

THE GRIFFIN AND LION IVORY PYXIS LID FROM THE GRAVE OF THE GRIFFIN WARRIOR AT PYLOS

ABSTRACT

In 2015, an exquisite ivory pyxis lid was discovered in the grave of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos. The lid, carved in high relief, depicts in great detail a combat in which a lion defeats a griffin. The modeling and carving of the ivory are of exceptional quality. Here, we first consider the specific context and circumstances of discovery of the lid—the final find removed from the grave—before turning to a discussion of precedents and parallels for its motifs and theme. Finally, we consider the possibility that a scene of a lion victorious over a griffin had particular significance at Pylos, in light of relations between Messenia and Neopalatial Crete in the Late Helladic IIA period.

Pyxides (cosmetic boxes) made of ivory and carved in either rectangular or cylindrical form are common enough in the Aegean world, but only infrequently do they bear figural decoration. In this article, we introduce a lid from one such vessel, carved in high relief with a design of extraordinary beauty, depicting a lion and a griffin apparently locked in mortal combat (Figs. 1, 2).¹ Its presence in the grave of the Griffin Warrior is yet another example of the exceptional character of objects acquired by the elite at Pylos in the Early Mycenaean period and interred there in graves, in this case specifically in Late Helladic (LH) IIA.² We here describe the

1. We thank Alexandros Zokos for his collaboration in excavating, mending, and conserving this lid; we are grateful to Joanne Murphy, for supplying us with Figure 6, and to Jeff Vanderpool, Christina Kolb, and Tina Ross, for the photographs and drawings of the lid. We are grateful to the many who have supported our efforts to conserve and publish finds from the grave of the Griffin Warrior. These include Malcolm Wiener and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, the Louise Taft Semple Fund of the University of Cincinnati, Phokion Potamianos and his family, the 1984

Foundation, Lawrence Stack and Loretta Cummings, Jeffrey Barnouw, Jennifer and Arthur Stephens, the J. M. Kaplan Fund, the Captain Vassilis and Carmen Costantakopoulos Foundation, and James and Mary Ottaway, who adopted the pyxis published here and have patiently followed its restoration now over many years.

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of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.) (law 4858/2021).

2. This lid (SN25-16) and other as yet unpublished ivory objects from the grave are not the first ivory finds from Pylos. Concerning ivory objects from Pylos found prior to the resumption of excavations in 2015, see Poursat 1977b, pp. 175–176; Sakellarakis and Konstantanidi-Syvridi 2022, pp. 23, 26, nos. 46, 53. For terms related to the use of ivory in the Pylos Linear B tablets, see Sacconi 1972. For the date of the burial of the Griffin Warrior, see Stocker et al. 2022.



a



b

Figure 1. Ivory pyxis lid (SN25-16)
from the grave of the Griffin Warrior,
Pylos: (a) top view; (b) bottom view.
Scale 1:1. Photos J. Vanderpool; courtesy
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Cincinnati

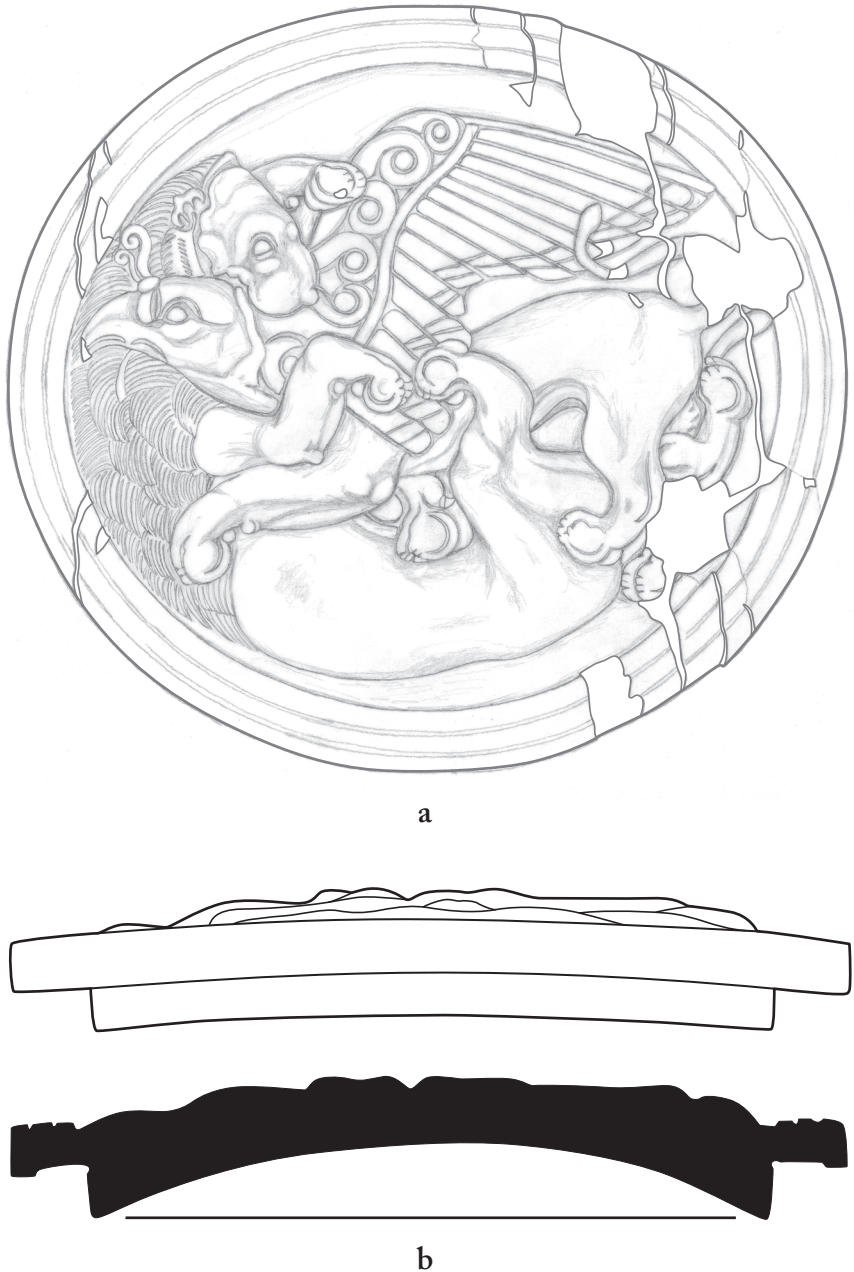


Figure 2. Ivory pyxis lid (SN25-16) from the grave of the Griffin Warrior, Pylos: (a) top view; (b) profile view and section. Scale 1:1. Drawings T. Ross and C. Kolb; courtesy Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati

lid and its archaeological context, and we then consider the iconography of the carving—with the griffin being defeated by a lion, which is unusual, though not unique, in representations dating to the early phases of the Late Bronze Age (LBA) Aegean.³

3. The grave of the Griffin Warrior took its name from a large fragment from the body of the pyxis (SN14-30). It was found in poor condition early in the course of the excavation of the grave. It and the many other fragments of the pyxis are still undergoing

conservation, and, as yet, only part of the eponymous fragment has been described in oral presentations, first at the Open Meeting of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens on April 7, 2023 (Stocker and Davis 2023). That fragment contains

representations of a griffin and lion in a rocky landscape. It and the other fragments adjacent to and beneath it were found broken over the left femur of the Griffin Warrior. See also Davis and Stocker 2016, p. 627, n. 1.

THE IVORY PYXIS LID

SN25-16

Figs. 1, 2

W. 10.0 × 11.1; max. H. 2.0 cm.⁴ Largely complete lid of a pyxis. Restored from many fragments, mended as removed from the ground with HMG paraloid B-72 restoration adhesive. Manganese deposits on a fragment of the lid seem to represent pseudomorphs of textiles.⁵

The upper surface and sides of the lid are polished to a high luster. The lid would have been made from a single slab of elephant ivory, cut from the more solid part of the tusk, toward its point.⁶

The lid is oval-shaped, and its flange has evidently been designed to fit into the mouth of an ivory pyxis—pyxides cut from elephant tusks are oval—rather than a round one of some other material, such as wood. Otherwise, there would have been no reason for the oval shape of the lid.⁷

THE DISCOVERY

The discovery of the lid on September 19, 2015, came as a complete surprise; it was the last major find recovered from the grave of the Griffin Warrior. At the time, it appeared that the only grave goods that remained to be removed were several very thin fragments of bronze that lay near the tomb's southern corner, at the bottom of the grave shaft, next to a ledge that ran around its periphery.⁸ Most of these fragments could not be removed intact. Conservator Alexandros Zokos first covered the larger fragments of bronze with gauze impregnated with a bonding solution; then, when he lifted the largest fragment, an oval ivory disk was found to be encased in soil adhering to its lower surface (Fig. 3). That disk was the top half of the lid; the bottom half remained in the ground.⁹

The entire operation was overseen by Sharon Stocker, who was, by this time, the only archaeologist remaining at the site along with Jack Davis. She described the progress of excavation in her notebook as follows:

Alex[andros] and I are working in the southeastern half of the SW side of the trench. We left this area back in early August in order to move on with the central part of the burial. There have been ephemeral traces of bronze, very thin and v[ery] fragmentary that

4. Davis and Stocker authored this and the following section.

5. As observed by conservator Lydia Avlonitou (pers. comm., 2018) and subsequently confirmed as likely by conservator Julie Unruh (pers. comm., 2023).

6. Concerning details of the manufacture of ivory pyxides, see Sakellariakis 1979, pp. 52–56 (discussing the polishing of ivory surfaces with pumice or the barbed skin of certain species of fish); Evelyn 1993, p. 230; Gachet-Bizollon 2007, pp. 18–19, fig. 5. For the profile of the bottom of the lid, cf. Poursat 1977a, pp. 145–146, no. 421,

pl. XLIV:421 (Menidi).

7. On Mycenaean ivory pyxides in general, see Iliaki 1976, pp. 86–182. The Pylos lid falls into group A in Iliaki 1976. Three pyxides in that group clearly preserve both their lid and base (Iliaki 1976, p. 88): nos. A1 (Athenian Agora), A2 (Athenian Agora), and A4 (Menidi). Two others appear to as well: A10 (Mycenae) and A18 (probably Mycenae), the latter our Figure 12 (Iliaki 1976, pp. 91, 132, figs. 69, 70). Pyxis A4 has a tenon that fits into the pyxis rim; pyxis A1 has traces of a tin lining inside. Iliaki's group F consists of a composite vessel of ivory and bronze.

8. Stocker et al. 2022, p. 218, fig. 8, stage 8. This “ledge” turned out to be the top of earth packing around the sides of the wooden coffin that had held the body of the Griffin Warrior, and that remained after the decay of the coffin.

9. The bronze fragments were assigned the Pylos inventory number SN25-15. Although the fragments are heavily corroded, X-rays taken by conservator Katherine Cook in April 2021 identified them as at least two armor fragments with a wire-reinforced edge and lacing holes.

Figure 3. Pylos ivory pyxis lid in situ; the lower part adheres to a piece of bronze armor, while the upper part is still embedded in earth. Courtesy Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati

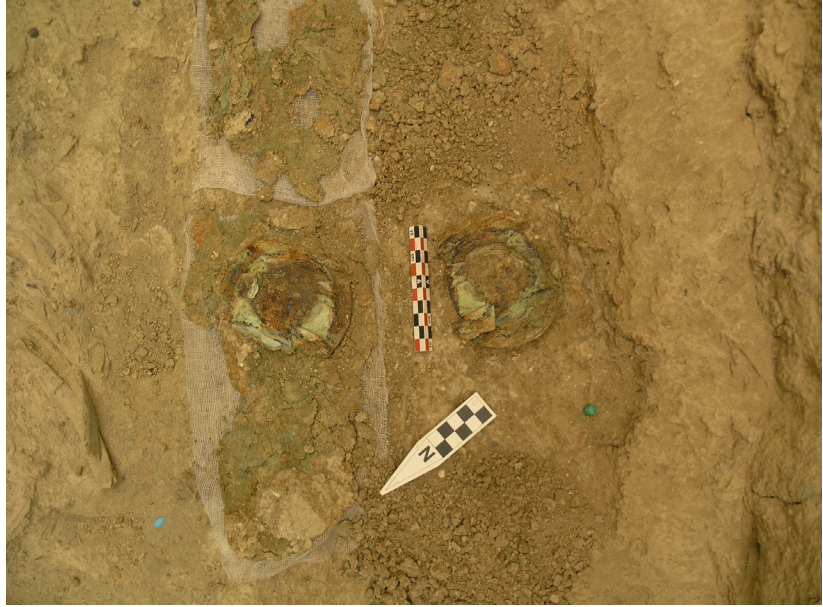


Figure 4. Upper and lower parts of the Pylos ivory pyxis lid joined and removed from grave, but still adhering to the piece of bronze armor. Courtesy Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati



have come out with general sweepings, but it is unclear what type of object they might belong to. Alex will remove the frag[ment]s in the NW with gauze, but the SW corner cannot be saved.

The context here is the “redder” soil that spanned the edge of the SW wall to the SW side of the sword (SN24-28).¹⁰ . . .

Alex finished removing Frag[ment] 1 10:15 [A.M.]. It came out with a largish circular piece of ivory that looks like it might be a pyxis lid (SN25-16).¹¹ The imprint of various other frag[ment]s remain in the ground. We decided that Alex would put it together as he removes these, rather than log[g]ing their position by collecting them in a bag [Fig. 4]. We don’t know if there is a vessel body beneath.

10. For the sword, see Davis and Stocker 2016, p. 634, n. 15; Konstantinidi-Syvridi et al. 2022, p. 24; Davis and Stocker, forthcoming b.

11. Once removed and studied, it became clear that the lid was oval rather than circular.

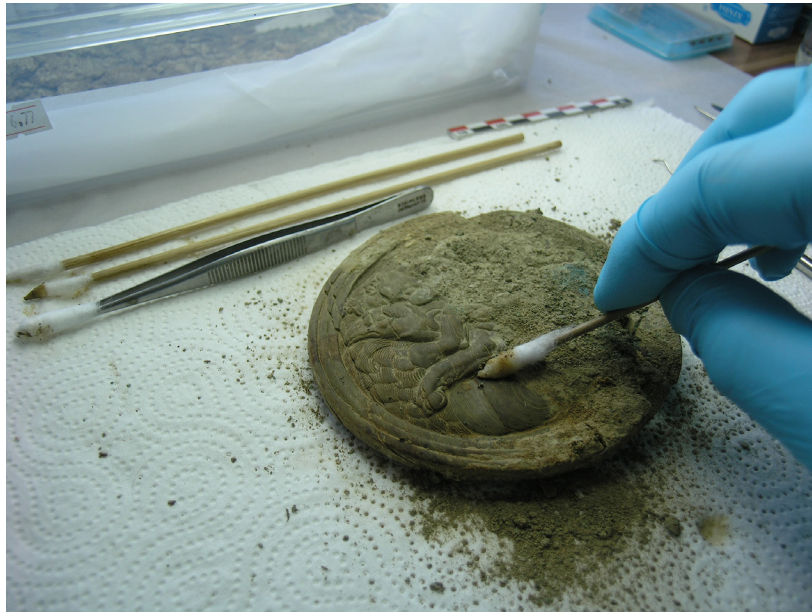


Figure 5. Griffin and lion scene on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid partly exposed in the course of conservation. Courtesy Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati

Underneath this context the hard gray is appearing in some areas that might be associated with the ledge. Alex needs to cut into it a bit to remove the lid (to get under it).

Once he finished with the lid, the remainder of which came out remarkably well, I got in to clean the area. Alex cleaned (began to [clean]) the lid, which is amazing—it is a griffin (so far) with intricate detail [Fig. 5]. . . .

This lid appears to have been [at] the bottom of the grave good level. Beneath it the red soil continues, but imperceptibly it begins to contain a few larger white nodules of lime. There are a few carbon flecks and an occasional sherd.

It was immediately clear that the lid had come to rest near the Griffin Warrior's left side, between his sword and the packing (that is, the ledge) that separated the wooden coffin in which he was buried from the southwest stone-built wall of the grave. It will have belonged to the lowest stratum, which contained the most precious grave goods buried with him. Such a position in the grave is obviously indicative of its special value to the warrior and/or to those who chose to bury it with him.

The body of the pyxis to which the lid belonged was smashed into many pieces, and its fragments were found elsewhere in the grave.¹²

THE ICONOGRAPHY

The ivory carving presented here displays the ferocity of a confrontation between the most powerful natural animal, the lion, and its leonine-avian counterpart in the supernatural world, the griffin.¹³ The oval field of the lid and the execution of the decoration in high relief allow for a dynamic and detailed representation of the face-to-face battle between the two beasts. The lion has sunk its teeth into the neck of its struggling adversary,

12. See n. 3, above, and p. 12, below.

13. Aruz authored this and the following two sections.

their bodies and legs intertwined. Given its terminus ante quem of the LH IIA period, it is perhaps the earliest datable ivory carving of a combat between a griffin and lion, although the theme was certainly circulating in the Aegean, with similar scenes engraved on Minoan seals and rings (see pp. 12–13, Fig. 13, below).

THE GRIFFIN

The griffin on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid has the distinctive curved beak of a raptor, and its eye is defined by an almond-shaped linear outline and raised iris. Its crest consists of two upright spiral curls placed at the point where a bird's nostrils would meet the curve of the forehead—perhaps a distant allusion to the individual feathers protruding from the heads of certain hawks and other birds, such as the hoopoe. While there is a precedent for (single) spiral curls on the heads of griffins in Middle Bronze Age (MBA) Syrian, Anatolian, and Minoan art, such curls are generally longer.¹⁴ By the beginning of the LBA, multiple coils forming an elaborate crest are seen on the griffin depicted on a painted jar from Ayia Irini on Kea;¹⁵ this feature is also repeated on images of griffins on walls in the throne rooms of Knossos and Pylos.¹⁶ Based on a surviving fresco fragment at Knossos, however, Shank has observed that a crest of short continuous feathers may rise above the spiral curls, unless the tip of a wing is depicted.¹⁷ If the former, the Knossos fresco would be the earliest attested evidence of such a crest in the Aegean, which also appears on the later griffin fresco in the throne room of Pylos, as well as on later Mycenaean ivories (for example, see Fig. 9, below).¹⁸ Yet it adorns Aegean-type griffins depicted in Egypt at the beginning of the LBA. Most notable is the griffin seated below the inscription “beloved of Montu” on an axe-head bearing the cartouche of the pharaoh Ahmose, founder of the 18th Dynasty.¹⁹ Such head feathers, along with a chest spiral and angled wings adorned with spirals and “notched plume” patterning—features that first appear in the Middle Minoan (MM) III period in Cretan art (for example, see Fig. 7, below)—make for a radically new representation that deviates from the canonical Egyptian royal griffin image of earlier periods. There is a similar crest and chest and wing spirals on the griffin in the so-called Hunt frieze from Tell el-Dab'a in Egypt (its long flight feathers do not survive),²⁰ and again on a wooden pyxis lid from Saqqara that depicts compartmented

14. For MBA Near Eastern seals featuring griffins with long, single spiral curls, see, e.g., Otto 2000, nos. 123, 351, pls. 10, 28; Aruz 2008, figs. 233–235 (Karahöyük; Kültepe); see also *Beyond Babylon*, p. 28, fig. 13 (wall painting, Palace of Zimri-Lim, Mari). Images like these are likely the inspiration for a griffin depiction on a Middle Minoan seal from Phaistos (Herakleion, Archaeological Museum 716: *CMS* II.5, no. 318; Aruz 2008, p. 293, no. 182, fig. 230).

15. Kea, Archaeological Museum 592: Marthari 1998, p. 150, fig. 1.7. For examples of a single spiral curl

and incipient multiple spiral curls on Middle Cycladic painted pottery from Akrotiri, see Papagiannopoulou 2008, pp. 436–440.

16. For the griffin paintings, see Shank 2007, pp. 160–161, fig. 19.1, pls. 19.1, 19.2. While some Aegean griffins on seals have short upright feathers, the crest treatment of a row of individual spiral curls recurs only rarely, as on a 14th-century BCE bronze plaque originally thought to come from Tyre, discussed below (p. 16; Fig. 15), and an Egyptian Dynasty XX (1189–1077 BCE) wall painting depicting a

handled box with a galloping griffin in the so-called international style (Montet 1937, p. 114, fig. 155; see also Teissier 1996, p. 89, fig. 2:b).

17. Shank 2007, pp. 162–164, figs. 19.3–19.5.

18. For griffins with a row of upright individuated feathers, rather than a continuous feather crest, see *CMS* II.7, no. 163 (sealing, Kato Zakros).

19. Luxor, Luxor Museum JE 4666: *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 119–121, no. 67 (J. Aruz and P. Lacovara).

20. See Morgan 2010, pp. 305, 309–313, 319, fig. 1.



Figure 6. Gold seal depicting a griffin, from Pylos Tholos IV. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 7986 (= *CMS* I, no. 293). Not to scale. Photo M. Mauzy; courtesy Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati

scenes of a griffin and lion hunting prey among landscape elements.²¹ This crest treatment in representations in Egypt may have inspired the rendering of the gold griffin drinking vessels that formed part of the Keftiu treasure in the painted tombs of Egyptian officials of the 18th Dynasty.²²

The shape of the griffin's head on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid compares relatively well with those of griffins on contemporary seals from Vapheio and Myrsinochori-Routsi.²³ Similar, too, is the head of the spectacular recumbent griffin engraved on a gold seal found in Tholos IV at Pylos (Fig. 6);²⁴ this griffin, however, has a more elaborate, treelike crest emerging from its forehead. In contrast to this seal, which depicts the creature at rest with majestically displayed and patterned wings, the ivory griffin is shown in full profile with only a single raised wing visible, more sharply angled to suggest the profile characteristic of a bird about to take off or land. This realistic avian detail is already present on Syrian seals of the MBA,²⁵ although used regardless of whether the creature is in flight or seated (both in Syria and, somewhat later, in the Aegean). The earliest depiction of this wing form on Crete, already with incipient "notched plume" feather patterning, appears to be on a gold ring from Archanes Tholos B, datable to MM III (Fig. 7).²⁶ It is another feature that may suggest an observation of nature, in particular, the patterning on the flight

21. Dussaud 1914, p. 287, fig. 206; Kantor 1947, pl. 24A.

22. As Matić (2019, pp. 657–658) points out, such vessels do not exist among extant Aegean artifacts. See now Davis and Stocker 2023 for discussion of a different type of metal vessel represented in a Theban tomb and a gold cup found in the grave of the Griffin Warrior.

23. *CMS* I, nos. 223, 271.

24. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 7986 (= *CMS* I, no. 293).

25. E.g., Collon 2000, pp. 287–288, fig. 6 (see n. 57, below); Otto 2000, no. 123, pl. 10.

26. Herakleion, Archaeological Museum AMH X-A1017: see Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, pp. 651–653, figs. 718, 719 ("intended to hint at a depiction of a chariot drawn by a griffin"); Becker 2018, pp. 335–336, no. R3. Additionally, a miniature fresco fragment of a recumbent griffin with "notched plume" wing pattern derives from the Northwest Fresco Heap at Knossos. While dated by Evans (1921, p. 549, fig. 400) to MM IIIB, the nucleus of the deposit was redated by Hood (2005, pp. 52, 58–60) to Late Minoan IA. Regarding possible Syrian forerunners of the "notched plume,"

a fresco fragment from Tel Kabri preserves wing fragments with "notched plume" patterning, and it has recently been redated based on ¹⁴C evidence to the MBA, leading its present excavators to propose, controversially, an origin for this feature in the Levant; see Kempinski 2002, p. 277, pl. XXXV; Cline, Yasur-Landau, and Koh 2017, p. 45. Niemeier and Niemeier's (2000) reconstruction of the Alalakh VII fresco as a seated Minoan griffin with curved triangular markings on the feathers has been challenged by Yener (2021) based on the original photographs of the fresco fragments in situ.



Figure 7 (left). Gold ring depicting a griffin and female figure, from Archanes Tholos B. Herakleion, Archaeological Museum AMH X-A1017. Not to scale. Courtesy Archaeological Museum of Heraklion



Figure 8 (right). Lanner falcon in flight. Photo C. Kruger; CC BY-SA 4.0

feathers of birds of prey such as the lanner falcon (Fig. 8).²⁷ The Archanes ring engraving also introduces another element that persists throughout the Aegean LBA: the use of a row of individual spiral coils to define the covert wing feathers. On the Pylos ivory pyxis lid, as well as on seals from sites such as Myrsinochori-Routsi,²⁸ those spirals nearest to the chest face one another, forming a quasi-ivy leaf motif. Unlike the depiction on the Archanes gold ring, however, the long feathers of the griffin on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid lack the “notched plume” patterning so characteristic of Aegean griffin wings on wall paintings and seals. These markings appear less often on griffins depicted on ivory plaques; one prominent example comes from a chamber tomb at Mycenae, but more often they are reduced to zigzags.²⁹ Many other ivories, however—most notably the 14th- to 13th-century BCE griffin attack scenes from Athens,³⁰ Delos (Fig. 9),³¹ and Byblos,³² and the Aegean-style plaques from Megiddo featuring seated griffins³³—depict unpatterned long feathers as on the Pylos lid, with lower border lines set parallel to the wing edge, possibly suggesting layering. Similarly, a fragmentary plaque from Megiddo portraying a griffin swooping down on an unsuspecting(?) lion, its head reversed, displays an array of unpatterned long feathers; here, the griffin’s long spiral curls face one another over the scalloped treatment of its chest feathers (Fig. 10).

27. For the lanner falcon, see Kozloff 2012, also with head patterning from which Egyptian images of Horus falcons and griffins seem to derive. For details of the wings of the lanner falcon and African rock kestrel, see also Tarboton and Pickford 1990; www.oiseaux.net, s.v. lanner falcon.

28. E.g., CMS I, no. 271.

29. Poursat 1977a, no. 285, pl. XXVI:285 (Mycenae chamber tomb 27); see also Poursat 1977a, nos. 27 (Mycenae acropolis, Tsountas House [griffin or sphinx]), 312 (Mycenae chamber tomb 81), pls. I:27,

XXXIII:312; 2014, p. 185, fig. 236 (LH IIIB).

30. Athens, Agora BI 511 (pyxis): Morgan 2010, p. 315, fig. 14:a, b.

31. Delos, Archaeological Museum B07075. For a discussion of this plaque, see *Beyond Babylon*, p. 414, no. 267 (P.J. Chatzidakis).

32. Beirut, Direction générale des antiquités 2461: *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 411–412, no. 264 (J. Aruz).

33. E.g., Chicago, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum OIM A22212: *Beyond Babylon*, p. 411, fig. 128.



Figure 9. Ivory plaque with a lion attacking a griffin, from the Artemision of Delos. Delos, Archaeological Museum B07075. Not to scale. Photo The Metropolitan Museum of Art; courtesy Ephorate of the Cyclades

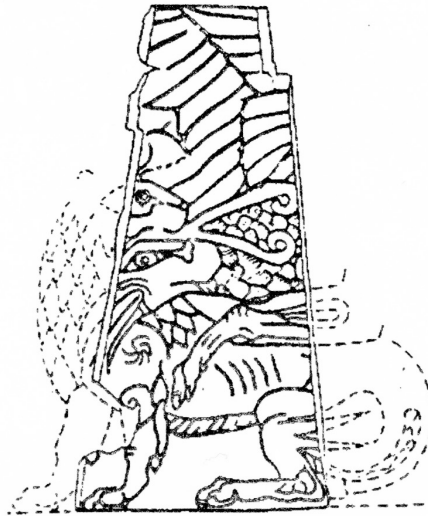


Figure 10. Drawing of a fragmentary ivory plaque with a griffin attacking a lion, from Megiddo. Not to scale. Kantor 1956, p. 163, fig. 3:c

The leonine body of the griffin on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid is supple, with a curving belly, and with swellings and raised circular protrusions on the limbs marking internal skeletal details and musculature. Its leonine paws are detailed with engraved lines for claws; the dewclaw is visible on the foreground foreleg, which crosses the lion's upper body. In close confrontation, the near hind leg is kicked forward across its adversary's haunches; the far hind leg, not well defined, appears to be overlapped by that of the lion beneath a S-curving tail. There are no specific markings on the body.

THE LION

The lion on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid has a long head with an almond-shaped eye—a hallmark of the early Neopalatial style—similar to that of the griffin, with a modeled iris and raised linear outline further defined by a curving ridge that extends to the nose.³⁴ Knobs and swellings give further substance to the head. The beast's strong, curved jaw expresses the power of its attack as it bites the back of the griffin's head and wing. This form of frontal assault is repeated on an ivory from the House of the Shields at Mycenae, where the victim is a deer.³⁵ The Pylos lion's luxurious layered

34. For the eye shape, see Rehak and Younger 1998, p. 237.

35. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 7399, 7400; Poursat 2008,

p. 183, fig. 230 ("Maison des boucliers," dated to LH IIIB1). Rehak and Younger (1998, p. 242, pl. XXVI:f) date it stylistically to LH I-II.

mane is depicted with individual tufts detailed with parallel curving lines. This distinctive treatment can be compared to that of the running lions on a gold cup from Mycenae Shaft Grave V;³⁶ other lion manes on ivories and seals have been described as flamelike with pointed tufts.³⁷ Interrupted only by its protruding quasi-trefoil ear, the Pylos lion's mane extends to the griffin's foreleg. The lion's body, parallel to that of the griffin, is bulkier, with its limbs similarly defined; one foreground leg is at the griffin's neck, the paw bent over the front of its wing. The other foreleg is also visible behind the head of the griffin, extending over the top of the wing. One of the lion's hind legs extends over the belly of the griffin, while the other appears to mask the griffin's rear hind limb.

THE COMPOSITION

Framed by three raised concentric ovals, the scene of a lion attacking a griffin covers the entire field of the Pylos ivory pyxis lid. Unlike the depiction on the ivory that gave the Griffin Warrior his name, with a lion and griffin in a rocky setting—now identified as part of the body of the pyxis³⁸—there are no landscape elements to define the exact orientation of the scene. The nearly circular field with animals in conflict is matched on other ivory pyxis lids, sword pommels, and the engraved surfaces of Aegean seals and rings. One notable ivory pyxis lid from Tiryns, not far in date from the Pylos lid but in a fragmentary state and apparently in lower relief, bears the remains of a combat scene of griffins and lions (Fig. 11).³⁹ Found in a domestic context dated to LH II,⁴⁰ the best-preserved element appears to be the lion, with an elongated body fully stretched out and contorted, belly up with forepaws outstretched and hind legs facing upward, to match the lower curve of the lid. Only part of the lion's neck remains; it is perhaps turned back to face the griffin above, which is lost except for the diagonal feathers of its displayed wing and a pair of forelegs hanging vertically below the lion's belly. Additionally, the lion's posture can be matched on a gold-plated pommel from Mycenae Shaft Grave III, where it is attacking a leopard, both feline bodies aligned with the curve of the surface.⁴¹ In the original publication of the Tiryns pyxis lid, the scene was described as an attack in which each protagonist bites the other, although the area of action appears to be missing.⁴² A second griffin, with attenuated upright hindquarters and a reversed beaked head between the lines of its own wing feathers, seems to stride away from the attack. This scene appears to present an unusually extensive narrative of

36. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 656: Marinatos 1959, pl. 192, top; I thank J. Weingarten (pers. comm.) for this observation.

37. For the “flame” treatment, see *CMS* I, nos. 117 (seal from Mycenae chamber tomb 83), 243 (seal from the tholos tomb at Vapheio); *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 414–415, no. 268.

38. On this ivory (SN14-30), see n. 3, above, and p. 22, below.

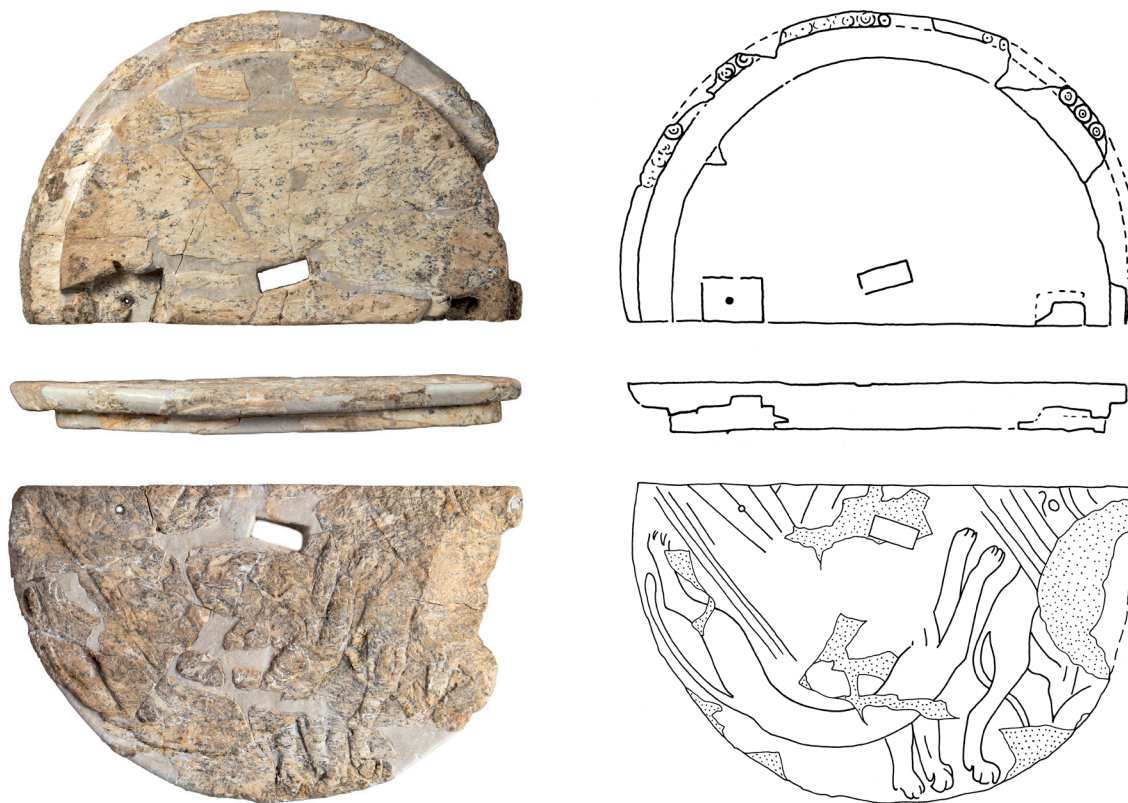
39. Nauplion, Archaeological

Museum ZU 1412 (housed in the storeroom of the Tiryns excavations).

40. The lid was found in the southeastern lower town in trench H, below House M. See further in *Tiryns* XIII, pp. 181–182, 199.

41. Athens, National Archaeological Museum Karo 295a: Younger 1978, p. 288, fig. 5, attributed to the “Mycenae-Vapheio Lion Group” of the early Neopalatial period.

42. *Tiryns* V, pp. 18–19.



a griffin attack in the confinement of an oval field, where animals cannot easily chase one another but rather are depicted in contorted postures over or under their prey or face to face, as on the Pylos lid.

It is likely that scenes on ivory pyxis lids, more commonly abbreviated, were part of a narrative expanded in greater detail on the body of the pyxis itself.⁴³ Such appears to be the case at Pylos, now that the fragments previously identified as a “slab” are, in fact, recognized as part of the same object, although the relationship of its protagonists remains to be determined. This is also the case for another ivory pyxis (Fig. 12), its findspot categorized by Poursat as “Mycenae provenance inconnue” in his catalogue of Mycenaean ivories from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.⁴⁴ Despite its poor condition, one can make out the image of a griffin above a lion on the lid; on the pyxis itself,⁴⁵ a griffin appears to have attacked a striding lion from behind. An excerpt from an extensive griffin hunt of deer is carved on the lid of the well-known ivory pyxis discovered in a 14th-century BCE tomb in the Athenian Agora.⁴⁶ It depicts a horizontally placed griffin that has brought down a deer, shown belly-up below it.

The confrontational postures of the two protagonists on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid, with a lion biting the neck of a griffin with long, unpatterned flight feathers and a row of continuous spirals decorating the short wing coverts, is probably best paralleled not on ivories but on sealing fragments, impressed by metal rings, from Knossos (for example, Fig. 13).⁴⁷ Although the animal bodies are missing, one might expect that they were curved to align with the frame, as are a number of single lions on Minoan seals and sealings,⁴⁸ and their limbs were probably entangled. In another frontal confrontation depicted on a seal, the griffin is

Figure 11. Ivory pyxis lid with griffin and lion combat, from Tiryns. Nauplion, Archaeological Museum ZU 1412. Scale 2:3. Photo M. Kostoula; drawing *Tiryns* XIII, pl. 1:1; courtesy Nauplion Museum (photo); J. Maran (drawing)

43. We see such a narrative unfold on an ivory pyxis from Katsambas, depicting a bull hunt (Alexiou 1966, 1967); regarding its date, see n. 94, below.

44. Poursat 1977a, p. 112, no. 347, pl. XXXVII:347.

45. Athens, National Archaeological Museum II 11049.

46. Athens, Agora BI 511; see n. 30, above.

47. Herakleion, Archaeological Museum AMH Σ-T1041 (= *CMS* II.8, no. 359). See also *CMS* II.8, no. 360; Becker 2018, no. A61.

48. E.g., *CMS* II.6, no. 91 (Ayia Triada).

Figure 12. Ivory pyxis (a) and lid (b) with griffin attacking a lion, probably from Mycenae. Athens, National Archaeological Museum Π 11049 (pyxis). Not to scale. (b) Poursat 1977a, pl. XXXVII:347; courtesy (a) National Archaeological Museum, Athens; (b) J.-C. Poursat

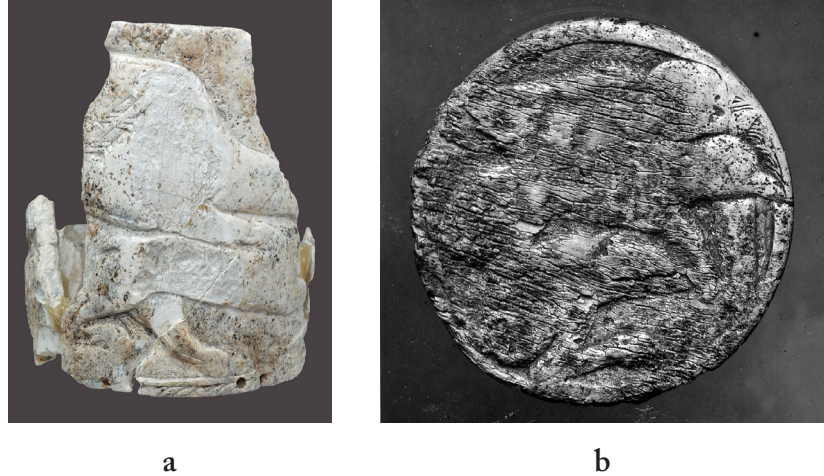


Figure 13. Seal impression fragment with lion attacking griffin, from Knossos. Herakleion, Archaeological Museum AMH Σ-T1041 (= *CMS* II.8, no. 359). Not to scale. Courtesy CMS Heidelberg



the victor, having laid low a contorted, upside-down lion with a bite to the belly.⁴⁹ Other scenes of combat between griffins and lions on Aegean seals and seal impressions depict attacks from above, below, and behind, in one case with a vertically oriented lion catching a galloping griffin at the nape of the neck.⁵⁰

THE THEME

The foremost predatory quadrupeds in Aegean art are lions and griffins. While they may attack each other, more often they are portrayed in parallel, as hunters of powerful animals, such as bulls and boar, and weaker prey, such as goats and deer. Noting the griffin's presence on the Tell el-Dab' a Hunt frieze, Morgan suggests that "lions hunt bulls [and] the griffin may have been attacking deer."⁵¹ Indeed, the frequency of the theme of the griffin attacking a deer has led Blakolmer to suggest that it "must have constituted a kind of iconographic cycle . . . [and] possessed a deeper mythological meaning."⁵² While such scenes become prominent in the Aegean during

49. *CMS* VI.2, no. 394 (Crete).

50. E.g., *CMS* II.6, no. 103 (Ayia Triada); *CMS* II.7, no. 96 (Zakros);

CMS V, Suppl. 3, no. 480 (Miletos); *CMS* XI, no. 244; Morgan 2010, pp. 319–320.

51. Morgan 2010, p. 321; see also n. 20, above.

52. Blakolmer 2016, p. 130.

the LBA—with examples found on Minoan seals and on the fresco painted on the east wall of the West House at Thera,⁵³ as well as an ivory sculpture from Knossos⁵⁴—the imagery of this fantastic beast as a hunter had already been established in the Near East centuries earlier. In Egypt, however, until the LBA, its main adversaries were human enemies, over which the griffin, as a symbolic representation of the Egyptian pharaoh, trampled.⁵⁵ Syrian cylinder seals of the MBA depict scenes of the griffin attacking in a typical static posture, with the body horizontal and the hind legs firmly grounded or even recumbent behind its prey.⁵⁶ One notable exception, however, shows a griffin leaping onto the back of a collapsing goat;⁵⁷ its angled wing extends over the back, foreshadowing the preferred griffin wing outline in the Aegean that, as mentioned above, first appears on the MM III gold ring from Archanes (see Fig. 7). The Syrian seal seems to be related to a stylistic phenomenon attributed by Collon to an “Aleppo Workshop”;⁵⁸ this includes animals in previously uncharacteristic dynamic poses, at times in full flying gallop, and depictions of hunters and bull leapers with long hair in loincloths (an important example is found on a sealed document from the site of Alalakh).⁵⁹

Scenes of griffin and lion combat also appear occasionally in MBA Syrian glyptic, with griffins as the aggressor.⁶⁰ As supernatural beasts combining aspects of the most powerful land and air creatures—lion and bird of prey—and with their apparent divine associations, their primacy would be expected. Blakolmer, citing Morgan, notes that

the griffin and lion *share the same symbolic roles* . . . they shared the same enemies and both were prominent protectors of divine figures. Nevertheless when . . . depicted in an aggressive confrontation with each other, the griffin dominates the lion twice as often as the lion dominates the griffin.⁶¹

Notable examples occur on Minoan sealings from both Ayia Triada and Zakros, in both cases with the griffin galloping toward its adversary from behind.⁶² Indeed, the griffin on the Megiddo fragment depicts the reverse of the scene on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid, with a griffin overcoming a lion (see Fig. 10).

53. West House fresco: Morgan 1988, pl. 60 (for a discussion of the griffin, see pp. 49–54).

54. This object, depicting a griffin attacking prey (with only its head and the victim's leg preserved), was discovered outside the wall of the South House at Knossos in a mixed context; it has been described as a freestanding three-dimensional sculpture (Herakleion, Archaeological Museum 195: Mountjoy 2003, pp. 17–18, 188–189, fig. 7.9:175).

55. E.g., on the pendant of princess Mereret, from Dahshur, 12th Dynasty (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE 3085: *Beyond Babylon*, p. 105, fig. 34). Contrast that with the “intercultural”-style

vicious griffin attacking a goat in a hunting scene on a chariot attachment in the tomb of Tutankhamun (Cairo, Egyptian Museum temp. no. 30.3.34.52: *Beyond Babylon*, p. 390, fig. 122).

56. Teissier 1996, p. 89, nos. 165 [unprov.], 166. This Syrian posture is again visible on a cylinder seal from Herakleion-Poros, which has been designated as Syro-Minoan in style (Herakleion, Archaeological Museum 3793: Rethemiotakis 2007). The use of [unprov.] indicates that an object was acquired after November 14, 1970, but has been published in a qualifying publication.

57. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

1913.165: Collon 2000, pp. 287–288, fig. 6.

58. Collon 1981, 2000.

59. Antakya, Archaeological Museum 7960-6: Collon 1981, pp. 36, 41, no. 6 (impression on envelope, Tell Atchana-Alalakh, level VII).

60. E.g., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Seyrig collection 15: Teissier 1996, p. 89, no. 166 (Syria).

61. Blakolmer 2016, pp. 130–131 (*italics original*). Another metal seal of unknown provenience and unusual style (*CMS XI*, no. 244) shows two lions, one biting the neck of a griffin galloping toward it while a second seems to flee.

62. *CMS II.6*, no. 103 (Ayia Triada); *CMS II.7*, no. 96 (Zakros).

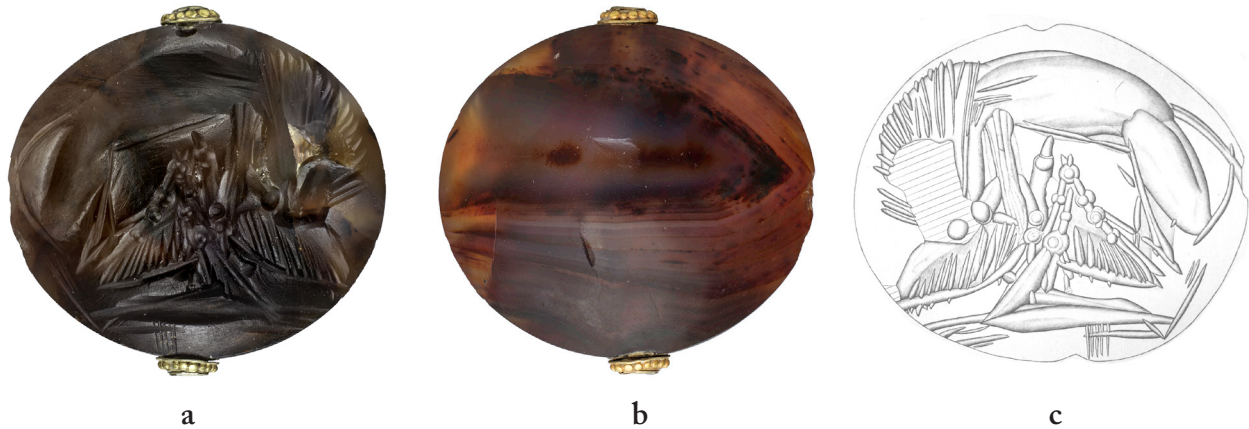


Figure 14. Carnelian lentoid seal (SN24-663) depicting a lion attacking a griffin from above and biting its wing, from the grave of the Griffin Warrior, Pylos: (a) front view; (b) back view; (c) drawing of impression. Scale 3:2. Photos J. Vanderpool; drawing C. Murphy and M. Anastasiadou; courtesy Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati

The statistics cited by Blakolmer may be significant, and he further points out, regarding a Minoan seal from Phylakopi, that it “shows a triple hierarchy of predation: a flying griffin attacks a lion which in turn is attacking a stag.”⁶³ Yet this order of things may not hold universally. The depiction on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid elevates the lion as a worthy and fierce counterpart to the victorious griffin, as does the ivory plaque from Delos, with its powerful scene of a lion having caught a griffin in its massive jaws (see Fig. 9). This view may be reinforced by the presence of a carnelian lentoid seal featuring a lion attacking a griffin from above, biting its wing, in the grave of the Griffin Warrior (SN24-663: Fig. 14; see also p. 19, below). In another instance, an unprovenienced seal shows an upright lion that may be interpreted as menacing the griffin standing on all fours before it.⁶⁴ Other seals, as mentioned above, clearly demonstrate the power of the lion over its adversary, or show both land and sky predators with their mouths in position to attack one another.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the hilt of a niello dagger from Mycenae Shaft Grave Δ features lion heads securing the blade, while the blade itself is adorned with griffins in a flying gallop, emphasizing the violence of both creatures and their relationship to the predatory humans who fought with such weapons.⁶⁶ Of course, there can be no doubt of the griffin’s ascendant role as a supernatural being with divine associations,⁶⁷ at times acting like a natural animal (perhaps in the underworld).⁶⁸ Still, the creature may sometimes be portrayed on the same plane as the lion, not only in combat scenes but also in what appear to be scenes of an otherworldly nature, as on a Mycenaean cylinder seal from the tholos at Kazarma and on a Cypriot cylinder seal found on Rhodes.⁶⁹

Turning to examples from the wider Mediterranean world of the LBA, we find a cylinder seal from the residential quarter at Ugarit stylistically

63. *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 202; Blakolmer 2016, p. 161, fig. 59.

64. *CMS* IX, no. 148.

65. *CMS* V, Suppl. 3, no. 480 (Miletos); *CMS* XI, nos. 45 (Athens), 244.

66. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 8710: Mylonas 1973, pp. 86–87, no. Δ-277, fig. 8; Morgan 2010, pp. 317–318, fig. 21. The decoration of horns on the sword hilt also references, *pars pro toto*, Cretan wild

goats (*agrimia*), weaker victims of lions in Minoan art, by illustrating only their heads and horns.

67. See, for instance, *CMS* I, nos. 128 (Mycenae), 223 (Vapheio); *CMS* II.3, no. 63 (Knossos); *CMS* VI.2, nos. 314 (Crete), 317 (Psychro cave); *CMS* X, no. 268; *CMS* XIII, no. 39; see also Rehak 1994.

68. *CMS* II.8, no. 193 (Knossos); *CMS* V, Suppl. 1B, no. 137 (Antheia);

see also the Ayia Triada sarcophagus (Herakleion, Archaeological Museum: Long 1974). For griffins nursing and as parents, see *CMS* I, nos. 269, 271 (Myrsinochori-Routsi); Rutter 2014 (pottery vessel from Lefkandi).

69. *CMS* V.2, no. 584; Aruz 2008, p. 167, no. 123, fig. 329 (Kazarma); *CMS* V.2, no. 657 (Cypriot seal from Rhodes).



Figure 15. Bronze plaque with lion and griffin combat, from the Levant. Paris, Musée du Louvre AO 15557.

Not to scale. Photo The Metropolitan Museum of Art; courtesy Musée du Louvre

dated to LB I, on which an interesting hierarchy is presented: lions and a griffin act in concert to bring down an ibex, while a fallen human hunter appears below.⁷⁰ However, on a cylinder seal said to come from Membij, Syria, with mixed Aegean and Near Eastern stylistic characteristics, the griffin predominates, flying toward the back of a lion while another lion attacks a bull.⁷¹ A more direct confrontation between a lion and a griffin occurs in the scene executed in repoussé on a small bronze plaque originally attributed to the Levantine coastal site of Tyre, datable stylistically to the 14th century BCE (Fig. 15).⁷² It displays a mixture of Aegean and Near Eastern elements. As on the earlier ivory pyxis lid from Pylos, although not contorted into an oval frame, the two protagonists on the bronze plaque clash head-on, with the griffin's vulturelike head topped by three short spiral curls; its angled wings emphasize its avian power. In this case, however, the griffin bites the lion's back while the lion's open mouth overlaps one of its wings. The upper register appears to be part of a hunting scene in which the human actor is missing (although implied by the hound below the lion, which is attacking a charging bull). In composition, the "Tyre" plaque somewhat resembles a fragmentary faience vessel found in the House of the Shields at Mycenae, with a scene of a crossing but not overtly aggressive lion and griffin.⁷³ The faience fragment has been attributed by various scholars to local manufacture, but Peltenburg believed that its technique may point to a Levantine workshop.⁷⁴

70. Damascus, National Museum 3003: Amiet 1992, pp. 169, 173, no. 405.

71. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1913.251: Aruz 2008, p. 295, no. 189, fig. 357.

72. Paris, Musée du Louvre AO 15557. For a discussion of the

plaque and its provenance, see *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 404–405, no. 259, n. 1 (J. Aruz).

73. Mycenae 53–362: Tournavitou 1995, p. 241, pl. 35:c.

74. Peltenburg 1991, p. 164; see also Tournavitou 1995, pp. 241, 243.

Addressing the significance of such imagery, Blakolmer asks whether animals and mythological creatures belonged to two different spheres. He notes that “in Minoan and Mycenaean animal combat scenes . . . animals and fantastic beings lived together in the same violent realm of nature.”⁷⁵ This may also be true of these creatures in the Near East and Egypt. Wrestling with this question, he cites Hiller, who suggests that the ancients believed that the griffin was a real animal from an exotic distant land—a notion that may indeed have been expressed in the desert scenes depicted in tombs from Beni Hasan of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom.⁷⁶ Quack further states that “we should recognize that our categorization of ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ animals is far from being an objective criterion of universal applicability”; he cites a demotic Egyptian tale of a griffin that comes from the Red Sea and wreaks havoc among the Egyptian army.⁷⁷

THE USE OF ELEPHANT IVORY

In the Aegean, elephant ivory was a precious and exotic raw material, and its acquisition depended on extensive trade networks. We are given a glimpse into the circumstances for its transfer from the east through various forms of evidence: the presence of elephant ivory tusks and tusk sections in 15th- to 14th-century BCE contexts on Crete and later at Mycenae, as well as in Anatolia and Syria, with an impressive cache in the level VII palace at Alalakh;⁷⁸ evidence for elephant hunting in Bronze Age Syria;⁷⁹ the depiction of Syrian envoys to the Egyptian court with tusks and an elephant;⁸⁰ and a section of elephant tusk on the westward-sailing Uluburun ship.⁸¹ Elephant ivory, possessing the qualities necessary to create luxury products such as pyxides, remained a rare commodity by comparison with hippopotamus teeth, which were more easily accessible and commonly utilized.⁸² Prior to the LBA in the Near East, an impressive object made of elephant ivory, a jewel-encrusted box from MBA Acemhöyük in central Anatolia, shows an elaborate ritual scene carved on the body in low, flat relief.⁸³ The sculptural modeling of this material appears to have been refined by the LB I–II period, as seen on a subtly sculpted Hathor mask from LB I–II Qatna,⁸⁴ followed by the impressive ivory production at Ugarit in succeeding centuries.⁸⁵

The earliest examples of the actual manufacture of craft goods from elephant ivory on the Greek mainland date to the beginning of the LBA.

75. Blakolmer 2016, p. 164.

76. Blakolmer 2016, p. 164; see also Newberry 1893, pl. XXX; Hiller 1996; Kamrin 2013, pp. 161–166.

77. Quack 2010, p. 342.

78. For the Alalakh cache, see Barnett 1982, p. 6; Krzyszkowska 1988, pp. 212, 230.

79. See Pfälzner 2012.

80. Thebes, Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100): *Beyond Babylon*, p. 328, fig. 105 (C. Pulak).

81. *Beyond Babylon*, p. 328, no. 197 (C. Pulak). For the Uluburun shipwreck

and trade more generally, see Pulak 2008, pp. 298–300; *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 328–330, nos. 197, 198 (C. Pulak); see also Krzyszkowska 1988, pp. 226–228.

82. See Krzyszkowska 1988, pp. 212–213; *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 328–330, nos. 197, 198 (C. Pulak).

83. Ankara, Museum of Anatolian Civilizations AC 024: Özgüç 1976.

84. Homs, Homs Museum MSH02-3266.707: *Beyond Babylon*, p. 234, no. 144 (D. M. Bonacossi).

85. Gachet-Bizollon 2007.

The elephant tusk tips discovered in the Mycenae shaft graves, according to Krzyszkowska, served no practical purpose and may have been trophies that signaled wealth in this exotic material; she believes they were the likely residue from the production of sword pommels.⁸⁶ One outstanding pommel from Mycenae Shaft Grave IV, with four lions rendered in a torsional whorl, stylistically attributed to the “Mycenae-Vapheio Lion Group,”⁸⁷ led Rehak and Younger to conclude that Minoan-trained artisans had set up shop in the Argolid.⁸⁸ Poursat, however, questions this notion, pointing to the dearth of sculpted ivory throughout the Aegean at the onset of the LBA.⁸⁹ Rather, he turns to other crafts, such as wood carving, to explain the development of expertise in ivory working at the time.⁹⁰ Hemingway has also noted that “nothing in the preceding periods prepares one for the high quality of ivory sculptures that appear in the Second Palace Period.”⁹¹ In his discussion of the exquisite Palaikastro kouros, made partly of hippopotamus ivory and found in a Late Minoan (LM) IB context,⁹² he also points to (later) accomplished pieces such as the well-known ivory triad from the Mycenae acropolis,⁹³ which he believes, as do Rehak and Younger, to be a Minoan work.⁹⁴ The discovery of a rectangular jewelry box in a LM IB house at Mochlos further attests to the development of ivory-working skills on Crete, albeit in a very different style from that of the Pylos ivory pyxis lid.⁹⁵ The decorative plaques embellishing the wooden box are fashioned of elephant ivory and carved in relief, with an elaborate religious scene on the lid. The box’s imagery and its contents—including beads made of exotic stones—point to the elevated status of the owner (“the Lady with the Ivory Pyxis”). As the property of a priestess, according to Soles (or a bride of high status, according to a new interpretation by Jones),⁹⁶ the precious character of the box is expressed not only by its carving but also by the choice of its material. It is in this artistic environment that the Pylos lid, an outstanding example of ivory high-relief sculpture on the Greek mainland of the time, may be viewed. The lid, with its theme—the epic conflict between the greatest forces of the natural world and an otherworldly or outerworldly realm—combined with the intrinsic value of its exotic material, certainly represents a “mark of exceptionality.”⁹⁷

86. Krzyszkowska 1988, p. 231; see also Velsink 2003, p. 6.

87. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 295b: Younger 1978, pp. 286–288, no. 4, fig. 4.

88. Rehak and Younger 1998, p. 242. They note that “the difficulty in separating ‘Minoan’ from ‘Mycenaean’ elements remains a problem from this point on,” as ivory-working skills developed during the LH I period.

89. Poursat 2022, p. 311. Yet, as pointed out by J. Weingarten (pers. comm.), this view may not be accurate, based on the craftsmanship demonstrated on a circle of elephant ivory incised with Linear A signs and images

of animals and vases from the Anetakis site at Knossos; see Kanta 2019a, no. 280.

90. Poursat 2022, p. 311; on the subject of “cross-craft,” see also Thomas 2014.

91. Hemingway 2000, p. 115.

92. Siteia, Archaeological Museum: MacGillivray, Driessen, and Sackett 2000.

93. Athens, National Archaeological Museum II7711: Wace 1961.

94. Hemingway 2000, p. 118; see also Rehak and Younger 1998, p. 240. See Konstantinidi-Syvridi 2012, for a contemporary ivory female figure from Prosymna (Athens, National

Archaeological Museum 6580).

Rehak and Younger (1998, p. 237, n. 85), along with a number of other scholars, have placed the Katsambas pyxis (see n. 43, above), with its high-relief depiction of bull hunting, in this period; however, Poursat (2022, p. 311), noting that the shape of the pyxis should not date earlier than LM IB, argues for a LH IIIA1 date; see also Poursat 2011.

95. The box is now housed in the Archaeological Museum in Siteia; see Soles 2016.

96. Soles 2016, pp. 249–252; Jones 2023.

97. See Helms 1993, p. 165.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCENE AT PYLOS

In naming the grave of the Griffin Warrior, we initially imagined that the griffin had a special significance for the warrior. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now say that he appears instead to have had a preference for lions.⁹⁸ Among the seals from his grave, there are 17 with lions, either alone or in combination with other creatures, one the carnelian lentoid with a lion attacking a griffin illustrated above (see Fig. 14), and only a single seal with a lone griffin. Aside from seals, lions attack a griffin on the sword of the Griffin Warrior.⁹⁹

Here we consider whether or not the scene of a lion defeating a griffin on the Pylos ivory pyxis lid had special meaning for the Griffin Warrior, irrespective of its place of manufacture or its significance for its maker and intended original audience.¹⁰⁰ Did the Griffin Warrior (and thus should we) assign any importance to the fact that the lion is the victor and that lion imagery is dominant on seals buried with him? It is, of course, always risky to attempt a direct reading of prehistoric iconography, and we approach this topic with caution.

The griffin and lion, in a single composition, have been associated with Pylos in the minds of Aegean prehistorians since Carl Blegen's discovery of the 13th-century BCE throne room of the Palace of Nestor and the restoration of wall paintings from its northeastern wall—although it is not an antagonistic relationship that is there represented or implied, but rather a peaceful coexistence. The lions and griffins flanking the throne, along with nearly identical forms of *megara* at both Pylos and Mycenae, led Rutter instead to imagine that there had existed a special relationship between Mycenae and Pylos, and to suggest that this theme may have been chosen to represent an interdynastic marriage between the two.¹⁰¹ He speculated:

Is it possible that the peculiar combination of lions with griffins in Pylian palatial frescoes of LH IIIB date does, in fact, reflect an intentional melding of originally discrete Knosso-Messenian and Argive royal traits that can also be discerned in palatial plans, wall-building techniques, and decorated plaster floors? Might the combination of royal iconographies in Pylian frescoes provide some insight into what actually happened when the LH IIIA period came to an end at Ano Englianos? That is, might the combination on Pylos' palace walls of heraldic devices familiar individually from Knossos and Mycenae bear witness to a dynastic marriage or perhaps even an Argive conquest of the Pylian kingdom?¹⁰²

98. Davis and Stocker authored this and the following section.

99. SN24-28. See Stocker and Davis 2023 for a first presentation of the designs incised on the gold embroidery decorating the hilt of the sword. The decoration will be presented in Davis and Stocker, forthcoming b. The carnelian lentoid seal will be described

in greater detail in the catalogue of an exhibition to open first in Kalamata and then at the J. Paul Getty Villa Museum in 2025.

100. As mentioned above, the scene may have been excerpted from an iconographic cycle (see p. 13 and n. 52, above).

101. Rutter 2005, p. 34.

102. Rutter 2005, p. 34.

Rutter built on the earlier thoughts of Immerwahr and Hiller. Immerwahr had written:

The griffin had a long history in Crete, having been introduced from Syria or the Levant during the Old Palace period. . . . The lion too has much the same history but occurs more frequently on the mainland, where it apparently became the heraldic device of the kings of Mycenae. . . . Thus the painted decoration of the Throne Room at Pylos and the derivative frieze in the smaller hall [Hall 46] seem to pay tribute in inspiration to Mycenae as well as Knossos.¹⁰³

Immerwahr's and Hiller's views of the world of the early Late Bronze Age now seem to us overly Mycenocentric, and we wonder if the lion was not symbolic more generally of emergent mainland principalities. Is it plausible to imagine that the Griffin Warrior would have identified the lion as symbolic of an emergent Pylian state already in LH IIA, in contrast to the griffin as emblematic of Crete, or even more specifically of Knossos?¹⁰⁴

Zenzen has noted that we as yet have little understanding of the relationship between motifs on seals and their owners, generally because we are lacking specific cultural associations for the former.¹⁰⁵ This is equally true for most iconographical representations in other media in Aegean art. In the case of the Pylos ivory pyxis lid, however, we stand on firmer ground. Its context is clear, as is its association with the Griffin Warrior, a single powerful individual who died in Pylos at the beginning of the Mycenaean period. It has, moreover, been demonstrated elsewhere that many objects interred with the Griffin Warrior were deliberately selected to express aspects of his identity.¹⁰⁶ Did the Griffin Warrior, who otherwise seems to have identified with or have been identified with the heroic warrior on the Pylos Combat Agate, also see himself as a lion raging on the battlefield

103. Immerwahr 1990, p. 137. Cf. Hiller 1996, pp. 78–81. Others have assigned sociopolitical meaning to themes appearing in wall paintings at other sites. For example, Marinatos (2007) argued that bull-leaping representations point to a special relationship between Knossos and Avaris, while Hallager and Hallager (1995) had previously suggested that there existed a special relationship between Knossos and bull representations.

104. The griffin representation on the gold cushion seal from Tholos IV at Pylos (see Fig. 6) has become emblematic of Pylos in modern times, but its chronological context cannot be precisely determined, whether before, contemporary with, or subsequent to the burial of the Griffin Warrior. Tholos IV was built toward the end of

the Middle Helladic period and used throughout the 15th century BCE (for the earliest use of the tomb, see Davis and Stocker 2015). Similar to this griffin representation are the griffins on either side of a short sword discovered in a foundation deposit for the Fetish Shrine in the Anetakis plot at Knossos, built in LM II/IIIA1 (Kanta 2019b; Giunilia-Mair and Kanta 2022). Kanta associates those with the griffins on the walls of the Knossos throne room and the dynasty ruling Knossos in its Final (Monopalatial) Palatial phase, which she considers to have been Mycenaean.

Might the agrimia attacked by lions on the hilt of the Griffin Warrior's sword (SN24-28; see p. 19, above) also have been reminiscent of Crete, given their prominence in Minoan iconography?

105. Zenzen (2015, p. 398) warned against overinterpretation of a scene depicted on a seal from Miletos, in which a lion defeats a griffin. Nonetheless, he himself argues (p. 401) that the image reflects the vulnerability and apprehension of a Minoan official dispatched from Crete: "Das Siegelbild warnt somit vor den Gefahren, denen derjenige, der seine Autorität missachtet, die Bahn bricht. Man könnte weiter gehen, indem man die Fremdheit und Bedrohlichkeit der dargestellten Szene als der Tätigkeit des Besitzers in der Peripherie der minoischen Kultur, in einer fremden und möglicherweise als bedrohlich empfundenen Welt, als besonders angemessen betrachtet."

106. See, e.g., Davis and Stocker 2022a.

or on the prowl for prey in the manner of artistic depictions in the Shaft Grave period and of Homeric similes (for example, *Il.* 11.113–114: “as a lion crushes the young of the swift deer with his powerful teeth”)¹⁰⁷

It does seem likely that the griffin had become emblematic of Knossos by the time of the Griffin Warrior. The slightly later wall paintings in the throne room at Knossos were applied after a general remodeling of that part of the Palace of Minos. Galanakis, Tsitsa, and Güntel-Maschek have written:

For archaeological and stylistic reasons . . . a Late Minoan (LM) II date is favoured for the execution of the Throne Room’s decorative programme, which included “traditional” (i.e., Neopalatial) and “innovative” (i.e., Final Palatial) elements. The coexistence of these elements is, in our view, best interpreted as a conscious effort of the artist(s) and their commissioners to create a new, yet still recognisable, image of power—an image that represents an artistic as well as a political turning point between the Neopalatial and Final Palatial periods.¹⁰⁸

Its decoration was applied, therefore, shortly after the burial of the Griffin Warrior, a time when we see the accelerated blending of the old and new demonstrated in the choice of his grave goods. Galanakis, Tsitsa, and Güntel-Maschek refer to such blending in regard to the *wanax* as:

an ideological blending and the beginning of a wanax ideology in art. . . . With the possible rise of the wanax within no more than a few decades from the end of LM IB and beginning of LM II, it could well be that the decoration of the Throne Room served the creation of a renewed ruling environment in which a high official now, or soon after, called the wanax already existed and had important leading functions. The wanax ideology then made use of visual imagery to accompany and perhaps justify this new model of power based on sole rulership, along with his entourage that helped support this power. Within this model, we see divine permission or blessing as necessary for the wanax to legitimise his position within this “new order.”¹⁰⁹

It is curious that, at about this time, after a very long period of “Minoanization” at Pylos, *wanax* ideology may also have been adopted on the mainland at Pylos.¹¹⁰ In this context, did the Griffin Warrior acquire the Pylos ivory pyxis, with the lion as the victor on the lid, as an expression of resistance to, and independence from, Knossos (though not, of course, from Minoan culture itself, which had so deeply influenced Pylos in the

107. On the symbolic content of lion imagery, see Thomas 2004, pp. 184–187; on lion similes, see Alden 2005. On the Griffin Warrior as hero, see Stocker and Davis 2017.

108. Galanakis, Tsitsa, and Güntel-Maschek 2017, p. 47. All griffins represented on objects from the grave of the

Griffin Warrior are winged, as opposed to the winglessness of the griffins of the throne room at Knossos, which seems to be an innovative feature there; see Galanakis, Tsitsa, and Güntel-Maschek 2017, p. 76.

109. Galanakis, Tsitsa, and Güntel-Maschek 2017, p. 87.

110. We have suggested that the very office of kingship, along with its accoutrements, had been imported to Pylos from Crete, probably from Knossos, and there adopted by men like the Griffin Warrior; see Stocker and Davis 2020.

very recent past and continued to do so in his day)?¹¹¹ Was competition between these emblems eventually resolved by the “intentional melding of originally discrete” symbolic expressions of which Rutter speaks, which had taken place by the 13th century BCE, and which found a final expression in the wall paintings of the megaron of the Palace of Nestor?

IN RETROSPECT

The lid published in this article is the earliest griffin and lion combat scene in ivory yet known in the Aegean. As a result of ongoing conservation and mending of ivory fragments, it appears now that the eponymous ivory plaque that gave its name to the grave belongs to the body of the pyxis to which the lid also belongs.

The presence of a complete cosmetic box in the grave of the Griffin Warrior would not be at all surprising given the other artifacts in the grave that indicate a concern for bodily care, both in the form of actual grave goods and in representational art. In our publication of the Pylos Combat Agate, we called attention to the flowing locks of the warrior-hero who may have inspired the Griffin Warrior.¹¹² We have also mentioned the many combs in the grave, as well as the mirror. In addition, there was a small gold box and two associated gold spoons, likely for cosmetic use.¹¹³

Since there is no question about the relative date of the construction of the grave of the Griffin Warrior and the deposition of the burial and the accompanying grave goods, it has seemed reasonable to us to consider the meaning of the iconography of the combat between the lion and griffin in the historical context of the end of the New Palatial period in Crete (LH IIA/LM IB). We have raised the possibility that the scene references an excerpt from a myth. Both creatures are divine protectors, but what is unusual is that the lion on the lid dominates the griffin. We have proposed that the imagery on this lid had special meaning for the Griffin Warrior, perhaps alluding to his role in conflicts between mainlanders and Knossos.

Although we ourselves initially thought of the Griffin Warrior as identifying with a griffin, as our analysis of finds from the grave has progressed, it now instead seems that he might rather have been a griffin fighter, symbolically and emblematically a lion. Such an interpretation hardly seems far-fetched given the apparent care with which burial goods were selected for the grave.

111. The careful modeling and musculature of both lion and griffin may reflect Neopalatial workmanship, perhaps inspired by relief frescoes. Blakolmer (2011, pp. 67–68) has suggested that attempts to render the volume of the Knossian throne room’s griffins through techniques of chiaroscuro may similarly have found their inspiration

in relief fresco. On Minoanization at Pylos, see particularly the summary in Davis and Stocker 2022a, 2022b. The craft of wall painting had been introduced to Pylos from Crete already at the end of the Middle Helladic period, as had the use of cut-stone masonry (although the theory advanced by Kilian [1985, pp. 213–217; see Nelson

2001 for commentary and critique] that an earlier palace on the Englianos acropolis had a central court is not sustainable).

112. Stocker and Davis 2017, pp. 591–592.

113. Davis and Stocker, forthcoming a.

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