

Chapter 15 Prized Possession, Original Iconography, Seminal Art

At the end of a very long book full of detailed discussion, how have my readers fared? The museum visitor is probably still somewhat overwhelmed, as she was when first looking at all those seals in the Herakleion Museum. Still, I hope that I have been able to convey something of the thousand and more years of artistic production and iconographic variety – not to mention appreciation of the beauty of these exquisite gems. For the international scholar who already knows some of this, I hope that I have provided new insights into the material. I trust that the exposition on the art of the seals in Chapters 1 to 3 has made it easier to understand the images. I trust that the opening sections of the thematic treatment of the subject matter assisted by the IconAegean Databases in Chapters 4 to 12 have made the iconography accessible as never before. I cannot say if either the museum visitor or the international scholar has ventured with me into the interpretation sections of these Chapters, culminating in Chapters 13 and 14. If they have so ventured, I cannot say whether they agree with my interpretations of the images. However, I do claim to have argued everything out of the iconographic detail which the Aegean artists have bequeathed to us. The iconographic arguments adduced here are integral to a comprehensive schema of Aegean glyptic iconography, the terms holding across all seals, signets and sealings and into the wider art of the Aegean koine. So, let us review what has been achieved by this iconographic analysis of Aegean seal images and ponder what insights have been revealed of life and society in the Minoan and Mycenaean worlds by this focus on the seal medium.

The Achievements of this Iconographic Analysis

1. A multitude of seal images, ordered thematically and copiously illustrated, is now accessible.
2. A comprehensive theory of Aegean art, the *Icon* Theory, has been proposed.
3. The IconAegean Vocabulary has been created to facilitate iconographic discussion.
4. The IconAegean Databases have been created to search the seal corpus on iconographic detail.
5. The meaning of the seal images has been explored in the absence of contemporary descriptions.

Having access to such a large number of seal images ordered by thematic content and copiously illustrated is a boon to readers and researchers alike. The drawings in the opening sections of Chapters 4 to 12 and the colour photographs of Chapters 1 to 3 and 13 to 15, together with the descriptions of their content, comprise a “book within a book”, an easily accessible iconography reference manual. In the early days of discovering the Aegean Bronze Age world, seals and signets were published mostly as archaeological artefacts and/or precious items. At that time only a few seals appeared in publications and often it was the same few seals which kept on being illustrated. Subsequently, the systematic publication of the seals by the CMS, in print and online, has provided a comprehensive black and white photographic record which includes line drawings of the impressions/sealings. This means that, following the release of *CMS VI* in 2009, over 10,000 images sourced from all major collections are available to be consulted. However, the images are not ordered iconographically across the Corpus (see below). Accordingly, it has been very difficult for readers and researchers to gather like-themed images or to view the whole range of subject matter across the long floruit of seal production. In Chapters 4 to 12 the seal impression line-drawing examples are placed in thematic context from earth forms, through flora and fauna, to the exploits of mortals and on to the supernatural realms of fantastic and hybrid creatures and deities.

The first sections of these nine Chapters are a valuable resource where readers and researchers can turn the pages and gain immediate access to the images and their detail. A bonus is the inclusion of colour photographs of the seals in Chapters 1 to 3 and 13 to 15. Rarely are the seals shown in colour in any number. So, placing on these pages the rainbow that is the seals allows all to gain a much better understanding of the seal corpus and the seal artists. Whatever readers and researchers make of the later interpretative sections, the value of this “book within a book” remains.

Chapters 2 and 3 expound a comprehensive theory of Aegean art, the *Icon Theory*. Although there has been much discussion of Minoan and Mycenaean art since the Aegean Bronze Age finds began to appear, there has, to date, been no theory that has been able to gather together all the seemingly disparate features. To understand the art, scholars first turned to pottery and the frescoes. They worked with the grand designs of the Phaistos Style and Palace Style repertoires while the motifs on Mycenaean pottery were also analysed in detail. In recent decades researchers have concentrated on the frescoes/wall paintings, reviewing the early reconstructions of the Knossos finds in the light of the extensive Thera and then Pylos compositions. Yet, for all the insights that emerged from these studies, an inclusive art theory has proved elusive. So, it seems that, all along, we have been looking in the wrong place to find our inspiration, or we have been looking in periods too late to reveal our source. When we focus on the seals and begin in prepalatial times, we begin to see why the Minoan artists took those particular compositional decisions. They shared with their community a need to discern the essential nature of things and worked with the size and shape of the seal face to create compositions of clarity and power. This book places the creation of Aegean art in the prepalatial seals and sees all major developments achieved, either in full or in embryo, within the seal medium by the end of the protopalatial period.

A standard vocabulary, the IconAegean Vocabulary, has been created to facilitate discussion of the iconography. The lack of a precise vocabulary has long plagued Aegean art research. In Chapter 2 we commented on the use of some of the fanciful names which were misleading and on the duplication of terms for the one entity. To some extent these problems of nomenclature are a concomitant of having no translated literature to provide the names that the Minoans gave to their surroundings, to themselves and to their gods. In addition, there are no contemporary descriptive texts accompanying the images in Minoan or Mycenaean art. We have termed this the Aegean silence. Other artistic traditions of the ancient world do not have this problem, drawing, as they do, on the translated hieroglyphic or cuneiform texts which surround the images in their art. The IconAegean Vocabulary which provides descriptive terms for subject matter and concise terms for artistic composition has been widely available since the publication of *The Iconography of Aegean Seals* in 2013 as *Aegaeum* 34. Many of the descriptive terms for content have not occasioned much comment, since they were already in scholarly use, but specific art terms like *Icon* and climactic point, as well as the new names for deities like Dolphin Lord and Great Lady, have caused some consternation. Yet, the descriptive titles for figures assigned here will help until, if ever, the subject matter of Aegean art can be directly associated with contemporary texts that reveal their true names and the stories that go with them. For the first time in this book, the IconAegean Vocabulary has been systematically employed to conduct analyses of art and iconography. It can be seen how useful it is in achieving precision and avoiding periphrasis. Perhaps better choices might have been made for some of these names and terms but, in the absence of any other standard vocabulary, the IconAegean Vocabulary provides a functional vehicle for enhanced iconographic discussions.

The creation of the IconAegean Databases allows the searching of the CMS Corpus on iconographic detail. This has not previously been possible. The CMS was founded in 1958 and since then it has systematically published, and is still publishing, all the seals in both print and database form. However, as noted in Chapter 1, the only viable method of publication division was to devote a *Volume* to each Museum seal collection. For iconographic studies this division has no meaning. The problem is further compounded by having various different authors of the earlier *Volumes* who each described the images in their own terms. In the later *Volumes*, and in the CMS Database, this variety of description was curtailed by the CMS Staff's regularisation of some of the terms. However, until now, it was impossible to search across the whole seal Corpus except by reading each separate image description and then comparing the

text against the image itself and in relation to other images and their text description. This extremely time-consuming endeavour has, of course, been undertaken by seal experts and by scholars searching for particular comparisons and they will continue to do so. However, there is no doubt that the absence of a standard vocabulary and the lack of a convenient searching mechanism has constrained iconographic research and certainly has prevented a wider appreciation of the riches of the seal images. The IconAegean Databases solve both these problems. Capturing the *Icon* compositions in the IconAegean Vocabulary, as set out in the IconADict Database and in the hierarchical schema of the IconAegean Database, has provided new tools for discussing the iconography. The IconAegean descriptions complement the visual CMS records and allow systematic searching of the iconography across those CMS records. It is a pleasing result that, when the IconAegean Vocabulary is employed to describe the iconography, all the polyvalent elements work together with no discordant notes. The IconADict Database explains the terms of the IconAegean Vocabulary and shows their use in describing the seal images within a searchable format. The Key Words for searching are the terms of the IconAegean Vocabulary. The IconAegean Database provides iconographic access to the whole CMS Corpus. Thus, the whole Corpus can now be searched for iconographic detail. A bonus comes with sorting the entries on the IconA Code field. This action places all 10,972 CMS images in iconographic order, a first for Aegean iconography.

The meaning of the seal images has been explored in the absence of contemporary descriptions. Recognising the limitations imposed by the Aegean silence, this analysis has based its findings firmly on the primary visual material. The interpretations sections in Chapters 4 to 12 and in Chapters 13 and 14 have postulated identities for creatures and human figures and proposed meanings for ceremonies and gestures. It might not have been possible to bring all my readers with me in these arguments but I would say, in answer to their hesitations, that everything has carefully been argued out of the iconographic detail. Further, the iconographic arguments used here are ones that are standard across all iconographic research. I have simply applied them systematically to the Aegean material. In many ways, it is a traditional assessment of the iconography proposing a Minoan love of the natural world and a Mycenaean predilection for emblematic and symbolic displays. Yet, I have given the reader much more than an exercise in iconographic analysis and a repeat of earlier identifications. Nowhere is this so true as in the commentary on the gods. For many years, there has been a general consensus among scholars that the small hovering figures are epiphanies and that the large female seated in a special place is a goddess. I concur with these, and with other similar, identifications. Yet, in both the specificity and the number of deities, this paper claims new insights because the images of the gods have been identified according to strict iconographic rules. The methodology proposed here and its rigorous application to all the seals, signet and sealings have resulted in identifying an Aegean Pantheon which is not based on personal predilection but on observable detail and logical argument.

Sustained Creativity across the Centuries

One cannot overstate the achievement of being the creative medium for more than a thousand years! The response of the seal artist to living in the Aegean world created an art tradition spanning some 1500 years from c.2700 to c.1200, with the seals being the creative iconographic medium for the fourteen centuries to c.1300. The first 1250 years comprise the Early Seal, Experimentation and Minoan High Art Periods. In these Periods the creative impetus was Minoan and centred in Crete. It culminated with a great flourish in Minoan High Art at the time of the second palaces when the appreciation of a sophisticated society valued artistic creation. This was also the period when Minoan influence was felt strongly on the Mainland as the Mycenaean princes began to establish their states. The LM IB destructions of c.1440 brought an end to this successful era and to the Minoan artistic impetus. After the destructions, seals continued to be made in Crete but much of the creative vitality was gone. On the Mainland the seals continued to inspire the iconographic repertoire as it adapted to Mycenaean tastes in the Legacy Period. Some time before c.1300 the cutting of hard stone seals ceased, the cessation no doubt related to the final destruction of the Mycenaean-occupied Knossos palace c.1340. Subsequently, the role of the seals as a

driver of iconographic creation also ceased and, in the Late Seal Period, artistic creativity was sourced in other media down to the destructions of c.1200. By the end of the Mycenaean era, it is the wall paintings that most clearly reveal the Mycenaean indebtedness to Minoan inspiration but also their very different mind-set. While keeping the structures of Minoan art composition largely intact, the Mycenaean made significant changes to the subject matter content to suit their own customs and beliefs. During this last century there was no role for seals as either artistic inspiration or as important point of power display although some heirloom seals remained in use to stamp palace records. The proud seal tradition begun so long ago had come to an end.

For some 1400 of the 1500 years of activity, the seal tradition was the wellspring of artistic and iconographic creation, first for the Minoans and then for the Mycenaean drawing on the Minoan creations. Here again the seal record helps in establishing the major iconographic advances. The Phaistos Sealings, published as CMS II.5 in 1970, and the LM I Sealings from the Cretan sites, published as II.7 in 1998, CMS II.6 in 1999 and II.8 in 2002, testify to originals now lost, but through the very act of performing their sealing duty, they provide some of the finest images. The Phaistos Sealings reveal the iconography in use at the end of MM II c.1700, a selection illustrated in 1.52 to 1.66. They remind us that there has already been a thousand years of seal development in which all the compositional features of the art, based on the *Icon*, had been created and virtually all the subject matter content had been initiated. The LM I Sealings reveal the iconography in use at the high point of the second palaces before the c.1440 destructions and remind us of the sophisticated level of production of the Minoan High Art Period, as in the bull sport selection 9.157 to 9.168. In both the protopalatial and the neopalatial eras, the sealings are a measure of the contemporary art of the other media since they are securely dated as in use in the Period and provide a wide coverage of iconographic detail, regularly with compositions intact. Iconographic discussions published before the Phaistos Sealings and the LM I Sealings were available need to be reviewed for accuracy since the writers at that time did not have the benefit of being able to consult these images. Discussions and reconstructions of compositions in the other media should always take account of the seal iconographic record.

The Aegean Koine of the Late Bronze Age

The Aegean koine refers to an identifiable cultural and artistic milieu seen throughout the Aegean sphere in the Bronze Age. It is most clearly discernible in the Late Bronze Age and, in the sphere of art, it refers to the sharing of both subject matter and compositional formulas. While we have begun our iconographic coverage with EM II c.2700, there have been shared iconographic motifs earlier like the spiraliform designs seen across the Balkan peninsula and into the Aegean islands and Crete. Then Crete began its thousand-year development of art and iconography until the end of the first palaces and continued its artistic achievements during the time of the second palaces. The Minoan artistic tradition became so strong and all-encompassing that it inspired other Aegean peoples within its sphere. The peak of this influence came during the time of the second palaces when seals in the Minoan idiom are found as far as Samothrace while frescoes in the Minoan idiom are painted on fine buildings on Aegean Islands like Thera, Melos and Kea and at Bodrum in Turkey. Thera is a special case in that it appears to be the island city most thoroughly integrated into Minoan ways and thus provides much of the evidence for Minoan art of the Late Bronze Age. Preserved in the volcanic ash, remains of a Bronze Age town survive, some of the buildings still standing three storeys high. Small items are there, including pottery, seals and sealings, but it is the frescoes remaining on the walls that have excited wonder and comment for the past fifty years. Placing images like that of the Goddess Fresco beside the seal images of Minoan High Art shows how completely integrated the iconography was across the media, including ivory carving, relief vases, gold work and jewellery. Pottery shared in a more limited repertoire, continuing the love of floral and plant forms and marine life but rarely portraying animals or human figures. During the Mycenaean ascendancy the iconographic repertoire was reduced but the Mycenaean adaptations of the remaining

subject matter continued the Aegean koine. When the Mycenaean citadels finally fell, the pottery, wall paintings and sealings remained to tell us of the artistic heritage of the whole Aegean area.

The primary role of Minoan art in developing the Aegean koine has always been accepted but now we can acknowledge the seminal role of the seals within that. What has also emerged from this study is that not all Minoan iconography transferred abroad. Many of the memorable *Icons* and strong elements were accepted and found their way into the koine but many did not, as the contrasting cases of Thera, which absorbed so much, and Mycenae, which was highly selective, indicate. It is time to review the composition of the artistic koine in each period. The nuances of what is included and what is not will be one of its most revealing studies.

From the East and to the East

Throughout the book, as various elements and themes were discussed, reference has been made to the relationship between Aegean art and that of the two great traditions to the east, Egyptian art and Mesopotamian art. The transference of eastern motifs into the Aegean has been noted with celestial signs, the double horns, exotic and fantastic creatures, various heraldic poses and antithetical group compositions. When a motif or an idea was taken over from the grand artistic traditions to the east, it always resulted in an idiosyncratic solution to recast the import into Minoan idiom. The complete assimilation and Aegean re-fit of the Fabulous Five is a striking example of this eastern influence. At two points Minoan images are accepted into the eastern traditions. In the Middle Bronze the links between Crete and Mesopotamia surface in the grand wall paintings at the Palace of Zimri Lim at Mari on the Euphrates. Running spiral designs frame the Investiture Fresco while marbling patterns are shown on floors. In 18th Dynasty Egypt, Aegean animal poses are in favour with the flying gallop, flying leap and reverse twist being used in wall paintings and in repousse works. These lively animal poses also appear in Syrian cylinder seals. These successful adoptions of Minoan motifs have two things in common. They are artistic innovations with no equivalent designs in the east and they are free from religious/cultural connotations. These two factors enabled their adoption in the east by artists who saw their artistic merit and welcomed the possibilities of expanding their own repertoire with such vibrant images. Similar choices were no doubt made when it came to including various Aegean motifs in the International Repertoire and the International Style seen in the east in the Late Bronze Age. What the Minoans do not take from the east is revealing. None of the grand images of kingship from either tradition moves west. There is no smiting figure sacrificing prisoners, no winged sundisk, no insignia of royalty. The fact that the sphinx has a delayed welcome into Mycenaean art may well signify that the Mycenaean had a different view of the power of a monarch, more akin to Egypt than to Minoan Crete.

In my 1989 book, *The Aegean and the East*, I proposed four eras of contact coinciding in Crete with the pre-palatial, protopalatial and neo-palatial periods and then in LH IIIA-B with the Mycenaean expansion. These eras of contacts still provide the most evidence for artistic transference, as seen in the more recent finds from excavations at Tell Kabri in Israel and Tel d'Aba in Egypt. However, just as the trade routes were never truly forgotten, the memory of art might well have remained continuously in people's consciousness even though we cannot trace it from this distance in time. In the light of this seal study, which has been able to take account of the extensive evidence of the pre-palatial and proto-palatial seal images, some changes to the timing need to be made. Inspiration from the east came much earlier than has previously been recognised. At the beginning of the Early Seal Period, the monkey, lion, griffin and dragon entered the art along with papyrus, palm and palmette designs. In celebration of Helene Kantor's 1947 seminal publication, *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium*, a Symposium was held under the same name at Cincinnati in 1997 and published as *Aegaeum 18* in 1998. The Symposium was able to ponder the advances in understanding the Bronze Age interconnections in the fifty years since the Kantor publication. Although it is not yet fifty years from the Cincinnati Symposium, perhaps it is already time to plan another such international conference on the same topic in order to gather all the new excavation and iconographic evidence for cross-cultural inspiration.

Remembering Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece

We began the enquiry in this book with a warning of how hard it would be to interpret the images of Aegean art because of the Aegean silence. Minoan texts are not yet translated and Minoan art does not place accompanying texts around the images to help explain the meaning. For Mycenaean art we do have the translations of Linear B texts but we have a similar problem in that the texts are not placed beside the images to describe the subject matter and, of themselves, they provide little descriptive comment which can be used to identify motifs in the images. On the other hand, we have been graced with the most amazing iconography delivered to us by the hands of the Aegean artists who have succeeded in rendering visual the world around them and the mind of their people by creating such memorable images. Can we marry the two without explicit placement of text and image side by side? Can we even look back to earlier images with the descriptions in later texts in our hands? The Venice Aegaeum Conference, MNEME Past and Memory in the Aegean Bronze Age, was held in 2018 and published as *Aegaeum 43* in 2019. The many papers offered explanations of how the memory of past events, distant places and vanished constructs can be handed down to later generations in the understanding that the memory can be very long indeed. From the years before the first prepalatial seals were cut down to Classical Greece is a significant expanse of time for tales to be transmitted. Yet, for someone who lives in a country where the people have handed down their stories and songlines for tens of thousands of years, something under three thousand years does not seem very long at all. Story, myth, legend and eventually the written word are vital routes of transference but so are the actual artefacts recovered from the past and held in the hand to view again. Traces of the original iconographic content may be preserved in the words of poems only to be resurrected by later artists who may produce new offerings that nevertheless are very close to the originals of centuries before. Artefacts like the seals, long hidden in burials, may be found by later generations and their bold images may recall pieces of the folklore story and go on to inspire a new generation of artists.

We have seen from the Linear B texts that the Classical Poseidon already had his identity as a great god firmly established in the Bronze Age. If we are correct in seeing the Dolphin Lord of 13.48 and the Bull Lord of 13.47 as two personas of Poseidon, then he already has his Earthshaker identity as the god of the high seas with its tsunami potential in the bull from the sea and as the god of the seismic destruction of the land with his bull avatar. What other images from the Bronze Age might have informed later art? Can we see in the many lion hunts like 14.3 or the Lion Master of 2.24 a presaging of the image of Herakles slaying the Nemean lion? Is the Triple Bud Rod Lord of 13.45 really a Hermes Psychopompos? Is the story of Europa being carried off by the bull a reflection of the Dragon Lady riding her fantastic familiar as in 1.47 and 13.41? Looking forward in time from the Bow Lady and the Bow, can we see Artemis and Apollo? An enquiry into these possible sources may be very profitable as increasingly the continuity from Bronze Age into Iron Age and later is explored.

Another area where a new approach with images can be taken is the Minoan hieroglyphic script. For the best of reasons, the CHIC authors gave each sign an identification number rather than attempting to name it by its visual representation. Now that we have seen that various signs have a parallel life as symbols in the art, we need to look again at their appearance in places other than texts and also when one sign is used by itself. The eye (CHIC 005) is a hovering symbol, the ewer (CHIC 053) with its variation the spouted ewer (CHIC 052) and the vase (CHIC 054) are special objects, the double axe (CHIC 042) is one of the main constructed symbols and the importance of the bee (CHIC 020) is clearly evident in the cultscapes with beehives and the pulling the tree ceremony. These six images are simply the easiest to compare. However, all signs need to be investigated to identify, if possible, the items which inspired their shape, to document the appearance of these items in artistic contexts and to probe their meaning.

The *Icon* Essence (Plates 15.1 to 15.31)

So, we return to the seal owner and to the seal artist and the community in which they lived. The seal images have summonsed us to look deeply at life lived in Crete and Mainland Greece in the Bronze Age. These are the images which show how the peoples wished to view themselves within the everyday world and in the light of the supernatural world. Their record has been arresting in its visual display and surprisingly encompassing in its subject matter. With acute observation and great imagination, the seal artist has not only reflected back to the owner commissioning her/his seal and to the wider community the real world and its supernatural surround but has also shaped the visualisation of both. The seal images give the widest span of subject matter of all the art media and show us subjects we cannot find elsewhere. Without the seals we would not know of the overwhelming importance of animals or be able to fully appreciate the vital role of exotic and fantastic creatures. We would not know the extent of the depictions of the Mistress of Animals and Master of Animals, or of the human hybrids, the birdwoman and bullman. We would not have such a convincing exposition of the bull sports or know the significance of the kneeling the boulder and pulling the tree ceremonies.

We have been able to trace the development of image design across the long floruit of the seals. Now that we know it is the seals that create the structure of the art, the final piece of the art history jigsaw fits into place. The problems that the early researchers had in trying to unite the various, apparently disparate, strands of Aegean art into a convincing whole are now solved. They were looking in the wrong places for the source of the art – in the pottery designs which have limited subject matter and in the frescoes which came too late upon the scene. It is the seal images that are the source. Reflecting the constraints of size and face shape within which the seal artist had to work, the art is both patterned and emblematic, both naturalistic and formal, full of vital human and animal action, yet always controlled by design concepts and compositional devices. Along with the subject matter these structural forms of seal design came across to the other art media, their traces recognisable to the end of the era. For the reader here, viewing that visual record, we have been able to explain the art of the seal image through the inspired creation that is the *Icon* and to describe the iconography in the IconAegean Classification using 590 terms. The *Icon* Theory of Aegean art sets the *Icon* as the compositional imperative of seal design. The *Icon* is the memorable image compounded out of element and syntax. From the 125 *Icons* which control image composition I have chosen thirty-two of the most memorable to provide both a thematic summary of Minoan iconography and a review of the iconographic analysis undertaken in this book. These thirty-two *Icons*, discussed in the order of their illustration in Plates 15.1 to 15.31, are tree growing from rocky ground, celestial sign, spiraliform, script sign, single flora, multiple flora, animal resting, animal flying leap, bird flying, animal caring for young, animal crunching, dolphin leaping, sailing ship, animals at the grand pillar, hovering symbol, serving at the shrine, war duelling, leaper somersaulting, beehive with bees, pulling the tree, animal standing, carrying the special object, hybrid woman, hybrid man somersaulting, Mistress of Animals, Master of Animals, VIP with familiar, gesturing, VIP appearing on high, VIP granting audience, kneeling the boulder and human couple. Assembling these *Icons* across the seals, signets and sealings 15.1 to 15.31 also provides the opportunity to take an overview of the element and syntax parts composing the *Icon* and then their coalescing into the memorable *Icon* itself.

The 340 elements that constitute the *Icons* are also memorable in themselves, created boldly. The earth forms of land, water and sky are ever-present. Rocky ground is seen in 15.1, 15.16, 15.19 and 15.20 as rocks and boulders while a rocky glen frames the Master in 15.26 and a Staff Lady stands on a rocky mountain in 15.28. Dolphins leap past a rocky wateredge in 15.12, the sunburst shines above a cultscape in 15.2 and a skyline is marked in 15.15. The bounty of nature flourishes early in plants like the lily, rosette, quatrefoil, palm/palmette and papyrus as in 15.3 to 15.6 and more naturalistically in the flower fields of the cultscapes in 15.15 and 15.16. The tree in its many forms becomes a symbol, identifying a tree shrine as in 15.2 and 15.29, while the associated beehive and bees as in 15.1, 15.19 and 15.20 remind of the desired pollination. Geometric elements like the S spiral and vierpass spiral and petaloid are seen in 15.3 and 15.4, only to disappear from the seal repertoire but to inspire later

jewellery, ivory and fresco designs, especially borders. Land and sea animals are bursting with life, with their distinctive characteristics always rendered sensitively, whether at rest as with the agrimi in 15.7, in distress as with the stag in 15.11 or with the power of the leaping dolphin as in 15.12. Four become signature animals for their own domain and/or as identifying familiars for deities: the Wild Agrimi, the Faithful Hound, the Messenger Bird and the Leaping Dolphin, as seen in 15.1, 15.7 to 15.9, 15.12 and 15.26. The constructed environment yields numerous elements and symbols equally memorable. There are major constructions like the ship as in 15.13, the shrine as in 15.2, 15.16, 15.28 and 15.29 and structures like the grand pillar of 15.14, 15.29 and 15.30 and the double horns atop buildings as in 15.16 and 15.28. Of the set of twelve special objects, ten are made by hand like the cloak knots hanging from the grand pillar in 15.14, the double axe and horn bows of the headdress of the Mistress in 15.25 and the panoply in the right curve of the bezel in 15.20. The specialist grouping of the ten hovering symbols are recorded here by the double axe with scarf, the piriformshape and the grainshape as in 15.1, 15.15, 15.20 and 15.31. Exotic and fantastic creatures inhabit and define the supernatural world. The Fabulous Five which ultimately came from the east are thoroughly re-imagined for an Aegean domicile. The dragon, griffin and lion are familiars of deities. The monkey is a server in 15.30 and the griffin and the lion both share symbolic roles as protectors of the grand pillar as in 15.14. The lion, griffin and genius have powerful presences as seen in 15.11, 15.21, 15.22, 15.25 and 15.28. The spirit world is best exemplified by the birdwoman as in 15.23 and the bullman as in 15.24. The Great Gods provide memorable images like the Bull Lord in his avatar form of 15.18, the Lion Mistress of 15.25, the Hound Master and Mighty Lord of 15.26, the Lion Lord of 15.27, the Staff Lady of 15.28, the Epiphany Lord and Staff Lord of 15.29 and the Great Seated Lady of 15.30.

The 90 syntax constructions allow the artist to present the elements as clearly as possible in view of the constraints of the size and shape of the seal face. The overall composition is set out by one of the eleven design concepts: decorative, writing, talismanic, focus, frieze, stage, mountain view, landscape, townscape, seascape and cultscape. The decorative is seen in 15.3 and 15.5 and writing in 15.4. The focus is used to great advantage with sole subject images like 15.7 to 15.9, 15.18, 15.21, 15.22 to 15.24 and 15.27. The stage concept handles most of the scenes of peaceful human activity as in 15.1, 15.2, 15.16, 15.19, 15.20 and 15.28 to 15.30. The much less used mountain view concept is seen in 15.15. The imaginative developments in presenting scenes to enable maximum iconographic detail without sacrificing clarity are particularly clearly seen in the cultscape compositions as in 15.1, 15.2, 15.15, 15.16, 15.19, 15.20 and 15.28 to 15.31. Then there are ten compositional devices. Radiation and symmetry are seen in the early seals 15.3 and 15.5. The antithetical group is used extensively for the concise presentation of important themes as in 15.14 and 15.28 and with the Mistress of Animals as in 15.25 and the Master of Animals in 15.26. Various groundline forms anchor scenes while the curve fit is seen to advantage with the tree growing from rocky ground arching over the boulder kneeler in 15.1 and 15.31. In scenes of war and the hunt the special effects of diagonal play and the climactic point concentrate the violence, as with the mortal combat of the two warriors in 15.17. Heraldic poses allow variety yet precision in the depiction of animals and fantastic creatures as in 15.7, 15.14, 15.21 and 15.25 to 15.27. The innovative and distinctive Aegean animal poses extend the possibilities for presentation of the animal body in action, in joy or in trauma. The flying gallop and the flying leap are regularly used to show the power and speed of the animal, as with the bull in 15.18 and the agrimia in 15.8. The reverse twist turns the front half of the animal body in reverse. This is the quintessentially Minoan pose, rarely used correctly by other than Minoan artists.

The 125 *Icons* are created when the artist melds element and syntax, enhancing the details to produce the most memorable images. In 15.1 the cultscape is composed of five *Icons* including the tree growing from rocky ground in the right curve of the bezel. The joining of the symbol of the sacred fertile earth with the plant symbol of the flourishing tree produces a symbol of double potency which overshadows the boulder kneeler here and in 15.31 and becomes the focus of the ceremony of pulling the tree in 15.19 and 15.20. In 15.2 there are four *Icons* including the celestial sign *Icon* of the sunburst. This is the most used of the celestial signs and comes to be a symbol in its own right. In 15.3 to 15.6 the spiraliform

and flora *Icons* complement each other, just as they intimate the deep geometric structure of vibrant plant life. In 15.4 we are reminded of the visual impact of the script sign *Icons*, some of which enjoy a later life as special objects or hovering symbols. In 15.7 to 15.11 we see five *Icons* from the group of thirty *Icons* developed to express the life of land animals, by far the most popular subjects in figurative seal images. The animal resting in *Icon* in 15.7 summarises all the images of animals in their characteristic form at rest while the animal flying leap *Icon* recalls all the vibrant Aegean animal action poses. The bird flying in 15.9 and its associated *Icons* of bird rising and bird staying remind us just how important the bird is. In 15.10 the animal caring for young, along with the associated animal suckling and animal mating *Icons*, allows the theme of fecundity to be explored with some tenderness. The opposite is true of the animal crunching *Icon* in 15.11 where the theme of predation is explored, exposing all the power and violence of the predator and the agony and terror of the prey. Similar images result in the other *Icons* of the predation set and sequence, like animal distressed and animal contorted. The *Icon* of dolphin leaping in 15.12 sums up the power and beauty of this sea mammal and links it to the many sea creature *Icons* which reveal such close observation of life in the realm of the sea. In 15.13 the sailing ship *Icon*, from early times to the end, testifies to the close Minoan relationship with the sea. In 15.14 the animals at the grand pillar *Icon* takes the eastern motif of animals at the tree of life and gives it an Aegean cast and an Aegean meaning. Its parallel *Icon*, animals at the curved altar, reveals a similar Aegeanisation. Of the four *Icons* controlling the image in 15.15 we note the hovering symbol *Icon*. Seen also in 15.1, 15.20, 15.30 and 15.31, the hovering symbol is one of the most important symbolic creations within the cultscape assemblage. In 15.16 the serving at the shrine *Icon* can be paired with the serving at the altar *Icon* to stress the importance of respectful observance at their cult places of shrine and altar by the Minoans, almost always led by women and indicating one of their most significant roles in Minoan life. In 15.17 the war duelling *Icon* is one of the most confronting of all the violent images. Together with its twin, the hunt duelling *Icon*, and with the associated *Icons* in the hunt and war set and sequence, the disciplined life of a Minoan man is explored as he trains to face death. This is also the case in 15.18 with the leaper somersaulting *Icon* where the leaper worships the Bull Lord in his avatar form. In the bull sports set and sequence the leaper can fail and die as the leaper fallen, his crumpled body here recalling the parallels of the hunter fallen and warrior fallen *Icons*. In 15.19 the beehive with bees *Icon* is seen in the left curve of the bezel with the bees flying across to the tree canopy above. In 15.20 the *Icon* of pulling the tree records the important spring pollination ceremony as also in 15.19. In 15.21 the animal standing *Icon*, created for real land mammals, presents the griffin as if this fantastic creature lives a normal life in this world. However, it is in its role as the great predator that the griffin even more clearly blurs the interface between the two worlds, bringing the supernatural into daily experience. In 15.22 the genius is seen in the *Icon* of carrying the special object where the special object is the ewer, thus presenting in his original and primary role. Yet, his roles are widened in Minoan High Art and he comes to act like a human and, by substitution, a deity. In the hybrid human *Icons* of 12.23 and 12.24 the power of the spirit world is immanent although their exact meaning is elusive. The striking Mistress of Animals and Master of Animals *Icons* in 15.25 and 15.26 are to be read as codified statements of the Great Gods who are, at other times, portrayed separately as VIP deities. The Great Gods may be shown individually in serene pose in the VIP full figure *Icon* but also in the distinctive VIP with familiar *Icon* as in 15.27 with the Lion Lord. What a statement of majesty and power with the god in long kilt and tasselled pointed hat controlling his magnificent lion by touch on the rump as he holds out the staff in the power gesture! In 15.28 the gesturing *Icon* exacts maximum impact as the Staff Lady holds out her staff in the power gesture over the man below who acknowledges her presence and her divinity with the forehead gesture. Here the artist layers meaning by playing with duality to strengthen the visual impact as it doubles (or triples) the power of the deity depicted because the Staff Lady shares the personas of Epiphany Lady as the VIP appearing on high and Lion Lady as the Mistress of Animals. Gestures between mortals and between mortals and deities invite us into the society and into the supernatural world where polite exchange is the norm. In 15.29 and 15.30 we see the two *Icons* created specially to portray the meeting of mortal and deity: the VIP appearing on high and the VIP granting audience. Of

the six *Icons* comprising the cultscape in 15.31 we concentrate on two. The kneeling the boulder *Icon* has the ceremony here performed by a woman whereas it is performed by a man in 15.1 and 15.19. This image should be considered beside the pulling the tree *Icon* of 15.19 and 15.20. Each is a memorable statement of worship, the one a plea for preservation by a people living in a seismic land and the other a prayer for the pollination of tree and plant so that the food source for the coming year is secured. The final *Icon* in our summary is the human couple *Icon* set at the centrepiece of the cultscape in 15.31. The woman and the man are in a special relationship but they are not shown holding hands or giving the heart gesture. They meet contesting a bow in a one only image – and we are reminded again that there is much that we cannot explain in Aegean iconography.

Reviewing these thirty-two chosen *Icons* has not only memorably evidenced the range of iconography encompassed by Minoan seals; it has also clearly revealed the layered connectivity of images in the Minoan idiom. Having a standard vocabulary has enabled the iconography to be accurately described. Iconographic details of *Icons*, elements and syntax seamlessly refer to details across images, with never a discordant note. The whole iconography is constantly being called upon as each image comes into focus. It is this iconographic whole that the artist, the seal owner and the wider community shared in their consciousness, allowing them to read each image in all its pregnant richness. Some four thousand years later, we readers and researchers are attempting to share in these iconographic riches but the difficulties we face in understanding their meaning are immense.

The *Icon* is the memorable image that imprints the most important visuals in the viewer's mind. Through the layering of *Icons*, the Minoan seal artist has created a subtle, sophisticated and polyvalent iconography which is one of the great glories of the Aegean civilisation. The value of this book lies in giving an overview of the fifteen centuries of seal creativity, in presenting an integrated view of the art and iconography and in providing a guide to illuminate our sharing of the iconographic riches. Through their memorable and beautiful images the seals lay claim to being the pre-eminent source for understanding life as it was lived and imagined in Minoan Crete, Mycenaean Greece and the Aegean Islands in the Bronze Age. The seals emerge as the driving force for artistic creativity shaping all other media. They are prized possession, original iconography and seminal art.

Plates 15.1 to 15.31

The *Icon* Essence



gold signet



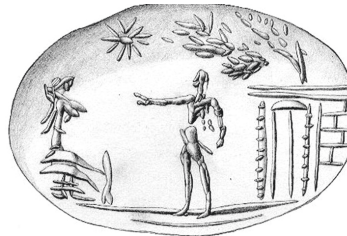
gold signet



sealing from a hard stone seal



15.1 – tree growing from rocky ground
(Sellopoulou Ring/LM I)



15.2 – celestial sign
(XI 28/LM I)



15.3 – spiraliform
(IV 140/MM II)



green jasper four sided prism



sealing fragment



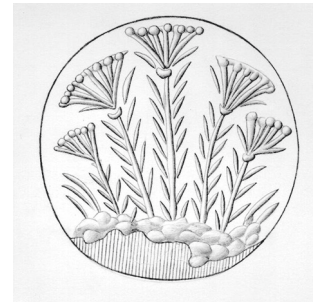
silver signet



15.4 – script sign
(II.2 316a/MM II)



15.5 – single flora
(II.8 9/EM III-MM IA)



15.6 – multiple flora
(VS 1A 46/MM III-LM I)

The *Icon* Essence



red and gold veined jasper discoid



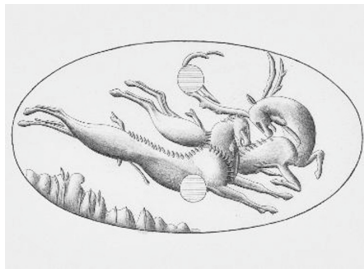
string sealing, from a convex oval metal seal bezel



string sealing from a lentoid of soft stone



15.7 – animal resting
(II.3 340/MM III-LM I)



15.8 – animal flying leap
(II.6 70/LM I)



15.9 – bird flying
(II.6 113/LM I)



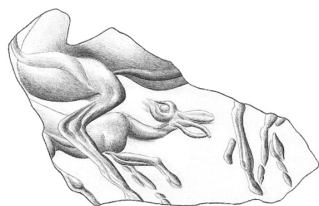
sealing from a signet of metal



orange carnelian lentoid



sealing from a seal of metal?



15.10 – animal caring for young
(II.8 508/LM I)



15.11 – animal crunching
(XI 42/LH I-LH II)



15.12 – dolphin leaping
(II.8 161/LM I)

The *Icon* Essence



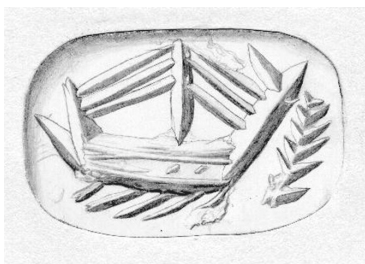
steatite three sided prism



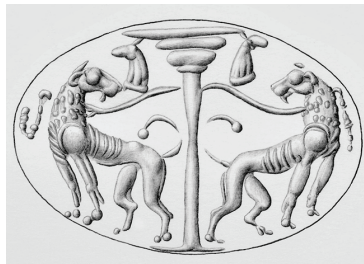
gold signet



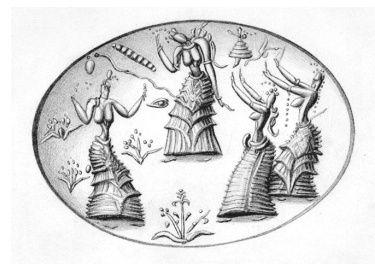
gold signet



15.13 – sailing ship
(II.2 276b/MM II)



15.14 – animals at the grand pillar
(VI 364/LB I-LB II)



15.15 – hovering symbol
(II.3 51/LM I-LM II)



gold signet



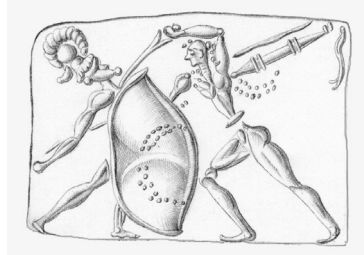
gold cushion



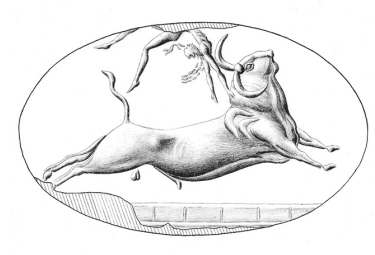
packet sealing from an oval metal ring bezel



15.16 – serving at the shrine
(VS 1B 113/LB I-LB II)



15.17 – war duelling
(I 11/LH I)



15.18 – leaper somersaulting
(VS 3 392/LM I)

The *Icon* Essence



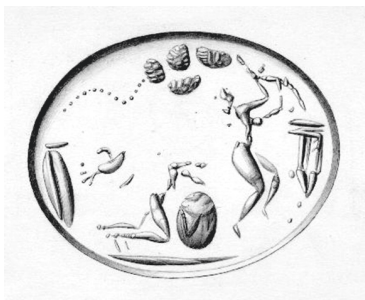
gold signet



gold signet



agate cushion with gold mounting



15.19 – beehive with bees
(II.3 114/LM I)



15.20 – pulling the tree
(I 219/LM I)



15.21 – animal standing
(I 271/LB I-LB II)



haematite? amygdaloid



black green schist cushion



haematite lentoid



15.22 – carrying the special object
(XI 35/LB I-LB II)



15.23 – hybrid woman
(III 367/LM I)



15.24 – hybrid man somersaulting
(III 363/LM I-LM II)

The *Icon* Essence



carnelian lentoid



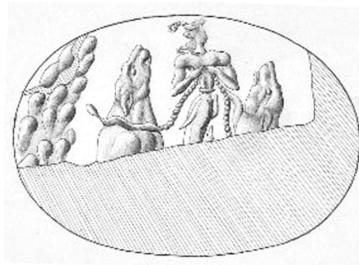
string sealing from an oval metal ring bezel



sealing from a metal? signet



15.25 – Mistress of Animals
(I 144/LB I-LB II)



15.26 – Master of Animals
(II.8 248/LM I?)



15.27 – VIP with familiar
(II.8 237/LM I)



string sealing from an oval metal ring bezel



gold signet



gold signet



15.28 – gesturing
(II.8 256/LM I)

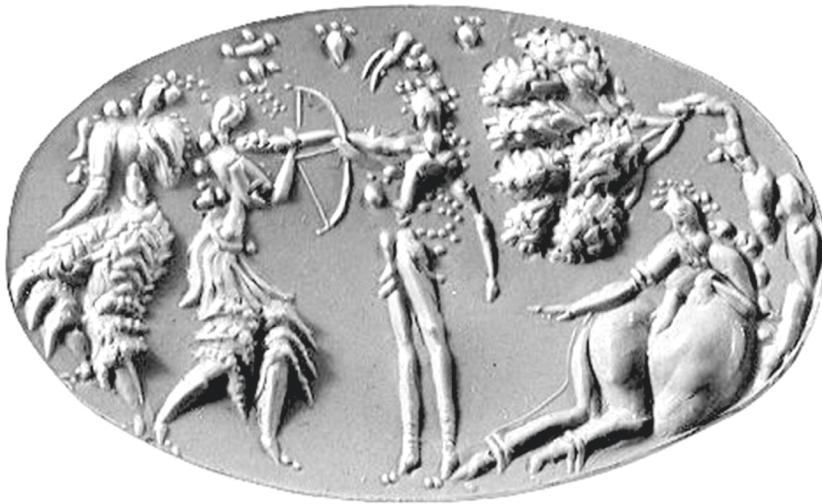


15.29 – VIP appearing on high
(VI 281/LM I)



15.30 – VIP granting audience
(II.3 103/LM I-LM II)

The *Icon* Essence



15.31 – human couple, meeting, gesturing, tree growing from rocky ground, kneeling the boulder, hovering symbol (XI 29/LM I, bezel size 2.27 cm x 1.35 cm)