

New perspectives on *aegyptiaca* in Portugal: on Egyptianising scarabs

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Abstract: This work aims to present an update on the iconographic analysis of the 18 so far known Egyptian and Egyptianising scarabs from the Portuguese Late Bronze and Early Iron context. Such scarabs are part of the Egyptian objects of religious content that both Phoenicians and Greeks consumed and spread across the Mediterranean basin during their colonial waves. To some extent, these Egyptian religious objects also started to be produced by Phoenicians and Greeks in many factories in their colonies. All that Egyptian and Egyptianising material of religious content is called *aegyptiaca*. During the seventh and sixth centuries BC, Phoenician colonists expanded their settlements towards the Algarve and the estuaries of navigable rivers along the Atlantic shoreline. Most of those new settlers were Phoenicians of second and third generation who had departed from the area of Cadiz and Malaga. They established themselves in new sites, but also in indigenous communities. The transformations undergone in those native societies can be most easily noticed through archaeological data. Phoenician objects acquired a distinctive status and became widely consumed, but also mimicked by Phoenician, Greek and other local artisans. Scarabs are funerary amulets, but also had a protective and magic valour. They could also have been used for social distinction as seals or emblems by their owners. The main question asked when *aegyptiaca* is found so far in the west concerns the identity of its owner: Phoenician or Native? So, this paper has two main objectives. Firstly, to update the scarce information so far published on these scarabs, by presenting an iconographic study on the representation of demons. Secondly, to posit new questions concerning the role played by *aegyptiaca* in the Atlantic limits of the Phoenician presence, on religion and cultural identity.

Key words: Phoenician colonisation, Portugal, *aegyptiaca*, iconography, scarab amulets

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The Mediterranean witnessed the development of some of the great cultures of the past. The facilitation of trade and cross-cultural exchanges afforded by the Mediterranean basin enabled the exchange of goods, cultures and modes of thought.

The first presence of eastern Mediterranean populations in the Iberian Peninsula was followed, from the ninth to the seventh centuries BC, by the foundation of sites in eastern Spain and southern Andalusia. This phenomenon also extended westwards, towards southern Portuguese territory, during the eighth to sixth centuries BC.

This work defines the encounter between Phoenicians and native Iberians as “colonisation”. However, there is no *a priori* implication of moral superiority from one group over the other. Here, colonisation renders “the presence of one or more groups of foreign people (the colonisers) in a region at some distance of their own place of origin and asymmetrical socio-economic relationships between the colonising and colonised groups.”¹

¹ Van Dommelen 2012: 398.

So, from the late ninth century BC onwards, the establishment of Phoenicians in the Iberian Peninsula in groups of colonies transformed the surrounded areas into areas of colonial encounters. Those areas allowed the formation of continuing relations between geographical and historical communities. Such cross-cultural and economic relations triggered a process of ‘Mediterranisation’ (or ‘Orientalisation’) of the Iberian Peninsula. In Portugal, second and third generation Phoenicians settled along the occidental littoral and big estuaries. Normally, those new settlements were founded over indigenous communities.

In the absence of adequate written evidence, the history of such contacts in the Iberian Peninsula during the Late Bronze age and beginning of the Iron age (c. eighth–sixth centuries BC) is largely based on our knowledge and evaluation of imports and there are archaeologically visible influences in indigenous material horizons. So, until the end of the eighth century BC, at the beginning of Phoenician colonisation in Portugal, it was possible to identify three distinguishable realities: Phoenician coastal settlements, native deeply Mediterranean coastal settlements, and inland settlements without signs of Mediterraneanisation.² In less than a century that reality had changed to a more homogeneous material culture and usages of technology, including architectonic models.

This Panorama demonstrates the complexity of the Mediterraneanisation processes taking place between the Western Mediterranean region and the Atlantic from the late ninth century BC onwards. So, after an initial period of differentiation it followed a process of cultural homogenisation. Such homogenisation originated in the coastal areas of Phoenician settlement, and a generation later, advanced inland.

On the approached *aegyptiaca*: the Egyptianising scarab amulets

By the sixth century BC, indigenous Late Bronze coastal settlements incorporated Mediterranean elements not only in architecture, building techniques and artefacts, but also in religious practices. The Mediterranean presence in the region manifested itself mostly through the introduction of artefacts related to adornment and bodily care, and some exotic pieces, related to religious practices. Imported Mediterranean remains found in Late Bronze Age context made a decisive contribution to the rise of elites and the gradual development of greater social complexity at the time.

The topographical position of these sites in every case occupied coastal positions on small islands or peninsulas near the mouths of navigable rivers, affording easy access to inland areas. Some colonies were founded *ex novo*, other sites, of indigenous origin, may have had Phoenician “quarters”.³ The Phoenician language was also spoken at all these sites, as is borne out by inscriptions found in Lisbon,⁴ and Tavira.⁵

The great majority of Mediterranean objects are partially related to the sacral-funerary field, but not exclusively restricted to it. Right from the start we can notice a complex interplay between sacral, political and economic fields.

There have been 19 Egyptianising scarab amulets so far found in Portuguese territory.⁶ They are all from the Atlantic archaeological environment, making them very special and raising the question of the identity of their owners: Natives or Phoenicians. The whole Iberian Southwest shall be integrated later in this corpus and include, from Spain, also a group of 25 similar amulets from Extremadura, another group of 15 Egyptian and Egyptianising scarab amulets from the necropolises of Cadiz, plus 17 from the Tartesian region (Huelva-Cadiz-Seville) and a group of 29 from Gibraltar are also to be included in this corpus. The typology and iconography point to diverse origins: Saite Egypt, earlier period Egypt, Greek (Mostly from Naucratis), Phoenician colonies, and even two native-made bronze exemplars.

Here follows the Portuguese corpus of scarab amulets:⁷

² Arruda 2015.

³ Arruda 2015.

⁴ Arruda 2014.

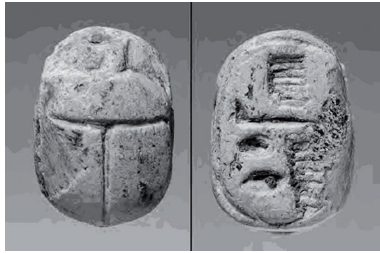
⁵ Zamora López, Amadasi Guzzo 2008.

⁶ Although seven of them are still under study and will be displayed in another table.

⁷ Those on display are all made of steatite, except by Alcácer do Sal 4 (which is made of dark quartz) and Alcácer do Sal 5 – which is officially described as made of “Black Agatha” (although the stone is actually greenish).

1.		<p>Alcácer do Sal 1 Winged sun disk; corrupted Sekhmet holding papyrus sceptre; corrupted Horus on standard; a heart and an unknown vertical hieroglyph. The base forms a nb.</p>
2.		<p>Alcácer do Sal 2 Winged sphinx and feather.</p>
3.		<p>Alcácer do Sal 3 A palindrome featuring two baboons and a palm tree. Egyptian happy new year formula.</p>
4.		<p>Alcácer do Sal 4 Seated feline with facing head. A lotus in front of the feline and an <i>uraeus</i> behind.</p>
5.		<p>Alcácer do Sal 5 Winged sun disk; a central deity holding two sceptres.</p>
6.		<p>Alenquer 1 Two <i>udjat</i>-eyes and the cartouche of Thutmose III (Men-kheper-Ra).</p>
7.		<p>Alenquer 2 An unrecognisable deity and the cartouche of Thutmose III (Men-kheper-Ra).</p>

8.

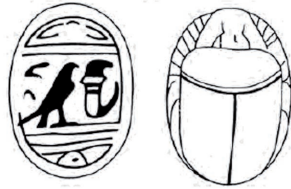


Corte Margarida, Aljustrel, Beja
Hieroglyphs: possibly Petubastis I.

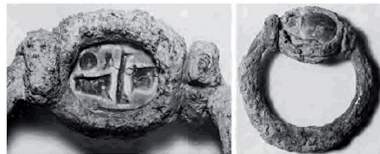
9.



Fonte Santa, Ourique
Corrupted Horus and *uraeus*. A winged sun disk is possibly at the top and the nb-hieroglyph at the bottom.



10.

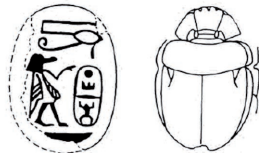


Palheiros, Ourique
Petubastis I.

11.



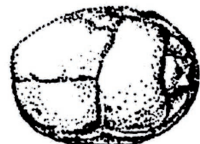
Gaio 1, Sines
Thoeris, *udjat*-eye and the cartouche of Thutmose III (Men-kheper-Ra).



12.



Quinta do Almaraz
A bull (kA) over an *uraeus*. At the top it is possible read nxt, rendering the text kA-nxt



A preliminary analysis of typology and chronology has been made for many of them, by Martin Almagro-Gorbea and Mariano Torres Ortiz.⁸ This table tries to complement their work by trying to fill some gaps on Gorton's typology.⁹

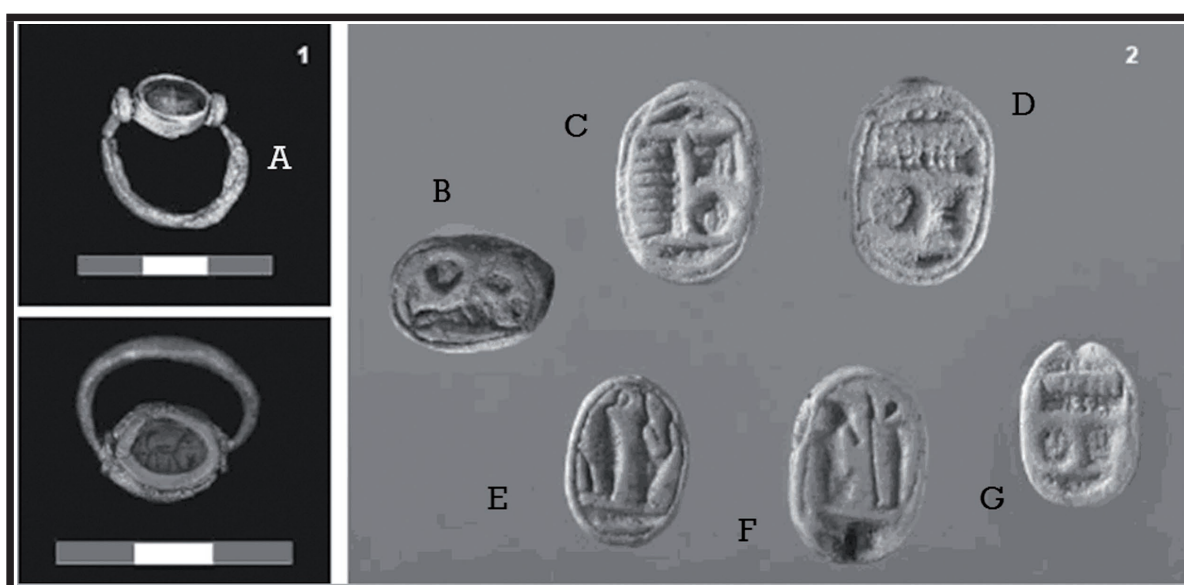
⁸ Almagro-Gorbea, Torres Ortiz 2009. Vercouter (1945) analyses the scarab's anatomic details.

⁹ Gorton (1996) analyses the amulet's motives and iconography.

	Type (Vercouter 1945)	Type (Gorton 1996)	Century	Origin (probable)
1. Alcácer do Sal 1	IVb	XXVI,B	sixth–fifth	Naucratis(?)
2. Alcácer do Sal 2	IVc	XVI	sixth	Carthage
3. Alcácer do Sal 3	IV	XX,C	sixth	Cyprus
4. Alcácer do Sal 4*	IVb	XVIII(?)*	sixth*	Sardinia/Etruria*(?)
5. Alcácer do Sal 5	IVb	XVIII	sixth–fifth	Sardinia
6. Alenquer 1	---	XV,A	sixth	Naucratis/Carthage
7. Alenquer 2	IVa	---	seventh–sixth	(?)
8. Corte Margarida	IVa	XXXVIII,B	sixth–fifth	Naucratis
9. Fonte Santa	IVb	XIII	seventh–sixth	Cyprus/Carthage
10. Palheiros	IVa	XXXVIII,B	seventh–sixth	Naucratis
11. Gaio 1	IV(?)	VI,12	seventh–sixth	Egypt
12. Quinta do Almaraz	---	XXIII,A	sixth	Cyprus(?)

A recent study published another set of seven scarab amulets. The team of archaeologists was headed by Prof. Ana Maria Arruda, specialist of Phoenician Studies, from the University of Lisbon. Their study approached an inhumation necropolis - at Vinha das Caliças, in the Além Tejo region - with 47 graves belonging to men, women and children, sharing the same spaces. That necropolis dates back to the second half of the sixth century BC and was used over two or three generations. Despite a previous sack during the Roman age, it was still possible to find pottery, clothing, adornments, furniture and weapons. Amidst those finding, there were also the following seven new scarabs.¹⁰

Those scarabs are currently under study by Almagro-Gorbea and Torres Ortis. Nonetheless Prof. Ana Arruda kindly allowed me to use their images. The Latin letters are given by me, since we do not have yet any formal tagging. Scarab “A” is made of some bluish hard stone. The others are all made of steatite. So, this is nothing but a preliminary study.



¹⁰ Arruda *et al.* 2017.

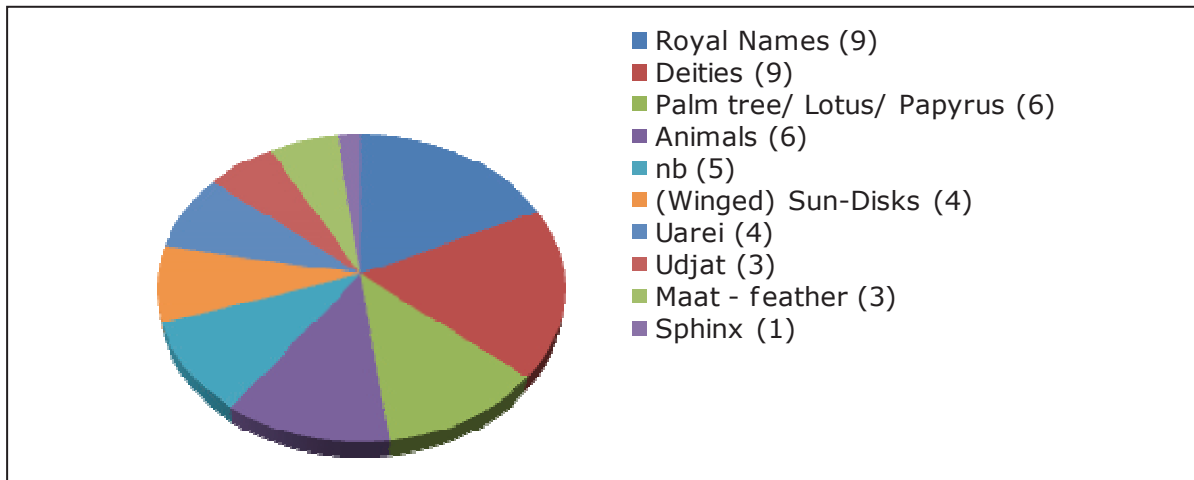
The list of motifs reproduced by this new set of scarabs portray:

A. Horse and lotus flower; B. Lion and solar disk; C., D., G. Pharaoh Petubastis I's name; E. *Uraeus* serpent and squatting deity over the hieroglyph nb; F. Squatting deity and Ptah over the hieroglyph nb.

Since we only have images from the scarabs' iconography, it is not possible to propose any suggestion on Vercoeur's typology. On the other hand, except for scarab "F", which is still a work in progress,¹¹ I could say they all fit into the typology of models from Naucratis' workshops.

	Type (Vercoeur)	Type (Gorton)	Century	Origin (probable)
13. A	---	XXX,A	seventh-sixth	Naucratis
14. B	---	XXVIII,A	seventh-sixth	Naucratis
15. C	---	XXXVIII,B	seventh-sixth	Naucratis
16. D	---	XXXVIII,B	seventh-sixth	Naucratis
17. E	---	XXVIII,A	seventh-sixth	Naucratis
18. F	---	(?)	seventh-sixth	Phoenician/Punic(?)
19. G	---	XXXVIII,B	seventh-sixth	Naucratis

Gathering all 19 scarabs, we can see the occurrences of motifs. Royal names here are counting both names in and out cartouches. There are five Petubastis, three Thutmose III and one Horus Name of Psemtek III. Deities include also three unidentified humanoids, plus Sekhmet, Thueris, Sobek, Ptah, and two Horus. Palm tree, lotus flowers and papyrus plant are here in a single occurrence. Sun-disks occurred three times with wings and once without them. *Uraei* serpents with the White Crown are present three times, and another one with no crown. The *udjat*-eye appears as a pair, once, and alone once. There is just one occurrence of the feather of Maat. There is only one sphinx.



Conclusion: some questions on the amulet owners

Scarabs are funerary amulets, but also had a protective and magic valour. They could also have been used for social distinction as seals or emblems by their owners. The main question asked when *aegyptiaca* is found so far in the west concerns the identity of their owner: Phoenician or Native?

Comparatively, the Iberian Northwest shows up a small amount of scarab amulets. Most of this corpus lacks a proper archaeological context. Given the nature of the Phoenician presence on Portuguese territory, it is hard to tell about the identity of those amulets' identity... at least about their cultural identity.

¹¹ The embedding line, two figures in confrontation and the nb-hieroglyph as basis for the image are typical Phoenician elements. Nonetheless, I still cannot present any conclusive suggestion of a group of Gorton's typologies.

Were they Phoenician or Phoenician descendants? Were they orientalised Iberian peoples? Were they bicultural?

All studied scarabs which offer a more concrete context belong to a funerary environment. The funerary context behind these findings denotes a gradual transition towards Mediterranean religious and funerary practices. Yet, the iconography on those scarabs depicts mostly an unknown fauna and flora from foreign lands. The same goes to hieroglyphic inscriptions and gods' depictions. On the other hand, the Phoenicians already promoted their own interpretation of Egyptian motifs, bringing new elements to the iconography of their scarabs. So, how exactly the usage of those amulets was interpreted in the Peninsula?

What comes next for this project is comparison between the scarabs found in Portugal and references from other Iberian regions, so that we can start talking about patterns of typologies, and strategies of distribution. The Phoenician settlements in the area of Cadix and Malaga were the natural ports of redistribution of oriental artefacts and goods to the western peninsular territories.

Despite the small number of scarabs in Portugal, the distribution of Egyptian and Egyptian replica scarabs reproduce the pattern from the entire Mediterranean basin. Indeed, exemplars of Egyptian, Phoenician, Punic and Greek (and even Etruscan, perhaps) typologies can be verified in Portugal.¹² So, did those amulets find their way to Portuguese territory only throughout Phoenician commerce? No matter the Phoenician influence over the coastal regions, natives kept control of the commercial network at least in the interior of the land. So, how important was the Iberian inner commercial routes by land in that process of Mediterraneanisation?

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¹² In general, non-Egyptian scarabs reproduce imperfect or “corrupted” Egyptian styles, motifs, hieroglyphics, etc. Phoenician and Greek Egyptising material combine native interpretations of Egyptian elements. See: Cooney 2008; Masson et al. 2015; Costa et al. 2019. See also below, n. 10.

