The ancient Etruscans have always had a peculiar fascination for us moderns. The fact that we know so much and yet so little about them has stimulated our imagination. Their origin, their history, their language, and their art have long been subjects of discussion and research. Perhaps a little scarab recently acquired by the Museum may shed a faint ray of light on one particular phase of Etruscan art.

It is a carnelian, carved in relief on one side in the form of a beetle and engraved on the other with the figure of a collapsing youth. Its workmanship is of the first quality. The beetle is rendered in great detail, with delicate little dots on the head, beading around the lower part of its clypeus, and a border of beads and tongues along the edge of the base. The engraving—which is in reverse, of course, for the stone was used for sealing—is also very fine. The youth is represented as falling on his knees, looking upward, still grasping his shield, but letting go of his spear. He is Kapaneus, one of the six Argive heroes who set out against Thebes to restore Polyneikes to power after he had been ousted by his brother Eteokles. The story was immortalized by Aeschylus in his Seven against Thebes—written within a few decades of the carving of our stone—as well as by other ancient writers. Kapaneus, we are told, brought upon himself the wrath of the gods by his presumptuous claim that even Zeus could not prevent him from destroying the city. As he scaled the wall Zeus's thunderbolt struck him and he fell back dead. It is this moment that the artist of our engraving has chosen. Even if the name of the hero had not been inscribed—Capne, Etruscan for Kapaneus—we should recognize him. For he is a favorite subject on Etruscan gems and is regularly represented in a posture of collapse, struck by Zeus's thunderbolt, his helmet or spear or sword falling from him. In our stone and in another one, also inscribed with the hero's name, the thunderbolt is not actually shown. The name evidently served as sufficient identification.

The Etruscans had a special liking for the heroic tales of Greece. Not only Kapaneus but Ajax, Achilles, Peleus, Odysseus, Perseus, Tydeus, as well as Herakles are familiar figures in Etruscan art. As Mr. Beazley said in his book on Etruscan Vase Painting, we "must suppose that there was a heroic strain in the Etruscan character to which these figures made a natural appeal."

Of all the representations of Kapaneus on Etruscan gems ours is the finest. Its exquisite detail can hardly be seen with the naked eye (the stone is only a little more than half an inch high) and the skillful composition within the oval field must be enlarged many times to be fully appreciated. The style is pure Greek of about 510-480 B.C. The hair, with strands radiating from the top of the skull and with rows of spiral curls front and back (rendered
by tiny globules), the wide arch for the lower boundary of the thorax, the two horizontal divisions above the navel in the rectus abdominis, the slightly curving ribs on the sides of the thorax, the shield with arm band in the center and looped cords along the edge, the spear with thong near the center of gravity, are all familiar renderings in late archaic Greek sculptures and vase paintings. Moreover, there is the same partial knowledge of foreshortening that we find in Greek works of that time—profile and full front views pieced together, with only an occasional three-quarter view (in the shield, for instance, and the right hand). We may note particularly the curious rendering of the right foot—the heel in profile, the ball and the toes in full front, and the arch foreshortened.

In spite of the consistent Greek style, however, there can be no doubt that the stone was made in Etruria for an Etruscan. The Etruscan inscription shows this, as well as the elaborately ornamented beetle and the border round the edge of its base—both characteristics of Etruscan scarabs but not of Greek ones. The Etruscans used engraved scarabs not only for sealing, like the Greeks, but also as ornaments; so the carving of the beetle naturally received special attention.

We may surmise, therefore, that our scarab was made by a Greek in Etruria for an Etruscan patron. The artist was probably one of those Greeks who introduced gem-engraving into Etruria, for this art was apparently not practiced there before the late archaic period, whereas in Greek lands it had been known for centuries. Moreover, the historical background makes the surmise a likely one. Persian aggression in Asia Minor and the Greek Islands in the second half of the sixth century, the Ionian Revolt in 499 B.C., its suppression by Persia in 493, and the subsequent invasion of the Greek mainland must have caused many Greek artists to emigrate. Rich and art-loving Etruria offered many attractions. The close connection of Greek and Etruscan art at this period was, therefore, probably due not only to Greek influence on Etruscan artists—derived from Greek imports and general contacts with Greeks—but to Greek artists working side by side with Etruscans for Etruscans. A faint echo of this relationship has reached us in the statement by Pliny that the Greeks Damophilos and Gorgasos decorated the temple of Ceres in Rome (493 B.C.).

Our newly acquired stone with its pure Greek style and its Etruscan inscription is another significant witness.

The accession number of the scarab is 48.11.1. It was broken in two pieces and reattached. Only a small chip at the left hand of Kapanes is missing. The dimensions of the engraved side are 1.2 x 1.5 cm.; the thickness is 0.9 cm. For other representations of the collapsing Kapanes on archaic Etruscan gems, see A. Furtwängler, Antike Gemmen, pl. xvi, 32-38, 44, 46, 51, 55; G. Lipppold, Gemmen und Kameen des Altertums und der Neuzeit, pls. xlv, xlvii, 1-5, 13; H. B. Walters, Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Cameos in the British Museum, nos. 625-627, 652, and Catalogue of Bronzes in the British Museum, no. 2266; F. H. Marshall, Catalogue of the Finger Rings in the British Museum, no. 1228, pl. xxx (bronze ring with engraving on the bezel).