

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to obtain an overview over the extant composite creatures in Aegean glyptic and to draw possible conclusions around the mindset of their creators and users. The so-called ‘monsters’ were first divided into two analytical groups that defined them as either *occasional hybrids*, with no cross-regional or long-enduring existence, or *fixed hybrids*, that can be witnessed at various sites, often in different media and, in some cases, also throughout many centuries. It is only possible to infer single pieces of the puzzle concerning the social cognition evolving around occasional hybrids by recognizing traits of a constituent animal that were emphasized in Bronze Age pictorial culture. It is therefore possible to comment on the qualities of a bull-man who incorporated the strength and energy of a rampant bull and the athleticism and precision of a human acrobat. On the other hand, it is not possible to say whether the animal-human composites were considered as uniquely existing ‘metaphysical’ entities or, rather, as a type of ‘monster’ that occurred as more than one representative. Their rather short existence might have been symptomatic of social needs arising at a certain point in time, when Minoan civilization underwent changes after a crucial turning point in its history. Perhaps bull-men, drawing on Knossian palatial iconography, postulated a link to a past that seemed desirable after the end of the Neopalatial era. After having either fulfilled or disappointed such an objective, human-animal composites ceased to occur.

Similarly, the vast array of non-viable composite creatures and motif combinations from Zakros had a very ephemeral existence. Possibly, local beliefs and rituals that reached far back in time and were detached from other beliefs prevalent on the island of Crete gave the impetus for the creation of these unique types. Since they could only have been understood in the remote area of Zakros, there was no place for them in Minoan social cognition across the island, and they did not spread. At the same time, other images, such as bull acrobats, addressed several social groups across Crete, their understanding of this ritual and its social significance leading to the dissemination of bull-leaping scenes throughout the island and even beyond.

In contrast to the many open questions regarding the understanding of occasional hybrids, fixed hybrids are somewhat easier to grasp. Most, if not all, of these derive from contacts with other Mediterranean cultures, such as Egypt and Syria. The griffin, sphinx, Minoan Dragon and *Taweret*, the later Genius, and probably also the grotesques and *bird ladies*, came to Crete from the east at the turn of the Protopalatial to the Neopalatial periods. This was a consequence of trans-Mediterranean contacts involving trade and diplomatic exchanges at a time when Minoan Crete became an important player and trading partner in the Aegean. Items of foreign material culture

were imported and with them came the ‘monsters’ of the east. While it is far from certain that these fantastic creatures were understood by Minoan individuals the same way they were in their home countries, the iconographical evidence from seals and sealings, but also from prestigious pictorial media such as wall paintings, gold or ivory plaques, and others supports our modern comprehension about the status of the fixed hybrids in Minoan and Mycenaean social cognition. The archaeological evidence proves that it is necessary to differentiate between these cultural categories, as the same hybrid could play a different role in each context. We have seen, for example, how the Minoan Genius has literally changed its face over time and attained new responsibilities and functions, culminating to a prominent figure in Mycenaean elite representational media.

It is possible to connect the appearance of ‘monsters’ in Minoan glyptic with times of change, such as the transition from the first to the second palaces or in the Final Palatial phase after the LM IB destruction. Not only do composite creatures display a novel level of somatic mastery achieved through the fusion of species, they are also a means of cultural mastery and even socio-political consolidation. This explains their occurrence at times of power shifts and hierarchical consolidation and at places of administrative, religious or political power where such developments and changes had the strongest impact.

Despite the difficulties arising from missing (stratified) contexts and the problematic dating of seals that often refers to time spans over a century long, the study of seals and sealings remains worthwhile, as they deliver the largest amount of iconographical material available for the Bronze Age Aegean. Glyptic media preserve images that derived directly from the heads of prehistoric individuals and social groups for whom these small artefacts offered the possibility to creatively experiment with imagery in ways that would have been out of question in larger scale media. This is likely also the reason why occasional hybrids do not feature on wall-paintings, vessels or other representational objects. Finally, seals prove to be an ideal medium for the study of social cognition due to their entanglement in various parts of social life in the Bronze Age. They played an important role in the web of administration, control and distribution of goods, providing a medium of external symbolic storage, while on another level constructing, emphasizing and giving proof of identity. Like no other pictorial medium, seals were functional and symbolic at the same time. They were closely connected to the human body and the human mind, leaving marks not only in clay, but also on the people that wore them and the minds that created them.