# The Orientation and Posture of the Human Torso as a Convention in Neopalatial Iconography

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**Abstract** *A recent examination of LM I and LC I iconography reveals that the orientation (frontal or profile) and posture (straight, arched or hunched) of the human torso function together as a subtle yet significant visual convention. Used in scenes depicting direct communication between pairs of figures, and in scenes depicting groups of figures who do not directly interact but engage in collective action, the convention helps define these figures' roles in the represented activities and the nature of the relationship they maintain with each other. In conveying a precise message to the viewer about function, status and hierarchical position, the convention belongs to a standardised visual tradition which – it is here proposed – is concerned with the representation of, on the one hand, social differentiation and, on the other hand, social collaboration.*

## The Human Torso: A Subtle Yet Significant Iconographic Feature

Interpretations on communication between human figures in Aegean Bronze Age art have to date been built upon examinations of the positioning of hands, arms, heads and of the careful rendering of facial features (*e.g.* Wedde 1999; Morgan 2000; Cain 2001; Morris 2001; Boulotis 2011). Through the observation of patterns of recurrence of gesture, posture, stance and movement, a number of visual iconographic conventions have been identified, and it has thus been possible to tease out the nature and meaning of some of these interactions. A fresh survey of Neopalatial iconography however shows that there is also another, subtle but significant, convention used in the representation of interaction and communication: that of the orientation and posture of the torso. The torso is shown in two orientations – frontally or in profile – and in one of three postures – straight, arched, or hunched. A careful examination of this convention in wall paintings, glyptic, on stone vessels and other portable objects (excluding figurines)[1] furthermore reveals that two types of torso orientation and posture combinations (henceforth referred to as 'couplings') exist among interacting figures. The first (Coupling 1) involves a figure with a frontal torso and a figure with a profile torso, and the second (Coupling 2) involves two figures with frontal torsos (Fig. 1). The survey moreover reveals that torso orientation and posture are also carefully represented in scenes in which human figures are shown alone with an animal or in which figures do not directly interact but engage in collective action.

While this convention is identified and analysed for the first time here, the human torso has frequently been referred to in studies on the Minoan body. Variations in orientation and posture have certainly been noted, and on a few occasions have been remarked upon (see *e.g.* Peterson Murray 2004, 108–110; Wedde 2004, 157–158). On most occasions, however, discussions have been more general: the male torso has mostly been discussed in terms of shoulder breadth, waist width, and muscular development (*e.g.* Coulomb 1981, 1985, 1990; Marinatos 1995; Weingarten 2000; Chapin 2007, 2009, 2012), whereas the female torso has been examined principally for the baring, size and shape of the breasts (*e.g.* Evans 1930; Davis 1986; Coulomb 1989; Morris 2009; Chapin 2011). It would appear that the torso has in fact mostly been per-

1 Figurines are not considered in this discussion because three-dimensional representations of the body require a different form of analysis.



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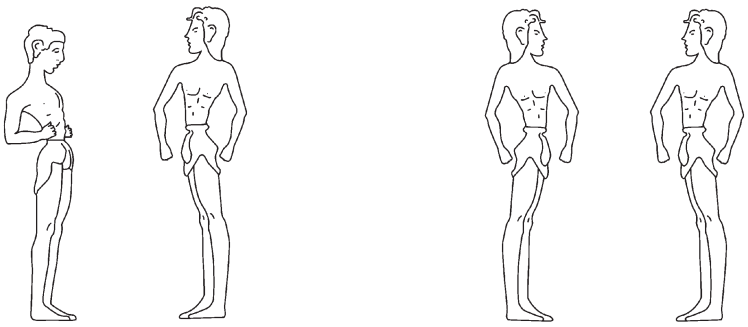


*Fig. 1: Technical illustration indicating the composition of Coupling 1 (a) and Coupling 2 (b). Sketch by the author.*

ceived as a secondary feature, in other words, as a canvas upon which informative details on the figures' age or status – encapsulated by anatomical features and adornment – are applied rather than as a directly meaningful iconographic feature per se. The present study, however, reveals that torso orientation and posture function in tandem and actively contribute to the message a scene seeks to convey to its audience. Owing to the systematic consistency with which the couplings and torso arrangements recur throughout the iconography, it is evident that they consist of more than mere technical features or the result of arbitrary choices. A mapping of this convention's occurrence reveals that it serves to indicate the nature of the activity the figures engage in, the latter's role in the interaction and their position in the social group they are shown in. Here, the first attempts at articulating the essence of this subtle iconographic feature are undertaken.

The iconography discussed in this paper is limited to the LM I[2] and LC I periods, and mostly originates from Crete and Thera although other comparative contemporary Cycladic material is also included.[3] The detail with which human anatomy is rendered in wall paintings and on stone vessels in this period allows, in most cases, for an easy identification of the orientation of the torso. For glyptic, which exhibits more visual complexity, however, the representation of the shoulders also serves as a qualifying criterion. The rendition of both shoulders correlates with a frontally oriented torso while the rendition of one shoulder correlates with a profile oriented torso.[4] The imagery upon which the study relies therefore belongs to a standardised iconographic repertoire, which flourished with the rise of the second palaces and the establishment of political and religious institutionalisation. The discussed convention can thus be considered as a widely-recognised visual cue, carefully represented by the images' producers in order to communicate a specific message.

## Torso Orientation and Comportment for Figures Engaging in Direct Interaction

### *Coupling 1: frontal + profile torsos*

The iconographic convention of Coupling 1 appears in scenes of direct interaction showing figures engaged in clearly identifiable activities, as is demonstrated by their gestures, postures, outfits, hairstyles, the objects they manipulate, and the environment in which they are depicted

2 The precise dating of certain wall paintings remains a matter of debate, and it is possible that a number may originate from MM III.

3 Material from the mainland, however, is mostly excluded from this paper. Despite the visual similarities apparent between Cretan and mainland iconography, these cultures employ different conventions. This is particularly apparent where the torso is concerned. Depictions of the torso in mainland iconography thus deserve their own focused investigation. The miniature wall painting from the West House on Thera is also excluded owing to its extensive variety and to the vast space subsequently required to discuss its numerous scenes. Several points made here are nevertheless relevant to it and can be considered in future studies.

4 Scenes in which the torso's orientation is not clearly rendered are not cited as supporting evidence in this paper but were nevertheless considered in the analysis.

| Coupling 1: frontal + profile torsos | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Activity** | **Media** | **Sources** | **Gender/species** |
| Saffron gathering | Wall paintings | Xeste 3, Room 3a (Thera) | Female-Female |
| Object bearing | Wall paintings | Xeste 3, corridor west of lustral basin (Thera) | Male-Male |
| Fishing | Wall paintings | West House, Room 5 (Thera) | Male-Male |
| Service | Wall paintings | Xeste 3, Room 3a (Thera) | Female-Female |
| | | Pillar Crypt (Phylakopi) | Female-Female |
| | | House of the Ladies, Room 1 (Thera) | Female-Female |
| | Glyptic | *CMS* II 8, no. 268 (Knossos) | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 8 (Kato Zakros) | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* VI, no. 283 (Kydonia) | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 3 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Male |
| | Vessels | Rhyton (Knossos) (Warren 1969, P476) | Male |
| Combat | Glyptic | *CMS* II 6, no. 15 (Agia Triada) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 20 (Kato Zakos) | Male-Male |
| Boxing | Wall paintings | House Beta, Room 1 (Thera) | Male-Male |
| | Glyptic | *CMS* II 8, no. 280 (Knossos) | Male-Male |
| | Vessels | Boxers Rhyton register 3 (Agia Triada) | Male-Male |
| | | Rhyton (Knossos) (Warren 1969, P472) | Male-?Male |
| | | Rhyton (Knossos) (Warren 1969, P475) | Male-Male |
| Hunting | Wall paintings | Xeste 3, vestibule (Thera) | Male-Male-Bull |
| | Glyptic | *CMS* IX, no.152 (Sitia) | Male-Lion |
| | | *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 135 (Kastelli Chania) | Male-Lion |
| | | *CMS* II 6, no. 37 (Agia Triada) | Male-Bull |
| | | *CMS* IV, no. 233 (Sitia) | Male-Lion |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 33 (Kato Zakos) | Male-Male-Lion |
| Animal domestication | Wall paintings | Xeste 3, Room 3a (Thera) | Female-Monkey |
| | | House of the Saffron Gatherers (Knossos) | Monkey |
| | Glyptic | *CMS* III, no. 358 (Sitia) | Female-Monkey |
| | | *CMS* III, no. 357 (Prassa) | Male-Monkey |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 24 (Kato Zakros) | Female-Monkey |
| | | *CMS* II 3, no. 103 (Kalyvia) | Female-Monkey |
| Formal exchange | Wall paintings | Priest King (Knossos) *extended arm* | Male-? |
| | | Captain and Warrior (Knossos) 2+ figures | Male-Male |
| | | Sacred Grove and Dance (Knossos) 2+ figures | Male-Male |
| | Glyptic | *CMS* II 8, no. 256 (Knossos) *extended arm* | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* VI, no. 281 (Knossos) *extended arm* | Female-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 6, no. 8 (Agia Triada) *extended arm* | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 180 (Kastelli Chania) | Female-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 3, no. 103 (Kalyvia) | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* XI, no. 29 (unprov. Berlin ring) 2+ figures | Female-Male |
| | Vessels | Chieftain Cup (Agia Triada) *extended arm* | Male-Male |

*Table 1. Instances of Coupling 1.*

(Table 1). These activities consist of saffron gathering, object bearing, fishing, service, combat and boxing, hunting and animal domestication. Coupling 1 also appears in scenes of interaction where figures are involved in some less clearly identifiable activities, but which have generally been described as bearing religious connotations, and as depicting epiphanies or engagements between deities and humans (*e.g.* Nilsson 1951; Hägg 1983; Marinatos 1993; Cain 2001). For the sake of simplicity, these less clearly identifiable activities are here referred to as 'formal exchange'.

*Coupling 1 in scenes depicting saffron gathering, object bearing and fishing*

In scenes depicting saffron gathering, object bearing and fishing, Coupling 1 serves to mark a difference in knowledge and practical experience between the interacting figures. The figures whose torsos are shown frontally are more experienced than those with the torso rendered in profile. The painting on the east wall of Room 3a in Xeste 3 on Thera, in which two girls communicate while gathering saffron, illustrates this clearly (Fig. 2a) (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 152, fig. 116). Although it has been proposed that the interaction is evocative of anecdotal chitchat (Boulotis 2011, 8), the scene has also been interpretated as capturing an educational moment:

the older left-most figure supervises, advises or corrects the attentive, younger, right-most figure (Tzachili 2005, 113–114; Vlachopoulos 2008, 493). A similar arrangement, which also includes the particular positioning of one of the figures' head, is visible in the painting on the south wall of the corridor west of the lustral basin in Xeste 3 (Fig. 2b) (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 146, fig. 109). A young boy carrying a vessel apprehensively raises his gaze towards a youth holding a cloth, possibly in expectation of advice or praise. Finally, while the spatial positioning of the two fishermen in Room 5 of the West House on Thera (Fig. 2c) (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 52, figs. 18–19) does not immediately impart an impression of direct communication between the figures, they nevertheless face each other. The profile figure, in the south-west corner of the room, is slightly shorter and holds less fish than the youth with a frontally depicted torso placed in the north-west corner of the room. It is conceivable that he is also learning from the older figure.

*Coupling 1 in scenes depicting service*

In scenes of service, Coupling 1 is employed to differentiate the servant from the person being served. Its use is characterised by the depiction of one or more figure(s) in profile approaching a seated figure with a frontally depicted torso. Examples of such interactions appear in the central arrangement of the north wall of Room 3a in Xeste 3 (Fig. 2d) (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 158, fig. 122), and on three sealings from Knossos, Kato Zakros and Kydonia (Figs. 2e, f) (Table 1). In all the cited examples, it is clear that the frontally-depicted figure is older in age than the figures depicted in profile, as is indicated by the clear rendering of the former's breasts and of the latter's flat chests. It is also very likely that the seated figure is of a higher social status than the serving figures owing to her lavish jewellery and her association with 'official' symbolism.

While fragmentary and heavily reconstructed, the wall paintings from the Pillar Crypt at Phylakopi on Melos (for illustration see Morgan 1990, 259, fig. 8) and the corridor in Room 1 in the House of the Ladies on Thera (Fig. 2g) (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 38, figs. 6–7) also deserve a mention as some – although not all – of their compositional elements echo those from the scenes discussed above. Regularly referred to as depictions of robing events (Marinatos 1984, 102; Peterson Murray 2004, 107; Morgan 2007, 384), these two wall paintings show profile-positioned figures tending to another female figure. Regardless of the latter's positioning, posture and age – details which have provoked debate (Marinatos 1984, 103, fig. 71; Peterson Murray 2004, 112 and 116, figs. 6.10 and 6.12; Jones 2014) – the figures in profile, like those on the sealings, all present slightly hunched shoulders and are depicted as leaning forwards or extending their arms in front of them.

Although some technical reasons certainly lie behind the leaning and slightly hunched rendering of these figures' upper bodies – mainly because it facilitates the representation of the depicted action and places visual emphasis on the handled object – it may also have been included in the scene in order to communicate some additional contextual information. Because the leaning and slightly hunched posture, which is also accompanied by slightly flexed and bent knees, is always rendered on the servant and never on the figure being served, might it also be interpreted as an expression of deference, as indicative of the serving figure's lower status, or as defining the type of service the figure is engaged in? The scenes discussed so far have only involved women, but it is noticeable that leaning male figures in profile are also rendered on a rhyton fragment from Knossos (for photograph see Alexiou, 1959, 353, pl. ΛΔ) (Fig. 2h) and on sealing *CMS* II 7, no. 3 from Kato Zakros (Fig. 2i). In the latter, the posture is typically regarded as expressive of submission to a hierarchically superior figure (see *e.g.* Marinatos 2010, 182–184; Koehl 2016, 118–127; Blakolmer 2019, 51–53).

*Coupling 1 in scenes depicting combat and boxing*

Turning to scenes depicting more violent activities, such as combat and boxing, Coupling 1 serves to indicate a figure's degree of physical strength and to differentiate the victor from the

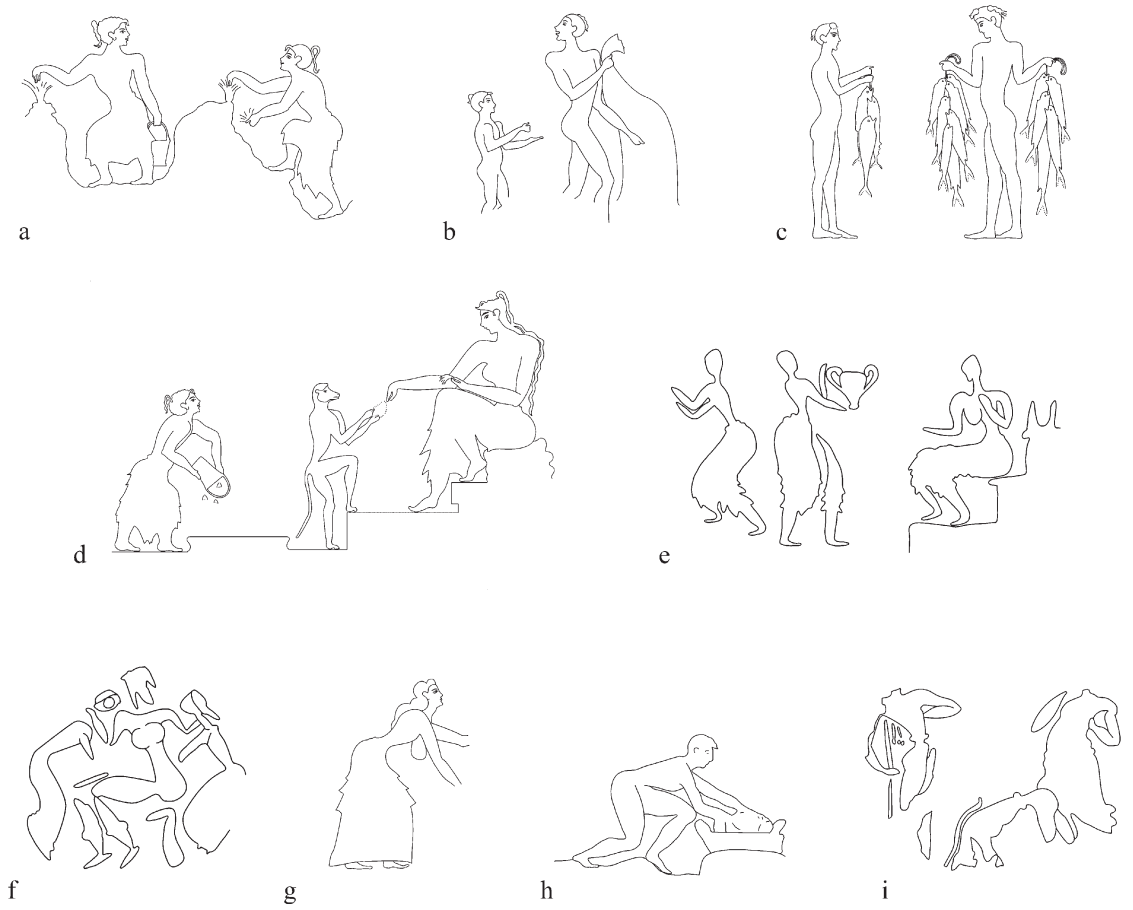


*Fig. 2 a: Wall painting, Xeste 3, Thera; b. Wall painting, Xeste 3, Thera; c. Wall painting, West House, Thera; d. Wall painting, Xeste 3, Thera; e.* CMS *II 8, no. 268; f.* CMS *VI, no. 283; g. Knossos rhyton; h.* CMS *II 7, no. 3. Images not to scale. Sketches by the author.*

vanquished. The figures whose torsos are depicted frontally are winning while those with a torso rendered in profile are being defeated. This is best illustrated by two sealings from Agia Triada (Fig. 3 a) and Kato Zakros (Fig. 3 b) (Table 1), and by boxing scenes such as the third register of the Agia Triada Boxer Rhyton (Fig. 3c) (for illustration see Koehl 2006, fig. 29) and the wall painting from House Beta on Thera depicting two young pugilists (Fig. 3 d) (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 112, fig. 78). Through comparison with these scenes, it can therefore be argued that the fragments of other contemporaneous boxing scenes show the victorious figure (Table 1). Although Coupling 1 is the most prevalent torso arrangement in scenes of agonistic sports and combat, exceptions do occur. For example, sealings *CMS* II 6, no. 16 and *CMS* II 6, no. 17 from Agia Triada and the fourth register of the Boxer Rhyton (Figs. 5 a–c) present both the victorious and the defeated figures with a frontally depicted torso. These instances are discussed further below, in the section devoted to Coupling 2.

*Coupling 1 in scenes depicting hunting and animal domestication*

Coupling 1 appears principally in scenes depicting direct engagement between humans, but it can nevertheless also be noted in scenes involving animals. Hunting scenes also contain violent action and the convention might, as in the case of combat and boxing, here be understood as indicative of domination and defeat. While animals are usually depicted in profile in Minoan iconography, the frontal positioning of the human figures on sealings from Kastelli Chania, Agia

Triada and Sitia (Figs. 3e, f) (Table 1) likely serves to indicate their superiority or control over the beasts.

Moreover, Coupling 1 is also shown in hunting scenes in which two human figures engage with an animal. In these instances, one of the men is also represented in profile, but unlike the animal, does not appear to have been defeated. Might such instances, best represented by *CMS* II 7, no. 33 from Kato Zakros (Fig. 3g), and possibly also shown in the recent reconstruction of the wall painting in the vestibule of Xeste 3 (Vlachopoulos 2021, pl. LXa), consequently also depict educational events? Or might they, as in the case of the service scenes, depict a status difference between the figures, with the profile figure being the frontal figure's attendant or assistant?

Coupling 1 also appears in non-violent engagements between humans and animals. Three sealings from Sitia, Prassa and Kato Zakros (Figs. 3h, i) (Table 1) depict humans, with frontally depicted torsos, facing monkeys rendered in profile. As in the case of hunting, this arrangement most likely represents the human's superiority or control over the animals, but it may, as in the saffron gathering scenes discussed earlier in this paper, also contain an educational dimension. Might the figures be training the monkeys to collect saffron? The presence of a lead around the monkey's waist on the Prassa sealing, and the presence of a harness on the monkey in the Knossos wall painting (for photograph see Morgan ed. 2005, pl. 4) – who is incidentally in a similar position to the younger saffron gatherer in Xeste 3 (Fig. 2a) – might indicate that the animal is domesticated, or is in the process of being domesticated. Indeed, despite their clear association with fauna, monkeys are also often anthropomorphised in Minoan iconography (see *e.g.* Rehak 1999, 707; Vlachopoulos 2008, 493).

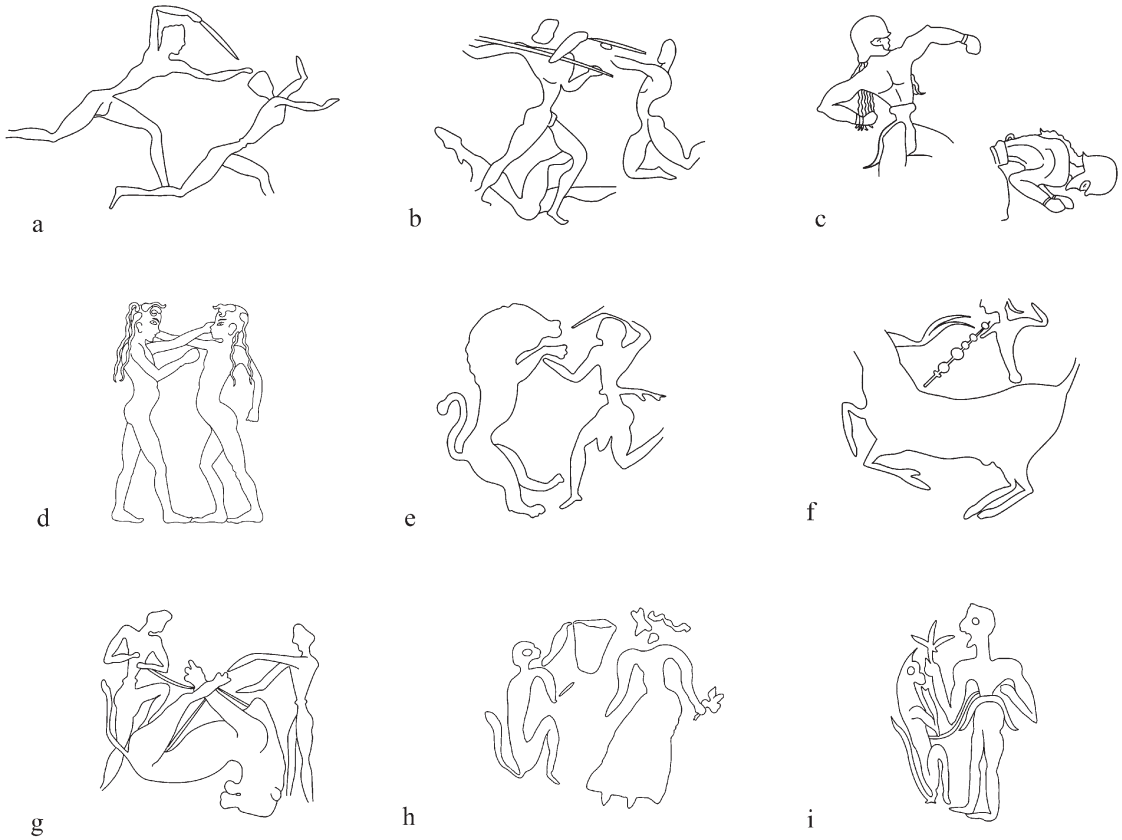


*Fig. 3a:* CMS *II 6, no. 15; b.* CMS *II 7, no. 20; c. Boxers Rhyton register 3; d. Wall painting, House Beta, Thera; e.* CMS *V, Suppl. 1A, no. 135; f.* CMS *II 6, no. 37; g.* CMS *II 7, no. 33; h.* CMS *III, no. 358; i.* CMS *III, no. 357. Images not to scale. Sketches by the author.*

*Coupling 1 in scenes of 'formal exchange'*

The last type of scene in which Coupling 1 occurs depicts various types of 'formal exchange'. Two or more figures appear in these scenes and, as was stated above, the exact nature of the interactions is less clear than those discussed so far as the figures' hands are, for the most part, not occupied with objects but instead perform symbolic gestures. Often, these scenes have been interpreted as depicting epiphanies or the sanctioning of rulership (see *e.g.* Nilsson 1951; Hägg 1983; Rutkowski 1986; Marinatos 1993; Krattenmaker 1995; Cain 2001). Coupling 1 here nevertheless seems to help define the figures' role, and in some cases, probably their position in a hierarchy too. The convention is included in scenes in which a figure extends an arm (sometimes holding a staff) towards another figure (Figs. 4a–d) (Table 1).[5] This out-going gesture has consistently been interpreted as expressive of 'command' while the more contained gesture of the responding figure has been interpreted as indicating deference and 'adoration', and in some cases as consisting of a 'salute' (see *e.g.* Krattenmaker 1995, 49–50; Cain 2001, 40).[6] In most cases, the figure with the extended arm is rendered with a frontally depicted torso and the respondent's torso is rendered in profile: details which indeed support the suggestion of one figure's seniority, superiority or pre-eminence over the other. Nevertheless, the figure on sealing *CMS* II 6, no. 8 from Agia Triada (Fig. 4d), whose arm is extended, is in profile and faces a larger seated woman. It can consequently be suggested that, despite the fact that the smaller figure is 'commanding' and thus performing a prescribed – and likely authoritative – role, hierarchy between the figures is demarcated by the torso orientation. The combination of a seated position and a frontally depicted torso can thus be regarded as a convention for hierarchical superiority, as it does in scenes of service. Before examining scenes in which multiple figures occur, it must be noted that Coupling 1 also appears in interactions between two figures – such as those depicted on *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 180 from Kastelli Chania and *CMS* II 3, no. 103 from Kalyvia (Fig. 4e) – with raised forearms rather than fully extended arms. The frontal torso of the female figures may also be regarded as indicative of a superior role. Noteworthy are the parallels existing between the Kalyvia ring and the wall painting from Room 3a in Xeste 3 (Fig. 2d).

Turning to scenes of 'formal exchange' in which multiple figures occur (Table 1), a similar function can be assigned to Coupling 1. Although it remains unclear whether direct interaction occurs between only two of the depicted figures, or whether it involves all of them, it is nevertheless also likely that torso orientation marks a functional, and possibly also hierarchical, difference between the communicating figures. In the 'Captain and Warrior' fragment of the Knossos Sacred Grove and Dance wall painting (Fig. 4f) (for photograph and reconstruction see Morgan ed. 2005, pl. 10), for example, a staff-wielding man stands before a crowd of identically clad men, some of whom also wield staffs. Alongside the fact that the figure stands apart from the crowd, his frontally depicted torso,[7] and the latter's partially hidden torsos,[8] indicate that he holds a different – and probably more authoritative – role than the other figures. A comparable use of Coupling 1 to demarcate function or role is also evidenced on an unprovenanced[9] signet-ring held in Berlin (Fig. 4g) (Table 1) in which a male figure with a frontally depicted torso engages with a profile positioned female figure holding a bow.

5 While the illustration of *CMS* II 6, no. 6 shows a floating figure with an extended arm, the poor preservation of the sealing makes this hard to confirm. This piece is therefore excluded from the argument.

6 Niemeier's (1987) reconstruction of the Knossos 'Priest King' relief wall painting can also be included here.

7 Although the torso is only partially preserved, the overt rendering of the musculature strongly suggests that it was depicted frontally.

8 Their torsos are for the most part eclipsed by their fellows' heads and thus their exact orientation cannot be securely confirmed, but the profile rendering of similar figures in the Sacred Grove and Dance section of the wall painting suggests that they are in profile.

9 While it cannot be verified whether this ring was Minoan in origin, it presents a consistent use of Coupling 1. Noteworthy is the fact that, although from the mainland, the much-discussed Elateia ring (*CMS* V Suppl. 2, no. 106) also presents similar characteristics.

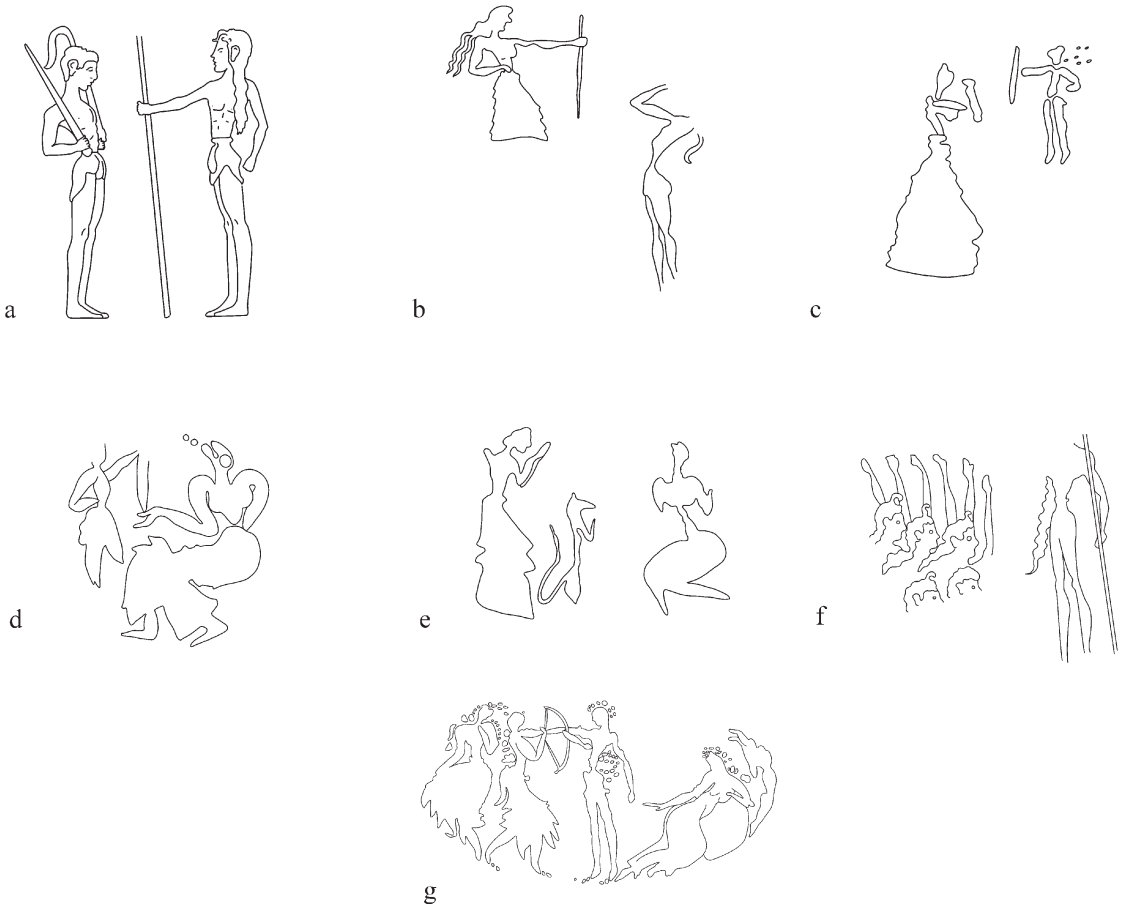


*Fig. 4a: Chieftain Cup; b.* CMS *II 8, no. 256; c.* CMS *VI, no. 281; d.* CMS *II 6, no. 8; e.* CMS *II 3, no. 103; f. Wall painting, Knossos; g.* CMS *XI, no. 29. Images not to scale. Sketches by the author.*

Overall, the bodily comportment of the male figures positioned in profile in scenes of 'formal exchange' is tense. They all maintain an upright posture, and in some cases, also present a slight arch in their lower back. Their legs, moreover, are not flexed but are kept straight. Contrastingly, owing the volume of their skirts and to the slight crane of their necks, the demeanour of the female figures appears less strained. It was previously suggested that the leaning and slightly hunched posture of figures in service denotes a form of deference, and the comportments identified here may also convey such a meaning, but may nonetheless be expressive of respect of a slightly different nature – for example, a form of respect which does not involve service. Noteworthy is also the fact that, except for the Chieftain Cup (Fig. 4a) (for photograph see Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005, 154), no overt age distinction conventions are visible between the figures in these scenes. They all appear to be adults – or near adulthood – as is indicated by their hairstyles and the presence of breasts for the female figures. Finally, scenes of 'formal exchange' in which Coupling 1 occurs depict interaction between both male and female figures, which is a phenomenon that does not occur in the other instances of Coupling 1 examined above.

***Coupling 2: frontal + frontal torsos***

Coupling 2 is characterised by direct engagement between two figures with frontally depicted torsos. Instances of this coupling are much fewer than Coupling 1, and it is also noticeable that in a number of scenes, the torso orientation can be slightly ambiguous. Nonetheless, a number of examples do exist and deserve careful examination (Table 2). Overall, Coupling 2 occurs principally in scenes of 'formal exchange' but, as was mentioned earlier in this paper, it also appears in three

scenes depicting combat. Despite its sparsity, it is nevertheless also considered as indicative of the type of interaction depicted and of the relationship maintained between the figures.

*Coupling 2 in scenes of combat*

Sealings *CMS* II 6, no. 16 and *CMS* II 6, no. 17 from Agia Triada (Figs. 5a, b) show figures engaged in combat with frontally depicted torsos. Another likely instance of Coupling 2 appears on the fourth register of the Boxer Rhyton (Fig. 5c), and while the torso of the figure lying in front of the frontally depicted victor is not visible owing to the vessel's fragmentary state, the torso of the defeated man behind the victor appears to have been represented frontally (note the difference with the profile positioning of the figure on the second register and Fig. 3c). He has been knocked down by another boxer whom, in the light of his typical lunging posture, can also be considered as rendered with a frontally oriented torso. While the presence of Coupling 2 may, at first glance, be interpreted as indicative of another – for example, earlier – stage of battle than that shown in the scenes with Coupling 1, the presence of defeated figures on the rhyton and on *CMS* II 6, no. 17 suggest otherwise. Rather, Coupling 2 in fact seems to imply a different form of interaction between the figures. The frontal depiction of all fighters' torsos imparts a visual impression of balance although the imagery is clearly evocative of victory and defeat. Moreover, the presence of helmets on the victorious figures in the glyptic scenes differentiate them from the bare-headed figures on *CMS* II 6, no. 15 and *CMS* II 7, no. 20 (Figs. 3a, b) examined above. The reverse phenomenon is visible on the Boxers Rhyton, and noteworthy is also the absence of columns on the vessel's fourth register. Was Coupling 2 therefore employed to show that the figures are fair adversaries, with equal levels of strength and experience? Do these scenes represent more gruelling combats than those in which Coupling 1 is shown? Alternatively, it is also conceivable that the convention served to indicate that the warriors are of the same hierarchical position or social status.

*Coupling 2 in scenes of 'formal exchange'*

In scenes of 'formal exchange', Coupling 2 appears principally in glyptic, and namely on a signet-ring from Knossos, on a sealing from Malia, and on an unprovenanced seal held in Geneva (Figs. 5d, e) (Table 2).[10] In all instances, two figures with frontally depicted torsos extend their arms towards each other. The figures' mirrored gestures further contribute to the impression of balance created by the orientation of their upper bodies. As a result, the direction of the communication is more difficult to identify than in scenes of 'formal exchange' containing Coupling 1, and generally the interactions appear less authoritarian. Might Coupling 2 therefore point to a more equal form of communication between the figures than that expressed by Coupling 1? As was noted earlier, however, the figures must not necessarily be perceived as holding the same function and status or as being of the same hierarchical positioning. The seated position of the woman on the on the Geneva seal (Fig. 5d) indeed differentiates her from the standing figure, in a way reminiscent of the seated ladies in the aforementioned scenes of service.

Coupling 2 also appears in 'formal exchange' scenes in which figures do not perform the same gestures (Figs. 5f–h) (Table 2). Although the imagery generates less of a visual balance than scenes in which figures do mirror each others' arm positioning, it nevertheless produces less of a contrast than Coupling 1. It is thus conceivable that, similarly to the above, Coupling 2 serves to mark a different form of interaction to that depicted in scenes including figures in profile, although its exact nature remains unclear. Nevertheless, like in the scenes of 'formal exchange' discussed in the previous paragraph, the seated position of the ladies on the Poros Ring (Fig. 5f), on *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 177 (Fig. 5h), on the Mochlos Pyxis (for image see Soles 2019, pl. X)

10 The clear rendering of the standing figure's right shoulder on this seal suggests that the torso is depicted frontally. Moreover, although from the mainland, the Kalapodi ring (*CMS* V, Suppl. 3, no. 68) also presents similar characteristics.

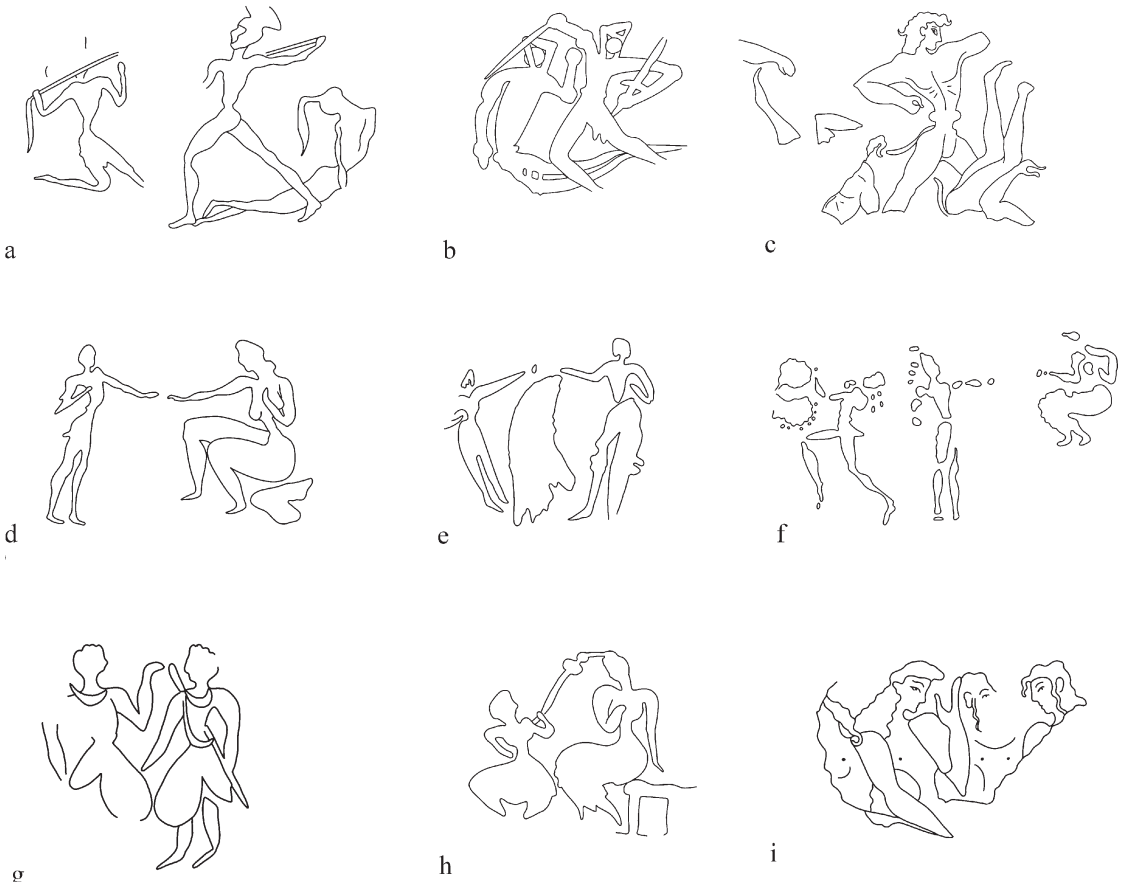


*Fig. 5 a:* CMS *II 6, no. 16; b.* CMS *II 6, no. 17; c. Boxers Rhyton register 4; d.* CMS *X, no. 261; e.* CMS *II 3, no. 145; f. Poros ring; g.* CMS *II 7, no. 18; h.* CMS *V Suppl. 1A, no. 177; i. Wall painting, Knossos. Images not to scale. Sketches by the author.*

and in the reconstruction of the Pseira mural (for image see Betancourt and Davaras 1998, pl. H) clearly differentiates them the other standing figures facing them. A similar phenomenon, but depicted on a larger scale, can be noted on the Knossos Grandstand wall painting (Fig. 5 i) (for photograph and illustration see Morgan ed. 2005, pls. 10–11), where a group of seated ladies with frontally depicted torsos communicate with each other while surrounded by figures represented in profile.

| **Coupling 2: frontal + frontal torsos** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Activity** | **Media** | **Sources** | **Gender/species** |
| Combat | Glyptic | *CMS* II 6, no. 16 (Agia Triada) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 6, no. 17 (Agia Triada) | Male-Male |
| | Vessels | Boxer Rhyton register 4 (Agia Triada) | Male-Male |
| Formal exchange | Wall paintings | Grandstand (Knossos) | Female-Female |
| | | Building AC (Pseira) | Female-Female |
| | Glyptic | *CMS* VI, no. 280 (Knossos) | Female-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 3, no. 145 (Malia) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* X, no. 261 (unprov. Geneva) | Female-Male |
| | | Poros Ring (Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis 2000, fig. 4) | Female-Male |
| | | *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 177 (Chania Kastelli) | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 18 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 1 (Kato Zakros) | Female-Male |
| | Vessels | Pyxis (Mochlos) | Female-Male |

*Table 2. Instances of Coupling 2.*

***Overview: torso orientation and posture as a convention in scenes of direct interaction***

The mapping out and analysis of recurring instances of Couplings 1 and 2 in Neopalatial iconography show that the depiction of the orientation and posture of the human torso was structured and intentional, and that it did not result from a haphazard choice on the part of the artist. It is moreover evident that, in most instances, the rendering of the torso was not dictated by technical limitations encountered in the representation of human anatomy, as a number of identical gestures and actions are performed by figures with torsos shown both frontally and in profile. In the few instances – such as scenes of service – in which the choice of torso orientation does however artistically facilitate the representation of certain elements, the frontal torso orientation of the figures being served is not strictly necessary from a technical perspective. In the light of the analyses presented above, it in fact appears that Couplings 1 and 2 were principally used to define the type of relationship maintained between the interacting figures.

Coupling 1 clearly indicates an asymmetry, be it in terms of skill, knowledge, role, and sometimes age and status. Coupling 1 therefore shows a vertical hierarchy, in which one figure is presented as more experienced or socially superior to the other. The convention furthermore simultaneously contributes to a clearer delineation of individual characters. Because it does not create the visual contrast projected by Coupling 1, however, Coupling 2 contrarily implies more of a horizontal type of relationship between interacting figures. Nevertheless, differences in role, status, and possibly age are certainly shown through other means, thus also allowing for the portrayal of individual characters.

The discussed torso orientation and posture conventions consequently serve to define the figures' position in the social group they are depicted as a part of, and to effectively mark social differentiation. In fact, it can be argued that, in certain cases, the couplings depict different stages of socialisation in Minoan society: Coupling 1 frequently appears in relation to training and formative acclimatising to certain socially constructive tasks and Coupling 2 is associated with accomplished figures who are beyond training and have proved their competence. The torso is thus a subtle but significant element of visual vocabulary which has different layers of meaning and which functions on different levels simultaneously. It can function as a primary marker of role or status but it can also function as a secondary sub-status marker. It is consequently a flexible and adaptable convention, which can be used in a number of different contexts.

## Torso Orientation and Posture as a Convention for Figures Not Engaged in Direct Interaction

Having examined the use of the convention in scenes depicting figures engaged in direct interaction, the question remains whether the rendering of the torso plays the same role in scenes in which no direct interaction between figures is represented, or in which lone human figures are shown with animals. Does the frontally depicted torso also indicate a figure's hierarchical superiority over another, or her or his status? Does the torso in profile also show a figure's hierarchical inferiority, juniority or trainee status? Is social differentiation as keenly emphasized as in scenes of direct interaction? Below, a selection of representative iconographic scenes in which groups of non-interacting or lone figures with animals are depicted are analysed (Table 3).

***The torso convention in scenes depicting bull leaping***

In LM I, most representations of bull leaping appear in glyptic. In these scenes, figures are frequently represented alone with the bull, but on *CMS* II 7, no. 35 and *CMS* II 8, no. 221 from Kato Zakros (Figs. 6a, b), two non-interacting figures are shown. It remains unclear whether they represent different stages of the leap or two separate acrobats (see *e.g.* Younger 1986, 135–136) but, regardless, the figures' torso orientations differ. The figure leaping over the bull's head is represented in profile, as is the case with most other leaping scenes showing a single figure (Figs. 6c, d) (Table 3). The figure behind the bull is presented frontally: this depiction of the torso is rarer but also appears on *CMS* II 6, no. 43 from Agia Triada (Fig. 6e) and its parallel

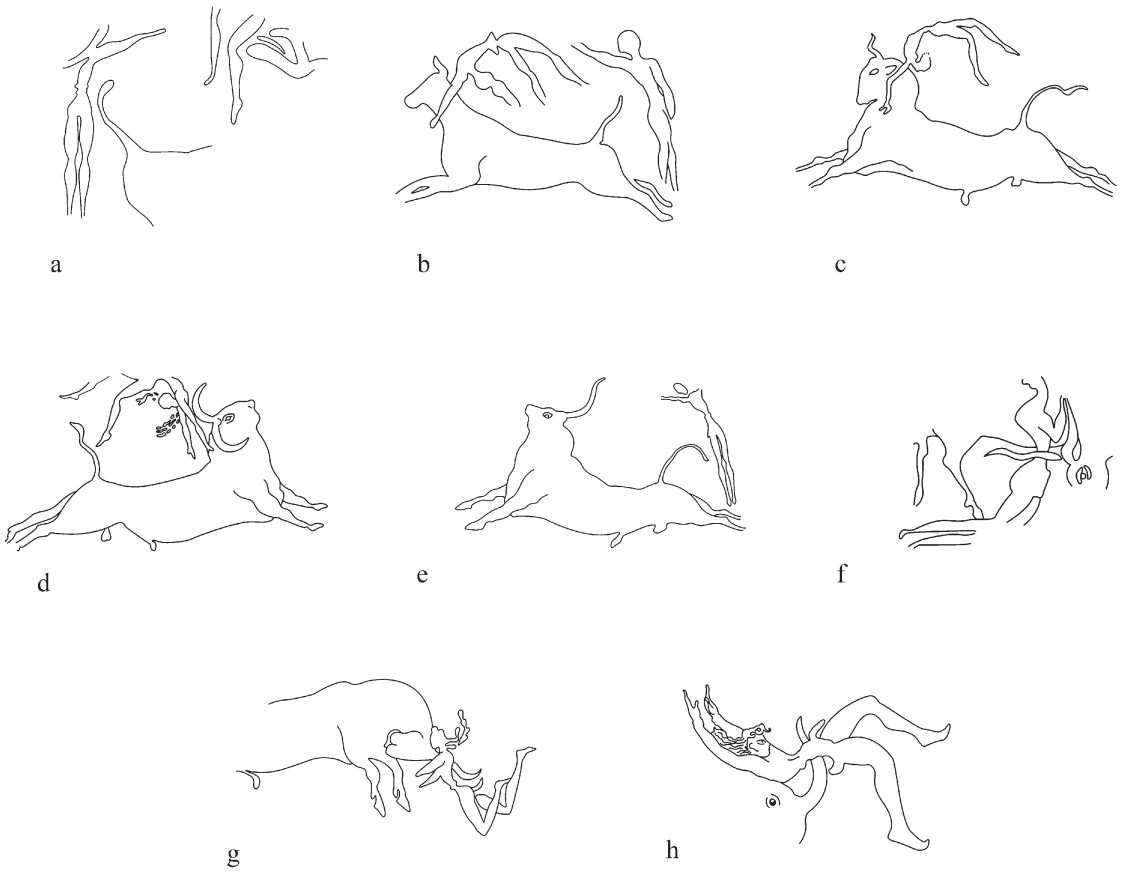


*Fig. 6 a:* CMS *II 7, no. 35; b.* CMS *II 8, no. 221; c.* CMS *II 6, no. 44; d.* CMS *V, Suppl. 2, no. 392; e.* CMS *II 6, no. 43; f.* CMS *II 8, no. 228; g.* CMS *V Suppl. 3, no. 395; h. Boxer Rhyton register 2. Images not to scale. Sketches by the author.*

*CMS* II 6, no. 161 from Gournia. Most striking about the scenes is their representation of a hazardous act in its midst. Where the profile positioned figure is concerned, he is at the most dangerous stage of the stunt: one wrong move could jeopardise its success and thus his survival. Owing to the incomplete nature of the action, however, the profile positioning of the torso cannot here be regarded as indicative of defeat as it does in other scenes of athletic or violent action. Moreover, given the hazardous nature of the acrobatics, it is unlikely that the scene depicts a training event. Rather, the profile orientation of the torso may here be interpreted as simply indicative of an uncertain outcome depending on the acrobat's skill and luck, of an incomplete activity, and possibly also of a compromising situation.

Worth a mention are nevertheless the profile positioned figures depicted on *CMS* II 8, no. 228 from Knossos, *CMS* V Suppl. 3, no. 395 from Akrotiri (Figs. 6 f, g), and on the second register of the Boxers Rhyton (Fig. 6 h). It is noticeable that their engagement with the bull is slightly different to that rendered on the scenes discussed above. The leapers either appear in contact with the bull's horn or are depicted in proximity to the ground. Might these details, alongside the animals' reared or lowered head position, imply an unfortunate outcome to the stunt?[11] Might the profile torso here demonstrate defeat? If so, the convention, even when included in scenes depicting the same kind of activity, can clearly function in different ways. It is therefore evident that its meaning is defined not only by a scene's general context, but also a number of other subtle details.

11 Although later in date and from the mainland, the unsuccessful leapers on the Vapheio cup are also positioned in profile and in a similarly catastrophic situation.

Finally, turning to the figures whose torsos are oriented frontally in scenes of bull leaping, it can consequently be argued that the convention serves to represent successful athletes, whose survival is guaranteed. Indeed, as shown on sealings *CMS* II 6, no. 43 from Agia Triada (Fig. 6e), *CMS* II 7, no. 35 and *CMS* II 8, no. 221 from Kato Zakros (Figs. 6a–b), the figures are positioned behind the bull, rather than above its head or back. Positioning is key as it clearly shows that the most dangerous part of the stunt is over. While the figures are still in the air, they have successfully completed the perilous leap and are landing to safety. The convention of the frontally depicted torso can thus here be understood as demonstrative of accomplishment, in a similar way as it does in scenes including Couplings 1 and 2.

***The torso convention in scenes depicting parades***

Of the twenty-six male figures rendered on the Agia Triada Harvesters Vase (Fig. 7a.1–3), seventeen are presented with a frontally depicted torso, five with a profile depicted torso (the sistrum player and the four men involved in the tripping incident), and four with a covered torso precluding the observation of its exact orientation (the three singers and the leader) (for photographs see Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005, 186–189). While the figures do not directly address each other, they participate in a collective event. The scene has been variously described as a religious procession, a processional dance, a military march, and an agricultural celebration (Forsdyke 1954, 1–9; Warren 1969, 175–176; Hood 1978, 145; Blakolmer 2007, 204), but for the sake of analysis, it is here referred to as a parade – a term used to describe a number of figures advancing in a specific direction in a lively and usually celebratory way. Except for the small section reserved to the depiction of a tripping incident, the scene overall imparts an impression of cohesion. As in the case of the couplings discussed above, the frontally depicted torso can consequently also here be understood as an indication that the figures are accomplished practitioners who are beyond training or, as in the case of the frontally-depicted warriors or bull leapers, that they have successfully achieved or completed a physically demanding task.

A close observation of the other figures involved in the scene suggests that the profile orientation of the torso also functions in two ways. First, the profile positioning of the figures involved in the tripping incident (Fig. 7a1) serves to indicate failure. Owing to the context in which the incident is shown – in other words, a context in which training or instruction is not implied given the absence of Coupling 1 – and owing to the tripping figures' identical outfit to that of the men with frontally oriented torsos, the use of the profile torso can be conceptually compared to its appearance on the second register of the Boxers Rhyton, on aforementioned *CMS* II 8, no. 228 and on *CMS* V Suppl. 3, no. 395 (Figs. 6f–h), where it shows failure related to poor judgement, incompetence or bad luck rather than to the figure's trainee status. Moreover, the impact that the trip bears on the collective harmony is clearly accentuated as three figures are shown as disturbed by the falling man, thus emphasizing the importance of attention to each performed movement. Second, the profile torso of the sistrum player mainly serves to differentiate him from the parading men (Fig. 7a.2). While the musician is depicted in the foreground of the scene – possibly to allow for a clear rendition of the instrument – his torso's orientation indicates that he is accompanying the men but is not one of them. His different clothing, lack of headdress, and stockier corpulence may also indicate that he belongs to a different age group. Owing to the straightness of his back, and in the absence of hunched shoulders, however, it is difficult to assess whether he is also of a different social status to the other figures involved in the parade.[12]

The covered torsos of the cloaked figure leading the parade (Fig. 7a.3) and of the three singers (Fig. 7a.2) also serve to differentiate them from the twenty-one parading men and the sistrum player. The three singers' position in the background, their different garb and hairstyle moreover suggest that they should be differentiated from the long-haired leading figure, who has also been described as the eldest in the scene (*e.g.* Koehl 1986, 103). The covered torso, which appears in

12 For a note on class difference in this scene see van Effenterre and van Effenterre 1999, 885.

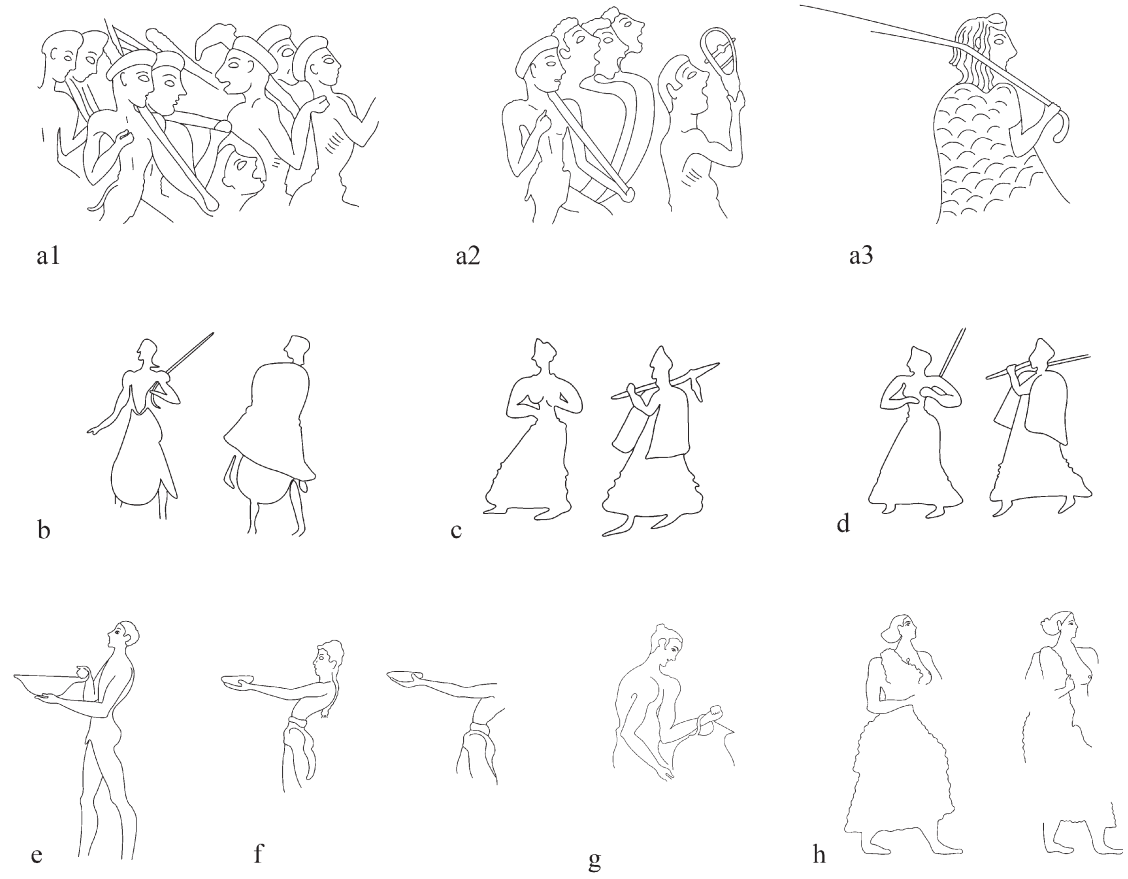


*Fig. 7a: 1–3 sections of the Harvesters Vase; b.* CMS *II 6, no. 11; c.* CMS *II 7, no. 17; d.* CMS *II 7, no. 16; e. Wall painting, Xeste 3, Thera; f. Knossos rhyton P474; g. Wall painting, Xeste 3, Thera; h. Wall painting, Xeste 3, Thera. Images not to scale. Sketches by the author.*

other scenes, such as the miniature wall painting (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 58, fig. 26) and the priestess figure (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 56, fig. 24) in the West House, the Chieftain Cup, and numerous glyptic representations, points to the figures' different function – and possibly status – to figures with nude or partially nude torsos. Indeed, cloaks have been interpreted as a sign of high rank (*e.g.* Nilsson 1968, 160; Marinatos 1993, 137; Blakolmer and Hein 2018, 197). The covered torso, however, cannot be regarded as a marker of age, as both youths and older figures are clad with cloaks, gowns, hides or are hidden by shields. The covered torso of the men in the Harvester's Vase can thus be regarded as a means of further differentiating the figures in terms of their role in the parade, and possibly in terms of their social function and rank.

Similar, but more condensed, representations of different groups of people gathered in parade also appear in glyptic, and the torso orientation and posture conventions play the same role as above. While *CMS* II 6, no. 11 from Agia Triada, and *CMS* II 7, no. 16 and *CMS* II 7, no. 17 from Kato Zakros (Figs. 7 b–d) have also been considered as representing a 'special procession' (Blakolmer 2018), these scenes showing a frontally depicted figure accompanied by a cloaked figure impart a similar impression of accomplishment and harmony to that conveyed by the figures on the Harvesters Vase. It is nevertheless likely that the nature of these parades differs from that shown on the vessel.

***The torso convention in scenes depicting processions***

While representations of processions flourish in the LM II period, a few depictions do nevertheless appear in LM I iconography. Scenes of procession are here distinguished from parade on account of the figures' poised attitude. Typical of this activity is the profile orientation of the

figures' torsos. As is shown in the painting of a cupbearer situated in the corridor of the apartment west of the lustral basin in Xeste 3 (Fig. 7e) (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 147, fig. 111) and on a rhyton fragment from Knossos (Fig. 7f) (for photograph see Warren 1969, P474), the figures also maintain a slightly arched posture which, despite their handling of utilitarian paraphernalia, serves to clearly demarcate them from the hunched or slightly forwards-leaning figures in scenes of service discussed earlier in this paper. In fact, the posture of the figures in procession is reminiscent of that of some of the profile positioned figures in scenes of 'formal exchange' in which Coupling 1 occurs, which was associated with a form of respect-paying. Thus, might the bodily comportment of the Knossian and Theran cupbearers help characterise them as performing a higher function – or as being of a higher status – to figures engaged in service while nonetheless implying an attitude of deference to the non-depicted receiver(s) of their offerings?

It is here important to make brief mention of the male figure with the hydria from Xeste 3 (Fig. 7g) (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 146, fig. 110), placed on the wall perpendicular to the cupbearer, towards whom the latter and the two object-bearing youths arranged in Coupling 1 appear to be advancing. His upper torso positioning is complex, and differs substantially to that of the other figures surrounding him. However, because his right shoulder shields his chest, he is here regarded as represented in profile. His hunched posture, moreover, is reminiscent of that of figures in service, and while it may serve to emphasize the weight of the hydria, it may also serve to differentiate him from the cupbearer. Might the torso convention indicate that the figure – who is older than all the boys surrounding him (Doumas 1992, 130; Chapin 2007, 245–246) – performs a different function or possesses a different status to the latter?[13] On the basis of the figures' torso orientations, the three painted panels of the corridor can be considered as representing three separate narrative instances despite their overarching thematic unity. Indeed, the man with the hydria and the cupbearer are not arranged in one of the two identified couplings, and their two profile torsos may imply that they are not interacting. Moreover, the frontal torso of the youth with the cloth (Fig. 2b) ought to be considered as relevant to his interaction with the small boy towards whom he looks, rather than relating to the man with the hydria who is depicted as turned away from him.

Albeit in fewer instances, LM I iconography also includes scenes of procession in which figures are rendered with frontally depicted torsos. The women in the mural arrangement in the corridor on the first floor of Xeste 3 consist of the best example (Fig. 7h) (for photographs and reconstructions see Doumas 1992, 168–170, figs. 131, 133; Vlachopoulos 2008, 501, figs. 41.33, 41.34). Their attitude is less tense than that of the male figures in procession discussed above, and their torsos are slightly covered by a garment although their breasts are emphasized and both their shoulders are shown frontally. Owing to the figures' developed breasts, their clothing and their bunched hair which clearly point to their maturity (see Chapin 2012, 298; Vlachopoulos 2008, 493), the frontal rendering of their torso here probably serves to designate their function or status, rather than to indicate that they have completed their training. It is nonetheless likely that their standing position also serves to differentiate them from the seated woman facing the monkey and the saffron bearer represented in the adjacent room (Fig. 2d) whose torso is depicted in the same way. It is consequently conceivable that the young lady with the necklace rendered in the lustral basin (for photograph see Doumas 1992, 136, fig. 100), whose torso is also positioned frontally is a younger version of the mature ladies.

Overall, in scenes of procession, the orientation and the posture of the torso appear to principally define the type of activity – in this case, the form of object bearing – that the figures are engaged in. It serves to clearly demarcate these figures from those in service while nonetheless indicating that they are placed within a hierarchy, and not on the top rung. It is noticeable that no clear age or status differentiations appear among the figures participating in a given procession. It is additionally worth noting that, as in the case of the other service scenes discussed earlier,

13 See also Rehak 1996, 47 and Morgan 2000, 935 for discussions on this figure's inferior status.

although both female and male figures are engaged in procession, they are never depicted together in the LM I renditions.

***The torso convention in scenes depicting jogging and running figures***

Figures positioned in a linear fashion, but engaged in a form of movement different to that shown in the scenes discussed above, can be seen as jogging or running. It is principally the open and slightly bent positioning of the men's legs on four sealings from Kastelli Chania and Kato Zakros (Figs. 8a, b) (Table 3) which differentiate them from the parading figures on the Harvesters Vase. While more reminiscent of a sprint than a jog (see Lebessi *et al.* 2004, 13), the position of the legs of the central figure on the Kato Syme gold ring (Fig. 8c) is also different to those of the men on the Harvesters Vase: the rear leg is raised high. Although these glyptic scenes – except for the Kato Syme ring – have been described as processions (see Wedde 2004, 167; Blakolmer and Hein 2018, 196), and despite the fact that the figures' torsos are depicted in profile, and are for the most part shown with a slightly arched posture, the figures' arm gesture and the absence of carried vessels here places them in a different category of activity.

In the light of the observations made so far in this paper, the torso orientation of the leading figure on *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 133 (Fig. 8a) is surprising. If he is indeed guiding captives, why is he not depicted with a frontal torso, like the victorious warriors discussed earlier in this paper? It is conceivable that the profile orientation of the torso here serves to indicate a particular function or activity, as it does for the male figures in procession. In the absence of any details suggesting a training context, it is also possible that the convention indicates that the figure is part of a hierarchy but does not belong to the upper rungs. A similar suggestion can be advanced for the figures on *CMS* II 7, no. 13 and *CMS* II 7, no. 14 (Fig. 8b) who wear hide skirts – a garb usually considered as associated with hierarchically elevated figures. Might the hunched posture of the figures on *CMS* II 7, no. 15 (Fig. 8d) thus be interpreted as a marker of a slightly different type of jogging (see Lebessi *et al.* 2004, 13), or as a marker of a different social function and maybe even status as it does for the hunched man with a hydria from Xeste 3? Finally, the frontally oriented torso of the Kato Syme runner may indeed serve to point to a different type of sport, to his more elevated status, but it may also serve to show that he is a victorious athlete (Lebessi *et al.* 2004, 15) like the frontally depicted bull leapers.

***The torso convention in scenes depicting 'cultic events'***

The last type of scene in which Coupling 1 occurs depicts figures engaged in a range of activities here gathered under the 'cultic events' umbrella. While usually considered as bearing religious and ritualistic connotations, the exact nature of the actions performed by the figures have been widely debated and have been varyingly described as dances, tree-pulling, baetyl-hugging, ecstatic performances or as the summoning of epiphanies (see *e.g.* Nilsson 1951; Warren 1981, 1988; Marinatos 1993; German 1999; Rehak 2000; Cain 2001; Tully 2022). Some scenes in which these actions are rendered show groups of figures moving in a seemingly synchronous and choreographed way while others show figures acting independently from each other. The very brief and superficial analysis presented below does not do justice to the richness and complexity of these scenes, yet it is conspicuous that they do also present similar adoptions of the torso conventions to the other scenes containing groups of figures discussed in this paper.

Groups of female figures moving in an apparently choreographed way appear on a number of rings, seals and sealings (Table 3) (Figs. 8e, g, h) and in the Knossos Sacred Grove and Dance wall painting (Fig. 8f) (for photographs and reconstructions see Morgan ed. 2005, pl. 10). In most cases, the figures' torsos are positioned frontally, but in the wall painting and on *CMS* II 3, no. 51 from Isopata (Fig. 8e), some figures are shown in profile. The latter's clothing is also slightly different to that of the frontally depicted women (Rehak 2000, 272–274). It is thus conceivable that, as in the case of other scenes which contain groups of figures, the convention serves to show a difference in role or status among the performers, alongside possibly represent-

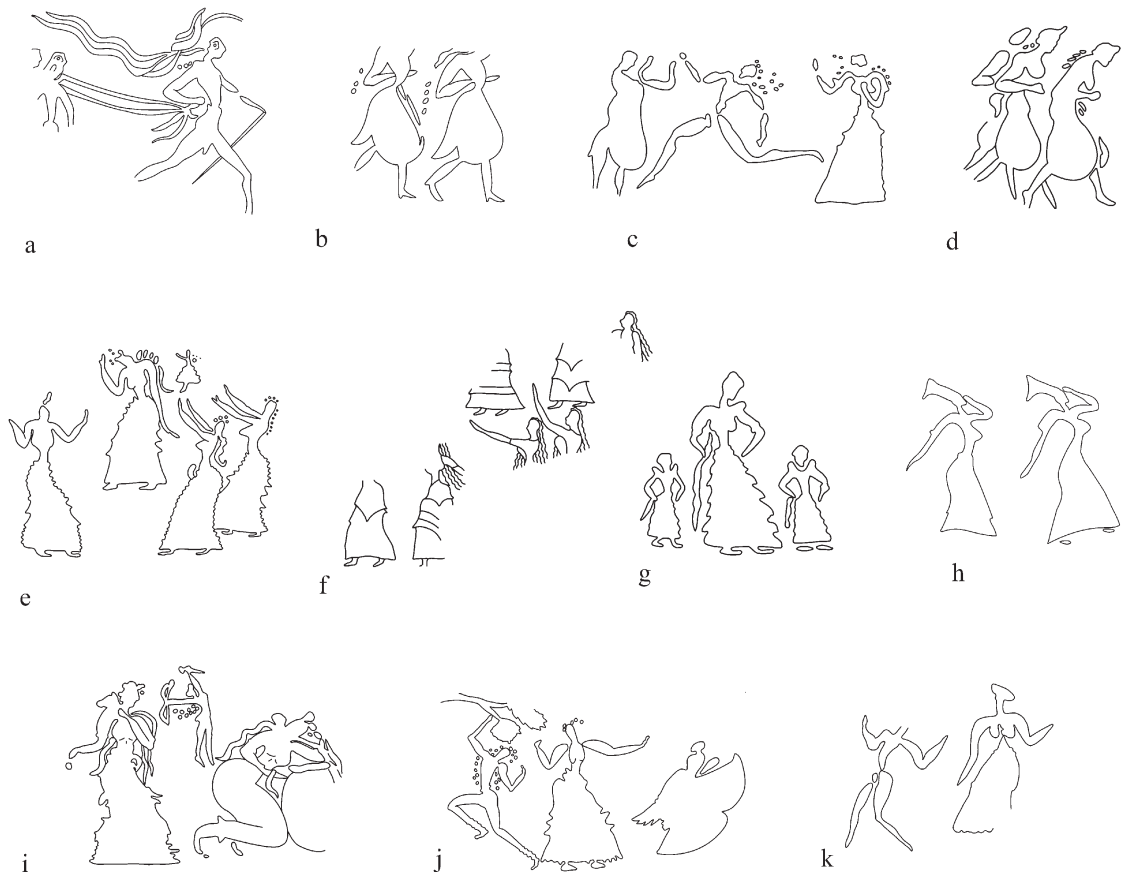


*Fig. 8a:* CMS *V, Suppl. 1A, no. 133; b.* CMS *II 7, no. 14; c. Kato Syme ring; d.* CMS *II 7, no. 15; e.* CMS *II 3, no. 51; f. Wall painting, Knossos; g.* CMS *II 6, no. 1; h.* CMS *II 6, no. 13; i.* CMS *VI, no. 278; j.* CMS *I, no. 219; k.* CMS *V, Suppl. 1B, no. 194. Images not to scale. Sketches by the author.*

ing different dance moves. Scenes representing groups of figures behaving in apparently autonomous ways show the latter as more self-absorbed than the figures in the scenes discussed so far in this paper. The bodily comportment of the women and men engaged in these types of 'cultic events' do not suggest that they are attentive to the movements of the other figures depicted next to them. These scenes are for the most part reserved to glyptic (Table 3) – including *CMS* XI, no. 29 held in Berlin (Fig. 4g) and the Poros ring (Fig. 5f) examined above – but the Agia Triada Room 14 wall painting (for image see Morgan ed. 2005, pl. 2) can also be tentatively included here despite its fragmentary state. The majority of the figures are rendered with a frontally positioned torso, but those hanging from trees are rendered with a profile positioned torso (Figs. 8i–k). Similarly, to the above, the torso orientation may here also serve to differentiate the figures in terms of role in the event, in terms of function, but possibly also in terms of status.

***Overview: torso orientation and posture as a convention in scenes not showing direct interaction***

The analysis conducted above demonstrates that torso orientation and posture also clearly function as a convention in scenes in which lone human figures with animals, or multiple figures who do not directly interact, are depicted. It therefore clearly allows for the 'reading' of composite scenes. The convention certainly serves to differentiate the figures from each other yet in significantly different ways to Coupling 1. In fact, except in bull leaping scenes, the convention principally marks out the figures – or groups of figures – in terms of function rather than ability or degree of experience (except in the case of the tripping incident depicted on the Harvesters Vase). Indeed, all the examined figures are adults, or very close to adulthood, and the scenes depict the

| Figures not engaged in direct interaction | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Activity** | **Media** | **Sources** | **Gender/species** |
| Bull leaping | Glyptic | *CMS* II 7, no. 35 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Bull-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 8, no. 221 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Bull-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 6, no. 44 (Agia Triada) | Male-Bull |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 34 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Bull |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 36 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Bull |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 37 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Bull |
| | | *CMS* II 6, no. 43 (Agia Triada) | Male-Bull |
| | | *CMS* II 6, no. 161 (Gournia) | Male-Bull |
| | | *CMS* II 8, no. 228 (Knossos) | Male-Bull |
| | | *CMS* V, Suppl. 3, no. 395 (Akrotiri) | Male-Bull |
| | Vessels | Boxer Rhyton register 2 (Agia Triada) | Male-Bull |
| Parading | Glyptic | *CMS* II 6, no. 11 (Agia Triada) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 16 (Kato Zakros) | Female-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 17 (Kato Zakros) | Female-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 12 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Male |
| | Vessels | Harvesters Vase (Agia Triada) | Male |
| Procession | Wall paintings | Xeste 3, corridor west of lustral basin (Thera) | Male |
| | | Xeste 3, corridor on the first floor (Thera) | Female-Female |
| | Vessels | Rhyton (Knossos) (Warren 1969, P474) | Male |
| Running and jogging | Glyptic | *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 133 (Kastelli Chania) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 13 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 14 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* II 7, no. 15 (Kato Zakros) | Male-Male |
| | | Kato Syme Ring (Lebessi *et al.* 2004, table 1) | Female-Male |
| Cultic events | Wall paintings | Sacred Grove and Dance (Knossos) | Female-Female |
| | | Room 14 (Agia Triada) | Female-Female |
| | Glyptic | *CMS* II 3, no. 51 (Isopata) *choreographed movement* | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* II 3, no. 17 (Knossos) *choreographed movement* | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* II 8, no. 266 (Knossos) *choreographed movement* | Female-Female |
| | | CMS II 6, no. 13 (Agia Triada) *choreographed movement* | Female-Female |
| | | CMS II 6, no. 1 (Agia Triada) *choreographed movement* | Female-Female |
| | | *CMS* II 3, no. 236 (Gournia) *choreographed movement* | Female-Female |
| | | CMS V, Suppl. 1A, no. 178 (Kastelli Chania) | Female-Female |
| | | CMS VI, no. 278 (Chania) | Female |
| | | CMS II 6, no. 4 (Agia Triada) | Female |
| | | CMS II 3, no. 114 (Kalyvia) | Female |
| | | CMS II 7, no. 10 (Kato Zakros) | Female-Male |
| | | CMS V, Suppl. 1B, no. 194 (unprovenanced) | Male-Male |
| | | *CMS* XI, no. 29 (unprov. Berlin ring) | Female-Male |
| | | Archanes Ring (Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997, fig. 722) | Female-Male |
| | | Poros Ring (Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis 2000, fig 4) | Female-Male |

*Table 3. Instances of torso orientation and posture for figures not engaged in direct interaction.*

actual performance of an activity rather than training. The fluid synchronicity of the majority of the figures' movements and actions suggests that the represented activities have been mastered through repetitive practice. Finally, it is significant that, except for some of the 'cultic event' representations, these scenes present an emphasis on the group and collaboration and thus indirectly highlight the power of collective action.

## Neopalatial Iconographic Conventions and an Interest in Marking Social Differentiation

The examination of the torso orientation and posture convention undertaken in this paper shows that many subtleties are involved in the rendering of the human body in LM I and LC I iconography, and thus in the rendering of the activities that the figures engage in and of the relationships they maintain with each other. It appears that these subtleties were employed by the images' producers to clearly mark out the existence of distinct groups of people and of hierarchies both among and within these groups. Moreover, except for combat scenes, the majority of the studied scenes – especially those depicting direct interaction between figures, but also

images such as the Harvesters Vase or the Knossos miniature wall paintings – also demonstrate a clear interest in showing peaceful coexistence and engagement, but also reciprocity and possibly dependence, between these different groups. Indeed, scenes (again, except for combat) in which Coupling 1 appears, and thus in which asymmetries are most pronounced, suggest that these groups need each other: youths must be educated, the hierarchically superior must be served and respected, and the hierarchically inferior must be guided. Depictions of groups with the same torso orientation and posture, which imply symmetry rather than asymmetry, however also celebrate the power of collaboration and reliance between co-participants in an activity, be they peers or on a different hierarchical standing. Thus, in showing, on the one hand, the existence of different groups, and on the other hand, their need for collaboration, the studied iconography creates an overall impression of equilibrium. As follows, the imagery evokes a set of values most clearly shown by the figures' body language: a disposition to teaching and learning, an ability to command and defer, and an ability to cooperate.

Like the use of the torso convention, the demarcation of groups alongside the representation of collaboration in LM I and LC I iconography is however not an iconographic trend existing in a vacuum. Alongside possibly referring to a series of commonly known stories or 'myths', the imagery also indirectly betrays certain contemporary socio-political concerns. The images were produced during a period of significant societal change manifested through the construction of the second generation of palaces and by the further fragmentation of communities into a number of differently advantaged groups, likely stratified into a hierarchy over which the upper tiers exercised extensive control. It has been argued that, in order to preserve this control while simultaneously maintaining order, the upper tiers of the hierarchy propagandistically celebrated notions of a generally shared communal interest, collective identity and cohesion, despite the existence of increasingly marked differences within the population (see *e.g.* Letesson and Driessen 2020; Driessen and Letesson 2023). Might the concurrent iconographic emphasis on legitimised social differentiation among groups, and even among individuals circulating within the higher spheres of society, as well as the depiction of interaction between different social groups have therefore been a part of this programme?

Finally, the analysis presented in this paper has shown that while the torso's orientation and comportment are subtle features, they are significant and consist of enlightening cues. The torso, a part of the body which is usually regarded as a backdrop against which hands are placed in a number of gestural formulas, is a visual trove of information allowing for the characterisation of the depicted figures and of the type of relationship they maintain. In simultaneously functioning on different levels while maintaining an overarching meaning, the convention ultimately demonstrates how complex yet standardised LM I and LC I iconography is.

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