

Funerary Chest of Irthorru **The British Museum**

Probably from Thebes, Egypt
Late Period, after 664 BC

The priest of Amun and necropolis singer



The canopic jars containing the embalmed internal organs were often placed inside a stone or wooden chest. This in turn was placed in the tomb close to the coffin or in a special niche in the burial chamber. During the Old and Middle Kingdoms, these chests were of simple cubic shape, with flat or vaulted lids. This custom changed at the beginning of the New Kingdom (about 1550 BC), after which canopic chests imitated the form of a shrine, with a cavetto cornice and a sloping roof.

This chest seems too small to accommodate canopic jars, so Irthorru's internal organs were probably simply wrapped in linen packages.

The four sides of the chest are decorated with scenes and inscriptions relating to rebirth and the protection of the dead. At the front is the *djed* pillar, symbolic of the god Osiris. Here the pillar is depicted in partly human form, with crown, human arms and hands grasping royal sceptres. The rear surface is occupied by a large *tit* sign, symbolic of the goddess Isis. In the accompanying text, Isis promises protection to the deceased. On each side are two of the four Sons of Horus, the deities most directly associated with the protection of the internal organs.

Source URL: http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/aes/f/funerary_chest_of_irthorru.aspx
Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/arth201>