

## BUCHANAN'S SYSTEM FOR THE TERMINOLOGY OF STAMP SEALS

This entire section is as Buchanan wrote it. It was written early in his work on stamp seals. Although it goes far beyond the chronological range of this fascicule, this seemed the appropriate place for it.

The terms used in this volume endeavour to provide a broad coverage of the ancient stamp seal. It was originally prepared for the stamp seal volume of the *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals* in North American collections, but has been somewhat modified for its present purpose. Professor Edith Porada of Columbia University, Dr David Bivar of the University of London, and John Boardman, Professor of Classical Archaeology at Oxford, have been especially helpful with criticisms and suggestions.

In deciding on the terms to be used, the practice of Hogarth in *Hittite Seals* was taken as a standard. Since the scope of the present work exceeds that of Hogarth, deviations from the latter's terminology were necessary. In general, names were sought that not only suggest a particular shape but are already in common usage. Many Minoan-Mycenaean and Classical designations have been added for the sake of completeness.

In most cases the names derive from the design of the back. The terms regularly used in this volume are here printed in italics; most of them will also be illustrated. Following the definition of a term, some indication is given of the period and region in which its particular shape is principally attested.

No practical terminology could possibly include all of the variations in the shape of the stamp seal. Such variations became especially common in late periods, when novelty was often sought. However, in all periods forms will have been produced that, defying rigid classification, must be individually described.

*Stamp Seal* (Fig. 1:1): an object with a *back*, by means of which it can be handled, and a *face*, engraved with a design that will make an impression. If a face is not flat, its profile should be described. Hogarth divided the backs into two main classes: handleless, the back of which consists of a single mass, usually perforated; and handled, the back of which has a *base* from which rises a projection, the *handle*, which is usually perforated. Elaborate handles will often have a distinct *stem* and *top* (see *knob-topped seal* and *stud*).

The back of a stamp seal may have one or more distinct *sides*, which are called *side faces* if they bear a design. The junction between the face and the back of a seal is referred to as its *edge*; it may be sharp, round, notched, etc.

The *ends* of a seal will generally be regarded as the area adjacent to the outlets of the perforation. However, when a seal is distinctively longer than it is wide, the term will apply to the points of greatest separation without regard to the position of the perforation.

Any part of the back of a seal that slants outwards towards the face is referred to as *sloping*, an inward slant is called *cut-in*.

In describing designs of seals, certain terms will be used in specific senses:

- Globe* – spherical body
- Lozenge* – diamond shape; may have one or more rounded corners
- Criss-cross* – crossed diagonal lines
- Crossed lines* – lines crossed at right angles to sides
- Angle-filled cross* – a cross design each quadrant of which contains an angle, or angles one inside the other, pointed towards the centre
- Line-filled cross* – a cross each quadrant of which contains a line or lines roughly radiating from the centre
- Web-filled cross* – a line-filled cross the arms of which are connected by a series of concentric lines
- Chevron cross* – a cross the arms of which consist of a series of short chevrons which may be bisected
- Swastika-filled cross* – a cross from the arms of which lines extend in a swastika-like arrangement.

STAMP SEAL TYPES

A Handleless

*Hemispheroid* (Fig. 1:2) – also known as a domed, or plano-convex seal; takes in a wide range of shapes varying from much less than a hemisphere to much more (see *Dome*). Most examples of this very inclusive type Hogarth called domed hemispheroids. Here extremes of height will be designated *High* or *Low*, while those pieces that level off on top are called *Flattened*.

A true hemispheroid will be circular; the more general class however takes in all kinds of roundness. Slight deviations from the circular may be due to wear. They are usually indicated as a variation of diameter in the measurements given in the catalogue. More extreme cases are called *Oval Hemispheroids*, with separate measurements of length and width.

Flat-faced, quite regular-shaped hemispheroids are distinctive of the glyptic of most of Western Asia in the Late Prehistoric period, being less common in Iran, Anatolia, and North Syria.

*Carinated Hemispheroid* (Fig. 1:3) – in which the back arches to a faint ridge and has rather blunt ends at the perforation.

*Gabled Hemispheroid* – an exaggerated version of the carinated type in which the back arches to a pronounced gable. It is commonly found with North Syrian gables (below) of the Late Prehistoric period.

*Lentoid* (Fig. 1:4) – named for its profile; a convex seal with rounded, carinated, or gabled back; seldom very thick; of rounded, usually roughly circular face. Enough examples have come from Late Ubaid levels in Mesopotamia to suggest that there it was the distinctive glyptic type of the period. With the amygdaloid (below), it became very popular in the Late Bronze Age of the Aegean area.

*Ovoid* – a hemispheroid type named for its irregularly oval face. The term is particularly applied to seals with a rounded back and an elongated, often quite angular, blunt-ended contour. In the Near East ovoid shapes are much less common than in Egypt and more irregular and individual in character. They occur beside more popular types in the Prehistoric and Proto-literate periods and again, usually with decorated backs, in the Iron Age. As an easy way to describe them they may be named after natural objects: *Loaf-shaped* – a blunt-ended ovoid

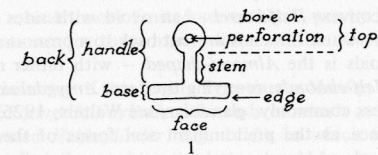


Fig. 1:1-1:30

with sides not very convex; *Half-barrel* — an ovoid with sides more convex than the loaf-shaped; *Sliced barrel* — when the ends are cut back to a pronounced degree. Perhaps the most common of these ovoids is the *Almond-shaped* — with rather narrow ends. Those with flat faces may be called *Half-almonds*, reserving the term *Amygdaloid* for convex-faced examples. The amygdaloid (or less commonly, glandular; see Walters, 1926, p. 2, fig. 4) and the lentoid have special significance as the predominant seal forms of the Late Bronze glyptic of the Aegean area.

*Collared Ovoid or Hemispheroid* (Fig. 1:5) — a type of hemispheroid, usually ovoid in contour with pronounced bulges at the ends of the perforation. A variant found with some frequency in the late Prehistoric hemispheroids of Southern Mesopotamia.

*Grooved Hemispheroid* (Fig. 1:6) — a Hittite form called semibulla by Hogarth. It is really a high hemispheroid with a groove just above its face, thus creating the effect of a base topped by a dome. Usually both face and top are engraved.

*Dome* (Fig. 1:7) — a Sasanian form. In section it approximates a sphere with one side cut away to serve as its engraved face. Often the perforation is quite large. Examples with sides much cut back at the perforation are called *Ring-seals*.

*Conoid* (Fig. 1:8) — the back of this type tends to be conical, but a wide range of shapes is included from true cones to crude round-peaked lumps (see engraved pebble below). The true *Cone* is rare; the usual form being more or less *Truncated*, a term reserved for extreme cases.

The conoid is especially attested in Anatolia where it had a considerable vogue during the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, particularly in baked clay, as a complement to the stalk (below), the distinctive seal form of the region at that time. The conoid remained in considerable use during the Early Iron Age of the Levant, particularly in Cyprus and Palestine. Finally it attained great popularity during the revival of the stamp seal throughout the Near East from about the eighth-century on.

In Neo-Imperial Babylonia and Assyria the type most distinctive of this revival was rounded on top; but had four sides, the two broadest of which each had bevelled corners, thereby creating what may be called an *Octagonal Pyramid* (Fig. 1:9).

*Pyramid* (Fig. 1:10) — as with the conoid, the type is usually somewhat truncated, the top either having a small flat tip or being slightly rounded. An infrequent variant of the pyramid has three sides, and is referred to as a *Triangular Pyramid*.

The pyramid occurs to some extent in Southern Mesopotamia during the Sumerian and Neo-Sumerian phases of the historic period.

*Rectangular Seal* (Fig. 1:11) — sometimes called the parallelepiped. It is to be distinguished from the tabloid (below) by the great height or thickness of its back in relation to its face. Sometimes its ends or a side or sides are *Sloping* or *Cut-in*. Few examples appear in any period.

*Prism* (Fig. 1:12) — normally has three sides or faces; the exception, a bar-like rectangular seal, roughly square in section, will be called a *Four-Sided Prism*. The most common occurrence of the type was in the Early and Middle Minoan periods. Most often Minoan prisms have rounded corners, thereby producing oval or ovoid faces each of which normally bears a design.

*Gable* (Fig. 1:13) — this type, the distinctive and most popular seal form of Late Prehistoric North Syria, has been so named because its back resembles a gabled roof. It bears a design only on its face; a feature that distinguishes it from the three-sided prism which usually has designs on all three faces. Normally its face will be roughly rectangular.

The term gable is used in a much more limited sense than it was by Hogarth, who included under it a great many variants, among them many which will be treated here as carinated or gable hemispheroids.

*Half-cylinder* (Fig. 1:14) — the name of this largely Egyptian or Minoan type is self-descriptive. Special variants include the *Sloping Half-cylinder*, the ends of which are cut back towards the top, and the Egyptian *Mounted Half-cylinder* (Fig. 1:15), in which the body of the seal is mounted on a thin platform. Strictly speaking the latter should be classified with the handled seals.

*Flattened Cylinder* (Fig. 1:16) — this chiefly Aegean type has an oval or lentoid profile.

*Scaraboid* — so named because in its most common form it has the approximate contour of a scarab, but generally lacks all scarab details. Normally it has a rounded top and vertical sides. Sometimes the sides vary considerably from the vertical, or the top is flat or highly domed or pointed. Such variations should be separately described. The scaraboid developed from the scarab of Egypt during the second millennium to become one of the most popular seal forms of the first, both in the Near East and in the Classical World.

*Circular scaraboid* — has a circular or near circular contour. Details of side and top should be specified. Some are probably examples of a common form of weight, which normally has cut-in sides.

*Plaque* — a relatively thin object, usually perforated between two approximately corresponding parallel surfaces, either or both of which bears a design. In the latter case these surfaces, being the twin faces of the seal, are called *Obverse* and *Reverse*; the obverse being the flatter of the two, if there is a difference in this respect; or it will be the face on which appears what is taken to be the principal design.

The term 'plaque' need be used for this type of seal only in the case of an unusual contour, as for example when triangular or lozenge-shaped.

*Tabloid* (Fig. 1:17) — a rectangular plaque. This is the term used by Hogarth for all kinds of plaques.

*Disk* — a circular plaque; if of oval contour to be called *Oval Disk* (Fig. 1:18). Hogarth used the term 'bulla' for a Late Hittite form of disk having straight sides, commonly with shallow grooves, and convex, sometimes conoid, faces, both normally bearing designs. It is better to call this form a *Double-Convex Disk* (Fig. 1:19), since the term 'bulla' more commonly refers to a round sealing attached to a document or piece of property.

*Reel-shaped Seal* (Fig. 1:20) — a rare variety of disk, often quite thick, commonly has concave sides. Sometimes the groove formed by its concave sides provides the only means of suspension.

*Grooved Disk* (Fig. 1:21) — a disk with a deep groove cut around its middle, usually creating a distinct rim on either side; a form common in Hissar I-IIA, but rare elsewhere. It might be called a bead because of its small size and because it has two means of suspension, a groove and a perforation. It was originally classified as a button seal, though evidence exists that it had often been worn strung in sets (Schmidt, 1937, p. 56).

Plaques are sporadically attested in all periods when the stamp seal was popular; most common were the Hittite double-convex disks and the Hissar form just cited.

#### B Handled

*Tall Stamp* — a form intermediate between handleless and handled. It is often roughly *conical* or *cylindrical*; though many irregular shapes occur which should be differentiated in description. There may be only the suggestion of a base or none at all. Probably used chiefly to stamp

objects like pottery or loom-weights, or perhaps even to mark the human body with colouring matter. Rarely attested; but probably most common in early Anatolia, where the form goes with, and sometimes can hardly be distinguished from, the local stalks and conoids. Apparently grouped with the stalks by Hogarth.

*Stalk* (Fig. 1:22) — in this type the handle is relatively long in terms of the size of the base. The many possible variations in the shape of the handle may be indicated by designating stalks as cylindrical, pyramidal, conoid, etc. Its appearance as the distinctive seal form of early Anatolia has already been noted. A possibly related occurrence is attested in Hissar III with probable prototypes as early as I (see under Stem-handled seal).

*Knot-topped Seal* (Fig. 1:23) — this type of seal has a handle consisting of a longish stem topped by a knob, through which it is usually perforated. Most of the better-made Old Hittite stalks belong to this class.

The backs of knobs are often elaborately treated with incidental decoration or shaped in various special ways. Among the Hittite special forms are types called by Hogarth *Hammer* (Fig. 1:24), for its hammer-shaped knob, and *Tripod* (Fig. 1:25), for its stem consisting of three quite thin legs.

*Button Seal* — strictly speaking this term should be used only for seals with handles so short as to be impractical or at least not very efficient for the purpose of sealing. The range of shape of such seals approaches that of many modern buttons. Furthermore it is possible that some of them were used decoratively or even functionally as buttons, being attached to garments by means of pins or thread. However, there can be little doubt that primarily they served as beads and only secondarily and perhaps somewhat later as seals.

The term need be used only to refer to the general class, or to individual seals that do not fit in a subgroup. Button seals of various types are found to some extent at all stages of the stamp seal, though from the second millennium on as increasingly rare occurrences. They constitute quite distinctive forms in Early Prehistoric glyptic; and they especially characterize the 'button seal' phase of the early stamp seal in Egypt (Dyn. VI—early First Intermediate).

*Bossed Seal* (Fig. 1:26) — called 'loop' by Hogarth and described as having a handle only large enough to be perforated. Here the term 'loop' is reserved for a special type of button seal. Whatever its particular shape, domed, or flat, in which case it may be circular, ovoid or rectangular, the boss proper will not usually be more than a slight protuberance the perforation of which often cuts down into the base of the seal.

*Stem-handled Seal* (Fig. 1:27) — a type of handled seal intermediate in height between the boss and the stalk. It will therefore often be difficult to classify a piece as a stem rather than at one or the other extreme. The decision must be based on the context in which it was found or on the group to which because of other characteristics it belongs; otherwise a choice can only be arbitrary. A seal may be classified as a stem, that is, with the button seals, if in all respects except height it is comparable to bosses rather than stalks. To distinguish extreme cases the adjective tall will be used. Stems of various heights were particularly common on the typical seals of Hissar I.

*Loop-handled Seal* (Fig. 1:28) — a special type of button seal the name of which is self-descriptive. The size of a loop will usually depend on the size of its perforation and on the position of the latter in relation to the base of the seal.

The different kinds of loops will be named in the same manner as the variant ridges described below.

*Ridge-handled Seal* (Fig. 1:29) — in this case the handle of the seal consists of a narrow mass

across the base, forming a ridge that is usually perforated sidewise. Most ridges slope from the middle in either direction towards the edge of the seal; they may be called *Sloping Ridges*. Sometimes a ridge is of such rounded thickness as to approach a half-cylinder in shape; the name for such is a *Rolled Ridge*. The perforation of this type is commonly lengthwise. Such a ridge can be distinguished from the mounted half-cylinder because in the latter the base and the cylinder are clearly differentiated.

*Stud* (Fig. 1:30) — a type of seal with a short stem topped by a small knob, usually perforated through the stem. It was especially popular during the Iron Age in the Levant. By its shape it might be regarded as a button seal; however, the massive size of many examples makes a specific classification more desirable.

#### *Looped Handleless Seals*

These are not button seals, but handleless seals topped by a loop which is usually quite small. They may be named after the various handleless types involved: *Looped Hemispheroids*, *Looped Conoids*, etc. A somewhat similar form in Egypt, or much later in Urartu, is often called, because of its appearance, a *Bell*.

#### *Miscellaneous*

*Seal Ring* — can be divided into two basic types: that made in a single piece, commonly of metal, with all or part of the hoop engraved, to be called an Engraved Ring (compare the Ring-seal under Dome); and that with a bezel, usually of semi-precious stone, set in or otherwise attached to a metal hoop, to be called a *Bezel (ring)*. A bezel with pronounced sides will usually be classified as a scaraboid, the term bezel being reserved for relatively thin specimens. *Stamp Cylinder* — an object that has on top a perforated handle or some other device for suspension; it bears on its cylindrical face a design that produces a continuous, frieze-like impression and on its base a design making a circular impression. Stamp cylinders appear, especially to the west, in the earlier half of the third millennium BC (see *Buchanan*, 1966, no. 719A), reappear during the Hittite Old Kingdom (c. 1600–1500 BC), and again in Urartu in the ninth to seventh centuries BC (see *Buchanan*, 1966, no. 1049). In the Late Assyrian period the form occurs with a head on the handle, in which case it may be called an *Amulet-seal*. Stamp cylinders will usually be treated as cylinder seals, since the design on their cylindrical face normally constitutes their principal feature.

*Engraved Amulet* — an object that is shaped to resemble some other object and that has on at least one surface a design which could be impressed. The type includes the animal amulets, sometimes called theriomorphic seals, of the Early Proto-literate period in Mesopotamia and Western Iran. These miniature sculptures were undoubtedly sacred objects of high amuletic value; it is possible but not certain that they were also used as seals. The most well-known of all engraved amulets is the Egyptian scarab which served variously as amulet, seal, and bead.

The backs of every one of the seal types discussed above could be made to resemble something else, and many of them have been. The tendency to treat seal forms in this fashion was particularly strong in Egypt; there ovoids or scaraboids often became fish amulets, eye amulets, human-head amulets, etc.

So far as possible, amulet seals will be described according to the subject-matter of their backs.

Sometimes amulet seals have a distinct base on which the amulet is mounted. These may be called *Mounted Amulets*. They occur frequently in Egyptian glyptic from the 'button seal'

period onwards, with considerable variation as to the size and shape of the base, as well as in the extent to which it is separated from the amulet.

*Engraved Bead* — an object, approximately symmetrical, usually perforated on its long axis, and so shaped that no one of its surfaces or facets, when engraved, could easily be used for making impressions. Among the hemispheroids many ovoids and collared pieces probably belong in this category.

*Engraved Pendants* — an object perforated through its engraved face usually near the top, or having a tang above that face. Such a tang may be perforated, most often from the side. Engraved pendants are a distinctive feature of early Prehistoric glyptic.

*Engraved Pebbles* — many early handleless seals and even some early button seals show such an irregular, even indeterminate shape as to suggest that they were made by the process of crudely fashioning a casually picked-up small stone. Such pieces will be called according to the type they most nearly resemble: *Hemispheroid Pebbles*, *Conoid Pebbles*, *Looped Pebbles*, etc. Seals of this sort were probably more common when the vogue for a particular kind of better-made piece was being established. Hence their frequency in early Prehistoric times when the stamp seal was coming into use. However, such pieces are apt to occur at any time as crude imitations of objects known to be valued for their magic and for the prestige represented in them.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Between 1949 and 1974 Briggs Buchanan was a regular summer visitor to the Ashmolean, where after the ravages of the War he did much first to set the collection of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in order, and then to catalogue it. Most of his visits were undertaken at his own expense and his work was a labour of love. He was always deeply indebted to Mr D. B. Harden, Keeper of the Department of Antiquities from 1945 to 1956, who first invited him to Oxford, and for the continuing support and encouragement of Mr Harden's two successors, Mr R. W. Hamilton (1956-72) and Mr H. J. Case (1972-82). A number of individuals, not on the Museum staff, regularly helped him: Professor John Boardman, with Classical glyptic; the late Professor Sir Geoffrey Driver with Hebrew seals; Mrs Diane Gurney with drawings; Professor Oliver Gurney with Akkadian and Hittite inscriptions; and Professor Edith Porada, his only peer in this field of study. Within the Museum his work was admirably supported by Miss A. C. Western and the staff of the conservation laboratory, by Miss Olive Godwin of the photographic studio, and by the staff of the Ashmolean Library. He always spoke with pleasure and appreciation of the help and friendship he had received in the 1950s from the late Dr. W. Llewellyn Brown, from Mr J. J. Orchard, and Miss A. L. Showers. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s the seals upon which he worked were in that part of the Ashmolean collection for which I was responsible. I owe him an enduring debt of gratitude for developing my own knowledge of Near Eastern glyptic and for many personal kindnesses.

I am aware that there are many people unknown to me who in various ways helped Briggs Buchanan in his preparation of this catalogue. I regret that he died before committing their names to paper and hope they will understand their absence from this list of acknowledgements. It in no way reflects on his feeling for their help and friendship; Briggs Buchanan was a man who depended much on the support and encouragement of others, not least that of his wife, and was always deeply appreciative of what he received.

Virtually all the photography for this volume was undertaken by Mr Robert L. Wilkins (see p. v); the drawings are by Mrs Diane Gurney (see above). The plates were pasted up by Mrs Pat Jacobs.