

Outer Coffin of Gua **The British Museum**

From the tomb of Gua, Deir el-Bersha, Egypt
12th Dynasty, 1985-1795 BC

With maps showing the route to the underworld



During the Middle Kingdom (about 2040-1750 BC) the exterior of outer coffins was mainly decorated with hieroglyphic texts. The characters were incised and filled with coloured pigment. The lid of this coffin is inscribed with an address to Anubis, while on the sides there are addresses to Osiris, Isis and Nephthys, all gods who were associated with the dead. The vertical inscriptions that divide the coffin into panels guarantee the protection of Shu, Tefnut and other deities. A pair of eyes was placed on one side of the coffin so that Gua's mummy could see through to the rising sun.

The interior of the coffin is decorated on all its surfaces. There are several themes, including maps of the route to the Underworld, which are part of the *Book of Two Ways*. This book formed part of the *Coffin Texts*, that were intended to help the deceased reach the Afterlife. The *Coffin Texts* are also inscribed on the interior of the coffin, in columns of cursive hieroglyphic script. There are also representations of objects required for the Afterlife, including food and an offering list. These representations were believed to act magically in the place of real items. The offering list guaranteed that the food would be provided eternally.

J.H. Taylor, *Egyptian coffins* (Aylesbury, Shire Publications, 1989)

I. Shaw and P. Nicholson (eds.), *British Museum dictionary of A* (London, The British Museum Press, 1995)

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S. Quirke and A.J. Spencer, *The British Museum book of anc* (London, The British Museum Press, 1992)

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