



RAMESSIDE SCARABS SIMULATING MIDDLE BRONZE AGE CANAANITE PROTOTYPES: CANAANITE OR EGYPTIAN?

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Scarabs found in Ramesside contexts in the Levant are generally considered as Egyptian imports, especially examples assigned to the reign of Ramesses II. This is a reasonable conclusion considering the strong Egyptian control over Canaan during this period. Moreover, many of these scarabs display royal and/or divine names and images, suggesting their most likely production in Egyptian royal and temple workshops (Ben-Tor 2011: 207). This is supported by the high quality of workmanship of many examples.

Nevertheless, the possibility of local scarab production in the southern Levant during the Ramesside period was considered, especially in the case of scarabs from Ramesside contexts displaying archaizing of Canaanite Middle Bronze Age designs (Brandl 2003; Lalkin 2008: 182-84). Considering the large number of Middle Bronze Age scarabs produced in Palestine during the Second Intermediate Period (Ben-Tor 2007: 117-83), the Ramesside imitations were assumed to be inspired from locally unearthed early prototypes. However, these scarabs could just as well have originated in the region of Tell el-Dab'a – Qantir, the location of Avaris and Piramesse – the capitals of the Hyksos and the 19th and 20th Dynasties, where Middle Bronze Age Canaanite scarabs were imported on a large scale during the Second Intermediate Period (Ben-Tor 2007: 191-92). Moreover, as shown elsewhere (Ben-Tor 2007: 72-113; 2010), Egyptian Second Intermediate Period scarabs produced in the eastern Delta display close similarity to Middle Bronze Age Canaanite scarabs in both designs and features.

The scarabs under discussion display primarily variations of symmetric arrangements of good-luck hieroglyphs, and variations of the so-called *ḥnr* formula, both typical of Middle Bronze Age Canaanite scarabs. Yet, although apparently inspired from these Middle Bronze prototypes, the Ramesside variations are easily distinguished from the early models, in both designs and features. Moreover, occasional designs and most of the features of the Ramesside archaizing scarabs are found also with Ramesside scarabs of different types, including those displaying royal and divine names.

A comprehensive study of these scarabs has never been done. One of the main difficulties awaiting such a study is the scarcity of excavated scarabs from Ramesside contexts in Egypt, which may account for the fact that most excavated Ramesside scarabs of this type come from the Levant, mostly the southern Levant.

The aim of a study I recently started is to try to establish the origin of production of these scarabs by examining their find contexts whenever available, but in view of the few items from Egypt, a more reliable approach is to compare the features of these scarabs with Ramesside scarabs of clear Egyptian origin. The latter include items bearing royal and divine names and/or images, and items bearing mottos and blessing formulae, which although lacking archaeological provenance, their Egyptian origin is evident.

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