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REPUBBLICA ITALIANA



REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

Necropolis of Is Pirixeddus

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Carnelian scarab

The scarab comes from tomb 6 PGM in the necropolis of Sulky, comprising a single chamber that is carefully painted and with two bethels sculpted into the back wall and dated, according to the pottery items found, to the 5th century B.C.

The small item (1.2 x 1.1 x 0.9 cm), has a gold mount formed by a ring (1.7 x 1.5 cm) and a red coral fragment, with spiral ends and a hook obtained by torsion (figs. 1-4)

The back is made with a simple vertical engraved line that divides the elytres and another curved, almost "V" line that outlines the prothorax (fig. 5). The clipeus and the head appears much worn and the legs in relief can be seen on the sides (figs. 2).



Figs. 1-2 - Back and side of the scarab in carnelian. Municipal Archaeological Museum "F. Barreca" (from Sechi 2005-2006, p. 80, sheet 50).

A Greek-style human male is engraved on its oval base within a string frame, naked, running towards the right, with a cap headdress (maybe a helmet) from which curls escape on the front and on the neck. The character has his left arm bent behind the body and with his hand he grips a sort of branch which bends over him, forming an arc that follows the contour of the oval and ends with a fruit or a flower towards which he extends his arm with open right hand, while trying to pluck it (fig. 4)



The iconography is, as mentioned, Greek-style, but Punic scarabs also have many Egyptian, Etruscan and Eastern-style images and scenes, in addition to those of mixed type, which blend design elements from different cultures.



Fig. 3 - Carnelian scarab. Municipal Archaeological Museum "F. Barreca" (photo by Unicity S.p.A.)



Fig. 4 - Oval base of the scarab with an engraving depicting a male character
Municipal Archaeological Museum "F. Barreca" (photo by Unicity S.p.A.)

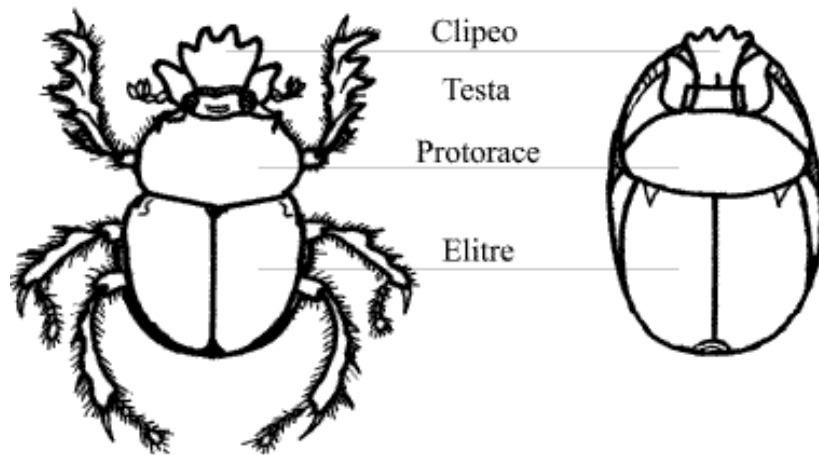


Fig. 5 - Anatomy of a scarab (from Olianias 2011-2012, p. 363).

The technique used is that of freehand carving and engraving and of the round tip drill, which renders the muscles of the body and the details of the face, according to the procedure of the so-called mixed technique. The scarab has a classic longitudinal drilling, which allows inserting the setting. The object is made of hard semiprecious stone and gold, finely worked, and is certainly a luxury item which must have belonged to a wealthy person. The carnelian stone is the second most common stone in Punic engraved gems, and in particular in Sardinia, after the green jasper which is the preferred one for creating scarab-seals (fig 6). Other semi-precious stones used are the agate, rock crystal, chalcedony. However several specimens, mainly belonging to the Phoenician period (VII-VI century B.C.) are in paste or steatite.



Fig. 6 - Back and oval base of a scarab in green jasper with iconography of a deer seized by an eagle, Municipal Archaeological Museum "F. Barreca" (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Both the green of the jasper and the red of the carnelian were linked to rebirth, and were often used to create other amulets. The scarab was indeed an amulet, and therefore maintained a certain protective value, accompanying the deceased in the afterlife, but it was also a personal seal, which could represent a sign of recognition of some officer, a priest or a wealthy person who covered some important role. It is thought that they may identify a family and be real *social symbols*, without excluding links with mystic cults that certain iconographs (Isis, Bes, etc) may refer to. The practical use of the scarab as a seal is supported by the discovery of numerous *cretulae* (seals) in several sites, including Selinunte and Carthage itself which respectively turned up 600 and 4000 examples, while in Sardinia, at Cuccureddus Villasimius, only 5 have unfortunately been found up to now .





Fig. 7 - Cretula (seal) from Carthage (from Redissi 1999, n. 69)

Most of the Sardinian scarabs seem to come from Tharros that was probably one of the largest production and exporting centres in the Mediterranean of the Punic era. Compared to this, the Sulky documentation is not very rich. Digs in the last decade have returned a large number of them, not only in precious stone, but in steatite or glass paste, and two elaborately made ones can be noted among them, from the 7th and beginning of the 6th century B.C., both believed to be imported, the first perhaps from Egypt (fig. 8) the second from Phoenicia (fig. 9): the latter one especially is interesting for the Phoenician inscription, a detail hard to find in scarabs from the Punic West.

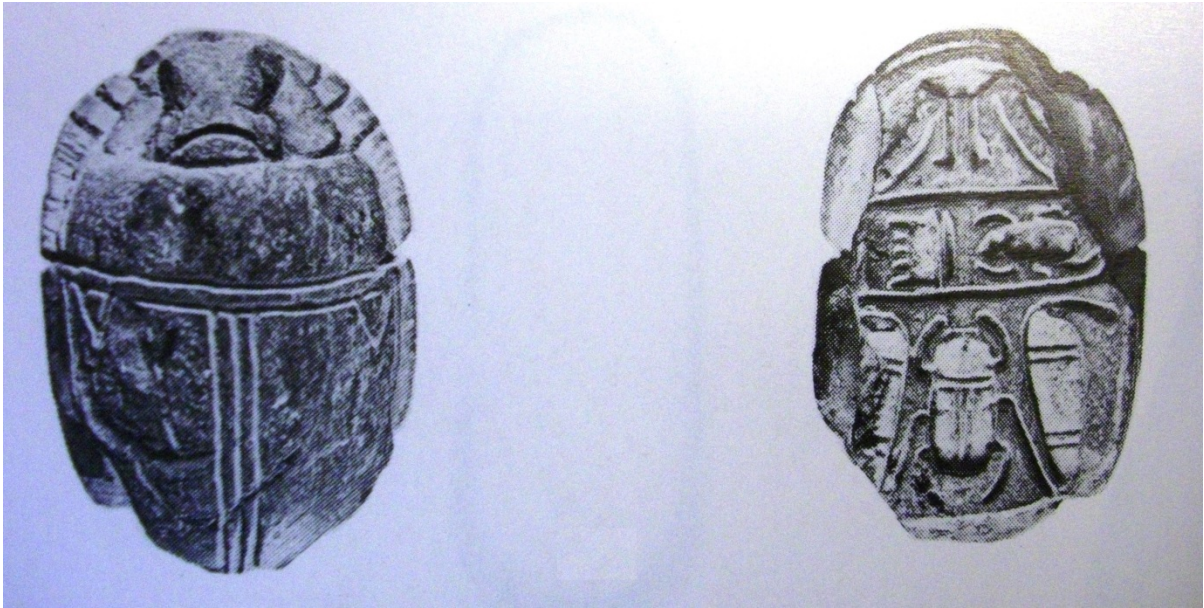


Fig. 8 - Scarab with hieroglyphs from the Biggio Collection of Sant'Antioco (from Moscati 1988, table XXXI, fig. 4).



Fig. 9 - Scarab with hieroglyphs from the Biggio Collection of Sant'Antioco (from Moscati 1988, table XXXI, fig. 5).

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Cinzia Olianas

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