

OSIRIS HYDREIOS

A JAR BRINGING HOPE FOR ETERNAL LIFE



In the vicinity of two sphinxes, a marble jar was found by the IEASM in Canopus. Unhallowed out, broken at the top, with very worn raised relief decorations on the body. Not far from there, the missing top of this jar was unearthed, in the shape of a male head wearing the nemes. Connecting the two parts made it possible to identify the iconographic type of ‘Osiris-Canopus’,

from its geographic origin, or ‘Osiris Hydreios’, from its attributions. These types could have appeared in the late 1st century BC, becoming particularly popular in the 2nd century AD.

Absence of the uraeus

The head, with its regular features, is in fact wearing the tripartite wig with the bands delimited by incision. At the top of the head, a round hole was used to attach an additional element; a slight lump under the chin may well be the remains of the false beard.



A notable feature is the absence of the uraeus, which is generally raised on the foreheads of these types of figures (Osiris–Canopus from Ras el-Soda, Greco-Roman Museum, Alexandria; Osiris–Canopus from the small Serapeum at Luxor; Osiris–Canopus in Amsterdam or in the Louvre).

Poor surface condition makes reading difficult

This Osiris–Canopus belongs to a known type, characterized by the decoration on the belly with a religious scene. Despite the poor condition of the surface, a comparison with the example from Ras el-Soda makes it possible to ‘read’ the scene in relief.

In the middle, a **winged scarab** holds up the solar disc flanked by two uraei. It is positioned on a reed boat, whose prow can just be seen to the right, made up of three bundles of reeds. Further to the right, at the same level, a **cynocephalus** (a monkey with an extremely elongated snout like a dog), with the solar disc on its head, is crouching on a plinth.

The rearing heads of the uraei support a **rectangular naos** enclosing, in the Ras el-Soda example, two cynocephali, crouching and facing each other. At the upper corners of the naos, **two falcons** are positioned facing each other. The usekh collar, generally hung around the neck of the god, cannot be seen here.

Nevertheless, the protuberance in the middle of the neck could correspond to a heart-shaped amulet, as in the examples at the Louvre and Leyden.

Childlike individuals

On either side of the naos, two pairs of **naked individuals** can be seen, their proportions childlike. To the left, the first individual is presented with the body facing out, including the shoulders, while the legs, arms and head are in profile, in accordance with the traditions of Pharaonic low relief. The very rounded depiction of the body is classical.

The child is depicted walking towards the naos, the right foot on the prow of the boat supporting the scarab. The child is touching his mouth with his left index finger. The facial features have been worn away, but at the back of the head one can clearly distinguish a thick '**sidelock of youth**', curling down onto the shoulder.

The identification of the first individual poses no problems – **Harpokrates** – but the second, perhaps slightly more svelte, figure presents no characteristic traits.



Depiction of goddess Isis?

To the right of the naos the scene, which has been considerably worn down, seems to develop in symmetry with the preceding one. The general scheme of composition is in perfect accord with that of the known images of Osiris–Canopus. This type of figuration in fact includes two identical effigies of Harpokrates on either side of the naos.

Behind the child god stood Isis on the right and Nephtys on the left (Osiris–Canopus from Ras el-Soda) or two figures of Isis (Osiris–Canopus in Amsterdam). On the sculpture from Canopus, there is nothing to indicate whether the two goddesses are depicted.

Object: Osiris hydreios. Marble. H. 37.3 cm. First to second century AD. Canopus. Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Museum of Antiquities (SCA 205)

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