
The scarabs of king Amenhotep III

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Large commemorative scarabs inscribed on their underside with lengthy texts extolling the king's deeds are characteristic of Amenhotep III. Not only did he invent the custom, he is the only ruler to have issued them in large numbers.¹

More than two hundred are known to exist in museums and private collections in Europe, North America, and the Middle East; they have been found everywhere from Syria (Ras Shamra) to the Sudan (Soleb).²

¹Blankenberg-van Delden, *Large Commemorative Scarabs*, pp. 166-168, lists three for Amenhotep IV, six for Ramesses II, and one each for Merenptah, Shabako, and Necho II. Opinions are divided regarding the authenticity of a large commemorative scarab of Tuthmosis IV; see Bryan, *Thutmose IV*, pp. 354-356.

²Blankenberg-van Delden, *Large Commemorative Scarabs*, list of provenances on pp. 194-195; idem, "More Large Commemorative Scarabs of Amenophis III," *JEA* 62 (1976): 74-80, pis. XII-XIII; idem, "Once Again Some More Large Commemorative Scarabs of Amenophis III," *JEA* 63 (1977): 83-87, pis. XIII-XIV; M. Jones, "The Royal Lion-Hunt Scarab of Amenophis III in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester (Chester, no. 429.F/1930)," *JEA* 65 (1979): 165-166, pi. XXVIII; May Trad and Adel Mahmud, "Another Commemorative Lion-hunt Scarab of Amenophis III," *ASAE* 70 (1984-85): 359-361, pi. I, Cairo, JE 97853, from Tura; San Antonio, private loan, unpublished, another lion-hunt scarab, said to be from southern Lebanon; and Cleveland, 84.36, a wild bull-hunt scarab [1]. The number continues to grow. Sales: London, Sotheby's, July 8, 1991, Antiquities, no. 152, a lion-hunt scarab; New York, NFA Classical Auctions, Inc., December 11, 1991, Scarabs and Design Amulets, nos. 115, 116, 117, two lion-hunt scarabs and a Tiye scarab.

The scarabs vary in length from 4.7 to 11 centimeters, most being between 7 and 8.9 centimeters. The vast majority, 59 percent, are carved of steatite, originally glazed blue or green, also a popular medium for small-scale royal sculpture in this reign [20-22]. In every case but one the Cleveland wild bull-hunt scarab [1] the back is naturalistically carved in the shape of a scarab beetle (*Scarabams sacer*), showing the main different parts of the body. Most are pierced longitudinally with a hole for suspension.³

Five varieties of scarabs are known, distinguished by the inscriptions on their underside. By far the most common are the lion-hunt scarabs, numbering 123 examples, recording the number of lions 102 (variant, 110) killed by Amenhotep III "with his own arrows" from his first regnal year up to his tenth. This was the king's way of telling the world what a strong and mighty ruler he was. Lion imagery is prominent in this reign particularly on monuments from or having to do with Nubia. On the Semna stele of Viceroy Merymose in the British Museum and the triumphal stele between Aswan and Philae with reference to the Nubian campaign of year 5, the king is called a "fierce-eyed lion"; on a statue base in the Louvre, with name-rings of conquered Sudanese tribes, he is called "lion of rulers"; jar sealings from Buhen depict the king as a lion attacking his foe. But the significance of lion imagery for this king is best illustrated in the two granite lions from Soleb, where he is referred to as a "mighty lion."⁴

Queen Tiye is the subject of the next most common variety of scarabs, numbering fifty-six examples. Although these were traditionally called

³ Eighteen percent are said to be made of hypersthene, 7 percent of schist and sericite-schist. Identification of material as reported in Blankenberg-van Delden, *Large Commemorative Scarabs*, based on the statements of the various owners.

⁴ *Urk. IV: 1660, 9, 1666, 14-15, 1742, 3*; H. S. Smith, *The Fortress of Buhen: The Inscriptions*, ExVI 48 (London, 1976), pi. XLV. On small scarabs and seals he is called "lion of rulers" and "mighty lion"; see Petrie, *Hist. Scarabs*, p. 40; idem, *Scarabs*, pi. XXXIII (58).

the "marriage" scarabs and believed to refer to the king's marriage to Tiye at the beginning of his reign, the term is a misnomer, for the text says nothing about marriage, nor is there any indication of a regnal year date.⁵

It begins with the full five-part titulary of Amenhotep III, followed, as on all the scarabs, by the name of his principal queen, "the great royal wife Tiy, may she live." What comes next refers specifically to the queen: "Her father's name is Yuya; her mother's name is Tuva; she is the wife of a mighty king, whose southern border is at Karoy and whose northern is (at) Nahrin." Karoy, the southernmost limit of Egyptian authority in the Sudan, is the region extending from between the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts on the Nile to the gold mines east of Abu Hamed.⁶

Nahrin is the kingdom of Mittani on the upper Euphrates. The expression, "from Karoy to Nahrin" was already somewhat clichéd by the time of Amenhotep III, denoting the extreme southern and northern limits of the Egyptian empire.⁷

The mention of the queen's parents (here and on the Kiluhepa scarabs) is unparalleled in ancient Egyptian history, as is the definition of the boundaries of the realm in terms of the queen, putting her on a level with her husband. Because of this, a better name for this variety would be the

⁵ See the discussion in Blankenberg-van Delden, *Large Commemorative Scarabs*, pp. 4-8. It appears that the idea of a "marriage" scarab goes back to Ippolito Rosellini's publication and translation of it (*Monumenti storici*, III: 1, 247, 267), where he misreads the element *semen hepu*, "establishing laws," in the king's Two Ladies name, as "II quale ha stabilito le sue nozze," deriving ancient Egyptian *hep*, "law," from Coptic, *hop*, "marriage."

⁶ On the recto of the Israel stele Amenhotep III says in reference to the Third Pylon, "His Majesty brought the gold for it from the land of Karov, on his first campaign of victory of smiting'vile Kush" (*Urk.* IV 1654, 14-15). For the location of Karoy, see Zibelius, *Afrikanische Orts- und Volkernamen*, pp. 162-163.

⁷Gardiner, *AEO* I: 176*-178*.

Tiye scarab.⁸

The three remaining types are considerably rarer. Eleven lake scarabs record the digging of a lake for Queen Tiye in year 11. Five wild bull-hunt scarabs relate in great detail a wild bull hunt in year 2, in which the king distinguished himself by slaying ninety-six wild bulls. And five Kiluhepa scarabs tell of the arrival in year 10 of Kiluhepa, daughter of Shuttarna II, king of Mittani, and 317 women of her retinue, not inappropriately described as "a marvel."⁹

Amenhotep III's large commemorative scarabs are remarkable not only for their inscriptions, but also for their uniformity. One might have expected to find a correlation between the size of the scarabs and the length of their inscriptions. In fact, the wild bull-hunt scarabs, which have by far the longest text (16 lines), are also the largest, with an average length (excluding fragments) of 9.9 centimeters. The lion-hunt scarabs, however, have the shortest text (8 lines) and an average length of 7.7 centimeters. This group shows the greatest variation in size, ranging from 4.7, the smallest, to 9.5 centimeters, with most (73.6 percent) between 7 and 8.9 centimeters. The Tiy scarabs, with 9 or 10 lines, average 8.5 centimeters; the Kiluhepa series, with 10 lines, 7.2 centimeters; and the lake series, 11 lines, 8.4 centimeters. The average size for all the scarabs is 8 centimeters. Considering the number of scarabs, the difference does not appear significant.¹⁰

Until now it has always been taken for granted that the scarabs were issued in separate series, the marriage scarabs in year 1, the wild bull-hunt scarabs in year 2, the lion-hunt and Kiluhepa scarabs in year 10, and the lake scarabs in year 11. In fact, however, the variations within each

⁸Blankenberg-van Delden, *Large Commemorative Scarabs*, p. 7.

⁹ Arielle, P. Kozloff and Besty M. Bryan with Lawrence M. Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and his world*, 1992, the Cleveland Museum of Art, 69.

¹⁰ Arielle, P. Kozloff and Besty M. Bryan with Lawrence M. Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and his world*, 1992, the Cleveland Museum of Art, 69.

individual group are the same as those of the scarabs as a whole. This suggests that they were all made at the same time, probably in the same workshop and by the same group of artisans at least, the variations are exactly what one would expect if that were the case. Similarly, a huge number of seated Sekhmet statues were carved at the same time, as were the glazed steatite statuettes of the king and queen.¹¹

Sometime, then, in the eleventh year of his rule or thereafter, Amenhotep III issued and circulated throughout the empire a group of large commemorative scarabs highlighting what he considered to be the most significant events of his rule up to that point, showing him in various mostly youthful roles.

But why this particular medium, the glazed scarab? The scarab was the image of Khepri, the sun god, specifically the young sun god. The scarab beetle rolls its eggs in a ball of dung, which it then buries in the earth. The young, after feasting on this ball, emerge from the ground, fully formed. For this reason the rising sun is called *Khepri-kheper-emt*, "Khepri, who

¹¹ A few years ago, Aldred ascribed the group of glazed steatite statues of the king and queen, which he dated to the early part of the reign, to the work of a single studio: "In such a case one would expect to find a certain variation in minor details and design, such as appears, for instance, in contemporary faience and glass, not to mention the commemorative scarabs." To explain what seemed to be their sudden disappearance after the first decade or so, he postulated "the exhaustion of a deposit of fine white steatite which affected also the manufacture of scarabs, particularly large examples" ("Ahmose-Nofretari Again," *Artibits Aegypti: Stadia in honorem Bernardi V. Bothmer a collegis amicis discipulis con-scripta quae edenda curaverunt H. De Meulenaere et L. Limme* [Brussels, 1983], p. 11). Although we date the statues in question [20-22] to the later part of the reign, the delivery of a large consignment of steatite to the royal workshop, though it cannot be demonstrated, might account for the spate of production in both cases. The most probable source for this stone in the pharaonic period would appear to be in the area of the Barramiya gold mines, reached via Wadi Abbad. We know these mines were worked in the reign of Amenhotep III (inscription of Merymose).

is born from the earth." The word for glazed material is *tjebenet*, from *tjeben*, "to dazzle." Amenhotep III, "the Dazzling Sun Disk of all lands," thus had found the perfect calling card. LMB¹²

1. Wild Bull-Hunt Scarab

Steatite. w. 6.56, L. 10.46, D. 2.46

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Betty and Max Ratner, no. 84.36

The Cleveland scarab is the only large commemorative scarab not actually carved in the back in the form of a beetle. Instead, the back is almost tent-shaped, smooth, rising up and back from the perimeter to a sort of ridge down the center. In addition, the scarab is pierced not once longitudinally, as is the rule, but twice transversely. Microscopic examination of its inscribed underside reveals that the hieroglyphic characters were first cut by a drill, the drill holes being then connected by knifelike cuts. The wild bull-hunt is one of the rarer varieties of large commemorative scarabs; only 5 examples are known compared to, for example, 123 lion-hunt scarabs or 56 Tiye scarabs.' It has the longest text of all 16 lines of which Cleveland's is the best preserved:¹³



rnpt-sp 2 hr hm n

In the second year of the reign of His Majesty,



hr k3-nht h^cj-m-m3^ct nbtj smn-hpw

the Living Horus, the mighty Bull, diademed with Maat (i.e. Truth), the [e]Stabliasher of Laws,

¹² Amenhotep III's devotion to Khepri is also shown by the colossal scarab by the sacred lake at Karnak, PxVI IP: 221.

¹³ The others are in the British Museum, Petrie Museum, Israel Museum, and a private collection in Cairo; see Blankenberg-van Delden, *Large Commemorative Scarabs*, pp. 57-61, pi. X; B 3 is now Israel Museum, 76.18.244, Ben-Tor, *Scarab*, p. 57, no. 3.

[] ḥt ḥm=f ḥr ssmt mšc=f tm m-ḥt=f šḥn.tw srw ḥnw nw mšc r-dr=f mj-ḳd=f

hrdw

were commanded to keep a strict watch on the wild cattle, and all the children

[] n kp r jrt rsw ḥr n3 n sm3w jst wd.n ḥm=f rdj.tw

n kp r jrt rsw ḥr n3 n sm3w jst wd.n ḥm=f rdj.tw

of the neighbourhood to do the same. And His Majesty gave orders for all the wild cattle

jth.tw nn k3w m sbtj ḥnc šdy wd.

jth.tw nn k3w m sbtj ḥnc šdy wd.

to be driven into a stockaded enclosure with a ditch (?) round about it.

wd.jn ḥm=f r nn sm3w r 3w=sn rht jrj k3 170

wd.jn ḥm=f r nn sm3w r 3w=sn rht jrj k3 170

His Majesty commanded a counting of all the wild cattle to be made, and their total number was 170.

jn ḥm=f r nn sm3w r 3w=sn rht jrj k3 170 rht jn.n ḥm=f m bḥs m hrw pn k3

56w3ḥ.jn

ḥm=f hrw 4

The number of the wild cattle which His Majesty hunted and slew on this day was 56 head. His Majesty remained idle for four days

[] m-wš rdjt srf n ssmwt=f ḥt ḥm=f ḥr ssmt

m-wš rdjt srf n ssmwt=f ḥt ḥm=f ḥr ssmt

Chief of Equipment Nakht, and Sailor Ipu.¹⁶

EXHIBITED

Cleveland, 1985, The Cleveland Museum of Art, *The Tear in Review for 1984*, cat.: *BCLcvMns* 72 (April 1985): repr. 166, no. 2¹⁷

2. Lake Scarab

Green glazed steatite. W. 7.1, L. 9.5, D. 4.2

Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1935, no. 35.2.1

The back of this scarab is exceptionally well modeled, with three lines dividing the wing cases and a double line surrounding the prothorax. There are two double-lined triangular notches on the outer corners of the wing cases, below the lower line separating the wing cases from the prothorax. The legs are carefully striated, indicating hairs (*setae*).¹⁸

The prothorax is inscribed with a cartouche a rare feature, known only on one other example "the good god Nebmaatira, beloved of Horus, lord of Buhen."¹ The town of Buhen (now submerged under Lake Nasser) was situated just below the Second Cataract, across from Wadi Haifa, at the border between Egypt and the Sudan. It was the site of a great Middle Kingdom fortress, which guarded what was at that time the

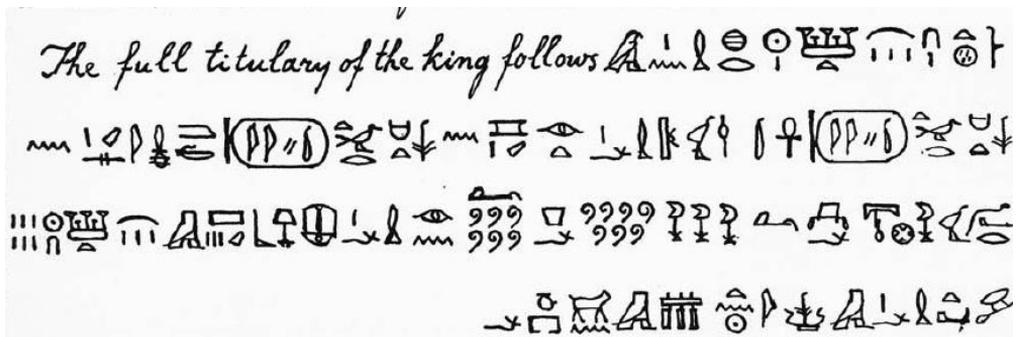
¹⁶Nebenkemet is known from a stele in Chicago (Oriental Institute Museum, 11696, Sir Flinders Petrie and Guy Brunton, *Sedment II, BSAE* 35 [London, 1924], pi. LII); *Siese* from a stele and a funerary cone, both in Cairo (stele, IE 49113, Gaballa A. Gaballa, "Siese, Naval Standard-bearer of Amenophis III," *ASAE* 71 [1987]: 87-95, pis. Mil; funerary cone, Davies-Macadarn, *Corpus*, no. 249); *Nakht* from an ebony whip-handle in Liverpool (Newberry, *PSBA* 35 [1913]: 157-158); *Meryptah* from a stele in Vienna (E. V. Bergmann, "Inchriftliche Denkmaler der Sammlung agyptischer Akerthiimer des osterr. Kaiserhauses," *RecTrav* 7 [1886]: 188, no. 11); and *Ipu* from a stele in the British Museum (EA 295, *BM Stelae*, VIII: 49-51, pi. 41).

¹⁷ Arielle, P. Kozloff and Besty M. Bryan with Lawrence M. Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun*, 72

¹⁸ Arielle, P. Kozloff and Besty M. Bryan with Lawrence M. Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun*, 72

southern border. Its temple built mainly in the New Kingdom by Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III and dedicated to Horus, lord of Buhen, is now preserved in the garden of the National Museum in Khartoum. The triangular spaces between the front and middle legs and the base on either side are inscribed with the king's name on the right ("the good god, lord of the two lands, Nebmaatra, given life") and the queen's on the left (partly obscured by the glaze).¹⁹

The lake group of scarabs commemorates the digging of a large artificial lake for Queen Tiye. Eleven examples are known; they exhibit an unusual number of variants in the text (noted below in the translation), although, as Blankenberg-van Delden points out, these are minor and do not affect the meaning. The present example is one of the two best-preserved specimens, the other being in the British Museum. The text on the underside is as follows:



rnpt-sp 11 3bd 3 3ht sw 1 hr (hm n)

Year 11, third month of the Season of Inundation, day 1, under (the majesty of)

hr k3-nht h^cj-m-m³t

Horus: Mighty bull appearing in truth;

nbtj s mn-hpw sgrh-t3wj

Two Ladies: Who establishes laws, who pacifies the Two Lands;

hr-nbw ^c3-hpš hwj-sttjw

¹⁹ Blankenberg-van Delden, *Large Commemorative Scarabs*, p. 11.

Gold Horus: Great of strength, who smites the Asiatics;

nsw-bjtj nb-m3^ct-r^c s3-r^c jmn-htp hk3-w3st

The king of Upper and Lower Egypt: Nebmaatre; Son of Re:

Amenophis, ruler of Thebes,

dj^c nh^c hmt-nsw wrt tjy^c nh^c .tj

given life, and the great king's wife Tiy (may she live!).

w_d hm=f jrt mr n hmt-nsw wrt tjy

His Majesty ordered the creation of a lake for the great wife of the king,

Tiy

nh^c.tj m dmj=s n d^crw h3

(may she live!), in her town of Djaru kha,

3w=f mh 3700 wsh=f mh 600

its length being 3700 cubits and its width 600 cubits.

jr.n hm=f hb wb3 sw

His Majesty celebrated the feast of the opening of the lakes

m 3bd 3 3ht sw 16

in the third month of the Season of Inundation, day 16,

hn.tw hm=f m wj3 jtn thn m-hnw=f

when His Majesty was rowed on it in the barque 'Aton gleams'^{1,20}

Aten-tjehen, "the dazzling sun disk," Amenhotep III's favorite epithet, makes its first appearance on the lake scarabs in the name of the king's barge. Rebus writings of the name on jar sealings from the royal palace at Malqata in western Thebes show an image of a seated god (*neb*), holding a feather (*niaat*) in his hands and crowned with the solar disk (*Ra*). This is enclosed within a larger disk, which rides in a boat over the long horizontal sky-sign (*pet*). Below this is the hieroglyphic sign for "dazzling" (*tjehen*), the whole spelling out "Nebmaatra is the dazzling sun disk". The sky was conceived as a vast expanse of water on which the sun god sailed in his bark by day. This is the image conjured up by the lake

²⁰ Blankenberg-van Delden, *Large Commemorative Scarabs*, p. 14.

group of scarabs.²¹

Plates



Plate 1: Wild Bull Hunt Scarab of Amenhotep III

²¹ Hayes, *JNES* 10: fig. 25 (E, F); Johnson, in Berman, ed., *Art of Amenhotep III*, pp. 38-39



Plate 2: Lake Scarab of Amenhotep III