

CHAPTER 16 THE CROCODILE IMAGE

In Egypt

The crocodile is native to the Nile River valley, living in the shallow, slow-moving water and banks of the river and lakes.¹¹³² At least until the New Kingdom it was common along the entire river and the Delta, and especially in the Faiyum marshes. Both Pliny and Strabo mention that the crocodile inhabited the marshes along the Wadi Zarga just south of Caesarea in Palestine.

The crocodile was employed as a hieroglyph as early as the Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts*, depicted with its tail either curled below the body (I 5) or straight out behind (I 3). By the Middle Kingdom, the former was used as a determinative for verbs such as *s3k* ('to collect'). The latter was employed in less benign verbs, such as *hnt* ('be greedy'), *skn* ('lust after') and *3s* ('be angry/aggressive'), in addition to being an ideogram for *msh* and *hnty* ('crocodile'); it also appeared in a pair for *ity* ('sovereign'). All these connotations, including the less savoury aspects, continued throughout the entire dynastic period. More specifically cultic versions of the crocodile (I 4, I 5*) were employed as a determinative or ideogram for the god Sobek, never for the crocodile itself; one depicts an archaic cult statue of the god as a crocodile, and the other a crocodile atop a shrine.

Amulets in the form of a crocodile appear even before the beginning of Dynasty IV¹¹³³ and continue into the Roman period. They are shown individual-



Fig. 28 Amulet in the form of a recumbent crocodile, glazed steatite, L: 15 mm, Egyptian, Dynasty XII–XIII (BOURRIAU 1988:156 #176a)

ly,¹¹³⁴ and occasionally paired side-by-side,¹¹³⁵ or as a septet row.¹¹³⁶ Almost universally they are in 'glazed steatite' with string-hole through the width (usually through the neck or below the jaws), although occasionally they lack a string-hole altogether (see Fig. 28). Early examples also are in ivory. The crocodile most commonly stands with tail straight out behind on a flat unembellished base nonetheless suitable for a face design, but occasionally the tail turns slightly to one side and there is no defined base. Some flat 'relief' amulets have a curled tail.¹¹³⁷ When indicated, the coarse body surface is shown by rough cross-hatching.

The earliest seal designs with crocodiles had been dated to Dynasty XV by Petrie,¹¹³⁸ but more recent research has indicated examples as early as the FIP.¹¹³⁹ Nonetheless, they are not common prior to the SIP. Carved on face designs they can appear together with human figures or other creatures (e.g. scorpion, lion, jackal, sphinx)¹¹⁴⁰ or in *tête-bêche*

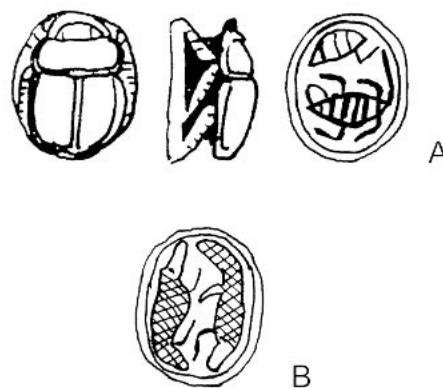


Fig. 29 A) Scarab with face design incorporating a crocodile representation, glazed steatite, L: 10 mm, from Badari, Egyptian, First Intermediate Period (WARD 1978:pl. VI:163); B) Scarab with face design of two crocodiles *tête-bêche*, L: 18 mm, from Tell el-^cAjjul area J, Egyptian, Second Intermediate Period (TUFNELL 1984:II:pl. XXXIX:2594)

¹¹³² Recent major discussions of the crocodile in ancient Egypt are BRUNNER-TRAUT in *LÄ* III.5–6:791–801 ('*Krokodil*'); KAKOSY in *LÄ* III.6:801–811 ('*Krokodilskulte*'); HORNUNG and STAHELIN 1976:122–126. An earlier version of the present chapter was presented at the Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists at Cambridge in 1995; see PHILLIPS 1998.

¹¹³³ ANDREWS 1994:26, Fig 4.d.

¹¹³⁴ REISNER 1907–1958:I:184–187 #12422–12447, 12450, pl. XXIII:12422, 12425, 12433–12435; HERRMANN 1985:83 #327–328; BOURRIAU 1988:156 #176.a.

¹¹³⁵ PETRIE 1914:pl. XLI:240:l.

¹¹³⁶ REISNER 1907–1958:I:186 #12439–12440; PETRIE 1914:48 #240 Type E.

¹¹³⁷ HERRMANN 1985:82–83 #325–326.

¹¹³⁸ PETRIE 1925b:25.

¹¹³⁹ WARD 1978:52, pl. VI:160–165, 168.

¹¹⁴⁰ REISNER 1907–1958:I:182 #12413, pl. XXIII:12413; PETRIE 1925b:pl. XIV:898–902, XVI:1141; TUFNELL 1984:II:pl. XXXIX:Class 9:D.

pairs,¹¹⁴¹ and carved between texts on royal cylinder seals (see Fig. 29).¹¹⁴² Both straight-tailed (I 3) crocodiles and those with tail turned up like a scorpion are shown but the tail most commonly is turned downward (I 5). Most often, this is the result of the seal shape rather than any iconographical distinction. However, the downcurled-tail version (I 5) is not represented on face designs. Body surface is indicated by rough cross-hatching. The position of the hind legs, facing forward in the same direction as the forelegs, identifies cruder representations as a crocodile rather than a lizard. The lizard hieroglyph (I 1) clearly depicts the hind legs in the opposite direction of the forelegs.

Scaraboids in crocodile form appear in the Middle Kingdom and later, individually¹¹⁴³ or paired *tête bêche*,¹¹⁴⁴ with cross-hatched details of body surface. The curled tail seems to be preferred on scaraboids, rather than the straight or slightly turned tail common to amulets without face design.

Larger figurines also are known, most common in late Dynasty XII–XIII. Often they were quite detailed, carved in wood, stone and faience, but can also be quite crude.¹¹⁴⁵ Body surface is indicated by long deep lines running along the length of the body, intersected by short dashes in a vaguely cross-hatched pattern. Whether the figurines (like the amulets and scaraboids) actually represented Sobek, or merely the crocodile itself, is an open question. None have any indication of a divine attribute.¹¹⁴⁶

The crocodile also appeared as an apotropaic figure, one of many on ‘magic rods’¹¹⁴⁷ and ‘magic wands’¹¹⁴⁸ of, especially, the Middle Kingdom and Dynasty XIII. The body surface, when indicated, usually has cross-hatched lines but occasionally is shown by multiple rows of dots or short vertical lines

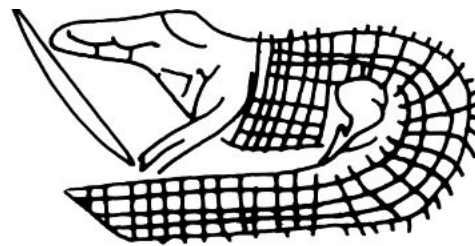


Fig. 30 Representation of a crocodile on a ‘magic wand,’ Egyptian, Dynasty XIII (ALTENMÜLLER 1965:fig. 28)

separating large circles (see Fig. 30).¹¹⁴⁹ On ‘magic rods,’ the tail appears straight behind the body (I 3), but on ‘magic wands’ almost always was curled below it (I 5).¹¹⁵⁰ This distinction may or may not be significant, as it also is found as the two hieroglyphic signs, either distinguishing between two different creatures for some unknown but presumably cultic reason or simply the most appropriate means of using the space available on the two object types and, presumably, in hieroglyphic texts. The crocodile’s specific protective function on these potent objects is unknown, but it is one of the more commonly represented creatures there. A lack of identifying inscriptions precludes naming the creature, especially as a number of possible deities and protective creatures in crocodile form were known in the Middle Kingdom, and it may be that more than one were used.

The most important was Sobek (*Sbk*), god of water,¹¹⁵¹ vegetation and fertility,¹¹⁵² a combination vaguely Osirian in character, who was directly related to Pharaoh in the Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts*.¹¹⁵³ His attribute consists of a tri-leafed plant atop his head.¹¹⁵⁴ By the Middle Kingdom he is associated both with Re

¹¹⁴¹ HORNUNG and STAEHELIN 1976:pl. 89:796–799, 111:B 51, 115:B 85, 118:D 21; ANDREWS 1994:53 fig. 54.e. Occasionally the crocodiles were in mirror image, usually separated by some other figure or object, e.g., *ibid.*:pl. 101.901.

¹¹⁴² REISNER 1907–1958:II:48 #12898, pl. XI:1289; HORNUNG and STAEHELIN 1976:241 #250, pl. 24:250. These are limited in date to Dynasty XII. See also BOURRIAU 1988:154 #172.

¹¹⁴³ REISNER 1907–1958:I:187 #12448–12449, pl. XXIII:12448–12449; HORNUNG and STAEHELIN 1976:pl. 54:507.

¹¹⁴⁴ PETRIE 1925b:17, pl. VI:231:c.

¹¹⁴⁵ HAYES 1953–1959:I:225; BOURRIAU 1988:117–118 #109.

¹¹⁴⁶ Anthropoid cult statues with crocodile head are also known; one of limestone was found at Hawara, and the record of an order by Amenemhat III for twelve greywacke statues for the same temple survives. See PETRIE, WAINWRIGHT and MACKAY 1912:pl. XXIV:2; BROVARSKI in *LÄ* V.7:999.

¹¹⁴⁷ HAYES 1953–1959:I:228 fig. 143, the relief images having

an extended tail and the attached figurine a curled tail; all jaws are closed. Also BOURRIAU 1988:115–116 #104:a–b, one with its jaws closed and the other open, seemingly about to devour the recumbent lion in front of it; the tail of the latter may be curled, the other is straight.

¹¹⁴⁸ ALTENMÜLLER 1983:34; BOURRIAU 1988:115 #103. See also ALTENMÜLLER 1965.

¹¹⁴⁹ See also LEGGE 1905:pl. XVII:39.

¹¹⁵⁰ Virtually the only exceptions are when the crocodile is found on the back of the hippopotamus deity. The crocodile as distinct creature always is shown with the tail curled below the body. A rare exception to this is ALTENMÜLLER 1965:fig. 14.

¹¹⁵¹ Although not the Nile god, personified by Hapy (*Hꜥpy*).

¹¹⁵² On the god, see *LÄ* V.7:995–1031.

¹¹⁵³ FAULKNER 1969:99 Utterance 317.

¹¹⁵⁴ *LÄ* V.7:997 fig. 4.

as Sobek-Re¹¹⁵⁵ and Horus as Sobek-Horus,¹¹⁵⁶ but he also continues to retain a separate identity throughout pharaonic times. He was particularly venerated in the Faiyum area,¹¹⁵⁷ his cult reaching its peak during later Dynasty XII–XIII, when a number of local crocodile cults (including Khenty-Khet at Athribis) were assimilated into one of Sobek apparently under royal ægis,¹¹⁵⁸ probably as a result of the intensification of increased political and economic importance of the Faiyum (and thus its most important deity) at this time. Royal patronage is also indicated by the names of the pharaohs themselves: Queen Sobekneferu (last ruler of Dynasty XII), the common royal epithet *s3 Sbk* ('Son of Sobek') for other Dynasty XII kings, the six Sobekhotep kings of Dynasty XIII, two Sobekemsaf kings of Dynasty XVII, and a number of other royal family members whose names and epithets include his name. Although his cult continued into New Kingdom and later times, Sobek was supplanted in importance by other combined deities with whom he had been assimilated, especially Sobek-Re. Nonetheless, as Sobek he acquired sovereignty over foreign lands in the New Kingdom.

The cult of Sobek never regained its supremacy following the collapse of the Middle Kingdom, although a number of temples and other signs of continued worship are evident.¹¹⁵⁹ This reduction in power of a god who remained essentially benevolent seems to have been followed by a rise in the more malevolent aspects of the crocodile in the Egyptian view. In the Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts* he is Sobek and wholly beneficial, and in the Middle Kingdom *Coffin Texts* the crocodile functions as a benevolent force during the journey of the deceased through the Netherworld, protecting him and interceding on his behalf. Here, he usually is identified as Sobek but also as multiple but unnamed 'crocodile-gods.'¹¹⁶⁰

In the New Kingdom *Book of the Dead*, however, the crocodile always is a malevolent force. The journey through the Netherworld is threatened first by one and then a quartet of crocodiles, and the deceased was provided with a spell to prevent his *k3* (generally, 'soul') being devoured by them.¹¹⁶¹ The crocodiles in the accompanying vignettes normally have a straight tail, but occasionally have the head turned back or tail curled around, or both.¹¹⁶² Geb (*Gb*), personification of the earth, also appears as a crocodile in these texts, his open mouth eloquently representing the abyss, a thing to be avoided at all costs. Ammut ('*mwt*'), the 'Devourer of Hearts,' who stands awaiting the final judgement of the 'Weighing of the Heart' in the Netherworld to consume the hearts of the wicked, was a composite creature with the head of a crocodile, foreparts of a lion and hindquarters of a hippopotamus. In the *Papyrus Westcar*, dated to Dynasty XV or 'Hyksos period,' the crocodile takes on the role of executioner.¹¹⁶³ The crocodile also was a familiar of the 'evil' god Seth and again acted as a divine enemy, especially in the New Kingdom and later times. Nonetheless, the crocodile with straight tail was also identified as one of the Northern constellations, Hetepredwy (*htp-rdwy*, 'restful of feet,' also an epithet of Sobek by the early Middle Kingdom), found directly opposite a male figure about to kill it. It also appeared with curled tail as Sek (*Sk*), together with the scorpion.¹¹⁶⁴ These astrological figures continue into the later New Kingdom and beyond.

It may perhaps be due to the change in Egyptian attitude towards the crocodile in the religious sphere that New Kingdom representations of the crocodile are rare, with the exception of its hieroglyphic use on scarabs and illustration on religious texts and the *Books of the Dead*. Few examples of the crocodile as amulet, scaraboid and even figurine are dated to the New Kingdom.¹¹⁶⁵

¹¹⁵⁵ A crocodile with solar disc atop the head, sometimes with large double-plumed crown.

¹¹⁵⁶ A crocodile with falcon head and double crown.

¹¹⁵⁷ The major cult centre at Shedet in the Faiyum was called Crocodilopolis in the Graeco-Roman period. The original Egyptian name employed a crocodile as determinative.

¹¹⁵⁸ See BOURRIAU 1988:154.

¹¹⁵⁹ Including the temple at Sumenu near Gebelein, where a Dynasty XIX stela dedicated to Sobek (TBM 67.174) and numerous other objects were found.

¹¹⁶⁰ See FAULKNER 1973–1978:III:194 ('Sobk').

¹¹⁶¹ ALLAN 1974:354 ('crocodile,' 'Crocodile Demons'). Spell 81, allowing the deceased to assume the form of a crocodile, is the only beneficent appearance of the animal in the *Book of the Dead* texts.

¹¹⁶² E.g. ALLAN 1960:pl. XIX–XX, LXV.

¹¹⁶³ *LÄ* V.6:804. However, in the New Kingdom tale of 'The Doomed Prince' the crocodile's role of executioner is somewhat ambiguous at the end, as preserved; see LICHTHEIM 1975–1980:II:200–203.

¹¹⁶⁴ NEUGEBAUER and PARKER 1969:III:1:11–13. 193, 194, fig. 2. It also appears on the back of the standing hippopotamus constellation; see Chapter 12.

¹¹⁶⁵ PETRIE 1914:pl. XLI:240.e; HAYES 1953–1959:II:252, 383 are a few examples. Crocodiles, as many other animals, were sanctified, mummified and buried in sacred animal necropoleis in the Late Period, beyond the chronological scope of the present study. There is no earlier evidence of such practice on crocodiles. See D'AURIA, LACOVARA and ROEHRIG 1988:230–231, 234–235 #192.

On Crete

The crocodile is not native to Crete nor, for that matter, anywhere in the Aegean, Cyprus nor Syro-Palestine except near Caesarea. Any indigenous representation of the creature must be of foreign, and almost certainly of ultimately Egyptian, inspiration.¹¹⁶⁶

Pre-Palatial

There are no Pre-Palatial examples, either imported or local, of the crocodile from the Aegean.

Proto-Palatial

The earliest Minoan image of a crocodile is found on a seal face design from Tsoutsouros {514}, stylistically dated to the Proto-Palatial period. Identified originally as a lizard, the forward angle of its hind legs in particular precludes such identification (compare with Fig. 28).¹¹⁶⁷ This observation, together with the long snout and claws, spiked tail and indications of scaling suggest rather a crocodile. Additional weight for this argument lies in its setting, which may easily be interpreted as two high banks of land and shallow water, the natural habitat of the animal. It is shown with the tail raised, and head *regardant*, in part due to the odd shape of the seal face on which it is carved. This face design is unique.

Neo-Palatial

No crocodile images are known from this period.¹¹⁶⁸

Final Palatial

One fragmentary ivory comb handle decorated with multiple pairs of crocodiles can be dated to the period prior to the destruction of Knossos, from the 'Mycenaean grave circle' at Archanes {62}. Less than half this handle survives, but parallel examples indicate its original appearance, generally rectangular with four crocodiles either side in two registers. Each register contains a pair of 'confronted' crocodiles, with heads *regardant* and tails curled in a spiral, the upper pair at least separated by a large central rosette. Although the figures are recognisable as crocodiles, viewed from the side and with all legs facing forwards in the Egyptian manner, the comb cannot be mistaken for Egyptian work. They have long, scaled bodies with

elongated snout, short but powerful legs, long clawed feet and long tail. The upper ridge of the back is rough, and the body pockmarked by numerous dots and lines along its length.

End Palatial

The majority of Cretan crocodile representations date to the End Palatial period, but seem to seamlessly continue on from the Archanes image; likely they are little separated chronologically, but the contexts of the three discussed here are LM IIIA2–B and thus are pushed into the End Palatial period, not necessarily as late as LM IIIB. One comb, from an LM IIIA2–B chamber tomb at Karteros {102}, is quite similar to the Archanes comb handle {62}, including the depiction of confronted crocodiles with *regardant* heads and central rosette in the upper register. The other, from the town excavations and more likely the latter half of LM IIIA, at Palaikastro {427}, shows the same double pair of crocodiles but back-to-back ('opposed') with spiraled tails intertwined at the centre of each register. Both better preserve the short low legs and long claws of the creature, not really visible in the published photograph of the Archanes piece {62}. The more mannered representation of the body is indicated by the formal treatment of its rough surface, with double lines separating alternately blank and dotted rows along the length of the body.

Additionally, an ivory pendant from the LM IIIA2–B chamber tomb at Milatos {398} is the single known three-dimensional representation of a crocodile. It exhibits the same mannered treatment of the body surface, *regardant* pose and ridged back, but with a curled (not spiraled) tail due undoubtedly to its three-dimensional format. Carved in the round, it was intended to hang vertically from the head end up.

Post-Palatial

No crocodile images are known from this period on Crete.¹¹⁶⁹

Commentary

The majority of Minoan crocodile images date within LM IIIA/B, the period during which the palace of

¹¹⁶⁶ See Distribution Map 36.

¹¹⁶⁷ See WARD 1978:52.

¹¹⁶⁸ For the comb from Palaikastro {427} decorated with crocodiles, see End Palatial, below.

¹¹⁶⁹ The imported Canaanite Iron Age scarab (HM Σ-K 1309; KARETSOU *et al.* 2000:330 #349) from Arkades (Profitias

Ilias) depicts a 'Master of Animals' figure holding two very stylised crocodiles. Whilst without context and dating just beyond the chronological parameters of the present study, it is one variation of a face design type well known in the Levant; see KEEL 1990b:341–342, figs. 11–15, and above, n. 548.

Knossos is destroyed and strong Mycenaean features appear on Crete. Thus it is not surprising that these crocodiles correspond to similar and contemporary objects from the Mainland.¹¹⁷⁰ A comb with crocodiles resembling the one from Palaikastro {427} was recovered in an LH IIIA–B chamber tomb at Spata,¹¹⁷¹ and one from an LH IIIA2 palatial context at Kadmeian Thebes is similar to both the Archanes {62} and Karteros {102} combs.¹¹⁷² The ivory pyxis lid from an LH IIIA chamber tomb at Asine depicting a pair encircling a rosette is an obvious derivation of the comb arrangement.¹¹⁷³ The three-dimensional probable pendant from Milatos {398} is derived from the same source. Clearly it was intended to be worn, probably hanging from the neck due to its size, which suggests an amuletic function as it is hardly likely to have been other than a centrepiece to any form of jewellery. The crocodile may be considered an elaborate decorative motif during this period, but whether any apotropaic or protective function was involved is speculative. The collection of eight crocodiles on each comb handle may have been viewed to some degree as apotropaic in function as well as being decorative elements. There is no indication of any antagonistic or destructive force here, unlike in contemporary Egyptian (later Dynasty XVIII–XIX) representation and iconography. The crocodiles are static, their heads lowered and resting on the front legs, rather than malevolent or destructive.

The pose itself is standard in the Aegean although inaccurate, with several features not original either to the animal or its Egyptian representation. The most obviously inaccurate characteristic is the spiraled and intertwining tail(s), a wholly

Minoan artistic conceit unknown in Egypt and impossible in nature. The completely stylised body detail, although still indicative of the animal's rough hide, also is not that employed on any Egyptian representation. The *regardant* head, again a typically Minoan feature, can be compared only to occasional vignette illustrations in *Book of the Dead* papyri, a medium unlikely to have been imported to the Aegean.¹¹⁷⁴ The reptile itself can turn its head less than 90° in either direction.

LEVI (1945:270–280) and GILL (1963) developed the theme of the ‘dragon’ as a fantasy creature derived from Babylonian iconography, and attempted to explain its consequent variety of iconography and functions as separate manifestations of the same creature. Gill (following Levi) combined them all as the ‘Babylonian dragon.’ Extant examples of both ‘dragon’ and crocodile nonetheless indicate two basically different animals with distinct types. Physical distinctions include the standard elongated neck and legs and normally smooth skin of the ‘dragon,’ in contrast to the rough body surface, short neck and crouched legs of the crocodile. Additionally, the ‘dragon’ always is shown in a running posture with head raised, and the crocodile in static pose, with head lowered and *regardant*. POURSAT (1976) correctly has separated the two quite different animals into ‘dragon’ and crocodile and, for the ‘dragon,’ distinguished two separate iconographies – one being ridden by a female deity figure (see Fig. 31), and the other riderless (see Fig. 32). Although not noted by him, the ‘dragon’ occasionally has distinctive crocodile features¹¹⁷⁵ such as multiple dots or solid lines on

¹¹⁷⁰ The majority previously have been identified as another animal, including lizard, bird, griffin, dragon or ‘marine animal,’ hindering discussion of their source of inspiration. Attempts to define the animal and similar fantastic creatures include LEVI 1945:270–280; GILL 1963; POURSAT 1976. The last distinguishes the crocodile, already identified by MARINATOS 1927–1928b:88. Poursat’s identification of the ‘crocodiles’ from Mycenae and Kourion (POURSAT 1976:468–470 Type III:5, 8) are problematic, and rejected in the present study; see n. 1175, below.

¹¹⁷¹ See GILL 1963:pl. I:d; POURSAT 1976:fig. 8.

¹¹⁷² SYMEONOGLOU 1973:pl. 82:251:lower centre, 252–252a.

¹¹⁷³ FRÖDIN and PERSSON 1938:388 #2, fig. 253. See also POURSAT 1976:fig. 9.

¹¹⁷⁴ E.g. ALLEN 1960:pl. IX, LXV. The head is turned back and looking upwards, rather than lowered as in the Aegean representations. MARINATOS 1927–1928b:89, fig. 14 compared the crocodiles on comb {102} and a late Ptolemaic *cippus* or stela of the child Horus standing on two anti-

thetical crocodiles having heads *regardant*. The obvious chronological disparity renders any such comparison valueless. *Cippi* of late Ptolemaic to Roman date also exist, but the type is unknown earlier than Dynasty XXVI; they most commonly were household shrine stelae.

¹¹⁷⁵ Two ‘crocodiles’ (as identified by POURSAT 1976:468–470 Type III.5, 8), gold cut-outs from Grave Circle A, Shaft Grave III at Mycenae and a jar sealing of a cylinder seal from Kourion on Cyprus, are more likely ‘dragons.’ Although the cut-out heads are *regardant*, all other characteristics are more indicative of the ‘dragon’ form, especially the short running legs and high curled tail paralleled in other ‘dragon’ representations of his Type II, and the figures are, in any event, both found on the Mainland and from an earlier (LH IB=latter part of LM IA) date than the ivory crocodiles; for dating of the tomb and its contents, see Dietz 1991:250 fig. 78. Nonetheless, they may indicate a Mainland origin for the LM/H IIIA–B riderless, *regardant* and spiral-tailed crocodiles. Two figures inter-



Fig. 31 Lentoid with representation of a female deity astride a 'dragon,' chalcedony, Dia: 27 mm, from Mycenae, LH II-III (CMS I:#167)

its tail, possibly as additional decoration, but the crocodile is not found with a smooth hide.

We can assume the likelihood of the crocodile initially being introduced before the 'dragon' – in the Proto-Palatial period, as evidenced by the Tsoutsouros seal {514}. This seal has the only Aegean representation of a crocodile contemporary with the period of its popularity as a motif in Egypt, later Dynasty XII–XIII. Nonetheless, unlike other motifs already adopted by the Minoans by this time, such as the crouching ape and standing hippopotamus images, the crocodile had little iconographical effect on Minoan Crete.¹¹⁷⁶ The Tsoutsouros image is unique.

All other Aegean crocodile images are contemporary to later Dynasty XVIII–XIX, when the image was rare in Egypt. An obvious gap exists in its Aegean development, and the later image on ivory combs and other objects must be considered a re-introduction of the motif, part of a general trend in fantastic creatures on costly objects for the apparently palatial or

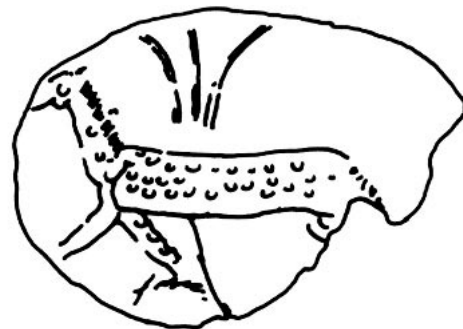


Fig. 32 Sealing with representation of a 'dragon,' clay, original seal L: c. 21 mm, from Sklavokampos, Crete, LM I (POURSAT 1976:465 fig. 6)

at least wealthy élite. The image of the 'Babylonian dragon' seems to have developed in Neo-Palatial, as the vast majority of 'dragons' *without* the riding deity¹¹⁷⁷ are LM I in date. Those being ridden by the female deity(?) are dated to LM IB and LH II–IIIA¹¹⁷⁸ while the crocodile seems not to have re-appeared before LM/LH IIIA with an already fully developed Aegean iconography. It may be that the LM III crocodiles were no more than one of the later varieties of the LM/LH I 'fantastic creature,' which developed into two separately distinguishable entities, the 'dragon' and the crocodile, of which the latter was the more popular in LM/LH III.¹¹⁷⁹ Thus it should not be a direct adaptation from any Egyptian source.

The Aegean crocodile is considerably different from Egyptian representations. The crocodile with head *regardant* is virtually unknown in New Kingdom and earlier Egypt, but the Aegean propensity for counter-movement and the shape of the combs themselves are easily accountable for it.¹¹⁸⁰ No Minoan artist could have seen a crocodile unless as a visitor to Egypt, as the animal itself could hardly have been exported abroad to Crete. The image must have come from verbal descriptions by those who had

mediary between the 'dragon' and crocodile are depicted on a lentoid from Mycenae (CMS V Suppl. 1B:#76), from an LH IIB–IIIA2 chamber tomb; both have curled tails and the head of one is *regardant*. Another lentoid, dated to LH II–III and from the Tomb of Klytemnestra at Mycenae, depicts a female deity riding an intermediary figure, with curled tail (CMS I:#167).

¹¹⁷⁶ See Chapters 12–13.

¹¹⁷⁷ POURSAT 1976:464–465 Type II.

¹¹⁷⁸ POURSAT 1976:463–464 Type I.

¹¹⁷⁹ The reasons may have been partly cultic in some manner, or possibly the result of the media used. The 'dragon,'

with some exceptions, is confined mainly to small-scale seal (and sealing) representations, whereas the crocodile is limited to ivory carvings. Ivory working did not really develop in the Aegean until LH III except on Crete; see HOOD 1978:122–123. The lack of crocodile representations on seals may be due to the unsuitability of its long, low body to seal shapes of the period, but which was admirably suited to the comb handle.

¹¹⁸⁰ Note, however, that three faience Egyptian amulets in crocodile form were found in Tomb 30 at Perati, dated to LH IIIC; see IAKOVIDES 1969:III:pl. 91.β:Δ71–Δ73; BROWN 1975:63 #16–18.

traveled there, possibly supplementing (or ‘correcting’) the Aegean image of the ‘Babylonian dragon.’ Notably again the objects decorated with the crocodile image are made of a single expensive and imported product from Egypt or Syria – elephant ivory – and also are limited almost exclusively to palaces and royal/extremely rich mainly chamber tombs, both on Crete and the Mainland. The only non-‘royal’ exception is from a doubtful and probably secondary context at Palaikastro {427}.

Poursat’s suggestion that the ‘dragon’ originated from Egyptian representations of horse and rider is not inherently tenable, although its origin in the horse is possible.¹¹⁸¹ The horse was known earlier in the Near East, being introduced from there into Egypt during the Hyksos period (Dynasty XV–XVII).¹¹⁸² The iconographical image of the deity supported on a horse, lion or similar animal is strong in the Near East, a much more reasonable source of inspiration. Although normally shown seated on a throne atop the animal in the Near East, Gill’s explanation of their transference to the sidesaddle position is logical.¹¹⁸³ The ‘Babylonian dragon’ theory of both Levi and Gill is far to be preferred. If any Egyptian influence might be isolated, it could only be in the amalgamation of crocodile and ‘dragon’ characteris-

tics. The earliest ‘dragons’ seem to be an image unknown and misunderstood by Aegean artisans, probably drawn from a mixture of verbal descriptions. The crocodile, on the other hand, must have been drawn from a more accurate, almost certainly Nilotic, source. Such imagery is non-existent in the Near East, except on imported or ‘egyptianising’ objects.¹¹⁸⁴ As it is difficult to assume that the animal itself would have been imported into the Aegean area, it can only be surmised that the design was based on sighting(s) of the animal in Egypt, possibly by an Aegean, or through verbal description to the initial artisan. Whether he was Minoan or Mycenaean is unknown, but the small number and homogeneity of the ivory combs, pendant and lid from both Crete and the Mainland suggest they all even might have been products of a single workshop, presumably located at a palatial centre somewhere in the Aegean, not necessarily on Crete. Although different degrees of (comparatively speaking) naturalism vs. abstract patterning of the body is evident from Archanes through to Palaikastro, they seem to be a tightly unified group, and most likely should date to, or near, the one period when all contexts overlap, perhaps LM/H IIIA1–early A2, and thus be products of the Final Palatial period on Crete.

¹¹⁸¹ POURSAT 1976:467.

¹¹⁸² The only exception to this seems to be the Buhen horse, initially dated to the end of Dynasty XIII with the destruction of the fort; see CLUTTON-BROCK 1974. The excavation of this skeleton, its methodology and records, leave this dating open to much doubt. The earliest certain

horses are discussed by VON DEN DRIESCH and PETERS (2001).

¹¹⁸³ GILL 1963:3–4.

¹¹⁸⁴ E.g. scarabs. See TUFNELL 1984:I:133 for some Palestinian finds.