

MITTEILUNGEN

THE AUTHENTICITY OF CRETAN AND MYCENAEAN SEALS

The publication of Band V, Teil 1 and 2, of the *Corpus der Minoischen und Mykenischen Siegel* is welcome for the full evidence which it presents of seal usage in Greece in the Bronze Age. In Teil 1 the sealings of Argos, already known through the publications of Martha Wiencke, are fully presented, and they reveal fundamental differences, even at that earlier age, between the workmanship of Crete and that of mainland Greece. For this presentation, as for that of objects from other early sites, we are greatly indebted to American scholars. We learn also about seal usage at other contemporary and later sites – Tiryns, Larissa and Zygouries – and about the collections at Ayia Irini and Kavalla, and at other smaller museums in important places like Eleusis and Delphi Medeon which may be easily missed by the ordinary traveller. The full character of the seals or *pintaderas*, as they are called in the publication, is fully shown by the fine photographs and reproductions.

The seals of Thebes, too, are published, and among these are some of the finest Mycenaean and Helladic examples known. Some of them, such as V2 Nos. 677, 678 and 680, have developed from the earlier Cretan style quite differently from, for example, Nos. 663–666, though they are of equally fine quality. No. 686 from Tanagra in the Thebes Museum, Nos. 688 and 689 from Orchomenos, and No. 690 from Akrotiri in the Thera Museum also show individual styles of development.

In this context, the stones from the Schliemann Collection are of special interest, since, although their origin is unknown, they were no doubt acquired before the manufacture of ‘ancient’ seals became a profitable and extensive business: but they are not all necessarily genuine. V1 Nos. 176–179, which depict fish, a ship and talismanic vases in shapes and material typical of the Bronze Age, raise no doubts. No. 180b however poses problems of subject, style and technique. If, as is possible, its engraving was added in modern times in order to gain a higher price, it might throw some light on the dubious character, style and technique of No. 181; as opposed to which No. 182 has a typical Bronze Age Aegean character. These pieces were of course acquired at a time when the corpus of Cretan seals was considerably smaller than it is now.

We should recall that the information that a stone derives from an excavation does not guarantee its genuineness; for stones have been taken to excavations and deposited there, to be discovered subsequently for reward. This may have happened in the cases of Nos. 188 and 189.

A number of stones from the Benaki Museum in Thebes appear to be doubtful. Few ancient engravers, for example, would throw the uprights of the panels on No. 190 out of the vertical; and all the subjects of Nos. 191–193 are well known, as is their type of engraving. They may be ancient pieces of poor workmanship, but it could be significant that they all use variants on older Cretan themes; as does the lentoid No. 658 from Koukounara, with its motif of bull-jumping, with which No. 597 from Mycenae in the Nauplion Museum should be compared.

For these a section of *Dubitandae* would perhaps be of profit, for this title does not condemn a piece outright, but leaves it open to doubt. In this category VI Nos. 190, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199 and 200 could well be included. In the cases of Nos. 198 and 199, imitative modern work on the bezels and ring handles seems present. In other cases, such as Nos. 698 and 699, although their authenticity could not be challenged, they may not have been seals but the remains of Neolithic household scrubbers, the deep holes having been filled with bristles. Indeed the fractures of the top of No. 698 and at the top and part of the side of No. 699 are consistent with over-vigorous use. For these as for the pieces of doubtful origin a section entitled *Dubitandae*, of the kind which appears in some earlier volumes of the Corpus, would have been useful. An expression of inadequate knowledge is sometimes the mark of a scholar.

VICTOR E. G. KENNA

'CRETAN SEALS'

Since the publication of this work in 1960 by the University Press Oxford, seven volumes of the Corpus of Cretan and Mycenaean Seals have appeared. These and the research required in their preparation have suggested that while the main thesis of the work Cretan Seals remains unchanged, greater accuracy in the chronological placing of some pieces is now possible. The following list of the Cretan seals in the Ashmolean Collection under their present sequence numbers in the book will show in some cases a new chronological position. The new sequence presentation which appears more stylistically consistent may be more accurate.

	K61	K4	K13
	K1	K5	K17
EM	K2	K6	K18
II	K7	K9	K19
	K8	K10	EM K14
		K11	III K21
	K3	K12	K22

	K23		K123, 124		K280-281
	K24		K125-142		K283-284
	K20		K143-143		K285-287
	K16		K146-149		K288, 310
	K15	MM IIIa	K150-151		K289-290
	K28		K152-164		K291-292
	K25				K293-294
	K27		K165-167		K295
	K28		K168-171		
	K29		K172-174		K296-298
	K30		K175-185		K300-302
	K31	MM	K186-190		K299-303
	K32	IIIb	K191-193		K304
			K194-197		K305-309
	K33		K198-199	LM	K311, 312
	K34			II	K313-316
	K35	MM IIIc	K200-203		K317
	K36		K212-218		K318, 319
	K37		K210-212		K320-322
	K38		K207		K323-326
	K39		K219		K327-331
	K40-53		K220-226		K332-334
1st	K54		K204		K335-337
TRANS.	K55		K205-206		K339, 340
PHASE	K56-60		K227		K342-343
	K62		K228		
	K63	2nd	K232-234	LM	K341, 345
	K64-72	TRANS.	K235	III	K346, 349, 350
MM	K73	PHASE	K229-231	A1	K347, 348, 338
I	K74-82		K235		K351
	K83		K236-237		K352
	K84				K354
	K85-93	LM	K208, 209	LM	K353
	K94	I	K238-240	III	K355-358
	K95		K241-243	A2	K359-364
	K96		K244-246		
	K97-102		K249		K365-367
	K103		K248	LM	K368-373
	K104-107		K247	III	K374-376
MM	K108-110		K250-253	B	K377-379
II	K111, 112		K254-258		K383-389
	K113		K259-261		K380-382
	K114		K262-265		K390-391
	K115, 116	LM	K266-271		K392-393
	K117-122	I	K272-276		K394-395
			K277-279		K396-398

The stones on Pl. 18 appear to be representative of the work of Helladic Greece. K69 and 79 show characteristic Helladic features, but at the same time they appear to have been strongly affected by Cretan styles.

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THE CAMBRIDGE COLLOQUIUM ON MYCENAEAN GEOGRAPHY

The colloquium took place at Cambridge on 27–28 September 1976, under the auspices of the British Association for Mycenaean Studies. The Colloquium Secretary, Dr. J. Bintliff, deserves high praise for his organisation of accommodation and facilities, for steering us successfully through a somewhat crowded programme, and for producing the proceedings (papers and discussion) with the minimum of delay (available from the British Association for Mycenaean Studies, Laundress Lane Faculty Rooms, Cambridge CB2 1SD, at £1.50 / \$3.50 including postage).

The colloquium brought together specialists in Aegean archaeology, Linear B, geography, statistics, computer studies, and other interested persons, to consider a whole range of approaches to the study and interpretation of the settlement-pattern in Mycenaean Greece and its relevance to Mycenaean civilisation generally. Certain assumptions were common ground (at least among the more vocal of the participants!): the essential correctness of the Linear B decipherment, and the 'orthodox' view of the Aegean Late Bronze Age, involving the elimination of Knossos as a major political and artistic centre in the Aegean by c. 1380 B. C.; but there was more disagreement, clearly implied by contributions and discussion if not explicit, over many other matters. It proved to be the main task of the archaeologists to emphasise the gaps in the available evidence (e. g. on the distribution of sites) and to pour cold water on some hopes (e. g. on the use of Mycenaean pottery for artefact distribution analysis); of the Linear B specialists to show how far analysis of the texts had been taken; of various practitioners of scientific disciplines to stress the need for rigour in the use of their techniques; and of Bintliff himself to demonstrate that historical interpretation by archaeologists had often involved the use of outdated approaches to the geography. Archaeologists in other fields provided instructive pictures of their findings and problems. In fact, much of what was said attempted to perform the service of clearing the ground and establishing the boundaries of possible knowledge, and it is hoped that participants gained a heightened perception of the problems, especially regarding the variable quality of the primary evidence.

Contributions from Hope Simpson and the author of these comments stressed that information from surveys was very incomplete and unevenly distributed; only one province, Messenia, had a claim to have been surveyed

with fair thoroughness in some parts by the University of Minnesota Messenia Expedition (Bintliff's published comments on the limitations of this and other surveys have since provoked vigorous reaction from Hope Simpson, and must certainly be considered somewhat misleading on the intentions and results of the Messenia survey). It was no accident that Messenia was thus singled out, for much of it is held to have been included in the territory controlled from the palace at Epano Englianos (Pylos), and this had led the Expedition to attempt a multidisciplinary survey.

Several papers and much discussion concentrated on the data from the Pylos texts, including interesting attempts to apply statistical and computing techniques to the problems of Pylian geography. Here the author feels that there is a danger that present hypotheses on the positions of the two Pylian provinces and their subdivisions will harden into dogma. Analysis of the texts has been rigorous, but the aid of archaeology is required to link place-names with likely sites and to outline their probable history and that of Messenia as a whole; yet current hypotheses do not seem to take all the archaeological evidence into account (here it is hoped that the imminent publication of an enlarged and improved Gazetteer by Hope Simpson and the author will help) and are difficult to square with it at some points. In this respect Killen's account of the geography suggested by the Knossos tablets (which admittedly include many likely 'fixes') fits much more satisfactorily with the emerging archaeological picture, since both point to West as distinct from East Crete as the area of greater significance and probable concern to the rulers of Knossos, after the mid-15th century B. C.; it also presented a strong case for deriving the stirrup jars inscribed with Cretan place-names from the west.

Broader-based discussions showed how difficult it still was to understand properly the workings of Aegean, and especially Mycenaean, civilisation. It was generally accepted that exploitation of the land provided the ultimate basis for prosperity, and that the palaces' role as gatherers and redistributors of the goods produced was of great importance. But it remained uncertain how this system could be exploited for the acquisition of the raw materials that the Aegean must have imported, notably the basic metals copper and tin; the potential importance of the olive, sheep, or flax in providing tradeable products of value was supported by some but disputed by others. A certain reluctance to treat the rise of Mycenaean civilisation as a distinct and rather sudden phenomenon was apparent in some quarters, and archaeologists and Linear B specialists again parted company on the origins of Linear B and the Mycenaean palaces. The author would maintain that theories should be based on the archaeological evidence as it is, and not as it ought to be on certain hypotheses; the silence of the evidence is frequently genuine and not due merely to an absence of material.

In a characteristically stimulating summary Renfrew called attention to the notable differences between the Aegean and Near Eastern civilisations with regard to literacy and religious monuments, and expressed hopes for more localised intensive surveys and more use of the analytical techniques being

developed. In his view, the foundations had now been laid and prospects for further progress were encouraging; with the reservations expressed above, the author agrees, and hopes for more such colloquia in the future.

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