

Animals and Mythical Beasts: The Aegean



AHAR7007

Animals in Aegean Art

- Represented in various media:
 - Clay relief vases, Malia
 - Glyptic & gold signet rings
 - Stone vases
 - Faience & ivory
 - Wall paintings
- Our focus today will be the wall paintings – supplemented by reference to other media



Blue monkey, Akrotiri Building Beta

Animals in Aegean Art

- Range of real & mythical animals in variety of settings:
 - Native & imported species
 - Natural or tamed landscapes
 - Or in ritual, ceremonial & divine (otherworldly) settings
- Characterised by naturalism/realism & liveliness
- What is the purpose of these images?

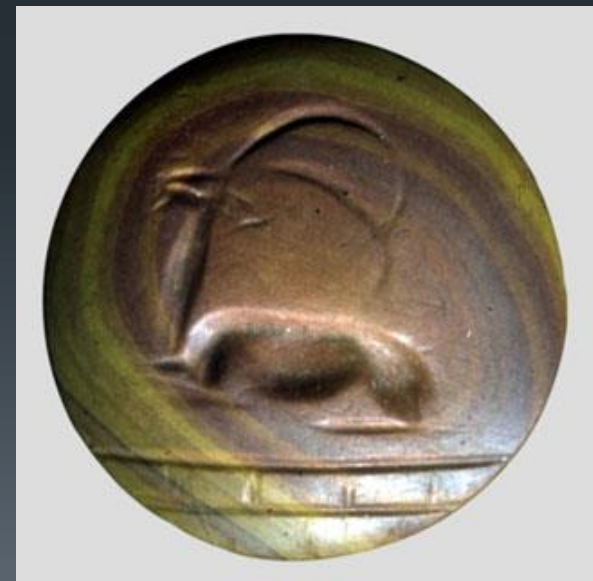
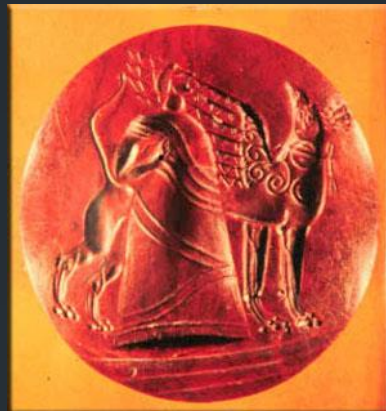


Ayia Triadha



Malia

Examples From Other Media



Examples From Other Media



Monkeys

- Common motif in Minoan & Thera art
- Earliest of the figured scenes
- Colour convention
- Identified as African monkey:
 - *Cercopithecus aethiops aethiops* (Ethiopia)
 - *Cercopithecus aethiops tantalus* (sub Saharan)



“Blue boy”, Knossos



Cercopithecus aethiops (Vervet monkey)

Monkeys

- Typically in rocky/natural landscape
- Frequently picking saffron
- Also engaged in human activities
- Acting as intermediary with goddess



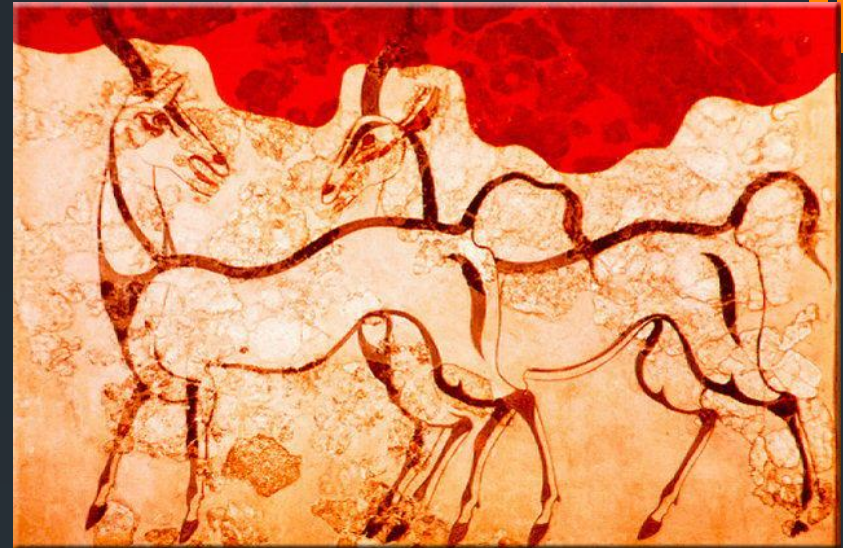
Lyre playing monkey, Akrotiri



Akrotiri Xeste 3

Antelopes

- Antelopes occasionally represented in rocky landscape & suckling young
- Liveliness of pose – artist viewed actual animals?
- Identified with East African antelope:
 - *Oryx beisa*
- Hybrid animals: hints of Cretan agrimi



Akrotiri Building Beta



Knossos



Oryx beisa

Minoan Cats

- Cats in vegetation stalking birds in Minoan art from MM I (Malia)
- Possible Egyptian antecedents?
- Crete: landscape looks Minoan
- Akrotiri: apparent Nilotic landscape & aspect of the divine with griffin



Ayia Triadha



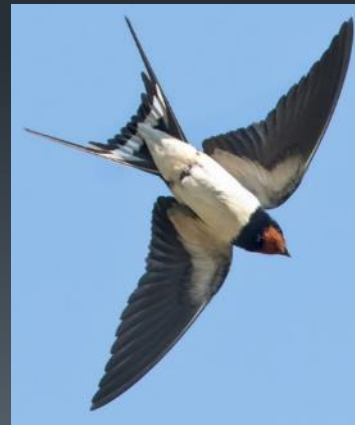
Akrotiri

Swallows

- Swallows flying amongst (oversize) lilies in rocky landscape
- Stand out for lifelike detail, movement, grace & agility...
- Detailed attention to plumage & body form
 - Identified as *hirundo rustica*
- Characteristic pottery motif
 - But no swallows on Thera



Detail of swallows, Akrotiri Delta 2



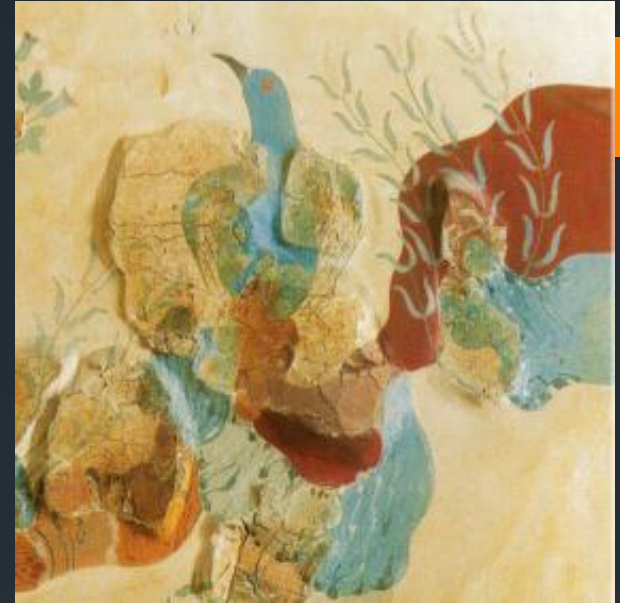
hirundo rustica



LC I jug

Minoan Birds

- Several bird species identified in Minoan wall paintings:
 - Doves
 - Partridges
 - Hoopoes
- Naturalism of Minoan art allows for identification of species



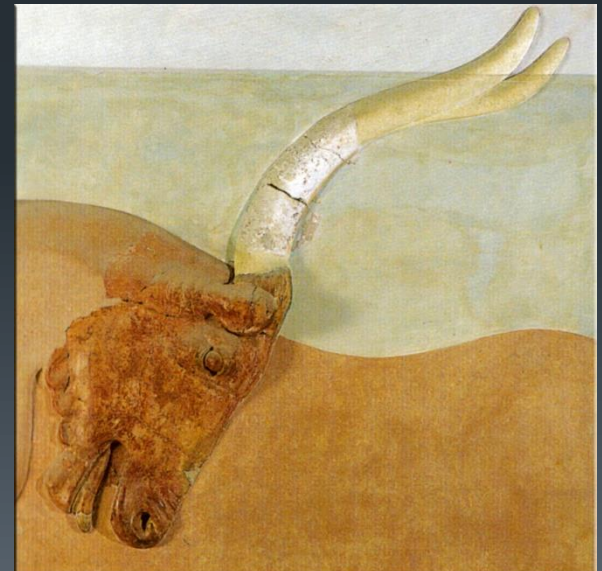
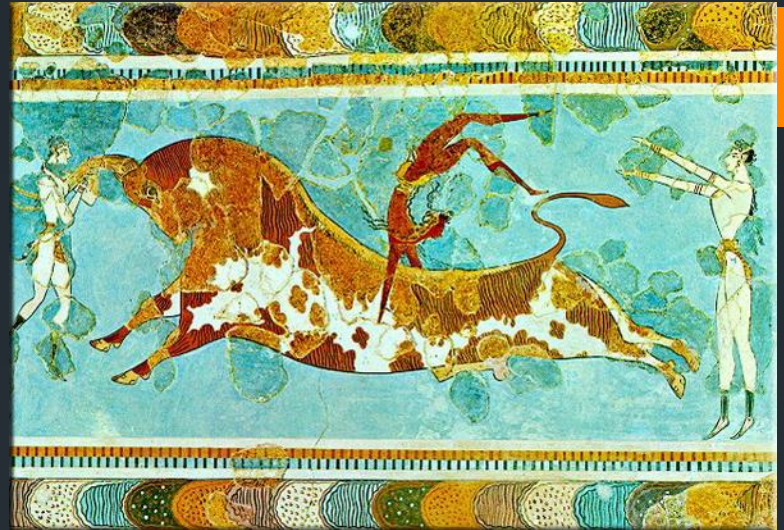
Monkey & blue bird fresco



Caravanserai

Minoan Bull

- Bull imagery prevalent in Minoan Crete:
 - Frequently in association with humans
- “deep-rooted tension between the wildness of the bull & the need to master it also appears to underlie the most famous Minoan institution involving bulls: bull-leaping” (McInerney 2011: 8)
- Images reference power & religious connotations of bull:
 - a tension that underlies man’s somewhat tenuous mastery of nature, reaffirmed each time human triumphs over animal ((McInerney 2011: 13)

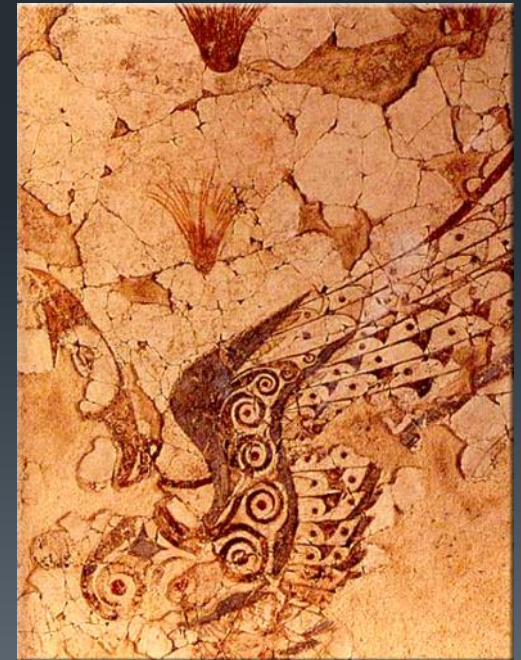


Minoan Griffin

- Lion's body, eagle's head & possibly vulture's beak
 - Characteristic wing
- Tend to be associated with women (goddesses)
- Mark space as special, divine, metaphysical
- Knossos- human control of mythical beast:
 - Relief griffin on leash
 - Wingless griffin, throne room



Knossos



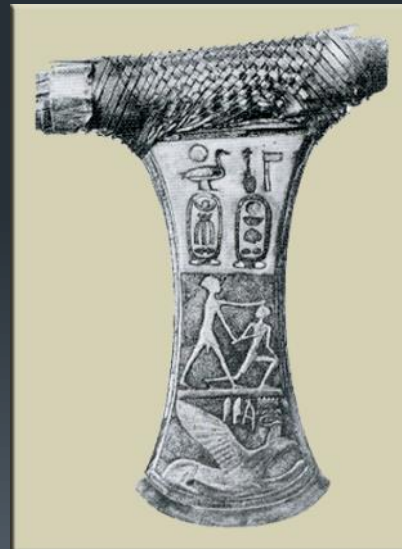
Akrotiri, Xeste 3

Griffins to Egypt

- Early New Kingdom:
transmission of Minoan
griffin to Egypt
 - Tell Dab'a wall painting
 - Ahmose axe
- Distinct from Egyptian
falcon-headed griffin
- Short-lived phenomenon



Tell Dab'a griffin wing



Ahmose axe



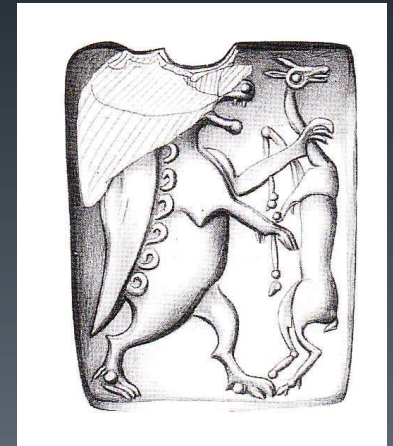
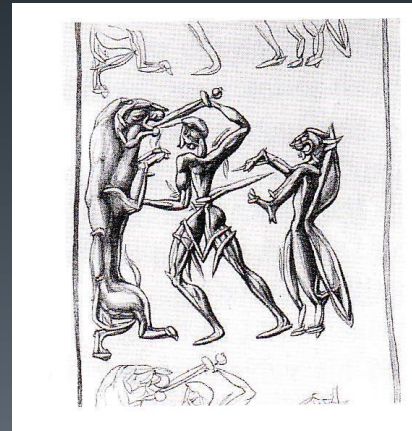
Middle Egypt, Beni
Hasan, Tomb of Kheti

Minoan Genius

- Hybrid: hippo head & lion body, standing on hind legs
 - Frequently portrayed with ewers & associated with libations
 - Attendant to female figures
 - Also associated with animal sacrifice
- Embedded in Aegean mythology from Old Palace period to late Mycenaean period



Minoan genii, Vapheio, Tiryns
Kakovatos & Kalyvia



Tawaret to Minoan Genius

- Derived from MK Tawaret:
 - Apotropaic figure associated with women & children
 - Divine nurse
- Earliest Minoan examples have hippo body & are close to Egyptian prototypes:
 - Dorsal appendage, swollen belly
 - Weingarten links the carrying of ewer to Egyptian offering posture
 - Lion-headed versions found in NK



Minoan sealings, Knossos & Phaistos



Magical ivory knife

Animals in Aegean Literature

- Surprisingly little engagement with them:
 - Why?
- Largely descriptive rather than analytical
- To some extent accepted that these represent the world around the Minoans:
 - Very detailed observation of a real world
- Some reference to ritual practices & also to Minoan cosmologies



Leashed griffin, Knossos

Our perspective?

- How useful are the anthropological perspectives for interpreting the animal scenes?
 - Aesthetic
 - (symbolic) communication
 - Agency
 - Enchantment
- What about narratives?



Knossos, blue monkey

Summary

- Depiction of animals in all media characterised by naturalism:
 - Possible to identify specific species of animals
- Purpose of representing animals?
 - Aesthetic
 - Narrative
 - Symbolic communication
 - Agency/enchantment
- Hybrid animals (griffins & genii) indicate the divine & liminality
- Monkeys: association with divinity & also engaged in human practices