

4. COMPOSITE CREATURES ON SEALS AND SEALINGS

FIXED HYBRIDS

Fixed hybrids are defined as a category of composite creatures that arise on a broad temporal and regional scale: They occur in different Minoan places at the same time and, in most cases, exist over a longer span of time. Due to their overall longer presence than occasional hybrids, fixed hybrids continually evolve adhering to basic conceptual rules while at the same time being altered to fit needs, expectations or tastes of social groups in certain time periods. The composite creatures that are featured in this group are the Minoan Genius, grotesques (often called 'gorgos'), griffins, sphinxes and, finally, the Minoan Dragon. While these creatures all appear on Crete at a similar point in time, at the end of MM II/beginning of MM III, they show different metamorphoses and varying degrees of 'success' throughout the Bronze Age and occur in more media than only seals. Only the group of Minoan grotesques ceases to exist by the Late Minoan period.

4.1 MINOAN GENIUS

The fixed hybrid of this chapter has prompted a large number of studies and scholarly debates. While the identification of the Minoan Genius throughout iconographic media has been very straightforward, the question of its role in Minoan society has been a matter of debate for over a century.²⁰¹ A hybrid with elements of a hippopotamus, leonine legs and human arms, as well as the back of a crocodile had inspired Minoan seal engravers by the time of MM IIB.

While it came to Crete from Egypt, possibly via the Levant,²⁰² it soon became subject to intense changes, providing the former demi-god Tw-3rt (*Taweret*)²⁰³ with an Aegean iconography and identity.²⁰⁴ This entailed a rapid loss of the hippopotamus features, replaced by a leonine head and extremities, and even later by a donkey-like head on the Greek mainland,²⁰⁵ as prominently known from a fresco fragment from

²⁰¹ Cf., for example, Winter 1890, 108; Evans 1935, 430–67.

²⁰² Blakolmer 2015b, 29. An imported Egyptian scarab excavated in Platanos (CMS II5 no. 283) testifies to a first contact with the Egyptian demi-god in the late Pre- or early Protopalatial period on Crete, cf. Panagiotopoulos 2004, 41, n. 35, 42 fig. 12; Sambin 1989, 88, fig. 23. It was adapted by Cretan gem engravers in the same period, cf. Panagiotopoulos 2004, 41, n. 36.

²⁰³ Egyptian *Taweret* was a protective composite deity responsible for women, childbirth and the nursing of children, as well as the underworld. Her image was “attached to beds, head-rests and cosmetic articles, but she is also found in [...] the ‘Book of the Dead’ and even in temple reliefs” (Lurker 1995, 119). A 13th Dynasty predecessor was the male hippopotamus deity Ashaheru, which was later absorbed by *Taweret* (cf. Blakolmer 2015b, 29; 2015a, 198; Sambin 1989, 79–85; Weingarten 1991, 6–10).

²⁰⁴ Panagiotopoulos 2004, 41.

²⁰⁵ Panagiotopoulos 2004, 41.

the Cult Center of Mycenae.²⁰⁶ The crocodile backside is transformed into a “conch-like”²⁰⁷ appendage that does not seem to follow a strict iconography, but is open to variation.²⁰⁸ In Aegean archaeological literature, the minoanized hybrid is referred to as the ‘Minoan Genius’ so as to differentiate it ontologically from its Egyptian antecedent *Taweret*. Moreover, the application of the term considers that it was unlikely that Minoan recipients of the iconography of the Egyptian demi-god were informed about the functions attributed to it in its home country.²⁰⁹ Hard and soft stones were both used for depictions of the Minoan Genius. If the extant record is representative, there was a preference to engrave this motif on hard-stone seals, but soft ones were also common. Alongside 36 hard- and 19 soft-stone seals, only two metal seals depicting the Genius are known,²¹⁰ the Tiryns Ring (**MG.11**) and the impression of a metal signet ring found in Pylos (**MG.21**). The Minoan Genius appears very often in narrative depictions, playing important roles in ritual activities like offering²¹¹ scenes, and thus stands apart from most standard hybrids.

The first typological shape of the adapted hybrid is the so-called “belly-variant;”²¹² named after its large, swollen abdomen that was accompanied by pendulous breasts and the head of a hippopotamus or possibly lion with an open mouth. Two impressions from MM IIB Phaistos (**MG.01–02**) preserve a hybrid that is still recognizable as an antecedent of *Taweret*. This early Minoan Genius, as preserved on other MM seals,²¹³ such as **MG.03**, carries a Minoan single-handled jug.²¹⁴ Throughout time, it continuously and frequently occurs bearing a vessel (cf. **MG.02–03, 05, 07, 09–11, 16, 22–23**). For this reason, it is assumed that it played a major role as a libation pourer in Minoan ritual-scapes.²¹⁵ This is supported by the motif on a stone rhyton in shape of a triton found in a LM IB context in Malia²¹⁶ that displays two Genii involved in a libation ritual.²¹⁷ The smaller of the two pours a liquid into the hands of its counterpart, cleaning or even purifying it. The handle of a bronze krater recovered

²⁰⁶ Marinatos – Hirmer 1973, pl. LVIII.

²⁰⁷ Blakolmer 2015a, 200.

²⁰⁸ However, Blakolmer 2015a, 200 speaks of a standardized form of the dorsal appendage, which can only apply to its general shape and not its detailed execution.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Panagiotopoulos 2004, 41, n. 40. Contra this view: Weingarten 1991, 12 supposes a “close familiarity”.

²¹⁰ The numbers derive from the database created for this study. Due to their amount, not every seal depiction of a Minoan Genius can be discussed here, but all 55 depictions collected for this study are listed in the catalogue.

²¹¹ See Boloti 2016 for an example of a textile-offering Minoan Genius.

²¹² Blakolmer 2015b, 29; 2015a, 198.

²¹³ CMS IIB no. 195; II3 no. 105.

²¹⁴ Blakolmer 2015a, 198 points to the fact that this is a Minoan vessel without Egyptian parallel.

²¹⁵ Rehak 1995, 217–19: “The libation can be targeted at palm trees, an offering table, a stand or altar, a pile of stones, or tripod; however, some scenes do without targets.” Cf. also Weingarten 1991, 12.

²¹⁶ Darcque – Baurain 1983, *passim*.

²¹⁷ Rehak 1995, 217, 230 no. 66.

in Cyprus similarly bears a relief decoration with two Minoan-style Genii similar to the Malia tripod specimens.²¹⁸ Facing each other they each balance an open vessel on their heads. The depiction of two Genii together is also a recurrent theme on seals (cf. **MG.05, 17–19, 21–22**) and often involves the typical libation jug.²¹⁹

The only known MM III seal with the motif of the Minoan Genius, **MG.04**, comes from Kalyvia. While the upper part of the cushion seal is damaged, an open hippopotamus mouth can be recognized. It also has a swollen belly and holds out its hands carrying a quadruped. This constellation also appears frequently on later seals.

After the Middle Minoan period, the Genius underwent a conceptual change, drawing closer to Neopalatial human iconography while at the same time *possibly* switching its gender to male.²²⁰ The loss of the swollen belly and pendulous breasts seems to have correlated to a change in function, extending from the sphere of fertility to a broader spectrum of activities. Blakolmer calls the resulting type the “standard variant.”²²¹ Apart from the now slender, humanoid shape, its extremities transform to leonine forms,²²² while it still prominently bears libation jugs raised with both paws in front of the body (cf. **MG.05, 07–08**). This is suggestive of its persistent responsibility for fertility, involving watering and libation rituals. Interestingly, the posture of raised arms is also configured in scenes where the Genius does not handle jugs (e.g. **MG.12–15**) – this has led Blakolmer to conclude:

[...] holding a jug with both paws [...] became a stereotypical, de-contextualized, ‘petrified’ iconic formula firmly connected with the creature itself, irrespective of his distinct activities.²²³

The term ‘fixed hybrid’ thus also applies on the level of the motif which has become “a static, template-like, abstract emblem of formulaic character”²²⁴ that remained popular throughout the Late Bronze Age on Crete and the mainland. A characteristic of the Minoan Genius is its appearance in pairs or even larger numbers. This is a commonality with other fixed hybrids, i.e. griffins and Minoan Dragons.²²⁵ Like the griffin it can be encountered in *potnios theron* compositions (e.g. **OH.47, MG.22–24**). However, unlike griffins, it can also assume the role of the *potnios* (e.g. **MG.20, 24**).

²¹⁸ Crouwel – Morris 2015, 155–58. I would like to thank Dr. Charlotte Langohr for pointing this out to me.

²¹⁹ Cf. *CMS* I no. 232; IS no. 137; II3 no. 112b; VI nos. 309–11; VIII no. 65; XII no. 302.

²²⁰ This process is highly debatable as the gender of the MM Genius is not clear. Blakolmer uses the neutral ‘it’ when speaking about the MM Genius, and the male ‘he’ for the later representations (Blakolmer 2015a, *passim*), while asserting that its sex is now “an obviously male one” (Blakolmer 2015a, 200). Weingarten posits a female sex, referring to it as ‘her’ (Weingarten 1991, *passim*). This paper simply uses ‘it’ in order to prevent interpretive bias.

²²¹ Blakolmer 2015b, 29.

²²² Blakolmer 2015a, 200.

²²³ Blakolmer 2015b, 30–31.

²²⁴ Blakolmer 2015b, 31.

²²⁵ Blakolmer 2015b, 31.



Fig. 7 Becoming (para-)human? Minoan Genii in human roles. Top row: MG.14; MG.20; MG.13. Bottom row: MG.22; CMS II8 no. 250; II4 no. 111.

Accordingly, it must be acknowledged to have more agency than other fixed hybrids, which do not dominate compositional scenes. This fact is also supported by other compositions that feature Genii: leading a bull or lion; killing (hunting?) a bull; and carrying different quadrupeds (bulls, lions, goats, deer)²²⁶ which Rehak identifies as victims.²²⁷

A particularity of the Genius is that it always appears as a creature in control of itself and the situation, which sets it apart from animals of power although it might be classified as one. It never appears feral like the wild beasts on other seals, nor is it ever depicted in a narrative of defeat.²²⁸ Rather, the Minoan Genius substitutes humans that otherwise feature in similar or the same scenes on different seals (*fig. 7*).²²⁹

Intriguingly, it can even take up the role of a human and handle humans instead of animals, as can be seen on **MG.13** from Patras, on which a Genius carries a man. While Rehak comments that it would be tempting to interpret the man as a sacrificial victim, he assumes that this is not the case, pointing out the man's pose "with the left arm crossed over the chest and the right extended [...]".²³⁰ He goes on to assume that "this cannot be a moribund figure, like the limp stags and bulls in other representations,"²³¹ however, neither can he propose a solution, offering solely the possibility that the "seal may represent a change in plan on part of the craftsman."²³²

²²⁶ Leading a bull: CMS VI no. 304-05. Leading a lion: CMS VI no. 306. Killing a bull: CMS II7 no. 31. Carrying quadrupeds: CMS IX no. 129; VS1B no. 167; VI no. 307.

²²⁷ Rehak 1995, 219.

²²⁸ Blakolmer 2015a, 206.

²²⁹ Leading a bull: CMS II8 no. 211 (note the interesting parallel arm posture!). Leading a lion: CMS II3 no. 24. Killing a bull: CMS II6 no. 37. Carrying quadrupeds: CMS II4 no. 111; XI no. 301.

²³⁰ Rehak 1995, 220-21. Blakolmer 2015b, 32 assumes that the man is dead.

²³¹ Rehak 1995, 221.

²³² Rehak 1995, 221.

Yet, two considerations need to be pointed out: First, no matter whether this motif is a spontaneous creation or a planned and carefully executed work of craftsmanship, it invariably depicts a narrative with a realistic, understandable meaning to a contemporary observer in the LBA. Second, the human figure could be a key to understanding the scene. It is a man clad in a loincloth and wearing a circlet around the neck. This combination can be found in close parallel on another seal also dating to LB II–III A1 (*CMS* VI no. 336) that shows a bull leaper with strong similarities to the man carried by the Genius – not only because he wears the same garment and necklace, but also on stylistic grounds (the rendering of the facial features, muscles and length of the limbs). Rehak has commented on the similarity between the carried man’s posture and that of bull-leapers or ‘minotaurs’ (which are here called bull-men, cf. ch. 3.1) in general.²³³ Either display an “extended, curving pose”²³⁴ that makes use of the lentoid seal face they are engraved on. Therefore, a different interpretation of the scene is proposed here: The Minoan Genius, acting as a protective figure, is on this seal supporting an injured man who is clutching the wound at his breast that may have resulted from bull-leaping. Wounded leapers are commonly depicted on various media.²³⁵ Moreover, the Minoan Genius also appears in a protective role, flanking possibly divine figures, and, in another case, assisting a man in combat with a lion.²³⁶

Another instance in which the Genius is elevated to a divine level is on **MG.14**, where it assumes the central position between two humans in an antithetical composition reminding²³⁷ of *potnios theron* scenes (however, in this case, the term *potnios anthropon* would be more appropriate). Not only does the Minoan Genius thus assume human roles; in handling humans, it transcends human behavior, as none of the extant representations on seals show humans being carried like an animal or flanking a central *potnios* figure. Rehak posits the interpretation that the Genius had turned into an “object of veneration in its own right”²³⁸ by the time of LB II–III. “Occurring [...] in highly unusual scenes”²³⁹ such as the ones in *fig. 7*. The Genius possesses many capabilities and has a strong potential to exert agency that go beyond its original role in libation rituals.

²³³ Rehak 1995, 220.

²³⁴ Rehak 1995, 220.

²³⁵ E.g. on the ‘Boxer Rhyton’, where the leaper’s leg is impaled by the bull’s horn, cf. Evans 1930, 224 fig. 157; or in the case of an assistant to a bull leaper on a taureador fresco, cf. Bietak et al. 2007, 124 fig. 112; or a bull leaper who hits the ground on another fresco, cf. Bietak et al. 2007, 125 fig. 115. *CMS* I18 no. 227 shows another such occasion.

²³⁶ *CMS* I no. 379; XI no. 208 (frontispiece). Cf. Blakolmer 2015b, 31–32.

²³⁷ While human *potnioi* are depicted in frontal or three-quarters view with the arms stretched out to the animals on either side, the Genius is rendered in the standard emblematic profile depiction with its typical arm posture. However, this hybrid is never depicted frontally, so the scene should nevertheless be interpreted as a *potnios theron/anthropon* scene.

²³⁸ Rehak 1995, 228.

²³⁹ Blakolmer 2015b, 30.

Scenes common for human figures that have been interpreted as deities, due to their prominent position and enforced by the presence of subdued wild animals or even fantastical creatures, can also feature Genii. Blakolmer convincingly describes this as a reinforcement of the hybrid's "supernatural character comparable to that of deities,"²⁴⁰ a facet the author has advocated with considerable evidence.²⁴¹ Its divine character has also been espoused earlier by Sambin, who made an important observation:

*Le génie minoen se révèle plus puissant que les hommes, moins inaccessible que les dieux. C'est donc un intermédiaire entre les deux sphères humaine et divine.*²⁴²

The material evidence for a divine character has been discussed above, yet the Minoan Genius should not be seen on an equal level to anthropomorphic deities in Minoan and Mycenaean religion. This is evidenced by scenes that show the hybrid as a servant of such (supposed) divine figures.²⁴³ On the Tiryns ring, a procession of four Genii bearing libation pitchers approaches a seated woman in elaborate clothing holding up a Minoan chalice.²⁴⁴ Because of her size, slightly overtowering the standing Genii, and her seated posture, she is interpreted as a goddess on the basis of iconographic conventions.

Another feature that is attributed to goddesses, the head-gear conventionally termed 'snake-frame,'²⁴⁵ is worn by an upright female figure flanked by rampant deer on a sealing from Pylos, **MG.21**. Behind these are at least one, but plausibly two, Minoan Genii balancing each an upright stick on their palms.²⁴⁶ Given these two examples, Sambin's interpretation of the Minoan Genius as an intermediary between the spheres of humans and gods stands to reason.

The iconography of the *standard variant* continues throughout the Neopalatial period on Crete as well as the mainland (up until LH IIIB1),²⁴⁷ while an increasing preference for Genii in antithetical compositions flanking a central element, such as a column or plant, can be observed, *e.g.* on **MG.17–19**.²⁴⁸ This poses some contrast to the narrative scenes from LM I on that preferably show the Genius in intercourse with animals or humans, as on **MG.11–15**. However, the motif of leading a quadruped is also

²⁴⁰ Blakolmer 2015b, 33.

²⁴¹ Blakolmer 2015b, *passim*.

²⁴² Sambin 1989, 93.

²⁴³ Concerning the difficulties in identifying or differentiating Bronze Age deities *cf.* Blakolmer 2005, 33.

²⁴⁴ Rehak 1995, 225.

²⁴⁵ Rehak 1995, 226.

²⁴⁶ *CMS* I no. 379. A similar composition showing a Genius with a branch in paw and a rampant quadruped was also found on a nearly contemporary ivory pyxis from Dendra: Rehak 1995, 227, fig. 9, 231 no. 72.

²⁴⁷ The latest example comes from an ivory plaque from Thebes; Blakolmer 2015a, 201; Rehak 1995, 218 fig. 2, 219.

²⁴⁸ *CMS* I no. 231; II3 no. 112b; II8 no. 199; V no. 367; VI nos. 309–11; VIII no. 65; XII no. 302.

recurrent.²⁴⁹ Possibly, it is out of the *standard variant* that a new stylistic form of the Genius evolves, termed “insect-agrimi variant”²⁵⁰ by Blakolmer. Representatives of this type (e.g. **MG.17–21**) display an ovoid body shape, slim and long legs, “often with double-drilled eyes reminiscent of a wasp-like insect”²⁵¹ (cf. **MG.18**).

On some variants, such as **MG.18–19**, a long curved line with knobs sprouts from the head arcing back and down along the length of the back or appendage. Blakolmer compares this to “the horns of the Cretan wild-goats (agrimia),”²⁵² which is why the type is called *insect-agrimi variant*.

In LH IIIB the continuous transformation²⁵³ of the Genius led to yet another type with the head of a donkey. Blakolmer attributes this change to a transformation from the iconographic carrier of seals to large-scale media such as wall-paintings, in the process of which occurred an “individual transformation by misinterpreting the standardised components of this creature.”²⁵⁴ However, while it should be acknowledged that the transformation from one medium to another, larger one, has the potential of altering and adding details, it is misleading to attribute this to a misinterpretation of standardised components. The Minoan Genius has proven to be a hybrid with a strong availability for modification, being fitted and re-fitted on an iconographical, but also highly likely on a semantic level, to suit changing social expectations and needs. While certain elements were obviously deemed as necessary components (such as the dorsal appendage, upright posture, and position of the arms), the Genius never reached a level of true standardisation – a result that would have run counter to its mutability. Moreover, the Minoan Genius was capable of such variation because, as a hybrid, it still remained easily recognizable due to the unique combination of composite elements – even when single parts such as the head were substituted – which set it apart from other Aegean hybrids. Besides, its interactive agency would contribute to its recognition.

The importance of the Minoan Genius seems to have increased in Mycenaean times, during which it develops to an emblem of palatial ideology. On the mainland, it featured at “most of the major centers of power in IIIB contexts (Mycenae, Pylos, Tiryns,

²⁴⁹ Blakolmer 2015a, 200.

²⁵⁰ Blakolmer 2015a, 200.

²⁵¹ Blakolmer 2015a, 200.

²⁵² Blakolmer sees his observation as further evidence for “a continued ‘Minoanisation’ by an approximation of the autochthonous Cretan wild-goat,” (2015a, 200–01) this observation cannot be endorsed on basis of the iconographic data.

²⁵³ The word ‘transformation’ is employed in the sense of Hahn’s theory of appropriation, that includes, on the fourth and final level, *transformation*, meaning “the attribution of new meanings to objects, which very much depends on the local context where the object is used” (Stockhammer 2012, 48; cf. here for a concise theory of appropriation). In this manner, the Minoan Genius is the ‘object’ of transformation.

²⁵⁴ Blakolmer 2015a, 205.

Thebes)²⁵⁵ where it left its native medium of seals and became part of prestigious media of display, such as wall-paintings, ivories and ornamental glass plaques probably intended as burial offerings.²⁵⁶

The only signet rings displaying the Genius come from LH III mainland contexts, the Tiryns Ring **MG.11** and the impression of another signet ring, **MG.21**. This prestigious material and the large size of the rings emphasize the importance of the hybrid.²⁵⁷ Again, the Minoan Genius proves its strong potential to be transformed according to the needs of a social group and to become fully absorbed in the respective material culture. The once Egyptian demi-god has become fully traditionalized²⁵⁸ by the Late Bronze Age and probably had little or even nothing in common with the functions of *Taweret*.

4.2 MINOAN GROTESQUES

The images in this category have conventionally been termed ‘gorgos’ – which is in fact an anachronistic term derived from the archaic and classical Greek myth of Medusa and her two sisters Sthenno and Euryale from the island of Sarpedon.²⁵⁹ Going backwards in history from Hesiod’s mention of the Gorgo in his *Theogonia*,²⁶⁰ one encounters the *gorgoneion*, the head of this monster, in Homer’s *Iliad* as an attribute of the goddess Athena and borne on the shield of Agamemnon as a daunting and deterring image.²⁶¹ The iconography of archaic *gorgoneia* shows close ties to motifs from the Middle Minoan period, as will be demonstrated below. This has led to a transmission of the Greek term to the Bronze Age images in the literature. However, a similarity in iconography does not imply a similarity in the concepts and notions attached to a motif. Therefore, the designation ‘gorgo’ is rejected here and replaced by the more unbiased term ‘grotesque’.²⁶²

²⁵⁵ Rehak 1995, 229.

²⁵⁶ For a detailed description cf. Rehak 1995, esp. 229–30.

²⁵⁷ MG.11 measures L/W 5.6/3.52 cm; the fragmented impression MG.21 preserves 2.65/1.2 cm.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Hahn 2005, 103–04.

²⁵⁹ Hes. Th. 276f.; POxy 61, 4099; Apollod. 3, 10, 3. For further ancient sources cf. Bremmer 2006, New Pauly Online http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_dnp_e426440 (last accessed 23/08/18).

²⁶⁰ Hesiod can most certainly be dated after Homer, for more on this subject cf. Arrighetti 2006, New Pauly Online http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_dnp_e512160 (last accessed 23/08/18).

²⁶¹ Hom. Il. 5, 741 describes the *gorgoneion* as an attribute of Athena: ἐν δέ τε Γοργείη κεφαλὴ δεινοῖο πελώρου / δεινὴ τε σμερδνὴ τε [...]. In Il. 11, 15–46, Homer describes how Agamemnon arms himself for battle, his shield bearing a *gorgoneion* as central image: τῆ δ’ ἐπὶ μὲν Γοργῶ βλοσυρῶπις ἔστεφάνωτο / δεινὸν δερκομένη, περὶ δὲ Δεῖμὸς τε Φόβος τε (Hom. Il., 11, 35f.). Note that one effect of this image is in both cases *δειμὸς*, “terror”, also *φόβος*, “fear”, in the case of Agamemnon, because it is terrible to look upon (*σμερδνὴ*, from *σμερδαλέος*). English translation based on LSJ.

²⁶² While this line of thought also holds true for the terms ‘griffin’ and ‘sphinx’ the latter are more difficult to replace, because they are firmly established designations for a definite group of hybrid creatures. This is not the case for the grotesques discussed in this chapter.

From the array of seal faces covered by this study it was possible to reconstruct several typological criteria for grotesque representations. All criteria are applicable to the first typological group, which is therefore called the *archetype group*. The term *archetype* applies only to the Minoan grotesques without taking foreign prototypes into consideration.

The shape of the head is the decisive criterion for defining a grotesque. It can be separated into the following classes: a rather narrow, rounded forehead and very prominent plastic ‘apple-cheeks’ that extend the frame of the face creating what Anastasiadou has called a “heart-shaped lower half”²⁶³ with the chin as its tip; however, the chin is not pointed but rather rounded. The ears connect the narrow forehead with the middle part of the head, the protruding cheeks. This is a second defining criterion. Thirdly, the facial features are rather grotesque due to an over-large rendering of eyes, ears and nose. In most depictions, the grotesques’ mouth is open with extruding teeth or tongue, turning the facial expression to a grimace. Its head is always topped by short, spikey hair. Finally, there is one difference between hard and soft-stone grotesques in that versions on hard-stone prisms also have long, curving incisions that remind of locks of hair (“J-spirals” or “S-spirals”)²⁶⁴ protruding from the sides of their heads which can be seen especially well on **Gr.01**, whereas other hard-stone versions do not show the single strands of ‘hair’, but rather schematic outlines. A secure identification of this as a depiction of hair is not possible, but the notion suggests itself due to the arrangement on the sides of the head. It could also be horns, assumption that can be made regarding the soft stone grotesques. On soft stones, these spiral locks are missing. Instead, two seals show elongated incisions on the sides of the head that might contest to the feature on hard stones. The first example is **Gr.06**, a lost soft-stone seal first published by Chapouthier in 1932.²⁶⁵ Only a schematic sketch and a murky photography has survived, but the drawing has preserved the lines on the seal, which look like “saw branches”²⁶⁶ that Chapouthier calls twigs (“*rameau[x]*”)²⁶⁷. The second example is the steatite prism **Gr.05** that displays slightly curved lines which roughly follow the outline of the face but remain unconnected to it. Apart from these two examples that may show a connection to the hard-stone J-spirals, no soft-stone grotesques have such lateral extensions. Based on this analysis, fourteen Minoan grotesques can be discerned and subdivided into typological groups.

²⁶³ Anastasiadou 2011, 207. Anastasiadou – Pomadère 2011, 67 („*une forme de coeur*”).

²⁶⁴ Anastasiadou 2011, 208 uses the term “J-spiral” whereas *CMS III* uses “S-Spiralen”. In the following, the term “J-spirals” will be preferred as the shape of a J comes closer to the grotesques antennae.

²⁶⁵ Chapouthier 1932. It is also treated by Anastasiadou 2011, cat. no. 548b, pl. 39 and Krzyszkowska 2016, 118, pl. XLIVe

²⁶⁶ Anastasiadou 2011, cat. no. 584.

²⁶⁷ Chapouthier 1932, 185.

Before turning to these groups, the general typological criteria need to be evaluated in terms of ‘true’, *i.e.* archaic and classical gorgos, in order to explain literature’s attribution to this term. On a group of terracotta masks from Tiryns dating to the early 7th century at the latest,²⁶⁸ the typical head-shape known from the Minoan frontal grotesques prevails: The narrow, rounded forehead lies above very plastic, bulging cheeks and once again large ears expand over the sides of these areas of the face. The eyes and nose are equally bulging, the mouth wide open with pointed fangs (instead of teeth as in the case of some Minoan examples). The conclusive head-shape has abundant examples in archaic times. It is especially prominent on a clay antefix from Taranto in the Heidelberg Collection.²⁶⁹

This can be compared directly to seals such as **Gr.01** or **Gr.03**. The antefix also displays a wide-open toothed grin, a stuck-out tongue and, as the Tiryns mask, fangs. The fangs cannot be encountered decisively on the Minoan images, however, the long and pointed teeth of some (**Gr.01, 04, 08**) could be considered as either type of dentition. Another difference between the Minoan and archaic images is the now clearly identifiable hair, which is, with some early exceptions,²⁷⁰ usually rendered as curled or braided strands or even with snake-heads.²⁷¹ However, the later snake curls could well have developed from Bronze Age J-spirals. Also, some (full-bodied) gorgos especially of the so-called ‘Orientalizing’ phase in Archaic Greek art bear wings that take on this J-shape.²⁷² Of course, the archaic images emerged almost one millennium after the Middle Bronze Age seals and we cannot trace a continuous use and development of the image linking these far-apart eras.²⁷³ They are, however, very close so that ‘gorgo’ has become the prevalent term for the Bronze Age grotesques. While the thesis of its Bronze Age descendants stands on rather firm iconographical grounds,²⁷⁴ one needs to acknowledge the very late emergence of the designation ‘gorgo’ and that it was applied to a concept that had been developed over several centuries and might not have had anything to do with the social cognition evolving around what is here called the Minoan grotesques.

²⁶⁸ LIMC IV, Gorgo, Gorgones no. 2. This mask shows some striking similarities to a MM II serpentine petschaft (*CMS* III no. 105). However, both are designed to display very basic human features and their similarity may be coincidental rather than directly related.

²⁶⁹ Heid. Univ. T33 = LIMC IV, Gorgo, Gorgones 67b.

²⁷⁰ Such as the Tiryns mask.

²⁷¹ Compare, for example, LIMC IV, Gorgo, Gorgones nos. 31, 46 (locks of hair) and 67b, 68a (snake hair).

²⁷² LIMC IV, Gorgo, Gorgones nos. 234, 239, 250–51, 261.

²⁷³ Possibly, both the Minoan grotesques and the Archaic gorgos developed out of a Near Eastern prototype such as Humbaba that remained prevalent in Near Eastern iconographic and oral traditions throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages.

²⁷⁴ It needs to be pointed out, that the observations and inter-connections of the grotesque- and gorgo-images presented here are based solely on *iconographic* grounds and do not consider beliefs or the *mythological* development of the creature. The later cannot be traced in Minoan times.

Archetype Group

Seven seals can be assigned to the first group: four four-sided hard-stone prisms and three soft-stone seals (two three-sided prisms and one lentoid). All specimens date to MM II. The above-mentioned seal **Gr.01**, probably from Central Crete, is a four-sided carnelian prism with a whitened surface. Face *a* shows a frontal head with the characteristic shape and features discussed above including an open mouth with protruding irregular teeth. Its head is topped by the distinctive short hair and some finer hairs, which even protrude from its chin. The J-spirals to the side of its head are filled with nearly parallel incisions of 'strands of hair'. The figure is also adorned by earrings. In the upper left and right corner next to the figure are hieroglyphic signs.²⁷⁵ To sum up, **Gr.01** contains all typological criteria established above that define a grotesque.

The next representative of the group is the four-sided prism **Gr.02**, a translucent and nearly colorless agate whose provenance is most likely Malia. The frontal face on side *b* has the characteristic narrow and rounded brow and the pronounced cheeks and curved chin typical of a grotesque. The nose is drilled similarly to the one on the first *archetype* seal, as are the eyes but with additional eyebrows. The ears almost take on the shape of the number eight and it might be argued that earrings are implied, however this seems unlikely and has not occurred to the CMS either. Another difference lies in the rendering of the spirals that are not filled with single strands, which give them the impression of horns, but in comparison to other renderings of J-spirals they could be accounted as hair locks nevertheless. Finally, a circle is engraved on either side of the chin, probably as an ornamental filler.

Another close representative of the group is a seal excavated in the Petras cemetery, **Gr.03**. Again, we are dealing with a four-sided carnelian prism, however from the north-east of the island as opposed to the central Cretan specimens above. Stylistic differences should be sought in the different workshops and not be considered as typological aberrations. On seal face *c* one encounters two frontal faces *tête-bêche* that almost exaggerate the typical head forms, the foreheads being narrower, the cheeks broader and the features cruder – not in technical terms, their execution is of a very high standard, but in stylistic ones. The upper and middle part of the head are again connected by the ears, which are simple bows. The mouths are open wide and, as far as this can be discerned from the published impression, the rather long tongue is hanging out. Here, the J-spirals are represented by single curvy lines protruding from the upper head. Once again, all above typological criteria are fulfilled.

When it comes to the rendering of the spiral locks, the grotesque on **Gr.04** could be seen as a missing link. Like on the Petras seal, the lateral spirals are represented as

²⁷⁵ CHIC 50 (right) and 19 (left side of impression).

single curved lines extending from the upper head. However, these are mirrored by smaller versions, which extend from the lower part of the face at about the same height where the J-spirals of **Gr.01** end. In contrast, on **Gr.04** the lines never meet (compared to **Gr.01** and **02** of this group). The frontal face is again rendered in the typical plastic way as discussed above. Its ears are closer to the human physiognomy, but the lobes are completely unattached to the head. Like the first example of the *archetype group*, this grotesque's mouth is open as well, showing its long, pointed teeth. The corners of the seal-face are filled with a lunette each.

Before moving on to the soft-stone archetypes, one observation needs to be pointed out. It concerns the ornamental additions to the seals discussed so far. It has already been mentioned that **Gr.01** has two Cretan hieroglyphs next to the frontal head on face a, but the other three seal faces all bear hieroglyphs as well. This is an interesting fact, as the next grotesque on a seal of the *archetype group*, **Gr.02** is also associated with hieroglyphic syllabograms.²⁷⁶ On a first level, this observation implies an interrelation of grotesque depictions and Cretan script. Yet, as Krzyszkowska has shown in regard to four-sided prisms, of the “ca. 25 examples in hard stone, only four do not bear hieroglyphic inscriptions on at least one face; none bears solely figural motifs.”²⁷⁷ Examples of such prisms show either ornamental motifs or inscriptions (with one exception, to be discussed below).

All extant hard-stone seals depicting grotesques are four-sided prisms, but they are only four out of “ca. 25” – the notion of a direct connection of these grotesque faces and hieroglyphs is quickly challenged when turning to the remaining two examples that do not share this characteristic. **Gr.04** is accompanied by lunettes and, on the other three seal-faces, by abundant ornamental décor (such as loops, crosshatching, or spiral hooks with leaf-shaped ends).²⁷⁸ This still fits the characteristics of four-sided prisms that Krzyszkowska has observed. However, the same cannot be said of the Petras seal **Gr.03**, which is “in this respect [...] highly unusual”²⁷⁹ as it uniquely bears figural motifs on all four seal faces. These motifs are, in turn, very stylized with curling hindquarters, spiraling tails and ‘appendages’ that in themselves pertain a decidedly ornamental character even when depicting animals and other figures.

To sum up these observations, it can be ruled out that grotesques are commonly associated with Cretan hieroglyphic script. Rather, the hieroglyphs might also be understood as ornamental elements such as the two isolated syllabograms floating on the

²⁷⁶ CHIC 42, 28 and 5 (left to right on the impression as published by the CMS).

²⁷⁷ Krzyszkowska 2012, 151. For the occurrence of hieroglyphs on hard-stone prisms see also Pini 2010, 325.

²⁷⁸ For details on every ornament cf. the respective CMS entry (CMS III nos. 238b-d).

²⁷⁹ Krzyszkowska 2012, 151.

sides of the head on **Gr.01**. Moreover, it can be posited that grotesques on hard-stone seals are frequently accompanied by ornamental motifs.

Having discussed the four hard-stone specimens of the *archetype group*, it is time to address the soft-stone seals. As stated in the introductory passage, soft-stone grotesques do not share the J-spirals with their hard-stone relatives. This is a typological feature supported by all extant soft-stone depictions of the group. The first example to be discussed here is **Gr.05**. In fact, the CMS states the following on this depiction: “Device difficult to describe, somewhat resembling the frontal head of a feline with bristling hair, open mouth and lines beside the cheeks; perhaps a boar’s head with bristles and tusks?”²⁸⁰ When scrutinized against the background of our typological criteria this proposition posed by the corpus proves the necessity of re-negotiation. Beginning with the head, this depiction attests its close affiliation to the group of grotesques: the frontal head is narrow, and ellipsoid, it has very protruding ‘apple-cheeks’ and a pronounced chin. The ears connect the upper and middle part of the head. The space between them on top of the head is filled with short, spikey hair. The facial features are very crude and Anastasiadou mentions, “the nose [...] looks more like that of a pig than that of a human.”²⁸¹ However, frontally depicted boars all have a very characteristic, prolonged snout and the bristles are generally not rendered on top of the head but to the sides.²⁸² As the seal has been damaged, the facial features are otherwise hard to account for, but their distribution on the face follows that of other grotesques. Finally, the abovementioned feature of long incised lines running almost parallel to the sides of the head like cut-down simplified J-spirals call for an interpretation of the motif not as a boar, but as a grotesque human face.

Gr.05 closely resembles the lost prism **Gr.06** published by Chapouthier.²⁸³ The ‘saw-branches’ have already been mentioned above, but the rendering of the face seems quite similar as well. However, a problem remains with the conclusive interpretation of the object since it is lost. The drawing by Chapouthier is, rather a sketch than a technical drawing, complicated by the fact that it was made of the seal face, which of course lacked the plasticity of the impression and obfuscated the general form, as grooves and smoothed-out drill-holes could not realize their full potential. Consequentially, the lines of the face on the drawing are rather angular, but when compared to impressions of other soft-stone seals bearing the grotesque motif it becomes probable that these were just as rounded and prominent as on the extant examples discussed so far. Chapouthier

²⁸⁰ CMS VI, 174 no. 71b.

²⁸¹ Anastasiadou 2011, 208.

²⁸² Cf. CMS II7 nos. 150. 201-02; one example of a boar with bristles on top of the head: CMS IV no. 454a – however, they are not scattered on the head, but “sprout” from the center.

²⁸³ Chapouthier 1932, 183–201. The author was also aware of the resemblance to archaic *gorgoneia*, cf. pg. 200: “le style de la figure présente une rapport saisissant avec les plus anciennes représentations du *gorgoneion*.”

also published a picture of the seal itself, though the resolution is low. However, when compared to his drawing, it becomes obvious that the lines engraved on the seal were much smoother and more rounded.²⁸⁴ **Gr.06** also shows the distinct characteristic of ears connecting the upper to the middle part of the head. The mouth of the grotesque was most likely open, its eyes bulging.

The final seal that can be attributed to the soft-stone *archetype group* is **Gr.07**. Incised is a frontal head with voluminous cheeks and a narrow, rounded forehead with very short spikey hair on top and what looks like bangs covering the brow. The figure's large ears connect the upper and middle section of the face and end on the level of the eyes, as is the case on the lost Chapouthier seal. The nose broadens considerably towards its lower end. The left and lower section of the face as well as a smaller part of the upper right edge are missing so that it is impossible to say whether the mouth was open or closed. The chin is mostly missing as well but the overall preserved features lead to the fair assumption that it was constructed in the typical way, set off from the cheeks.

Unlike the hard-stone seals of this group, the soft-stone grotesques do not derive solely from prisms but, in the case of **Gr.07**, featured at least once on another type, namely a lentoid. **Gr.05** is cut on one face of a three-sided prism, the other sides displaying a man in profile with a “‘Pole’ slung with ‘String vessels’”²⁸⁵ on face a and a four-legged spider together with a dog or lion head on c. **Gr.06** is accompanied by a bucranium in between two antithetical donkey heads²⁸⁶ on seal face a and a crouching dog or perhaps lion²⁸⁷ on face c. In contrast to the hard-stone prisms, there is no association with Cretan hieroglyphs or ornaments, but rather with motifs of the natural world such as the quadruped, be it dog or lion.

The grotesques discussed in this first typological group show a close affiliation to one another and therefore form the basis for the assessment of further types. The dominant feature remains the distinctive shape of the head, the proportions of the facial features and the hair of the figures, as examined above. These characteristics are also conspicuous in the following group.

²⁸⁴ Chapouthier 1932, pl. 1 fig. 2b.

²⁸⁵ Anastasiadou 2011, cat. no. 494.

²⁸⁶ Proposed by Chapouthier 1932, 185. Anastasiadou 2011, cat. no. 584 cautiously calls them “ruminants”.

²⁸⁷ Following the typology of Anastasiadou 2011, cat. no. 584. Chapouthier 1932, 185 simply calls it “*animal replié*”.

Subgroup 1: Upright Grotesques

As the title of this group reveals, we are not dealing with frontal, otherwise detached, heads, but with upright bodies. Two extant seals can be assigned to this group. The first is a steatite prism discovered in Malia's *Sector Pi* in 2007 showing a crouching figure on its face a.²⁸⁸ The posture of **Gr.08** is not immediately recognizable, Anastasiadou and Pomadère describe it as "*assise ou accroupie*"²⁸⁹ (seated or squatting). The creature's legs form the shape of a clear-cut letter M when viewed on the seal and the impression, its incision being deep and sharp. The female upper body is crude and appears nearly deformed. The creature's arms are raised from the elbow on with the hands ending on the level of the ears.

This posture can also be seen on *CMS II2* no. 127 from the *Atelier des Sceaux* in Malia. The figure has its arms in the same bent position, just as the preserved leg of the figure assumes a squatting position.²⁹⁰ Regarding the head, **Gr.08** can immediately be characterized as a grotesque – with a 'heart-shaped' lower face, large ears connecting the middle and upper part of the head, which is once again topped by short hair as observed before on soft-stone seals. The creature's mouth is open wide and rendered through a drill hole that leaves a protrusion in the impression that might represent a stuck-out tongue.

Another seal excavated at Petras (**Gr.09**), a rectangular bar with two faces, shows a very detailed upright figure with a grotesque frontal head. Krzyszkowska has called this "one of the most extraordinary images to survive from the Aegean Bronze Age – a frontal figure with outsized head, pendulous breasts, hairy legs, and a tail possibly dangling in between."²⁹¹ No comparable figure of such detail has been uncovered yet. It does have some parallels to **Gr.08** as in the upraised arms and deformed female body but apart from this, there are also considerable differences. For example, the figure is clothed in a skirt-like garment or cuirass.²⁹² The head, on the other hand, shows a close affiliation with grotesque iconography. It features all typological criteria in detailed engraving. Its J-spirals are shorter and thus more clinched, but this is due to the limited amount of space on the seal face. They are otherwise perfect examples of the 'hair' on seal **Gr.01**, with striations denoting single strands.

²⁸⁸ Anastasiadou 2011, cat. no. A.21; Anastasiadou – Pomadère 2011, *passim*.

²⁸⁹ Anastasiadou – Pomadère 2011, 67.

²⁹⁰ A possible explanation for this figure could be the possibility of it wearing a mask. Perhaps this is a feasible interpretation for both *Gr.08* and *CMS II2* no. 127. It is conceivable that such a mask might have been worn at a ritual that also afforded this special body posture as seen on the seals. However, we are here confined to speculation and a further elaboration lies beyond the scope of this discussion.

²⁹¹ Krzyszkowska 2012, 153.

²⁹² Krzyszkowska 2012, 153.

Both **Gr.08** and **Gr.09** have been considered in relation to the Egyptian demi-god Bes.²⁹³ Bes is also always figured frontally and can even be configured as female, in the shape of Beset.²⁹⁴ The grotesque shape “was meant to drive away pain and sorrow”²⁹⁵ although this function might not have travelled with its iconography.

The adaptation of a foreign, *i.e.* Egyptian, motif is not unheard of in the Aegean Bronze Age, as this is a transcultural phenomenon arising in the Protopalatial period on Crete and throughout the Aegean. A well-known example is *Taweret* which was not simply taken over from Egypt, but intensely transformed into what is conventionally called the ‘Minoan Genius’. Krzyszkowska points out that Cretan workshops did not simply copy foreign motifs but adapted them and changed them based on their own needs and notions of the world.²⁹⁶ Thus, seals with foreign influences also show a range of typical Minoan elements, as can be seen in the direct comparison of **Gr.09** and **Gr.01** or **Gr.08** and *CMS* II2 no. 127, for example.

Subgroup 2: Winged Grotesques

This subgroup is represented by several impressions from two different seals in Zakros, **Gr.10a** and **b**. Unlike the other grotesque representations, these date to LM I. The motifs engraved on these seals were very similar, one likely being the copy of the other. However, it was clearly from two different seals that these impressions were made, **Gr.10a** from a slightly smaller lentoid with a diameter of 1,8 cm, **Gr.10b** the larger with 2 cm in diameter. The impressions display almost the entire seal faces and are of excellent definition and preservation. They show the same intense plasticity that has been observed on all grotesque impressions in the *archetype group*. If not for their heads, they could have been assigned to the group of hybrid *bird lady derivatives*.²⁹⁷ Their heads, however, display every typological criterium defined for soft-stone grotesques. Their faces are clearly divided into the narrow, ellipsoidal forehead, the voluminous ‘apple-cheeks’, and rounded chins. Both figures’ ears connect to the upper and middle facial section and their heads are crowned by short, upward streaming hair. Crude facial features and a very pronounced brow and nose contribute to their grotesque image. Their mouths are small and lips open. There is no neck, instead, each head is mounted directly on a bird’s body. The wings are outstretched with vertical, slightly wavy incisions used to render the feathers. Especially **Gr.10b** has a rather shaggy appearance, whereas the

²⁹³ Anastasiadou – Pomadère 2011, 68; Aruz 2008, 85; Krzyszkowska 2012, 154.

²⁹⁴ See also Krzyszkowska 2016, 119–20 concerning Bes and Beset and the spread of their iconography from Egypt.

²⁹⁵ Krzyszkowska 2012, 154.

²⁹⁶ Krzyszkowska 2012, 154

²⁹⁷ See above chapter 3.

feathers on **Gr.10a** are longer and give the plumage a more regular impression. Lion legs are attached directly to the lower bow of the wings and continue the inorganic junction of the separate body parts. Unlike the *upright grotesques*, they cannot be explained as viable or organic combinations, a feature that accounts for an appreciation as ‘monstrous’ in the minds of the seals’ users and those who would have seen the seals and sealings. It is remarkable from an iconographical perspective that these seals are impressed on three-seal (“pyramidal”) flat-based nodules²⁹⁸ and on a two-hole hanging nodule together with other seals that bear further inorganic combinations (*CMS II*7 nos. 119 and 151 on one, and either no. 119 or 120 and 151 on another). Although these images sealed administrative documents, the motifs should not be considered as solely as pragmatic bureaucratic artefacts with a very practical function. Moreover, they must have also conveyed meaning (apart from the owner’s identity). Tsangaraki has correctly stated that, “there must have been a relation between the designs engraved on seals [...] and the administrative use of these artefacts”, adding that “the administrative demands must have had an impact on seal production and [...] imagery.”²⁹⁹ Although the images’ semantic meaning escapes us, one must be aware of the fact that the administrative practices in the palatial centers were part of a political, economic and cultural network. Seals are part of elite media and it should be kept in mind that, as administrative tools, they correlate “with power ideology and structures.”³⁰⁰

As the two subgroups have demonstrated, Minoan seal engravers were perfectly able to extend the repertoire of grotesque motifs by adding bodies to the pre-configured typical heads. They also found other ways to re-use these heads, as the following category will show.

Subgroup 3: Streamered Look-Alikes

This group comprises iconographically related motifs that all share the characteristic streamers derived from the J-spirals of hard-stone grotesques. Perhaps they can be considered a type of short-hand for the locks of hair. They also share other features such as the rounded head or the open mouth with protruding tongue. The first example in this group is **Gr.11**, also known as the “Mochlos imp”³⁰¹. This limestone *petschaft* from Mochlos Tomb X preserves some, but not all characteristics postulated for Minoan grotesques. It therefore remains disputable like the other items in this category. Nevertheless, it displays the general shape of the head as observed, but its features are little detailed, and the ears are missing. The ‘imp’ has two large, round eyes, but the nose

²⁹⁸ Cf. Hallager 1996, 136–37 for a typology of flat-based nodules.

²⁹⁹ Tsangaraki 2010, 363.

³⁰⁰ Tsangaraki 2010, 381.

³⁰¹ Krzyzskowska 2012, 155 n. 38; 2016, 118; Weingarten 1983, 92.

and mouth are not clear-cut. Rather, a thin vertical line runs through the center of the face where usually the nose would be. It ends in the lower third in a 90° angle to the middle of a horizontal line. When impressed, a triangular crevice remains where the mouth would be expected, showing a very rudimentary sense of an open mouth. The streamers do not extend horizontally from the head like in the case of the J-spirals as witnessed on **Gr.03**, but upward like antennae. The seal also displays similarities to one of the *upright grotesques*: Like **Gr.07** it raises its hands upwards on each side of the head (although, unlike **Gr.07**, it does not have a body!) with similarly rendered, sketchy fingers. Due to the similarities with other motifs clearly identified as grotesques above, a typological affiliation can be ascertained, and it shall be here proposed to consider the ‘imp’ a representative of the grotesques.

The next example of this group, **Gr.12**, is considered with some skepticism. On first sight, we are dealing with a schematic bucranium. But compared to bucrania a difference in the shape of the head becomes obvious: Bucrania tend to take on either the form of a tip-down triangle (*e.g. CMS VI no. 63a. 64a. 89a.*) or the snout is rendered in shape of a finial circle (*e.g. CMS VI no. 43b; VII no. 34; X no. 34b*). On **Gr.12** neither is the case. The head closely resembles a broad human head. As it is rendered only by curved lines, there is little detail and the typological grotesque head shape is not rendered true to the original. Facial features are missing altogether and only two lines cross the face; the first divides the forehead horizontally from the rest of the face; the second line begins a little to the right of the true middle of this line and runs down vertically to the chin. Basically, this is the opposite case as on **Gr.11**. This specimen’s streamers drop down almost parallel to the face contour, but they preserve the characteristic curvature of the J-spirals and are iconographically close to the Petras hard-stone prism **Gr.03**. Taking these observations into consideration, a typological proximity to the group can be traced, although the identification of the motif as a grotesque remains disputable.

The final *streamered look-alike* is a very interesting composite creature that could also be dealt with in the chapter on sphinxes. However, this study treats it in the framework of the grotesques based on four criteria: (1) The creature has proportionately over-large facial features; (2) a wide-open mouth with a very long protruding tongue; (3) voluminous ‘apple-cheeks’ and a pronounced chin; and (4) the characteristic J-spirals as observed on the hard-stone *archetype group*. Like **Gr.04**, **Gr.13** features these spirals from the upper and lower part of the head, respectively. For these reasons, the creature could easily be listed as a very close representative of the hard-stone *archetype group*. Yet, there is one remarkable difference to this group: the face of **Gr.13** is featured in profile, not frontally. The fact that it nevertheless displays this abundance of typological criteria has led to its classification as a grotesque here.

Returning to the claim that this seal might also be dealt with in the sphinx chapter, one also needs to look at the body of this creature. The head is mounted on the body of a quadruped in profile. Its arms and legs end in three claw-like incisions that are typical of paws. The shape of the body, especially the hindquarters and the tail further the evidence that we are dealing with the body of a lion. The space between the legs, in front of the creature and above its flank is filled with ornaments – a feature already noticed on four-sided prisms with grotesques. This is a three-sided prism, but the other faces support the above observation. Side a shows a recumbent agrimi behind an S-spiral that runs diagonally over the seal face and ends in the shape of a fir branch. This is a shared similarity with the soft-stone prisms that present motifs of the natural world. Side c has ornamental elements as well as Cretan hieroglyphs.³⁰² Thus, **Gr.13** links the associated iconography of grotesque representations to the hard- and soft-stone *archetype group*, providing further reasons to treat it within this framework.

A possible interpretation of the Aegean grotesques is that these were masks worn at certain liminal occasions. Karen Polinger Foster discusses Near Eastern and Egyptian examples of masks as part of rituals during which they were worn by high-ranking persona such as priests and kings. However, in the case of Minoan Crete there are neither archaeological nor written sources to testify to masked rituals on the island.

While Polinger Foster envisages especially hybrid creatures, such as bird people and lion-men, in her study, it seems worthwhile to consider the grotesques as possible depictions of real masks. This can only be understood when drawing a parallel to Mesopotamian Humbaba masks, made of terracotta and further backed by written sources. Like Humbaba, the grotesques are rendered with “frontal orientation and grimacing faces”³⁰³ that return the viewer’s look. As such, it is not an inanimate object “but emanates a powerful force.”³⁰⁴ Humbaba’s face is not only preserved in iconographical media, but also in the shape of masks that could be worn by a human impersonating the demonic figure.³⁰⁵ Such a possibility could also be hypothesized in the case of Minoan grotesques, although there is no archaeological data to support this.

³⁰² CHIC nos. 1, 44, 49.

³⁰³ Graff 2012, 136.

³⁰⁴ Graff 2012, 136.

³⁰⁵ Graff 2012, 137–39.

4.3 GRIFFIN

Griffins were composite creatures of a Near Eastern origin attested on Crete from MM II/III on. The hybrid originated in the early Elam period, after which its iconography spread to predynastic Egypt and was further developed there. Later, at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE, the Egyptian griffin came to Syria where it was again subdued to iconographical changes. The characteristic curl in the nape of the creature's neck is typical for the Syrian griffin³⁰⁶ and was also imported to Crete in Middle Minoan times.³⁰⁷ While Classical Antiquity produced griffins of various types, such as lion-, serpent-, or bird-headed creatures with the winged body of a lion, the Aegean griffin always had the head and wings of a bird of prey and the body of a lion.³⁰⁸ Aruz has shown that these features were taken over from Late Old Syrian and Classical Syrian style.³⁰⁹

All the while, Aegean artisans regularly varied some details, adding or leaving out feather plumes, rendering beaks open or closed and even deciding to configure female griffins (*e.g.* **G.09–10, 70**), which are otherwise unattested in the neighboring cultures.³¹⁰ Highly characteristic of Aegean griffins are their wings, of which two main versions are attested.³¹¹ The lower flight wings could either be decorated with a “notched plume’ motif: slightly curved, discontinuous and suspended from the upper lines of the feathers”³¹² or a decorative spiral motif running along the neck and upper line of the wing whose feathers can also be rendered in the ‘notched plume’ motif. Both types can also be found on Aegean sphinxes. Dessenne proposes that the griffin had been created alongside the sphinx, a human-headed composite creature with the body of a lion.³¹³

The griffin proved a popular motif from its earliest time in Crete, a fact attested by early seal impressions from Protopalatial sites, *e.g.* Malia and Phaistos.³¹⁴ Interest-

³⁰⁶ For Syrian griffins, *cf.* Aruz 2008, 288–90.

³⁰⁷ Niemeyer, H. G. 2006. s.v. "Greif". New Pauly Online. Web. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e427810. (last accessed 12/07/2018) Minoan examples with the curl are abundant, *e.g.* on an early impression from MM II Phaistos: *CMS* II5 no. 318. For a more detailed account of how the image came to Crete *cf.* Aruz 2008, 107–08.

³⁰⁸ Delplace 1967, 49. Possibly, the griffins in the Throne Room of Knossos did not have wings at all, *cf.* Evans 1935, 913.

³⁰⁹ Aruz 2008, 108.

³¹⁰ Delplace 1967, 49, 71–73.

³¹¹ These can be seen especially well in larger media than seals, such as wall paintings, ornamental plaques and metal works. For the range of media depicting griffins (and sphinxes) in the Bronze Age, see D’Albiac 1995, *passim*. It needs to be pointed out that not all griffin depictions on seals strictly adhere to one of these two typical versions of wings and less decorative forms are attested especially on the early glyptic griffins.

³¹² D’Albiac 1995, 64.

³¹³ Dessenne 1957, 208.

³¹⁴ Malia: *CMS* II6 no. 215; Phaistos: *CMS* II5 nos. 317–19. Another MM griffin can be seen on a seal without provenance: *CMS* XI no. 6.

ingly, it is prominent on different iconographic media throughout the Aegean, not only on seals, but also in wall-paintings,³¹⁵ on painted vessels,³¹⁶ and on larnakes³¹⁷. Perhaps this is the reason why this hybrid does not show any conclusive preference for either soft- or hard-stone seals, which show a ratio of nearly 1:1 (97 soft; 101 hard).³¹⁸ With 21 known examples of metal seals,³¹⁹ it is the most prominent composite creature featured in this high-value material.

Owing to the large amount of griffin representations on Aegean Bronze Age seals, an exhaustive typology for the extant repertoire cannot be presented here, due to the limited amount of space.³²⁰ Instead, they will be treated in four large motif groups that comprise a multitude of styles, forms, and materials. These are:

- 1) standing or recumbent griffins in complete profile;
- 2) griffins in profile with spread, frontally represented wings;
- 3) narrative scenes (e.g. hunting or chariot scenes); and
- 4) heraldic scenes with one or two flanking griffins accompanying a central figure or motif.

Before turning to these four groups, it is necessary to indicate some insights as regards the establishment of griffin iconography and style in Minoan Crete.

On Style

The fixed hybrid creatures that appeared on Crete by the end of the Middle Minoan Period did not arrive in firm standard forms. From the end of MM II and during MM III, seal engravers were experimenting with the form and style of foreign composite creatures such as *Taweret*/the Minoan Genius, the Minoan Dragon and the griffin. By LM I characteristic shapes and styles appear, such as the standard variant of the Minoan Genius or the Aegean griffin with the notched plume motif. Unlike in the cases of the other fixed hybrids, the intense negotiation of the griffin's appearance did not seize during the early Late Minoan Period. Rather, this era stands for a wide range of griffin depictions that display variations throughout all elements of the creature's composition. What remains is the basic tool kit of a bird's head, wings, a quadruped/leonine body with a tail and four legs.

Fig. 8 shows a selection of griffin motifs on seals and sealings that date to LM I. While the form that is considered the typical Aegean griffin with the notched plume

³¹⁵ E.g. at Knossos: Evans 1935, 910–14, pl. 32. In Xeste 3, Akrotiri: Dumas 1992, 158–59 fig. 122.

³¹⁶ MC III vessel from Phylakopi, Melos: Zervos 1957, 201 fig. 271.

³¹⁷ Clay larnax from Palaikastro: Schachermeyr 1964, 289 fig. 155.

³¹⁸ The slight majority of soft stone seals should not be over-interpreted and is likely the result of preservation.

³¹⁹ Counting sealings that originated from metal seals.

³²⁰ The catalogue of griffin depictions in the annex contains at the end the CMS numbers of further seals not treated in the main text and catalogue.

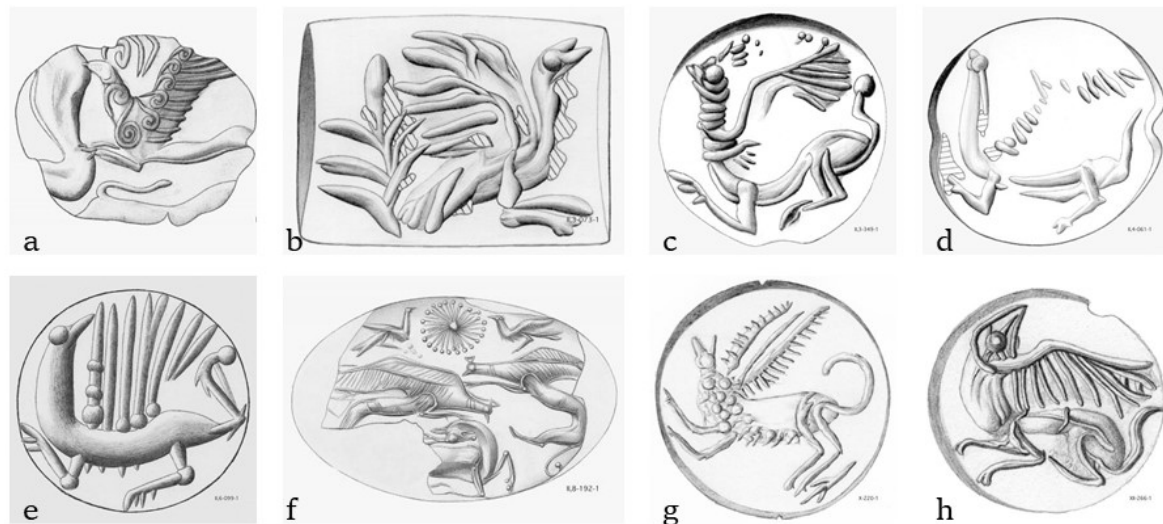


Fig. 8 Selection of varying griffin depictions dating to the period LM I. Top row: CMS II7 no. 96 (Kato Zakros, metal ring sealing); II3 no. 73 (Knossos, sst cushion seal); II3 no. 349 (unprovenanced, sst lentoid); II4 no. 61 (Gournia, sst lentoid). Bottom row: II6 no. 99 (Ayia Triada, hst lentoid impression); II8 no. 192 (Knossos, metal ring impression); X no. 220 (unprovenanced, sst lentoid); XII no. 266 (unprovenanced, sst lentoid).

motif along the wings is already constituted, to be seen on 8a, it is not yet the standard variant. The material evidence hints at a prevalence of the type in hard stone and metal seals,³²¹ but 8e and 8f prove that different styles were also possible on these materials in LM I. The other metal seal of the below examples, 8f, shows a very different understanding of the hybrid creature. While 8a is characterized by ornamental elements that constitute the point of focus, 8f concentrates on a near-natural rendition of the animal parts. It is engraved with great detail, paying attention to single feathers along the wings and the creature's body tension. Yet, the near-natural appearance is reduced by strong contour lines running along the body. The griffin on the soft stone cushion 8b is manufactured by cutting and scraping, creating the impression of floral elements that are softly bent by a wind. This applies especially to the wings. Due to its amorph structure, it is rather difficult to understand where the creature ends and whether what is emanating behind its rump is part of the hybrid or indeed a floral element. The griffin on 8c, also cut from a soft stone, was created by scraping and drilling. All constituent body parts can be discerned properly. This creature stands out by the rendering of its neck, that is made of consequent horizontal tubes. Its wing, which resembles the shape of a ginkgo leaf, is unique. This griffin's tail ends in a rounded bobble, as with the hard-stone specimen on 8e, but the other griffins in the figure do not share this feature. Created solely by the technique of scraping, 8d, which features the same pose as 8c, displays very sketchy, graphic features. Where 8c exposes carefully modelled body parts, 8d refrains from differentiating constituent elements.

³²¹ For metal: compare also to CMS II8 nos. 186, 359=G.27, 360. Hard stones: CMS II6 no. 102=G.55, IX no. 162c=G.21.

The griffins on *8e* and *8g* are female, as indicated by the zig-zag teats of *8e* and the dotted-line teats of *8g*. Both creatures feature highly unusual wings. By use of the cutting wheel and solid drill, *8e* was equipped with a wing consisting of a row of straight, vertical lines. Interestingly, drill holes up along the first line and at the base of three further lines perhaps indicate notched plumes. The wings of *8g*, which were scraped, are both shown and resemble fir branches or saws. The array of dot-shaped elements along the chest and shoulder of the creature is unusual as well. Possibly, this denotes a lion-man, which could also be rendered by dots, or an elaborate breast plumage. The engraver of this piece was possibly re-arranging the hybrid elements of bird and lion. Finally, *8h* displays near-ornamental features, such as the strong turn of the head and the curvature of the wing which runs into the outline of the face. However, the quadruped body shows more detail than examples *8d*, *e* and *g*.

In summary, griffins display a broad range of stylistic variation in the early Late Minoan Period. While other hybrids have completed their processes of style formation and type negotiation by this time, standard variants of the griffin can only be discerned in hindsight when compared to later specimens.

Group 1: Griffins in Complete Profile

Representations of griffins shown in profile are the most common and were recurrent from MM II until the end of the Aegean Bronze Age.³²² Among them are the first seals displaying griffins that have come to light in the Aegean so far. Three MM II and one MM II–III seal bear quite different, but recognizable griffins in profile.³²³ The sealings **G.01–03** were excavated in Phaistos and each depict a griffin in left profile. They share the same compositional constituents, such as a head ending in a long protrusion, plumage-like elements sprouting from the head, the body and legs of a quadruped, a long tail, and wings. However, these griffins seem to record a process of iconographical ‘evolution’ that had not yet settled on the later Neopalatial ‘aegeanized’ griffin.³²⁴ On a pictorial level, the impressions differ greatly. The creature on **G.01** has three leaf-shaped plumes extending from its rather schematic head. Two incisions around the neck merge into a pouch-shaped pendant – a detail missing on the other griffins. Its posture is recumbent with its quadruped legs³²⁵ folded beneath the body. The creature’s wing is indicated by four very graphic incisions. It is typical for griffins shown in profile to have only one wing; there are no attempts of creating dimensionality through a second wing

³²² They amount to a ratio of ca. 46% among the classifiable griffins. Non-classifiable griffins derive from impressions too fragmented to judge their overall composition.

³²³ Yule 1981, 138.

³²⁴ Cf. Delplace 1967, 77–78.

³²⁵ The pincer-like paws are typical for lion and dog feet in MM times; cf. Anastasiadou’s motif 16 (dog/lion) in Anastasiadou 2011, pl. 18–23.

in the background. The only alternative, as encountered in *group 2*, is to show both wings in frontal view. **G.02**, a griffin in walking pose, has quite similar, graphic wings, made from three incisions. The shape of the head is different, though, with a more rounded forehead. From it emanates a volute that places it in the tradition of Syrian griffins. Single feathers or perhaps a mane are indicated around the chest, but the quality of the single extant impression does not allow for better recognition. The third MM griffin from Phaistos, **G.03**, is very different from the first two. Its legs are extended in striding pose and detail is added to the body shapes that appear more distinct than the rather amorphous body of **G.01** and the still very graphic body of **G.02**. Incised triangles around the chest remind of the plumage of a bird of prey. The creature's body consists mainly of its foreparts, whereas the rump is reduced to a thin line that widens slightly at the flanks. The hind-legs are not preserved. The griffin's wing flows along its backside and consists of single incised feathers attached to a bow. Also, its beak-like mouth is open – something that can be seen on **G.04** as well, although apart from this similarity, its body is rendered quite differently and on a very schematic level.

G.05, a MM III–LM I seal known by its impression on a vessel handle from Malia, demarcates a change in the iconography of griffins at the turn of the Neopalatial period. The beaked head of a bird becomes well-recognizable and the overall body shapes more defined and closer to prototypes in the natural world. The seal engraver has differentiated the haunches from the abdomen, the chest from the shoulders, neck from head, etc. The creature's wing remains rather graphic, though, in the shape of a long leaf with diagonal striations for the feathers. This is a feature that can also be seen on LM I griffins, *e.g.* **G.06** or **G.54**, but generally, wings become first more natural and successively more elaborate in Neopalatial glyptic. As pointed out above, Neopalatial griffins were cut in different techniques and styles, which resulted in certain iconographical shapes that were owed to execution and style group.³²⁶ The outcome should not be accounted as signs indicative of one or another bodily concept (*e.g.* concerning degrees of abstraction or 'naturalism').

Neopalatial griffins of the first group can be configured in three main variants: standing with the legs firm on the ground (*cf.* **G.07–08**, **13**), striding or running with outstretched or cocked limbs³²⁷ (*cf.* **G.09–10**, **16**), and recumbent creatures whose hind legs are usually tucked in beneath the body (*cf.* **G.11–12**, **14–15**, **17–18**). The extant representations that can be dated to LM I show an almost equal share of the three

³²⁶ *Cf.*, for example, Cut Style griffins CMS IX no. 204; V no. 437; VS1A no. 203; Cretan Popular Group griffins II3 no. 25a; IX no.178; G.12; a 'talismanic' griffin: MD.14.

³²⁷ Delplace 1967, 68 calls this posture "*galop volant*", a term that expresses the almost-flying state of the respective griffins. The posture can also be nicely seen on an MC III ewer from Phylakopi, Melos; *cf.* Zervos 1957, 201 fig. 271, which demonstrates the contemporaneous spread of griffin iconography in the Cyclades.

possibilities, while there is a slight majority of recumbent creatures.³²⁸ This changes over the course of time: Running or striding specimens cease to be shown on seals as early as LM I–II (in the preserved glyptic record), while an increase of couchant griffins can be noted. Only slightly more than one third of the creatures in *group 1* are represented in a standing position.³²⁹ This may be a happenstance of preservation, as in LM II–IIIA1 we again encounter an almost equal share of the two poses.³³⁰ Finally, from LM IIIA onwards, the archaeological record suggests a preference for standing griffins over recumbent ones, indicated by the ratio of 5:3. All things considered, it is evident that we are dealing with rather small amounts of data and should not over-interpret the output of numbers of a certain type, as the preservation and discovery of seals is always subject to unquantifiable fortuitousness.³³¹

Group 2: Griffins in Profile with outstretched Frontal Wings

While the griffins in this group follow the same compositional and stylistic possibilities as in *group 1*, there is one crucial difference, which is the wings. Instead of the single wing stretched along and above the back of the creatures as seen in the first group, the specimens in the following display two wings that are spread out above the body. Sometimes, the chest is also shown frontally (cf. **G.19–20**), but usually the body is rendered in profile (cf. **G.21–22**). The first griffins stretch their wings in LM I. From the beginning, the pose is not restricted to a specific style, seal shape or material. A likely high-ranking administrator at Ayia Triada used a hard-stone lentoid, **G.23**, with two recumbent *tête-bêche* griffins in a very linear style for administrative purposes.³³² A stylistically quite different griffin on a cushion seal, **G.24**, was also used at Ayia Triada. This creature's chest is figured frontally, its head bent elegantly backwards, regarding its recumbent body. In the same period, a seal cutter, probably in the Lasithi area, engraved **G.19**, a carnelian amygdaloid with a very plastic and broad-chested griffin

³²⁸ Of the seals dated by the CMS to LM I, 13 show recumbent griffins, and eight each running and standing ones.

³²⁹ For LM I–II, 23 recumbent and 13 standing griffins have been registered in the database.

³³⁰ The ratio of recumbent to standing griffins is 7:6.

³³¹ Further griffins in complete profile: CMS I nos. 269, 271, 282 (LB I–II), 472–73 (LM IIIA1–2), 475 (LM I?); II3 nos. 73 (LM I), 79 (LM I?), 219 (LB I–II), 349 (LM I); II4 nos. 47 (n/s), 61 (LM I–II), 71–72 (n/s), 116 (LM I?), 166, 171 (n/s); II6 no. 99 (LM I); II7 no. 87 (LM I); II8 no. 183 (LM I–II); III nos. 370 (LM I–II), 371 (LM I), 376 (LM I–II), 508a (LM I–II); IS nos. 94b (LM I–II), 149a (LM I?), 152 (LM I–II); IV nos. 266 (LB I–II), 283a (LM I), 313, 318, D39, D51, D58; IX nos. 104 (LB I–II), 138, 178–79 (LM I); V nos. 437–38, 684 (LB I–II); VI nos. 269–70, 387–88 (LB I–II), 390 (LM II–IIIA1) 391 (LM I); VII nos. 120 (LB I–II), 140 (LM IIIA1–2); VIII nos. 88 (LB I–II), 99 (LH IIIA2–B); VS1A no. 164 (LM I); VS1B nos. 222, 228, 256 (LM IIIA1–2); VS2 no. 32 (LB I–II); VS3 nos. 64, 67 (LB I–II), 327 (LM IIIA1); X no. 134 (LB II–IIIA1), 170 (n/s), 220 (LM I?); XI nos. 40 (LM I–II), 120 (LB I–II), 178–79 (LH I–II), 245, 302, 328, 346 (LM II–IIIA1); XII nos. 233 (LB I–II), 247 (LB II–IIIA1), 253 (LMI I–II), 300–01 (LM IIIA1); XIII nos. 54–56.

³³² Weingarten 1988, 106–07, 109.

whose voluminous feathered wings make use of the extra space at either end of the gem. These are just three LM I seals that exemplify the many possibilities seal engravers had when producing seals with griffins. Even in LM II and later, a time when the lentoid was the dominant seal shape, griffins still feature on amygdaloids and cushion seals – unlike other composite creatures, such as human-animal-hybrids.

The outstretched wings of the griffins in this group seem to have been especially suited for Cut Style representations.³³³ Some specimens of this style group are so linear that they appear rather like abstract ornamentation than (imagined) live creatures; *e.g.* **G.25–26**. In fact, during LM I–II, the floruit of Cut Style,³³⁴ the largest amount of *group 2* griffins was produced, most of them in this style or influenced by its use of the cutting wheel. Yet, when compared to the entire spectrum of griffin glyptic, *group 2* is the smallest group represented in the extant iconographical repertoire, adding up to only ca. 10%.

Two spread-winged griffins were executed on metal. The first, on a LB II gold cushion seal from Pylos (**G.81**), is executed with meticulous detail, the wings covering the length of the seal face are decorated with minute drill holes along the feathers. Placed on a decorative frieze,³³⁵ it throws its head back, *regardant*. Its head is topped by an intricate plumage and J-Spirals extend from it over the chest and along the wings – these can also be observed on griffins in wall-paintings.³³⁶ All in all, this majestic creature reflects an elite – one is tempted to say ‘royal’ – identity, that was possibly legitimized through a transcendent instance of which the griffin was an emblem. The context of griffins in the ‘throne-rooms’ at different administrative centers, such as Knossos and Pylos, of course supplements this idea.

In the case of Minoan Crete, a royal instance is, however, very debatable. It is likely that the Minoan cognition on the one hand, and the Mycenaean cognition on the other, were somewhat disparate with regard to griffins’ emblematic qualities – a hypothesis that will be scrutinized in the following sub-chapters, dealing with narrative and heraldic scenes. These offer more footing for iconological interpretation, since we encounter interactive agents and dynamic scenes, as opposed to the static portrayal of the hybrid in the first two groups.³³⁷

³³³ For a detailed account of Cut Style seals, *cf.* Pini 2000.

³³⁴ Krzyszkowska 2005, 147.

³³⁵ The face of a metal signet ring is preserved by several impressions from Pylos (*CMS* II no. 329). It displays a griffin, lion and another quadruped in a row on another pedestal with an exuberantly decorated frieze.

³³⁶ D’Albiac 1995, 64.

³³⁷ Further griffins in profile with outspread frontal wings: *CMS* I no. 389 (LB II); II8 nos. 182 (LM I–II), 184 (LM IIIA1–2); III no. 374 (LM II–IIIA1); IS no. 138 (LM I); IV no. 248 (LM I–II); IX nos. 105 (LB I–II), D22 (LB I–II); V nos. 208, 590 (LB I–II), 672 (LB IIIA1–II); VI nos. 268 (LB I–II), 385 (LM I); VII no. 135 (LB I–II); VS1A nos. 101 (LB IIIA1), 347 (LB I–II); VS3 no. 349 (LB I–II); and X no. 267 (LB II–IIIA1).

Group 3: Narrative Scenes

Narrative scenes form the second-largest group of griffin seals. Before going into detail, it is necessary to differentiate them from heraldic scenes, which can also be seen to have narrative potential. While narrative scenes convey a dynamic interplay of the represented creatures, be they human, animal or hybrid, heraldic scenes are rather static portrayals. One could say, narrative scenes open a window to a sequential happening, presenting a ‘snap-shot’ of the story; whereas heraldic scenes display a pre-structured portrayal of an idea rather than a story and can therefore be understood as emblems.

Fifty-eight seals with narrative scenes involving one or more griffins have been accumulated in this study. These rather dynamic representations occur from LM I on and are still produced by the end of the Aegean Bronze Age. The dominant theme is hunting: usually, the griffin is shown as the hunter of regularly occurring species in the glyptic repertoire, *i.e.* bulls, deer, lions and boars.³³⁸ While it could be argued that these are not actual ‘narrative’ scenes, but rather an iconographic *topos*, we can assume from the large number of griffin attack scenes that these were part of a narrative cycle.³³⁹ A few exceptional cases display griffins under attack by a wild animal, like a lion (*cf.* **G.27–28**). Some lentoids depict griffins and their usual prey in a *tête-bêche* composition that is here posited to be understood as abbreviated animal-attack scenes (*cf.* **G.29–32**). This interpretation is also supported by *tête-bêche* scenes that show the attack of the griffin, usually aiming with its beak at its prey (*cf.* **G.31–32**). Possibly, attack scenes derived from a Near Eastern tradition, where griffins and wild animals were frequently depicted in such a narrative. Near Eastern and Cypro-Aegean cylinder seals from Minoan contexts are proof for the dissemination of this tradition on Crete, and later, the Greek mainland.³⁴⁰ Near Eastern seals were copied or re-worked and even inspired the creation of cylinder seals with Minoan styles, such as the Cut Style that can be seen on four seals from different find spots: *CMS* I no. 206 from Prosymna (LB II–III), *CMS* VII no. 94 from Knossos (LB I–II), *CMS* VS1B no. 197 from Angelliana (LB I–II) and, possibly, *CMS* VS3 no. 347 from Mochlos (LB I–II). While these seals show Near Eastern motifs in Aegean style, a cylinder seal from Kazarma, **G.38**, adheres to Near Eastern styles employing Aegean motifs. Aruz states that, “the composition of simple, large forms, a female riding side-saddle on a lion and confronting a griffin, looks Aegean.”³⁴¹

³³⁸ MD.14 shows a griffin attacking another fantastic creature, *i.e.* a Minoan dragon. However, the authenticity of the seal is questionable. See chapter 4.5, *Minoan Dragon*, for more details.

³³⁹ Blakolmer 2019, 130.

³⁴⁰ *Cf.* G.33–38 and *CMS* I no. 206 (LB I–II).

³⁴¹ Aruz 2008, 167.

Griffin attack scenes are strongly reminiscent of lion attack scenes. Both creatures are portrayed as dangerous and potent predators that do not back off from dangerous animals but engage in direct contact with creatures that have the potential of injuring or killing them, such as wild bulls (**G.49–52**). Like the lion, griffins can also be hunted. Yet, in contrast to the felines, there are no depictions of humans hunting griffins, with the possible exception of one scene that is not fully preserved and therefore difficult to interpret: This is the impression of a metal ring (**G.39**) showing two men in running postures chasing quadrupeds. While the lower appears to be chasing deer, the upper man, the only figure whose head is mostly preserved, grabs a griffin by the wing while wielding a spear. Blakolmer offers the interpretation that “the men are protecting deer against a group of rapacious griffins,”³⁴² which he deduces from the large amount of seals depicting griffins that attack fallow. Apart from this, griffins are either configured alongside humans as accompanying or heraldic creatures (e.g. **G.53, 66**) or as draught-animals for chariots (**G.37, 40–41**).

While LM I griffins are mostly depicted in animal attacks, one narrative scene that stands out not only among the repertoire of hybrid creatures, but even in the entire context of Aegean glyptic is the so-called **Ring of Nestor**, probably derived from the Kakovatos tholos. While its authenticity has been a matter of intense debate, challenged by scholars such as Martin P. Nilson, Georg Karo, John G. Younger and Agnes Sakellariou, Yannis Sakellarakis and Ingo Pini have plausibly demonstrated the gold ring’s authenticity not only on the basis of iconography, but also from technological points of view.³⁴³ The ring is divided by a tree and its horizontal branches into four registers. The griffin is featured in the lower right register (impression). It sits upright on an elevated platform reminiscent of a modern table, where it is the center of attention of several female figures wearing flounced skirts and performing gestures. Behind it stands a single female, as if flanking it, with one arm down and the other bent up. The same gesture is performed by the woman in the far left of the register, the only figure who is not facing the griffin, but instead, the trunk of the tree. Behind her, two female figures performing the same gesture of bending one arm up in front of the body, while inclining their heads toward the enthroned hybrid, approach or stand in front of the creature. The griffin itself is sitting upright, its wings outstretched, and head raised. Apparently, it is the focus of the females’ adoration and therefore needs to be credited an elevated status in the cognition of the attending humans, and ultimately, the historical people who ushered and used this narrative piece of glyptic art.

³⁴² Blakolmer 2019, 130.

³⁴³ Sakellarakis 1973; Pini 1998. For an account of the debate, cf. Krzyszkowska 2005, 334–36, with references to Nilson, Karo and Younger; Sakellariou 1974.

The seals that can be dated to LM I–II continue to follow the themes of the LM I griffin depictions, while we can note the introduction of a new shape; the Syrian cylinder seal (**G.33–38**). This seal shape can display various glyptic styles. **G.33** shows a Cut Style animal attack scene featuring a griffin and different quadrupeds. **G.34**, from Poros, depicts (when rolled) a narrative lower frieze of a griffin hunting a wild goat, and an upper frieze of a man summersaulting over the griffin and a bird soaring over the head of the goat. The published drawing does not show many details, but the engraving seems consistent with Minoan Neopalatial art as observed on seals and larger scale media. **G.36** is possibly Syrian with Cypro-Aegean influence (?) and bears a shallow engraved frieze of griffins above a scene involving sketchy human figures. **G.37** is Cypro-Aegean, less sketchy and quite detailed, depicting several elements, such as a chariot scene, a *potnios theron* composition, and a procession, all mirrored in axial symmetry. The mainland seal **Gr.38** is not composed in registers but displays a full-size scene of a figure clad in a long kilt or perhaps a flounced skirt leading a lion that stands chest to chest with a griffin (or back to back, depending on how the seal is rolled). **G.42**³⁴⁴ is an interesting piece. It displays a scene with two human figures: a man in an upright position carrying a griffin over his shoulder; and a woman riding a quadruped with an elongated body.³⁴⁵ With its body under tension and its wings stretched out, the griffin appears to be alive.³⁴⁶ Similar motifs are known of humans, mostly elegantly clad women, perhaps priestesses, carrying quadrupeds that are interpreted as sacrificial animals over one shoulder.³⁴⁷ When such a quadruped, existing in the natural world, is substituted by a non-existent fantastic creature, it is possible to assume that the narrative is transferred from the tangible world of the Bronze Age Aegean into a realm of gods, demi-gods and hybrid animals. The man carrying the griffin must then be regarded as a divine entity.

The period LB II–III continued producing glyptic with griffin representations. Animal attack scenes are prevalent, but one seal, **G.40**, shows a highly detailed chariot scene. This gold signet ring excavated in the Anthia tholos tomb displays a four-spoked chariot³⁴⁸ with two passengers whose gender cannot be determined. The one in the front holds the reins of the two griffins hitched up in front of the vehicle. The hybrids take up most of the seal face and are rendered with many details. They seemingly differ from other griffin representations, as the tail of creature in the foreground is very short,

³⁴⁴ G.42 is also attributed the cat. no. MD.13 because it is also discussed more extensively in the chapter on Minoan dragons below (4.5).

³⁴⁵ The quadruped is commonly interpreted as a Minoan dragon, see chapter 4.5.

³⁴⁶ This becomes apparent when compared to representations of animals being carried, where the quadrupeds show limp extremities or a drooping tongue. See, e.g., MG.15.

³⁴⁷ Cf. CMS II3 nos. 86, 117, 287.

³⁴⁸ This chariot type derives from the Near East and first appears in the Aegean in LB I; cf. Aruz 2008, 208.

like a deer's. Yet, this may be due to the limited amount of space between the chariot and the griffins. The scene is accompanied by palm trees and a broad-leaved tree. While some elements, such as the palm trees and the chariot, have their roots in the Near East, others, such as the configuration of the human bodies and even the shape of the palm trees that is strongly reminiscent of Aegean maritime type octopods,³⁴⁹ are typical for Aegean iconography.

From LB IIIA1–2, four datable seals depicting griffins exist, all of them showing animal attack scenes. Unlike early Neopalatial and Final Palatial griffins, these late ones have small, thin heads, that consist of barely more than a drill-hole for the eye, and a triangular beak (**G.41–46**). By comparison, the beaks of earlier specimens were usually curved, like the beak of a bird of prey, and attached to a more voluminous head that could be either round (**G.32, 46–47**) or almond-shaped (**G.49–50**). **G.51** possibly documents an intermediate stage between the distinct heads of earlier and the abbreviated heads of the later griffins. This can be observed in the case of *groups 1* and *2* as well. For *group 4* representations, which will be discussed now, this is rather difficult, as only one of the four LB IIIA1–2 depictions of heraldic griffins preserves the creature's head.³⁵⁰

Group 4: Heraldic Scenes

This group features heraldic compositions of griffins flanking a central figure or device.³⁵¹ Strictly speaking, the latter is obligatory for the recognition of the heraldic character of the scene. However, some antithetical configurations lacking a central device are also treated in this group, because the overall compositional idea is closely related.³⁵² Like the narrative depictions in the previous sub-chapter, the representations in this group begin in LM I and are most popular between this period and LM IIIA1, finally reclining between LM IIIA1–2. While the motifs need not present an axial symmetry, this is often the case (*e.g.* **G.53–55, i.a.**). Some are rendered in close symmetry,

³⁴⁹ For the shape of the palm trees in maritime imagery octopods, *cf.*: CMS XII no. 205; BM Cat. Vase C501 (esp. regarding the body/trunk).

³⁵⁰ Further narrative (animal attack) scenes: CMS II3 nos. 25a (LM I–II), 334 (LM I?); II4 no. 73 (LM I); II6 nos. 103, 265 (LM I); II7 nos. 96–97 (LM I); III nos. 375 (LM II–III A1), 503a; IS no. 176 (LB II–III A1); IX nos. 148 (LM I), D20 (LB III A1–2); V nos. 216 (LB II–III A1), 642 (LB I–II), 675 (LB III A1–2); VI no. 392–93 (LM I); VII nos. 94, 116 (LB I–II), 173 (Cypro-Aegean); VS1B nos. 101 (LB III A1), 197 (LB I–II); VS3 no. 480 (LM I–II); X nos. 125–26 (LB II–III A1); XI nos. 41, 45 (LB II–III A1).

³⁵¹ *Cf.* Aruz 2008, 174.

³⁵² Seeing as the classification 'heraldic' is a modern construct that does not feature an ancient category of thought, this slight deviation from the heraldic schema defined above should not pose a heuristic hurdle for the understanding of the compositions treated in this chapter.

such as *potnios theron* scenes,³⁵³ of which eleven are published in the CMS,³⁵⁴ with different flanking creatures or scenes with secondary motifs (e.g. **G.56**).

A flat-based nodule from LM I Ayia Triada preserves the impression of an amygdaloid seal, **G.55**, with two rampant griffins to the sides of a single papyrus stalk. The arrangement is decidedly Near Eastern. In her study of Bronze Age Mediterranean seals, Aruz posits the following:

*The composition of symmetrically-placed animals has a long history in the Near East and is often found in Syrian art. The central device is usually a sacred tree, and the animals extend their forepaws to make contact with it.*³⁵⁵

Such a scene with two griffins is featured on a cylinder seal of Syrian or Cypriote origin from the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.³⁵⁶ This composition is close to **G.55**, whose iconography and seal shape, on the other hand, are clearly Aegean. A Cypro-Aegean cylinder seal of LB I-II date, **G.57**, should be mentioned along these lines, as it also displays two rampant griffins to either side of a papyrus stalk. A human figure in the schematic style typical of Cypro-Aegean seals is also engraved, holding both griffins by a leash – an arrangement that can only be fully recognized from the impression.

Another seal dating to LM I, **G.54**, displays two antithetically arranged griffins standing chest-to-chest without a central element. This is not to be interpreted as a deviation from the heraldic scheme, but rather as a modification of the iconographic input that arrived on Crete from the Near East. A near compositional parallel is the LB II seal **G.58** from Dendra that shows less attachment to formal rules of symmetry, resulting in a minor deviation from the axial symmetry due to individualized postures of the two griffins as well as some non-symmetric fillers.

The two other LM I seals are rather dissimilar. **G.59** is an unusual cylinder seal with a Minoan-style engraving.³⁵⁷ When rolled to make an impression, it reveals two registers, one with a male figure clad in Minoan shorts, limbs spread in dynamic

³⁵³ It needs to be remarked that next to the griffin, lions appear most often flanking a central figure of power. As Blakolmer (2016, 62) has pointed out, “both were stimulated by the Near East and reached Crete already in the Prepalatial period.” It even stands to reason that the iconographical lion derived from the Near East might have been considered a fantastical creature or ‘monster’ when it first came to Minoan Crete.

³⁵⁴ With two flanking griffins: CMS II3 nos. 63 (LB II-III A1), 276 = G.53 (LB I-II); IS no. 54 (not Aegean – Mitanni); V nos. 654 (LB II-III A1), 669 (*tête-bêche*, male *potnios*, LB III A1-2); VI nos. 314 = G.62, 317 = G.63 (LB I-II) and X no. 268 = G.57 (Cypro-Aegean, LB I-II). With one flanking griffin and one other heraldic animal: CMS II3 no. 167 = G.65 (together with a lion, male *potnios*, LM I-II); V nos. 201 = MG.23 (together with a Minoan Genius, male *potnios*, LH II-III A1), 657 (together with a lion, male *potnios*, Cypro-Aegean).

³⁵⁵ Aruz 2008, 174.

³⁵⁶ Cf. <https://www.themorgan.org/seals-and-tablets/84689> (last accessed 17/06/2018); no pictures available. Picture in Aruz 2008, fig. 351.

³⁵⁷ See, for example, the body schema of the male figure or the circular engravings on the griffin’s head and neck.

movement, the other with an aegeanized rampant griffin that probably placed its paws against the register (in place of a central device). The other, a sealing from Zakros, **G.60**, bears two antithetically arranged rampant creatures, one a griffin, the other a larger agrimi. Both of their paws touch the outer perimeter of the seal. Perhaps this contact to the liminal border of the seal face was a re-configuration of the contact heraldic animals would establish to central elements that separated one side of the seal face from the other.

A combination of griffin and agrimi can be seen in a very different manner on a LM I-II barrel-seal in the British Museum, **G.61**. Its attribution to *group 4* is difficult, as it deviates considerably from the other motifs, because it displays a standing agrimi and, beneath this, a standing griffin with outstretched forearms. Both creatures are divided by a sun-shaped element. The impression looks like a decorative band, but on the seal itself, the engraving is reminiscent of heraldic compositions, the creatures being in line with the string hole and consequently 'rampant' when suspended.

Most of the seals that can be dated to LM I-II are *potnia theton* configurations with a central female figure in elaborate costume consisting of a flounced skirt and sometimes a 'snake-frame' and shoulder pads. These figures of significance are flanked by rampant (**G.53, 62**) or standing (**G.63**) griffins with outstretched wings that contribute to an understanding of the women as important religious instances, be they priestesses or goddesses. On another seal, **G.64**, a woman is also accompanied by a rising griffin. The composition reminds of women carrying quadrupeds on a shoulder, but the griffin has its feet placed firmly on the ground and is standing on its own accord. Yet again other LM I-II seals show male figures in combination with griffins. **G.65** displays a *potnios theton* scene with a poorly preserved central male figure accompanied by a griffin and a lion which he seems to grasp by or touch on the heads.

Two further seals are engraved with a griffin standing next to a male figure. On **G.66** the human is in the foreground and a very detailed and intricately worked griffin in the background. In comparison, **G.67** places the griffin with an unusually long body in front of the male, which has also been elongated, as both his upper torso and most of his legs can be seen despite the large griffin that covers most of the foreground of the seal face. No clothing is shown, but a crude line running from the man's hand to the creature's neck is probably a leash, something that can also be seen on the cylinder seal **G.80**. An observation of these seals demonstrates the possibility of focusing on either the human, the fantastic creature, or both when creating such a 'companion scene'. In both cases, the griffin is indicative of, one could say 'heralds', the elevated position of the human figure who has tethered the fantastic creature. A further seal, **G.68**, that has not been attributed to any period by the CMS, possibly belongs in the context of seals discussed in this paragraph. It is an interesting combination of a *potnia theton*

configuration and the motif of griffins flanking a central device. Two rampant griffins place their front paws on a biconcave pedestal that supports a staff with two protrusions on each side of the upper end, vaguely resembling an anthropomorphic figure with upraised arms. Above this staff floats a small female figure, clad in a long dress with a 'snake frame' in place of the head.

A continuation of the motifs prevalent in LM I-II can be observed during LB II-III A1. Antithetically arranged griffins with or without a central device are common, as are *potnia theron*, and one instance of a *potnios theron*, representations. As has been observed before, griffins on mainland gold seals are shown with extremely fine detail, featuring single feathers and elaborate J-spirals running along the shoulder and wing perimeter. Examples of this can be seen on **G.69-70** and the impression **G.71**, as well as, to some lesser extent, on **G.72**. This mode of fine depiction can also be witnessed on the hard-stone lentoid **G.73**, paying equal attention to the rendering of the griffins' wings. **G.74**, from Dendra, shows two antithetical griffins face to face in a landscape setting, implied by wavy lines and grasses.

Griffins now assume as much space as possible on the seal face, taking up most of the available surface. This can be evidenced on **G.71**, which displays two antithetically arranged, recumbent griffins who are in turn each accompanied by a smaller griffin right above each of them, mirroring their pose. The griffins have a veritable coiffure resembling a peacock's plumage on the head. Their J-spirals flow into convoluted circles that adorn their chests. Another example is **G.69**, a shield ring displaying two standing griffins, hindquarters to hindquarters, with their heads turned back regarding one another. Fine detail is placed in the rendering of the haunches, where muscles and veins have been indicated. The same accounts for the front legs and, as on other signet rings, the single feathers are indicated along the wings. On each narrow side of the seal face, a two-sided fir branch alongside a row of dots frames the motif.

Two further seals stand out among the repertoire of this period. **G.70**, a gold signet ring from Mycenae, shows a combination of familiar motifs: A seated human figure is holding a large attendant griffin by a leash that consists of circular elements, possibly beads. It fits in well among the repertoire of mainland gold signet rings; the seated person is stylistically close to the one on the Pylos ring **MG.11**, while the griffin is paralleled on the other LM II-III A1 signet rings. However, the next seal shows a more difficult constellation. A finely banded plate seal from Tiryns, **G.75**, displays a griffin in right profile possibly in the process of jumping or rising on its hind-legs. Behind it there is a female human figure clad in a skirt who wraps her arm around the creature's neck, both figures' eyes meeting. The lower body of the woman is depicted frontally, the head and obscured upper body in profile. Like on **G.60** above, the proportion of the

human figure is amiss, probably due to the griffin covering the mid-section of the body. This results in a proportionately overlong torso, most of which is hidden in the background.

The final heraldic scenes date to LB IIIA1–2 and summarize the preceding repertoire. Alone **G.76** stands out. The lentoid from Mycenae depicts two antithetical, standing griffins tied to a central pole. Beneath these, a human figure lays stretched out on its stomach, arms and legs positioned as if swimming. Because of the position of the limbs and the raised head, it can be assumed that the human figure is alive. However, the meaning of this position remains elusive. Further four seals that can be attributed to this period. One shows a pair of symmetrical griffins back-to-back, another a schematic *potnios theron* scene, the *potnios* being rarely more than a simple stick-figure, the griffins only schematic winged quadrupeds that are arranged *tête-bêche*. A third seal, **G.77**, shows a tall, standing griffin in front of a smaller female figure with one arm raised toward the creature. This lentoid is not preserved very well, which makes it hard to discern any details. Possibly, this griffin is not held by a leash like others, but rather, the gesture of the woman parallels those of adoration on other seals, among them the scene in the lower right register of the **Ring of Nestor**, which indeed dates considerably earlier. The final ring dating to LB IIIA1–2 is **G.78**, a poorly preserved lentoid possibly displaying a *potnia theron* composition.

Four groups of griffin representations have been established. The first two display single griffins in standing or recumbent posture and can be differentiated based on their wings (single configuration in profile vs. double frontal representation). The next group comprises three types of narrative scenes: chariot scenes, scenes with humans on cylinder seals, and third, most prevalent, animal attack scenes. Griffins are usually the predator, but they can also be attacked. In comparison to the Minoan Genius, that can also hunt, but is never hunted, it is possible to propose the griffin's hierarchical place in Bronze Age Aegean cognition. Like the Genius it was not a discrete and unique composite creature, since it could also appear in pairs or more. Nevertheless, its repeated occurrence together with supposedly divine figures demonstrate its belonging to a 'transcendental' sphere in Bronze Age cognition.

The same could be said of lions, the only real-world animal that is often treated similarly to the griffin. It is, however, rather striking that *potnios theron* scenes with lions not only show rampant creatures, but clearly dominated animals, grabbed by their necks and subdued by the central human figure, which is not the case for griffins. This is one indication for the hybrid's superiority over lions. Although it can be chased by lions, it must nevertheless be considered the higher ranking of the two creatures: Several seals display men hunting and killing lions – something that is uncommon for griffins and can only be proposed in one instance. Moreover, whenever griffins are displayed together with humans, they either occur as heralds, as discussed in *group 4*, of an

iconographically emphasized figure, possibly a divine instance (*cf.* *CMS* VI no. 315, **G.65–66, Ring of Nestor**) or as draught-animals for elaborate chariots. Alongside the heraldic representations together with humans, there are a number of heraldic configurations without any human figure, but instead, either with or without a central vertical device.

A question that has rather not been touched upon until now is why griffins were so successful. What was it that kept this composite creature alive in the Bronze Age cognition over such a large span of time? Three cylinder seals found strung together on a necklace in the Kazarma tholos tomb hint at a first answer to this question. These seals were combined with “large amethyst, carnelian, and glass beads”³⁵⁸ and worn by a male buried in the tholos. The material and form of the seals were imported from the Near East, however, as Aruz has pointed out, the designs were “in many respects Aegean.”³⁵⁹

The first, **G.38**, already mentioned above, is an amethyst cylinder depicting a woman riding a lion and confronting a griffin. The second seal, **G.79**, likely made of glass, is not preserved well. An upright griffin is engraved on this seal, its head turned back. Aruz supposes that the seal was damaged and therefore not finished, but “its prestigious form still made it appropriate for fashioning into jewelry.”³⁶⁰ The third seal, *CMS* V no. 585, is an amethyst seal bearing a male charioteer bent over the edge of his vehicle to goad the felines harnessed to it. Although these have no manes, they are likely lions. A sealing from Knossos, **G.41**, made by a metal signet ring shows a similar scene with two griffins drawing a chariot in flying gallop while the charioteer is bent forwards to an almost horizontal position, spurring on his supernatural draught animals.

Aruz proposes that the owner of the Kazarma seals was “acquiring seals (of exotic stones and imagery) in groups for use as tokens of authority or to be distributed to subordinates,” and that “possibly the foreign material and foreign shape enhanced the prestige of the seals for this early Mycenaean prince.”³⁶¹ While it cannot be proved that the buried man was indeed a Mycenaean prince, the idea that the unusual material and shape was a means of acquiring prestige is very plausible.³⁶² Apart from material and shape, the collection was obviously aiming at a certain repertoire of motifs, among which griffins played a prominent role.

These hybrids that derived from the Near East were in the beginning exotic creatures of whom the Minoans possibly even believed that they existed in the real world,

³⁵⁸ Aruz 2008, 167.

³⁵⁹ Aruz 2008, 167.

³⁶⁰ Aruz 2008, 168.

³⁶¹ Aruz 2008, 168–69.

³⁶² The mainland origin of this assemblage needs to be pointed out. To my knowledge, no comparable Minoan ‘collections’ have been discovered so far.

just like lions, which were certainly not common on Crete and are only sporadically attested in the form of single bones in archaeological contexts.³⁶³ Asma has shown several instances in later times where people found and handled bones of extinct species, such as the Protoceratops, a dinosaur with the body of a carnivore and a strong, beaked head. Trying to make sense of such fossils might have led to the idea of a bird-headed quadruped predator such as the griffin.³⁶⁴ Writers of Classical Greece and Rome also mentioned bones that seemingly derived from fantastic creatures.³⁶⁵

Members of the elite seemed to have had a special interest in using griffin representations, which demonstrates the potential of the composite creature for transferring notions of authority (be it worldly or spiritual) that made it an adequate medium for the legitimization of power. If nothing else, its bodily condition, combining the qualities of a feline predator, its skillful swiftness and elegant movement, with those of a bird of prey, an equally skilled predator able to touch the sky and reach places that humans could not, made it an admirable emblem of power.

4.4 SPHINX

The sphinx is a hybrid creature that, like the griffin, is also based on the body of a lion. This is combined with a human head and, originally, with wings. It is closely related to the griffin and likewise played a role in Egyptian royal iconography before travelling to Crete.³⁶⁶ The Egyptian sphinx, a bearded seated creature, first travelled to the Near East where it was changed to fit Syrian interests, in the process of which it lost its beard and could be configured recumbent or striding. Syrian sphinxes were either winged or wingless.³⁶⁷ In the late Protopalatial period, this hybrid first appears on Minoan seals and other media, such as clay figures³⁶⁸ and vessels³⁶⁹. Later, in Final and Post Palatial times, the sphinx is mostly confined to funerary contexts where it again appears in various materials and shapes beyond the record of seals.³⁷⁰

³⁶³ Shapland 2010a, 277.

³⁶⁴ Asma 2009, 28–29.

³⁶⁵ Asma 2009, 30–32.

³⁶⁶ Aruz 2008, 38–59.

³⁶⁷ Aruz 2008, 106–07. Cf. a Syrian seal in the Louvre depicting a sphinx: *ibid.*, fig. 223.

³⁶⁸ Cf. the MM II clay sphinx attached to a vessel found in Malia in the Herakleion Museum: Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005, 228.

³⁶⁹ Cf. a clay vessel in the shape of a sphinx from Petras, Simandiraki-Grimshaw 2017, *passim*.

³⁷⁰ Simandiraki-Grimshaw 2010, 100, „it may mean that this hybrid, although still restricted to elite contexts, reverts to being more diffused, perhaps ideologically loaded and animated in more complex ways. A mirror with a ‘sphinx’ on the handle, if used before burial, would have been both intimate and displayed, physically manipulated by a human hand (not just seen or worn). It would have fused a depiction of a human-headed hybrid with a physical reflected head. Equally, a comb depicting a ‘sphinx’, if/when immersed in hair, would create the illusion of the hybrid sitting on a human head.”

A seal from Archanes, **S.01**, displays a sphinx that shows both Egyptian and Syrian influences, since it still has a beard, but is configured in a recumbent posture without wings. It is lying above three parallel incised ground lines. The head appears proportionately large for the feline body and is emphasized by a beard growing in a J-spiral from the chin as well as long locks of hair streaming behind the creature and forming a curl. The head is held high, gazing upward with a large eye and open mouth. The creature's nose is rather bulbous, reminding of grotesques in the same period. While the head and hair are rendered with some detail, the feline extremities are engraved rather schematically, especially the paws that are only drill-holes with no organic shape.

Gr.14 appears to have been inspired not only by grotesque depictions, but also by sphinx iconography. It features a grotesque human head upon a feline body. While it is often treated as a sphinx in the literature,³⁷¹ a comparison with other MM sphinx depictions, such as the seal above or a clay vessel figure from Malia³⁷² shows that although sphinxes tend to have bulbous facial features, they do not reach the level of distortion that grotesques do. Therefore, **Gr.14** should be called 'grotesque-sphinx' rather than simply 'sphinx'.

Another MM II seal that possibly depicts a sphinx has been excavated in the Petras cemetery. Face *c* of the four-sided prism **Gr.03** has already been discussed in context of the grotesque *archetype group*. Face *b* (**S.02**), however, displays two composite creatures arranged *tête-bêche* with human heads, a backward streaming strand of hair and the forequarters of a recumbent quadruped, probably a lion. The hindquarters are missing and instead replaced by "spiral 'tails.'"³⁷³ The Petras workshop seems to have favored the iconographic convention of spiral finials that can be seen on different seals from MM II, *e.g.* CMS VI no. 138, XI no. 233a and the Petras seals P.TSK05/499-a and P.TSK05/322-a and -b. Krzyszkowska proposes that the spiral hindquarters were "perhaps occasioned by lack of space"³⁷⁴, however this need not be the case as the four-sided prism discussed here offers enough room for the execution of hindquarters. Perhaps the engraver instead attempted to create a hybrid creature with ornamental character that would fit the common combination of four-sided prisms with hieroglyphic script and ornamental devices.

In the Neopalatial period, sphinxes become more aegeanized. This can be seen by the distinctive use of tubular drill-holes along the wings and the characteristic spirals on the chest that have been noted on griffins in the previous chapter. The impression of a soft-stone lentoid found in Zakros, **S.03**, testifies this integration of the sphinx in Minoan iconographic culture. Interestingly, the chest and head of the creature are

³⁷¹ Aruz 2008, 106.

³⁷² Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005, 228.

³⁷³ Krzyszkowska 2016, 151.

³⁷⁴ Krzyszkowska 2016, 150.

thrown back, a posture known from the depiction of humans in a stance that can be interpreted as saluting or greeting.³⁷⁵

S.04,³⁷⁶ a LM IA seal excavated in Akrotiri, Thera, poses some difficulties as it could be interpreted either as a griffin or as a sphinx due to its ambivalent head. While the shape cannot be immediately recognized as human, the lack of a beak denies it any bird-like quality. The element protruding from its head, however, indicates that we are dealing with a sphinx. Such a curved protrusion can be seen on sphinxes from later contexts, such as **S.05** from Ayia Triada or **S.06** from Mycenae. This is part of a head garment that is also known from Egyptian sphinx depictions and referred to as a crown.³⁷⁷ The protruding feature is likely a feather. The introduction of aegeanized elements does not seem to have had any impact on the iconography of this sphinx, whose paws show six claws, something not common of Minoan feline depictions. Furthermore, the body is contoured by unusually deep intaglio lines. Also, this sphinx is possibly a female creature,³⁷⁸ as inferred from the line of dots along its stomach that could indicate teats, which is also attested for some griffins. Finally, the sphinx is accompanied by a dolphin whose significance, put in the words of Krzyszkowska “is obscure.”³⁷⁹ Neither are there parallels for sphinxes with maritime creatures, nor can we make out any near parallels in the Aegean or Near Eastern records.

The sphinxes on LM II–IIIA1 glyptic show a further refinement of details, such as in the differentiation of single body parts, of the human face and the wings. Gold signet rings depicting large-scale sphinxes are fashioned on the mainland. **S.07**, for example, is iconographically close to heraldic griffin compositions around a central device. It bears two antithetically arranged upright-sitting sphinxes wearing ‘crowns’ and necklaces and facing a central element, a stylized three-leafed plant with a straight vertical stem and a half-ellipsoid protuberance at the bottom. It is a near parallel to the heraldic griffin scene on **G.72** from Prosymna. Other sphinxes are depicted alone and in profile during this period. One example is the recumbent sphinx with spread wings **S.06** on a golden signet ring from Mycenae. Its feathered wings are rendered in a very orderly fashion, with ellipsoid indentations for feathers, instead of round ones like those observed on other wings, *e.g.* the recumbent griffin on **G.81** that has a similar posture. An abraded gold signet ring from Knossos, **S.08**, shows a sphinx in the same recumbent posture with frontally depicted outspread wings. However, it seems to have equine rather than feline legs. On **S.05**, a hard-stone lentoid from Ayia Triada dating also to this

³⁷⁵ Compare this with the impression *CMS* II7 nos. 3 and 7 from the same context.

³⁷⁶ S.04 = G.10

³⁷⁷ Aruz 2008, 129.

³⁷⁸ In many cases, no gender-specific features are added to Minoan sphinxes. When these are absent, it is not possible to differentiate the sex of the creature (*cf.* Yule 1981, 137) and it can be assumed that Bronze Age Crete conceived male and female sphinxes.

³⁷⁹ Krzyszkowska 2005, 150.

period, the sphinx is depicted in a different pose: Once again, it is rendered in profile with one wing held up. The creature arches its back while resting on its lower forelegs. It is wearing a 'crown' with a protruding feather and, possibly, a necklace with a star-shaped pendant.³⁸⁰

A unique depiction is displayed on a seal in the museum of Nafplio that was most likely acquired in the Argolis. It is also dated to LB II–IIIA1 on stylistic grounds. **S.09** is the only extant seal that uses the iconography of a fixed hybrid in a composition known from animal-human hybrids. Two antithetically arranged winged lion bodies shown in profile along the sides of the lentoid conjoin to a single human head featured in frontal view. The eyes, nose and mouth are rendered in simple, yet recognizable shapes, the head is topped by either a diadem of possibly short strands of hair. A small drill-hole has been added underneath the chin, perhaps as a reminder of bearded sphinxes.

The final sphinx depiction dating to this period is found on a cylinder seal, **S.10**, possibly of Cypro-Aegean origin. This seal displays figures reaching from the top to the bottom of the seal without any registers or subdivision. In the front there is an animal-human hybrid, possibly an agrimi-man, followed by a stag that is being attacked by a feline predator. In between the stag and the human-animal hybrid a small recumbent quadruped is placed, possibly a fawn. Behind the animal-attack scene the sphinx is engraved. Due to the available amount of space it has a rather unusual posture, the head showing up like an upright human's with the upper body made to fit this posture, but the hindquarters are arranged in the same way as those of the attacking quadruped in front of the sphinx. This results in an L-shaped body that cannot be seen on other seals. Finally, the last figure in the register is a quadruped, perhaps a lion as indicated by a possible mane.

Four seals with sphinx depictions can be dated to LB IIIA1, two from Crete (Mochlos and Tripitos, near Sitia), one without a known provenance and possibly dating somewhat later, between LB IIIA1–2, and finally a Mycenaean one. Both **S.11** from Mochlos and **S.12** from Tripitos display a recumbent sphinx. While the first is shown in right profile, the latter is in left. These are the only other soft-stone seals with sphinxes alongside the much earlier Zakros sphinx dating to LM I. The Mochlos sphinx is rendered in a linear fashion, with parallel incised feathers along the wings and a crown configured of triangular incisions. The neck is very long and the front part of the body quite thin, although this is obscured by the strong abrasion of the string hole that has damaged this part of the intaglio. However, a similarly long neck and thin forequarters can be observed on the Tripitos sphinx. This shows less linear elements, although the feathers are rendered by horizontally incised lines. Its chest and wing are decorated by

³⁸⁰ This necklace is not included in the drawing, except for the star-shaped element. However, the seal and the impression reveal a line running along the neck into the 'pendant' that shows signs of damage.

tubular drill-holes with a concentric circle. The head of the sphinx has been damaged by abrasion³⁸¹ and could be confused with a griffin, but the contour of the crown can be made out.

S.13 is only a likely sphinx, because, while it has the body of a lion, wings are absent and the head is not easily recognizable: It is of an irregular, roughly trapezoid shape with a central drill-hole for an eye. The upper corners are pointed and stand off the head like graphic cat ears or, possibly, the prongs of a sphinx' crown. It is featured on the seal together with two quadrupeds, one grazing in the lower half, the other, probably a feline as indicated by the paws, facing it. This is not a familiar constellation, which calls for some doubts concerning the identification of a sphinx. However, this seal is from a context later than the other sphinx depictions and the constellation might prove an eclectic composition of older motifs. **S.14** from Mycenae is a sphinx in right profile. Its head is only roughly shaped like a human head, with a simple contour line for the nose and a large eye at the top underneath short, spikey hair or perhaps a crown. As on **S.13** this difference to earlier sphinxes with easily recognizable faces may depend on their later date of production and changed stylistic and iconographical preferences.

Sphinxes appear in similar poses as griffins: in profile, recumbent, standing, and in heraldic compositions around a central device. In contrast to griffins, however, they are not shown in animal-attack or hunting scenes, neither in narrative, nor in heraldic scenes together with humans. Perhaps this reduction of possible constellations is a reason why there are much less depictions of sphinxes on Bronze Age Aegean seals than of griffins, who have had a stronger interactive and emblematic potential than their human-headed cousins. The sphinx does not engage with elements of the real world, and, due to its human head, it was very likely not a creature that would have been considered real – something that cannot be ruled out in the case of griffins. Therefore, sphinxes must have been imagined in a realm that transcended the influence of the real world and could possibly not be touched upon by intermediaries such as lions, griffins, or the Minoan Genius.

³⁸¹ The serpentine lentoid was excavated in a Hellenistic stratum, so, possibly, the seal had come to light in Hellenistic times and was further handled and abraded in this second 'life-time'. Cf. *CMS VS3*, 553 no. 359.

4.5 MINOAN DRAGON

Another composite creature with a somewhat misleading denomination is the so-called Minoan Dragon. While the word ‘Dragon’ is usually associated with a fantastic scaled beast, possibly capable of flight or even of spitting fire, this has nothing to do with the fixed hybrid that has been dubbed ‘Minoan Dragon’. Rather, we are dealing with a squat, elongated creature that “gives the impression of being a land quadruped.”³⁸² It has a relatively small head that is set upon a long neck which joins to a yet again long, tubular body banded with dots or streaks that sometimes give the impression of scales. The legs are very short and the creature’s paws large. It ends in a tail that is usually “curling high over the back.”³⁸³ The unparalleled iconography of the creature has led to many wild guesses concerning its identity in the early literature, resulting in classifications as a lion, bull, griffin or even crocodile.³⁸⁴ With the regular appearance of more creatures of this type, scholarship began to recognize it as a distinct fantastic creature. Its name, Minoan Dragon, derives from the ‘Babylonian Dragon’, a mount ridden by Mesopotamian gods who were depicted standing on its back.³⁸⁵ Aruz has pointed out that Near Eastern Dragons “behave[d] like land animals”³⁸⁶ and are encountered standing, walking or sitting. This behavior can also be observed of Minoan Dragons, and they as well act as mounts for a divine instance, an elaborately clad female mostly addressed as “the Minoan goddess.”³⁸⁷ Their recurrent depiction “in an exotic papyrus landscape”³⁸⁸ also hints at a “foreign narrative”³⁸⁹ of this fantastic creature.

Little does it surprise that the Minoan Dragon makes its appearance on Crete in the same period as the Minoan Genius, griffins, and sphinxes. A MM II three-sided prism of the Malia Steatite Group, **MD.01**, possibly depicts the first specimen on Crete. It shows a creature in profile, head turned back, mouth open, its body displaying characteristics of dogs and lions combined to an elongated body with upward curving tail.³⁹⁰ Anastasiadou has noted that the representation of the eye is a characteristic feature also of Late Minoan Dragon.³⁹¹ The use of elements from dog and lion representations has prompted her to suggest that “the motif first appears as a variation of a Dog/lion and that it then becomes fossilised as a type by itself and overtaken as such

³⁸² Aruz 2008, 172.

³⁸³ Gill 1963, 2.

³⁸⁴ Gill 1963, 2–5 gives an overview over the early literature dealing with what was later named the Minoan dragon. See also Poursat 1976, 461–62.

³⁸⁵ Aruz 2008, 172, fig. 338.

³⁸⁶ Aruz 2008, 172.

³⁸⁷ Aruz 2008, 172. Krzyszkowska 2005, 172–73 emphasizes the difficulties in classifying prominent female figures in Aegean art as worshippers, priestesses or goddesses.

³⁸⁸ Blakolmer 2016, 65.

³⁸⁹ Blakolmer 2016, 65.

³⁹⁰ Cf. Anastasiadou 2011, Motif 17: ‘Minoan dragon’.

³⁹¹ Anastasiadou 2011, 180.

in LM times.”³⁹² This can be supported by the observation of other imported hybrids whose iconography does not settle to a discrete Minoan, respectively Aegean, style before the Late Minoan period. The creature on **MD.02**, a MM II–III figural seal, shows the characteristics observed on the Malia Dragon, including its pose with its head turned back and mouth open. Unlike **MD.01**, the structure of the body is rendered, showing striate lines and branching elements that give it a scaly impression. **MD.03**, dating between MM III–LM IA, shows a very schematic Minoan Dragon in a striding position. It displays the characteristically long body, short stubby legs, long neck and small head with open mouth. Its tail is proportionately larger than on other representations, which might be owed to the discoid seal shape whose contour the engraver chose to follow in the shape of the tail.

As posited by Anastasiadou, LM Dragons become more stable and standardized in their representational scheme. Like in the case of griffins, Dragons could also be rendered in different styles, such as the ‘Talismanic’ Style.³⁹³ An example of this is **MD.04**, a LM I carnelian amygdaloid, possibly from Knossos, displaying the creature in the distinct technique of ‘talismanic’ engraving making use of the cutting wheel and tubular drill. A further example is **MD.05**, a carnelian lentoid probably from the Mesara that depicts a Minoan Dragon in flying gallop in between star-shaped ornaments.³⁹⁴

The impressions of three LM I metal signet rings have been preserved. **MD.06** and **MD.07** are preserved on flat-based nodules excavated in Ayia Triada. The first bears the elongated body of a Dragon with short legs and large paws ridden in side-saddle by a woman wearing a flounced skirt. The upper part of the motif is not preserved, but a row of small dots could be part of the coiffure. The figure seems to be holding something that ended in a vertical line behind it. Another such line can be seen in between the rider and the head of the Dragon, which is also only partly preserved. The other impression preserves two recumbent Minoan Dragons lying next to each other. The front one looks straight ahead, the other turns its head back toward the tip of the tail that is preserved. Two whole papyri and part of the spray of a third are in the lower right part of the impression, alongside some blades of grass. No facial features, *i.e.* eyes, ears, snout, can be seen on the impression and neither are there dots or dashes that dapple the creatures’ bodies.

³⁹² Anastasiadou 2011, 180.

³⁹³ See Krzyszkowska 2005, 248 for a short introduction to the ‘Talismanic’ Style.

³⁹⁴ Further ‘talismanic’ dragons can be seen on MD.15, an agate amygdaloid without provenance, and on MD.14, a chalcedony lentoid depicting a unique scene to be discussed below. Both also feature star-shaped ornaments. A final ‘talismanic’ dragon is set in a natural scene on the amethyst prism MD.16, where it stands still among brushes. MD.17 possibly stands in a ‘talismanic’ tradition but does not fit in well, as the solid drill has also been used a lot and the tubular drill was used obliquely.

On the third signet ring, **MD.08**, preserved on a flat-based nodule excavated in Sklavokambos, we encounter another scene of the Minoan Dragon in a natural landscape. This creature is striding above a wavy ground line while three vegetal elements grow in the center of the background. Poursat interprets these lines, that also appear on other depictions of Minoan Dragons, as an uneven terrain or waves of the sea (“*terrain vallonné ou vagues de la mer*”).³⁹⁵ It should be added that this might as well represent a river landscape, something that can be encountered together with papyrus stalks and other vegetation on further representations. Such a landscape is easier to recognize on large-scale media such as the frieze on the NE wall in Room Five of the West House at Akrotiri.³⁹⁶ This displays the undulating blue lines of a river framed by vegetation such as palm trees, bushes and other plants, preferably of Nilotic origin. Real and fantastic creatures, such as wild cats and griffins, are running in flying gallop alongside the river. Accordingly, another running fantastic creature, such as the Minoan Dragon, might have also been suited for depiction in a Nilotic landscape.³⁹⁷

Returning to the seal, a fourth element in the right third of the impression needs to be mentioned. It grows from a vertical line into a nearly triangular, horizontal feature that cannot be further identified. However, as no tail is preserved on the impression, whose lower right fraction is missing, this might have been the upward curving tail of the creature. **MD.09**, a fragmented impression of, presumably, a hard stone on a flat-based nodule from Zakros, preserves the hindquarters of a Minoan Dragon in close parallel to the Sklavokambos impression. Both creatures are dappled along the length of their bodies and their short legs are stylistically close. However, the creature from Zakros has the typical upward-curving tail of Minoan Dragons. Another element consisting of a thin vertical line with irregular horizontal striations and a broader, vertical device ending in three thinner, leaf-like tips is partially preserved on **MD.09**, but it cannot be identified. The possibility that this is something held by a riding female should be ruled out, as the right part of the impression preserves an upward arching line where the body joins into the long neck.

A single Minoan Dragon is preserved on a LM I soft-stone seal. **MD.10** is a lentoid without provenance, but likely from Crete. It configures the same natural setting observed in the cases of the single Dragon motifs of hard stone seals and metal signet rings. Like **MD.08**, the creature is running above a wavy ground line with stalks of a bush or tree in the center of the background. While it is recognizable from its dappled, elongated body and neck, short legs and comparably large paws, it also shows some

³⁹⁵ Poursat 1976, 466

³⁹⁶ Marinatos – Hirmer 1973, col. pl. 8.

³⁹⁷ Gill 1963, 4 argues against this interpretation, stating that the vegetation necessitates firm ground. While this holds true, and the dragons indeed run over firm ground, this does not rule out that the landscape itself is riverine.

differences to its conspecifics rendered in hard material. A horizontal line divides the body into an upper and a lower register, continued through the neck up until the jawbone. Each such register has a single line of almost circular dapples. The tail does not curve inward, but has the shape of an inverted letter S. Although engraved on a soft stone, the creature shows more parallels to LM I hard stone Dragons than to the soft-stone precursors of MM times.

On seals, the latest Dragons appear in LB I–II. Krzyszkowska supposes that the absence of Minoan Dragons in LB II–III glyptic “may be mere chance, since they are found on the mainland and decorate LM II–III ivories.”³⁹⁸ A jasper lentoid from Mycenae, **MD.11**, displays a pair of antithetical recumbent Dragons. Both are looking toward the right, which means that the Dragon in the background turns its head to face its upward curving tail, while the one in the foreground looks straight ahead. This reminds of the LM I motif of recumbent Dragons from Ayia Triada, **MD.07**. However, ears, snout and eyes as well as dash-shaped dapples along the body are added on the Dragons from Mycenae. **MD.12**, an agate lentoid of the same provenance shows a stylistically very different Dragon ridden by a female figure with upraised arms. While **MD.11** stands firmly in the tradition of Cretan Dragons, this specimen shows a newly evolved mainland iconography. Its body is contoured and streaked by long incisions, the legs are stubby and almost fat, ending in small circular drill-holes for the paws. The posture, however, is the same as on earlier striding Dragons. Additionally, the creature is mounted by an elaborately clad woman wearing a long, flounced skirt, cinched belt and necklace. She is sitting side-saddle and extends both arms upwards. The figure is very tall, and her feet almost touch the ground although she is sitting. The ground line is unique in the case of Dragon depictions. It consists of a horizontal array of overlapping semi-circles and has variously been interpreted as marine or terrestrial,³⁹⁹ both attributions remaining speculative.

On the **Ring of Nestor**, a Minoan Dragon can also be seen in a natural setting. It is standing on a grassy ground in front of the trunk of the tree whose branches separate the seal face into four registers with mythical or religious scenes. It alone does not participate in any of the performative and ritual actions presented in these registers and seems to have been added rather as a symbol than a narrative element.

A final LB I–II seal depicting a Minoan Dragon has already been discussed in the chapter on griffins, since both fantastic creatures are encountered on this cylinder seal from Ayia Pelagia, **MD.13**.⁴⁰⁰ Here the Minoan Dragon functions once again as a mount for a female rider. The woman covers most of the Dragon’s body. Its legs are stretched

³⁹⁸ Krzyszkowska 2005, 208.

³⁹⁹ Gill 1963, 4.

⁴⁰⁰ MD.13 = G.42.

out in a flying gallop, head raised high with a slightly open snout. The background is filled by papyrus stalks and the ground underneath the Dragon looks like a rocky terrain. There is no indication of a river on this seal. Nevertheless, as papyrus usually occurs in riverine landscapes, the setting may indicate such without explicitly showing the watercourse.

Intriguingly, the other figure on the seal, a man carrying a griffin, seems to be excluded from this landscape setting. No papyrus stalks are engraved behind him and the stalks growing right in front of his feet curve away from the composition toward the scene with the riding woman. That it was possible to engrave the papyrus in the background of a figure is proven in the part with the Dragon. Therefore, the engraver intentionally did not fill the background of the man carrying the griffin with floral elements. Another factor indicating the separation of both scenes is the missing terrain underneath the man's feet. It is known from ancient impressions that Minoans did not use cylinder seals in the way they were originally intended to be, ignoring their affordance to be rolled on clay to create an ongoing impression that could establish an entire scene. Rather, they chose to simply impress these seals without rolling them.⁴⁰¹ Possibly, this derived from three- and four-sided prisms, that bore different seal faces which did not establish any scene but could be used individually. Thus, it is possible to explain these different scenes on one and the same cylinder seal through the different use and understanding of the shape's pictorial set-up.

Overall, the extant Bronze Age repertoire of Minoan Dragon representations can be summed up in three categories:

1. Dragons striding or running (**MD.09**, *too fragmented for sub-classification*)
 - a. Isolated (**MD.01, 03, 17**)
 - b. 'Talismanic' (**MD.04–05, 14–16**)
 - c. In a landscape setting (**MD.08, 10**, *possibly 02*)
2. Recumbent Dragons (**MD.07, 11**)
3. Dragons used as a mount by a prominent female figure (**MD.06, 12–13**)

These observations correspond to the classification made by Poursat over 40 years ago, who divided Minoan Dragons from different media into the three categories *Dragons montés par une déesse*, *animaux isolés passants*, and *animaux isolés couchants*.⁴⁰² Other media that displayed Dragons are glass plaques from Midea,⁴⁰³ ivory plaques from My-

⁴⁰¹ Aruz 2008, 149.

⁴⁰² Poursat 1976, 463.

⁴⁰³ Gill 1968, no. 12; Poursat 1976, no. I4.

cenae,⁴⁰⁴ possibly an ivory lid from Asine,⁴⁰⁵ and a gold ornament⁴⁰⁶ from Mycenae. These can all be added to the categories above. There is only one exception that needs to be pointed out: **MD.14**, cut in the ‘Talismanic’ Style bears the unique motif of a griffin attacking a Minoan Dragon. The identification of the two creatures is unambiguous, but the meaning behind the scene is puzzling. For this reason, Gill has doubted its authenticity.⁴⁰⁷ Poursat only mentions it in a footnote, referring to Gill’s classification as a *gemma dubitanda*.⁴⁰⁸ Apart from these mentions, the archaeological literature seems to evade making any statement on this seal. While it does not match any other representations of Minoan Dragons, it appears less puzzling in the context of griffins, which frequently appear in animal-attack scenes, although up to now without any other composite creatures involved. With the very small repertoire of Minoan Dragons on seals and sealings, there are no parallels to help testify the seal’s authenticity.

In summary, Minoan Dragons are composite creatures that can be defined as a ‘species’ rather than a specific individual entity. They can appear in pairs on seals, just like griffins, sphinxes and Minoan Genii. As in the case of the sphinx, the possibilities of this creature’s representation were restricted to a few motifs, which might be the reason why it occurs less often in Bronze Age Aegean glyptic. Unlike the sphinx (and the griffin), the Minoan Dragon stands out for its “greater morphological variability and less standardization.”⁴⁰⁹

The creature was interesting also beyond the scope of glyptic, and rendered in materials of high value, such as gold, ivory and glass. Perhaps it was its rather static representational style that made the fantastic animal attractive for ornamental use in the shape of plaques or combs, which were made in a period for which we have no glyptic evidence of the creature. Its occurrence as the mount of the so-called ‘Minoan goddess’ poses it in the realm of servant fantastic creatures, to which the Minoan Genius and, as her attendant, also the griffin belongs. Yet unlike these two other hybrids, the Minoan Dragon is in close, bodily contact to the female figure riding it, which perhaps implies a more intimate relation of the presumably divine figure and her mount.

⁴⁰⁴ Poursat 1976, no. I6.

⁴⁰⁵ Gill 1968, no. 10.

⁴⁰⁶ Poursat 1976, 468 believes this is a crocodile, but it is most certainly a Minoan dragon, corresponding to the iconography of recumbent dragons, head turned back, *regardant* the curved tail. Gill 1968, no. 9 also sees this as a dragon.

⁴⁰⁷ Gill 1968, 5–6.

⁴⁰⁸ Poursat 1976, 463 n. 4.

⁴⁰⁹ Blakolmer 2019, 133.