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Chinese Bronze Jar

Early Han Dynasty

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"appears when the king shows compassion to all people." There are other symbols of good augury not easily identified: for example, the flying birds may represent such omens as the white crow which "appears when the king properly pays homage to his ancestral shrine," and the green bird which "appears when the king is good to all living things," and the *t'ung-hsin* bird which "appears when the virtue of the king extends to distant quarters including barbarians on the four sides." In the group are found two fishes: the upright one in the center of the drawing may very likely be a manifestation of the Spirit of the River, and the other, toward the extreme left, the white fish which entered the boat of King Wu of the Chou Dynasty when he crossed the Yellow River, marking the victory of the king over the last sovereign of the Yin Dynasty.

The carriages and their occupants present a problem. Whether these conveyances of different styles are all for royal use or whether some of them are intended for officials is a question. There is a kneeling figure in front of the carriage which is drawn by four horses, indicating the importance of the occupant.

So it seems fairly certain that the upper of the two registers suggests the ancient Chinese conception of a remote world inhabited by wild, as well as mysterious, beings. The lower register, on the other hand, portrays that part of the world over which the influence of an enlightened sovereign is spreading. This supposition is advanced with the realization that it may sound somewhat daring, especially in the present state of research.

The nature of the designs of animals and carriages on the jar at once recalls the slabs with bas-reliefs which served as wall decorations of mortuary chambers of the late Han period.¹ These slabs illustrate scenes mythological and historical, legends of emperors and ministers, paragons of filial piety, doers of noble deeds, etc., as well as spirits, and real and unreal animals and birds. Interesting and important as they are, a comparison of the treatment of such designs on the slabs with similar motives on the bronze jar strengthens the impression that the decoration on the Han slabs is inferior. It is known that the numerous themes treated on the Han slabs are but later attempts to reproduce those which adorned in frescos the ancestral shrines of the Ch'u kings as early as the fourth century B. C. and that they appeared likewise on the walls of the Ling-Kung Palace in the second century B. C.; but there is no indication as to the artistic merit of these representations except in fanciful, poetical descriptions. It is not to be doubted, however, that the freer treatment of animal motives, which began sometime before the Han Dynasty, became fully developed in the early part of that period. From the general nature of the evidence, it may not be far wrong to assign the bronze under

discussion to the first or second century B. C. and to assume that therein is shown the early animal motive at its height. In connection with the animal motives on the jar, mention should be made of the numerous pottery jars and censers of the Han Dynasty bearing in relief representations of "animals and hunters."² There should also be noted a small number of bronzes of the same epoch which are decorated with kindred subjects.³ A comparison of such pottery and bronze objects with the new Museum bronze will further reveal the superiority in workmanship of the latter.

So exceptional in technique and in quality is this bronze jar of the Han Dynasty that its acquisition is a great event. KOJIRO TOMITA.

The Art of Seal Carving in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom

THE sculpture and architecture of Egypt are of such impressive beauty that the smaller works often escape the observation of the public and even of students of the arts. One of the most beautiful examples of the artistic sense and the technical skill of the Egyptian craftsman is preserved by the great body of seal designs carved on seal cylinders, scarabs, and stamps of all periods, but in particular of the Middle Kingdom.

The famous Egyptian scarab was in reality a personal seal used by the owner as modern people use such objects to seal letters, packages, and doors. The development of the Egyptian seal from the cylinder seal of Dynasty I was due chiefly to the invention of the more convenient stamp-seal about the beginning of Dynasty V. The cylinder seals were rolled over the sealing clay and left a rectangular impression. The earliest stamp-seals, which also left rectangular impressions, were of several forms,—

1. Rectangular plate with pierced cylinder on the back.
2. Hemi-cylindrical form with the stamp on the flat side.
3. Pyramidal form with the stamp on the base.

Along with these, but possibly introduced a little later in time, a series of seals was used which left circular impressions, the so-called button-seals, which consisted of a circular plate with a clumsy ring-shank on the back. The button-seal made of ivory, bone, faience, glazed steatite, or metal, became the most common seal used in Dynasties V and VI, and the known examples present a number of cases in which the ring-shank on the back was carved in the shape of one of the amulets used in that period. The amulets of the period, representing the hawk, the crocodile, the turtle, the beetle, the fish, the frog, the lion, and many other beings and objects of divine power, have been found in considerable numbers carved in ivory, carnelian, green stone, gold, faience, and glazed

¹These are fully illustrated in E. Chavannes: *Mission Archéologique dans la Chine Septentrionale*, Pls. 1-104; T. Sekino: *Sepulchral Remains of the Han Dynasty in the Province of Shantung*; S. Omura: *Chosohen*, Pls. 94-114.

²See B. Laufer: *Chinese Pottery of the Han Dynasty*.

³See S. Omura: *Chosohen*, Pls. 136-138; *The Ch'ien Lung Catalogues, Hsi Ch'ing Ku Chien*, Vol. XXI, Pl. 19, and Vol. XXIX, Pl. 26, and *Ning Shou Ch'ien Ku*, Vol. IX, Pl. 30.



Fig. 1. Obverse of selected sealings, showing the seal impressions.



Fig. 2. Reverse of the sealings shown in Fig. 1, with impressions of the objects to which they were attached.

steatite. In Dynasties V and VI no particular amulet, unless it be the lion, appears to predominate on the stamp-seals, but between Dynasty VI and Dynasty XI many of the stamp-seals have a fat oval form and are covered by a crude scarab. From Dynasty XII onwards the union between the scarab amulet and the seal plate (now a fine oval) was perfect, and the scarab was carved either in a naturalistic or in a conventional form. But the scarab was not in any period the only amulet combined with the stamp-seal. The frog, the crocodile, the lion, the porcupine, and other animals occur, although less frequently than the scarab.

It was in the Middle Kingdom that the art of carving seal designs reached its greatest development. The examples known to us have been found on scarab and other stamp-seals and on the impressions left by such seals on clay sealings. In the Egyptian forts and cemetery at Semna¹, we found 183 scarab and other seals, of which over fifty were of the Middle Kingdom and Hyksos periods. In the fort at Uronarti we retrieved a collection of nearly 5000 seal impressions on clay (or mud). These clay sealings give us not only a very large collection (about 500) of seal designs, but also a new insight into the manner in which the seals were used.

The material of the sealings varies, according to Mr. Lucas, from ordinary Nile mud to a fine black clay obtained by washing out the coarse particles from the Nile mud. The fine black clay is still hard and durable, similar in consistency to dried modelling clay. The coarser material, although exposed to the vicissitudes of nearly 4000 years, is usually fairly hard, and only a few of the sealings are in a soft or crumbling state. When the sealings had been stripped from letters and packages or broken from the locks of doors or boxes, the fragments in careless oriental manner were thrown aside in the courtyards and streets. The whole collection of sealings is clearly from Dynasty XIII, and probably from the first half of that dynasty. The inner part of the fort appears to have been cleared out about the end of Dynasty XII, after eighty years of occupation. The only objects of Dynasty XII which we found were ten inscribed memorial tablets of plastered wood dated to the reign of Amenemhat III, left in the mud-brick temple. After Dynasty XII the floors of the streets and the courts were covered with a deposit about 10-25 cm. deep of dust and decayed mud from the walls. In the lower part of this deposit we found the sealings under discussion. Later, perhaps in the New Kingdom, some of the rooms were again occupied and a number of rough walls were built over the layer of debris which contained the sealings. About 500 of the sealings (ca. 10%) had suffered from the weather so as to be quite illegible, or had been too broken to be identified.

The upper surface of the sealing has been stamped with one or more impressions, usually from

the same seal. In pressing down the seal, the mud was usually held by the fingers of the left hand and in many cases retains the finger prints of the owner of the seal. If there were any purpose to be gained by the procedure, a collection of finger prints of the officials of Dynasty XIII could be gathered from these seals.

The underside (reverse) of the sealing bears an impression of the object to which the clay or mud has been applied. A proportion of the sealings are quite intact, although a majority are either broken or fragmentary. Even in the case of perfect sealings it is not always easy to determine the form or character of the object sealed. The sealings used on letters written in Hieratic on papyrus are unmistakable. They are of the fine hard black clay and bear on the reverse the print of the fibred surface of the papyrus. The letter or document had been folded into a flat packet 3 to 8 cm. wide and of indeterminable length (probably 12 to 25 cm.). On top of this a pat of clay was laid. The string was tied around the middle of the packet over the clay. Half the pat was folded back over the string and stamped with one impression of a seal. All the other sealings are of the coarser mud, but are by no means uniform in quality. The mud of many sealings was local and bears traces of local stones while others came from a distance, probably in part from Egypt. The coarser seals fall into two large groups,—those which have been used to seal packages, baskets, and other receptacles dispatched to Uronarti from other places, and those used on doors, boxes, and sacks at Uronarti itself. The different types of sealings may be separated into those with prints of strings and those which have been applied directly to doors and boxes. It is only the string-marked sealings which may have come to Uronarti on parcels dispatched from elsewhere, and of these only a part.

The great majority of the sealings made at Uronarti itself (about 2,500 sealings) were large sack sealings or door sealings stamped with the official stamp of "The Storehouse of the Fortress of Khesef-yuwuw," that is, Uronarti (see Fig. 3, No. 6)¹ or the "treasury" of that fortress (see Fig. 3, No. 7). These represent the periodical operations of adding to the stores and of dealing out rations and supplies to the troops and officials. One curious feature is that the official controlling the sealing of the doors and the sacks did not trust entirely to the sanctity of the official seal, which might have been accessible to a number of other men, but added an impression of his own private seal as an *overstamp* to the official stamp. This fact gives an insight into the red tape of the government administration, and also into the suspicion of their subordinates which lurked in the minds of all superior officials.

There are two other types of sealings which strengthen the impression of general suspicion, and

¹An account of the "Ancient Egyptian Forts at Semna and Uronarti," by Professor Reinier, was published in the Museum Bulletin, No. 163, Oct. 1929, pp. 64-75.

¹The drawings are the work of Hansmartin Handrick, inked by Joseph Bonello.

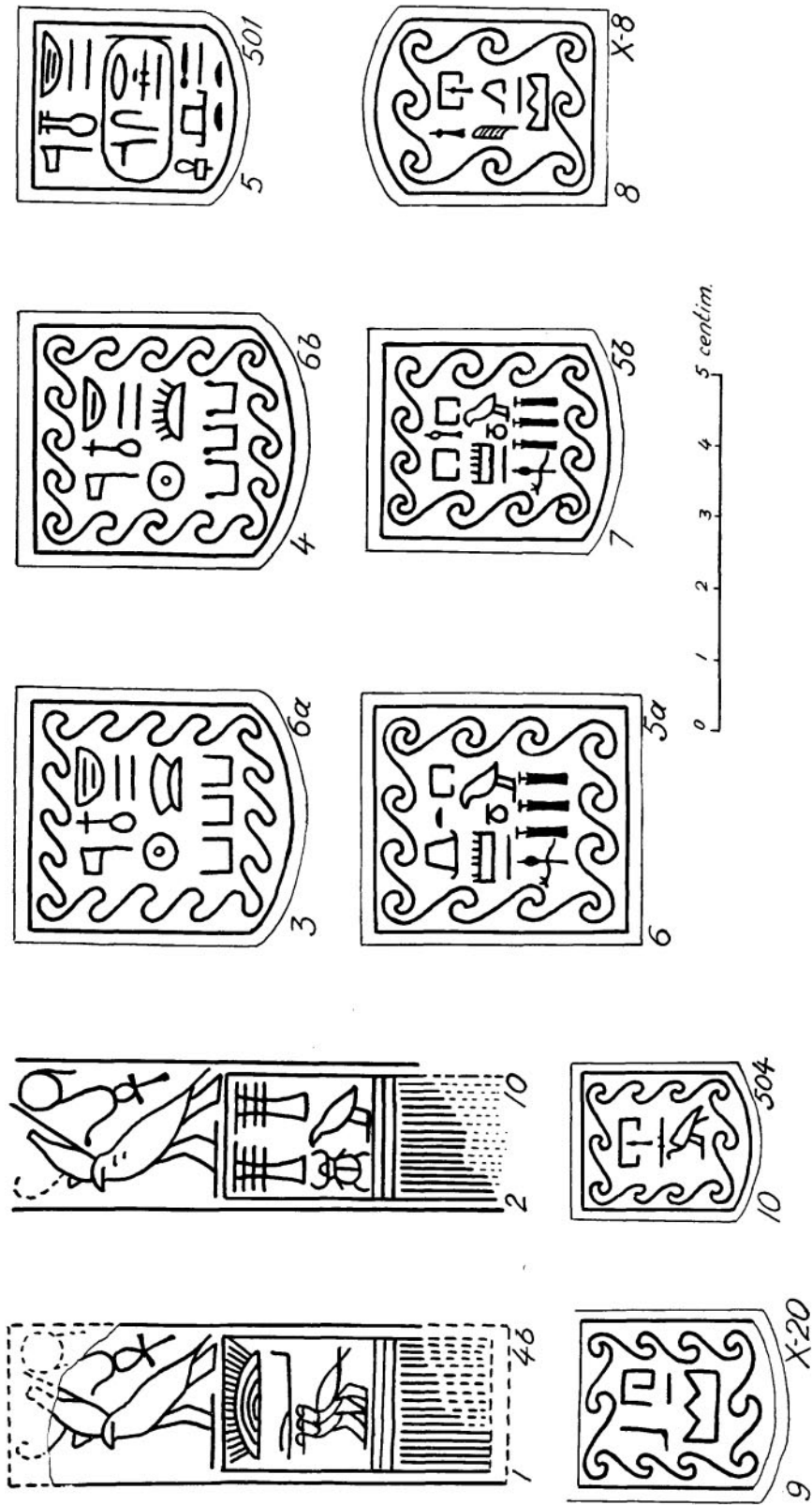


Fig. 3. Official seals: Nos. 3-5, office seals of the temple endowments of Sesostis III; Nos. 6-7, official seals of the granary and treasury of Uronarti fort; Nos. 8-10, store seals of the forts of Tgen, Buhen, and Senmut. Scale: actual size.

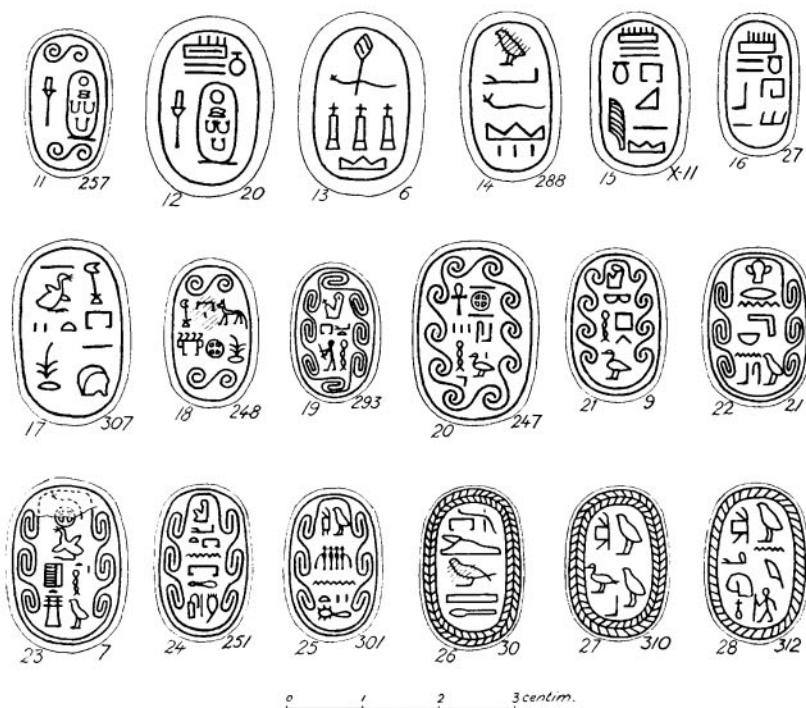


Fig. 4. Nos. 11-16, letter seals of the forts of Semna West (two seals), Uronarti, Sarras, Tqen, and Buhen; Nos. 17-18, letter seals of the Vezir's offices; Nos. 19-28, private seals with names. Scale: actual size.

suggest not only frequent disputes concerning the tampering with parcels and letters in transit, but also occasional claims of trickery on the part of dispatchers and recipients. These are the two kinds of sample sealings, the ordinary sample sealing and the incised sample sealing. The ordinary sample seal consists of a cone or round pat of mud which has not been attached to any object and has been stamped on the top with a single impression of a seal. The sides of the cone or pat of clay show the finger prints of the hand in which it was held while being stamped. One of these sample seals is one of the two official stamps of the fortress of Semna West (*Sekhem-Khakaouwa*), and corresponds to two other impressions of the same seal found on letters at Uronarti. Probably when the seal of Semna West was changed, a copy of the new seal was made and sent to Uronarti for the information of the officials of the latter fort; but the occasion may have been a dispute as to some dispatch. There are six other sample seals of private persons which probably served also to permit some one at Uronarti to control the integrity of sealed packages and letters sent from some other place. There are five other sample sealings which appear to be impressions taken of the original seal-impression on parcels received at Uronarti before breaking the sealings. We suspect that these were taken as a precaution in case the parcel did not contain all that it was alleged to contain by the sender.

The use of seals at all periods is evidence of the suspicion with which men regarded one another in business transactions, and it is a relief to turn from the use of the seals to the designs carved on the stamp side, of which we found nearly 500 examples at Uronarti. Each of these designs was a special mark of an individual, and every seal must be identifiably different from every other seal, at any rate in each province of Egypt. At present in Egypt, where the majority of men have seals inscribed with their name and the date of the cutting, a register is kept by the seal cutters licensed by the provincial governments (the *Mudirias*). We suggest, therefore, that in ancient Egypt a similar register was kept in the capital of each province. In that case even if the same name or the same design was used on two different seals in two different localities, variations in size, in the craftsmanship, and in minor details would make the two seals distinguishable. In fact we found a small number of cases at Uronarti in which the same design appeared on two or more seals. The two seals (Fig. 7, Nos. 22 and 23) present two different sizes of the same design; and also Nos. 24 and 25 in the same figure. In other cases the same design used on two or more seals offers variations in details as well as in size,—for example, the five seals (Fig. 8, Nos. 9-13). In such cases we cannot, however, be sure whether the seals of similar design belonged to different people or were different versions of a design used by one and the

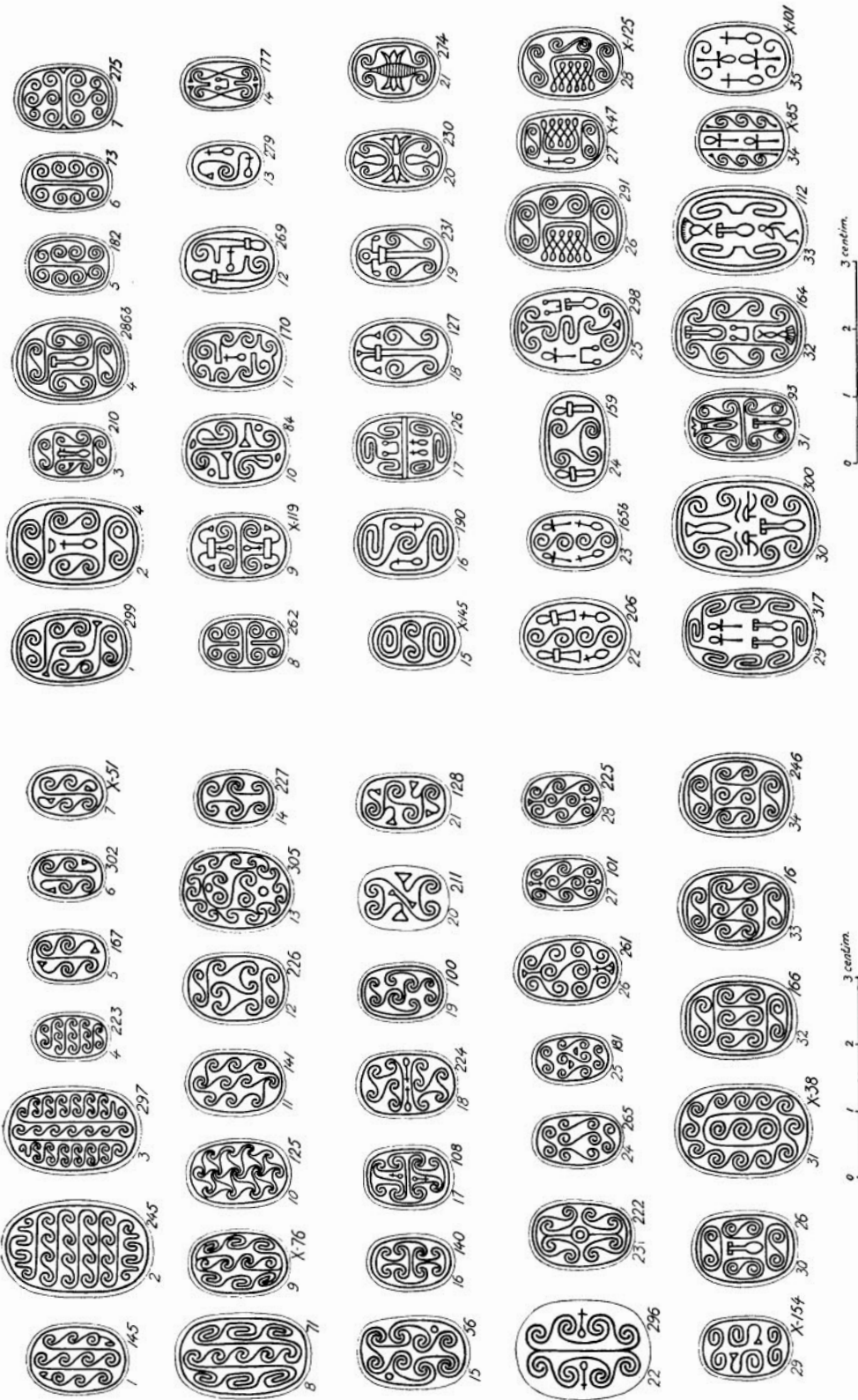


Fig. 5. Private seals with scroll patterns. Scale: actual size.

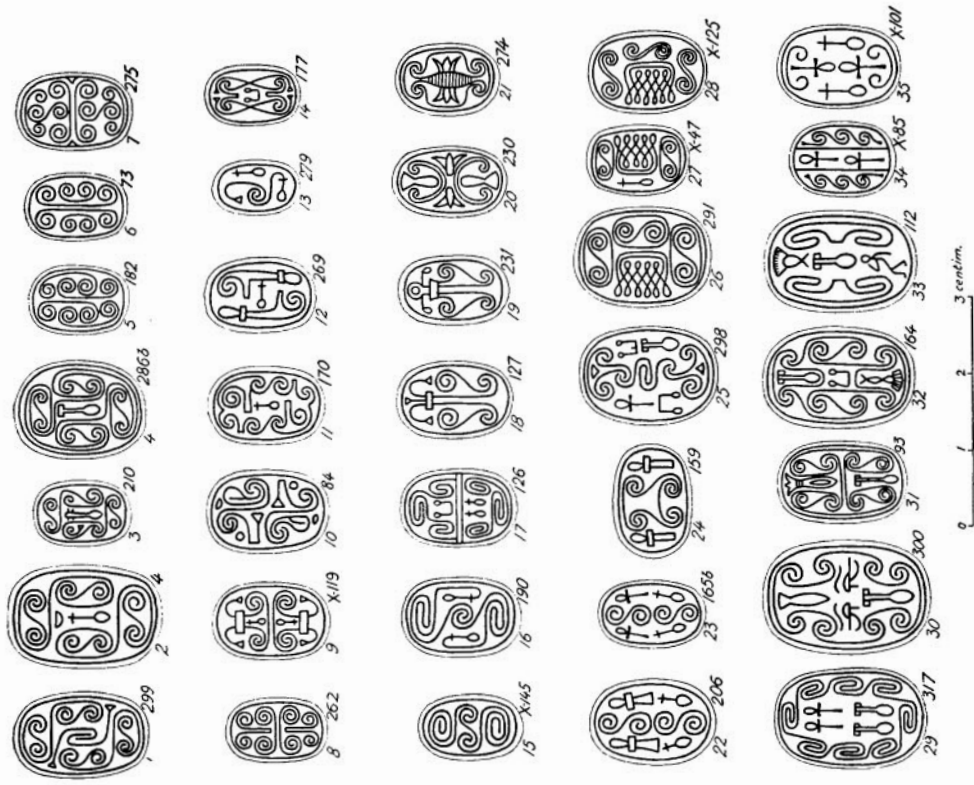


Fig. 6. Private pattern seals: Nos. 1-21, scroll designs; Nos. 22-35, mixed patterns, scrolls, and symbols. Scale: actual size.

same person. A man having registered a design loses or breaks his seal, as happens nowadays. He might be expected to have the same design cut on his new seal and that design would necessarily show small differences from the original seal.

The seal designs found at Uronarti fall into two classes, — official seals and private seals. The official seals include royal seals bearing the name of the king (Fig. 3, Nos. 1 and 2), the seals of administrative officials in Thebes (Fig. 4, Nos. 17 and 18), the seals of the different forts used in official correspondence (Fig. 4, Nos. 11–16), and the seals of the storehouses and treasuries of those forts (Fig. 3, Nos. 6–10), and of the temple endowments founded by Sesostri III (Fig. 3, Nos. 3–5). These official seals are large and well cut but have little ornamentation. The seals of the granaries and the treasuries have at most a scroll with spiral whorls around the edges. The administrative letter seals often have a simple two whorl scroll at top and bottom. The private seals fall into two classes, — those with name and those with a pattern. The name seals (Fig. 4, Nos. 19–28) are enclosed in a scroll or rope border or a plain line border, and are identifiable by the name and title. Many of these are fine pieces of workmanship but present little opportunity for artistic invention.

The great mass of the private seals bear however no name and are identifiable only by the variations of pattern. A very large number present variations of the scroll design. Figs. 5 and 6 show 69 variations, but there are many more. The seal-engraver had a full knowledge of the possibilities of the scroll with connected whorls, with disconnected whorls, with reversed whorls, and with whorls ending in small buds or flowers, and appears to have invented each seal individually at the command of the owner. But he used other elements in pattern seals, such as looped cords, twisted rope, rosettes, and tied flowers (Fig. 7). He also had at his disposal a set of amuletic signs or symbols, — “life,” “good,” “prosperity,” “endurance,” “the king,” etc. In Fig. 6, Nos. 22–35 show the combination of these symbols with scrolls, while Fig. 8 shows variations in the grouping of the symbols.

The number of name seals (as Fig. 4, Nos. 19–28) found on the Uronarti sealings amounted to 51 seals; the pattern seals (Figs. 5–7) to 191, of which 69 had scroll designs; and the symbol seals to 205. The private seals with obscure or fragmentary designs add 26 to the above, making a total of 483 seals, of which only 149 are represented in the illustrations.

With the elements partly geometrical and partly symbolic which are illustrated in the figures, the engraver seems to have invented a great number of different designs. Many more probably existed which have not been preserved and undoubtedly even these did not exhaust the possibilities of variation. The cost of the seal depended upon the size of the stamp and the intricacy of the design. It may be taken in general that the large, fine seals

belonged to more important persons. But whether the seal be expensive or not, the design shows the fine taste of the Egyptian craftsman, his sense of proportion and balance. Perhaps no great ability was required to multiply the designs, once the basic types were invented and the methods of variation developed; but the basic designs and the types of variation show a creative faculty which was characteristically Egyptian. Much has been said of the foreign origin of the scroll with spiral whorls; but spiral whorls, disconnected it is true, are common in the decorations of the predynastic Egyptian pottery long before the time of any known foreign examples. The motive is so simple and so obvious in many forms of shells that it may well have arisen quite independently in several different cultural areas. The spiral whorl and the scroll both appear made of gold or silver wire in jewelry as early as the Old Kingdom and it may be that the *motifs* of the seal patterns of the Middle Kingdom are to be traced to this form of metal work.

Unfortunately we know nothing of the engravers who cut the seals with which the clay sealings of Uronarti were stamped. They were all probably resident in Egypt itself. The craftsmen who cut the royal and administrative seals (Figs. 3–4, Nos. 1, 2, 17, 18) were of course the court engravers in Thebes. It seems to me likely that they also engraved the other official seals of the fortresses and storehouses (Figs. 3–4, Nos. 3–16). The important officials whose seals appear in Figs. 3–8 were probably attached to the central administration at Thebes and had had their seals cut in the capital city. These finer seals show a very similar technique as if engraved by the same shops. But there are a number of seals with heavy lines and crude cutting which manifestly show the workmanship of a provincial school. The sealings on which these crude seals were stamped came to Uronarti perhaps on packages or sacks of goods sent from Assuan Province.

The sealings give us a vivid picture of one side of the life of the garrison. The king of Egypt and the ministries in Thebes sent out orders and instructions. The commanders of the other forts corresponded frequently with him of Uronarti, no doubt in connection with supplies and the business of guarding the river traffic. The food supplies and stores were carefully watched, and resealed after every transaction involving the receipt or issue of rations. The storehouses at other forts *occasionally* dispatched goods of some sort to Uronarti. And there was either an officer of the temple endowment of Sesostri III at Uronarti or certain supplies were sent to the island from the endowment office at Semna. The greater part of the official sealings were found about the temple in the southwest quarter of the fort or in the “Commandant’s House” at the north end, and with these were many private sealings. But there were also a few small houses in which masses of private sealings were found, and we have no doubt these

houses were the quarters of merchants who lived in the fort and dealt in all sorts of goods with the soldiers. Some of them also exported Sudan goods to Egypt for private account, working under the protection provided by the king for the royal import and export business with the south. G. A. R.

N. F. W.

Two Pallava Marble Pillars

THE two very elegant marble columns here illustrated, each consisting of a monolithic fluted shaft and separate ribbed bulbous capital, and measuring 2.515 metres in height over all, were purchased some time since from the Charles Amos Cummings Fund, and are exhibited in Room A3. All that is known about their origin is that they are said to have come from a district to the north of Madras.

A comparison with the four central columns of the rock-cut Mahiṣasura Maṇḍapam at Māmalla-puram (the well-known Pallava site, often called the "Seven Pagodas," thirty miles south of Madras) will establish beyond doubt that the Museum pillars must have belonged to the porch of a temple of the early middle Pallava period. One of these columns is shown in the accompanying figure; in the words of Mr. Longhurst, "The shafts of the pillars are sixteen-sided with plain unfinished bases, cushion capitals with a square abacus, cubical block stone, and deep unfinished corbel brackets supporting the architrave."¹ The Museum pillars must have belonged to a structural, not a rock-cut shrine; but the Māmallapuram example shows how they must have been completed in the same way by a thin square abacus and corbel brackets. The tenons projecting upwards from the detachable cushion capitals of the Museum pillars no doubt connected with these superior elements. The Māmallapuram shrine may be dated between A. D. 625 and 675, perhaps nearer to the earlier than to the later limit.

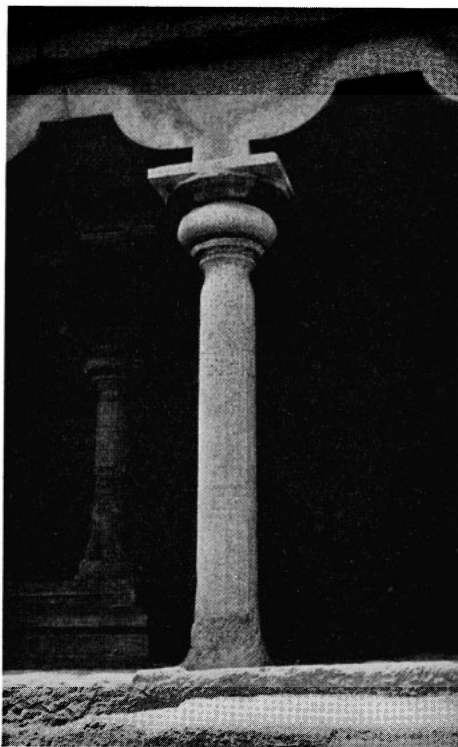
There are no known masonry-built Pallava shrines of precisely this type extant; the slightly later structural temples at Kāñcipuram have indeed pillared porches, but the pillars are of the more usual Pallava type, commonly seen also at Māmallapuram, in which the column rests not directly on a ground pedestal, but on a sedent lion, which forms about one-third of its height. However, it is not to be doubted that other structural types existed; and if Mahendravarman's inscription at Maṇḍagapattu speaks only of such as were built of brick, timber, metal, and mortar,² this negative evidence is not sufficient to warrant our exclusion of hewn stone as a building material used in some of the structural shrines which must have existed in and before his day, and equally certainly formed the models of the rock-cut excavated examples at Māmallapuram.

As more probably models than copies of the

¹Longhurst, A. H., *Pallava architecture*, II, Mem. Arch. Surv. India, No. 33, 1928, p. 34 and Pl. XXIV, a. Cf., also Temple No. 3, *ib.*, Pl. VII, b, with very similar columns of rather coarser execution.

²Jouveau-Lubreuil, *Conjeevaram inscription of Mahendravarman I*, Pondicherry, 1919.

Māmallapuram pillars, one is inclined to date the Museum pillars before A. D. 625. Additional grounds for this may be found in their probable source. There can be little doubt that the provenance "north of Madras" is correct so far as it goes; but it would be safe to go farther, and say that in all probability the pillars came from the Kistna-Godāveri delta, the ancient Veṅḡi, the homeland of the Āndhras, and now the Guṇṭūr and Bezwāḍā Districts. A marble similar to that of the Museum pillars is here found abundantly, and it had been employed under the Āndhras from the second century B. C. to the third century



*Pillar of the Mahiṣa Maṇḍapa, Māmallapuram
7th century*

A. D. in the construction of Buddhist shrines, notably at Amarāvati, Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, Goli, Jaggayapeṭa, and other less known sites. The Pallavas succeeded the Āndhras in the same area, after the third century, and, like their predecessors, had been Buddhists; Siṃhavarman (acc. 437), though already ruling from the southern Pallava capital at Kāñcipuram, is still recorded to have presented an image at Amarāvati. Mahendravarman above alluded to (r. 600-625) was originally a Jaina, but was converted to Śaivism and turned against his former co-religionists, destroying their principal monastery; all later Pallava kings were predominantly Śaiva. Some persecution of Buddhists and Jains seems to have taken place. Mahendravarman's recorded act of destruction suggests the possibility that in some instances older material