



Figure of a bulti fish

On display

Title/Description: Figure of a bulti fish

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Ivory (?)

Measurements: h. 45 x w. 89 x d. 20 mm

Accession Number: 587

Historic Period: Dynasty XII or earlier (c. 1900 BC)

Production Place: Africa, Egypt

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1974

Models of fish in ivory are found in the earliest dynastic burials in Egypt: later examples appear in a variety of materials. This specimen of the *bulti* fish (*Tilapia nilotica*) must, when complete, have been an object of considerable beauty. The dorsal fin is not present but a narrow continuous slot along the back suggests that it was fitted as a separate adjunct of metal, probably gold, which is now missing. A separate metal tail may also have been fitted into a smaller slot at the rear. The inlay in the right eye remains and is of a crystalline rock (rock crystal ?) set in a metal frame, probably base silver. The mouth area is damaged, especially on the left side, and the tail part is abraded. Scorch marks are evident on the right rear edge and front left edge. There is a fine drilled hole in the front at the level of the mouth; a larger drilled hole lower down at the base of the gills has the remains of an ivory plug. In the absence of comparative material, its date is difficult to assess, but the workmanship suggests the standards of early Dynasty XII.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Peter Sharrer in 1974 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
