

## Chapter 2 The *Icon* and its Iconographic Vocabulary

In this Chapter the aim is to look at the challenges that artists faced in creating images to fit within the particular shape of the seal face and then at the mind games they played to transform ideas into images within this small compass.

### **Miniature Art: the Size and Shape of the Seal Face** (Plates 2.1 to 2.24)

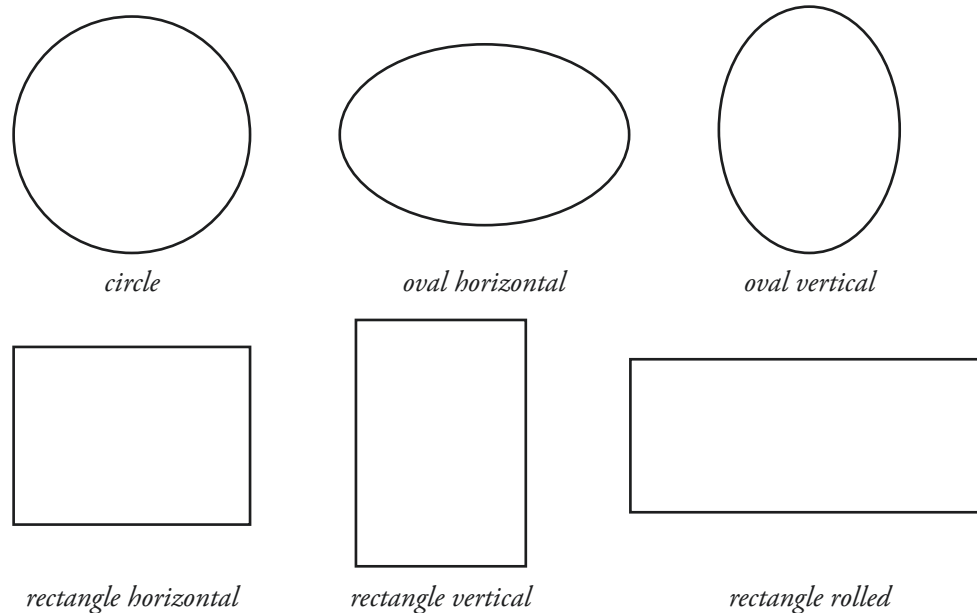
The tourist visitors to the Herakleion Museum must have wondered, as they looked at the seal and the drawing provided beside it, how the seal artists put that image on to the small seal face that they were viewing. In Chapter 1 we noted the size of some seals, but let us now spend a little time trying to comprehend just how small the seal face actually is. For each seal face in examples 2.1 to 2.24, measurements are listed in centimetres (cm), length x width. The smallest are 2.3 measuring 1.2 cm x 1.2 cm and 2.8 measuring 1.5 cm x 0.6 cm. The largest are 2.16 measuring 2.9 cm x 1.5 cm and 2.24 measuring 2.8 cm x 1.8 cm. There are even larger seals with the magnificent Dendra Lentoid as in 1.92 and 14.20 measuring 4.1 cm x 3.9 cm and the bezel of the great Mycenae Ring as in 14.55 measuring 3.4 cm x 2.5 cm. To try to fully appreciate the artist working at this miniature level, run a ruler over the illustrations 2.1 to 2.24 and compare those measurements with the ones listed below each seal face. They are up to twice the size of the original! It has often been surmised that the seal artists must have had some means of magnification to work so successfully at this miniature level. However, it is likely that the artists' own excellent eyesight and good light from the Aegean sunshine were sufficient<sup>1</sup>. Now that we know just how small the seals actually are, is it permissible to show the seal face enlarged about one and a half to two times the original? In order to study the images we need to enlarge them so that we can easily discuss their intricate iconography and, so long as we keep in mind that we are talking about items the size of your thumbnail, or the stone in a pretty dress ring, or the modest-sized watch face on your wrist, the magnification can be seen as permissible. It is a tribute to the skill of the seal artists that their images still work when substantially enlarged in print or even enlarged more to huge expanse when projected onto a wall-sized screen for lectures.

After confronting the miniature size of the seal, the artists must rise to their next challenge: working within the shape of the seal face. The figural prepalatial seals can show a variety of face shapes depending on the animal or item that forms the seal itself, as with the base of the boar head in 2.1, the little owl in 1.13 and the monkey in 1.28. When the seal form is the top pointed section of the hippopotamus tusk then the seal face is roughly circular. If the tusk is sliced horizontally then two roughly circular seal faces of slightly different diameters are provided as in 2.2. With the *petschaft*, the seal face is the base and that is circular as in 2.3. Further developments ensured that most seal faces came to assume regular geometric shapes as seen in the representative examples 2.4 to 2.24 where the circle, oval and rectangle are clear. However, for the composition of the design it is important also to register the orientation of the shape; so the oval and the rectangle need to be named as horizontal or vertical. There is an additional shape

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<sup>1</sup> The assessment of Ingo Pini, private communication. No evidence of magnifying equipment remains but then there is no evidence of seal-cutting equipment from the period either. The earliest illustration in the Aegean of a bow drill is the image on a tombstone of the 2<sup>nd</sup>c CE, AS, Fig. 5.1a. Other illustrations show a version of the lathe powered by a bow used by traditional craftsmen in India, 5.1b, and modern electric lathe equipment, 5.1c.

belonging to the cylinder seal as in 2.29 which marks the shape of the design when rolled out, named the rectangle rolled. This is a rectangle with defined upper and lower edges but no defined ends to mark the two smaller edges since the seal can be rolled continuously. This shape is rarely seen because the cylinder seal is not an indigenous creation but a copying of the (originally) Mesopotamian form. A diagram of the seal face shapes is provided in *Fig. 1*<sup>2</sup>. The face shapes are discussed through the eight most characteristic seal forms providing those shapes: petschaft, three sided prism, four sided prism, lentoid, amygdaloid, cushion, signet and cylinder seal.



*Fig. 1 Seal Face Shapes*

The **petschaft** is the simple stamp seal with a rounded handle containing the perforation for the suspension cord as in 2.3. The handle is regularly shaped with rings below the suspension hole. Overall, the elegant form of the petschaft provides a seal face in the shape of a **circle** as in the lovely chalcedony pieces in 2.3 and 1.25 and the gold example in 1.19. The petschaft is in favour in MM II.

The **three sided prism** is a prism with the string hole through the long axis emerging at each triangular end as in the steatite example 2.4. The three sides for the seal faces are usually in the shape of an oval but the oval is not like a true ellipse but rather more like a rectangle with the corners rounded and, on occasions, can be almost circular. The design is worked as an **oval horizontal** in each of the three seal faces of the steatite examples 2.5 to 2.7, and similar examples are found in 2.39, 2.40, 1.15, 1.16 and 1.39. The design may also be worked as an **oval vertical** as in 1.37 and 6.60. The three sided prism is in favour in MM II.

The **four sided prism** is a prism with the string hole through the long axis emerging at each square end as in the gold example 2.8. Each of the four seal faces is a **rectangle** with the design usually worked as a **rectangle horizontal**, especially when hieroglyphic signs are the subject as in the four faces of the green jasper example 2.9 to 2.12. Other examples are 2.53, 1.17 and 1.38. The design can also be worked as a **rectangle vertical** as with the figurative subjects in 6.62 and 12.31. The four sided prism is in favour in MM II.

The **lentoid**, so called because the seal itself takes the form of a lens, has its seal face in the shape of a **circle** as in the chlorite, carnelian and dark green jasper examples 2.13 to 2.15. The string hole is bored across a diameter, and sometimes gold finials are set to protect the string hole as in 1.8. The lentoid may

<sup>2</sup> This diagram was first presented in IAS, 14-15.

also be placed within a gold setting as in 1.43. These gold embellishments serve to underline the precious nature of the seal. Other lentoid examples are 2.28, 2.30, 2.35, 2.37, 2.46, 1.18, 1.22, 1.24 and 1.47. The lentoid comes into favour in LM I and remains a popular seal form.

The **amygdaloid**, so called because the seal form is like an almond, has a seal face in the shape of an **oval** as in the haematite, carnelian and green jasper examples 2.16 to 2.18. The string hole is bored through the long axis, and the ends of the oval may be cut off where the string hole emerges, no doubt to provide stronger ends where the wear of the string would be most damaging. The amygdaloid oval is close to the pure ellipse shape. The design may be worked with the **oval vertical** as in 2.16 and 12.32 or with the **oval horizontal** as in 2.17, 2.18, 1.42 and 1.46. A particularly rich example is the gold amygdaloid with gold finials 2.36. The amygdaloid also comes into favour in LM I and continues into the following period.

The **cushion** is so named because it is somewhat like a square cushion. The seal face is in the shape of a **rectangle** where the string hole is bored through the long axis as in the green stone, steatite/gold and chalcedony examples 2.19 to 2.21. The length and width measurements often do not differ very much, and consequently the effect is usually more of a square as in 2.20. Extra richness is provided by overlaying the stone with gold foil as in 2.20<sup>3</sup> and by capping the stone with gold band finials as in 2.21. Working the whole cushion in gold creates a stunning effect as in the three cushions from the Shaft Graves 2.32, 2.34 and 2.58 and the Pylos cushion 2.44. All these seals have the design worked **rectangle horizontal** but examples 3.37, 12.60 and 12.170 have the design worked **rectangle vertical**. The cushion comes into favour in MM III and continues into later periods.

The **signet** ring is known from the earliest times made of bone or hippopotamus ivory with a rounded seal face as in 1.30<sup>4</sup>. Later signets were made in precious metal, regularly gold but sometimes silver. The bezel is set at right angles to the hoop. This bezel provides a seal face in the shape of an oval as in 2.23 although a few are in the shape of a circle as in 2.22 and 2.50. The oval shape is close to an ellipse with some faces “fatter” as in 2.65 and some later ones more elongated as in 2.60. A silver ring is seen in 2.50 and gold examples are 2.22, 2.23, 2.26, 2.33, 1.26, 1.41 and 1.48. There are also examples of signets carved from a single piece of stone as with the red jasper example showing a Lion Master 2.24, the chalcedony signet with cows suckling 1.91 and the agate signet with an agrimia chariot scene 12.187. All these signets have the design worked oval horizontal. If the sealings in 1.10 and 12.138 were impressed by a signet they are examples of an oval vertical design. Then there is the rare example 2.22 where the design is organised by a coil spiral. The gold signets come into favour in MM III and continue into LM and LH times.

The **cylinder seal** takes the shape of a cylinder with the design worked around the circumference surface so that when the cylinder is rolled out it gives a rectangle with hard top and bottom but fluid edges so that the rolling can continue. Examples include the translucent agate cylinder with gold finials 2.29, 12.155 and 12.157. There are relatively few examples of cylinder seals and most are LM or LB.

There are various other seal forms which come into favour at different times like the pear-shaped stamp seals 1.7 and 1.29, the discoid 1.23, and also the stamp cylinder, conoid, quader and cube. However, in each of these cases the seal face is one of the shapes set out in *Fig. 1*.

### **Searching for the Essence: the *Icon*** (Plates 2.25 to 2.36)

Now that we have some appreciation of the challenges that the size and shape of the seal face present to the artist we can turn to the challenge of depicting the subject matter. From the very beginning there is a distinct Minoan point of view.

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3 The image here is 90° turned to the left from the CMS mounting as this view has the dolphins in the characteristic leaping down pose rather than swimming into the rocks.

4 Termed stempelring in the CMS.

Consider the images they create of the animals closest to them, the agrimi, hound, stag and boar. The agrimi, the Cretan wild goat, is one of the most popular subjects in all periods. The artist portrays the agrimi with characteristic features and in characteristic poses so that the true nature of the animal is conveyed to us. For the male agrimi the great statement of its identity is the magnificent pair of curved and knobbed horns, but the variety of life episodes depicted give a fuller picture of all agrimia. They are seen resting as in 2.25 and 1.3, standing as in 1.31 and 1.71 and coursing along in flying gallops or flying leaps as in 2.29 and 1.27. They are shown in mating and suckling scenes as in 2.26 and 2.27 and in animal attack and hunt scenes where they are the seized prey as in 2.29 and 1.76 and the wounded quarry as in 1.79. Each image is a graphic statement of some essential characteristic of the agrimi, its body shape, its ability to run and leap, its virility and its tenderness with its young. Taken altogether they give us the full understanding of the agrimi as a particular animal different from all others. It is the same with the hound, another great favourite of the Minoans. The characteristic shape is clear in the early seals, with its long tail being one of the main identifying features, curled upright in 1.35. The hound may sit or stand or scratch as in 2.46, and its characteristic cooling method of panting is marked in the open mouth and lolling tongue of 1.56. There is no need to read the teeth and protruding tongue as indicating aggression and hence a wolf, as has often been proposed. It is simply someone's favourite mastiff hound panting. The bitch suckles its young as in 6.82 and cares for its nearby young as well. Puppies play together in 6.81. In action the hound courses at full stretch as it runs through a rocky landscape in 1.61 or as it chases and seizes its quarry in 2.29. It bends up or down to secure its quarry as in 1.62 and 1.76 or leaps up to hold its quarry at bay as in 1.60. Almost always the hound is shown with its collar, thus indicating that it belongs to its master. To accompany its master to the hunt is its highest calling and the hunter master with his trusty hound beside him regularly makes a stunning picture as in 2.35. Those other denizens of the forest, the stag and the boar, are also shown in characteristic shape and pose. For the stag, its identifying characteristic is the set of antlers, featured for the red deer in 1.16 and shown in clear detail for the fallow deer in 1.46 and 2.28. The doe suckles its young in 6.23. The stag's active life is concentrated in its role as the prey of violent predators where its body is either contorted or stretched in great suffering as in 2.28 and 1.46. The boar is always immediately recognisable with its distinct snout and heavy body with upright back bristles as in 1.55. The sow may suckle young as in 6.29. In action the boar's main role is as the hunter's quarry where it is a most dangerous foe. The tusks are clearly shown in the confrontation in 2.35. So, as we see, each animal shape is carefully distinguished by body mass and genus specifics. One or two of these characteristics may be somewhat exaggerated seemingly as a key marker of the particular animal, the great curved horns of the agrimi, the raised tail and/or panting mouth of the hound, the varied antler shape of the stag, and the back bristles and/or tusks of the boar. Yet much is also revealed in the characteristic behaviour they share. So, the artist portrays the speed of the agrimi and the stag and their suffering as they are prey/quarry brought down by their predator/hunter, as well as the tenderness of the mother nurturing her young, applying equally to agrimi, doe, bitch and sow. We can only deduce that the artist is striving for something more than simply an identifiable image of each animal. They are trying to express their essence. This is the Minoan artistic vision.

Consider now the images of men fighting or hunting. In examples 2.31 to 2.36 the men are all shown at their prime, their musculing especially clear with the minimal dress of the belt and kilt of the Minoan male (sometimes with codpiece or simple shorts shown as well). The weapons and armour are carefully detailed – spear, sword, scabbard, plumed helmet, boar tusk helmet, and eight shield or tower shield. Yet it is not the detail that arrests the viewer. It is the face-to-face combat! This is a duel to the death! This is the climactic point of the fatal blow! In each image two magnificent adversaries face each other. In the war images they are warrior heroes while in the hunt images they are a hunter hero and a great beast raised to the stature of hunter hero by its size, ferocity and ability to kill. In the war duelling image there is a warrior victor who drives his weapon home and a warrior vanquished who falls away dying. In 2.31 and 2.33 there is the additional figure of a warrior fallen, his body stricken and suffering and unable to rise. In the hunt duelling images of 2.34 and 2.35, the victor is the hunter hero but even as he defeats the great lion or the ferocious boar he can suffer grievous wounds from claws, teeth or tusks. In

2.36 it is the great bull who is the victor. Even as it is caught in the tensioned net, it tramples and gores the unfortunate hunter whose crumpled body as hunter fallen is a parallel to the warrior fallen figures of the war scenes. In all depictions the artist does not allow any extraneous detail to detract from the confrontation of the duel. In 2.31, 2.32, 2.34 and 2.35 there is no background at all while in 2.33 and 2.36 there is only the framing of the glen motif or the necessary introduction of a tree so that the net which ensnares the bull can be anchored. Now, there are many ways to depict warfare or the hunt. The army may march out to war or begin the battle charge. The warrior king may be shown triumphing over his opponents or even sacrificing his prisoners after the battle. Hunters may pursue their quarry and slay it by missile fired from afar or may cunningly ambush their quarry or drive multiple animals into a corral for easy dispatch. Rarely, if ever, is the warrior/king/hunter in any real danger. However, this is not the Minoan vision. While there are images of warriors marching out to battle or driving their chariots, it is in the duelling scenes that the essence of conflict in war and the hunt is starkly imaged. By rendering the duel at its climactic point, the heroism of the duellers, man or animal, is fully revealed. They face death, and only one will survive, and even then this survivor may suffer terrible wounds. This is the essence of bravery in war and the hunt.

Through these two examples of animal life and men duelling we can see that Minoans are trying to encapsulate the essential nature of the thing, the virility and life force of the animal and the drama of striking the fatal blow in a duel. This endeavour of distilling the essence results in the creation of the *Icon*, the memorable image, and it is in the seals that the *Icon* is developed. The two constraints on the artist, the small size of the seal and the shape of the seal face, actually facilitate the concentration inherent in the *Icon* concept. The *Icon* theory of Aegean art was first proposed in a trilogy of *Aegaeum* papers as the Thalassa Theory since it was first argued through the example of depicting the sea<sup>5</sup>. It has more recently been explained through the images of the bull sports in my book, *The Iconography of Aegean Seals* (IAS). There, the process of creating the *Icon* is given an extended exposition<sup>6</sup>.

“The creation of an icon begins with the point of view for the composition being the artist’s own eye (through which we can also see), a point of view which gives Aegean representational art its essential humanism. The crafting of the icon then proceeds through a creative sequence of initial image, essential image and elaborate image to the completed memorable image, always allowing flexibility for the individual artist to change details and create a unique seal design. The initial image is the eidetic image registered by the artist: the natural shape of human and animal figures at rest and in movement, of plants and buildings. The artist then works on the initial eidetic image with its characteristic shape to extract the essence of the subject and this is the essential image: the tenderness of suckling animals, the violence of an animal attack, the courage to fight a duel. Finally the artist works on this essential image to make it as clear as possible and fit it into the seal shape, thus producing the elaborate image; the leaper somersaulting, the flying gallop of an animal attacking, the antithetical group. The result of this sequential overworking of the images is the memorable image, the icon, immediately accessible to the viewer, partly because the viewer’s eye easily takes the point of view of the artist’s eye but also because of the enhancing of the image by the artist’s skill. Explaining the composition of seal designs as the sequential overworking of images helps the viewer of the composition and the reader of the seals to understand the complexity and richness of the icon. In practice, however, the point of view of the artist and the three steps of composition are possibly not so separate. The artist takes his point of view by surveying the scene and deciding on the particular aspect to be highlighted in the composition. The artist’s eye intuitively responds to the shape and movement of the eidetic imprint while the mind decides what effects are needed to extract the essence of the subject and the trained

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5 Crowley 1989a, 203-214, 1991, 219-230 and 1992, 23-37, where it was argued as a comprehensive theory after paying tribute to the early iconographers, Henriette Gronweger-Frankfort, Henri van Effenterre, Emily Townsend Vermeule and Gisela Walberg.

6 IAS, 15-17.

hand immediately knows which elaboration to apply. The icon is the compositional imperative of Aegean glyptic art. The icon theory is a comprehensive theory of Aegean glyptic design, distilled from the material itself and, as such, provides an accurate description of the many aspects of this sophisticated art.”

At this earlier stage of my thinking, I proposed that the *Icon* was developed in two stages: an earlier proto-icon stage where single subjects were depicted and the full-icon stage where the artist began to portray the whole scene as a unit. However, I now consider that this is a somewhat arbitrary division and so I identify all these memorable images from the Early Seal Period as *Icons*, recognising that the changes seen in the Phaistos Sealings mark the time when the full potential of the *Icon* composition began to be realised. This is when the artists took the whole scene as the eidetic image and re-envisioned the *Icon* to depict the essence of the activity and the essence of place<sup>7</sup>.

In the *Icon* composition we see a beautiful meeting of the mind of the artist and the shape and size of the seal face. In fashioning the *Icon* through the three phases of its creative sequence of initial image, essential image and elaborate image to achieve the completed memorable image there is, of necessity, a summarising and an extracting to grasp the essence. Its naissance is in the Minoan seal artists' point of view where the artists, seeing the shape of the subject before them, also see its underlying structure, and infuse this insight into their designs. The Minoans are the impressionists of shape<sup>8</sup>. The centrality of the *Icon* for artistic and iconographic composition can hardly be overestimated. The seal artists created 125 *Icons* to express their point of view, and these *Icons* organise their chosen subject matter. The *Icon* is the compositional imperative of Minoan seal design and, eventually, of all Aegean art.

### **The IconAegean Databases: IconADict and IconAegean**

So, what are these *Icons*? Do they have names? Does every detail of their depiction and composition have a name? No doubt they all had Minoan names in the long-distant past but, as we have seen, we have a problem in the Aegean in that there are no contemporary associated texts to provide descriptions. Accordingly, we must create a vocabulary and classification to enable precision in the discussion of Aegean art. Yet, how to do it? Any attempt to force the images into a Procrustean bed of some pre-conceived 20th or 21st century CE schema would be disastrous. It is of the utmost importance that such vocabulary and classification evolve out of the material itself, and that has been my guiding philosophy over the years<sup>9</sup>. The other guiding precept that has been my constant companion is the need to do justice to both the extent and the subtlety of the iconography. The vocabulary and classification must be broad enough to encompass the wide variety of subject matter but at the same time nuanced enough to reveal the sophistication of the image creation. So, for many years I have been working to create just such a comprehensive yet nuanced vocabulary for iconographic discussion (in English) and to use it in a classification for the seal images which can be presented in user-friendly databases for easy searching. This work has resulted in the IconAegean Vocabulary and IconAegean Classification and in the IconAegean Databases. These were introduced to the scholarly community in trial versions across several CMS Symposia<sup>10</sup> and through the CMS Website.

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7 See the discussion of the Phaistos sealing images as the pivot of change, Chapter 1 above.

8 See the discussion on impressionism in Chapter 3 below.

9 The dangers of the “Procrustean bed” have been the subject of many a discussion with Ingo Pini in the Great Room of the seal impressions in Marburg, fondly remembered by both of us.

10 Crowley and Adams CMS B5, 39-58 and Crowley CMS B6, 15-26.

The trial versions initially comprised two Databases, IconADict and IconADData. Extensive work has seen the Databases revised through several iterations from Versions 1.0 to 1.3. In the original IconADData Database, 1000 seals were chosen to illustrate the range of image iconography. The entries in the dictionary database, IconADict,

<https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zaw/cms/index.html>. They were further explained in my book, *The Iconography of Aegean Seals*, and now reach their full exposition in this sequel volume and in the updated versions of the IconAegean Databases. There are two Databases, IconADict and IconAegean. They are created in *FileMaker Pro*<sup>11</sup> and their updated versions are being released in conjunction with this book. The Parameters for creating the IconAegean Databases are set out in Appendix 1. They deal with the problems encountered in trying to describe the images as carefully and as economically as possible in the absence of contemporary vocabulary. As you read the Parameters you will see that several of them directly address the problems outlined in Chapter 1, like avoiding anachronistic terms and emotive descriptions.

The **IconADict Database** (Dict for Dictionary) sets out and defines the 590 terms in the IconAegean Vocabulary and these terms are also the Key Words for searching the Databases. The terms are listed here in Appendix 2, alphabetically along with their Classification fields. In the IconADict Database each term is given one page for the definition and a seal image is provided to illustrate the usage. The definitions include comparisons with other images within the selected 1000 seals of the IconADict Database by referring to their IconADict number. In Plates 2.37 and 2.38 the term VIP (Very Important Person) is used in the description of the image. In the IconADict Database the definition of the term VIP is given as it applies to Aegean iconography. A print-out of the VIP definition is provided as Appendix 3. IconADict also contains entries to explain how to use the two Databases and presents the Parameters controlling the creation of the two Databases as mentioned above.

The **IconAegean Database** holds the seals published so far by CMS and places all the 10,972 seal face images within the IconAegean Classification, one seal face image to a page in the Data View layout. The one-page data entry provides the seal image as a drawing of the impression, a long text entry as the IconAegean Classification and a shorter text entry as the CMS Record which draws on the CMS publications to list the main features of the seal and its provenance. Within the IconAegean Classification section the vocabulary which provides the iconographic description of the seal images is employed in an hierarchical schema of five fields: Category, Theme, *Icon*, Element and Syntax. It became very clear early in the creation of the Classification that a one- or two-line description would not do justice to the subtlety of the iconography and so an hierarchical schema based on the *Icon* was devised. Through examples 2.37 to 2.54 below an explanation is provided of just how the Classification works to describe each seal image.

It is easy to **Search the Databases**. Both the IconADict and IconAegean Databases have been designed to be as user-friendly as possible, allowing for the amount of material incorporated and the sophisticated iconography. The use of the 590 Vocabulary terms as Key Words and the one-page Data View layout of the IconAegean Classification facilitate access through the Find command of *FileMaker Pro*. In the IconADict Database, the Find command will call up a blank Data View layout with the various fields outlined, and the User can type in the vocabulary term in the Key Word field and then, on pressing Perform Find, the entry being sought will appear. Similarly, in the IconAegean Database the File command will call up a blank page with the various fields outlined, and the User can type in the vocabulary term in the appropriate field of the five Classification fields available, and then, on pressing Perform Find, the entry being sought will appear. As an additional searching aid, pop-up menus in each field suggest the vocabulary terms the User may wish to try. The popup menus list the 590 terms in the IconAegean Vocabulary in their appropriate Classification fields totalling 10 Category, 25 Theme, 125 Icon, 340 Element and 90 Syntax fields. The IconAegean Database is still a work in progress but the first three fields, Category, Theme and *Icon*, are complete, and searches across these fields will yield accurate

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continue to use these 1000 images to illustrate and explain the terms used, but the IconADict Database itself has been discontinued now that the IconAegean Database has been developed in the same format, and it contains all the CMS published seals.

<sup>11</sup> *FileMaker Pro* is a relational database application from Claris International. Its initial release was in 1985 and it now provides for ease of customising one's own database.

assemblages of images. The seals are entered in the IconAegean Database in the order in which they are published in the CMS. Users can search for any particular seal by using the Find command to call up the field outlines and then entering the CMS number in the CMS Number field in the CMS Record section. Users can also find seals with particular characteristics like shape or material or by provenance by entering the queried term in the appropriate field outline. Moreover, Users can make use of the Sort command to organise entries in any of the iconographic or CMS fields. It is most useful to Sort on the IconA Code field in the IconAegean Classification section. This sorting process is rather like allowing all the pages in the CMS Volumes with one seal to a page to float up in the air and then settle back down into iconographic order. It is all much easier in the IconAegean Database where the *Filemaker Pro* command Sort assembles the seal images in iconographic order, and Users may then scroll through them to gain a new appreciation of the iconography through this direct access. Placing all 10,972 CMS images in iconographic order is a first for Aegean iconography.

### **The IconAegean Vocabulary and the IconAegean Classification** (Plates 2.37 to 2.54)

In order to help readers of this book and users of the IconAegean Databases to understand how to use the IconAegean Vocabulary and the IconAegean Classification, we take the eighteen seal images, 2.37 to 2.54, as examples. The discussion here proceeds on the premise that the reader knows the IconAegean Vocabulary or consults the IconADict Database to become familiar with the naming and usage of the terms. We do a step-by-step classification of the images 2.37 and 2.38 so as to set out the Data View layout for each in the IconAegean Database and then do a quick summary of the classification of the images 2.39 to 2.54 in order to show the variety of descriptions available across the iconographic repertoire. We then make a step-by-step search of the IconAegean Database on some selected terms to show how to find comparable material.

The *Icon*, the memorable image, is the compositional imperative of Aegean glyptic art and constitutes the artistic core of the IconAegean Classification. Identifying the *Icon* begins the Classification process. Once the *Icon* of the image is identified it can be listed in the *Icon* field. Attention then turns to the components of the *Icon*. The fusion of eidetic/essential/elaborate images which creates the *Icon* finds its expression in the two component database descriptions set out in the Element field (the individual motifs and their detail) and the Syntax field (how the motifs are organised). The next step is to see where the *Icon* fits in the overall subject matter of the iconography repertoire. There are thematic considerations, and the *Icon* field entry can be filed in the appropriate Theme field. Once this is done the *Icon* field and Theme field can be placed within even larger groupings of the Category field. Thus, the hierarchical classification is complete. This five-field filing is extremely useful to the iconographer. It immediately identifies each image by its *Icon* which is its artistic core and then gives component detail. Yet, it also allows larger groupings of subject matter to be easily assembled.

In 2.37, the seal, CMS I 223, and the drawing of its impression are shown. Working with the drawing of the impression, as is the protocol for discussing the iconography of seal images, and using the IconAegean Vocabulary, we begin with the *Icon* field<sup>12</sup> and then work through the other fields to file the descriptions in the Data View layout. The *Icon* is VIP with familiar and refers to an elite human figure and the term familiar refers to an identifying animal accompanying the VIP<sup>13</sup>.

We first identify and list the *Icon* as:

VIP with familiar

We then list the Element constituents of the *Icon* as:

VIP as Griffin Lord, wearing diagonal robe, griffin as familiar, wearing cord as collar

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12 The term *Icon* is used in Italics when referring to the concept and the theory as well as the *Icon* field of the Databases. The other field names of Category, Theme, Element and Syntax are rendered in plain text.

13 Search the IconADict Database in the Key Word field on VIP, familiar and VIP with familiar.



and leash,  
triple line as groundline

We then list the Syntax organisation of the *Icon* as:

circle, focus,  
Lord front centre, standing profile to left, arm bent to waist holding cord tied into a collar  
around the griffin's neck,  
griffin back centre, statant to left, wings elevated, head erect regardant,  
groundline below

Returning to the information contained in the core of the iconographic description, the *Icon* field and its component Element and Syntax fields, we may now draw on this information to make the appropriate entry for the image in the Theme and Category fields.

We file the image in the Theme field as

symbolic

because it has features beyond those appearing in the real world.

We file the image in the Category field as

human figures

because the *Icon* contains a human figure with detailed features and clothing.

The pertinent details of the *Icon*, Element and Syntax field descriptions for CMS I 223 are listed in summary as the caption below 2.37. The full IconAegean Classification for CMS I 223 is shown as Appendix 4. This is a print-out of the Data View layout page from the IconAegean Database.

In 2.38, the sealing, CMS II.8 268, and the drawing of its image are shown<sup>14</sup>. To classify the image we repeat the steps described above. Working with the drawing of the impression and using the IconAegean Vocabulary, we begin with the *Icon* field and then work through the other fields. The *Icon* is VIP granting audience and the action records an elite seated personage allowing figures of lesser status to approach. The *Icon* of gesturing, where figures use standard gestures, is added.

We first identify and list the *Icons* as:

VIP granting audience, gesturing

We then list the Element constituents of the *Icons* as:

VIP as Great Lady, as Seated Lady, of large size, wearing flounced pants, as gesturer,  
giving heart  
gesture and reaching gesture,  
tiered shrine topped by double horns as Lady's seat,  
woman as server, wearing flounced pants, as bearer, holding skyphos,  
woman as server, wearing flounced pants, as bearer, holding unknown item,  
rocky ground as glen

We then list the Syntax organisation of the *Icon* as:

oval horizontal, stage, cultscape,  
Lady VIP right granting audience to server, sitting combination to left on second tier of shrine  
far right, arm bent across breast, arm bent out gesturing,  
woman server bearer centre, standing profile to right facing Lady, arms bent out to right offering  
skyphos to Lady,  
woman bearer left, standing profile to left, arms bent out holding item,  
rocky glen above

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14 There are several sealings allowing a composite drawing of the whole seal image.

Returning to the information contained in the core of the iconographic description, the *Icon* field and its component Element and Syntax fields, we may now draw on this information to make the appropriate entry for the image in the Theme and Category fields.

We file the image in the Theme field as

symbolic

because it has features beyond those appearing in the real world.

We file the image in the Category field as

human figures

because the main *Icon* contains a human figure with detailed features and clothing.

The pertinent details of the *Icon*, Element and Syntax field descriptions are listed in summary as the caption below 2.38. The full details may be found in the Data View layout page of the IconAegean Database under its CMS number, CMS II.8 268.

The remaining images 2.39 to 2.54 also note under their illustrations the pertinent terms in their *Icon*, Element and Syntax description while the full entry can be viewed in the Data View layout of the IconAegean Database. They follow the same classification procedure.

In 2.39, the *Icon* field is man carrying loads. The detail of Element and Syntax will cause it to be filed within the peaceful activities Theme field, and because it contains a human figure without detailed features or clothing the image will need to be filed in the Category field, stylised human figures.

In 2.40 the *Icon* field is sailing ship. The detail of Element and Syntax reveals size and complexity and so places the image within the major constructions Theme field, and because it shows something made by human hands the image will need to be filed in the Category field, human artefacts.

In 2.41, the *Icon* field is special object. The Element detail of double axe shows a relatively small item which could be made and carried by one human being. So, it is filed in the minor constructions Theme, and because it shows something made by human hands it belongs in the Category field, human artefacts.

In 2.42 the *Icon* field is special object. The detail of Element and Syntax shows the eight shield and cloak knot which are associated with war and the hunt and so they go in the war equipment Theme field. Because they are items made by human hands the image needs to be filed in the Category field, human artefacts.

In 2.43, the *Icon* field is hybrid woman. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image in the hybrid humans Theme, and because it shows a creature of fantasy in its fusion of features the image needs to be filed in the Category field, fantastic creations.

In 2.44, the *Icon* field is animal resting. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image in the animal study Theme field, and because the creature is not a real animal but a griffin then it must be filed in the Category field, fantastic creations.

In 2.45, the *Icon* field is animal parts plus. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image in the Zakros fantasy Theme field, and because it shows a fantasy combination it needs to be filed in the Category field, fantastic creations.

In 2.46, the *Icon* field is animal scratching. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image within the animal study Theme field, and because the Element detail names a hound then it is filed in the Category field, fauna.

In 2.47, the *Icon* field is animal tethered. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image in the animal study Theme, and because the Element description names a bull then it is filed in the Category field, fauna.

In 2.48, the *Icon* field is dolphin leaping. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image within the sea creature study Theme field and within the Category field, sea life.

In 2.49, the *Icon* field is single flora. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image within the floral Theme field, and the Element description rosette flower requires the image to be filed within the Category field, flora.

In 2.50, the *Icon* field is multiple flora. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image within the floral Theme field, and the Element description papyrus flower plant places the image within the Category field, flora.

In 2.51, the *Icon* field is multiple flora. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image within the foliate Theme field while the strongest Element component, the petaloid, places the image within the Category field, flora.

In 2.52, the *Icon* field is spiraliform. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image within the curvilinear Theme field while the Element vierpass spiral places the image within the Category field, geometric.

In 2.53, the *Icon* field is script sign. The detail of Element and Syntax places the image within the text Theme field while the Elements identified by their CHIC number place the image within the Category field, script.

In 2.54, there is no appropriate icon to identify the image because the seal belongs to a foreign artistic tradition and so it must simply be listed in the Category field, miscellaneous.

When the User comes to consult the IconAegean Database for comparisons, a search may be instituted on one or more of the five Iconographic fields helped by the prompts of the available vocabulary. To find featured male images comparable to the one in 2.37, go to any Data View layout and use the Find command to call up the field outlines. Enter VIP with familiar in the *Icon* field and enter Lord in the Element field. On the Perform Find command, 51 comparable images will be retrieved. The User may scroll through the selected entries, or they may be viewed as a list in the Comparison layout. To switch to the Comparison layout go to the pulldown layout command which currently reads Data View and click on Comparison. The selected entries will be assembled in a list showing the images. This is particularly helpful for the User wishing to compare iconographic detail. To find featured female images comparable to the one in 2.38, go to any Data View layout and use the Find command to call up the field outlines. Enter VIP granting audience in the *Icon* field. On the Perform Find command, 16 comparable images will be retrieved. The User may scroll through the selected entries, or they may be viewed as a list in the Comparison layout accessed as described above. A print-out of the Comparison layout of these 16 images is provided as Appendix 5.

Now that we have arrived at the point of understanding the IconAegean Vocabulary and its use in the IconAegean Classification of seal images, we will be able to use it consistently throughout this book. The discussion and argument here is presented through the illustrations of the seals. The Plate pages are thus integral to the exposition, but additional examples can always be consulted by searching the IconAegean Database using the IconAegean Vocabulary terms as Key Words. In Chapter 3, as the discussions begin to use the IconAegean Vocabulary, we will refer readers to the appropriate searches on the IconAegean Database so that they can find additional examples and gain familiarity with the vocabulary terms. If readers do not wish to start interrogating the Database at this point, there will be other opportunities. In Chapters 4 to 12, which expound the iconography of each motif, the first *Footnote* lists the apposite IconAegean terms and reminds readers where they can find examples by searching on each term in its appropriate IconAegean Database field. Collecting all the extant examples helps to inform the Database User and the reader which motifs and compositions are most favoured and which are relatively rare in the various periods.

### **Design Concepts and Compositional Devices** (Plates 2.55 to 2.63)

Let us return now to the *Icon* as set out in the *Icon* field and to its constituent parts set out in the Element field and the Syntax field. We have seen that the identification of the *Icon* and the describing of the detail of its Element component are crucial for the sorting and classification into Categories and Themes. In these duties the Syntax component is somewhat muted. However, it is the Syntax component that can help the reader understand the full importance of subject matter detail. In opening this section on design concepts and compositional devices we stress that the viewer of the image must know what the design

construction is in order to read the message of the seal. All art is like this but, in the concentrated world of the seal, attention to the Syntax of the image is vital. For each image, the overall Syntax composition and its constituent structures guide the viewer to recognise the most important features and to attend to those small additional Element details that highlight content. Over the centuries the seal artists developed a formidable array of design concepts and compositional devices to organise their designs in both bold and subtle ways. To recognise this, the IconAegean Vocabulary lists 90 Syntax terms to explain the organisation of the image detail. All are defined in the IconADict Database. The first entry in the Syntax field is the shape of the seal face as set out above in *Fig. 1*. This is the confining perimeter into which the artist must fit the image. Over the long floruit of the seals the seal artists displayed amazing ingenuity and skill to organise the subject matter into the face shapes. We can observe this in the design concepts that they employed and also in the compositional devices that executed these concepts. For the early decorative designs the devices are bound up with geometry in their reliance on radiation division, symmetry and interlocking rapport. For the early animal subjects, heraldic poses regularly organise the compositions. Later, particular aspects of the *Icons* showing human activity are emphasised by newly created devices. We turn now to the detail of the design concepts and compositional devices<sup>15</sup>.

### **Design Concepts** (Plates 2.55 to 2.63)

There are eleven design concepts: decorative, writing, talismanic, focus, frieze, stage, mountain view, landscape, townscape, seascape and cultscape.

The **decorative** design concept is most frequently seen in the Early Seal Period. It organises floral and geometric subjects. The term decorative should not be construed as implying a superficial treatment or one treating a subject lacking in meaning. In 2.51 the various floral and foliate elements are intertwined to play into a curvilinear design, and in 2.2 leaves form a design with S spirals. In 2.52 the vierpass also displays interlinking spirals. In 2.55 radiation organises the design into eight main divisions. In 2.56 and 2.57 symmetry guides the composition. Much of the subject matter of the prepalatial and protopalatial seals is concerned with the decorative arrangement of these geometric, floral and foliate forms<sup>16</sup>. In these designs the artists show consummate mastery of antithetical balance, spiraliform fluidity, radiation division and all four types of symmetry as discussed below.

The **writing** design concept allows the artist to place script signs within the seal face perimeter. The hieroglyphic script is the most used in the seal images and is found in MM II seals like 2.53, 2.8 to 2.12, 1.17 and 1.38. In hieroglyphic script the signs are pictures, with most showing in a reduced shape some foliate form, animal, person or object from daily life. The pictographic nature of this script should not be forgotten when the signs are identified by a number, the number assigned in the *Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae* (CHIC)<sup>17</sup>. The organisation of the signs is controlled by the rules of writing hieroglyphic text, as yet not fully understood, but there appears to be some interest in creating a pleasing artistic effect with careful placement of additional items. Linear A is found on a few seals of MM III-LM I date and it, too, has its own rules for depiction, the most interesting being the spiral composition in 2.22. Linear B is virtually absent<sup>18</sup>.

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15 All design concepts and compositional devices are defined in the IconADict Database. Search in the Key Word field on decorative, writing, talismanic, focus, frieze, stage, mountain view, landscape, townscape, seascape, cultscape, radiation, translatory symmetry, reflectional symmetry, dilatory symmetry, rotational symmetry, antithetical group, mirror reverse, groundline, perimeter groundline, parading, glen, curve fit, centre, left, right, above, below, far left, far right, above centre, above left, above right, below centre, below left, below right, climactic point, diagonal play, heraldic poses, set, sequence, parallel, substitution and duality. These terms are also explained in IAS in the Syntax section.

16 See Chapter 5 below.

17 The CHIC Corpus was published in 1996 with each sign illustrated and given a number.

18 Other scripts, also undeciphered, are known through a few examples. The Phaistos Disk shows a pictographic

The **talismanic** design concept organises the images on a large group of LM I hard stone seals<sup>19</sup>. They are characterised by their distinctive cutting style which features much work by the drill and little polishing away of the cut marks. Some of these characteristics continue into the later Cut Style. A detailed analysis of the talismanic seals has been undertaken by Artemis Onassoglou, and her discussion of the motifs is cited in the Chapters below where parallels with the IconAegean terms used in this volume are explained<sup>20</sup>. The subject matter in talismanic images is similar to the Elements in other seals depicting floral and foliate motifs, animals and insects, sea creatures and things made by human hand like vessels, wickerwork and ships. However, fantastic creations and human figures are rare. Many examples have the motif as sole subject, as with the ship in 2.18 and the double axe in 2.41, and with these, the subject is placed centrally in the design. Other examples add in additional subjects, as with the vase and branches in 1.42, or the vase and double horns in 1.84. So, the description talismanic does not actually signify unusual subject matter or a particular organisational concept. Rather, the nomenclature talismanic refers to the drilling/cutting style that allows special treatment of the motifs. They are linearised, some to the extent that they look abstract. As quite a large group, the talismanics are calling attention to the sub-set of main-stream subject matter that, for some reason, becomes important at this particular time.

With the **focus** design concept, the main subject may stand on a groundline, but all background detail is removed. The effect is to concentrate attention on the main subject and thus declare its importance. It is a concept regularly used in coinage, even to this day, where it is particularly apposite to use the monarch's head on the obverse. In Aegean seals it is one of the most used design concepts from the earliest times to the end and it always serves to bring to the viewer's attention the importance of this particular subject which is granted the sole subject placement in the design. The three gold cushions from the Shaft Graves discussed earlier use the focus concept to heighten the tension. In 2.58 the wounded lion collapses on rocky ground but is otherwise shown without any surrounding detail. The result is a concentration on the lion subject and its agonised twist towards the imbedded arrow. In the war duelling and hunt duelling presentations of 2.32 and 2.34 the focus concept sets a blank background. Thus, all attention is riveted on the violent confrontation of the protagonists, climaxing in the fatal sword thrust. Similarly, the human figure in 2.37, the griffin in 2.44, the fantastic composite in 2.45, the hound in 2.46 and the agrimi in 2.25 are positioned in this featured way and thus enhanced in importance. The effect of the focus still holds even when a small addition is made to the main subject, as with the branches and birdwoman in 2.43 or when a grouping of subjects stresses their composite importance as with the man, his hound and flask in 2.39 and the row of eight shields and cloak knots in 2.42. However, to return to the image in 2.37, it is one of a number in Minoan High Art which appear to take the focus design concept and its depiction of the sole subject to new levels. Here the human figure and his accompanying griffin stand quite still. It is the same with the male figure and lion in 1.43. These figures are not involved in any action and seem to exist beyond time or place, thus enhancing the stature and importance of these figures. The other use of the focus concept concerns *Icons* where the activity of human figures or animals is already organised in a codified way, as with the antithetical group discussed below.

The **frieze** design concept organises subjects between confines at the top and bottom but not at the sides, thus allowing repetition of the design. The frieze is a characteristic composition of the cylinder seal as seen in the Mesopotamian/Anatolian example, 2.54. This eastern medium facilitates the unending nature of the design as it is rolled out by inter-linking the subjects in the design and allowing different combinations to be presented. In the Aegean, the relatively few cylinder seals sometimes make use of the repetitive possibilities of this medium, but often artists prefer to set an *Icon* on the curved surface of the

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script arranged in a spiral pattern, CM Pls. 72 and 73. For the "Archanes Script" see AS, 70-72.

19 Numbering about 900 seals. Some talismanic seals might have been made before the beginning of LM I and so are stylistically dated MM III-LM I. A few are of pseudo-jasper, limestone or marble and are thus of somewhat softer stone.

20 CMS B2. The technical aspects are explained, 171-189, and there are comments on the Cut Style, 190-192. See also AS, 133-137, for discussion of the talismanic group and AS, 201-203 for the Cut Style.

cylinder as if it were a stamp seal face. An animal seizing is seen in 2.29, a Griffin Lord is seen in 12.155 and a chariot scene is shown in 12.164. Sometimes the image is turned at right angles to the top/bottom confining line<sup>21</sup>, suggesting that the artists did not feel restricted by any of the artistic rules pertaining to this eastern cylinder seal medium.

The **stage** and **mountain view** design concepts refer to how the artist organises complex scenes<sup>22</sup>. These design concepts belong to the periods after the change seen in the Phaistos Sealings when the *Icon* begins to encompass the whole scene. Accordingly, the images created in these design concepts belong to compositions of the Experimentation and Minoan High Art Periods or later when the *Icon* has become the total image. The eye of the artist creates the complex image and invites the viewer to take the same point of view. Thus, the viewer stands looking in at these scenes as one would at a concert presentation for the stage concept or from a high vantage point for the mountain view concept. There is nothing between the viewer and the image. The viewer is not required to understand certain artistic rules before approaching the image and so the effect is immediate. It is this very human viewpoint that makes Aegean art so accessible. With the stage concept, the people and surrounding detail are positioned on a groundline as in 2.59. All the activity seems to take place within a surface plane with no real suggestion of depth, as with acting on a stage. In 2.63 the rocks, woman, grand pillar and shrine are all positioned on the groundline while the Epiphany Lord hovers above within the same plane. Other examples are 2.38 with the Great Lady granting audience and 2.72 with the Staff Lady giving the power gesture. The stage concept is the most popular way of organising complex images. With the mountain view<sup>23</sup> design concept the subject matter is organised as if seen by someone looking down on a scene which is set out as a panorama before their eyes. There is a real attempt to convey depth in the image. In 2.60, the ship scene is depicted with the ship and its crew at the quay in the foreground together with one of the main figures, the people on the quay are positioned at different levels in the middle ground, and then there are the buildings in the background. Similar effects are seen in 3.55 to 3.57. The mountain view is an experimental concept, but its influence serves to modify the stage usage and to introduce the use of perspective discussed in the next Chapter.

The **landscape**, **townscape**, **seascape** and **cultscape** design concepts are created by the artists in order to manage the detail of complex scenes. The stage and mountain view concepts consolidate their role in image composition in Minoan High Art by providing the best method for artists to express the interest in human and animal activities. For the seal artists, the amount of detail required for the depiction of these complex scenes poses new problems of providing clarity within the small compass of the seal face. They develop four new concepts which work to refine the stage and mountain view. I have named them landscape, townscape, seascape and cultscape. For each of these there is a cluster of indicator Elements which the artist places strategically within the overall design, and these act like a “shorthand” to define the setting for the main action. Using these indicator Elements the artist is able to restrict the number of items in the complex scenes and thus achieve the clarity needed to help the viewer understand the full import of the image. With the landscape, one or more of rocks, water, plants and trees are positioned below, above, left or right to suggest the outdoors where the *Icon* field activity takes place. In 2.61 the lion leaps out from a rocky outcrop through tall plants while in 2.36 the tree and rocky ground confine the netted bull and fallen hunter. With the townscape, one or more buildings or parts of buildings are positioned right, left or above to suggest the urban setting for the *Icon* field activity. These details allow the viewer of the seal immediately to visualise the scene which, of course, they are likely to have seen many times, as with the farewell/arrival at the quayside in 2.60. With the seascape, the artist takes the viewer under the surface of the sea to look at the aquatic life cavorting there. The rocky wateredge has a

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21 As in CMS II.3 65 and CMS VII 174.

22 See the analysis of complex scenes in Aegean glyptic in Crowley CMS B8, 131-147.

23 Sometimes called the cavalier perspective but coining a new term, mountain view, avoids the anachronism and pays respect to the early origins of this concept created by a people familiar with mountain views.

distinct form and surrounds the fish and octopus in 2.62 and the dolphins diving down in 2.20 and 2.48. In other images seaweed is added to define the under-water scene, as in 7.19, 7.20 and 7.22. With the cultscape, the activity of human figures occurs within a setting that may have the Elements of rocks and greenery that define the landscape or buildings that define the townscape. However, significantly, it has indicator Elements which declare the activity of these human figures as special, as cultic or symbolic of the supernatural world. These indicators are the *Icons*, VIP appearing on high, hovering symbol, celestial sign, flying messenger and tree growing from rocky ground, as well as the presence of one or more of the Elements, shrine, altar, boulder, beehive or flower field. In 2.63 a woman greets a VIP appearing on high in front of an ashlar tree shrine, and in 2.72 a man greets a VIP appearing on high in front of a tiered shrine. In 3.55 women gesture in a flower field, and the beehive with bees appears in 5.121 and 5.127.

### **Compositional Devices** (Plates 2.55 to 2.57 and 2.64 to 2.66)

There are ten compositional devices: radiation, symmetry, antithetical group, mirror reverse, groundline, perimeter groundline, placement, climactic point, diagonal play and heraldic poses.

We begin with the early images inspired by **geometric principles** which organise detail in the decorative concept. Various terms from other art traditions have been used over the years in discussions on Aegean art, and the ones that are purely descriptive like dreipass and vierpass have been retained. For others the IconAegean Vocabulary chooses rather to use geometric terms for such descriptions, thus recognising the serious understanding of geometry displayed by the seal artists. This nomenclature was begun by Friedrich Matz in his pioneering work on early Cretan seals where he set out the principles of symmetry, radiation, interlocking and unending rapport<sup>24</sup>. The **radiation** principle divides the circle by equally spaced radii. In 2.55 the 16 divisions result in an eight-pointed star with “rays” marking the interstices. In other examples the favourite divisions of 4, 6 or 8 result in the geometric/floral symbiosis of flowers with four, six or eight petals. The adventurous use of the four forms of **symmetry** produces some of the most pleasing decorative patterns. In 2.56 the flowers are arranged in **translatory** symmetry where motifs are repeated in parallel, but the placement also results in an exercise in **reflectional** symmetry where the motifs reflect each other across a median line (in this case twice, about a central vertical line and about a central horizontal line). In 2.57 the vierpass spiral spins the composition anti-clockwise in **rotational symmetry** as the S spirals interlock. In 1.25 the dreipass likewise spins anti-clockwise while in 2.52 the vierpass spiral moves clockwise. The use of rotational symmetry is a particular feature of Minoan decorative composition, and it is widely used early, imparting movement to the designs. For **dilatory** symmetry, where a motif is repeated in a larger or smaller version, examples are rare in seal design, perhaps shown only by the palmettes in 5.90. Interlocking designs are featured in spiraliform compositions and in the meander and guilloche motifs which, by their very nature, are interlocking designs. In 2.57 four S spirals interlock to form a vierpass spiral, as also seen in 2.52. In 1.53 four interlocking C spirals create a tightly balanced design while a similar balanced effect is achieved by the arrangement of the coil spirals in 1.54. The meander may show rounded bends as in 4.42 to 4.45 or may use angular interlocking<sup>25</sup>. The guilloche uses simple rope-like interlocking, as in 2.2, right through to complicated folding<sup>26</sup>. Unending rapport describes designs where the pattern is not confined by borders, as in the quatrefoil pattern in 1.69, the zigzag pattern in 4.46 and the palmette pattern in 5.90.

The **antithetical group** and the **mirror reverse** compositions reveal that an interest in symmetry is not restricted to decorative patterns. Reflective symmetry is also on display in these two formal compositions involving human figures and animals which fill out detail in focus concepts. The antithetical group composition is the more used of the two. The Mistress of Animals as in 2.64, 2.72 and 1.24 and the

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24 See Matz 1928, *Die Frühkretischen Siegel. Eine Untersuchung über das Werden des minoischen Stiles*.

25 As in CMS II.1 60, CMS IV 4 and CMS IV 5.

26 As in CMS II.5 162 and CMS II.8 22.

Master of Animals as in 2.24 and 1.97 place the human figure as the central motif, with attendant animals each side providing the reflective symmetry and thus the balance in the composition. It should be noted that the attendants in the Mistress and Master images are usually the same animal in the same pose each side, but not necessarily so. In 2.24 the pose of the lions is different, and in 12.192 the animals attending the Master are a griffin and a lion. Such variations are always at the hand of the seal artist who is ever looking for details to make the seal image unique. The other much-used antithetical group is the animals at the tree of life composition and its Aegean make-over with the grand pillar and/or curved altar substituting for the tree as the central motif. In 2.65 and 1.98 griffins attend a grand pillar, and in 1.26 the attendants are lions. In contrast to the antithetical group with its central figure, the mirror reverse has a central space, and the sides are in reflective symmetry about this. It is not as widely used as the antithetical group but can be seen in the animals and fantastic creatures posed in 2.23, 1.48 and 1.91 and in the four-way depiction of the milking scene in 1.87. These two compositional devices, along with their original subject matter content, are ultimately sourced in the eastern traditions, the Mesopotamian for the antithetical group and the Egyptian for the mirror reverse<sup>27</sup>. They harness the inherent reflective symmetry to provide extra emphasis on the subject matter, a point to be kept in mind when reading the import of the image.

A simple **groundline** is regularly used across all periods to anchor animals and humans to the base of the design. The **perimeter groundline**, known from the early seals, has profound design effects. In 2.66 an animal file walks anticlockwise around the perimeter of the circular design, described as parading. Within this outer ring a file of spiders crawls clockwise around an inner (understood) perimeter. In 1.14 three humans sit in a circle within a leafy perimeter. This use of the confining edge of the seal face as a groundline recurs throughout all periods, finding its best expression in the electric confrontation of hunter and boar in 2.35. One other design function of the perimeter concerns its use in the glen motif. Here, the rocky ground, which provides the groundline for humans and animals to stand upon, is continued above and around the upper perimeter, as in the war duelling scene in 2.33 and the granting audience scene in 2.38. It is not possible to continue the looping rocks rising up as they do from the below perimeter and so the artist simply “hangs” them down from the above perimeter. What we are intended to read from this compositional device is that there is a background of rocks, a rocky hillside, against which the human figures are seen as they would be in real life. However, if the artist had continued the rocks throughout the background they would have “cluttered” the image and made it difficult for the viewer to read all the detail – especially that of the important human figure subjects. Accordingly, in the interests of clarity, the artist simply removes the background around the protagonists to leave them featured but reminds the viewer of the rocky ground all around by using the compositional device of the glen motif to “hang” looping rocks from the perimeter groundline. Misunderstanding the glen motif has often led to mistaken interpretations when seal images are being read. The sustained use of the glen motif signifies its usefulness for design clarity and the need to register the earth forms of mountainous Crete and Greece. It is known in an incipient form in the Early Seal Period as in 4.1, 4.7 and 4.8 and continues into the later designs as in 2.47 and 4.114. The perimeter is also a controlling aspect in the compositional device of the curve fit. In this the artist shapes the motif to fit within the curve of the perimeter. In the Early Seals the toothed pole tool is normally shown as straight as in 9.1, but in some examples it is curved to fit the perimeter as in 9.2. In many cases, using the curve fit is simply making a virtue of necessity as when the great horns of the agrimi sweep round the upper perimeter as in 1.3, 1.79 and 2.26, and the arc of the leaper’s somersault reaches up to the perimeter as in 1.86. The ceremony of pulling the tree does necessitate the tree bending over the tree puller, but the artist regularly exaggerates this movement to follow the line of the upper perimeter as in 5.121 to 5.123, 5.126 and 5.127.

The **placement** of each Element within the perimeter boundary is a careful choice of the artist to preserve clarity and enhance meaning. Overlapping of Elements is eschewed. For the much-used

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27 See AE, 19-27.



focus composition there is only the centre position as in 2.16 and 2.25. In the simpler compositions comprising several Elements, each may be placed in the centre, left, right, above or below positions as in 2.7 and 2.39. For the complex compositions of LM I, mostly seen on the oval ring bezels, more detail in the positioning is needed as in 2.33 and 2.60. Thus, the original five positions are supplemented by the far left, far right, above centre, above left, above right, below centre, below left and below right positions. In creating the cultscapes, the nuanced placement of Elements allows for the clear presentation of maximum information. In 2.72, 3.45 and 3.56 the far left and/or far right curves of the bezel are used to draw attention to important Elements like a shrine, panoply and beehive. In 3.98 the importance of the grand pillar is stressed by placing it in the far right. It then comes to stand at the back of the seated female, a placement which is also an important identifier of VIP figures. In 2.63, 3.55, 3.56 and 3.98 the above centre, above left and above right placements declare the importance of the epiphany figures and the hovering symbols.

The next two compositional devices, **climactic point** and **diagonal play** are found in Minoan High Art, usually in the depiction of war and hunt scenes, and often together, as discussed above. Choosing to portray a war duel or a hunt duel at the very moment of the delivery of the fatal thrust is pure *Icon* composition. The artist emphasises the extreme violence of the battle by exploiting the diagonals inherent in the body postures. When the seal perimeter is a rectangle then the diagonals of that geometric form are also harnessed. Thus, in 2.32 and 2.34 we see the purest form of the climactic point and diagonal play. The climactic point is also on display in the animal attack Theme. Here the artist chooses to portray the precise moment when the predator takes the prey either in the crunching *Icon* as in 2.28 and 1.92 or the seizing *Icon* as in 2.29 and 1.80.

Many of the compositional devices discussed above employ **heraldic poses** to portray the animals. In these formal compositions animals are depicted in codified poses based on observations made from nature. These poses have already been given names in the complicated art of European heraldry. Although I have generally resisted anachronisms in choosing IconAegean Vocabulary, I have accepted the heraldic poses because they are extremely precise and do not bring back to the Bronze Age any meaning from their later time slot. Most of the heraldic terms for animal poses are employed here, and a new one, displayed, is coined to describe the spread wing position. Accordingly, in formal presentations in the Syntax field, animal poses are described as statant, couchant, sejant, rampant, inverted, suspended, gardant, regardant, erect, lowered, addorsed and in saltire, and for wings as close, elevated and displayed. Examples are the griffin couchant regardant displayed in 2.44, the lions statant regardant addorsed in 1.26, the lions rampant in 1.24, the hounds rampant regardant addorsed in 2.64 and the griffins sejant elevated in 2.65.

### **Layering Meaning through *Icons*** (Plates 2.67 to 2.72)

Now it has always been thought that seal designs were limited as art works because their small size restricted the subject matter that could be fitted into each seal face, and so there could be no large-scale compositions. Technically this is true, notwithstanding the complex scenes in the late signet rings – but have we been missing something? If readers gather all the seal images together for each period they will see groups of images combining to give an extended view of certain subjects. Take the motif of the agrimi we discussed earlier. The animal is shown singly, in groups, standing, reclining, in a flying gallop, mating, suckling young, attacked by hounds, wounded by an arrow, contorted in death, carried as catch by a hunter, bound as a sacrifice, or shown only as a head. The life cycle of an agrimi is presented across the totality of this group. One image at any point in this cycle recalls all the other images and so a full depiction of the agrimi is recorded. Consider the human subjects in the Early Seal Period. These stylised human figures show similar referencing across many images. There are men shown singly, in pairs, in a group, with an animal, at work, with a vessel, with a tool and carrying loads. Add to these the images where a man holds a weapon, and you have a succinct summary of the ordinary man's duties, both in peace and in war, at the time of building the first palaces. Again, one image can call to mind the other

activities of men in everyday life. Thus, to consider each image as belonging to a wider grouping allows the viewer to see the seals as presenting a composite picture of experienced life that resonates with the artist and the seal owner alike. This interconnectedness of *Icons* provides for a carefully crafted layering of meaning.

The **sets** and **sequences** of Minoan High Art take up the interconnectedness of *Icons* that has been with us since the Early Seal Period to further craft the layering of meaning. This occurs when a Theme is worked out through specific *Icons*. Some sets and sequences focus on the male pursuits of bull leaping, war and the hunt. The bull sports Theme requires six *Icons* to portray fully the episodes of danger faced by the bull leapers, and these constitute the bull sports set: leaper preparing, leaper somersaulting, leaper landing, leaper falling, leaper fallen and leaper bulldogging. In 9.94 the leaper stands before the charging bull, in 2.67 and 1.86 leapers somersault over the bull's back, in 2.68 the leaper is landing, in 9.166 and 9.167 the leaper is falling, in 2.69 the leaper has fallen and in 9.95 the leaper is bulldogging. The *Icons*, in sum, explore the points of highest danger that the leaper faces and thus, as a set, give a full account of the lethal intensity of bull sports activity. There is, moreover, within five *Icons* of the set, a time sequence, and this sequence either leads to success for the leaper, or failure. The successful endeavour begins with the leaper preparing, continues with the somersaulting and ends with the safe landing. Disaster is catalogued with the other sequence, leaper preparing followed by the somersaulting where the leaper misjudges his vault and slips down into serious injury as the leaper falling or to death under the hooves of the bull as the leaper fallen. When the viewer looks at one of these bull sports images then the others come to mind, swirling around to give a full account of the bravery of the leaper and the power of the bull. To portray the Themes of the war and the hunt, the war set/sequence comprises four *Icons* – warrior armed, warrior aiming, war duelling and warrior fallen – while the hunt set/sequence comprises six *Icons* – hunter aiming, hunt duelling, hunt wrestling, carrying the catch, dealing with the catch and hunter fallen.

With its focus on animal life, the animal attack Theme requires a set/sequence comprising seven *Icons* to give it full display: animal stalking, animal holding at bay, animal chasing, animal crunching, animal seizing, animal carrying the catch and animal feeding on the catch. The sequence begins with the *Icons* of animal stalking as with the cat and the bird in 6.88, the animal holding at bay as with the hound and agrimi in 1.60, and the animal chasing as with the hound and stag in 6.24. The actual attack is rendered by the *Icons* of the animal seizing and the animal crunching. In the animal seizing, the predator comes from under the prey to bite deep into its belly, as with the hound and the agrimi in 1.76 and the cat and bird in 1.80/2.13. In the animal crunching, the predator makes its onslaught from above, biting down hard into the backbone of its prey, as with the lion and the bull in 1.92 and the lion and stag in 2.28. The aftermath of the attack is recorded by the *Icon* animal carrying the catch, where the predator takes its meal away, as with the lion and the agrimi in 2.30, and by the *Icon* animal feeding on the catch, where the predator consumes its meal, as with the lion gorging on the quadruped in 10.33.

**Parallels** in *Icon* depiction extend the layering of meaning by linking various sets. Consider the war set, the hunt set and the bull sports set. In each of these there is an *Icon* showing the male protagonist in dire straits. In 2.70 the war duelling clearly identifies two warriors, a victor and a vanquished. However, there is a third figure, slumped and twisted and now out of combat as the warrior fallen. The warrior fallen is also seen in 2.31 and 2.33. In the hunt set the hunter fallen is seen in 2.36, his body twisted and bent back as the bull still tries to gore and trample him while twisted around by the ensnaring net. In the bull sports set the leaper fallen is seen lying stretched below the bull in 2.69. When the viewer observes one of these *Icons* they immediately recall the others because of the parallel depictions of the human male body slumped/twisted/stretched in agony. By creating these parallel *Icons* of human distress, the artist warns in the most graphic way of the life-threatening nature of war, the hunt and the bull sports.

**Substitution** of a figure or symbol is one of the most significant ways of extending meaning. This occurs when one meaningful figure or symbol is placed in the position usually occupied by another meaningful figure or symbol. In 2.71 we see the VIP granting audience *Icon* where a power figure is seated and is approached by other figures of lesser standing. The power figure one expects to see is a large female, the Great Seated Lady, but here it is a monkey who sits on a special seat with footstool and gives

a greeting gesture to an approaching figure. The substitution raises questions of identity and association that beg interpretation. What does it mean that the Great Seated Lady and monkey can occupy the same exalted pose? Substitution can involve symbols as well. The Mesopotamian motif animals at the tree of life, which is rendered in the antithetical group composition discussed above, is known in the Aegean. In these antithetical group images the central symbol of the tree of life can be replaced by an Aegean grand pillar as in 2.65 and 1.26 or by an Aegean curved altar as in 10.14 or by both, with the grand pillar standing on a curved altar as in 1.98. The importance of the grand pillar/curved altar in the Aegean is emphasised by its subsuming the position of one of the most powerful symbols in the great Mesopotamian tradition.

**Duality** of meaning is a particularly potent way to layer meaning within the image. This occurs when a figure/symbol has two meanings, with both applicable in the particular image on view. The use of duality begins early with the overlay of geometric and floral motifs. In 2.55 it is a geometric radiation design but it is also a flower with eight pointed petals. In 2.51 the large and small triple buds combine to give the effect of a larger lily flower with pistil and stamens while the petaloid below functions as a leaf. In 2.57 geometric flora duality has spirals as vine tendrils and petaloids as leaves. In Minoan High Art duality can apply to human figures. In 2.72 the *Icon* VIP appearing on high has the human male gesturing to the Epiphany Lady above him as she descends to the mountain top<sup>28</sup>. However, the Epiphany Lady is also flanked by lions each side of the mountain in an antithetical group that declares her the Mistress of Animals similar to the image in 1.24. This female VIP exudes the power of both identities. In 12.192 the Master of Animals has as attendants a griffin and a lion. Accordingly, he is both a Griffin Master and a Lion Master telescoped into one powerful being. In another Master of Animals image, 12.193, the Hound Master is the Mighty Lord with duality calling on the power of both personas.

In an attempt to register this overlap of meaning some writers have described it as ambiguity<sup>29</sup>. However, the word ambiguity in English has two meanings: something that is unclear because it can be understood in one of two (or more) ways, or because it is uncertain, indefinite or confusing. Even when writers try to stay closely with philosophical interpretations of ambiguity, it is not always clear why they are advocating multiple meanings for the image. It seems better to avoid all these problems with the term, ambiguity, and coin one that more carefully describes how the Minoan seal artist actually creates the overlap of meaning. There is no suggestion of uncertainty, indefiniteness or confusion. The *Icons* are clearly presented through their Element and Syntax details when they are used in the seal images. There is no suggestion that the viewer has to choose between meanings when the details coalesce in the image. Indeed, all meanings are true, and so there is a doubling (or tripling) of the efficacy of the message in the image. Accordingly, this book does not use the term, ambiguity, but has coined a new term, duality, to encapsulate the certainty and power of this particular artistic method of layering meaning used by Minoan artists.

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28 The sealing image can be assembled from six extant pieces but the vital piece showing where her feet are in relation to the mountain top is missing.

29 Lyvia Morgan opened discussion of the problem in her essay, "Ambiguity and Interpretation", Morgan CMS B3, 145-161, with particular focus on the seal images. Later writers appear to use the term rather freely.

**Plates 2.1 to 2.72**

**Miniature Art: the Size and Shape of the Seal Face**

**figural**



2.1 – ivory  
(II.1 294/EM III-MM IA) 2.2 x 2 cm



**stamp cylinder**



2.2 – ivory  
(II.1 497 a and b/EM III-MM IA)  
2.26 x 2.13 cm and 1.87 x 1.85 cm



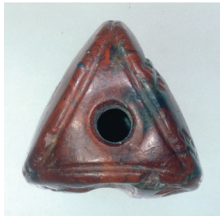
**petschaft**



2.3 – chalcedony  
(II.2 249/MM II) 1.2 x 1.2 cm



**three sided prism**



2.4 – steatite  
(III 505/LM I-LM II)  
1.33 x 1.29 cm



2.5 – steatite  
(III 168a/MM II) 1.42 x 0.85 cm



2.6 – steatite  
(III 168b/MM II) 1.42 x 0.94 cm



2.7 – steatite  
(III 168c/MM II) 1.42 x 0.94 cm

**four sided prism**



2.9 – green jasper  
(II.2 256a/MM II) 1.8 x 0.7 cm



2.10 – green jasper  
(II.2 256b/MM II) 1.8 x 0.7 cm



2.8 – gold  
(III 234/MM II) 1.5 x 0.6 cm



2.11 – green jasper  
(II.2 256c/MM II) 1.8 x 0.7 cm



2.12 – green jasper  
(II.2 256d/MM II) 1.8 x 0.7 cm

**Miniature Art: the Size and Shape of the Seal Face**

**lentoid**



2.13 – chlorite  
(VI 367/LM I-LM II) 1.8 x 1.8 cm



2.14 – carnelian  
(III 377/LM I) 1.68 x 1.66 cm



2.15 – dark green jasper  
(VI 459/LM I) 1.7 x 1.7 cm

**amygdaloid**



2.16 – haematite  
(VII 88/LM I) 2.9 x 1.5 cm

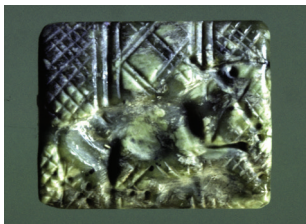


2.17 – carnelian  
(II.3 61/LM I-LM II?) 2 x 1.15 cm



2.18 – green jasper  
(II.3 208/LM I) 2.3 x 1.65 cm

**cushion**



2.19 – green stone  
(II.3 238/MM II-MM III) 1.6 x 1.3 cm



2.20 – steatite/gold  
(VI 182/MM III-LM I) 1.75 x 1.53 cm



2.21 – chalcedony  
(II.3 52/LB II-LB IIIA1) 2 x 1.45 cm

**signet**



2.22 – gold  
(II.3 38/MM III-LM I) 0.95 x 0.85 cm



2.23 – gold  
(I 189/LB II-LB IIIA1) 2.2 x 1.5 cm



2.24 – red jasper  
(I 89/LB II) 2.8 x 1.8 cm

Searching for the Essence: the *Icon*

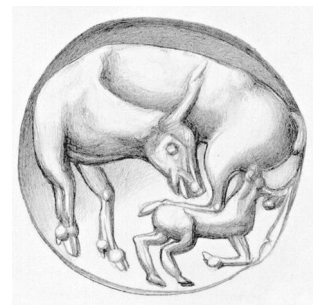
agrimi



2.25 – agrimi resting  
(II.8 375/MM III-LM I)



2.26 – agrimia mating  
(VII 68/MM III-LM I)

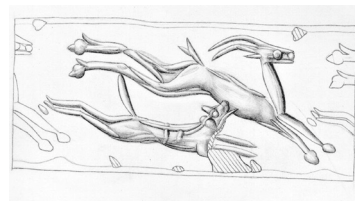


2.27 – agrimi suckling  
(VS 1A 156/LM I)

animal attack



2.28 – lion crunching  
(XI 42/LH I-LH II)



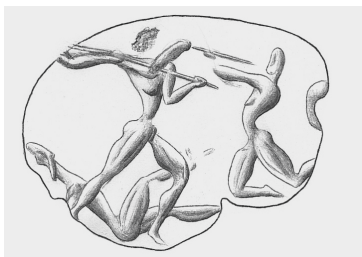
2.29 – hound seizing  
(VS 1B 190/LM I)



2.30 – lion carrying the catch  
(VII 125/LB I-LB II)

Searching for the Essence: the *Icon*

war



2.31 – war duelling, warrior fallen  
(II.7 20/LM I)



2.32 – war duelling  
(I 11/LH I)



2.33 – war duelling, warrior fallen  
(I 16/LH I)

hunt



2.34 – hunt duelling  
(I 9/LH I)



2.35 – hunt duelling  
(I 294/LB II)



2.36 – hunter fallen  
(I 274/LB I-LB II)

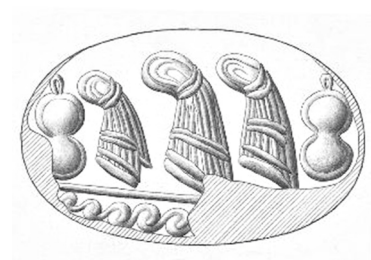
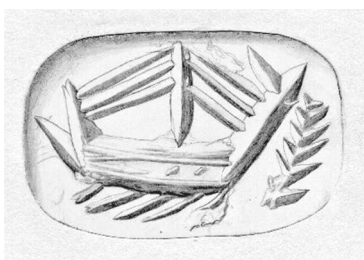
The IconAegean Vocabulary and the IconAegean Classification



2.37 – VIP with familiar: Griffin Lord:  
circle, focus  
(I 223/LB I-LB II)

2.38 – VIP granting audience: Great Lady:  
oval horizontal, stage  
(II.8 268/LM I)

2.39 – man carrying loads: porter:  
oval horizontal, focus  
(VI 44c/MM II)



2.40 – sailing ship: ship: oval horizontal,  
focus  
(II.2 276b/MM II)

2.41 – special object: double axe:  
circle, talismanic  
(VII 54/MM II-MM III)

2.42 – special object: cloak knot, eight  
shield: oval horizontal, focus  
(II.8 127/LM I)



The IconAegean Vocabulary and the IconAegean Classification



2.43 – hybrid woman: birdwoman: circle, focus  
(III 364/LM I)

2.44 – animal resting: griffin: rectangle horizontal, focus  
(I 293/LB II)

2.45 – animal parts plus: boar head: circle, focus  
(II.7 157/LM I)

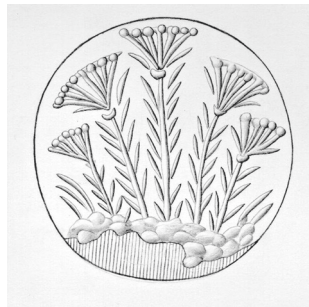
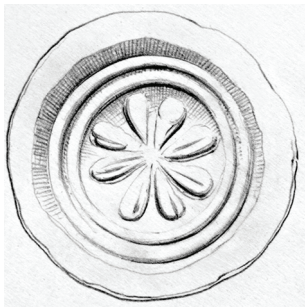


2.46 – animal scratching: hound: circle, focus  
(VI 396/LM I)

2.47 – animal tethered: bull: oval horizontal, mountain view  
(V 198/LM II-LM IIIA1)

2.48 – dolphin leaping: dolphin: fragment  
(II.8 161/LM I)

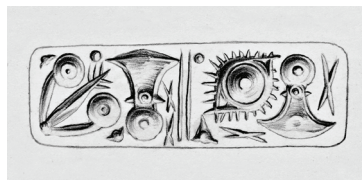
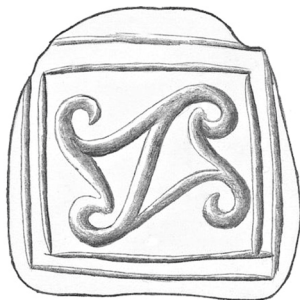
The IconAegean Vocabulary and the IconAegean Classification



2.49 – single flora: rosette flower: circle, focus  
(II.1 302b/EM III/MM IA)

2.50 – multiple flora: papyrus flower plant: circle, focus  
(VS 1A 46/MM III-LM I)

2.51 – multiple flora: petaloid, triple bud: circle, decorative  
(III 86/MM II)



2.52 – spiraliform: vierpass spiral: rectangle horizontal, decorative  
(II.8 19/EM III-MM IA)

2.53 – script sign, CHIC: rectangle horizontal, writing  
(VI 100c/MM II)

2.54 – category: miscellaneous  
(II.2 29/-)

**Design Concepts and Compositional Devices**

**Design Concepts**



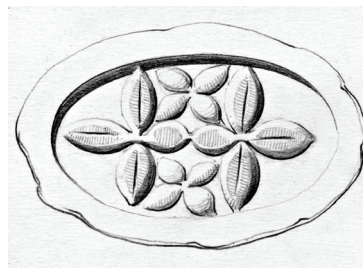
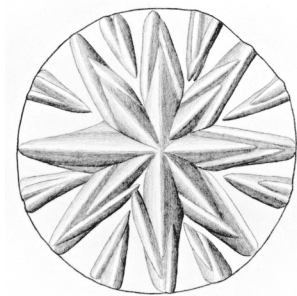
2.55 – decorative radiation, division 8  
(III 91/MM II)



2.56 – decorative translatory symmetry,  
reflectional symmetry  
(II.1 135/EM III-MM IA)



2.57 – decorative rotational symmetry  
(IV 140/MM II)



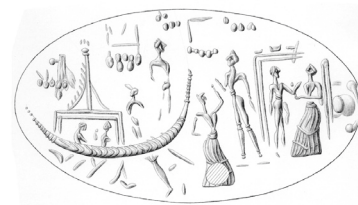
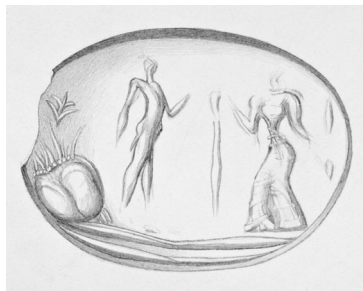
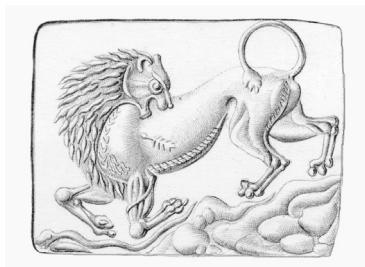
2.58 – focus  
(I 10/LH I)



2.59 – stage  
(VS 1A 180/LM I)

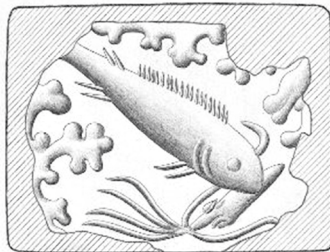


2.60 – mountain view, townscape  
(I 180/LB II)



**Design Concepts and Compositional Devices**

**Design Concepts**



2.61 – mountain view?, landscape  
(VS 1B 331/MM II-MM III?)

2.62 – stage, seascape  
(II.8 157/MM III-LM I)

2.63 – stage, cultscape  
(VI 281/LM I)

**Compositional Devices**



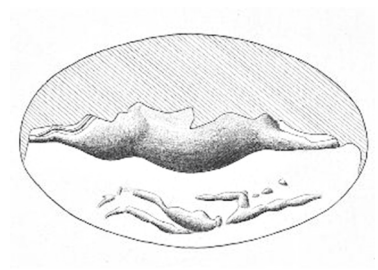
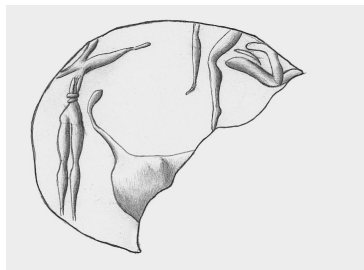
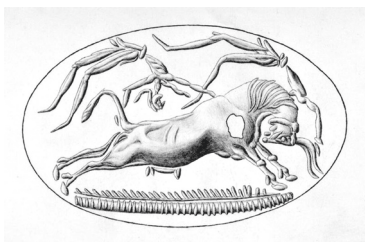
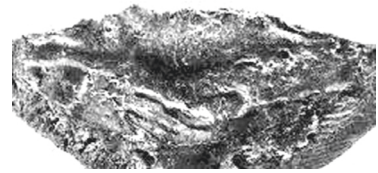
2.64 – antithetical group, heraldic poses  
(II.8 254/LM IIIA1)

2.65 – antithetical group, heraldic poses  
(I 218/LB II-LB IIIA1)

2.66 – perimeter groundline  
(II.1 248a/EM III-MM IA)

Layering Meaning through *Icons*

Sets and Sequences

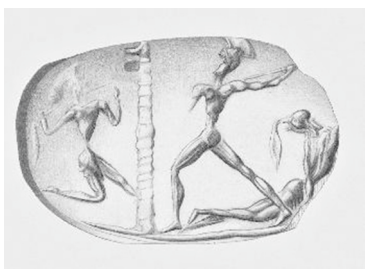


2.67 – bull sports set, sequence  
(VS 1B 135/LB H IIIA1?)

2.68 – bull sports set, sequence  
(II.7 35/LM I)

2.69 – bull sports set, sequence  
(II.8 227/LM I)

Parallels, Substitution, Duality



2.70 – parallel  
(II.6 17/LM I)

2.71 – substitution  
(II.8 262/LM I-LM II?)

2.72 – duality  
(II.8 256/LM I)