

PREFACE

To be in a favoured position, to know the country intimately, to have official approval in making a collection of Cretan Seals, and to be able to acquire them whenever they are offered, fall to the lot of few men. It fell to Richard Seager, the larger part of whose collection is now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, the remainder being in the University Museum, Philadelphia; it fell to Richard Macgillivray Dawkins and to Sir Arthur Evans. It also fell to two eminent amateur collectors: Dr. Stylianos Giamalakis, whose seals are already known by publication, and to Mr. Nicholaos Metaxas.

The Evans collection, now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, probably the finest group of Great Seals extant, gives, because of its excellence, a slightly misleading account of Cretan Seal use. It is unlikely that the majority of Cretan Seals in use in the Bronze Age, possessed the quality of these pieces. Sir Arthur, like the founder of the Lewes House Collection, now for the most part in Boston, Massachusetts, like that of the late Captain E. Spencer-Churchill, aimed at excellence, even for artistic value.

This slightly misleading picture is corrected by the Seager Collection, which is far more representative of Cretan use as a whole, than for example, the magnificent group in Boston. Thus for the student of archaeology, the Seager and Dawkins Collections are in some ways more valuable in giving a more balanced picture of Cretan glyptic. Even the famous collection of Aegean seal stones in the Athens National Museum, with its seemingly inextricable mixture of Cretan and Helladic pieces, does not present a true picture of general seal use in the Late Bronze Age. The very quality of these stones and – except for Pylos – the paucity of sealings, suggests a noble kingly use, rather than one which belonged not only to the Court, but to farmers, craftsmen and merchants.

The seals from Lenda have redressed the imbalance caused by the magnificent ivories from Platanos, Koumassa, Ajia Triada and recently from Archanes. So the original Dawkins Collection and that of Seager, although comparatively deficient in ivories, are more representative of Cretan use, than those at Oxford and the British Museum.

The collection of Mr. Nicholaos Metaxas, at present as large as that of Richard Seager and of Sir Arthur Evans, is as representative of Cretan use, as the former, yet in two ways surpasses both collections, for it contains a large number of ivories from South Crete, and some outstanding examples, which by the evidence of the sealings from Ajia Triada, must be fine work from South Crete of the Late Minoan I period. Indeed a number of seals in the Metaxas Collection have such quality, that had they been discovered two or three generations ago, they would doubtless have now been housed in Oxford. Chief among them is an ivory seated duck (No. 5) of the end of the Early Minoan Age from South Crete. Its base is meticulously engraved, with orderly spaced vertical members in rows, which alternating in

direction, are framed by an interlocking rectangular pattern. The intricacy of this overall pattern is astonishing, and provides, as these early ivories often do, a perfect foil to the serene simplicity of the shape of the sitting bird.

Near in time to this beautiful theriomorph, but slightly earlier and, except for wear, in good condition, is a massive portion of a tusk just shaped for use (No. 1). Indeed one side, obliquely concave, is designed for the thumb to rest in during the making of the impression. This piece has in common with some of the finer seals datable to the end of the Early Minoan Age, a delicacy in its overall patterns of conjoined C- und S-spirals. In contrast with the meticulous precision of the motif on the base of the sitting duck, are two others related in precision, but of greater depth, namely Nos. 3 and 4, both great wedges of ivory, with rectangular interlocking patterns. No. 4, fractured completely through the line of the string hole, makes up for this loss by a perfect cross section, showing the string holes at their respective positions and angles. No. 3 has a deceptively simple pattern whose description demands an analytic treatment, since any other would blur the decorative mastery it reveals.

Then datable to the end of the First Transitional Phase, a theriomorphic shape of a lion's head in white steatite (No. 30), bearing on its base an overall lozenge pattern, alternatively plain and hatched. Comparable with the seated duck, in this case the elaboration belongs to the head itself, in contrast with the simplicity of its overall lozenge pattern. This work, by any standard of engraving or carving in the round, could take its place with the finest work of the Knossian Palace Period, nor would it be out of place with comparable pieces from Mesopotamia or classical Greece.

Near in time to the lion's head, is another theriomorph (No. 28) of white glazed steatite, of two monkeys in embrace, and as the former of the lion's head – although the monkeys have lost some of the fineness of the original engraving by wear – it shows a similar contrast of intricacy in the carving of the shape, with the simplicity of the motif on its elliptical base, diagonally quartered and correspondingly halved. The expression on the faces of the two monkeys, a minor masterpiece, is a trembling balance between humour and pathos, neither predominating. A number of ivory seals with ridged hooped handles (Nos. 16–18, 23–25), whose faces are generally engraved with plain cross hatching, almost exact parallels with those from Ajia Triada, like an equal number of *epomion* or shoulder shaped seals (Nos. 12–15, 19–22), also in ivory, and of quite plain conical signets of steatite and ivory in the Heraklion Museum, are reminders of more common uses and needs, with one of the finest double seals to advertize the genius of seal cutting in the early Palatial age. This, the section of a fine ivory tusk, or a reduced cylinder (No. 42), has been hollowed out (in the interest of economy, the interior of the tusk was in all probability cut out and made into another seal, since the width of the cut would not have allowed the perfect fit of the two ends), and fitted with ends of the same material, so closely and perfectly that the engraved design, continued without apparent break over the ends of the seal and its ivory caps. The motifs are germane, being on one cap a pattern of S-spirals with palmettes and on the other C-spirals with centred circles. There are other examples of this inventive joinery, few so perfectly fitted as this one, or graced by such an emphatic design – since usual for derived spiral form designs on the Syrian coast, but rare for the Cretan instances. In these two motifs in both S- and C-Spirals, multiple centred circles from the tubular drill have been used as a base for the execution. This piece belongs to the fine work of the end of the Middle Minoan I period, and the beginning of

Middle Minoan II, the time of a renaissance after much poor work in the south. No. 44, a fine elongated ivory pyramidal shaped, has a deep but beautifully cut motif of a spreading quatrefoil with cup-sinkings between the leaves.

There are many other shapes in ivory, smaller, intricate and, despite or perhaps because of their size, a microcosm of this early glyptic art.

A number of Middle Minoan I button shaped seals of steatite (Nos. 75, 77, 78, 80), using the tubular drill marks as a basis for the motifs, can be related to sealings from the Phästos deposit: for Middle Minoan II and perhaps its earlier part. They are discoids and rudimentary lenticular shapes. To the Middle Minoan III A should belong, first a green jasper signet (No. 141), which although badly damaged, retains enough of its original shape and motif of a running goat, to bridge the gap between the stiffer rendering of some animal forms at the end of Middle Minoan II and the beginning of Middle Minoan III, with the freer renderings associated with the Temple Repositories sealings, and a green jasper three-sided prism bead (No. 156) with hieroglyphs on two sides and a rampant or climbing goat on the third. In workmanship, this piece compares with British Museum 1934, 11-20-1 (*CMS*. VII No. 40), and with Metropolitan Museum, New York 26.31.155 (*AJA*. 68, 1964, Pl. 2 no. 2, Pl. 3 no. 18), to which in time, if not in workmanship, it must be closely related.

From an informative group of discoids bearing architectural and façade designs, No. 158, of mottled red, black and white agate, stands out as chief. It possesses an added distinction, because of its close relationship in style and technique – as also in material – with the discoid in the Colville Collection (*CMS*. VIII No. 105) which with those from the Ashmolean and Heraklion Museums, mark some of the most meticulous and beautiful engraving of the Bronze Age. No. 168 was a great find: a lentoid of black marble, since it is yet another study of a bull's head by the master of the Chanting Priest and with a Knossian provenience, as are the other related bovine studies (*Festschrift für Friedrich Matz*, 1962, p. 6). A discoid (No. 166) is believed to be unique. Of obsidian (Nos. 157, 195, 207 and another recently acquired from Vassilies are of the same material; four others are known to the authors in Switzerland and the USA, except those published in *CMS*. VIII No. 136 and *Kret. Chron.* 17, 1963, p. 352, pl. 18) it probably derives, as do the two in the Dawkins Collection (*CMS*. VIII. Nos. 39, 40) and two others in the British Museum, (*CMS*. VII, Nos. 37, 38) from the cores of obsidian vessels, since, like them, at least on one side, it retains the natural marks of its cleavage, yet with the added distinction that the reverse is discreetly and shallowly engraved with a running goat. The attitude of the hind leg links it with the slightly later studies of dogs scratching themselves (Cf. No. 185). This suggests the survival of an older shape, perhaps because of its material, into the Second Transitional Phase.

No. 233, of haematite, a lengthened amygdaloid, gives one of the most spirited accounts of a man fighting with a lion. Its shape assists the dramatic content of the theme, since the narrow field emphasizes infighting, and its length a lack of cover. Both desperation and strength are seen in this motif and the balance between them is precariously held.

A contemporary amygdaloid, also of haematite (No. 246) bears a beautiful study of two water fowl, one just about to fly. The unanimity of the motif is enhanced by the river plants being Cretan, and not of Egyptian species. An other amygdaloid (No. 232) of red and black mottled jasper, still leans expertly towards verisimilitude, in spite of the growing use of the shape for talimanic subjects. Its theme of four swimming fish is engagingly naturalistic; the

two bunches of weed in spray alternative positions at the edge of the stone, speak of the growing pressure of the talismanic class. The engraving is superlative.

Near in time is No. 236, an object lesson in the deployment of space within a glandular shaped field. A young *bucranium* is central to the field, the two branches as the portcullis above, emphasize both relationship and grades of symbolic meaning within a unity of the themes. The green jasper material is exactly the right background for it. For the deployment of objects in the field, with evidence of a great sensitiveness with regard to space, No. 224, a glandular red and white mottled agate, with opulent carination, ranks as high as No. 257. On it are engraved two *bucrania* inverted to each other. This at once recalls the sealing from Ajia Triada bearing a similar subject (*ASAtene* 8-9, 1925-26, 88, fig. 34). In complete contrast No. 257, although a later stone, this red jasper lentoid bears a study of two birds, a wind blown seed and papyrus. Here spatial relationship appears to be out of hand, until the erratic motion of the presumed flying seed is understood.

Matching this work in its technical virtuosity, although belonging to the very end of the Knossian Palace period, is the study of a lioness attacking a bull (No. 259). Its delicately mottled material appears to be a rare kind of mineral, since its colour, quite uniform, has a certain light tinge of brown. This engraving shows supreme mastery of technique, and must be a Palace period prototype of the more frequent studies technically related to it, but on a lower grade, of a number of lentoids datable to Late Minoan III A.

The Metaxas Collection has, in addition to the fine examples of seals proper, a fine number of talismanic pieces of the Second Transitional Phase and Late Minoan I period. Some of these show new motifs, others stylistic variations of motifs already known. All are of fine material and workmanship. Two of the most striking are No. 192, a grey sapphirine chalcedony cushion-shape¹, showing two jugs facing outwards and a great amygdaloid sardonyx (No. 226), on which is engraved a talismanic combination of a *cantharos* and a *bucranium*. Clear instances of the use of the silphium seed for this class of stone, occur on Nos. 174, 200, 210, 237. There is a new motif of what appears to be a seed pod set within a panel on No. 239, a fine variation of the panel theme, while another (No. 201) shows a *cantharos* set between two foliated horns of consecration. There are three striking variations of the *cantharos* fused with talismanic variations (Nos. 188, 226, 250). These in particular are of great value, since their metamorphosis stands in complete contrast with those stones which on grounds of style, subject and execution, are hybrids. Seal-talismans, perhaps indicating that the first clear distinction between the talismanic stone and the seal proper, which on present evidence occurred in the Second Transitional Phase, had already in Late Minoan IB become blurred. The Seager Collection has a good number of these fine and interesting stones. This number and the knowledge of this reactionary movement, is enhanced by No. 223, an amygdaloid stone of a sacral ivy leaf and an axe head with a single blade. It is, in this instance, the sprouting decoration on the axe blade, which betrays a talismanic leaning, as does the rash of crescents on a fine sard lentoid of a megalithic gate (No. 164). There are some seals with fine fore-parts of fish, others with tapering and curved bundles, similarly arranged. There are exam-

¹ Since the conventional term "flattened cylinder" is a contradiction in terms, and has for Near Eastern scholars a confused meaning, the authors prefer the term "cushion-shape" to describe these rectangular shaped stones.

les of the more debased rendering of motifs, particularly in the case of the double axe (No. 191, 202, 255). In these examples of the talismanic class and the related hybrids, as regards material, cornelian and green jasper are naturally plentiful; yet there is a quota of finer and more colourful material, including a fine amethyst (No. 204) which although damaged, suggests a variation from a stereotyped use.

Stereotyped characteristics, however, are seen in the group Nos. 261–264. Close parallels in subject and style can be seen in a similar group in the British Museum (*CMS*. VII Nos. 139, 151–153²). Evidence of technique suggests the superlative skill of Late Minoan II; the stereotyped character, a probable manufacture for export. A number of examples of this class have been found on the mainland (*CMS*. I Nos. 55, 56, 143).

Apart from the aesthetic appeal of many of these pieces, which in itself can be regarded as archaeological evidence, the total effect greatly enhances the knowledge of Minoan seal use and Cretan glyptic. This is particularly true of the stones of the closing period of the Late Minoan age, whose comparative drabness may, like the excellence of the earlier pieces, disguise their archaeological value. The number of Late Minoan IIIB stones are for example of value as evidence for the character of the closing period of the Bronze Age in Crete. Many of them damaged, some later re-engraved, add to the tale of activity in the making of small carved stones in Crete at the end of the Bronze Age. A small but particularly valuable number, whose recorded provenience is the Messara, are so like many of the Late Minoan IIIB stones in material, subject and style found in the Knossos area, as to suggest that north central Crete was their origin and that probably in antiquity they were taken to the south of the island (Cf. Heraklion Museum Nos. 174, 1364 and No. 2136 [Rotassi]). These stones, which by style and typology can be dated to the end of the Bronze Age, do provide observable differences from those of the immediately prior period Late Minoan IIIA₂, of which there are a sizable number in this collection. These earlier stones are of value, because stylistically, technically and even from the standpoint of material – serpentine and good marble being more frequent than steatites and slates – they are not only sometimes subtly, sometimes distinctively different from the last period, but provide a line between them and the finer stones of Late Minoan IIIA. So while not perhaps as exciting as the last experiments of Late Minoan IIIB, nor as traditionally satisfying as those of Late Minoan IIIA₁, the Late Minoan IIIA₂ in the Metaxas Collection, do strengthen the hitherto rather precarious link between Late Minoan IIIA and Late Minoan IIIB, and show the beginning of the recession from mainland influence observable in Late Minoan IIIA₁.

The cost of making a collection of this importance is great, not only in effort, or even in actual purchase, but in a fairly high percentage of waste, due to doubtful pieces and those which later were seen to be falsifications. But it is of value first to the collector, who is thus warned of his fallibility; then of value to the archaeologist, when he pits his knowledge and experience of ancient glyptic against an extensive trade and specialist technique, in reminding him forcibly that the sense of style is acquired and maintained by disciplined and unremitting study, lastly of a different and special kind of value to the collector, since these doubtful and fraudulent pieces are the necessary waste in the building of a fine collection.

² These stones should have been placed earlier.

The doubtful pieces are grouped together in the section entitled *Dubitandae*. If reference is made to one of these pieces elsewhere, the capital letter D will be placed after the number.

Costs of production prevent a publication of many of these pieces, nor would a collector desire it. Certain *Gemmae Dubitandae* are given in a special appendix, since this term – advisedly chosen in 1960 – signifies that, although on present evidence these pieces are not wholly related to the body of extant Cretan glyptic, yet on the available evidence, no decisive judgement on them can be given, since the crucial knowledge to regard them as falsifications or completely genuine, is absent.

The authors wish to express their appreciation of Mr. Gautel's photography (for the photographs of No. 123 a we are indebted to Mr. Xylouris) and of the drawings of Mrs. Down and Mrs. Fäthke (Nos. 88, 114, 226, 275, 312, 12D, 16Da–c, 17Dc, 54D). By their expert work, the tentative solution of some problems of identification was confirmed. Grateful thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. Metaxas for allowing them to frequent their home during the years of 1965–68, in order to study the material. We are also indebted to Mr. I. Pini for the final redaction of this volume and the preparation of the map.

Midsummer 1968

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