

WINGED HEART SCARAB FOR
THE RENEF PRIEST HOREMHEB



THE MERRIN GALLERY





Winged Heart Scarab for the Renep Priest Horemheb

Egypt, Late Period, 664 - 332 B.C.

Faïence and glazed steatite

Width with wings: 21 cm. Scarab: 7.5 cm H, 5.5 cm W

Kôm el-Hisn (ancient Imaou), Valley of the Kings

Provenance: Private collection, France, 1970

Didier Wormser, France, 1999

Private collection, Europe, 1999 to 2018

Art Loss Certificate: S00125871

This exquisite winged scarab amulet made of faïence and glazed steatite comprises three parts. The wings are rendered with long, primary and secondary individual feathering, as they represent those of a falcon. The rounded body is divided by three lines of the back plate and a thin molded pattern of raised rectangular beads separate the head and eyes. Three legs on each side are molded in bold relief, folded along the body.

The winged scarab was highly symbolic to the ancient Egyptians as it represented rebirth and was associated with the sun god, Ra. It was thought that the sun was pushed across the sky by a giant scarab, the god Khepri, an image that came from observations of the scarab hatching from dung and using its back legs to emerge. They seemed to hatch from the ball of dung in an act of self-creation, reaffirming their association with life and renewal¹. These objects were a mystic symbol throughout ancient Egyptian history. The earliest scarab amulets appeared in the First Intermediate Period (c. 2124 BC) and were still in use in Greek and Roman times (c. 332 BC– 364 AD).

In ancient Egypt, people were buried with a *Book of the Dead*, a series of spells with detailed instructions on their preparation for the afterlife. This winged scarab was placed within the Renep Priest Horemheb's mummy wrappings, atop his heart, as instructed in Spell 30². The heart was the only organ left in the body during mummification, as it was thought to contain the soul. The other organs were placed in canopic jars and entombed with the mummy. The heart was thought to have been weighed against the Feather of Ma'at in the Hall of Two Truths to determine a person's fate.

Four neat right-facing hieroglyphs are inscribed on the back of each wing beginning with a kneeling figure of the Nile-god Hapy. The god is recognized by the papyrus plant crowning his head. He holds a notched stick indicating a multitude. The following signs combine to form the name Horemheb (“Horus-is-in-festival”). The final sign, is a seated figure which is the determinative of a deceased person of noble status.

The text on the underside of the scarab itself is given in a horizontal format, incised neatly with hieroglyphic signs presented in six lines that read from right to left. The scarab preserves the genealogy of the official Horemheb going back four generations to a vizier of the same name (his great-great grandfather). Based on its style, the scarab can be dated within the late 25th Dynasty or first half of the 26th, although the genealogy probably stretches back into the Third Intermediate Period sixty years. The use of the title “vizier” by Horemheb, great great-grandfather of the scarab’s owner, is of the utmost significance to his lineage and status.

Horemheb was a “renep” priest, which means he was the high priest and responsible for performing rites and giving offerings for the deceased of the area. Horemheb likely had his tomb prepared during his lifetime, when this scarab would have been made. The tomb, in the Valley of the Kings, Kôm el-Hisn (ancient Imaou) was known for celebrating the goddess Hathor. This is of exceptional quality. Similar winged scarab from the 26th Dynasty are at the British Museum (EA58992) and at the Brooklyn Museum (49.28a-c).

¹Though protective amulets were worn by the living, the scarab was associated with the dead. Petrie, W. M. Flinders, *Scarabs and cylinders with names: illustrated by the Egyptian collection in University College*, London, University College, London, 1917. pp. 3-4

²Entombed Books of the Dead were often written in advance, leaving the beneficiary’s name blank until it is used. Thomas George Allen, *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day: Ideas of the Ancient Egyptians Concerning the Hereafter as Expressed in Their Own Terms*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 37, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974. pp. 47





The Merrin Gallery

724 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10019 • 212 757 2884
info@merringallery.com • www.merringallery.com