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Impressions of the natural world: landscape in Aegean glyptic*

Olga Krzyszkowska

What exactly constitutes landscape? It is, according to the dictionary, an extensive area of land regarded as being visually distinct. In art it is a painting, drawing or photograph depicting natural scenery and by extension covers the whole genre that includes such images. But man's attitudes toward the natural world are not constant; perceptions of landscape and, by extension, its representation, are conditioned and informed by cultural context. This may be shaped by socio-economic factors, religious belief and collective artistic memory. Familiar to all nowadays are the works of Constable, Turner or the French Impressionists, while *Kritologoi* may favour the fine watercolour sketches of Cretan landscapes by Edward Lear. In 19th century landscape it is the natural world that dominates: hills and mountains, valleys and plains, trees and meadows, rivers, lakes, the sea, and of course the sky — sometimes sunny, misty, or filled with dramatic cumulus clouds — depending on the atmosphere to be conveyed. Human figures, animals, or buildings — if present at all — are subordinate to the landscape. By providing scale they stress the primacy of the natural world.

Landscape in Aegean painting seemingly took a different form, though this may be partly an accident of preservation. Flowers, shrubs, trees and rocky ground are all well attested. Hills, rivers and the sea appear in the West House miniatures; blue sky and clouds apparently occur on miniature friezes at Ayia Irini, Kea.¹ But critically, in Aegean frescoes depicting the natural world, human figures and animals are almost always present and, more often than not, take centre stage.² In other words, we are often dealing with landscape settings, rather than landscapes in the modern sense. Even so these landscape settings offer a privileged glimpse into the Minoan sense of the natural world. And our eyes, conditioned by impressionism and abstraction in European art of the 19th and 20th centuries AD, subconsciously accept that images can be non-realistic, but at the same time can be naturalistic, or at any rate, can capture effectively those essential characteristics of real world forms, as Peter Warren himself has shown.³

Although considerable attention has been devoted to landscape settings and landscape elements in Aegean frescoes, their use in glyptic has been largely neglected.⁴ Paul Yule's surprisingly brief remarks on landscape in

glyptic down to the end of MM III occupy little more than a page in *Early Cretan Seals*.⁵ A promisingly entitled article by Henri and Micheline van Effenterre — 'Terre, ciel et mer dans la glyptique' — makes disappointing reading, for it fails to tackle the many conventions for landscape elements or show a real grasp of diachronic developments.⁶ However, a few useful studies on specific landscape features have appeared, which draw extensively on glyptic evidence, including

* It is with the greatest possible pleasure that I offer this article to Peter, initially my doctoral supervisor and now a valued colleague. His deep love of the Cretan countryside and profound knowledge of matters botanical, not to mention published discussions on specific landscape elements in Aegean art, chimes well with my own long-standing fascination with the treatment of landscape elements in Aegean glyptic. For useful discussions and providing additional scans from the CMS Archive, Marburg, I cordially thank Ingo Pini and Walter Müller. I am also grateful to Ingo Pini for his helpful comments on a late draft of this article. CMS images (some of which previously appeared in AS) are used in the following illustrations: FIGS. 17.1, 17.2 c–d, 17.3, 17.5 g–i, 17.6 d–f, 17.7, 17.8, 17.10 a–d, 17.11, 17.12, 17.13, 17.15 b, 17.16, 17.17 b–c. The remaining photos are by the author. Abbreviations: AS = O. Krzyszkowska, *Aegean Seals: An Introduction*. BICS Suppl. 85 (London 2005).
MOPS = W. Müller, J.-P. Olivier, I. Pini and A. Sakellariou(†), *Die Tonplomben aus dem Nestorpalast von Pylos* (Mainz 1997).

1 West House: Doumas 1992, pls. 26–48. Note also the riverine landscape in Xeste 3: Vlachopoulos 2000. Marshy landscape and sea are also reported on the Ayia Irini miniatures: Morgan 2005, 31–2. Marinatos and Morgan 2005, 120.

2 Immerwahr 1990, 40–50, 59–62, e.g. Kn nos. 1–5, 20; A.T. no. 1; Ak nos. 1–3, 6; add Vlachopoulos 2000. Possible exceptions may be the Amnisos frescoes (Am nos. 1–2), though female figures may have appeared in the same room.

3 Warren 2000.

4 Morgan 1988, 17–40 is basic for any understanding of landscape in Aegean art, not only fresco; but glyptic parallels (*passim*, esp. pp. 41–67) relate chiefly to depictions of animals and humans. Valuable remarks on the role of glyptic in the creation of an artistic vocabulary appear in Walberg 1986, 6–56, 100–15, 139–40; also Immerwahr 1990, 28–30, 68 (steatite prisms wrongly dated EM III/MM IA).

5 Yule 1980, 168–9.

6 H. and M. van Effenterre 1985.

those by Peter Warren himself on squills and baetyls.⁷ More could certainly be undertaken. But as I hope will become apparent, a comprehensive study is both essential and overdue.

What then constitutes landscape in Aegean glyptic? Given that engravers worked on minute canvases, with intractable materials and without a colour palette, we must concede from the outset that true landscapes would have been difficult or impossible to achieve. Even the creation of a *landscape setting* would present real challenges, although a few exquisite examples do exist (e.g. FIG. 17.5). More likely would be the selective use of *landscape elements* which could convey an impression of the natural world.⁸ But to proceed further, to evaluate how this was achieved — and why it was even attempted — is no small undertaking, for even a passing acquaintance with the glyptic repertoire suggests that landscape elements are both many and varied, their use long-lived. Any systematic study would need to address a range of methodological issues, beginning with the problem of classification. Essential — though far from straightforward — would be the creation of a typology encompassing all conventions used to depict trees, bushes, plants, flowers (as well as subsidiary motifs of a vegetal and floral nature), ground and rocky terrain, water and riverine settings, the sky and astral features. In some cases the identification of specific species and distinctions between them — say, between grass and reeds — might have to be arbitrary. We should not expect depictions always to be botanically or topographically accurate. Important considerations would be technique and style, as well as the specific constraints imposed by miniature fields, no more than a few centimetres across, within which individual elements are measured by the millimetre.⁹ One would also need to assess whether and how specific conventions changed through time and, critically, to consider under what circumstances landscape elements were deployed. Did they consistently appear with certain representations of humans, animals, features of the built environment or other inanimate objects; did they serve chiefly as fillers, or were they fully integrated within a scene? And finally, what proportion of seals, in any given period, depicted landscape settings or deployed landscape elements? Only when all these aspects are fully documented, would one be equipped to evaluate the role of landscape within Aegean glyptic as a whole and its possible contribution to the wider artistic repertoire of the Aegean Bronze Age. The initial steps toward such a study will be greatly aided by the CMS database, now in preparation.¹⁰ Here I can give only a brief glimpse of the natural world as depicted by seal engravers, chiefly in Minoan Crete.

LANDSCAPE IN MM II–III GLYPHTIC

Although motifs of a floral and vegetal character already appear in Prepalatial glyptic, their use is largely

decorative; and the same remains true during MM I–II.¹¹ Only late in MM II do we find that such elements are truly integrated in pictorial representations. Our best evidence comes from seal impressions in *vano* 25 at Phaistos, preserved by the MM IIB destruction. For glyptic this deposit provides an invaluable *terminus post quem non*, and helps to underscore the critical importance of dated contexts. Were this not a closed destruction deposit with clear ceramic associations, we would be hard pressed to date the impressions (and by extension the original seals). Indeed on *stylistic* grounds we might well be inclined to see some as MM II–III or even later.¹² Crucially, they demonstrate that seal engravers were experimenting with landscape settings as early as MM II — well before figural frescoes, at least to judge by the surviving repertoire.

But it must be said that even at Phaistos landscape elements are rare, appearing on no more than two dozen pieces out of some 325 seals in use.¹³ Many occur on

- 7 Warren 1984 (squills); 1990 (baetyls). Also Marinatos 1984 (palms). For the built environment: Hallager 1985, 18–21; Krattenmaker 1995.
- 8 Yule 1980, 168 distinguished between ‘landscape elements’, which he defined as ‘foliage or ... suggestions of scenery usually deployed in peripheral areas of the composition’, and ‘landscapes’, in which ‘the artist must integrate subject with setting, instead of simply filling in the empty spaces of the composition with fill elements’. As we shall see, below, the gradations are more complex.
- 9 Most seals considered in this paper are c. 1.0–2.0 cm across and ring bezels c. 2.0–3.0 cm. The largest clump of flowers on the Isopata ring (here FIG. 17.10 f) is c. 4 mm high. See also below.
- 10 Work by the CMS team in Marburg on this searchable illustrated database is now well advanced and should be ready for presentation on the internet within the next two or three years. Much, however, still remains to be done on refining the search fields (including those relating to landscape elements) and checking the tens of thousands of individual entries for accuracy and consistency. As of summer 2010, our work on the English version is also well underway. Nevertheless it is already clear that the database itself will be no substitute for an intensive and systematic consideration of landscape elements in glyptic, e.g. a topic perhaps suitable for study at doctoral level.
- 11 The evolution of such motifs is beyond the scope of the present paper, but must be given attention in any systematic study; meanwhile see: AS 66–7, 70–1, 74, 87–8, 95–6.
- 12 In glyptic, stylistic dates can rarely be pinpointed exactly, hence time spans such as MM II–III, MM III–LM I, LM I–II, LM II–IIIA etc. Sometimes one is hard pressed to decide into which of two consecutive stylistic phases (e.g. MM II–III or MM III–LM I) a given seal should be placed. See also AS 10–11 (datable contexts), 89–90, 104–08 (Phaistos).
- 13 I include both landscape elements used as fillers and as integrated within a pictorial scene (below n. 16) but *exclude* the many purely decorative devices with a vaguely floral or vegetal character, sometimes termed ‘pictorialising’, e.g. CMS II.5 no. 202 (here FIG. 17.3 a–b), 203, 205–207, 209–222, 224–229. Yule (1980, 169) curiously stated that in MM II ‘true landscapes’ are ‘*somewhat uncommon*’ (my italics).

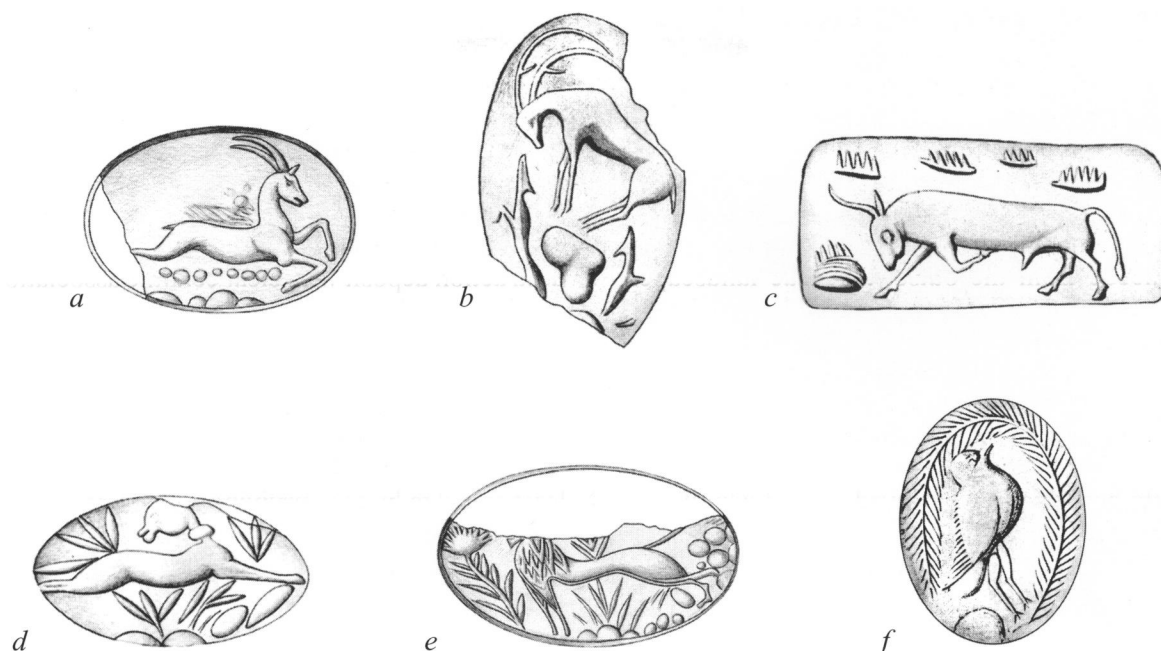


Fig. 17.1. Drawings of selected seal impressions from MM IIB Phaistos depicting landscape elements. Scale 2:1.

signet rings made of metal, which are readily discernible from their oval bezels and extremely fine engraving; a selection is shown in FIG. 17.1 a–f.¹⁴ The range of landscape elements and the way they are deployed is stunning.¹⁵ Identifications are (currently) imprecise and subjective, but I can discern leafy sprays, perhaps reeds or grasses, bushes and flowers. There are rocks and boulders of different sizes. Absent are trees, water and the sky, though this may be chance. In a few cases we discern the integration of more than one landscape element into the pictorial composition, which helps to convey the impression of a landscape setting. It is also worth noting that landscape elements occur in association with a wide range of species, real and imaginary: goats, bulls, lions; also a monkey, bird, tritons, the Minoan genius and perhaps the griffin.¹⁶

Let us now consider what conventions and techniques were used to depict landscape elements in this pivotal phase of Aegean glyptic, when the introduction of fast rotary tools enabled hard semi-precious stones to be engraved.¹⁷ Fine cutting wheels produced the linear elements, straight or slightly curved, used to render grasses and other plant motifs. An exceptionally long-lived convention in Aegean glyptic — not confined to hard stone seals — is the so-called *Tannenzweig* or fir branch, frequently with ‘needles’ either side of a central stem, sometimes with ‘needles’ on one side only (FIG. 17.2 a–b).¹⁸ The fan-shaped motif in FIG. 17.2 b consists of curving incisions with notches disposed either side of a central ‘stem’, suggesting a palm frond. Rocks were normally created with the application of snub-nosed (solid-bit) drills.¹⁹ At this stage modelling was still rather rudimentary:

engravers were still learning the advantages and drawbacks of their new rotary tools. And of course they had to work in reverse. Working in precious metal, whether gold or silver, gave engravers greater control (FIG. 17.2 c–d).²⁰ The tools could also produce much finer detail, with burins (gravers) being used to remove metal (thus suitable for linear motifs) and punches serving to displace metal (hence ideal for rockwork). In passing I should stress that very few seals depict

14 FIG. 17.1c (CMS II.5 no. 269) is the impression of a hard stone seal, original shape uncertain (pers. comm. Ingo Pini).

15 Cf. the few rudimentary plant fillers on MM II soft stone prisms, e.g. CMS II.2 nos. 125a, 267b. A detailed study of the prisms by Anastasiadou (2009) is now being revised for publication; meanwhile for a brief summary see AS 92–5.

16 E.g. CMS II.5 nos. 253, 258 (here FIG. 17.1 b), 259 (FIG. 17.1 a), 269 (FIG. 17.1 c), 270 (FIG. 17.1 e), 272, ?273, ?274, 276 (FIG. 17.1 d), 277, ?280, 285, ?293, ?297, ?304, 305, ?308, 310 (FIG. 17.1 f), ?319, 322. Isolated plant motifs (fillers?) occur on: CMS II.5 nos. 255, 256, 261, 268, 287, 303.

17 See AS 83–5.

18 CMS VI nos. 129 and 157. The *Tannenzweig* is also attested in purely ornamental motifs, e.g. CMS II.1 nos. 266, 328 (EM II–III); II.1 nos. 224, 361, 380 (MM IA); and in MM II–III architectonic designs, e.g. II.3 no. 205. It occurs as a principal motif on II.5 no. 203.

19 Cf. CMS VII no. 35b where a tubular drill set at an angle is used to indicate rocks.

20 CMS II.2 no. 43 (silver discoid) for which see now Pini 2005, 66 no. 44, pl. 3.15–16. CMS V S.1A no. 46 (silver ring bezel) for which see also AS 126–27 no. 212, esp. n. 27 (dating).



Fig. 17.2. Impressions of selected MM II–III seals depicting landscape elements: a–b) hard stone; c–d) silver. Scale 2:1.



Fig. 17.3. Floral motif attested on a series of partial ring impressions from MM IIB Phaistos: a) HMs 788; b) composite drawing. Scale 2:1.

flowers or plants as the sole motif: the examples shown here in FIG. 17.2 b, d constitute notable exceptions.²¹

Seals and rings of metal have a poor survival rate, being especially attractive to tomb robbers ancient and modern, and very few originals datable to MM II–III are known to us. The gold discoid from Poros, published by Nota Dimopoulou elsewhere in this volume,²² thus makes an exceptionally welcome addition. Noteworthy is the placement of the guard dog within a landscape setting, consisting of a plant motif with three branches and rockwork, combined with a built structure. The landscape setting accords well with those attested at Phaistos, but the plant motif is hard to parallel in the surviving glyptic repertoire, both in respect of shape and rendering of specific details. The ‘leaves’ on stemmed plants or branches are normally indicated by simple incised lines — straight or sometimes slightly curved; here they are ‘fleshed out’ and resemble petals. This is may well be linked to the greater potential for detail afforded by metal. Indeed the closest parallel is found on a magnificent floral motif — albeit decorative rather than pictorial in character — known from a series of partial ring impressions at Phaistos (FIG. 17.3 a–b).²³ The atypical rendering of the leaves on the Poros seal, combined with the unusual shape of the plant itself, suggests an experimental stage in the treatment of landscape elements, before conventions were fully fixed.²⁴ The isodomonic masonry on the Poros seal is also noteworthy, as it confirms that interest in representing the built environment also begins in this period. Similar masonry, although without the

distinctive embrasure, appears on several discoids without provenance, which are dated on stylistic grounds to MM II–III and MM III–LM I.²⁵

LANDSCAPE IN MM III–LM I GLYPHTIC

As we move forward into MM III–LM I, we note that engravers handle hard stones and rotary tools with far greater assurance, which has a concomitant impact on style and how specific elements are incorporated within overall compositions. Several distinct though not mutually exclusive trends can be discerned in glyptic output. Purely ornamental motifs, still dominant during MM II, now wane in favour of pictorial representations,

21 The lilies on CMS V S.3 no. 41 (Malia) appear to me ornamental rather than strictly figural or pictorial. This highlights the subjective element in evaluating landscape elements. The palm-like fronds on CMS XII no. 180 belong to the MM III–LM I ‘talismanic’ style (cf. I no. 6), in which individual plant elements sometimes appear as the principal motif (see below). The LM I gilt bronze ring CMS VI no. 472 depicts a papyrus and ivy leaf.

22 Chapter 9 and FIGS. 9.1–3.

23 CMS II.5 no. 202; cf. no. 201; also II.5 nos. 226, 227, 228.

24 For the shape of the plant and especially the slightly irregular contours of the branches, the best parallel (but not especially close) occurs on CMS VI no. 178 (four branches) datable to MM III–LM I on stylistic grounds.

25 MM II–III: CMS X no. 281; XII no. 137. MM III–LM I: CMS II.3 no. 340; also CMS I S. 92 (lentoid).

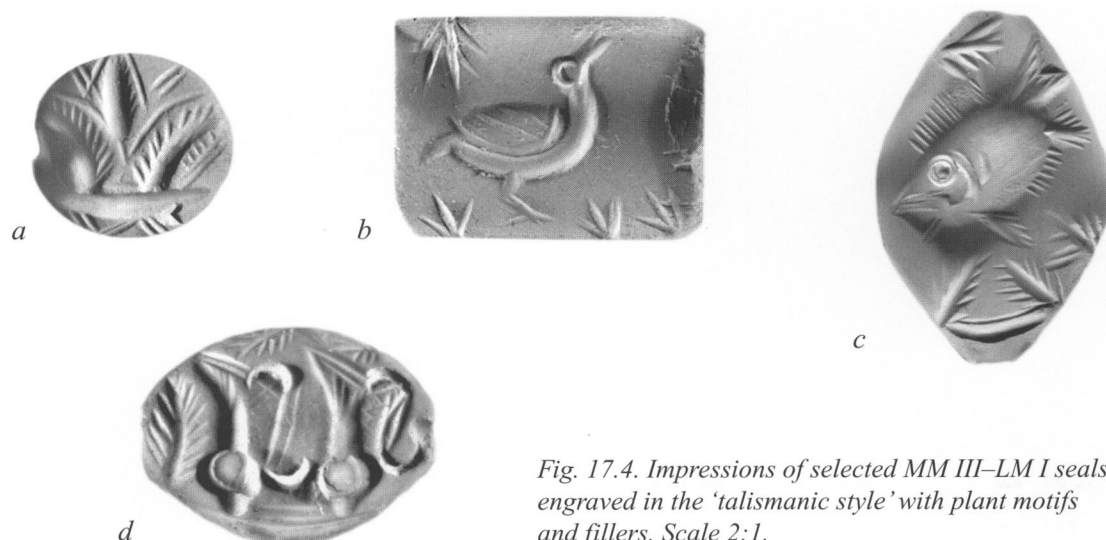


Fig. 17.4. Impressions of selected MM III–LM I seals engraved in the 'talismanic style' with plant motifs and fillers. Scale 2:1.

increasingly treated in a 'naturalistic' manner. In addition MM III–LM I sees the development and widespread use of the so-called 'talismanic style'.²⁶

The 'talismanic style'

This style is characterised by the rapid application of rotary tools, with no attempt at smoothing or modelling. Motifs of a floral or vegetal nature — often exuberantly stylised — are common and include leafy sprays (FIG. 17.4 *a*), heart-shaped leaves, and papyrus.²⁷ Other principal motifs include goats, birds, scorpions, fish and other sea creatures. These are normally accompanied by plant fillers resembling clumps of grass, termed *Randbüschel* by the CMS, which frequently frame the periphery of the field. Especially effective is the convention whereby the 'border clumps' are oriented inwards and even downwards, hence providing a hint or impression of an overall landscape setting (FIG. 17.4 *b*); when accompanying fish and sea creatures, they may convey the sense of an underwater environment (FIG. 17.4 *c*).²⁸ Similar 'clumps', as well as other plant fillers, also accompany inanimate motifs: jugs (FIG. 17.4 *d*), amphorae, double axes and the like.²⁹ But how much or how little we should read into these associations is open to question, and this applies more generally to the significance of landscape settings in this period.

'Naturalistic' motifs

Three ring-stones — an exceptionally rare seal shape — provide especially fine examples of MM III–LM I 'naturalistic' representations with landscape elements. On an exquisite piece made of blue chalcedony in the Giamalakis Collection, we observe a kid goat *regardant* calmly perched on a rocky outcrop (FIG. 17.5 *b*).³⁰ The overall composition cannot be faulted, while the outcrop itself — deftly executed by a few applications

of the solid drill — is carefully modelled to convey an impression of a mountainous landscape. A second example in chalcedony, from the Idaean Cave, is altogether less successful with its artificial ground-line: the grasses or reeds below resemble fillers (FIG. 17.5 *c*).³¹ The species of animal is also uncertain, perhaps a cow-like goat or goat-like cow. More ambitious is the amethyst ring-stone from Zakros, where a lion springs out from a rocky setting, while in the background are long reeds or grasses (FIG. 17.5 *a*).³² The treatment of the animals and grasses is so similar that these two pieces could very well come from the same workshop.

To much the same chronological horizon belong several famous cushions in the Ashmolean Museum, once owned by Sir Arthur Evans (FIG. 17.5 *d–f*). In

26 Onassoglou 1985. About 950 'talismanic' seals survive, the largest known stylistic group: *AS* 133–7; Krzyszkowska 2005*a*, 760; forthcoming *a*.

27 Onassoglou 1985, pls. 14–17, 18–19, 20–20*a*. Here FIG. 17.4 *a* = CMS VII no. 58.

28 Onassoglou 1985, pls. 21–36, 47–49, 56–62; note that many of her birds pls. 50–55 belong to the Cut Style. Here FIG. 17.4 *b* = CMS VII no. 44; FIG. 17.4 *c* = CMS VI no. 257.

29 Onassoglou 1985, pls. 1–4 (Amphora), 5–9 (Kanne), 10 (Humpen), 41–42 (Doppelaxt). Here FIG. 17.4 *d* = CMS II.3 no. 206.

30 CMS III no. 150 said to be from Malia. On ring-stones see *AS* 145–6 n. 87 with references.

31 HM 3117. See Sakellarakis 1997, 23–9. Here FIG. 17.5 *c* is adapted from his figs. 1, 4 and *PAE* 1984, 554, fig. 5.

32 CMS V S.1B no. 331; Krzyszkowska 2005*b*, 125, no. 8, pl. 26*c*. The CMS describes the plant motifs as reeds or grasses. As intimated above, the distinction — typologically speaking — is not easy to make. One might imagine that grassy settings would be more appropriate for terrestrial creatures, whereas reeds or rushes would indicate marshy or riverine landscapes, and as such be more suitable settings for waterbirds.

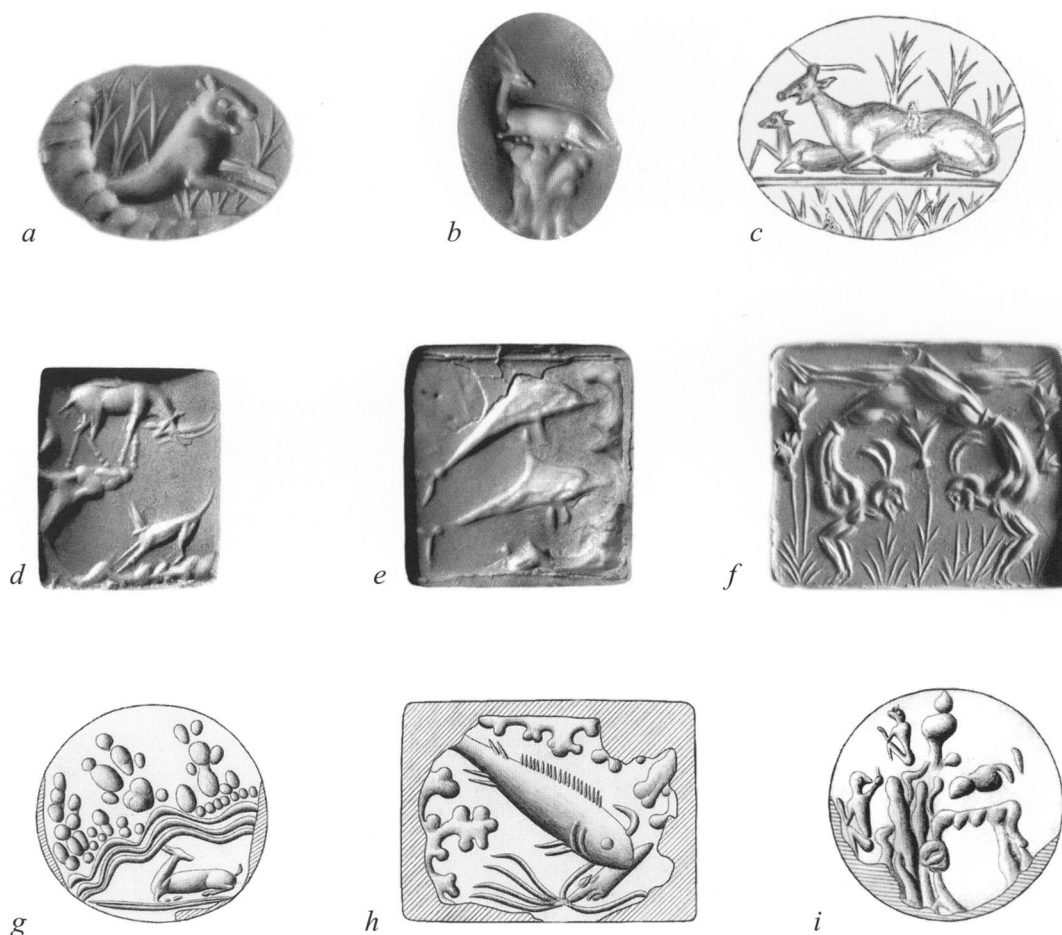


Fig. 17.5. Selected examples of MM III–LM I seals depicting landscape elements: impressions and drawings of impressions. Scale 2:1.

common with the Giamalakis ring-stone, the so-called ‘wild goat at bay’ also conveys a landscape setting by rockwork alone (FIG. 17.5 *d*). Indeed the overhanging cliff and rocky terrain below are integral to the scene and contribute to the sense of narrative, for which the piece is frequently praised.³³ The partial framing of scenes with rockwork above, or to one side, provides an especially effective means of suggesting a landscape setting, as seen on the soft stone cushion covered in gold foil, depicting two dolphins (FIG. 17.5 *e*).³⁴ A small, but significant, detail is the use of tiny projections — here created by minute solid drillings — to indicate the interface between rocky coastline and water. Finally five long-stemmed flowers (perhaps lilies) and sundry grasses suggest that the acrobats on FIG. 17.5 *f* are performing their extravagant handstands in a lush outdoor setting.³⁵ Significantly these landscape settings occur on oval ring-stones and cushions, shapes which offer greater scope than lentoids for the inclusion of subsidiary motifs.³⁶ While most of the pieces just described are hard stone, engravers working in soft stone and metal followed similar trends in depicting landscape elements.³⁷

Three highly interesting seals with landscape settings are known from impressions attributed to the so-called Hieroglyphic ‘Deposit’ at Knossos.³⁸ But they lack any ceramic associations and we are forced to date them on purely stylistic grounds. The so-called ‘hart by a mountain brook’ — probably a kid goat — fits well

33 Evans 1935, 508ff, fig. 453. See CMS VI no. 180 for full bibliography; also AS 145–46 no. 255, C21. This cushion is also blue chalcedony, a stone used infrequently for Aegean seals: AS 82, 123; Krzyszkowska 2005b, 126 n. 53; 2010, 252; Pini, this volume, Chapter 23.

34 CMS VI no. 182. AS 146 no. 255, C23.

35 CMS VI no. 184. AS no. C26; also blue chalcedony (see above n. 33).

36 Other MM III–LM I cushions with landscape elements include: CMS V S.1B no. 247 and VI no. 178.

37 E.g. CMS II.8 nos. 353–354 (impressions of soft stone rings, oval bezels); VII no. 68 (gold ring with round bezel, though the mating goats overpower the rockwork below: AS 127–8, no. 214a–c, C22).

38 See AS 112–16 with references.



Fig. 17.6. Selected examples of MM III–LM I and LM I seals depicting birds and landscape elements: a–d) impressions and e–f) drawings of impressions. Scale 2:1.

with MM III–LM I glyptic (FIG. 17.5 g).³⁹ Once again we note that the landscape forms an integral part of the motif, as on the Giamalakis ring-stone and Ashmolean cushion depicting the ‘wild goat at bay’. Most unusual here is the prominence given to the ‘brook’ or stream, rendered by three wavy lines, which divide the field into two unequal portions. Beneath is the kid goat *regardant* on a double ground-line; above a series of small rocks and perhaps larger boulders (or plants?) indicated by round or elongated forms. There are no remote parallels for the scene as a whole, very few for the rendering of the stream.⁴⁰ Also unparalleled — at least in the glyptic repertoire — is the impression of a lentoid depicting a pair of monkeys clambering in a rocky setting; it may well date to LM I (FIG. 17.5 i).⁴¹ Unfortunately the condition of the sealing is poor and the rockwork difficult to evaluate. Another sealing attributed to the Hieroglyphic ‘Deposit’ depicts an unusual marine attack, set in amid framing rockwork, rendered by irregular projections (FIG. 17.5 h).⁴²

Marshy and riverine settings are ordinarily indicated by vegetation, for instance grass, reeds or papyrus, with or without wavy lines beneath to represent water. Such landscape elements are most commonly found in association with waterbirds, characterised by long elegant necks. However, one of the most effective compositions (FIG. 17.6 a) eschews plant motifs altogether in favour of thick irregular wavy lines to indicate water.⁴³ It calls to mind the simplicity of the rocky terrain on the Giamalakis ring-stone (FIG. 17.5 b) and should be more or less contemporary (MM III–LM I). Long grasses similar to those on the Zakros and Idaean Cave seals (FIG. 17.5 a, c) are seen again in FIG. 17.6 b; an irregular line beneath suggests that the bird

is swimming or floating on water.⁴⁴ Border clumps, popular in the ‘talismanic style’, are also sometimes used on ‘naturalistic’ seals depicting birds and waterbirds, though rarely ‘hang’ into the field. Another convention sees the elongated stems of papyrus (FIG. 17.6 c) or reeds (FIG. 17.6 d) curving beneath the birds, again contributing to the sense that the creatures are set within a marshy landscape.⁴⁵ Further scrutiny of the

39 CMS II.8 no. 376, perhaps the impression of a discoid; AS 115 no. 200.

40 Cf. fragmentary impression CMS II.8 no. 171 (double wavy line; waterbird above, grass/reeds below). Also a metal lentoid CMS X no. 69 (ex-Erlenmeyer Collection now Cambridge Fitzwilliam GR 11.2001) with double wavy line and grass/reeds above and net pattern below; cf. Pini 2005, 74, 81, pl. 7.14–15 (Minoan origin questioned).

41 CMS II.8 no. 286. Cf. Dumas 1992, pls. 85–89 (blue monkey fresco at Akrotiri).

42 CMS II.8 no. 157; AS 115 no. 201. A related convention for rockwork appears in fresco and pottery: Morgan 1988, 13–14, 35–8, 167–8. See also below.

43 CMS VI no. 458; AS 144–5, no. 258. Cf. CMS V S.1A no. 76 a green jasper lentoid from Mycenae, where a broad wavy band beneath the two ‘dragons’ probably indicates water. On grounds of material and motif, I consider a Minoan origin for the seal to be likely: AS 237 with n. 23; and below nns. 52, 79.

44 CMS II.3 no. 350.

45 FIG. 17.6 c = CMS VI no. 459; AS 144–45, no. 259, C27. Waterbirds and papyrus also on: CMS II.8 no. 172; IV no. 257; XII no. 221; perhaps II.3 no. 179. FIG. 17.6 d = CMS IV no. 246. Waterbirds and reeds/grass also on: CMS II.3 no. 172; II.4 no. 191; II.6 nos. 119–120, 124; II.8 no. 171; VI no. 460; X no. 224 (close parallel for IV no. 246).

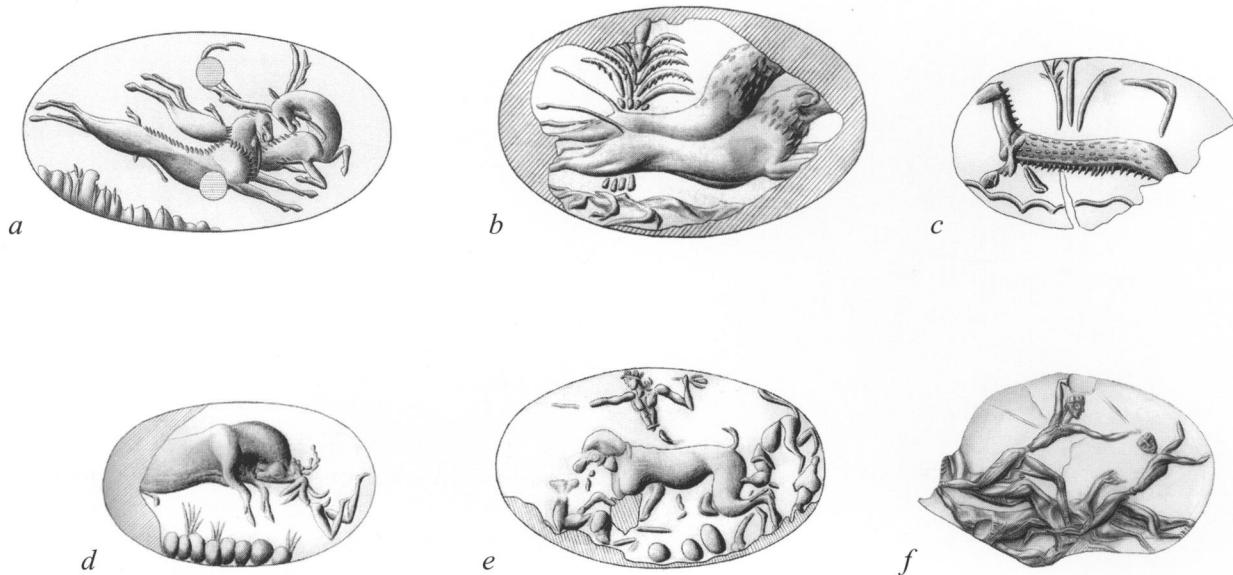


Fig. 17.7. Drawings of selected LM I ring impressions depicting landscape elements. Scale 2:1.

repertoire reveals that birds and waterbirds are rarely shown without a plant motif of some kind, though the landscape settings of the kind just described are not common. Unique, at least in the surviving repertoire, is a seal impression from Chania, depicting a bird in a rocky terrain (FIG. 17.6 *e*).⁴⁶ The association of waterbirds with landscape elements is not confined to hard stone seals, but is also attested on soft stone seals and in impressions of at least one fine metal ring (FIG. 17.6 *f*).⁴⁷ A further striking association exists between the depiction of waterbirds and hard opaque green stones (e.g. green jasper) or hard opaque black stones (including blue-grey haematite).⁴⁸ Whether this merely reflects availability in a particular workshop or has a symbolic meaning is open to question. But again any systematic study needs to take into account any and all such associations. At the moment this means ploughing through the individual volumes of the *CMS*, in future the *CMS* database will help minimise such drudgery.

LANDSCAPE IN LM I GLYPHTIC

Animals in landscape settings

Much of our evidence for LM I glyptic derives from seal impressions, notably those preserved by the LM IB destructions. These destructions merely provide a *terminus post quem non*, and presumably certain seals in use had been made during LM IA, although unfortunately we cannot distinguish the glyptic output of these phases on stylistic grounds.⁴⁹ As we shall see, landscape elements are common in cult scenes; in other representations their use is more circumscribed. Sometimes they serve chiefly to create a harmonious composition, as in the case of the two wild goats in

flying gallop (FIG. 17.7 *a*).⁵⁰ Remove the rockwork and the balance and overall impact of the motif are diminished. Especially fine are the incomplete ring impressions from Knossos and Zakros, depicting lions in a rocky landscape with a fan-shaped palm behind (FIG. 17.7 *b*), which call to mind the Nilotic scenes in West House miniature frescoes.⁵¹ Two rare depictions of the 'Minoan dragon' are also, appropriately, shown in landscape settings: one associated with papyrus, the other with reeds (or grasses) and a wavy line beneath, presumably suggesting a riverine scene (FIG. 17.7 *c*).⁵²

46 *CMS* V no. 234.

47 *CMS* II.6 no. 124. For soft stone see below n. 48.

48 Hard green, including green jasper: *CMS* VI no. 458–459; VII no. 134 (Potnia, birds, waves); XII nos. 203, 212. 'Hard black', including blue-grey haematite, often amygdaloids with faceted backs: *CMS* I S. no. 75; II.3 nos. 172, 179, 250, 307, 350, ?357; III no. 354; IV no. 246; V S.1A no. 189; VI nos. 368, 460, 461. For these materials see Krzyszkowska 2010, 253–4. The soft stones used during this period — chiefly serpentine, sometimes schist — also have greenish and bluish-black hues; examples with waterbirds and landscape elements include: *CMS* I S. no. 99; II.3 nos. 78, 142; II.4 no. 191; X no. 224. Add II.3 no. 352 (silver).

49 See *AS* 191, n. 103 (*apropos* the chariot ring attested at LM IA Akrotiri and on LM IB Crete).

50 *CMS* II.6 no. 70; *AS* no. 326.

51 *CMS* II.7 no. 71 = II.8 no. 298; see also II.8 no. 297; cf. *CMS* I no. 253 (below n. 85). For Thera: Doumas 1992, pls. 31–34; Morgan 1988, 24–9.

52 *CMS* II.6 no. 34 (with papyrus) and 262 (here FIG. 17.7 *c*). See also above n. 43 and below n. 79.

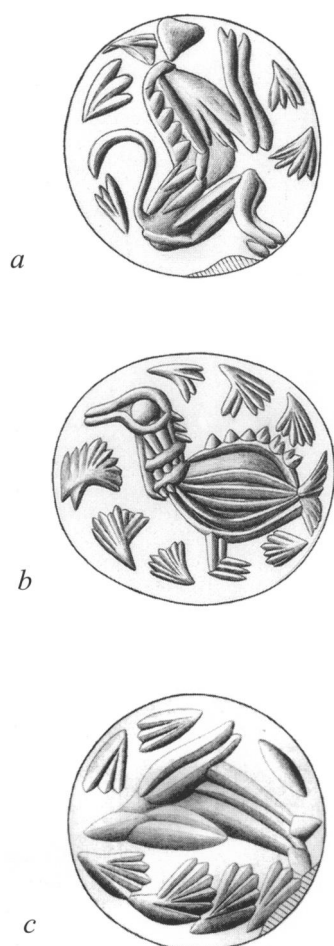


Fig. 17.8. Plant fillers on seal impressions from Ayia Triada. The original seals were of soft stone and by the same hand. Scale 3:1.

Attack scenes are sometimes accompanied by an indication of rocky ground, but representations of animals in landscape settings are surprisingly rare in LM I; and even simple plant fillers do not seem to be especially common.⁵³

Excursus: identification of LM I plant motifs

While on the subject of seal impressions I would like to return briefly to the problem of identifications. As already noted it is possible and arguably essential to devise a typology for landscape elements to ensure some consistency in descriptive terminology. But we must exercise extreme caution in identifying specific species and then making inferences about iconography and iconology based on them. Especially suspect are identifications based on the drawings of seal impressions published by Evans, Hogarth and Levi in the last century. The impressions themselves are of variable clarity, while the published drawings count as little more than sketches. Thus, I have very strong reservations that the plant fillers surrounding the

monkey on a seal impression from Ayia Triada are crocus blooms (FIG. 17.8 a).⁵⁴ As the new CMS drawings reveal, they are virtually indistinguishable from the plant fillers surrounding the bird and fish (FIG. 17.8 b–c), certainly by the same hand.⁵⁵ All are neutrally described in the CMS as *büschelartige Pflanzenmotive*. Of course, in reality, they are only a few millimetres across. Similar caution should be exercised in respect of all landscape elements associated with cult scenes (see below). It is, of course, true that certain iconographic associations, including the monkey and crocus, are well known to us from the fresco repertoire. It is also possible that the seal engraver himself intended that the fillers be ‘read’ as crocuses here, and that the original owner or user of the seal did just that. But there is simply no way of telling. Consequently, it is risky to employ such equivocal representations in glyptic to corroborate more explicit evidence from other media. When comparanda in other media are altogether lacking, our ability to decipher the glyptic record is more limited still.

Humans and animals

Thus far all our examples have shown animals and landscape elements. But in glyptic human figures of any kind are rare before LM I and they appear on no more than 10% of the surviving LBA repertoire. Very few show humans in landscape settings, except in cult scenes. Noteworthy is the bull-leaping or grappling scene on a sealing from Akrotiri, but which was originally impressed on Crete (FIG. 17.7 d).⁵⁶ This is the only bull-leaping scene with *any* indication of landscape. Other scenes with landscape elements all relate to hunting (FIG. 17.7 e); or conceivably a combat (FIG. 17.7 f).⁵⁷ A hint of rocky ground, a plant filler, the occasional tree is all we see. But once human figures are combined with animals, there is scant room for more, even on a ring bezel. Perhaps it is all the

- 53 Rocky ground: e.g. CMS II.6 nos. 46, 57, 70, 72, 83, 94, 111, 282; II.7 nos. 31, 47, 61, 62, ?69, 70, ?100, 101; II.8 no. 491; V S.1A no. 383. Fan-like plant fillers include: CMS II.3 no. 174; II.4 no. 175; II.6 no. 160; III nos. 453, 508c; HM 2123 (Knossos, Royal Road, LM IA; Pini 1995, 200, fig. 6b). See also CMS II.6 no. 46; II.7 nos. 69, 87; II.8 no. 491.
- 54 Morgan 1988, 29 and 182, n. 132. She also asserts that a crocus appears in the cult scene CMS II.7 no. 1 (= Nilsson 1950, 284, fig. 142). In fact a *long-stemmed* plant? with pendant flower or fruit, appears to grow from a built structure.
- 55 CMS II.6 nos. 73 (monkey), 117 (bird), 132 (fish); AS 170–1, nos. 331–332. On drawings generally see AS 7–10.
- 56 CMS V S.3 no. 395 (impression of metal ring). The clay is not Theran: Dumas 2000, 57–65; AS 167–8.
- 57 CMS V S.1B no. 341 and II.6 no. 15 (AS nos. 365, 371). Other hunt/combat scenes with landscape elements include: CMS II.6 no. 37; II.7 no. 19; V S.1A no. 174; V S.3 no. 404. Note also II.6 no. 20 with water (?) and rocky coastline (?).



Fig. 17.9. LM I gold signet rings with cult scenes in landscape settings. Scale 3:1.



Fig. 17.10. Selected examples of LM I rings with cult scenes in landscape settings: a–c) drawings of impressions; d–f) impressions. Scale 2:1.

remarkable that some engravers felt compelled to include them.

Cult scenes on signet rings

A small but important group of LM I signet rings bears representations of cult scenes in landscape settings. Altogether about 30 examples are known, divided almost equally between surviving rings and impressions on sealings. While the impressions were preserved in LM IB destruction deposits, very few original rings come from secure LM I contexts and some lack any meaningful provenance at all. Nevertheless on technical, stylistic, and iconographic grounds their LM I dating is beyond doubt.⁵⁸ Some — perhaps many — could have been engraved in LM IA, but as noted above, we unable to assign seals to single ceramic phases. Two

of the surviving rings are made of bronze; and imprints of tell-tale rivets appear on several impressions (FIG. 17.10 c). Stone rings are also attested, though very few seem to have depicted cult scenes. Thus the elaborate cult scenes with landscape settings occurred chiefly on signet rings of gold. This point is critical, for the mixed technique of punching and engraving on precious metals permitted extremely fine detail. In consequence complex scenes with several figures, built structures, and landscape settings could be depicted on bezels rarely measuring more than 2.5 cm in length

58 For construction and dating: AS 126–31, 194–5. For LM I rings on the mainland: AS 243, 305; Krzyszkowska 2005a, 771; Pini 2009.

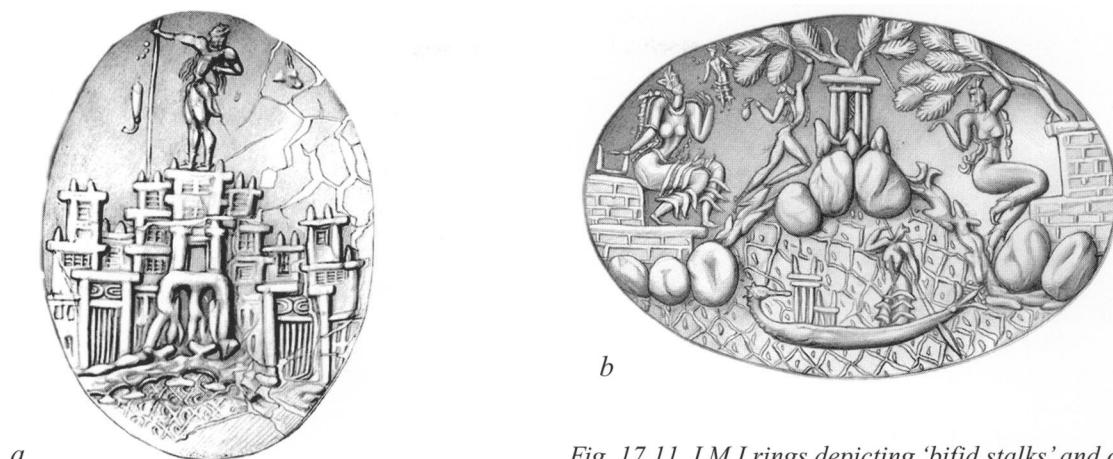


Fig. 17.11. LM I rings depicting 'bifid stalks' and other landscape elements: a) 'Master Impression'; b) 'Ring of Minos'. Drawings of impressions. Scale 2:1.



Fig. 17.12. Impressions of selected LM I seals with cult scenes and landscape elements. Scale 2:1.

and about 1.5 cm in width. The technique also led to a range of highly artificial conventions, which nonetheless convey a sense of naturalism. Overall compositions are also often artificial and dictated principally by the shape of ring bezels — hence trees with strongly bent branches or 'baetyls' onto which figures lean being placed on the edge of scenes (e.g. FIG. 17.10 *d–e*). In such cases, the landscape elements do not merely provide an appropriate setting for ritual action; they are integral to the action itself.

The selection of rings and ring impressions shown in FIGS. 17.9–10 are familiar to all and space here permits only brief comment. Noteworthy on the Ashmolean epiphany ring are hints of a landscape setting — sketchily rendered, but conceivably rocky ground and/or clumps of vegetation — behind the female figure, and a built shrine surmounted by leafy branches (FIG. 17.9 *a*).⁵⁹ These features are well attested in the repertoire, as are larger trees, sometimes grasped by participants (FIG. 17.10 *e*), or which form the central element in a scene.⁶⁰ Large oval objects, generally regarded as sacred boulders or 'baetyls', may also be the object of ritual action, as seen in FIGS. 17.9 *b* and 17.10 *d*. Unusual on the Oxford ring (FIG. 17.9 *b*) is

the elongated foliage above the oval forms, leading Peter Warren to suggest that this may be a hybrid depiction of a baetyl and squill.⁶¹ Rocky ground also

⁵⁹ CMS VI no. 281; AS 127f., 142, 316, no. 216 = C25. Further rings with built shrines and trees/vegetation: CMS II.3 nos. 15, 114, 252; II.6 nos. 1 (FIG. 17.10 *a*) and 2; V S.1A no. 176; XI no. 28; HM 989 (Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997, II, 654–60, figs. 722–4); HM 1629 (Poros: Dimopoulou and Rethimiotakis 2000); HM 1700 ('Minos', here FIG. 17.11 *b*).

⁶⁰ Bent trees: CMS I no. 219 (FIG. 17.10 *e*); II.6 no. 6; XI no. 29; HM 1034 (FIG. 17.10 *d*); HM 1700 ('Minos', FIG. 17.11 *b*). Central trees: CMS II.3 no. 305; II.6 no. 5; V S.1A no. 178. Also VI no. 280 (small tree above ship).

⁶¹ CMS VI no. 278; AS 127f., 142, 333, no. 622; Warren 1984, 19–21, pl. 7.4; 1990, 195–200, fig. 15. Cf. Smaller oval objects, with fan-shaped plant motifs above (to use the neutral CMS terminology): CMS II.3 no. 252, II.6 no. 2, V S.1A no. 180, V S.3 no. 395 (FIG. 17.7 *d*). Similar in appearance is an enigmatic object ('jellyfish?' in the CMS) on a ring impression from Knossos with waterbird and dolphins: II.8 no. 160. Other scenes with 'baetyls' include: CMS II.3 no. 114; II.6 no. 4; II.7 no. 6; XI no. 29; HM 989 (Archanes: above n. 59); HM 1034 (Sellopoulo: FIG. 17.10 *d*).

sometimes appears in these landscape settings (e.g. FIG. 17.10 *e*), though artificial ground-lines and isodomic masonry are also found, perhaps indicative of paved courtyards (FIGS. 17.9 *b*, 17.10 *a*).

Rare in the glyptic repertoire — as in fresco — are attempts to render the sky and astral features.⁶² Perhaps the most effective is seen on a ring impression from Ayia Triada, where a series of very fine wavy lines is disposed in the upper part of the bezel (FIG. 17.10 *a*). Other instances involve zig-zags, curved lines and minute dots. ‘Shooting stars’ occur in several cult scenes which apparently depict epiphanies (FIG. 17.10 *d–f*). On the Isopata ring we find one of the very few instances in Minoan glyptic where an attempt is made to depict blossoming plants; here the four floral clumps — the largest perhaps just recognisable as lilies — convincingly suggest a flowery meadow (FIG. 17.10 *f*).⁶³ Unique is the use of inverted Vs, graduated in size, to create the sense of a rocky summit in the famous ‘Mother of the Mountain’ motif; on the ancient impressions the effect seems less artificial than the drawing might indicate (FIG. 17.10 *b*).⁶⁴ More conventional is the ‘hanging rockwork’ on the presentation scene from Knossos (FIG. 17.10 *c*), but its significance here is hard to fathom.⁶⁵ Does the rockwork merely point to an outdoor setting or might it represent the interior of a cave? A similar ring (also probably bronze) known from a single, incomplete impression at Zakros has no trace of rockwork.

Brief mention must also be made of three unusually complex LM I cult scenes which employ the convention of ‘bifid stalks’, better known from the fresco repertoire, to indicate a water course or coastline. On the ‘Master Impression’ from Chania the ‘stalks’ are disposed either side of a broad wavy line, separating the building complex and rocky ground from the sea. The sea itself is rendered conventionally by an overall net pattern (FIG. 17.11 *a*).⁶⁶ On the ‘Ring of Minos’ the sea is treated in a similar fashion, but here the bifid stalks serve to delineate the upper edge of the water (FIG. 17.11 *b*). The accurate rendering of such a minute convention, only documented in the 1980s, was one of telling points in favour of the ring’s authenticity. Now that the original ring has resurfaced, remaining doubts should be quelled; the consummate skill of the engraver can at last be fully appreciated.⁶⁷ A truly astonishing cult scene with an architectural setting is the so-called Sacred Mansion ring from Poros.⁶⁸ The iconography is almost too good to be true: had this piece not come from an excavated context, its authenticity might also be open to question. The ring bezel is a bare 1.93 cm in length and the quality of engraving is not high. Nevertheless beneath the building are rudimentary bifid stalks, indicating the interface between the rocky shore and water — conceivably a river. One cannot help wondering whether the ring might depict the Palace of Knossos itself, and not merely an anonymous mansion.

Cult scenes on LM I seals

Cult scenes with landscape elements also occur on LM I seals made of soft and occasionally hard stone. By and large the motifs chime well with the iconographic repertoire attested on signet rings, although direct comparanda are often hard to muster. The smaller fields inevitably mean that any landscape elements will be shown in an abbreviated fashion. Without close parallel is Peter Warren’s extraordinary seal depicting a female figure clasping a baetyl in a rocky or cavernous landscape, indicated by a series of irregular oval forms hugging the periphery of the seal face (FIG. 17.12 *a*).⁶⁹ The seal was found above the LM II building in the Stratigraphical Museum Extension Site at Knossos, but is certainly LM I in date. Rocky landscape accompanies the seated female and lion on a lentoid from the LM IIIA–B cemetery at Armenoi; a rare depiction of a blossoming plant appears in the extreme left of the field (FIG. 17.12 *b*).⁷⁰ While it is potentially significant that certain seals and signet rings with cult scenes remained in circulation after the LM IB destructions, we badly need more from secure LM I contexts to help establish the status of the original owners. Sadly all too many are simply stray finds. This applies to a carnelian amygdaloid in the Giamalakis Collection, which is unusual on two counts. It is made of hard stone and it depicts a male figure, holding a tripartite plant motif, conceivably intended as a crocus, a tethered ape and three similar plants in the field (FIG. 17.12 *c*).⁷¹ Most seals with cult scenes and landscape elements are soft stone and bear female figures. A distinctive series

62 Sky line(s): CMS II.3 no. 114; II.6 no. 4; V no. 199; V S.2 no. 106. Shooting stars (also seen as ‘ears of grain’): II.3 nos. 51 (FIG. 17.10 *f*), 103; V S.3 no. 68; HM 1629 (Poros: above n. 59); HM 1699 (Syme: Lebesse *et al.* 2004). Sun: V no. 199; X no. 28. For Mycenaean rings see below.

63 CMS II.3 no. 51; AS 128–29, no. 215.

64 CMS II.8 no. 256; AS 7, 223, no. 5.

65 CMS II.8 no. 268; AS 226, nos. 434–435, 437. Cf. II.7 no. 1. See below for further LB I–II examples.

66 CMS V S.1A no. 142; AS no. 247; Hallager 1985. For bifid stalks: Morgan 1988, 13–14, 35–8, 167–8. For the net or scale pattern, cf. CMS II.8 no. 264.

67 HM 1700. Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis 2004; AS 336, no. 625 summarising the controversy. Cf. Warren 1990, 492; Hallager 1985. Note that owing to a printers’ error at CMS VI, p. 697 the Oxford replica (1938.1110) is erroneously illustrated with a photo of the Ring of Nestor.

68 Rethemiotakis and Dimopoulou 2003.

69 HM 2815a; Warren 1983, 65 (context); 1986, 16–17, pl. 9; 1990, 198–200, figs. 12–14: bifacial lentoid of serpentine with naturalistic deer on face b.

70 CMS V no. 253 material uncertain, perhaps a naturally occurring ore; cf. Pini 2005, 70 no. 57, pl. 5.9–10. For the rocky landscape cf. CMS II.8 no. 239; also II.6 no. 8; III no. 358; X no. 261.

71 CMS III no. 351. See above for crocuses.



Fig. 17.13. LB I gold signet rings and seals with landscape elements from the Greek mainland: a–b) rings from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae; c) cushion from Shaft Grave III; d) amygdaloid from Pylos–Routsi T. 2. Scale 3:2.

depicts a female figure flanked by small ‘stars’ and/or sketchy plant motifs (FIG. 17.12 *d*); sometimes the figure actually holds a ‘branch’ in one hand.⁷² We cannot of course be absolutely certain that these particular examples refer to cult, and the identity of the female figures — human or divine — remains obscure. Nevertheless one may with caution suggest that they echo the more explicit representations on signet rings where there is a close association with female figures and cult activity in landscape settings.

THE GREEK MAINLAND IN LB I–II/IIIA

Space here space permits only brief and highly selective comments regarding the use landscape elements on LB I–II/IIIA seals and signets rings found on the Greek mainland. As is well known, it is very difficult indeed to identify which LBA pieces found in mainland contexts are local products and not Cretan imports.⁷³ In respect of seals or signets made of hard stone and metal during LB I–II/IIIA there are few clear distinguishing criteria relating to technique, although iconography, composition and style may offer subtle clues. Few soft stone seals datable to LB I–II have been found on the Greek mainland; all appear to be Cretan imports, but none includes landscape elements.

The gold signet rings and seals from Circle A at Mycenae are indistinguishable in style and technique from contemporary Cretan products, which often are known to us only through imperfect impressions on clay sealings. Consequently they provide further insights into the technical advances of LB I glyptic,

and allow us to observe additional conventions for rendering landscape elements. All-encompassing ‘hanging rockwork’ — here comprising a series of irregular round and oval elements punched into the ring bezel — appears on the famous Battle of the Glen from Shaft Grave IV; rockwork is treated similarly in the upper part of the hunt scene, found in the same grave (FIG. 17.13 *a–b*).⁷⁴ Also incorporated in the latter is a ‘tree’, whose ‘trunk’ somewhat improbably doubles as a wavy ground-line, hugging the lower edge of the bezel. This calls to mind the elongated stems of reeds or papyrus plants which curve beneath waterbirds (FIG. 17.6 *c–d*). By contrast the rocky ground on one of the gold cushions from Shaft Grave III is rendered in a more ‘naturalistic’ fashion through a series of irregular punches, merging into irregular broad wavy bands (FIG. 17.13 *c*).⁷⁵ On a contemporary amygdaloid of gold from

72 E.g. plants: CMS II.3 no. 72; II.8 no. 265; III nos. 349, 354; plants and stars II.3 no. 171 (FIG. 17.12 *d*); stars II.3 nos. 3, 304; III nos. 351–353. For these groups, see: Pini 2010; Krzyszkowska, forthcoming *b*.

73 AS 235–6. For metal seals and signets: Pini 2005; 2009.

74 CMS I no. 15 (hunt) and 16 (combat); AS 250–2, nos. 464, 478. Note that the bezels measure *c.* 3.5 cm long, significantly larger than most contemporary Cretan examples. Schiering 1971, 5–6 (followed by Davis 1977, 18ff, esp. 18–19) regarded the ‘hanging rockwork’ on the Vapheio cups as clouds. I thank Ingo Pini for reminding me of this interpretation, but (in my view) it is not applicable to the Shaft Grave rings.

75 CMS I no. 10; AS 241, no. 459; Pini 2005, 70 no. 59, 80, pl. 5.13.

Pylos–Routsi the rocky ground beneath the netted bull is rendered by punched round and oval elements of varying size (FIG. 17.13 *d*).⁷⁶ In front of the animal is a small bush or tree (?), whose branches terminate in groups of minute dots perhaps indicative of leaves or flowers. While the treatment is effective, the placement of the plant makes for a cramped composition.

On hard stone seals of LB I–II date from the Greek mainland attempts to render rocky ground appear but seldom, and follow no set conventions. ‘Hanging rockwork’, framing the upper edge of the scene, is encountered on the well-known boar hunt from Vapheio (FIG. 17.14 *a*).⁷⁷ Unlike the irregular ‘rocks’ on the gold rings and seals discussed above, here the individual elements are all similar in size, almost regimented, though some appear singly, others double and overlapping to fit the composition. Vaguely resembling leaves or petals, each has a distinct ridge or contour line along the outer edge, perhaps linked to the use of a snub-nosed drill. Unique is the rendering of rocky ground on the magnificent agate lentoid from Dendra, datable to LB II, depicting an animal attack (FIG. 17.14 *b*).⁷⁸ Disposed across the field beneath the animals are eight irregular wavy ‘arches’ of varying size and shape. Several are filled with round or oval elements, another with small dots (?pebbles), two more are empty. Both in detail and in overall concept, the treatment is undeniably artificial. Its success perhaps lies in the fact that the rocky ground serves to balance the composition as a whole, as on the scene from Ayia Triada depicting wild goats (FIG. 17.7 *a*). It is worth stressing that at 4 cm in diameter, the Dendra seal is one of the largest known: its size clearly afforded the engraver ample opportunity to contrast the powerful bodies of the animals, with an almost delicate treatment of the ground beneath. A parallel of sorts for the Dendra rockwork is to be found on a seal from Mycenae, depicting a ‘goddess’ seated on a ‘Minoan dragon’ (FIG. 17.14 *c*).⁷⁹ Beneath the ‘dragon’, and disposed obliquely across the lower part of the field, appears a series of 11 irregular ‘arches’: in concept they seem similar to those on the Dendra seal, but are far less elaborate, lacking any internal details. Is rocky ground actually intended here, or might this be an echo of the watery riverine settings that accompanied Cretan depictions of ‘dragons’? If so it would be unique on the Greek mainland.

Palm trees are depicted on a number of rings and hard stone seals of LB I–II/IIIA date, chiefly from the Greek mainland.⁸⁰ Two signet rings, almost certainly by the same hand, found in the tholos tomb at Anthia provide examples of LB I–II date in gold.⁸¹ These palms have spindly segmented trunks and central ‘heads’, from which just three sets of ‘leaves’ or ‘branches’ splay outwards and down, faintly resembling the tentacles of an octopus (FIG. 17.15 *a*). On a contemporary ring, used to impress sealings at Pylos in LH IIIB2, three palms, with tall segmented trunks and drooping ‘leaves’, occupy centre field, flanked by recumbent

animals (FIG. 17.15 *b*).⁸² The restricted fields on seals favour the more compact drooping variety — often surmounted by a pointed or spiked ‘crown’; the leaves are sometimes abbreviated to a single pair (FIG. 17.15 *c*).⁸³ It would, however, be incorrect to see the palm with segmented trunk as a purely mainland development, inasmuch as one is attested on a ring impression from House A at Zakros.⁸⁴ But the lush fan-shape palms or palm fronds with dentate leaves found occasionally on Cretan seals from MM II–III onwards, either as independent motifs (e.g. FIG. 17.2 *c*) or incorporated within a landscape setting (FIG. 17.7 *b*), evidently die out in LB I–II, and are virtually unknown on the mainland.⁸⁵ Moreover from LB II onwards, and especially during LB IIIA1, palms — along with other plant motifs — are often deployed purely as fillers, their placement within overall compositions increasingly awkward.

Cult scenes

It remains to consider the use of landscape elements in the cult scenes attested on gold signet rings from the Greek mainland. While a handful can be isolated as

-
- 76 CMS I no. 274; cf. no. 283 where the gold sheet (or foil) is pressed over a partly (?) engraved core: Pini 2005, 71, nos. 62–63, pl. 5.18–22.
 - 77 CMS I no. 227 from the floor cist (LH IIA), here FIG. 17.14 *a*. Cf. oval ‘rocks’ beneath animals on CMS I nos. 188 and 248; more naturalistic renderings of rocky terrain on CMS I no. 242 and 252; highly artificial treatment on the boar hunt CMS XI no. 32.
 - 78 CMS I no. 185; AS no. 455. Cf. Furumark 1972, FM 62 (tricurved arch).
 - 79 CMS I no. 167; AS 489. For ‘Minoan dragons’ see FIG. 17.7 *c* and above nns. 43 and 52.
 - 80 Examples associated with animals (lions, goat, cattle) include: CMS I nos. 52, 74, 88, 105, 111, 343 (MOPS 65), 358 (MOPS 63); V nos. 158, 587, 597; V S.3 nos. 94, 259, 353; VII no. 113; XI no. 52; XIII no. 10. From Crete: CMS II.8 no. 413, 498; V S.1A no. 197. Palms with humans are much rarer: CMS I no. 114, V no. 608, V S.1A no. 75, V S.1B no. 136 (here FIG. 17.15 *a*), V S.3 no. 369.
 - 81 CMS V S.1B nos. 136–137 (palm likened to octopus at p. 148); AS nos. 486–487.
 - 82 CMS I no. 375 (new drawing at MOPS pl. 15, no. 37A). Compare other antithetic compositions with central trees, sometimes of indeterminate variety, e.g. I nos. 58 and 87.
 - 83 CMS I no. 57; AS 260 no. 509. Here and on several other examples beneath the palm appears an element resembling double ‘horns of consecration’, but its identification (part of the palm or built structure) is problematic. The association of palms with sacrifice as argued by Marinatos 1984 is open to question.
 - 84 CMS II.7 no. 87 with sphinx. Cf. also CMS V S.1A no. 75 ‘from Knossos’.
 - 85 But see CMS I no. 253, animal attack in landscape setting on a metal ring from Vapheio, floor cist (context LH IIA).

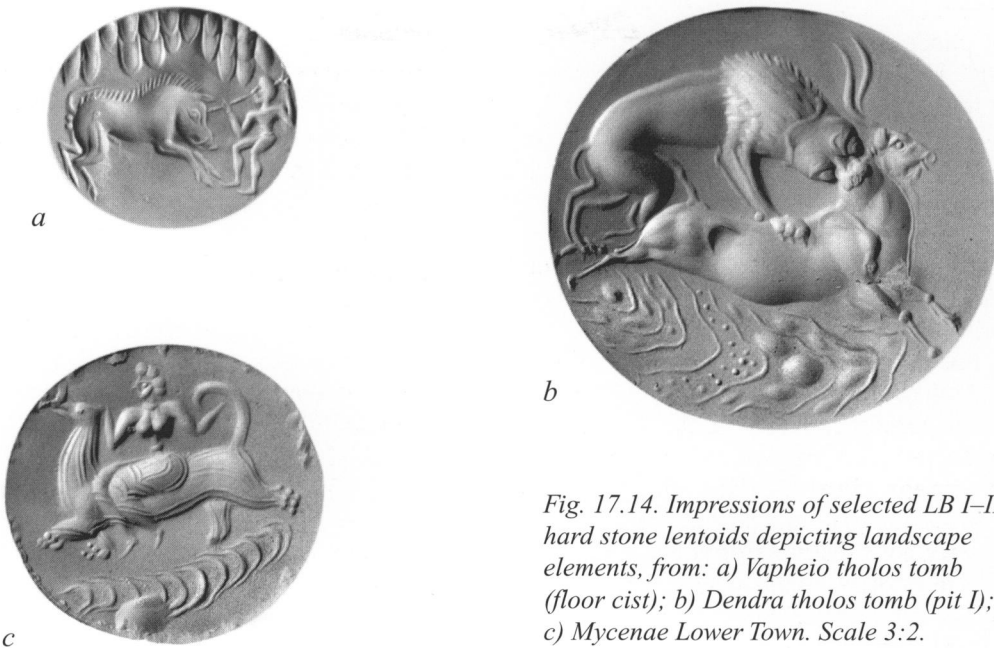


Fig. 17.14. Impressions of selected LB I–II hard stone lentoids depicting landscape elements, from: a) Vapheio tholos tomb (floor cist); b) Dendra tholos tomb (pit I); c) Mycenae Lower Town. Scale 3:2.

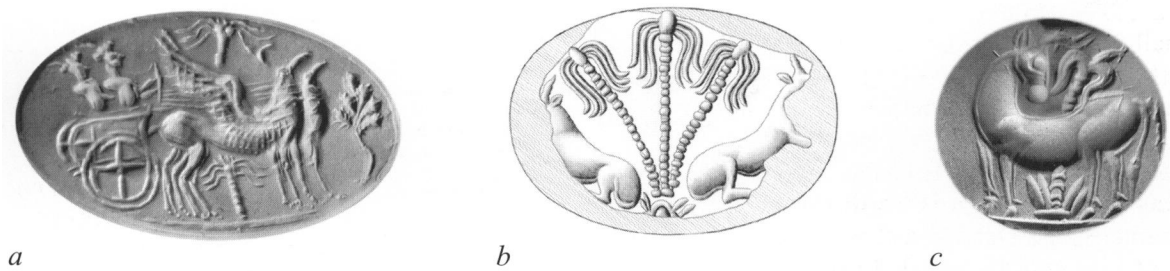


Fig. 17.15. Impressions of selected LB I–II seals depicting palm trees: a) gold signet ring from Anthia; b) drawing of ring impression from Pylos; c) agate lentoid from Mycenae. Scale 3:2.

LM I products, most are likely to be locally made and dispassionate scrutiny reveals subtle deviations from Minoan iconography: individual elements familiar from the LM I repertoire sometimes being deployed in unfamiliar ways.⁸⁶ There are also notable, but potentially significant, losses too. One of the closest to Cretan examples in style is a ring from Aidonia, where a built shrine, set on rocky ground and flanked by bushy plants or trees, is approached by lithe female figures, two of whom carry elongated long-stemmed plants or flowers (FIG. 17.16 a). For the shrine building, rockwork, ground-line and sky — rendered as a dotted wavy line — convincing Cretan parallels can be adduced. A second ring from the same tomb displays a built structure surmounted by horns of consecration, approached by two females, who carry lily and papyrus blossoms; similar flowers grow (somewhat unconvincingly) from isodomic masonry below (FIG. 17.16 b). Several more processional scenes from the Greek mainland also depict females carrying flowers, sometimes toward built

shrines;⁸⁷ to date not a single example has been found on Crete, suggesting a distinct shift in iconography (and conceivably in underlying cult practice).

Famous for its enthusiastic use of Minoan iconographical elements is the ring from the Acropolis Treasure, at Mycenae (FIG. 17.16 c).⁸⁸ It also manages

⁸⁶ AS 235–6, 241–6; Pini 2009; see also above n. 58.

⁸⁷ E.g. CMS I nos. 86, 191, 279 (lentoid); V S.3 no. 243; on CMS I no. 119 a single male figure, followed by a goat, touches the top of a tree or shrub growing out of a built structure. Unparalleled is CMS I no. 127, where two female figures flank a stepped ‘altar’, from which grow ‘ears of grain’, rendered as a series of chevrons; behind one figure ‘grain’ (?) surrounded by dots, behind the other flame-like plant (?) or rock (?) motifs.

⁸⁸ CMS I no. 17; AS 244, 254–5, no. 465, with references. Compare the simplicity of CMS I no. 101 where elongated oval elements (rocks or plants?) appear behind the seated female.

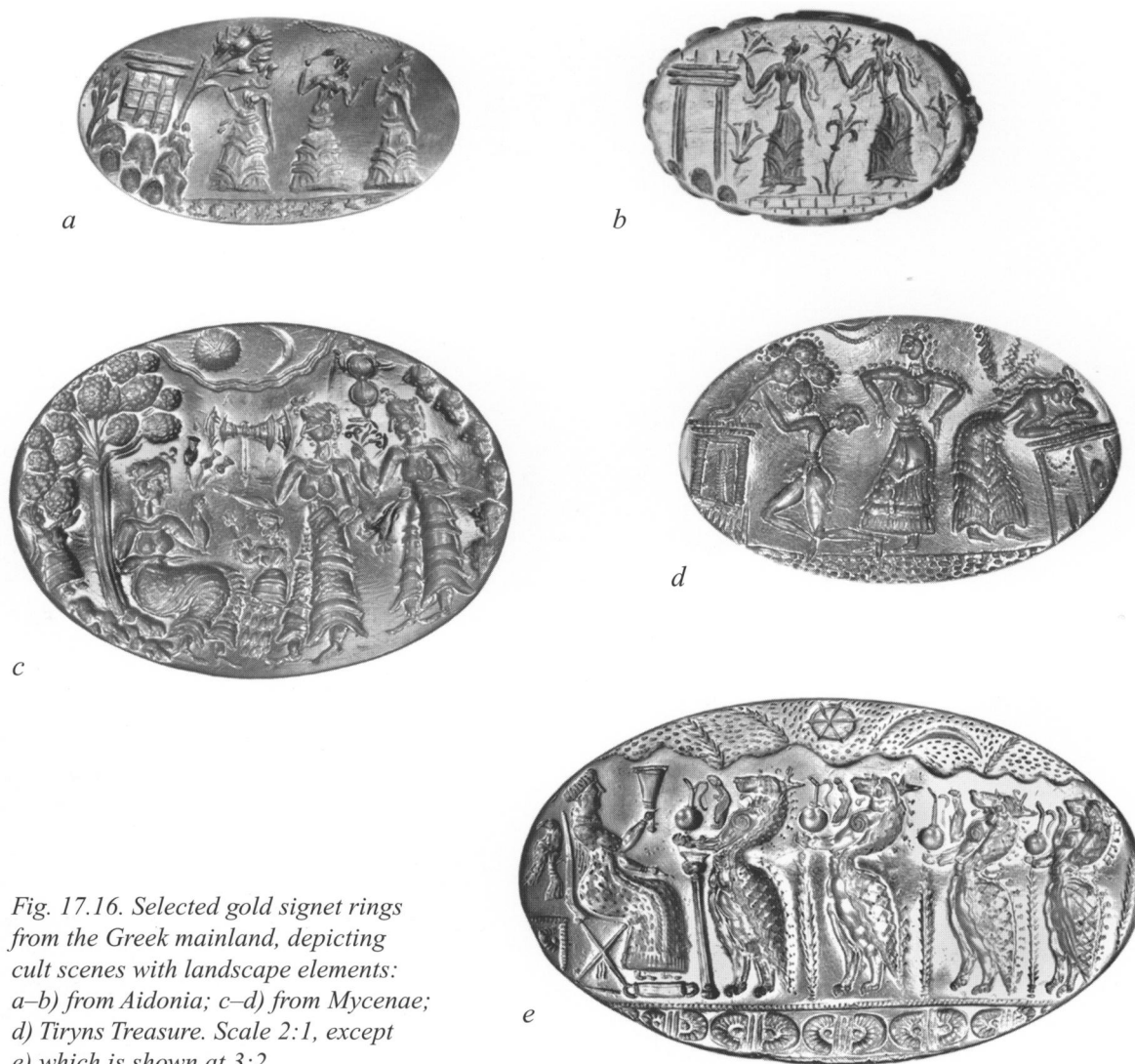


Fig. 17.16. Selected gold signet rings from the Greek mainland, depicting cult scenes with landscape elements: a–b) from Aidonia; c–d) from Mycenae; d) Tiryns Treasure. Scale 2:1, except e) which is shown at 3:2.

to cram in more landscape elements than any other cult scene, which helps to contribute to the overall *horror vacui*. Growing from irregular rocky ground is a tall tree with straight trunk and short curving branches which terminate in about a dozen leafy ‘boughs’. These are rendered as irregular round or oval elements, filled with minute punched ‘dots’ to indicate leaves or conceivably fruit. Three poppies (recognisable as such) are held by the seated ‘goddess’, while lilies and perhaps another variety of long-stemmed flower are borne by one of the ‘adorants’. Also to be seen are sun, crescent moon and double wavy sky line.

Another well-known ring from Mycenae depicts one of the few cult scenes from the mainland that is non-processional, presumably derived from Cretan prototypes (FIG. 17.16 d).⁸⁹ As on the previous example the ‘boughs’ of the tree are rendered as four irregular depressions, filled with minute punched dots; here, additionally, further dots follow the outline of the tree-top. Behind the female figure are three elements which might, perhaps, be construed as ‘ears of grain’; the

heavens above are marked by two small arcs. Interesting here is the ground, indicated by a series of small oval dots, set closely together, conveying the sense of pebbles.

Pebbly ground is otherwise unparalleled, but a related convention is used to render the (starry?) sky on the great Tiryns ring (FIG. 17.16 e).⁹⁰ Here the individual punched dots are elongated, almost seed-like in appearance, and spaced quite widely apart. A rather rudimentary sun motif (circle with radiating spokes) and crescent moon are depicted, as well as four ‘ears of grain’ — here perhaps intended as shooting stars. A wavy line sets off the sky from the main part of the field. Unique is the fact that the entire astral zone was hammered down, prior to engraving. Thus *in impression* the heavenly canopy slightly stands proud of the main

⁸⁹ CMS I no. 126; AS 254–5, no. 494.

⁹⁰ CMS I no. 179; AS 243, 256, no. 457.



Fig. 17.17. Impressions of selected LB III soft stone seals with plant motifs: a–b) from Armenoi; c) from Korakou; d) from Mycenae. Scale 2:1.

figural zone. I know of no parallels.⁹¹ In the main field ‘ears of grain’ set upright between the processing genii constitute the sole plant motifs.

LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS IN LB III

The *Nachleben*, the afterlife, of landscape elements in Aegean glyptic may be dealt with swiftly. Never especially common even in LM I, thereafter their use declines sharply on Crete and the Greek mainland alike. The repertoire also contracts dramatically: for instance depictions of rocky ground virtually disappear, as do flowers. Plants, when present at all, are chiefly indeterminate fillers, crammed into whatever space is left unoccupied by the principal motif. This is certainly true of LB III output in soft stone, illustrated here by two examples chosen at random from the many hundreds known from Crete and the mainland (FIG. 17.17 a, c).⁹² The filling motifs deployed in the so-called Mainland Popular Group of LH IIIA2–B are well documented; the LM IIIA(–?B) Cretan examples merit similar scrutiny.⁹³ Clumps of ‘leaves’, small ‘bushes’ or miniature ‘trees’ are sometimes found (FIG. 17.17 a). Especially common are stylised ‘fir branches’ (*Tannenzweige*) first attested in MM II (cf. FIGS. 17.17 c–d with 17.1 f, 17.2 a–b). But so simplified have the plant fillers become that sometimes we struggle to decide whether they should be classed as *Tannenzweige* or are merely comb-like ornaments, a point illustrated

by the seal from Korakou shown in FIG. 17.17 c, which is carefully engraved and almost workshop fresh. Representations of humans are exceedingly rare in the LB III soft stone repertoire. The two rudimentary figures in long robes flanking a stylised tree on a seal from Armenoi (FIG. 17.17 b) may well hark back to earlier Cretan cult scenes, where landscape elements were integral to the action.⁹⁴ Similarly two long-stemmed plants (?) or trees (?) are placed between the figures on the unusually large Mainland Popular Group

⁹¹ On several ‘bimetallic’ rings a wavy line demarcates the upper and lower parts of the bezel, e.g. CMS I no. 108 (cf. AS 199–200, 246 for further information and references). The Tiryns ring is, of course, entirely different in construction, but an overlay of thin silver foil would have made the astral zone even more striking.

⁹² FIG. 17.17 a = CMS V no. 248; AS no. 419 (Armenoi T. 18) of serpentine. FIG. 17.17 c = CMS V no. 512; Dickers 2001 cat. no. 135 (Korakou) of steatite. Both are workshop fresh.

⁹³ For the Mainland Popular Group, see Dickers 2001, esp. 25–6 and fig. 7; also brief summary in AS 271–3. The Armenoi Cemetery provides the best evidence for LM IIIA(–?B) soft stone seals on Crete (cf. AS 212–14).

⁹⁴ FIG. 17.17 b = CMS V no. 244 (Armenoi T. 15). For earlier comparanda see above n. 60. Other late Cretan seals with females and plants include: CMS XI no. 347 and XII no. 12D.

seal from Mycenae (FIG. 17.17 d).⁹⁵ Although male figures seem to be shown here, the scene might conceivably reflect processions on earlier gold rings involving females (FIG. 17.16 a–b). But scarcely more than a handful of LB III seals depict humans accompanied by landscape elements. From a Cretan perspective, their disappearance is especially striking.

CONCLUSIONS

As I intimated at the outset, the present account is no more than an introduction to the subject of landscape elements in Aegean glyptic. To understand their significance the material must be assessed qualitatively, quantitatively, and diachronically. From this brief and selective overview, however, I would make the following observations. Landscape elements and settings appear by MM IIB. Thus there seems no question of a ‘minor art’ imitating major art, as is sometimes believed. Indeed the contrary seems to be the case, with engravers developing a visual vocabulary that was later extended by fresco painters, especially the miniaturists. In MM III–LM I abbreviated landscape elements occur widely in the so-called ‘talismanic style’, with impressionistic *landscape settings* achieved on a few masterpieces, like the ring-stones or cushions. In LB I the repertoire of landscape elements is expanded and enhanced: new conventions are developed and some are conceivably borrowed from fresco painting. Given the tiny size of seals, the images are often closer to the essentialist than to the naturalistic on that representational spectrum discussed by Peter Warren. In any case in LB I landscape elements are associated with hunt and combat scenes, and become essential components in cult scenes. Thereafter they all but vanish, apart from non-descript plant fillers. Whether we should read into their demise a wider symbolic or cosmological significance is very hard to say. By LB II–III seal engravers undoubtedly had very different *stylistic* agendas. And the link between style and society, the extent to which art reflects wider social concerns in the Bronze Age is still imperfectly understood.

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