

VICTOR E. G. KENNA

## SEALS AND SCRIPT

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ANCIENT CRETE\*

In all ancient civilizations where seals have been used, there has also been a tradition of writing. It would seem that the very impress of the seal upon the clay which was to secure a door, chest or jar and so prevent unauthorized entry, inclined ancient peoples to use and make other special and recognizable signs to identify, record, and then to communicate with one another; to be understood by sign as well as sound. Since too, in describing objects whether by sound or mark, there is a tendency to abstraction, and a similar abstraction is noticeable in the early seals, (whether this was due to the limitations of primitive technique, or to the principle quite early apprehended, that for the field of a seal, stamp or cylinder, there must be a certain restriction in design) in both activities from a schematic representation to the use of a pictograph was but a small step.

Some later forms of writing seem to be entirely devoid of any connection with pictorial signs, yet the first essays to equate marks with sounds would have been affected by the appreciation of the form of natural objects and their subsequent representations<sup>1</sup>. Products of nature were the chief concern of primitive man, not only in social and economic life, but also in cult and religion. For the latter, to a people whose skill at cutting and using flint tools is

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\* Abbreviations: AM = Ashmolean Museum, BMCG = Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Cameos in the British Museum, CdM = Cabinet des Médailles, CP. = Evans, Cretan Pictographs, CS = Kenna, Cretan Seals, HM = Herakleion Museum, HT = Haghia Triada, PM = Evans, The Palace of Minos, SM = Scripta Minoa.

<sup>1</sup> See however Frankfort, *Birth of Civilization in the Near East*, 56 and note 1. It is however possible that the "purely arbitrary signs" are the result of even a higher degree of abstraction than the contemporary pictograms, and like them derive ultimately from the natural objects which they represent; unless the arbitrary signs are abstract forms of other objects which in primitive times were invariably found in close association with the objects they finally came to represent. Compare G. R. Driver, *Semitic Writing* (The Schweich Lectures 1944) p. 47 seq. and P. Amiet, *La glyptique mesopotamienne archaïque* p. 1 seq.

still a matter for profound admiration, carving on bone or stone would seem as natural as the painting or scratching of an image on a cave wall. Each attempt to register the natural form was probably thought unique, but between the painting or graffito and the incising on bone, there were two differences. The latter by its size was more private, and was perhaps intended to be so, and by its power to impress on clay, could be of repeated use, without impairing its uniqueness, since by the nature of the impression, the design was in reverse.

So it may be said that the engraving of designs, on small objects whether the designs were derived from nature or entirely invented, was connected with the making of signs for communication, and that primitive designs on seals were connected morphologically or by some primitive kind of logic with script in its earliest forms.

There appears too another similarity between the two processes. A word or sound must be distinctive and precise. It must have some characteristic unshared by any other word or sound, nor should it change much in use, otherwise communications are not possible. This distinctiveness it shares with the ancient seal, only differing from it in the respect that words are for common use, a seal is for individual use<sup>2</sup>. Yet as some words become so distinctive as to be unique, as in the names of individuals — nor were they told without good reason or safeguard<sup>3</sup> so seals also were peculiar possessions and in some cases were regarded as the *alter ego* of the person<sup>4</sup>.

The close connection between the two activities and their invariable sequence has been noticed wherever seals and sealings have been found in any quantity. As in Mesopotamia, so in Egypt; indeed wherever in the ancient world writing has been found. So much so, that when seals are discovered, but no sealings, an imported use is suggested, and a script likewise imported, usually follows.

Interesting sidelights on the relationship of seals, sealings and script come from the Indus Valley<sup>5</sup>. From this civilization, so far, few sealings have been discovered. Their absence may be due to

<sup>2</sup> In certain instances of early Egyptian cylinders the name of the owner was the motif. Compare the sealings from the Tomb of Aha, Frankfort, Cylinder Seals 295, figs. 93. 95, also Petrie, Royal Tombs II 91 pl. XIII, 108 pl. XV.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis XXXII 29

<sup>4</sup> Genesis XXXVIII 18

<sup>5</sup> E. H. J. Mackay, Chanu-Daro Excavations 140; J. Marshall, Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization, II, 380

the unhardened state of the clay nodules, or to the destruction of the sealings after use, so that no record was kept. This is feasible, if a perishable material like papyrus was used for writing — indeed the small size and shape of the Indus Valley seal suggest, as the use of a small stamp seal in Egypt, material of this kind. But generally, if other civilizations are any guide — and Egypt has a wealth of clay seal impressions from small stamp seals used to secure papyrus letters<sup>6</sup> — the absence of sealings denotes that the seal was used more for the purposes of ornament or amulet<sup>7</sup>. This, in the case of the Indus Valley seals is consistent with another characteristic. Most of these stones bear motifs consisting of animals indigenous to or found in India; script lies in another part of the field, as though the letters were used for a distinctive or decorative purpose. The script, still undecipherable, seems to derive from an earlier use now lost, for in its formalized character there is a plastic relationship between the animal forms on the seals and the script alongside of them. This relationship is so close and the form of the motif so constant in arrangement and style for five hundred years or more, that the script seems like the much later use of Greek letters on small Greco-Roman cameo ringstones, to be talismanic or for good luck, and perhaps like them, positive in the engraving. Here, in both ancient and more recent use, like the inscriptions on the Gnostic gems, is an underlying connection between script and seal now largely unobserved. In these cases, the older use shows by the juxtaposition of natural forms to the script a deeper and more primitive relationship.

Writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt seems to have emerged from a pictographic use related to the motifs of the earlier seals<sup>8</sup>. Certainly in the early dynasties, formal similarities between pictographs and motifs can be observed, while later, script is found on seals and sealings not only as adjunct to other forms and then part of the motif, but still later in some cases, as the motif itself; which inscriptions are for the most part in the negative.

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<sup>6</sup> G. A. Reisner, *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* XXVIII (1930) 49 seq.

<sup>7</sup> E. H. J. Mackay, *op. cit.* 140 seq.

<sup>8</sup> Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* 30. While Frankfort does not adduce direct connection between the early pictograms and the forms used on the cylinder seals, the development of seal cutting and writing from Uruk to Jemdet Nasr is suggestive. In Egypt of the early dynasties, the connection is even more close, since the motifs of many early Egyptian cylinders were entirely literary.

It is of course possible that the crucial period of association between script and seal in Mesopotamia and Egypt was during the early use of the cylinder seal, in what was for both civilizations the first two settled phases of glyptic, since after the VI dynasty, Egypt moved through two stages to the use of an amuletic stamp seal.<sup>9</sup> The supersession of the cylinder by the stamp seal in Egypt appears to coincide with a growing consciousness and autonomy in culture and a greater freedom in the use of script. For the button shaped-seal motif rarely contained script of any kind. Script was to reappear in a more articulate form with the growing and later vogue of the scarab, and contemporaneously with its general use as a seal writing in Egypt reached an excellence and volume without precedent. If the connection of script and seal was close in the Indus Valley, it was closer still in Egypt. But should there be any question of the relationship between script and seals in early Egypt, both Frankfort<sup>10</sup> and Legrain<sup>11</sup> seem convinced of their connection in the emergence and development of Mesopotamian writing. Any examination of a group of cylinder seals of the Ancient Near East gives the impression that script belongs to them<sup>12</sup>.

Later Jewish and Islamic ring stones also bear script, as Byzantine rings symbols related to ideas already expressed in language. The former were probably not intended to be used as seals, but seem rather to be talismanic or prophylactic in character. These two great literary cultures, who valued such stones and for whose script preference there was probably a religious reason, were unconsciously reviving a relationship of an earlier kind which began in Mesopotamian seal use, and in so doing pointed to one great element in its manifold character; as the glyptic in the Aegean world, in stressing the formal qualities of the motifs of the seal, pointed to the other.

In the whole range of Aegean glyptic — the Middle Minoan Age being the great exception — from the ivory cylinder from Tomb II, Mochlos (HM 743), now dated to the end of the EM II period<sup>13</sup>, to the sealings of Myc III b date at Pylos, to the Island stones, the Spartan Ivories and to the gems of the classical period, the use of script or letters on seals and sealstones was generally avoided. The

<sup>9</sup> Brunton, Qau and Badari 58

<sup>10</sup> Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* 1 and 30

<sup>11</sup> Legrain, *Ur Excavations* III 2

<sup>12</sup> Except in the case of later Assyrian cylinders. Compare Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* pls. XXXI i. j., XXXII b, XXXIII a

<sup>13</sup> CS 18

later inclusion in classical times of the names of owners or artists can hardly be considered in the same category as the script on the Gnostic gems, Islamic stones, Phoenician seals, Egyptian scarabs, or Mesopotamian cylinders.

This avoidance, seen pre-eminently in Cretan usage generally — from which the greater part of the Aegean use seems to derive, shows an acute appreciation both of seals and of script. For it should not be forgotten that script on seals, unless it is a declaration of ownership or of appropriation, or unless it is a votive prayer which by its place on the seal is a potential, and by its registration on the sealing is an actual invocation, and so is a perfect counterpart of that Near Eastern conception of prayer which informs the Jewish and Christian worlds<sup>14</sup>, either deprives the seal of its unique character — since words by their very nature are for common use — or misuses the script. And just as the first seal use abhors an elaborate use of subjects or scenes of ephemeral character, since the quasi-sculptural quality of glyptic demands a more permanent character in its forms, so it abhors the common use of words for the same reason. In Cretan use the imprint of a seal may be endorsed or countersigned, i. e. the seal may be used for a particular purpose or for a particular occasion which is specified by the endorsement; but since the *seal itself* is not restricted by the superscription, it remains of more permanent value, and is above the level of such contingency.

So it is suggested that the Aegean use and the Cretan seal tradition from which the Aegean use largely stems, does not favour the use of script on seals in the way of Egypt or of the Ancient Near East, and tends to value glyptic for its own sake. The former a matter for almost immediate observation in the seal use of the Early and Late Minoan Ages, suggests not only a divergence between the glyptic use of the Aegean and that of the Ancient Near East, but perhaps a divergence in the character and use of the earlier scripts also. Apart from the Middle Minoan Age, which differs fundamentally in this respect from both its predecessor and successor, and the beginning of the Second Transitional Phase in which a certain momentum from the Middle Minoan Age was still operative, only two Cretan sealstones have so far been found bearing script, the lentoid Amethyst from Prosymna, Tomb 44<sup>15</sup>, and an Amygdaloid, now in

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<sup>14</sup> The use of Phylacteries in New Testament times (Matthew XXIII 5) is also related.

<sup>15</sup> C. Blegen, Prosymna I 273. 274; II 136. 144

the National Museum Athens<sup>16</sup>. Both of them however appear to have been re-engraved. The former with circular mark around which is a linear ideograph, while the motif of the second, two Cretan goats, has been disfigured by another ideograph. Neither of these signs seem to conform entirely to the recognized Linear scripts. A lentoid of red jasper engraved with characters thought to be Linear Script B was found strung with other beads round the neck of a skeleton in a tomb at Perati dated LH IIIB-CI. The position of this stone, i. e. with other beads round the neck, and the lateness of the burial suggests a non-sphragistic use of the Mainland<sup>17</sup>. By its use of ideographs and by its material it is reminiscent of those Bulla shaped stones thought to be Hittite which are so often engraved with script of an indeterminate kind.

Two other engraved jewels, probably dating from the Second Transitional Phase must be considered. They are the gold ring from Mavrospelio<sup>18</sup> and a green steatite or marble amygdaloid from the Little Palace area at Knossos<sup>19</sup> both of which are engraved with script of Linear A. The amygdaloid may well have been in use during the earlier part of the Late Minoan Age, for it is not unreasonable to see in the use of a stone of this shape for a script not contemporary with it, as in the spiral arrangement of signs on the bezel of the ring, a talismanic intent. The time of their use has been a matter of some conjecture, but certainly the small diameter of the loop handle of the gold ring suggests the earlier, rather than the later class of ring-signets, and probably work of MM III or the Second Transitional phase, which the presence of Linear Script A confirms. They should in all probability be regarded as conserving something of the character of seals of the Middle, rather than of the Late Minoan Age, a proper consideration of which can only come from a consideration of the special character of glyptic and its relationship with script in the Middle Minoan Age.

The first record of a combined use of seal and script comes from two sealings discovered by Evans at Knossos in an MM Ia provenience called by him the S. E. Pillar Room<sup>20</sup>. The fact that the forms on these sealings as indeed on most of the latter Hieroglyphic seals and sealings are related to those on earlier three sided prism

<sup>16</sup> Awaiting publication

<sup>17</sup> S. Jacobides, *Praktika* (1957) 98, fig. 9

<sup>18</sup> PM II 557 fig. 352

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* I 670, fig. 490

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* I 196 fig. 144; SM I 19 fig. 9

beads, generally different in shape and character from the seals of the Messara Tholoi, suggests that they, like their subsequent use as script, derive from North and Central Crete, and were also affected by the amuletic character which these stones on other counts appear to have possessed.

Those impressions of early pictographs and the later hieroglyphs which have survived, appear to come from seals of geometric shape, the fields of which are usually rectangular. Sometimes the ends of the seals were rounded, but except for those later seals of the Middle Minoan Age when the signs, although script, appear to be more used for decorative purposes than for language so that the field could be any shape fancied by the designer, the majority of seals with script were made with rectangular fields. Some of the seals — all pierced for stringing — have two, three or four sides. One of the first — the only one extant, now in the British Museum<sup>21</sup> — shows an arrangement of hieroglyphics on the one side and a scene of the chase on the other. By style — unless there is, as sometimes obtained, a deliberate archaism — this stone should be dated MM IIb. Impressions on sealings from the Hieroglyphic Deposit at Knossos appear to be later, but like the extant stone, show a certain stiffness as though something of the hieratic character of the script had infected the natural forms used in other motifs. There may however be another explanation. From MM I onwards, as the early Cretan button seals with quasi-Egyptian motifs<sup>22</sup> show and as the motifs in the XIIth and XIIIth Dynasty Scarabs imply<sup>23</sup>, the connection between Crete and Egypt was very close. In neither case was the influence onesided, or overwhelming — the cretanising of the Egyptian motifs on the MM I and MM II seals show this, but since there is other evidence of Egyptian influence in Crete during this age<sup>24</sup>, a formalist tendency in the treatment of seal motifs as indeed of the script should be expected. Although lessened during MM IIIb as the sealing of the Temple Repositories and a certain freedom with the form of the hieroglyphs on later seals show, it seems to remain in Palace circles until the end of this age. The form and arrangement of the hieroglyphics on the Royal Seal (AM 1938. 791)<sup>25</sup> are strongly influenced by the style of the Egyptian Royal Car-

<sup>21</sup> BMCG No. 3 = SM I 157 P. 41

<sup>22</sup> CS 34; Nos. 74, 77, 86-88

<sup>23</sup> Newberry, Scarabs pls. XVIII, XIX

<sup>24</sup> PM I 201, 268, 689; Pendlebury, Archaeology of Crete 121, 131, 141, 143, 172

<sup>25</sup> CS No. 174

touches. The use of the scarab form still continues in Crete, although one example (AM 1931. 475)<sup>26</sup> with a linear script seemingly unconnected with the hieroglyphic use of this age, and another with a combination of hieroglyphic forms with Linear Script A from the Spencer Churchill collection<sup>27</sup> shows that the Second Transitional Phase had begun. But so strong was the Middle Minoan custom of combining writing with glyptic that even after the inception of Linear Script A, hieroglyphs still appear in the motifs of seals, sometimes in combination, sometimes mixed with other decorative or natural forms. By the evidence of these examples since they were contemporary with a regular use of Linear Script A, it would seem that their use as current script had ceased<sup>28</sup>. Like the later use of the Gothic script in England, to give texts in a writing no longer used, an additional sanctity. The last evidence of their use seems to be that on a sealing from H. Triada<sup>29</sup> which appears to derive from a four sided bead and later than the three or four examples from Zakro<sup>30</sup>. From the early sealings from the S. E. Pillar Room, there is thus a process covering some four hundred years. This process could be divided into four periods (not of equal length) in which seals and sealings on stylistic grounds can be provisionally placed:

- MM I Two sealings from the S. E. Pillar Room<sup>31</sup>.  
also, AM 1938. 762; AE 1216, 1215; 1938. 768; HM 1191, 571, 566; HM 89; CdM M 7988.
- MM IIb AM 1938. 748, 929, 928, 774; AE 1771; 1910. 233, 1941. 85, 1938. 797; HM 1442; BMCG 3.
- MM IIIa AM 1889. 998; AE 1194, 1938. 932, 936, 925, 924; HM 115, 748.
- MM IIIb HT 3; AM 1938. 791, 116; AE 1777; 1938. 792, 794, 793, 796, 945, 791; HM 1537.

## II

The engraving of hieroglyphs or certain linear derivations of them on stones for decorative or perhaps talismanic purposes rather than for sphragistic use is surely one indication that that form of writing

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. No. 145

<sup>27</sup> Awaiting publication

<sup>28</sup> By this, is meant their use as the usual or normal method of writing. Owing to lack of knowledge, the possibility that different forms of script were in use at the same time can not be ruled out.

<sup>29</sup> D. Levi, *Le Cretule di Haghia Triada* 86 No. 2 fig. 29

<sup>30</sup> D. G. Hogarth, *JHS XXII* (1902) 333-8 pls. VI-X

<sup>31</sup> PM I 196 fig. 144; SM I 19 fig. 9



is no longer in general vogue. The change in the axis of the hieroglyphs at a certain advanced stage in the use, paralleled by a like freedom in placing pictographs on Mesopotamian cylinder seals, was a sign that change was in the air. Indeed the development and change at this stage are strangely similar in each use. This does not suggest any derivative use or even influence, but it seems to point to what is a purely natural process where script and seals are both in use at the same time. What is of moment is that whether Linear Script A superseded the Hieroglyphic script in Crete, or whether there was for a time a contemporaneous use, the presence of the earlier forms of script on seals is not necessarily an indication of a general use of that kind of writing. If anything it is the reverse, indicating that the use of the hieroglyphic forms on later seals, if not purely decorative or archaistic, may be quasi-religious or talismanic<sup>32</sup>, and in all probability, connected with a later use on stones of Linear Script A, as already mentioned. The later use, however, was not so extensive as the use of hieroglyphs on seal stones. This may have been due to the fact that the earlier script, hieratic in character and related to Egyptian use, lent itself more readily to the purpose of votive inscriptions. It may also indicate a newer outlook in the use of seals and script, or rather, an earlier one which the Egyptianizing phases of the Middle Minoan Age had displaced.

One other factor must also be considered, the two better known cases of engraving of Linear Script A on the almond shaped stone<sup>33</sup> and on the gold signet<sup>34</sup> by their shape and the use of the script date from a time when the stones from East Crete bearing evocative symbols of water, strength, and fertility had begun to start what was rightly recognised by Evans<sup>35</sup>, a fashion in talismanic stones. The frequency of these stones, until the end of the Late Minoan Age, would inevitably affect the use of the older talismanic use of letters. Symbols, especially those taken from natural forms are more recognizable and were perhaps found more efficacious than words or letters. But except for four sealings from Gournia of LM Ia date, no sealings, from this type of stone have been found in Crete<sup>36</sup>; and

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<sup>32</sup> Similar Egyptian use on the decorative Scarabs of XII-XVIII Dynasties should be compared. See Newberry, *op. cit.*, pl. XIX, Nos. 2, 5, 9, 13, 21-24, 28-31.

<sup>33</sup> PM I 670 fig. 490

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* II 557 fig. 352

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* I 672-4; IV 446-50

only one so far on the mainland. Suffice it is to say that except for these two instances of the use of Linear Script A on stones or signets of seal shape, and on two other related stones mentioned below, so far, no sealshaped stone engraved with Linear Script A or Linear Script B has yet been found in Crete; and what is more significant, no sealing of any kind which derives from a seal which had been engraved with Linear Script A or Linear Script B<sup>37</sup>. One clay imitation of a three sided prism bead — a shape whose amuletic associations made for its sporadic appearance in each Minoan Age — engraved with signs of Linear Script B was found by Evans in the Palace at Knossos and recorded in the note books<sup>38</sup>. Whether it was a clay amulet which for an important safeguard took the place of an ordinary sealing; or whether it was a special label in the form of a threesided prism bead, or whether it was merely the copy of an ancient form inscribed with Linear Script B for votive reasons is not known. It is quite different in form from SM II No. 1707 and presumably in purpose<sup>39</sup>. Certainly it had not been used much as a seal, if at all, for there were no signs of wear on its clay of medium hardness.

Since examples of seal shaped stones or metal engraved with Linear Script A are so far limited to these four, they merit closer examination. Two published by Evans (PM I fig. 490; PM II fig. 352) conform to ordinary Cretan shapes, the amygdaloid, and the signet with the ring handle. Two do not, that published by Evans PM I fig. 475 of indeterminate shape<sup>40</sup>, and that published by W. C. Brice, in his valuable study, *Inscriptions in Minoan Linear Script of Class A* pl. XXIX v. 5, is of conical shape. The latter from the Finlay collection in the British School at Athens is thought to have come from Melos and to be of Cretan origin. Both conjectures are justified since a number of Cretan sealstones have been found on the islands of the Aegean. Many of these with other so-called Melian or Island stones found on Melos were published together by early travellers<sup>41</sup>. It is of importance however in this connection to realize that the

<sup>36</sup> The four sealings from Gournia show the vase motifs now thought to be associated with a talismanic use of the Second Transitional Phase and Late Minoan Age, in their earliest forms.

<sup>37</sup> This absence becomes impressive when the very great number of different kinds of clay sealings from Crete are considered.

<sup>38</sup> Evans, MSS Notebook in the Ashmolean Museum (1901) p. 10a

<sup>39</sup> SM II 64

<sup>40</sup> If this example is to be considered as Helladic rather than Cretan in origin, the argument is strengthened.

<sup>41</sup> L. von Ross, *Reisen auf den Griechischen Inseln*, 1st Edition p. 21

Cretan sealstones from Melos were of the talismanic type; another from Cythera with LM II seal motifs was a three sided prism bead, so that they were not strictly seals at all<sup>42</sup>. Might not therefore the conical stone of the Finlay collection, a shape not in seal-use at a time when Linear Script A was being used, also signify a non-sphragistic use? The coneshaped pendant engraved on the base was like the three sided prism bead, a replica of a seal shape from the last phase of the Early Minoan Age and First Transitional Phase. So too was the stone of indeterminate shape.

The absence of sealings from the talismanic stones of LM I and LM II in the Palace at Knossos and, except for the four mentioned above from Gournia, in Crete as a whole, suggests, too, that these four examples bearing Linear Script A may not have been intended for sphragistic use<sup>43</sup>. And the rarity of signs from the earlier script inscribed across the motifs of the sealings themselves — none in the Middle Minoan Age, where on contemporary Egyptian parallels, none shall be expected — only three examples of Linear Script A (Brice pl. II) suggests that in spite of the counter markings on the back of nodules, a certain distinction between script and seal was still maintained. Brice, however, in transcribing the script of these four examples of seal shapes with Linear Script, does not appear to be consistent. Evans PM I in both figs. 479, 490 gives a drawing of the stone itself. Likewise in the case of the gold ring from Mavrospelio (PM II fig. 375). In Brice the transcription of the Mavrospelio ring is taken from the object itself, but in the case of the three stones,

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<sup>42</sup> CS 19-22. The Middle Minoan use of this shape is regarded as exceptional. See above p. 6

<sup>43</sup> This is in part an argumentum ex silentio. But in view of the number and immense variety of sealings found in Crete and apart from the use of the Middle Minoan Age and the four examples quoted by Evans and Brice — two of which in the author's view belong to the Second Transitional Phase, a complete absence of any seal or sealing which has a motif of script is remarkable. The practise of countersigning which started, so it is thought, with Linear Script A (Brice op. cit. p. 11) and fully developed among the Late Knossian sealings is also evidence that script engraved on seals was not a normal fashion. Mesopotamian use shows the opposite principle. Script on seals — from the Third early dynastic period becomes an almost normal occurrence, and in the Kassite use practically fills the field — as often in the case of Egyptian scarabs the whole of the field is also filled. So too in Egyptian and Mesopotamian sealings the practise of countersigning is very rare. Two examples occur in the Louvre, Delaporte, op. cit. p. 488f. pl. 46. In other cases a distinction must be made between the countersign on a sealing and any overwriting (perhaps an endorsement) made on the existing cuneiform of a clay tablet, which may, as in the case of the Kerkouk tablets (ibid. pl. 119) run on over the impression of a seal.

from their impressions, pls. XXIX, XXX also P. 24. He may, of course, believe that a distinction should be made between the use of gold signet and of the stones. Here the general run of the evidence appears to be on the side of Evans. Yet it is possible in the case of the three stones, that the engraved signs are those which could be read from left to right or from right to left<sup>44</sup>. But the simpler explanation, and one consistent with a complete absence of any sealings of this sort, is that the engraving of the script on these stones was positive, and that they were not intended to be seals. This is consistent too with the practice of the Early and Late Minoan Ages in Crete; but it is not consistent with the use of script on seals in Mesopotamia or in Egypt where the script on the seal is usually in the negative and so rightly registered on the sealing<sup>45</sup>. Indeed there is one cylinder, formerly in the Brett Collection, which has been condemned as a forgery precisely on these grounds, that the votive prayer in cuneiform engraved on the cylinder is in the positive<sup>46</sup>. Since however this cylinder is believed by the author to be Cretan work of LM II, the inscription in the positive takes on a new and significant meaning.

<sup>44</sup> In some Middle Kingdom Scarabs the hieroglyphs used are such that they are of the same form in the positive and the negative. See Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs in the British Museum I Nos. 94-202.

<sup>45</sup> In this connection, Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, 8, note 2, has observed that on Assyrian Cylinders the inscription is generally in the positive. This is not wholly correct. A study of some of these cylinders, suggests, as Frankfort himself admits (194), that the style and choice of subjects are not always normal for Mesopotamian practise. Moreover the full use of script on Assyrian Cylinders comes later rather than earlier (187). What script there is on the earlier seals suggests ordinary Mesopotamian use, with writing for the most part engraved on the cylinder in the negative. Later Assyrian Cylinders then appear to fall into two groups, (a) Those whose script is engraved in the negative and which in the inscription itself are called seals, L. Delaporte, *Musée du Louvre, Catalogue des Cylindres* pl. 85; Nos. 603, 619, 695, 708, (709 is a special exception); compare also Ward, *Cylinder Seals of Western Asia*, Nos. 699, 707, 597. (b) Those whose script is engraved on the cylinder in the positive, and which never in the inscription mention the word seal, but instead, charm or talisman, and when the burden of the inscription is always for good luck. Delaporte *ibid.* pl. 85; Nos. 604, 620, 715, 716, 717; also Ward, *ibid.* Nos. 655, 586, 589. On some Cylinders the script is horizontal and runs parallel with the impression, e.g. one from the Southesk collection, and another from the Bibliothèque Nationale 307 (Frankfort pl. 31 i. j.); j, however, shows the script negative on the Cylinder: on others script and design are strangely incorporated, e.g. one from Boston (Frankfort 32b). None of these Cylinders show normal Mesopotamian use. The possibility that these seals were affected by glyptic influence from the West can not be wholly discounted.

<sup>46</sup> H. H. von der Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mrs. Agnes Baldwin Brett*. pl. VIII No. 80, pp. 12, 60

Certainly the general practice of script and seals in LM I, LM II and LM IIIa bear out this contention. (Of instances of stones engraved with marks of Linear Script B listed in SM II 65, Nos. 1719, 1721 are on a par with 1718, an obvious talismanic use)<sup>47</sup>. While even in the Middle Minoan Age when seals used the hieroglyphic script as motifs, linear versions of the script were not used as motifs on any seals or sealings so far found. Nodules, however, were inscribed with a linear version of the current hieroglyphic quantities which appear as seal motifs in their full hieratic form — if they can be regarded as contemporary — for there is always a possibility that the forms engraved on the stones of which the sealing is a record were not regarded as interchangeable or of exactly the same meaning. No sealing of the Middle Minoan Age so far has been discovered which has been countersigned, although in many cases the script in its linear use is formally connected with its hieratic prototype. This practice was to wait until the Late Minoan Age and the last days of the Palace at Knossos. For if the relationship of seal and script in the Middle Minoan Age — certainly until the MM IIIa period — was too intimate for a distinction to be made or for their relationship to be assessed, and the use of Linear Script A to be too sporadic or tenuous for a real appreciation to be made, the similarity of the use of Linear Script A on sealings is so close to the Palace use of Linear Script B as to suggest not only a change from the script and seal use of the Middle Minoan Age of a fundamental kind, but also a relationship perhaps more than formal between the script of Linear Script A and Linear Script B. At the best the Linear Script A endorsements ("countermarking" Brice p. 11) are attenuated, and generally like the rest of the script lack the firmness and decision of Linear Script B. Nowhere is this more apparent than on the sealings from the Palace at Knossos. The three examples of countersigning in Linear Script A over the motifs of the sealings from H. Triada, noted by Brice, appear to show a timidity, as though the scribe was averse to tampering with the motif. All twelve examples from Knossos, countersigned over the motif with Linear Script B show no such lack of confidence, indeed in one example, that from the Corridor of the Sword Tablets (SM II No. 1708 pl. LXXXVIII) the countersign of the man over the motif of the contorted lion has almost completely covered it. Yet if countersigns

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<sup>47</sup> The unfinished talismanic vase shape and filling chevrons in the field can be clearly seen. They are not script.

in nearly all the other cases are examined, it will be seen, that at no expense to the vigour of the marking, the sealing has been respected; it will be also seen that sometimes the pattern is enhanced, that there is an underlying harmony between the script and the design which shows an habitual appreciation of seal use generally. This is apparent in all twelve cases of sealings countersigned with Linear Script B, save one, which on stylistic grounds may derive from the Mainland<sup>48</sup>.

That this nicety in countersigning which although more vigorous and certain than the practice on the Hagia Triada nodules, is not too hypothetical, is clearly seen by the evidence of the sealing HM 253, on which there is a clear indication that the original engraving of the seal has been altered by a later and unappreciative owner<sup>49</sup>.

The twelve sealings in questions are these:

*Suggested chronology on stylistic grounds*

AM 1938. 1052	LM IIIa
AM 1938. 1080	LM II
AM 1938. 861	LH II
HM 121	LM II
HM 124	LM II (late)
HM 129	LM IIIa
HM 156	LM II
HM 122	LM IIIa
HM 119	LM II (late)
HM (PM IV 617 fig. 400)	LM II
HM 401, and SM II pl. LXXXVIII	LM II (late)

Of the Ashmolean examples, in 1938. 1080 from the Vth Magazine (PM IV fig. 604b) the bared sign could almost, but for the disturbance of the clay near the face of the wrestler, be part of the design; while the sign on 1052 fits the whole composition as well. The latter acquires further interest if it is compared with HM 119 from the same seal, where the countersign also respects the composition. As mentioned above the countersign on AM 1938. 861 has been inscribed with a singular lack of appreciation of the motif. In this respect it compares unfavourably with the counter marks of the later sealings of Blegen from Pylos, which have recently been exam-

<sup>48</sup> See below, AM 1938. 816

<sup>49</sup> See University of London, Institute of Classical Studies: Mycenaean Seminar May 17th, 1961, 241

ined in Athens by the author. Two already published by M. Lang in *AJA* 1959 pl. 30, Wr 1360, 1960 pl. 44, Wr 1374, suggest this also, as though by the time of the last Palace there, with a use of script and sealings similar and no doubt derived from the earlier use at Knossos, a finer appreciation of seal use had assuredly come.

Of the Heraklion sealings, the countersign on HM 121 even enhances the design, as another does on HM 124; while the sign on HM 156 appears deliberately placed on the neck and body of the young calf which has no mane, rather than disturb the fine work on the neck of the opposing calf. Unbarbed arrows occur as countersigns on HM 122, 119, and 401. In each case these carefully conserve the design. In 122 the vertical position of the sign at 90 degrees to main axis of the bodies of cow and calf suggest not only a refusal to spoil the details of the engraving but also an appreciation of the formal structure of the motif.

If a chronology of the script preserved on these sealings is sought, nothing could be more immediate than the use of the seal which preceded the countersign of the nodules, and the countersign itself<sup>50</sup>; and if the character of the script is to be appreciated, every aspect of form and discrimination in use, suggests a sensitive approach to glyptic; an appreciation like the tradition from which it sprang, the fruit of considerable time and experience.

It has been said with some insight and point, that it is strange that a people so refined and ingenious in their artistic products could have invented and used so clumsy a script. This well meaning and perhaps pertinent observation surely rests upon a misconception of Minoan culture, and indeed of the writing itself. The fact that the countersigns, certainly in two or three cases enhance the impression of the motif on the clay nodule suggests that some of the signs at least were not in themselves formally objectionable. The facility and precision with which many of them appear to have been made suggest forms which lend themselves to speed in writing and clearness in execution. But should, in spite of these mitigating features the disparity between the "clumsiness" of the script and the grace of other Knossian products still be urged, it could be said that the beauty of a phonetic language may lie in the sound; and that the possibility that Minoan culture was primarily aesthetic and did not crave after historical expression or literary character, might also be considered.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. remarks by Dr. J. Chadwick