

Outer coffin of the priest Hornedjitef



From the burial of Hornedjitef at Thebes, Egypt
Early Ptolemaic Period, around 220 BC

A giant anthropoid (human-shaped) coffin

Hornedjitef was a priest in the Temple of Amun at Karnak during the reign of Ptolemy III (246-222 BC). His high status is reflected in his elaborate funerary equipment, which is typical of a high-ranking dignitary of Thebes in the third century BC. CT scans of the mummy show that Hornedjitef was a mature man at his death. His body showed signs of osteoarthritis and osteoporosis, indicating that he might have reached an advanced age.

The form and decoration of Hornedjitef's coffins are in keeping with traditional Egyptian practice. The massive outer coffin stands on a plinth. The reason for its huge size may have been to indicate Hornedjitef's wealth and high status, or to protect the burial from robbery.

The decoration is fairly simple, as was traditional with outer coffins. The surface is painted black, with details, such as the eyes and garland around the neck, picked out in yellow. Black was associated with Osiris, and was seen as a colour of regeneration and fertility. The decoration includes the figures of Isis and Nephthys, mourning over the deceased. The inscriptions are spells from the Book of the Dead.