



FROM A LAND FAR AWAY: EGYPTIAN(IZING) AMULETS FROM JEBEL QURMA, BLACK DESERT, JORDAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an Egyptian and an Egyptian-style amulet, recently excavated in tombs in the Jebel Qurma uplands in the Black Desert of northeastern Jordan. The amulets (a *pataikos* and a scarab) date to the early to mid-1st millennium BCE. It is extremely rare to find such objects in this remote part of the southern Levant. While the scarab is a Levantine product from the early Iron Age, the *pataikos* amulet is Egyptian in origin and may have arrived in the Jebel Qurma region of Jordan after traveling from Egypt across the Sinai or northwestern Arabia.

INTRODUCTION

Recent excavation of burial cairns in the Jebel Qurma basalt uplands in northeastern Jordan has led to the discovery of two amulets dated to the early to mid-1st millennium BCE. One of these amulets is in the form of a *pataikos*, i.e., a representation of the Egyptian dwarf god Ptah-Pataikos, while the other is scarab shaped. Evidence for such exotic items is extremely rare in this remote part of Jordan, with only a single scarab known from a previously excavated tomb located northeast of Azraq that dates to the 1st millennium BCE.¹ These new finds from the Jebel Qurma region add to our understanding of the ties between the local nomads and the settled communities of the Levant and Egypt in the Iron Age.

The Jebel Qurma range lies some 30 km to the east of the Azraq oasis, on the fringes of the black basalt desert and close to the Jordanian-Saudi border (FIG.

1). The highly arid region has an average annual precipitation of less than 50 mm and consists of steep basalt-covered table mounds and plateaus rising up to 80 m in height. Rolling gravel plains extend to the north and south of the basaltic uplands, alternating with stretches of low limestone rises and mudflats of varying sizes. Narrow and shallow wadis carve through the desert landscape and lead into two much larger channel systems on either side of the Jebel Qurma's high grounds: Wadi Rajil in the west and Wadi al-Qattafi in the east. These wadis serve as natural corridors through the basalt barrier, which is otherwise difficult to access and travel through. They connect to the flat, shallow depression of the Wadi Sirhan further to the southwest, which was a major caravan track between the Levant and Arabia.

Since 2012, the Jebel Qurma Archaeological Landscape Project has conducted surveys and excavations in the rough and rocky Jebel Qurma



FIGURE 1: Map of Jordan showing the location of the Jebel Qurma region (red rectangle). (Source: Terra-MODIS image, NASA/GSFC; Jebel Qurma Project Archive.)

range, identifying hundreds of burial cairns of different types and sizes.² The tombs lie primarily on the basalt-strewn plateaus and the summits of the basalt hills, high above the areas of ancient settlement. The installations mainly are isolated, single structures, although there are also a few concentrations of graves. The earliest securely dated cairns come from the 4th and 3rd millennia BCE, but the majority of the identified burials belong to the Iron Age of the 1st millennium BCE.³ The tombs and associated finds discussed in the present paper also belong to the 1st millennium BCE.

Several types of Iron Age burial cairns have been distinguished: round tower tombs, apsidal tower tombs, ring cairns, and cist graves.⁴ Of relevance to the present study are the ring cairns and the apsidal tower tombs. The former type consists of relatively large, conical cairns, usually 5–8 m across at their base and about 1–1.5 m in height. They have an oval or rectangular corbeled burial chamber in the center, encircled by an outer ring of large basalt blocks. Basalt rocks fill the area between the outer ring and the central burial chamber. These ring cairns were a long-lived form of burial used locally from at least the late 3rd millennium BCE until about 300–400 CE.

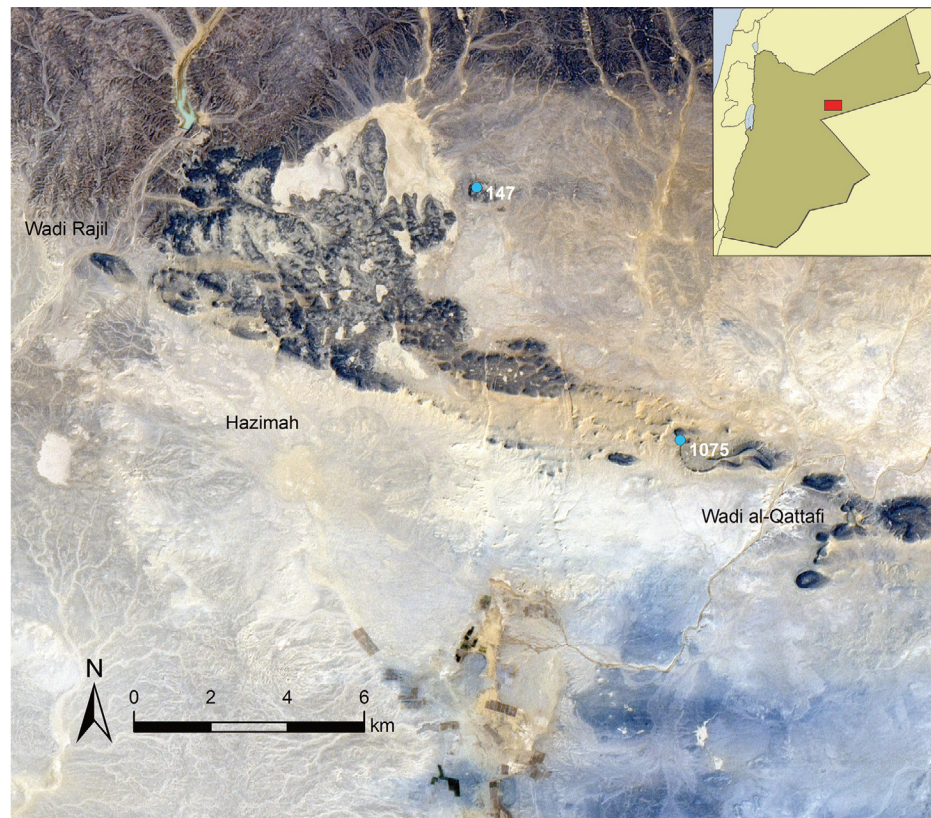


FIGURE 2: Satellite image of the Jebel Qurma area, with the location of the two burial cairns with Egyptian(izing) amulets (base map: Landsat 7–USGS; Jebel Qurma Project Archive).

Skeletal preservation in these tombs is generally poor, but it is clear that the deceased were consistently laid to rest in a flexed position on the side—a characteristic that the ring cairns shared with the other types of tombs. The *pataikos* amulet came from a ring cairn at the site of QUR-147 in the Jebel Qurma area (FIG. 2).

The apsidal structures are an entirely different type of cairn, identifiable by their distinct tower-like shape. These cairns are roughly hemispherical or square in plan and have one straight façade that is usually oriented towards the east. They are about 4 m across and up to 1.2 m in height. At present, these tombs are relatively rare, occurring at only two

neighboring sites in groups of two to seven cairns in the easternmost part of the Jebel Qurma range. The scarab was found in association with an apsidal tower tomb at the site of QUR-1075.

THE *PATAIKOS* AMULET FROM JEBEL QURMA

This small and roughly rectangular object (FIG. 3) has curved long sides and rounded corners. It is pierced transversally and could be worn as an amulet, likely suspended from a necklace. The amuletic figurine measures 28 x 12 x 8.5 mm. It was produced in a mold and made of a yellowish-white faience that originally had a green glaze, traces of which are preserved in the crevices.



FIGURE 3: *Pataikos* amulet from the tomb at QUR-147 in the Jebel Qurma region (inv. no. 17QUR147A112). (Photograph: Jebel Qurma Project Archive.)

The object represents a standing male figure in frontal view. He is naked except for a broad collar (*wsh*) draped over his shoulders and an Egyptian crown on his head. Although partially damaged, the crown consists of a central element flanked by ostrich feathers and raised cobras, placed on top of a pair of ram horns.⁵ This is probably the Osiris crown (*atef*). Covering his round and oversized head is a tight-fitting skullcap, which is the characteristic headdress of the Egyptian god Ptah. His eyes are large and protruding, the mouth is suggested by a straight horizontal line, and the nose is large and triangular; further facial details are worn and no longer discernible. The figure's legs are short and bent outward, giving him a dwarf-like appearance. Genitalia are visible underneath the belly with its large navel.

These characteristics identify the figure as a *pataikos*, which is a representation of the Egyptian dwarf god Ptah-Pataikos. The attributes emphasize particular aspects of the deity (see below). Two falcons perch on each shoulder, facing forward. The *pataikos'* bent arms are placed besides his chest, while he clenches two long straight objects in his hands, most probably a pair of knives.⁶ The figure stands on a square platform with worn, rounded edges, which does not contain additional details; similar *pataikos* figures occasionally stand on crocodiles or snakes. The underside is anepigraphic, although other *pataikos* amulets were inscribed with protective signs and blessings.⁷

The *pataikos* is placed upright against a back plate. Contrary to the front, which is modelled in the round, the figurine's back was decorated by lines carved into the surface. These lines depict a winged goddess, standing in profile on the right side. She appears to be naked or perhaps wears a long, tight-fitting dress. Her long hair or wig covers her shoulder, and she wears an ostrich feather on top of her head. The goddess extends her arms, exposing the detailed feathers of her wings, and she holds two large ostrich feathers in her hands. The feathers are a direct reference to Maat, the Egyptian goddess of justice and order, whose main attribute is the ostrich feather. Contrary to the amulet from Jebel Qurma, most other *pataikos* amulets with a winged goddess on the back show her with cow's horns and a sun disk (Isis or Hathor); in some cases she also holds ostrich feathers to identify her as Isis-Maat.⁸ Provenanced parallels representing the goddess with an ostrich feather on her head come from Saft

el-Henna in the Nile Delta (see below, FIG. 6), and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast.⁹

THE FIND CONTEXT

The *pataikos* amulet comes from a large ring cairn at the site of QUR-147, excavated in 2017. The single cairn lies on top of a relatively low basalt-covered elevation, located on the edge of a vast mudflat (FIG. 4). Although the cairn stands in the center of a Chalcolithic "wheel"¹⁰ dating to the late 6th to early 5th millennium BCE, the cairn was clearly a much later addition, given its associated radiocarbon and OSL dates (see below).

The ring cairn at QUR-147 is about 8.4 m in diameter and is preserved to a height of about 1 m. Originally, the ring cairn must have been higher, since it appears to have been partially levelled to facilitate the construction of the round tower tomb. The central, oval, corbeled burial chamber inside the ring cairn is about 1.3 m long, 0.95 m wide, and 0.9 m high (FIG. 5). The ring cairn was damaged substantially not only by the construction of the tower tomb on top of it but also by two Islamic burials sunk into it. Additionally, recent looting has contributed to the damage, as a large, irregular pit was dug into the cairn and roughly half of its chamber on the west side. The taper-shaped looting pit continued through the original burial floor and until the natural surface below. However, the eastern half of the burial chamber was untouched by the looters and provided evidence for several successive burial events.

The ring cairn was first constructed in the Early Bronze Age IV period (ca. 2200–1890 cal BCE), according to ¹⁴C dates obtained from preserved human bone material. While the OSL date from underneath the outer ring of the cairn has very large margins (2300 BCE–100 CE), part of it still falls within the ranges of the ¹⁴C dates.¹¹ However, the Early Bronze Age cairn appears to have been reused for burial in the Iron Age. In the undisturbed part of the burial chamber, about 20–25 cm above the original EBA IV remains and divided from these by a layer of sand, were the few and poorly preserved skeletal parts of an adult individual of unknown sex.¹² Recognizable elements include ribs, a distal humerus, a femur, and tibia fragments, as well as the right calcaneus and talus. The *pataikos* amulet, which dates to the mid-1st millennium BCE, was found among these bones in the burial chamber.

In addition to the *pataikos*, there were other pieces



FIGURE 4: The large ring cairn at QUR-147, prior to excavation. (Photograph: Jebel Qurma Project Archive.)

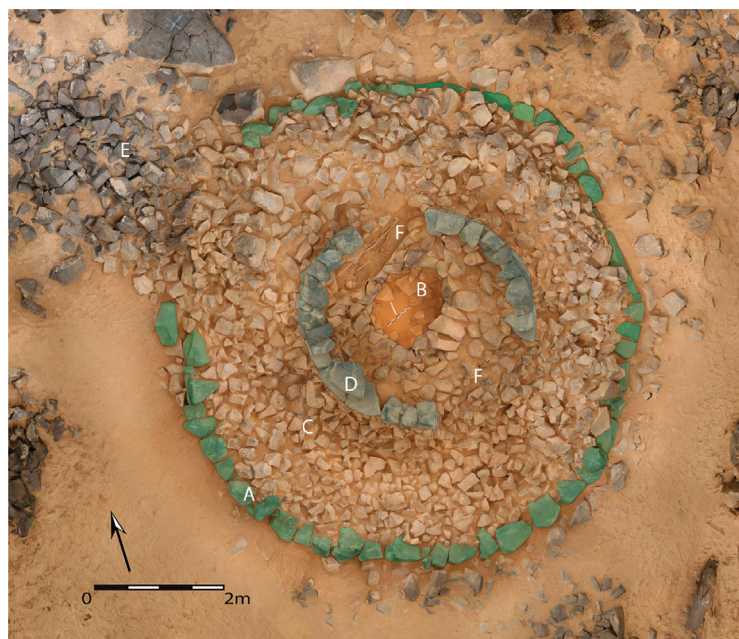


FIGURE 5: Aerial photo of the ring cairn at the site of QUR-147 in the Jebel Qurma area. A: outer ring of large stones. B: central burial chamber. C: stone infill between the burial chamber and the outer ring. D: remains of the tower tomb, built on top of the ring cairn at a later stage. E: start of the tail of small cairns. F: Islamic burial sunk into the cairn. (Photograph: Jebel Qurma Project Archive.)

of jewelry in the chamber, including beads made of faience (n= 8), marine shell (2), ostrich eggshell (3), and stone (5). Here there also were fragments of an iron signet ring, an iron clasp or buckle, two bronze armor platelets, and a bronze bracelet. Identical pieces of jewelry, as well as more adult human skeletal remains, were found in the looting debris outside of the burial chamber and very likely belong together with those in the chamber. These finds included beads made of faience (n= 12), stone (6), marine shell (8), and ostrich eggshell (8), as well as two iron clasps or buckles.

Significantly, the bones in the looting debris outside of the tomb also included the highly fragmentary parts of yet another two individuals. These come from an adolescent and a child over five years old at the time of death and probably post-date the adult burial.¹³ These individuals also must have been laid to rest in the cairn, only to be thrown out of their grave at the time of plunder.

MEANING AND INTERPRETATION

In ancient Egypt, dwarf gods were credited with protective and regenerative powers. They were valued for warding off danger, disease and evil, especially “in the crucial times of transition between life and death.”¹⁴ The images of dwarf gods such as Bes and Ptah-Pataikos are well known and were common from the New Kingdom onwards, particularly in the shape of amulets.¹⁵ Amulets of Ptah-Pataikos were worn to protect the living from snakebites or during childbirth¹⁶ and are regularly found in or near domestic buildings. The larger amulets could have served for home altars.¹⁷ *Pataikos* amulets also assisted the deceased in the afterlife, given their symbolic association with regeneration and rebirth. Hence, they occur in burials or are sewn onto mummy bandages. Ptah-Pataikos is also represented on coffins and in the Book of the Dead.¹⁸ Thus, the person owning or wearing a *pataikos* amulet called upon divine protection, expressed by the elements in the composition (goddesses, falcons), which we will now consider individually.

Dwarfs seem to have had a special affinity with Ptah, the creator god of Memphis, and with solar deities. Unfortunately, contrary to the dwarf god Bes, no Egyptian text mentions Ptah-Pataikos. His nature is known mainly from iconographic sources.¹⁹ Ptah-Pataikos was a manifestation of solar gods, such as Khepri, Horus, Re, Sokar, and Amun-Re, but also of regeneration gods, such as Osiris and Min.²⁰ Often, a

scarab—the sacred beetle and animal associated with the god Khepri and symbol of creation and regeneration—is positioned on the head of the *pataikos*. Royal statuary and religious texts also provide evidence for the connection between the sacred beetle and Ptah.²¹ The association of dwarfs with Ptah is probably linked to his role as a cosmic creator god: “the ‘half-formed’ appearance of dwarfs may have embodied the continuing process of creation.”²²

Similarly, the association of Ptah with the goddess Maat or Isis-Maat has been explained as a reference to “the pristine state of the world at the time of creation, and its perfect harmony.”²³ One of Ptah’s well-known divine epithets, especially from the New Kingdom onwards, is *nb mꜣꜥt* (i.e., “lord of truth” or “lord of Maat”), which invokes him as the protector of the ordered world.²⁴ It is in this capacity as a creator god that he functions on the amulet from Jebel Qurma. A more elaborate variant of this type of *pataikos* amulet has figures of the goddesses Neith and Sakhmet (in the Third Intermediate Period) or Isis and Nephthys (in the Late Period) standing on either side of the dwarf god.²⁵ In his study of *aegyptiaca* from Sardinia, Günther Hölbl proposes a detailed classification of subtypes,²⁶ although this does not provide corresponding dating parameters.

On the Jebel Qurma amulet, Ptah-Pataikos is not only protected by the winged goddess but also by a pair of birds on his shoulders. The falcons appear with a range of additional elements and their meaning may have changed over time. Since they often occur in compositions with (winged) goddesses²⁷ and the young sun god Nefertum, the use of birds in the *pataikos* amulet compositions probably derived from the Memphite theology. Nefertum, son of the Memphite Ptah and Sekhmet, is connected to the sun god Horus and is consequently linked with the Horus falcon. Györy associates the two birds with the young Horus (Harpocrates) on the *cippi*. While the connection to the creator god Ptah is more prominent in the earlier examples, the interpretation of the birds is linked to Isis and Horus during the Late Period. The two birds have been interpreted, for example, as guides assisting with the process of (re)birth and transmitters of life force, or as representations of Isis and Nephthys protecting the young Horus, in this case emphasizing the assimilation of Ptah-Pataikos and Horus.²⁸ The knives in his hands also refer to the protective powers of the figure, allowing him to ward off evil.²⁹

As for the crown, excavated *pataikos* parallels from the Levant do not show this type of crown.³⁰ They generally depict the *pataikos* wearing a skullcap, which is the most common headdress of this deity. However, several *pataikos* wearing feather crowns have been discovered at sites in Egypt, such as in burials at Tell er-Retabeh,³¹ Abusir,³² Matmar,³³ Lahun,³⁴ and Meroe in Nubia.³⁵ A scarab is sometimes positioned on the front of the crown, but this detail is not visible on the Jebel Qurma amulet. Crowns assimilate Ptah-Pataikos with a specific god: in the case of the *atef* crown, primarily with Osiris, the god of the Underworld, but also with the (rejuvenated) solar gods Re and Horus. By referring to (solar) renewal and fertility, this type of crown further highlights the nature of Ptah-Pataikos.³⁶

ORIGIN AND DATE

Beyond Egypt, *pataikos* amulets circulated widely in the Levant and throughout the Mediterranean.³⁷ They are among the most common types of Egyptian amulets found in the Levant, where they mainly occur at sites along the Mediterranean littoral, as early as Iron Age IA (ca. 1200–1100 BCE). They are particularly numerous during the Iron Age II period (ca. 900–700 BCE).³⁸ As mentioned above, the type with a winged goddess carved on the back is attested in the Levant, but none of these *pataikos* figures wear a crown. The type is attested as far as the western part of the Mediterranean.³⁹

In the Levant, the image of Ptah-Pataikos was well known⁴⁰ and he may have been associated with local deities, for example with the Phoenician Melqart, Adonis, or Eshmun.⁴¹ Christian Herrmann concluded that the great majority of amulets found in the Levant represent imports from Egypt,⁴² but scholarly opinions differ on the existence of Levantine amulet workshops. Despite the discovery of (imported Egyptian) amulet molds and evidence for faience workshops manufacturing Egyptian-style objects in the Levant, the origin of many amulets remains debated.⁴³

Stylistically, the Jebel Qurma amulet shares characteristics with finds from Egypt. Especially the fact that parallels wearing this type of feather crown come from the Egyptian corpus (see above) is a

strong argument to typologically assign the amulet to an Egyptian origin. A find from W.M.F. Petrie's 1906 excavations near Saft el-Henna/Goshen is closely related on typological and stylistic grounds (FIG. 6).⁴⁴ Even though this *pataikos* does not wear a crown, the execution of the engraving on the back, the broad collar, and the facial traits are strikingly similar to those on the Jebel Qurma amulet. Unfortunately, Petrie never published a full report of these excavations and details on the archaeological context that yielded the amulet remain unknown.

Amulets similar to the Saft el-Henna example but with more finely executed details than the Jebel Qurma amulet were discovered on Sardinia⁴⁵ or are, regrettably, unprovenanced.⁴⁶ Yet, none show the *pataikos* wearing an Egyptian crown. Finally, worn faience *pataikos* figurines are among the finds from a *dépôt d'offrandes* excavated in Byblos in 1929.⁴⁷ From these amulets, it is important to note the resemblance in the rendering of the knives and the broad collar with those from Jebel Qurma, Saft el-Henna, and Sardinia. To these ones we may also add a badly damaged *pataikos* amulet from Amathus in southern Cyprus.⁴⁸



FIGURE 6: *Pataikos* from Petrie's excavations at Saft el-Henna (Goshen), Lower Egypt. (© Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter; images courtesy of Thomas Cadbury; not to scale.)

Unfortunately, these parallels do not come from securely dated contexts. Although the *pataikos* amulets remain relatively unaltered in their fundamental characteristics throughout their period of manufacture, it is possible to discern some major chronological developments. Amulets on which the figure can be identified with certainty as Ptah-Pataikos first appears in the New Kingdom, they flourish in the Third Intermediate Period (21st–25th Dynasties), and continue to be produced in Graeco-Roman times.⁴⁹

One determinative element for dating the Jebel Qurma amulet may be the pair of birds perched on his shoulders. In a study of this feature, Hedvig Györy argued that it was introduced to *pataikos* amulets in Egypt during the Third Intermediate Period.⁵⁰ She also observed that they were more frequently present on *pataikos* amulets with four-figure compositions (i.e., in which three deities accompany Ptah-Pataikos) than on those with depictions of the winged goddess.⁵¹ Secondly, the *atef* crown appears during the Third Intermediate Period,⁵² and the more elaborate triple *atef* crown

(*hnmhm*) emerges in the 26th Dynasty (ca. 664–525 BCE).⁵³ Finally, the goddess on the back first appears during the Third Intermediate Period: the wings protectively envelop the *pataikos*' sides in the round and then evolve into a two-dimensional carved surface in the Late Period.⁵⁴ The popularity of the type with this decoration on the back is also evident in the considerable numbers distributed in the Levant during the Iron Age II–III (ca. 900–600 BCE).⁵⁵ Seen from the side, the *pataikos* and the back plate with the image of the winged goddess from Jebel Qurma are two distinct elements, like the Late Period parallels. Based on these observations, the amulet from Jebel Qurma can be dated to the early part of the Late Period, ca. 664–525 BCE (26th Dynasty).

THE SCARAB FROM JEBEL QURMA

The second Egyptian(izing) object found in Jebel Qurma is a scarab-shaped amulet (FIG. 7), perforated longitudinally by means of a drill, and measuring 12 x 9 x 7 mm. It is made of white or light-gray steatite that turned beige-white when it was heated to



FIGURE 7: The scarab from Jebel Qurma (inv. no. 19QUR1075A24).
(Photograph: Jebel Qurma Project Archive.)

receive a blue glaze, which originally covered the entire surface of the amulet. While the glaze deteriorated to a green-blue color over time, traces of it are preserved inside the incisions for the wings, for the decoration of the underside, and on the head plates and legs of the scarab. The scarab itself is well preserved except for some chipping on the legs and damage to the right part of the underside. However, this does not hinder the legibility of the incised theme.

The back shows the scarab's wings divided by a single line that ends in a small triangle, representing the scutellum of the beetle. A double line separates the wings from the pronotum. On either side of the wings, three oblique strokes mark the shoulders (i.e., the humeral callosities). The pronotum has a concave side for the head, which has a trapezoidal shape with an inner semi-circle for the head itself. The head plates are present, the clypeus is dented, and the so-called horn is shown as a relatively large triangle on top of the head. The sides of the scarab are deeply chip-carved to represent the fore, mid-, and hind

legs. The mid-legs meet where pronotum and wings join, but the legs are undecorated.⁵⁶

The underside has linear incisions and deeply carved-out shapes, depicting an anthropomorphic figure who faces to the right and sits on a chair or throne with a low back. Horizontal bands across his kinked torso indicate the presence of a waistband or other element of dress. His left arm, incised with a single undulating line, hangs down to hold an Egyptian *was* scepter. The right arm, on the other hand, bends at the elbow in a very angular and irregular manner. It is unclear what the strokes behind his head represent: a flail, a necklace counterpoise, or a part of a headdress? The flail is the most likely option, as it would explain the bent position of his right arm.

THE FIND CONTEXT

The scarab stems from an apsidal tower tomb at the site of QUR-1075, excavated in 2019. The tomb is located high on top of a basalt-capped rise, which is part of the much larger Jebel Rijlat Suleiman in the



FIGURE 8: Tower tombs at the site of QUR-1075 in the Jebel Qurma area. Right: the apsidal tower tomb with the scarab, dated to the early first millennium BCE. Left: round tower tomb, built in the late first millennium BCE. (Photograph: Jebel Qurma Project Archive.)



FIGURE 9: Three-dimensional image of the apsidal tower tomb at the site of QUR-1075, with its straight façade oriented to the east. A: outer wall; B: burial chamber. (Photograph: Jebel Qurma Project Archive.)

eastern part of the Jebel Qurma area, close to Wadi al-Qattafi. Originally, the tomb was one of two apsidal tombs which stood next to each other at the site, but the other installation was wholly levelled in the late 1st millennium BCE and replaced by a round tower tomb (FIG. 8).

The cairn is apsidal in plan with one straight façade oriented towards the east (FIG. 9). It measures about 3.6 by 3.5 m and is preserved to a height of 1.2 m. An oval burial chamber is located slightly off-center inside the structure, measuring about 1.25 m long by 0.6 m wide (interior), with a preserved interior height of 65 cm. Its wall was carefully stacked, and a large flat basalt outcrop served as the floor of the chamber. The cover of the grave is missing, as it was removed during a looting incident. The removed basalt blocks lay around the cairn, together with other plunder debris (human bones,

artifacts). While the western half of the chamber remained roughly intact, the looting seems to have focused on the eastern half, removing the original in-situ deposit of sand and human bones until reaching the floor. This ransacking probably took place a long time ago, since, after the event, the chamber had entirely filled in with wind-blown sand deposits up to 40 cm thick and rocks had fallen down from the chamber wall.

The skeletal remains of three individuals were on top of the floor in the chamber, with the bones poorly preserved and often split and flaked. Identified parts included skull and mandible fragments as well as teeth, vertebrae, scapulae, humeri, ulnae, and radii. They were partially intermingled throughout a ca. 2–5 cm thick layer of relatively soft sand, although some parts were still articulated, indicating primary burial. The skeletal

fragments were concentrated in the western part of the chamber, with only a few bones remaining in the looted eastern part. Moreover, they were limited to the parts of the upper body. The leg bones were entirely missing in the chamber, but these were identified among the bones found in the looting debris outside of the tomb. The dead were clearly laid to rest in a contracted position on their side,⁵⁷ oriented east–west, and with their heads to the west.

The remains of a mature adult lay on the floor in the middle of the chamber, flanked on either side by two younger individuals.⁵⁸ An adolescent lay along the chamber wall immediately to the south of the adult, while the immature bones of an older child about 10–16 years of age occurred along the wall on the north side, scattered on the edge of the looter's pit. It seems that the corpses were originally deliberately positioned next to each other on the chamber floor, in an identical orientation. This suggests that the three individuals were buried together in a single event, instead of during several successive funerals.

Along with the human bones, several pieces of jewelry were found in situ in the burial chamber, including nine beads made of faience and glass, two bronze earrings, a bronze pin, and an iron signet ring. All objects were found in clear association with the remains of the adult individual in the center of the chamber, and none could be connected to the other, younger persons. Similar objects (and more human bone fragments) also occurred outside the tomb. Here were eight beads made of glass and faience, three red carnelian beads, a pendant made of a translucent purple stone, an iron ring fragment, a bronze earring, and two bronze armor platelets. Significantly, the bronze earring was identical to the two found in association with the adult in the burial chamber; its occurrence outside of the tomb must have been due to the looting of the grave. The same undoubtedly holds for (most of) the other finds.

The scarab, too, was found outside of the tomb, on the natural gravel surface immediately along the cairn's western outer façade. It is tempting to also relate the scarab to the looted adult burial in the cairn. However, there is reason to believe that the scarab and perhaps some of the other finds had nothing to do with any of the burials discussed above. It is likely that they belonged to a still earlier interment in the cairn, disturbed by the placement of the three individuals. Firstly, the tower tomb was partly renovated on its northern and eastern sides, with basalt blocks newly inserted into parts of the

walls that apparently had fallen into disrepair. This renovation clearly aimed to reuse the cairn for burial. It seems reasonable to assume that this repair was contemporary with the preparation of the cairn for the interment of the three individuals. Secondly, on the basalt floor slab in the burial chamber, and underneath the skeletal remains of the three individuals, there was a thin, 1–2 cm thick, layer of hard and compact sand. This layer contained many tiny bone fragments, none of which could be identified. These may be the remnants of an older, original burial in the tomb. Thirdly, the date of the jewelry is inconsistent, with some finds being much earlier than other objects. As argued in detail below, the scarab dates between the 11th and 9th centuries BCE. However, items such as the iron signet ring, the bronze armor platelets, and at least some of the faience beads undoubtedly belong to the late 1st millennium, after ca. 300 BCE.⁵⁹ We must conclude that the finds outside the cairn represent a blend of contexts, with the objects belonging to more than one interment in the tomb. The scarab, we believe, was part of the inventory of the original grave in the apsidal tower tomb,⁶⁰ while most of the other finds were associated with a (much) later reuse of the cairn, including the interment of the three individuals.

MEANING AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SCARAB

The flail or flagellum is an attribute seen in the hands of the Egyptian gods Min, Osiris, or syncretic deities with Osirian aspects (Ptah-Sokar-Osiris), or held by deceased persons and the pharaoh when he is identified with Osiris. Osiris and the pharaoh are often shown with arms crossed in front of the chest, holding a flail and crook. The flail itself consequently became an emblem of royal authority and kingship.⁶¹ The other attribute, the *was* scepter, is an Egyptian symbol of power. Like the crook and flail, it is associated with deities as well as with the king.⁶² As to the identity of the seated individual, the unconventional rendering of characterizing details impedes ascertaining whether it depicts a king or a specific deity (FIG. 10).

If the figure is royal, it is difficult to define the type of crown. Representations of the pharaoh appear on scarabs from the New Kingdom onward, with the theme of the enthroned king popular during the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Dynasty,⁶³ and only sporadically attested afterwards.⁶⁴ Whether the precise symbolic details of the Egyptian royal image



FIGURE 10: Detail of the scarab design from Jebel Qurma with overlaying drawing to highlight the incisions.

were fully understood in the southern Levant in the period following the end of the New Kingdom is doubtful. This can be concluded from the limited repertoire of Egyptian royal symbols copied in local glyptic traditions of the early 1st millennium BCE,⁶⁵ and from local developments in royal iconography in other media.⁶⁶

Vertical extensions on top of the figure's head, which is hardly discernible by the absence of a neck or facial features, do not exclude that he is an animal-headed deity. The incisions would allow for an identification as a canine-headed god or as Seth,⁶⁷ but examples of enthroned anthropomorphic representations of Seth on scarabs are absent. The extensions are too short to refer to the two-plumed crown (*šwtj*) of the god Amun,⁶⁸ who is occasionally depicted seated and holding a *was* scepter on Egyptian seal-amulets and signet rings.⁶⁹ Egyptian New Kingdom scarabs showing enthroned deities with a *was* scepter also surface in the Levant, for example a possible Ptah on a scarab from Tell Jemmeh,⁷⁰ Amun on a fragmentary seal-amulet from Tell Ta'anek,⁷¹ and a falcon-headed Re on a scarab from Tell el-Far'a South⁷² (FIG. 11). While the seated Ptah – holding his iconic attribute, the *was* – is also



FIGURE 11: Selection of Egyptian New Kingdom scarabs showing enthroned figures. From top to bottom: scarabs found in Tell Jemmeh, Tell Ta'anek and Tell el-Far'a South (after Keel 2013, 65 no. 149; Keel 2015, no. 5; Keel 2010b, 143 no. 265).

known from scarabs,⁷³ this identification must also be excluded here, because the seated figure in the Jebel Qurma example clearly wears more than Ptah's characteristic cap. One can also recognize in the outline another type of crown worn by deities: a trapezoidal shape with two horizontal extensions (horns or plumes?) on either side. This resembles the headdress of Syro-Palestinian deities such as Ba'al,⁷⁴ and could also be a debased version of the *atef* or the Osiris crown. Osiris, however, rarely features on Egyptian scarabs.⁷⁵ Given the lack of parallels (cf. below), an interpretation as a bearded deity (Ba'al? Osiris? Amun?) wearing an Osiris(-like) crown remains problematic.



FIGURE 12: Examples of early Iron Age southern Levantine stamp-seal designs with representations of enthroned figures, from Geser (after Keel 2013, 406–407, no. 560, 430–431, no. 614).

In conclusion, the design can be considered as a corrupt combination of the image of the enthroned pharaoh with regalia and that of a deity holding a *was* scepter. The flail and scepter leave no doubt that the scene is strongly inspired by Egyptian iconography, but its symbolic nature—royal or religious—cannot be defined at this point.

ORIGIN AND DATE

The theme allows for a comparison with the stylized representations of royal figures in the repertoire of early Iron Age Levantine glyptic⁷⁶ (FIG. 12). This is inspired by Egyptian kingly imagery of the late New Kingdom but clearly distinguishable from it. These southern Levantine seal amulets of the 10th century BCE show similarities in composition and workmanship, but enthroned figures do not grasp a *was* scepter and show an attendant or worshipper in the company of the king. It is therefore not feasible to link the Jebel Qurma scarab directly to these seal amulets, since it does not share any typological affinity. However, it should not be placed too distant within the chronological development of the theme.

The back type (FIG. 13) draws from Ramesside models for the oblique strokes on the beetle's "shoulders," but these do not necessarily show the same number of dividing lines or the same head type.⁷⁷ Moreover, contrary to the Ramesside scarabs, the Jebel Qurma scarab has a rather high profile, further supporting the conclusion that this scarab copies a model and must therefore be dated in the Ramesside period or, more likely, shortly thereafter. The use of oblique decoration on the shoulders

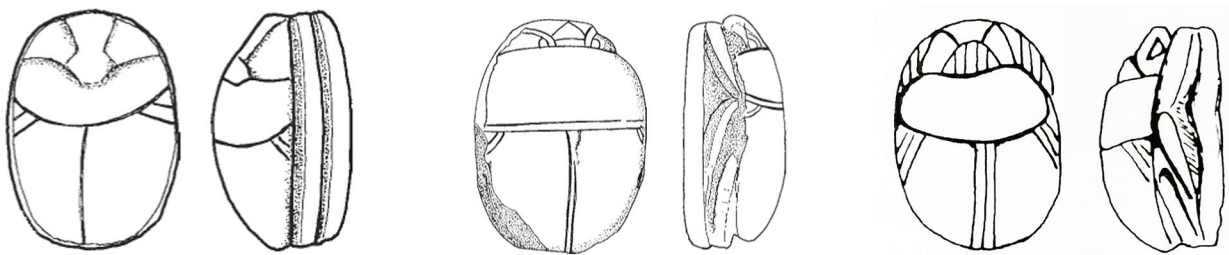


FIGURE 13: Scarabs showing similar decorations on the back. From left to right: an Egyptian late New Kingdom scarab from Tell Erani (after Keel 2010a, 591, no. 4), a Phoenician scarab from Beit She'an (after Keel 2020a, 184–185, no. 199), and a scarab from the Persian period found in Sardinia (after Hölbl 1986, 173, no. 18) (not to scale).

reaches another peak in the Persian period⁷⁸ but these scarabs have a ribbed head. It is important to point out here, however, that the continuation of the use of this feature throughout the early 1st millennium BCE, as illustrated by a Phoenician scarab from Beit She'an dating to the late 9th to 8th century BCE,⁷⁹ again has a different treatment of the head and the pronotum. The overall combination of typological details thus suggests a date between the 11th and 9th century BCE for the scarab from Jebel Qurma, most likely towards the earlier part of that timeframe, because the features relate closer to the Ramesside than to the Phoenician types.

The overall impression of the quality of the workmanship of the scarab is mediocre, as if executed by an inexperienced hand, repeatedly engraving along the same lines while often deviating from its track. This is apparent in the irregular line tracing and in the line surrounding the design on the underside, which is not fully closed at the top. On the back, this tendency is most noticeable in the crooked and irregular line separating the wings and on the right shoulder, where the diagonal strokes cut though the lines delineating the pronotum, while this does not occur on the left shoulder. As discussed above, excavated comparanda for the scarab and its decoration suggest that the carver drew upon models on which these details on the back and underside had been executed with more care and a sense of symmetry. Similarly, several elements in the design on the underside, such as the throne, diverge from the models but are still sufficiently recognizable as the motif to which they refer.⁸⁰ At this point, it is not possible to determine whether this level of workmanship should be attributed to the skills of the carver or to a conscious choice to reproduce a more stylized version of the model.

The adoption of the scarab shape for amulets is a well-known and well-studied phenomenon in the archaeology of the Bronze Age and Iron Age Levant, but it is still not easily recognizable in "peripheral" areas where Egyptian influence was perhaps less prominent. Sperveslage suggested a local imitation of Egyptian scarabs took place in the Gulf region during the Bronze Age because of the greater distance to Egypt and the subsequent reduced access to original Egyptian objects.⁸¹ While distance and availability certainly are to be considered for the imitation of Egyptian scarabs, this is not a decisive factor for every region or period.⁸² A more complex situation is suggested by the Levantine adaptations

of the Egyptian scarab and by the fact that, during the Iron Age, the scarabs found in the Arabian Peninsula are either of Egyptian or Levantine (Phoenician) origin, and not local, Arabian imitations.⁸³ The origin of the scarab from Jebel Qurma thus must lie to the west of the basalt desert, in the Jordan valley or beyond. In this region, scarabs had circulated since the early 2nd millennium BCE, and steatite scarabs were being made here as early as the 17th century BCE.⁸⁴ The scarab from Jebel Qurma was created by an individual who had access to the proper raw material and a model to copy (even if he did not fully comprehend its imagery), and who had some experience in carving soft stone and glazing steatite. The copied model, it seems, was a scarab very similar to the aforementioned one found at Tell Jemmeh in the western Negev (cf. FIG. 11, top) or the unprovenanced scarab in Bonn (see above note 68).

CONCLUSIONS

Egyptian and Egyptian-style objects are still very scarce in the Jordanian basalt desert. In addition to the finds from Jebel Qurma, only one other excavated cairn on the eastern edge of the basalt expanse between Ruwayshid and Wisad yielded a scarab, dated to the Egyptian Late Period (Twenty-sixth Dynasty, ca. 664–525 BCE).⁸⁵ Several hundreds of kilometers to the south of the Jebel Qurma range, a faience scarab was found in a looted cairn near Dûmat al-Jandal (biblical Dûma, in the Jowf region of Saudi Arabia), radiocarbon-dated to the very end of the 1st millennium BCE.⁸⁶ As for the nearest finds to the north of Jebel Qurma, scarabs have been found at sites in the Damascus oasis. Two scarabs are reported from Late Bronze Age levels at Tell Sakka,⁸⁷ and another two scarabs in 6th century BCE contexts come from Tell Salihiyeh.⁸⁸ More relevant, but too numerous to be discussed here, are the Egyptian imports that have surfaced in the Jordan Valley and the Transjordanian highlands to the west of Jebel Qurma.⁸⁹ Clearly, there is a concentration of scarab finds in the western Levant and very low numbers of *aegyptiaca* in southern Syria, eastern Jordan, and the northern part of Saudi Arabia.

While this paucity of finds in the latter regions may be partially due to restrictions in the scale of research, it may also reflect an overall limited use of *aegyptiaca* and other exotic items in these areas. Amulets such as the scarab and the *pataikos* from Jebel Qurma may have been valued for their exclusiveness as well as

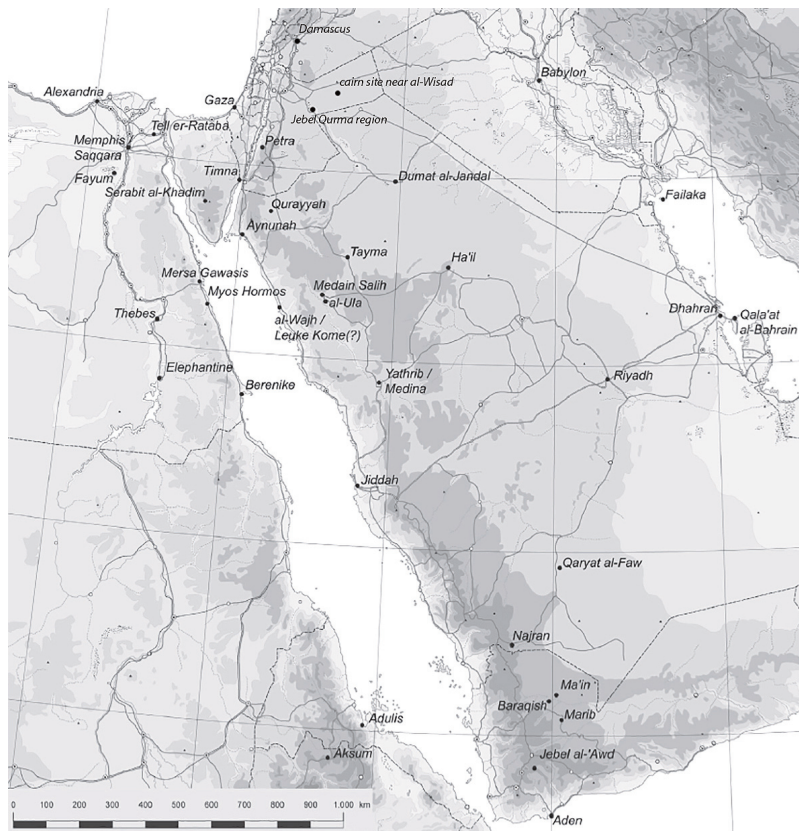


FIGURE 14: Map of the main trade routes in the southern Levant, northwest Arabia, and Egypt in the early Iron Age, with the location of sites mentioned in the text (after Sperveslage 2016, fig. 14.1; © DAI Orient-Abteilung).

for their magic connotations. However, it has been doubted whether these imports kept much if any of their original symbolic meaning for the nomadic groups who came in contact with such objects on an irregular basis and on a small scale.⁹⁰

As argued in detail above, and taking into account the main exchange routes in 1st millennium BCE Jordan, the Levantine scarab from the tomb at QUR-1075 must have traveled to its final destination via an urban center to the (north)west of Jebel Qurma.⁹¹ In contrast, the *pataikos* amulet, which is Egyptian in origin, may have travelled from Egypt via direct trade routes across the Sinai or northwestern Arabia, without a Levantine intermediary (FIG. 14). Although finds at oases such as Qurayyah⁹² and Tayma in northwest Saudi Arabia reveal contact and exchanges with southern Levantine communities, the Egyptian objects—including scarabs—found

there⁹³ probably arrived at the sites via direct connections with Egypt.⁹⁴ There is a still limited but increasing scholarly interest in the intercultural exchanges between the Arabian Peninsula and pharaonic Egypt in the early 1st millennium BCE.⁹⁵ Importantly, these studies do not exclude that Egyptian objects could have reached the Jordanian basalt desert via nomadic networks in northern Arabia (through Tayma and Dumat al-Jandal) and not only by means of the more evident routes through the Jordan Valley and its vicinity.

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NOTES

- ¹ Eggler and Keel 2006, 166–167.
- ² Akkermans and Brüning 2017; Akkermans et al. 2020.
- ³ Akkermans and Brüning 2020.
- ⁴ Akkermans and Brüning 2017; Akkermans et al. 2020.
- ⁵ See the interpretation below for examples of this type of crown. The central element is most likely the Egyptian white crown as part of the Osiris crown. See Goebis 2001 on Egyptian crowns. Vanessa Boschloos thanks Marsha Hill, Isabel Stünckel, and Maud Slingenberg for helpful comments on a draft of this section of the paper.
- ⁶ A *pataikos* figure can also hold snakes, with their curling bodies oftentimes continuing on the legs of the figure, which, however, is not the case here.
- ⁷ E.g., Hölbl 2017, cat. no. 9; Daressy 1905, 202, CG 38.810.
- ⁸ Dasen 2008, 3.
- ⁹ Contenau 1926, 158, fig. 56. Also reproduced in Hölbl 1986, 111, Abb. 1. Additional examples are in the Cairo museum (Daressy 1905, CG 39.243), the museum of Cagliari (Sardinia) (Acquaro 1977, no. 599), and the Bible+Orient Museum in Fribourg, Switzerland (inv. no. 1608).
- ¹⁰ The so-called “wheels” are roughly circular arrangements of enclosures, often surrounded by a string of round hut structures (cf. Akkermans et al. 2014, 197–200).
- ¹¹ Akkermans and Brüning 2020.
- ¹² The deceased was apparently laid to rest on this layer of sand. It remains unknown whether the sand was intentionally brought into the cairn for burial purposes or whether it was a wind-blown deposit that had gradually filled in the cairn.
- ¹³ No remains of these two individuals were found in the undisturbed part of the burial chamber.
- ¹⁴ Dasen 1993, 156.
- ¹⁵ Dasen 1993, 58, 85; Raven 1987.

- 16 Györy 2004, 63.
- 17 Michalowski et al. 1950, pl. XLI, nos. 21 and 29; Petrie 1937, pl. 30, no. 31.
- 18 Dasen 1993, 97; Dasen 2008, 4–5.
- 19 Dasen 2008.
- 20 Dasen 1993, 48–54, 91–97; Györy 2004, 56–57.
- 21 Minas-Nerpel 2013, 148.
- 22 Dasen 1993, 92; Györy 2004, 66–67.
- 23 Dasen 1993, 92–93.
- 24 Leitz 2002, III, 639.
- 25 Györy 2003, 17, 19; Matzker 1990, 201, 207. The multiple figure type is sometimes called a *cippus* amulet, in accordance with the Horus *cippus* stelae (Andrews 1994, 38).
- 26 Hölbl 1986, 80–83. The Jebel Qurma amulet can be classified under Hölbl’s type 4.3.1: “Schutzgöttin auf der Rückseite—ohne seitliche Schutzgöttinnen; realistischer Typus.” He discerns on this type also the Egyptian double crown on the birds’ heads and hieroglyphic inscriptions on the underside, which are absent on the example from Jebel Qurma.
- 27 Matzker 1990.
- 28 Györy 2003, 21–28.
- 29 Kandil 2009, 312–316.
- 30 The only example known to the authors comes from the antiquities market and is now in the Bible+Orient Museum in Fribourg, Switzerland (inv. no. 1609) (Herrmann 2003, no. 517, Taf. LXXIII). Though the crown is badly worn, it is composed of a long central element (a white crown?) flanked by feathers and uraei. The authors are grateful to Florian Lippke for sharing images of this amulet.
- 31 Petrie 1906, pl. XXXII.
- 32 Schäfer 1908, 131–132, Abb. 215.
- 33 Brunton 1948, pl. LVIII, no. 39.
- 34 Petrie 1891, pl. XXIX, no. 43.
- 35 Dunham 1963, 7, fig. 3f, 27, fig. 19h.
- 36 Goebs 2001, 323.
- 37 Dasen 2008, 4; Herrmann 1994, 404–492; Hölbl 1986, 113–114.
- 38 Arav and Barnett 1997, 212–213, table 3; Herrmann 2002, 27–37, 74–81, 114, 139–140; Herrmann 2006, 124–147, nos. 148–199; Herrmann 2016, 142–159.
- 39 Herrmann 2016, Taf. XXV.
- 40 See also Herodotus (*Histories* III, 37), who introduced the name Pataikos and describes seeing similar dwarf-like figures on the prows of Phoenician ships (Morenz 1954).
- 41 Hölbl 1986, 109–110.
- 42 Herrmann 1994, 37; 2002.
- 43 Herrmann 1994, 36–37; Hölbl 1979, 189–190; Hölbl 1986, 157–159.
- 44 Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, inv. no. 447/1906, “Late Period” (< rammcollections.org.uk/object/447-1906/>); accessed 15 September 2019. Vanessa Boschloos thanks curator Thomas Cadbury for this information, the images, and the permission to publish them here.
- 45 Acquaro 1977, no. 599; Hölbl 1986, Taf. 15, no. 2.
- 46 Bible+Orient Museum Fribourg, Switzerland inv. no. 1608 (= Herrmann 200, no. 516, Taf. LXXII); Herrmann 2016: no. 299 (Israel).
- 47 Dunand 1937–1939, pl. LXXIII, lower left image. The find spot is located immediately south of room H of the so-called *Bâtiment II* or Temple of the Ba’alat Gubal (squares 39 and 40) of *levées* VI–VIII (Dunand 1937–1939: 174, pl. CCVI).
- 48 From Site E, tomb 88 (Murray et al. 1900, 120), now in the British Museum (inv. no. 1894, 1101.272).
- 49 Arav and Barnett 1997, 208–209; Dasen 2008, 5; Györy 2002; Györy 2003, 15–20.
- 50 Györy 2003.
- 51 Györy 2003, 12.
- 52 Györy 2003, 16–17.
- 53 Györy 2003, 20. For Late Period amulets showing the *pataikos* with various feather crowns, see, e.g., Daressy 1905, CG 38.807, 39.237, 39.270.
- 54 Györy 2003, 19–20. From publications this can only be verified when an image of the side of the amulet is provided. Compare the side views showing the goddess’ wings on Third Intermediate Period amulets (e.g., Brunton 1948, pl. LVIII no. 39 [Matmar]; Herrmann 1994, 465–466

- nos. 642 [Tell el-Ajjul] and 644 [Ashkelon]; Herrmann 2006, nos. 171–172 [Akhziv]; Hölbl 2017, 42–43 no. 9 [al-Mina]; Petrie 1891, pl. XXIX no. 43 [Lahun]) with the carved plate seen on Late Period examples (e.g., Györy 2003, 20–21; Hölbl 1986, Taf. 13 no. 3 [Sulcis], Taf. 14–15).
- ⁵⁵ Herrmann 2002, 35.
- ⁵⁶ These features correspond to head-type F2, back-type I and side-type d5 in the typological code system of Keel 2017, xvii–xviii; Keel 1995; see also Tufnell et al. 1984.
- ⁵⁷ In view of its restricted size, the chamber cannot support a burial in a supine position.
- ⁵⁸ The generally poor and incomplete preservation of the skeletal remains did not allow for the recognition of either sex and (precise) age of the deceased.
- ⁵⁹ A detailed analysis of the artifactual finds is underway, as are radiocarbon dates from the various skeletal fragments.
- ⁶⁰ An early date for the apsidal tower tombs (in the late 2nd to early 1st millennium BCE) is also suggested by finds in other apsidal cairns at the nearby site of QUR-102. One carnelian ax-shaped pendant at the latter site has excellent parallels at early Iron Age sites as far apart as Wadi Fidan in Jordan and Saruq al-Hadid in the Emirates. See Akkermans et al. 2020; Beherec 2011; Weeks et al. 2017.
- ⁶¹ Wilkinson 2003, 62–63, 120–121; Fischer 1977.
- ⁶² Martin 1986.
- ⁶³ Wiese 1990, 27–33; Jaeger 1982, §391.
- ⁶⁴ The theme of the enthroned pharaoh appears only occasionally on Egyptian scarabs of the Twentieth Dynasty or later (e.g., Wiese 1990, 27, no. 1030; Hall 1913, no. 2305). For its continuation in the Levantine production of the Iron Age II–III see, e.g., Heinz (ed.) 2010, 82, 92, fig. 61, pl. 11; Hölbl 1986, Taf. 143, no. 2.
- ⁶⁵ Münger 2018.
- ⁶⁶ Bonatz 2009.
- ⁶⁷ Canine-headed deities such as Anubis are rarely depicted on scarabs and never in anthropomorphic form (Hornung and Staehelin 1976, 930). Seth, on the other hand, is shown (although not enthroned), particularly during the Ramesside period due to the syncretism between Seth and Ba‘al (Schroer 2011, nos. 896, 898, 907, 908, 930; Tazawa 2009, 154–156; Cornelius 1994, 134–234; Hornung and Staehelin 1976, 99–100).
- ⁶⁸ Goebis 2001, 323–324.
- ⁶⁹ E.g., Dunham and Janssen 1960, pl. 120, nos. 28, 30; Newberry 1907, pl. IX, no. CG 37350; Regner, 1995, nr. 42.
- ⁷⁰ Keel 2013, 64–65, no. 149.
- ⁷¹ Keel 2013, 145, no. 5.
- ⁷² Keel 2010b, 142–143, no. 265. There assigned to the Levantine (Phoenician) production of the Iron Age II. Note, however, the typological features (cf. Ben-Tor 2015; Jaeger 1993, no. 5) and the delicate style of engraving with finely incised hatching inside motifs (Jaeger 1982, 137, §1071), which assign this scarab to the early Eighteenth Dynasty.
- ⁷³ Keel 1989.
- ⁷⁴ See examples of headdresses in Schroer 2011, 312–369, especially nos. 873, 878, 937; Tazawa 2009, 124–129; and Cornelius 1994, figs. 22, 41, 45, 50. The image on the Jebel Qurma scarab does not correspond to Ba‘al-iconography on seal amulets (Cornelius 1994, pl. 47–50).
- ⁷⁵ Hornung and Staehelin 1976, 90, 98.
- ⁷⁶ Münger 2005, 95; Schipper 2003, 260–263; Keel 1994, 83–84.
- ⁷⁷ Compare, e.g., Keel 2010a, 591, no. 4; Keel 2010b: 109, no. 188, 127, no. 229, 405, no. 896; Keel 1997, 53, no. 93; Keel 1995, §102, Abb. 63; Jaeger 1993, no. 30; Schlick-Nolte and von Droste zu Hülshoff 1990, nos. 59, 71.
- ⁷⁸ E.g., Hölbl 1986, 173, nos. 16, 18, 19, 23, 25.
- ⁷⁹ Keel 2020a, 184–185, no. 199.
- ⁸⁰ The *was* scepter is easily identifiable, but the chair is more problematic.
- ⁸¹ Sperveslage 2016, 322.
- ⁸² Boschloos 2017.
- ⁸³ Sperveslage 2016, 312, 318–319, 322–323.
- ⁸⁴ Ben-Tor 2007.
- ⁸⁵ Clark et al. 1981, 242, 246, fig. 3:2.14; Eggler and

- Keel 2007, 166–167, no. 1.
- ⁸⁶ Munoz et al. 2020.
- ⁸⁷ Taraqji 1999, 33–34, figs. 4–5.
- ⁸⁸ Von der Osten 1956, 68, Taf. 31, Abb. 77.
- ⁸⁹ See Eggler and Keel 2007 for a catalog of seal amulets and Boschloos 2014 for insights into the intraregional distribution of scarabs.
- ⁹⁰ See Sperveslage 2016, 323.
- ⁹¹ Cf. Potts 1988; Augé 2013; also Akkermans 2019, 427–428.
- ⁹² To date, three scarabs have been discovered at Qurayyah; Marta Luciani (University of Vienna), personal communication.
- ⁹³ Sperveslage 2016, 314–316; Hausleiter 2010, 231; Hausleiter 2011, 111, 113.
- ⁹⁴ Sperveslage 2016, fig. 14.1; Potts 1988.
- ⁹⁵ Sperveslage 2016; Sperveslage 2018; Sperveslage and Eichmann 2012.