

The Mycenaean ‘Lunge and Thrust’

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Abstract *This paper was conceived in response to the widely held view that the so-called Combat Agate seal, from the Griffin Warrior tomb at Pylos, is a masterpiece of Neopalatial Minoan art. However, it is argued here that the seal depicts the Mycenaean formula for showing the moment of the kill in a face-to-face combat. As will be demonstrated, the victor in these scenes stands in a posture identified here as the ‘lunge and thrust’. This consists of two movements involving a shift in body weight: a backward movement to gain momentum, followed by a forward lunge which is accompanied by a sword thrust. To date, no Minoan seals show figures in the ‘lunge and thrust’ pose. Rather, all the relevant parallels come from mainland Helladic contexts. While there is no question that the style of depicting the male figures on the Pylos seal and on the other Mycenaean seals discussed here emulate Minoan figural art, their mainland funerary contexts imply that they were received and appreciated by Mycenaean who might even have identified with the victor who stands in the ‘lunge and thrust’ posture.*

The discovery in 2015 of a banded agate seal-stone, now known as the Combat Agate, in the tomb of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos, justifiably has received worldwide recognition for the beauty of its carving, thanks largely to its prompt publication by the excavators, replete with outstanding photographs, which thus enables a critical appraisal of the object (Fig. 1; Stocker and Davis 2017). While the seal has unanimously been lauded as a masterpiece of Minoan glyptic art (Stocker and Davis 2017, 599–601), I would challenge that assumption and rather situate the seal in the cultural milieu of the Late Helladic/Mycenaean Greek mainland. To that end, this paper argues that the victorious figure carved on the seal-stone’s left side, stands in a posture called here the ‘lunge and thrust’, which will be shown to be a crucial element of the Mycenaean formula for depicting a kill during LH I and LH II A, be it man versus man, or man versus lion.

The evidence that has been mustered to argue for the seal’s Minoan pedigree has relied on several Minoan sealings which are alleged to depict a similar combat scene. Yet, on close inspection, none of the sealings from Crete which have been cited as comparanda provide convincing parallels to the imagery and narrative of the Combat Agate, despite the relative contemporaneity of the Pylos seal, dated to LH II A, with the sealings which come from LM IB contexts (on the chronology, see Krzyszkowska 2005, 171, 178; Warren and Hankey 1989, 97–98).

One of these is a sealing from Agia Triada (CMS II 6, no. 15), with versions from Knossos (CMS II 8, no. 279), whose imagery has been interpreted as a combat scene, with one warrior running ahead of the other (Fig. 2; Krzyszkowska 2005, 189; Stocker and Davis 2017, 599, n. 51, fig. 8; on combat scenes in Aegean art, see Hiller 1999; Krzyszkowska 2005, 139; Rupp 2012, 282–283). The rear male, who has long hair and wears a necklace, appears to raise a weapon and is ready to strike the forward male who, on account of his short hair, may be recognized as the younger (on age and male hairstyles, see Koehl 1986; 2000, 135–137). The theme of combat seems to be reinforced by the frontal face of the forward figure, a pose which Lyvia Morgan (1995, 137, 139) interprets as signifying his imminent death, presumably at the hands of the rear figure, though she avoids referring to them as warriors.

Before turning to the imagery on the sealing, the differences in the composition between the Combat Agate and this sealing must be acknowledged. Whereas the Pylos seal is composed of two facing, hence bilateral figures, with a third, fallen figure placed along the bottom, the



Fig. 1: Pylos Combat Agate amygdaloid bead seal (courtesy of the University of Cincinnati).

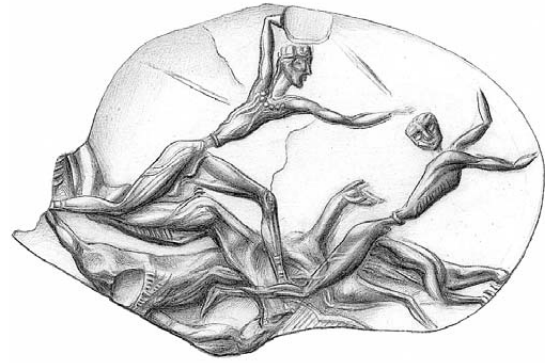


Fig. 2: Agia Triada, Man hunt sealing (CMS II 6, no. 15; drawing courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

sealing(s) depicts two figures running in the same forward direction. And rather than a fallen male figure, the lower part of the seal appears to show a dog running with the males, amidst more indecipherable elements, perhaps landscape.

The presence of the dog introduces an iconographic element which significantly alters previous interpretations of these sealings and implies that the scene is related to a hunt (on dogs in Aegean hunting scenes, see Papageorgiou 2008, 21–23). Thus, while charging ahead, the forward figure may be understood as turning his head back to communicate with the rear figure, which is often a necessity in hunting. However, it must also be acknowledged that, despite the poor state of the sealings' preservation, the weaponry that both figures wield is ambiguous. Although the forward figure raises his arms, no trace remains of what they originally held. And while the rear figure seems to brandish a weapon, he appears to hold both its back and front end, thus making it unlikely that it was a sword or spear, neither of which are held by the blade.

Recently, these sealings have been re-examined by Giorgos Rethemiotakis in preparation for their re-publication who attests that the element previously interpreted as a dog has been misunderstood as such (Rethemiotakis, pers. comm., 11/15/2021). While we await a future publication, an alternative explanation is offered here, that does not depend either on the presence or absence of a dog (or dogs). In this author's publication of the Chieftain Cup, it was suggested that the cup's relief decoration depicts an episode from the cycle of male 'rites of passage,' specifically, the culminating event in the initiation of a Minoan youth who has been granted special status, known in the historical period, as a 'parastatheis', or the one who stands beside (Koehl 1986, 105–108). Thus, on one side of the cup we see an adult male, identified as such by his height and distinctive long hair, presenting a youth with a sword, which the youth holds in one hand and its scabbard in the other, as well as three ox hides, on the opposite side of the cup, to be converted into figure-of-eight and/or tower shields. According to the historical sources, which appear to describe the rites in some detail, the cup itself would also have been presented as a gift from the 'philetor' or lover, to his 'parastatheis' (Koehl 1986, 109).

While this is not the occasion to evaluate the validity of using historical sources to illuminate Minoan imagery and cultural practices, which most scholars have ascribed to the Dorians (for a preliminary discussion, see Koehl 1986, 105–106, 109–110), in the belief that there were elements of cultural continuity from the Minoan into the historical era, albeit significantly modified, this sealing, like the Chieftain Cup, appears to illustrate an episode from this same cycle of Minoan male initiation rites. The historical source which describes Cretan male initiation rites that may derive from the Bronze Age is a passage from Strabo (X 483–484), quoting the 4th century BC historian, Ephoros, who explains the customs associated with the love affairs between Cretan young men and youths. According to Ephoros, a young man would select a youth from

an 'agela', literally, a 'herd', or cohort, and after making elaborate preparations with the boy's friends, would stage a mock abduction of the youth, followed by a two-month period hunting and feasting, which culminated with the presentation in the 'andreion', or men's hall, of the gifts noted above. Perhaps the sealing in Figure 2, which purports to show a human hunting another human, actually depicts this mock abduction. Like the more mature figure on the Chieftain Cup, the abductor on the sealing has long hair and wears a beaded necklace, whereas the youthful abductee has short hair, like the recipient on the Chieftain Cup,



Fig. 3: Palaikastro Master Ring, cast of sealing (courtesy of J. Weingarten, M. Polig, S. Hermon).

thus providing iconographic links between the cup and sealing. This interpretation might also explain the youth's frontal face. Rather than see the frontality as a presentiment of his actual death, or murder, perhaps it alludes to his metaphorical death. According to Mircea Eliade (1958, xii–xiii, 13–37), rituals which celebrate the transition from one age grade to the next often contain elements that allude to the initiate's death, since the departure from one stage of life is understood as a kind of death, whereas entry into the next stage is regarded as a kind of rebirth.

Another Minoan sealing which has recently been cited as a close stylistic parallel to the victor on the Pylos agate is the towering male figure on the Palaikastro Master Ring (Fig. 3; Weingarten et al. 2020). Judith Weingarten has even proposed that the two glyptic masterpieces might derive from the same Minoan palatial workshop (Weingarten et al. 2020, 135). While Weingarten has convincingly shown that the two figures depict powerful male figures with similar physiques, and both lean into their 'prey' at a similar angle (Weingarten et al. 2020, 134–135), the hunting theme and mono-directional composition of the Palaikastro sealing has more in common with the chase depicted on the sealings from Agia Triada and Knossos discussed above, than with the bilaterally composed, inward facing, combat scene on the Pylos agate.

What is not challenged here is the dependency of the Pylos agate on Minoan stylistic conventions for depicting the 'ideal' male figure, whose conception, with narrow waist, broad shoulders, and muscular arms, torso and legs, may have begun in MM III B, as evinced by the sealings from the Knossos Temple Repository, notably the boxer (CMS II 8, no. 280). By LH II A, this ideal type for the male figure was clearly entrenched on the mainland, as witnessed, e.g. by the male figures on the Vapheio Cups. Indeed, even if Ellen Davis (1974) was correct in her belief that the 'Quiet' cup was made by a Minoan craftsman, the male figures on the 'Violent' cup, which was undoubtedly a mainland product, adhere to this type. What is challenged here, however, is the notion that the composition and theme of the Combat Agate is Minoan. And while the birthplace of the artist who executed the seal is unlikely ever to be known, its ultimate recipient was undoubtedly the Mycenaean Griffin Warrior of Pylos, with whom it was buried.

The one group of Minoan sealings from LM IB contexts which do, in fact, depict two figures in a face-to-face confrontation are two from Kato Zakros (Fig. 4: CMS II 7, no. 19; Fig. 5: CMS II 7, no. 20) and one from Agia Triada (Fig. 6: CMS II 6, no. 17; see also Rupp 2012, 282). Once again, the figures have been identified as warriors engaged, in this instance, in a spear throwing duel (e.g. Crowley 2013, 85, 87; here, she identifies CMS II 7, no. 19, as a hunter; Hiller 1999, 321, 323; Rupp 2012, 282). Yet, on close inspection, the object which they brandish is clearly not a spear, as is apparent from its blunt tip, best preserved in the left-hand figure on CMS II 7, no. 20 (Fig. 5). Indeed, where spears are depicted, their thickened, pointed tips are clearly distinguishable from the shaft, as seen e.g. on a sealing from Knossos (CMS II 8, no. 276) and a LM II jug from Knossos (Popham 1984, 86, pl. 153.7; on the archaeological evidence for spears, see Molloy 2012, 126–127). Furthermore, the object on the seals is held by the figures

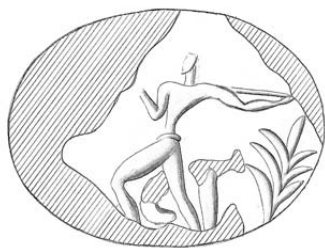


Fig. 4: Kato Zakros, Bare-headed stick throwing sealing (CMS II 7, no. 19; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 5: Kato Zakros, Bare-headed stick throwing competition sealing (CMS II 7, no. 20; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

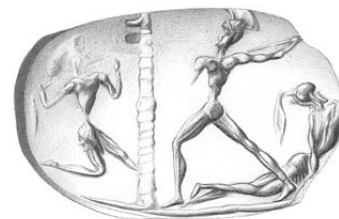


Fig. 6: Agia Triada, Helmeted stick throwing sealing (CMS II 6, no. 17; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 7: Agia Triada, 'Duel' sealing (CMS II 6, no. 16; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

using both hands, with the front arm bent at an acute angle, whereas a spear in use is invariably held in the raised, cocked back arm, while the front arm is extended for balance and aim, as the jug from Knossos clearly illustrates. Indeed, even when carried "on parade", Minoan spears were carried in one hand, as on CMS II 8, no. 276.

Elsewhere this author has recently suggested that the group of sealings from Agia Triada and Kato Zakros, discussed above, depict the hitherto unrecognized sport of stick-fighting, a competitive sport which has its roots in Old Kingdom Egypt, whence it probably arrived on Crete (Koehl 2022). And as on the Boxer Rhyton, which depicts two zones of competing boxers wearing helmets, and one zone with bare-headed boxers (Koehl 2006, 164–165), the opponents on the sealing from Agia Triada wear helmets (Fig. 6), whereas the opponents on the sealings from Kato Zakros are bare-headed (Figs. 4–5). The sticks are held with both hands, with the front arm used to jab at the competitor. Furthermore, as on the zone with bare-headed boxers, the fallen figure on CMS II 7, no. 20 (Fig. 5) kicks a standing figure, suggesting that a version of the sport allowed for kicking. Lastly, as on the Boxer Rhyton, the presence of a columnar structure on the sealing from Zakros with helmeted stick-fighters suggests that the helmeted version of both boxing and stick-fighting took place in a built environment, such as the interior courtyard of a palace, whereas the presence of foliage on CMS II 7, no. 19 (Fig. 4) suggests that their bare-headed versions took place outdoors.

The two glyptic images that seem to depict an actual duel are also two of the least skillfully carved and, consequently, among the most inscrutable Minoan seals with human figural imagery. One of them, a sealing from Agia Triada (CMS II 6, no. 16) was classified by Stefan Hiller (1999, 321) as a single combat between warriors without shields (see also Rupp 2012, 280). However, several elements are irreconcilable with this interpretation (Fig. 7). While both figures wear head-gear, it is difficult to identify as a helmet, as it appears to outline the head, which is clearly visible, and thus provides no apparent means of protection. The figure on the right, who appears to be the victor, based on his striding pose, holds his sword with its tip pointing upwards, his arm acutely bent, while with his raised right arm, he holds the sword's scabbard, pointing downward, which touches the shoulder or back of the fallen figure (contra Rupp, 2012, 280, who identified the scabbard as another weapon). The fallen figure, who appears to be unarmed, reaches towards the striding figure with one bent arm, while the other arm hangs down. Though his upper body is vertical, he seems to bend at the waist. His two legs taper enigmatically to a point, curving along with the bottom of the scene. The identification of the bifurcated, diagonal object that emerges from the right-hand figure's bent front right leg and behind the 'legs' of the fallen figure

is also enigmatic. Thus, it is perhaps best to leave this seal out of the discussion, at least until its meaning is untangled.

Somewhat less ambiguous is a LM IA lentoid stone seal from Petras which, like *CMS* II 6, no. 16, discussed above, depicts two facing figures (Fig. 8; Rupp 2012). Like the sealing from Agia Triada, the right-hand figure appears to be the dominant one, from his upright posture and wide-legged stance. The carver's lack of skill seems apparent from the stiff position of the forward, extended leg, which on every other glyptic image considered here, both Minoan and Mycenaean, is bent at the knee. Yet it is also the clearly defined, curving legs of the left-hand, "falling" figure, which seem to be slipping from underneath him, that may help clarify the identification of the tapering element on the Agia Triada sealing as legs (Fig. 7). Furthermore, like the Agia Triada sealing, the dominant, right-hand figure, seems to reach out to touch the shoulder or the back of the left-hand figure, although it is unclear if he is empty-handed or, as David Rupp cautiously suggests, is holding a dagger (Rupp 2012, 279–280, 285). Rupp, again cautiously, suggests that the left-hand figure may also be holding a dagger (Rupp 2012, 280, 285), and thus identifies the scene as a duel, though as became clear from the discussion following the seal's initial public presentation (Tsipopoulou 2012, 287–289), the imagery remains inscrutable and thus, like the sealing from Agia Triada, does not substantially contribute to the discussion regarding the artistic context from which the Pylos Combat Agate emerged.

Though none of the Minoan seals and sealings discussed above seem to offer satisfactory parallels for the agate seal from Pylos, there do exist several glyptic artifacts from Mycenaean, or Helladic, contexts which provide compelling artistic and narrative comparanda for the seal. These objects come from two phases, LH I and LH IIA, the latter being the date for the Pylos agate. All the LH I glyptic group come from Grave Circle A at Mycenae and is comprised of a carnelian amygdaloid seal from Shaft Grave III (Fig. 9: *CMS* I, no. 12), two gold cushion-shaped seal beads also from Shaft Grave III (Fig. 10: *CMS* I, no. 9; Fig. 11: *CMS* I, no. 11), and an oval-shaped gold signet-ring from Shaft Grave IV (Fig. 12: *CMS* I, no. 16). The LH IIA group comprises, in addition to the Combat Agate from Pylos (Fig. 13), an amethyst amygdaloid bead seal

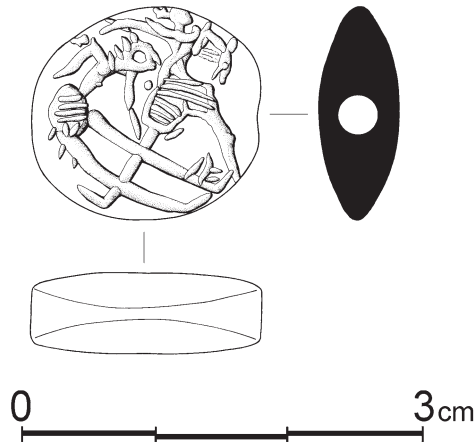


Fig. 8: Petras 'Duel', lentoid serpentinite seal (courtesy of M. Tsipopoulou and D. Rupp).



Fig. 10: Mycenae, Lion duel, gold cushion seal (*CMS* I, no. 9; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 11: Mycenae, Duel, gold cushion seal (*CMS* I, no. 11; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

Fig. 9: Mycenae, Duel, carnelian amygdaloid bead seal (*CMS* I, no. 12; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 12: Mycenae, Conflict in the 'glen', gold signet-ring (CMS I, no. 16; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 13: Pylos Combat Agate (courtesy of the University of Cincinnati).



Fig. 14: Pylos, Lion duel, amethyst amygdaloid bead seal (CMS I, no. 290; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

from Grave Δ also from Pylos (Fig. 14: CMS I, no. 290), and an agate amygdaloid cylinder bead seal from a tholos tomb at Kakovatos (Fig. 15: CMS XI, no. 208).

What defines these seals as a coherent group in iconographic terms is the presence of a male swordsman, who is shown in a specific pose, called here, the 'lunge and thrust'. This is a complex pose performed simultaneously by the arm, torso, and legs. While standing in a wide stride, with the front leg bent and the back leg extended, the swordsman lunges forward, with his sword raised in most cases above his head, which he thrusts it into his opponent (also see Rupp 2012, 283). On the amethyst bead seal from Pylos (Fig. 14), the swordsman is shown leaning back, as if to gain momentum for the forward thrust. Hence, the heel of his bent front leg is raised, whereas on the other seals, the forward motion causes the heel of the back leg to rise. On CMS I, no. 9 (Fig. 10), the lion seems to be lifting the swordsman's bent front leg off the ground with his paw.

The actual sword thrust, or "kill-stroke" as Sharon Stocker and Jack Davis (2017, 598) aptly call it, severs the jugular vein as depicted on the amygdaloid seal (Fig. 9), the gold cushion-shaped seal (Fig. 11) and the Pylos agate (Fig. 13; see also Peatfield 1999, 71). On the gold cushion-shaped lion duel seal (Fig. 10), the sword seems to pass through locks of the swordsman's hair before piercing through the lion's muzzle, whereas on the amethyst seal from Pylos, (Fig. 14) and the agate cylinder from Kakovatos, (Fig. 15), the swordsman stabs the feline in its opened maw.

Oddly, although the helmeted swordsman on the oval-shaped gold signet-ring from Shaft Grave IV (Fig. 12) stands in the 'lunge and thrust' pose, his sword, or more correctly, his dagger, does not penetrate his opponent, but rather terminates at his own neck. His other arm hangs down, apparently behind the shoulder of his opponent. Indeed, if he were depicted pushing down on his opponent's shoulder, it would mean that the artist had rendered his hand as emerging from his upper arm, at the location of the elbow. Rather, the artist shows the opponent's fully rounded pectoral muscle. This opponent, who is bare-headed and wears a distinctive short hairstyle with a top knot (on the top knot, see Koehl 1986, 101–102; 2000, 135–137), indeed wields a sword which he appears to thrust up to the mouth of the facing helmeted figure. A second helmeted figure, positioned to the far left, thrusts his spear towards this other, facing helmeted figure, which stops just short of his helmeted head. Thus, the imagery on this ring depicts an ambiguous narrative: since there are no apparent victors, the outcome remains uncertain.

In their initial discussion of the Pylos Combat Agate, Stocker and Davis (2017, 598) correctly observed that its closest parallel, in terms of composition, theme and iconographic details, is the dueling scene on the gold cushion-shaped bead seal from Shaft Grave III (Fig. 11). However, the carnelian amygdaloid bead seal from Shaft Grave III (Fig. 9), also provides important and relevant parallels. To be sure, there are aspects of the carnelian seal's engraving which are enigmatic, and perhaps ought to be attributed to the carver's inexperience with a relatively new art form, as discussed below. However, the artistic intelligence of the glyptic carver must be acknowl-

edged in the choice of the amygdaloid, over the lentoid. Both the amygdaloid and lentoid seal shapes were familiar to Mycenaean seal cutters as evinced by the presence of imported Minoan specimens from Grave Circle B (*CMS* I, nos. 5–7, possibly no. 8). But it seems that the lentoid was mostly rejected as ill-suited for a duel, hence the awkwardly positioned legs of the sword and spear wielding hunters on the lentoid seals from Chania (*CMS* V Suppl. 1A, no. 135) and Pylos (*CMS* I, no. 294).

Inexperience might explain the drill hole used to indicate a hand at the end of the victor’s outstretched arm on the Shaft Grave carnelian amygdaloid seal (Fig. 9). Interestingly, his outstretched arm lies on top of his opponent’s helmet, recalling the Egyptian smiting gesture. This gesture was used continuously in Egyptian imagery, from Pre-Dynastic times through the New Kingdom, to visually express pharaonic dominance over his enemies and may well have been an ultimate source of inspiration for the Helladic ‘lunge and thrust’ pose (on the Egyptian smiting gesture, see Bestock 2018; Davis 1992, 192–200; Hall 1986; Luiselli 2011). More difficult to explain is the curved element at the handle end of his sword which resembles a knuckle guard, although there is no evidence to suggest that Aegean swords were equipped with knuckle guards (Rupp 2012, 283, thinks the swordsman grasps the sword with both hands). As with Rupp (2012, 283), it seems that the opponent raises one arm to block the sword; the other arm dangles behind. What is also notable is the sword’s trajectory: it appears to have broken through the edge of the opponent’s figure-of-eight shield which looks shattered, especially along its inner edge and lower half.

As already suggested, the seal seems like an ambitious attempt at a complex narrative by a relatively inexperienced seal carver. Certainly, the dependence on the drill, even for details like the hands and kneecaps, lends credence to this notion. Inexperience might also account for seal’s crowded appearance. A more experienced carver would have eliminated the filling motif to the right, thereby giving more space to the swordsman. However, even with the elimination of the filling motif, the tapered sides of the vertically oriented amygdaloid would still severely restrict the space for a proper ‘lunge and thrust’ pose, unlike the cushion-shaped bead seals from the same grave, *CMS* I, no. 9 (Fig. 10) and *CMS* I, no. 11 (Fig. 11), or the horizontally oriented ovoid signet, *CMS* I, no. 16 (Fig. 12).

In LH IIA, the next generation of seal carvers appear to have recognized the suitability of the horizontally oriented amygdaloid shape for depictions of the killing formula, whose protagonist, the swordsman, is shown in the ‘lunge and thrust’ stance. Though the Pylos Combat Agate surely represents its most glorious expression, with both the swordsman and his opponent comfortably extending their back legs (Fig. 13), the stance’s depiction on the amethyst bead seal from Pylos, *CMS* I, no. 290 (Fig. 14) and on the amygdaloid agate cylinder bead seal from Kakovatos, *CMS* XI, no. 208 (Fig. 15), merit further comment. As Olga Krzyszkowska (2005, 252) has noted, the positioning of the imagery on the cylindrical bead with swollen center, at a right angle to the bead’s vertical axis (*i.e.* its horizontal piercing) is unique in Aegean glyptic. Clearly, it provided a comfortable frame for the ‘lunge and thrust’ swordsman, his leonine prey, and the ‘demon’ or ‘genius’ who stands grinning behind the swordsman.

The amethyst amygdaloid bead seal from Pylos is notable not only for the rarity of its material, but also for the positioning of the swordsman. This is the only seal, out of seven, where the swordsman making the ‘lunge and thrust’ pose was carved on the right, and thus appears on the left side of the impression. Although the actual skill of the carver may be questioned, especially when compared with its contemporary from Pylos, the Combat Agate, the ‘energy’ of the figure’s back-leaning pose, causing the heel of the front leg to rise, and the successful placement of the



Fig. 15: Kakovatos, Lion duel, agate amygdaloid cylinder bead seal (*CMS* XI, no. 208; courtesy of the *CMS* Heidelberg).



Fig. 16: *Gouvalari, Duel, amethyst cushion seal* (CMS V, no. 643; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

lioness and swordsman within the amygdaloid frame, might actually attest to the carver's experience. In this light, it may also be worth drawing attention to an amethyst cushion-shaped seal from Gouvalari, *CMS V*, no. 643 (Fig. 16), which almost certainly comes from the same workshop, if not the same hand, as the amygdaloid amethyst seal from Pylos. The seal from Gouvalari depicts two facing figures who, like the swordsman on the amethyst seal from Pylos, lean backwards and thrust forward, a pose not seen on any other Aegean seals. And like the Pylos amygdaloid, the 'victorious' swordsman on the Gouvalari seal was carved on the right and thus appears on the left side of the impression. Perhaps most telling though are the long tassels which dangle from the sword's scabbard on the Pylos amygdaloid and from the handle ends of both daggers (or better, single-edge swords with curled tang handles), on the Gouvalari cushion-shaped seal. These tassels are otherwise unknown in Aegean glyptic imagery. The narrative content of the Gouvalari seal may also be unique. The figure on the right appears to have successfully blocked the swordsman's thrust to his jugular so that, instead, the swordsman seems to stab his opponent's upper arm. Thus, as on the gold signet-ring, *CMS I*, no. 16, not every duel in Mycenaean glyptic arts ends in an unmitigated success.

The preceding discussion offers a concrete example of Jeffrey Hurwit's assessment regarding the 15th century that "Mycenaean art as a whole is, perhaps, an art of formulae, conservatively utilizing a repertoire of images that are not as characteristic of Minoan art" (Hurwit 1979, 416). Thus, the Minoan sealings which have previously been brought into analyses of the Pylos Combat Agate have been shown here to be different thematically from the Pylos seal, in their depictions of the sport of stick-fighting, an agrimi hunt, and a human hunt or mock kidnapping. On the other hand, the Pylos agate seal can now be seen as one of a group of Helladic glyptic scenes, albeit its most outstanding representative, which formulaically depict duels or combats in which one character wields a sword and stands in a pose called here, the 'lunge and thrust'. And unlike the Minoan sealings, which were all made from ovoid metal signet-rings, the Mycenaean carvers seem to have discovered that the combat compositions featuring a swordsman in the 'lunge and thrust' pose are best suited to the cushion-shaped or the amygdaloid seal; only signet-ring *CMS I*, no. 16 (Fig. 12) is ovoid, a shape which, admittedly, is similar to the amygdaloid in its spatial allowances. Although the birthplace and gender of the artist who carved the Pylos Combat Agate will never be known, nor where they received their training, considering the mainland funerary contexts, and the thematic and compositional unity of the seal with that of the others in the 'lunge and thrust' seal group, it would seem that at least for two generations, from LH I to LH IIA, they may well have comprised one of the grandest and most quintessential of Mycenaean artistic expressions.

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