

The Construction of Metaphysical Space: The Adoption of Minoan Cult Symbols and the Development of Mycenaean Religious Iconography

Jörg Weihartner¹

Abstract: From the beginning of the Shaft Grave period, leading people on the mainland were in the position to acquire foreign luxuries and valuable raw materials in growing quantities. Some of these prestige goods clearly served as cult equipment in Minoan Crete; others display a complex system of religious figurative scenes and motifs of undoubtedly Minoan inspiration. Such scenes and motifs were virtually unknown in the preceding periods of MH Greece. Despite their foreign background, these objects had some impact on the formation of Mycenaean cult practices. It is argued that within this process of appropriation mainland inhabitants made a deliberate choice of the available ceremonial equipment and cult symbols. It seems that only those cult implements such as rhyta and tripod offering tables were borrowed from Crete, which could be incorporated in indigenous MH religious traditions. Significantly, such objects were produced until the end of the Palatial period. Correspondingly, Mycenaean were interested in only those representations of ritual actions and symbols which had a meaning in terms of their own religious conceptions. Along these lines, Minoan forms of artistic expression had a strong impact on the development of Mycenaean religious figurative art and symbolism.

Keywords: rhyta, tripod offering tables, double axe, fenestrated axe, processions, crocus, lily

Introduction

Among the many aspects of Minoan material culture and cultural traditions that were adopted and subsequently adapted by the people of the Mycenaean mainland is religious iconography in art.² While the significance of the indigenous MH religious tradition for some features of Mycenaean cult practice is now much better appreciated than thirty or forty years ago,³ the strong impact of Minoan forms of artistic expression on the establishment of Mycenaean religious figurative art is beyond doubt. According to the basically non-figurative character of Middle Helladic art in general,⁴ the inhabitants of Middle Bronze Age Greece did not express their religious conceptions in figurative terms. This virtual lack of a pronounced artistic tradition of pictorial representations on the mainland forms the basis not only for accepting a large number of religious motifs and symbols known from Minoan iconography but also for using them in the construction of a religiously based elite identity in the early Mycenaean period.⁵ Early Mycenaean elites can be characterised as rulers in search of religious symbols, which they could use to legitimate and consolidate their power by promoting connections with the divine sphere.⁶ Whether they observed

¹ Fachbereich Altertumswissenschaften, University of Salzburg, Austria; e-mail: joerg.weihartner@sbg.ac.at.

² Vermeule 1975, 47–48.

³ See, in particular, Tranta-Nikoli 2010; Whittaker 2010; Whittaker 2014. Despite its provocative title (*Did the Middle Helladic people have any religion?*) Hägg 1997 brings together those archaeological remains that suggest religious activities of some kind in the MH population on the Greek mainland. For a much more negative attitude, see Dickinson 1977, 38: “Nor are there any signs of cult-centres which might have served a wide area; indeed, the evidence for religious activity is almost nil”. See also Platon 1981, 210.

⁴ However, on some possible traces for an indigenous tradition of figurative art on the Greek mainland in images of the Shaft Grave period, see Blakolmer 2010.

⁵ Heitz 2008, 21–31; Maran 2013, 159.

⁶ Heitz 2008, 1, 29–30; Whittaker 2011, 137, 144.

these symbols primarily on objects imported from Crete or on objects seen in Minoan palaces is under discussion. In any case, crafts(wo)men who came from abroad are likely to have played a crucial role in the development of Mycenaean religious iconography.⁷

Cretan Prestige Goods in Mainland Graves

In archaeological terms, the growing interaction between Crete and the Greek mainland becomes most clearly manifest in prestige goods⁸ that were deposited in shaft graves, built tholos tombs and rock-cut chamber tombs of high status persons during the 17th to the 15th centuries BC. Before that period, archaeological evidence for interrelations between Crete and the Greek mainland had mainly consisted in rather small amounts of Minoan pottery found at mainly coastal sites and, to a much lesser degree, Minoan stone vases.⁹ As James Wright has stated, the rich finds from graves of men and women of elevated status may be viewed as manifestations of the “transformation of traditional subsistence oriented agro-pastoralists communities to a more cosmopolitan and craft-oriented political economy”.¹⁰ In any case, due to wide-reaching changes in the structure of Hellenic society, members of the emerging Mycenaean elites were in the position to acquire valuable raw materials and foreign luxuries in growing quantities.¹¹

Such luxuries are best known through the material evidence of the Shaft Graves of Grave Circle A in Mycenae, which are characterised by prestige goods of great symbolic significance displaying the wealth and status of the deceased.¹² A number of items illustrate the borrowing of cult equipment and symbols, which clearly served a religious purpose in Minoan Crete. Most impressive are rhyta of various materials and large ‘sacral knots’ made of faience.¹³ Among the motifs, which formed part of the Minoan set of religious symbols, one may refer to cut-outs of thin gold foil in the shape of a tripartite shrine with birds and horns of consecration, a double axe between the horns of a bull’s head, and a running or recumbent griffin.¹⁴ Other motifs of eminent

⁷ In some instances the borrowing of motifs from Minoan imagery seems misunderstood. This clearly speaks in favour of an adoption of imported objects, see, e.g. Blakolmer 2010, 516. However, most objects of art that show Minoan inspiration point either to the presence of immigrant Minoan crafts(wo)men at major centres on the Greek mainland or even to some Mycenaeans who had access to the inner parts of a Minoan palace.

⁸ For a definition of prestige goods, see Haselgrove 1982, 81–82, who states that prestige goods are objects that “require rare materials, considerable technical skills or a high labour investment, or are only available from outside the local system, e.g. foreign trade goods”.

⁹ Rutter – Zerner 1984, 77–80. This paper refers also to the occasional presence of small objects of Minoan origin or type such as a zoomorphic stone figurine and three terracotta loom weights, all from MH Lerna. On a more recent evaluation of interactions between mainland Greece and different regions of Crete in the Middle Bronze Age, see Cadogan – Kopaka 2010, 848–853. Next to pottery they refer to shoe-socket spearheads, the sword of the Aigina ‘Shaft Grave’ and some isolated more ‘personal’ items. On the special relationship between Aigina and Crete during the MH period, see Gauß – Weilhartner 2020, 129–133; Weilhartner, in press. On the origin of seven bronze pendants in the shape of a double axe from two different graves at Antheia-Kastroulia in Messenia, see below n. 40.

¹⁰ Wright 2010, 815.

¹¹ Hägg 1982, 35, building on Dickinson 1977, 107–108, and Matthäus 1980a, 42.

¹² See, e.g. Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986; Voutsaki 1999. For the particular role of objects made of gold in burial contexts see Whittaker 2006, 283, who states “it can be maintained that in a funerary context the social expression of status and wealth is of a necessity intermixed with eschatological and cosmological concepts”.

¹³ Rhyta: Karo 1930, 64, no. 166, pls. 148–149; 70, no. 221, pl. 170; 77–78, no. 273, pls. 107–108; 93, no. 384, pls. 119–121; 94, no. 388, pls. 115–116; 94, no. 389, pls. 138–139; 106–110, nos. 477, 481, 504, pl. 122; 114, no. 552.2, pl. 142; 114–116, nos. 552.1, 567, 573, pls. 141–142; 120, no. 608, pls. 132–133; 125, 139, 147, nos. 648, 774, 832, pl. 142; 125, 146, nos. 651, 828, pls. 141–142. See Whittaker 2014, 156, tab. 3; Petrakis 2016, 50–51, tab. 1. ‘Sacral Knots’: Karo 1930, 114–115, nos. 553–554, 557–564, 569–571, pls. 151–152.

¹⁴ See Karo 1930, 48, no. 26, pl. 27; 48, no. 29, pl. 27; 51, no. 47, pl. 26; 74–75, nos. 242–244, pl. 18; 91–92, nos. 353–354, pl. 44. See Whittaker 2014, 153, 155, tab. 2. At least most of those gold foil applications, first found in Grave Circle A on the mainland, had probably been sewn or glued to the deceased’s clothing, see Whittaker 2011, 143; Whittaker 2014, 154, with earlier literature.

symbolic value such as the lion, butterfly, or octopus appear as well.¹⁵ However, some of the central motifs and scenes of Minoan religious iconography are missing, either nearly or altogether: as I shall argue, this points to a deliberate selection by mainland groups rather than to a random accumulation of exotic luxury imports.

These objects of value visibly indicate that Minoan religious symbolism and imagery not only appealed to early Mycenaean elites, but were also used for the expression (as well as legitimation) of their elevated status. However, there is some discussion with regard to the precise perception of these symbols.¹⁶ Several scholars have argued that early Mycenaeans were interested in these symbols primarily as a means to express their authority, to enhance their standing or to reinforce their claims to political power without worrying much about their religious meanings.¹⁷ This may apply especially to those elements of Minoan religious expression, which on the Greek mainland are more or less confined to the Shaft Graves. For example, six large ‘sacral knots’ made of faience from Shaft Grave IV have no actual later parallels on the mainland,¹⁸ and whether this motif does appear on LH seals found on the mainland is under discussion: all of those representations that have been termed ‘sacral knot’ seem to represent a different item, better identified as a ‘sacral garment’.¹⁹ It seems that the ‘sacral knot’ was not incorporated into regular mainland cult practices. Their religious significance was apparently not compatible with religious conceptions on the mainland. The knots made of faience from Grave Circle A may indeed have functioned primarily as expressions of status and power by means of their foreign origin and exotic material.²⁰

Prestige Goods with Religious Significance: Minoan Animal-head-shaped Rhyta, Minoan Double Axes and Near-eastern Fenestrated Axes

However, the adoption of other prestige goods with symbolic significance had a more permanent effect. In my view, the special attraction of these objects lies in their capacity to enhance conscious efforts to promote a process of institutionalisation of existing cult practices. The offering in form of libations, i.e. the pouring out of a liquid as an offering to a divine recipient, forms a case in point. As there is some, albeit scanty, archaeological evidence that this cult practice was performed in MH Greece,²¹ it appears unlikely that this wide-spread custom, which is a well-known standard cult practice in many ancient civilisations,²² was introduced to the mainland at the beginning of the Shaft Grave period from Crete. Another piece of evidence, which speaks against a wholesale adoption of this practice from Crete, is of a linguistic nature: on linguistic

¹⁵ Karo 1930, 43, no. 2, pl. 28; 44, no. 4, pl. 28; 46, no. 18, pl. 28; 48–49, nos. 30–31, pl. 27; 49, no. 32, pl. 27; 50, nos. 39–40, pl. 26; 51, no. 49, pl. 27; 51, no. 51, pl. 26; 62, no. 138; 94, nos. 386–387, pl. 24. See Whittaker 2014, 153, 155, tab. 2.

¹⁶ See recently, Kalogeropoulos 2015 with further bibliography.

¹⁷ E.g. Hägg 1984, 121; Hägg 1985, 213; Whittaker 2014, 154–156.

¹⁸ Karo 1930, 114–115, nos. 553–554, 557–564, 569–571, pls. 151–152; Foster 1979, 140, pls. 45–46.

¹⁹ For seals found on the mainland with this motif, see Foster 1979, 140–141; Boloti 2016, 506–508. For the differentiation between the terms ‘sacral knot’ and ‘sacral garment/dress/skirt’, see Warren 2000, 460 n. 21; Crowley 2012, 231–232. Instead of employing the traditional terms Janice Crowley speaks of ‘scarf knot’ and ‘cloak knot’. All examples on seals from the mainland represent the heavier fabric with no discernible loop, i.e. they are to be identified as ‘sacral garment’ or ‘cloak knot’ respectively. According to Crowley 2012, 235–236, the ‘scarf knot’ belongs to the female sphere, whereas the ‘cloak knot’ regularly features as a symbol of the male warrior/hunter. Is it for that reason that the depiction of ‘cloak knots’ enjoyed much more popularity on the mainland?

²⁰ See Voutsaki 1999, 114.

²¹ Whittaker 2014, 82–89, 156–157. See already Hägg 1990, 184; Hägg 1997, 17–18. Because no rhyta are known from MH contexts Hägg 1985, 210, 221–222 n. 34, tentatively argued for an introduction of the custom of libation from Crete at an early stage in the Mycenaean period. See also Tranta-Nikoli 2010, 547, who only refers to Hägg’s 1985 paper.

²² Hägg 1990, 177; Davis 2008, 47–55.

grounds, the ritual practice of libation clearly forms part of the Indo-European religious heritage of the Greeks.²³

On present evidence, no specific cult equipment for libations existed in MH Greece. Rather, libations seem to have been performed with domestic pouring or drinking vessels, whose shape does not indicate their function in cult practice.²⁴ In the Shaft Grave period elites from the mainland borrowed a specialised vessel shape in order to enhance the symbolic display of performing a libation: all types of rhyta that have been found on the mainland – besides the rich assemblages from Grave Circle A, examples of LH I date are reported from a few sites only – appear earlier in Crete.²⁵ In particular, the animal-head-shaped rhyta are viewed as a typical feature of Minoan ritual practice.²⁶ Since these vessels are usually made of stone or clay in Crete, it has been suggested that the Shaft Grave rhyta are mainland versions in metal.²⁷ If true, these objects were made on the mainland. Conversely, rhyta in limestone or made of ostrich eggshell (with attachments in faience or some other material) are generally viewed as direct imports from Crete.²⁸ No matter whether these rhyta found on the mainland are of Cretan manufacture or inspiration, the idea of performing a libation by means of specialised cult equipment was clearly borrowed from Crete. A custom that had existed on the mainland in a not yet formalised way underwent some modification in terms of symbolic display.²⁹ Minoan influence resulted in the institutionalisation of what had previously been performed in a more informal way. As terracotta animal-head-shaped rhyta dating to LH IIIA from Ayios Konstantinos, Methana, and Ayios Vasileios, Lakonia, as well as fragments of two or three animal-head-shaped rhyta made of stone dating to LH IIIB from Mycenae, Argolid, demonstrate,³⁰ this borrowing was of long-lasting effect. In fact, a pictorial style conical rhyton, fragments of two Mycenaean fish rhyta, and three fragments of a large, hollow, wheelmade, ithyphallic terracotta figure found in the Tirynthian Epichosis provide

²³ Casabona 1966, 231–298; Benveniste 1969, 209–221.

²⁴ Hägg 1997, 18.

²⁵ Hägg 1985, 209–212, fig. 3, building on Koehl 1981, 179–180, fig. 1; Hägg 1990, 182–183, fig. 8. Although some of the Shaft Grave rhyta, such as the golden lion's head rhyton or the silver rhyton in the shape of a figure-of-eight shield, are without exact parallels, the general idea of shaping such vessels is clearly Minoan in origin. The single exception is a silver drinking vessel of Anatolian type in the form of a stag (which has been converted – without success – into a rhyton by means of a secondary circular hole on the stag's snout) from Shaft Grave IV of Circle A, which is commonly considered as an import from Anatolia, see Koehl 2006, 14; Petrakis 2016, 53–55, fig. 1r. On the popularity of rhyta in Grave Circle A, where the earliest examples of these vessels are found on the Greek mainland, see recently Petrakis 2016. Petrakis 2016, 50–51, tab. 1, provides the basic information on all rhyta found on the Greek mainland. For a list of (probable) LH I rhyta outside Grave Circle A, see Petrakis 2016, 48–49. Two fragmentary stone rhyta with relief decoration (Koehl 2006, 185, nos. 818–819) and a possible bronze animal-headed rhyton (Lambrinudakis 1981, 62–63, fig. 9; Steinhart 2002, 9, fig. 1; 16–20), to which Vasilis Petrakis does not refer, come from the sanctuary site on Mount Kynortion near Epidauros. In terms of style, technique of relief carving, and material of manufacture, all three examples are almost certainly of LH I/IIA date. On the arguments for the LH I date of the two fragments of stone rhyta, see Morgan 1988, 151, pls. 193–194.

²⁶ Koehl 2006, 32–43; Kalogeropoulos 2015, 174–175. On the various domestic and ritual uses of rhyta, see Koehl 2006, 277–342.

²⁷ Dickinson 1977, 81–82; Dickinson 1984, 116. However, there is no general agreement whether the rhyta made of silver and/or gold are of Helladic or Cretan manufacture, see Koehl 2006, 34, 115, no. 294; 36, 121–122, no. 328; 38, 125, no. 343; 48–49, 138–140, no. 425. On the problem of the exact provenance of these vessels, see Petrakis 2016, 56–57.

²⁸ Dickinson 1977, 81–82; Sakellarakis 1990, 286, 306. Whether the ostrich-eggshell rhyton with a silver neck piece from the tholos tomb of Dendra is a LH IIIA1 vessel of mainland origin or a LM I Minoan heirloom is a matter of discussion, see Sakellarakis 1990, 306; Koehl 2006, 27, 100, no. 186.

²⁹ See Whittaker 2014, 156–157.

³⁰ Ayios Konstantinos: Konsolaki-Yannopoulou 2001, 214–215, pl. 68b–d; Ayios Vasileios: Petrakis 2012, 30–31, fig. 19; Mycenae: Koehl 2006, 32–33, 120–121, nos. 323–325. For more examples of different types of rhyta of LH III date, see the catalogue in Koehl 2006, 71–238. On the LH IIIA2/IIIB fox-head rhyton allegedly from Tiryns, see Doumas 1968, 384–386, fig. 19. – I thank Elina Kardamaki for discussing the exact date of the animal-headed rhyton from Ayios Vasileios with me (LH IIIA2).

evidence for libation practices performed with specialised cult equipment at the very end of the Late Palatial period.³¹

Along with rhyta, tripod offering tables were also introduced from Crete.³² Two probable LH I examples were found at Mycenae.³³ Other early examples are reported from Tiryns, Prosymna and Routsis.³⁴ Like the rhyta, these cult implements remained a common feature for centuries: a fragmentary offering table, which was found close to the hearth in the throne room in the palace of Pylos, and another one from Room 18 of the so-called Temple Complex in the Cult Centre of Mycenae provide evidence from the Final Palatial period.³⁵ As rhyta and tripod offering tables at times occur together in sets, one function of these offering tables apparently seems to have been their use as a receptacle for the liquid poured from libation vessels.³⁶ On other occasions, these objects obviously served as trays for food offerings.³⁷

The adoption of the Minoan form of the double axe, one of the most important cult symbols of Minoan Crete, could also be explained by its integration into already existing cult practices. In contrast to rhyta and tripod offering tables, there is scanty evidence for the use of this symbol in MH Greece. In this period, however, the link to the Minoan form of the double axe is questionable. Among the rare objects found on the MH mainland there are seven bronze pendants in the shape of a double axe from two different graves of two tumuli at Antheia-Kastroulia in Messenia from the earliest phase of this period.³⁸ It has been suggested by Helène Whittaker that these bronze pendants may have functioned as a marker of Minoan identity of the deceased.³⁹ However, as there is no strong evidence for direct or indirect contacts between Crete and Messenia before the Shaft Grave era⁴⁰ these pendants may indicate a mainland tradition instead. Two terracotta double axes have been found at Lerna in the Argolid. One, whose faces are decorated with incisions, but of which only one half is preserved, presumably dates to the latest phase of the MH period. The other one is intact and served as a burial offering.⁴¹ Significantly, the shape of these double axes does not correspond to double axes of Cretan Neopalatial date and Minoan influence

³¹ On this assemblage as well as the dating of the so-called Epichosis, see Veters – Weilharter 2017, with further bibliography.

³² Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1984, 20–21, 30–31; Hägg 1985, 210–212, fig. 4; Hägg 1990, 183.

³³ Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1984, 22, nos. 2–3; Whittaker 2014, 204.

³⁴ Tiryns: Kilian 1992, 11; Whittaker 2014, 204. Prosymna, Tomb 44: Dickinson 1977, 84; Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1984, 21 n. 2. Routsis, Tholos 2: Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1984, 24–25, no. 33; Kilian 1992, 12; Whittaker 2014, 203.

³⁵ Pylos: Blegen – Rawson 1966, 91, figs. 271.11, 272.5; Hägg 1990, 182–183, fig. 9. Mycenae: Moore – Taylour † 1999, 21, fig. 6; 26, fig. 9; 29, pl. 9b; 30–31, 98. For a list of tripod offering tables found on the mainland, see Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1984. Since this publication many more examples have come to light. For a recent find at Iklaina, see Cosmopoulos 2015, 46.

³⁶ Hägg 1990, 183; Davis 2008, 50 n. 36.

³⁷ Cosmopoulos 2015, 46. See Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1984, 31–33.

³⁸ MH I: Rambach 2007, 145, fig. 23; 148; Rambach 2011, 470, 472, fig. 13. See Davis – Stocker 2010, 104.

³⁹ Whittaker 2014, 74.

⁴⁰ Hägg 1982, 28–29; Korres 1984, 144–145; Dickinson 1996, 69–70; Voutsaki 1999, 104; Rutter 2005, 19; Davis – Stocker 2016, 636. For some fragmentary sherds of Minoanising wares and a single actual import from Crete, dated to the Old Palace period, found at Pylos, see Davis – Stocker 2010, 104. Among the grave gifts of Grave 2 of the MH I Tumulus II at Antheia-Kastroulia one jug has been considered as a possible Minoan import, see Rambach 2007, 146 n. 32, fig. 32. – According to Jörg Rambach, the excavator of the tumulus, the question whether the bronze pendants in the shape of a double axe indicate influence from Crete or point to a mainland tradition has to be left open, see Rambach 2007, 148. Since he refers to the large hearths in buildings at EH II Lerna and Berbati with a central cavity in the shape of a double axe head, as well as to bronze pendants in the shape of double axes from the Mycenaean and Geometric period, he seems to favour the latter interpretation. One may add the double axe-shaped beads of silver from the EH III jewellery hoard from Aigina-Kolonna, see Reinholdt 2008, 27–29, pls. 12.1–3; 16.1, cat. nos. 26–28 (with references to Anatolian and Near Eastern examples from the Early Bronze Age).

⁴¹ Caskey 1957, 146, fig. 2; Banks 1967, 656–658, pl. 21; van Leuven 1981, 40; Hägg 1997, 14, fig. 1; Whittaker 2014, 72–77, fig. 3.

is difficult to prove.⁴² By virtue of size or material, the objects found in Antheia-Kastroulia and Lerna are not meant to serve any practical purpose, and a symbolic function – whether as votive or cult symbol – is therefore to be assumed. As the symbolic significance of the double axe in MH Greece is substantiated only by these isolated finds (mostly from graves), it is impossible to come to any conclusions concerning specific connections with ritual practices.⁴³ It does not seem too far-fetched that they may have functioned as a visual symbol for animal sacrifice (although this assumption is solely based on later evidence). In any case, archaeozoological remains indicate that the ritual practice of animal sacrifice has been performed in MH Greece.⁴⁴

The double axe in its characteristic Minoan form is clearly attested in the Shaft Grave period. A substantial number of golden cut-outs from Grave IV of Circle A in Mycenae form well-known early examples of this ubiquitous symbol of Minoan culture,⁴⁵ and large bronze double axes and smaller double axes made of thin bronze foil have been found in early Mycenaean cult deposits in the later sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas on Mount Kynortion near Epidaurus.⁴⁶ In addition, the double axe is one of the characteristic motifs of LH I and LH IIA pottery⁴⁷ clearly copied from Minoan pottery (and maybe representations on other works of art).⁴⁸ As a general rule, the – rather few – instances on LH I pottery show a single straight haft and closely resemble Minoan examples.⁴⁹ LH IIA pottery prefers wavy double stems and a more stylised shape of the blade. A series of jars from the Shaft Graves of Circle A illustrates this variation.⁵⁰ Other examples have been found from all over the mainland. By LH IIA the double axe is among the most common motifs: pottery with double axes was almost mass-produced.⁵¹ Although it has been argued by Penelope Mountjoy that pictorial motifs which had been transferred from Crete to the mainland had no

⁴² On the basis of imported Minoan and Minoanising pottery as well as a few small objects of Minoan origin or type found at Lerna – which point to a possible presence of Minoan residents (see Rutter – Zerner 1984, 77–79) – Whittaker 2014, 73–74, tentatively associates the double axes made of clay with Minoan residents at Lerna. In particular, she wonders whether these axes “could therefore have functioned in some way as a marker of cultural and religious identity that was separate from that of the majority population.” If true, one would expect a closer affinity to Cretan Neopalatial ceremonial double axes. In any case, as Whittaker clearly points out, other possibilities of interpretation also exist, see Whittaker 2014, 77.

⁴³ Whittaker 2014, 77.

⁴⁴ For a summary of the evidence, see Whittaker 2014, 78–81.

⁴⁵ Nilsson 1950, 194–235. See more recently Dietrich 1988, 12–14; Pötscher 1990, 17–66; Nikolaidou 2016, 97–99, 103–106; Whittaker 2016, 109–110. All four authors provide many references to earlier bibliography.

⁴⁶ For the small golden double axes with and without a bull’s head, see Karo 1930, 91–92, nos. 353–354; 364, pl. 44. On the early Mycenaean cult place on Mount Kynortion, see Lambrinudakis 1981; Whittaker 2014, 189–194.

⁴⁷ Furumark 1941, 145, 329–330 (FM 35); Niemeier 1985, 118–120, fig. 57; Mountjoy 1993, 42–44, 50.

⁴⁸ If the blade of a double axe is to be recognised in the so-called ‘butterfly motif’, double axes are portrayed on Minoan pottery from EM II onwards, see Betancourt 1985, 43, fig. 24; 44, fig. 26c; 80, fig. 56H, L, pls. 5I, 6F; Nikolaidou 2016, 104–106, pls. 41–42. In LM I the double axe (with haft) was a popular motif, be it alone, in combination with a long scarf or set between the horns of a bull’s head, see, e.g. Nilsson 1950, 199–213; Betancourt 1985, 137, fig. 103D; 139, pl. 19D; 141, fig. 105K; 147–148, pls. 18A, 22F; Niemeier 1985, 116–120, fig. 57; Whittaker 2014, 154.

⁴⁹ See, e.g. RMDP, 202, fig. 62.2 (cup FS 211 from Korakou, Corinthia); 253–254, fig. 82.13 (straight-sided cup from Kastro, Kythera). Some vessels of LH I date are decorated with the double axe with wavy double stems, typically found on LH IIA vessels, see, e.g. RMDP, 501–502, fig. 178.10 (cup FS 211 from Eleusis, Attica). Conversely, few vessels of LH IIA date are decorated with a single-hafted double axe, usually found in LH I, see RMDP, 875–876, fig. 357.40 (cup FS 211 from Ayia Irini, Keos).

⁵⁰ Karo 1930, 66–67, nos. 190–192, pl. 167; RMDP, 87, fig. 12.24–26.

⁵¹ Mountjoy 1993, 44. See RMDP, 93–94, fig. 15.55 (pear rhyton FS 202 from Prosymna, Argolid); 202–203, fig. 62.4 (piriform jar FS 27 from Tsoungiza, Corinthia); 256–258, fig. 84.28 (cup FS 211 from Ayios Stephanos, Lakonia); 501–502, fig. 178.13 (piriform jar FS 27 from Attica); 503–504, fig. 179.20 (squat jug FS 87 from Eleusis, Attica); 507–508, fig. 180.35 (cup FS 211 from Ayios Kosmas, Attica); 650–651, fig. 247.4 (alabastron FS 80 from Thebes, Boiotia); 875–876, fig. 357.39 (cup FS 211 from Ayia Irini, Keos); 894–895, fig. 363.13 (jar FS 20 from Phylakopi, Melos). For examples of the motif (of varying design) on LH I/IIA vessels from Aigina, see Hiller 1975, pls. 4.47–50; 6.84–95. For examples of this motif on (partly unpublished) LH I/IIA vessels from Messenia, see Lolos 1987, 457–458; Vlachopoulos, this volume. On cups of LH II date found in Cyprus, but produced in the Argolid, which show double axes with straight double stems crowned by a small ‘orb’, see Buchholz 1999, 402, fig. 71e–j.

particular meaning for Mycenaeans,⁵² I doubt that the double axe as a motif on pottery was free of any religious connotation. Notably, it not only appears on pottery and – on a much-reduced scale – on metal cups,⁵³ but also on early seals and signet rings from mainland contexts, where the double axe is regularly imbedded in unambiguously religious scenes.⁵⁴ Later representations of the double axe on fresco fragments from the Palatial period⁵⁵ as well as its occurrence on pottery and *in corpore* in LH IIIB/C⁵⁶ bear witness to the incorporation of this object into actual Mycenaean cult practice.

According to traditional interpretation, the symbolic meaning of the double axe was derived from its use as a functional tool associated with animal sacrifice.⁵⁷ Although this interpretation has been challenged,⁵⁸ the well-documented representation of the double axe between the horns of a bull proves the case.⁵⁹ Well-known examples are the aforementioned golden cut-outs from Shaft Grave IV of Grave Circle A. This combination of double axe and horns of a bull clearly derives from earlier Cretan prototypes: along with the representation of the double axe between the horns of a bull's head on a MM IIIB jar from Palaikastro and on a LM IA jar from Pseira one may think of functional metal double axes of LM I date with an engraved bull's head *en face*, found in the Amari Valley and in the Knossos region respectively.⁶⁰ The double axe between the horns of a bull also appears on seals (Fig. 1) and sealings of various date from both Crete and the Greek mainland.⁶¹ A Mycenaean krater of LH IIIA date found at Enkomi on Cyprus illustrates that this motif is not unknown in Mycenaean vase painting.⁶² A late example offers explicit evidence for the sacrificial use of the double axe: a sherd of a LH IIIC Middle pictorial krater from Kynos in East Lokris shows a double axe above the head of a goat and represents an animal sacrifice on board a ship (Fig. 2).⁶³ Most interestingly, a functional bronze double axe was discovered in a LH IIIB2



Fig. 1: Seal from Argos, LBA I/II (CMS XI, no. 259)

⁵² Mountjoy 1993, 43–44.

⁵³ On a fragmentary silver cup of the Vapheio type inlaid with gold in the form of a double axe beneath a bull's head found outside Chamber Tomb 12 at Dendra, see Verdelsis 1967, 52–53, Beilage 30.1–2; Åström 1977, 54–55, no. 11, pl. 9.1–3; Davis 1977, 263–266, figs. 210–211, no. 109. For a similar example, see Davis 1977, 118–123, figs. 95–96, no. 24.

⁵⁴ Such seals and rings were found at Mycenae (CMS I, nos. 17, 144, 145: all LBA I/II), Argos (CMS XI, no. 259: LBA I/II), Vapheio (CMS I, no. 219: LM I) and Pylos (CMS I, no. 379: a LH IIIB sealing from an LBA II/IIIA1 'heirloom' seal). On other seals, double axes are depicted with animals (see, e.g. CMS V.S1B, no. 140: LBA I/II [from Antheia]), with a scarf (see, e.g. CMS V.S1B, no. 138b: LBA I/II [from Antheia]) or without context (see, e.g. CMS V, no. 578: LBA I [from Kazarma]).

⁵⁵ For a fresco fragment from the palace of Tiryns, which shows two double axes with a floral motif but without clear narrative context, see Rodenwaldt 1912, 157–158, pl. 16.6. For a fresco fragment from Mycenae with women looking out of windows, which are decorated with small white double axes, see Rodenwaldt 1911, 222–223, pl. 9.2; Immerwahr 1990, 110, 190, pl. 54 (My No. 1a).

⁵⁶ On actual double axes of LH IIIB/C date see below.

⁵⁷ Nilsson 1950, 195–235, esp. 227–231; Dietrich 1988, 15; Maran 2015, 251.

⁵⁸ Pötscher 1990, 20–24; Buchholz 1999, 494–495, 612. See Haysom 2010, 38. This paper puts the religious associations of the double axe in Neopalatial Crete into perspective.

⁵⁹ Mavriyannaki 1978, 204–208; Kalogeropoulos 2015, 175; Whittaker 2016, 109–110.

⁶⁰ On representations on vases, see Mavriyannaki 1978, 200, 205, figs. 4–5; Crouwel – Niemeier 1989, 6–7, figs. 3–4; Rehak 1995a, 452, pl. 53d; Kalogeropoulos 2015, 175. On functional double axes with engraved representations of a bull's head, see Mavriyannaki 1978, 198–204, figs. 1–3; Mavriyannaki 1983, 211–212, fig. 16; Rehak 1995a, 437, pl. 50c; Whittaker 2016, 109, pl. 43b.

⁶¹ CMS II.3, no. 11 (Knossos: LM I/II); CMS V.S1A, no. 141 (Chania: LM IIIA1?); CMS XI, no. 259 (Argos: LBA I/II); CMS XII, no. 250 (unknown: LBA II/IIIA1), CMS XIII, no. 15 (unknown, talismanic). See Mavriyannaki 1978, 202–203, 205–206, figs. 7–8.

⁶² Furumark 1941, 247–248, fig. 28.4.1 (FM 4); Mavriyannaki 1978, 201, 205, fig. 6. Furumark 1941, 247, assigns a LH IIIB date to this krater, however, an earlier date is more likely, see the discussion in Crouwel – Niemeier, 1989, 6 n. 6.

⁶³ Dakoronia 2016, 388–390, pl. 119a–b.



Fig. 2: Sherd of a LH IIC Middle pictorial krater from Kynos (after Dakoronia 2016, pl. 119b)



Fig. 3: Bronze double axe from Kakovatos (photo: B. Eder; Kakovatos project)

context of the same site, associated with a bronze one-edged knife as well as burnt ashes and animal bones. This assemblage clearly indicates the practice of animal sacrifice.⁶⁴

Returning to the early phase of the Mycenaean period, real specimens have come to light at a few sites only.⁶⁵ Recently, a (functional?) bronze double axe has been found in the Grave of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos, which is dated to LH IIA, another early functional example has come to light at Kakovatos (Fig. 3).⁶⁶ Examples with a non-utilitarian function, which are closely comparable to Cretan types, were found at the early Mycenaean cult deposits on Mount Kynortion already mentioned above.⁶⁷ These double axes, which are either made of thin foil or show features that make no sense for practical use, are usually considered votives.⁶⁸ However, according to Robin Hägg they “functioned as symbols, put up on display during the ritual”.⁶⁹ If true, it was their non-functional, symbolic value that was significant for the participants in early Mycenaean cult practices. Accordingly, this cult symbol, which is easily connected with animal sacrifice, may have gained importance on the mainland as a means to enhance the symbolic significance of the indigenous cult practice of animal sacrifice. Overall, there is neither strong evidence to support the view of the double axe as a symbol of rebirth and renewal (whether in Minoan Crete or

⁶⁴ Dakoronia 2016, 389, pl. 120a–b; Kounouklas 2016, 527–529, pl. 151a.

⁶⁵ Hägg 1985, 207; Dietrich 1988, 20.

⁶⁶ Davis – Stocker 2016, 634. The double axe, the dimensions of which have not yet been published, is compared to two LH bronze double axes that were found at the site Metaxada-Kalopsana, Messenia, see Hope Simpson – Dickinson 1979, 135 (D22). On the rather small example from Kakovatos, which was deposited beneath a LH IIB-floor of a storeroom in the basement of the main building of the site, see Eder 2012, 93, fig. 7. I owe this reference and the photograph to Birgitta Eder.

⁶⁷ Lambrinudakis 1981, 62–63, fig. 10. Along with bronze double axes of larger size small bronze double axes of unpretentious design were also found, see Lambrinudakis 1981, 62–63, fig. 12. In general, see Hägg 1984, 120–121; Sakellarakis 1996, 97 n. 187. *Contra* Whittaker 2014, 189, more than one example of larger bronze double axes have been found, see Lambrinudakis 1977, 173, pl. 149γ; Lambrinudakis 1981, 62–63, fig. 10.

⁶⁸ Lambrinudakis 1981, 62–63, fig. 10. See Hägg 1981, 36. The same is true for double axes from Crete: although some of the LM examples are functional, most of the double axes known from the archaeological record – including votive replicas of gold, silver, bronze, steatite and ivory – served for display only. Notably, they have been found in cave sanctuaries and peak sanctuaries, see Mavriyannaki 1983, 197–199, 207–211; Haysom 2010, 42–49; Whittaker 2014, 191–192. For a small bronze votive double axe from a LM I peak sanctuary at the site Ayios Georgios sto Vouno on Kythera, see Sakellarakis 1996, 86, pl. 19d.

⁶⁹ Hägg 1997, 17.

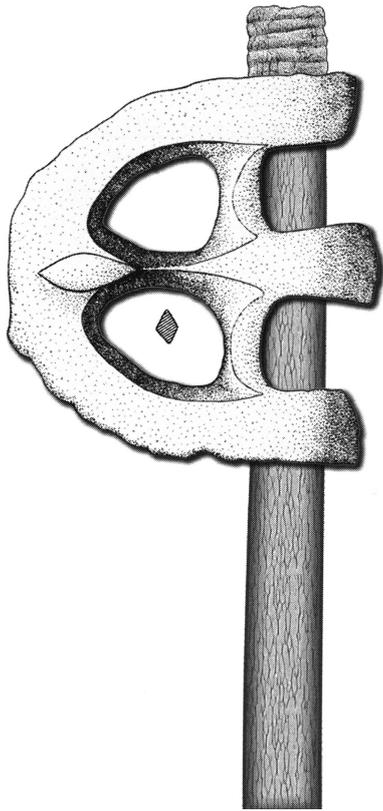


Fig. 4: Reconstruction of the hafted fenestrated axe-head from Vapheio (after Maran 2015, 266, fig. 2; graphics: M. Kostoula)

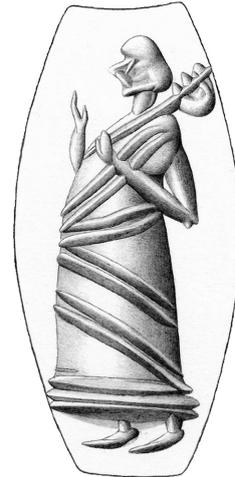


Fig. 5: Seal from Vapheio, LBA I/II (CMS I, no. 225)

fenestrated type,⁷³ which was found in an untouched cist grave inside the robbed tholos tomb of Vapheio,⁷⁴ is another example of the appropriation of non-local cult equipment by early Mycenaeans (Fig. 4). A sealstone (Fig. 5) from the same context illustrates a person in a long garment with diagonal bars carrying the same type of axe.⁷⁵ According to this representation, the person who owned this peculiar axe will have derived benefits from carrying it at public events as a means to express social prestige. The bronze axe-head from the Vapheio cist grave is the only actual find of this kind of object in the Aegean. Its weight and dimensions indicate that it was, in fact, fully functional.⁷⁶ Interestingly, such axes may have played a more important role within Mycenaean cult practice than has been previously recognised.

on the Greek mainland)⁷⁰ nor for the opinion that the symbol had no significance in Mycenaean religion at all.⁷¹ Rather, the double axe of Minoan shape seems to have been accepted as a religious symbol because it could easily be associated with the indigenous ritual of animal sacrifice and built on a symbol of similar shape already in use.⁷²

The semicircular axe of the Near Eastern

⁷⁰ Dietrich 1988.

⁷¹ Mylonas 1977, 119–123.

⁷² For a similar view, see Hägg 1985, 207–210.

⁷³ On this kind of axe, see Buchholz 1999, 489–490, 611, fig. 100b–d.

⁷⁴ On the tholos tomb at Vapheio and its archaeological finds, see, e.g. Kilian-Dirlmeier 1987; Banou – Hitchcock 2011. For a detailed analysis of the fenestrated axe, see Maran 2015, 244–251, fig. 2.

⁷⁵ CMS I, no. 225. This seal forms part of an extraordinary large number of seals deriving from a single grave (total of twenty-eight sealstones and three metal rings), only recently outnumbered by the unique large number of about fifty seals and four gold rings from the Grave of the Griffin Warrior, see Davis – Stocker 2016, 632. The subject as well as the craftsmanship seem to suggest that the sealstone in question was made in Crete (like most, at least, of those which were found with it) or by a Cretan craftsman, see Banou – Hitchcock 2011, 5–6, 13. Another fourteen seals and two gold rings were found on the floor of the plundered tholos (along with other objects missed by the tomb-raiders). NB: the numbers of seals and rings given above are based on Kilian-Dirlmeier 1987, 197–200, who refers to the original publication of the finds by Christos Tsountas. These numbers do not reconcile with those arising from CMS I (Cist grave: one ring, thirty seals. Tholos: one ring, eleven seals).

⁷⁶ Davis 1995, 16; Maran 2015, 245 with n. 20: height: 14.5 cm, weight: 479.16 grams.

Some peculiarities in the design of the actual axe – such as the three separate socket loops which protrude from the blade and enfold the haft – and a seal from Crete showing a person in the same dress and with the same type of axe as on the seal from Vapheio,⁷⁷ have led Arthur Evans to suggest that the axe from Vapheio was of Cretan origin and served as a ceremonial implement or sacrificial instrument in Late Bronze Age Crete.⁷⁸ On the contrary, a detailed analysis of the morphological features of the Vapheio-axe by Joseph Maran speaks in favour of its Near Eastern origin.⁷⁹ Whether the axe is a Near Eastern import or an Aegean product, it was most likely used in Crete from where it was transferred to Lakonia. The combination of the actual axe and the depiction on the seal suggests that this happened on purpose.⁸⁰ Although it cannot be confirmed that the deceased assigned a ritual significance to this object, its unusual shape fulfilled the requirements for ceremonial use;⁸¹ it may well have functioned both as a religious and a status symbol at the same time.⁸² Based on the grave goods of the cist it is indeed highly likely that the deceased possessed political as well as religious power. The finds include a Type A sword, two daggers with inlaid decoration and two spearheads, which point to a high status warrior.⁸³ Other finds such as a bronze incense burner, a bronze shaft-hole hammer axe with reliefs of a figure-of-eight shield on each of its sides and the famous gold cups with scenes of bull capture had (or may have had) some ritual significance. The same holds true for the collection of seals made of semi-precious stones and metal rings, a substantial number of which show scenes of a religious character.⁸⁴

For a long time this axe has been regarded as a unique example without a successor. Recently, however, Maran has pointed out that a semicircular axe-shaped pendant of lapis lazuli from Mycenae (Fig. 6) and a group of similar lapis lazuli pendants or beads from Thebes, which date to the Palatial period, indicate that the artisans who manufactured these objects, had some knowledge of semicircular Near Eastern axes.⁸⁵ The three-dimensional mode of representation and the precise

⁷⁷ CMS II.3, no. 198. Pace Evans 1935, 413–414 (and by implication Kilian-Dirlmeier 1987, 203–204, Davis 1995, 15, and Koehl 1995, 30, who all had to rely on the illustration published by Evans 1935, 414, fig. 343b) the axe carried by the long-robed person on CMS II.8, no. 258, seems to be of a different type. According to the illustration in CMS II.8, published in 2002, it resembles the hammer-axe carried by another long-robed person on CMS II.3, no. 147. Curiously, in the description of this sealing in CMS II.8 the axe is still viewed as ‘syrische Axt’. On another seal from this cist grave (CMS I, no. 223) a person with an identical robe is leading a griffin, which suggests to some scholars that persons who wear this kind of garment belong to the religious sphere, see e.g. Kilian-Dirlmeier 1987, 203–204; Davis 1995, 15–17; Koehl 1995, 29–31. Others prefer to view these people as profane authorities, see, e.g. Rehak 1995b, 110–111, 114; Dubcová 2010, 23–24. In general, they are described as individuals of high rank (with or without an explicit religious function) and considered male. However, their sex cannot be determined on a secure basis, see Weilhartner 2014, 448–450.

⁷⁸ Evans 1935, 413–418. On this peculiar feature, which does not appear on Near Eastern examples of the fenestrated axe, see Aruz 2008, 176. For a detailed discussion on the morphological features of the Vapheio axe-head, see Maran 2015, 246–249, 251.

⁷⁹ Maran 2015, 246–249. See p. 246 n. 27 for a list of authors who also regard the axe as a Near Eastern import to the Aegean.

⁸⁰ Other examples of an interrelationship between grave goods and iconographical representations on objects found in the same tomb are provided by the findings of the Grave of the Griffin Warrior, see Davis – Stocker 2016, 649–652. This clearly indicates that the collection of rings and seals was not arbitrary. However, the symbolic meaning ascribed by mainlanders to iconographical scenes and motifs may have (sometimes substantially) differed from the original meaning ascribed by those who lived in Minoan Crete. On possible semantic linkages between details of the cult scene on the gold signet ring (CMS I, no. 179) and actual objects from the so-called Tiryns treasure, see Maran 2013, 159–160.

⁸¹ Maran 2015, 250.

⁸² Banou – Hitchcock 2011, 5–6, 9; Maran 2015, 251, 256 n. 106.

⁸³ Category 1.2 according to the evaluation of contemporary tomb contexts by de Vreé, this volume.

⁸⁴ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1987, 198–208, figs. 2, 5, 9; Banou – Hitchcock 2011, 2–6, fig. 3.

⁸⁵ Maran 2015, 251–254, figs. 9–11. On the possible appearance of a stylised version of the head of the semicircular axe as a motif on LM pottery of the so-called Palace Style and Mycenaean pottery of the Palatial period, see Maran 2015, 243–244, 252. However, as Maran clearly states, there is no general agreement on the identification of this motif. For example, Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier (1985, 112–115, fig. 53) prefers to use the neutral designation ‘Schirmchen’ for this motif on Palace Style vase painting. In the form of pendants and relief beads of valuable materials this motif is regularly referred to as ‘wallet’, see, e.g. Effinger 1996, 39; Hughes-Brock 2008, 131.



Fig. 6: Semicircular axe-shaped pendant made of lapis lazuli from Mycenae (after Maran 2015, 269, fig. 9; photo: M. Kostoula)

rendering of morphological details of the example from Mycenae have suggested to Maran that some axes of this type were still circulating in the Mycenaean Palatial period. If true, this ceremonial implement played a more permanent role in Mycenaean cult practice than hitherto acknowledged.

As animal-head-shaped rhyta, tripod offering tables, Minoan double axes and single-bladed Near Eastern axes demonstrate, early Mycenaean elites borrowed actual cult implements from Crete. In view of how these cult implements were used (as actual objects or in representations) early Mycenaean had at least some knowledge of the function of these objects during the performances of rituals on Crete. Since these cult objects were manufactured/depicted until the end of the Mycenaean Palatial period, it seems likely that early Mycenaean managed to integrate sophisticated cult implements of Minoan ritual practices into their own religious traditions. In addition to the objects dealt with above, a few more paraphernalia of Minoan cult and elements of Minoan religious imagery are found on the Greek mainland from the Shaft Grave period onwards until the Palatial period. The most prominent examples are ‘horns of consecration’ and the figure-of-eight shield, both of which would deserve a study of their own.⁸⁶ Such symbols (either in the form of actual cult equipment or as elements of religious iconography) may have incorporated existing local semantic associations, which would have favoured their acceptance.

Religious Glyptic Iconography: Epiphany versus Processions

With the adoption of Minoan cult equipment the Shaft Grave period saw the beginnings of religious iconography on the mainland. Of particular interest in the development of this iconography are gold rings that display a complex system of religious figurative scenes and motifs of undoubtedly Minoan inspiration, irrespective of whether these objects were imported from Crete or produced by Mycenaean craftsmen on the mainland on the basis of Cretan objects or under the guidance of Cretan masters. As these objects are buried in graves, some scholars are inclined to regard them as symbols of status and prestige rather than as objects of religious significance to their owners.⁸⁷ However, as Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier has demonstrated by an analysis of the cult scenes on gold rings found in the Argolid, early Mycenaean elites seem to have been interested first and foremost in those representations of ritual actions, which had a meaning in terms of their own religious conceptions,⁸⁸ such as depictions of human individuals or, occasionally, supernatural beings, carrying cult equipment or objects of various kinds and approaching in linear movement a seated female figure (regularly considered a goddess) or some form of architectural structure (usually viewed as a cult building or altar). These scenes of ritual processions not only appear on a substantial number of gold rings and seals of Neopalatial date found in Crete but also on early Late Bronze Age rings and seals (Fig. 7) found on the Greek mainland.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ The literature on the iconography as well as the symbolic role of the figure-of-eight shield and the ‘horns of consecration’ in Minoan and Mycenaean religion is quite impressive. For a start, see Niemeier 1985, 120–124, figs. 58–59; D’Agata 1992; Warren 2000; Simon 2002; Banou 2008; Rethemiotakis 2012.

⁸⁷ See, e.g. Hägg 1985, 213.

⁸⁸ Niemeier 1989, 184; Niemeier 1990, 165–170.

⁸⁹ Niemeier 1989, 167–169, 173–174, figs. 1, 4; Niemeier 1990, 166, 170; Wedde 2004; Krzyszkowska 2005, 142, 253–254. Due to the small size of rings and seals, which favours pars pro toto compositions, the goal of a procession is regularly not shown, see Wedde 2004, 163–169.

On the other hand, representations of ecstatic or envisioned epiphany are almost completely missing among the gold rings found on the Greek mainland.⁹⁰ Epiphany, however, is a key element in Minoan religion.⁹¹ The representation of this momentary visual experience is associated with various rites such as the ritual dance of ecstatic character, the shaking of a tree or the clasping of/leaning upon large baetylic objects.⁹² None of these cult rituals are prominent features on objects found on the mainland.⁹³ Other symbols, which have been associated with epiphany, like the human ear and the human eye, do not appear on seals or rings found on the mainland at all, neither during the Shaft Grave period nor during the Palatial period.⁹⁴

Conversely, representations of ritual processions continued on the mainland in other media such as fresco painting. Apart from the repertoire of pictorial representations there is also much archaeological and textual evidence from the Palatial period that clearly document the importance of processions in Mycenaean ritual practice.⁹⁵ Without doubt, processions played a fundamental role in Minoan cult practice as well.⁹⁶ This may be another case of ritual practice that had been performed in MH Greece in a comparably simple manner and was enhanced and institutionalised by early Mycenaeans on the Cretan model.

Floral Symbols of Religious Significance: Lily and Crocus

The phenomenon of selective adoption that Niemeier observed in the case of religious scenes in Minoan-Mycenaean glyptic is also confirmed by the selective adoption of Minoan symbols of religious significance, which may appear on pottery and other objects found on the Greek mainland. A case in point is the representation of the lily. In Crete, this motif is particularly well known from MM III/LM IA frescoes and contemporary large jars, but it occurs on LM II and LM IIIA pottery as well.⁹⁷ Representations of this flower also occur frequently on objects found on the

⁹⁰ Niemeier 1989, 169–171, fig. 2; Niemeier 1990, 167–170. Representations of ecstatic epiphany are characterised by small figures ‘in the air’, see Crowley 2016, 91, pls. 36, 38.54, 39.64. Such figures appear on the mainland only on the eclectic Acropolis Treasure ring from Mycenae (CMS I, no. 17), on a gold ring from Tholos Tomb IV at Pylos (CMS I, no. 292), and on a gold ring from the Elateia cemetery (CMS V.S2, no. 106), which is usually regarded as of Minoan origin, see Krzyszkowska 2005, 256 n. 88, 305. Other mainland examples of ecstatic epiphany may be provided by one of the gold rings of the Grave of the Griffin Warrior (Davis – Stocker 2016, 643–645) and a gold ring from the tholos tomb at Vapheio (CMS I, no. 219). However, on both examples the figure in question is represented in full size. For that reason, it is difficult to decide whether these scenes represent ecstatic or enacted epiphany. On the differentiation between ecstatic epiphany, where divine presence is seen or felt by the worshippers, and enacted epiphany, where the appearance of a deity is performed by a human, see Hägg 1986, 46, 55–62; Niemeier 1989, 170–171, 174. Other examples like the gold ring from Chamber Tomb 91 at Mycenae (CMS I, no. 126) show comparable features, with the central figure apparently representing a human being, see Niemeier 1990, 169.

⁹¹ Nilsson 1950, 330–388; Furumark 1965, 91–92; Hägg 1986; Morris – Peatfield 2002, 113–115; Soles 2016, 249–250, pls. 81–82.

⁹² Furumark 1965, 91–92; Niemeier 1989, 174–177, fig. 5; Niemeier 1990, 168–169; Crooks et al. 2016.

⁹³ One of the very rare exceptions is the famous gold ring of Vapheio (CMS I, no. 219), which is generally regarded as an import from Crete, see Krzyszkowska 2005, 305. As she notes, only three golden signet rings found on the mainland have been identified as Cretan with certainty. Apart from the Vapheio ring, this group includes rings from Elateia (CMS V.S2, no. 106) and from Kalapodi (CMS V.S3, no. 68).

⁹⁴ Hägg 1986, 58; Crowley 2016, 91–92. See, e.g. CMS II.3, no. 51; CMS III, no. 502; CMS VI, no. 278. For a similar observation, see Krzyszkowska 2005, 256, who notes that signs such as birds, butterflies and shooting stars, which herald epiphanies, are mostly absent on examples from the mainland. For a possible interpretation of eye and ear in the context of representations of epiphany, see Steinhart 2002, 16: “Die Darstellung von Auge und Ohr [sc. on CMS II.3, no. 51] weist damit in Entsprechung zu mehreren anderen Ringbildern auf die Intensität des dargestellten Moments der Göttererscheinung hin”.

⁹⁵ See, e.g. Hägg 2001; Weilhartner 2013; Maran 2016, 588–590.

⁹⁶ See, e.g. Warren 2006.

⁹⁷ Furumark 1941, 136, 142, 155, 188–189, 257–260 (FM 9); Niemeier 1985, 57–60, fig. 18; Negbi – Negbi 2000, 596–597. On lilies in Thera wall painting, see Angelopoulou 2000, 549–550.

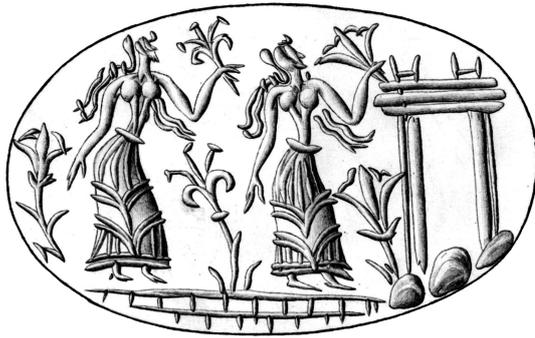


Fig. 7: Gold signet ring from Aidonia, LBA I/II
(CMS V.S1B, no. 113)



Fig. 8: Seal from Routsis, LBA II
(CMS I, no. 279)

mainland. Notably, lilies form the motif of the electron inlays on the blade and the gold relief on the hilt cover of the so-called lily dagger from Shaft Grave V⁹⁸ and of golden cut-outs from Shaft Graves III and IV.⁹⁹ In addition, lilies appear in various cult scenes on seals found on the mainland.¹⁰⁰ Among them is the golden signet ring from Aidonia (Fig. 7), which depicts two women as part of a processional scene carrying flowers towards a small cult building or altar marked by a pair of horns of consecration. One of the women carries a lily, another lily is depicted in front of her. A seal from Tholos 2 at Routsis (Fig. 8) provides another example of a woman with lilies moving towards an altar.

In the ceramic repertory the lily appeared from LH IIA onwards and became popular in LH IIB when it is found as a central motif on Ephyraean goblets.¹⁰¹ In addition, it appears on a wide range of other vessel shapes from different regions and occurs regularly until LH IIIA1.¹⁰² As regards examples of the Mycenaean Palatial period, one may refer to fresco fragments illustrating female lily bearers from Mycenae and Thebes (thus picking up a motif attested on seals from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age), cut-out inlays for furniture made of ivory in the form of lilies from the West Houses at Mycenae, as well as glass and gold relief beads featuring this motif.¹⁰³ I refrain from speculating about what meaning the lily had for Mycenaean but just want to emphasise that some of the polyvalent layers of meaning which the lily had in Minoan iconography appealed to Mycenaean. For reasons unknown, this does not apply to the motif of the crocus.

⁹⁸ Karo 1930, 137, no. 764, pls. 91–92; Vermeule 1975, 46.

⁹⁹ Karo 1930, 55, no. 79, pl. 27; 92, no. 378, pl. 44. A necklace of separate pieces made of gold in the shape of lilies was found in an unlooted cist grave under the peribolos of Tholos 1 at Peristeria, dating to the transition from the MH to the LH period, see Korres 1979, 493, pl. 263γ.

¹⁰⁰ See, e.g. CMS I, no. 17 (Mycenae, Argolid); CMS I, no. 279 (Routsis, Messenia); CMS V.S1B, no. 113; CMS V.S3, no. 243 (both from Aidonia, Corinthia). A sealing from the palace of Knossos (CMS II.8, no. 285), which shows a hand holding a lily, may be viewed as representing a detail of such scenes.

¹⁰¹ Niemeier 1985, 60–61, fig. 19; Mountjoy 1993, 46, 57–59, fig. 93; RMDP, 212–215, fig. 67.79; 515–516, fig. 183.77; 901–903, fig. 366.45–46.

¹⁰² RMDP, 101–102, fig. 18.88 (cup FS 219 from Argos, Argolid, LH IIB); 102–103, fig. 18.92 (cup FS 237 from Prosymna, Argolid, LH IIB); 405–406, fig. 142.1 (piriform jar FS 33 from Aigion, Achaia, LH IIB); 510–511, fig. 181.51–52 (piriform jar FS 31 from Athens, Attica, LH IIB); 523–524, fig. 187.119 (conical cup FS 230 from Athens, LH IIIA1); 655–657, fig. 249.43 (cup FS 237 from Thebes, Boiotia, LH IIB); 699–700, fig. 268.8 (piriform jar FS 28 from Chalkis, Euboia, LH IIB); 701–702, fig. 269.16 (jug FS 132 from Chalkis, LH IIB); 702–704, fig. 269.20 (piriform jar FS 31 from Chalkis, LH IIIA1); 703–705, fig. 270.34 (jug FS 144 from Chalkis, LH IIIA1); 748–749, fig. 288.11 (goblet FS 254 from Krisa, Phokis, LH IIB); 812–813, fig. 323.8 (piriform jar FS 31 from Livanates, Phthiotis, LH IIIA1); 1082–1085, fig. 442.12 (alabastron FS 84 from Eleona, Kos, LH IIIA1).

¹⁰³ For fresco fragments, see Immerwahr 1990, 115–117, pl. 21 (Th No. 1); 119–120 (My No. 5). For ivory inlays, see Tournavitou 1995, 145–149, fig. 28, pls. 17–18. For glass and gold relief beads, see Higgins 1980, 78, 81, fig. 13.12–15; Eder 2015, 228–233, with further bibliography.

The crocus represents another floral motif from the Minoan repertoire with clear religious associations. It has long been recognised as a popular motif in Minoan art from the Protopalatial period onwards until LM II.¹⁰⁴ Frescoes and ceramics offer the most striking depictions of this flower, but representations of crocuses also occur on faience objects, stone vessels, jewellery, and seals. The prominence of this floral motif is linked to its role in religious ceremonies: crocuses appear in representations of offerings to deities and occur on objects which had a religious function, such as tripod offering tables and faience votive robes.¹⁰⁵ Obviously, this motif serves as a symbol with a special meaning that helps to accentuate the setting for ritual compositions.¹⁰⁶

Contrary to the lily, the crocus does not appear in depictions of nature on the Greek mainland; there are no scenes with crocuses growing from the ground. In mainland frescoes, possible representations of this flower are restricted to stylised versions of an isolated element: they may appear as a motif on textiles.¹⁰⁷ As regards pottery, Arne Furumark lists only four instances, when this motif occurs, all from LH I or LH IIA/B respectively.¹⁰⁸ Yannis Lolos – in his monumental work on early Mycenaean pottery of the southwestern Peloponnese – adds a LH I rounded cup decorated with isolated crocus blooms from Volimidia.¹⁰⁹ These and the few examples published in Mountjoy's comprehensive compilation of Mycenaean decorated pottery¹¹⁰ show variations in the design of the crocus, which seem to suggest that Mycenaean potters were not familiar with that motif. If crocus blooms appear on pottery produced on the mainland, the execution and the arrangement of this motif stand apart from conventional Minoan compositions. As Linear B evidence of the Palatial period demonstrates, saffron, the spice produced from the dried stigmas of some species of crocus, was much valued in Mycenaean Crete and – by implication – on the Greek mainland, whether as a dye, medicine or for culinary purposes.¹¹¹ However, the general

¹⁰⁴ Niemeier 1985, 61–62, fig. 20; Day 2011a. This article presents a detailed survey of the crocus motif in Aegean art from the Early Bronze Age to the Mycenaean period. Interestingly, after LM II one observes a general disappearance of the crocus motif from all media, see Day 2011a, 356, 370–371. On the crocus in Thera wall painting, see Angelopoulou 2000, 548–552; Porter 2000, 614–623.

¹⁰⁵ On its assumed role as a sacred plant, see Day 2011a, 369–373, with some cautious notes. The observation that the crocus is a flower of religious significance goes back to Evans, see, e.g. Evans 1921, 265, 506.

¹⁰⁶ However, the symbolic character of the crocus does not exclude its presence as a more or less decorative element, see, e.g. Angelopoulou 2000, 552: “Hence, the symbolic use of individual elements, such as the lilies or crocuses in religious scenes, does not justify the connection and identification of an analogous meaning in all scenes where these are present”.

¹⁰⁷ For a trifoliate motif resembling crocuses on the left shoulder of the garment of the ‘Lily Bearer’ from the Cult Centre at Mycenae, see Day 2011a, 346–347, fig. 5. The red and yellow pendants of the necklace worn by the ‘Mykenaiia’ on another fresco fragment from the Cult Centre at Mycenae are also taken to resemble crocuses by Day (2011a, 348). This interpretation, however, is not justified. On two fresco fragments from Pylos and one fragment from Tiryns the flowers depicted bear some resemblance to crocuses. However, their stylised shape leaves it unclear whether the fresco painter intended to portray a particular species (i.e. a crocus) or to adorn the wall with a generic floral decoration, see Day 2011a, 349.

¹⁰⁸ Furumark 1941, 260 (FM 10).

¹⁰⁹ Lolos 1987, 448, figs. 375i, 379, 667.5. A LM IB/LH IIA saucer from Routsis, Tholos 2, with growing crocuses is considered an import from Crete, see Lolos 1987, 209, fig. 410. Other examples are too schematic to allow clear identification as crocus, see, e.g. Lolos 1987, 139, figs. 168, 665.5; 200, fig. 345; 436, fig. 225. Significantly, lilies appear regularly on LH I and LH IIA pottery of the southwestern Peloponnese, see Lolos 1987, 447–450.

¹¹⁰ RMDP, 83–84, fig. 11.20 (Prosymna, Argolid, LH I); 98–99, fig. 17.77 (Kazarma, Argolid, LH IIB); 507–508, fig. 180.33 (Kolonna, Aigina, LH IIA); 748–749, fig. 288.4 (Kirrha, Phokis, LH IIB); 800–801, fig. 319.8 (Ayios Ilias, Aitolio-Akarnania, LH IIB). Significantly, the crocus is not among the LH IIA floral motifs discussed in Mountjoy 1993, 46–48. Within the whole monograph the crocus is mentioned only once, as a motif on a LH I squat jug from Samikon, Elis, see Mountjoy 1993, 36, fig. 32. This evidence is not easily reconciled with Maria Marthari's view that a LH I panelled cup decorated with crocuses found at Thera is an import from the mainland, see Marthari 1982, 194–196, pl. 71γ; Marthari 1993, 249, 255 n. 11. Neither the rendering of the flower, which resembles Minoan prototypes, nor the motif of crocuses growing from the ground has any parallels on pottery or other objects from the mainland. For doubts on the assumed mainland origin of this cup, see Dietz 1991, 230, 311. For pottery decorated with crocuses found at Akrotiri on Thera and imported from Crete, see Niemeier 1980, 57–59, fig. 33.1–3; Lolos 1987, 448.

¹¹¹ Day 2011b.

lack of this motif on mainland pottery and in other media¹¹² suggests that the special symbolic value of this flower had no significance for the Mycenaeans. Rather, the rare appearance of the crocus may point to a deliberate rejection of the meaning it had in Minoan Crete. Anyway, the difference identified in the transfer of lily and crocus is one more argument for a deliberate selection of Minoan symbols by early Mycenaeans.

Results

The selective adoption of Minoan cult paraphernalia seems to indicate the following: there is no question of a wholesale adoption of Cretan cult practices or religious beliefs. However, there are some traits, which suggest that actual cult practices current in Middle and Late Minoan Crete had an impact on the performance of cult practices on the mainland. Minoan cult practices (and maybe some religious ideas) seem to have been adapted in terms of indigenous religious concepts i.e. by means of an *interpretatio Mycenaea*. Rhyta, tables of offerings and double axes of LH IIIB date provide clear evidence for their appropriation and lasting acceptance as paraphernalia for Mycenaean cult practice after they have been taken over at the beginning of the Shaft Grave period. Fenestrated axes, if still used in the Palatial period, may provide another piece of evidence. Along with the adoption of cult paraphernalia, the selective borrowing of significant elements of Minoan religious motifs and symbolism led to the creation of a Mycenaean religious iconography. In view of the ritual scenes on four golden signet rings of LM I date used as burial gifts in a LH IIA stone-built tomb near the palace of Pylos (the so-called Grave of the Griffin Warrior),¹¹³ it seems difficult to accept that this religious iconography was developed at a single centre (Mycenae) or region (the Argolid) and spread to other parts of mainland Greece afterwards.¹¹⁴ Rather, various sites along the major trade routes seem to have played different roles in the dissemination of religious symbols,¹¹⁵ and the almost uniform symbolism of the Mycenaean Palatial period seems to be preceded by a formative phase, which is characterised by the appropriation of particular motifs of Minoan religious iconography in various regions of the mainland.

Summing up, I do not see any “radical changes in the religious worldview of the inhabitants of the Greek mainland,”¹¹⁶ but rather argue for a fundamental change in the way that religious ideas

¹¹² Among the numerous examples of the motif across different media listed by Day 2011a, passim, only beads morphologically similar to the pendent crocus on LM IB ceramics are mentioned as objects found on the mainland, see Day 2011a, 360. The stylised shape of these beads found in various contexts does not allow classifying these objects as representations of crocuses; they are known as beads of ‘bee type’, see Higgins 1980, 79, 82, fig. 13.31.

¹¹³ Davis – Stocker 2016.

¹¹⁴ Although Oliver Dickinson (1977, 110; 1989, 133) is at pains to stress that many of the characteristic Mycenaean features were *not* developed at and disseminated from a single centre, within the field of religion he tentatively argues that “on present evidence [...] these [sc. Minoanising] influences were confined to the Argolid at the beginning” (citation from Dickinson 1989, 136). A comparable view is expressed by Dickinson (1977, 82) on behalf of early metal vessels: he takes early vessels found in Messenia “to be ‘imports’ from Mycenae rather than products of a local school, or at the least to represent an industry introduced from the Argolid”. By contrast, Hartmut Matthäus (1980b, 156, 341–342) tentatively argues for a “lokales messenisches Produktionszentrum” by referring to three (presumably) early kraters of similar manufacture from Pylos, Chandrinou and Charokopeio. The gold, silver and bronze vessels found in the grave of the Griffin Warrior may help to settle the matter. On these vessels, see Davis – Stocker 2016, 632–635.

¹¹⁵ For a similar observation concerning the repertoire of motifs on early Mycenaean decorated pottery, see Lolos 1987, 523: “[T]he local [i.e. in the south-western Peloponnese] LH I lustrous-painted decoration is characterized by [...] the presence of a series of patterns (spiraliform, floral, linear and other) and other decorative elements (e.g. groups of bars acting as dividing motifs) which are completely absent from, or are extremely rare on, the LH I fine pottery of the Argolid-Corinthia”. See also Mathioudaki 2014, 15–16. For the remarkable diversity in tomb-types between regions and sites in the early Mycenaean period, see Dickinson 1989, 133–135. As Birgitta Eder (pers. comm.) reminded me, another case in point may be provided by the regional difference in the motifs of gold foil ornaments, see Dickinson 1989, 134. On various trade routes from Crete to the mainland, see Graziadio 1998.

¹¹⁶ As has been argued by Whittaker 2014, 208.

were expressed and how actual ritual practices were performed. Therefore, I do not think that symbols of religious significance were borrowed from Crete by Mycenaean elites “as a means of removing themselves from the common beliefs [...] of Helladic custom, thus symbolically elevating themselves above the commoners”.¹¹⁷ Nor do I think that they intended to distance themselves from ritual practices that were performed by the majority of the population. Rather, I would like to suggest that due to close contacts with Minoan palatial culture they dressed existing cult practices in new, much more elaborated clothes.

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Illustrations

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