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## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE 'RING OF NESTOR'\*

The rings of Minos and Nestor are the two par excellence cases of suspicious rings that exemplify the problem of Aegean forgeries<sup>1</sup>. Continuing to study these objects may appear pointless, considering the conflicting opinions among most prominent scholars on their authenticity after over a century of painstaking studies in Minoan and Mycenaean iconography. One must nevertheless pursue the research. In fact, considering the rich iconographic repertoire of these rings, the achievement of a wide consensus on the issue would be of great benefit, particularly for the student of religion. Iconographic analysis is still the main tool at our disposal for a traditional archaeological approach, and it is the only implement employed in this paper. Technical analysis, on the other hand, is supposed to be able to provide definite answers, but it often exhibits its own internal contradictions.

In recent decades the authenticity of the ring of Minos was defended by Pini and Warren<sup>2</sup>, while other scholars remained more skeptical<sup>3</sup>. Generations of Aegean scholars, including the present author, were educated with the tale of the ring's meteoric appearance c. 1926 at Knossos and its disappearance some time after 1930, and were literally astounded by its reappearance in 2001<sup>4</sup>.

\* The original version of this paper dates to 2001, some months before the reappearance of the ring of Minos. For a number of reasons, the essay was not published at that time. This final version incorporates the event of the reappearance of the ring and includes some relevant articles that have appeared since 2001. Otherwise it retains its original form. My English text was improved and edited by the anonymous reviewers and by S. Vitale, C. McNamee, and T. Hancock, to whom I am grateful.

<sup>1</sup> For a survey of the problem of suspicious rings up until 1973, see SAKELLARAKIS 1973, 303-306. Significant studies in the field of glyptic since then include: PINI 1981; BETTS 1981; SOURVINOU 1990; HUGHES-BROCK 2000; MARINATOS-JACKSON 2011. For the ring of Minos, see the following note. For a recent analysis of a ring allegedly from the Athenian Acropolis, see PAPAIOGLOU 2009.

<sup>2</sup> HALLAGER 1985, 25 n. 21; PINI 1987; WARREN 1987; PINI 1989. The latest case for its authenticity, *before* its reappearance in 2001, was made by N. Dimopoulou and G. Rethemiotakis, after a comparison with the new 'Sacred Conversation' ring from Poros (DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKIS 2000, 44-45, 49, 52-53). The argument was based on the assumption that the 'isodomic' construction with double cornice which encloses the tree is paralleled only in the ring of Minos (unless the cornice in the Poros ring is a wooden open-work frame, as is probably the case in the Mochlos ring CMS II, 3, n° 252 and the Ligortyno seal CMS IX, n° 163). In any case, the Berlin ring CMS XI, n° 28 and the Ashmolean 'Epiphany' ring CMS VI, n° 281 undoubtedly show isodomic constructions, albeit taller and with doors, again with double cornices, and enclosing trees. Thus, if we add the constructions enclosing the trees of the Mochlos ring and of the Haghia Triada sarcophagus, although the latter has no isodomic details, we may conclude that in 1926 enough cases of built

structures enclosing trees were known for a modern forger to reproduce the scene appearing on the ring of Minos.

<sup>3</sup> These '*homines suspiciosi*', as archaeologists should be when dealing with such objects (cf. MARINATOS 1927-1928, 34, n. 1, include NIEMEIER 1989, 180; 184 and BOULOTIS 1989, 58 n. 17). Very careful iconographic analysis is needed in order to argue for the genuineness of a glyptic object. For example, Platon (1984, 68 n. 35, 69) cited in favor of the authenticity of the ring of Minos the fact that when it appeared no picture of a goddess seated on a shrine was known. However, Niemeier (1989, 181 n. 106) observed that a forger could have used pictures such that of the Knossos 'Counterfeit Matrix' CMS II, 8, n° 268 (our Fig. 3a), which is similar to the Zakros sealing CMS II, 5, no. 8 (but cf. WARREN 1987, 489 with cautionary remark on the different position of the hand). To Niemeier's list, we can add the Berlin ring CMS XI, n° 30 with the goddess holding either a mirror or less likely a sistrum. Other early instances of seated women are mentioned by PINI 1987, 450-451. NIEMEIER 1989, 179 also doubts the genuineness of the Ashmolean ring CMS VI, 2, n° 278 (inv. n° 1919.56), which is on the other hand defended by SOURVINOU 1971.

<sup>4</sup> DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKIS 2004 presented the 2001 ring of Minos with high-quality photographs and a final case for its authenticity. The main iconographic elements that they stress are the vertical wavy line, common in the sacred tree enclosure of the Minos and the Archanes 1965 rings, and the general similarities in composition shared by the 2001 ring of Minos, the 1983 Chania Master Impression (CMS V, Suppl. 1B, n° 142) and the 1996 Poros ring. The pictorial elements of the recently discovered ivory pyxis from Mochlos (SOLES-DAVARAS 2010) are new important factors for the discussion of the authenticity of the ring of Minos.

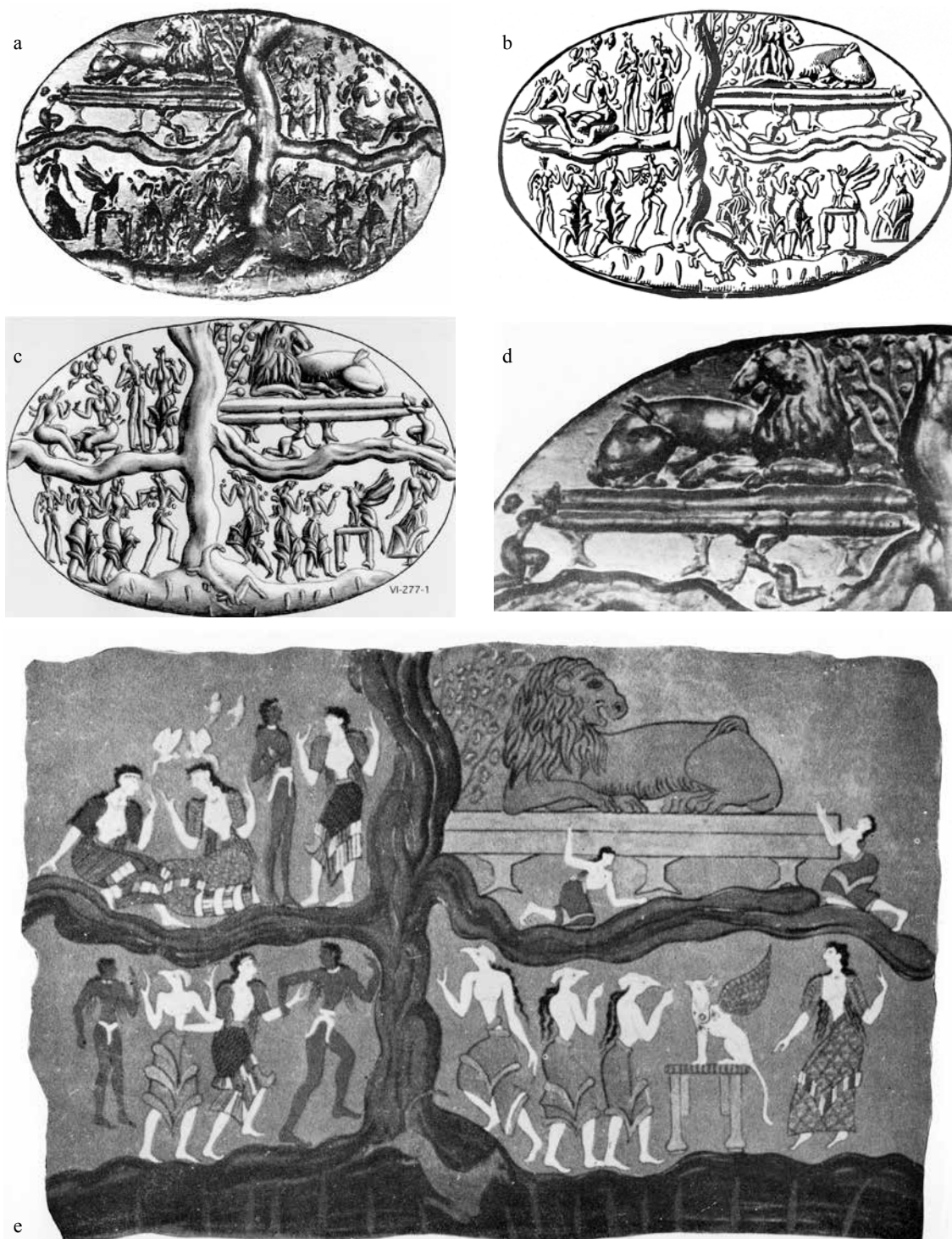


Fig. 1 a) The ring of Nestor, Ashmolean Museum, *CMS* VI, no. 277 (after SAKELLARAKIS 1973, pl. 85a).  
 b) The impression of the ring of Nestor as drawn by E. Gilliéron, fils (after EVANS 1925, fig. 55 = *PM* III, fig. 104).  
 c) The impression of the ring of Nestor as drawn in the *CMS*. d) Upper left hand quadrant of the ring of Nestor (after SAKELLARAKIS 1973, pl. 86a). e) Translation of the ring into a miniature fresco by E. Gilliéron, fils (after EVANS 1925, pl. V = *PM* III, pl. XXA)

The ring of Nestor (Ashmolean Museum inv. no. 1938.1130, now published in *CMS* VI, no. 277), does not possess the same aura of mystery: while it was condemned as fake by most of the previous scholars, its authenticity was defended in 1971 by Sakellarakis<sup>5</sup> mainly on the basis of the presence of the butterflies, but also because of the women with griffin-like heads (Fig. 1)<sup>6</sup>. Poursat and Baurain were ardent supporters

<sup>5</sup> SAKELLARAKIS 1973.

<sup>6</sup> For the idea that these griffin-like heads represent a mask, see PAPAPOSTOULOU 1977, 13 n.1.

of its authenticity<sup>7</sup>, as were Hampe and Simon, who offered a rather lively new interpretation of the scene: Evans's tree of life was a depiction of converging rivers leading to the sea. Therefore, the seated women are shown on its bank, while the human figures have 'butterfly' heads and dance in imitation of a butterfly's transformations; the lion is a follower, emblematic of the king or the deity; and the dog is a 'Babylonian dragon'<sup>8</sup>. In 1981, Pini seemed inclined to support the genuineness,<sup>9</sup> comparing the same rendering of the 'Perlhaar' of the figures in the Vapheio, Archanes, Sellopoulo and Nestor rings and the same 'aufgeworfene Ränder' on both it and the Vapheio ring. Betts attributed the modern pieces of the Thisbe treasure to perhaps the same early 20th A.D. century engraver who also produced his Sangiorgi Group. He did not, however, refer to Nestor's ring<sup>10</sup>. For his part, R. Hägg announced research in 1986 on the circumstances of the ring's origins that would prove that it was not genuine<sup>11</sup>. In his 1988 iconographic catalogue, Younger included the ring of Nestor, but his view on its genuineness may have changed over time<sup>12</sup>. In 1994, A. Sakellariou condemned it<sup>13</sup>. In 1998, Pini argued again for its authenticity on technical and iconographical grounds<sup>14</sup>. In several other studies, the ring is tacitly put aside<sup>15</sup>. Since 1995, it has been on display in Oxford and in 2009, it finally acquired a CMS entry. N. Marinatos argued in 2011 that it was counterfeit, a work of E. Gilliéron fils, who used Egyptian funerary themes and tricked Evans. The Gilliérons had already been blamed by Younger, Sakellariou, Hägg, and others<sup>16</sup>.

Evans published the ring together with the counterfeit 'Thisbe Treasure' and the Amari ring CMS V, Suppl. IB, no. 195<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 3c), and referred to it many times in the *Palace of Minos*<sup>18</sup>. The *terminus post quem non* for the ring to have been forged is 1925, the year of its publication. Of course, this fact must be dated to a few years earlier. Evans states that he became familiar with the ring through an imperfect impression in Athens, and that the ring was found prior to 1907 in Kakovatos Tholos A. Here we shall assume that the early 1920s is the latest possible period for the forging of the ring.

We will discuss only the upper left quadrant of the image, depicting the lion lying couchant on a table or platform, with ivy branches at its side and two small human figures underneath (Fig. 1d).

Evans describes the table thus: [the lion] "...couchant on a kind of bench with three supports visible... the couch on which the lion rests in the present case resembles the three-footed bench seen on an agate lentoid from a chamber tomb at Mycenae<sup>19</sup> and which serves as a kind of operation table, a fat boar being laid upon it belly upwards for the dissection of its entrails by a priestly haruspex. Some mystic association may therefore have attached itself to what in the present case seems to have simply served as a kind of couch for the great beast"<sup>20</sup>. Younger also refers to this construction as a three-legged table<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> POURSAT 1976, 472, fig. 11; BAURAIN 1985, 114, fig. 15.

<sup>8</sup> HAMPE-SIMON 1980, 188, pls. 287-288, fig. 28. EVANS 1925, 49-59 and *PM* III, 147 had already compared the scheme of the tree to the "four rivers of Paradise or the triple-branched water-course of the Fields of Ialû in the Egyptian 'Islands of the Blest'". In the end, however, he maintained that the tree is unmistakable. The interpretation of the tree as a river was revived by POURSAT 1976. For the parallelism between the dog and the Babylonian dragon of CMS I, n° 167, cf. POURSAT 1976. On the Minoan dragon, see PALAIOLOGOU 1995, 199, n. 26. She notes that the dragon on the ring of Nestor strengthens the idea of its authenticity. The same view had been expressed by LAFFINEUR 1991, 234.

<sup>9</sup> PINI 1981, 147; 149; 157.

<sup>10</sup> BETTS 1981, 32-34.

<sup>11</sup> HÄGG 1987, 57. According to this information, the forger would be E. Gilliéron fils himself. See, however, WARREN 1987, 498 n. 15.

<sup>12</sup> YOUNGER 1988, 140, 141, 257, 283, 350. Cf. PINI 1998, 1.

<sup>13</sup> SAKELLARIOU 1994.

<sup>14</sup> PINI 1998. Recently PINI 2009, 607 commented on the predominant Minoan vs. Mycenaean iconographical features of the ring.

<sup>15</sup> To mention only the elements of the upper left hand quadrant, see e.g. the numerous fairly recent studies on lions in glyptic art: WOHLFEIL 1997, 91-105 (on the poses of lions); MORGAN 1995, 137 (on frontal lions); PINI 1995; BALLINTJN 1995; ONASSOGLU 1989, 199; MÜLLER 2000, 181-194; generally on lions, see MORGAN 1988, 44-49;

BLOEDOW 1992, 295-305; THOMAS 2004 (on early Mycenaean lions, but the ring of Nestor is not commented upon). The ivy branches near the lion are also not referred to in a study on ivy, OTTO 1996; cf. YOUNGER 1988, 350 ('sacred hearts'). Ivy leaves together with an undulating band, as on the ring of Nestor, appear on a fresco from Mycenae, cf. KRITSELI-PROVIDI 1982, 64, pl. Za. As for the 'streams', HALLAGER 1985, 16 could have mentioned them in his discussion on the depiction of streams and the sea, since he also refers to the streams on Theran frescoes (TELEVANTOU 1994, 255-258), which were used by POURSAT 1976 and HAMPE-SIMON 1980 in order to interpret as such the 'tree' of Evans. We can also compare the 'streams' to the banded dividing device between the animal scenes on a pictorial pithos from Acrotiri, cf. DOUMAS 1999, fig. 4, pl. 4.

<sup>16</sup> PINI 1998, 1; MARINATOS-JACKSON 2011. This article offers an insight into the cultural milieu of the 1920's, which according to the authors is the period when the ring was made.

<sup>17</sup> EVANS 1925, 66, fig. 56; NILSSON 1927, 310. The genuineness of this ring is not questioned in CMS.

<sup>18</sup> *PM* II, 278 on the butterflies; *ibid.*, 334 on the lion; *ibid.*, 342 on the two young attendants of the lion, *ibid.*, 482 on the ivy leaves by the lion, *ibid.*, 785 on the griffin; *PM* III, 127 again on the lion, *ibid.*, 145-157 on a general description of the scene; *PM* IV, 44 on the funeral concept, *ibid.*, 947-950, a comparison with the ring of Minos.

<sup>19</sup> CMS I, n° 80.

<sup>20</sup> EVANS 1925, 65-66.

<sup>21</sup> YOUNGER 1988, 257.

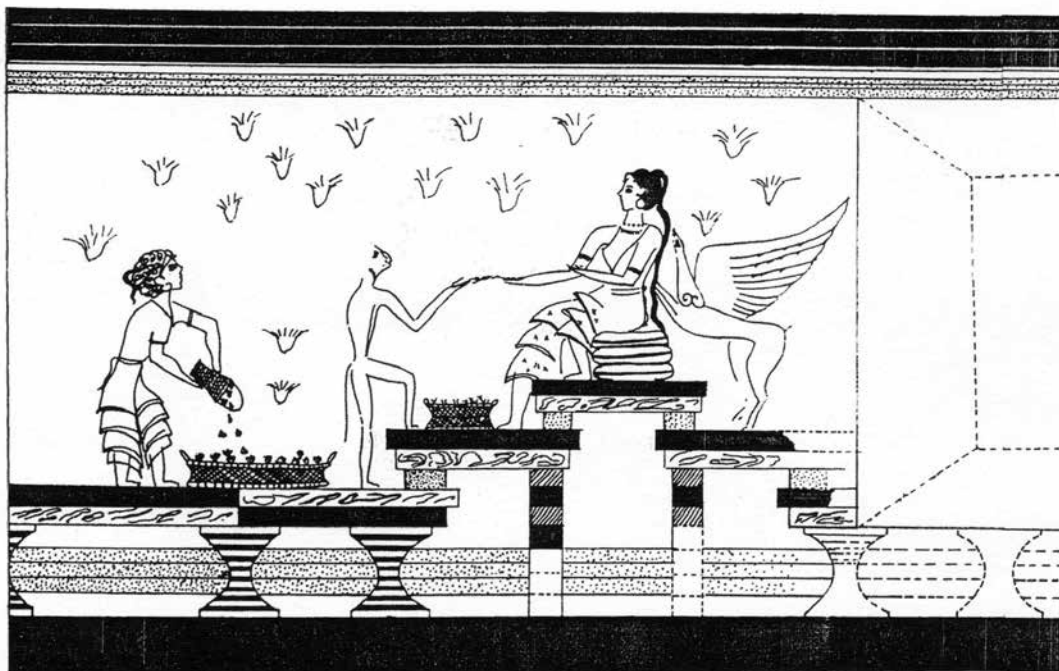


Fig. 2. Thera, Xeste 3, Room 3, upper floor: the 'Potnia Theron' fresco (after TELEVANTOU 1988, 142, fig. 6a)

However, the shape of the three supports of the 'table' points to another Minoan-Mycenaean form, namely that of the incurved altar. With the central 'waist' and the symmetry of the upper and lower parts, the resemblance is unmistakable. The somewhat unclear or slightly contorted shape of the 'feet' could be the result of an original imperfection. It seems that the very limited space available did not allow for an elegant, curving rendering of the sides of the altars. Their undersides may even follow the irregular contour of the 'streams' or 'tree branches'. Such carelessly shown altars do exist in other examples, as in the Munich seal CMS XI, n° 176. The resemblance to incurved altars is even more evident in E. Gilliéron's fils 'translation' of the ring's picture into a fresco (Fig. 1e), in which the table and the feet are painted in a 'saffron yellow', as are the griffin's stand and the women's clothes<sup>22</sup>. It is strange, therefore, that Evans did not recognize the altars, or else he would have had Gilliéron render them with a canonical incurved, rather than squared waist<sup>23</sup>. This fact could be explained in different ways:

a) A natural tendency to see a representation of the 'slaughtering table' class when confronted by both an image of an animal laying on a flat surface<sup>24</sup> and the depiction of a three-footed table, the latter being a feature typical in representations of slaughtering tables. A weak point of this explanation, however, is that the lion is not an animal of sacrifice;

b) The uncertainty and confusion about the identification of incurved altars caused mainly by Nilsson's objections in subsequent years<sup>25</sup>, even though Evans had seen things quite clearly; this confusion lasted until the unmistakable in corpore recognition of such altars in the 1960's; and

c) Perhaps the most important reason was the fact that an incurved altar had never appeared in such a function; when depicted as supporting something, it was always animals' forefeet and columns or horns of consecration. The resemblance of the tables' legs to incurved altars has been noted by M. Shaw, who suggests that a piece of carpentry, an actual wooden bench is shown, with the form of its feet influenced by the shape of an incurved altar<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> EVANS 1925, 72, pl. V; PM III, 157, pl. XXa.

<sup>23</sup> At least one instance of a squared altar exists in the seal CMS XI, no. 47. Evans did not take it into consideration probably because he insisted (EVANS 1901, 161) that the object on which the lions rest their paws "must not be confounded with the usual altar base... It is essentially columnar, it represents one of the baetylic tables of offering". One can also observe that not all altars have the pronounced waist of the Lion Gate and the in corpore Archanes altars. The in corpore altars of Malia and the Knossos High Priest's House (*infra*, n. 46, 47) are very

much less waisted, their sides tending towards verticality.

<sup>24</sup> This connection was established as we saw by EVANS 1925, 65 and was continued by SAKELLARAKIS 1973, 309; 315, who stressed the uniqueness of this 'altar-table', which he saw as differing from the slaughtering tables. This was also Nilsson's main argument against the authenticity of the ring, see *infra*.

<sup>25</sup> NILSSON 1927, 101-102 (= NILSSON 1950, 121-122).

<sup>26</sup> SHAW 1986, 120: "The shape of such an altar is also echoed, I believe, in carpentry, as under the bench on which a lion crouches on the so-called Nestor's ring...".

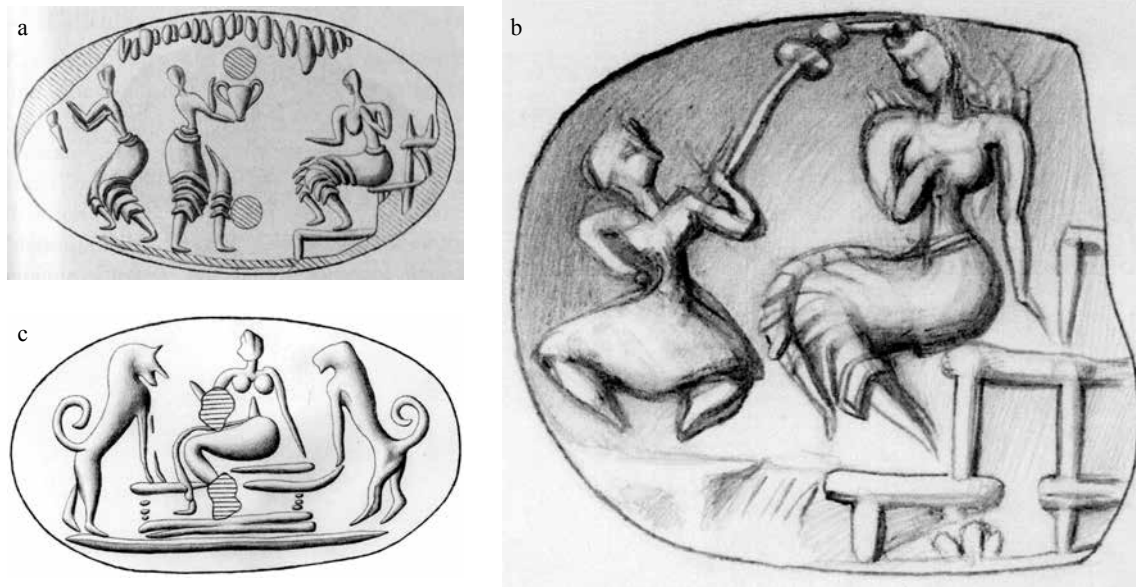


Fig. 3 a) The Knossos 'Counterfeit Matrix' *CMS* II, 8, n° 268 (after *CMS*). b) The Chania sealing *CMS* V, Suppl. IA, n° 177 (after *CMS*). c) The Amari ring *CMS* V, Suppl. 1B, n° 195 (after *CMS*)

Now, I think we can carry the argument further and recognize real incurved altars supporting a platform. The proper identification was made long ago by Yavis, who noted that three stands with concave sides support the 'couch'<sup>27</sup>. It is more probable that on the ring we do not have the 'feet' of a 'table', but incurved altars as separate parts supporting a horizontal, double-lined surface. The new monument that now solves the riddle is undoubtedly the 'Potnia Theron' fresco of Thera's Xeste<sup>328</sup>. What we see in this fresco (Fig. 2) is a platform resting on incurved altars, with its central part raised and based on small pillars. The platform again consists of two lines, or alternating double plaques, one grained, the other blue. It has already been pointed out, shortly after the fresco's assembly, that this construction must be related to similar constructions with a seated goddess in Minoan glyptic art, some of them stepped, such as the Knossos 'Counterfeit Matrix'<sup>29</sup> *CMS* II, 8, no. 268 (Fig. 3a), the Chania sealing *CMS* V, Suppl. 1A, no. 177 (Fig. 3b), the Amari ring *CMS* V, Suppl. 1B, no. 195 (Fig. 3c), and some others<sup>30</sup>. Admittedly, this stepped platform, as it was known until now from iconography does not seem to regularly incorporate incurved altars as bases<sup>31</sup>. All examples, however, are miniature glyptic, while in the first large-scale appearance of the stepped platform, observed in the Theran fresco, the altars became evident. This is also the case in the recent spectacular find of the ivory pyxis lid from Mochlos<sup>32</sup>. The possible explanations are either that such altars were not always used or that we have only a limited iconographical corpus. A very interesting idea, however<sup>33</sup>, sees in the Knossos Throne Room a translation of the Xeste 3 fresco. Common elements are the deity and her seat, flanked by benches or platforms, incurved altars, and fabulous animals. At Knossos the seat and the benches are in corpore. The common underlying idea is the

<sup>27</sup> YAVIS 1949, 22.

<sup>28</sup> MARINATOS 1976, 37; DOUMAS 1980, 295, fig. 4; TELEVANTOU 1988, 140, fig. 6a; DOUMAS 1992, fig. 122 (with a large color picture).

<sup>29</sup> POPHAM-GILL 1995, pl. 7, R1-R5-R54-Q22.

<sup>30</sup> PAPAPOSTOLOU 1977, 80; PLATON 1984; MARINATOS 1985, 224 n. 22; MARINATOS 1990, 372-3; MARINATOS 1993, 161, fig. 147 (not a seal from Knossos); SHAW 1993, 676-678; REHAK 1995, 104-105; REHAK 1997, 170-171, 'architectural seats/platforms'; KRATTENMAKER 1995, 126, 'stepped openwork platforms'; VANDENABEELE 1996, 1329, figs 3, 4: 'sorte d'estrade'; PALYVOU 2012, 20-21, fig. 16 (computer model of the platform). Similar representations seem to occur among others in the fresco from Room 14 at Haghia Triada, the ring *CMS* V1, no. 199 said to be from Thebes in the Benaki Museum, and most likely in an unpublished sealing from Thebes (PITEROS-OLIVIER-MELENA 1990, 109-110, nn° 6, 7, 20; Thebes Museum inv. nn° 9909, 9910, 9924), described

provisionally by YOUNGER 1995a, 179 n° 162. The Minoan-Mycenaean seated goddess is the subject of the author's doctoral dissertation, ELIOPOULOS 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Evans (*PM* II, 767), followed by MARINATOS 1993, 161 thinks that part of an incurved altar is visible in the Knossos 'Counterfeit Matrix' (here Fig. 3a), as part of the 'platform', but not as a foot. NIEMEIER 1987, 167 n. 43 sees it as a half-rossette. In the Chania sealing *CMS* V, Suppl. IA, no. 177 (here Fig. 3b) a possible floral element is shown at the base of the platform. Rehak's statement that incurved altars are present as supports for the platforms is rather hasty (REHAK 1997, 171; cf. Rehak 1995, 104-105). Apart from the Xeste 3 fresco, incurved bases as supports of a platform are reported in an unpublished sealing from Thebes (*supra*, n. 30) and in the new ivory pyxis from Mochlos (*supra*, n. 4).

<sup>32</sup> SOLES-DAVARAS 2010.

<sup>33</sup> SHAW 1993, 676-678.

epiphany of the goddess. In any case, the Xeste 3 construction can probably be explained as a kind of composite stand, similar to that constructed today for the officials in parades, possibly not fixed but temporary<sup>34</sup>. Its function is the creation of a raised podium for the goddess, or rather its epiphanic impersonation by a priestess. A question concerning our subject is whether such a platform can be understood without a central raised part, and how the presence of the lion rather than a goddess (see *infra*) can be explained.

#### INCURVED ALTARS UNTIL THE PUBLICATION OF NESTOR'S RING IN 1925

In the context examined here it is useful to survey the development of the notion of incurved altars up to the 1920s. Evans expressed quite clearly his view on 'incurved altars'<sup>35</sup> in 1901, comparing the Lion Gate scheme to the iconography of three seals from Mycenae, *CMS I*, nos 46, 73, 98 (Fig. 4), and recognizing an incurved altar in the roof of the golden sheets with the embossed tripartite shrine façade from the Mycenae Shaft Graves. The three cases that are crucial for the early understanding of the concept of this altar were the depictions on Tsountas's stucco tablet from Mycenae, the Psychro relief pithos sherd, with 'offerings' on top, and the Idaean cave seal *CMS II*, 3, n° 7. Up until 1925, incurved altars were known in the following way, solely in the iconography<sup>36</sup>, or as small simulacra:

a) As solitary stands for columns and/or feet of animals, i.e. the Lion Gate relief scheme<sup>37</sup> (the only one with the altar doubled), repeated in the Mycenae seals *CMS I*, n° 46 (Fig. 4a), n° 73 (Fig. 4b) and n° 98 (Fig. 4c), and in the Zakros sealing *CMS II*, 7, n° 73. The same scheme in ivory relief work appeared in the Acharnai lyre<sup>38</sup>, and with monkeys in the Haghia Triada sealing *CMS II*, 6, n° 74. This sealing had not been published when Nestor's ring appeared.

b) As a stand for horns of consecration and branches in the Idaean Cave seal *CMS II*, 3, n° 7.

c) As isolated single objects in ritual associations: Tsountas's Mycenae stucco tablet and the Psychro cave relief pithos sherd, with 'offerings' on top<sup>39</sup>.

d) As an in corpore miniature model recognized among the MM II or MM III objects of the Loom Weight Basement (according to Evans belonging to a Shrine of the Dove Goddess) at Knossos<sup>40</sup>, or as beads in this form, mainly of glass paste and gold from Mycenaean tombs<sup>41</sup>.

e) Depicted as part of the architecture in the Mycenae Shaft Grave golden sheets with the façade of a tripartite shrine, in the Knossos faience Town Mosaic, and in a Knossos miniature Fresco, the latter not understood as such by Evans<sup>42</sup>.

As it is clear, no single representation with more than one altar was known, apart from the Lion Gate relief and the Knossos Throne Room fresco, or, what is more important, not a single representation with incurved altars supporting a horizontal piece. One could not have referred to the two altars of the Lion Gate, where a plaque intervenes between them and the column, or the Zakros 'Gate Sealing' *CMS II*, 7, no. 74. Another image that could be mentioned is the Vapheio seal *CMS I*, n° 231, where the base on which the horns with the branch seat has a vague resemblance to an incurved altar<sup>43</sup>. However, none of these cases creates in any way the iconographical idea of a platform supported by a row of incurved altars.

<sup>34</sup> On the construction depicted behind the woman on the fresco from Haghia Triada Room 14, see MILITELLO 1998, 271-273.

<sup>35</sup> EVANS 1901, 158f.

<sup>36</sup> Except a dubious instance from Zakros, HOGARTH 1901-1902, 136, fig. 47.

<sup>37</sup> On which see YOUNGER 1995b, 346 f.; LAFFINEUR 1992, 106.

<sup>38</sup> PLATON 1965, 222, pl. LXX; YOUNGER 1998, 62, pls 5-8 (new restoration).

<sup>39</sup> WATROUS-WIDENOR 1996, 38, 49, pl. XIX-i. They date it probably to LM I, interpreting the offerings as perhaps cylindrical rolls of bread, and adding the significant observation that it has on both ends of the upper surface two cup-like depressions, 'like a kernos', described by NILSSON 1927, 102 as horns with missing tips. A second sherd (WATROUS-WIDENOR 1996, pl. XIX-j) with relief double axes seems to belong with it.

<sup>40</sup> *PM I*, 220, fig. 166H; *PM II*, 607, fig. 380; MERSEREAU 1992, 334 thinks that all of these terracottas are fragments of an architectural model and do not testify to the existence of a shrine.

<sup>41</sup> Golden beads from the Acharnai (Menidi) tholos, glass beads from the Spata tombs, HIGGINS 1961, 81, fig. 141; see also SAKELLARIOU 1985, 302, n° 81, pls 79, 99, 130, 131. For a more recent find from Chania, a necklace consisting of 36 glass and faience beads in this form, see KARETSOU-VLAZAKI-PAPADAKIS 2000, n° 100.

<sup>42</sup> The faience pieces in *PM II*, 608, 381c. Cf. WATERHOUSE 1994, 165-174; The fresco fragment from the Ivory Deposit in *PM III*, 207, fig. 141. Compare SHAW 1986, 116, fig. 11 for the interpretation of the latter with altars. For incurved altars in architectural iconography, cf. BOULOTIS 1990, 437-439, fig. 9.

<sup>43</sup> NILSSON 1927, 102; SAKELLARIOU 1966, 39.





Fig. 4 a) The Mycenaean seal CMS I, n° 46 (after CMS). b) The Mycenaean seal CMS I, n° 73 (after CMS). c) The Mycenaean seal CMS I, n° 98 (after CMS)

#### INCURVED ALTARS AFTER C. 1925

After 1925-1927, Nilsson's method of doubts contributed to create a certain degree of confusion on the subject. He thought that on the basis of iconography, these altars were round in shape and compared them with tall cylindrical stone offering tables or lamps<sup>44</sup>. Fortunately the first possible in corpore examples were found in the Knossos High Priest's House in 1931<sup>45</sup> and in Room XVIII 1 at Malia in 1929<sup>46</sup>. The waist of the Knossos altar was not pronounced and on one side, which was probably the back, it was flat. However, it generally conformed well to the iconography and to Evans's descriptions. The Malia altar was significantly inscribed with 'mason's marks', a cross and a star. Evans's best, most concise, and acute observation is that [the incurved altar] "... constantly recurs as a base, -conveying the same idea of consecration"<sup>47</sup>. Elderkin, Yavis, Matz, and Reusch<sup>48</sup> in the following years wavered between the 'altar' and the 'symbol' interpretation, comparing the incurved altar to similar altar shapes in the Near East and Etruria. Sp. Marinatos correctly believed that these 'altars' were best understood as 'sacred bases'<sup>49</sup>, but went one step further, denouncing their actual in corpore existence and seeing them only as a thin slab, in reality an iconographic theme. His actual reason was a possible connection with an Egyptian hieroglyph, but perhaps also a speculation on the origins and deeper meaning of this enigmatic altar form. We now know that its first appearance may go back to MM I, in the form of a cut-out shape in the walls of the triple jug found between Burial Building 6 and Tholos Tomb B at Phourni, Archanes<sup>50</sup>. It would be surprising if this object had been readily understood, since even much better known Minoan-Mycenaean symbols, such as the horns, still inspire speculation<sup>51</sup>. A multiplicity of functions is probable<sup>52</sup>, as shown by real specimens, (some almost miniature, e.g. from Knossos, Syme, and Palaikastro<sup>53</sup>), which have a circular depression on top; therefore, the shape of the altar is perhaps lent to a receptacle.<sup>54</sup> A perhaps inherent connection, long observed, is the relation of incurved altars with the triglyph and half-rosette frieze: it seems that, on some occasions, Minoans, perhaps deliberately, combined these two elements, creating some degree of ambiguity<sup>55</sup>. The shape of an incurved altar is automatically created by two adjacent half-rosettes. In some cases, there is no problem of interpretation, e.g. when the space

<sup>44</sup> NILSSON 1927, 101. However, some color to this suggestion was lent only recently by small offering tables, some circular, mainly from the Syme sanctuary (METAXA-MUHLY 1987, 275), which could be influenced by the shape of the bigger incurved altars, cf. *infra*, n. 54. In this connection one could also think already of the cylindrical incurved 'tables' of the Kamilari clay model. Cf. also the waisted stone pedestals used as lamps from the Phylakopi shrine, RENFREW *et alii* 1985, 345, 385, pl. 66a-b.

<sup>45</sup> PMIV, 209, fig. 160a.

<sup>46</sup> BÉQUIGNON 1929, 523, fig. 11; PELON 1988, 36-37, pl. IVa, with a discussion of the context.

<sup>47</sup> PMII, 607.

<sup>48</sup> ELDERKIN 1941; YAVIS 1949, 19-22; MATZ 1958, 408; REUSCH 1958, 349-352, with an up-to-date bibliography on the altars on page 349, n. 106; cf. FURUMARK 1988, 75, reflecting Nilsson's doubts, but his half-finished text is dated to the 1960's.

<sup>49</sup> MARINATOS 1948, 66-67; MARINATOS 1959, 20.

<sup>50</sup> SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1997, ii, 403, fig. 361; for the dating cf. WATROUS 1994, 727. Other early instances are a steatite bead from the Haghia Triada Tholos (STEFANIBANTI 1930-1931, 198, fig. 64h; Higgins 1961, 81) and, according to REUSCH 1958, 351, a motif in the sealing PM IV, 626, fig. 617b from the Knossos Hieroglyphic deposit, which Evans interpreted as a double axe.

<sup>51</sup> Bibliography in REHAK-YOUNGER 1998, 143 to which one can add MACGILLIVRAY *et alii*, 2000, 129 for a revival of the idea of a connection with the Egyptian horizon sign.

<sup>52</sup> Advocated with good arguments by SHAW 1986, 120-121.

<sup>53</sup> Knossos: Hogarth's Houses: HOOD 1957, 22-23, fig. 7 and DAUX 1958, 785, fig. 15; Syme: METAXA-MUHLY 1987; Palaikastro, inscribed in Linear A: FURUMARK 1988, 55, 58, fig. 1-type II a-b.

<sup>54</sup> PLATON-PARARAS 1991, 41-42.

<sup>55</sup> PMII, 607-8 for Fyfe's and Evans's comments.

between the outer curves of the half-rosettes is restricted and filled with arches, as on the Knossos relief stone plaques<sup>56</sup>. But in other cases, one is not certain if one sees consecutive half-rosettes or consecutive incurved altars. The result of this iconographic ambiguity is that there is still some controversy. A good example is the Mycenaean gold sheets with the tripartite shrine façade, where some see an incurved altar underneath the horns, while others see only two adjacent half-rosettes, dismissing the idea of an altar<sup>57</sup>. That some connection with the half-rosette motif exists in any case is very probable. The half-rosette motif was given a hieroglyphic interpretation by Bossert and Demangel<sup>58</sup>, who compared it to a Hittite hieroglyph. This leads us into the symbolic interpretation of some Minoan-Mycenaean works, which is almost exclusively the product of Sp. Marinatos's inspiration. In his 1951 article<sup>59</sup>, one of the most enchanting in Aegean literature, he interpreted the female figure with down-bent palm branches in the well-known golden pin from Mycenaean Shaft Grave III as expressing the Egyptian pharaonic motto 'numerous years of joyful life'. In this framework, which occupied him until the early 1960s, he saw (following an observation by the Egyptologist J. Capart) in the shape of incurved altars the Egyptian hieroglyph with the phonetic value *mr*, denoting the sea. We can add that the true meaning of the hieroglyph is "channel, boat-channel, dike, waterway, port, pool, reservoir". He compared it with the shape of the flower pots in the Amnisos fresco, and a 'flower pot' in the electrum vase from Mycenaean Shaft Grave IV<sup>60</sup>. We cannot enter into the heart of the subject<sup>61</sup>. Sp. Marinatos, with a foresight which is difficult to match, entered into a world of imaginative, often awe-inspiring speculations. His ideas have received little critical response<sup>62</sup>. Concerning the incurved altars themselves, his opinion that they did not have in corpore existence, but were only of hieroglyphic value in iconography, was proven incorrect by the Archanes altars a few years later. This spectacular find solved once and for all the identification problem. Combined with the Xeste 3 fresco, it gives us a much fuller scope on these altars. Should we, however, dismiss lightheartedly Marinatos's symbolic interpretation even though it turned out that incurved altars do have real existence? The shape itself of these altars (or 'bases of consecration' as we think they could be called) is peculiar enough to invite a new specific study. Here, in contrast to the double axes or the sacred horns, there would still be a lot of ground to cover<sup>63</sup>. A tempting element is that an unmistakable

<sup>56</sup> PMIV, 222 f., figs. 172-173.

<sup>57</sup> SHAW 1986, 115, fig. 9 follows Evans thinking that an incurved altar is shown (with yet another one higher up), while HALLAGER 1985, 18-19 discusses and denies this interpretation.

<sup>58</sup> DEMANGEL 1938; cf. NIEMEIER 1986, 85. Moser 1986, 30-32 questions the connection of the triglyph and half-rosette frieze either with the incurved altar or with the Hittite hieroglyph and promotes the rather original idea of some relationship with the Egyptian fan as a motif in iconography as well as an actual implement.

<sup>59</sup> MARINATOS 1951, 102-116; cf. WARREN 1985, 200 and HÄGG-LINDAU 1984, 67, 73. We can add that the main subject, the papyrus vs. lily symbolism, is reminded to us in the golden Aidonia ring CMS V, Suppl. 1B, no. 113, with the two women holding each of these flowers respectively, advancing towards a shrine, and in a second ring from the repatriated Aidonia treasure, see DEMAKOPOULOU 1996, 71.

<sup>60</sup> MARINATOS 1956.

<sup>61</sup> Marinatos's idea was discussed mainly by SCHÄFFER 1992a, 85-88 and 1992b, 116-118, 124-126; he thinks that these 'altars' may not have had a hieroglyphic meaning and could represent a vessel for sacral uses in the shape of a sacred pool, imported to Crete from Egypt.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. e.g. TZAVELLA-EVJEN 1968; EAD., 1970, 121-128 and passim; for the bees as royal symbols in the Malia pendant, see HOOD 1976; speculations of this order, however, can be dangerous, as those of BLOEDOW-BJÖRK 1989.

<sup>63</sup> The observation (SAKELLARIOU 1966, 38) that in Cretan seals animals do not step on the incurved altars, while in Mainland seals they do, is weakened by the Haghia Triada sealing CMS II, 6, n° 74, with monkeys resting their forefeet on the altar, and by the half-finished seal CMS II, 3, no. 165. For Rutkowski's views on incurved altars, see

RUTKOWSKI 1981, 44. Recent additions to the corpus of depictions of incurved altars include the Thebes sealing CMS V, Suppl. 1B, no. 353, in which the incurved altar on which two lions with a common frontal face usually rest their paws is replaced by a bull's head flanked by palm trees. In the seal CMS Suppl. 1A, no. 75 (in a collection in Athens) an adoring follower faces a palm tree. Between them, there is an incurved altar topped by horns. In the gold ring CMS V, Suppl. 1B, no. 140 from Antheia, a lion and a stag are depicted. On the ground, two adjacent objects are interpreted as axes (one is banded and seems to have a haft but in a horizontal position). They look very much like two incurved altars. From Jukhtas comes a miniature steatite model, KARETSOU 1975, 336, fig. 2, pl. 264στ'. The altars reappear occasionally as a motif in the painted decoration of LM III larnakes, as in those from Gazi (ALEXIOU 1973, 10, pl. 2b-c, but cf. Aubert 1995: ingots), Pigi (with horns set atop, GODART-TZEDAKIS 1992, pl. CLVI-1), Sata (set between half-rosettes, PROKOPIOU-GODART-TZIGOUNAKI 1990, 199, fig. 5b), Voliones (POLOGIORGI 1981, 88, 96-99, figs 5, 10, pls 44b, 47a-b) and Klima (RETHEMIOTAKIS 1995, figs. 4, 6, 7). Altars appear also in a relief ivory appliqué panel found in 1995 in Thebes, depicting a chariot hunt, see ARAVANTINOS 2009, fig. 25. One of the latest recognizable appearances of this motif in the Bronze Age must be on the sides of the LH IIIC painted stele from Mycenaean (TSOUNTAS 1896, 6, pl. 1b). For a re-examination of this stele, see ELIOPOULOS 2012. It is argued that in the top row of the stele, the picture does not represent one or more persons seated on thrones (as in the *communis opinio*) and two alternatives are proposed: either a scene of animal sacrifice on a slaughtering table, a parallel to the sarcophagus of Haghia Triada scene, or, less plausibly, a prothesis scene. The crux to this new interpretation is the object to the left, which can be seen not as a throne, but either as a Minoan-Mycenaean slaughtering table or as a bed.

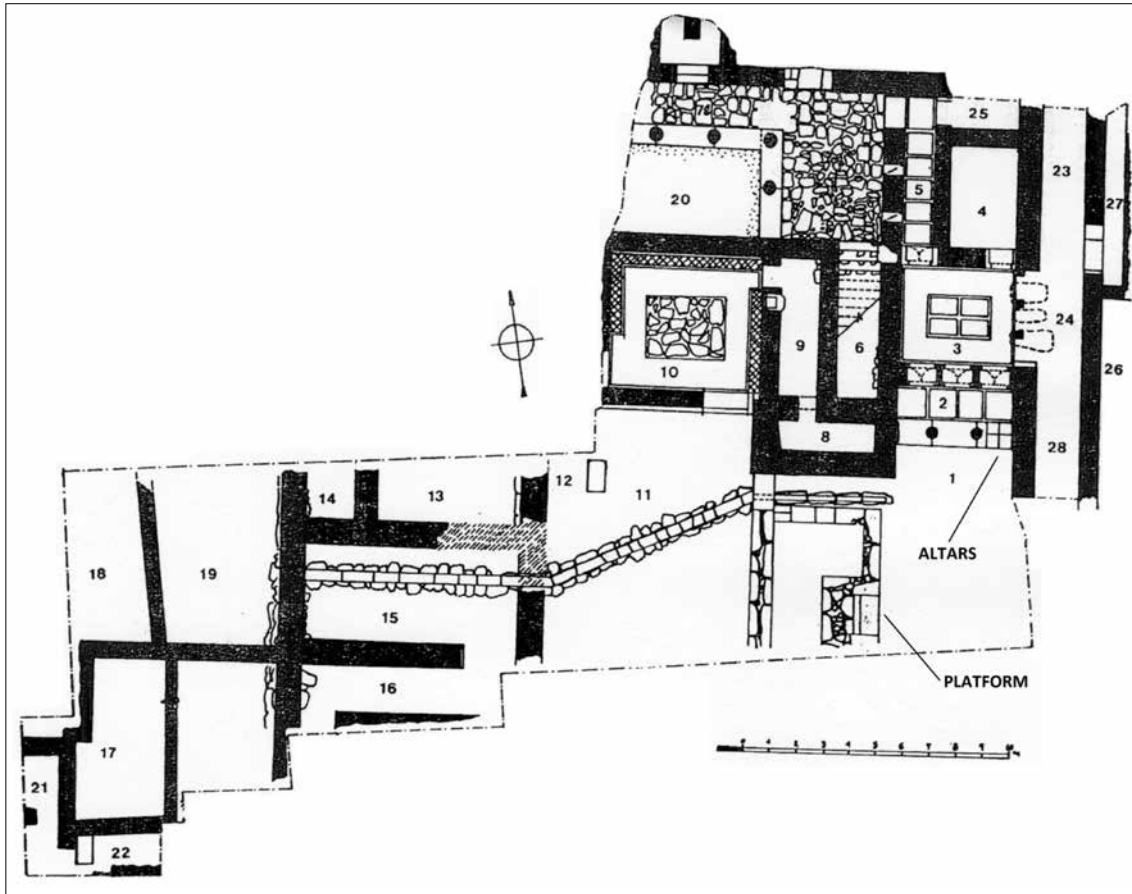


Fig. 5. Archanes, palatial building, including the excavated part of the 'platform' between areas 1 and 11, with the stepped orthogonal altar and the drain, and four incurved altars in the portico, between areas 1 and 2 (after SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1989, 305, fig. 1)

incurved altar in an identical function, i.e. as a base of consecration, but with a woman standing on top, appears in Crete as late as the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., in one of the Prinias stelae<sup>64</sup>.

#### THE ARCHANES PLATFORM

Too much stress has perhaps been laid on the spot where the Archanes incurved altars were found, as proof that such altars were placed at the front of sacred buildings<sup>65</sup> and perhaps signifying a sort of portal shrine.<sup>66</sup> It must be noted, though, that their placement seems to have been temporary, as they obstruct the way through the eastern part of the two-columned portico towards Corridor 2 (Fig. 5).<sup>67</sup> It is also difficult to imagine that such a placement, with two of the altars located on top of the other two, is an original ritual setting. It does not correspond to iconography (this, however, could be accepted, given our limited data<sup>68</sup>) and rather gives the impression that they were temporarily stacked away in an orderly fashion as becoming a ritual apparatus, but not in an actual usable arrangement. It has already been hinted by some scholars that the Archanes altars were possibly used as bases in the vicinity of the spot where they were found: M. Shaw<sup>69</sup> thinks that they could have been used in an open space somewhere nearby and N. Marinatos believes that they could have been set in a straight line to support something.<sup>70</sup> Rehak contested the idea

<sup>64</sup> LEBESSI 1976, 89, pls 4-5 and cf. the footstool in pls 28-29.

<sup>65</sup> As the Zakros peak sanctuary rhyton shows (for previous examples, see REUSCH 1958, 350; SHAW 1986, 117, 122).

<sup>66</sup> SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1983, 373-386; SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1997, i, 80-82, figg. 62-65.

<sup>67</sup> A suggestion by the excavators is that this placement may correspond to the off-axis door of Room 4, see SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1997, i, 82.

<sup>68</sup> SHAW 1986, 121 suggests that within the Lion Gate relief, perhaps four altars were depicted, two of which would be implied invisibly at the back.

<sup>69</sup> SHAW 1986, 120 and EAD. 1993, 676.

<sup>70</sup> See REHAK 1995, 105, n. 104.

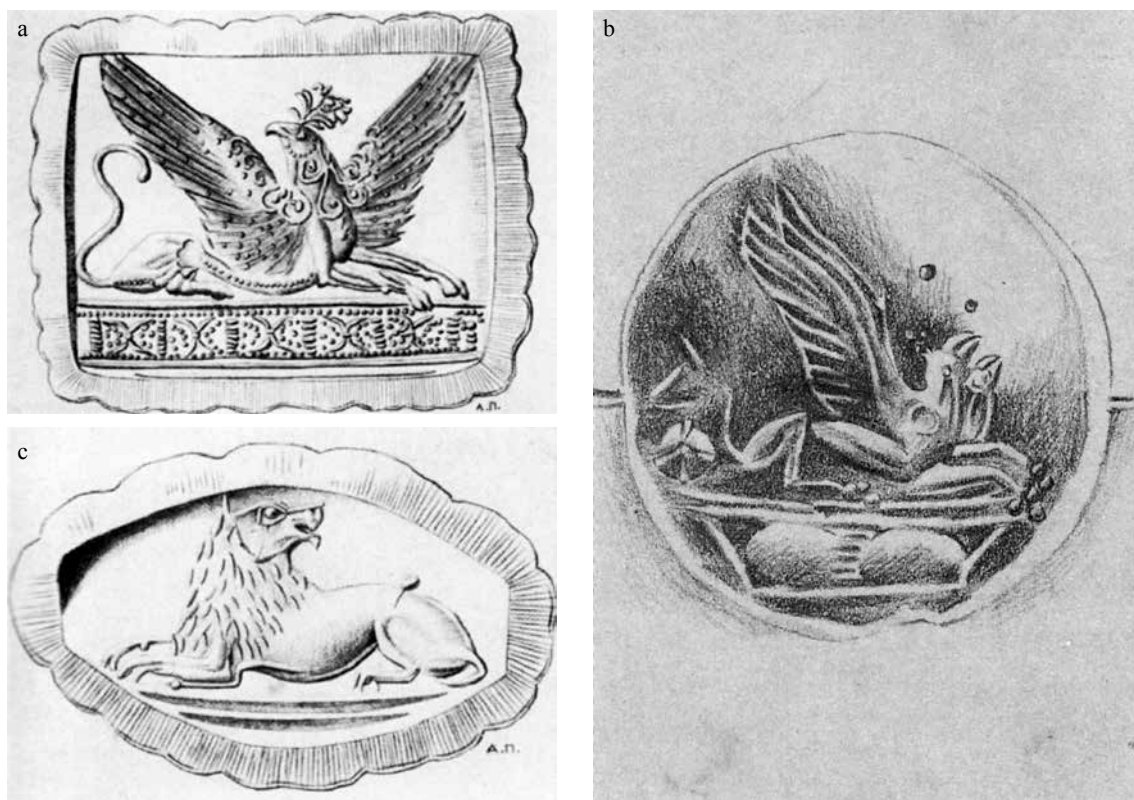


Fig. 6 a) The Pylos golden bead seal *CMSI*, no. 293 (after *CMS*). b) The Routsis seal *CMSI*, n° 282 (after KORRES 1991, 135, fig. 7a). c) The Vapheio seal *CMSI*, n° 244 (after *CMS*)

on the grounds of insecure stability, but promoted a rather doubtful theory: that they could have been used to support the corners of the large stone slaughtering table found in Hall 10.<sup>71</sup> Until now, there are no iconographical examples of slaughtering tables with feet in the shape of incurved altars.

A suitable place for the use of the altars, however, may be identified in the close vicinity of their original findspot: the peculiar construction in the middle of the court, separating areas 1 and 11. It was significantly identified by the excavators as an 'exedra' (platform).<sup>72</sup> Its southern part has not yet been excavated, but the visible part shows a low rectangular foundation, c. 5 m. in length (from N to S) and 4,88 m. in width (from E to W),<sup>73</sup> bordered to the north by a high orthogonal altar with a stepped 'prothesis' and a drain. The low foundation has a square projection at the SE end, possibly, according to the excavators, for placing a pyramidal double axe base that was found nearby. The excavators refrain from speculating on the original form of this construction, which could have had a low superstructure. A new hypothesis could be that, in the unexcavated part to the south, the 'platform' continues for nearly the same length, acquiring a total length of c. 8 m. and a width of 4,88 m., and therefore placing the square projection in the middle of the whole construction. This rather original construction is supposed to have been an enclosure for a sacred tree, while there is also evidence for libations and/or the collection of blood.<sup>74</sup> Based on the most important feature of the construction, the rectangular altar on its north side, and on the iconographic evidence from the Xeste 3 fresco from Thera and the Zakros peak-shrine rhyton, we could bring the nearby incurved altars into the picture. If one interpreted this low foundation as a basis for the erection of a superstructure of perishable (wooden?) materials on the 'platform', keeping in mind the creation of a large exedra in the form of the Theran fresco, one could also explain the existence of the square projection of the foundation. The latter, if located in the middle of the platform, could have been the basis of an elevated central part, creating a three-partite impression, as can again be found in the Theran fresco, where the goddess sits on the raised part, supported by small (stone?) pillars. Then, the incurved altars could be used as the supports for this elevated platform, resting on the foundation. Of course, it is likely that more than the four altars found would have been needed. Fragments of plaques of marble and other

<sup>71</sup> REHAK 1995; for this stone table see SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1997, i, 98, fig. 76.

<sup>72</sup> SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1983, 382-386; SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1997, i, 102-104, figs 80-82.

<sup>73</sup> Exact measurements are given in SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1983, 391.

<sup>74</sup> SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1997, i, 103.

stones have been found in some quantities in the Archanes palace, described as fallen elements of the upper floor.<sup>75</sup> Plaques of this type could have been placed horizontally on the altars, using the latter as supports, as in the Xeste 3 fresco. Both in the Nestor ring and the Xeste 3 fresco, the altars support a double platform. In the fresco, the alternating grained and blue plaques could stand for wooden and stone plaques. The length of c. 8 m. for the Archanes platform would accord well with the length of the Xeste 3 platform, with the human scale of the saffron-gatherers and the goddess herself taken as measure for reference. If the priestess seated on this platform faced towards the west, she would face Jukhtas; if she faced towards the east, she would have Jukhtas as a background with the congregation facing the holy mountain. This cannot be decided, because the eastern front of court 1-11 is unexcavated and the overall appearance and relative importance of its sides are as yet unclear.

This interpretation of the Archanes platform is offered here as a tentative suggestion; perhaps, new information on this most interesting cultic feature will be available, after the whole structure has been exposed.

Coming back to the ring of Nestor, the detail that struck previous scholars as suspicious is the impressive presence and the possible meaning of the lion on the 'couch'. Presumably, the latter cannot be other than that described by Hampe and Simon: it is the follower and emblem of the king or deity, replacing the goddess seated on this platform. The Xeste 3 fresco, the Amari ring, and the unpublished Thebes sealing<sup>76</sup> show the role of griffins, lions, and demons as supporters and satellites of the goddess seated on the stepped platform. The next logical step is the idea of the goddess giving her position to the lion on her platform. This could perhaps explain why it was not now necessary (or possible) to have a platform with a raised middle part. One can also observe that, even in the Xeste 3 fresco, only the attendants of the deity and her sacred animals stand on the 'incurved based' platform. The goddess herself is seated upon the raised middle part, which is supported by small pillars. We can also consider the two-storied pedestal on which the demons stand in the Malia triton-shell rhyton.<sup>77</sup> Since the two demonic beings are upright, there was no iconographic problem to show them occupying the highest position and replacing the goddess. Yet, kingly felines, lions and the fabulous griffins best express their idle and imposing nature in the couchant position, the famous pose of the Sphinx. In the 'truly royal jewel',<sup>78</sup> the Pylos gold seal *CMSI*, no. 293 (Fig. 6a), with the griffin in such a position,<sup>79</sup> the animal lies on a frieze of triglyphs and half-rosettes. There is a related seal picture, which is very important as a comparison for the lion's platform on Nestor's ring: the Routsis seal *CMSI*, no. 282 (Fig. 6b).<sup>80</sup> A pair of griffins is depicted sitting on a double line, which rests on a shape undoubtedly originating from the motif of the frieze of half-rosettes enclosing an incurved altar. An actual altar is almost discernible in the centre, banded as the incurved altar of the Zakros peak-shrine rhyton. If this seal had been found before 1925, it would have made a strong argument for the ring to be counterfeit, but now works decidedly in favor of its authenticity. If Nestor's ring is genuine, a lion suits well the connection with incurved altars, since lions and such altars are closely connected in iconography. In all of the above cases, we observe the same recurrent motif, the deity who is followed closely or even replaced, and her substance expressed by animals. The Xeste 3 fresco revealed this Aegean idea of the connection between the goddess and animals in all of its power.

In an effort to reconstruct a forger's possible iconographical sources and ways of thinking in the 1920s (at the latest) towards conceiving the lion couchant on a 'table' or 'platform' of the form described above, we must proceed step-by-step, postulating the following:

a) It is highly improbable that the idea came from the iconography of another contemporary source, that is Egyptian or Near Eastern. If we restrict ourselves to the lion then admittedly little can be said, given the overwhelming frequency of the subject in East Mediterranean iconography. The lion couchant would no doubt be an easy idea for an early 20th century forger to depict, given such lion imagery in Mycenae's Grave circles,<sup>81</sup> on seals, as the Vapheio seal *CMSI*, no. 244 (Fig. 6c), but also couchant, as in a small gold

<sup>75</sup> SAKELLARAKIS-SAKELLARAKIS 1997, i, 104-105.

<sup>76</sup> PITEROS-OLIVIER-MELENA 1990, 109-110, nn° 6, 7, 10 and YOUNGER 1995a, 159, n° 162, with a tripartite platform based on incurved altars, with griffins and demons flanking the enthroned goddess. A photograph has been published in ARAVANTINOS 2010, 94, middle of top row.

<sup>77</sup> BAURAIN-DARCQUE 1983, 3-73; SAMBIN 1989, 91 compares this pedestal with bases on which Thouris stands in Old and Middle Kingdom iconography. Cf., more recently, the pedestals of male, divine as it seems, figures in the ring from Poros (DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKIS 2000) and in the larnax from Klima (RETHEMIOTAKIS 1995).

<sup>78</sup> BLEGEN 1954, 32.

<sup>79</sup> An exact parallel for this griffin's pose with open wings appeared in the griffin of a flat cylinder seal found in Tragana tholos 1 in 1980, see KORRES 1991, 130-134, fig. 6, who also describes the poses of griffins in seals from Messenia, with bibliography on griffins.

<sup>80</sup> A new drawing of the Routsis seal, with improvements over the *CMS* one, has been published by KORRES 1991, 135, fig. 7a (cf. the older drawing in THOMAS 2004, 198, no. 26).

<sup>81</sup> VERMEULE 1975, 41.

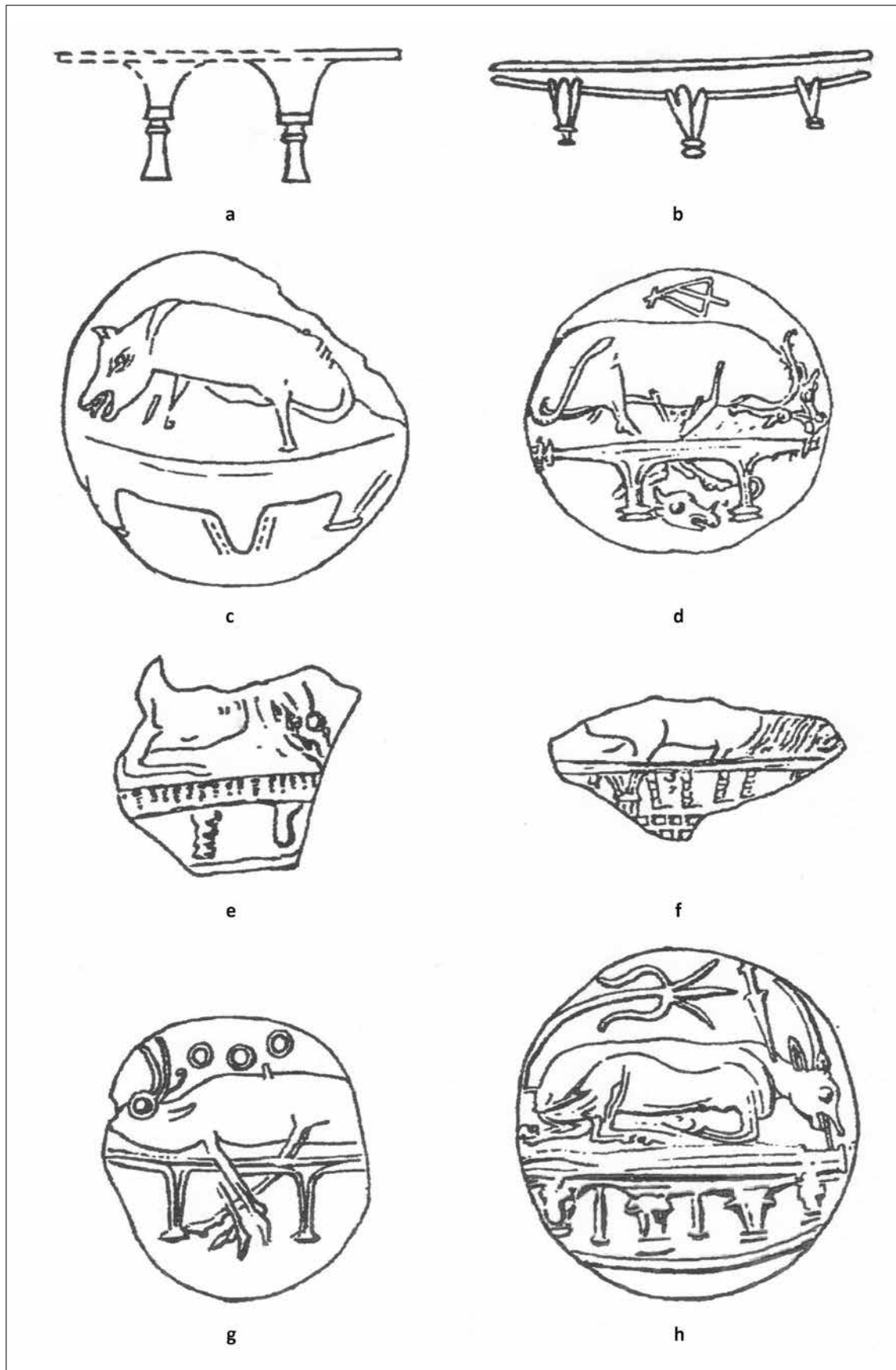


Fig. 7. Slaughtering tables until 1925 (adapted from SAKELLARAKIS 1970, figs 8, 9):  
 a) The Haghia Triada Sarcophagus. b) The 'Haruspex' seal *CMS* I, n° 80 from Mycenae. c) The Ashmolean Museum seal *CMS* VI, n° 422, inv. n° 1938.1086. d) Seal of unknown provenance in the Heraklion Museum, *CMS* II, 3, n° 338.  
 e) Sealing *CMS* II, 8, n° 482, H.M. inv. n° 142 from Knossos. f) Sealing *CMS* II, 8, n° 480, H.M. inv. n° 211 from Knossos. g) The seal *CMS* I, n° 203 from Nauplia. h) The seal *CMS* XI, n° 52, 'from Mycenae', in Berlin (the former Montigny gem)

ornament from the Shaft Graves.<sup>82</sup> However, the 'table' with its peculiar 'legs', understood as incurved altars, makes for an exceptional scene.

b) The only closely related Aegean iconographic subject known until that time (and providing a possible source for the forger) is that of an animal on a slaughtering table. This is Nilsson's 'decisive' argument against the authenticity, as he stated that the engraver misunderstood the slaughtering table, making it into the pedestal or throne of the Lion.<sup>83</sup> Until the publication of the ring, the following examples were known (Fig. 7): the sarcophagus of the Haghia Triada scene, the Mycenae 'haruspex' seal *CMS* I, n° 80, the former 'Montigny gem' in Berlin *CMS* XI, n° 52; the Nauplia seal *CMS* I, n° 203, possibly the Ashmolean seal *CMS* VI, n° 422 (inv. n° 1938.1086), bought by Evans before 1935,<sup>84</sup> and the Heraklion Museum seal *CMS* II, 3, n° 338, bought around 1909 and first published by Bossert in 1921.<sup>85</sup> Two Knossos sealings, *CMS* II, 8, n° 482 (HM inv. n° 142) and *CMS* II, 8, n° 480 (HM inv. n° 211)<sup>86</sup> were unpublished at the time, but we should include them, as forgers were probably familiar with unpublished pieces as well.<sup>87</sup> While it would not be prudent to outright dismiss the possibility that the forger imitated such slaughtering tables, the fact remains that in the above cases the animal depicted is always a bovine, boar, or goat<sup>88</sup> and the feet of the table are decidedly not in the form of an incurved altar. The feet seem, of course, elaborately sculptured, as part of the wooden framework that held the probable stone slaughtering plaque itself.<sup>89</sup> Fortunately, we have a clear picture of the feet of these tables in the Haghia Triada sarcophagus. This practice corresponds to the descriptions of elaborate furniture details in Linear B. A discernible resemblance of the feet on the Montigny gem is to bucrania, as Evans thought,<sup>90</sup> a detail comparable to the relief decoration of 1st mill. B.C. altars with bucrania. If we push the reasoning, we could perhaps even admit that an imaginative forger could have replaced the bulls on a 'table' with a lion. One could say that he may have been influenced by the Amari ring (Fig. 3c), published together with the ring of Nestor, with a kind of a platform and two lions resting their paws on it, in combination with scenes of a lion couchant on a flat surface, as that of the Vapheio seal *CMS* I, n° 244 (Fig. 6c). But how he conceived to change the form of the feet of these tables, adapting them into an unmistakable incurved altar form, when nothing until then in Aegean iconography or even the archaeological literature, of which he must have been aware, connected these 'tables' -or indeed any tables- to incurved altars, is extremely difficult to grasp. This elaborate scheme did exist in Minoan times, but was revealed to us only in the 1970s and 1980s by the Xeste 3 fresco, and, even then, it was kind of an iconographical surprise. The engraver must have had in mind representations and real-life platforms -supported on incurved altars- of exactly that (Theran) order. But, following the evidence presented above, this would mean that he operated in the Bronze Age and not in 20<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

*Theodore Eliopoulos*

<sup>82</sup> HOOD 1978, 198, fig. 194 from Grave III, and specifically the lion couchant on a base from the cache south of Grave Circle A (MARINATOS 1959, fig. 199, top).

<sup>83</sup> NILSSON 1927, 553-554; 556 (= NILSSON 1950, 47-48): "This type of table is known from the sacrificial scene on the H. Triada sarcophagus and a series of gems, and its purpose is always the same: it is the slaughtering table on which the sacrificed animal is laid to be cut up. I cannot help feeling that the artist has misunderstood this slaughtering table and made it into a base for the Divine Animal....The decisive argument, which seems not to have been properly appreciated, is that the engraver has misunderstood the slaughtering table, making of it the pedestal of the cult image of the Lion, or, say, the throne of the Lion, if the animal is thought to be living".

<sup>84</sup> *PM* IV, 42, fig. 25; KENNA 1960, 136, n° 332, pl. 13.

<sup>85</sup> BOSSERT 1921, 39, fig. 246i, from a cast in the Berlin University. Evans (*PM* IV, 42, fig. 26) mentions only its later publication by NILSSON 1927, 195, fig. 62.

<sup>86</sup> H.M. n° 142 was noted but not depicted by Evans 1900-1901, 101; see SAKELLARAKIS 1970, fig. 8-3. For

H.M. no. 211, see SAKELLARAKIS 1970, fig. 8-4.

<sup>87</sup> There are two more sealings of the same class from Knossos, somewhat obscure, that are not included in SAKELLARAKIS 1970 and not shown in our Fig. 7. The sealing *CMS* II, 8, 481, from the Room of the Chariot Tablets, shows a similar picture, a bovine on a table supported by two triangular feet with curved sides. Its existence became known only recently, cf. POPHAM-GILL 1995, 41, 53, pl. 24, no. 1548. The second sealing, *CMS* II, 8, n° 540, partially preserved, whose exact find-spot is unknown, was first published in the *CMS*. Part of a table-like slaughtering table is discernible with animal's feet tied to it.

<sup>88</sup> On the species of animals on slaughtering tables, see MARINATOS 1986, 11-14. She considers the lion a sacrificial victim as well, in connection with hunting.

<sup>89</sup> As analyzed by SAKELLARAKIS 1970, 175 ff.; cf. MARINATOS 1986, 15.

<sup>90</sup> *PM* IV, 568, fig. 542b, but NILSSON 1927, 195 rejected this idea; cf. the discussion in SAKELLARAKIS 1970, 175.

**ALCUNE OSSERVAZIONI SULL'ICONOGRAFIA DELL'‘ANELLO DI NESTORE’** - Il presente studio ha come oggetto l'analisi iconografica di un elemento raffigurato nel quarto sinistro superiore del cosiddetto ‘anello di Nestore’. Si tratta di una *trapeza* sulla quale è rappresentato un leone accovacciato. I ‘piedi’ di questa *trapeza* sono interpretati come altari a pareti concave che sorreggono una piattaforma analoga a quella raffigurata nell'affresco della *Potnia Theron* dalla Casa Xesté 3 a Thera. Una struttura *in corpore*, rinvenuta nel cortile del complesso palaziale di Archanes, è interpretata come fondazione di una piattaforma dello stesso tipo. Tale piattaforma, probabilmente in legno, sarebbe stata sorretta da quattro altari a pareti concave trovati nelle vicinanze e probabilmente usati per cerimonie nelle quali una sacerdotessa impersonava l'epifania di una dea. La raffigurazione iconografica di una piattaforma sorretta da altari a pareti concave, ancora ignota agli studiosi negli anni '20 del secolo scorso, costituisce un importante elemento a favore dell'autenticità dell'‘anello di Nestore’.

**ΠΑΡΑΤΗΡΗΣΕΙΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ ΤΟΥ «ΔΑΧΤΥΛΙΔΙΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΝΕΣΤΟΡΑ»** - Στην παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζεται μία εικονογραφική λεπτομέρεια του «δαχτυλιδιού του Νέστορα». Πρόκειται για είδος τράπεζας επάνω στην οποία εικονίζεται ανακλιμένο ένα λιοντάρι στο άνω αριστερό τεταρτημόριο της εικόνας. Τα πόδια αυτής της τράπεζας ερμηνεύονται ως αμφίκουλοι βωμοί οι οποίοι υποβασιάζουν μία εξέδρα ανάλογη εκείνης της θηραϊκής τοιχογραφίας της «Πότνιας Θηρών» από την Ξεστή 3. Μία *in corpore* κτιστή κατασκευή η οποία έχει εν μέρει αποκαλυφθεί σε έναν υπαίθριο χώρο του ανακτορικού συγκροτήματος των Αρχανών, ερμηνεύεται ως θεμελίωση σύνθετης εξέδρας του τύπου αυτού. Η ίσως ξύλινη αυτή εξέδρα θα στηριζόταν στους τέσσερις αμφίκουλους βωμούς οι οποίοι βρίσκονται πολύ κοντά της και θα χρησιμοποιείτο για τελετουργικές «Επιφάνειες» ιερειών ως θεοτήτων. Η εικονογραφική αυτή λεπτομέρεια εξέδρας ερειδομένης σε αμφίκουλους βωμούς, άγνωστη την δεκαετία του 1920, ενισχύει την γνησιότητα του «δαχτυλιδιού του Νέστορα».



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