

Scarab Seals with Anthropomorphic Figures

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[This paper deals with and analyses six scarab seals that have been uncovered in different areas throughout the Palestinian territories in 2006 to 2008. The scope of time to which the objects refer, extends from Middle bronze IIB to Iron Age IIB, in other words, from 1750-700 B.C. The scarabs were manufactured from Enstatite, Steatite, and Hematite and finely designed to bear Hieroglyphic signs, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic decorative patterns, which testifying symbolic and religious meanings. The decorative pattern displayed on the base of the scarabs depict a king or a god and the lord of animals. Some scarabs are definitely Egyptian cultural material but imported by locals, while others are just Caannaitic production with Egyptian influence.]

Keywords: Middle Bronze IIB Age scarabs, Scarab seals from Palestine, Human iconography on scarabs, Archaeological objects from the West Bank.

1. Introduction

This small group comprises six scarabs: four of them (JC 3622-3625) were discovered in Jericho in 2006 by antiquity looters and have been confiscated through the resolution issued by Jericho's court of first instance 2008/122; the two other scarabs were uncovered in Bethlehem (BL 2306) and Hebron (HB 4305) also by illegal tomb looting in 2014. All of the objects were brought to the Department of Palestinian Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in Ramallah, recorded and labeled with serial national number. Since 24 February 2016, they have been under closer scrutiny in order to publish these findings. The scarabs are well preserved and were finely made, except BL 2306, which is partially damaged on the base. Some of them had been coated with white glazing JC 3624 while a black stripe is found on the back of JC 3625, and yellowish coating is discernible on the back and the base of JC 3625 and HB 4305.

The six objects have been longitudinally drilled through, suggesting that they had rings which for some reason went missing. Backs, heads and sides of the scarabs were differently designed. The scarabs share two stylistic features: a hollowed out engraving and an iconographical main motif of anthropomorphic figures on the bases. This main motif, however, mostly appears associated with other objects or decorative elements and in different arrangements and settings:

- A standing or walking human figure holding a lotus flower (§ 562 10A1b)¹ in his left hand while his right hand hangs down along the body (JC 3625), or with two cobras in front and holding one of them by its tail (§ 563 10A1c) (JC 3623) in his left hand.

1. § This symbol followed by numbers and letters indicates the inscribed features that have been described and developed by Keel 1995, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel, Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit*,

- A standing or walking human figure holding with his two hands two horned animals by their necks (JC 3624).
- A kneeling human figure, either a king or a god, with empty hands (§ 621 10C2d) (BL 2306).
- A standing human figure holding up empty hands (JC 3622) flanked by two animal heads.
- A standing human figure holding up empty hands and surrounded by hieroglyphic signs (HB 4305).

2. Analysis

1. JC 3625

Object: Scarab, D2/0/d5, oval base with borderline, hollowed-out engraving; black stripe extends to the back. Well preserved. Material: Steatite. Dimensions: 17 x 11 x 6 mm.

Base: A single standing human figure (human head with blue crown and cobra on his forehead) (§ 547) and wearing a pointed kilt with face oriented towards the right, and holding in his left hand an inwardly directed (§ 429) lotus flower² (§ 562) at its stalk (§ 587). The right hand hangs down along the body³ (§ 562 10A1b). The human figure is standing above a hatched *nb* sign⁴ (§ 458).

Date: MB IIB (1630-1522 B.C.).

Find's context: unknown.

Collection: Department of Palestinian Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, JC 3625.

Bibliography: Previously unpublished.



Einleitung (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica 10) (= OBO.SA) 10:41–62, 158–246; and Keel 2013, OBO.SA 33:xv. See Tufnell's classification of designs and motifs 1984:32–38, 115–150.

2. See design class 10A1b Tufnell 1984, 2 Pl. 42 No. 2695; Ben-Tor 2007 design class 10A Pl. 102 No. 46, Pl. 104 Nos. 29, 39.

3. For similar setting, see Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Afek No. 52, Tell el-ʿAgul No. 278, 359; OBO.SA 2010 Tell el-Farʿa South No. 41, 440.

4. Cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Tell el-ʿAgul No. 1058. For a similar figure with face oriented towards right and standing above a hatched *nb*, see cf. Keel 2013 OBO.SA 33 Geser No. 262.

2. JC 3623

Object: Scarab, B2/0/e11, oval base with borderline, hollowed-out engraving. Small breakages can be seen on the top and the bottom of the base. Material: Steatite. Dimensions: 19 x 13 x 7 mm.

Base: A walking human figure with falcon-headed⁵ (§ 588) with shoulder-length hair and pointed kilt, the rear arm hangs down along the body, the front arm is slightly bent, angled forward, and holds an inwardly directed cobra by its thin tails, another outwardly directed cobra⁶ (§ 563, 522) appears from the hem of the triangular kilt (§ 563 10A1c). Behind his back there is a thin branch (§ 433) that passes over the borderline,⁷ below this figure a *nb* sign (§ 458) is depicted.⁸

Date: MB IIB (1630-1522 B.C.).

Find's context: unknown.

Collection: Department of Palestinian Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, JC 3623.

Bibliography: Previously unpublished.



3. JC 3624

Object: Scarab, A1/I/d5, oval base with borderline, hollowed-out engraving. Well preserved. Material: Steatite. Dimensions: 15 x 11 x 7 mm.

5. Cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Tell el-ʿAgul No. 118.

6. See design class 10A1c Tufnell 1984, 2 Pl. 42 Nos. 2712, 2718; design class 10A, Ben-Tor 2007 Pl.102 Nos. 9, 21, Pl. 103 Nos. 14, 16, 28, 34.

7. Cf. Keel 2010 OBA.SA 29 Bet Mirsim No. 3. For a similar branch but placed in front of the figure, cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Tell el-ʿAgul No. 514; or on both sides of human figure, cf. Egger / Keel 2006 OBO.SA 25 Pella No. 11, 15.

8. For similar setting, cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Tell el-ʿAgul No. 502, 1051, 1059; 2010 OBO.SA 29 Bet El No. 6, Bet Shean No. 107; 2010 OBO.SA 31 Tell el-Farʿa South No. 442) and Egger / Keel 2006 OBO.SA 25 Amman No. 14; Giveon 1985 Tell el-Ajjul No. 59.

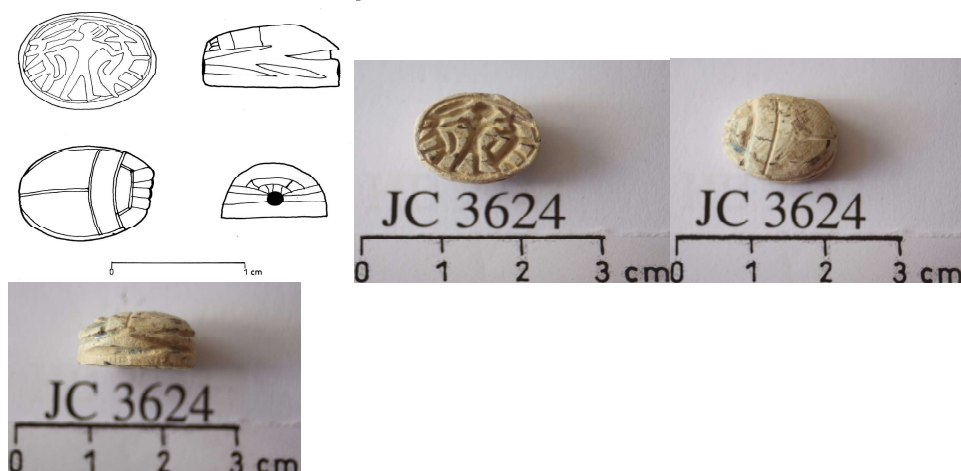
Base: In horizontal arrangement a standing human-headed figure wearing a short kilt. The head has diagonal strokes; they could represent the mouth and the nose.⁹ The figure holds a horned animal in each hand¹⁰ by its neck, “the lord of animals”. The horned animals could be two caprids (ibex) (§ 518-521), or two gazelles,¹¹ and their setting is back to back.¹²

Date: MB IIB (1600-1500 B. C.).

Find’s context: unknown.

Collection: Department of Palestinian Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, JC 3624.

Bibliography: Previously unpublished.



4. BL 2306

Object: Scarab, A1/I/e10, oval base with broken borderline, upper and lower sides are partially broken, hollowed-out engraving. Material: Steatite. Dimensions: 14 x 7.5 x 3.5 mm.

Base: In the center of the base there is kneeling empty-handed¹³ anthropomorphic figure (§ 621 10C2d), wearing double feather crown *shmtj* (§ 461). For the double feather crown worn by such figures in different settings, see Keel.¹⁴ It represents the god “Amun”.¹⁵ The left hand of the figure is angled and raised in greeting or blessing;¹⁶ His right hand is angled on his knee. This kneeling figure is flanked by two falcons with spread wings (§ 442, 450, 454, 467, 556f.);¹⁷ or by a pair of

9. Cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Tell el-ʿAgul No. 395.

10. Cf. Hornung / Staehelin 1976 No. 792.

11. For a pair of gazelles or caprids, cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Ekron No. 72.

12. Cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Akko No. 18; 2010 OBO.SA Dan No. 7-11. For the same figure holding two crocodiles “the lord of animals”, cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Akko 115; a female figure holding two animals “the mistress of animals”, cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA Akko No. 116.

13. See design class 10C2f, Tufnell 1984, 2 Pl. 47; design class 10C, Ben-Tor 2007 Pl. 104.

14. Cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Tell el-ʿAgul No. 554; 2010 OBO.SA 29 Deir el-Balah No. 88, 105; 2010 OBO.SA 31 Tell el-Faʿra South Nos. 475, 515.

15. For Amun standing and wearing a double feather crown in the triad, cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Bet Shean No. 112; 2013 OBO.SA 33 Geser No. 28; or kneeling with uraeus, cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA Der el-Balah No. 84; for Horus the child kneeling with the red crown on his head, cf. Giveon 1985 Amrit No. 46.

16. Cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Bet Shean No. 199.

17. Cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Deir el-Balah No. 66; Keel 2010 OBO.SA 31 Tell el-Faʿra South No. 888.

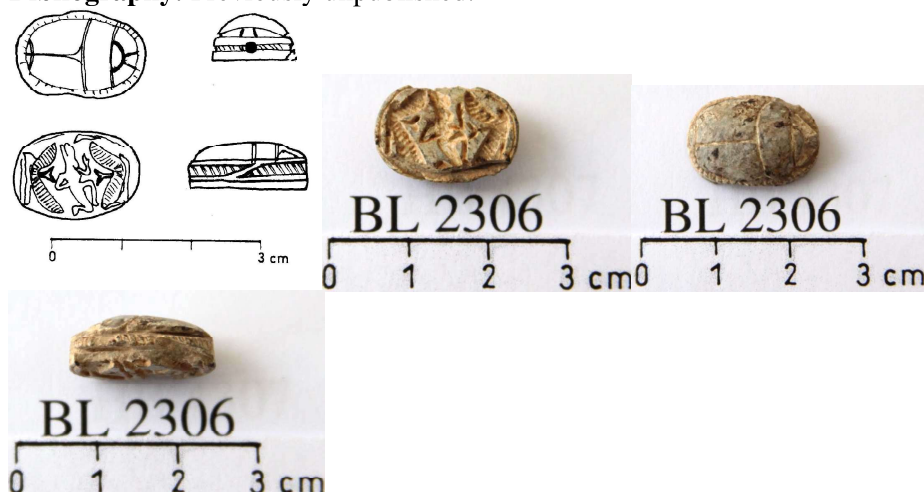
protecting hawks,¹⁸ or by two winged-sun disks from which uraeus are hanging (§ 450, also § 650).¹⁹ Professor Keel (through personal communications) proposed that the iconography of this scarab is unusual and can be dated to MB IIB. He said there are two unpublished parallels (Jerusalem No. 152, 153) which show the kneeling king flanked by two falcons.

Date: LB IIA – Iron IIB (1400 – 700 B.C.).

Find's context: unknown.

Collection: Department of Palestinian Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, BL 2306.

Bibliography: Previously unpublished.



5. JC 3622

Object: Scarab, A6/I/e12, oval base, no borderline, hollowed-out engraving. Material: Hematite. Dimensions: 16 x 11 x 7 mm.

Base: In schematic representation, in the center, there is a walking human figure²⁰ with outstretched risen arms²¹ and spread legs, wearing a short kilt.²² The human figure is flanked by two animal heads. A horned animal head, bovine head (§ 554 9G2) or bull head (§ 172) on the left side,²³ and a caprid head (§ 518-521)²⁴ on the right,²⁵ and sun disk (§ 461).²⁶

18. It seems that it is a combination of a stylized image of a hawk/falcon and a schematically drawn winged sun disk with two-pendant uraei, cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Akko No. 51-52, Ashdod No. 66. Cf. also Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13, Achsib No. 72. Cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Achsib No. 153.

19. Cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Ekron No. 17.

20. Design class 10Bf. Tufnell 1984, 2 Pl. 45, for three human figures on a seal, cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Arad No. 27; 2010 OBO.SA 31 Tell e-Far'a South No. 301; Egger / Keel 2006 OBO.SA 25 Tawilan No. 11.

21. For a human figure associated with two scorpions, cf. Keel 2013 OBO.SA 33 Tel Gamma No. 113, Geser Nos. 35, 129, 550.

22. For a similar figure but with hand hanging down along the body, cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA. 13 Akko No. 112. For a human figure in similar setting and associated with a caprid Cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Bet Shemesh No. 34, 43, 49.

23. Cf. Keel 1997 OBA.SA 13 Achsib No. 58; 2010 OBO.SA 29 Bet Shean No. 195. For a bullhead with a sun disk, cf. Keel 2013 OBO.SA 33 Gat No. 54.

24. Design class 9B. Tufnell 1984, 2 Pl. 36; design class 9B, Ben-Tor 2007 Pl. 97.

25. Cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Bet El No. 22.

Date: MB IIB (1630-1522 B. C.).

Find's context: unknown.

Collection: Department of Palestinian Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, JC 3622.

Bibliography: Previously unpublished.



6. HB 4305

Object: Scarab, D8/0/e9, oval base with borderline, linear engraving, yellow slip on the back and sides, well preserved. Material: Enstatite. Dimensions: 10 x 6 x 4 mm.

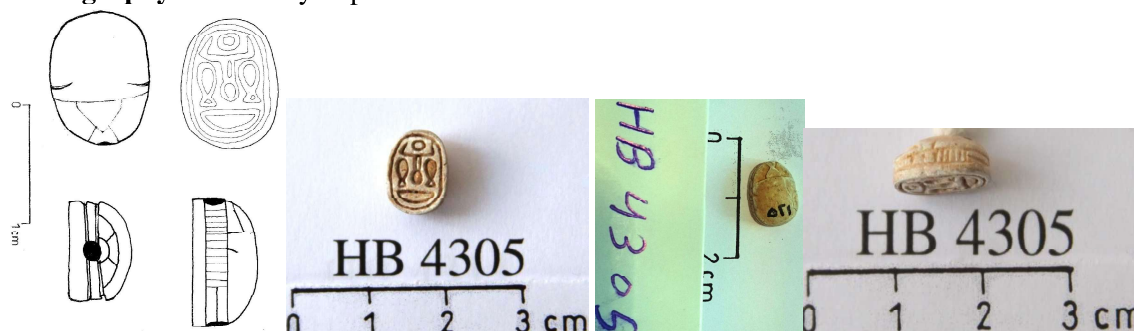
Base: It exposes a schematically designed human figure rising up with his hand in an adoring position.²⁷ The figure is flanked by a pair of *hm* signs (§ 453), or a pair of *ꜥ* (§ 465),²⁸ at the bottom there is *nb* “lord”²⁹ (§ 458).

Date: MB IIB (1750-1550 B.C.), Canaanite with Egyptian influence.

Find's context: unknown.

Collection: Department of Palestinian Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, HB 4305.

Bibliography: Previously unpublished.



3. Conclusions

This small group of scarabs presents anthropomorphic figures on base; it portrays human (JC 3622, JC 3623, JC 3625) and divine figures (BL 2306), the lord of animals (JC 3624) as well as a few zoomorphic figures such as mammals (caprid or gazelle JC 3624, bovine JC 3622) and reptiles

26. For a sun disk in combination with a caprid, cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Bet Shemesh No. 51; 2010 OBO.SA 31 Tel el-Far'a South No 391.

27. Or *ꜥh* (§ 449), cf. Keel 2010 OBO.SA 29 Bet Shean No. 146. For a similar figure, cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Achsib No. 11; Akko No. 168; Hornung / Staehelin (1976 No. 709).

28. Cf. Keel 1997 OBO.SA 13 Afek No. 16; Tell el-ʿAjul No. 794.

29. For a *nb* on lower part of the base, cf. Keel 2013 OBO.SA 33 Gat No. 26.

(cobra JC 3623). These entire motifs had symbolic and religious meanings. A wide representation is reflected in the period these scarabs belong to. The scope of time of these objects extends from Middle bronze IIB to Iron Age IIB, in other words, from 1750-700 B.C. In spite of the unknown archaeological context and the unknown find's spot and based on the iconography on the bases of these scarabs and on parallels from previously published material, one could assume that these scarabs are Egyptian cultural material but imported by locals except HB 4305, which is a Caannaitic production with Egyptian influence. The scarabs had been used and then found their way to tombs, which had been looted by antiquities dealers and their agents.

4. References

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