SEALS. The idea of testifying the personal presence or the agency of an individual on some particular occasion, by affixing the impression of his seal (Lat. *sigillum,* O. Fr. *scel)* to the record or object connected with the transaction of the moment, can be traced back among the nations of the old world when advanced only a comparatively short way on the path of civilization. In the East the custom which has prevailed for centuries, and which is a practice at the present day, of using the seal as a stamp wherewith to print its device in ink or pigment in authentication of a document is parallel to our western habit of inscribing a signature for the same purpose. In the West, too, the impression of the seal has. at certain periods, had the same value as the signature; and at all times the connexion between the signature and the seal has been intimate in European practice (see Auto- graphs and Diplomatic). But the western method of obtaining the impression has differed from the eastern method. With us, the notion of a seal is an impression in relief, obtained from an incised design, either on a soft material such as wax or clay, or on a harder material such as lead, gold or silver. By common usage the word “ seal ” is employed as a term to describe both the implement for making the impression, and the impression itself; but properly it should be confined to the latter, the graven implement being technically called the matrix.

The earliest examples of seals, both matrices and impressions, are found among the antiquities of Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria. On the clay stoppers of wine jars of the remote age which goes by the name of the pre-dynastic period, and which preceded the historic period of the first Pharaohs, there are seal impressions which must have been produced from matrices, like those of Babylonia and Assyria, of the cylinder type, the impress of the design having been repeated as the cylinder was rolled along the surface of the moist clay. Two such engraved cylinders of this archaic period are in the British Museum collections. The cylinder, however, seems to have been generally superseded in Egypt by the engraved scarab, or beetle-shaped object, which, it may be assumed, was used at an early time, as it certainly was in later Egyptian history, for sealing purposes, although its proper function was that of an amulet. Stiff, the fashion for cylinders appears to have revived at intervals, for they are found in the 6th, the 12th and the 18th dynasties. Even in the 1st dynasty, about 4500 B.c., the Egyptian Pharaohs had their official sealers, or, to use a modern expression, keepers of the Royal Seal. Egyptian signet- rings, which were used for sealing, date back to the 12th dynasty.

As already stated, the matrices of ancient Babylonian and Assyrian seals, usually cut on precious stones, are in cylinder form.

The fine collection in the British Museum presents us with Babylonian specimens of even archaic times, followed by an historical series, the earliest of which is of nearly 4500 years B.c. The Assyrian series is not so full. The engraved subjects are chiefly mythological. Impressions are to be found on many of the cuneiform clay tablets. Early in the 7th century b.c. the cylinder seal gave place to the cone, the impression being henceforth obtained

after the fashion followed to the present day.

The Phoenicians, as was only to be expected of those traders and artisans of the ancient world, appear to have adopted both the cylinder of Assyria and the scarab of Egypt as patterns for their seals. Examples indeed are rare, but that these people were acquainted with both forms is certain. Phoenician names are found cut both on cylinder matrices and on scarabs by the Phoenician engravers employed in Assyria and Egypt; and, when the cone-shaped matrix superseded the cylinder in Western Asia, the Phoenicians

conformed to the change.

In Europe, the use of seals among the early Greeks is well known. Of the Mycenaean period numerous seal-impressions in clay have been found. Also from ancient times have survived the numerous engraved stones or pebbles, technically called gems, which served as matrices and in most instances were undoubtedly mounted as finger-rings or were furnished with swivels. At first being

used in their natural forms, these pebbles or gems have been grouped as lenticular or bean-shaped, and glandular or of the sling-bolt pattern; later, from the 6th to the 4th century b.c., they were fashioned as scaraboids, that is, in the general form of the Egyptian scarab, but without the sculptured details of the beetle’s body. To these, by a natural process, succeeded the matrix formed of only a thin slice of stone, which was more conveniently adapted for the bezel of the ring; and in this shape the engraved matrix passed on from the Greeks to the Romans. Signet-rings also with fixed metal bezels were in common use among the Greeks from about 600 b.c.

But white the scarab met with little favour in Greece, where, as just stated, the scaraboid was preferred, among the Etruscans its adoption was complete, and with them it became the commonest form of the seal-matrix, dating from the latter part of the 6th century b.c., engraved chiefly with subjects derived from Greek art.

Impressions of late Greek or Roman gems in clay have survived in a few instances. A series of impressions from Greek seals was found at Selinus in Sicily, dating before 249 B.c.; a small collection of sealed Greek documents on papyrus of the 4th and 3rd centuries b.c. has been discovered at Elephantine in Egypt. An interesting and very rare example of a Roman law deed sealed with gem impressions in clay is in the British Museum, recording the sale of a slave boy in a.d. 166.

It is not the object of this article to deal further with the history of antique seals (see Numismatics; also Gems, Jewelry and Ring), but to give some account of European seals of the middle ages, when the revival of their use for the authentication of documents resulted in their universal employment among all classes of society. Hence it is that we are in possession of the vast number of impressions still to be found in public museums and archives, and in private muniment rooms and antiquarian collec- tions, either attached to the original charters or other deeds which they authenticated, or as independent specimens. Hence, too, have survived a fairly large number of matrices.

The connecting link between the general use of the signet, which was required by the Roman law for legal purposes, but which had died out by the 7th century, and the revival of seals in the middle ages is to be found in the chanceries of the Merovingian and Carolingian sovereigns, where the practice of affixing the royal seal to diplomas appears to have been generally maintained (see Diplomatic). Naturally, surviving examples of such seals are rare, but they are sufficient in number to indicate the style adopted at different periods. The seal-ring of Childeric II. (d. 673) was found in his tomb, bearing a full-face bust and his name; and impressions of seals of later monarchs of the Merovingian line, engraved with their busts and names, have survived. Pippin the Short and the early Carolings made use of intaglios, both actual antiques and copies from them; their successors had seals of ordinary types usually showing their busts. One of the oldest matrices is an intaglio in rock crystal, now preserved at Aix-la-Chapelle, bearing a portrait head of Lothair II., king of Lorraine (a.d. 855-869), and the legend “ Xpe *[Christe]* Adivva Hlotharium Reg.” As time advanced there was a growing tendency to enlarge the royal seal. Under Hugh Capet there was (a.d. 989) a further development, the king being represented half-length with the royal insignia; and at last under Henry I. (a.d. 1031-1060) the royal seal of France was complete as the seal of majesty, bearing the full effigy of the king enthroned. In Germany, however, this full type had already been attained somewhat earlier in the seal of the emperor Henry II. (a.d. 1002-1024); and it had been used even earlier by Arnulf, count of Flanders, in 942. The royal seal thus developed as a seal of majesty became the type for subsequent seals of dignity of the monarchs of the middle ages and later, the inscription or legend giving the name and titles of the sovereign concerned.

All the early royal seals which have been referred to were affixed to the face of the documents, that is, *en placard\*,* but in the 11th century the practice of appending the seal from thongs or cords came into vogue; by the 12th century it was universal.