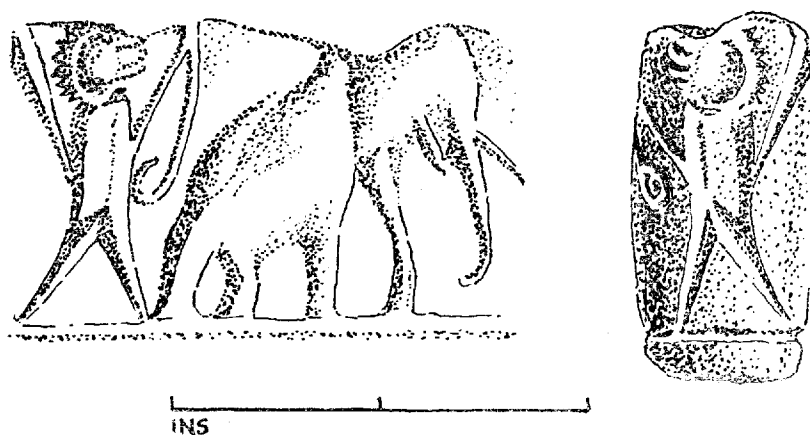


Notes and News

A CYLINDER-SEAL FROM SOUTH INDIA

A recent discovery in Hyderabad State, Deccan, is so remarkable that it seems desirable to draw attention to it in a more widely known and accessible journal than that of its original publication. The State Archaeological Department has conducted relatively large-scale excavations at an ancient site near Maski, and in one of the brief interim reports a cylinder-seal of terra-cotta engraved with a man and an elephant is described and illustrated by photographs from which the figure is drawn (1). The Maski site has yielded numerous stone axes and a large quantity of long chert blades and cores similar



to those known from the Harappa Culture, but their stratigraphical context, if any, is not indicated in the very unsatisfactory report. In the main the earliest structures so far excavated on the site seem to belong to the Andhra dynasty (1st–2nd cent. A.D.) and are broadly comparable to another site in Hyderabad State, Paithan (2), where the early levels contained brick buildings, a street drain and wells curiously reminiscent of Harappa but dated to Andhra times by coin finds actually in the drain. In addition to the uncertainty as to the prehistoric occupation of the Maski site, the cylinder-seal was found on the surface. There is therefore no dating evidence from associations and we have to fall back on stylistic criteria.

The cylinder-seal is such a specialized type of object that it seems hardly likely that the Maski find represents a local Indian invention equivalent to, but quite independent of, the great Mesopotamian cylinder-seal series. On the other hand it is not easy to see how Sumerian or later allied influences could have come to affect the Deccan, nor at what precise period. The Harappa Culture has produced three cylinder-seals engraved with Indian rather than Sumerian motifs, all found at Mohenjo-daro (3); outside India

¹ *Annual Report, Arch. Dept. of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions*, 1936–37, p. 15 and pl. XIII(a).

² *ibid.* pp. 39 ff.

³ E. Mackay. *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro* I, p. 344.

NOTES AND NEWS

four have been found in Elam and Sumer (at Susa, Ur and Tell Asmar (4)), and one possibly of Indian workmanship or inspiration at Hissar in Iran (5). The Mohenjo-daro seals are from the upper levels; that from Susa is probably Akkadian and that from Tell Asmar certainly of that date. The dating of the Hissar III stratum which contained the cylinder-seal is still under discussion, but an Akkadian or even later date seems not improbable. On the whole therefore the introduction of the cylinder-seal idea to India (where it obviously never proved popular) was not earlier than the middle of the third millennium B.C., and the presence of an actual Sumerian cylinder-seal at Herat in Afghanistan, dated by Sayce to the IIIrd Dynasty of Ur, would fit in with this evidence (6).

In itself the Maski seal is not an impressive work of art, both the man and the elephant he is driving being very roughly portrayed. Stylistically neither figure resembles Harappa workmanship; the elephant is a poor sloping-backed creature unlike the sturdy Harappa beasts, and one may perhaps see an indication of the two types of draught elephants commented on by Mackay (7): the flat-backed stocky Komooria Dhundia (as on the Harappa seals) and the inferior Meergha with its long legs and sloping back, seemingly represented on the Maski seal. One point is however of interest and that is the curious 'radiate' headdress of the man, which is paralleled by that of the human figure grappling with two tigers on a seal from Mohenjo-daro (8). This scene, with its affinities to the Sumerian representations of Gilgamesh, might be used as another pointer for an ultimately Sumerian origin for the Maski as well as the Harappa cylinder-seals, and there is one additional point: the groove at the base (and probably originally at the top) of the former. This feature occurs on the cylinder-seals in Indian style from Susa and Tell Asmar, and Frankfort has commented on it as a feature not normal to Sumer and perhaps to be associated with India (9).

Our enquiries have not taken us very far, and the Maski seal must still remain something of an enigma. Possible points of contact with Sumer via Harappa have been noted, but we have not yet any reliable evidence for a South Indian prehistoric culture contemporary with or immediately subsequent to that of Harappa. To such a culture the Maski seal may be the first clue, but the possibility of a freak independent invention of the cylinder-seal idea in later, early historic, times cannot altogether be ruled out.

STUART PIGGOTT.

AFRICAN PALAEOOLITHIC CULTURES

Some useful information about recent progress in equating the palaeolithic cultures of West, East and South Africa is contained in a précis* of the (unpublished) 6th, 7th and 8th Annual Reports of the South African Bureau of Archaeology covering the period April 1940 to March 1943. The most important conclusions reached are that the Stone Age of the Congo includes a long series of developing industries and material cultures that provide a striking parallel to the development that took place in South Africa during the Earlier Stone Age. Toward the end of the great hand-axe group of cultures however, there is a noticeable divergence or differential development. The Congo Stellenbosch is almost a mirror-image of the Cape Stellenbosch, but the Kalinian

⁴ *ibid.* p. 345 n. for refs. cf. *ANTIQUITY*, 1943, xvii, 178.

⁵ E. Schmidt. *Excavations at Tepe Hissar*, fig. 118.

⁶ *Journ. Asiatic Soc. Bengal*, 1842, xi, 316-21; *ANTIQUITY*, 1927, I, 204-15.

⁷ *op. cit.* 329. ⁸ *ibid.* 337. ⁹ *Cylinder Seals*, 305.

* The Editors are indebted to Professor Gordon Childe for the loan of this précis.