

PREFACE

Few gifts to Museums could compare with the collection of more than three hundred sealstones bequeathed by Richard Berry Seager to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, either in character or extent. It is perhaps the largest single gift of its kind¹). By it, the Metropolitan Museum has custody of one of the most complete collections of Cretan and Mycenaean seals extant. Like its rival, the Ashmolean Collection – largely the gift of Sir Arthur Evans – it is comparatively deficient in the ivory seals of the Early Minoan Age, since at the time both collections were being built up, such seals as the products of excavation were rightly not to be had. If on another count, the Ashmolean has a larger number of the three-sided prisms of the Early Minoan Age, the Seager Collection excels in the three-sided prisms of Middle Minoan I and II; as it does in the seals of LM I, and in the stones of a talismanic type attributable to that age. In these stones it equals the Metaxas Collection, containing as it does not only a great variety of stones of this kind, but also a striking number of amygdaloids whose quasi-talismanic motifs still preserve elements of a sphragistic character. While not so rich as the Ashmolean Collection in fine stones of the MM III and Second Transitional Phase, or as that of the Metaxas Collection in the lentoids of LM III, it preserves some remarkable pieces of the last period of the Middle Minoan Age, and in consequence repairs a deficiency in the cushion shaped seals of that period and of the subsequent Transitional phase, whereby, as far as seals are concerned, the Middle Minoan passed without interruption into the last age of Minoan Crete. It is, however, the number and quality of these Middle Minoan III three-sided prisms and rectangular shaped beads of agates, chalcedonies, jaspers and cornelians, bearing hieroglyphs, whose material, technique and style more than outweigh the absence of such fine cushion shaped seals as are to be found in the Ashmolean Museum.

Few of the stones in the Seager Collection have recorded or known provenience. They were acquired sporadically over many years during work and residence in Eastern Crete. Sometimes they were gifts or tokens of esteem. Thus a collection, growing as it were naturally,

¹ All seals with the Metropolitan Museum inventory number 26.31. seq. were the gift of Richard B. Seager. The small remainder with the following inventory numbers were acquired at various times by the Museum as a result of gift or purchase: 07.286.123; 07.286.129; 11.196.1,2; 14.104.1,2,3,4; 21.88.9; 23.160.27; 25.78.105; 42.11.34; 46.111.3.

The whole group of seals provided a larger number of pieces than those published in the Corpus. Those which were not included in the present volume were considered by the author to be not of Aegean origin. Some were from Anatolia; others from Cyprus, which had probably been taken to Crete at various times since the Minoan Age. Some appear to have been more recent copies of ancient Cretan pieces for amuletic purposes. Others perhaps are modern copies. A complete list of all the stones lies with the records of the Department of Greek and Roman Art in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; another, for reference, in the offices of the Redaction of the Corpus, 355 Marburg, Renthof 22.

through valued and respected ties of friendship and work is at once removed from one made by casual purchase, even if a commercial interest is absent. Thus it can be observed with some assurance, that just as the Dawkins Collection (*CMS. VIII*) reflected the chance find of sealstones in the country districts of Crete towards the end of the last century, so the Seager Collection is a fair reflection of the run of the stones discovered in North and East Crete during and after the first World War.

Among these stones are a trefoil signet of green steatite datable to the early Hittite Empire, and a rectangular black marble bead seal of Late Cypriote III. These stones found in Crete may signify early foreign relations, since it is unlikely that at the time Seager was collecting there would have been any commercial traffic in seals from Anatolia or Cyprus; Greek private collections of seals at that time being chiefly concerned with the products of the Aegean.

The collection of Cretan seals in the Seager Collection gives a fair picture of Cretan seal use as a whole. To complete the picture there is one sealing of the Zakro type, No. 174, confidently referred to by Seager as coming from the Harbour Town of Knossos; and the jewellers mould No. 262, a triangular block of red marble or jasper with deep engraving for moulding glass seals and for gold repoussé work, for it seems that the block was used for both processes. On one side two of the recessed roundels, deeply engraved in relief, appear to have been used for repoussé work by the spaces and interstices left for the folds of the metal; but the single roundel on the reverse for the moulding of a glass lentoid.

To this great group of Cretan seals may glyptic examples of Helladic seal work, appear to be something in the nature of an accretion; but historically an inevitable extension of Cretan glyptic art, sometimes in sheer copy, sometimes rudely as it were in reaction from it, sometimes as a development incorporating principles proper to Helladic life. No. 284 appears to be a good example of the second, as No. 288 a superb example of the first, as No. 289 is a poorer example. No. 287 typifies the third as does No. 285 and No. 290, although this stone bears marks of the influence of Cretan talismanic use.

No. 305, with its ideograph perhaps connected with Cyprus, No. 306, a green steatite or serpentine lentoid of a large size, No. 308 of LH IIIA/B date, and No. 310, a beautiful motif, show the trend of Helladic seal use as it moves towards its extinction in the Iron Age.

The chronological arrangement of the seals in this collection appears in many ways to have determined itself; yet considerable difficulty was felt about the positions of Nos. 74, 79, 81, 147, 151, 218, 244, 269, 288, 310, 8D, and in one case the genuineness of No. 295.

The doubtful pieces are grouped together in the section entitled *Dubitandae* as in *CMS. IV*. If reference is made to one of these pieces elsewhere, the capital letter D will be placed after the number. With the advice of the editors of the *Corpus* it was decided to omit the explanatory comments hitherto added to the descriptions of the *Dubitandae*. In some instances they could have been described as prejudicial or revealing the personal taste of the author. There is also an additional advantage in refraining from pointing out technical errors, which information could be of help in the future production of "Aegean" sealstones.

The writer wishes to express his thanks to the Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas P. F. Hoving, and the Curator of the Department of Greek and Roman Art, D. von Bothmer, for their courtesy and help during a long period of research in 1961, during one comparatively shorter in 1968, when Herr P. Gautel with acumen and great industry took well over one thousand photographs: and again in 1970 for final checking. He must in duty bound

thank Miss G. Richter for her suggestion made soon after the war that he should study and if possible publish the collection; and also to the authorities of the United States of America for the Award in 1959 of a Fulbright Grant to do the work. His gratitude remains to Mrs. B. Down for the excellent drawings and to Frau A. Fäthke for the drawings of No. 262, to Herr P. Gautel for the photographs and to Herr I. Pini for his exemplary redaction and for his skill and industry in making new impressions of all the seals in the Metropolitan Museum for this volume. Impressions of most of the early seals were made of Elastomer-Knetmasse, impressions of the later seals of plasticine. Photographs of the impressions of Elastomer-Knetmasse were taken by Fräulein G. Burgfeld and those of the plasticine impressions by Herr I. Pini.

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V. E. G. Kenna

Redaktionsanmerkung: Die Elastomer-Knetmasse wurde dankenswerterweise von der Firma A. Kettenbach in Wissenbach zur Verfügung gestellt.

Eine größere Anzahl von Siegelzeichnungen wurde auf Anweisung der Redaktion korrigiert. Für ihren jetzigen Zustand trägt I. Pini mit die Verantwortung.