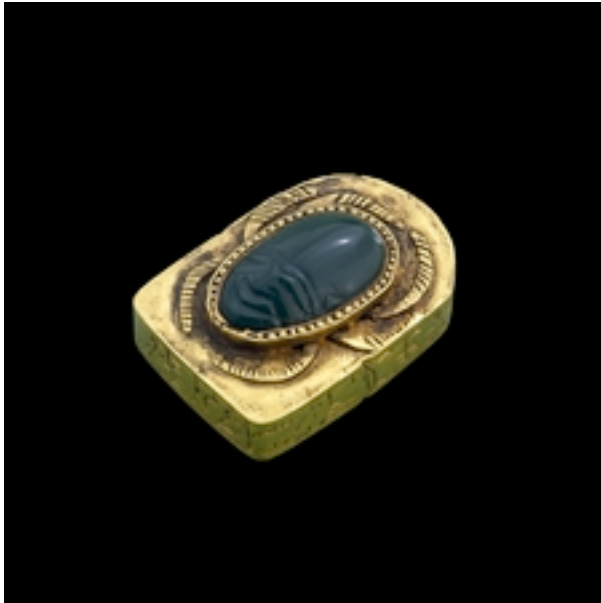


Green jasper heart scarab of King Sobekemsaf



From the tomb of King Sobekemsaf, Thebes, Egypt
17th Dynasty, around 1590 BC

A human-headed scarab set in a gold mount

This is among the earliest heart scarabs known, and the first that is known to have belonged to an Egyptian king. It may have been among the items stolen by the tomb-robbers who confessed to stealing from the mummy of Sobekemsaf II at their trial in about 1109 BC (known from a papyrus in the Musée du Cinquantenaire, Brussels and the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York).

The heart scarab was an amulet placed on the chest of the mummy to ensure that the heart, believed to be the seat of intelligence and personality, was not removed. A verse of Spell 30B of the Book of the Dead is roughly incised around the base of the scarab. The appearance of Sobekemsaf's scarab follows the instructions of the spell exactly, being 'made from green stone, mounted in fine gold'.

Spell 30B was apparently very old, perhaps composed during the Old Kingdom (about 2613-2160 BC). A heart scarab of the Thirteenth Dynasty (about 1795-1650 BC) suggests that they were first produced in the Middle Kingdom, around 400 years after the spell was supposedly composed. It seems that a false pedigree was created for the spell, so that it appeared older than it was. This illusion of antiquity is also used to validate the 'Memphite theology' on the Shabako stone.

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