ART
INSTITVTE
CHICAGO

CAT. 85

Amulet of a Leg and Foot

Late Old Kingdom–First Intermediate Period, Dynasty 5–11 (about 2494–2055 BCE)
Ancient Egyptian
Carnelian; 2 × 1 × 0.3 cm (3/4 × 3/8 × 1/8 in.)
The Art Institute of Chicago, purchased with funds provided by Henry H. Getty and Charles L. Hutchinson, 1894.896

Through the principle of substitution, this amulet in the form of a leg and foot was thought to give the deceased mobility in the afterlife. Religious texts call for the deceased to have the ability to move freely in and out of the tomb, a reference to the migration of the soul (*ba*), which took the form of a human-headed bird.[1] It was believed that the *ba* spent the night with the body, but flew out of the tomb at dawn to enjoy the sunlit world. At dusk, it had to return to the body.

The beveled surface around the perimeter of this amulet and the hole drilled at the top indicate that it was meant to face right—the normal orientation of hieroglyphs. Hence, the amulet represents a right leg. The foot is shown with an arch that would not be visible to the viewer on a naturalistically depicted right foot. As is also typical with the representation of feet, the toes that should be visible are not depicted (see cats. 1, 7–8 for similar representations of feet), both standard conventions of Egyptian art into the New Kingdom.[2]

There are examples of a left-facing leg-and-foot amulet paired with a right-facing one, strung together to form an anklet.[3]

Leg-and-foot amulets, including this example, are usually made of carnelian, a material that was specially favored for amulets in the Old and Middle Kingdoms.

ADDITIONAL VIEW OF CAT. 85

Back of cat. 85.

For more on amulets, see About Amulets.

Provenance

Reverend Chauncey Murch (1859–1907), Luxor, Egypt; sold to the Art Institute of Chicago, 1894.

Publication History

Thomas George Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923), 123.

ENTRY BY EMILY TEETER

NOTES

1. Among these religious texts is the Book of the Dead Spell 89, in Thomas George Allen, trans., *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day: Ideas of the Ancient Egyptians Concerning the Hereafter as Expressed in Their Own Terms*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 37 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1974), 74–75.
2. William Stevenson Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 159, 273–74.
3. Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 72.

HOW TO CITE

Emily Teeter, "Cat. 85 Amulet of a Leg and Foot," in *Ancient Egyptian Art at the Art Institute of Chicago* by Emily Teeter and Ashley F. Arico, ed. Ashley F. Arico (Art Institute of Chicago, 2025), https://doi.org/10.53269/9780865593213/88.