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Canopic Jar with Lid

H: 43 cm, Diam.: 15 cm

Jar: Calcite Alabaster, Lid: Wood

Egypt

Circa 664-332 BC, 26th-30th Dynasty, Late Period

A canopic jar of tapering form carved from cream-coloured calcite alabaster, with a rounded rim leading to the wooden lid in the image of a jackal's head. The front of the jar is incised with a hieroglyphic inscription referring to the jackal-headed Duamutef, one of the four sons of Horus. The lid is painted and stuccoed with fine detail – the darker ruff on the jackal's neck is painted in blue-black, and the facial features of the thin canine eyes, nose and philtrum, are also picked out in polychrome.

Canopic jars were intended to hold the viscera of a mummified person, with each jar dedicated to a particular organ and inscribed with prayers to the gods for protection. The jars would have been kept in their own chest when placed in the tomb. The earliest canopic jars, with plain lids, date to the Old Kingdom (c. 2575–c. 2130 BC), with sculpted human heads introduced as lids during the Middle Kingdom (c. 1938–c. 1630 BC). From the 19th Dynasty until the end of the New Kingdom (1539–1075 BC), sets of canopic jars represented the four sons of the god Horus (jackal-headed Duamutef, falcon-headed Qebehsenuef, human-headed Imsety, and baboon-headed Hapy) and the four cardinal directions. Duamutef was the god who protected the stomach of the deceased. Duamutef translates to 'He who adores his mother', or 'adoring his motherland', as injuries to the torso and stomach were the most common cause of death in war. Duamutef was himself protected by the goddess Neith, and was aligned with the east. Three other canopic jar lids, representing the other three sons of Horus, from the Reinhold Holtermann collection are now in the collection of the Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm: Qebehsenuef, MME 1969:025; Imsety, MME 1969:020; and Hapi, MME 1969:025.

Literature:

Klassiska, Stockholms Auktionsverk, Stockholm, Spring 2020, lot 140