The Egyptian Golden Ring with Lapis Lazuli Inscribed Scarab at the Benaki Museum. Was it the Property of a Libyan Pharaoh of Dynasty XXII?

RINGS are normally circular bands used to decorate ears, toes, noses, or, most often, fingers. A finger-ring has traditionally been worn for various reasons. It may have a symbolic meaning (as a wedding or a consecration ring); it may identify the wearer or indicate rank or authority (as a signet-ring); it may be thought to have magic powers (as an amuletic ring); or it may be worn merely as an ornament. In ancient Egypt signet-rings bearing carved scarabs (beetles) or engraved hieroglyphs developed from seals carried on cords and were particularly common. The small size of the rings (and of the scarabs) meant that they could 'travel' and 'be travelled', as is evident from the great number of Egyptian rings uncovered around the Mediterranean, in Crete, Cyprus, Phoenicia, Scythia, Sardinia, Meroe, and elsewhere.

The Benaki Museum premises house a small Egyptian collection with several interesting objects, including a faience group which contains finds dating from the Pharaonic period itself. One of the unique non-faience Egyptian objects at the Museum is a charming small ring bearing a scarab (figs 1 a-c), which is examined in detail in this paper:

Category: Finger-ring with revolving scarab mounted as swivel in funda (inv. no. B 7335).

Typology (Ring / Scarab): Type II [Keel 1995 (n. 4) 106-09] / Type HC.11(13.-26.) [?]–EP.27(15.-27.)–SIDE 27(13.-26.) [Rowe 1936 (n. 4) cited in Keel 1995 (n. 4) 42, 45, 53 (respectively)].

Date: TIP, Dynasty XXII, belonging to Sheshonq I or II or to somebody of their retinue.

Provenance: Egypt (unspecified details).

Acquisition: Donation by Lucas Benaki (April 1969).

Materials: Gold and lapis lazuli.

Weight: 3.4 gr.

Colour: Golden metal annulus and lapis blue scarab.

Dimensions: $H_{\text{scarab}} = 1.40$ cm, $L_{\text{scarab}} = 0.90$ cm, $W_{\text{scarab}} = 0.30$ cm; $D_{\text{ring, mean}} = 2.20$ cm.


Similar Objects: MFA 51.59; BM EA 14345 & 57698; Museo Egizio (Firenze), 2790 & 2791; Castellani Collection 335; Newberry (n. 4) 93 & fig. 109; Matouk (n. 4) 128-31, 197-98 & figs 754, 756-58, 770, 772-73; Cagliari 21912; Carthage Museum [1190].

Technique: Incision (scarab); hammering (ring).

The object studied is a golden (signet-)ring with a lapis lazuli scarab, which is enclosed in a golden funda (in order to protect its edges from possible injuries), and which in turn is mounted as swivel on the (relatively thin) ring by means of perforation threaded with a separate golden wire, the ends of which are tightly wound round the hoop. This type of mounting appears first during Dynasty XII and continues to be used during the SIP, NK and into the TIP. The hoop of the ring, whose dimensions fit a man's rather than a woman's fingers, is slightly distorted (figs 1 a-c). The funda (or bezel) that holds the scarab in place has the shape of a small cartouche and is made of two oval frames, tightly attached one on the other (fig. 1c). The thinner golden perforation wire passes through the scarab (following the longitudinal
AMANDA-ALICE MARAVELIA

Fig. 1 a, b, e. (a) The scarab on the ring Β 7335> (b) the inscription on the sphragistic surface of the scarab on the same ring, (c) the same ring in profile (photos: K. Manolis).

Fig. 2 a, b, c. (a) Linear drawing of the inscription on the scarab of the ring Β 7335, (b) idealized drawing of the inscription on the scarab by the author, (c) linear drawing of the inscription on the scarab of the similar ring MFA 51.59 (after: E. L. B. Terrace, Ancient Egyptian Jewellery in the Horace L. Mayer Collection, A/A 67/3 [1963] pi. 58 figs 18-19) (drawings: author and K. Mavragani).

It has been argued that the Ση-ring is related to the eternity god, whose notched palm-branch sign (symbolising «years») forms the base;12 in this aspect the scarab, engraved and «protected» by the oval funa, is related not only to eternity and royal protection, but also to the idea of resurrection and eternal life. Hence, a scarab-ring would be the perfect bearer of this particular symbolism. This gives us a first hint as to the ring’s possible owner, whose identity will be founded on the study of its hieroglyphic inscription. In fact this object is not a signet-ring13 [anc. Eg.: htm, db (w)t; Copt.: ῆθθε, TOB] per se, but rather a bezel-ring of amuletic character, bearing a New Year’s inscription for prosperity. This object clearly evokes a double protection for the bearer: the oval cartouche, protectively enclosing a king’s name; and the solar regeneration symbolism, relevant also to the beginning of a happy New Year.14 The inscription on the sphragistic surface of the scarab apparently goes like this: Mwt wp nprnfr SïSï<nk> [= (May) Mût open a happy New Year]5 (for the Pharaoh) Sheshou<nq>!.

At this point, we have to consider two questions: (i) is this the actual inscription or not, as the partially damaged surface of the back of the scarab renders the reading of the last line somewhat problematic; (ii) if this is the actual inscription, then do we have any clues as to which of the most important pharaohs of Dynasty XXII with this name6 it refers?

Let us examine first of all what is certain about the inscription. It is typical of a New Year’s object, beginning with an evocation to Mût,7 the goddess of Thebes, consort of Amün and mother of Khonsû, to offer a happy New Year to the person whose name is in question. Let us call this name N. It seems very probable that the reading of the two identical hieroglyphic signs in the lower row is as shown above: Sï-Sï. However, supposing that this is not the case, what alternative readings of these signs (if any) do we have? A hypothetical rendering could well be: Mwt wp nprntfr SïSï<nk> [= May (Mût) open a happy New Year’s beginning]. If so, the word Sï<nk> (= beginning)18 would present a rather peculiar orthography, which implies that the scribe has made two mistakes simultaneously—even without taking the anomalous syntax into account—by writing it erroneously and by repeating a similar sign Sï after the first.19 This seems a quite impossible speculation and accordingly should be
rejected. Furthermore, we cannot consider N as being either the word $S\delta$ (= ordain, predestine)\textsuperscript{26} twice repeated, or the word $S\delta$($\zeta$) (= travel)\textsuperscript{27} twice repeated, since the context of the New Year's wish would not justify something like this. Nor can we consider the two signs as being a repetition of the group $hm$-$k\iota$ (= k3-priest),\textsuperscript{28} no matter how much they resemble this sign, since the meaning would again not fit the context [namely: Mut, happy New Year's Day; (to the) k3-priest, k3-priest]. Similarly, we must exclude the possibility that the word is a person's (commoner's) name, since no similar entry is found in Ranke's work.\textsuperscript{29} Finally, any cryptographic\textsuperscript{30} context in this particular inscription must also be excluded. Thus, it seems that the only possible rendering of the inscription is indeed that given in the previous paragraph.

It is almost certain that $N = S\delta S\delta$, and highly probable that $N = S\delta S\delta < n\kappa>$, referring to the royal name Sheshonq. Now we have to discuss to which of the three pharaohs with the same *prenomen*\textsuperscript{31} it belongs. In certain instances the name of Sheshonq II is written simply as $S\delta S\delta$, without the final two hieroglyphic signs, using this 'minimal' orthography.\textsuperscript{32} However, there are some scarabs of Sheshonq I where the name of the king is also written merely as $S\delta S\delta$, omitting the final two signs.\textsuperscript{33} As for Sheshonq III, the known concomitant scarabs, to the best of our knowledge, show his full name.\textsuperscript{34} Thus the ring appears to name either Sheshonq I or Sheshonq II, though which of them cannot be decided with absolute certainty. Last but not least, stylistic reasons\textsuperscript{35} imply that it is probably a ring of the Libyan Dynasty. The scarab and its basic anatomical lines are rendered in a particular manner which is reminiscent of the TIP style (cf. also a similar ring: MFA 51.59, already referred to).\textsuperscript{36} Additionally, comparison of the scarab with another, also made of lapis lazuli but this time set on a golden bracelet of Sheshonq II which imitates a swivel finger-ring,\textsuperscript{37} corroborates this evidence. The ring examined here, bearing a royal name, is made of gold and has a finely worked inscribed scarab; however, it is not particularly opulent and it is not made of massive solid gold. It may perhaps have belonged to either Sheshonq I or Sheshonq II, but it seems safer to surmise that it was probably given by the king as a reward to one of his officers or priests. Table 1 shows some interesting parallels to this finger-ring.\textsuperscript{38}

Dr Amanda-Alice Maravelia
Egyptologist/Archaeoastronomer
e-mail: a_maravelia@hotmail.com

**Notes**

*May I thank Prof. Dr Angelos Delivorrias, director of the Benaki Museum, together with the Museum staff, for permitting and encouraging the study and publication of this ring, as well as of the faience collection. Warm thanks for various pieces of information and some bibliographical references are also due to: Dr D. Sweeley (Tel Aviv University), Dr B. Brandl (Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem), Dr N. Guilhou (Université Montpellier III); Mr Ch. Naunton, M. Phil. (The Egypt Exploration Society, London); Prof. Dr E. Cruz-Urbi (Department of History, Northern Arizona University).


4. See, for instance, P. A. Newberry, *Egyptian Antiquities: Scarabs. An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian Seals and


8. See Newberry (n. 4) 93.


10. On the (solar/cosmic and protective/encircling) symbolism of royal cartouches, see Wilkinson (n. 2) 194-95 and Lurker (n. 2) 38-39: EG, 74.


12. See Wilkinson (n. 2) 193.


14. Among the inscribed faience objects at the Benaki Museum is a New Year’s jar, already published by the author (see Maravelia (n. 7) 87-88 figs 2 a-c), bearing an inscription mentioning Amün and the New Year’s festival. On the importance of New Year’s Day to the ancient Egyptian mind, cf. also the reference to the New Year and the heliacal rising of Sirius/Sōthis in the context of ancient Egyptian Love Poems (see e.g. A.-A. Maravelia, pτρι. στι mi Σpdτ hψy m-hit rpnt nfr: Astronomical and Cosmovisional Elements in the Corpus of Ancient Egyptian Love Poems, Lingua Aegyptia 11 [2003] 79-112; pChester Beatty I, v, C1, 1-2). For the expression rpnt nfr, in opposition to ṣgp (cf. pAnnāsī IV), see P. Germond, Les invocations à la bonne année au temple d’Edfou (= Aegyptica Helvetica 11, Genève 1986) 79-80.

15. On some faience rings with New Year’s Day wishes, dating from the LP, see B. Latellier, Un souhait de bonne année en faveur d’une reine kouchite, RdE 29 (1977) 43-52 pl. 1; L. Török, Meroe City: An Ancient African Capital (London 1997) 239-40: Inscr. 56a-56d; fig. 122: Inscr. 56a-56d.

16. Of the Libyan Dynasties XXII, we know three important Pharaohs with this nomen: Sheshonq I [945-924 BCE] = (H九十 hpr Rψ, Stp n Rψ) (Ššṣnk, Mry 1mn); Sheshonq II [c. 890?-883 BCE] = (H九十 hpr Rψ, Stp n Rψ) (Ššṣnk, Mry 1mn); Sheshonq III [835-775 BCE] = (Wsr Mψt Rψ, Stp n Rψ) (Ššṣnk, Mry 1mn). On this, see A.-A. Maravelia, Χρονολογικό μνημόνιο της αρχαίας αιγυπτιακής ιστορίας και των φαραών της δυναστείας του Ιούνιος: Η περιπέτεια του φαράων του Εδφού (Athens 2007) 1-266, esp. 261. For a detailed history of the TIP and the «Sheshonqide» kings, see K. A. Kitchen, The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 BC) (Warminster 1986) 287-359, 575-76. We discard the possibility that the ring under study may date from a slightly later era, e.g. that of Sheshonq V [775-735 BCE] = (šḥḥḥḥḥḥψy Rψ) (Ššṣnk). According to Kitchen (loc. cit. 88), there is some doubt on the existence of Sheshonq IV [c. 788-777 BCE] = (Wsr Mψt Rψ, Mry 1mn) (Ššṣnk); additionally (loc. cit. 354-55 n. 639), supposed scarabs of Sheshonq V from Palestine are probably not explicitly his.

17. For Mût, see Lurker (n. 2) 82-83; H. te Velde, Towards a Minimal Definition of the Goddess Mut, JIEL 8/1 (1979-1980) 3-9. In other objects different deities are invoked, e.g. in the Benaki Museum New Year’s jar (B18.258), for which see Maravelia (n. 7) 87-88, figs 2a-c, where Amün is named. Returning to Mût, we must add that her name is met in some scarabs; see, for instance, Petrie, Buttons (n. 4) 12, 21, 23, 28, pls. IX: # 318, XII: # 700, XIII: # 796, XV: # 1046, 1046a.

18. See Wb. IV, 406ff; CD, 261.

19. The basic archetype for this very ancient sign (already met in the PT) is M8 (see EG, 480); in the context of this
The Egyptian Golden Ring with Lapis Lazuli Inscribed Scarab at the Benaki Museum. Was it the Property of a Libyan Pharaoh of Dynasty XXII?

ring it is rather M8J (less possibly M8H or M8L); cf. N. Grimal – J. Hallof – D. van der Plas et al. (eds), Hieroglyphica: Sign List (Utrecht-Paris 2000) 1 M-1.


22. Cf. Wb. III, 90; CD, 169. Further similarly written words exist, but their meaning does not fit the context (cf. e.g. CD, 261: 333t = necklace; CT IV, § 384a: 333 = escape; CT VII, § 397u: 333 = a snake species; & c.). See also Wb. IV, 413-14.

23. See H. Ranke, Die ägyptischen Personennamen I-III (Hamburg 1932-1977). There is only a simple form Si, with sign hn (M2) as taxogram, dating from the NK (cf. [op. cit.] I, 12).

24. For some cryptographic inscriptions, see F. Crevatin, Minor Egyptian Inscriptions (mainly Cryptographic), GM 195 (2003) 17-19.

25. See n. 16, supra. This name corresponds to the Hellenic names Σέσωγχις/Σεσώγχωσις οι Μανθόν.


27. See Matouk (n. 4) 128-29, 197, # 754, 756-58. There is another scarab, bearing a New Year’s wish for Kar'am (Ki-Rc), the wife of Sheshonq II, where the name of the hereditary prince Sheshonq is fully written (see [op. cit.] I, 198: # 770; Newberry [n. 4] pl. XL,8): wp Pth wnpt nfr n (i) r (y) - p t (r) Σίπίσικκ, m3t-hrw mwt Ki-Rc-t m3t = (May) Ptah open a happy year for (the) hereditary Prince Sheshonq, justified <by his> mother Kar'am]. See, finally, M.-A. Bouhène, Les noms royaux dans l’Égypte de la Troisième Période Intermédiaire (Le Caire 1987) 124; id., Les Chechenquides: Qui, combien?, BSPE 134 (1995) 53-54.

28. See Terrace (n. 9) 274 pl. 58: figs 19-20; Matouk (n. 4) 131, 198 # 772-73. Cf. also Pietrie, Scarabs (n. 4) passim pl. L: 22.7. See, however, Bonhène (n. 27) 124 (for a few instances of the ‘minimal’ orthography, though not on scarabs). The same holds for Sheshonq V (op. cit. 139) and Sheshonq VI, whose existence is dubious (see Kitchen [n. 16] 87, 88).

29. On the dating and stylistic criteria for scarabs and rings, see Ward – Tufnell I (n. 4) 20-35; Keel, Corpus 1995 (n. 4) 39-61, 106-09.

30. See Terrace (n. 9) 274, pl. 58: figs 18-20. The inscription on that ring goes like this: Mry-Innn, Σίπίσικκ, z3 Bistt; Imn-Rc wp wnpt nfr [= (The) beloved of Amün, Sheshonq, (the) son of Baset; (may) Amün–Re’ open a happy year (to the king)].

31. For this exquisite piece from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 72189), see Andrews, Ancient Egyptian Jewellery (n. 2) 148 fig. 130.

32. For more parallels, see Reeder (n. 5) 171 # 60; 217 # 98; Hall, Scarabs (n. 4) 2 and # 2-3, pls III # 2936, 4917; Stampolidis (n. 5) 584 and # 1190, for the ring from the National Carthage Museum with no inventory number (together with additional relevant bibliography); the CD-Rom by D. van der Plas (ed.), Egyptian Treasures in Europe. I: 1.000 Highlights (Utrecht 1999), for the rings 2790 and 2791 of the Archaeological Museum in Florence; Marshall (n. 5) xxxviii (for two bezel-rings with scarabs, namely 1004 & 1007), 60 (for ring 335 of the Castellani Collection).

AMANTA-ΑΛΙΚΗ ΜΑΡΑΒΕΛΙΑ
Έταν ο χρυσός δακτύλιος με ενεπίγραφο σκαραβαίο από λαζουρίτη του Μουσείου Μπενάκη προσωπικό αντικείμενο Λίβυου Φαραώ της 22ης Δυναστείας;

Στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη φυλάσσεται ένας χρυσός δακτύλιος με επενάγραφο σκαραβαίο από λαζουρίτη. Επενάγραφο σκαραβαίο από λαζουρίτη. Ο σκαραβαίος περικλείεται από πλαίσιο (funda) σε ελλειπή σχήμα φαραωνικής δέλτου και είναι προασβεσμένος στον δακτύλιο με λεπτό μεταλλικό σύρμα που διαπερνά τον κάθετο αξόνα του. Κατά πάσα πιθανότητα το αντικείμενο αυτό, το οποίο φέρεται ακροθιγώς ευχή για το Νέο Έτος (wp wnpt nfr), χρονολογείται από την 22η Δυναστεία, ενώ μπορεί να ανήκε, είτε στον Φαραώ Σέσωγχι Ι (945-924 ΠΚΕ), είτε στον Φαραώ Σέσωγχι ΙΙ (περ. 890-883 ΠΚΕ). Υποθέτουμε ότι το πιθανότερο είναι πως έταν δώρο ενός από τους δύο αυτούς φαραώ προς κάποιον κάποιος τους (αξιωματούχο ή ιερέα). Η ευχή αναφέρεται στη θεά Μουτ (σύζυγο του Άμμωνα), την οποία επικαλείται ώστε να χαρίσει στον Σέσωγχι ευτυχισμένη (πρωτο)χρονιά. Στην εργασία αυτή μελετάται ακροθιγώς η επιγραφή και αποκλείονται
συγκεκριμένες πιθανές αποδόσεις της (εξαιτίας των
dυσανάγνωστων ιερογλυφικών στην τελευταία γραμμή
tης), ενώ ταυτόχρονα δίνεται πλήρης περιγραφή του
σφυρηλατού δακτυλίου. Η χρήση του δακτυλίου εν
eίδει περιάπτου ευημερίας και προστασίας θα χάριζε
στον κάτοχο (πρεσβείας της Μουτ) ευτυχία και ευμά­
ρεια για τη νέα χρονιά. Ο σκαραβαίος, ηλιακό σύμβο­
λο αναγέννησης και ανάστασης, κατείχε στη σκέψη
tων Αιγυπτίων εξέχουσα θέση ως αρχέτυπο. Δακτυλιοί
όπως αυτός, αλλά και απειράρθυμοι σκαραβαίοι, έχουν
εντοπισθεί σε πολλά σημεία ανά τη λεκάνη της Με­
σογείου, γεγονός που καταδεικνύει τη φήμη των αιγυ­
πτιακών περιάπτων κατά την αρχαιότητα. Το συγκε­
κριμένο αντικείμενο φέρει εγχάρακτη επιγραφή στην
οποία το όνομα Σέσωγχις δεν είναι γραμμένο εξολο­
κλήρου (απουσιάζουν τα δυο τελευταία ιερογλυφικά),
γεγονός σύνηθες, τόσο για τον Φαραώ Σέσωγχι Ι, όσο
και για τον Σέσωγχι ΙΙ.