

Observations on Unpublished Scarabs of the Ducal Museum Gotha

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[The aim of this paper is to present my ongoing research project on “Ancient Egyptian Amulets at the Ducal Museum”, with the special focus on scarabs. At present, the actual number of scarabs in the collection consists of 24 pieces. Four of them are decorated with various patterns, four pieces with images and then pieces engraved with hieroglyphical signs. The materials are mostly faience, stone and ivory. 21 of them are drilled, two with eyelets and two have nothing. Six representative scarabs from this collection will be discussed and analyzed in this paper.

Keywords: amulet, scarab, Herzogliches Museum, Ducal Museum, Gotha.

1. Introduction

The Ducal Museum Gotha is a part of the Castle Museum Friedenstein,¹ which was built in 1643 and called “Baroque Universe of Gotha”. The castle’s collection was gathered by the Duke Ernst I of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg (1601–1675), who together with his descendants inherited artistic possessions from their princely Saxon and Ernestine predecessors. These collected pieces are artworks of ivory, amber, silver and enamel from over the centuries. Amongst these great collections, highlights include an elephant made of gold-plated silver from the workshop of the world-famous goldsmith Johann Melchior Dinglinger (1664–1731) and a hat originally owned and worn by the Emperor Napoleon I (1769–1821). The Ducal Museum² was built between 1864 and 1879 and displays firstly the Egyptian collections, vases, sculptures and jewellery from antiquity. Then it exhibits also 18th century cork models, artistic treasures from China and Japan, Dutch and German paintings, and additionally ceramic collections consisting of special Italian majolica from the 16th century as well as Böttger-pottery and Meissen porcelain from the 18th century. Although the Ducal Museum does not display a great number of the Egyptian objects in comparison to other Egyptian Museums of Europe, it represents the oldest and most important ducal collection in Germany.

The historical background to the Egyptian collection of the Ducal Museum can be traced back to 17th and 18th century, when Europeans were interested in ancient Egyptian culture, and were particularly obsessed with remedies made from the mummies. Therefore, there were many so-called “pharmacies of dirt” (*Dreckapotheke*), where people could obtain mummy’s powder as

1. <http://www.stiftungfriedenstein.de/en/castle-museum>. (accessed on May 1, 2019).

2. <http://www.stiftungfriedenstein.de/en/ducal-museum>. (accessed on May 1, 2019).

remedy both as ointment and as an oral medicament. In 1715, the “Hofapotheke” of Gotha was a popular and famous place for acquiring medicaments made from mummies. In his book “Mumiographia medica”,³ Hertzog described the “opening” of a mummy in detail, which had arrived at the *Hofapotheke* in Gotha from Egypt via England in 1715: “ohne Haupt, und Beine, so nicht mit geliefert worden, doch mit Leinwand vielmahl unwickelt,...”.⁴ Moreover, during the unwrapping of the mummy’s bandages, many amulets appeared from different body parts, such as in lower part of the body (n. 73 pieces), under both arms, on the chests etc. (n. 1–72) .⁵ Additionally, Hertzog tried to classify them to different groups: symbols of Isis (n. 5, 6), *wḏbt*-eyes (n. 8–19), symbol of frog for goddess Heket (n. 20, 21), scarabs (n. 22–26), tools of the opening of the mouth (n. 29–32), *ḥh*-sigh (n. 35), headrest (n. 36), hearts (n. 37–39), *ḏd*-pillar (n. 40–44), papyrus-column (n. 48–50), pyramid stumps (n. 54–57), and fingers (n. 73). Hertzog might have known that these amulets were related with the cult of the dead and have an apotropaic function, but he misunderstood each of their significance and meaning.

Later, the German naturalist Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811) played a significant role in collecting Egyptian objects for the Ducal Museum Gotha. Under the instruction of Ernst II, the Duke of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg (1745–1804), and his son Emil August (1772–1822),⁶ Seetzen began his research exploration in the Middle East and brought back many acquisitions,⁷ such as Syrian, Palestine, Jordanian, and Egyptian objects which made the Castle Museum Friedenstein one of the oldest Egyptian collections in the world. The last transport of acquisitions from the Middle East and Egypt consisted of 16 boxes, which contained 1574 manuscripts, 3536 antiques, jewellery, furniture, animals, plants, minerals, four complete mummies, 40 heads of mummy, embalmed ibises and ichneumons.⁸ All these objects were published as a collection list in 1810.⁹ Johann Heinrich Möller began to survey the Seetzen’s acquisitions from 1817 and listed an inventory of objects in handwriting. After him, Adolf Bube, Carl Aldenhoven, Karl Purgold went on reviewing the objects of Egyptian collections and updated several times the list.¹⁰ Today, the present objects of the collection are as follows:

3. C. Hertzog, *Mumiographia Medica, oder, Bericht von Egyptischen Mumien...* Reprinted. (Charleston, South Carolina, 2012 [1716]).

4. Hertzog, *Mumiographia Medica*, 57.

5. Hertzog, *Mumiographia Medica*, 58.

6. U. Wallenstein, ‘Aegyptiaca und ägyptische Bronzen am Gothaer Hof’, in M. Fitzenreiter et al. (eds), *Gegossene Götter. Metallhandwerk und Massenproduktion im Alten Ägypten* (Leidorf, 2014), 193–195.

7. U. J. Seetzen, *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen’s Reisen durch Syrien, Palästina, Phönicien, die Transjordan-Länder, Arabia Petraea und Unter Aegypten*, Bd. 1–4. Edited by F. Kruse. Reprinted. (Berlin; Boston, 2008 [1854–1859]).

8. U. Wallenstein, “‘Ich habe mehr gefunden, als ich erwartete...’: Seetzen und Ägyptensammlung Gotha’, in H. Stein (ed.), *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811): Leben und Werk. Die arabischen Länder und die Nahostforschung im napoleonische Zeitalter* (Gotha, 1995), 71.

9. U. J. Seetzen, *Verzeichnis der für die orientalische Sammlung zu Gotah, zu Damask, Jerusalem u.s.w. angekauften orientalischen Manuskripte und gedruckten Werk, Kunst- und Naturprodukte u.s.w.* (Leipzig, 1810).

10. U. Wallenstein, *Ägyptische Sammlung: Schlossmuseum Gotha* (Gotha, 1996), 23–29.

Objects	Quantity
Sculptures/reliefs (Old Kingdom–Ptolemaic Period)	10
Small sculptures (Ushebtis, statues from bronze, wood, stone, amulets)	1,600
Cartonage mummies, wood coffins, bandaged mummies	10
Animal mummies, part of animal mummies	65
Various objects related to cult of mummies (covers of mummies, parts of faces of coffins and masks of mummies)	20
Vessels from stone, clay and faience	25

Amongst these 1600 small sculptures, there are approximately 800 amulets of different kinds. Their classifications are following:

- 1) Symbols: *wꜥꜣt*-eye, *ꜥꜥ*-pillar, papyrus-column;
- 2) Parts of the human body: finger and heart;
- 3) Animal amulets: crocodile, cat, lion, hare, frog;
- 4) Scarabs;
- 5) Divine amulets: Anubis, Seth, Isis, Horus, Shu, Bes etc.;
- 6) Pataikos;
- 7) Symbols of ruler, and
- 8) Hieroglyphs.

2. Provenance and case studies of scarabs

There are altogether 41 scarabs recorded in the archives of the Museum. According to Hertzog's record, five scarabs came from the "opening" of the mummy indicating with number 22–26;¹¹ 36 scarabs are registered in the index of Seetzen.¹² Unfortunately, these numbers from Seetzen's index do not match to inventory from the present time.¹³ We can only assume that eight of these scarabs were obtained by him from Mitrahine/Mierehene (a village closed to the ancient city Memphis):¹⁴ "Denn ich eröffnete hier aufs neue einen kleinen Markt, wo mir besonders von den kindern allerhand gefundene Sächelchen gebracht wurden, welche man in den Schutthügeln bey diesem Dorfe findet, z.B. alte Kupfermünzen, Korallen, Amuletten, kleine Figuren oder Idole und dergleichen."¹⁵ Additionally, two pieces were bought from other collectors.¹⁶ At present, the actual number of scarabs in the collection consists of 25 pieces. Only one scarab with Inv. nr. Ae 213 is exhibited permanently at the Ducal Museum; others are in the depot of the Perthesforum. Four of them are decorated with various patterns, four pieces with images and ten pieces engraved with hieroglyphical signs. Their size is between 36–11 mm (long) × 26–8 mm (wide) × 15–4 mm (high). The materials are mostly faience (10 pieces), stone (8 pieces) and ivory (7 pieces). 21 of them are drilled, two with eyelets and two have nothing.

11. Hertzog, *Mumiographia Medica*, 70.

12. Seetzen, *Verzeichnis*, Chapter Münzen, Antiquitäten, physikalische Instrumente u.s.w.


13. This makes difficult to distinguish between the objects listed in Seetzen's, *Verzeichnes*, and those are present at the Ducal Museum.

14. Seetzen, *Verzeichnis*, Kat. 1468, 1531, 1846, 1884, 1885, 1909, 2062, 2922b.

15. Seetzen, *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen's Reisen*, Band 3, 323.

16. E.g., Ae210 was bought from Mik. Zitell in Chios on February 1907 and Ae1033 from Dr Alexander Margaritis in Munich. The one with Kat. 2761 given by Mr. Drovetty is recorded in the Seetzen's, *Verzeichnis*. Unfortunately, it is still not clear for its provenance.

Scarabs – dung beetles – are the most well-known amulets in ancient Egypt. They are also found even later in Syria and Palestine.¹⁷ Scarabs amulets are related to the god *Hprj* “Khepri”, who symbolizes the “new-born” sun. The shape of scarabs represents the hope of new life and resurrection,¹⁸ sometimes they bear engraved inscriptions, motifs and different pictorial images on the lower surface. In the beginning, scarabs were crudely formed, but from the First Intermediate Period onwards, scarabs were made more precise and insect’s leg were clearly shown at the sides of the body, and they developed their function as seals.¹⁹ Later, their sizes enlarged and bore more different geometrical patters, images of animals or plants, and even royal names and inscriptions. The heart scarabs had firstly the role of strong political statues, as the result of a successful career in the service of Pharaoh; secondly, they are shown in the Chapter 30 B of the *Book of the Dead*, the “heart scarab formula”,²⁰ to bind the heart to silence during the weighing. They served as symbol of triumph of purity and wisdom over death and corruption.²¹ Most heart scarabs are large, averaging between seven to eleven cm. Commemorative scarabs are known from the 18th Dynasty, particularly those of Amenhotep III (1390–1353 BC).²² They bear inscribed events or deeds of kings, and could actually be considered as one kind of materials that bear royal inscriptions. At the Ducal Museum Gotha, there are neither heart nor commemorative scarabs. Therefore, the focus will be lying on the normal kind of scarab amulets. Here below some representative scarabs from this collection will be discussed.²³

Case 1: scarabs with spiral pattern		
Inv. number	Ae209	
Origin	Mitrahine (Kat. 1468)	
Material	stone	
Measures (long × wide × high)	19 × 13 × 7 mm	
Date	Hyksos Period	
Color	green	
Description	This kind curl and spiral motif is probably related to the small desert plant. ²⁴ It shows relief art of the Old Kingdom, and then also on the amulets. It is considered that such spiral form developed within Egypt, and became popular on the scarabs. ²⁵	

17. There are already abundant researches of scarabs, as well as various scarabs’ catalogues of different museums and collections. A general introduction see R. H. Wilkinson, *Egyptian Scarabs* (Oxford, 2008), 16–22.

18. C. Andrew, *Ancient Egyptian Amulets* (London, 1994), 51.

19. Wilkinson, *Egyptian Scarabs*, 16–17.

20. <http://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetTextDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&tc=26021&db=0>. (accessed on May 2, 2019).

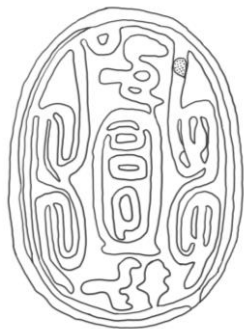
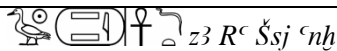
21. R. Sousa, *The Heart of Wisdom: Studies on the Heart Amulet in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2011), 9.


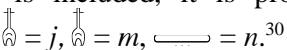


22. C. Blankenberg-van Delden, *The Large Commemorative Scarabs of Amenhotep III* (Leiden, 1969).

23. For this part, I would like to thank one of the anonymous peer-reviewers for the useful hints.

24. W. A. Ward, *Egypt and The East Mediterranean World 2200–1900 BC* (Beirut, 1971), 111.

25. E. Hornung and E. Staehelin (eds), *Skarabäen und andere Siegelamulette aus Basler Sammlungen* (Mainz, 1976), 176 n. 3; Ward, *Egypt and The East Mediterranean World*, 118.

Case 2: scarabs with royal names		
Inv. number	Ae211	
Origin	unknown	
Material	ivory	
Measures (long × wide × high)	18 × 14 × 6 mm	
Date	Second Intermediate Period	
Color	brown	
Description	<p>In the middle, the inscription is clear:  <i>z3 R^c Šsj ʿnh dt</i> “son of Re, Sheshi, living forever”. The other sides by edge are design of scroll. Sheshi is a king of the Second Intermediate Period, probably 14th or 15th Dynasty (ca 1800–1550 BC). He might be one of the kings who owns more than 200 scarabs from Egypt, Nubia and Palestine.²⁶ The exact date of his reign is still controversial.²⁷</p>	

Case 3: scarabs with (private/divine) names ?		
Inv. number	Ae206	
Origin	unknown	
Material	stone	
Measures (long × wide × high)	12 × 9 × 4 mm	
Date	unknown	
Color	dark grey	
Description	<p>There are three <i>nfr</i>-signs on the surface. <i>Nfrw</i> as personal name is known since the Old Kingdom.²⁸ In the Middle Kingdom, <i>Nfrw</i> on scarabs and seals appears sometime with the personal title and epithets, even with different decorations.²⁹ The <i>t3</i>-sign is not so clear. However, if the <i>t3</i>-sign is included, it is probably the cryptographic notation of Amun:  = <i>j</i>,  = <i>m</i>,  = <i>n</i>.³⁰</p>	


26. K. Ryholt, *The political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period c. 1880–1550 BC* (Copenhagen, 1997), 105–109 n. 354–358.


27. K. Ryholt, ‘The Date of Kings Sheshi and Yaqubhar and the Rise of the Fourteenth Dynasty’, in M. Marée (ed.), *The Second Intermediate Period (Thirteenth-Seventeenth Dynasties): Current research, future prospects* (Leuven, 2010), 109–126.

28. H. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, I (Glückstadt, 1935), 203:18.

29. G. T. Martin, *Egyptian Administrative and Private-Name Seals. Principally of the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period* (Oxford, 1971), 61 n. 733–739.

30. E. Drioton, ‘Trigrammes d’Amon’, *WZKM* 54 (1957), 28 n. 100.

Case 4: scarabs with animal images		
Inv. number	Ae207	
Origin	unknown	
Material	faience	
Measures (long × wide × high)	14 × 12 × 6 mm	
Date	Second Intermediate Period–18th Dynasty	
Color	blue green	
Description	<p>A lying capride (ibex, gazelle or antelope) is depicted on the surface and on its back is a twig (possibly). This motif of a desert animal with a twig appears as early as the First Intermediate Period onwards, yet on scarabs a little later. Erik Hornung³¹ suggests that the desert animal represented triumph over the death to the ancient Egyptians and for desiring the Afterlife, because it lives in a rough environment and has to fight against death by predators to survive. The twig is linked to the repeated rejuvenation.</p>	

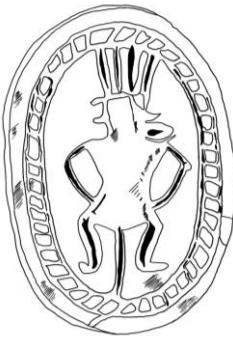
Case 5: scarabs with inscriptions		
Inv. number	Ae215	
Origin	unknown	
Material	ivory	
Measures (long × wide × high)	12 × 9 × 7 mm	
Date	probably 18. Dynasty	
Color	bright green	
Description	<p>On the surface, a <i>j</i>-sign, and a <i>mn</i>-sign are clear to identify, therefore, under <i>mn</i>-sign are probably a <i>n</i>-sign, sun-sign, two vertical strokes and a <i>t</i>-sign (?). They combine as <i>Imn-R^c</i> “Amun-Re”. The <i>nb</i>-sign could be as <i>nb(=j)</i> “my lord” and the meaning will be “Amun-Re is my lord”.³² Stephen Wimmer suggests that it might be read <i>jmnjtt</i> “(the) daily (bread)”.³³ This will be suitable for the <i>t</i>-sign. But such <i>jmnjtt</i>-scarabs “were probably never used in their original sense”.³⁴</p>	

31. Hornung and Staehelin, *Skarabäen*, 138.

32. I express my gratitude to one of the anonymous peer-reviewers who suggested that the *nb*-sign serves probably a “n” phonetic complement to the *mn*-sign.

33. S. J. Wimmer, ‘Jmnjtt-Skarabäen’, in Nunn, A. and R. Schulz (eds), *Skarabäen ausserhalb Ägyptens: lokale Produktion oder Import? Workshop an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, November 1999* (Oxford, 2004), 63–65.

34. O. Keel, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit. Katalog Band IV: Von Tel Famma bis Chirbet Husche* (Fribourg; Göttingen, 2013), 118 n. 52–53.

Case 6: scarabs with deity		
Inv. number	Ae216	
Origin	unknown	
Material	ivory	
Measures (long × wide × high)	36 × 26 × 15 mm	
Date	22th Dynasty	
Color	brown	
Description	<p>The deity Bes with a tall plume is shown on the surface. Around him is a circle decorated with lattice. Bes always repels danger and hostile power, and he is the protector for childbirth and postpartum period.³⁵ Very similar object to this scarab is a glazed steatite scaraboid belonged to Thutmose III at the British Museum.³⁶</p>	

3. Brief remarks

“Ancient Egyptian Amulets at the Ducal Museum” is an ongoing project, which started in 2017³⁷ and will be probably completed in 2022. With this great number of amulets, scarabs possess a minor quantity. These six examples of scarabs are relatively well preserved and legible. Certainly, more time is needed to make a deep survey of other scarabs and a comparative study as well. The result of this brief examination of these scarabs might hopefully tempt more audiences, who are not familiar with the collection of the Ducal Museum Gotha, and thus increase the interest in and attention to the collection.

35. Hornung and Staehelin, *Skarabäen*, 94.

36. H. R. Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, etc., in the British Museum* (London, 1913), 127 n. 1298.

37. This project is funded by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities – Nankai University with project number 320-63182030 (from May 2018–April 2019) and the Herzog-Ernst-Scholarship programs of the Fritz-Thyssen-foundation (from July–August 2019).