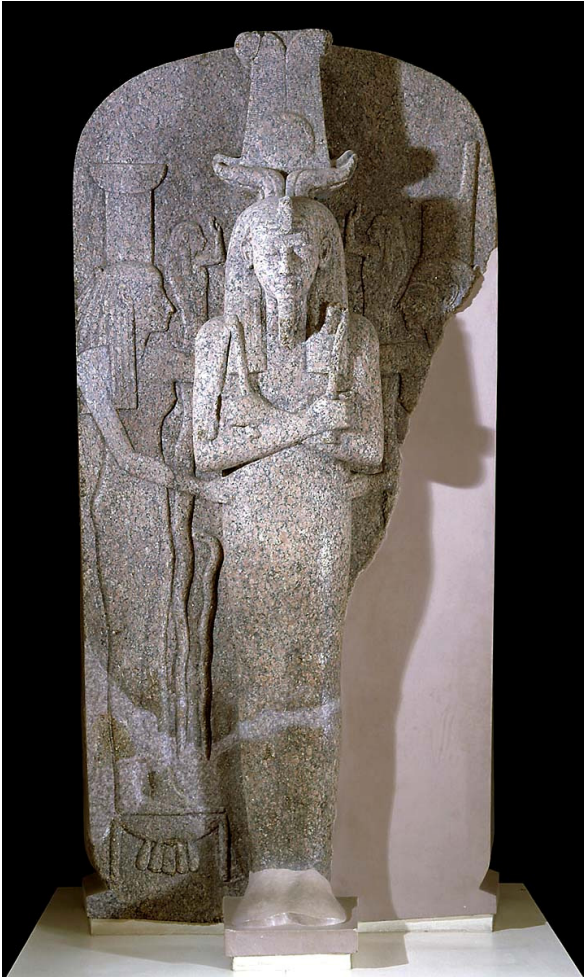


# THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

## EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

### Fact Sheet



**Coffin Lid of Ramesses III  
(Gallery 20) E.I.1823**

### The Ancient Egyptians Sarcophagus Lid of Ramesses III

This impressive object is the carved lid of the sarcophagus (outer coffin) of Ramesses III (ruled 1183 – 1152). It is carved from red granite and weighs about seven tons. The other half of the sarcophagus is in the Louvre museum in Paris. It is inscribed with spells, inside and out, intended to help the Pharaoh on his journey to the afterlife.

The corner of the lid is missing. The tomb was probably broken into at an earlier date (possibly only a few hundred years after Ramesses' death) by tomb raiders trying to steal the valuable grave goods that would have been placed alongside the Pharaoh's mummified body. Archaeologists have recently found several more fragments of the lid whilst working in the tomb of Ramesses III.

Ramesses is shown here as the god Osiris, in mummy form. In ancient Egyptian belief, the living king was thought to be the incarnation of the god Horus. When he died it was believed that he would be transformed into the god Osiris, ruler of the underworld.

Ramesses wears the sacred uraeus on his forehead as a symbol of his kingship. The uraeus shows a cobra rearing up ready to attack – the snake's eyes never close – it is ever watchful on the Pharaoh's behalf. He also wears a long plaited false beard, wig and the Atef Crown, made of ostrich feathers, the sun disk and ram's horns. All of these are associated with Osiris who was believed to be the first ruler of Egypt. In his hands, Ramesses holds a flail and a crook, which became symbols of rulership also by their association with Osiris.

The protective sister goddesses Isis and Nephthys, can be seen standing on either side of the Pharaoh, embracing him and keeping him safe. Nephthys, on the left, stands on the hieroglyph for gold. Beside them are two half female, half snake figures who probably represent the goddesses Nekhbet and Wadjet, the patron goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt. In addition, there were probably two other snakes, of which one is now visible (see Animals Fact Sheet).

The sarcophagus lid itself is shaped like a cartouche – royal names were usually written inside this cartouche shape, which is a form of an Egyptian sign which reads "shen" and means "to

encircle". There are several other examples of cartouches in Gallery 20 but in this instance the cartouche surrounds the whole image of Ramesses.

The sheer size, weight and appearance of this impressive object, coupled with its rich and powerful symbolism convey the status, importance and wealth of its owner, Ramesses III.

### **Ramesses III**

Ramesses III modelled himself on his predecessor Ramesses II and reigned at a time when there was a lot of movement of foreign people through the Eastern Mediterranean. He famously fought successful battles against the Sea People to defend Egypt. He is seen as the last great king of the New Kingdom.

For an interactive, problem-solving approach to how this object was made visit the Ancients Appliance of Science part of the museum's website at: [www.fitzmuseum.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.ac.uk), click on Education and then The Ancients Appliance of Science.

You can also find information about this object on PHAROS at [www.fitzmuseum.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.ac.uk)