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ROYAL SCARAB FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION



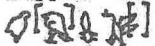
Fig. 4. Porte et avant-porte tardive de l'acropole.

The scarab representing the sacred beetle (*scarabaeus sacer*) was one of the most popular religious amulets among the Ancient Egyptians. They believed that those amulets would protect their owner against all kinds of harm in the underworld as well as in this life. Sometimes however, and this phenomenon occurred during the Middle Kingdom mainly, they were used as seals and a few were cutted to commemorate historical events. It is the reason why in the course of time scarabs bore inscriptions or ornaments of a kind appropriate only to a seal. This custom remained also under later dynasties, in spite of the fact that under the XVIII dynasty scarabs reverted to its original position as an amulet.

Scarabs, those small objects often beautifully made of beautiful colour have always been objects of interest as specimens of art of the Egyptian craftsmen. Carried to Europe by travellers, dealers and collectors they enriched museum collections and private ones as well.

There is a scarab brought to Poland by an unknown traveller who visited Egypt in XIX century. Now this scarab is in the possession of Zofia Skulimowska, an archaeologist and exhibited in her collection of the Mediterranean antiquities¹. The scarab is rather in well preserved state except the base that has been chipped on one side. Its lenght is 20 mm, its width is 13 mm and it is 12 mm high. The beetle-figure that shows a faithful naturalism is carefully cutted in the steatite fadded to light yellow; the head is distinguished, body, wings and legs are weel marked too. The head shows clypeus and eyes. The protorax is marked. The elythra has a triangle at each side. One wing is scored with diagonally lines but the other one is scored only in part². The wings are separated from the body by a notch. The legs are very well modelled: they are long and stand high making an empty

triangle between the body and a base³. The scarab was pierced longitudinally with a hole, the size of which is sufficient to receive a thread or a wire.

The scarab stands on an elliptical base that is chipped on one side. The base is covered with a brief inscription:  The hieroglyphic signs are very well cutted: the surface of the *h*-sign is covered with very thin parallel lines, *hr*-sign and *p*' (*?*)-sign⁴ that represent birds have their feathers elaborately marked. The arrangement of the hieroglyphs of the inscription is the same as on a few scarabs kept in the British Museum⁵ but the shape of them in turn resembles the shape of hieroglyphs engraved on the scarab B.M. 26596⁶. According to common opinion the inscription probably contains a play on the name of Pemay (*p*' *mi*) "The Cat" from XXIInd dynasty (950 - 730 B.C.)⁷. His prenomen is probably preceded by a sentence *h**ḏ* *hr* "may Horus be light"⁸. A little is known, in fact, about that king except he was the father of his successor Shoshenk IV and he ruled Egypt for a few years⁹. It is due to the fact that few records have remained from the time of his reign. Among them there are scarabs that having a great vogue were also manufactured in a great quantity at that time. That scarab is one of records that come from the reign of Pemay. As the another scarabs with the name of this king inscribed on its base as an additional protection it had to protect this ancient owner from any harm.

Notes

¹ I would like to thank her for allowing me to study this object.

² They represent hairy legs upon the back, cf. P. E. Newberry, Ancient Egyptian Scarabs, London 1905, 73.

³ Cf. H. R. Hall, Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, London 1913, XXXI A5; 245, 2453.

⁴ Cf. A. H. Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, 2nd ed., Oxford 1957, 472, 41; H. Gauthier, Le livre des Rois d'Egypte (MIFAO, t. XXIX), Le Caire 1913, 372, n.4.

⁵ H. R. Hall, op. cit., 245 - 246 nos 2453 (*p*'-sign is different), 2454 (*p*'-sign is different), 2455, 2457, 2458.

⁶ P. E. Newberry, op. cit., pl. XL, 9. The hieroglyphs follow the same order too.

⁷ H. Gauthier, op. cit., 372 VIII; H. R. Hall, op. cit., 245, no 2453; A. H. Gardiner, Egypt of the Pharaohs, Oxford 1961, 334.

⁸ Couldn't those two signs form the one word *hr* "Horus", cf. Wb III, 124.

⁹ 774 - 770 B.C., cf. E. Drioton, J. Vandier, L'Egypte, Paris 1952, 568; H. Gauthier, op. cit., 370.



[The scarab was fully illustrated in the article: A. Dembska, Skarabeusz z kolekcji prywatnej, "Przegląd Orientalistyczny 1988, no. 4/148/, pp. 353-356. - Editors].