

'Scarab with Hathor Head'

Jenna-Marie Heard: (MArt in Mediterranean Archaeology)

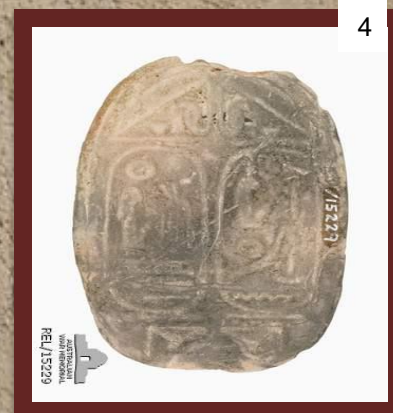
Background: Varying in materials and size, scarabs are found across Egypt and the Near East. Scarabs held religious connotations being connected to Khepri, God of rebirth. This meaning was also adopted by other ancient cultures. Emerging during the Old Kingdom they are consistent until the Graeco-Roman Period, often appearing as protective amulets, 'heart' scarabs (used in assisting the deceased during the weighing of the heart ceremony) or as commemorative scarabs (1).

Description: Measuring 8.6 x 6 x 2.8cm, this scarab was likely crafted via a mould using clay (see lack of sharp detail in the face and cartouches – figs 1 & 2). The base shows cartouches with the name of Ramses II. Although the artefact appears to be ancient Egyptian it could be a Levantine reproduction, imitating commemorative scarabs. This object could also be discussed as being a modern forgery or souvenir.

Comparative: Comparative artefact 15229 (figs 3&4) was purchased by Sgt D. Roberts in 1915 in Cairo. The object shares details with 'the scarab with Hathor head' regarding material, stylistic features, and the cartouches of Ramses II. The seemingly intentional decolourisation and similar damage on both suggest that they were mass-produced, possibly in the same workshop in Cairo where Sgt Roberts bought his when serving in Egypt (2).



Connection to Funerary Sphere: It is unlikely that the 'scarab with Hathor head' and its comparative are 'heart' scarabs as neither are inscribed with spell 30B from the Book of the Dead (3). The inclusion of the Hathor face and Sphinx head, opposed to the image of the 'deceased one' is likely because of the popularity of the imagery and their association with major tourist sites like the Giza Plateau and Dendera, oppose to serving a religious or funerary function (4).



Figures 1 & 2 – Front & base of 'scarab with Hathor head' (taken by author). Figures 3 & 4: Front & base of 'souvenir sphinx scarab paperweight'.

Overview: Because the 'scarab with Hathor head' is so unusual it is difficult to definitively determine whether the artefact is ancient, and sold as a souvenir, or a modern forgery.