

THE OSSIMO SCARAB

Alan R. Schulman, Tel Aviv, Israel.

The scarab illustrated herewith was found at Ossimo Superiore, while excavating trenches for the basement of a house, in circumstances described in detail in the *Rapporto del Direttore* for 1969, which appears in this same volume of *Bollettino* (Vol. V, pp. 23-24). Inasmuch as it was not possible for me to see the actual scarab, I have had to base my remarks on the excellent photographs of it which Professor Anati kindly provided for me.

General Details: Seemingly a white frit, with traces of burnish. L. 9.5 cm., W. 6.7 cm., H. 4.3 cm. Inscription on underside (base) neatly executed in sunken relief: anatomical details on top and sides neatly and carefully indicated.

Description of top: Oval shape; clypeus, head and prothorax occupy approximately one-half of the scarab; ridges of the clypeus nicely modeled; details of head likewise finely modeled; head separated from prothorax by a simple double curved line, prothorax from elythera by a curved, «braided-rope» line; wing-cases of elythera formed by a single dorsal line which ends a V-shaped notch at the «braided-rope» bordering the elythera; a parallel line on

either side of this dorsal line runs from the back of the scarab until the apex of the V-shaped notch; the outer edges of the elythera also framed by «braided-rope» border; V-shaped notches at the outer edges of the wing-cases where they meet the «braided-rope» border of the prothorax; all three V-shaped notches also of the «braided-rope» pattern; legs carefully modelled in high relief at the sides; the scarab was not pierced vertically for suspension.

Description of base: Inside of an oval frame is a cartouche containing the prenomen of Ramesses II *Wšr-m', t-r'* flanked on each side by the *ma'at*-feather, and resting on a *nb*-basket. A second inverted *nb*-basket fills the field at the head of the cartouche. The bottom portion of the cartouche has suffered damage, a chunk of the surface having been chipped away. The king's prenomen is spelled with the hieroglyphs of the seated figure of the goddess *Ma'at*, wearing a feather on her head and holding the sign of life (*nh*) in her hand. In front of her is a very curiously incised, canine-headed scepter, the sign *wšr* «rich», «powerful». Above the head of the goddess is the sundisk *R'*. Between the loop of the *nh*-sign and the edge of the cartouche is a vertical sign for which I have no explanation. The goddess appears to be sitting on something, the left half of which has been lost due to the damage to the face of the base at this point. What is preserved, suggests a *nb*-basket. The fields of this sign, the two *ma'at*-feathers and the two *nb*-baskets flanking the cartouche, as well as of the goddess and the sundisk within the cartouche are all filled in with diagonal crosshatching of the «braided-rope» pattern already met with in the description of the top of the scarab.

Remarks: 1) There are basically three types of scarabs: seals, commemorative scarabs, and heart scarabs. The first type, the scarab seal varies greatly in its dimensions, but is never bigger than ca. 3-3.5 cm. and usually much smaller. The second type, the commemorative or historical scarab is much, much larger in size, frequently nearly approaching the dimensions of the scarab under discussion. These, to my knowledge, are always royal in

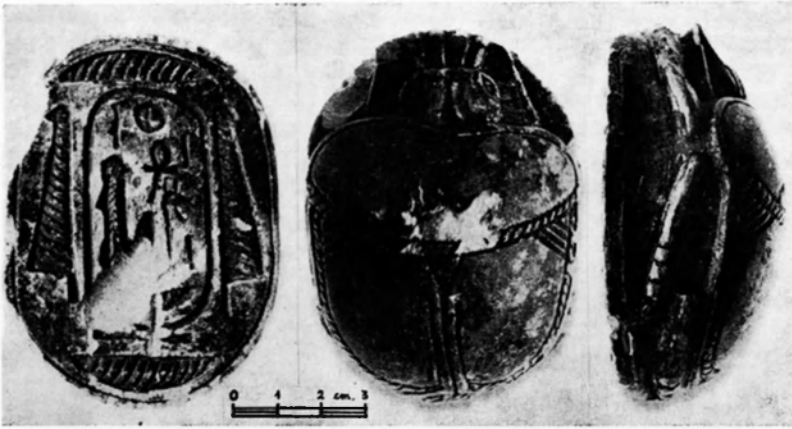


Fig. 125 *The Ossimo scarab.*

origin and commemorate a historical event which their instigator considered important. Their period of greatest frequency falls within the reign of the pharaoh Amunhotpe III of the 18th Dynasty (ca. 1397-1360 B.C.E.), though some are known earlier and some later. The third type of scarab, the heart scarab, also usually of dimensions frequently approximating those of the scarab under discussion, was magic-religious in purpose, being frequently, but not always, engraved with a text of a religious nature. This type of scarab was placed within the mummy-wrappings over the spot where the incision was made to remove the heart, hence the name.

2) From its dimensions, it is clear that the scarab under discussion was not intended as a seal. Its dimensions are clearly those of either a commemorative or heart scarab, but the absence of any historical text rules out its being of the former type. It does not, however, appear to be a heart scarab.

3) The «rope-braid» pattern which occurs as a decorative element on both the top of the scarab and in the fields of the hieroglyphs incised on the base, while occasionally attested on Egyptian scarabs, is a very unusual

feature. Taken together with both the dimensions of the piece plus the fact that its inscription is a Ramesside cartouche, which in the context of the size of the scarab is meaningless, I would be inclined to doubt the authenticity of this scarab very much. In other words, if it is supposed to be an Egyptian scarab, it is clearly a forgery for which many parallels can be found. However, the question arises whether it really is an Egyptian scarab, and, indeed, it very well may *not* be. The Ramesside cartouche provides a *terminus ante quem non* of the 12th-11th centuries B.C.E., a period when Egyptian cultural influence throughout the rest of the ancient Near East and part of the Mediterranean still played an exceedingly dominant role, particularly in minor art. Indeed, this cultural-artistic influence lasted well into the 1st Millennium, particularly in the Syro-Palestinian area. Scarabs continued to be produced there in prolific quantities, but frequently without any real understanding of their original type or purpose. The «braided-rope» pattern of decorative element appears to have been a common feature of Syro-Palestinian or «Phoenician» scarabs, both within the fields of the figures incised on the base, and on the double-lines separating the various portions of the scarab's anatomy on the top. A good example of this is to be seen in the three Phoenician scarabs published by Ward in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 53 (1967) pl. XII and figs. 1-3. It is not impossible that our scarab may have been such a Phoenician imitation of a pharonic scarab, misunderstood and enlarged when it was copied from a Ramesside original. If this were the case, the finding of it in Italy is much more easily understandable. However, without a physical examination of the scarab itself, it is impossible to make any definitive statement about the scarab's authenticity solely from the photographs of it.