

# THE ANCIENT CRAFT AND ART OF THE LAPIDARY

## INTRODUCTION

LEONARD GORELICK

In 1971 the papers given at an important symposium on "Archaeological Chemistry" were published. One of the noted participants was Professor Cyril Stanley Smith of M.I.T. The text contained a most thoughtful appendix written by him called "A Post-Symposium Note: Science in the Service of History." His comments are equally pertinent to the present symposium "The Ancient Craft and Art of the Lapidary." He wrote,

... artifacts are more than indices (of time and place). Is it not an equally important part of human history, not just to know that at one time and place there existed a people enjoying the external form of a glazed ceramic pot, using iron daggers to kill each other, or bedecking their women with gold and amber, but also to study the knowledge possessed by the man who made these things and to trace the rise and decay of technical skills in different cultures? By careful scientific study of the details of structure of an object, it is possible to form a very good idea as to the sequence of thermal, mechanical and chemical operations that brought it to being. It is possible almost to relive the experience, sensually if not intellectually, of the artist or artisan. ... Any one study (read symposium) can answer only limited questions. My plea is just that we should try to bring into the scene something that has hitherto been grossly neglected.

It is my view that examination of the craft of the ancient lapidary has been neglected. *Stone working is a craft as old as man himself, exceeding all others, and the lapidary is a specialized stone-worker.* Cutting across time, place and culture, the craft of the lapidary has been the subject

of scholars with diverse points of view and interests. A consequence of this scholarly diversity has been widespread publication of research in a multitude of journals. Knowledge of the subject has been both uneven and fragmented. There is no single unifying text on the subject. One purpose of this symposium is to gather scholars from separate fields in order to bring the subject of lapidary into central focus. This has not been done before. Hopefully, the symposium will be a stimulant to further research and symposia which can include periods and cultures that have also made significant contributions. Apologies are in order to the remarkable lapidaries of ancient Egypt, Mexico, Japan, etc. whose work was omitted because of the constraints of time and cost.

Our opinion that the craft of the ancient lapidary has been neglected was fortunately shared by the Archaeological Institute of America and the National Endowment for the Humanities who became sponsors together with our North Shore Society of the AIA. It was also shared by Bernard Wailes, editor of *Expedition*, who made available these special issues.

On behalf of the North Shore Society of the AIA I offer thanks and appreciation to all who have made this possible.

Leonard Gorelick  
Symposium Coordinator  
North Shore Society of the  
Archaeological Institute of America

The Symposium will be held at the New York Institute of Technology, Old Westbury, Long Island. It will take place on Saturday, November 21, 1981, from 9:30 to 4:00. For further information write to Leonard Gorelick, 54-44 Little Neck Parkway, Little Neck, New York 11362.