

# Canopic Jars

The practice of removing the internal organs and placing them in separate containers first appeared in the Old Kingdom. By the end of the Fourth Dynasty, four jars roughly carved of limestone with slightly domed stone lids were used. These jars were also made in pottery and colored white to simulate limestone.

By the Middle Kingdom, the jars had human headed lids, intended to be idealized portraits of the deceased. This practice continued into the New Kingdom when the jars became associated with the deities known as the sons of Horus. Later in the New Kingdom, the jars were given sculpted heads and associated with the four sons of Horus: Imsety, with a human head who protected the liver; The baboon-headed Hapi, who guarded the lungs, Duamutef, the jackal headed, who was associated with the stomach and Quebeseneuf who oversaw the intestines.

In the Third Intermediate Period, the internal organs were mummified and wrapped and put back inside the body cavity with wax images of the four sons, but the tradition of jars continued and “dummy” or false Canopic jars with no internal space were carved of stone for inclusion in the burial. Fully functional Canopic jars returned at the end of the Third Intermediate Period and were used until the Roman Period.

The term “Canopic Jar” is a misnomer and comes from the confusion by early travelers who equated these jars with the classical myth of Canopus, the captain of the ship of Sparta during the Trojan War. He was said to have sailed into the Nile Delta and was bitten by a poison serpent. After his death, a monument was set up for him in the shape of a jar with a human head.

