

SOME EARLY FORGERIES: THE SAN GIORGI GROUP*

BY JOHN H. BETTS

Many of the Bronze Age sealstones available for study in museum and private collections have no known provenience or 'respectable' history which might suggest that they came to light before reasonable forgeries began to appear, during the first decade of this century. Some scholars would on principle refuse to base firm conclusions about Minoan-Mycenaean glyptic on the authority of any pieces without certain provenience or reputable history; some would virtually ignore all but those found in excavation contexts. Their view is extreme; for it is clear that chance discovery and even illicit excavation may produce genuine pieces and that, if *bona fide* excavation continually brings to light pieces which extend in wholly unexpected directions our knowledge of the Minoan-Mycenaean repertoire of motifs, techniques and styles, then sealstones from less reliable sources are likely to do the same.

Two instances may be cited which highlight the dilemma of the scholar faced with a unique piece which has no assured provenience. CMS V 531, a carnelian lentoid depicting a frontal human head with spiky hair and the hem of a *chiton*-like garment at the neck, came from the floor of the Nichoria tholos in Messenia. It is so different from any Bronze Age seal hitherto known that, had it appeared in a private collection or come onto the market without authentic provenience or history, it would almost certainly have been widely condemned as a forgery. The gold ring from the chest of the 'priestess-queen' in tholos A at Archanes¹ might also have been doubted, not for its differences from the known repertoire but because its cult scene combines in an unusual way motifs from other long known and well published gold rings and it might therefore have seemed too close to what could have been expected from the hand of a careful forger. The scholar should be on his guard against pieces suspiciously different from the known repertoire and also against pieces suspiciously similar to and, therefore, perhaps imitative of it. But he must not be so suspicious that he sees forgeries in every peculiarity or similarity. He may often have been deliberately confused by the forger or the dealer; for genuine

* Sources of illustrations: Fig. 1: after PM IV, 540, fig. 491 bis. – Fig. 31: photo C. Albiker. – Figs. 2, 5–10, 14–16, 18, 21, 22, 25–28, 35: photo G. Kelsey. – Figs. 30, 33: photo Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. – Figs. 4, 12: photo W.-D. Niemeier. – Figs. 3, 11, 13, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24, 29, 32: photo I. Pini. – Fig. 34: photo J.G. Younger.

¹J. Sakellarakis, *Minoan Cemeteries at Archanes*, *Archaeology* 20 (1967) 280, fig. 13; P. Warren, *Aegean Civilizations* (London, 1975) 99.

and false pieces often find their way together onto the market or into a collector's hands through the same intermediary who has included a genuine seal with a perhaps reliable provenience to lend authenticity to associated pieces of modern manufacture². In such cases it may well be that the illicit excavator or, more probably, the first intermediary is associated with a modern engraver who has the opportunity to handle and imitate original pieces³.

Faced with clever forgeries the scholar has few really scientific criteria to guide him. His doubts begin as personal and subjective; they depend on 'feel' and a broad familiarity with the known repertoire of Bronze Age glyptic. Once the seeds of doubt are sown, he endeavours to justify them by objective reasoning⁴. Doubt often begins with a seal's motif and style and its justification is based on other factors such as technique, material, shape, size and the nature of wear or damage. Many pieces cannot be convincingly supported as genuine or condemned as false and some scholars have resorted to the expedient of calling such pieces *gemmae dubitandae*. It is an artificial category; for the fact is that every piece which passes through the scholar's hands is either genuine or false; there is no half-way stage for his convenience. He should resist the temptation to sentence pieces to the 'limbo' of *gemmae dubitandae*, from which they can never be wholly redeemed⁵. 'Innocence' should be assumed until a cogent set of reasons for 'guilt' can be presented.

The group of seals examined here is without doubt false. They may be assigned with some confidence to the hand of a single forger or, at most, two associated forgers. He (or they) was, at his best, a superb craftsman but was working too early to have grasped entirely the Minoan-Mycenaean style or to have kept within its repertoire of shapes and materials. He sometimes used certain Bronze Age pieces as models but applied to their motifs his own idiosyncracies of style which were sometimes based on a familiarity with later Greek engraving. The group is worthy of examination for itself, for its relationship with other notorious forgeries such as the Thisbe treasure and because the criteria used here to group the products of a single forger's hand are similar to those by which the work of a single ancient hand can be assembled, but, in the forger's case, the survival of a higher proportion of his output makes the grouping easier.

² e.g. CMS X 6, from the collection of J.B., Celle, W. Germany, said to be from Siva in the Mesara, came onto the market from the same collection and with the same provenience as an ivory/bone cylinder (Rollsiegel) depicting horses. The former is genuine and the latter, now in the Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, is almost certainly a forgery; *Early Art in Greece* (Emmerich Gallery, New York, 1965) 23f., nos. 59 and 62.

³ e.g. CMS X 224, which has a somewhat angular shape and a suspiciously high polish; its close parallel CMS IV 246, said to be from Mochos, has the water-birds facing in the opposite direction. It may be that the former is a modern copy modelled on an impression of the latter and this would account for the more summary treatment of the birds' plumage and the apparently unfinished legs of one bird at the point where the model was itself chipped.

⁴ cf. P. Yule, *Zwei minoisch-griechische bilinguistische Siegel*, AA (1977) 141: 'Wenn der Experte die Frage nach der Authentizität eines Siegels oder anderer antiker Gegenstände stellt, so wird er versuchen, objektive Kriterien zur Unterstützung seiner subjektiven Ansichten zu finden'. This process can lead to errors such as that made by the author of this paper in respect of the seal from Kydonia in the Benaki Museum depicting a male figure on 'horns of consecration', flanked by a winged lion with goat's head and a 'Minoan genius' (BSA 60 (1965) 203ff., pl. 55); the piece is certainly genuine.

⁵ For unscientific attempts to define *gemmae dubitandae*, see CMS IV p. xii and CMS XII p. 391.

Sir Arthur Evans published in 1934 a sealstone of dark sard depicting a lion attacking a goat (or fawn); it was said to come from Crete and is now in the Sangiorgi collection in Rome (*Fig. 1*)⁶. Its oval shape and large size are not right for a Minoan amygdaloid and the spacing of the motif within the field seems more typical of classical Greek or even Greco-Persian gems than of Bronze Age seals. However, some elements of the engraver's style and motif were drawn from a knowledge of Minoan-Mycenaean pieces: he tried, somewhat unevenly, to imitate the use of tubular-drilled circles for the goat's eye and as fillers within the field; his full-face lion, with its heavy outlined cheeks or jowls, 'teddy-bear' outlined ears, dot eyes and dot in the centre of the forehead, has genuine parallels (CMS VII 159 and CMS XIII 26) which, though unpublished, appeared early enough to have provided him with models. On the other hand he was such a craftsman in his own right that personal un-Minoan idiosyncracies betray him: the goat's haughty 'camel-like' muzzle and long smoothly modelled 'sausage-like' body with a little mark where the hind-leg joins the body, the 'stubby' tail, the long ear, the fore-leg sharply bent beneath the body, the 'lumpy' dotted joints and large, clearly cloven hooves; and on the lion the spare flesh stretched taut over emphasized ribs and vertebrae, the narrow hips, long snaking tail ending in a series of dots and the massive claws, a series of vertical lines with rounded ends, probably engraved with a tool unknown in the Bronze Age when such cuts tended to have sharp ends.



Fig. 1 Sangiorgi collection, Rome.



Fig. 2 Hermitage Museum, Leningrad,
Inv.no. 502.

Another large oval pseudo-amygdaloid of sard or carnelian, brownish with a paler area, came into the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad from the Polovzena collection in 1921 (*Fig. 2*)⁷. Lion and lioness attack a victim. The lion, again shown full-face, has the same forehead dot and outlined jowls, the same slim waist and snaking tail, and claws engraved in the same distinctive manner. The lioness has identical claws but is

⁶ PM IV 540, fig. 491 bis. I am indebted to Mr. Sergio Sangiorgi for information that the piece is still in his possession and for permission to republish it.

⁷ M.I. Maximova, *Anichnie Reznie Kamni Ermitazha* (1926), pl. 1, 5. Dr. A. Peredolskaya and Dr. M.A.V. Gill have kindly supplied information about the Leningrad seals and Miss M.-L. Vollenweider loaned the impressions for Figs. 2 and 14.

depicted in profile with a circular drilled eye and a series of dots at the tip of her tail; her femininity is over-emphasized with meticulously engraved duggs. The victim is a stag with multi-branched antlers and a long ear somewhat disconnected from the head and confused with one of the lion's hind-feet; it shares several features with the Sangiorgi goat: circular drilled eye, bent 'camel-like' muzzle (here almost hidden by the jaws of the lion which bites it on the nose), 'stubby' tail, 'sausage-like' body, sharply bent foreleg with a mark where it joins the body, 'lumpy' joints and cloven hooves.

The same smoothly rounded modelling of the body was used for the bull (or buck) on a seal, said to come from Melos, which arrived in the P. Arndt collection from an Athens dealer before 1922; it is now in the Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich (*Fig. 3*)⁸.

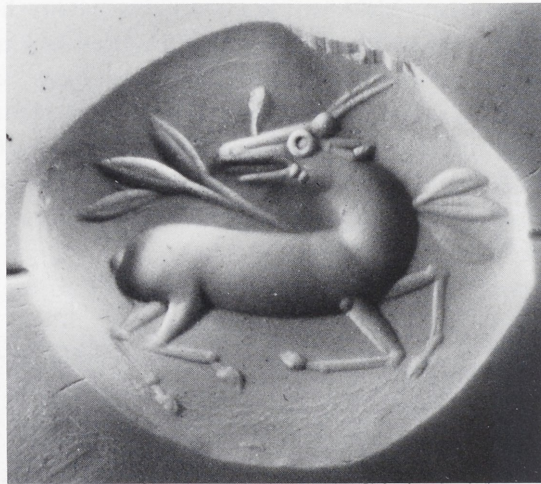


Fig. 3 Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich,
Inv.no. A 1190.

Its material is orange carnelian and its shape unusual, as though the craftsman was torn between making a lentoid and an amygdaloid; it has two odd lines engraved on its faceted back. The 'sausage-like' body, the diminutive tail, circular drilled eye, disjointed outlined ear, sharply bent foreleg, 'lumpy' joints and cloven hooves, all betray the same hand. The trefoil sprays in front and behind and the treatment of the animal's head, in particular its prominent tongue, strongly suggest that it was modelled on a genuine seal – CMS VII 261 – from the Bosanquet collection now in Liverpool⁹.

An amygdaloid, rather flat like the previous piece, of grey carnelian with red-brown markings, is now in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris (*Fig. 4*)¹⁰. It depicts a running

⁸ G. Lippold, *Gemmen und Kameen des Altertums und der Neuzeit* (Munich, 1922) who noted "moderne Kopie?"; D. Ohly, *Griechische Gemmen* (Wiesbaden), pl. 4 and *MüJb* 3, 2 (1951) 16, pl. 1, 3; *AGD* I, 1 (Munich, 1968) 23, no. 39, pl. 5.

⁹ For a fuller discussion of the relationship between these pieces see I. Pini, *Echt oder Falsch? – Einige Fälle*, in the present volume. I am indebted to him for the photograph and to Dr. Küthmann for permission to publish this and other pieces in Munich (Figs. 9. 10. 11. 21 and 29).

stag with branching antlers (*cf. Fig. 2*) and a large outlined ear (*cf. Fig. 3*); the smooth rounded body-modelling, mark above the hind leg, joints, large hooves and tiny stub of a tail are characteristic of the craftsman's style and technique.

Three seals by the same hand were together offered – the date is uncertain – to the Basel collector H. Erlenmeyer who had the good sense to reject them. The material of these pieces and their present whereabouts are unknown but impressions survive¹¹. The first was a long narrow 'barrel-like' pseudo-amygdaloid showing a stag in 'flying gallop' (*Fig. 5*). Its branching antlers, circular drilled eye, large ear, 'sausage-like' body, short tail, leg joints and cloven hooves have been noted on previous pieces. There are two rather uncertain attempts at tubular drill marks in the field (*cf. Fig. 1*) and two trefoil sprays, this time with straight line cuts or veins on the leaves. The second piece (*Fig. 6*) is an oval pseudo-amygdaloid with lion attacking stag. Every feature of the victim – branching antlers, circular drilled eye, large disjointed ear, shape of head, rounded modelling of body, tiny tail, bent fore-leg with a mark where it joins the body, 'lumpy' joints and large cloven hooves – belongs to the craftsman's repertoire of techniques. The lion is also in the typical full-face attacking pose (*cf. Figs. 1 and 2*) and has the characteristic heavy jowls, forehead dot, 'teddy-bear' ears and slim waist; the snaking tail has a plain rather than dotted end but the claws are exactly similar to those of the previous lions. (The third Erlenmeyer impression (*Fig. 18*) is discussed below.)

A long 'barrel-like' pseudo-amygdaloid (*cf. Fig. 5*) of brown and white banded agate in a private collection in Bern was purchased by the present owner's father at least as early as the 1920s (*Fig. 7*)¹². It depicts a goat in 'flying gallop' (*cf. Fig. 5*) with head turned back; the rendering of eye, hooves and other features, the faulty drilled circles below (*cf. Figs. 1 and 5*) and the single trefoil spray with engraved veins (*cf. Fig. 5*) indicate the same craftsman's hand.

Similar in many respects is the goat with veined trefoil spray and tentatively drilled circle fillers on a rather flat carnelian amygdaloid in the possession of E. Borowski, Basel (*Fig. 8*). Its haughty 'camel-like' muzzle is particularly indicative (*cf. Fig. 1*). That the forger was influenced by familiarity with classical Greek as well as Minoan-Mycenaean engraving, is suggested by a carnelian scaraboid in the Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich, showing the god Pan with a running goat (*Fig. 9*)¹³. Muzzle, circular drilled eye (never used in the classical period), 'sausage-like' body, bent fore-legs, 'lumpy' joints and large hooves betray the hand of the same forger. This piece too came from the P. Arndt collection (*cf. Fig. 3*).

¹⁰ I am grateful to Mme. M. Van Effenterre for information about two seals in Paris and Dr. W.-D. Niemeier for the photograph of this piece.

¹¹ Frau M.-L. Erlenmeyer drew these impressions to my notice and has kindly allowed me to publish them (*Figs. 5, 6 and 18*).

¹² I am indebted to the owners of this and the following piece for permission to publish them (*Figs. 7 and 8*).

¹³ D. Ohly, *Griechische Gemmen* (Wiesbaden), pl. 22 and *MüJb* 3, 2 (1951) 31, pl. 4, 22; *AGD I*, 1 (Munich, 1968) 60, no. 285, pl. 33; the piece is more fully discussed by I. Pini (see footnote 9). I am grateful to Prof. J. Boardman for the information that a tubular drill was not used after the Bronze Age.

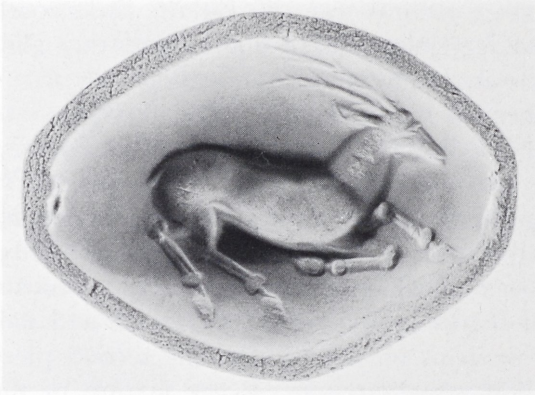


Fig. 4 Cabinet des Médailles, Paris,
Inv.no. M6868.



Fig. 5 Impression, Basel.

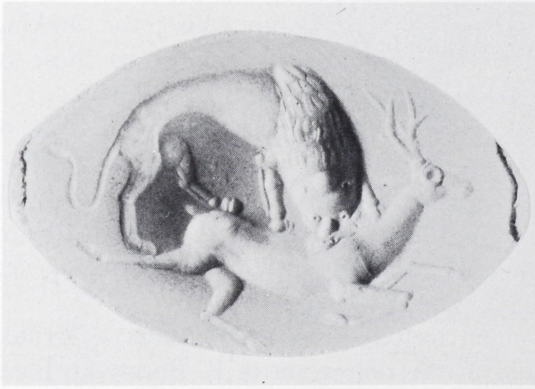


Fig. 6 Impression, Basel.

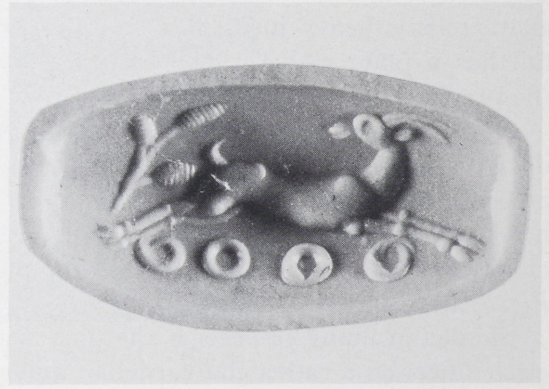


Fig. 7 Private collection, Bern.



Fig. 8 Borowski collection, Basel.



Fig. 9 Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich,
Inv.no. A 1446.



Fig. 10 Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich,
Inv.no. A1183.



Fig. 11 Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich,
Inv.no. A1184.



Fig. 12 Kannelopoulos Museum, Athens.

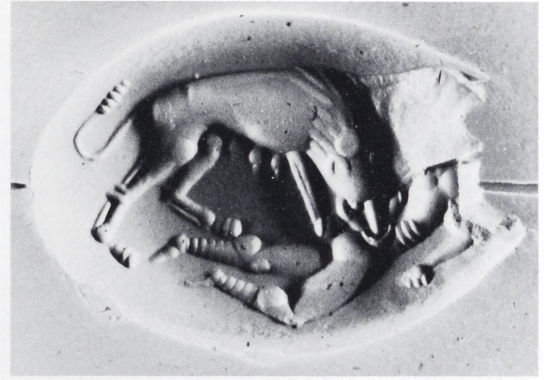


Fig. 13 National Museum, Copenhagen,
Inv.no. 7137.

A number of full-face lions and lionesses repeat the characteristic attacking pose which the forger favoured and have details of technique and style which betray his hand. An oval pseudo-amygdaloid of orange and white banded agate or carnelian, purchased from a Paris dealer, is now in the Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich (*Fig. 10*)¹⁴. It depicts a lioness with carefully executed over-emphasized dugs, heavy jowls, 'teddy-bear' ears each containing a dot, and dot at the centre of the forehead; the vertebrae are indicated (*cf. Fig. 1*) and the massive claws are rendered in the typical fashion. A lioness in similar pose and style occurs on an amygdaloid of the same material in the same museum; the piece was purchased from an Athens dealer (*Fig. 11*)¹⁵. A large clumsy amygdaloid of poor quality banded agate, in the Kannelopoulos Museum, Athens, shows a lion in the same pose with seven tentatively drilled circle fillers (*Fig. 12*)¹⁶. An oval pseudo-

¹⁴ D. Ohly, *MüJb* 3, 2 (1951) 16, pl. 1, 4; AGD I, 1 (Munich, 1968) 23, no. 41, pl. 6.

¹⁵ AGD I, 1 (Munich, 1968) 23, no. 42, pl. 6.

¹⁶ Dr. I. Pini kindly drew this piece to my attention and Dr. W.-D. Niemeier supplied the photograph.

amygdaloid of yellow-white translucent material (chalcedony or agate?) arrived in the National Museum, Copenhagen before 1924 (*Fig. 13*)¹⁷. It depicts a lioness in characteristic pose attacking a man who has fallen below. The animal has the typical heavy jowls, outlined ears, forehead dot, carefully engraved dugs (cf. especially *Fig. 2*) and dots at the tail-tip (cf. *Figs. 1 and 2*); its huge claws are executed with the usual round-ended cuts and similar cuts are used on the legs of the man, giving him the appearance of wearing 'striped socks'.

Lions and lionesses in different poses appear to be the work of the same craftsman. A large oval pseudo-amygdaloid of banded grey and white agate came into the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad from the Nuri Beya collection as early as 1908 (*Fig. 14*)¹⁸. It shows a lioness with the familiar narrow waist, snaking tail, emphasized dugs, vertebrae and claws; its head is somewhat 'hunched' into its neck (cf. *Fig. 2*) but its eye is treated differently, as a dot with triangular outline. An agate lentoid in the National Museum, Copenhagen, published in 1926 (*Fig. 17*)¹⁹, shows two seated lions back to back. Their heads, in profile with open jaws and prominent tongues (cf. *Fig. 3*), turn back to face one another with lines representing foliage between. The creatures' eyes are circular drill marks (cf. especially *Fig. 2* and the craftsman's goats and deer discussed above) and the treatment of the bodies with tiny marks where the fore-legs join them, of the manes, claws and dotted tail-tips, all indicate the work of our craftsman. A long 'barrel-like' pseudo-amygdaloid of orange carnelian recently on the market in Zurich (*Fig. 16*)²⁰, shows a lion in 'flying gallop' with its head in profile and its circular eye clumsily drilled. The placing of the animal within the field is unlike the work of any Minoan-Mycenaean artist but typical of our craftsman; the lion's 'lumpy' joints and claws are clearly his work and within the area of the mane he has attempted with two deeper cuts to indicate his characteristically large outlined ear (cf. *Fig. 14*). An oval lentoid whose present whereabouts has not been traced produced an impression now in Geneva (*Fig. 15*)²¹. It shows a lion in contorted pose with head and massive open jaws in profile (cf. *Fig. 17*); taut flesh over clearly depicted ribs and vertebrae (cf. *Fig. 1*), drilled circular eye, snaking tail and massive claws, all put it very close to our forger's hand.

Two of three seals offered to the Basel collector H. Erlenmeyer have been discussed and their surviving impressions illustrated above (*Figs. 5 and 6*). The third was an oval pseudo-amygdaloid depicting a lion in profile with massive head and open jaws attacking a bull (*Fig. 18*). This lion is in some ways different from others so far discussed but

¹⁷ Rev. Arch. (1924) 276, fig. 6; I am grateful to Dr. H. Salskov-Roberts for information and permission to publish this and other pieces in Copenhagen and to Dr. Pini for photographs of them (*Figs. 13, 17 and 23*).

¹⁸ B.L. Bogaevski, *Krit i Mikenî* (1924) 175, fig. 51; for acknowledgements, see footnote 7.

¹⁹ D. Levi, *Le Cretule di Zakro*, *ASAtene* 8-9 (1925-1926) 190, fig. 240; for acknowledgements, see footnote 17. Two other unpublished pieces in inferior style have, in similar pose, a lioness and a lion: a rather oval lentoid of red jasper recently seen with a London dealer; and a lentoid of unusual blue stone in the Liverpool City Museum; both have circular drilled eye but seem in a clumsier, more hasty style than other examples of the craftsman's work.

²⁰ Miss H. Vollmoeller kindly allowed me to publish this piece; the photograph was provided by P. Gautel.

²¹ I am grateful to Miss M.-L. Vollenweider, who drew my attention to this impression.

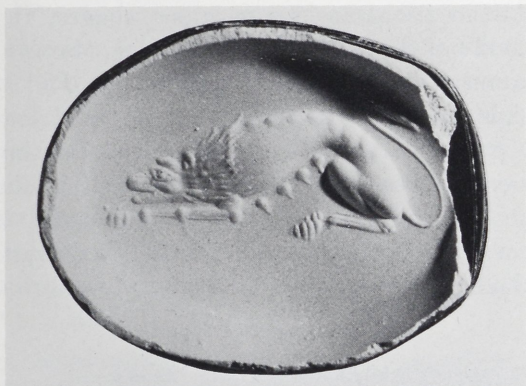


Fig. 14 Hermitage Museum, Leningrad,
Inv.no. 512.



Fig. 15 Impression, Geneva.



Fig. 16 Galerie Vollmoeller, Zurich, no. 4609.



Fig. 17 National Museum, Copenhagen,
Inv.no. 7138.



Fig. 18 Impression, Basel.



Fig. 19 Private collection, London.

its dotted tail-tip, claws and large outlined ear in the area of the mane suggest the same hand, as does the long smoothly-rounded body of the bull, its bent fore-leg, 'lumpy' joints and cloven hooves. It has wide open mouth with prominent tongue (*cf. Fig. 3*) and the engraver has given it a kind of 'top-knot' where the horns join the head and a series of lines down the front of the neck, probably to indicate loose folds of skin – a feature hardly found in Bronze Age engraving. The clarity of outline seen in the surviving impression of this piece suggests that, like all the pieces so far discussed, it was of hard semi-precious material such as carnelian or agate. That clarity contrasts strongly with the poor fuzzy outlines of a black glass seal now in private possession



Fig. 20 Museo Archeologico, Florence,
Inv.no. 84587.



Fig. 21 Staatliche Münzsammlung,
Munich, Inv.no. A2451.

in London and it seems most probable that the glass piece was moulded from an impression of the semi-precious original offered to Erlenmeyer (*Fig. 19*). The same process of moulding repeated glass seals from a semi-precious piece, itself probably a forgery, is illustrated by a carnelian amygdaloid, CMS X 146, with contorted bull-man, of which three moulded glass copies survive, CMS V 632, HM 3685 (Giamalakis collection) and a seal of black glass purchased at the same time and in the hands of the same London collector as our black glass seal with lion attacking bull. It seems probable that our forger (or an accomplice) resorted to moulding poorer quality glass pieces from his own semi-precious originals²².

²² For a fuller discussion and illustration of these seals, see I. Pini, *Echt oder Falsch? – Einige Fälle*, in the present volume. I am indebted to Dr. Pini for photographs of these pieces and to Mr. Falkiner for permission to publish his two glass seals. While these pieces are clearly false, it should be said that a similar process was in use in the Bronze Age and may account for the clay *matrix* from the Archives Deposit – Kadmos 6 (1967) 21f. Duplicate glass seals were also moulded from stone *matrices* such as CMS XII 262 and are known, especially from Medeon – CMS V 349. 350. 380 and 392. 360 and 383. 363. 364 and 385. 381 and 382. For similar processes in the Hellenistic period, see e.g. J. Boardman and M.-L. Vollenweider, *Catalogue of Engraved Gems and Finger Rings in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford, 1978) 112, nos. 382 and 383, pl. 4.

When the forger used cheaper materials, such as glass or the blue stone of the Liverpool piece (see footnote 19), he may, like ancient artists, have been involved in slightly different techniques and produced on occasion more slipshod work. A large lentoid of black stone with white veins, which came into the Museo Archeologico, Florence in 1910 (*Fig. 20*)²³, has a lioness in the forger's typical attack pose above a stag which it is biting on the nose (*cf. Fig. 2*). Its outlined jowls, ears with interior dot, forehead dot, dugs, claws and snaking tail are the work of our forger and the stag with its branching antlers, 'top-knot' (*cf. Fig. 18*), large ear, smooth rounded body, short tail, sharply bent fore-leg and mark where the hind-leg joins the body is also his, though the material has required



Fig. 22 Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge,
Inv.no. B27.



Fig. 23 National Museum, Copenhagen,
Inv.no. 7308.

slightly different techniques, e.g. for eye and joints. Similar in many respects, but with the stag inverted to form a more rounded overall composition, is a large lentoid of black stone in the Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich (*Fig. 21*)²⁴. Its composition was surely copied from the genuine CMS XIII 26 and the forger's typical antlered stag substituted for the bull of the model. A black stone oval pseudo-lentoid which arrived in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, in 1927 shows an antlered stag which may be one of our forger's more hasty inferior works (*Fig. 22*)²⁵.

The forger also attempted in both hard and soft stones to imitate Minoan-Mycenaean cattle motifs. A large amygdaloid of white and grey agate in the National Museum,

²³ C. Laviosa, *SMEA* 10 (1969) 10, no. 5. I am indebted to Dr. G. Maetzke of the Soprintendenza alle Antichità dell' Etruria for the permission to republish the piece.

²⁴ *AGD I*, 1 (Munich, 1968) 23, no. 46, pl. 6.

²⁵ I am grateful to Dr. R. Nicholls for permission to study and publish this piece. Two stags with multi-branched antlers in a pseudo-classical style may also be by the hand of our forger: the first is a wrongly shaped scarab of mottled green stone in the Ashmolean Museum Oxford (Inv. no. 1965.361), formerly in the Spencer Churchill collection; and the second an oval pseudo-amygdaloid of 'Hornstein' in the Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich (Habich, *MüJb* 4 (1927) 484, pl. 1, 7; *AGD I*, 1 (Munich, 1968) 59, no. 280, pl. 32).

Copenhagen, was purchased in Paris in 1920 and said to come from Phaistos (*Fig. 23*)²⁶. It shows one bull behind another with only the head and legs of the rear one shown; the idea is Minoan, but the execution typical of our craftsman's idiosyncratic adaptations. Both bulls have long snaking tail, emphasised penis, circular drilled eyes and meticulous little fringed 'top-knot' at the base of their short horns. The front bull has the long smoothly modelled 'sausage-like' body and lines on the neck representing loose folds of skin (*cf. Fig. 18*).

The craftsman's favourite cattle motif was cow suckling calf in which he varied his style considerably from piece to piece. He was responsible for the large 'barrel-like' pseudo-amygdaloid of grey and white banded agate which came into Herakleion Museum from the Mitsotakis collection (*Fig. 24*)²⁷. The elongated cow has straight legs with 'lumpy' joints and cloven hooves and turns its head as it suckles a calf which has the typical, sharply bent fore-legs. The piece is virtually 'signed' by our forger with the inclusion of his tentatively drilled circle fillers below the motif. A rather round lentoid-like amygdaloid of dark brown stone with metallic flecks, said to be from Carchemish, was purchased by the West Asiatic Department of the British Museum in 1933 (*Fig. 25*)²⁸. It repeats the motif of the Mitsotakis piece with some variations, giving both cow and calf circular drilled eyes and including three circle fillers above; the cow's large ear, leg joints and cloven hooves betray the forger's hand. The whereabouts of a very similar piece, once in the possession of Mary Hamilton Swindler, Bryn Mawr, can no longer be traced but a damaged plasticine impression survives (*Fig. 26*)²⁹. It shows a cow, with circular drilled eye and three circle fillers above, suckling a bent-legged calf. The notes made on it in 1935 by Miss Edith Eccles are interesting because they include the comments of Sir Arthur Evans:

'This gem is now in the possession of Mary Hamilton Swindler. It was offered to me in Shoe Lane (Odos Pandrosou) in May 1934 and I turned it down, thinking it a forgery. M.H.S. bought it soon afterwards and later (Sept. 1934) sent it to me in England. Evans on seeing it wrote: — "It is, I am sure, all right and is of very good LM III workmanship. It feels all right but it has on the back a real sign of genuineness such as a forger could not have known. The strokes there incised are a surviving tradition of the practice in amygdaloid types of earlier fashion. I have seen instances of this before".'

Miss Eccles asked the British Museum to compare the piece with their own; they reported that it was 'not Minoan' and that 'a third gem of the same type, obviously a forgery,

²⁶ For acknowledgements, see footnote 17.

²⁷ Ch. Zervos, *L'Art de la Crète Néolithique et Minoenne* (Paris, 1956), pl. 679; N. Platon, *Crete* (London, 1966), pl. 84; L. Banti, G. Pugliese Caratelli and D. Levi, *Arte Minoica e Micenea* 30, pl. 46.

²⁸ BMQ 8 (1933-1934), pl. 45, 10; I would like to thank Dr. R.D. Barnett for permission to study and republish this piece.

²⁹ I am indebted to the late Miss Edith Eccles for permission to publish a photograph of her impression and quote from her notes; also to Prof. M. Mellink, who has attempted to trace the original piece in Bryn Mawr.

was offered to the British Museum the same summer'. Whether this third piece also had cow suckling calf is not clear but it may be that it was in fact a black stone lentoid which was eventually sold by Sotheby & Co., London to the Peabody Museum, Harvard in 1938 (*Fig. 27*)³⁰. Like the previous piece, it has incised lines on the reverse which,



Fig. 24 Herakleion Museum, Crete, Inv.no. 1264.



Fig. 25 British Museum, London, Inv.no. 125334 (1933.2.9.2).



Fig. 26 Impression, Athens.



Fig. 27 Peabody Museum, Harvard, Inv.no. 38.92.4674.

pace Evans, are not a sign of genuineness but an additional idiosyncratic trait of our forger. The Peabody piece shows a lioness, more clumsily executed than those in hard stones but still clearly the same man's work, attacking a goat with the typical haughty 'camel-like' muzzle, bent fore-legs, 'lumpy' joints, cloven hooves and circular eye; there are two circle fillers in the field.

³⁰ The late Dr. V.E.G. Kenna first drew my attention to this piece and I am also indebted to Mrs. P.D. Shaplin of the Peabody Museum for supplying an impression of it.

There are also a number of oval or long 'barrel-like' pseudo-amygdaloids with cow suckling its calf or, with a bull. These are mostly clumsier than the forger's usual work but are probably by him or a close collaborator: (1) an oval grey stone with pinkish markings which came into the Greek and Roman Department of the British Museum in 1922 (*Fig. 28*)³¹; (2) an elongated pseudo-amygdaloid of oval section in black stone in the Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich (*Fig. 29*)³²; (3) an elongated pseudo-amygdaloid



Fig. 28 British Museum, London,
Inv.no. 1922.6.13.1.

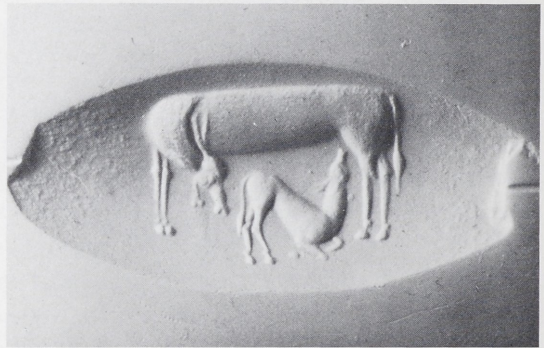


Fig. 29 Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich,
Inv.no. A2449.



Fig. 30 Metropolitan Museum, New York,
Inv.no. 26.31.228.

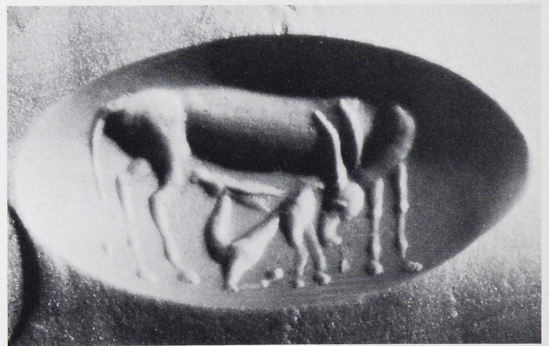


Fig. 31 Giamalakis collection, Herakleion.

of oval section in green and black 'marble' in the Cabinet de Médailles, Paris (Inv. no. M6597); (4) a similarly shaped piece in the same green and black stone which came in 1926 from the Richard B. Seager collection into the Metropolitan Museum, New

³¹ H.B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems in the British Museum* (London 1926), no. 452; I am grateful to Mr. R. Higgins who gave me facilities to study and permission to publish this piece.

³² AGD I, 1 (Munich, 1968) 28, no. 75, pl. 9.

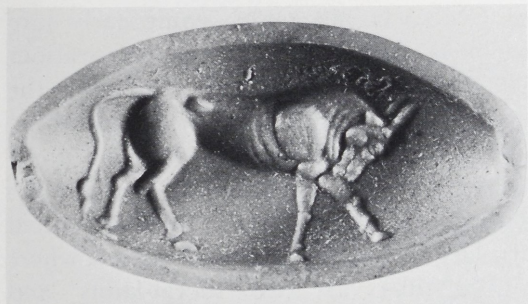


Fig. 32 Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.



Fig. 33 Metropolitan Museum, New York,
Inv.no. 26.31.281.

York (Fig. 30)³³; (5) an oval pseudo-amygdaloid in the Giamalakis collection, Herakleion (Fig. 31)³⁴; (6) an elongated pseudo-amygdaloid of oval section in black stone now in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (Fig. 32)³⁵, showing a bull with circular eye and lined neck (cf. especially Fig. 23); (7) a similarly shaped piece of green and black stone which came into the Metropolitan Museum, New York at the same time as (4) above (Fig. 33).

Many of this forger's pieces emerged in the 1920s and early 1930s but, if he was working then, it is curious that he did not better understand the shapes, size and styles of Minoan-Mycenaean sealstones. The fact is that he must have worked much earlier; for one piece (Fig. 14) reached the Hermitage Museum from a private collection as early as 1908 and another (Fig. 20) arrived in Florence in 1910. In some ways his general style suggests that he knew classical Greek and Greco-Persian engraving; he was not above trying pieces of such a period (see Fig. 9 and footnote 25) and may well have consolidated his style before the period when he might have had regular access to Minoan-Mycenaean material. Certainly, his personal idiosyncracies as an engraver overcame any desire to make really faithful copies of Bronze Age models. However, he had seen and made use of his knowledge of a number of genuine Bronze Age pieces. His stiff-legged cow suckling calf with drilled circles in the field may have derived from CMS I 67, which had come from Chamber Tomb 27 at Mycenae and been published as early as 1888^{35a}. The pose of his lioness attacking stag in Munich (Fig. 21) was based on the lioness attacking bull on CMS XIII 26 which arrived in Boston in 1923 but is known to have been in Athens in 1904 before entering the Lewes House collection. It may have inspired his cloven hooves, emphasised dugs, lined claws, 'teddy-bear' ears, forehead dot and heavy jowls. Another model may have been CMS VII 159, with lioness attacking two stags, which reached the British Museum in 1910 and would have been seen in Greece earlier; from it he could have derived his long-antlered stags and trefoil spray fillers, though he later introduced his own idiosyncratic techniques into both. His bull

³³ I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. J. Mertens for allowing me to study and publish the pieces illustrated in Figs. 30 and 33 and for supplying my photographs. Mr. Paul Yule kindly drew my attention to these two pieces.

³⁴ I am indebted to Dr. C. Albiker for a photograph of this piece.

^{35a} Ch. Tsountas, *Ephem* (1888) 177, pl. 10, 22.

(or buck) in Munich (*Fig. 3*) was derived from CMS VII 261 which came early into the Bosanquet collection. He seems, in fact, to have had access to material from excavations or passing through the Athens market into private hands just before and just after the turn of the century. Into this category fall a group of seals which came from the collection of E.P. Warren into the Boston Museum in 1901³⁶. They included a suckling scene (CMS XIII 29) in which both animals have circular drilled eyes and a foliage filler above with spiky lines around the edge (cf. perhaps *Figs. 5, 7 and 8*). Another lentoid (CMS XIII 33) shows a bull with 'lumpy' joints, large outlined ear, a tiny mark where the fore-leg joins the body and a braided tail; the fillers are two 'sacral-knots' and a figure-eight 'shield'. And a cushion seal (CMS XIII 35) depicts a bull with smooth elongated body and a man fallen below. The last two, between them, inspired the forger of the Thisbe treasure gold cushion (*Fig. 34* centre) which copied its motif from the section and combined the two sacral knots from the first³⁷. That the forger of the Thisbe treasure was the same man as the craftsman whose work has been examined here seems not unlikely. Indeed it seems inherently improbable that two craftsmen of such misguided ability had access to the same groups of seals in Athens at the turn of the century. The Thisbe treasure forger used four shapes, ring, cushion, oval amygdaloid and elongated pseudo-amygdaloid of which the last two are also the commonest shapes in our group. If both groups represent the work of a single hand, he deliberately varied his style for work in gold from that used in stone. This is only to be expected; indeed minor variations between his hard and soft stone styles have already been noted; and there are several characteristics of the Thisbe group which relate it closely to the Sangiorgi group. The lion on Ashmolean 1938.1116 (*Fig. 34 lower left*) has large profile head and snaking tail and its claws are done in a manner very similar to those of the Sangiorgi group's lions³⁸. The stag on Ashmolean 1938.1118 (*Fig. 34 lower right*) has the bent fore-legs, large cloven hooves, short tail and long branching antlers of the Sangiorgi group's stags. The bull on Ashmolean 1928.1113 (*Fig. 34 upper right*) has short straight horns (cf. *Fig. 3*) and outlined ear, lined neck (cf. *Fig. 23*), cloven hooves and a mark where the foreleg joins the body. And the man who plunges his dagger into the bull's neck has at his ankles the 'striped-sock' arrangement of the fallen man attacked by a lioness on the seal in Copenhagen (*Fig. 17*). Similar 'anklets' appear on a number of human figures engraved on the Thisbe pieces and especially on a gold ring said to be from Smyrna³⁹, which must be by the Thisbe engraver. Its bull with 'sacral knots' and figure fallen below is very close to Ashmolean 1938.1114 (*Fig. 34 centre*) and the position of the human figure, his lined 'socks', 'kilt' and waist band and his 'lumpy' muscles are like those of the fallen man on the Copenhagen piece. The full-face lion with heavy jowls and

³⁶ I am grateful to Dr. Emily Vermeule for information about the early history of these pieces and for drawing my attention to their publication in D. Osborne, *Engraved Gems, Signets, Talismans and Ornamental Intaglios, Ancient and Modern* (New York, 1912) of which p. 32 is quoted below.

³⁷ CS, pl. 21, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Inv. no. 1938.1114; I would like to thank Dr. J.G. Younger for supplying the photographs for *Fig. 34*. For the suggestion that CMS XIII 35 inspired this gold cushion see J.G. Younger, *JHS* 96 (1976) 255.

³⁸ Cf. also the lioness on PM IV 507 bis.

³⁹ PM III 225, fig. 158.



Fig. 34 Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Inv.nos. (upper left) 1938.1120, (upper right) 1938.1113, (centre) 1928.1114, (lower left) 1928.1116, (lower right) 1938.1118.

'teddy-bear' ears which attacks a stag (or goat) on one of the Thisbe rings⁴⁰ and a bull on Ashmolean 1938.1120 (*Fig. 34 upper left*) is very similar in conception, if not execution, to the full-face lions of the Sangiorgi group. And the bulls on Ashmolean 1928.1113, 1114 and 1120 have a 'top-knot' or forehead decoration of dots which may have been intended too on the clumsy bull in the Metropolitan Museum (*Fig. 33*). The models for many features of the Thisbe animals, such as the little fringes on the bellies of the lions or the rocky landscape surrounds, lie in the craftsman's familiarity with material from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae but for Ashmolean 1938.1120 he probably used the well-known rectangular ivory plaque from Spata which had been published in 1878⁴¹. The same model was probably also used for a pinkish jasper (?) lentoid recently on the market in Basel (*Fig. 35*)⁴², and this too may be by the Thisbe craftsman.

⁴⁰ PM IV 540 fig. 491.

⁴¹ B. Haussoullier, *Catalogue des objets découverts à Spata*, BCH 2 (1878) 212f., pl. 16, 4; PM IV 533 fig. 484. The Thisbe forger's griffin or sphinx with zig-zag lines on its wings (AM 1938.1124) may also be derived from the Spata ivories.

⁴² CMS X 219; I am indebted to Dr. H.A. Cahn who drew this piece to my attention and allowed me to publish it.



Fig. 35 Münzen und Medaillen A.G.,
Basel.

Even with this evidence some may doubt whether the Thisbe group and the Sangiorgi group are by the same hand; even within the Sangiorgi group some of the inferior soft stone pieces and the glass replicas may represent a copier. However, the whole assemblage has a coherence that suggests the hand of one man or two men working in close collaboration. They were familiar with models from the earliest excavations at Mycenae and with Minoan-Mycenaean seals passing through dealers' and collectors' hands in Athens at the turn of the century, many of them at that stage still unpublished. They must have been close to Athens dealers and have had a substantial workshop there and an outlet to collections in Europe, perhaps through Switzerland. That they were artists of calibre familiar with engraving techniques and metal-working is obvious and it should not be too difficult on the basis of this evidence to guess who they were, but, as the evidence is so far circumstantial, the guess should perhaps not be set down in print here.

On April 10th 1907 Adolf Furtwängler wrote as follows to Duffield Osborne who was preparing his book on engraved gems (see footnote 36): –

“A very dangerous kind of forgeries comes in the last years from Athens, very clever imitations of Mycenaean and Archaic Greek gems... One must be very cautious against these things. The forgeries betray themselves by mistakes in the forms of the stones and by the quality of the material, and, of course, in the style; but great experience is needed to guard against them.”

He was almost certainly referring to the seals discussed in this paper. It is ironical that, despite his early warning, dealers, museums and scholars who should have known better long continued to be duped and that our forger's pieces still reappear occasionally on the market. This paper may belatedly prevent his products making fools of us any longer, but one cannot help but admire his artistry and his audacity⁴³.

⁴³ Since this paper was prepared for publication, the author has, through the kindness of Mme. H. Nicolet, been able to see a number of seals in the Cabinet de Médailles which belong to the group (cf. footnote 10 above). These are nos. M 6514. 6521. 6596. 6597. 6607 and 6608, which – along with 6868 (= Fig. 4 above) – entered the collection through Paris dealers between 1906 and 1908; also a large oval seal with characteristic

suckling scene and stag above from the Chandon de Briailles collection. Publication of these pieces and discussion of their relationship with the group must await fuller study of the whole question of forgers and forgeries during the early years of this century.

DISKUSSION

I. PINI stimmt zu, daß die gezeigten Siegel moderne Arbeiten sind. Er zögert aber in einigen Fällen, sie alle ein oder zwei Fälschern zuzuweisen. Die stilistisch plumperen will er auf keinen Fall mit den sehr feinen um das Sangiorgi-Stück zusammenbringen.

J.H. BETTS ist der Meinung, daß Fälscher, wenn sie Erfolg hatten, auch schneller gearbeitete Siegel aus weicherem Material herstellten.

M.A.V. GILL bemerkt dagegen, daß die Qualität eines wirklichen Künstlers auch dann durchschlägt, wenn er in schlechterem Material und mit größerer Schnelligkeit arbeitet.