RINGS ARE normally circular bands used to decorate ears, toes, noses, or, most often, fingers. A finger–ring has traditionally been worn for various reasons. It may have a symbolic meaning (as a wedding or a consecration ring); it may identify the wearer or indicate rank or authority (as a signet-ring); it may be thought to have magic powers (as an amuletic ring); or it may be worn merely as an ornament. In ancient Egypt signet-rings bearing carved scarabs (beetles) or engraved hieroglyphs developed from seals carried on cords and were particularly common. The small size of the rings (and of the scarabs) meant that they could 'travel' and 'be travelled', as is evident from the great number of Egyptian rings uncovered around the Mediterranean, in Crete, Cyprus, Phoenicia, Scythia, Sardinia, Meroe, and elsewhere.

The Benaki Museum premises house a small Egyptian collection with several interesting objects, including a faience group which contains finds dating from the Pharaonic period itself. One of the unique non-faience Egyptian objects at the Museum is a charming small ring bearing a scarab (figs 1 a–c), which is examined in detail in this paper:

**Category**: Finger–ring with revolving scarab mounted as swivel in *funda* (Inv. no. B 7335).

**Typology (Ring / Scarab)**: Type II [Keel 1995 (n. 4) 106-09] / Type HC.11(13.-26.) [?]–EP.27(15.-27.)–SIDE 27(13.-26.) [Rowe 1936 (n. 4) cited in Keel 1995 (n. 4) 42, 45, 53 (respectively)].

**Date**: TIP, Dynasty XXII, belonging to Sheshonq I or II or to somebody of their retinue.

Provenance: Egypt (unspecified details).

Acquisition: Donation by Lucas Benaki (April 1969).

Materials: Gold and lapis lazuli.

Weight: 3.4 gr.

Colour: Golden metal *annulus* and lapis blue scarab.

Dimensions: $H_{\text{scarab}} = 1.40$ cm, $L_{\text{scarab}} = 0.90$ cm, $W_{\text{scarab}} = 0.30$ cm; $D_{\text{ring, mean}} = 2.20$ cm.


Similar Objects: MFA 51.59; BM EA 14345 & 57698; Museo Egizio (Firenze), 2790 & 2791; Castellani Collection 335; Newberry (n. 4) 93 & fig. 109; Matouk (n. 4) 128-31, 197-98 & figs 754, 756-58, 770, 772-73; Cagliari 21912; Carthage Museum [1190].

Technique: Incision (scarab); hammering (ring).

The object studied is a golden (signet-)ring with a lapis lazuli scarab, which is enclosed in a golden *funda* (in order to protect its edges from possible injuries), and which in turn is mounted as swivel on the (relatively thin) ring by means of perforation threaded with a separate gold wire, the ends of which are tightly wound round the hoop. This type of mounting appears first during Dynasty XIII and continues to be used during the SIP, NK and into the TIP. The hoop of the ring, whose dimensions fit a man’s rather than a woman’s fingers, is slightly distorted (figs 1 a–c). The *funda* (or bezel) that holds the scarab in place has the shape of a small cartouche and is made of two oval frames, tightly attached one on the other (fig. 1c). The thinner golden perforation wire passes through the scarab (following the longitudinal
It has been argued that the $\text{sn}$-ring is related to the eternity god, whose notched palm-branch sign (symbolising «years») forms the base; in this aspect the scarab, engraved and «protected» by the oval funa, is related not only to eternity and royal protection, but also to the idea of resurrection and eternal life. Hence, a scarab-ring would be the perfect bearer of this particular symbolism. This gives us a first hint as to the ring’s possible owner, whose identity will be founded on the study of its hieroglyphic inscription. In fact this object is not a signet-ring\textsuperscript{13} [anc. Eg.: $\text{hn}$, $\text{db}(w)t$; Copt.: $\text{tfr}$, $\text{ttr}$] per se, but rather a bezel-ring of amuletic character, bearing a New Year’s inscription for prosperity. This object clearly evokes a double protection for the bearer: the oval cartouche, protectively enclosing a king’s name; and the solar regeneration symbolism, relevant also to the beginning of a happy New Year.\textsuperscript{14} The inscription on the spheragistic surface of the scarab apparently goes like this: $\text{Mwt wp } \text{rnpt nfr } \text{sa}<\text{nq}>\text{=} \text{(May) Mnt open a happy New Year}^{15}$ [for the Pharaoh] $\text{Shesho}<\text{nq}>\text{!}$. At this point, we have to consider two questions: (i) is this the actual inscription or not, as the partially damaged surface of the back of the scarab renders the reading of the last line somewhat problematic; (ii) if this is the actual inscription, then do we have any clues as to which of the most important pharaohs of Dynasty XXII with this name\textsuperscript{16} it refers?

Let us examine first of all what is certain about the inscription. It is typical of a New Year’s object, beginning with an evocation to Mnt\textsuperscript{17}, the goddess of Thebes, consort of Am\textsuperscript{n} and mother of Khons\textsuperscript{u}, to offer a happy New Year to the person whose name is in question. Let us call this name N. It seems very probable that the reading of the two identical hieroglyphic signs in the lower row is as shown above: $\text{sa}-\text{sa}$. However, supposing that this is not the case, what alternative readings of these signs (if any) do we have? A hypothetical rendering could well be: $\text{Mwt wp } \text{rnpt nfr } \text{sa}<\text{a}>\text{=} \text{(May) Mnt open a happy New Year’s beginning}$. If so, the word $\text{sa}$\textsuperscript{18} (= beginning) would present a rather peculiar orthography, which implies that the scribe has made two mistakes simultaneously—even without taking the anomalous syntax into account—by writing it erroneously and by repeating a similar sign $\text{sa}$ after the first.\textsuperscript{19} This seems a quite impossible speculation and accordingly should be
rejected. Furthermore, we cannot consider N as being either the word $\text{S3} (= \text{ordain, predestine})^{26}$ twice repeated, or the word $\text{S3} (s) (= \text{travel})^{21}$ twice repeated, since the context of the New Year's wish would not justify something like this. Nor can we consider the two signs as being a repetition of the group $\text{hm-k3} (= \text{k3-priest}),^{22}$ no matter how much they resemble this sign, since the meaning would again not fit the context [namely: Mut, happy New Year's Day; (to the) k3-priest, k3-priest]. Similarly, we must exclude the possibility that the word is a person's (commoner's) name, since no similar entry is found in Ranke's work.^{23} Finally, any cryptographic context in this particular inscription must also be excluded. Thus, it seems that the only possible rendering of the inscription is indeed that given in the previous paragraph.

It is almost certain that $\text{N = S3S3}$, and highly probable that $\text{N = S3S3<nk>}$, referring to the royal name Sheshonq. Now we have to discuss to which of the three pharaohs with the same prenomen$^{25}$ it belongs. In certain instances the name of Sheshonq II is written simply as $\text{S3S3}$, without the final two hieroglyphic signs, using this 'minimal' orthography.^{26} However, there are some scarabs of Sheshonq I where the name of the king is also written merely as $\text{S3S3}$, omitting the final two signs.^{27} As for Sheshonq III, the known concomitant scarabs, to the best of our knowledge, show his full name.^{24} Thus the ring appears to name either Sheshonq I or Sheshonq II, though which of them cannot be decided with absolute certainty. Last but not least, stylistic reasons^{28} imply that it is probably a ring of the Libyan Dynasty. The scarab and its basic anatomical lines are rendered in a particular manner which is reminiscent of the TIP style (cf. also a similar ring: MFA 51.59, already referred to).^{29} Additionally, comparison of the scarab with another, also made of lapis lazuli but this time set on a golden bracelet of Sheshonq II which imitates a swivel finger-ring,^{31} corroborates this evidence. The ring examined here, bearing a royal name, is made of gold and has a finely worked inscribed scarab; however, it is not particularly opulent and it is not made of massive solid gold. It may perhaps have belonged to either Sheshonq I or Sheshonq II, but it seems safer to surmise that it was probably given by the king as a reward to one of his officers or priests. Table 1 shows some interesting parallels to this finger-ring.^{32}

Dr Amanda-Alice Maravelia
Egyptologist/Archaeoastronomer
e-mail: a_maravelia@hotmail.com

Notes

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4. See, for instance, P. A. Newberry, Egyptian Antiquities: Scarabs. An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian Seals and Signet Rings (London 1906) 62ff. For scarabs, see also W. M. F. Petrie, Scarabs and Cylinders with Names, Illustrated by the Egyptian Collection in University College I-III (London 1917); id., Buttons and Design


8. See Newberry (n. 4) 93.


10. On the (solar/cosmic and protective/encircling) symbolism of royal cartouches, see Wilkinson (n. 2) 194-95 and Lurker (n. 2) 38-39; EG, 74.


12. See R.H. Wilkinson (n. 2) 193.


14. Among the inscribed faience objects from the Benaki Museum is a New Year’s jar, already published by the author [see Maravelia (n. 7) 87-88 figs 2 a-c], bearing an inscription mentioning Amün and the New Year’s festival. On the importance of New Year’s Day to the ancient Egyptian mind, cf. also the reference to the New Year and the heliacal rising of Sirius/Sōthis in the context of ancient Egyptian Love Poems [see e.g.: A.-A. Maravelia, \textit{pti. st mi Spt h't y m-hit rntp nfr}: Astronomical and Cosmomedical Elements in the Corpus of Ancient Egyptian Love Poems, \textit{Lingua Ae- gyptia} 11 (2003) 79-112; p. Chester Beatty I, v, C1, 1-2]. For the expression \textit{rntp nfr}, in opposition to \textit{rntp spb} (cf. p.\textit{Anastasi IV}), see P. Germond, Les invocations à la bonne année au temple d’Edfou, (= \textit{Aegyptiaca Helena} 11, Genève 1986) 79-80.


16. Of the Libyan Dynasty XXII, we know three important Pharaohs with this \textit{nom}: Sheshonq I \[945-924 BCE\] = (\textit{Hd hpr R'}, \textit{Sp n R'}) (\textit{Siθnk}, \textit{MryImn}); Sheshonq II \[c. 890-883 BCE\] = (\textit{Hk1 hpr R'}, \textit{Sp n R'}) (\textit{Siθsθθnk}, \textit{MryImn}); Sheshonq III \[835-783 BCE\] = (\textit{Wsr MθθR'}, \textit{Sp n R'}) (\textit{Siθmθnk}, \textit{MryImn}). On this, see A.-A. Maravelia, Χρονολογικό μνημόνιο της αρχαίας αγω- 

17. For Müt, see Lurker (n. 2) 82-83; H. te Velde, Towards a Minimal Definition of the Goddess Mut, \textit{JEOl} 8/26 (1979-1980) 3-9. In other objects different deities are invoked, e.g. in the Benaki Museum New Year’s jar (B18.258), for which see Ma-

18. See Wb. IV, 406ff; CD, 261.

19. The basic archetype for this very ancient sign (already met in the \textit{PT} is M8) is \textit{EG} (see \textit{EG}, 480); in the context of this ring it is rather M8j (less possibly M8h or M8I); cf. N. Grimal – J. Hal- 


22. Cf. Wb. III, 90; CD, 169. Further similarly written words exist, but their meaning does not fit the context (cf. e.g.: CD, 261: \textit{sθθnk} = necklace; \textit{CT IV}, § 384a: \textit{θθ} = escape; \textit{CT VII}, § 397a: \textit{θθ} = a snake species; & c.). See also Wb. IV, 413-14.

23. See H. Ranke, \textit{Die ägyptischen Personennamen I-III} (Hamburg 1932-1977). There is only a simple form \textit{θθ}, with sign \textit{hnn} (M2) as taxogram, dating from the NK (cf. op. cit. I, 12).
Τό Μουσείο Μπενάκη φυλάσσεται ένας χρυσός δακτύλιος από μετάλλιο και μετέπιπτο από μετάλλιο με περιστρεφόμενη σφυνδόνη και επενάπτο σκαραβαίο από λαζουρίτη. Ο σκαραβαίος περικλείεται από πλαίσιο (fundus) σε ελλειψοεδές σχήμα φαραωνικής δύναμης και είναι προσδεδεμένος στον δακτύλιο με λεπτό μεταλλικό σύρμα που διαπερνά τον κάθετο αξώνα του. Κατά πάσα πιθανότητα το αντικείμενο αυτό, το οποίο φέρει χαρακτηριστική ευχή για το Νέο Άιτος (wp npt nfr), χρονολογείται από την 22η Δυναστεία, ενώ μπορεί να ανήκει είτε στον Φαραώ Σέσωγχι Ι (945-924 ΠΚΕ), είτε στον Φαραώ Σέσωγχι ΙΙ (επ. 890-883 ΠΚΕ). Υποθέτουμε ότι το πιθανότερο είναι πως ήταν δύο ενός από τους δύο αυτούς φαραών προς κάποιου υπήκοου τους (αξιωματούχου ή ιερέα). Η ευχή αναφέρεται στη θεά Μουτ (sūgīn του Άμμωνα), την οποία επικαλείται ούτως ώστε να χαρίσει στον Σέσωγχι Ι πανυψηφισμένη (προτο)χρονία. Στην εργασία αυτή μελετάται ακριβής η επιγραφή και αποκλείονται συγκεκριμένες πιθανές αποδόσεις της (εξαιτίας των δυσανάγνωστων ειρογλυφικών στην τελευταία γραμμή της), ενώ ταυτόχρονα δίνεται πλήρης περιγραφή του σφυρήλατου δακτύλιου. Η χρήση του δακτύλιου εν είδει περιόπτου ευημερίας και προστασίας θα χάριζε στον κάτοχο (προβεβείας της Μουτ) ευτυχία και ευμά- ρεια για τη νέα χρονιά. Ο σκαραβαίος, ηλικιακό σύμβο- λο αναγέλνησης και ανάστασης, κατείχε στη σκέψη των Αιγυπτίων εξέγερα φάση ως αρχέτυπο. Δακτύλιοι όποιοι αυτοί, αλλά και απεριόριστοι σκαραβαίοι, έχουν εντοπισθεί σε πολλά σημεία ανά τη λεκάνη της Με- σογείου, γεγονός που καταδεικνύει τη φήμη των αιγυ- πτιακών περιπάτων κατά την αρχαίτες. Το συγκεκριμένο αντικείμενο φέρει εγγράφους επιγραφή και ανάφηκα στον οποίο το ιόντα Σέσωγχις δεν είναι γραμμένο εξολο- κλήρου (αποσυναρτών τα προς της ειρογλυφικής), γεγονός σύνθετος τόσο για τον Φαραώ Σέσωγχι Ι, όσο και για τον Σέσωγχι ΙΙ.