

## A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE SCARAB FROM TĀMRA (EZ-ZU'ABIYYA)

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The scarab (Fig. 1) was found in the earth that was dug out of an Iron Age building, with which it was most likely associated (see Tepper, this volume). However, the scarab's features and base design argue for a date in the Middle Bronze Age (see below). This does not pose any problem as scarabs are known to have been saved for generations, and thus, their common occurrence as heirlooms in later contexts (Keel 1995:262–263, §692–694; Ben-Tor 2007:1).<sup>1</sup>

*Material:* Glazed steatite, the glaze worn off.

*Measurements:* L 16.9 mm, W 11 mm, H 7.5 mm.

*Features:* Back: O; Head: D3; Side: e6.<sup>2</sup>

The back, head and side types of the scarab strongly point to a Canaanite rather than an Egyptian origin, belonging to the late Palestinian series (Ben-Tor 2007:183, Pl. 107:4, 12, 16). The base displays Egyptian hieroglyphs arranged in two columns, right and left, separated by a central, vertical double line. The top part of the base surface is broken. The remaining signs<sup>3</sup> on the right column from top to bottom include the Egyptian hieroglyphs *nbw*—gold (Gardiner S12), *sh*—booth, or *sd*—festival (Gardiner O22); *nb*—lord, or all (Gardiner V30); *nfr*—good (Gardiner F35); and a seated goddess wearing the crown of

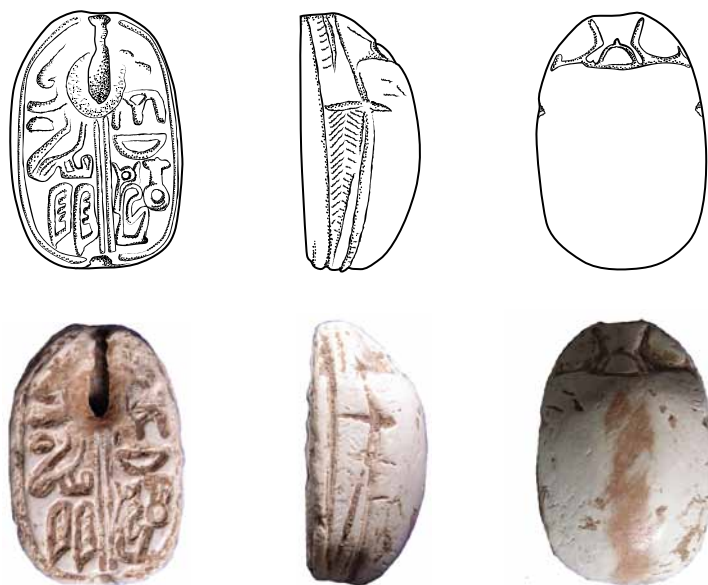


Fig. 1. The scarab.

Hathor (Gardiner C9). The signs on the left column from top to bottom include a small circle or *t* (Gardiner X1); a bird, probably an owl (Gardiner G17), with a small loop at its front; and two reeds—*y* signs (Gardiner M17).

Inscriptions arranged in two columns divided by a central vertical line are found on Egyptian scarabs of the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period bearing names and titles of officials, or members of the royal family.<sup>4</sup> However, the signs on the base of the Ṭamra scarab do not form a coherent inscription, therefore supporting a Canaanite origin for the scarab. The irregular form of the sign at the top of the right column, the loop in front of the bird in the left column and the seated Hathor hieroglyph—which is unknown on scarabs of Egyptian or Canaanite origin—all point in favor of a Canaanite origin.

Supporting evidence for the scarab's Canaanite origin are two scarabs, presented by Giveon as Dynasty XIII royal-name scarabs (1978a: Figs. 1, 5), which display meaningless groups of signs similarly to the Ṭamra scarab; these probably imitate Egyptian scarabs bearing names, not necessarily royal names. The scarab presented by Giveon (1978a: Fig. 1)<sup>5</sup> displays a bird with a loop at its front, like the one on the Ṭamra scarab—a feature that is not attested on any bird hieroglyph in Egypt (Gardiner G1–54). The scarab presented in Giveon's Fig. 5 displays an owl, a hieroglyph of a seated deity(?) (Gardiner A40) and two reed signs (Gardiner M17) like those found on the Ṭamra scarab.

The seated Hathor hieroglyph (Gardiner C9) is sometimes used for writing the name of the goddess (Gardiner C9; Leitz 2002:75), but it is not known to have ever occurred on scarabs. In contrast, the symbol of the goddess, displaying a sistrum (Gardiner Y8), is well-attested on Egyptian scarabs of the Middle Kingdom (Ben-Tor 2007: Pl. 19:19–28), and local variations appear on Canaanite scarabs of the Middle Bronze Age (Ben-Tor 2007: Pls. 105:29–46; 106:1–13). Syrian cylinder seals of this period display Hathor-like heads and Egyptian-style

goddesses wearing the Hathor crown (Teissier 1996:134–135, 157). It should also be noted that the conventional writing of the name Hathor (Gardiner O10) is found on private-name scarabs of the Middle Kingdom (Martin 1971: Nos. 1311–1321), and local imitations occur on Canaanite scarabs (Keel 2004: Figs. 64–67; Ben-Tor 2009: Fig. 9). However, the form of the hieroglyph depicted on the Ṭamra scarab is so far unique in Egyptian and Levantine glyptic, and therefore, the source of inspiration for the Canaanite artisan who engraved the scarab is unknown.

### *Discussion*

As stated above, the hieroglyph displaying the seated goddess with Hathor's crown (Gardiner C9) is sometimes used for writing the goddess's name; however, “the house of Horus” sign (Gardiner O10) is far more common (Leitz 2002:79–86). The complex nature of the Egyptian goddess Hathor is reflected in her numerous and diverse roles, and in the number of her cult centers in Egypt (Daumas 1977:1024). Hathor also played an important role in the Levant as patroness of the natural resources in the region that were sought after by the Egyptians. During the Middle Bronze Age, Hathor was identified with the local goddess of Byblos (Pinch 1993: 79), and the only temple dedicated to her outside the Nile Valley before the New Kingdom was in the turquoise mines at Serabit el-Khadim in Sinai. The inscriptions found at the site are dedicated to Hathor, “Lady of turquoise,” and most of them display the traditional writing of her name, i.e., with the “House of Horus” sign (Gardiner O10). However, at least three Middle Kingdom private monuments from the site display her name with the seated hieroglyph, as on the Ṭamra scarab (Valbelle and Bonnet 1996: Figs. 180, 183, and cover).

Could the inspiration for the sign on the Ṭamra scarab come from monuments at Serabit el-Khadim? The participation of Asiatic workers from the Levant in the turquoise mines during the Middle Kingdom is clearly

indicated in the inscriptions at the site (Giveon 1978b:56; Schroer 2008:72–73). There is, however, a chronological difficulty, as the Egyptian monuments from the site indicate that mining expeditions began in the early Middle Kingdom and continued until the late New Kingdom, with breaks in the Second Intermediate Period and the Amarna period (Pinch 1993:49). Considering the date of the scarab in the later phase of MB IIB, its time of production corresponds with the Second Intermediate Period, or possibly, the beginning of Dynasty XVIII in Egypt (Ben-Tor 2007:155, 170–171; 2011a:30; 2011b:202–203). There is no clear evidence for Egyptian activity in the turquoise mines at Serabit el-Khadim during the Second Intermediate Period. However, in her comprehensive study of votive offerings dedicated to Hathor, Pinch points out some Second Intermediate Period scarabs among the votive offerings at the site, and suggests

that “these unpublished pieces provide the only evidence that mining expeditions might have continued, presumably on an occasional basis and a much smaller scale, during the Second Intermediate Period” (Pinch 1993:55). Some of the Second Intermediate Period scarabs may have arrived at the site in the early New Kingdom, yet, the possibility for small-scale work at the mines during the Second Intermediate Period, initiated by the Hyksos in the eastern Delta or by the people of the Southern Levant, should not be ruled out. Considering the absence of cult centers for Hathor in the eastern Delta, the inspiration for the seated Hathor hieroglyph on the Ṭamra scarab may have come from Middle Kingdom monuments at Serabit el-Khadim rather than one of the cult centers of the goddess in Egypt. As the scarab was found in a secondary, and much later context at Ṭamra, its association with the site remains unknown.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I thank Vanessa Boschloos, Stephen Quirke, and Wolfram Grajetzki for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> The typology of the scarab’s features follows Tufnell 1984:31–38.

<sup>3</sup> The Egyptian hieroglyphs are described according to the sign list in Gardiner 1963:438–548.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., a late Middle Kingdom (Martin 1971: Pl. 35: 1) and Second Intermediate Period (Martin 1971: Pl. 35:2–19, 21) private-name scarabs, a late Middle Kingdom scarab bearing the name and title

of a princess (Ben-Tor 2007: Pl. 22:9), and a Second Intermediate Period scarab bearing the name and title of a prince (Martin 1971: Pl. 35:20).

<sup>5</sup> This scarab is considered by Ryholt (1997:48, Fig. 6/b) a royal-name scarab of Dynasty XV, but see Ben-Tor, Allen and Allen 1999:62.

<sup>6</sup> The Hathor temple in the copper mines at Timna dates from the New Kingdom (Pinch 1993:59–70 with references therein).

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