

LIONS DEPICTED ON AEGEAN SEALS – HOW REALISTIC ARE THEY?

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Attention has often been drawn to the lively representation of lions on Minoan and Mycenaean seals and sealings. Within the stylistic conventions of Aegean art it is apparent from certain details in the anatomy and behaviour of these animals that some of the artists were well acquainted with the outward appearance of a lion and the way in which it catches its prey.

The source material for my research is to be found partly within the field of zoology. Literature about anatomy, normal habitat and behaviour of lions, augmented by observing them in zoological gardens, looking at photographs and watching films showing them in their natural surroundings, are indispensable to assess realistic as well as unrealistic elements in the Aegean depictions.

Animals which artists could see around them all the time, such as dogs and cattle, are sometimes recognizable in certain anatomical details or particular postures of the lions represented.

From the Early Minoan period onwards depictions of lions from other cultures in the Eastern Mediterranean have played a not unimportant role as models in Aegean art. Nevertheless the artists have always adapted these examples to suit their own principles of style and composition.

Since the beginning of the Late Bronze Age scenes of attacking lions appear, showing a realism which has no parallel in the Near East or Egypt, with which the Aegean area maintained contacts. In my opinion, comparison with photographs and films shows that these depictions must have been based on real-life observations.

Nothing indicates, so far as I can ascertain, that Minoan seal-engravers had really been able to observe lions before the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. From the Early Minoan period onwards, lions were a favourite subject in glyptic art, and their depiction shows considerable development as regards anatomical details and postures. Nevertheless examples from the Near East must have formed the craftsmen's main source of inspiration. In addition other animals, especially dogs, have served as models when representing lions.¹

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Illustrations are not to scale. Where no datings have been mentioned for seals and sealings listed in the footnotes, these have not been specified within LM or LH, as far as I know.

Anatomical Characteristics

Both in Crete and mainland Greece, images of lions appeared in LM I/LH I showing remarkably detailed depictions of anatomical characteristics typical of lions.

The lion (*Panthera leo*) distinguishes itself clearly from other quadrupeds by a number of specific characteristics. It has a bony, segmented face, with marked accents on the jaw and — in the case of a male animal — on the ruff. The ears are round, the eyes almond-shaped, with a clearly marked tear-duct. The body is slim and muscular. The heavy paws have large claws.

Broadly speaking a distinction can be made between African and Asiatic type lions. The African breed is characterized by a relatively long, slender body and a thick, straight-haired mane, while the Asiatic type has a stubbier body and a curly mane. There are also Asiatic species without a mane. The average length of an adult lion is 2 m. and 60 to 70 cm.; lionesses are slightly smaller.²

Not only can the build and mane vary considerably but numerous crossbreeds have developed, so it is difficult to define which variety is being portrayed when studying representations from the Mediterranean. In glyptic art, particularly, this presupposes an accuracy that can hardly be expected.³

Depictions of lions, whose anatomical proportions and details indicate that they are true to nature, start to appear on the mainland of Greece from LH IA onwards without there having been any forerunners in the Middle Helladic period. The above mentioned details can be detected in most of the portrayals of lions found on objects from the Mycenaean Shaft Graves. Pronounced stylization does not detract from a careful observation of nature: on the gold rhyton from Shaft Grave IV even details such as tear-ducts and whiskers are reproduced.⁴

Source of illustrations: *Fig. 3*: R. Opificius, *Das altbabylonische Terrakottarelief* (1961) 269 Fig. 624; *Fig. 4*: I. Pini, *BCH Suppl. XI*, 1985, 155 Fig. 5; *Fig. 5*: Leyhausen, *Vstudien* Fig. 47; *Fig. 6*: Özgüç, *SSI Pl. XXXII,2*; *Fig. 8*: I. Pini, *AA* 1982, 605 Fig. 1; *Fig. 9*: W. Wreszinski, *Morgenland* 23, 1932, Pl. 2,4. Remaining photographs from the Archives of CMS.

¹ See for the EM period the lions of the 'Parading Lions Group', Yule, *ECS* 209; many examples of this group are to be found in *CMS* II,1 and II,2. They can be compared with impressions of Mesopotamian stamp seals, e.g. Buchanan, *YBC* Pls. II No. 37; III No. 38. Lions on MM seals and sealings, e.g. *CMS* II,3 No. 277; II,5 Nos. 272. 274. 275. 282; VIII Nos. 103. 104; XI No. 82 show similarities with impressions of stamp seals and cylinder seals from Karahöyük and Kültepe found in contexts of the first quarter of the 2nd mill. B.C.; see S. Alp, *ZSK* Nos. 106. 109. 125 and N. Özgüç, *The Anatolian Group of Cylinder Seal Impressions from Kültepe* (1965) Nos. 11. 47. 58. For lions based on dogs see the Phaestos sealings *CMS* II,5 Nos. 279. 284 and seals in the shape of a lion lying down in a curved position which is characteristic of dogs, Sakellariou, *CollGiam* No. 181 and H.B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Cameos, Greek, Roman and Etruscan in the British Museum* (1926) No. 106.

² Bertram, *PoL* 15f.; W. and U. Dolder, *Löwen* (1988) 6f.

³ I do not agree with the reconstruction of a 'Greek lion', based on Aegean depictions, by H. Hemmer, *Säugetierkundliche Mitteilungen* 14, 1966, 300ff.

⁴ Karo, *Schachtgräber* No. 273, Pls. 117. 118.

Several archeologists have pointed out the similarities concerning anatomical details and general style between the lions on objects from the Shaft Graves and a number of seals of the same period or of a slightly later date.⁵

On two gold flattened cylinders from Shaft Grave III, one with a lion killer and another with a wounded lion (*Fig. 1*), a slanting vein — the inner *saphena* — is correctly shown on the inner side of the hind leg. However, the great *saphena* is wrongly shown on the outer side of the foreleg muscles: in reality it runs across the outer side of the hind leg.⁶ These veins are clearly visible on most lions observed in real life. They appear also in portrayals of lions on other objects from the Shaft Graves.⁷ They are retained in glyptic art on the mainland into LH IIIA.⁸ J.-Cl. Poursat traces the origin of the representation of these veins to depictions of lions on objects in precious metals and not to glyptic art. Works of art from the Near East could have set the example.⁹ In my opinion the fact that in some of the representations in Aegean art the vein is depicted in the right place can also indicate observations from nature.



Fig. 1 Wounded Lion. CMS I Nr. 10



Fig. 2 Lioness suckling cub. CMS I Nr. 106.

⁵ Boardman, GGFR 395; J.-Cl. Poursat, *Les ivoires myceniens* (1977) 204ff. See e.g. CMS I Nos. 247. 249. 250 from Vapheio (context LH IIA); I No. 62 and XIII No. 20 from Mycenae (style LH I-II); I Nos. 272. 280 from Routsis (context LH IIA); I No. 185 from Dendra (context LH III); XI No. 169, findplace unknown (style LM/LH II); X No. 131.

⁶ See the anatomical drawing in E.E. Thompson, *Studies in the Art Anatomy of Animals* (1896) Pl. 25; cf. also J.G. Younger, *AJA* 82, 1978, 88.

⁷ Examples from the Shaft Graves are the lions on the Lion Hunt dagger from Grave IV (Karo, *Schachtgräber* No. 394 Pls. 93. 94), the lion and leopard on the gold pommel (Karo, *Schachtgräber* No. 295a Pls. 75. 78) and the lions on the ivory pommel (Karo, *Schachtgräber* No. 295b Pls. 75. 76. 78).

⁸ Examples in glyptic art are mentioned by J.-Cl. Poursat (*supra* n. 5) 202ff. and J.G. Younger (*supra* n. 6) 88.

⁹ J.-Cl. Poursat (*supra* n. 5) 236f. mentions as examples a stone sculpture from Tell Harmal (Baghdad Mus.) and a terracotta plaque from Mari (Paris, Mus. du Louvre, Inv.No. 1144), both dating from the beginning of the 2nd mill. B.C. (A. Parrot, *Sumer* [1960] Pls. 364. 354).

Lionesses

Although the great majority of lions are male, it is clear that the Aegean artists were sometimes trying to portray a lioness. This they did by providing the male animal with teats.¹⁰ From LM I/LH I until LM IIIA/LH IIIA one comes across such a portrayal of the animal both in Crete and the mainland. Sometimes the lionesses are depicted standing up or walking.¹¹ It is remarkable how few of the lionesses are depicted with a cub (*Fig. 2*).¹² Usually the male animal — thus without teats — stands in for her in her role as mother.¹³ The motif of a lion or lioness standing, with its head lowered and facing backwards towards the cub who is stretching up to drink, is not realistic; in fact, a lioness always suckles her cubs lying down. Here illustrations of other animals, especially cows, have obviously been used as models.¹⁴

The lioness with mane and teats is also depicted while attacking a prey; sometimes there is a cub with her.¹⁵ When cubs are about four months old, they accompany the lioness when she goes hunting,¹⁶ but it is unlikely that the craftsman who engraved CMS II,3 No. 99 wanted to portray that, because the cub is lying down. The unnatural portrayal of the lioness with teats and mane and the suckling male animal do not to my mind prove that Aegean artists had never seen lions.¹⁷ It is quite possible that they expressly depicted a lioness with a mane — with or without teats — so as to make it clear that it was a lioness and not just some other animal. There are examples of lions without manes,¹⁸ but none of lions without manes but with teats.

The lioness with mane and teats is an Aegean invention and, as far as I know, no parallels are to be found in the Near East or Egypt. The same is true of the motif of a lion with a cub.

¹⁰ The number of teats varies in the depictions. In reality a lioness has four of them (Dolder [supra n. 2] 19).

¹¹ E.g. on a sealing from Haghia Triada (terminus post quem non LM IB), ASAtene 8/9, 1925/26, 6 No. 38 Pl. XIII; CMS II,3 No. 102 'from Hierapetra' and No. 122 from Porti (style LM I–II); V No. 304 from Chora (context LH I–II); CMS I Suppl. No. 168 from Thebes (style LH II–III); XI Nos. 115. 242. 317, findplaces unknown (style LM I–II) and X No. 303, findplace unknown.

¹² CMS I Nos. 78. 106, both from the Chamber Tombs of the Lower Town of Mycenae.

¹³ CMS II,3 No. 198 'from Anopolis', No. 344 from Gortyna (style LM IIIA); II,4 No. 48 'from Evanjelismos' and a sealing from the Palace of Knossos (J.H. Betts, BSA 62, 1960, 43, No. 57); Kenna, CS No. 298, findplace unknown (style LM IIIA) and CMS XII No. 286, findplace unknown (LM/LH II?).

¹⁴ See e.g. CMS I No. 20 from Mycenae and CMS II,3 No. 88 from Knossos, both showing cows.

¹⁵ CMS II,3 No. 99 from Kalyvia (context LH IIIA1), No. 273 from Knossos (LM III?); VIII No. 159, findplace unknown (style LM/LH IIIA).

¹⁶ Bertram, PoL 87.

¹⁷ Boardman, GGFR 395 regarded this as evidence, but when he wrote this lion bones had not yet been found on the Greek mainland.

¹⁸ See e.g. CMS I No. 246 from Vapheio (context LH IIA) with a very thick neck, but without any indication of a mane. In most examples these lions are anatomically incorrect, even if they are recognizable as lions: CMS IV No. 259 from Tsoutsouros (style LM II?); I Nos. 51. 70 from Mycenae; V No. 660 from Salamis (context LH III); I No. 388 from Menidi (context LH IIIB); V No. 313 from Delos (style LH IIIA?), and the following from unknown findplaces: CMS XI Nos. 43. 273 (style LM/LH II–IIIA1) and XIII No. 57.

Male Figures with Lions

This motif, of which two sealings from the Temple Repositories of the Palace at Knossos – dating from MM IIIB – are the oldest examples, remained in use during the Late Bronze Age. The representation on a seal impression from Haghia Triada showing an archer wearing a conical-shaped head-covering and accompanied by a small lion, is closely related to the sealings from Knossos.¹⁹ In other depictions, the lions are very large in comparison with the men who are keeping them under control. This is true not only of the other examples from Crete but also of those from the Greek mainland.²⁰ It is not impossible that the lions are portrayed so excessively large so as to emphasize even more the power the god or hero had over strong animals. Quite possibly this idea was taken over from the Near East²¹ (*Fig. 3*). In my view, such images are no proof that lions were tamed or held in captivity, as has been suggested.²²



Fig. 3 Male figure with a leashed Molossian hound.
Terracotta relief. From Ur, 16th century B.C.



Fig. 4 Two lions attacking a bovine.
Sealing from Tyllissos.

¹⁹ Evans, *PM* I 505. 680 *Fig.* 363a–c. Evans points out the Hittite origin of the attire of the male persons; cf. also R. Boehmer, *Die Reliefplastik von Bogazköy* (1983) *Fig.* 10, dated to the 16th century B.C.

²⁰ CMS II,3 Nos. 24, 27, both from Knossos (contexts LM IA and LM III); XII No. 207 from Crete? (style LM I); I No. 512 from Crete; examples from the Greek mainland are CMS I No. 280 from Routsí (context LH IIA); I No. 133 from Mycenae; examples of unknown provenance are CMS VII No. 169 (style LM/LH IIIA); II,3 No. 329; IX No. 114; Sakellariou, *CollGiam* No. 338.

²¹ Cf. also the same motif with a dog: CMS II,3 No. 52 and with a bovine: CMS VII No. 102. This motif occurs also on Old-Babylonian terracotta reliefs, usually with Molossian hounds as in Crete, but there is also an example with a lion, found at Ur and dating from the 16th century B.C. (R. Opificius, *Das altbabylonische Terrakottarelieff* [1961] 171. 237).

²² See the description of CMS VII No. 169.

Lions on the Hunt

Various archeologists have paid attention to depictions of lions who are attacking their prey and pointed out the often striking resemblance to reality.²³ Here I will not go into all the non-realistic variations that were developed by Aegean artists from the beginning to the end of the Late Bronze Age, but only point out a number of examples that make observation from nature plausible.

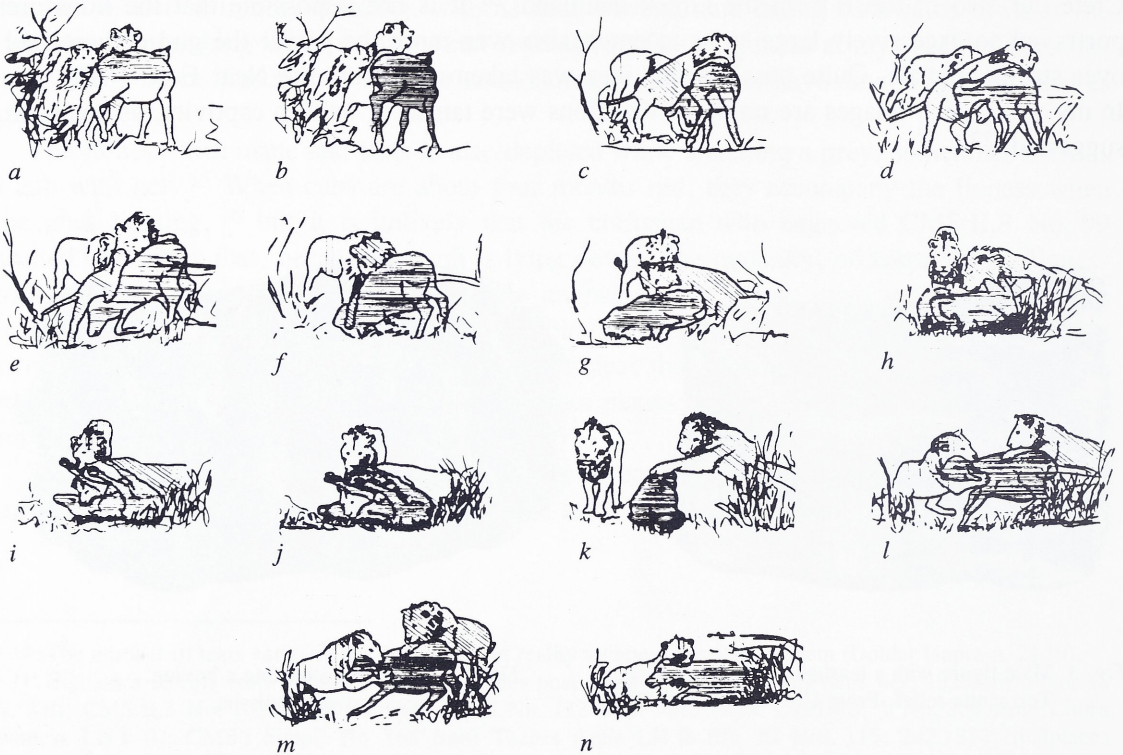


Abb. 5 Two lions attacking a prey. Drawing after a series of photographs.

Living in prides, lions often hunt together, which also increases their chances of success.²⁴ As a rule, two or more lions encircle their victim and then they attack from different angles. One of the lions usually pounces sideways on to the prey. The attacker digs its claws and teeth into the hindquarters, the shoulders or the nose of the prey and by pulling it sideways or backwards tries to fell the beast, sometimes assisted by its fellow attackers.

²³ Evans, PM IV 528ff.; Hemmer (supra n. 3) 299f.; E. Vermeule, *The Art of the Shaft Graves* (1975) 39; I. Pini in: *L'Iconographie Minoenne* 153ff.; Morgan, MWPT 44f.

²⁴ Bertram, PoL 129f.

The prey is usually killed by a bite in the neck or throat (*Fig. 5*).²⁵ Despite its primitive workmanship, the stela from Shaft Grave Alpha in Grave Circle B at Mycenae gives a correct picture of two lions attacking a bull.²⁶ Examples in glyptic art which are closely related to reality are known from both Crete and the Greek mainland (*Fig. 4*).²⁷ In Aegean art lions out hunting are nearly always males, which does not correspond with reality. Although male lions sometimes assist with the encircling and rousing of the prey, it is usually the lionesses who actually attack.²⁸ Probably there have been artists who knew this, but they deliberately depicted the lions as male, whether in an group or single, in order to differentiate them from hunting dogs.²⁹

The first phase of the attack, the short sprint after the lion has stalked to within a short distance of its prey, is not depicted in glyptic art, probably because a seal's small size makes it almost impossible to show running animals one behind the other. In other media however, one can see the chase. Examples include a lion who is chasing a deer-like animal on a stela which stood above Shaft Grave V at Mycenae, and a lion chasing three deer on the mural of the South wall of Room 5 in the West House at Akrotiri.³⁰ On the gold foil plaques of a hexagonal wooden box from Shaft Grave V there is a lion rushing along in flying gallop, just on the point of grabbing its victim.³¹ In both the first-mentioned examples it is noticeable that none of the animals being chased is looking back at its pursuer. Often animals in flight are depicted regardant. In reality not a single animal fleeing from danger as fast as it can will look back as that would result in loss of speed. Undoubtedly the artist who made use of this convention would have known that fact. However, an animal with its head turned backwards as it runs away expresses panic far more effectively than one looking where it is going. In addition a composition depicting two or more fleeing animals is more lively if one of them is shown regardant.³²

²⁵ Leyhausen, *Vstudien* 22ff. Figs. 21 and 47 (= our Fig. 5); Bertram, *PoL* 129f.

²⁶ Sp. Marinatos, *AAA* 1, 1968, 175. 177 Fig. 1. See for a reconstruction drawing N. Marinatos in: Hägg – Nordquist, *Celebrations* 144, Fig. 2. Cf. our Fig. 5m. The stela is so far the earliest known depiction of this motif in Aegean art.

²⁷ See e.g. a sealing from Tylissos (our Fig. 4) and another from Pyrgos (terminus post quem non LM IB), a sealing from Knossos (context LM IIIA2): Pini (supra n. 23) Figs. 5,1.4 and a seal from Dendra (context LM IIIA1): CMS I No. 186; cf. our Fig. 5l–m.

²⁸ Bertram, *PoL* 117; Dolder (supra n. 2) 27; Morgan, *MWPT* 44. It can also be observed regularly in nature films showing a group of preying lions.

²⁹ For examples with dogs see Pini (supra n. 23) 161 with n. 39 and Younger, *Iconography Pose Types* 41. 42A. 43. 47A. 49B. 50B. 52B for schemes of lions and dogs in the same positions attacking a prey. The most striking examples of two similar compositions, one with lions and the other with dogs, are the gold cut-out plaques from Shaft Grave III (Karo, *Schachtgräber* Nos. 119. 120 Pl. 33) and the wall painting with the boar hunt from Tiryns, probably of LH IIIB (G. Rodenwaldt, *Tiryns* II [1912] 130 Fig. 55). It shows how such representations are based on conventions, even if they contain elements which were originally founded on observation of nature.

³⁰ Karo, *Schachtgräber* No. 1427 Pl. 6 and Morgan, *MWPT* Pl. 8.

³¹ Karo, *Schachtgräber* Nos. 808–811 Pls. 143. 144.

³² The convention of representing fleeing animals regardant was current in the Aegean, the Near East and Egypt. In the Aegean it appears for the first time on two MM II sealings with quadrupeds in flying gallop from Phaestos: CMS II,5 Nos. 276. 277. For an example from the Near East, see an Akkadian cylinder seal (style 2350–2200 B.C.) (Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, text Fig. 36). In Egypt the convention can be seen on wall paintings

There are two different schemes for a single lion who attacks its prey. In one design the lion's hind legs remain on the ground, in the other the lion pounces on the back of his victim.

Examples of the first scheme that show a close affinity to reality are to be seen in glyptic art from the mainland and in that from Crete as from LM I/LH I.³³ In these depictions the lion digs its claws into the back or neck of its prey and tries to pull it down on to the ground, or kill it by biting into the neck.³⁴ Not only the lion's behaviour but also that of the prey, with its bulging eyes and open mouth, are unexpectedly life-like.

A lion who is hunting on his own, will prefer not to attack head-on because of the risk it runs of being wounded or killed by the horns of its prey. Frontal attacks are more frequent if lions hunt in a group and the prey is being threatened from different angles.³⁵ Perhaps the Aegean portrayals showing a frontal attack by one lion³⁶ originate from examples showing more than one attacker.

The scheme in which the lion is leaping on to back of its victim, and from which the oldest known example stems from the deposit of sealings from Phaestos,³⁷ was far more popular in Aegean art than the scheme by which the hind legs stay on the ground. This method of attack is not described in the zoological literature I have read, although the authors are experts who have studied the behaviour of lions and other feline animals for many years either in zoological gardens (Leyhausen) or in the wild (Bertram and Dolder).³⁸ I. Pini compares a drawing from a photograph showing a lion jumping on the back of its victim which is just on the point of collapsing, with a number of representations in Aegean glyptic art used by him as examples of the scheme.³⁹ A spectacular attack such as the one on a sealing from Knossos, probably from LM I, where a lion is shown in the act of leaping on top of an animal running at full speed is not impossible: once I saw an excellent example of

of the Middle and New Kingdoms with hunting scenes. Good examples from the Aegean are the lions on the dagger from Shaft Grave IV (Karo, Schachtgräber No. 394 Pls. 93. 94) and the fallow-deer on the other side.

³³ See also Pini (supra n. 23) 157ff.

³⁴ For examples see a lentoid seal from Knossos (terminus post quem non LM IB): M.S.F. Hood, *ARepLondon* 1961/62, 27 Fig. 38; a lentoid seal from Vapheio (context LH IIA), a lentoid seal from Argos (context LH IIIA), and a three-sided prism from Midea (context LH IIIB): CMS I Nos. 294. 252. 290. For ill. of such attacks in nature, see Leyhausen, *Vstudien* Figs. 19. 21e–i; Bertram, *PoL* Pls. 56. 90–92; I. Pini in: *L'Iconographie Minoenne* Fig. 11.

³⁵ Dolder (supra n. 2) 27; Leyhausen, *Vstudien* Fig. 11f–h gives an example of a lion playfully attacking another lion in this manner.

³⁶ CMS I No. 253 from Vapheio (context LH IIA), No. 388 from Menidi (context LH IIIB); XI No. 169, of unknown origin (style LM/LH I–II).

³⁷ CMS II,5 No. 286. A. Evans already noticed that this scheme had been developed out of the theme of hunting dogs leaping on the neck or back of wild goats (*PM* IV 527f. Figs. 470. 471). Cf. for the same scheme with a dog, the sealing from Phaestos (CMS II,5 No. 284). In the Near East the scheme is rare, but not totally absent. Cf. e.g. Özgüç, *SSI* Pl. XXXII Nos. 1–3.

³⁸ Bertram, *PoL* 129: "If a hunt is successful, a lioness catches up with, and brings down a prey animal; she does this, not by leaping on to the animal's back as is often supposed, but actually by seizing the rump and shoulders with her claws; the prey is almost fleeing fast at this stage, so is thrown off balance and falls to the ground."

³⁹ I. Pini in: *L'Iconographie Minoenne* Figs. 12. 16 = CMS V No. 602 from Mycenae. This representation is still not realistic because the lion's body is not leaning on that of his victim: in this manner he would never have been capable of keeping his balance.

this in a nature film.⁴⁰ Actually this method of attack is highly exceptional, and therefore it is far more likely that the source of inspiration was canine behaviour. Similar schemes on sealings from Kültepe (*Fig. 6*), dated to the first quarter of the 2nd millennium B.C., could also have had an influence. Related to this motif is the scheme in which the lion bites its prey which is already lying on the ground.⁴¹



Fig. 6 Griffin attacking a bull. Impression of a stamp seal. From Karum Kanish (Kültepe), Level Ib. First quarter of the 2nd millennium B.C.

The number of depictions showing animal fights that are obviously based on observations from nature is comparatively small. What they actually prove is that there were artists in the Late Bronze Age who were well informed as to how a lion pursued its prey, pounced on it and killed it and how the prey — for the most part cattle, deer and goats — reacted to its predator's behaviour.

Since 1979 lion's bones dating from the Late Bronze Age have been found at different places on the mainland of Greece, even in places that are not regarded as important centres.⁴² From this it can be concluded that lions almost certainly lived in the wild in Greece and were not, or not exclusively, imported from other areas in the Eastern Mediterranean. The bones were found in areas of human habitation, so artists there could have seen the lions — dead or alive — something which gave them the opportunity to observe their anatomical details very closely. Predators killing their prey create a problem for us,

⁴⁰ BBC Video No. 4179 (1988): 'Okavango, Jewel of the Kalahari.' After a short sprint a lioness leapt on all fours onto the back of a gnu and succeeded in clinging on for seconds before the running prey managed to throw her off. Cf. I. Pini in: *L'Iconographie Minoenne* Fig. 13.

⁴¹ E.g. on an amygdaloid seal from Eleusis(?), CMS XI No. 44; cf. Leyhausen, *Vstudien* Fig. 57. See also CMS I No. 303 from Mycenae and V No. 435 from Nichoria.

⁴² I. Pini in: *L'Iconographie Minoenne* 156 n. 12. and R. Felsch in: Hägg — Nordquist, *Celebrations* 147. In Crete so far no lion bones have been found.

because — according to present-day observers — this is not easy to observe without all sorts of modern equipment. In addition, the attack is often over so quickly that afterwards it is difficult to re-construct exactly what happened. Moreover in the wild one's view of what is going on is often restricted by high grass and sand blowing about. In my opinion it is quite possible that attacking lions were observed inside a fenced-in area: a zoological garden or a hunting park. So far no evidence for this has been found on the Greek mainland. Wall paintings from Crete and Thera indicate the existence of large well laid-out gardens, where animals may have been kept in captivity.⁴³ Such gardens also existed in the Near East and in Egypt. For instance, in the 18th century B.C. the Hittite king, Anitta, had an enclosure made for wild animals near a temple at Kültepe (Kanish) where, besides two lions, leopards, bears, deer, boars, and goats were kept.⁴⁴

In Egyptian tomb paintings from the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom and especially the first half of the New Kingdom, the desert animals people used to hunt can sometimes be seen inside an enclosure surrounded by nets.⁴⁵ J. Leclant has found remains of such an enclosure near Amenhotep III's Jubilee Temple at Soleb in Upper Nubia.⁴⁶

Sometimes lions were also caught alive, perhaps for animal parks where they could be bred or tamed. In a relief on the wall of Ptah-hotep's tomb at Saqqara dating from the Fifth Dynasty, one can see how a captured lion and leopard are being transported in cages on a sledge.⁴⁷ Remains indicating a menagerie and dating to the period between Seti I and Ramesses III, ca. 1300–1150 B.C.,⁴⁸ were found near the palace at Qantir. The remains consist of the bones of a lion, an elephant, different kinds of antelope and a gazelle.

Lion killers, Hunting scenes and Wounded Lions

A lion standing upright on its hind legs and fighting a male figure is a conventional motif, a formula for the concept 'lion killer' or 'enemy suppressor'. The earliest known examples are a flattened cylinder from Shaft Grave III at Mycenae (*Fig. 7*) and a lentoid seal from Chania dating from LM I. The composition is closely related to that of a duel between two human opponents.⁴⁹ The design for the fight is not taken from real life, but from examples

⁴³ Examples are the wall painting of the 'Crocus Gatherer' from Knossos, Evans, PM I 265 Pl. IV (the monkey was reconstructed as a human being); the mural with the blue monkeys from Thera, Chr. Doumas, Thera (1983) colour Pl. IX; and that of goats and hunting cats from Haghia Triada, Evans, PM I Fig. 391.

⁴⁴ RAVA VI (1983) 604; VII (1987) Heft 1/2, 86.

⁴⁵ Examples can be seen in the Grave Temple of Sahure, Abusir, from the beginning of the 5th Dynasty; in the tomb of Senbi at Meir, from the 12th Dynasty (Vandier, Manuel IV [1964] Fig. 454) and Tomb No. 100 (of Rekmire) at Thebes (Vandier, Manuel IV, Fig. 459).

⁴⁶ J. Leclant in: *Mélanges en hommage à Raymond Mauny* (1981) 727ff.

⁴⁷ See N. de Garis Davies, *The Mastaba of Ptahhetep ... at Saqqara I* (1900) Pl. 21.

⁴⁸ J. Boessneck – A. von den Driesch, *Studien an subfossilen Tierknochen aus Ägypten* (1982) 136ff.

⁴⁹ Good examples of both types have been found in Shaft Grave III: cf. CMS I No. 9 (= our Fig. 7) and No. 111, showing warriors. Professor I. Pini kindly drew my attention to the LM I lentoid seal from Chania, CMS V Suppl. 1A No. 135.

from the Near East where the scheme had a long tradition: the upright stance and the turn of the lion's head so that it can be viewed from above, as shown on the Mycenaean seal, had already appeared when biting lions were shown standing up vertically in Sumeria in the Early Dynastic period, especially ED III (ca. 2600–2400 B.C.), and it continued into the Neo-Assyrian period.⁵⁰ The consequent transformation of the formula into the lively images in Aegean glyptic art differs greatly from the stiff traditional examples from the Near East. The motif was more popular on the mainland of Greece, but not unknown in Crete.⁵¹ Examples which show two almost identical group fights, of which the 'Danicourt ring' is the best known, come exclusively from the mainland.⁵²

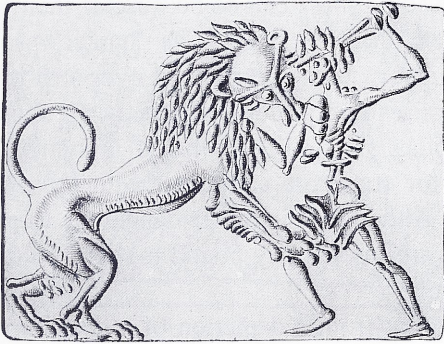


Fig. 7 Lion killer. CMS I No. 9.

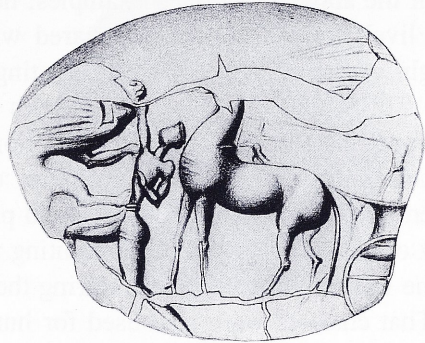


Fig. 8 Lion killer, chariot and horse.
Sealing from Pylos, Palace.

In some of the portrayals it is difficult to decide if the concept 'lion killer' is intended or whether a real hunting scene is depicted.⁵³ Compositions that at first sight can be regarded

⁵⁰ Cf. an Early Akkadian cylinder seal of unknown provenance (ca. 2300–2200 B.C.), Buchanan, YBC 153 No. 406, and two Old-Babylonian examples, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 14 Pls. 268a (19th century B.C.) and 268d (18th century B.C.).

⁵¹ Examples are CMS I No. 228 from Vapheio (context LH IIA), on which the hero protects himself with a figure-of-eight shield; No. 209 from Pylos (style LH I–II) showing a lioness with a mane; XI No. 208 from Kakovatos (style LH I–II); I No. 331 from Pylos with two men attacking a lion whose legs and body resemble those of a horse (*terminus post quem* non LH IIIB); IV No. 233 from Siteia (style LM I–II) and IX No. 152 from Siteia (?) with a hero wearing a conical helmet. A cylinder seal, found at Thebes and probably made in Cyprus, shows influences from the Near East in the attire of the hero and in the stiff postures (I. Pini, *JdI* 1980, No. C.2 Fig. 12; E. Porada, *AfO* 28, 1981, 21ff. No. 6; J.L. Crowley, *The Aegean and the East* [1989] 257f.).

⁵² CMS XI No. 272 from Saloniki (style LH I–II) and the sealings CMS I Suppl. No. 173 and I No. 307 from Pylos (context LH IIIB, but they should probably be dated LH I–II; see I. Pini in: CMS Beih. 3, 210).

⁵³ The duel-scheme can also be seen with a goat instead of a lion as an adversary, cf. CMS VII No. 131. The way lentoid seals should be turned can also evoke doubt concerning the interpretation. N. Marinatos in: Hägg – Nordquist, *Celebrations* 146 considers the representation on CMS II,3 No. 14 from Knossos as belonging to a

as falling into the category 'hunting scene', such as hunters who tie up or carry away a dead lion, are known from Crete and the Greek mainland. They were also used for less realistic subjects, such as seen on a seal where the hunter is replaced by a Minoan genius.⁵⁴

Hunting dogs, who are absent in the hunting scenes of the Shaft Graves, are to be seen on a sealing from the House of the Shields at Mycenae and on an seal from Syme, dated to LH II–III A1.⁵⁵

A sealing from Pylos shows a depiction which is unique in Aegean art. In addition to a man fighting with a lion, a horse and a chariot are represented (*Fig. 8*).⁵⁶ As was the case on military expeditions,⁵⁷ the chariot here apparently only provided transport to the spot where the fight with the lion was to take place, because the horse and chariot are stationary and the charioteer is still in the vehicle. The fight with the huge lion reflects the 'lion killer' scheme in all the above-mentioned examples, however misleading these can be because of their varied and lively postures when compared with those from the Near East. The 'hunter' probably fought with a short weapon, a thrusting spear or dagger, which he stabbed over-arm into the lion's head.⁵⁸ For me, the scene with the chariot raises the question of whether it should be interpreted as portraying an actual lion hunt. Another possibility is that it is symbolic for making war. The use of the chariot exclusively for transport combined with the fighting scheme of the lion and the man could point to that. Although it is rather dangerous to rely on only one example, symbols of hunting and warfare are inseparably bound together in the arts of the Eastern Mediterranean during the Bronze Age.

That chariots were also used for hunting is apparent from a depiction of a deer hunt on a gold ring from Shaft Grave IV and a Cypro-Aegean cylinder seal of unknown origin in the Louvre in Paris.⁵⁹ The composition scheme of a light two-wheeled chariot drawn by a pair of horses was borrowed from Western Asia by the Aegean as well as by Egypt. The earliest known use of these chariots for hunting is shown on Syrian cylinder seals from the 18th and 17th centuries B.C.⁶⁰

realistic hunt; this is plausible if one assumes that the stringhole runs diagonally. When it is assumed that the stringhole runs vertically, as Younger, *Iconography* 159, does, then the 45° turned motif belongs to the category 'lion killer'. Another case of a picture which is difficult to interpret is CMS I No. 112 from Mycenae.

⁵⁴ For the tying up of a lion see a sealing from Zakro (*terminus post quem non* LM IB) (D. Levi, *ASAtene* 8/9, 1925/26, No. 193 *Fig. 231*); CMS XI No. 165 from Crete (?) (style LM I–II); I No. 224 from Vapheio (context LH IIA). Two dead lions hanging on a pole are being carried away by a male person on CMS XI No. 301, of unknown origin (style LM/LH II–III A1), and by a Minoan genius on CMS XI No. 37 from Crete (style LM/LH II–III A1).

⁵⁵ CMS I No. 165; XI No. 33.

⁵⁶ CMS I No. 302 (style LH IIIA or earlier) with an inaccurate description and drawing, corrected by I. Pini, *AA* 1982, 604ff.

⁵⁷ J.H. Crouwel, *Chariots and Other Means of Land Transport in Bronze Age Greece* (1980) 137.

⁵⁸ At the very spot where the weapon could have been visible the sealing is damaged. The man's posture is nearly identical with that of the man on the right on CMS I No. 331, also from Pylos, who with an over-arm jab of his dagger is stabbing the lion in the head.

⁵⁹ CMS I No. 15 and Pini (*supra n.* 51) No. A.8 *Fig. 6*.

⁶⁰ E.g. M.A. Littauer – J.H. Crouwel, *Wheeled Vehicles and Ridden Animals in the Ancient Near East* (1979) 63 *Fig. 36*.

In early times lion hunting in Egypt and the Near East will have been necessary to protect cattle. Whether it was also necessary on the Greek mainland I gravely doubt, considering the nature of the landscape. The stelas over Graves Alpha and Gamma from Grave Circle B at Mycenae show cattle under attack from lions being defended by their herdsmen. I. Pini has pointed out correctly that such complex illustrations must have had prototypes. He thinks it is possible that the examples were seals.⁶¹ Some Mesopotamian seals show similar scenes (*Fig. 9*), but the difference in dating between them and the stelas is considerable⁶².



Fig. 9 Two men protecting a cow against an attacking lion. Mesopotamian cylinder seal, Akkadian period (ca. 2200 B.C.).



Fig. 10 Lion, man and goat. CMS V,1 No. 246.

In Aegean glyptic art the scene showing the defence of domestic animals is depicted on two lentoid seals, one each from Knossos and Armeni.⁶³ The interpretation of the Armeni seal (*Fig. 10*) is problematic. The composition is evidently based on two different models: a lion in torsion and a man with a goat.⁶⁴ The man is using both hands to hang on to the hind legs of the goat as it tries to break away, perhaps to protect the animal from the lion, although it looks rather as if he is trying to stop the goat from escaping. In my opinion it is not clear if the lion is attacking the man or the goat: it does not differ from the stereotyped lion in torsion. Perhaps the lion should be regarded as having been killed,⁶⁵ but there is no weapon either in the man's hand or in the lion's body. Probably the artist intended to depict a

⁶¹ I. Pini in: *L'Iconographie Minoenne* 157. 166.

⁶² Cf. a cylinder seal from the Uruk period (ca. 3200 B.C.), Buchanan (*supra* n. 50) No. 139 and another from the Akkadian period (ca. 2200 B.C.), W. Wreszinski, *Morgenland* 23, 1932, Pl. 2 Fig. 4 (= our Fig. 9).

⁶³ CMS II,3 No. 9; V No. 246 (style LM II–III A1).

⁶⁴ A. Tamvaki in: CMS Beih. 1, 210. 222; I. Pini in: *L'Iconographie Minoenne* 165.

⁶⁵ Cf. e.g. the posture of the wounded lion on CMS V No. 680.

man defending a goat against lions. The way in which he executed the theme depended more on using signs or symbols than on a narrative composition.

In my view a formula for the hunt/war is the representation of a solitary lion, wounded by an arrow or spear that is embedded in its body. It must have been a popular motif, as it occurs frequently, although exclusively in glyptic art. The oldest known example is the lion on a flattened cylinder from Shaft Grave III at Mycenae (*see Fig. 1*). The forelegs of the animal are about to give way, while it is biting at the arrow in its flank. Sir Arthur Evans had already noticed that the way a bovine collapses was sometimes copied in the case of a lion, and A. Donohue discovered that the forelegs of this lion and those of the lion on a lentoid seal in New York show anatomical characteristics that have been borrowed from cattle.⁶⁶ The excessively long curve of the lion's neck can be traced back to Cretan portrayals of wounded animals with their heads turned backwards. The scheme is not often used for lions.⁶⁷ A wounded lion is represented in several other different postures, not one of which bears any resemblance to reality. Some wounded lions which are shown trying to scratch away the projectile with one of their hind legs, are certainly based on non-wounded dogs in the same position.⁶⁸ In addition there are many wounded lions shown couchant, sitting, or in torsion, just as they are depicted in glyptic art, without any visible weapons in their bodies.

The most convincing portrayal of a lion hunt is that on the dagger from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae, where four men armed with shields and spears are fighting against three lions.⁶⁹ Nevertheless I regard it as most unlikely that the portrayal is based on reality. Several stereotype motifs are included which can also be found in other representations. The man with his legs drawn-up who is either collapsing or dead, we also see lying underneath a lion in an Early Minoan ivory seal from Kalathiana, and he is also depicted on the Vapheio Cup which shows bulls being caught in nets.⁷⁰ Archers in the same posture are shown on a steatite vase-fragment from Knossos, dated LM I–II, and on the Siege Rhyton from Shaft Grave IV.⁷¹ The behaviour of the attacking lion seems true to life, and may be based on

⁶⁶ Evans, PM IV 549; A. Donohue, AA 1978, 259ff. For other animals who may or may not have been hit by a projectile see CMS II,2 No. 60; II,3 No. 135, both from Crete, and CMS I Nos. 121. 355 from the Greek mainland.

⁶⁷ Examples are CMS XII No. 229, probably originating from the mainland (style LH I–II); CMS I Suppl. No. 81 from Crete.

⁶⁸ CMS I No. 248 from Vapheio (context LH IIA), No. 277 from Routsis (context LH IIA); XI No. 48 – without projectile – from Gythion (style LM II–III A1); IX No. 107 and XIII No. 21, both of unknown origin. Cf. the dog scratching himself on a sealing from Haghia Triada, ASAtene 8/9, 1925/26, No. 47 Fig. 68.

⁶⁹ Karo, Schachtgräber No. 394 Pls. 93. 94.

⁷⁰ For the seal from Kalathiana see CMS II,1 No. 130. The theme of a lion devouring a man is unique in Aegean art. The motif occurs already in the 4th mill. B.C. in the art of the Near East and in 3rd mill. Egyptian art. The closest parallels for the Minoan seal which I could find can be seen in relief on an Early Sumerian stone basin dated ca. 3500–3300 B.C., and in an unfinished sculptured group of the same period (W. Nagel, *BerIJBVFrühgesch* 6, 1966, Pl. VIII,1–3 and Fig. 10). However, the sculptured group is dated by others in the 6th century B.C.; see e.g. *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte XIV* (1975) Pl. 177. For the fallen man on the Vapheio Cup see E.N. Davis, *The Vapheio Cups* (1977) 41.

⁷¹ Cf. for the steatite vase Evans, PM III Fig. 159 and P. Warren, *Minoan Stone Vases* (1969) No. P 473; for the Siege Rhyton Karo, *Schachtgräber* Pl. 122.

descriptions in stories that can be regarded as the predecessors of similar Homeric ones and which will certainly have circulated in oral form. Such stories would have been enough to stimulate a craftsman with the artistic qualities of the maker of the dagger — who himself no doubt had a thorough knowledge of a lion's appearance — to portraying a lion hunt in this way.

Concluding remarks

The possibility that lions lived in the wild in Crete during the Bronze Age can be discarded. The fact that there were such remarkably life-like depictions of lions to be seen on the island by LM I — as far as portrayal of anatomical details and behaviour is concerned — is, to my mind, partly due to the close contacts between the island and mainland Greece from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. This would have enabled Minoan artists to observe real lions on the mainland.

In my opinion, it is not possible to make a distinction between Minoan and Mycenaean artists regarding their representation of lions. In the Late Bronze Age seals, seal impressions and other works of art were distributed over the whole Aegean area and, I suspect, played an important role as a 'pattern book' for artists. An artist could have used different examples to depict one particular subject.

It can be said that particular motifs enjoyed a certain preference in Crete, and others on the mainland. Gods accompanied by lions, suckling lions standing up, and solitary lions struck by a projectile are almost certain Cretan in origin.

Lion killers were perhaps more popular on the mainland, but the earliest known examples from Crete and from Mycenae are contemporaneous. This subject may well have reached the mainland not directly but via the island.

Art is not zoology. In my opinion the Aegean artists deliberately allowed themselves to deviate from reality where they regarded it as advantageous or necessary. Examples are the lioness with mane and teats and the almost universal depiction of a male lion in situations where that is unrealistic. The flying gallop, the flying leap, probably also the lion which leaps onto the back of its prey and the animal looking back in full flight, are means by which to emphasize the speed, power and savagery of what Aegean artists actually saw, and in my opinion do not necessarily indicate lack of knowledge.

In comparison with the hundreds of Aegean depictions of lions, the number of 'realistic' ones is small and most of these are dated early in the Late Bronze Age but there is enough to prove that some artists had observed real lions. Representations from the Near East and Egypt, where these animals undoubtedly existed in far larger numbers than in the Aegean area, can hardly have served as examples, especially as far as the method of hunting is concerned — because in these areas traditional artistic conventions which usually only bore a limited similarity to real life, were strictly adhered to over a long period of time.