Iranian Field Notes 1* On Sasanian Seals

KAMIOKA, Koji

Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa

In memoriam Father de Menasce who was mon maître par correspondance

The following stamp seals, fifty-seven in all, are those purchased, mostly in Shiraz, by me during the 1972–74 stay in Iran. The collection contains no inscribed seals with exceptions of No. 21 which is genuine and No. 19 the inscription of which is a later addition. To my knowledge, those authentically inscribed seem to have been exhausted from the market. Many inscribed seals1) which I saw in Shiraz (one of forgery centers of seals and coins) and elsewhere, are all fakes2). If one has a basic knowledge of inscripational Pahlavi, it is not so difficult, as it turned out to my own surprise, to discern modern inscribed forgeries, simply because characters on them are so falteringly incised3). This fact indicates that present-day forgers have no originals and are forced to cut after photos of inscribed seals which should be reversed on the material. Otherwise, producing much more puzzling pieces would not be such a difficult attempt for the forgers who seem to be quite skillful hands, apparently well supplied

---

* I plan to publish some five articles under this cover title the first of which is the following. All these five or so, as by-products of my doctoral dissertation, were written up or at least put into a draft form in the period of 1972–74 that I was in Shiraz, Iran on the Travelling Fellowship of Harvard-Yenching Institute to which I can find no adequate word to thank with. My debt is also not less to Dr. Mahyar Navabi and the staff of the Asia Institute, Pahlavi University who generously encouraged me to use all the facilities including its collection of art and archaeological books which once belonged to the late Professor Pope and Professor Ackerman. Prof. Richard N. Frye, my thesis adviser, was most kind and helpful, this time also. He read my draft and offered valuable suggestions. Last but never least, I wish to express my sincere thanks to THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES OF ASIA AND AFRICA which gave me generous two-year leave of absence and to every one of her staff who assured me of his whole-hearted support (November 1975).

1) Those belong to the group of Bivar 1969: ZA 1–5 in the shapes of ‘bezel’ and ‘dome’ (for these terms, see ibid., pp. 142 ff.)

2) The only case of exception is the bezel cornelian piece I saw in Chahār Bāgh, Esfahān. Unfortunately the storekeeper failed to offer me the blackish gum ball which is usually brought into use in antique shops so as to show customers an imprinted image and I dared not to copy the inscription. My guess, not unfounded, was a common ‘p̲t̲nb ‘L yazd ‘n. In passing he asked 700 toman for that piece while the other uninscribed ranged from 400 toman upward in his shop.

3) Good forgeries are not easy to detect except by inscribed letters. It is not infrequently the case that uninscribed forgeries look more real and old at the first glance.
with old gemstones for recutting\(^4\).

One characteristic of the seals introduced in this paper is that they represent those of lesser quality, probably those which once belonged to non-prestigious classes\(^5\). The objects of this type, it seems, are not fairly represented in museum collections or well-known private ones. If one studies, to illustrate, Bivar 1969\(^6\) or Borisov/Lukonin, one may well have an impression that more or less about twenty percent of all the pieces (and in the case of the Foroughi Collection, almost over 99 percent!)\(^7\) are inscribed and that more than ninety percent of them are well executed. However, it would prove to be quite inaccurate a picture. So far as I can judge\(^8\), inscribed stamp seals will never amount in number up to even five percent of the whole pieces produced in the Sasanian period\(^9\), and furthermore, not less than the half of them are more crudely done than those of average quality in Bivar 1969 or Borisov/Lukonin or Frye 1971 or Göbl 1973\(^10\).

\(^4\) They are normally not found in established shops, for example, in Khâbân-e Ferdowsi, Tehrân. But one can always see several of them on junk peddler's mats in Darvâz-e Esfahân, Shiraz, to name one. See one uncarved piece of decorated ellipsoid in Frye 1973, p. 40 and plate 5, No. 26.

\(^5\) We are not in a position to attribute these uninscribed seals to any specific social class or classes; hence 'non-prestigious' at the present. The subjects preferred to not seem to indicate any differences in class or rank, with, for example, an exception of male portraits which are of high quality, normally accompanied with inscriptions. So far as one follows common sense, on the other hand, one could safely presume that the quality, which is equivalent to the amount of money extended for the cutting of the seal (cf. Frye 1970c, p. 24), indicates differences in social classes. In this sense ours are folk seals (vs. aristocratic ones). We are also sure that these seals treated here are 'private' ones, not 'official/administrative' except No. 21 (cf. Frye 1970b, especially p. 77; Frye 1968, p. 118).

\(^6\) As a foot note, this book is reviewed by Pierre Amiet in Syria, Göbl in ZDMG and Rika Gyselen in Studia Iranica. One can see also McGuire Gibson's review in JNES and P. R. S. Moorey's in BSOAS, both non-critical.

\(^7\) Needless to say, one should be well prepared to see false inscriptions on much more than several of those in the Foroughi Collection.

\(^8\) Naturally, I am talking impressionistically here. I am personally convinced, however, that my observation is not an overstatement and will prove correct. The difference there is between the composition of reputed collections and that of the Sasanian seals as a whole in the then actualities (if it is to be revealed to us), is due to a simple fact that better executed seals, which are more wanted by collectors, usually bear inscriptions, or, that genuinely inscribed ones mostly—probably without any exception—are carefully engraved.

\(^9\) Thus, Bivar's observation (1969, p. 15) is kind of overstatement: “One of the main points of interest with Sasanian seals lies in the fact that they frequently bear inscriptions.” (my italics)

\(^10\) It should be noted that even our collection does not do justice to those pieces of poor workmanship. They are too crude to excite collector's interest and of such superficial engraving that their impressions are recognized only with difficulty on the gum and on the plate. This must also have been more true when they were actually applied to the clay. Were their clay impressions easy to identify? Probably not, except by the denture
Similar statement holds good with regard to shapes of the Sasanian seals. Quite contrary to the impression one gets from the British Museum Collection that 'bezels'\textsuperscript{11}, or decorated 'ellipsoids' are quite numerous and 'domes' are rather less in number, it seems to me that the shape of the majority of seals consists of domes and undecorated ellipsoids once the whole body of the Sasanian seals could be gathered\textsuperscript{12}.

Here, after my one-year "field" experience concerning those seals on the market, I would like to call attention to a fact of rather crucial importance that if one approaches the Sasanian seals only from the side of museum or reputed private collections\textsuperscript{13} they would not reveal themselves as they had actually been. Their whole picture will only be gained after those seals, largely of lesser quality, which have so far been left out on the market and are still much more numerous than those already collected, are gathered and examined. It should be kept well in mind that the Sasanian seals were probably to some extent shared by the people as well as the nobility while those of the Achaemenian period seems to have been limited for the use of high bureaucracy\textsuperscript{14}.

done by the size of a seal itself, which again does not serve as any definite means of identification because there are found many seals whose size and shape are identical. Here again, by way of caution, it is to be remembered that we could not judge the whole picture of the Sasanian seals from those clay sealings unearthed at Takht-e Soleiman, Qasr-e Abū Nasr (see Frye 1973) and those in the Foroughi Collection (see Frye 1968), since there seem to have been employed only those of good quality. Furthermore, to be emphasized is that such pronounced variations in the quality of engraving seem to indicate distinction between 'prestigious' and 'non-prestigious' classes and partly, as is pointed out by P. R. S. Moorey, p. 68, between 'court' and provincial artisans, rather than any significant chronological interval. Here also lies the importance of collecting Sasanian seals of lesser quality.

11) 'Bezel' (in describing the shapes of seals I follow Bivar 1969, pp. 142 ff.) is almost synonymous with good quality and these pieces are very frequently inscribed. And forgery makers know this fact well. The majority of Shiraz forgeries are at once 'bezel' in shape and limply inscribed.

12) According to Bivar's tentative chronology (Bivar 1969, p. 24) 'dome' mostly belongs to the fifth to the sixth centuries A.D., while 'bezel' is of the third to the fourth centuries. We are simply leaving out chronological consideration in our present statement. It remains true, of course, that the later they are the more chance they stand to survive, and at the same time I presume that the more were produced in the late Sasanian period provided that Bivar's chronology is correct.

13) That is, so far as they are selective in buying or collecting and they are in fact. The best collection—in the sense that it could reveal what and how the Sasanian seals really were—would be that of Dr. Nayeri's, reported by Frye 1970c. It contains over one thousand pre-Islamic pieces, according to Frye, obtained on the principle of buying total hoards without discrimination. Unfortunately Frye, ibid. treats only those inscribed in the collection.

14) Therefore, Frankfort's dogmatic statement on cylinder seals is certainly not applicable to those of the Sasanian period (p. 156): "The mediocre and poor seals would, as always, be mere imitations of the better examples and lack a meaning of their own."
Before getting into the details of each piece\(^ {15} \), I want to note, as another characteristics of the seals treated here, first, that the material of No. 2 is glass of purple color\(^ {16} \), one of the two whose place of discovery is known, and that its recutangular shape is of quite rare occurrence, especially non-bezel recutangular one\(^ {17} \), and, that, secondly, our collection contains one piece of baked clay, the material which is not introduced so far, and that, thirdly, six iron seals are included\(^ {18} \). Also I would like to point out that the present list adds several new subjects to those so far published.

I follow Bivar 1969 in arrangement\(^ {19} \). Place of purchase, unless otherwise noted, is Shirâz (Tehrân: Nos. 24 and 39; Esfahân: Nos. 14 and 17; Sanandaj: Nos. 18 and 25); place of discovery is known only with No. 2 (Arsenjân, Fârs)

\(^{15}\) I have to admit that my documental reference is far from satisfactory. For example, I had no access to half the items of those “Grundliteratur” listed in Göbl 1973, pp. 33 f.

\(^{16}\) Among the British Museum Collection of about 800 Sasanian seals, glass material is found only in one piece (EE 9 [=119948]). Bivar 1969, p. 34 offers two hypotheses for explaining of scarcity of glass seals: “The centre of the glass industry in antiquity was of course Egypt, and one line of explanation would be that the large-scale manufacture of glass in Iran did not commence until late in the Sasanian period. . . . Another possibility would be that the bazaar jewellers through whose hands the majority of Sasanian gemstones have passed to the west considered ‘paste gems’ of little value or interest, and took no trouble to collect them.” The weakness of Bivar’s former argument is that any Sasanian stamp seals would have consumed very little of glass. The latter reasoning seems to be more probable. It may induce some indirect confirmation from my experience that this glass seal (No. 2) was only asked for fifteen toman while thirty to fifty toman is generally charged for average stone seals in the same store. Furthermore, glass seals were supposedly no prestigious objects to carry around, like plain glass beads, as compared with those made of semi-precious stones. Attention may be called here also to the fact that both the piece of the British Museum and that of our collection are crudely engraved. On the other hand, probable difficulty involved in engraving glass material may be another reason; in this connection, compare one finely-cut iron piece in our collection (No. 25, also see Frye 1971, No. 149) which seem to have been in all likelihood much more appreciated than those of glass in spite of more difficulty in cutting.

\(^{17}\) All the recutangular pieces, five in all, in the British Museum are of ‘bezel’ type (see Bivar 1969, p. 72). In the Foroughi Collection four are listed, among which only two seem to be non-bezel, that is, recutangular yet not so flat (Frye 1971, Nos. 17 and 20). However, one may assume the pre-Sasanian origin of the seal in question.

\(^{18}\) Strange enough, none of iron seals is listed in Bivar 1969. Neither does Göbl 1973 (cf. pp. 23 f, §24). Out of the 209 seals in the Foroughi Collection only a single piece is of iron (Frye 1971, No. 149). So far as the Sasanian seals are concerned, I have been more than forty iron pieces on the market, six of which are described in the paper.

\(^{19}\) In so doing I am not completely happy with Bivar 1969, a long established—since Thomas (1852)— method of classification after the subjects, cf. Amiet, p. 144: “Faute de pouvoir adopter une classification chronologique, fondée sur les inscription ou sur la former des cachets, l’auteur a dû, à regret, se contenter d’une classification par sujets, fatalement arbitraire lorsque ceux-ci sont mal définissable.” (But it does not seem to me that Pierre Amiet understand difficulties of the Sasanian seals. The Sasanian seals on the one hand and Near Eastern cylinder seals on the other do pose before us often totally different
and No. 6 (back of sugar-refinery, Marvdasht, Fārs). The material is of stone\(^{20}\), unless otherwise commented. Appellation of seal shapes, as already noted, are after Bivar 1969, pp. 142 ff.

No. 1

2.1×1.9 cm., height of the seal 1.3 cm.; flat irregular dome (see the plate).

Profile bust of man to right, executed in a crude yet expressive touch, with an unusual horizontal line below. Characteristic eye and mouth. Cf. Bivar 1969, the AG group. This seal is cut in a stone with very slight working.

Ackerman writes about a similar male bust in her own collection in p. 792: “The head of the young man as it is rendered in the radical pattern also sometimes appears separately (Fig. 272) without any of the factors that characterize contemporary portraits, however abstract, so that we can

\(^{20}\) At present I cannot identify stones; I do not scruple to omit their description since it is evident that my collection includes no uncommon gemstones.
assume that this depicts one of the human avatars [of Verethragna]." No. 2
1.4 x 1.5, ht. 1.4; see the preceding statement and the plate; purple glass.
Profile bust of man to right, with two uncertain symbols in the right space. Discovered at Arsenjân, Fârs. As for further description, see the preceding item.
No. 3
1.2 x 2.0, ht. 1.9; undecorated ellipsoid.
Pigtailed Magus walking to right, holding before him a spray (barsom) with both hands, the leaves upwards, cf. Bivar 1969, the BD group: "Figure of Magus", especially Nos. 7 and 10 (wearing pigtail) and Nos. 8 and 10 (holding before him a barsom with both hands); Göbl 1973, Tafel 2.4 a. Also Bivar 1969, CC 11 may be referred to.
No. 4
2.1 x 2.6, ht. 2.6; dome.
The frontal figure is what is conventionally described as 'Gayômard' (Bivar 1969, The BF and BG group), with a stylized animal below. On left under the arm, a (Y) design. On right above the arm, traces of some symbol but more than half of it lost. Below middle from right above to down left, a deep, thick line while all the other parts are superficially executed. It looks due to deliberate doing. "Gayômard" is one of the possible cases of astrological identification: "This grotesque anthropomorphic figure" can hardly other than a Sasanian representation of the Orion, complete with the dog that usually accompanies him on western star-map." (Bivar 1969, p. 26) The dog is otherwise a very rare animal on the seals. Bivar 1969, for example, confirms only one or two cases in EK 1 and EK 2 (with "?" in his treatment of about 800 seals. Göbl 1973, p. 37

21) The parenthesized part is to be understood from the contexts. I agree with Ackerman in assigning this subject to 'avatar', but care should be taken of her tenacious tendency to reduce many subjects to the astrological or the 'avatar' categories. They may have had their origin in these specific categories, but it is another matter whether they were understood as such in the daily usage. As a rule of thumb, it would be safer to avoid astrollogizing or 'avatar' izing, cf. Amiet's sober criticism against Bivar's assignment of a female figure (CB 1) to Anâhîtā (p. 145) although in my opinion Bivar is right here.

22) To be noted is Burchard Bretnes' observation of this anthropomorphous figure (p.14):
"Dieser Gayomart findet sich auf mehreren Amulettten oder Gemmen der Sasanidenzeit dargestellt—und er ist weit äffischer, als wir uns heute selbst den >Alt menschene vom Typ des Peking=Menschen vorstellen. Er steht da als >Affenmensch mit langem Pelz und spitzen Tierohren." Whether he is correct or not, some Gayômards do look like "Affenmensch," and the monkeys count among human beings in Bundahishtn. (TD1, 8235−8231=TD2, 1000−1).

23) Note Amiet's suggestion to connect 'Gayômard' back to the images in the Luristan bronze pins found at Surkh Dum (p. 145, cf. Note 84) below.
identified the animal with “Ratte”. Göbl seems to be correct; see, for instance, BF 3 where the animal is beyond doubt a rat\(^{24}\). For ‘Gayômard’ in the Ermitage Museum, see Borisov/Lukonin, Nos. 760 ff.\(^{25}\); for those in the Metropolitan Museum, see von der Osten, Nos. 21–27; also see Göbl 1973, Tafel 1. la/b/d.

No. 5.

3.4×3.3, ht. 2.9; dome (or conoid) [see the plate]\(^{26}\).

Frontal Gayômard. A deep flaw in the middle is original to the stone, but a short, thick vertical line under the right leg is deliberate.

No. 6

2.1×2.1, ht. 2.0; dome.

Frontal Gayômard. This is the best-executed piece of the group I happened to meet in the market. A remain of wire can be seen on both sides of the holes (see the plate). A flaw under the right leg which probably caused by a deliberate cut intended to make a deep, thick line\(^{27}\) as can be noticed in Nos. 4 and 5. Discovered at “posht-e kårkhâne-ye qand”, Marvdasht, Fârs, by the hand of a farmer.

No. 7

2.0(above)/2.3(below)×2.1, ht. 1.9; irregular dome.

Gayômard to right, unaccompanied with an animal.

No. 8

0.9(above)/1.1(below)×1.9, ht. 1.9; dome.

Same as above. The stone shape the width of which increases in the lower part seems to be one of peculiarities to the group under consideration; one can see another example of this type in Bivar 1969, BF 12. Further, see No. 11 below.

No. 9

1.1×1.7, ht. 1.9; dome.

Same as above.

No. 10

\(^{24}\) Von der Osten, p. 235, was much cautious in describing a ‘Gayômard’ piece: “A bearded man, front view both arms outstretched and holding in each hand a stick or lance decorated at the end with a star(?) stands with spread legs above an animal.” (my italics) So is Frye 1968 in describing Nos. 58 and 72 (‘Gayômard’).

\(^{25}\) I refer only to the plate section of Borisov/Lukonin with a view to avoiding any guess on my part.

\(^{26}\) Bivar 1969 does not give any classifying norm of ‘dome’ and ‘conoid’, a point which may be criticized.

\(^{27}\) The line, therefore, is supposed to be meaningful. I have, however, no theory to propose at hand. A similar line is detected on No. 72 ‘Gayômard’ of the Foroughi Collection. One does not notice such line in the British Museum Collection, the collection of the Metropolitan Museum and Göbl 1973.
0.65×2.05, ht. 1.9; pebble shape (see the plate).

Same as above.

No. 11
1.8(at its widest)×2.5, ht. 3.0; pebble shape (see the plate).

Same as above.

Before leaving ‘Gayomard’ it seems to be in order to add general observations on this group. First, the subject, strongly schematized, must be the easiest for engravers. As a matter of fact, Gayomard pieces, even the very fine ones28, are cut somewhat perfunctorily, as if it were a prescribed rule. This fact may confirm that the motif is magico-religious. Furthermore, one recognizes that Gayomards are among the most superficially cut29 (see, for instance, BF 8–12 of the British Museum and Göbl 1973, Tafel 1.1a). It is reasonably doubtful, therefore, whether these pieces could possibly have made satisfactory marks of identification on clay.

The above observation seems to me to point to a conclusion that the Gayomard pieces were not primarily for sealing but probably—shall we say exclusively?—used as amulets. Many Gayomards are, it seems, meaningfully worn-out on surface (see Nos. 9–10; Bivar 1969, BF 9–11; Frye 1973, p. 38 and plate 4, No. 3; and so many of them circulating on the market). I suspect that those objects used to be manipulated as beads are today in Islamic Iran. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand why Gayomards alone have so much worn, frequently convex surface, such as, for example, No. 3 from Qasr-e Abû Nasr.

This hypothesis may be enforced by another fact that, as far as we can judge at the present moment, no Gayomard seals seem to be attested on bullae or clay sealings30. Moreover, the Foroughi Collection contains no more than two Gayomards (Nos. 58 and 72), simply because generally pieces of the group

---

28 It is immediately noticed, for example, when one compares those in Plate 4 and Plate 7, Bivar 1969 with ‘Gayomard’ seals presented in the facing Plates 5 and 6.
29 No. 6 is the deepest-engraved Gayomard I saw on the market. Most of them are in scratch style, and less deeply engraved than those presented here (note that ‘Gayomard’ is the group most frequently seen on the market).
30 There is no Gayomard motif in the whole body of 505 sealings excavated from Qasr-e Abû Nasr (Prudence O. Harper, “3. Seals and Finger Rings” in Frye 1959, p. 57). In passing, Frye proposed in the First International Congress of Iranists in Tehran, September 1966 that one should distinguish between bullae, or stamped pieces of clay attached to documents, and clay sealings attached to goods and wares. The former in Sasanian times were small pieces of fine clay usually with only one impression on them, whereas the latter were large pieces (on the average 5.0 cm. in diameter and 2.0 thick) usually with many seal impressions on them. See Frye 1970b, p. 79 and, also, cf. Göbl's objection on these terms in Göbl 1971, p. 104.
bear no inscription\(^{31}\). Also, out of the sixteen pieces in the British Museum, no more than one is inscribed and that with "blundered Pahlavi inscription" (Bivar 1969, BF 1) which may be a later addition. The Ermitage Collection offers no inscribed Gayŏmards, either. This situation might be again considered to strengthen our view. It is improbable that 'seals' would have been necessities to such proportion of the Sasanian population as is suggested by the large quantity of remaining seals.

Secondly, Bivar 1969 writes in p. 23 that the conoid shape appears to be restricted to a single group of stone representing the 'Gayŏmard' subject. I had no chance to see more than one unperforated piece\(^{32}\), although I handled many pieces of the motif in question, the group most frequent on the market as is noted already more than once. This may indicate that the conoid Gayŏmard are among those belonging to early Sasanian or pre-Sasanian period.

Finally, we have to add that sixteen Gayŏmards in the British Museum are all facing front with a possible exception of BF 12 which cannot immediately be decided from the plate, whereas ours offers five pieces facing to right (Borisov/Lukonin gives one latter example in No. 762; Frye 1971, one in No. 72; von der Osten, three possible examples out of the seven). Whether the direction of the fact is meaningful is a problem to be solved.

**No. 12**
0.95×1.0, ht. 0.7; dome; iron.

Schematized frontal head. To my knowledge this subject has not been reported so far\(^{33}\), unless it reminds us of 'Gayŏmard'. This bear a strong resemblance to the head, likewise schematized, of Gayŏmard, especially, in No. 4 above and Bivar 1969, BF No. 2\(^{34}\). Or, is it simply a lion's head

---

\(^{31}\) No. 50 is inscribed only on side of stone ("unintelligible", thus most probably a later addition): No. 72 is with "reversed(?) inscription at either side" according to Frye. To me the inscription, whether reversed or not, is illegible and does not seem to be original. If reversed and authentic, it will offer further confirmation of amuletic character of the motif.

\(^{32}\) Bivar 1969 himself does not record any conoid Sasanian 'Gayŏmard' pieces.

\(^{33}\) This subject cannot be connected with any of those frontal male bust in Bivar 1969, AF 2 and 3; Gobl 1973, Tafel 6.7b.

\(^{34}\) Then, could the head alone also represent 'Gayŏmard'? If it does, what becomes of its astoral identification? In this connection, it would be worth while to consider Amiet's suggestion (see note 23) above. And also, would it be too imaginative to connect the so-called 'Gayŏmard' subject to the famous Luristan plaque in the Cincinnati Museum of Art (cf. Ghirshman; and other similar Luristan bronze plaques one of which is presented in Pl. XX—Cat. 229 of Sept Mille Ans d'Art en Iran, Octobre 1961-Janvier 1962 = Kat. 105 of 7000 Jahre Kunst in Iran, 16. Februar bis 24. April 1962 [E. Borowski Collection, Basel])? It seems to me that to reconsider 'Gayŏmard' is now in order. On the other hand, this seal might belong to pre-Sasanian period.
in front view (cf. No. 588 in von der Osten 1924 which may be compared with)?

No. 13
1.7×1.8, ht. 1.6; dome.

Rider to right, with a gazelle right below. Three dots left above near border. Probably a hunting scene. Rider's horizontal cloth lines are characteristic, or it may depict a saddle or be merely decorative, cf. the following horse seal, No. 15. A scene with a rider to right and a game in a similar posture is seen in Borisov/Lukonin, No. 128 with an exception of a bear's figure (?) added on the left. Cf. the rider scenes in Bivar 1969, the BL group and Frye 1971, No. 65, 66 and 67.

No. 14
0.7×0.75, ht. 1.0; undecoarted ellipsoid.

Extended right hand, with thumb and forefinger together in ritual gesture. The depth of touch in the part of the back of the hand indicates that it is the right hand. Cf. Bivar 1969, CH 1–7 and CI 1–6; Frye 1971, Nos. 55 and 57; Göbl 1973, Tafel 6.8a and 8b.

No. 15
1.4×1.45, ht. 1.2; dome.

Horse to right, head down. Crescent above the back of the horse. Cf. Bivar 1969, EC 1–11; Göbl 1973, Tafel 17.48a. Also see Borisov/Lukonin, No. 730 in which a horse's posture is identical.

No. 16
1.1×0.9, ht. 1.1; dome.

35) In relation with this subject Bivar 1969 points out in p. 25 the anecdote of Cornelius Nepos, Roman historian of the first century B.C., and much later Mughol practice of the emperors who were accustomed to affix a miniature impression of a hand, and also the ritual of Mithraism in which the hand clasp played a part. One may also be referred to Frankfort, p. 240 and p. 179, according to which the hand emblem is a "truly Mesopotamian design." Von der Osten writes without giving no reason: "Perhaps the human hand was used thus as a protection against the evil eye" (p. 233). The hand gesture on the Sasanian seals has nothing to do with that of worship or deference to royalty, cf., for the latter topic, Frye 1972.

36) Out of the thirteen 'hand' pieces in the British Museum (the CH and CI groups) Bivar 1969 identified only FH 1 [= Bivar 1968, Plate XV, No. 7] as 'left hand', while describing the others simply by "Extended hand" (Bivar does often lack homogeneity in description of the motifs treated). It would be more natural to recognize the right hand in this pieces as well. Besides the fact that left hand has long been believed to be inauspicious, the finger posture of CH 1 as is clearly seen on the plate cannot be that of the left hand.

37) As for the usage of this and the following seals of small size (= 'private' seals), see Frye 1968, pp. 118 f.

38) This crescent may have no more function than to differentiate otherwise identical or similar pieces (cf. Bivar 1969, pp. 26 f.).
Griffin\textsuperscript{39) }flying to right. Cf. Bivar 1969, the EG group: Borisov/Lukonin, No. 466; Frye 1971, Nos. 158 and 159; Göbl 1973, Tafel 24.67.

No. 17
1.25×1.3, ht. 1.5; dome.

Sphinx or lamassu\textsuperscript{40) }seated to right, wearing a headress, with hatched border. Cf. Bivar 1969, the EH group; Borisov/Lukonin, Nos. 260–270; Frye 1971, Nos. 128–31.

Trever explained the subject with reference to the mythological personage ‘Gōpatschāh\textsuperscript{41) }’. Bivar’s remark, however, should not be neglected: “It seems obvious that the artists’ main inspiration must have been the Gate of Xerxes at the Persepolis.” (Bivar 1969, p. 27\textsuperscript{42})

No. 18
0.8×1.0, ht. 1.4; undecorated ellipsoid.

Humped bull\textsuperscript{43) }standing to right, in upper border of dashes. Cf. Bivar 1969, the EM group; Borisov/Lukonin, Nos. 422, 427, 435 and 436; Frye 1971, Nos. 165 and 166; Göbl 1973, Tafel 20.53. Greater in number is a sitting bull (Bivar 1969, the EN group).

No. 19
1.6×2.2, ht. 0.6; bezel.

Humped bull standing to right, with crescent right below. Inscribed letters\textsuperscript{44) }, a crescent and a graffitti-type symbol far below middle\textsuperscript{45) }are later additions done by another hand, which seems to be evident from direct examination. While the bull is carved confidently, deep and fine, these superficially engraved symbols and letters show unsecure and blundering touch. For reference, see the immediately preceding item.

There remains, however, some suspicion on its authenticity.

No. 20
1.1×0.95, ht. 1.2; irregular dome.

Superficially-cut bull walking to right. Oblique line on the continua-

---

\textsuperscript{39) }The latest monograph on the motif is: I. Flagge, \textit{Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung des Greifen}. Sankt Augustin 1974.


\textsuperscript{41) }This terminology is adopted by Borisov/Lukonin in No. 262 and also by Göbl 1973.

\textsuperscript{42) }Bivar classifies the ‘Gōpatschāh’ group into two subgroups: sphynx (seated) and human-headed bull (standing).

\textsuperscript{43) }For further description, see Prudence O. Harper’s remarkably well-organized chapter: “Representational Motifs of the Sealings”, in Frye 1973, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{44) }Unintelligible as it should be, probably imitated after a common ḫāṯn or ḫāwān.

\textsuperscript{45) }Not seen on the plate.

No. 21
0.7×0.8, ht. 0.8; dome.

Bull's head to right. A Pahlavi inscription beginning from left below to right below upside down, then continuing from right above to left:

\[\text{'sty} \quad \text{rāst} \quad \text{Correct.}' \quad \text{or 'Just.'} \]

Bivar 1969, p. 20 suggests that this term is most easily interpreted as an attestation of the correctness of the document which would bear the seal. The British Museum Collection offers about ten objects inscribed with the word\(^\text{46}\). For the bull's head, see Bivar 1969, EO 6; Frye 1971, Nos. 171 and 172; Göbl 1973, Tafel 20.53g/i.

No. 22
1.0×1.5, ht. 1.6; undecorated ellipsoid.

Winged bull flying(?) to right. It cannot be of a common subject of Griffins. The curved horns are represented full face cf. Bivar 1969, the EG group where twenty items of griffins are presented. Winged bull, if so, does not seem to be so far introduced, besides Frye 1971, No. 160 where it is perfectly clear that the subject is a bull.

No. 23
1.1×1.05, ht. 0.9; dome.

Ram standing to right, with diadem-ties at neck. Dotted border. Three dots right below. The same subject is in Bivar 1969, the EP and the EG group, especially EP 4 (ram standing to right, with diadem-ties at neck; three dots are seen in a similar position). Cf., also, Borisov/Lukonin, Nos. 337 and 339; Frye 1971, Nos. 174 and 176; Göbl 1973, Tafel 21.55. The ram, like a boar, is a possible case of Verethraghna incarnations\(^\text{47}\). Lukonin adds some comment on symbolism of the ram in Borisov/Lukonin, p. 36.

No. 24
1.5×1.4, ht. 1.5; dome; baked clay.

Standing ram(?), looking back, with diadem-ties(?) at neck. Bird-like symbol on left above. Carving, while wrought on clay, is of very poor and slovenly workmanship. Its pre-Sasanian origin may be doubted. For reference, see the preceding item.

No. 25

\(^\text{46}\) See Bivar 1969, p. 125 and p. 126 (under 'sty).

\(^\text{47}\) Cf. Bivar 1969, p. 26 and Ackerman, p. 798.
KAMIOKA, Koji: *Iranian Field Notes 1 On Sasanian Seals* 203

1.6×1.7, ht. 1.65; dome; iron.

Stag sitting to right, in dotted border. Engraving is deep in spite of its material being iron. Cf. Bivar 1969, the FB group for “sitting” stag; Göbl 1973, Tafel 18.51.

No. 26

0.8×0.7; bronze ring.

Stag standing to left. Out of the thirty-nine stag pieces in the British Museum none is with face to left, although eight of them are sitting to right, looking back. Also in Göbl 1973, Tafel 18.51 only one out of seven faces to left. Whether it is significant or not remains to be seen. This signet ring is only 1.7×1.5 in the inside diameter. Therefore it must have been in possession of a lady.

No. 27

1.6×1.0, ht. 1.0; for the shape, see the plate; iron.

Two stags seated, with a single head turned to right. A crescent-like symbol right above. Bivar 1969, FE 1 and 2 are almost identical in stags’ posture. This seal is not perforated, which would show that it was held by an iron bar now completely lost, cf. No. 6 above.

No. 28

1.0×1.2, ht. 1.2; dome.

Uncertain animal, probably ibex to right (?), the lower edge trimmed with wings; As for trimming of wings, see Göbl 1973, Tafel 40, Flügel.

No. 29

1.15×1.1, ht. 0.8; dome; iron.

Gazelle kneeling to right, or superficial engraving. Cf. Bivar 1969, the FH group; Göbl 1973, Tafel 19.52.

No. 30

1.0×0.95, ht. 0.15; bezel; lapis lazuli.

---

48) Some of them look like galloping. Bivar 1969, however, prefers to describe all the pieces in this group as “sitting”, except No. 1 “kneeling?” and No. 9 “sitting(?),” both with a question mark. The stag of No. 7 may be galloping. At any rate, the posture is well stylized and quite alike in all these pieces.

49) It is no surprise. There are three pieces, for example, in the collection of the British Museum on which is inscribed an lady-owner’s name; Now famous ‘Indami’s seal (BB 2) [= Bivar 1968, Plate IV, No. 5] with an inscription in Sogdian script (see Amiet and Moorey); CB 1 [= Bivar 1968, Plate XIV, No. 1] with a name of ‘Pêrdukuht’ in a Pahlavi inscription; CC 1 [= Bivar 1968, Plate XIV, No. 2] with ‘Armindukh’ in Pahlavi.

50) To be noted is that this type of decoration is listed neither in Bivar 1969, pp. 143 f. or in Göbl 1973, Tafel 41.

51) Ours is, however, very much schematized and does not exactly correspond to any of Göbl’s four types of ‘Flügel.’

52) To my knowledge, such pieces, small and superficially engraved with somewhat worn surface, as this are most frequently seen on the market regardless of materials.

**No. 31**
1.2×1.9, ht. 2.45; undecorated ellipsoid.

Nondescript quadruped walking to right, horn like that of a stag. A symbol ’v’ below the mouth which is hard to detect on impression yet clear in the seal itself. Uncertain trace of engraving below the head.

**No. 32**
0.85×1.15, ht. 1.15; undecorated ellipsoid.

Nondescript quadruped(?53) facing left. None similar to this subject is not so far published. The authenticity of this piece is beyond doubt.

**No. 33**
0.8×0.75, ht. 1.15; dome.

Nondescript creature to left, a unique subject. Winged lions may be referred to (*Bivar* 1969, DG 2 and 4 “Forepart of winged lion to right”; Göbl 1973, Tafel 25.69d/e “Flügellöwe, Protome/Profillkopf”).

**No. 34**
0.95×1.3, ht. 1.8; undecorated ellipsoid.

Chicken(?54) standing. *Bivar* 1969, the HF group may be here referred to.

**No. 35**
1.3×1.3, ht. 1.2; dome.


**No. 36**
1.0×1.4, ht. 1.75; undecorated ellipsoid.

Scorpion, cf. *Bivar* 1969, the KA group where all the impressions are presented to right56; Göbl 1973, Tafel 10.20a where a scorpion is presented in the position with head above and tail below.

---

53) We are not sure whether the subject here is a quadruped or biped. In either case, a pole(?5) on the middle of its back is still more puzzling, unless the engraver followed his momentary fancy.

54) I have seen three seals, all superficially engraved, of a similar design on the market.

55) Bivar 1969 does not specify the name of a bird in these types (the HG group). His description is merely “Bird flapping wings” but our identification seems to be a safe one. Göbl is more specific and that more accurate than Bivar in describing subjects, see Göbl’s review of Bivar 1969 in *ZDMG*.

56) As far as the impressions are concerned, there is no ‘scorpion to left’ in nine pieces of the KA group. “Scorpion to left” (KA 1), therefore, is a mistake on Bivar’s part. Correct is Göbl 1973’s upright presentation. See the scorpion seal in the Foroughi Collection, No. 202 which cannot be pressed horizontally; here the inscription starts just above the right claw.
The preceding motifs complete human and animal representation on the seals. Plants are next in order. There are a dozen of them:

No. 37
1.15×(?) [partly lost], ht. 0.85; dome.
Stylized, three-branched plant with a pomegranate flower57) at the top, flanked by birds. Needless to say, this is of the well-known sacred tree motif. The same subject may be recognized in: Bivar 1969, ES 1 (flanked by ram and goat), ES 3 [=Bivar 1968, Plate XVI, No. 9] (by two rams); Frye 1971, No. 179 ("Two mouflons facing central tree with crescent above, and inscription in lower segment.") and No. 80 (a tree flanked by busts of man and woman below and birds above); Göbl 1973, Tafel 22.55k/1, 56a (ram before a tree), 59a/b/e. See also Göbl 1973, Tafel 32.95d (flanked by birds58). Harper is perfectly correct in stating: "The pomegranate flower, singly or in bushes, held by human figures or placed by itself alone, appears on Sasanian seals far more frequently than any other plant form." (Frye 1973, p. 80)

No. 38
1.5×1.55, ht. 1.4; dome.
Schematized tree(?). A short downward line on the left is deliberate. The pre-Sasanian origin of the piece may be suspected.

No. 39
0.8×1.0, ht. 1.2; undecorated ellipsoid.

No. 40
0.9×1.3, ht. 1.7; undecorated ellipsoid.

57) Pomegranates are one of the traditional subjects, see detailed "Granatapfel" in Ernst Weidner and Wolfram von Soden, ed. Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie III. Berlin 1957-71, pp. 616-692.

58) One may still wonder at the rarity of the sacred tree motif (cf. Frankfort, pp. 205 ff.; van Buren, pp. 22 ff.; E. O. James. The Tree of Life. An Archaeological Study. Studies in the History of Religions. [=Supplement to NUMEN, XI]. Leiden 1966, which is trivial). Flowering tree, unaccompanied, cannot readily be proven to represent a sacred tree (Bivar 1969, the LA group; Göbl 1973, Tafel 32.95). They might be intended to be just a tree, cf. the following flower pieces.

59) Bivar 1969 describes of this type merely as "plant with single flower." Whatever it may actually be, this schematized flower carries a long tradition starting from well before the Achaemenian period. In passing, this reminds us of 'fleurs-de-lis'.

60) Again in passing, it seems that no flower seal is inscribed with a single exception of D. 145 in Frye 1973 so far as we can observed from those pieces published. This might be one of distributional characteristics of the Sasanian seals.
32.95b.

No. 41
0.8×1.0, ht. 1.4; undecorated ellipsoid.
   Same as above.

No. 42
0.55×0.8, ht. 1.2; undecorated ellipsoid.
   Same as above.

No. 43
1.0×1.35, ht. 1.45; dome.
   Same as above.

No. 44
0.65×0.9, ht. 1.35; undecorated ellipsoid.
   Plant with single flower in a scratch style.

No. 45
0.95×0.8, ht. 1.15; dome.
   Lotus flower, a subject which has not so far been introduced\(^{61}\).

No. 46
0.9×0.95, ht. 1.2; decorated ellipsoid (see the plate); iron.
   Single leaf. Pre-Sasanian(?).

No. 47
0.7×0.85, ht. 1.1; dome.
   Our choice is either flower or fire altar, in either case well schematized,
   cf. the following No. 48.

No. 48
0.75×1.2, ht. 1.25; dome.
   Schmatized fire altar. Flames are often indicated by several parallel
   oblique lines (see three examples of Göbl 1973, Tafel 33.98).

No. 49
0.75×1.2, ht. 1.25; dome.

No. 50
1.1×1.1, ht. 1.3; undecorated ellipsoid.
   ‘Whirligig\(^{62}\)’. Whorl of four heads, one human, one stag (right), one
   ibex (left) and one uncertain [gazelle?] (below). Cf. Bivar 1969, the MA
   group; Borisov/Lukonin, No. 757; Göbl 1973, Tafel 31.91b.

No. 51
1.3×1.35, ht. 1.0; dome.

\(^{61}\) Should one read something symbolic or magical into the lotus?

"'Device\(^63\)\) with crescent above, inverted letter \(\pi\)\(^64\), and complex element below in dotted border."\(^65\) This is a slightly flattened variant of \textit{Bivar 1969}, NH 6 [\textit{=Bivar 1968}, Plate XVIII, No. 11]. It does not necessarily suggest, however, its being a forgery, for variants of NH 6 are many, cf. the British Museum's NH 1–11 and \textit{Borisov/Lukonin}, Nos. 191–193 and No. 199 which look all practically identical. As a matter of fact, \textit{Frye 1971}, No. 32 shows one piece which is identical with NH 6 except inscription and star added. Cf., also, \textit{Frye 1971}, Nos. 33 and 35.

\textit{Lukonin} proposed in p. 69: "The insignia of this group perhaps were (neshåns) (symbols) of various shrines, according to the data provided by the written sources and inscriptions on the seals bearing these symbols (names of temples, names and titles of priests, religious formulae)." On the other hand, \textit{Bivar 1969}, which largely accepted \textit{Erdmann}, p. 115, searched their origin in a different direction: "It seems likely that their origin was as cattle-brands amongst the nomadic Iranians; and that they later came to be applied as marks of ownership to possessions of many kinds, and also to be used as insignia on armour." (pp. 27f.)

For overall observation, see \textit{Frye 1973}, pp. 53ff.

\textbf{No. 52}

1.0×1.1, ht. 1.05; dome.

'Device' with crescent above, encircled with spray of leaves. This is one of the two most elaborate device pieces I saw on the market. For reference, see the above item.

\textbf{No. 53}

0.6×0.85 (partly lost), ht. 1.1; undecorated ellipsoid.

'Device' with star above and crescent below\(^66\). Cf. \textit{Göbl 1973}, Tafel 33.101 among which two show star above crescent, and one, crescent above star in the reversed order (for the latter, see also \textit{Bivar 1969}, NA 2).

\textbf{No. 54}

0.4×0.8, ht. 0.75; undecorated ellipsoid.

'Device' with crescent subject as upper component and four dots around,

---

\(^{63}\) \textit{Bivar 1959} named the types "devices" = MP \textit{nîšân}. See, also, \textit{Bivar 1969}, pp. 28f. 'Monogram' is not always a happy designation. In passing, some antique dealers call all the stamp seals "neshûn." To them \textit{mohr} is not immediately communicative. As for the etymology of \textit{nîšân}, see Gershevitch 1971.

\(^{64}\) For not wholly convincing attempts at deciphering these 'devices', see de Menasce, \textit{Göbl 1971}, pp. 110 f. and posthumous Junker who apparently did not read de Menasce's article.

\(^{65}\) I borrowed the description of \textit{Bivar 1969}, NH 6.

\(^{66}\) After Ackerman, it is classified, as is generally so with her, among "seals with astral figures" (p. 798), cf. Fig. 275b of the same page where is given in a sketch a seal of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with similar crescent and star design. Von der Osten did not list the same piece.
cf. Bivar 1969, NC 1 and 2\textsuperscript{67}).

No. 55
0.7\times0.6, ht. 0.95; dome.

Another 'device' which has not so far presented. It may be introduced upside down or turned by 90 degrees as well. I don't see any reason for suspecting it of being non-Sasanian\textsuperscript{68}). Notice should be taken of the fact that the subject cannot be assigned to any of the classified categories of Bivar 1969 (see p. 43) and not easily, to any of the system of Göbl 1973\textsuperscript{69}).

No. 56
0.7\times1.5, ht. 1.2; dome.

Device(?). It might be presented upside down. One has here a similar problem of classification as the preceding item.

No. 57 [Forgery]
2.8\times3.0, ht. 1.9; dome.

Two ibexes—one of the traditional subjects in cylinder seals—galloping away; crossed hinder parts are omitted because they are to be executed at the expenses of the lion's head. Four flower symbols and one crescent as space-fillers. The main subject is a lion springing right on to the back of a bull one of whose horn is unproportionally small.

This superb stamp seal in an Achaemaenian style is one of contemporary Shiraz forgeries\textsuperscript{70}). [I will treat some thirty more Sasanian seals in Iranian Field Notes 2 More On Sasanian Seals to appear in the present journal No. 13]

References


\textsuperscript{67}) Might we be justified in presenting this upside down?

\textsuperscript{68}) The material is a very common cornelian, that is, translucent red-brown chalcedony.

\textsuperscript{69}) This cannot be classified under "108 Sonstige Symbole" (p. 55); the only possibility is to assign it to Göbl's last classificatory item, "XI. DEN EINZELNEN KLASSEN NICHT ZUWEISBAR, 120 Nach Sonderbeschreibung", although Göbl evidently will not accept this subject under No. 120.

\textsuperscript{70}) Produced by the hand of an elderly man living near Masjed-e Vakil who became a Hājī at the beginning of 1974. To my knowledge, in passing, forgery is not in daily vocabulary of Iranian antique dealers. What they are conscious of at least in the matter of seals, is not whether the object in question is a genuine piece or a forgery, but whether it is "gadim"/"az jīr-e khāk" ("old"/"from under the earth") or otherwise. Here we are facing, so to speak, different categorization in culture.


Brentjes, Burchard. *Die iranische Welt vor Mohammed*. Heidelberg (no date).


Von der Osten, Hans Henning 1924. *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mr. Edward*
T. Newell [≡OIP, XXII]. Chicago.


Photographing was done by Mr. Tsunenori Yoshioka, a good old friend of mine over twenty years. Without his voluntary offer the present article would have been destined to be abortive for its technical difficulty.

My thanks to him is not conventional.