

### 1.35 Trussed calf

Wood, linen.

Date uncertain.

H. 7.4 cm, W. 12.1 cm, D. 2.9 cm.

This charming little object poses several problems. Although it certainly looks Egyptian and it has been subjected to radiocarbon tests confirming the antiquity of the wood,<sup>1</sup> no exact parallels for it can be cited. Even the species of animal depicted here is not immediately obvious. The fairly rounded head and snout at first suggest that it is a calf, but its long straight horn casts doubt on this identification. One might think of a young oryx,<sup>2</sup> an animal which shows the tip of its horns from the day it is born. The oryx is a well-known sacrificial animal in Egyptian temple rites, being associated with the god's enemy.<sup>3</sup> No depictions or models of oryx calves from such a context are known, however. Two green glazed models of trussed oryxes of roughly the

same size as our wooden example were found in the so-called Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis and date from the Predynastic Period. These have very long horns, however, covering almost the full extent of the animal's back.<sup>4</sup>

The animal is modelled on one side only. Its mouth, nose and eye have been summarily indicated, but the ear and horn have been made of separate bits of wood and inserted in holes. All traces of paint, if there were any, have been lost. The back of the object is flat. Two holes contain what appear to be the remains of wooden dowels used to attach the object to a background.<sup>5</sup> The legs of the animal are bound with a rope made of a twisted strip of linen cloth.

The interpretation of the object is problematic. If it was fixed to a background, as the holes in the back appear to suggest, it may have been part of a Middle Kingdom wooden model of a butchery.<sup>6</sup> The animals in such models are invariably modelled in the round, however, not flat, and they are always cattle. Perhaps more likely is that the object comes from a foundation deposit, a



cache of real and model food offerings, tools and building materials ritually buried in or beneath the foundations of a building. Bovine sacrifices are a regular feature of foundation rites throughout Egyptian history, but during the reign of Thutmose IV miniature trussed animal models begin to appear in foundation deposits and these are particularly common in Rameside times.<sup>7</sup> Both cattle and antelopes occur, but they are invariably made of faience, not wood, and they are much smaller than the present object.<sup>8</sup> If it does indeed come from a foundation deposit, it may perhaps be assigned to the New Kingdom. The radiocarbon tests, however, suggest a date in the Middle Kingdom, although it is always possible that an ancient piece of wood has been used to carve the object. In view of the total lack of parallels, dating the object clearly remains hazardous.

JvD

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> Three species of oryx are known from Ancient Egypt, but the Egyptians themselves called all of them by the same name, *mahedj*, cf. D.J. Osborn, *The Mammals of Ancient Egypt* (Warminster 1998), 160–68.

<sup>3</sup> P. Derchain, *Le sacrifice de l'oryx* (Brussels 1962).

<sup>4</sup> J.E. Quibell, *Hierakonpolis I* (London 1900), Pl. XXII, Nos. 13 and 17; cf. Osborn, *Mammals*, 167 fig. 13–110.

<sup>5</sup> A third, smaller hole was drilled to provide a sample for the radiocarbon dating.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. A.M.J. Tooley, *Egyptian Models and Scenes* (Princes Risborough 1995), 32–34.

<sup>7</sup> J.M. Weinstein, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Egypt* (diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1973), 136–137; 247–249.

<sup>8</sup> C. Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London 1994), 91 with figs. 92a and c; O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Altorientalische Miniaturkunst* (Mainz am Rhein 1990), 98–99, fig. 127; B. Schlick-Nolte, in R. Busz and P. Gurke (ed.), *Türkis und Azur: Quarzkeramik im Orient und Okzident* (Wolfenbüttel 1999), 292–293, No. 42. Similar miniature trussed animals have also been found as amulets on mummies, particularly in the Late Period, see W.M.F. Petrie, *Amulets* (London 1914), 20 with Pl. 5, No. 63a–e.

