

From dig to digital

The future of scarab documentation

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CURRENT STATE

Scarabs are **small** in size • **complex** in shape and details • **omnipresent**

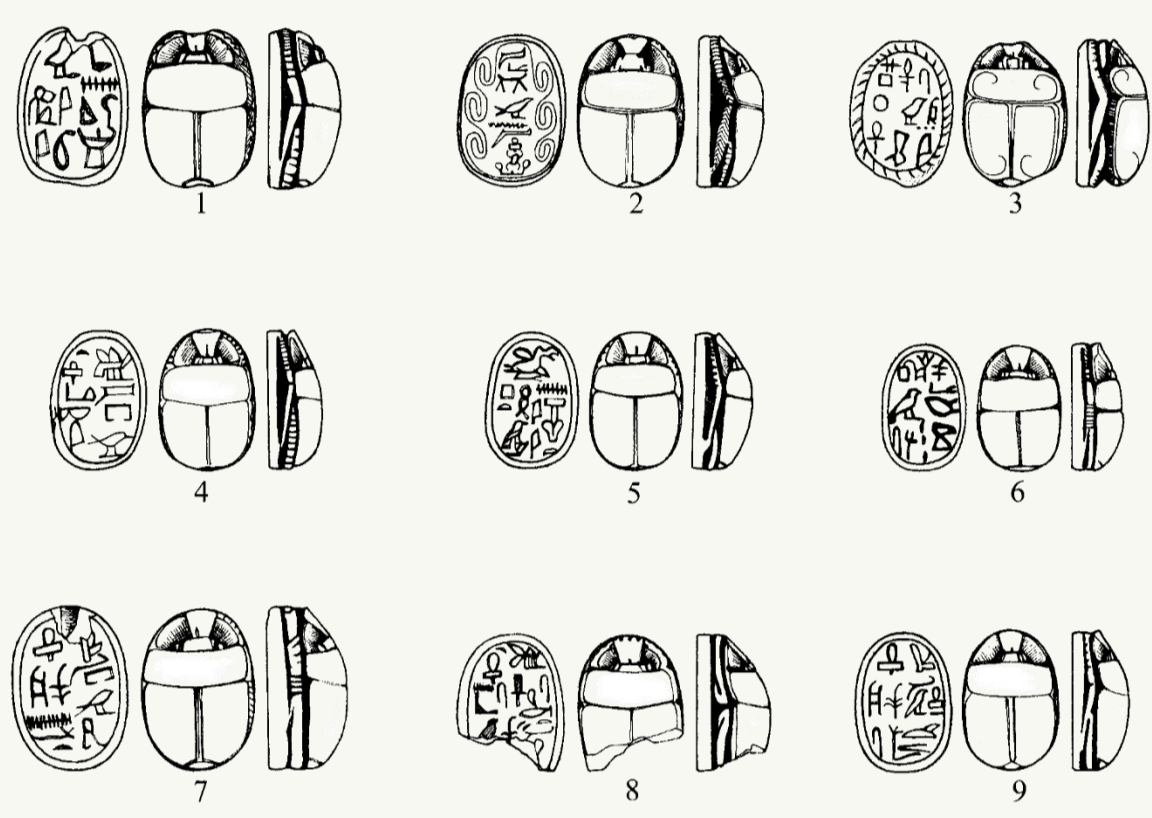
Documentation and publication habits still mirror long-standing research priorities:

- limited number of images
- only tombstone information
- name scarabs favoured over design scarabs
- iconography over typology
- classification over observation

➔ Many finds remain **unknown, inaccessible** to researchers, or are **summarily** published.

➔ Scarabs excavated in Egypt remain **underrepresented** in scarab studies.

Private-name scarabs with features of the Sobkhotep group scarabs PL. 23



Excerpt from Ben-Tor 2007, pl. 23.

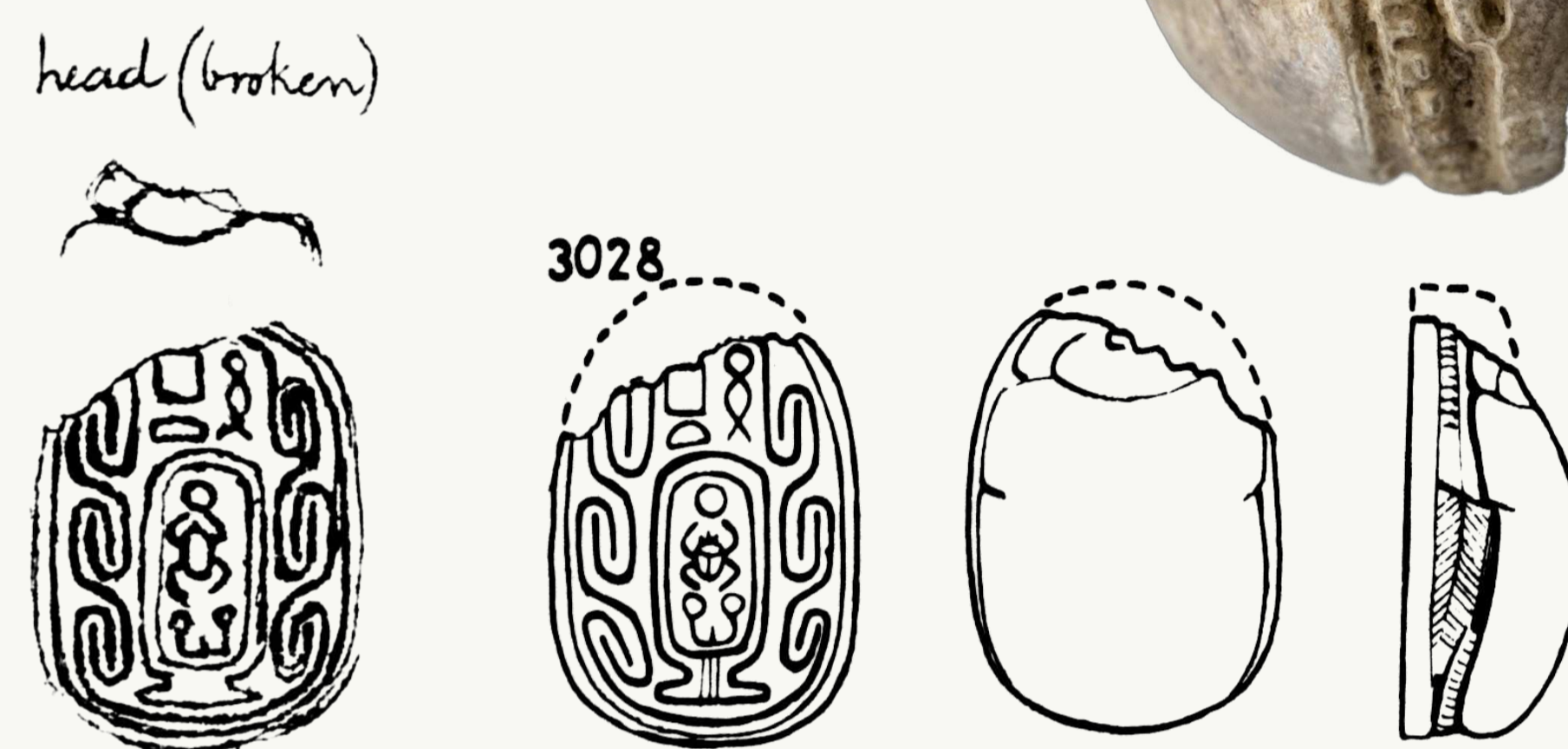
EXAMPLE

Minor details, which were not clearly identifiable in earlier publications of scarab BM EA20820, — the bordered sides of the plates and the long thick line running along the front legs — highlight the similarities between this scarab and scarab UC 11164.

Back and right side of steatite scarab BM EA20820 from Tell el-Yahudiya (18×14×8 mm) and drawings from its prior publications by Griffith 1890 (below, left) and Tufnell 1984 (below, right).



Back and right side of steatite scarab UC 11164 from Lahun (16×12×8 mm).



Proper documentation suggests that these two SIP scarabs may have more in common with each other than with scarabs of the same type (Mlinar's Type V) from Tell el-Dab'a and the Levant.

⚠ NO SCARAB IS AN ISLAND

No single scarab find allows conclusive statements. Scarab research is comparative by nature. Well-documented comparative material, preferably from known archaeological contexts, is essential for scarab studies.

⚠ NEW RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Materiality and production
- Object lives
- Imitations of historical styles
- Regionality and workshops
- Minute details: head plates, tail, perforation ...

⚠ LOSS OF DATA

Some modern scarab publications maintain the practices from 150 years ago.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> only drawings few (b/w) photos low-res photos (e.g., 1:1 scale) only back-base-one side 	➔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> photos and drawings color photos good quality macro photos views of all 6 sides
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OUTLOOK: A DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR EXCAVATED SCARABS FROM EGYPT AND SUDAN

GOAL: To develop a **digital platform** for the documentation of scarabs from Egypt and Sudan (current and historical excavations).

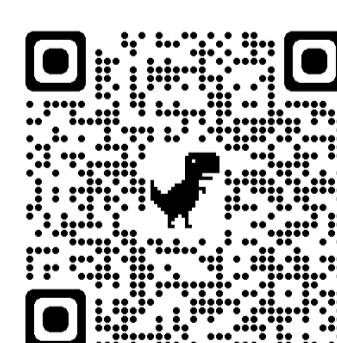
Such a platform, collecting **metadata and high-quality visual documentation**, would provide a basis for future scarab research focusing on scarabs from known contexts rather than on objects from the antiquities market. This project can only be successful if the Egyptological community is open to sharing scarab-related data in order to enable broad comparisons of this material.

Do you know what to do with scarabs?
Do you exploit their full potential?

GOAL: To create a richly illustrated **digital guide** to scarab documentation and description.

Whereas it seemingly only takes a tripod, a macro lens, and some portable light sources to make quality close-up photographs of scarabs, a survey of recent Egyptological publications shows that there is still a need for information on **how and why** to document scarab finds and scarabs in museum collections. Unstandardized documentation leads to the loss of a wealth of information and can cloud our vision.

Please **give us feedback** on whether (and under what conditions) you would be willing to **participate** and **contribute** excavated scarabs from your excavation / collection to a digital platform.



Please **let us know** if you would find a digital guide for scarab documentation useful — or useless — and if you have **specific use cases** in mind or **issues** to be addressed.

NEW DOCUMENTATION STANDARDS & IMAGING TECHNIQUES



All 6 views of unprovenanced steatite scarab KU Leuven MB.Gl.35 (left) and various visualisation filters applied to unprovenanced green jasper scaraboid RMAH Brussels E.05613 (above), both documented with the Portable Light Dome system. (applied filters above: color mode • color sharpen • shaded • surface normals • sketch + measuring tool to calculate incision depth and shape)

Image sources

BM EA20820: Photos courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum; E. Naville, F. L. Griffith 1890, *The Mound of the Jew and the City of Onias / The Antiquities of Tell el Yahudiya*, London, pl. X(1); O. Tufnell 1984, *Studies on Scarab Seals*, Vol. 2, Warminster, pl. LI(3028). UC 11164: Photos courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. D. Ben-Tor 2007, *Scarabs, Chronology and Interconnections. Egypt and Palestine in the Second Intermediate Period*, Fribourg/Göttingen. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 27.3.279: collections online, CCO. RMAH Brussels E.05613: V. Boschloos 2017, "Traded, Copied, and Kept: The Ubiquitous Appeal of Scarabs", p. 149–66 in P. P. Creasman, R. Wilkinson (eds.), *Pharaoh's Land and Beyond: Ancient Egypt and Its Neighbors*, New York/Oxford, pl. 7. KU Leuven MB.Gl.35: V. Boschloos, H. Hameeuw, E. Van Quickenberghe 2014, "Scarabaei Chananaei Lovanienses. Middle Bronze Age 'Hyksos' Seal-Amulets in the University Museums of Leuven and Louvain-La-Neuve (Belgium)", p. 1–8 in *Res Antiquae* 11 (2014), fig. 1a.