

She who Embraces

On our coffin, this mysterious demon is depicted guarding the door to the *tntt* mound. The door indicates that the scene takes place within a hall. In the *Book of Gates* the enclosed nature of the hall of judgement is indicated by kheker frieze and a portal (Manassa 2006, 136-137). The guardians by the kheker frieze in the *Book of Gates* are usually given snake forms (Manassa 2006, pls XV,XVIa), here we have a demon holding two knives. Although she appears frequently on coffins and papyri, and less frequently occurs in tombs from the 21st Dynasty, she is a figure of whom little is known.

Like the mound scenes, the figure of She who Embraces is a product of the 21st Dynasty (Seeber 1976, 67; van Voss 1992, 266). In the 21st Dynasty coffins amalgamated motifs from several sources, and She who Embraces is known from the *Book of the Dead*, the *Litany of Re* and the *Amduat*.



I describe her depiction as a guardian to the door of the *tntt* mound on our coffin. She holds a knife in each hand and wears a tight, patterned dress and a crocodile headdress. She is shown with the face of a lion. Two snakes appear from under her feet. In front of her is the Abydos fetish or, a bunch of onions! This object is discussed in more detail in the section on Osiris enthroned.

On our coffin she is named by the hieroglyphs to the left of her head. They are not, however, clear, though the signs for *ntr* (god) and *dw3t* (Underworld) are apparent. The hieroglyphs could possibly read *hnt dw3t* ('Mistress of the Underworld') or *ntr 3 dw3t* ('Great Mistress of the Underworld').

Elsewhere, she is usually called Hepet-hor (*hpt.t-hr*, 'Embracing of Horus'), for example, on the Greenfield Papyrus, British Museum EA 10554 (Budge 1912 pl.58). Swart (2008) states she is typically called 'Embracing of Osiris' and like Seeber (1976, 119-120) gives other examples. She is also known as 'the Lady of the West', 'The Eye of Re', etc. On the coffin of Nespawershefyt (E1.1822) in the Fitzwilliam she is called: *hnwt imnt.t irt R c hk3t b3wi nbt nrw m hrt-ntr š3t hprw hntit d3t wrt iwr r gs mh3t hrw sjp h c t3w* 'Mistress of the West, Eye of Re, Ruler of the Two Lands, Lady of Terrors in the God's Realm, Secret of Appearances, Foremost of the Underworld, Great One, Guardian next to the scales on the day of the weighing of the heart' (Budge 1893, 45-46; Seeber 1976, 119). On the papyrus of *P3-dj-Jmn* (Cairo) she is called 'She who embraces the Netherworld' (Rambova and Piankoff 1957, 104, footnote 2) and on Papyrus Cairo 40017 of *Nisj-t3-nb.t-t3.wj* she is called 'Selkit the Great, the Divine Mother' (Rambova and Piankoff 1957, 102). Englund (1974, 46) also gives references to her as Sekhmet and Dechty.

She may appear with a snake or crocodile and lion head, or all three. Like other guardians of doorways, this goddess often carries a knife in each hand, or on other

occasions, snakes (snakes and knives are closely connected in Egyptian mythology). On Papyrus Cairo 40014, the deity also wears the white crown (Seeber 1976, pl. 29). The solar aspects of this goddess are apparent, not only by her titles, but by the uraeus which she often wears. She also frequently appears associated with the Abydos fetish (see Osiris enthroned).

Deities protecting the gods are often female, but this one seems to have a more specific role. The deity is shown in scenes which can be regarded as components of the Judgement motif. On coffins such as ours she appears the scene of the resurrection of Osiris in the mound, the procession to Osiris and the weighing of the heart, which can all be considered part of a larger Judgement narrative. This mound also appears in the Judgement Hall, in the *Book of the Night* and more particularly in the *Book of Gates* and is associated with Ma'at (Manassa 2006, 116 and footnote 53, Manassa 2007 148-149, 460).

Embracing of Horus is most commonly depicted outside the door of the resurrection of Osiris from the mound, apparently protecting the god (Lull 2001, 185-186) e.g. 21st Dynasty tomb of *'nh.f-n-Jmnw* (Lull 2001, 182, fig.1), 21st Dynasty Greenfield Papyrus British Museum EA 10554 (Budge 1912 and Lull 2001 fig. 3), 22nd Dynasty tomb of Osorkon at Tanis (Montet, 1947, pl. xxiv; Lull 2001 fig. 2). She guards the mound on the 21st coffin of Khonsu-mes (Englund 1974, fig.4). She also shown guarding the approach to the judgement of Osiris and in doorways leading either to the judgement or to the weighing of the heart (Lisa Swart 2008 gives several examples).

More rarely, but not uncommonly, she is also depicted leading the deceased in the Judgement Hall (Seeber 1976, 119-120) or standing behind the deceased (e.g. MCCC 1991.1.17a-d the coffin of Lady Tahat in the Michael C Carlos Emory Museum). On coffin Basel III 129, a snake-headed goddess, presumably Hepet-hor, even appears checking the balances (Seeber 1976, 119, pl. 22). She also often appears in the procession to the throne of Osiris, sometimes in association with the Devourer (Swart 2008).

But protection in relation to judgement is not her only role. Lisa Swart (2008) also describes of two other types of scene in which she occurs. First there is one instance of her on a papyrus in the Opening if the Mouth Scene (in Bibliotheque Nationale pBN 170-173, and secondly in several *Litany of Re* manuscripts she appears as one of a series of mummiform deities (e.g. Niwiński 1989, 95; Swart gives further examples). In the *Litany of Re* manuscripts she is among other demons representing the amalgamation of the solar-Osirian (Swart 2008).

Van Voss (1992) also describes her in a scene from the *Amduat* in which she holds the sun-god aloft. Van Voss (1992) draws attention to this figure illustrated in the 11th hour in the *Amduat* Papyrus in the Nelson Atkin Museum of Art, Kansas City. It shows a mummiform figure on a snake being held aloft by a snake headed goddess. Van Voss interprets this as the sun god being carried by the goddess in her arms, giving a meaning to her name as 'She who carries Horus'. Swart (2008) describes a similar occurrence of her on a papyrus (Egyptian Museum pSVRVII 10238). Thus, as well representing Osirian rebirth as the successful outcome of the Judgement of Osiris, she is also closely related to solar rebirth. On the Cairo Coffin J.29662, the

solar rebirth aspect is more explicit in the mound scene (Niwiński 1987-88, 103, fig. 18) with the solar barque and wing Eye of Re/Horus being present, as well as Embracing of Horus.

Her presence in scenes of solar-Osirian amalgamation leading to the resultant birth of the sun-god, may plausibly be due to her feminine nature. While, male gods, were in Egyptian myth, able to reproduce, the presence of the female element was necessary for a successful outcome. The ‘embracing’ aspect of her name might allude to this. The theme of embracing iconographically shown by hands, in regard to solar rebirth is common in the 21st Dynasty. For example Cairo Coffin J. 29625 and Papyrus BM 10541 (Niwiński 1987-88, 96-99, figs. 6, 7, 11, 12) and Egypt Centre W648.

But what do the scenes of the mound and judgement, the Opening of the Mouth, the amalgamation of the solar-Osirian and the appearance in the 11th Hour have in common. They may all be seen as the final stages in rebirth. So the figure is connected with rebirth. There is also an obvious protective function, shown by the knives and guardianship of doors. Swart (2008) discusses the fact that this goddess is closely associated with other lion, vulture and crocodile headed deities, forming syncretic combinations. These include Mertseger, Sarit and Nekhbet, all goddesses with a protective function. In the Litany of Re papyrus of Mut-em-uia, there is even a male ‘Lord of Embraces’. The figure thus seems to provide protection during the critical moment of rebirth.

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