



Scaraboid frog amulet

Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil CCM (1275.0004)

Object type: Amulet

Providence: Egypt

Material: Faience

Period: Pharaonic period

Dimensions: 1.8cm length, 1cm height and 1.2 cm in width

Object analysis by Ben Andrews

The scaraboid frog amulet has many different meanings that are linked to every aspect of this object. The amulet possesses a dark rich blue colouration on account of it being made from Egyptian faience. This amulet has been created in the shape of a frog and possesses a small hole through front underneath the frogs' head. This indicates that the amulet was intended to be worn either in this life or to be used to adorn the deceased in the next life [reference]. The dimensions of the amulet are as follows 1cm high, 1.8 cm in length and 1.2 cm in width.

The frog is depicted in a prone position and has a series of parallel blue lines that run from the base of the head and down the body to the legs. The colouring of these lines is different and is lighter in colour compared to the rest of the body which is dark blue. When looking at other amulets of frogs within ancient Egypt, the depiction of a frog is common as it is often attributed to the deity Heket (Aman, 2011:160) who was the Egyptian goddess of fertility and birth (Lou, 2012:12). From the hole that can be found underneath the head of the frog, it is likely that it had been crafted and intended to be worn on a bracelet or necklace. The connection to the goddess Heket might indicate that it would have been used by women who was expecting as the Egyptians believed that Heket would help to protect the child from demons and safeguard it from its birth (Aman, 2011:161). The importance of the goddess was always very prominent in Egyptian mythology. One example that shows her significance is the temple of Dendera which contains a relief as depicted in Figure 1, that shows Heket giving the Child *Ankh* at birth while Khnum creates the body.

Figure 1: Khnum and Heket



(Taylor, 2001:25)

In everyday life, the goddess was used to show fertility and to safeguard childbirth as there would be 'wands' that had frogs depicted on them would also often be present at childbirth. In funerary practice however, the frog was a symbol of rebirth (Arnold, 1995 :35), which is fundamentally important to the Egyptian idea of the afterlife. The idea is reinforced by the blue colouration of the faience as it was seen as a piece of the sky (Nicholson, 2012: 15). This ties in with the myth from the old kingdom that the king would ascend and join the circumpolar stars

Figure 2: Base of amulet (ccm 1275.004) Ben Andrews



The amulet has been crafted from Egyptian faience which would suggest that it was made for the elite class as it was considered to be a semi-precious stone (Stocks, 1997:180). While this may have been made for an elite member, it does not reflect the high quality possessed by some other crafting materials. Therefore, it is likely that the amulet was more widespread spread as opposed to if it were made of something of a higher quality, such as Lapis lazuli.

Around the loop of the amulet shows clear signs of weathering either from its continual use or from age. From the weathering, it would seem to suggest that this was an object which was worn and not simply used for the funerary sphere. The amulet was most likely used as part of a

collection, should it have been adorned on a necklace or bracelet due to the size. The hole, however, would suggest that should it belong to the funerary sphere where it would have likely been used alongside other amulets such as the spine of Osiris (Andrews, 1994:19). Another way which the amulet may have been used is a kind of woven net, which became more common in the first millennium. It was decorated with faience beads and amulets attached and was associated with the Osiris myth (Taylor, 2001:207). This helped to propagate the importance of Heket as he was also attributed to rebirth in the afterlife (Taylor, 2001:207). From the colouring and the position of the hole on the amulet, the frog will be facing the sky or looking upwards, which would further suggest the divinity that relates to it which it inherits from the blue colouring (Nicholson, 2012:15). The base of the amulet does not have an inscription, suggesting that it was an object to be adorned. From the style of the amulet, it is the head and eyes that have chosen to be emphasised, this again would supplement the idea of birth/rebirth and new creation as it gives the frog a rising appearance, much like how they might have risen from the Nile mud following the annual flood (Aman, 2011:157).

Figure 3: Cornelian frog (M11570C) LIVERPOOL MUSEUM **FIGURE 4:** FRONT VIEW OF AMULET (LORNA KELLY)



Dating the amulet is difficult for several reasons. Foremost being that amulets have always been used through pharaonic Egypt as has the use of faience the earliest use can be dated to circa 5000 BC with the later developments that utilised a ceramic core instead of a stone one which occurred around 4000 BC (Stocks, 1997:180). However, in the new kingdom amulets and faience products drastically increased (Wilkinson, 2008:24). The frog amulet from Cyfarthfa castle it is not discernible what the core of the amulet is although it does appear to be made from ceramic material due to some of the weathering around the amulet. The amulet ccm 1275.004 shares similar characteristics with other amulets found throughout dynastic Egypt as shown in Figure 3 which is dated to the new kingdom. From the first intermediate period, however, the style of how frogs were depicted changed to the raised head with the eyes popping out (Andrews, 1994 :63) which is very similar to the object from Cyfarthfa castle. While the use of the frog in imagery was popular throughout pharaonic Egypt, it was replaced by the scarab in popularity but was made until the late period (Andrews, 1994:63). The amulet in both life and death to the Egyptians held similar meaning, be it either the birth of some or the rebirth Heket was there to protect them.

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