>(5)</sup> Faulkner in his translation (Vol. I, p. 56) renders « in the robe of Ḥathor », neglecting the fundamental meaning of *sfh* as « to loosen, to remove, to lay aside ». (See *FCD*, 225).

<sup>(6)</sup> de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Nefer-ḥotep at Thebes*, pl. XXIV and LXI A. Translation on p. 41.

<sup>(7)</sup> Although the lamentation is directed to a woman, masculine and feminine forms alternate, proving that it was a well-known formula, its standard form being masculine.

Lane <sup>(1)</sup> mentioning the turning upside-down of furniture in an Arab house on the death of the owner. From Ancient Egypt I have noted that the saddle cloths from both the Tombs of Senenmut <sup>(2)</sup> (Sh. 'Abd el-Qurna No. 71) and Madjar <sup>(3)</sup> (Deir el-Medîneh No. 1370) were found upside-down. As the former was inverted on the actual horse-mummy, an analogy with the inverted boots on a charger at present-day military funerals is perhaps not wholly superfluous <sup>(4)</sup>. Similar burial customs can be cited from other civilizations <sup>(5)</sup> which all point to the idea of the dead as the antipodes of the living.

Unfortunately, there is at present no textual indication known to me that garments were put into the tomb inside-out. The Egyptian word for it is unknown. With much hesitation, I would refer to Pap. Westcar 10, 2, describing how the goddesses, who would soon act as midwives, came to Rawoser's house and found him «standing *d3iw shd*». The literal translation of *shd* (*WB* IV, 265, 8 ff.) as «upside-down» is, of course, unacceptable in this context <sup>(6)</sup>, as Staehelin <sup>(7)</sup> has recently argued. She suggested that the word here means «loosened» and refers to a widely occurring custom of making strings etc. loose when the moment of childbirth approached. Attractive as this explanation may be, particularly since it corresponds with the practice of sympathetic magic in so many societies, I fear that I fail to be convinced of its correctness. Firstly, there is no other proof that *shd* could mean «to loosen». Indeed one would rather expect to find a word like *sfh* for that concept. The determinative, a man upside-down (Sign A 29), does not point in any way in the direction of «to loosen». Secondly, it is hard to visualize how a man could stand (*'h'*), not sit, when the waistband of his kilt was loosened. It would simply fall down to his feet!

<sup>(1)</sup> Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* II, p. 271.

<sup>(2)</sup> Lansing and Hayes, «The Egyptian Expedition 1935-1936», in *BMAA*, II (January, 1937), 14, and fig. 15.

<sup>(3)</sup> Louvre E 14500. On display at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston's «Egypt's Golden Age» Exhibition, and illustrated in the accompanying catalogue: *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom. 1558-1085 B.C.*, Boston, 1982, p. 183-184, cat. No. 210.

<sup>(4)</sup> Compare the Military Funerals (e.g. Churchill's and Kennedy's) where officers and troops

march with swords and rifles reversed.

<sup>(5)</sup> J. Guiart (Ed.), *Les Hommes et la Mort. Rituels funéraires à travers le monde*, Paris 1979, fig. 3 on p. 58, p. 129; 290. R. Needham (Ed.), *Right and Left. Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, Chicago-London, 1973, p. 76; 77.

<sup>(6)</sup> As given in the translation by Lichteim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: a book of readings* I, p. 220. Faulkner, Wente, Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, follow Staehelin.

<sup>(7)</sup> Staehelin, «Bindung und Entbindung», in *ZÄS* 96, 125-39.

I would therefore, tentatively offer a different interpretation of *shd* in this passage : namely « reversed » (i.e. « inside-out »). Obviously such a concept could not be indicated in any other form in a determinative than a man upside-down. One may note here that Staehelin (p. 133) mentions, as the basic meaning of *shd*, « umgedreht sein », which could equally well mean « inside-out » as « upside-down ». Unfortunately, I am unable to bring forward any other instance where *shd* could mean « reversed ». Nor is it clear why Rawoser at the hour when his wife was to give birth would have been dressed as a corpse, although strong analogies exist between the customs at childbirths, weddings, and burials as representing « rites de passage »<sup>(1)</sup>. Hence, the suggestion must of necessity remain rather speculative.

Nevertheless, it appears not improbable that the words from Pap. Westcar contain a link between burial customs (garments inside-out) and the sympathetic magic applied to birth. At any rate it seems more than likely that the practice of placing recently washed and worn garments in the tomb inside-out was a — religious and practical — custom in Ancient Egypt.

<sup>(1)</sup> Samter, *Geburt, Hochzeit und Tod*, Leipzig-Berlin, 1911, passim.



B. Dresses — Right-side out

<i>Museum Inventory No.</i>	<i>Provenance</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Cairo JE 88144	Naga-ed-Dêr Tomb N 94 Adult female burial	VI	Laurent-Täckholm, <i>Faraos blomster</i> , Stockholm, 1951, p. 255.
Boston 34.56 a	↓	↓	Riefstahl, <i>Patterned Textiles in Pharaonic Egypt</i> , Brooklyn, 1944, p. 8, fig. 7.
Boston 34.56 c	↓	↓	—
Boston 34.56 d	↓	↓	—
Boston 13.3966 a	↓	↓	—
Cairo JE 88145	Naga-ed-Dêr Tomb N 110 Adult female burial	VI	—
Turin Inv. No. 14087	Gebelein Unnumbered tomb Unsexed burial	VI	Hall & Pedrini, <i>JEA</i> 70 (1984), 136-139, fig. 1 and pls. XXII, XXIII.

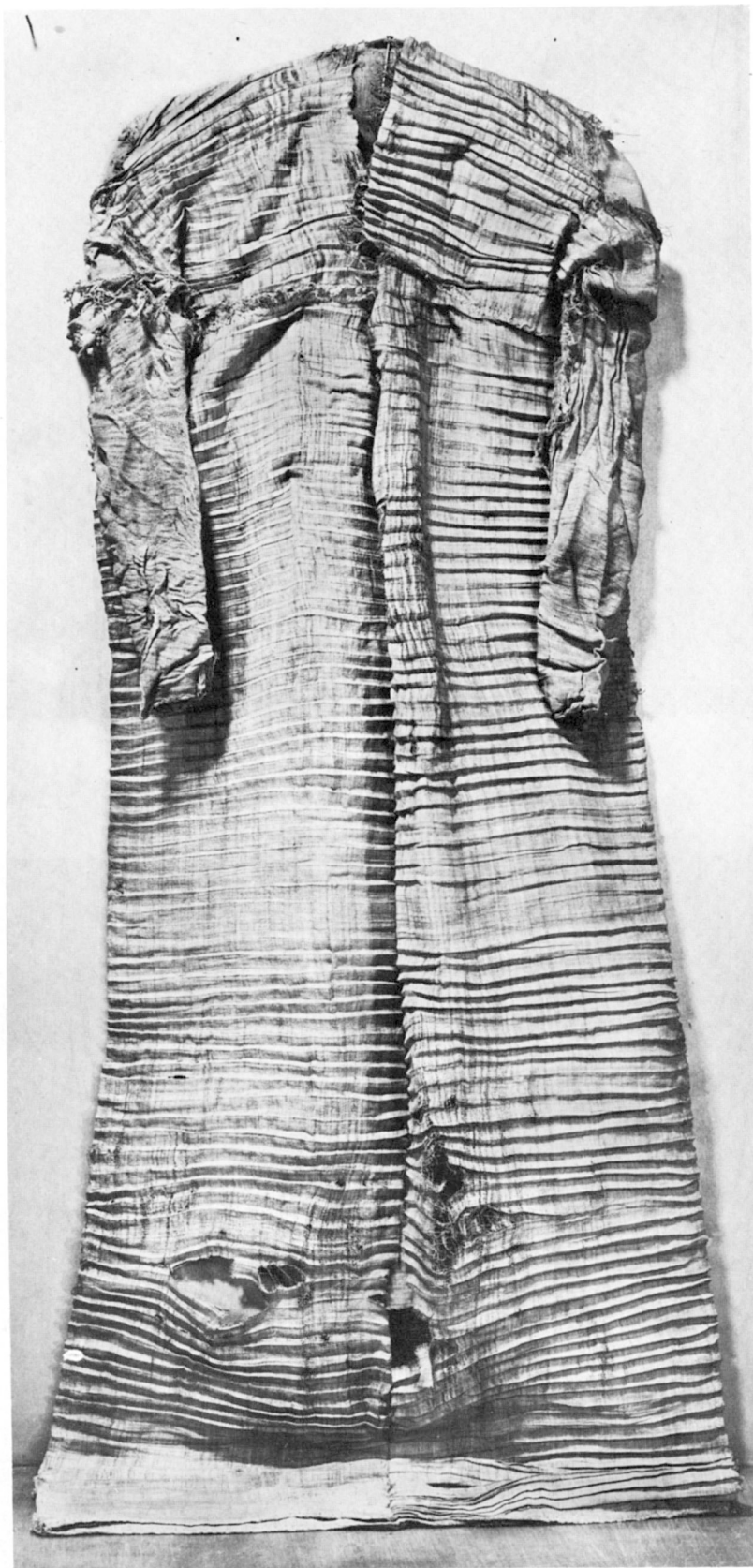
C. Unworn Dresses especially made for a Funerary Context and therefore right-side out

<i>Museum Inventory No.</i>	<i>Provenance</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Reference</i>
UC. 31182*	Deshasheh Tomb 148 b Adult female burial (with nine dresses)	V	Hall, <i>JEA</i> 67 (1981), p. 168-171, pls. XIX, XX
UC. 31183*	↓	↓	Hall & Barnett, <i>Textile History</i> 16 (1985) p. 5-22.
Boston 33.4-22 a +	Gîzeh Mastaba G2220B Adult female burial	V	Reisner, <i>A History of the Giza Necropolis I</i> , (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), p. 452-453, & pl. 42.
Şaqqâra Magazine +	Şaqqâra Tomb of Nywty Very young female burial	XI	Munro, <i>GM</i> 63 (1983), p. 102-3.

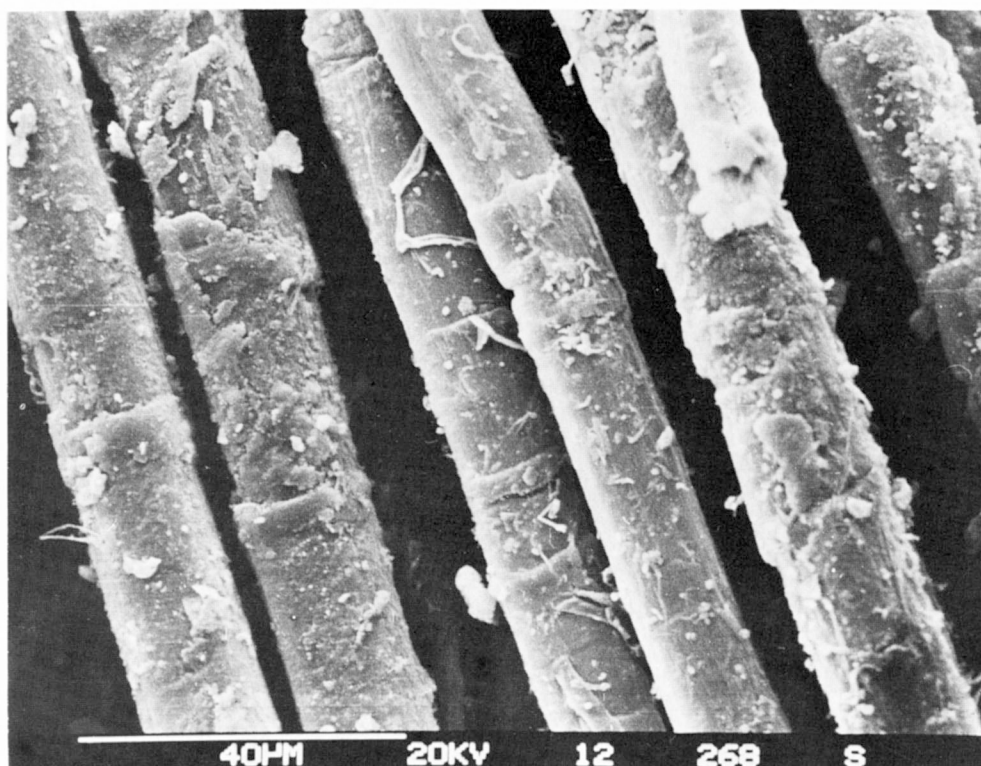
Dresses — hem turnings unconfirmed

<i>Museum Inventory No.</i>	<i>Provenance</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Cairo Unregistered	Meir Unnumbered plundered tomb Unsexed burial	XI	—

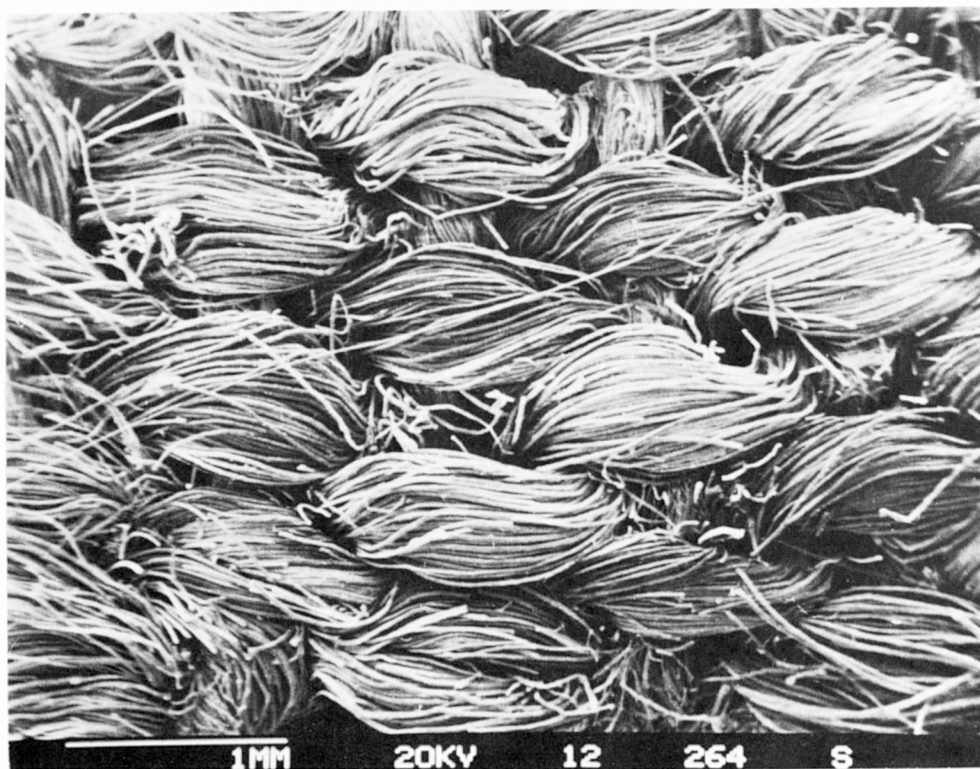
\* Complete dresses, but too long for wear in life.  
Half dresses — front portions only, laid directly on mummies.



Asyût dress, Louvre E 12026 (Courtesy The Musée du Louvre, Paris).



A



B

A-B. — Asyût dress, fibre examination in the scanning electron microscope  
(Courtesy The Department of Textile Industries, University of Leeds).