

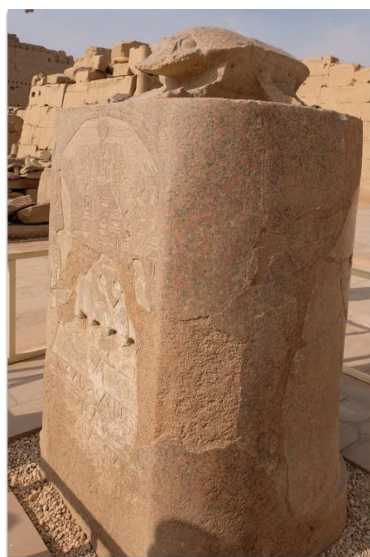
BEETLEMANIA! by Dulcie Engel

The dung or scarab beetle *Scarabaeus sacer* is found in the Egyptian desert. With its back legs, it rolls balls of animal dung, often larger than its body, into underground holes, to use as food. Similar balls, made from sheep dung and more pear-shaped, are rolled by females, who lay eggs into the dung. The Egyptians did not realise the balls were of different shape, composition, and purpose. They believed the beetles were only male, and deposited semen into the dung ball; the emergence of the young beetles from the dung ball being a sort of 'self' creation (Andrews 1994: 50-51).



Model of a scarab or dung beetle, Bolton Museum (photo DE)

The Ancient Egyptians saw a parallel between the dung ball being rolled across the desert and the sun moving across the sky each day, continually being re-born. The beetle was named 'kheper' ('to be created'), and linked to Khepri, the god of the rising sun. At Karnak temple in Luxor, there is a monumental scarab statue made of red granite on a cylindrical pedestal with flattened sides, belonging to Amenhotep III:



Scarab statue at Karnak (photo DE)

Representations of Khepri also appear on tomb paintings:



Wall painting showing Khepri, replica of Thutmose III's burial chamber, Bolton Museum (photo DE)

And on coffins, such as this example in the HoD:



W648 (HoD) : Khepri on coffin fragment

However, these sacred beetles were most often represented as amulets and seals, known as scarabs. And indeed, scarabs are by far the most common type of amulet, first introduced in the 6th Dynasty. By the mid-First Intermediate Period, scarab seals emerge. From the 12th Dynasty they are also found mounted on rings (EC). There are two examples in the jewellery case (HoL): LIH5, a white steatite scarab mounted on a silver ring with lotus decoration, and EC2002, a carnelian scarab on a gold ring, which is Hellenistic in date:



EC2002 Scarab ring (photo: Abaset)

The placing of amulets on mummies, between layers of bandages, peaked around the 26th Dynasty, when around 54 amulets would be placed on the body, in inner (stone amulets) and outer (glazed amulets) layers. The scarab was considered as a fertility and a protective amulet and placed on various parts of the body (Oslo University Historical Museum). Mummified human remains which have not been disturbed indicate where specific amulets were placed. This can be seen on diagrams such as the one in the HoD next to the amulets case. There is often a row of small scarabs placed centrally across the torso (re heart scarab: see below), and sometimes a large, winged scarab at the neck.

Scarabs can also be seen on bracelets and necklaces, such as W793 (amethyst and carnelian bead bracelet with scarab) and W796 (green faience bead bracelet with scarab) in the jewellery case (HoL). Both come from the Middle Kingdom burial of a wealthy female at Qau el-Kebir (See Engel 2021). It is worth mentioning that Egyptian Revival jewellery in the 19th and 20th centuries often used the scarab design, especially on rings.

Many of the references listed below are primarily illustrated catalogues of scarab amulets in various collections (Germond 2005, Hall 1913, Newberry 1906/ 2002, Petrie 1915, 1918, Rowe 1936, Ward 1902). Scarabs spread all around the Mediterranean region and were locally produced (see Andrews 1994: 50, Ward 1902). In the Egypt Centre, we have many scarabs on display: downstairs in the amulets, coffins, cartonnage, animals and mummification cases; upstairs in the jewellery, stone, maths, and temporary exhibitions cases. For the EC, Abaset lists 188 objects which use the word scarab or scaraboid in their description; and 66 objects with such references for the Harrogate Loan.

The catalogues mentioned are indicators not just of quantity, but of variety: there are many different styles of scarabs, from more naturalistic to more stylised. They can also range in size: from tiny ones often found in jewellery, to larger ones with longer inscriptions.

One of the major typological divisions is between scarabs and scaraboids. Basically, a scarab is in the oval beetle shape, with a flat base, and a raised, curved top or back. The back usually has markings suggesting the anatomy of a beetle: horizontal lines to mark

the head and thorax* areas, and a vertical line in the centre to mark the division of the wing case. Representations can range from basic lines to detailed anatomical renderings, including legs. There may also be geometric designs or religious symbols and texts inscribed on the back (Andrews 1994: 52-55, Wilkinson 2008: 25).

The term scaraboid is used to refer to amulets and seals in the oval shape of a scarab but with a back form representing a different animal/figure. Wilkinson (2008: 26) gives examples from the British Museum collection of a duck, a hedgehog, and a human face. In the EC, examples in the amulets case include a duck (EA64830), a goat or ibex (EA54796) and a hedgehog (EA64830). These all feature in Goodridge and Williams (2005).

Another design feature is the addition of wings to the basic shape. However, these are bird wings with feathers rather than beetle wings. Bird wings have heavenly associations (EC). Winged scarabs are often found as coffin decorations, such as on the coffin fragment W1042a, the wooden winged scarabs in the animals case (W546 and EC292), and the cartonnage fragment in the maths case (W891) upstairs. There are winged amulets in the amulets case, and a large beadwork winged scarab amulet (W947a) in the cartonnage case, which measures 257mm from wing tip to wing tip. In storage, there is a stone scarab with beadwork wings (W948a). Both are illustrated in Bosse-Griffiths (1978). Funerary scarabs with wings (often made separately) are popular from the 25th Dynasty. They tend to have holes around the edge for stitching onto bandages or bead nets (Andrews 1994: 59).



W947a Beadwork winged scarab (photo: Abaset)

With respect to the bases of scarabs and scaraboids, earlier ones often have geometric designs. Later, human figures and animals may appear, with hieroglyphic designs from the Middle Kingdom, when official and royal names also emerge. However, a royal name does not imply a direct connection to that person; rather an invocation. Thus, names of kings are unreliable for dating purposes (EC). Short inscriptions such as mottoes and good luck formulae emerge in the 18th Dynasty. Also in the New Kingdom, longer inscriptions appear on larger amulets such as heart and commemorative scarabs (Wilkinson 2008: 28-32).

Of all the amulets, the heart scarab was considered the finest, and was often the target of grave robbers (Oslo University Historical Museum). It became popular in funerary wrappings, placed on the chest, from the 13th Dynasty. On its base was usually an inscription of Chapter 30B of the Book of the Dead. This ensured that the heart would

not speak out against its owner on judgement day when the heart would be weighed against the feather of truth (EC, Germond 2005:32, 46). Heart amulets tended to be of a larger size (on average 7cm), perhaps because of the inscription:

“Oh my heart of [my] mother! Oh my heart of [my] mother! My heart of my different ages! Do not stand as a witness! Do not oppose me in the tribunal! Do not show your hostility against me before the Keeper of the Balance! For you are my ka which is in my body, the protector who causes my limbs to be healthy! Go forth (for yourself) to the good place to which we hasten! Do not cause our name to stink to the entourage who make men in heaps! What is good for us is good for the judge! May the heart stretch (i.e. be happy) at the verdict! Do not speak lies in the presence of god! Behold You are distinguished, existing (as a justified one)!”
(Translation of Ch. 30B from Arico & Foley 2021)

In the stone case (HoL), there is a (damaged) black granite heart scarab (EC263). In the HoD mummification case, you can see EA7900, a green schist New Kingdom heart scarab (featured in Goodridge and Williams 2005), and in the amulets case, W233, a green steatite scarab of Padiamun. There is a preference for green stone for heart scarabs, green being symbolic of life (Andrews 1994: 56-59, Wilkinson 2008: 34-35).



W233 Heart scarab of Padiamun

From the New Kingdom, a group of historically important scarabs emerge: commemorative scarabs, recording specific events and celebrations. They mostly date from the reign of Amenhotep III and are published in Blankenberg (1969). They record the pharaoh's marriage to Tiy, the arrival of a Mitannian princess at the royal harem, the cutting of an artificial lake, as well as wild bull and lion hunts carried out by Amenhotep (Andrews 1994: 55). In the temporary exhibitions case, as part of the Harrogate Loan exhibition 'Causing Their Names to Live,' we have a lion hunt scarab, HARGM3683. The inscription incised on the underside records that in the first ten years of his reign, the

king himself killed 102 lions. It is one of more than a hundred: another is highlighted on the website of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.



HARGM3683 Commemorative scarab of Amenhotep III (photo: Abaset)

Enjoy your scarab hunting in the museum!

I close with some lines from a poem written in 1864 by Robert Browning, *'Caliban upon Setebos or Natural Theology in the Island'*, which concerns the outcast Caliban** observing nature on the island to which he has been banished. These lines evoke the scarab or dung beetle perfectly:

*'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball
On head and tail as if to save their lives:
Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.*

*Technically this is just the top part of the thorax, called the pronotum, or prothorax.
**a character from Shakespeare's The Tempest. Setebos is a godlike figure Caliban imagines in this poem (see Cooke 2017).

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