

## TOWARD A GLYPHTIC CHRONOLOGY IN LATE HELLADIC III\*

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*Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen  
Siegel*

This report is based predominantly on the material which the author assembled in Greece for the *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*, Vol. V (Kleinere Griechische Sammlungen; henceforth *CMS*), the publication of which should not and cannot here be anticipated.<sup>1</sup> Thus a limitation on the results of this inquiry is necessary. Following are a few general observations on the state of research regarding seal chronology.

The different reviewers of volumes IV, VII, and VIII of the *Corpus*, among others, have in nearly the same manner criticized the very detailed chronological arrangement of seals, which almost without exception are not from scientific excavations. Sir Arthur Evans and later J.D.S. Pendlebury assigned Minoan seals occasionally to the fine letter designations (for example, MM IIIA, i.e., Middle Minoan IIIA) of the ceramic sequence. In various essays and in the aforementioned volumes V.E.G. Kenna has gone yet a step further, making use of the refined chronology for the Late Bronze Age of A. Furumark. Thus seals are assigned, for example, to the sub-phases LM IIIA1 (Late Minoan IIIA1) or on the mainland LH IIIA1 (Late Helladic IIIA1). In numerous articles, V.E.G. Kenna has explained the fixed points he utilizes for the organization of Late Minoan material. These foundations cannot be closely explored here. But the basis for his dating of Mycenaean seals does not emerge from his writings. One assumes that he gets his bearings from his chronological scheme for Minoan glyptic, and uses it in similar fashion for Helladic glyptic. Apropos of this method, it must be asked where Kenna obtains absolute certainty in the attribution of seals in Western European and American collections to either Minoan or Helladic production. In his dividing up of seals from the tholos tomb of Vapheio, the pieces were still separated into three categories, namely Minoan, Minoan-Mycenaean, and Mycenaean.<sup>2</sup> In later works, however, doubtful cases are almost never identified as Minoan-Mycenaean. H. Biesantz and later A. Sakellariou in their disserta-

tions found structural distinctions between Late Minoan and Mycenaean glyptic and strove for an absolute division for seals which did not derive from excavations, often on criteria as limited as those of Kenna.<sup>3</sup> Biesantz and Sakellariou are, however, cognizant of these circumstances.

In the ordering of the material in volumes VII and VIII of the *Corpus*, Kenna employed a continuous stylistic development for Late Helladic glyptic. Biesantz and Sakellariou arrived at other results in their research. In "List 2" of his work Biesantz presented a rather large number of seals which, in his opinion, are dated by accompanying finds and provide an unbroken chronological series. Furthermore he observed (pp. 57-58): "If one were to stop with the establishing of this series, it is conceivable that on stratigraphic grounds one could in fact attribute a specific group of seals to every ceramic phase.

"It becomes immediately clear that this idea is an illusion when one becomes aware of the two underlying assumptions. The first is that the time in which the seals were produced is always contemporary with that of the datable accompanying excavated objects. The second is that in every period glyptic and ceramic have a parallel development; that is, for every ceramic subgroup there exists a clearly recognizable and corresponding style in glyptic." V.E.G. Kenna evidently had adopted these assumptions himself. Biesantz continues: "Against this one must take into account that seals were handed down from generation to generation and thus were buried in a (ceramically) later period. Also, there is no reason to believe that all the classes of monuments of a particular artistic sphere must always have a synchronous development in their style. . . . With glyptic, one would rather expect (especially if it were a question of a family coat of arms) a conservative restraint that kept up only with the major stages of style development.

"The chronological succession in our (seal chronology) list means nothing without further reference

to attributed seals. The lists only record which seals were found in a particular chronological context, not, however, that they are characteristic of it."

The contexts adduced by Biesantz in his List 2 which in his opinion are securely dated are to be judged quite differently. Thus, for example, he dated tholos tomb 26 at Mycenae (L. 2F) only with the help of steatite relief vessels (the pottery is unpublished); on the dating of this grave B. Kaiser has taken a stand in his article.<sup>4</sup> Biesantz dated tholos tomb 24 of the same necropolis (L. 2P) with the help of a silver cup decorated with inlaid heads of men; however, even the other finds from graves documented long ago often do not provide secure contexts for the accompanying seals. In his stylistic analysis Biesantz draws seals from his List 2, in spite of his earlier observations (pp. 69ff.), as definite representatives of Late Helladic I, II and III. He accepted then at least the rough dating of the contexts as more or less secure, without verifying whether he proceeded from the correct supposition that these seals actually correspond to the same period as the contexts. Also, he based his analysis on the examination of relatively few examples. Briefly, the results are as follows: in LH I the "free movement" style was predominant while in LH III one finds "abating movement," which appears as both a "dissolving" and a "stiffening." Lastly, in LH II the early and late styles meet one another. Only a very rough dating is possible for seals which can be recognized as Mycenaean (p. 80).

A. Sakellariou in her thesis arrived at similar results which confirmed, modified, or completed his views in particular details (pp. 104 ff.). She also recognized three styles which may be referred to here as A (Minoan), B (Mycenaean) and C (a combination of the two) (p. 111). Following their advent all three styles exist next to one another and she comes to the conclusion that Mycenaean seals cannot on stylistic grounds be dated precisely (pp. 110 and 136). A group of seals which is generally considered at the end of Mycenaean glyptic points to the LH IIIC phase (p. 108). In her investigations she bases her opinions on securely dated seals from chronologically closely limited contexts which she presents on page X of the introduction of *CMS I*.

Kenna's conceptions stand opposite those of Biesantz and Sakellariou. Till now the latter two have doubtless offered the best arguments. Yet, in my opinion we must still someday succeed in verifying the chronological scaffolding with the help of new, firmly dated seal finds before we can affirm or challenge the correctness of their arguments. This

is a complex and protracted undertaking, which perhaps cannot be carried out at all, or can be only imperfectly, by means of available material from modern scientific excavations for the entire Mycenaean epoch. Yet the basis provided in *CMS I* by the more than 300 seals, especially those from controlled excavations, will soon be broadened in the forthcoming *CMS V*.

By means of this material the late phase of LH glyptic (which up till now has been known through such pieces as *CMS I*, 21-22, 25, 27, 29, 31, 34, 38-39, 210-211, 295-297, 397-403 and mostly dated in LH IIIC<sup>5</sup>) will in particular be better documented. The seals come from nearly all quarters of the Mycenaean mainland and the Aegean islands, from distant provinces as well as the center of Mycenaean culture. The large number of seals as well as the diverse find-spots make it understandable to examine this material as representative of Late Mycenaean glyptic. The earliest examples must still be dated in LH IIIA2, while the latest derive from LH IIIB1-C contexts. On this broadened base, the present chronology of Late Mycenaean glyptic—particularly for seals in private collections and in museums outside of Greece—must be examined anew, as well as the relationship of Mycenaean to contemporary Minoan glyptic.<sup>6</sup>

## NOTES

\*Translated by Paul Yule, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. The original German text appeared in *Die kretisch-mykenische Glyptik und ihre gegenwärtigen Probleme*, ed. F. Matz, Bonn-Bad Godesburg, 1974, pp. 96-100. *Archaeological News* wishes to thank Professor Pini for permission to publish this translation of his article summarizing the current state of research on Late Mycenaean seals.

1. In summer of 1972 the material collected for *CMS V* was substantially expanded and in spring of 1973 concluded. This volume is currently in press. [Ed.'s note—The volume appeared in January, 1976.]
2. V.E.G. Kenna, *Cretan Seals*, Oxford, 1960, pp. 80 f.
3. H. Biesantz, *Kretisch-Mykenische Siegelbilder*, Marburg, 1954, pp. 26 ff. A. Sakellariou, *Mykenaike Sphragidoglyphia*, Athens, 1966, pp. 91 ff., 134 f.
4. "Zur Datierung von Kammergrab 26 in Mykene," in *Die kretisch-mykenische Glyptik*, ed. Matz, pp. 37-57.
5. Sakellariou, p. 108 f. Similarly dated also by Kenna, *CMS VII*, 185-203; *CMS VIII*, 98-99.
6. The author is preparing a corresponding work. In it the relationship of these new seals is to be examined along with the LH IIIB dated seals from Menidi (*CMS I*, 384-389), and the contemporary impressions from Mycenae (*CMS I*, 160-165) and the Palace of Nestor (*CMS I*, 302-382).