

Catalogue Entry

Item Title: Canopic Jar Lid

Reference Number: CCM 184.004

Location: Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery

Item Description:

This item is a lid to a Canopic Jar, found in Ancient Egyptian tombs and burials. This item would have been one of four jars, each storing a different internal organ of the body, which would have included the liver, lungs, intestines and stomach. The organs would have been wrapped in linen and then placed in the jar (Spencer, 1984). This is the human headed lid of the jar meaning it is a possible representation of Amsety, one of the four deities that protects the Canopic Jars, in particular the liver (Germer, 1997).

Brief History of the items and its evolution:

The Ancient Egyptians believed that after you die you go to an afterlife, where you will require the body in its complete form. The reason why they started embalming the body, however, is due to the fact that the Ancient Egyptians noted that decay originated from the soft organs, leading them to removing the organs altogether (Germer, 1997). The internal organs were at first disregarded, then placed in a Canopic chest, before being placed inside a Canopic jar. The jars tended to be placed in a Canopic chest as well as on their own. The jars were usually placed near the body or in a special alcove for them in the burial chamber (Germer, 1997) (Strudwick, 2016) (Taylor, 2001).

Canopic jars are first thought to have evolved from the plain vases Nemset, as this can be seen at first with the plain and flat lids (Germer, 1997) (Oakes & Gahlin, 2007). These jars started appearing in the Old Kingdom especially from the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties and are only used in Royal burials (Germer, 1997) (Strudwick, 2016, p. 30). It was only after the Sixth Dynasty, that the jars can be seen in the burials of lower status people (Spencer, 1984).

The Canopic jars evolved from being plain lids to human headed. This change occurred into the Twelfth Dynasty. This may have been done to represent the deceased on the jar (Spencer, 1984) (Taylor, 2001). It was only when we get to the New Kingdom, in particular the Eighteenth Dynasty, that the lids change to animal heads (Spencer, 1984) (Germer, 1997) (Taylor, 2001). After the New Kingdom, the animal shaped headed lids stay this way until the Canopic Jars' use die out. This includes when they started in the Third Intermediate Period where they started putting the viscera



back into the body and the Canopic jars were still found in the tomb for just ritualistic purposes (Trustees of the British Museum, 1994, p. 178) (Taylor, 2001) (Spencer, 1984).

Each of the Canopic Jars were assigned to a deity, in particular the 'Sons of Horus', this came about in the Middle Kingdom (Germer, 1997, p. 53). Each one of them looks after an internal organ. The Sons of Horus are further protected by four goddesses, this protection is in the form of magic i.e Heka (Germer, 1997, P.50-55).

Organ In Jar	Sons of Horus	The Goddesses that Provides protection to the Sons	The lid's head
Liver	Amseti	Isis	Human Head
Intestines	Qebhsenuf	Selkis	Falcon Head
Lungs	Hapy	Nephtys	Baboon
Jackal	Duamutef	Neith	Jackal

(Taylor, 2001) (Trustees of the British Museum, 1994) (Spencer, 1984) (Bard, 2008).

The four Sons of Horus are originally mentioned in the Pyramid texts, being originally called closely associated with the Pharaoh as they help him to ascend to the sky after death (Wilinson, 2003). This shows that they have a clear connection with the funerary beliefs of Ancient Egypt.

Material: Marl Pottery (Bourbiau, et al, 2006).

Condition of Item: The item is in fairly good condition with couple of cracks on the nose, and two on the headrest (one located at the bottom and the other on the left ear).

Dimensions of Item:

Circumference at the Bottom: 34.8 CM

Circumference at the top: 26.9 CM

Top to Bottom: 10.3 CM

Date of Item: Estimated Middle Kingdom or New Kingdom??

One reason why it could be New Kingdom is because of the material used. This is because pottery was mainly used later in Ancient Egyptian History and the fact that it's possible that the potter's wheel didn't come about until the later on in Egyptian History.

Another factor is that the lids didn't change to human heads until the Middle Kingdom and the lid could be representing the deceased. However, it also could be New Kingdom due to the fact this is when they change to animal heads and so this would be Amseti. This can be debated as later as beards tended not to appear in until later on in Egyptian history, and also due to the fact that it is largely debated if Amseti is a male or a female.

Brief History of the Object: The item originated from Egypt, it was then obtained by Major Harry Hartley Southey in Cairo when he in service. When he died it was passed onto his family who then donated the item to the museum.

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