

FRONTAL FACE AND THE SYMBOLISM OF DEATH IN AEGEAN GLYPTIC

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In ancient art the convention of frontal face as applied to human and animal figures is relatively unusual; profile is the norm. When it is used, however, it has specific connotations, alluding in many cases to liminal states of consciousness. In Egypt it is associated with birth,¹ with music² and on occasion with death.³ In Mesopotamia, it is sometimes associated with sex and birth,⁴ but more frequently it is applied to a naked 'hero', a bull-man, and the lion⁵ — creatures of contest and perpetrators of death — such ideas

* Source of illustrations: *Fig. 1*: Evans, PM I 704 Fig. 527d; *Fig. 19*: M. Gill in: CMS Beih. 0, 36 Fig. 1; *Fig. 20*: C. Long, The Ayia Triada Sarcophagus, SIMA 41 (1974) Pl. 31 (detail); *Fig. 21*: M. Bietak, Egyptian Archaeology 2, 1992, 27. Remaining photographs from the archives of CMS.

¹ In the protective figure of Bes (G. Hart, A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses [1986] 58ff.).

² As in the deities Hathor and Bes (Hart, Dictionary, 60f. 80f.; L. Manniche, Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt [1991] Bes: Fig. 32 Pl. 7; Hathor-head sistrum: Pl. 11); also the banquet scene with dancers and musicians in the New Kingdom tomb of Nebamun, whose fragments are in the British Museum (T.G.H. James, Egyptian Painting [1985] 29 Pl. 27 and colour cover).

³ E.g. the drowned souls in the tenth hour of the Amduat (Book of the Underworld) in the tomb of Amenophis II (E. Hornung, The Valley of the Kings. Horizon of Eternity [1990] Pl. 99). Frontality is not, however, a common attribute of death in Egyptian iconography.

⁴ The goddess Inana (Sumerian)/Istar (Babylonian), goddess of sex and war, is often shown full-frontal, as is a nude female who appears on sealstones and plaques from the early 2nd millennium and whose function is thought to be to promote fertility (J. Black — A. Green, Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia. An Illustrated Dictionary [1992] 144 Pl. 118. Cf. 132 Pl. 109 'Nintu?' as 'lady of birth'. Inana/Istar: 108f.). The frontal face of Inana/Istar is equally applicable to both aspects of her domain — sex (birth) and war (death). In the first millennium the Egyptian god Bes (see n. 1) makes his way into Near Eastern iconography. He is not, however, named in cuneiform texts (J. Black — A. Green op.cit. 42).

⁵ The naked 'hero', shown bearded, with long locks and with frontal face, is sometimes called Lahmu, a protective deity (J. Black — A. Green [supra n. 4] 115). Frankfort, Cylinder Seals 59f. 88ff. comments on the popularity of the 'hero' throughout Mesopotamian art, but adds that it is uncertain if the hero with a protective (apotropaic) role on Akkadian seals is the same as the hero struggling with animals. The bull-man is usually the companion of the 'hero', the two frequently appearing together. Either may be shown as a 'Master of Animals'—often associated with combat, therefore indicating dominance (e.g. H. Frankfort, The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient⁴ [1970] hero: Pls. 19. 78 [with bull-men]; Collon, First Impressions, hero: 84; bull-man: 129. 317 [Cypriot, from Thebes]; both: 943 [also Pl. 54 (early and unusual) bull as 'Master of Lions'; Pl. 127, 'Mistress of Animals']). More frequently, the 'hero' and bull-man are shown (alone, with their double, or together) in combat with a lion, (e.g. Collon, First Impressions, Pls. 98–99. 954 [together]). The lion is also shown frontally, particularly as killer of prey (e.g. Collon, First Impressions, Pls. 81–83. 85. 158 [with frontal 'hero' and profile prey]).

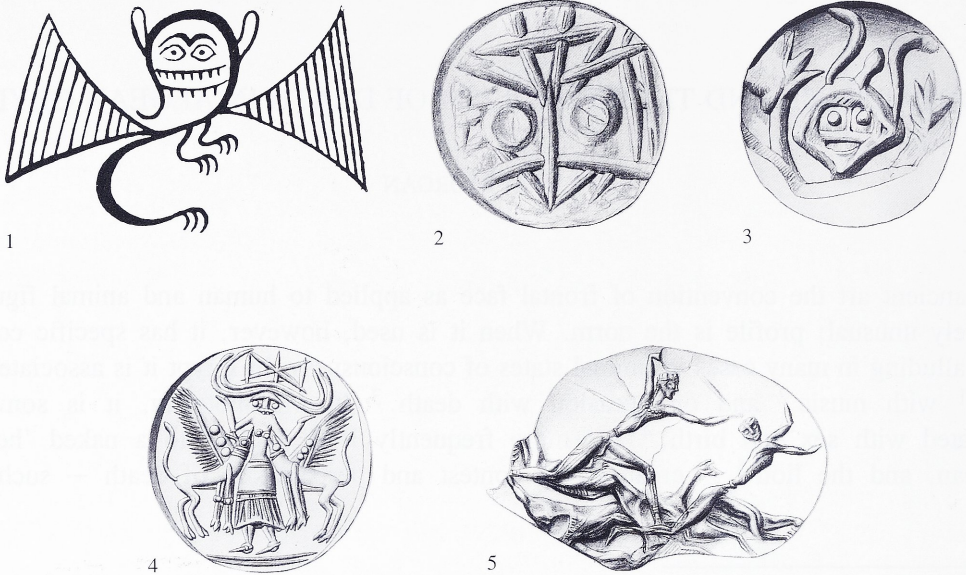


Fig. 1–5 1) MM painted pottery, Melos; 2) CMS XIII No. 94; 3) CMS II,2 No. 251; 4) CMS II,3 No. 63; 5) Sealing from Ayia Triada, HM Inv. No. 595.

reaching the Aegean through cylinder seals.⁶ In Archaic and Classical Greece it is associated with the state between living and dying,⁷ with music, inebriation, and with death.⁸ But what of the convention in Aegean art, where it has been largely overlooked by scholars? Do the same or similar allusions apply? In this paper I shall examine how the particular convention of frontal face is applied within Aegean glyptic scenes, in order to see what message(s) it conveyed. It is important to point out now that in most of the categories of scenes that I shall be examining frontal face is only sometimes used. However, this should

Another creature who is shown frontal face is Humbaba, the giant opponent of Gilgamesh, whose grinning mask-like face, it has been suggested, may have been inspired by Bes and was later incorporated into early Greek representations of Medusa (Collon, *First Impressions* 183, 186 Pls. 855, 856 [seals]; Green and Black [supra n. 4] 106 Pl. 85 [plaque]; J. Oates, *Babylon* [1979] 168 Pl. 118 [clay mask-face in the form of entrails as used in divination]). The winged monster Imdugud (Sumerian)/Anzu (Akkadian) is also represented frontal face, perhaps on account of his lionine nature (Black and Green *op.cit.* 107f. Pl. 86).

⁶ E.g. CMS II,2 No. 29, Knossos (old palace, from below an MM IIIA horizon): frontal face female, bull-man, bull, lions, lion-head (prey animals in profile).

⁷ As in the figure of Hermes leading Persephone up from the underworld on a red-figure crater in New York (J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases. The Classical Period* [1989], illus. 121).

⁸ See in particular: F. Frontisi-Ducroux, 'La mort en face', *Metis* I 2, 1986, 197ff.; and 'In the Mirror of the Mask' in: C. Berard et al., *A City of Images. Iconography and Society in Ancient Greece* (1989) Ch. X.

not lead us to think that application of the convention is arbitrary. Though not all instances of a particular scene use frontal face, all instances of frontal face, I suggest, carry the symbolism which is being applied.

Frontal human faces are exceedingly rare in Aegean art, and are mainly head-only, i.e. mask-like images. Isolated examples exist on sealstones and painted pottery.⁹ In the MM pot from Melos shown in *Fig. 1* and on an LM IB cup rhyton from Knossos,¹⁰ the wildness of expression and abbreviation of form suggest an apotropaic function. In these, the head is an isolated feature, without body though with attachments, and on the Melos pot an axe-like form extends beyond. A mask form within a double axe on a seal in the Philadelphia University Museum (*Fig. 2*) picks up this theme and expresses the relationship between frontal face, death and the implement of sacrifice which will be discussed later in this paper.

The convention as applied to human figures occurs on very few seals and, with the exception of *Fig. 5*, is reserved for head-only images: as an isolated mask;¹¹ in association with prey or sacrificial animals;¹² or with a contorted bull-man¹³ (which I will refer to again later). A curious seal from Mochlos has an impish face with raised hands (*Fig. 3*). On his head are what appear to be horns, which, if correct, would link him with the sacrificial bull, and between the horns is a phallic form, as though death and life-giving force were simultaneously attributed to the mask-like figure. The association of frontal face with birth known in Egypt through the figure of Bes, may be reflected in "the frontal-facing gorgons in childbearing pose" (Weingarten) amongst the Zakro sealings. But instances are few and the association not entirely clear.¹⁴ The only female figure to be clearly differentiated by frontal face is a Mistress of Animals flanked by griffins on a seal from Knossos (*Fig. 4*). She supports horns (the so-called 'snake-frame') on her head, surmounted by a double axe. Once again, these attributes characterize her association with animal sacrifice. Figures such as these on sealstones usually have a significantly reduced and therefore unreadable head, but it may be that the others too should be understood as frontal face. The 'Master of Animals' on the Aegina pendant is also frontal.¹⁵

A unique depiction of a fleeing man with frontal face can be seen on the drawing of a ring impression from Ayia Triada in *Fig. 5*. The human pursuer is shown in profile, the frontal face being specifically applied to the one who is about to die. In this context, we should remember the powerful effect of the gold death-masks from the Mycenae Shaft Graves,

⁹ Cf. Weingarten, Zakro Master Pl. 10. The drawing from the Melos pot illustrated in this paper as *Fig. 1* is one of two published in Evans, PM I 704 *Fig. 527c* and *d*. Cf. T.D. Atkinson – R.C. Bosanquet et al., Excavations at Phylakopi, JHS Suppl. Paper No. 4, 1904, Pl. XIV, 6a–c.9.

¹⁰ ARepLondon 27, 1980/81, 84 *Fig. 34* (= Weingarten, Zakro Master Pl. 10K, upside down).

¹¹ CMS V No. 431 (Nichoria); Weingarten, Zakro Master Pl. 10.

¹² CMS II,3 No. 115 (Kalyvia); II,3 No. 33 (Knossos) cylinder seal, face said to be 'lion'.

¹³ CMS X No. 145.

¹⁴ Weingarten, Zakro Master 103 (101ff. on Bes) Pl. 25: Z 44, Z 45, both birth scenes with abstracted frontal heads; Z 76, Z 78 have frontal heads but their significance is unclear; Pl. 20: Z 43, birth scene, has a profile monster's head.

¹⁵ Hood, APG *Fig. 193*.



Fig. 6–13 6) CMS XI No. 33; 7) CMS XI No. 272; 8) CMS XI No. 301; 9) CMS XIII No. 20;
10) CMS VII No. 159; 11) CMS XIII No. 25; 12) CMS XI No. 176; 13) CMS I No. 46.

whose impassive faces conjure the liminal state of the just deceased.¹⁶

Animals are more frequently characterized by frontal face, but only certain animals within definable contexts. The majority of examples date to the Late Bronze Age. Rare examples of earlier date fall into a different iconographic category since they are images from the Minoan pictographic script which therefore take their form from written prototypes rather than from

¹⁶ Hood, APG Figs. 158, 159; Marinatos – Hirmer, CaM Pls. 163–167 (Pl. 162 shows that the masks do have a profile, but the intention was clearly that they be seen from the front and their form is essentially that of frontality).

contextual idiom. These are the cat and the owl.¹⁷ The creatures which are depicted symbolically with frontal face — those with which we are concerned here — are the lion and bull. It is partly their relationship as predator-prey, and more specifically their role in the sacrificial rite which entitles them to the use of this convention. It is no coincidence that it is precisely these two creatures whose heads are represented in 3-dimensions as libations vessels.¹⁸

In the theme of man against lion (largely a Mycenaean theme) a number of glyptic scenes use frontal face for the lion: either with one man against one lion in a battle of strength;¹⁹ two men against a central, defeated lion (*Fig. 6*);²⁰ or two man-lion duals (as in the ring in the Musée Danicourt, *Fig. 7*).²¹ It is the imminent death of the lion which is expressed in the frontal face, just as it is in the fleeing man in the Ayia Triada ring impression in *Fig. 5*. To emphasize this point, slaughtered lions carried upside down like skins or carcasses by a man (as on the seal now in Vienna shown in *Fig. 8*) or carried on a pole by a genius (as on a seal in Berlin)²² are also depicted frontally. Here, it is not just the face but the upper body and front legs which are twisted round to confront the spectator.

A number of seals showing a solitary lion have the beast frontal face. Several have contorted bodies, twisting round the upper part of the body, expressive of the wounded and dieing animal.²³ Some are actually wounded, spear or arrow sticking into their backs.²⁴

But the most frequent occurrence of frontal face for the lion is in its role as predator (and this applies not only to seals but also to Mycenaean ivories).²⁵ Two lions attack a central beast (*Fig. 9*), or, more commonly, a single lion or lioness lunges into the attack, twisting neck, shoulders and head to face the spectator (*Fig. 10*).²⁶ The prey is most often bovine. It is a curious fact that in animal hunts (rather than man-animal hunts) it is not the dieing prey but the attacking predator that is depicted frontally. In other words it is again the lion to whom the convention is applied. This is a function of the symbolism of the lion as a

¹⁷ Cat: Hood, APG Fig. 214; CMS VII No. 45c (identified as a lion); schematized head: CMS I No. 423; II,2 No. 3; II,2 No. 282; IV No. 132a; VIII No. 34; X No. 280; XII No. 100. Owl: CMS II,5 No. 311 (Phaestos) curiously shown with ram's (?) horns. Evans, SM I 209 sign 75 (cat) (cf. 74); 210 sign 78 (owl). It should be noted that the bucranium or animal head (discussed below) also appears as signs in the pictographic script: 196 sign 38; 206f. sign 63 (bull), and 207f. sign 67 (sheep).

¹⁸ Lion: Marinatos — Hirmer, CaM Pls. 99 (Knossos). 176 (Mycenae); S. Marinatos, Excavations at Thera II (1969) Pl. 37,1; V Pl. 80. Bull: Marinatos — Hirmer, CaM Pls. 98 (Knossos). 175 (Mycenae).

¹⁹ CMS I No. 9 (Shaft Grave III); or man fleeing: CMS I No. 359 (Pylos).

²⁰ Cf. CMS I No. 331, Pylos; I No. 224 (Vapheio), lion contorted and tied up.

²¹ Cf. CMS I Suppl. No. 173; I No. 307 (Pylos sealings); the compositional form is remarkably similar in all three.

²² CMS XI No. 37.

²³ CMS I Nos. 43. 84 (Mycenae). 508 (Crete).

²⁴ CMS I No. 248 (Vapheio); I Suppl. Nos. 80. 81 (Crete).

²⁵ E.g. J.-C. Poursat, Catalogue des Ivoires Myceniens du Musée National D'Athens, Paris 1977, Pls. L 453 and 454 (= Hood, APG 122e: Spata); Hood, APG Fig. 112 (Athens); J.-C. Poursat, Les Ivoires Myceniens, Paris 1977, Pl. V,5 (Thebes).

²⁶ Cf. CMS XI No. 170.

perpetrator of death²⁷ and, on occasion, sacrificial officiant²⁸ (equivalent in the animal world to the human hunter or the priest); as an apotropaic guardian;²⁹ and (in both capacities) as an earthly infiltrator into the liminal zone through association with the deity (a role which will be considered below).

In scenes of animal hunts, the prey — which is usually though not exclusively bull — is shown in profile head. Only very few examples show full-face prey: all are bull. The animal is hunted by a lion,³⁰ by a griffin,³¹ or by both.³²

The close relationship between the predator-prey is expressed in the seal in the Boston Museum shown in *Fig. 11*, where confronting lion and bull are joined at the head, which is bull and is again frontal; and in a seal impression from Pylos in which two animals are joined in a single body, goat-head and legs one end and lion head and legs the other (the goat-head being frontal).³³ The element of death is more specifically expressed in a seal in the Ashmolean Museum which shows two frontal-faced lions joined at the waist beneath which is a bucranium and above which is a figure-of-eight shield;³⁴ and especially in the seal in Munich shown in *Fig. 12*, in which the central frontal head is an animal skull, framed by the necks of heraldic lions whose feet rest on a sacrificial altar. In the seal from Mycenae in *Fig. 13* it is the heraldic lions' heads which join to stare out at the spectator. Again they rest their paws on an altar. The image expresses the potency of the lion as a perpetrator of death and specifically links the beast with the sacrificial rite through the placement of the altar. The same message is conveyed in another seal from Mycenae with griffins³⁵ (who frequently have an interchangeable role with lions in Aegean iconography)³⁶ and the so-called 'impaled triangle', a probable weapon-symbol which, like the altar, has clear sacrificial connotations.³⁷ This theme is best known from the Lion Gate at Mycenae. There each animal rests its paws on an altar, between which is a column surmounted by an entablature of beam-ends symbolic of a palatial shrine.³⁸ From the positions of their necks it is clear that the now-missing heads were turned frontally to confront the visitors as they approached the entrance to the palatial ancient. Their association with the deity/ies is expressed by the altar

²⁷ See esp. L. Morgan in: Klados. Essays in Honour of Professor J.N. Coldstream. Institute of Classical Studies, BICS Suppl. 63, 1994 forthcoming; N. Marinatos in: Hägg — Nordquist, Celebrations 143ff.; J. Weingarten in: CMS Beih. 3, 299ff. (302–305). Consider, in terms of frontal face, the lions gripping a sword on a hilt from Shaft Grave circle B: Hood, APG Fig. 173.

²⁸ Marinatos, MSR 43. 45.

²⁹ Morgan, MWPT 45f.

³⁰ CMS XI No. 43; V,2 No. 602 (Mycenae); I No. 70 (Mycenae) with plant.

³¹ CMS XI No. 46; Kenna, CS No. 342 Pl. 13.

³² CMS VII No. 116 (lion and bull both frontal face).

³³ CMS I No. 381.

³⁴ Kenna, CS No. 336 Pl. 13.

³⁵ CMS I No. 73.

³⁶ See Morgan, MWPT 52ff.

³⁷ As discussed by Marinatos, MSR 61ff.

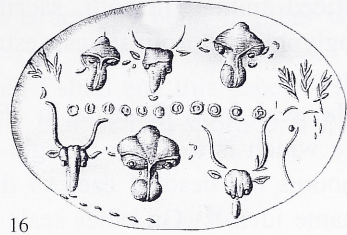
³⁸ Illus.: Hood, APG 101 Fig. 82; Marinatos — Hirmer, CaM Pl. 141. On beam-ends see Morgan, MWPT 74ff.



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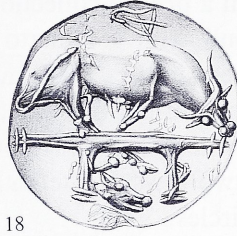
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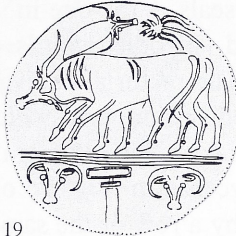
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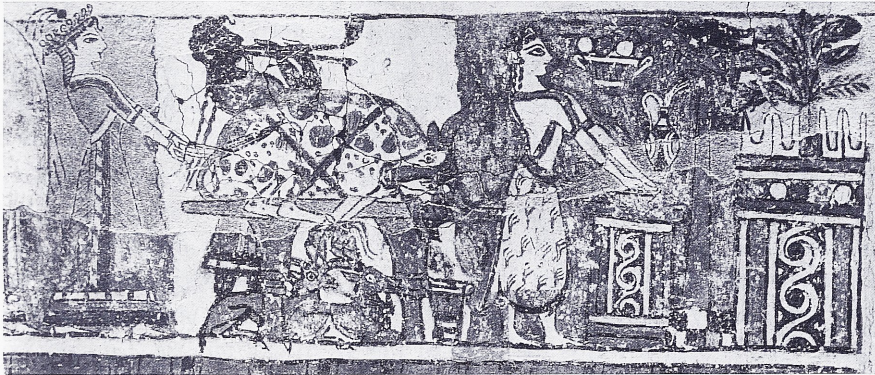
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Fig. 14–20 14) CMS VIII No. 141; 15) CMS I No. 203; 16) CMS I No. 18; 17) CMS II,4 No. 158; 18) CMS II,3 No. 338; 19) Composite drawing of a sealing from Knossos; 20) Detail from the Ayia Triada sarcophagus.

and beam-ends and their posture intimates their function as apotropaic creatures who ward off evil, while alluding to their symbolic association with death and sacrifice.

It is with the bull that the sacrificial element in the iconography of death becomes explicit.³⁹ There are relatively few extant examples of frontal-face bull where the whole animal is shown, but there are large numbers of examples of the bucranium or head of the

³⁹ On bull-sacrifice see in particular J.A. Sakellarakis, *PZ* 45, 1970, 135ff.; Marinatos, *MSR*.

sacrificed animal. In both, sacrificial adjuncts are added to the scenes. These function like hieroglyphic determinatives, establishing for the viewer the symbolic significance of the image.

The seal from Gournia in *Fig. 17* joins two heraldic bulls into a single frontal head, above which is a figure-of-eight shield.⁴⁰ In a seal in New York the sacrificial double axe surmounts the head of each of the two bulls and between them lies a pictograph expressing the same idea.⁴¹ On other seals the double axe appears above the bull's head without body (*Fig. 28*);⁴² and on a sealing in the Heraklion Museum an 'impaled triangle' is placed between the horns of the bucranium.⁴³

Two seals — the one in *Fig. 14* in a private collection and one from Kalyvia⁴⁴ — show a contorted, in other words dieing, bull with a hitherto unidentified symbol of three small circles. The pictorial equivalent of these in life eludes me (I wonder if they are related to the misnamed 'beam ends' which signify a shrine) but that they are sacrificial symbols is shown by the seal in *Fig. 15* from Naplion where the trussed bull lies on an altar, and from the ring from Mycenae in *Fig. 16* on which two rows of alternating lion/bull heads in frontal face are divided by a row of the same small circles.

The trussed-bull image in *Fig. 15* is best known from the Ayia Triada sarcophagus (*Fig. 20*), on which the convention of frontal face is again applied to the slaughtered bull, as it is in the seal in the Iraklion Museum shown in *Fig. 18* on which an 'impaled triangle', indicative of a weapon, lies in the field above the slaughtered bull, while the skull of another victim lies beneath the altar. In a seal now in Berlin, the sacrificed goat is shown in profile, but the legs of the altar are formed of stylized bucrania.⁴⁵ That theme is picked up in the sealing from Knossos (the drawing of which was made by Margaret Gill from two fragments) shown in *Fig. 19*.⁴⁶ Above are two frontal-face bulls, shown to be sacrificial by the bucrania below the platform as well as by the bent palm tree, also included in the Berlin seal, where the dagger at the neck of the beast leaves no room for doubt as to interpretation. Nanno Marinatos has shown that the palm tree has the iconographic function of marking a sacred spot, particularly in relation to sacrifice.⁴⁷ Added to this is the fact that on both these seals the palm tree is bent towards the head of the sacrificial animal. I do not believe this is because it follows the curve of the sealstone, as some might wish to argue, since it would be quite within the bounds of convention to place the tree upright, rising from behind the beast's back. Rather, I would suggest that the bent tree alludes to the desired presence of the deity for whom the sacrifice is intended. In cult scenes of the so-called 'shaking of the tree',

⁴⁰ On the figure-of-eight shield as a sacrificial symbol see: Marinatos, MSR 52ff. The joined head is repeated in CMS XI No. 249, here in the centre of a circle of 3 bulls.

⁴¹ CMS XII No. 250; cf. CMS II,3 No. 310 ('Sitia').

⁴² Cf. CMS II,3 No. 11; XIII No. 15.

⁴³ Marinatos, MSR 62 Fig. 52.

⁴⁴ CMS II,3 No. 101.

⁴⁵ CMS XI No. 52.

⁴⁶ M. Gill in: CMS Beih. 0, 36 Fig. 1; the top fragment is illustrated in CMS I No. 515.

⁴⁷ N. Marinatos, OpAth 15, 1984, 115ff. See also ead. in: CMS Beih. 3, 127ff.

interpreted as an act which induces the epiphany,⁴⁸ the tree is actually bent, in other words pulled forward, rather than shaken (*see Fig. 32*).

Before returning to the presence of the deity — with which I shall end this paper — let us consider two other contexts in which the frontal face occurs: that of bull-sports and that of the man-beast or so-called 'minotaur'. The two are related.

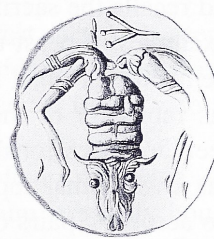
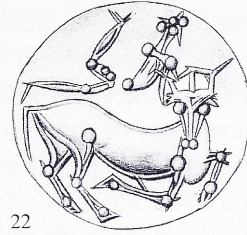
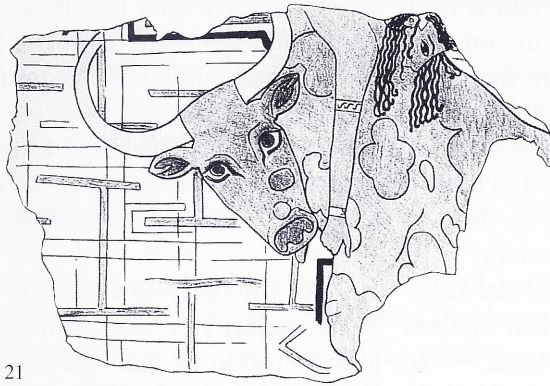


Fig. 21–23 21) Drawing of a Minoan wall painting fragment from Tell el Dab'a, Egypt; 22) CMS II,4 No. 157; 23) CMS XII No. 245.

An astonishing fragment of a Minoan wall painting was recently unearthed at Tell el Dab'a (ancient Avaris, the Hyksos capital in Egypt) in the eastern Nile Delta, (*Fig. 21*). It belongs to a group of paintings showing bull sports, processional male figure(s), landscape, and, judging from what appear to be dress fragments, large-scale female figures, and is dated by the excavator, Manfred Bietak, to the end of the Hyksos period.⁴⁹ Against a background of a labyrinth pattern is a taureador vaulting over the back of a bull whose frontal face dominates the picture. From the position of what remains of the front leg, it looks as though it was bent. His tongue lolls from his mouth. These are all, I believe, signs alluding to the

⁴⁸ Most recently: Marinatos, MR 185ff.

⁴⁹ M. Bietak, *Egyptian Archaeology* 2, 1992, 26ff. Id., *Ägypten und Levante* 4, 1994, 44ff. Pls. 14–22. The paintings were the topic of discussion at a Colloquium at the British Museum in July 1994 (proceedings forthcoming) and at a conference in Vienna in September 1994 (*Ägypten und Levante* forthcoming).

sacrificial role of the bull in Aegean religion. Though not an aspect of bull sports in paintings found in the Aegean, this frontal face does occur on some sealstones, as on that from Gournes shown in *Fig. 22*.⁵⁰ On all examples the front knees are bent, collapsing beneath the animal in an imminent fall. On one, in the Ashmolean Museum, the sacrificial symbol of the figure-of-eight is placed next to the bull's head.⁵¹ In the case of the Tell el Dab'a painting, it is unlikely that the sport depicted was actually practised in Egypt. Rather the scene alludes to a ritual activity which occurred at the palace of Knossos, itself suggested by the labyrinthine pattern. If, as seems to be the case, the paintings decorated a Minoan shrine abroad, what would have been required locally as an offering to the deity is the sacrificial ritual. The use of the frontal face therefore alludes to sacrifice, a probable function of the bull-sports where the ritual killing of a bull is likely to have occurred after the show.

A frequent form of the bull-man — or 'minotaur' — is in a contorted, acrobatic pose, the man's legs swinging up and away from the bull's torso, or the bull's head contorted down from his body and the whole form twisted at the waist so that the man's legs swing round to drop down behind. In both cases the inspiration for the form is surely derived from the bull sports — the frontal part from the bull, the back part from the acrobat (*cf. Fig. 22*).⁵² This reference to the bull-sports is evident in the seal in *Fig. 23*, now in New York, and the frontal head recalls the sacrificial bucranium.

Some examples of beast-man have frontal face⁵³ and one (in a private collection in Basel) has the disembodied frontal head of a man adjacent.⁵⁴ The majority of beast-men (outside the multifarious monsters of the Zakro Master)⁵⁵ are a combination of bull and man, though goat or deer are occasionally combined, either with man or with lion.⁵⁶ Sometimes the monster has two animal top-halves with one pair of human legs;⁵⁷ and in the example in *Fig. 23* two acrobatic pairs of human legs are combined with frontal face bull's head.

The specific animal-human combinations are significant. Occasionally, a lion-man is depicted, as in a seal from Mycenae where the frontal face of the beast attacking its prey is again a presentiment of death,⁵⁸ or in another seal in which a frontal-face lion-man attacks a

⁵⁰ Cf. CMS VII Nos. 108, 257; X No. 141; Kenna, CS No. 341 Pl. 13; also CMS VII No. 106 with collapsing bull but without taureador.

⁵¹ Kenna, CS No. 341 Pl. 13.

⁵² Discussed, with examples by L. Morgan in: CMS Beih. 3, 145ff. (151ff.).

⁵³ I. Pini in: L. Marangou (ed.), *Minoan and Greek Civilization from the Mitsotakis Collection* (1992), 219 No. 294; CMS I No. 77; II,3 No. 332 and VII No. 123 (both double-headed, lion- or bull-head frontal, goat profile); CMS X No. 232; Kenna, CS No. 323 Pl. 13 (double); Marinatos — Hirmer, CaM Pl. 119 (centre) = Sakellariou, *CollGiam* 63 No. 379.

⁵⁴ CMS X No. 145.

⁵⁵ D.G. Hogarth, *JHS* 22, 1902, 76ff.; Weingarten, *Zakro Master*.

⁵⁶ E.g. CMS VII No. 124 (goat-lion?); VII No. 138 (deer-man?).

⁵⁷ CMS VII No. 123; II,3 No. 332 (both of which have one frontal head); Kenna, CS No. 323 Pl. 13; and CMS XI No. 336; VII No. 126, genius-man with two dog top halves extending from the waist (perhaps not intended as a multiple monster but as three creatures, the two dogs being 'behind').

⁵⁸ CMS I No. 77.

bull-man, linking the themes of predator-prey with that of the minotaur.⁵⁹ In these examples the analogy between lion and man the hunter prevalent in Aegean (specifically Mycenaean) iconography becomes manifest in the monster.

Sacrifice is also alluded to in some beast-man images, through the symbols of figure-of-eight shield and 'impaled triangle',⁶⁰ or the star, a symbol which also occurs above the head of bucrania⁶¹ as well as in cult scenes where it sometimes signifies the sun.⁶² On a seal from the Idean cave the star appears by an altar surmounted by horns of consecration and sacred boughs.⁶³ On another seal, in a private collection in New York, a sacrificial head lies in the field beside the bull-man.⁶⁴ Also on that seal, like that from the Idean cave, is a plant, a regenerative motif which occurs on other examples with beast-man⁶⁵ and is a frequent glyptic symbol. It brings us to the final observations on the topic of this paper, which concern the continuum of life and death.

A leafy plant, whether a branch or a tree, has the unambiguous signification in ancient art of renewed life. In Aegean glyptic it is, on occasion, juxtaposed with scenes pertaining to death in a contrast which evokes the continuum of existence through regeneration. It occurs on either side of a bucranium;⁶⁶ below the dueling men and lions in the ring in *Fig. 7*; and in association with a prey or sacrificial animal above whose back lies a figure-of-eight shield.⁶⁷

The gold ring from Vapheio in *Fig. 32* is of particular interest. The cult scene includes various related sub-elements which make up the theme. On one side is the ritual of 'shaking' — i.e. pulling down — the tree. It is pulled towards the central female figure who is dancing, it is assumed, either as an enactment of, or as an inducement for, an epiphany. Above her head, to which the boughs of the tree almost reach, is an object often interpreted as an insect, but which, with others, I see as a bucranium. Above the bucranium is a leafy bough. On the other side are symbols of the sacrificial rite — the double axe (above) and a figure-of-eight shield, here shown in profile. Attached to the shield is the sacred garment of the goddess.

⁵⁹ Evans, PM IV 589 *Fig. 586*; CMS II,3 No. 10 from Knossos, may show the same theme, though the animals are hard to recognize.

⁶⁰ Both symbols: CMS XI No. 251; figure-of-eight shield: CMS I No. 216 (Prosymna); VII No. 123; IX No. 128; XII No. 238; Kenna, CS *Fig. 117* No. 322; 'impaled triangle': CMS II,3 No. 67 (Knossos); XI No. 336; Kenna, CS No. 322.

⁶¹ With beast-man: CMS IX No. 128 (with figure-of-eight-shield); XI No. 336 (with 'impaled triangle'); Kenna, CS *Fig. 128* No. 325. With bucrania: CMS II,3 No. 149 (Mallia); II,3 No. 289 (and plants), 'Psychro'; X No. 68; cf. the rosette on the silver bull's-head rhyton from Shaft Grave IV (Hood, APG 163 *Fig. 157*).

⁶² CMS XI No. 28; cf. *Fig. 44*. See also L. Goodison, *Death, Women and the Sun*, BICS Suppl. 53, 1989, 72ff.

⁶³ CMS II,3 No. 7.

⁶⁴ CMS XIII No. 84.

⁶⁵ CMS IX No. 127; perhaps also in *Fig. 23*.

⁶⁶ CMS XII No. 49.

⁶⁷ CMS V No. 254 (Armeni). On a cylinder seal found at Tiryns (CMS I Suppl. No. 19) the image of griffin-predator subduing goat-prey is pictured above the image of goats flanking a tree of life. In the centre are two frontal-face bull men (whose form and function, however, differ from that in the Aegean, and who are outside the scope of this paper).



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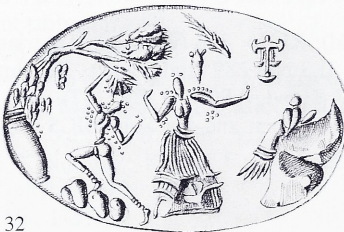
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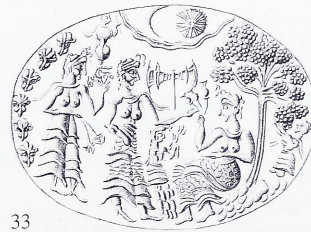
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Fig. 24–33 24) CMS I No. 106; 25) CMS II,3 No. 88; 26) CMS II,3 No. 122; 27) CMS I No. 54;
28) CMS XI No. 259; 29) CMS II,3 No. 8; 30) CMS VII No. 118; 31) CMS XI No. 330;
32) CMS I No. 219; 33) CMS I No. 17.

All of these sub-elements are encountered in the types of scenes we have been considering. That the frontal face bucranium takes such a central position in the scene, above the head of the priestess or goddess-impersonator, is significant. For the elements of life and death — the tree, the axe and shield — come together in the central images of bough and skull. This dimension of renewed life is perceivable in many of the scenes of death in which frontal face plays a role. A clear example is provided by the sealstone from Mycenae in *Fig. 24*, depicting a suckling lion-cub. Both cub and mother have the frontal face, while the lioness has her front legs in the twisted frontal position usually associated in this animal with the killer. To emphasise this part of the duality, an 'impaled triangle' lies behind the cub. On a seal in the Iraklion Museum a lion-cub again suckles (the creatures this time in profile) and the sacrificial elements of figure-of-eight shield and skull lie in the surrounding field.⁶⁸ The lioness's head is twisted back, as it is on the cow in the seal in *Fig. 25* from Knossos. It is the usual position of suckling scenes in Aegean art⁶⁹ and it looks as though the mother is licking the back of her young. However, it will be recalled that this very position is that adopted by the dying animal (*Fig. 14*), the contorted posture of the ultimate collapse, an ambiguity which surely did not go unnoticed by Aegean artists. In the Knossos seal in *Fig. 25* two waterfowl — perhaps another life-giving symbol — flank a central frontal face head above the suckling scene (bringing to mind the Master or Mistress of Animals). The frontal head, or skull, is interpreted in CMS as a human mask, but looks more lionine in the illustration. The duality of life and death is further expressed in a seal from Porti (*Fig. 26*), which shows a lactating lion (lions and lionesses are frequently mixed in Aegean glyptic). Above the lion, facing towards the animal's back-turned head, is a bucranium or disembodied animal head; below the lion, immediately under the full teats, is a plant: death above, life below.⁷⁰ The lactating lioness is not reserved for scenes of suckling, but is also applied to scenes of immediate death. An example is a seal now in the British Museum (*Fig. 10*) where the maned lioness attacks two deer, the symbolism of her teats contrasting with the symbolism of death in her twisted frontal head and legs.⁷¹ The same duality is apparent in a seal from Pylos on which a man attacks a lioness, who stands on her hind legs, her teats extending towards the hunter almost like daggers.⁷²

One symbol relevant to this topic which we have not yet discussed is the sacred robe or skirt, sometimes referred to as the 'sacral knot'. An offering to the goddess and the central element in scenes of the robbing of the priestess, the sacred garment is also associated with sacrificial symbols. It occurs not infrequently with the figure-of-eight shield and/or with the contorted bull,⁷³ as well as with the killer lion.⁷⁴ In the seal from Mycenae in *Fig. 27* it is

⁶⁸ CMS II,3 No. 344.

⁶⁹ E.g. Marinatos — Hirmer, CaM Pl. 71 (below), Temple Repositories faience plaque.

⁷⁰ In CMS V No. 304, death is below, in the form of a lion head or skull, again immediately below the lactating teats of the animal, and life is above the lioness in the form of a water-fowl.

⁷¹ Cf. CMS XIII No. 26, where the frontal-face lioness attacks a bull.

⁷² CMS I No. 290.

⁷³ E.g. CMS XIII Nos. 32. 33. See esp. Marinatos, MSR Figs. 46–48. 63. 65. 66. 72 (fake?). 74.

⁷⁴ E.g. CMS VII No. 125.

placed next to a lion whose frontal face stares directly at us. This association with death as well as with the goddess (which I will discuss in a moment) is accentuated in the seal in *Fig. 28*, now in Berlin. Here a double axe hovers meaningfully above the head of a bucranium on either side of which is a sacred robe. What is the significance of these associations? *Fig. 29* from Knossos, clarifies the latter. A priestess carrying the double axe in one hand and the sacred robe in the other, advances to an unseen presence on the left which must surely be the goddess. The sacrificial bull's head and the sacred robe are both offerings to the deity, but what of the association of the frontal face lion? The lion or lioness is apparently a servant of the goddess(es). It protects, averts evil, perhaps even, as in Egypt, avenges. Certainly it is instrumental in the killing of the sacrificial animal, whose ultimate destination is as an offering to the deity. That the lion also appears to be the enemy of man — as in the duel scenes — should not surprise us. Such duality is commonplace in animal symbolism. In Egypt, the lion as a solar animal symbolised death and destruction at night as well as rebirth in the morning.⁷⁵ The lioness-goddess Sakhmet, who is depicted with a woman's body and lion's head, is the avenger of the sun god Re and a vanquisher of the king's enemies. In one myth, however, her protective destruction runs away with itself when she goes on a blood-thirsty binge aimed at destroying mankind and must be stopped by the wives of Re.⁷⁶ Like life and death, protection and destruction are inseparable.

In a seal from Armeni, a goddess, a life-giving plant behind her, intimately strokes the chin of her lion.⁷⁷ In *Fig. 30*, a seal now in the British Museum, the seated goddess is flanked by two protective lions. The lions' paws rest on her, just as they do on the altar in *Figs. 12 and 13*. Her seat is the frontal face skull or head of a lion. She is protected by the instrument of death. In *Fig. 31*, a seal in a European collection, the goddess or priestess — figure-of-eight shields and the contorted sacrificial ox as the symbols of her sacrifice beside her — actually wears the frontal face mask of the lion. In appropriating the lion-symbol she has herself become the instrument of death.

As a final comment on this symbolism, I shall turn to the Mycenae Acropolis ring, *Fig. 33*. The goddess is seated beneath a tree, from which a child — a reference to new life — picks the fruit. In front of her two women and another child bring offerings of flowers. Right in the centre of the field, directly in front of the goddess, is a double axe, clearly alluding to a sacrificial offering. Above this are symbols for the sun and the moon. Behind, in the upper part of the ring is a tiny figure wearing a figure-of-eight shield. Extending in a curved line from the figure with the shield and occupying the space behind the female offering bearers are six frontal face lion heads or skulls. Just as in the Vapheio ring, the scene is divided into the elements of life on one side and the elements of death on the other with mixed symbolism combining sacrifice and vegetation in the centre. The fruit-bearing tree and the child lie to one side which is surmounted by the sun; the lion heads/skulls and the figure-of-eight shield lie to the other side which is surmounted by the moon: life and day; death and night. The

⁷⁵ M. Lurker, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt* (1982) 77.

⁷⁶ G. Hart, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (1986) 188f.

⁷⁷ CMS V No. 253.

offerings brought to the goddess — flowers and sacrifice, represented by the double axe — take the central position and reflect that duality which is the continuum of existence.