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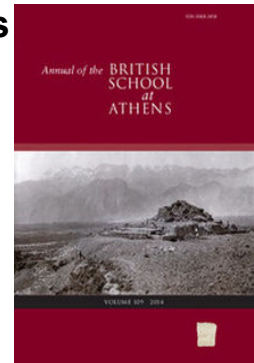
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Terra Lemnia

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TERRA LEMNIA.

IN ancient medical practice several sorts of natural earths, found at various places in the Levant and described in detail by Pliny and other writers, had recognised curative properties, being employed for the most part as astringents and desiccatives in the treatment of wounds and internal haemorrhages. Pliny's list includes the earths of Chios, Kimolos, Eretria, Lemnos, Melos, Samos, and Sinope. The use of many of these persisted into quite modern times,¹ but none was so generally esteemed either by ancients or moderns as the Lemnian, which was set apart in the first place by its alleged miraculous power against poisons (especially the bites of venomous reptiles) and later against plague, and in the second by the religious accompaniments and the various artificial restrictions of its production.

Of the Lemnian earth Pliny, who happens to be our earliest authority, says it was highly reputed among the ancients,² but we have no

¹ The earth of Chios is mentioned in modern times by Jerome Justinian, a Chiote Genoese (*Hist. de Chio*, p. 68) as found near Pyrgi: 'En un autre terrouer du dit Pirgy se trouvoit autre fois la terre dite Chia laquelle a le mesme vertu que celle qu'on nomme Lemnia. Le Grand Turc s'en sert maintenant en son seau (*sic*).' Thevet (*Cosmog. du Levant*, p. 52) considered it as valuable medicinally as the Lemnian, which opinion was confirmed by Covel a hundred years later. The latter adds that the Chian earth was dug like the Lemnian at a special season (May, whence it was called *πηλομαϊθτικο*), but was not used medicinally but only for washing (MS. *Add.* 22,914, f. 57 v). It has now become almost unknown owing to the low price of olive-oil soaps, but is traditionally said to have been a government monopoly under the Genoese. 'Kimolian' earth is said by Dale (*Pharmacologia*, 1693) to have been found in England. In Samos, Pococke (ii. 2. 29) notices a white earth which was eaten by children in his day. Melian earth is mentioned by Sir Thomas Sherley in his account of the island (*B.S.A.* xiii. 347, cf. Pococke, *loc. cit.*). Sinopic earth (see Robinson in *A. J. Phil.* xxvii. 141, §4) is probably the Armenian bole mentioned by Dale and his contemporaries as coming 'from Turkey,' and by others (Poulet, etc.) as a frequent ingredient in sophisticated Lemnian earth. It is presumably the *Terra Saraceni* used by the Arabs against plague, and the *Kil Ermeni* which was foisted on me as Lemnian in the Egyptian bazaar at Constantinople.

² *N.H.* xxxv. 6.

means of ascertaining how far back the use of it extends. It is interesting to note that the hill Moschylos on which it was found was associated in legend with the fall of Hephaistos, and that one version of the Philoktetes myth attributes the cure of the hero's wound, caused ultimately it will be remembered by the poison of the Lernaean hydra, to this medicine.¹

With Dioskorides we begin to be better informed: he tells us the earth was found in a tunnel-like aperture in Lemnos, prepared with an admixture of goat's blood, and thereafter made up into tablets and stamped with the figure of a goat, whence came its popular name 'goat's seal.' It had a singular virtue against poisons if drunk with wine, and acted as an emetic when poison had already been swallowed. It was also sovereign against the bites of venomous reptiles and for dysentery.² It will be seen that the chief use of it is here considered as antidotal.

It is from Galen³ that we first hear of the ceremonies in connection with the digging of the earth, and his information rests on his own investigations in Lemnos itself, whither he went especially for this purpose. On a certain day, he says, the priestess (of Artemis apparently from the sequel) came out of the city (Hephaestias), sprinkled a certain quantity of barley on the place where the earth was dug, and performed other ceremonial observances, after which she took a cartload of the earth and returned to the city. Here the earth was cleansed and sealed with the figure of Artemis.⁴ These usages were said in the island to be very ancient. The earth was locally used for ulcers (for which it was employed with success by Galen himself), for wounds, as an emetic, and for poisonous bites: for internal use it was drunk in wine, for external applied with vinegar. There were three grades, of each of which the first might be handled only by the priestess, the rest, like so many of the other earths cited by Pliny, being used industrially.

After Galen there is a complete silence among our authorities as to what happened at Lemnos.⁵ The earth continues to be cited after the ancients and the use of reputed Lemnian Seal⁶ or *Terra sigillata* persisted

¹ Philostratus, *Heroica*, vi. 2.

² V. 113.

³ *De Simpl. Medic.* ix. 246.

⁴ The goat's-blood story of Dioskorides was ridiculed; it was probably an inference from the seal he saw.

⁵ The last of the ancients to mention the earth seems to be P. Aegineta, vii. 3 (s. v. *Ge, terra*).

⁶ *Lempnia frigidus* in a mediaeval glossary quoted by Tozer, p. 260.

through the Middle Ages. Bartholomaeus Anglicus (13th c.) says of it:—

‘A serten veyne of the erthe is called Terra Sigillata, and is singularly cold and drie. And Dioscorides calleth it Terra Saracenicā and argentea, and is somedeale white, well smellynge and clere. The chief virtue thereof byndeth and stauncheth. And powder thereof tempred with the whyte of an egge stauncheth bledynge at the nose. And helpeth ayenst swellinge of the fete and ayenste the gowte, if it be layed in a playstre thereto, as it is sayde in Lapidario.’¹

It will be noted however that there is no evidence of first-hand know-

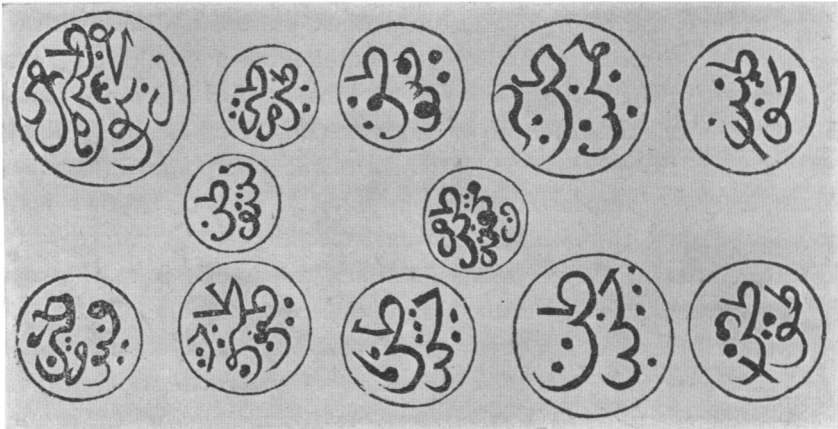


FIG. 1.—SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SEALS.
(From Belon.)

ledge in the above account, still less mention of Lemnos. In fact the earliest first-hand mention of the Lemnian earth in a modern writer known to me is in the *Bermannus* of Agricola. The author, writing in 1530, says that he had seen tablets of Lemnian earth brought from Constantinople: they were of a yellowish colour and stamped with Turkish letters. The Turks held it to be the only remedy for plague, using it as the Arabs used Armenian bole. At Venice it was ill known but sold dear.

About the middle of the century we have circumstantial accounts of the digging of the earth written by two scientific men—Belon and Albacario—who like Galen went themselves to Lemnos to investigate it. The first of these began his researches systematically by gathering information at

¹ Lib. xv. cxxxix. lxxxxviii. (ed. London, 1535).

Constantinople as to the various seals which guaranteed the quality of the earth, and these seals are engraved in his book for the benefit of the medical world (Fig. 1). Belon's account of the digging (at which however he was not present) is full and interesting as reproducing almost exactly—*mutatis mutandis*—the ancient ritual. The digging still took place only once a year, viz. at the festival of the Transfiguration (Aug. 6), and was preceded by a religious service at the church of the Saviour (which would naturally keep this day as its dedication festival) not far from the hill on which the earth was dug. The Turkish governor (Soubashi) of the island and the Turkish and Greek notables took part in the ceremony. A proclamation was made¹ and a sheep was sacrificed as *courban*, which was afterwards eaten by the Turks present, as the Greeks fasted at this time of year.² The digging began at or before sunrise and continued for six hours, after which the hole was closed and left till the next year. It was a penal offence to dig it out of season. The earth dug was cleansed and stamped with a seal bearing in Arabic letters the words *tin imachton* (sealed earth). Soranzo adds that it was baked.³ Certain officers were allowed to take a share of it, and the bystanders a small quantity each, but the bulk of the earth, including the whole of the first quality,⁴ was placed after sealing in a packet (also sealed) and sent to Constantinople by special messenger for the use of the Sultan.⁵ A certain amount, presumably of inferior quality, was sold on the spot by the Soubashi to merchants.⁶

Our second authority, Stefano Albacario, was a Spanish physician⁷

¹ This detail, with the text of the proclamation 'Le grand Dieu hault et tout puissant déclare aujourd'hui l'effect et vertue de ceste terre à ses très-fidèles serviteurs,' is preserved by Thevet (*Cosmog. Univ.* ii. 805), a bad authority, but his account seems derived from a good source beyond Belon. The characteristic dialogue with the Greek—*Frangi thes nagorasis apo tin gimou?* (Φράγκε, θέλεις να αγοράσῃς ἀπὸ τὴν γῆν μου;) etc. rings true.

² Till the 15 Aug. (Assumption).

³ Formansi delle tre differenti sorti di terra, tre diverse sorti di girelle, . . . dando agli uni ed agli altri una cottura per maggior durata.

⁴ Palerne.

⁵ The Grand Signor habitually drank out of a cup made of the earth (Palerne) and it was grated over all his meals as a precaution against poison (Crusius, 501).

⁶ The merchants are spoken of as Jews by Thevet (*Cosmog. Univ.*) and very likely were at this date. A hundred years later von Rheinfelden speaks of *Greeks* paying 18,000 dollars to the Sultan for the monopoly of it. From Belon's account it appears that the Soubashi paid a fixed sum and made what he could from the sale of the earth: it was evidently regarded, like mines all over the empire and certain other natural products, e.g. the mastic of Chios, as a perquisite of the Sultan who farmed it as he thought fit.

⁷ Probably a Spanish Jew with a Christian name; the surname sounds like Arabic.

commissioned to go to Lemnos to investigate the earth by the Austrian ambassador Busbecq, who sent his account to Matthioli.¹ Albacario's account in the main corroborates Belon's. Interesting new details illustrating the religious aspect of the digging are (1) that the earth was supposed to have virtue only on the day chosen for the official digging,



FIG. 2.—THE DIGGING OF THE LEMNIAN EARTH.
(From Thevet.)

(2) that a special washer had the handling of the earth up to the time of its exportation, and (3) that this washer appropriated a small bag of the earth, which however was not sealed.

¹ Albacario made one attempt to go to Lemnos while Busbecq was still at Constantinople but was prevented. He must therefore have gone after 1562.

Both Belon and Busbecq probably owed their interest in and knowledge of the earth less to its repute in European pharmacy at their date than to the custom then current at the court of Constantinople of offering tablets of the earth as official presents to foreign ambassadors and other persons of quality. Thus we find recorded presents of *terre sigillée* to French ambassadors at various dates from 1546 onwards;¹ Busbecq, the patron of Albacario, was an ambassador and had moreover seen the earth successfully used against plague². Slightly later von Ungnad, an Austrian ambassador, was given 40 tablets of Lemnian earth and a cup made of it³ by Zygomalas, who also sent some to Crusius.

A long series of western travellers, as the bibliography below shows, subsequently interested themselves in the famous earth, none adding greatly to our knowledge but Covell, who appears to record a more superstitious belief in it than his forerunners. Whereas Albacario distinctly says that the religious service was not supposed to influence the power of the earth, Covell reports that 'several papas, as well as others, would have persuaded me that at the time of our Saviour's transfiguration, this place was sanctified to have His sacred earth, and that it is never to be found soft and unctuous, but always perfect rock unlesse only that day . . . and at that time when the priest hath said his liturgy.' Covell further gives minute particulars of the washing of the earth⁴; this was done at the fountain of the neighbouring village (*Άγία Τράτη*), which, merely to increase the miracle apparently, was supposed to have an underground connection with the place of the digging. At this period it was accounted 'an infallible cure of all agues, taken at the beginning of the fit with water' and employed also for fluxes, to hasten childbirth, and as an antidote: no vessel made of it would hold poison but immediately splintered into a thousand fragments. The latter superstition has survived till our own day and is recorded also by several writers before and after Covell.⁵

¹ Charrière, *Negotiations de la France en Levant*, i. 618, ii. 776, iii. 548; de la Vigne; cf. Belon, ch. xxiii.

² Forster's *Busbecq*, i. 164.

³ Gerlach, *Tagebuch*, 403 (1577).

⁴ See also the rather obscure account of Soranzo, which lays great stress on a water-channel diverted on the day of the digging, the earth being found apparently in the natural receptacle into which the water normally flowed: 'si devia l'acqua dal canale, acciò non scorra più nella fossa, dalla quale alzatosi il coperchio se ne leva con molta diligenza tutta l'acqua rimasa con vasi ed in fine con spugne, poi se ne cava quel fango e molticcio (so B.M. *Reg.* 14 A. xiii.) che ha fatta l'acqua, il quale si mette a parte per la prima e più perfetta sorte di terra . . .'

⁵ Crusius, Soranzo, Benetti, Pocke, Tozer.

As to the history of the Lemnian earth in the mediaeval period it has been generally assumed that the export was continuous: de Launay even goes so far as to say that the constant bickering for the possession of the island was due to the value of the earth as an article of commerce¹; as a matter of fact the strategic value of the island is a quite sufficient explanation, and there is no evidence to show that the knowledge of the earth in mediaeval Europe was more than theoretical. This is borne out by Agricola's statement that it was known to few and sold dear in the Venice of his day (which, be it remarked, had had constant relations with Constantinople for several centuries) and by the ignorance of Thevet, who at the time of his voyage (1549) thought the earth came from Athos.² Its excessive rarity about this time is attested by the same author,³ who says he sold four tablets of it in Malta for fifty-five ducats. The complete silence of the early *isolarii* including Buondelmonti's and of such authors as the local Critobulus of Imbros and the traveller Cyriac of Ancona is a valuable negative argument. The only shred of evidence for the appreciation of the earth before the Turkish period is Belon's remark (repeated after him by several others probably drawing on his account⁴) that the custom of digging the earth on one day only dated from the Venetians: the Venetians occupied the island 1464-1477; how, if they organised the digging, as is alleged, for commercial purposes, was the Lemnian earth almost unknown again fifty years later? It is besides probable that 'the time of the Venetians,' like the modern 'time of the Genoese' all over Turkey, was only a vague expression for remote date.

In reality the revival in popularity of the famous drug is most likely due to the appearance of the Spanish Jews in the Levant. It is well known that the Jews, expelled in 1492 from catholic Spain, flocked in the next fifty years to the dominions of the Sultan, where they found a religious toleration unknown in Europe. During the second half of the sixteenth century the expelled Jews held a recognised position at Constantinople in the diplomatic and still more in the medical world. Several of the sultans

¹ This is evidently suggested by the anecdote of the taking of Lemnos in 1657 quoted by Tozer from von Hammer.

² *Cosmog. du Levant* 52. But in his *Cosmog. Univ.* he represents himself as having visited the island.

³ *Cosmog. Univ.* ii.805.

⁴ du Loir, Coronelli: Covel was told the same thing in 1677, only twenty years after another Venetian occupation.

about this date had Jewish physicians,¹ who were recommended not only by their scientific attainments, derived from Moorish Spain, but by their loyalty to their adopted sovereign. It is possible that one of these, knowing Galen from the Arabic translations, was instrumental in bringing the Lemnian earth to the notice of his imperial master. It is, on the other hand, by no means necessary to consider that the use of the earth was at any time extinct in Lemnos: we should probably conceive of it as a local remedy consecrated by religion in mediaeval as in ancient and in modern times till quite recent years.²

Immediately after the revival of the Lemnian earth, and for a century or more after, a number of earths found elsewhere in Europe, begin to compete with it. These were probably either actually similar in composition or credited with similar properties. The date of their discovery, when it can be ascertained, is subsequent to the rediscovery of the Lemnian earth and possibly dependent on it. They are known generically as 'sealed earths,' a local epithet being added, but most have no religious associations. The device of the seal is generally a coat of arms and the form of the tablet follows the Lemnian.

Of these the German and Austrian varieties are fully discussed in Zedler's *Universal Lexikon*, s.v. *Siegelerde*, and many varieties of seals are figured by Wurm³ and Valentini.⁴ Cups were made of the Bohemian⁵ and Strigonian⁶ earths, implying presumably their use as antidotes on the

¹ *E.g.* Selim I, Suleiman II, Selim II: the body-physicians of the last two were Andalusian Jews (M. A. Levy, *Don Joseph Nasi*, Breslau, 1859, p. 6). For the position of the Turkish Jews at this time in commerce and finance, see Belon (iii. 13), where also stress is laid on their proficiency in medicine and knowledge of ancient medical writers, derived from Spanish translations. They had already at this period a printing-press at Constantinople.

² A parallel case of a medicinal earth which has never attracted the learned is to be found in the 'blewish kind of earth like fullers' earth,' seen by Covell (p. 247) at Marash near Adrianople, which was moistened by a miracle on the day of the Assumption and bathed in by Greeks, Turks, and Jews 'for all kinds of infirmities.' Covell thought it might be of value for cutaneous diseases but scouted the miracle. The British Consul at Adrianople (Major Rhys Samson, to whom I may here express my obligations) tells me this mud is still used for rheumatism and the same day observed. A service is naturally celebrated in the church of the Virgin but is now said to have no connection with the mud-bath. It will be remembered that the same is said by Albarcio of the service in Lemnos.

³ *Museum Wurmianum* (1722).

⁴ *Museum Museorum* (1704-16).

⁵ Wurm, *loc. cit.* p. 15.

⁶ Strigonian earth (Strigionium=Gran in Hungary) was discovered as early as 1568 (Zedler), when Gran was Turkish. A specimen of this earth, the variety *de Monte Acuto*, is preserved in the museum of the Pharmaceutical Society (cf. F. Imperato, *Ist. Nat.* (1599) vi. xxxviii).

Lemnian analogy: it is further significant that one variety, found near Breslau, was used like the Lemnian for plague in 1633.¹

In France the earth of Blois seems to have been first exploited about the time of Belon's book. It is mentioned by Thevet² and Palerne.³

In Italy were exploited the earths called Sessana, Toccarese, Florentina⁴ (stamped with the Medici arms), and Oreana.⁵ The Toccarese variety was used as an antidote,⁶ and as cups were made of terra Sinuessa the same may be inferred of it. A Calabrian earth is said by Pococke to have entirely superseded the Lemnian in European practice.⁷

Maltese earth (Pauladadum) is so interesting a parallel (or derivative) of the Lemnian as to deserve a longer notice. It was found in small quantities in the cave of S. Paul near Città Vecchia and appears not to have been in vogue before the Lemnian: our first notices of it are subsequent to the coming of the Knights, and the church on the spot was built only in 1606.⁸ The earth was used for small-pox and fevers, and particularly for the bites of reptiles, this magical use being associated directly with the incident of S. Paul and the viper, after which all reptiles in Malta became harmless. Numerous varieties of seals are shewn in the plates of Wurm and Valentini, including (1) the bust of S. Paul holding staff and serpent (*rev.* a Maltese cross), (2) S. John (*rev.* arms of the Grand Master), (3) a hermit worshipping the cross (*rev.* a three-masted ship) and various saints. Images and vases were also made of the earth, the vases being thought, like the Lemnian, to crumble away when poison was poured into them.⁹ We have thus an almost complete parallel for the Lemnian earth.¹⁰

Outside Europe the earth of Bethlehem seems worth mentioning in this connection. It is found in a cave still shewn as the refuge of the

¹ Zedler, *loc. cit.*

² *Cosmog. du Levant*: Münster (ed. Belleforest i. 313) says it was discovered *de nostre tems.*

³ *Pèrègrinations*, 361. See also Zedler, *loc. cit.*

⁴ Valentini, *loc. cit.* ii. Pl. I.

⁵ Wurm, *loc. cit.* 7 ff.

⁶ Imperato, *loc. cit.* (1599), vi. xxxv.

⁷ Wurm, *loc. cit.* 347.

⁸ Brydone (1770).

⁹ They were also used for fever, cf. Carayon's *Relations de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 1864, p. 129.

¹⁰ For the Maltese earth see Thevet, *Cosmog. Univ.* i. 27; F. Imperato, *Ist. Nat.* (1599) 6. xxv.; Breithaupt, *Heideninsel Malta*, (1632) 39; E. Francisci, *Lustgarten*, (1668) Pl. XLI.; John Ray, *Travels*, (1738) i. 262; Zedler, *loc. cit.*; Brydone (1770). Wurm (p. 347) figures a cup of it with legend DIVINO HOC PAVLI ANTIDOTO ATRA VENENA FVGABIS and reptiles moulded in relief.

Holy Family and a place where the Virgin nursed the infant Christ. The cave is known already to Mandeville (1361)¹: a Russian pilgrim Grethenios (c. 1400)² says that pilgrims took a milky powder from the place 'for remedy and benediction' generally. Later it became specialised as a milk-charm, and was so used even by Mahometans.³ The earth, which is chalky, white, and very friable, is now made up into tablets about an inch square, roughly stamped with the bust of the Virgin on one side and a monogram on the other (Fig. 3, *a*). A second sort, much harder and



FIG. 3.—EARTHS OF BETHLEHEM.

more like clay, is sold outside the Sepulchre church: this is made up in round tablets with a very rough device (on one side only) shewing the Holy Family in the stable, the beasts being quaintly represented by projecting heads (Fig. 3 *b*). This seems to be an 'orthodox' variety.

The vogue of these rival earths naturally restricted the trade in the Lemnian. In the middle of the 18th century the traveller Pococke says it was no longer carried to Europe but used only in the Levant (and even here it was menaced by the export of the Maltese variety), while the

¹ Ed. Bohn, p. 163.

² Khitrovo, *Voyages Russes*, p. 182.

³ Thevet, *Cosmog. Lev.* pp. 37, 52; cf. also Feyerabend, *Reyssbuch*, 220, 274; Villamont, *Voyage*; Lithgow, *loc. cit.* 247, 425. A specimen is figured by Valentini, *loc. cit.* ii. Pl. I.

pharmacist Pomet¹ says that the number of seals then current was confusing, making him think 'that everyone makes 'em to his fancy'; he curiously dissociates the sealed earth from the Lemnian, which 'was said to be the same as the sealed earth but in its natural state without any impression upon it.'² Such a state of uncertainty among the profession could not fail to be fatal to what was essentially a faith-cure.

The West at length reached the stage of pure scepticism. Choiseul-Gouffier, Hunt, and Sibthorp no longer have any belief in the virtue of the Lemnian earth, and analysis has justified their conclusions at least so far as concerns modern samples.³ This scepticism has with the spread of western influence reached Lemnos itself. Conze in the sixties was able still to purchase sealed tablets of the earth at an apothecary's, and in 1876 Pantelides writes of it as still in repute among the Turks of Constantinople. Tozer found the superstition expiring, the festival nearly abandoned, and the site in a fair way to be lost. I myself in 1909 could not obtain the earth in the capital of the island, and at the pottery below the site, bought only bowls of ill-levigated clay bearing the old inscription *tini-maktoum*⁴ (Fig. 5). The monopoly of the pottery and seal, formerly hereditary in a Turkish family, has lost even this link with the past, and the once priceless antidotal bowls have come down to the very moderate figure of a half-penny each.



FIG. 5.
THE MODERN
SEAL.



FIG. 4.
'LEMNIAN EARTH' (?)
OF THE XVII.-XVIII.
CENTURY.

(From a specimen in the
Pharmaceutical Society's
Collection.)

F. W. HASLUCK.

¹ *Compleat History of Drugs*, (1712) p. 415. A contemporary specimen of Lemnian earth (which can hardly be genuine) in the museum of the Pharmaceutical Society is figured above (Fig. 4): this variety is mentioned by Zedler and figured by Wurm, p. 10.

² Probably the preparation made from the baobab tree and called *Terra Lemnia Sigillata*, *Encycl. Brit.* 3 ed. s.v. *Adansonia*.

³ Daubeny, *On Volcanos*, p. 373, De Launay. Tozer doubts whether the original vein is not exhausted. On the chemical side of edible earths in general an article (inaccessible to me) has lately been published in *Schweiz. Wochenschr. f. Chymie*, 1909, 417-425.

⁴ The seal itself is modern according to the tradition given by Tozer.

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¹ Authors who visited Lemnos are marked with a dagger (†). ² *V. Rev. Or. Lat.* xii. (1909), 175 f.