*French Royal Seals. @@1—*The earliest and most complete series of seals is that of the French kings. The Carlo- vingian and Merovingian monarchs mostly used antique gems or pastes,—portrait heads being selected and a legend added in the metal setting of the matrix. Charle­magne used a head of Jupiter Serapis, @@2 Pippin the Short that of the Indian Dionysus. The British Museum pos­sesses a seal of Odo or Eudes, king of France (888-898), impressed from a fine Greek gem of the 3d century b.c., with a portrait of Seleucus IV. The oldest existing matrix is that of Lothaire I. (*c.* 817), now preserved at Aix-la- Chapelle, attached to an altar-cross. It is an oval intaglio in rock crystal, with a laureated portrait and the legend + XPE . ADIVVA. hlotharivm. REG. ; it is not an antique, but is of contemporary Byzantino-Rhenish work. Till the time of Louis VI. (1108-1137) these seals were *plaqué,* but he introduced *pendant* seals about 1108 ; and counter-seals at the back were first used by Louis VII. (1137-80). The grand series of round seals with an enthroned figure of the king begins with the Capet Henry I. (1031-60). The king holds a sceptre in one hand and a flower in the other. Those of the queens are frequently of a pointed oval form, with a standing portrait figure holding a flower in each hand. In the 13th and 14th centuries the French royal seals were elaborate works of art, with a finely draped figure of the king seated under a rich canopy on a throne, decorated with lions’ or eagles’ heads ; the king holds a sceptre in each hand. The queens’ seals, of a round or pointed oval form, are also very beautiful, with a graceful figure standing between two shields under a rich canopy. After the 15th century there was a rapid decadence in the royal seals, and in the 17th and 18th centuries they were of the most tasteless style, far worse than those used in England at the same date.

*English Royal Seals.—*This, which is on the whole the most beautiful of all royal series, begins with the seal of Edward the Con­

fessor (see fig. 1). @@3 The great seal of Will­iam the Norman and his successors was not *plaqué,* like the earlier ones, but pendant ; it has on one side an enthroned figure of a king copied from contemporary French seals, and on the re­verse the king on horseback armed with spear and shield.

These two ways of representing the sovereign have been used on all the royal seals of England down to the present day. By degrees greater elaboration of ornament was introduced into the throne and its canopy. In Edward III.’s time niches with minute statuettes of saints were added at the sides of the obverse. The climax of magnificence was reached in the reign of Henry V. On the obverse of his seal the king

sits holding the orb and sceptre; the gorgeous canopy contains statuettes of the Virgin and two saints, and at each side are three rows of statuettes in minute canopied niches, each row two tiers high ; about fifteen minute figures of saints and angels are introduced into the design. On the reverse is the king on horseback, bearing a sword and shield ; the horse, going at full speed, is clothed with richly embroidered heraldic drapery, and on its head and on the king’s is a lion crest. After Henry V. the seals began to decrease in magnificence, and in the reign of Henry VII. the new taste of the Renaissance began to supplant the pure Gothic of the earlier seals. In the time of Philip and Mary both sovereigns appear together, seated under canopies, or riding side by side. @@4 The great seal of the Commonwealth is a marvel of ugliness. On the obverse is a perspective view of the interior of the House of Commons, and on the reverse a map of Great Britain and Ireland. Cromwell’s seal has an equestrian portrait of himself, and its reverse the arms of the Commonwealth between a lion and a dragon as supporters. Little is noticeable about the seals of succeeding sovereigns ; that of Victoria is minutely cut, but is very poor as a work of art.

*Other English Seals.—*Gilt bronze was the commonest material for large seals, but other metals were used, such as gold, silver, and lead, also jet and ivory, especially before the Norman Conquest. Rock crystal, carnelian, and sard were the favourites among the hard stones cut for matrices. Large seals were usually either round or of a pointed oval form (as in figs. 2 and 3) ; the small *secreta* were sometimes square, triangular, or hexagonal, as well as round or oval. @@5 The most elaborate and beautiful of all were those of religious corporations, such as the chapter seals of monasteries. @@6 These are among the most exquisite works of art that the Middle Ages produced, especially during the 14th century, and exceed in delicacy of work­manship and elaboration of design the finest seals of all other classes, not excepting those of the sovereigns. Fig. 2 shows the common seal of

Boxgrove priory (Sussex), the matrix of which is now in the British Museum. On one side is a figure of the Virgin enthroned, and on the reverse a representation of the west front of the priory church, with open tracery and niches contain­ing minute statuettes. This elaborate matrix is made up of four distinct pieces of gilt bronze, and to form the perfect seal must have been a work requiring con­siderable skill and patience.

The reverse was formed by two stamps used on two separate plaques of softened wax : one of these formed

the background with the various statuettes, and the second was used to stamp the open tracery work of the front of the church ; the latter when hard was fitted on to the

@@@1 See Wailly, *Éléments de Paléographie,* vol. ii., pl. A. ; by various authors, *Trésor de Num. et de Glyptique,* vol. i., Paris, 1834 (which contains also plates of English royal seals) ; Douet-d’Arcq, *Coll. de Sceaux de l'Empire,* Paris, 1863-68; *Bulletin de la Société de Sphragistique,* Paris, v.y. ; D’Anisy, *Recueil de Sceaux Normands,* Caen, 1835.

@@@2 The monks of Durham also used a gem with a head of Jupiter Serapis, round which was added the legend—CAPVT . SANCTI . OSWALDI.

@@@3 The English kings before the Conquest signed usually with a cross only, but a few, such as Offa, Ethelwulf, and Ethelred, occasionally used seals, especially on documents containing grants to St Denis and other French abbeys, on which they followed the French custom of affixing *plaqué* seals.

@@@4 A variety of design is introduced on the reverse of one of Queen Elizabeth’s seals : she is represented standing, holding the orb and sceptre, and wears a dress with enormous hoops. Her other seal has the usual equestrian portrait on the reverse.

@@@5 As a rule, from the 12th to the 15th century, ecclesiastical seals and those of females were of the pointed oval form, most others being circular ; there are, however, many exceptions to this rule.

@@@6 A special English office for the blessing of seals is printed by Maskell, *Mon. Ritualia,* 1882, vol. iii.