

## AN OMEGA-TYPE SCARAB FROM MIDDLE BRONZE AGE BURIAL PIT 204 IN ASHQELON

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An Omega-type scarab was found in Pit 204, the largest and best-preserved tomb in the Ramat Eshkol cemetery in Ashqelon (see Gershuny, this volume). The pit yielded a large assemblage of carefully positioned pottery vessels, as well as several bones and a fragmentary skull of a young woman; the scarab was found with the skull fragments. The scarab measured 1.4 cm long, 0.9 cm wide, with a height of 0.6 cm (Fig. 1).

Omega-type scarabs were first recognized by Keel, who characterized them as the Omega Group based on the  $\Omega$ -shaped decoration motif appearing on the base of most examples (Keel 1989:40–87; 1995:31, §55). In most cases, Omega-type scarabs are found in archaeological contexts identical to those of Canaanite scarabs of the early Palestinian

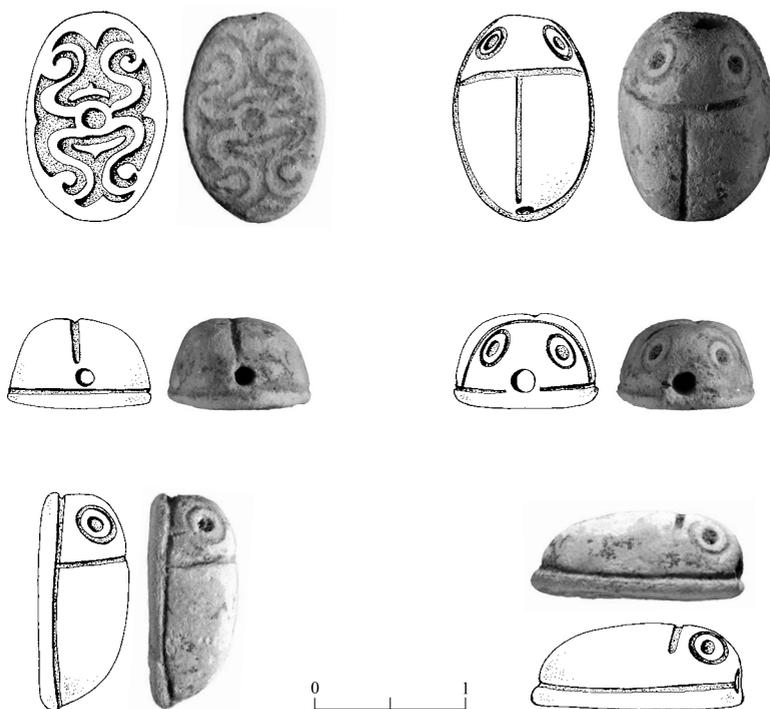


Fig. 1. Omega-type scarab.

series (Ben-Tor 1997:185–186; 2007:135–136; Keel 2004:78–81), and they primarily come from sites in southern Palestine (Keel 2004:78–81; Ben-Tor 2007:135–136). As the finds from Pit 204 are assigned to early MB II, the Ashqelon scarab corresponds to the chronology and the geographical distribution of the Omega Group.

The Omega Group scarabs differ from the known corpus of Egyptian and Canaanite scarabs of this period in every respect—size, material and form of decoration. They are usually smaller, are made exclusively of a glazed composition (faience), and their base decoration is in raised relief. Keel (1989:43–48) has presented conclusive evidence showing that the Omega Group was inspired by southern Anatolian prototypes. Yet, based on the scarabs' find contexts and some of the motifs decorating their bases (Keel 2004: Figs. 11–17), it is now generally agreed that these scarabs were produced in the Southern Levant in early MB II (c. 1700–1640 BCE), and they are regarded as one of the local groups assigned to the early Palestinian series (Ben-Tor 1997:185–186; 2007:135–136, 149–150, Pls. 58:17–29, 63:27; Keel 2004:78–81).

Like all Omega-type scarabs, the Ashqelon scarab is made of a glazed composition. The original green-blue color of the glaze has worn off, as is usually the case with glazed objects outside the dry climate of the Nile Valley. The scarab displays the schematic back- and side-type characteristic of the Omega Group,<sup>1</sup> with a line separating the *pronotum* (body) from the *elytra* (wings), and a line between the wings. An unusual feature on the *pronotum* are two concentric circles resembling eyes, which are not found on any of the published examples, but occur on an example from Rishon Le-Ziyyon (Ben-Tor 2018:590–591, No. 86). The base design of this scarab is also unusual, displaying two Omega-like motifs arranged as a mirror image with a circle at the center; the Omega motifs enclose vertical patterns, which are difficult to discern.

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<sup>1</sup> For the typical features of Omega-type scarabs, see Keel 2004: Figs. 6–13, 15–17.

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