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MYCENAEAN SIGNET RINGS



**MYCENAEAN
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Signet ring from Mycenae (fig. 17).

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MYCENAEAN
SIGNET RINGS

of precious metals
with cult scenes



ATHENS 2000

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The catalogue accompanying this monograph contains only signet rings of precious metals that have been found in mainland Greece or are Helladic. The numerous Helladic sealings made by rings are not included since this would entail a study of their technique and an attempt to interpret their function in relation to the places where they were found; this would exceed the limits of the present volume. For the same reason the Minoan metal signet rings and sealings are omitted even if they come from the so-called "period of Achaean hegemony", the period during which Crete was under Mycenaean rule. Omitted likewise are rings which are generally considered to be fakes.

Photographs

British School of Archaeology 33

American School of Classical Studies 12

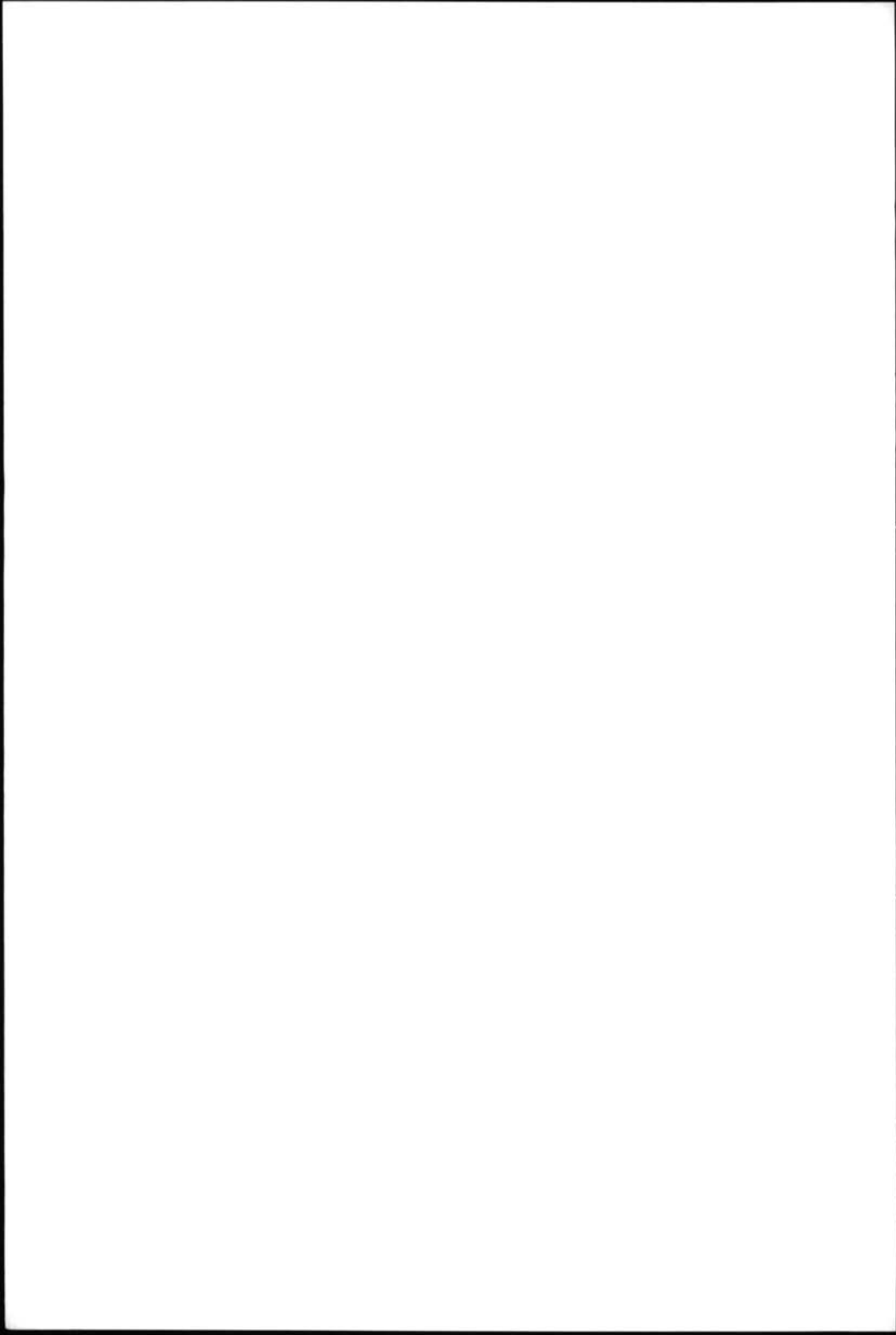
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In memory of Agnes Sakellariou

PREFACE

Seals make their appearance for the first time in Mesopotamia around the middle of the 4th millennium B.C. Towards the end of the same millennium they appear in Egypt and in Syria, whence they were introduced to Crete. The first Minoan seals date from the Early Minoan II period, around 2500 B.C., and they develop rapidly presenting a great variety in form and iconography.

At a time when there were no keys or padlocks, seals were the means of identifying and controlling property. It was impossible to break and replace the clay seal of a vessel or the band that secured a trunk or door, without being discovered, unless one had the seal. Thus the scene that decorated the seal and identified its owner, served as a safeguard and simultaneously as an apotropaic symbol. Indeed the meaning of the seal comes from the sense of protection, of the amulet, the talisman. The distance though between the apotropaic and the magical is small. The material of the seal, or the representation it bears, acquires magical powers which provide the sealed goods with magical protection.

With the organisation of administration in the Minoan palaces, the seal was used extensively from 2000 B.C. on. In mainland Greece the first seals appear during the Early Helladic period, a time of "internationalism." They come from Lerna, where the first signs of centralised

power are evident. In the Middle Helladic period (1900-1600 B.C.) there is an apparent gap. This is a time during which the mainland is relatively isolated: sufficient wealth has not yet been amassed, nor is there significant commercial activity or administrative organisation such as might justify the making of seals. The gap, to be sure, may simply be accidental and new finds may well bring new evidence. The use of seals reappears in the Late Helladic period with the flourishing of the Mycenaean civilisation. It accompanies the growth of trade, social organisation and the establishment of a central administrative power.

Seal-cutting appears to have been brought to mainland Greece from Crete already developed. Indeed the first mainland seals are probably the work of Minoans. It is impossible to tell whether the artisan who made the earliest Mycenaean seals and signet rings was a Minoan who worked for Mycenaean patrons or a Mycenaean who had been taught by a Minoan master or if these objects were actual imports from Crete. Even so, the choice of theme, its rendering in connection with the style and structure of the representation, all somehow help in the identification. Today it is generally accepted that most of the Helladic seals and signet rings were made by Mycenaean even though their Minoan association, which often enough depends on the seal-maker's personal feeling for plastic rendering, is apparant. It seems that the first seal-cutting workshops were established on the mainland as late as about 1450 B.C.

The seals were made of different hard materials, mainly semi-precious stones: a variety of agates, quartz, rock crystal, jasper, sardonyx hematite; also lapis lazuli, ivory

and glass paste. They were also made of precious metals, mainly gold.

A special category in the corpus of Minoan and Mycenaean seals is that of the metal signet rings. Their use was widespread, particularly from the time of the new palaces in Crete, when very hard stones began to be used for making seals. Although the technique had developed greatly, the working of hard stone presents difficulties. Mistakes in stone cannot be rectified, whereas with metal this is not a problem.

The metal signet rings make their appearance in Crete at the end of the Old Palace Period, around 1650 B.C. The earliest belong to the MM IIB - MM IIIA period and they have a round bezel: one bronze ring and one in silver come from the funerary cave Gerontomouri in Lasithi; a gold ring comes from Mavrospilio and one in lead from Sphoungaras.¹ The first example with an ellipsoidal bezel was found at Malia.² It is of lead covered with gold-sheet and it dates from the LM IA period, in the mid-16th century B.C. Thus, by the middle of the 16th century, the metal signet ring had already reached its developed form. For its manufacture various metals were being used: lead, iron, bronze and electrum, but gold was the metal of choice. This malleable material allowed an elegance of form and decoration and also enabled the artisan to render small perfectly finished figures. The relatively large seal surface, moreover, facilitated the depiction of scenes with many figures.³

The signet rings were not simply luxurious seals. Their distinctive fabrication and decoration lead us to conclude that they may have had some specific use. Perhaps they authorized or legalised a decision of some high official.

In any case, their great artistic value suggests that they were the property of individuals holding a high position in the social hierarchy, and particularly in the religious hierarchy if the scenes depicted are cultic. Indicative of this is the fact that they have been found in rich graves or "treasures", for the most part in big centres such as Mycenae. At Pylos, another large centre, only one signet ring has been found, but the many clay sealings impressed by rings attest to their extensive use. Many rings, to be sure, have disappeared, not only because they were in tombs that were robbed, but because relatives, when opening the tomb for a new burial, used to remove the valuable objects .

Fifty-three signet rings of precious metal are known from mainland Greece. Most of them (33 known to date)⁴ come from the Argolid.

In studying the signet rings of precious metals one has to take into account two aspects: One is the technique, the other its iconography. A third aspect, which cannot be examined in the present study, is style. A few years ago, Agnes Sakellariou, in cooperation with C. Hadziliou, then chief conservator of the National Archaeological Museum, studied the method of manufacture of the signet rings. Agnes Sakellariou reported on this research at the 3rd Symposium of Prehistoric Seal-cutting at Marburg and published the results in 1989.⁵

TECHNIQUE OF MANUFACTURE

In the corpus of metal signet rings we can distinguish seven different types, the most numerous of which are three: types I, IV and VI. The other types are represented by just a few examples (III, VII)* or they are found only in Crete (II, V).

Type I comprises rings that are cast or hammered, but hammering is also used on cast rings for the final stage. The hoop itself is a flat band. On some rings it is in one piece with the bezel [1]; elsewhere it is made separately and joined to the back of the bezel [2b]. Type I is the earliest and it appears during the LH I period. It is later given up in favour of other types, especially IV, to reappear toward the end of Mycenaean times. The rings from Perati and Dimini date to LH IIIC.

Type IV is known already by the end of the LH I period. It includes hammered rings. The bezel consists of gold-sheet at times thick enough to appear to be massive. The sheet is hammered on its two long sides and is folded inward toward the middle thus acquiring an amygdaloid shape. The face of the ring, the one with the decoration, is ellipsoidal and convex. The back has two elongated and slanting facets, shaped like the arc of a circle and bordering an empty space that is the hollow formed by the fold-

* The rings of type III have a bronze bezel set with a stone with a representation in intaglio. Only one example of this type is known from mainland Greece (CMS I, 253). Type VII is derived from type III but rather than being set with a stone, the bezel is covered with gold-sheet with a scene impressed in a mould. Of this type too there is only one example from the mainland (CMS V S1B, 187).



1. Signet ring from Dimini. View of the back. Type I. Hammered.

LH IIIc. Gold. Bezel 1,5 × 0,8, diam. hoop 2,3.*

Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 3342 (CMS I, 407).



2a, b. Signet ring from Perati (tomb I, burial 2). Type I. Cast. LH IIIc. Gold. Bezel 2,5 × 1,7.

Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 8084a (CMS I, 390).

Two caprids and schematised branches are depicted on the bezel.

* The dimensions of the rings are given in centimeters. The hoop measurement is the interior diameter

ing in of the sides. This hollow is covered with another gold-sheet, slightly concave in order to fit the finger. The ends of the hoop fit into the central hollow and are hidden by this concave covering. The gold-sheet covering holds together in place both the bezel and the hoop of the ring [3b].

The hoop can be massive, in which case it is soldered to the edges of the back of the bezel. As a rule, however,



3a, b. Signet ring from Midea - Dendra (chamber tomb 10). Type IV. Hammer-chisel.

LH IIIA1. Gold. Bezel 2,5 x 1,5, diam. hoop 2.

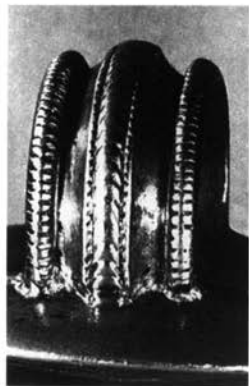
Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 8748 (CMS I, 191).

On the bezel is depicted a procession of women towards a sacred building.

it consists of one or two gold-sheets bearing granulated or embossed decoration [4b], or occasionally a decoration of unusual sophistication [20b].

The soldering of the hoops of the rings is perfect and only at the edges of the outer sheet, where heat developed at the join, can traces of it sometimes be detected. If the sheet from which the ring was made was not thick enough, the hollow created by folding over the sides was filled with a soft substance of some sort so that the ring would better withstand pressure.

Most of the signet rings from mainland Greece belong



4a, b. Signet ring from the "treasure" of Tiryns. Type IV. Hammer-chisel. 15th century B.C. Gold. Bezel 5,7 × 3,5, diam. hoop 2,2.

Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 6208 (CMS I, 179).

The hoop consists of two sheets; the outer one has two deep channels and three high convex mouldings decorated with curving and straight lines. On the bezel is depicted a procession of daimons moving towards a seated female divinity.

to type IV. This type appears to have suited the technical and artistic perceptions of the Mycenaeans better than the others. It is notable that the most developed cast rings of type I imitate the rings of type IV: The back of the bezel is slightly hollow in the middle and has flat rather than convex facets. The hoop is triangular in section and it is joined to the edges of the back. The two rings from the "treasure" of Grave Circle A at Mycenae are made in just this way. It is likely, as A. Sakellariou has observed, that they were made by a Minoan who was working in Mycenae and who applied the technique of casting with which he was familiar, adapting it to Helladic type IV [5b].

Type VI resembles type IV, differing, however, in the materials used. It is characterised by a combination of various metals such as silver, bronze, iron and gold. As with type IV, the upper surface of the bezel is convex and the back has three facets. Half of the upper part of the bezel on the long axis, its continuation into a facet at the back and the hollow are covered with gold-sheet [6]. The hoop of the ring consists of a core covered with gold-sheet, but only on the part joining the half of the bezel that has the gold sheeting. A small rivet secures the gold-sheet to the centre of the hoop [7]; such rivets attach the gold-sheet to the upper part of the bezel. On other examples, rivets are used to attach the hoop to the bezel. Type VI is attested, in addition, on sealings such as one from Pylos, *CMS I*, 313.

The circumstances leading to the creation of this type are not known. It is unlikely that economic factors, such as the cost of gold, would have played a part. Rather its creation must be due to aesthetic considerations, such as the impression of contrasting colours given by the metals.



5a, b. Signet ring from the "treasure" of the acropolis at Mycenae. Type I which imitates Type IV. Cast and hammered. Hammer-chisel; hand-chisel used for details.

1500-1450 B.C. Gold. Bezel $3,4 \times 2,5$, diam. hoop 2.

Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 992 (CMS I, 17).

The hoop is cast, triangular in section. On the bezel is depicted a seated female figure receiving offerings.

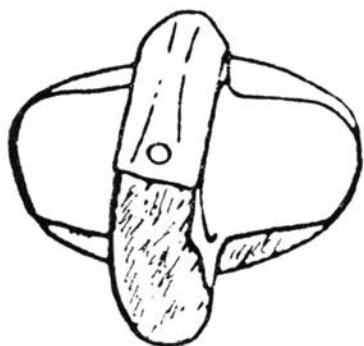


6. Signet ring from Asine (chamber tomb 1) (drawing). Type VI. Hammer-chisel.

1450-1400 B.C. Gold, bronze. Bezel $2,8 \times 1,8$. The hoop is missing.

Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 10275 (CMS I, 200).

A scene of bull-leaping is depicted on the bezel.



7. Hoop of a signet ring of Type VI (drawing: Agnes Sakellariou).

Perhaps, however, these rings were thought to have magical value, for it is known that magical properties were attributed to precious metals. This is why such metals have been found in foundation deposits.⁶ Similar properties, furthermore, have been ascribed to the rings made of various metals that were found in the tholos tomb at Dendra.⁷

Three different techniques are evident in the carving.

1. *Carving with the hand-chisel.* The hand-chisel is a small pointed carving tool. With it the artisan forms the figures freehand by means of many slanting blows, thus removing pieces of metal. He then employs a variety of tools each with a different edge or point. In this way he succeeds in creating flowing forms with fine, sharp volumes and outlines (slightly wavy) and fleeting details. The modelling has a pictorial effect and is the result of dense incisions made with the pointed edge of the chisel.

2. *Carving with the hammer-chisel.* This is a tool which is struck, a chisel with a slightly flattened edge. With this the artisan does not remove metal, but displac-

es it by striking the tool vertically with a hammer so that the imprint of the end of the tool is left on the metal sheet. Here too many other tools are employed, each with a different edge or point. The hammer-chisel makes figures with clean forms, rounded masses, emphasised outlines and clear articulation. Frequently both types of tools are used in combination on the same ring (hammer-chisel and hand-chisel).

Types I and IV were worked with either the hand-chisel or the hammer-chisel or with a combination of the two. On type VI only the hammer-chisel was used since the blow must be vertical in order to impress the forms both on the gold sheet and on the core that is covered by the sheet. Most of the rings from the Helladic area have been decorated by means of the hammer-chisel; and it is perhaps to the use of this tool that we must attribute the characteristic style of Mycenaean miniature sculpture with its cleanly modelled forms and its accentuated transitions from one plane to another. The style was popular in mainland Greece precisely because it corresponded to the particular artistic inclination of the Mycenaean, who sought clear shapes and well articulated structure. Minoan Crete, by contrast, preferred the technique of the hand-chisel, which could produce scenes more in the style of painting. This is not, however, a clear-cut distinction.

3. *Casting* (bezel cast in a mould). Casting is rare (three examples) since with the use of the mould alone it is not possible to produce delicate modelling [2a].

ICONOGRAPHY

Compositions of purely decorative or talismanic character are extremely rare in the iconography of metal signet rings.⁸

The themes depicted are the following:

Animals singly or in a scene [2a] [8]

Eleven rings have animals as a theme. One from Antheia [8] shows a landscape of palm trees with a lion with forelegs raised ready to pounce on a cow that is suckling its calf. The scene is characterised by strong Minoan inspiration with a beautiful naturalistic rendering of the animals. Similar style and iconographic details are seen on the ring in Fig. 30, from the same provenance.



8. Signet ring from a tholos tomb at Antheia. Type IV. Hand-chisel (in places). LH IIA-B. Gold. Bezel 3,2 x 1,88, diam. hoop 1,26. Olympia, Archaeological Museum (CMS V S1B, 136).

Secular scenes

These are scenes of battle or hunting that are generally related to aristocratic activities and which give us valuable information about Mycenaean life and society. The best known of the rings with this type of scene come from Grave Circle A at Mycenae [9]. Such scenes appear on four rings.

Cult scenes with classical mythological connotations

Two rings may be included in this category, which are connected with the cycle of religion.

The ring from the Tiryns "treasure" [10a.b] is the earli-



9. Signet ring from Grave IV of Grave Circle A at Mycenae (impression).
Type IV. Hammer-chisel; details made with hand-chisel.
Ca. 1500 B.C. Gold. Bezel 3,5 x 2,1.
Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 241 (CMS I, 16).
A battle scene is depicted on the bezel.

est ring of type IV, judging by the way it was made and by the composition of the scene. The hoop of the ring is wide and flat. The technician seems to have been less experienced in making the sophisticated decorations appearing on other rings. The scene, which is rendered none the less with careful workmanship and style, appears to be inspired by monumental art and especially by wall painting. Moreover the depiction refers to the iconographic cycle of nautical themes which includes the well known wall paintings of Thera. The nautical theme, a favourite in Minoan seal cutting, suggests Minoan influence. The ring dates from the transitional phase between the 16th and the 15th century B.C. It is not clear if the repre-



10a, b. Signet ring from the "treasure" of Tiryns. Type IV. Hammer-chisel. Ca. 1500 B.C. Bezel $3,4 \times 2$, diam. hoop 1,9. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 6209 (CMS I, 180).

sentation belongs to the sphere of everyday life or to the domain of cult. It is probable, however, that the subject is mythological, even though such themes are not yet known to be rendered in Mycenaean art.

The representation depicts three successive moments in time. Two figures, a man and a woman, sit facing each other in the cabin of a boat. Next, the pair is shown on the shore. They are then shown conversing in the entrance to a building. Many hypotheses have been suggested for the interpretation of the scene. Among these are the abduction of Ariadne or the departure of Helen and Menelaos for the Elysian fields (in each case mythological); likewise the voyage of a royal couple to the Isles of the Dead or, simply, the voyage of a couple. Perhaps the only certainty is that some official ceremony is being performed. Two male figures stand on the boat outside the cabin. One looks towards the shore. He could be interpreted as the skipper since at about the same level, below the stern, the rudder can be seen. The other figure, looking towards the couple, has a somewhat ecstatic stance. Beneath the ship are depicted the oars, a dolphin and a cuttlefish. Further on, the shore is shown with various buildings.

The ship, which has a tall sail, cabin, low hull and high stern, appears to be ceremonial and it very much resembles the ships on the well-known Thera wall painting which are taking part in a formal ceremony [11].

The other gold ring on which there is probably a mythological scene comes from the Ancient Agora of Athens [12]. A male and two female figures appear standing on the ground. The male figure, larger than the two female forms, is depicted running hastily off to the right. He



11. Aegean ships. Detail from the miniature frieze representing a flotilla. Thera. West House, room 5, south wall.

LM IA (ca. 1550 B.C.). Lime plaster. Meas. of the frieze 3,9 × 0,43 m. Athens, National Archaeological Museum.

wears a loin-cloth, carries a tall sceptre or spear with a trefoil top and appears to pull the first female figure with a double rope. The women wear garments with flounced skirts. Their arms are shown in a very schematised form. The faces of all the figures are unformed, but the male figure may be wearing a bull's head mask.

Many suggestions have been made about the meaning of the scene: most have interpreted it as presenting the Minotaur leading the maidens to sacrifice,⁹ but no single interpretation is certain. Recently a sealing from a gold



12. Signet ring from the Ancient Agora of Athens (grave VIII). Type IV. Hand-chisel.

LH IIIA. Gold. Bezel $1,85 \times 1,2$, diam. hoop $1,4$.
Athens, Ancient Agora Museum J5 (CMS V, 173).

ring depicting the same theme has been found at Chania in Crete, but it is of an earlier date (LM IB).¹⁰ The Agora ring carries on a Minoan tradition, but it appears not to be a Cretan import. Indeed in the LH IIIA period, to which this ring belongs, such rings are rarely imported.

Cult scenes or themes connected with religion

Most of the signet rings belong to this category.

1. *Animals in an actual cult situation or mythical beasts.* Two rings belong to this category.

One ring, probably from Thebes and today in the Benaki Museum (CMS V, 198), shows a bull in front of a sacred construction with which he is clearly directly associated. On another ring from a chamber tomb at Mycenae [13] there is a winged sphinx with the flat head-gear and plume that denotes official figures. It has an abbreviated head. On its breast it wears a necklace with spirals. The wings are clumsily joined to the body. The wavy bands that float out from the neck are a misinterpretation of the second wing that sphinxes usually have. It is a misunderstanding on the part of the artist who is copying without comprehending the function of such details.

2. *Bull-leaping*. This sport has a secular implication, but it is chiefly of ritual character. Two rings belong to this category.

Two acrobats are shown bull-leaping on a ring from Antheia [14]. In style it is similar to the ring from Asine



13. Signet ring from Mycenae (chamber tomb 91). Type IV.
Ca. 1400 B.C. Gold. Bezel 2,1 x 1,1, diam. hoop 1,4.
Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 3182 (CMS I, 129).

[6] and to another Minoan ring from Archanes which was found earlier by Evans.¹¹ The rendition is naturalistic in the spirit of Minoan tradition.

3. Two rings have *representations of symbolic character*.

The ring from the tholos at Dendra [15] shows two unusual caprids with canine bodies placed on a bow-like symbol whose tips end in snake-heads or leaf buds. Separated from the main scene by a decorative band, in an exergue at the bottom of the bezel are shown two other caprids. The scene is characterised by the crude modelling of the figures, clear forms and a tectonic composition. The meaning of the bow-like symbol which occurs in many representations,¹² remains obscure. It may be a combination of the "horns of consecration" with snakes or shoots. Whatever it is, it appears to be an attribute of the Great Goddess, the Potnia.

4. Found frequently on the sealstones and signet rings of mainland Greece are *representations of antithetical figures*, actual or mythical. These compositions reflect the artistic outlook of the Mycenaean, who sought a symmetrical organisation of space, stylisation and closed balanced compositions.

The antithetical figures are shown on either side of a tree, altar or more often a column from which branches may or may not spring [16]. The column is shown as *pars pro toto* in that it stands for the entire sanctuary. The tree too is a reference to a sacred area. The column with branches growing out of it symbolises simultaneously the sanctuary and the tree, but given the tendency towards abstraction in Mycenaean art, it may be a schematic rendition of the sacred tree adapted to the tectonic nature of a



14. Signet ring from Antheia (chamber tomb 4).
LH II-III A1. Gold. Meas. bezel 2,57 x 1,62, diam. ring 1,54.
Olympia, Archaeological Museum, ET 4, 56 (CMS V S1B, 135).
The hoop is decorated by a triple row of granulated dots.



15. Signet ring from the crypt of the "princess" in the tholos tomb at Dendra. Type IV. Hammer-chisel.
End of the 15th century B.C. Gold. Bezel 2,2 x 1,5, diam hoop 1,6.
Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 7327 (CMS I, 189).

heraldic composition. The heraldic composition was at its height of popularity during LH III times; by then it had acquired its emblematic sense and its strict structure.¹³ There is a tremendous variety of heraldic themes. Often the central element is missing from the heraldic composition, but the symbolism remains [17]. On six helladic rings antithetical animals are shown.

5. Finally, *cult scenes* with two or more figures are depicted on seal rings whose shape, material and size were suitable for such representations.

The rings with cult scenes belong to the LH II and LH IIIA periods, appearing around 1500 B.C. With the turn of the century, at the beginning of the 14th century B.C. they were no longer made. The scenes provide valuable information for the study of Mycenaean religion - indeed they provide practically the only existing evidence for the 15th century B.C. Yet the information is unclear, just as it is with most of the monuments connected with this aspect of Mycenaean life. It is like a "picture-book without text," as Nilsson noted in 1927,¹⁴ and his observation still holds. Minoan influence is evident in both the style and the iconography of the cult scenes on the Mycenaean rings.

When, at the beginning of the LH period, the Mycenaean became familiar with Minoan culture, they fell under its influence, not only in terms of artistic themes but of its entire system of social and economic organisation, including religious matters as well. In Crete the Mycenaean found advanced forms of art, specifically seal types. In the sphere of cult they found an established iconography and a religious ritual already organised. All this they adopted and absorbed. Thus it is to be expected that



16. Signet ring from Mycenae with a representation of two antithetical sphinxes (chamber tomb 55) (drawing). Type IV. Hand-chisel and hammer-chisel. LH IIIA1. Gold. Bezel 2,35 x 1,6, diam hoop 0,7. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 2854 (CMS I, 87).



17. Signet ring from Mycenae with a representation of antithetical griffins (chamber tomb 68). Type IV. Hammer-chisel. LH II-III A1. Gold. Bezel 3 x 1,7, diam. hoop 1,6. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 2970 (CMS I, 102).

the scenes on the signet rings dating to the LH II period, a time of strong Minoan influence on mainland art, appear to reflect Minoan religious perceptions. Indeed for a long time it was thought that Mycenaean religion was the same as Minoan. Today we realise that this is not the case. The Mycenaean had their own outlook on life. Especially after the Linear B tablets were deciphered, we know that the Mycenaean, just like the Minoan, worshipped a great goddess of fertility with various aspects and symbols. Most of the symbols, moreover, were drawn from the Minoan. They had, however, other gods entirely of their own, gods with names such as Zeus, Poseidon, Dionysos or Hermes who were equally important but there was no established iconography for them. In fact, the Mycenaean took over only part of the Minoan ceremonial apparatus and some religious ideas, those that did not basically come into conflict with their own.¹⁵ Within the framework of Minoan cultic representations - the garments, the poses of the figures, the symbols - the real religious perceptions of the Mycenaean can to a degree be discerned. Yet it is not easy to distinguish the Mycenaean from the Minoan element, for beneath two similar representations quite different ideas may be hidden. The style of a representation as well as an overall examination of Mycenaean art will often help in distinguishing the two suggesting that Minoan elements in the performance of religion were ultimately more superficial than the iconography of the 15th century might imply. Thus in later times they gradually lost their deeper symbolic force in favour of elements arising from the Mycenaean's perception of the world and their own achievements. The owner of a signet ring could of course have embraced the Minoan ideas ex-

pressed in the scene that decorated it, but he could just as well have given it another meaning.¹⁶ He could even quite simply have ordered it because it was something unusual that conformed with his social status.

Among the cult scenes shown on the signet rings are processions and scenes depicting the epiphany of a divinity.

A. *Processions* usually show female figures who move towards a construction of sacred character: a sanctuary or an altar often crowned with horns of consecration. Plants or trees symbolise the surroundings and suggest that the scene is taking place in a grove. The sanctuary is shown schematically in accordance with the Minoan conventional type but the extent to which this convention represents the reality is not known. Divine figures do not take part in these processions. Representations of this sort are common in Aegean iconography and their interpretation presents no particular problem. The Mycenaeans in this case are copying Minoan iconographical prototypes. The women wear Minoan dress, their breasts are bare, they carry branches which they will offer to the divinity [18], they raise the hand in a gesture of worship [19] or they are posed as if dancing [3a] [22]. They move from right to left. The correct picture is seen in the original rather than in the impression. The artisan begins his work at the left edge (from the standpoint of the viewer), proper right, where he places the sacred elements of the scene: divine figure, sacred tree etc. On a ring from the tholos tomb at Midea (Dendra), the sacred building has a pronaos with colonnade and in the interior there are two birds that indicate the presence of the deity [3a].

The ring from Aidonia [20a.b] shows two female fig-



18. Signet ring from Mycenae (chamber tomb 55). Type IV. Hammer-chisel.
Ca. 1400 B.C. Gold. Bezel $2,5 \times 1,55$, diam. ring 1,3.
Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 2853 (CMS I, 86).



19. Signet ring from Mycenae (chamber tomb 71). Type VI. Hammer-chisel.
LH IIIA1. Gold, silver. Bezel $2,8 \times 1,55$. Loop missing.
Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 2972 (CMS I, 108).

ures with long hair moving towards a sacred building which is crowned by an epistyle and horns of consecration. The first woman holds a papyrus frond, the second a lily. The stones in front of the shrine suggest a rocky landscape, but the forecourt is probably paved. Lilies and papyrus plants complete the scenery and Minoan influence is evident.

On another ring from Aidonia [21] three female figures appear moving towards a sacred building with a latticed balustrade, meant perhaps to be the sort of wooden altar known from other representations.¹⁷ The landscape is rocky and the ground somewhat uneven. Two trees grow beside the altar. The first woman holds something indeterminate in one hand, her other arm hangs down. The two other figures have both arms raised - the third raises only one - and they hold objects difficult to identify; perhaps a "budding branch."¹⁸ The objects, however, appear to be heavy, so they may be a club or hammer (the hammer, known from other representations, is a symbol of priesthood).¹⁹ The scene exudes a dramatic quality and an atmosphere of mystery emphasised by the poses of the figures, the objects they hold, the rocks and the singular altar.

A third ring from Aidonia [22], shows a procession of three female figures moving in a lively fashion between two sacred constructions crowned by horns of consecration. The buildings have two storeys and the landscape is rocky, as is suggested by the curved lines at the base of the buildings. The women wear tight fitting garments with pleated sleeves. Their skirts, which somehow resemble breeches, end in points and have a net pattern on the hips. The faces are undefined and perhaps they are



20. Signet ring from Aidonia (chamber tomb 7). Hammer-chisel and hand-chisel. This ring, as well as the rings shown in Figs. 22 and 24, is a variation of Type IV: the bezel consists of two ellipsoidal sheets joined at their edges. The back of the bezel is shaped like those of Type IV, but it is hammered.

LH II, ca. 1500 B.C. Gold. Bezel 2×1.25 , diam. hoop 1,72, weight 3,45 grs. Nemea, Archaeological Museum, 550 (CMS V S1B, 113).

The border of the bezel and the outer side of the hoop are decorated with small cells inlaid with glass paste.



21. Signet ring from Aidonia (chamber tomb 7) (drawing). Type IV. Hammer-chisel and hand-chisel.

LH II (ca. 1500 B.C.). Gold. Bezel $2,5 \times 1,45$, weight 7,5 grs. Nemea, Archaeological Museum, 549 (CMS V S1B, 114).



22. Signet ring from Aidonia (chamber tomb 7) (drawing). Variation of Type IV. See Fig. 20a, b. Hammer-chisel and hand-chisel.

LH II (ca. 1500 B.C.). Gold. Bezel $3,1 \times 1,9$, diam hoop 1,65, weight 7 grs. Nemea, Archaeological Museum, 548 (CMS V S1B, 115).

wearing some sort of mask. A few ringlets hang from the top of the heads, and the excavator therefore suggested that the heads were for the most part shaved.²⁰ Some of the figures in the wall paintings of Thera are depicted in this same way. Marked stylisation is evident in the arms, the feet, in the faces of the figures and in the buildings. The representation has no parallel in Mycenaean iconography. The circumference of the bezel and the exterior of the hoop are decorated with cells joined to the gold stem, and inlaid with glass paste as on the hoop of the ring in fig. 20b.

On some other rings the figures of the worshippers are not represented in procession, but stand near the sacred building [23] [24]. On a ring from a chamber tomb at Mycenae [23] two female figures are rendered in profile. They make a gesture of salute and they stand symmetrically on either side of a building the façade of which rises between them, with the rear part shown in perspective. The wall is constructed of ashlar masonry. The building is crowned by an altar from which foliage springs. Sheaves of wheat, branches and a tree frame the scene. Altars with leaves springing from them are known in other representations also, including that on the cup from Grave Circle A [25]. Processions are depicted on twelve seal rings altogether.

B. The other cult scenes have to do with the *epiphany of the divinity*. This is the culmination of the ritual: all the cult ceremonies have this ultimate purpose, to induce the divinity to appear. The presence of the divinity is felt on altars, in baetyls, in the sacred tree and in her symbols, birds and snakes. Her most important epiphany, however, is when her figure itself descends from above. As has



23. Signet ring from Mycenae (chamber tomb 91). Type IV. Hammer-chisel.
 Ca. 1400 B.C. Gold. Bezel $2,55 \times 1,5$, diam. hoop 1,55.
 Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 3180 (CMS I, 127).



24. Signet ring from Mycenae (chamber tomb 84). On the bezel are depicted a male figure and a wild goat. Variation of Type IV. See Fig. 20a, b. Hand-chisel.
 Ca. 1400 B.C. Gold. Bezel $3 \times 1,95$, diam. hoop 1,5.
 Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 3148 (CMS I, 119).



25. One-handed cup from grave IV of Grave Circle A at Mycenae. 1550-1500 B.C. Electrum, gold, niello. H. 0,155 m. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 390.

been rightly observed by Hägg²² and others, it is an ecstatic epiphany; the mortals perceive her as a vision.

a. The theme of the *ecstatic epiphany* is Minoan. It is represented on seven rings, five of which (four rings and a sealing) come from Crete with only two from mainland Greece, one of which is from Pylos. This is significant since we know that Messenia and Laconia are the first regions to have come into contact with Crete and the Minoan influence is clearly reflected in their art, especially during the LH I and II periods²³ [26]. On the Pylos ring,

there is an altar in the middle of the scene, probably wooden, crowned by horns of consecration and standing on rocky ground. A wild goat is leaning against the rock, and behind the altar is a bush. The figure of the divinity descends from above with one arm raised, while the worshipper opposite makes a corresponding gesture. The second ring was found relatively recently in a tomb at Elateia (CMS V S 2, 106). Its strong Minoan characteristics are evident especially in the movement and garments of the figures. Similar dress is known from other signet rings and from the sealings of Aghia Triadha.²⁴ The ring reached Mainland Greece probably from the Peloponnese and it may be the work of a Minoan.

b. Another group of rings includes representations of a *seated female divinity*. She is approached by proces-



26. Signet ring from Pylos (tholos tomb A at Ano Englianos) (drawing Piet de Jong). Type IV. Hammer-chisel.

LH II. Gold. Bezel 1,7 x 9, diam. hoop 1,4.

Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 7985 (CMS I, 292).

sions or single figures bearing offerings or in a pose of worship.

A ring from a chamber tomb at Mycenae [27] depicts a female figure wearing a garment resembling trousers. She wears a bracelet and anklets and she is seated on a low stool, behind which is a bush. A thin male figure approaches her and touches her lightly, his wrist on hers. The scene has been given the name of "sacra conversazione", a sacred dialogue between a divine figure and a worshipper or between two divine figures.

In the scenes of this type the seated form is generally taken to be divine, but it has often been suggested that rather than representing the divinity herself, it depicts a priestess who is portraying her.²⁵ In this case we would have an act, a performance in which the priestess plays the role of the divinity. It is not easy to distinguish the divine figure from that of the priestess, the more so since goddess and priestess wear the same type of garment and are accompanied by the same distinguishing symbols. The Mycenae ring [27] shows clear Minoan influence in both technique and style - empty field, not many filling elements, dignified poses. Yet its date, a number of details such as the type of stool and the objects that accompanied the ring in grave 66 where it was found, all bespeak of Mycenaean workmanship.

The Mycenaean spirit is clearly evident in two important Argive rings. The ring from the "treasure" of Grave Circle A at Mycenae [5a] shows a female divinity seated on rocks or on a pile of stones beneath the sacred tree, evidently in the sacred precinct. She is holding poppies. Two priestesses move toward her offering irises, while two little attendants stand in a pose of worship. Six lion heads at



27. Signet ring from Mycenae (chamber tomb 66). Type IV. Hand-chisel and in places hammer-chisel.

LH II-III A1. Electrum. Bezel $2,7 \times 1,75$, diam hoop 1,4.

Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 2971 (CMS I, 101).

the edge of the bezel symbolise either the escorts of the goddess or sacrificed animals. In the background are a double axe and a palladium, that is a figure-of-eight shield topped with a helmet. But this is not the divine epiphany. Both goddess and worshippers are looking elsewhere and appear to be unaware of it. The palladium here is a symbolic element, just as is the double axe. At the top of the bezel are the astral signs that are connected with the nature of the goddess and with human life. Indeed the ceremony that is unfolding here is connected with fertility. It is clear that the Mycenaean adopted a ready-made cult scene, adapting it to their own ideas. The double axe and the palladium are shown in emblematic fashion, and there is a notable lack of ecstatic movement. "Horror vacui" is manifest just as in other Mycenaean representations:

within a small space many things are represented and many objects are displayed necessary for understanding the scene.

The signet ring from the "treasure" at Tiryns [4a] is the largest known in the Minoan and Mycenaean world. It is made from very thick gold-sheet and has an elaborately worked hoop. At the bottom of the scene is an architectural frieze of triglyphs and half-rosettes, a pattern known also from the halls of the palaces showing that the scene is taking place in a formal setting. A female figure, clearly divine, wearing a priestly robe and a flat head-gear, sits on an elegant chair, a sort of throne with a high back. She rests her feet on a stool, a piece of furniture known from the Homeric epics and from the Pylos tablets (θρῆνυς). Behind the figure, a bird of prey with pointed bill stands on an object that is perhaps a sacral knot. The goddess raises a kalyx-shaped cup of the "holy communion" type known from excavations. Four lion-headed daimons holding libation jugs approach her. There is an incense burner on a little column in front of the divine figure. Between the daimons are cypress-like boughs, and at the top of the scene appear the heavenly symbols, sun and moon. The field of dots suggests rain or perhaps the starry sky. Shown here is a ceremony the purpose of which is to secure the earth's fecundity: the daimons approach to request the needed precious rain. There could be no more eloquent scene than the plea for "thirsty Argos"²⁶ as Homer called it. With its rich iconography, the staging of the scene, the full-blown forms, the hieratic quality of the figures, the full field and the architectural details, this ring is one of the finest pieces of Mycenaean art. On four rings processions toward a seated female figure are depicted.²⁷

c. Three rings show *figures accompanied by mythical creatures*, an association that places the scene in the divine sphere. The deities are accompanied by griffins, mythical beasts directly connected, in fact subordinate, to the divinity.

On a ring from a chamber tomb at Mycenae [28] a seated divine figure is represented wearing a priestly garment and holding a cord attached to a griffin. The sacred nature of the scene is shown almost in shorthand, and the representation is simplified, without many details and without style. A comparison of this representation to a similar one on a signet ring from Archanes, emphasises the sensitivity of the Minoan artist. [29]. Ethereal the slender silhouette of the goddess stretches out her hand over the mythical beast who is under her authority. The figure of the deity and the flight of the griffin are rendered harmo-



28. Signet ring from Mycenae (chamber tomb 91). Type IV. Hammer-chisel. LH IIIA1. Gold. Bezel 1,9 x 1,2, diam. hoop 1,5. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 3181 (CMS I, 128).



29. Signet ring from Archanes (tholos tomb B).
Ca. 1400 B.C. Gold. Diam. bezel 1,1.
Herakleion, Archaeological Museum, 1017.



30. Signet ring from a tholos tomb at Antheia (floor of tholos). Type IV.
Hand-chisel (in places).
LH II. Gold. Bezel 3,39 x 1,99, diam ring 1,24.
Olympia, Archaeological Museum (CMS V 51B, 137).

niously. The representation "breathes life", adapted asymmetrically, as it were, to the shape of the field with the volumes finely balanced.

A ring from a tholos tomb at Antheia [30] shows a chariot with four-spoked wheels drawn by two griffins in a landscape with palm trees. Riding in the chariot are two figures, evidently divine, wearing the low head-gear that is characteristic of highly placed personages. This is a subject that occurs also on sealstones²⁸ and on the well-known Aghia Triadha sarcophagus [31]. Griffins in general are connected with exotic landscapes: a griffin is shown in similar fashion in a landscape with palm trees on the miniature fresco of the West House at Thera.²⁹ The third ring, perhaps the earliest (Nat. Arch. Mus. Stathatou Coll. No. 226) shows a male figure between two griffins. It is said to have come from Andritsaina. Since this was more or less a rural area, we must suppose that the ring arrived there from some important Peloponnesian centre. Also, the authenticity of this ring has been in doubt (CMS I, Suppl., 13, no. 2).

d. The final group of cult scenes is connected with the mystic epiphany of the deity. It includes scenes that show various cult practices. Either ceremonial dances are being performed, or worshippers pull or shake the sacred tree or they embrace an oval object, a pithos or a large stone interpreted as a sacred baetyl. These are *scenes of invocation* in which the deity is called upon to appear.

Many symbols connected with the presence of the divinity are to be found in the scenes of invocation, such as branches, double axes, eyes, ears, butterflies (*chrysalis*), and so forth. In some cases birds appear, which signify the epiphany of the divinity.



31. The Aghia Triadha sarcophagus. End.

LM IIIA (ca. 1400 B.C.). Limestone. H. 0,895 m., L. 1,375 m., W. 0,45 m.,
H. of painted zone 0,25 m.

Herakleion, Archaeological Museum.

Such scenes appear on two rings from the Greek area, whereas from Crete there are eleven rings or sealings from rings with this same theme.

In the centre of the bezel of a ring from Vapheio [32] a female figure with flounced skirt and raised arms is represented in a pose suggestive of dancing. To the left on rocky ground is a man, practically nude, shaking a tree that is growing from behind a pithoid object. At the right edge a figure-of-eight shield is visible with a garment on it pinned by a sword. In the upper part of the field are a double axe with sacral knot, a bough and a chrysalis. The heads of the figures are unformed, rendered in aniconic manner.



32. Signet ring from the tholos tomb at Vapheio (floor of tholos) (drawing).
Type IV. Hand-chisel.

LH II. Gold. Bezel 2,15 × 1,8, diam. hoop 1,2.

Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 1801 (CMS I, 219).

The ring has been fashioned with a hand chisel. The technique is fine, the representation rhythmic and the forms harmonious. It is a creation of Minoan workmanship, with many Minoan symbols, and was perhaps imported from Crete. The finds from Vapheio, as elsewhere in Laconia (*supra* p. 40), particularly the sealstones, show strong Minoan influence.

It has been suggested that the central figure represents the deity who has just made her appearance. It is more likely, however, that this is a cult ceremony and that the central figure here too is a priestess. The shield is a symbol of the goddess associated with her warrior nature; it signifies protection and it is dedicated to the deity.³⁰ The garment, symbol of revival, was an important element in the ceremonies and one of the classic offerings to the divinity, as we gather from the wall paintings of Tiryns,³¹ and Thera.³² The religious symbolism and ceremonial importance of the garment continued into historical times. The sword is connected quite obviously with the shield. Shield, garments and sword are functional objects connected with the different aspects of the nature of the goddess, and they became implements of worship with a place in cult practice. The three objects taken together constitute a ceremonial garb of warlike character that implies the warlike nature of the prehellenic divinities of fecundity. In the sacred area where the scene unfolds, the ceremonial garb has its place as a votive. Moreover, according to the representations, shields and maybe garments were kept hanging in the sanctuary. In the scene under discussion, it is likely that someone, perhaps the priestess, wore the ceremonial garment for some special act of ritual.³³ The tree symbolises nature and the life-

giving forces of the earth, including also the power of the divinity. Shaking it will awaken the deity and will induce her to appear.

The stone, symbol of the earth, is connected with the deity. The pithos is associated with the idea of fruitfulness since within it are stored foodstuffs, oil, honey, wine, staples that imply perpetuity. Later on, in historic times, the first day of the Anthesteria was the Pithoigia, the opening of the pithoi that held the new wine.³⁴ The pithos that is associated with perpetuity is connected likewise with the dead. Yet in the scenes on the rings it has no funerary meaning.

We do not know whether the acts in themselves of shaking the tree or embracing the stone or pithos are to bring about the epiphany of the deity or if, instead, the worshipper by embracing them, that is through magic, will draw the strength held in both tree and rock into himself.³⁵ Four Minoan rings have scenes similar to that on the Vapheio ring. These are a ring from Kalyvia near Phaistos,³⁶ one from Sellopoulo near Knossos,³⁷ one from Archanes³⁸ and one from Isopata.³⁹ Related is also the scene on yet another Minoan ring now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.⁴⁰

The scene on the Sellopoulo ring [33] shows, in the centre of the field, a kneeling man who is leaning against a large stone. On the left in a rocky landscape stands a tree. To the right there is a layer of stone masonry and a large object (shield? garment?). A bird, signifying the presence of the deity, descends as if attacking. There is what may be a chrysalis in front of its beak. In the sky there is a bough. The hair of the figure is indicated with dots and the head is rendered aniconically .



33. Signet ring from Sellopoulo near Knossos (chamber tomb 4, burial 1) (drawing). Type IV. Hand-chisel.

LM IIIA. Gold. Bezel 1,95 × 1,1, diam. hoop 1,58.

Herakleion, Archaeological Museum, 1034.

The ring was found near the left hand of the dead. As the gold sheet of the bezel is thin, a sandy substance (probably magnetite sand) was used as a core.

The bough is known as the symbol of the divinity of fruitfulness. It is also an instrument of worship and magic and it is present in cult scenes along with other sacred objects or alone on seals with magic content and purpose.⁴¹ The chrysalis too is a symbol of rebirth.

The ring from Archanes [34] shows a female figure in a pose suggesting that she is dancing. To her right a man is kneeling before a pithos-shaped boulder which he appears to embrace. On the left, another male figure shakes a tree that stands within a tripartite sanctuary. The heads of the figures are unformed. Various suspended objects, butterflies, an eye, a little column, are rendered in the field. Full modelling, spontaneous and lively movement

characterise the representation. The ashlar base on which the figures move is continuous with the tripartite shrine, suggesting thus an official precinct. The central figure has been interpreted by the excavator and others as divine,⁴² but here, just as on the Vapheio ring, it cannot be proved and the scene is more likely to be one of invocation.

The ring from Isopata [35] shares many common features with the above mentioned rings. On the bezel four female figures are shown. Two raise their arms in a gesture of worship towards a central figure who raises one hand and is shown on a higher level. A fourth raises both arms in a pose of adoration. The heads are depicted in perfunctory manner. In the field a branch and an eye are rendered as objects suspended in space and lilies spring from the ground. The figures move as in a dance. The ritual, based on the dance, led to a state of ecstasy and to a vision of the deity within the sanctuary space. In fact, from high above a small form descends, thus consummating the epiphany. The Isopata ring is indeed the most beautiful of all the related rings. Its workmanship is fine, details are shown with extraordinary skill, and the scene is harmoniously articulated. The figures fill the field with gently curving lines without violating it and without stretching its boundaries with angular projections.

The rings of the group just examined, as well as all the other Minoan rings with related scenes, have in common (apart from various iconographic features that have already been discussed) the fact that the heads of the figures are represented aniconically. This has been attributed to the use of the hand-chisel⁴³ with which, it is claimed, details cannot be rendered precisely. Yet this is not the case, since there are representations worked with



34. Signet ring from Archanes (tholos tomb A).
LM IIIA. Gold. L. of bezel 2.
Herakleion, Archaeological Museum, 989.



35. Signet ring from Isopata (grave 1). Type IV. Hand-chisel.
LM IIIA1. Gold. Meas. bezel 2,25 x 1,6, diam. hoop 1,35.
Herakleion, Archaeological Museum, 424 (CMS IF, 51).

the hand-chisel in which details are clearly shown. Nor should the aniconic rendering be interpreted as having any particular religious significance.⁴⁴ It belongs most likely to the tradition of certain workshops, which found a response in some ideological tendency. The tendency towards the transcendental and illogical on which the abstract quality of form is based can be explained in this way.⁴⁵ The power of suggestion of an abstract figure and the demonic aspect achieved by abstraction contribute to the mysterious/magical sense of a theme.⁴⁶

On a ring from a chamber tomb at Mycenae [36] is a scene with three figures framed by two sacred structures founded on a gravel or pebble-strewn ground. On the left is a small two-columned shrine with entablature and a little obelisk inside it. A tree is shown as if growing from the top of it. A man shakes the boughs of the tree, turning



36. Signet ring from Mycenae (chamber tomb 91). Type IV. Hammer-chisel. Ca. 1400 B.C. Gold. Bezel $3 \times 1,8$, diam. hoop 1,5. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 3179 (CMS I, 126).

his face away. At the other side of the bezel is a table-like altar. This too has a little obelisk within it as well as garlands and another object resembling a figure-of-eight shield. Perhaps this shows in abbreviated form the interior of a sanctuary. A female figure leans over this construction as if mourning. In the centre of the scene another female figure dances, smiting her hips in a pose known from the Homeric Hymn to Demeter where it is recorded that "Metaneirasmote both her hips....." ("Μετάνειρα....ἄμφω πλήξατο μηρῶ.").⁴⁷

The figure in the centre of the ring poses no problem of identification. She does not appear to be a deity. She is a priestess and perhaps the scene shows not an invocation but a ceremony in which a dance is performed and which has to do with fertility and the changing of the seasons. The dance is a sacred ritual connected with the cult of the goddess of nature; it is also ritual magic: the rhythmic beating of feet awakens the forces of earth and induces euphoria. Ritual performances with dancing are known from sanctuaries, in particular from the sanctuary in Kea where female figures were found with the characteristic pose of dancers.⁴⁸ The ecstasy induced by contact with the tree is a mystical element in the scene on the Mycenae ring, but the quality of mystery and the complicated symbols are missing. Clearly here Minoan ritual prototypes are copied, the deeper meaning of which may well have been foreign to the Mycenaean.

The signet ring was popular in Crete during the New Palace Period and its spread accompanies the development of palace life and its administrative organisation. Not many rings are preserved from Crete, but the numerous

sealings bear witness to its dissemination. After 1400 B.C. its use declines.

In mainland Greece, there is evidence that the signet ring was in use from the 16th to the beginning of the 12th century B.C., but cult scenes are no longer in evidence from the early 14th century on. Although the palace system was in full force between 1400 and 1200 B.C., this sensitively conceived creation becomes all the more rare. It follows the general course of Mycenaean minor art which after 1400 B.C. no longer produced fine works such as magnificent daggers, swords or vessels, but became part of a system of mass production. The fashion that introduced the use of such items of high quality lasted as long as did Minoan influence; its decline began when Crete was brought into the Mycenaean sphere.

Despite the Minoan influence, it is notable that the themes that persisted in the cult representations on the signet rings are essentially the processions towards a sacred construction or a divine figure and antithetical groups, conventional themes found also in other fields of art such as wall painting. They are motives that express conventions rather than real religious conceptions. Only two rings show the epiphany of a deity and on a third one is represented a ceremony connected with tree worship. On no rings are truly ecstatic scenes depicted - with the exception to be sure of the ring from Vapheio which after all is considered to be Minoan.

These observations may perhaps reveal the character of the Mycenaeans: they were conventional in their art and, perhaps, in their religion too. They were also pragmatic with a tendency towards synopsis and abbreviation without concerning themselves with complicated details. The

mantle of generalisation that cloaks many representations and the codified repertory that they utilised does not help us to uncover their actual beliefs in any concrete way. No doubt further research and new discoveries will shed light on the problems posed by Mycenaean religion and its related iconography. Until then, however, Nilsson's "picture- book" continues to remain without its text.

CATALOGUE OF LATE HELLADIC SIGNET RINGS
ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THEME

1. Animals singly or in a scene

CMS I, 59

CMS I, 91

CMS I, 125

CMS I, 201

CMS I, 390

CMS I, 391

CMS I, 407

CMS V2, 336

CMS V S1B, 136

CMS V S1B, 187

Atalante Museum, M 2231. Gold signet ring with a representation of an animal. From a tomb at Kalapodi (unpublished).

2. Secular scenes

CMS I, 15

CMS I, 16

CMS XI, 272

National Archaeological Museum, BE 1996/11.1

3. Mythological (?) scenes

CMS I, 180

CMS V, 173

4. Animals shown in an actual cult situation or mythical creatures

CMS I, 129

CMS V, 198

5. Bull leaping

CMS I, 200

CMS V S1B, 135

6. Representations of a symbolic nature

CMS I, 18

CMS I, 189

7. Representations with antithetical figures, actual or mythical

CMS I, 58

CMS I, 87
CMS I, 90
CMS I, 102
CMS I, 155
CMS I, 218

8. Processions

CMS I, 86
CMS I, 108
CMS I, 119
CMS I, 127
CMS I, 191
CMS V, 728
CMS V S1B, 113
CMS V S1B, 114
CMS V S1B, 115

Ashmolean Museum, 1938.1128

National Archaeological Museum, BE 1996 11.2

Atalante Museum, M 2726. Gold signet ring showing a procession.

From a tomb at Kalapodi (unpublished)

9. Epiphany of a divinity

CMS I, 292
CMS V S2. 106

10. Seated female divine figure receiving offerings

CMS I, 17
CMS I, 101
CMS I, 179
CMS V, 199
CMS I, Suppl. 114 (very worn)

11. Figures accompanied by mythical beasts

CMS I, 128
CMS V S1B, 137
National Archaeological Museum, St. 226

12. Scenes of "invocation"

CMS I, 126
CMS I, 219

NOTES

1 *AE* 1986, 33 f., *CMS* II 3, 38 and 239 correspondingly.

2 *CMS* V S1A, 58. Catherine Kopaka, "Une bague minoenne de Malia," *BCH* 108, 1984, 3 f.

3 The bezels of lead signet rings frequently were plated with precious metal: see, for example, the rings *CMS* V, 266, *CMS* V, 267 in the Chania Museum, the ring mentioned above in n. 2, the one in the Rethymnon Museum *CMS* V, S1B, 208 and the Helladic ring *CMS* V, 614 in the Olympia Museum. Gold coating on the bezel appears also on bronze signet rings.

4 To these must be added the ring: *CMS* XI, 95, of unknown origin, now in Hamburg which is probably Mycenaean and also another ring of unknown origin in Berlin *CMS* XI, 30 which shows similarities to rings from Thebes *CMS* V, 198 and *CMS* V, 199, now in the Benaki Museum. The ring in the Ashmolean Museum, V. E. G. Kenna, *Cretan Seals* (Oxford 1960) 137, no. 340, comes in all likelihood from Mycenae. The ring *CMS* XI, 28, now in Berlin formerly in the Calvert Collection was found on the mainland, in Thracian Koilia between Sestos and Madytos and given to F. Calvert by Schliemann. Its origin is unknown but it is probably Minoan. Possibly a silver and iron ring of Type VI from the Mycenaean cemetery of Aidonia, is a signet ring too, but the exterior upper surface of the bezel is not preserved (K. Demakopoulou [ed.], 'Ο Θησαυρός τῶν Ἀνδονίων, Ἐθνικὸ Ἀρχαιολογικὸ Μουσεῖο, 30 Μαΐου - 1 Σεπτεμβρίου 1996, Cat. No. 20). Another very worn ring from Kakovatos, also of Type VI, preserves the bronze hoop with traces of gold-sheet and the back of the iron bezel. It is not known if the upper surface was covered with gold-sheet or of what form it was (*MDAI* 34, 1909, 275, pl. XIII, 35).

5 Agnès Xenaki-Sakellariou, "Techniques et évolution de la bague-cachet dans l'art créto-mycénien," *Fragen und Probleme der bronzezeitlichen ägäischen Glyptik*, Beiträge zum 3. Internationalen Marburger Siegel-Symposium, 5-7 September 1985, *CMS Beiheft* 3 (Berlin 1989), 323-338.

6 V. Karageorghis, *Kition* (London 1976), 80 and Chr. Boulotis, "Ein Gründungsdepositum im minoischen Palast von Kato Zakros," *AKB* 12, 1982, 159.

7 A. Persson, *Royal Tombs at Dendra near Midea* (Lund 1931), 57.

8 The gold-sheet of the bezel of ring *CMS* V, 614 in the Olympia Museum has a simple decoration of parallel lines; the bezel of the lead ring from Tiryns *CMS* V, S1B, 435, which has no sheeting of precious metal, is decorated with a linear anthemion-like pattern. Both rings are dated towards the end of the LH IIIB and the LH IIIC periods respectively.

9 T. L. Shear, *AJA* 37, 1933, 540, fig.1; id. *Hesperia* 4, 1935, 318, figs. 7-8;

- Sara A. Immerwahr, *The Athenian Agora* XIII (Princeton N.J. 1971), 192, VIII-6, pl. 41.
- 10 CMS V, S1A, 133.
- 11 A. Evans, *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, III (1930), 220, fig. 154.
- 12 CMS I, 144; CMS II³, 63.
- 13 Agnès Sakellariou, Une esquisse de la glyptique de Mycènes à l'HR III A/B d'après les cachets des "Tombe de Tsountas" à Mycènes, *Studien zur minoischen und helladischen Glyptik, Beiträge zum 2. Marburger Siegel-Symposium, 26-30 September 1978*, CMS Beiheft I (Berlin 1981) 187.
- 14 M. P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion* (Lund 1927), 7.
- 15 Dora Vassilicou, 'Ο Μυκηναϊκός Πολιτισμός (Athens 1995), 362.
- 16 W. D. Niemeier, Cult Scenes on Gold Rings from the Argolid, *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid, Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 11-13 June 1988*, R. Hägg - G. C. Nordquist (eds.) (Stockholm 1990), 166.
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- 18 Kalliope Krystalli-Votsi, *Τὰ δακτυλίδια ἀπὸ τὰ Ἀνόδια Κορινθίας, Φίλια Ἔτη εἰς Γεώργιον Ε. Μυλωνᾶν*, III (Athens 1989), 38.
- 19 I. A. Papapostolou, *op. cit.* 79.
- 20 Kalliope Krystalli-Votsi, verbal communication (lecture at the National Archaeological Museum).
- 21 S. Hood, *The Arts in Prehistoric Greece* (Harmondsworth 1978), 158.
- 22 R. Hägg, "Epiphany in Minoan Ritual," *BICS* 30, 1983, 184; id. "Die göttliche Epiphany im minoischen Ritual," *MDAI* 101, 1986, 45, 56-58.
- 23 *Idem*, "On the Nature of Minoan Influence in Early Mycenaean Messenia, *OAth* 14, 1982, 27-37; S. Hood, "Tholos Tombs of the Aegean," *Antiquity* 34, 1960, 166-176; K. Kilian, "L'architecture des résidences mycéniennes: origines et extension d'une structure de pouvoir politique pendant l'âge du Bronze Récent," *Le système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 19-22 juin 1985*, E. Lévy (ed.) (Strasbourg 1987), 213-217.
- 24 *Ibid.*, figs. 34, 35; *ASAtene* 8/9, 1925-1926, 131, fig. 140, pl. IX no. 124, 131 fig. 141, pl. XIV no. 125, 138 fig. 151, pl. XIV no. 135, 179 fig. 224, pl. XVIII no. 186, 180 fig. 225, pl. XVIII no. 187; CMS II⁶, 10, 11; CMS II⁷, 12, 13, 14.
- 25 R. Hägg, *supra* n. 20.
- 26 *Il. IV.* 171. "πολυδίφτων Ἄργος".
- 27 A procession towards a seated female figure is probably represented on the very worn ring CMS I Suppl., 114.
- 28 CMS V, 584.

- 29 Chr. Doumas, *Thera, Pompei of the Ancient Aegean* (London 1983), pl. XV.
- 30 A. Persson, *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times* (Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California 1942), 92; P. Rehak, "New Observations on the Mycenaean 'Warrior Goddess'," *AA* 1984, 535-545; Nanno Marinatos, *Minoan Sacrificial Ritual: Cult Practice and Symbolism* (Stockholm 1986), 56.
- 31 Chr. Boulotis, "Zur Deutung des Freskofragmentes Nr. 103 aus der Tirynter Frauenprozession," *AKB* 9, 1979, 59 ff; *id.*, *Bemerkungen zum Vaphio-Ring CMS I, 219: Ein Beitrag zur minoisch-mykenischen Sakralsymbolik* (in press); S. Hiller, *Te-o-po-ri-ja, Aux origines de l'Hellénisme: la Crète et la Grèce, Hommage à H. van Effenterre* (Paris 1984), 139 ff.
- 32 Nanno Marinatos, *Art and Religion in Thera* (Athens 1984), 102.
- 33 Colette Verlinden, "Nouvelle interprétation du décor incisé sur une double hache en bronze supposée provenir de Voros," *L'Iconographie minoenne, Actes de la Table Ronde d'Athènes, 21-22 avril 1983*, P. Darcque - J. C. Poursat (eds.), *BCH Suppl. IX* (Athens 1985), especially 148-149.
- 34 A. Persson, *op. cit.*, 17.
- 35 A. Furumark, "Linear A and Minoan Religion," *Oath* 17, 1988, 71.
- 36 *CMS II* 3, 114.
- 37 M. R. Popham, Elizabeth and H. W. Catling, "Sellopoulos Tombs 3 and 4, Two Late Minoan Graves near Knossos," *BSA* 69, 1974, 218, fig. 14D and pl. 37a-c.
- 38 J. and Effie Sakellarakis, *Archanes* (Athens 1991) fig. 53.
- 39 *CMS II* 3, 51.
- 40 Christiane Sourvinou, "On the Authenticity of the Ashmolean Ring 1919.56," *Kadmos* 10, 1971, pl. I, 1.
- 41 I. A. Papapostolou, *op. cit.*, 71.
- 42 J. A. Sakellarakis, "Minoan Cemeteries at Archanes," *Archaeology* 20, 1964, 280, fig. 13.
- 43 Agnès Xenaki-Sakellariou, *op. cit.*, 332.
- 44 I. Pini, "Chronological Problems of Some Late Minoan Signet Rings," *TUAS* 8, 1983, 44.
- 45 I. A. Papapostolou, *op. cit.*, 113, n. 1.
- 46 *Op. cit.*, 115.
- 47 Homeric Hymn to Demeter, 245.
- 47 Miriam E. Caskey, "Ayia Irini, Kea: The Terracotta Statues and the Cult in the Temple," *Sanctuaries and Cults in the Aegean Bronze Age, Proceedings of the First International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 12-13 May 1980*, R. Hägg - Nanno Marinatos (eds.) (Stockholm 1981) 133; *eadem*, *Keos II, Part 1. The Temple at Ayia Irini. The Statues* (American School of Classical Studies, Princeton 1986), 41.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AA *Archäologischer Anzeiger*. Berlin, Walter de Gruyter.
- AE Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς. Athens, Archaeological Society.
- AJA *American Journal of Archaeology*. New York, Archaeological Institute of America.
- AKB *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt. Urgeschichte, Römerzeit, Frühmittelalter*. Mainz, von Zabern.
- ASAtene *Annuario della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente*. Roma.
- BCH *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*. Paris, de Boccard.
- BICS *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London*. London.
- BSA *Annual of the British School at Athens*. London, Institute of Classical Studies.
- CMS *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*. Berlin.
- JHS *Journal of Hellenic Studies*. London, Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies.
- MDAI *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (Athen Abt.)*. Berlin, Mann.
- Oath *Opuscula Atheniensiæ (Acta Inst. Athen. Regni Sueciæ)*. Lund, Åströms Förl.
- TUAS *Temple University Aegean Symposium*. Philadelphia Pa.

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THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY AT ATHENS

When the Greek state was founded in 1830, after the War of Independence, the first governments were immediately faced with the great problems of the economy, public administration and education. The last of these also included the question of the country's ancient treasures, which had been looted and destroyed over the centuries by traffickers in antiquities. However, the official Antiquities Service was undermanned and incapable of taking proper care of the ancient remains, and so on 6th January 1837, on the initiative of a wealthy merchant named Konstantinos Belios, a group of scholars and politicians founded *The Archaeological Society at Athens* with the object of locating, re-erecting and restoring the antiquities of Greece.

The Presidents and Secretaries of the Society in its early days were politicians and diplomats, whose enthusiasm was such that in spite of the shortage of funds –for it was financed entirely by members' subscriptions and voluntary donations and received no assistance whatever from the State– they were able to carry out a number of ambitious projects such as the excavations of the Acropolis, the restoration of the Parthenon and the excavations of the Theatre of Dionysos, the Odeion of Herodes Atticus and the Tower of the Winds, all in Athens.

Until 1859 the Society was in such a precarious financial position that it was constantly on the verge of collapse. In that year the distinguished scholar and epigraphist Stephanos Kumanudes became its Secretary, and he held the position until 1894. With his expertise, his methodical mind and his energy he breathed new life into the Society, and on his initiative large-scale excavations were carried out in Athens

(Kerameikos, Acropolis, Hadrian's Library, Stoa of Attalos, Theatre of Dionysos, Roman Agora), elsewhere in Attica (Rhamnous, Thorikos, Marathon, Eleusis, Amphiaraeion, Piraeus), and in Boeotia (Chaironeia, Tanagra, Thespiai), the Peloponnese (Mycenae, Epidauros, Lakonia) and the Cyclades. Meanwhile the Society founded several large museums in Athens, which were later amalgamated to form the National Archaeological Museum.

Kumanudes was succeeded by Panayiotis Kavvadias, the General Inspector of Antiquities (1895-1909, 1912-1920), who carried on his predecessor's work with undiminished energy and presided over excavations in other parts of Greece -Thessaly, Epiros, Macedonia and the islands (Euboea, Corfu, Kefallinia, Lesbos, Samos and the Cyclades)- as well as the opening of numerous museums in provincial towns. Kavvadias was succeeded by three university professors, Georgios Oikonomos (1924-1951), Anastasios Orlandos (1951-1979) and Georgios Mylonas (1979-1988). Under them the Society managed to keep up its archaeological activities in spite of the difficulties caused by the Second World War and its aftermath, which hampered its work for a considerable length of time.

As an independent learned society, the Archaeological Society is in a position to assist the State in its work of protecting, improving and studying Greek antiquities. Whenever necessary, it undertakes the management and execution of large projects: this has happened with the excavations in Macedonia and Thrace in recent years and with large-scale restoration projects in the past.

An important part of the Society's work is its publishing. It brings out three annual titles: *Praktika tes Archaialogikes Hetairias* (*Proceedings of the Archaeological Society*) (since

1837) containing detailed reports on the excavations and researches carried out in all parts of Greece; the *Archaiologike Ephemeris* (since 1837) containing papers on subjects to do with Greek antiquities, including excavation reports; and *Ergon tes Archaiologikes Hetairias* (*The Work of the Archaeological Society*) (since 1954), published every May, with brief reports on its excavations. *Mentor* is a quarterly whose contents consist mainly of short articles on ancient Greece and the history of Greek archaeology, as well as news of the Society's activities. All these are edited by the Secretary General.

Besides the periodicals, there is the series of books with the general title *The Archaeological Society at Athens Library*: these are monographs on archaeological subjects and reports on excavations, mostly those carried out by the Society.

The Society is administered by an eleven-member Board, elected every three years by the members at a General Meeting. Every year, in May or thereabouts, the Secretary General of the Board reports on the Society's activities over the past twelve months at a Public Meeting.

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