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Current Approaches and New Perspectives in Aegean Iconography

Edited by Fritz Blakolmer

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Narrative in Aegean Art: A Methodology of Identification and Interpretation*

John G. Younger

Abstract: This study continues previous work on identifying narratives and myths that are illustrated in Aegean Bronze Age art. The study first details its aim and evolution; second, it lays out a general methodology for identifying narrative; and, third, the parameters for doing so. I take up the parameters that define Aegean narrative in the following order: In what artistic media will narratives appear?: all examples of state/formal art: sealstones, fingerrings, wall paintings. What themes can we expect to appear in these state/formal media?: in the Minoan, woman-centered culture, narratives focus on the successful childbirth and survival of the mother; Mycenaean art focuses on the history and the early foundations of the palatial kingdoms. How do we identify a narrative?: by identifying "strange and unusual" images with people and then linking these images with others whose details overlap. And what is the expected chronological range for Aegean narrative?: from MM II, when people become central in Aegean art to the end of the 14th century when sealstones and fingerrings are no longer being manufactured. For the above discussions, I first summarize my articles on "Minoan bull-games" as examples of a successful identification of narrative. I then append four more examples of Aegean narratives, two Minoan and two Mycenaean, as departure points for future discussions by future scholars.

The Aim and Evolution of this Paper

For much of my career, I have focused on the iconography of Aegean art, especially that of glyptic (sealstones and fingerrings) and its relationship to the other Aegean art forms. A larger goal has been to detail the range of Aegean art's subject matter and its basic chronology and development (Younger 2018). For sealstones and fingerrings, there are two basic periods: EM/EH II to MM I (mostly patterns and some animals); MM II–LM III A: 2/B: 1 (mostly animals in stock poses, and some people in both simple and complex narratives). The difference between the two periods is striking (Younger 2015).

Until April 1994, I had concentrated on cataloguing the glyptic iconography, deliberately avoiding the subject of their interpretation and "meaning". At the 1994 *Politeia* conference in Heidelberg, however, the van Effenterres threw down a challenge. In the morning session of the last day of the conference, I read my paper summarizing 20 years of work compiling an extended string of bull-game images (Younger 1976; 1995). At the end of my presentation, Henri and Micheline van Effenterre stood up and asked a simple question, "But John, what does it mean?" Caught off guard, I gave a simple answer: "I don't know." I had compiled a series of images of people capturing bulls, training them, leaping them (**Figs 1–2**), and finally butchering them (Younger 1976; 1995; *cf.* Stocker & Davis 2004): these images could have been strung together to form a kind of flip book to show bull-leaping in action (Wikipedia 2018).

At the end of our morning's session there was the usual discussion period, and by that time I had contrived a partial reply: "To set the bull-games in some kind of social context, we have to understand when, where, and for whom they occurred": when?, in the late Spring after bovine mating season; where?, Knossos primarily if not exclusively; and for whom?, "if indeed bull-games took place annually, the undeveloped bodies of bull-leapers of both sexes might imply that the games were part of some coming-of-age ceremony, and if the long hair of the leapers is indeed aristocratic

* I gratefully acknowledge permission to reproduce the drawing by T. Ross of the fingerring from the Pylos Griffin Warrior tomb (**Fig. 12**; Davis & Stocker 2016: fig. 10), courtesy of The Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati. For all other drawings of sealstones and fingerrings I am grateful to the *CMS*. All other sources for the illustrations are given in the captions.

Fig. 1. Evans's Schema for bull-leaping (drawing adapted by A. Watrous from Evans 1930: 223, fig. 156, commissioned by the author)

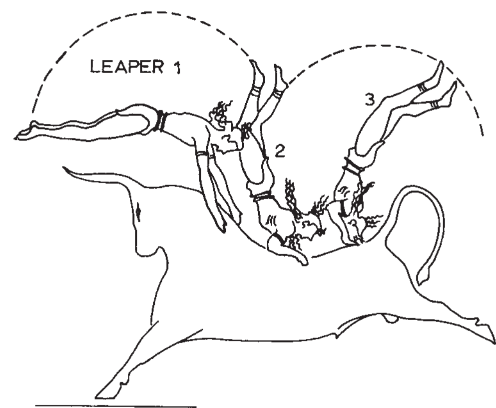

Fig. 2. Diving Leaper Schema (drawing by A. Watrous commissioned by the author)

(Koehl 1986), then the ceremony is palatial" (Younger 1995: 521–523, "Bull-Games as Ceremony"). In other words, bull-games, especially bull-leaping, would have been an annual event at the "capital" (in the Neopalatial period) when a small group of young men and women performed a coming-of-age ceremony on behalf of all adolescents in Crete with the grander goal of maintaining social stability and predicting and predicating the perservation of the state.

In the twenty-five years since 1994, I have been trying to see these relationships between Aegean art and society (Aegean art and the state) not just in theory but in detail, in the specific details that only individual artifacts supply. And recently, I have come to realize that Aegean art details many narratives, not just the extended one involving "Bull Games" as a generalized coming-of-age ceremony.

My goal here, therefore, is to lay out my method for identifying such narratives in Aegean art, provide some plausible examples, and suggest what some of them might be doing "for" Minoan and Mycenaean societies. In doing so, I avoid religious explanations for Aegean narratives since these explanations usually avoid the societal need for narratives. Nor do I appeal to religious concepts imported from other cultures to explain what Aegean art portrays: Aegean art should elucidate Aegean concepts to be received by Aegean peoples.

Parameters for Identifying Narratives in Aegean Art

Media

The major iconographic media in the Aegean that convey narratives include glyptic (sealstones and fingerrings [*e. g.,* Krzyszkowska 2005], and stone relief vases [*e. g.,* Kaiser 1976; **Fig. 3**]), wall painting (Immerwahr 1990), and pictorial vases (Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982). Most human figures in Aegean art, however, appear on sealstones and fingerrings, and even then they constitute a minority. While the majority of wall paintings and some vases, especially of the pictorial class, feature people, in terms of sheer numbers these occurrences pale against the thousand people on seals and rings. Stone vases with carved scenes in relief (featuring only men) seem not to have survived the LM I B destructions (Rehak 1997) and the rest of glyptic vanishes with the destruction of the palace at Knossos at the end of the 14th century (Younger 1981).

Themes

The classical Greeks populated their "grand narratives" (Lyotard 1971) mostly with the heroes and events of the "Trojan War"; I accept that some kind of Trojan War happened in the early 13th century (say, ca. 1250 BCE; Herodotos 2.145). But I would not expect that war and those heroes to be

the subject of Aegean art. It had once been assumed that the seeds of Classical myth and religion would be found in Minoan and Mycenaean art and texts (Evans 1925: esp. 29–32; Nilsson 1968), but this assumption has proven difficult to demonstrate in detail. The Linear B texts do confirm the presence of Olympian gods but they also confirm other divinities that must be earlier, Minoan (like everyone's favorite, Pipituna). However, the texts say nothing about the stories that must have circulated around any of these gods.

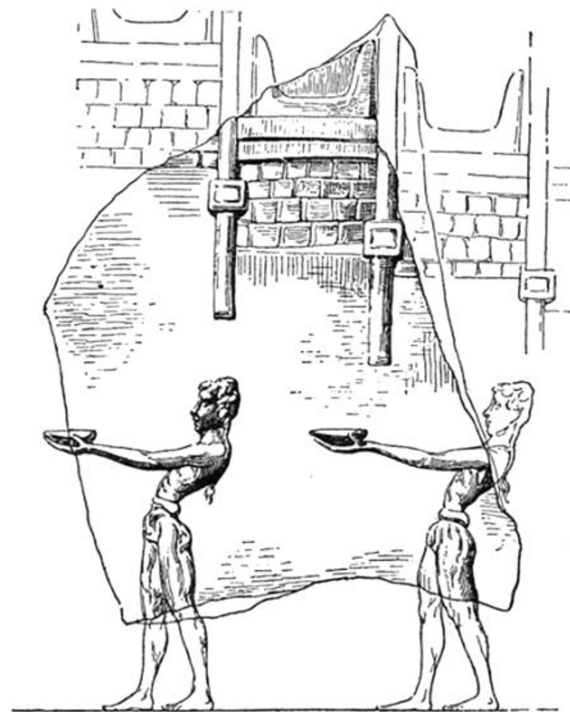

Fig. 3. Fragment of a stone relief rhyton from Knossos (HM 426) (drawing adapted from Evans 1930: 65, fig. 37)

After the decipherment of Linear B as Greek, in 1952, scholars therefore turned to Aegean art to discern the origins of Classical narrative (Banti 1954). Early results were not encouraging. There are two problems with this goal to find the seeds of Classical myth in Aegean art: the goal is too specific in trying to find a one-on-one match (Vermeule 1958: 99–100, wonders if the Athens ring, **Fig. 6,** depicts the Minotaur or Hermes Psychopompos) and scholars usually assume that the grand narratives of the classical world must have been similar to the grand narratives of the prehistoric Aegean. But why should they? The classical world was well established and poised to spread Hellenic/Hellenistic culture far and wide; the Aegean world of MM II, for example, had only recently become self-confident, but even so it still felt self-conscious as a result of its location on the western periphery of civilization (Younger 2015).

Emily Vermeule (1958: 99) characterizes Mycenaean (and Minoan) art as having "no fondness for narrative action. It is generally static, or worse, heraldic and like most arts of its period presents the typical and familiar rather than the individual and strange." Vermeule is, of course, writing well before the publication of the first volume of the *CMS* (1964), and since she cannot see easily the sweep of glyptic iconography she does not have the opportunity to detect "the individual and strange."

Methodology for Identifying Narrative

If narratives are stories about people, I try first to identify a core scene that is "individual and strange", a scene that is unusual against the broad sweep of Aegean iconography, a scene without exact parallel or with very few parallels. I then find other scenes that share details with the core scene, thus expanding the context and adding participants. In the rest of this study I identify two narratives that are Minoan and two that are Mycenaean, even though they may still be sketchy.

There are, of course, many "individual and strange" scenes but many of these do not (at the moment) "go" anywhere – that is, I can identify few scenes that can expand these narrative fragments into anything substantive. For example, the Akrotiri West House fresco incorporates several interesting scenes that recur on other media: "soldiers march along the shore" (also on a fragment of a stone relief vase from Epidauros); "men drowning in the sea" (also on a niello dagger from Vapheio) (Younger 2011: 164; 2016a: 433). But there are no other scenes that could augment these snippets into expanded narratives: we do not know where the soldiers are going (they march to our right with the sea on their right, so they should be going north or east); we do not know what caused the men

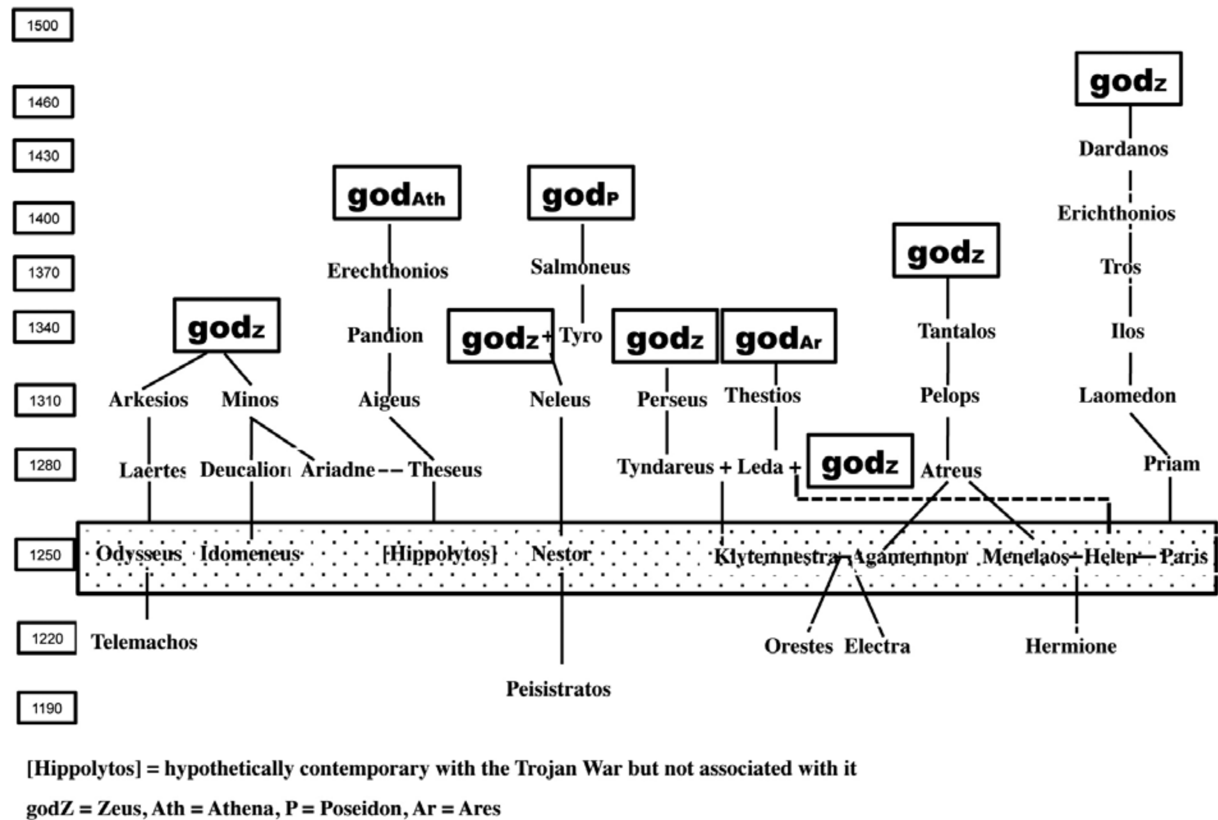

Fig. 4. Simplified genealogical chart of the Trojan war heroes and their ancestors (by the author)

to drown in the sea (some of them wear water-wings as if they anticipated floundering about in the sea). Perhaps future excavations will produce answers.

Chronology

With the publication of the *CMS,* we now know the chronological parameters for Aegean sealstones and fingerrings, roughly a thousand years from start to finish, 2300–1300 BCE (or 3000–1300, if we include Neolithic *pintaderas*). We know that seals and rings were no longer being engraved by ca. 1300 BCE (Younger 1987; Rehak 1997). Pictorial vases continued for another century or so (Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982), but most of their scenes are (so far) too generic (*e. g.,* bulls, birds, funeral contests [chariot races, boxing], women in windows) to imply the complexities of narrative.

To the classical Greeks, "history began with the Trojan War which signalled the end of the Mycenaean world" (Vermeule 1958: 105). This is the main reason why we should not expect Trojan War themes in Aegean art. But to see this more clearly, I give an abbreviated chart of the genealogies of the Trojan War heroes (**Fig. 4**). This chart reveals that we can usually trace the ancestry of these heroes back two to five generations, at which time a god is said to have intervened. For example, for Odysseus, his father is Laertes, his grandfather is Arkesios, and his great grandfather is Zeus. For Agamemnon, his father is Atreus, his grandfather Pelops, his great-grandfather Tantalos, and his great-great-grandfather Zeus. Excepting the royal houses of Troy itself and of Thebes (itself not a participant in the War), it is rare to be able to trace the genealogies back further than five generations. If we put the Trojan War around 1250 and give each generation 30 years (to be generous), we can trace these genealogies easily to the mid-to-late 15th century, occasionally a bit earlier, implying that Classical knowledge of events and individuals before the Trojan War did not penetrate much, if at all, into the period before ca. 1500 (*i. e.,* into the Shaft Grave period of ca. 1650/1550 or into the

Fig. 5. Jug from Akrotiri, Thera, pylon *sondage* (drawing by A. Papagiannopoulou adapted from Banou 2015: fig. 3)

period of or before the LM IB destructions of ca. 1580/1490 [in the high/low chronologies]: Rehak & Younger 2001, 391, table 1).

This short reach of classical memory into the past implies, hypothetically, that if there were narratives or myths in Aegean art they would have belonged to periods so long before the Mycenaean golden age that we might not easily discern them through the mist of classical tradition, let alone be able to discern their "arc", their narrative structure. In terms of the Hesiodic theogony, for example, we would be looking for Minoan stories from the cosmos of the Titans and for Mycenaean stories about the early ancestors of our Trojan heroes.

At the start of our actual time frame, Aegean myth and narrative must have begun being visualized about the time when people became central in Aegean art, *i. e.* around the time of the Malia Workshop (MM II, mid 18th c.; Anastasiadou 2012; Younger 2015). Earlier art usually refers to people only indirectly (*e. g.,* spiders and the interlace designs of the Lerna sealings imply weaving) but few seals and vases actually depict people directly: a stamp seal depicts a couple having sex (?) (*CMS* II 1, no. 446 a; on the other face, no. 446 b, agrimia have sex), an EM III jug from Malia Chrysolakkos probably depicts a woman giving birth (Younger 2016 b: 580–581, fig. 40.2), and small humans cling to the head and horns of contemporary terracotta bull rhyta with painted net patterns on their body (Younger 1995: 525, no. 7).

Even after MM II, there are relatively few images of people in glyptic (about 15%: Younger 1988: p. VII) though many wall paintings, from LM I on, focus on people. In contrast, vase paintings rarely convey people until the pictorial vases of the late Mycenaean period (LH III B–C, 13th–12th c.; Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982) – exceptions include a small number of MM II fruit plates and stands from Phaistos with dancing (?) women (Immerwahr 1990: 37, col. pls II–III) and a LM I A jug from Akrotiri with two youths flanking a branch or tree (**Fig. 5**: Thera Museum of Prehistory 1860; Banou 2015). In short, therefore, I would expect Aegean art to be able to convey narrative from ca. 1750 to ca. 1300 BCE and the narratives themselves to predate by centuries the period of the Trojan War.

Two Minoan Narratives

Leto's Childbirths

At the Vienna (2014) and Venice (2018) *Aegaeum* conferences (Younger 2016 a; 2019), I identified another Minoan narrative (in addition to bull-games), this one mythic in character. I began with occurrences of "two bound girls being led on a leash" by a man (**Fig. 6**: gold ring from Athens, *CMS*

V, no. 173; and **Fig. 7**: a sealing from Chania impressed by a gold ring, *CMS* V Suppl. 1A, no. 133); and it may be these females that a man leads to a third woman on a ring from Kalapodi (**Fig. 8**: *CMS* V Suppl. 3, no. 68). The "two led girls [bound and leashed]" then "flank an adult woman" who leads them alone (**Fig. 9**: lentoid from Mycenae, *CMS* I, no. 159; **Fig. 10**: lentoid from "Mochos", *CMS* II 3, no. 218) or to a shrine (building with tree) on a sealing from Ayia Triada impressed by a gold ring (**Fig. 11**: *CMS* II 6, no. 1). This group, "two bound, leashed girls flanking an adult woman", appears to the right of a shrine flanked by palms on a gold ring from the Griffin Warrior tomb at Pylos (**Fig. 12**). To the left of the shrine appears a pair of adult women saluting and wearing tall conical caps (*cf.* *CMS* II 6, no. 13; VI, no. 288, and **Fig. 13**: *CMS* XII, no. 168). At the Venice conference, I identified the pair of young leashed girls as Hyperborean Maidens and the adult pair with conical caps as Eileithyia, both pairs attending Leto giving birth on Delos ("shrine flanked by palms near the sea").

Other scenes that incorporate these two pairs of females, attending an adult woman, extend the narrative. In Xeste 3, Akrotiri, the second storey wall painting (**Fig. 14,** above the Lustral Basin) depicts one pair of young females flanking the goddess with a griffin and another, younger, pair on the side wall picking saffron crocus. Another pair of young women attends a seated adult woman with a long strip of cloth in the wall painting from the House of the Ladies, Akrotiri (**Fig. 15**: Younger 2016a: pl. CXXX b). A similar cloth is also held by a seated adult woman attended by a young woman with rope "necklace" (vestigial leash?) in a wall painting from Phylakopi (**Fig. 16**: Younger 2016a: pl. CXXIX f). The strip of cloth is also held by the oldest boy in the wall painting from the Lustral Basin's side chamber in Xeste 3 (**Fig. 17**).

I would connect all these images, therefore, as components of a single coherent narrative: Hyperborean maidens have been brought by Perpherées men to Delos to attend Leto giving birth in her shrine flanked by palms; the second pair of women are Eileithyia who attend Leto's second birth. The long strips of cloth are the infants' swaddling cloths, and lustral basins are birthing pits.

In a different context, the two pairs of maidens may also appear on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus, on the two end panels: in the east end panel (**Fig. 18a**), a pair of women wearing plumed caps drives a chariot drawn by griffins (a baby griffin above them). On a gold ring from the Anthia tholos (**Fig. 19**: *CMS* V Suppl. 1B, no. 137) a similar pair of women in plumed hats drives a griffin chariot past trees, two of which are palms. In the lower panel of the west end of the Ayia Triada sarcophagus (**Fig. 18b**), a pair of hatless women drives a chariot drawn by horses with agrimi horns. The juxtaposition of two pairs of females corresponds to the similar juxtapositions of females identified above as Hyperboreans (with griffins) and as Eileithyia (Minoan women with agrimi-horses); if the two pairs of females on the side panels of the Ayia Triada sarcophagus are birth attendants, the coffin may have held an infant.

Epiphany of the Bird

A jug from Akrotiri carries, front and back, two scenes spanning its complete height (**Fig. 5**; Banou 2005). One side depicts two youths costumed like bull-leapers (long hair, cod-piece with backflap, footware); they flank a branch (placed between their feet that form a Horns of Consecration). One youth holds a tall jug as if to pour its contents into the cup held by the other youth. The other side depicts a tall bird, wings displayed, standing, xoanon-like, on its tail and grasping a small bird in its talons.

This "displayed bird with talons" appears so commonly on MM III–LM I seals (more than 45 examples, most belonging to the "Talismanic" class) that I used a term from Medieval heraldry, "alerion", to describe it (Younger 1988: 236–239). The alerion sometimes spreads its tail widely as if to form a skirt, the "eagle-woman" with a woman's head and breasts (Younger 1988: 248–250; *cf.* **Fig. 20**:

Fig. 6. Gold ring from Athens, Agora Tomb VIII (*CMS* V, no. 173)

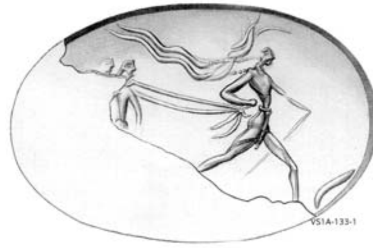

Fig. 7. Sealing from Chania (*CMS* V Suppl. 1A, no. 133)

Fig. 8. Gold ring from Kalapodi Tomb IV (*CMS* V Suppl. 3, no. 68)

Fig. 9. Lentoid from Mycenae Philadelpheus Tomb (*CMS* I, no. 159)

Fig. 10. Lentoid said to be from Mochos, Crete (*CMS* II 3, no. 218)

Fig. 11. Sealing from Ayia Triada (*CMS* II 6, no. 1)

Fig. 12. Gold ring from the Warrior Griffin tomb at Pylos (Davis & Stocker 2016: fig. 10, drawing by T. Ross, courtesy of The Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati)

Fig. 13. Lentoid, findspot unknown (*CMS* XII, no. 168)

CMS XI, no. 65). One bifacial amygdaloid (**Fig. 21**: *CMS* II 3, no. 254) has the alerion on one side and, on the other, two small bird-bodies, which may refer to the bird in the talons of the xoanon-alerion on the Akrotiri jug.

The scene of boys pouring a libation to (or watering) the branch in a Horns of Consecration is, as an iconographic unit, unique. Watering or libating a branch in a Horns of Consecration is imitated frequently, however, by Minoan genii holding water jugs aloft over the branch, as, for instance, on a lentoid from the Vapheio tholos (**Fig. 22**: *CMS* I, no. 231) and in jewelry (Evans 1901: 117, figs 12–14).

On another object, a stone triton shell-trumpet (**Fig. 23**: Ayios Nikolaos Museum 11286, drawing; Younger 1998: 64 no. 20), two genii in relief stand facing each other, the shorter genius pouring

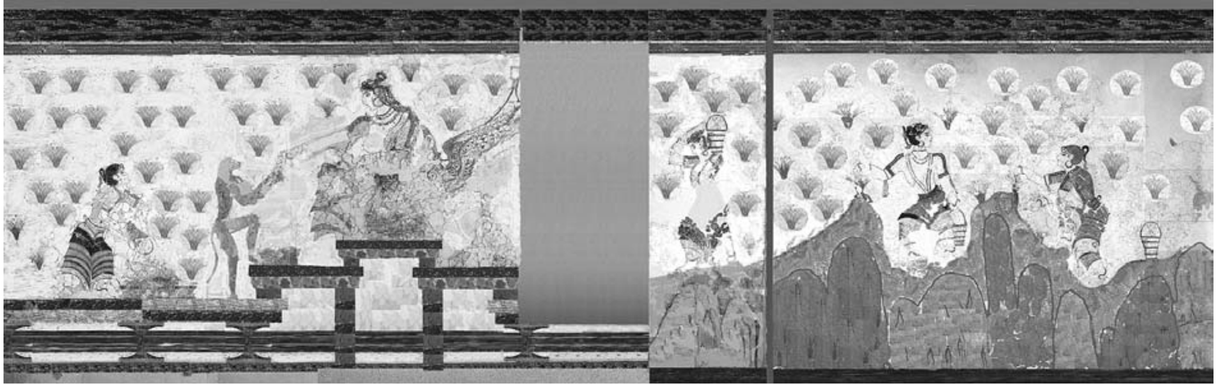

Fig. 14. Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera, upstairs wall painting (computer reconstruction by the author after Doumas 1992: figs 116, 122, 129)

Fig. 15. House of the Ladies, Akrotiri, Thera, computer restoration of rooms 1 and 2 (by the author, based on the exhibit in the Museum of Prehistoric Thera, Fira, Thera)

Fig. 16. Phylakopi, Melos, wall painting (drawing adapted from a drawing in Morgan 2005: fig. 1.16; after Younger 2016a: pl. CXXIXf)

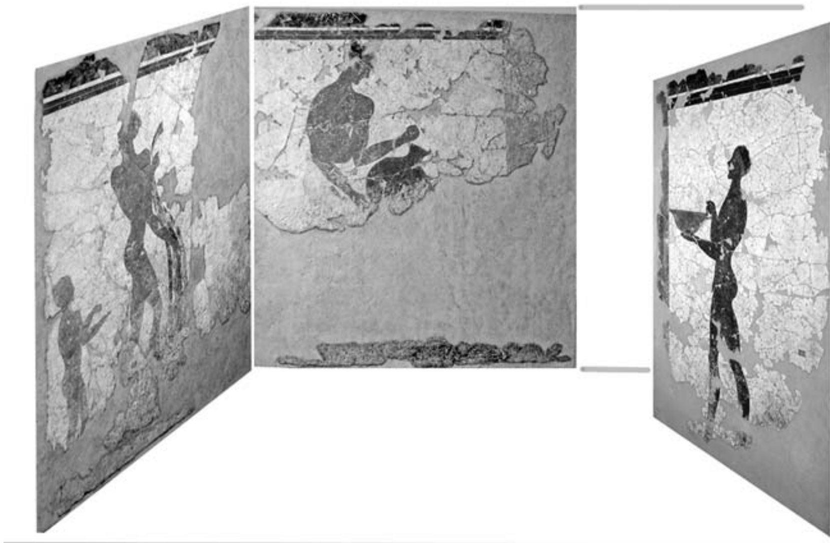

Fig. 17. Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera, Lustral Basin side room, wall painting (computer reconstruction by the author after Doumas 1992: figs 109–111, and Palyvou 2005: 166, fig. 245)

Figs 18a–b. Ayia Triada sarcophagus, end panels (photos by the author)

Fig. 19. Gold ring from the Anthia tholos (*CMS* V Suppl. 1B, no. 137)

Fig. 20. Lentoid, findspot unknown (*CMS* XI, no. 65)

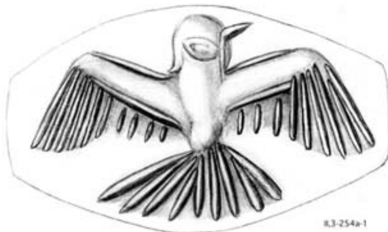
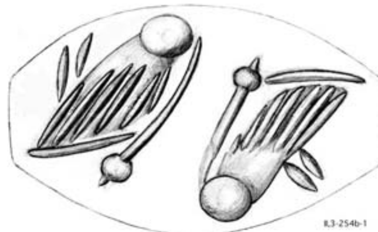

Fig. 21. Bifacial amygdaloid from Mochlos tomb XII (*CMS* II 3, no. 254)

Fig. 22. Lentoid, from the Vapheio tholos cist (*CMS* I, no. 231)

Fig. 23. Triton shell-trumpet from Malia, north-east of the palace, plaster cast of the relief (after Baurain & Darcque 1983: 17, fig. 14)

Fig. 24. Lentoid from the Idaean Cave, Crete (*CMS* II 3, no. 7)

Fig. 25. Stone ladle from Troulos, Archanes (HM 1545) with Linear A inscription, TI Za 1 (photo by the author)

Fig. 26. Gold ring from Kalyvia tomb XI (*CMS* II 3, no. 114)

from a ewer into the cupped paws of the taller; both genii stand on a dais or portable platform against a background of arcades (water?). Since the genius is a common Minoan figure, ultimately a transformation of the Egyptian birth divinity Ta-wrt (Weingarten 1991), it is tempting to interpret the stone trumpet as an instrument of sound at the occasion of an important birth. S. Alexiou (1964/1969: 108) reports that "the triton shell was used in Crete until a few years ago by field guards, rural postmen, and shepherds both as a trumpet and as a megaphone." So we might envision it being used as depicted on a rock crystal lentoid from the Cave of Zeus on Mt Ida (**Fig. 24**: *CMS* II 3, no. 7; Younger 1998: 37, nos 61, 77): a figure in a rough skirt blows a triton shell at an altar topped with horns of consecration with branches between and flanking it.

To this act of watering a plant, B. Davis (2014: 108, figs 76–78) connects the small stone ladles with Linear A inscriptions (*e. g.,* **Fig. 25**: Tl Za 1 from Troulos/Archanes; Younger 2000: /misctexts.html) and he sees the ladle-bearers on a stone relief rhyton from Knossos (HM 426; **Fig. 3** adapted from Evans 1930: 65, fig. 37) as depicting a procession of men bringing water (in stone ladles) to trees in a sanctuary.

The alerion with prey on the other side of the Akrotiri jug demands its own narrative, perhaps something like that to which the central emblem of the flag of Mexico alludes: an epiphany that designates a special location or event. The Mexican emblem depicts an eagle devouring a snake on a cactus, a sign to the Aztecs that they were to build their city, Tenochtitlán, there where they saw the vision.

The two images on the two sides of the one jug, however, should form a structuralist pair: the youths and alerion must be connected, but the link is not obvious – unless it is the link that is implied on gold rings that depict "tree-tugging" and "omphalos-hugging" apparently bringing about "the epiphany of a bird" (**Fig. 26**: *CMS* II 3, no. 114; Younger 2009b). If so, then the act of attending a tree / watering a branch in a Horns of Consecration causes a bird to appear. And if genii expand this narrative further, we might understand the bird-epiphany as favor being conferred on successful childbirths.

This extended narrative is (I admit) speculative, but successful childbirths in the prehistoric Aegean were undoubtedly important events, especially those that did not also result in the death of the mother (Younger 2016b: 518: with a woman's average age of death at 28, "death in pregnancy would have been common" before the age of sulfa drugs, in the early 19th c. CE, and modern antibiotics). And so "as not to tempt fate", depictions of sex, childbirth, and children (even lactation) were avoided. They are so uncommon in Aegean art that I consider them to have been taboo subjects (Younger 2016b: 580–581), and the avoidance of such images to have been apotropaic (*cf.* the depiction of an alerion on heart-shaped seals of amethyst, *e. g., CMS* VI, no. 273).

I would thus see these two Minoan narratives, "Leto's Childbirths" and the "Epiphany of the Bird", as complementary: narratives that concern the mechanisms for successful childbirths and surviving mothers.

Fig. 27. Wall painting from Mycenae, Megaron (photo adapted from Rodenwaldt 1921: col. pl. facing p. 30)

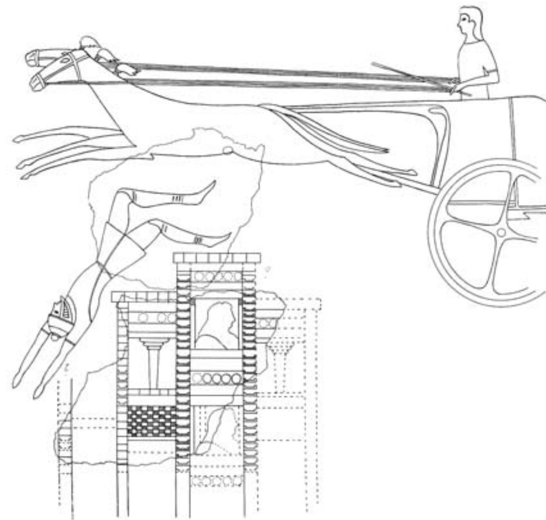

Fig. 28 . Wall painting from Mycenae, Megaron (drawing adapted from Rodenwaldt 1921: Beilage II)

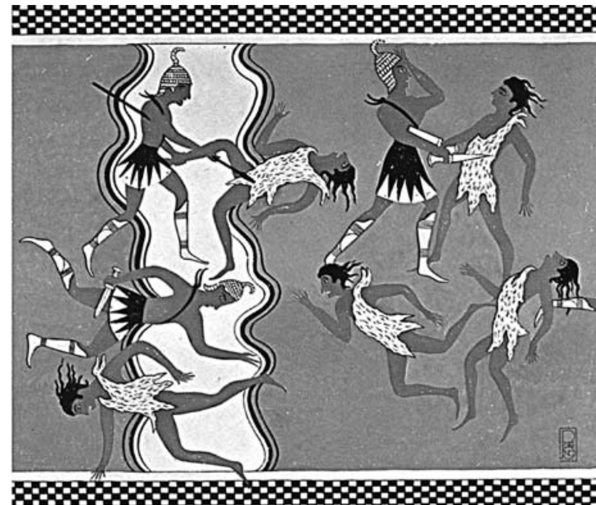

Fig. 29. Wall painting from Pylos, Hall 64 (photo adapted from Lang 1969: 71–72, no. 22 H 64, pl. M, reconstruction by P. de Jong)

Mycenaean Narratives

History of Place

There is strong circumstantial evidence for the Mycenaeans having a deep sense of "history of place". The physical development of Mycenae with heraldic stone relief over the main gate, the incorporation of early blocks belonging to the first palace into the walls of the final palace, and the creation of an approach avenue that goes past the Treasury of Atreus (displaying spolia from the destruction of Knossos) and past the two early grave circles – all this and more designate Mycenae as a "city of monuments" (Younger 1987; 2005).

If wall paintings in the various Mycenaean megarons depicted (myth-)historical events, they would also testify to this self-conscious "history of place". For instance, from the throne room at Mycenae comes a city-scape that includes women in windows and a man falling through the air past them (**Fig. 27**: Rodenwaldt 1921: Beilage II). From a brown area at the top of the fragment, Rodenwaldt (1921: 38–40) reconstructs the chest of a horse drawing a chariot (**Fig. 28**: Rodenwaldt 1921: Beilage V). If so, this man falling from a chariot could be Myrtilos being cast into the Myrtoan Sea by Pelops from his winged (Paus. V.17.7) gold chariot (Soph. *El*. 509–512).

Fig. 30. Gold ring from the Tiryns Treasure (*CMS* I, no. 180)

Fig. 31. Gold ring said to be from "near Candia" (Herakleion) (*CMS* VI, no. 280)

Fig. 32. Late Geometric *louterion* (BM 1899.2–19.1) (photo courtesy of the Board of Trustees, British Museum)

At Pylos, in Hall 64, a wall painting depicts Mycenaeans battling opponents wearing skins (**Fig. 29**: Lang 1969: 71–72, pls 16, 117, A, M, no. 22 H 64), recalling the young Nestor's cattle raid into Elis across the Alpheios (*Il.* 11.671–685, 675: λαοὶ δὲ περίτρεσαν ἀγροιῶται, "their people scattered about, being peasants"); the cattle raid, usually dismissed as folktale without much significance, is actually an important element in Indo-European nation-building (Lincoln 1976) and it would have held an important place in the history of the Pylos dynasty. Hall 64 itself is built on a terrace that includes, to the southeast, poros blocks and walls belonging to the earlier palace building (also marked with a Minoan double-axe mason mark).

Each Mycenaean palace had three megarons, one large one and two smaller ones (Younger 2005). At Pylos, Hall 64 is one of the two smaller megarons, itself outside the main structure. Like Mycenae and Pylos, Tiryns also displayed early poros blocks prominently – in corridor 28 leading to the smallest of the three megarons. It is, therefore, not impossible that Tiryns also displayed other elements of its early history – perhaps those who stood on the monolithic slab in bath-room 11 regretted that it had not been finished as planned: to present a heraldic image, like Mycenae's Lion Relief, to visitors coming through Tiryns' main gate (Younger 2005: 186–187).

Abductions of a Woman

A remarkable series of images shows a man leading a woman to a rowed boat (Vermeule 1958: 106). The earliest images are Aegean: a pair of gold rings, one (**Fig. 30**: *CMS* I, no. 180) found in the Tiryns Treasure, the other (**Fig. 31**: *CMS* VI, no. 280) from "near" Heraklion; both are probably LM I in date. The rest of the series, however, is Geometric-Archaic: a Late Geometric *louterion* now in the British Museum (**Fig. 32**) and a bronze cauldron stand from Olympia (**Fig. 33**), and a Daedalic ivory *mitra* (groin guard) from Sparta (**Fig. 34**).

All these images depict, however, essentially the same scene: a man grabbing a woman's left wrist (the marriage "abduction" gesture, χεῖρ ἐπὶκάρπο) at, or leading her to, a rowed ship. There are differences and added details, however, in the two Aegean images: the Herakleion ring includes a tree and a small female figure above/beyond the ship (a "floating figure"? or a girl on the shore beyond?). The Tiryns ring actually makes this shore explicit with buildings on it, in one of which the

Fig. 33. Bronze cauldron stand from Olympia (photo by the author)

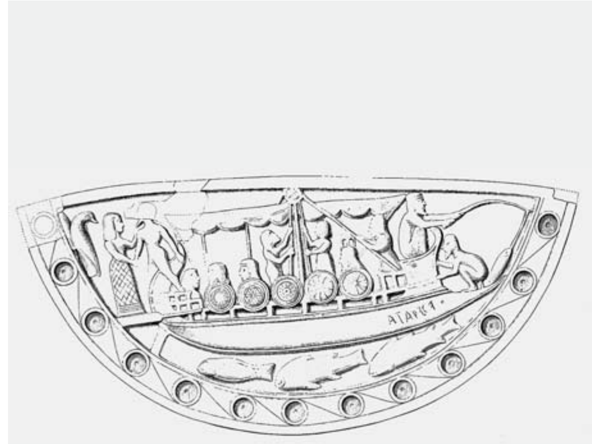

Fig. 34. Daedalic ivory mitra (groin guard) from the Artemis Orthia Sanctuary, Sparta (NMA inv. unknown) (drawing adapted from Dawkins 1929: pl. 110)

couple is talking before (if episodic) they greet each other at the ship (the man does not grab her wrist here).

For the occasion of the narrative, I think immediately of Herodotos book 1, chapter 1, sections 2–4, which tell first of the abduction of Io from Argos by Phoenician merchants before leading, through other abductions, inexorably to the most famous abduction of all, that of Helen by Paris (on the Herakleion ring, then, is it Hermione, who is left behind on the shore? *cf.* Sappho, Page, *PMG* 195, lines 10–11: κωὐδ[ὲ παῖ]δος οὐδὲ φίλων το[κ]ήων | πά[μπαν] ἐμνάσθη).

The conformity of the depictions is remarkable. The scene may have been composed and remembered in the Aegean Bronze Age, but in the Iron Age it was memorized, as if to illustrate a simple handed-down text, like τὴν δὲ Ἰοῦν ἁρπασθῆναι ἐς τὴν νέα, φυγεῖν (pardon my clumsy hexameter paraphrase of Herodotos 1.1.4). The two early Aegean images of the abduction provide specific details, location, and episodes, as if developing the narrative through art. And these are exactly the kinds of details we have come to expect in Minoan and Mycenaean narratives: the focus on the important woman and on the important place.

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This volume

In the archaeology of the Aegean Bronze Age our approaches and methods of analysing and interpreting pictorial images have changed throughout recent decades, and the questions we pose to the iconographic material have increased in complexity. As a consequence, the aim of this volume is to present an overview of current trends and individual methodological attempts towards arriving at an adequate understanding of Minoan, Cycladic, and Mycenaean iconography. Scholars active in this field of research have each contributed an article on a specific artistic object, an individual image, or a group of artefacts and their iconography, in order to illustrate the methodology they use in dealing with Aegean images and their wider context. The focus lies on the presentation of new, previously unpublished or neglected material from recent or old excavations, new reconstructions and interpretations of long-known artistic objects as well as superordinate pictorial subjects. The contributions focus on prominent artistic media such as seal images (on seals, signet-rings, and sealings) and mural paintings yet also include other artistic genera such as metal inlay work, relief images, pictorial pottery, and terracotta figurines. This collection of 18 case studies provides a representative cross-section that portrays up-to-date research on analysing and interpreting the iconography of the Aegean Bronze Age. This volume therefore makes visible current scholarly approaches and simultaneously provides new perspectives into Aegean iconography.

The authors

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