

# The Canadian Entomologist

VOL. LIV.

ORILLIA, JULY, 1922.

No. 7.

## POPULAR AND PRACTICAL ENTOMOLOGY

### THE SCARAB: EMBLEM OF ETERNITY

BY J. S. WADE.

Scientific Assistant, U. S. Bureau of Entomology.

While it is probable that most well informed people know in a vague, misty way that the emblem of the sacred beetle, held in high veneration by the ancient Egyptians, is identifiable in some way with the religious beliefs of that people, yet it is rather unusual to find any one who is able readily to give a clear explanation of the significance of the device. Perhaps this is due in some degree to the great variation of design and the consequent element of uncertainty which has existed among some Egyptologists as to the most probable meaning of this symbol. In view of this uncertainty, and of the perennial human interest attached to this matter, it is proposed here to review very briefly some of the most readily available data relating to the subject.

In Egypt the little objects of stone, pottery, emerald, green feldspar, obsidian, or other material, carved into various forms representative of a beetle, and engraven around the circumference or upon the bases with various devices, ornamental or hieroglyphic in character, may be considered as among the most common objects of art which have come down to us from antiquity, and they invariably excite the interest of the most casual traveler in that ancient land. There is much variety displayed in the form of these, as some are button-shaped, others are cylindrical, with or without a ring of gold or silver around the edge, while one form considerably used in Egyptian religions, especially upon the mummies of the period of the New Kingdom, appears with outstretched wings or bearing the head and horns of a ram.

The great majority of the emblems however are shaped to represent a beetle of the Coleopterous family Scarabaeidae, and this form is universally known as "the Scarab". It has been named for the black beetle, *Ateuchus sacer*, the metallic colored *Scarabaeus Aegyptiorum*, or related species numerous in the Mediterranean countries, and especially common in Egypt. These are closely related to the American *Canthon lacvis* Drury, often seen along country roads and pathways, rolling tiny balls of excrementitious matter from place to place, hence popularly known in this country as "the tumble-bug".

The Egyptian name of the insect "kheperer," "kheperi," or "khopi(r)." signified "become" or "create," likewise the substantive "phenomenon" or "marvel". In the form of "kheperi" the emblem was dedicated to the sun-god at Heliopolis, and from the temple at that place came the colossal granite scarab now in the British Museum. It was believed by the Egyptians that no female of the species existed but that the male, contravening the laws of generation, himself produced the egg and by his own act perpetuated the existence of the

species, therefore the scarab became a type of self-begotten deities and in particular of the god Kheperi who typified the rising sun.

In Egypt some of these little emblems were used as amulets, others were used as seals, while still others, like medals, were made to commemorate historical events. We are informed by Egyptologists that the soil of that country literally teems with them. They are often turned up while ploughing, and immense quantities have been found by antiquaries, under a variety of conditions, in thousands of tombs, especially those located along the banks of the Nile from Aswan to El Arian and Alexandria.

Curiously enough, the range in date of these little scarabs appears to be greater than that of any other class of inscribed monument; some of the older of them appearing to go back to the very dawn of history. To the data gleaned from inscriptions on such scarabs Egyptologists are indebted for the possession of much information of great value regarding the earlier dynasties. Further, they afford valuable clues to the student of ancient art in that they illustrate variations in styles during the different reigns and the inscriptions furnish facts of great value regarding customs and manners of the people in those far away times. Probably the most interesting and valuable of all the scarabs are those bearing the royal arms of the various dynasties. Various famous rulers were mentioned in these inscriptions upon scarabs of a date long subsequent to the periods of their reign. These range from Cheops of the IVth to the end of the XXVIth dynasty. During the reign of Amenophis III about 1450 B. C., a large number comprising in all five varieties of fine large scarabs were engraven and all were inscribed with names of this king and his queen Taia and those of her parentage—the latter possibly possessing a whimsical interest as a side light from hoary antiquity upon the mind of the eternal feminine.

It is to be expected that these Egyptian scarabs would be carried in trade to most of the near by countries, hence, it is not remarkable that they are found in occasional numbers on most of the islands and shores of the eastern Mediterranean, of Mesopotamia, and of Greece. The scarabs and their meaning were well known to the Jewish people and the reference in Hab. 2:11 translated as "beam" in the 1611 Authorized Version of the Bible has been interpreted in the Septuagint and Vulgate as "Scarabaeus". The forms of the Egyptian scarab have inspired some of the finest Etruscan gems of the sixth and fifth centuries B. C. and they have suggested some remarkable and interesting forgeries in more recent years.

As there has been a great deal of discussion of the origin and meanings of the devices of some of these scarabs, so there has been, as is usually the case, the utmost variation of opinion. The limits of this paper forbid a detailed discussion of the various interpretations which have been promulgated. It will be sufficient to indicate that they are of very unequal value; some of them being too trivial for serious consideration, while others of them being brought together from the writings of remote antiquity and representing the results of prolonged study may therefore be duly accredited. While there is no doubt that there has been considerable variation in the significance of the scarab at different periods and under different conditions of Egyptian history, its primary and enduring significance undoubtedly was that of a religious emblem denoting the reincarna-

tion of the body or the immortality of the soul. There are abundant evidences of the truth of this for there are to be found numerous instances in which the emblem was used and worn by the Egyptians in a manner not unlike that of some Christian people of today in wearing a crucifix or cross as an emblem of their religion and of the God they worship. Plutarch has directed attention to the fact that the *Hermitybies Calasiries*, the soldiery of Egypt, each carried a ring upon which this beetle was inscribed. It is also known that these soldiers, just before going into battle, placed scarabs around their necks. True to habit a variety of probable explanations of this procedure also has been made, though it appears most probable that the Egyptians may have used these emblems for markers as aids in identifying bodies of the slain and as a preliminary to the rites of burial.

The use of scarabs as seals was very extensive, especially in the Middle Kingdom (beginning Cir. 3000 B. C.) and New Kingdom (beginning Cir. 1700 B. C.) The seal type of scarab is not only extremely abundant, but the sculpture represents an almost endless variety of design. In some instances apparently the original design was executed with great care and exactness and afterwards was unskillfully copied by ignorant engravers until the original meaning was lost. It is of interest to study the meaning of some of these mottoes, ranging as they do from references to deities, magical devices and places, down to hints of good cheer and friendly wishes, such as, "Memphis is mighty forever," "Mut give thee long life", or "Bubastis grant a good year". Some scarabs made of amethyst were shaped with bases flat and with designs engraven thereon in intaglio and were pierced longitudinally for threading or for a swivel. While these probably were intended principally for seals, they might also be used as beads, necklaces, or other ornaments.

Not only did the nobles and other military and higher classes wear the sacred Scarab in a variety of forms about their persons, but there are abundant evidences to show that the lower classes of the population were equally devout. The emblems undoubtedly were adopted universally both in life and in death. They are found in greatest profusion painted upon and as emblems within the coffins of the dead both of the higher and of the lower classes. A large stone scarab upon which was engraved chapter 54 of "The Book of the Dead", often was placed in the bandages of the mummy. This was in the form of a written appeal that the heart of the dead person might not betray him when he came into judgment before Osiris. By virtue of this amulet the deceased was enabled to pass the ordeal of the "weighing of the heart" at the final judgment. A number of scarabs as well as actual specimens of the various species of beetles were placed here and there over the body, and a winged scarab frequently of very hard stone and skillful workmanship often was laid upon the breast. Not infrequently the heart was removed during the process of embalment and the emblem substituted in the cavity. They may be seen sculptured on funeral tablets buried with the bodies, or on the ornaments of the ring, the necklace, or in pendants attached to them, or in a veritable multiplicity of arrangements.

It is obvious to an entomologist that the rather striking habits of this beetle would be the source of many superstitions among ignorant and credulous people such as were the fellahs of the Nile. One can picture something of the simple wonder with which they watched the actions of the beetle, working busily,

always in pairs, along the cattle path or upon the sandy slope of a hillside pasture on a sunny afternoon, compacting, coating with dust, or transporting its pellet by pushing it backward with its hind legs, with great diligence and patience, through all manner of difficulties until placed in the desired spot. Whatever the Egyptians may have understood concerning its habits and its life history, which greatly resemble that of our common *Canthon*, it is known that they held the little insect in highest veneration, compared its tiny globe to the sun, and they builded up much fanciful superstition about it. Pliny has stated that it relieved the eye of fatigue to gaze upon the golden green *Atuchus Aegyptiorum* of Latreille, a notable variety found widely in Egypt and Nubia. Several nearly related species of the present genus *Atuchus* also were objects of veneration, and about thirty species have been described thus far from Africa.

It is at once interesting, and pathetic, to study the thought underlying the positions in which some of these Scarabaei most commonly were placed upon the mummies: They may be found most often on the chest next to the flesh and underneath the eye lids, the scarab in this position probably being most significant to them as representative of life and animation; symbolic that the heart some time would resume its pulsations and that the eye some time would flash again. The humble insect placed in these positions is overwhelmingly indicative of some kind of belief by them that a time would come when the heart would indeed throb again, and the eye truly regain its sight, and when the body would be reanimated and the soul having completed its term of transmigration would again return to the body in resurrection or would take on a new being in immortality.

The anthropologist, trained to sensitiveness in apprehension of every clue pointing however faintly or dimly toward great principles, is swift to heed and deduce the larger meaning of this overwhelming impulse manifested in the people of that far away time who used the little scarab as an emblem of the deathless desire and hope in them, and in mankind, and which has had so many other manifestations through the centuries, all pointing toward one interpretation.

In studying the scarab, and something of what it has meant in times past to these people and to humanity, one may be reminded of a statement from the pen of Ingalls in discussion of a lecture heard by him upon the evidences of immortality. The speaker had held the rapt and breathless attention of an immense audience comprising all that was cultured, brilliant, and renowned of a city while "he dwelt with remarkable effectiveness and power upon the fact that nowhere in nature, from the highest to the lowest, was an instinct, an impulse, a desire implanted, but that ultimately were found the conditions and opportunities for its fullest realization." He instanced the wild fowl which, moved by some mysterious impulse, start on their prodigious migration from the frozen fens of the north and reach at last the shining south and the summer seas; the fish which, from the tropic gulfs, seek their spawning grounds in the cool bright rivers of the north; the bees which find in the garniture of the fields and forests the treasures with which they store their cells, and even the wolf, the lion, and the tiger, that are provided with their prey. Turning to humanity he alluded to the brevity of life; its incompleteness; its aimless, random and fragmentary careers; its tragedies, its injustices, its sorrows and separations.

Then he referred to the insatiable hunger for knowledge; the efforts of the unconquerable mind to penetrate the mysteries of the future, its capacity to comprehend infinity and eternity, its desire for the companionship of the departed, its unquenchable aspirations for immortality, and he asked: "Why should God keep faith with the beast, the bee, the fish, and the fowl, and cheat man?"

## REFERENCES

- 1838—Hope. On the notions entertained respecting the emblem Scarabaeus. Trans. Ent. Soc. Lond. v. 2, pp. 172-174.  
1894—Myer. Scarabs. London.  
1897—Wiedman. Religions of the Ancient Egyptians. New York.  
1899—Petric. Historical Scarabs. London.  
1902—Ward. The Sacred Beetle. New York.  
1906—Newbury. Scarabs. London.  
1916—Dow. The testimony of the tombs. Bull. Brooklyn Ent. Soc. v. 11, pp. 25-33. pl. 1, figs. 11.

## TWO NEW SPECIES OF ACHORUTES (COLLEMBOLA)

BY CHARLES MACNAMARA,

Arnprior, Ont.

When acquaintances, only pretending, I fear, to a polite interest in my hobby, ask me where I find snowfleas, my answer is: "Everywhere." Any winter day when the temperature is 25 degrees F. or higher, once you get away from the precincts of the town these hardy minute insects are almost sure to be found on the snow over large tracts of country, sometimes sparingly and sometimes in incredibly vast numbers. When they are relatively few, any one species of the half-dozen regular snow frequenters may be in the majority. But when they are many, it is invariably teeming hosts of *Achorutes socialis* Uzel that speckle the snow over whole townships and perhaps counties. Although these tremendous outbreaks are very interesting for the collector they have a serious drawback. While they are in progress it is rarely possible to find any species on the snow except *socialis*. Others are certainly there, but as to the unaided eye all snowfleas are little more than black specks on the white surface, the others are indistinguishable among the innumerable swarms of *A. socialis*. It is worse than looking for a needle in a hay stack. It is like looking for one particular straw in a whole lot of straw stacks.

But it is only the logically impossible that never happens. (And since Einstein has made parallel lines meet, even this seemingly safe proposition may not be incontrovertible.) The merely improbable, no matter how improbable, is sure to occur some time or another. And so it was in the midst of a vast issue of *Achorutes socialis* that a hitherto unknown member of the Collembolan snow fauna was discovered.

The date, 12th Dec., 1920, as far as I can remember, marked no very significant event in human affairs. But for some reason or other it was a most important day for the snowfleas of my district, and some common instinct had