

AN EGYPTIAN SCARAB IN EARLY ROMAN TOMB F.31

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In Early Roman Tomb F.31 an Egyptian scarab was found during the 1976 Heshbon expedition. The excavator's number is 2525. The scarab is of gray steatite and measures 0.015 x 0.011 x 0.007m. Its back and sides belong to the simplest and most common types of scarabs and provide no help for determining its age, since they are found in nearly all periods of Egyptian history when scarabs were produced (see Pl. XIX:A).

However, its belly side carries the inscription 'Imn-R' in the center, the *nb*-sign to the left, and the *w'b*-sign to the right. This inscription can be translated "Amen-Ra' is lord of purity," or "Pure is the lord Amen-Ra'." A close parallel to this scarab is another scarab of almost identical dimensions in the Cairo Museum, which is attributed by Newberry to the 19th or 20th Dynasties.¹

The *w'b*-hieroglyph usually depicts either a sitting man pouring out a jar of water or a human leg over which is a jar pouring out water. From the 18th Dynasty on it appears, as on the Heshbon scarab, without either the sitting man or the leg, but with the same meaning.² Scarabs with 'Imn inscriptions are most common in the 19th Dynasty,³ for which reason I am inclined to attribute the Heshbon scarab to either the 19th or possibly the 20th Dynasty.

It is quite surprising to find an Egyptian scarab, undoubtedly

¹ Percy E. Newberry, "Scarab-shaped Seals," *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire*, (London, 1907), p. 191, pl. VIII, no. 36760.

² Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, I (Leipzig, 1926): 282.

³ See, e.g., Alan Rowe, *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs . . . in the Palestine Archaeological Museum* (Cairo, 1936), nos. 750-773.

an imported piece, in a tomb on the fringe of the Roman world more than a thousand years after it had been brought into circulation. One can only speculate as to how it found its way to the highland of Transjordan, where Egyptian objects are rarely found in excavations. It must have been a cherished heirloom which had been passed on from generation to generation until someone put it, together with other funerary objects, into the tomb of the scarab's last owner, so that the beloved dead would enjoy this cherished object in the afterlife just as much as he had enjoyed it during his life on earth.

This find of an Egyptian scarab of the New Kingdom period in a Roman tomb in Transjordan is one more example of the unreliability of scarabs as criteria for dating purposes, a point which cannot be emphasized strongly enough. Once more⁴ I want to point to a drastic example given by G. A. Reisner of the unreliability of scarabs for dating purposes. He found an intrusive communal burial place of the Roman period in the inner part of the pyramid temple of Mycerinus. On the same mummies which came to light there, coins of the first two centuries A.D. were found, and also scarabs of Thutmos III.⁵

⁴ In an article on the scarabs found at Shechem, I have pointed to the same example as a warning against the frequent use of scarabs to date archaeological contexts. Siegfried H. Horn, "Scarabs from Shechem," *JNES* 21 (1962): 13, n. 86.

⁵ G. A. Reisner, C. S. Fisher, and D. G. Lyon, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria*, 1 (Cambridge, 1924): 376, n. 1.

