GEMS AND FINGER-RINGS FROM NYMPHAEUM
(Towards a Monograph of Classical Glyptics)

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The custom of using seals stems from the specific way of life peculiar to the Classical polis: it was brought to the northern coast of the Black Sea by the first settlers arriving there from the Mediterranean centres. While gems and finger-rings with seals are rare and isolated finds, in the necropoleis of Olbia, Chersonesus and the cities of the Bosporus glyptic material is to be found on a mass scale. In the barbarian world a finger-ring and gem were usually of a purely decorative or representative character. This is eloquently demonstrated by several finds made in the burial-grounds of the Dnieper Valley and the Crimean steppes: 5-10 finger-rings with no engraving on the fingers of one of the deceased. In a Hellenic context, on the other hand, an individual seal was an essential element of a person's whole pattern of life: religious, aesthetic and economic. The presence of finger-rings among other archaeological materials in city-sites or burial-grounds can serve as an indication of the degree of a population's Hellenization.

We shall now provide statistical data about finds of glyptic material in various centres of the region to the North of the Black Sea: 460 in Panticapaeum and its environs, 265 in Chersonesus (to this another 70 could be added, if we include imprints of rings on pottery), 80 in Olbia, 80 in Phanagoria and 45 in Nymphaeum (plus 10 imprints on pottery).

For a time during the Archaic and Classical periods the demand for seals was satisfied by imports from ancient craft-production centres in mainland Greece, Ionia, Anatolia and Egypt. Later local workshops were set up in Panticapaeum and Chersonesus and possibly in other centres of the region. During both the Hellenistic and the Roman periods, however, imported seals were used as well as locally made ones.

The earliest finger-rings from Nymphaeum date from the first half of the 5th century BC.

1. A gold finger-ring with a narrow leaf-shaped bezel and a horseshoe-shaped hoop. On the panel Nike has been carved flying along with a wreath in her hands (Hermitage Museum. No. GK/N. 18). The ring was found in 1876 in the burial of a warrior with parts of Scythian-

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