

# AN AEGEAN GRIFFIN IN EGYPT: THE HUNT FRIEZE AT TELL EL-DAB<sup>CA</sup>

By *Lyvia Morgan*

A single griffin, on a scale with the lions and leopards, was found amongst the fragments of Aegean wall paintings dumped outside Palace F at Tell el-Dab<sup>CA</sup> in the early Tuthmoside period (Figs. 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> Like the other felines, the griffin must have been a predator in the Hunt Frieze. Most of the head is preserved, the beak, and part of the wing. Other small fragments identified as belonging to the griffin are the edge of the far wing and three pieces of legs. All are against a yellow ochre background, very slightly darker than the usual yellow and with well-preserved surface, slightly waxy to the touch.

## GRIFFINS: CHARACTERISTICS AND DEVELOPMENT<sup>2</sup>

Before discussing the particular characteristics of the griffin and its reconstruction, a brief outline of the early development of griffins is presented, in order to be able to evaluate its place within the iconographic repertoire. The significance of the predatory griffin will be discussed later in the paper.

### Near Eastern origins and Egyptian counterparts

The concept of the lion-bird predator is derived from Near Eastern models and has early Egyptian counterparts. Frankfort posited that the griffin made its way from Syria to the Aegean via the medium of textiles,<sup>3</sup> a supposition supported by Dominique Collon in her analysis of Syrian cylinder seals as the source of certain Aegean motifs.<sup>4</sup> By the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium the Syrian griffin

had developed from earlier lion-bird composites into a recognizable griffin. The Syrian-Levantine griffin has a small beak, like that of a falcon, with (usually) straight raised wings, and sometimes a solar disc or plant-form between tendril-like horns on the head. It stands as a heraldic pair, upright on hind legs,<sup>5</sup> or associated with prey and with lions (see below), in scenes subsidiary to human and divine action. The Syrian griffin also appears in Anatolia on seals,<sup>6</sup> and on an ivory furniture plaque from Acmhöyük (dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> century), where the seated griffin has straight upright wings with the distinct head of a falcon with a neck curl, and a short tripartite crest framed by horns.<sup>7</sup>

Leonine body and bird head was a combination rich with symbolic resonance of predation and protection. As such, it was appropriated with enthusiasm in the Aegean, where its form and iconography was transformed. Just as Syrian cylinder seals imported to Crete clearly had an impact on Minoan imagery, Syrian glyptic was subsequently imbued with aspects of Minoan-Mycenaean iconography and idiom.<sup>8</sup> The specifically Aegean griffin was to exert influence on Cypro-Aegean and Mitannian seals and Levantine ivories of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a time of intense cultural interactions within the ancient world.<sup>9</sup>

In Egypt, a prototypical griffin appears on a Late Predynastic palette from Hierakonpolis and a dagger handle from Gebel el-Tarif, in both cases

<sup>1</sup> See MARINATOS this volume on the lions; MORGAN this volume on the leopards, with bibliographic references to the excavation, dating and discussions of the paintings from Palace F. Reconstruction of the head and wing of the griffin was first published in MORGAN 2004, 287, fig. 1. An earlier reconstruction of two of the fragments of the griffin (head and wing) appeared in BIETAK, HEIN *et al.* 1994, 204, Kat. Nr. 229; BIETAK 2005, 13–17, in which the two Tell el-Dab<sup>CA</sup> pieces are superimposed over the head and wing of the Xesté 3 griffin.

<sup>2</sup> For specific studies on griffins see: FRANKFORT 1936; LEBOVITCH 1943; DESSENNE 1957; BISI 1965; DELPLACE 1967; RHYNE 1971; BARTA 1975; MORGAN 1988, 49–54.

<sup>3</sup> FRANKFORT 1936. EVANS, in contrast, posited Egypt as the source (PM I, 709).

<sup>4</sup> COLLON 2000, 287. The examples cited by COLLON date to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. The earliest Aegean griffins date to the same time span (MM II – MM III).

<sup>5</sup> TEISSIER 1996, 87, Nos. 163–164.

<sup>6</sup> ARUZ 2008, figs. 231, 234, 235, seated, with straight wings.

<sup>7</sup> ARUZ, BENZEL and EVANS 2008, 138, Cat. No. 76. Aruz speculates that the neck curl (evocative of the peregrine falcon markings in images of Horus) may be the source of the spiral curls of the Aegean griffin.

<sup>8</sup> ARUZ 1995a, 1995b; COLLON 2000.

<sup>9</sup> See most recently: FELDMAN 2006; ARUZ 2008; ARUZ, BENZEL and EVANS 2008.

hunting alongside lion and leopard.<sup>10</sup> In the Old Kingdom, the few, poorly preserved, instances of the griffin are associated with kingship.<sup>11</sup> The creature appears in the Middle Kingdom on a pectoral of Sesostri III (as an embodiment of the pharaoh conquering his enemies),<sup>12</sup> in hunt scenes at Beni Hasan and el Bersheh (apart from the action),<sup>13</sup> and as apotropaic creatures (with other mythical beasts, lions and leopards) on ivory 'magical knives'.<sup>14</sup> Its head is that of a falcon. Some are wingless, others have wings drawn in frontal view on the profile creature (in accordance with Egyptian aspective idiom), and, occasionally, a human head issues from the centre of the wings. Yet already in the late Middle Kingdom, the intercultural nature of the creature is apparent in a silver pendant of heraldic griffins, now in the Petrie Museum in London. Falcon-headed with patterns on neck and body that suggest folded wings, in overall format, the heraldic beasts closely match the Tell el-Dabca pendant of dogs from the 13<sup>th</sup> dynasty, as well as the Aegina Master of Animals pendant. Its origins – Egyptian/Aegean/Levantine – remain uncertain.<sup>15</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty history of the griffin is interwoven with that of the Aegean.

#### THE AEGEAN GRIFFIN

The Aegean griffin has the beak of a vulture, raised wings in profile (one behind the other), and often bears a crest and spirals.

The earliest Aegean griffins are on Middle Minoan II seals from Mallia and Phaistos<sup>16</sup> (Fig. 9), and in fragments of miniature painting from Middle Minoan III Knossos (Fig. 8). Griffins appear on pottery of Middle Cycladic III – Late Cycladic I from the islands of Melos, Kea and Thera.<sup>17</sup> The painted pots from Akrotiri appear to be the figurative forerunners of the LC I Thera paintings.<sup>18</sup> Popularity rose in the Late Bronze I period, when there are some thirteen examples of griffins on seal impressions from Ayia Triada and Zakros alone, several examples in metal from the Mycenae Shaft Graves, and three in wall paintings from Thera. As with lions, the largest number of Aegean depictions has come down to us on seals, while the creature became a popular motif of Mycenaean ivory carving.

In wall painting, besides the fragmentary Knossos miniatures, there are the two well preserved examples from Akrotiri, Thera – a hunter from the West House miniatures (Fig. 13) and a large-scale griffin flanking the Goddess from Xesté 3 (Fig. 4), as well as fragments of a griffin from the 'Porter's Lodge', associated with monkeys, man and palm, birds, and perhaps a seated goddess.<sup>19</sup> The cult associations recur in two paintings from the Cult Centre at Mycenae, in which a small griffin is held under the arm of a divine or priestly personage.<sup>20</sup> Large couchant griffins flanked the thrones at Knossos and

<sup>10</sup> Hierakonpolis palette: LANGE & HIRMER 1968, pl. 2; HOULIHAN 1996, pl. 1; OSBORN & OSBORNOVÁ 1998, pl. 12b. Gebel el Tarif dagger handle: OSBORN & OSBORNOVÁ 1998, 7, fig. 1-12.

<sup>11</sup> BARTA 1975, 339–340.

<sup>12</sup> LANGE & HIRMER 1968, col. pl. XIV (centre); MORGAN 1988, 53 and n. 109, pl. 62.

<sup>13</sup> Beni Hasan: Newbury 1893, Part II, pls. IV (Tomb 15), XIII (Tomb 17). SHEDID 1994, Abb. 64; EVANS, *PM I*, 710, fig. 533 A and B; FRANKFORT 1936, fig. 13. El Bersheh: GRIFFITH & NEWBERRY 1895, Part II, pl. XI.5 (Tomb 4), pl. XVI (Tomb 5).

<sup>14</sup> HAYES 1990, 249, fig. 159.

<sup>15</sup> ARUZ, BENZEL and EVANS 2008, Cat. No. 63 (cf. 62, 58)

<sup>16</sup> Mallia: CMS II.6, 215. Phaistos: CMS II.5, 317 (Fig. 9). Cf. CMS II.5, 318, a griffin-hybrid, with webbed feet.

<sup>17</sup> Melos: EVANS, *PM I*, opp. p. 559, fig. 405 (MC III jug with a drawing of a solitary griffin in flying gallop); MORGAN 1988, pl. 64 (sherd with head and part of the wing, probably of a griffin). Kea: MARTHARI 1998; MORGAN 1988, 51, fig. 40; CUMMER & SCHOFIELD 1984, pl. 79

(1318). Thera: PAPAGIANNPOULOU 2008a, 436–440 (three painted pithoi: two griffins part standing/part galloping, in association with palm trees and spirals (no. 8885); griffin and lion in flying gallop on opposite sides of the pot, in association with foliate branches and spirals, and concentric circles (no. 9323); fragment of two galloping griffins, associated with circles and an undulating ground line (no. 7256).) Griffin-like creatures also appear on Middle Helladic pots from the Shaft Graves, with folded legs and indeterminate form (*PM I*, opp. P. 559, fig. 406a and b).

<sup>18</sup> PAPAGIANNPOULOU 2008a, 2008b.

<sup>19</sup> VLACHOPOULOS 2007, 135, pl. 15.5, 15.17.

<sup>20</sup> KRITSELI-PROVIDI 1982, pl. 2a; (= MORGAN 1988, pl. 157). The other (poorly preserved) griffin is from the Shrine of the Fresco: MARINATOS 1988, figs. 2–3; MORGAN 2005, fig. 10.5 (MARINATOS reconstruction), pl. 24b (photograph, only forepaws and tail survive). (REHAK (1992, pl. XVIIIa) reconstructs the animal as a lion.) In both instances in the Cult Centre the creature is small and carried under the arm of a white-skinned figure.



Fig. 1 The Griffin. Scale: 1:2  
Head: F.181; beak: F.779; wing: F.15, F.228;  
forelegs: F.306; hind legs: F.760, 856; tail: F.309  
Reconstruction: Lyvia Morgan. Computer realization: Marian Negrete-Martinez





Fig. 2 Griffin head and wing fragments as reconstructed (scale 1:1)



Fig. 3 Large scale griffin from Tell el-Dab'a. Drawing of reconstruction by Clairy Palyvou



Fig. 4 Griffin head and wing.

Wall painting, detail from the presentation scene, Xesté 3, Thera. Late Cycladic I (DOUMAS 1992, pl. 128)

Pylos,<sup>21</sup> and this appears to have been the case, too, in Palace F at Tell el Dab<sup>c</sup>a. A wing fragment of a large griffin, also found in the dump just outside the palace, has been reconstructed by Claire Palyvou (Fig. 3),<sup>22</sup> and envisaged as flanking a throne by Manfred Bietak.<sup>23</sup>

Other fragments of what appear to be griffins come from Kea and, in the Levant, Tel Kabri and Alalakh. Fragments of 'notched plume', neck

feathers and perhaps a crest from House A at Ayia Irini, Kea have been recognized by Ellen Davis as belonging to a large griffin.<sup>24</sup> From Tel Kabri, a tiny griffin in flying gallop was reconstructed by Wolf-Dietrich Neimeier and Barbara Neimeier on the basis of a fragment of an s-shape 'curl' and two fragments of 'notched plume'.<sup>25</sup> At no more than 12.5 centimetres in length as reconstructed, it is surprisingly small. Amongst the wall painting frag-

<sup>21</sup> Recently discussed by SHANKS (2007).

<sup>22</sup> BIETAK and PALYVOU 2000 (reconstruction superimposed over the Knossos Throne Room griffin). The preserved fragment of wing has a relatively straight edge, hence the reconstructed wing is straight, uncharacteristic for Aegean griffins.

<sup>23</sup> BIETAK 2007, Fig. 25; BIETAK, MARINATOS & PALYVOU 2007, 40, fig. 36. The griffin has been matched with a proposed second griffin, heraldically flanking the

throne. For a reconstruction of the architectural plan with proposed throne room: BIETAK, MARINATOS & PALYVOU 2007, 22, fig. 16.

<sup>24</sup> DAVIS 2007, 148–149, pl. 17.1, G–J. On the 'notched plume' (occasionally used for Aegean griffins) see note 38 below; MORGAN 1988, 51/186, notes 80–81; D'ALBAIC 1995.

<sup>25</sup> NIEMEIER and NIEMEIER 2000, fig. 13.



ments excavated at Alalakh, the Niemeiers have identified a couchant griffin with raised wing.<sup>26</sup>

#### AEGEAN GRIFFINS IN EGYPT

In the time of Ahmose, at the onset of the New Kingdom, a new form of griffin for Egypt suddenly appears on the ceremonial axe of the king (Fig. 5).<sup>27</sup> The form is typically Aegean. Its beak is long, like a vulture, rather than short like a falcon. It has a crest of five feathers on its head – the same number as the Tell el-Dabca griffin. The wings are raised in profile and bent, as on Aegean griffins. Along the neck and upper part of the wing are spirals and, as with Aegean griffins, the direction changes from neck to wing. Given that the rest of the iconography on the axe is quintessentially Egyptian, it is astonishing that such precise idiomatic details should be defined.

In the reign of Tuthmosis III, Theban tombs represent *Keftiu* – Aegeans – bringing diplomatic gifts of animal headed rhyta, notably bull and lion (which have their counterparts in actual rhyta from Knossos and Mycenae<sup>28</sup>), also leopard and, in the tombs of Useramun (TT 131) and Rekhmire (TT 100), griffin.<sup>29</sup> There are no actual counterparts for griffin rhyta in the Aegean and the idiom is mixed Aegean/Egyptian,<sup>30</sup> but their inclusion provides a specifically Aegean corollary for the lion and bull as evocative symbols of power.

Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty we again encounter the Aegean griffin in Egyptian art, on a glass plaque from Gaza, in flying gallop, with raised wings and a crest, as part of a hunting



Fig. 5 Ceremonial axe. Tomb of Queen Ahhotep, Thebes. Ahmose I. Egyptian Museum, Cairo (SALEH and SOUROUZIAN 1987, 121a)

scene,<sup>31</sup> and attacking an ibex on a gold-foil chariot attachment (horse harness) from the tomb of Tutankhamun (Fig. 20).<sup>32</sup> This griffin has a crest and upraised bent wings and is part of a remarkably Aegean hunt scene (discussed below).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* fig. 22 (reconstruction), figs. 20, 21 (fragments of wing, body, and hind leg). The bent wing is reconstructed on the basis of Aegean examples, as is the flying gallop of the Kabri griffin.

<sup>27</sup> Colour: SALEH and SOUROUZIAN 1987, nos. 121 and 122; ARUZ, BENZEL and EVANS 2008, cat.no. 67. Cf. MORGAN this volume (Leopards) n. 76. Slightly earlier, a winged and crested griffin appears on a scarab of the Hyksos period found at Tell Beit Mirsim in Palestine (FRANKFORT 1936, fig. 15). ARUZ draws attention to a group of scarabs each with a single griffin with raised bent wings, perhaps datable to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty (2008, 177 and fig. 356, which also has a crest).

<sup>28</sup> MARINATOS & HIRMER 1976, pls. 98, 99 (bull and lioness, Knossos), 175, 176 (bull and lion, Mycenae); KARO 1930, pls. CXVII–CXVIII (lion), CXIX–CXXI (bull), both from Shaft Grave IV. Cf. a ceramic lion-head rhyton from Thera: R. KOEHL in ARUZ, BENZEL and EVANS 2008, 272–273, cat.no. 170.

<sup>29</sup> KANTOR 1947, 47, pl. IX, H–T; VERCOUTTER 1956, 315, pl. XXXVIII; HELCK 1979, 71; WACHSMANN 1987, 59–60.

<sup>30</sup> Egyptian artists sometimes hybridised both foreigners and their wares (Anubis rhyta are carried by Keftiu in the tombs of Menkheperasonb and Rekhmire). The griffin rhyton in the tomb of Useramen is falcon faced, but has a crest and spiral on the neck (where the rhyton ends). In the tomb of Rekhmire the griffin rhyton is less well preserved but evidently has a crest, spirals and the straighter beak of Aegean griffins (VERCOUTTER 1956, pl. XXXVIII, 260).

<sup>31</sup> KANTOR 1947, pl. XXIII.

<sup>32</sup> LITTAUER & CROUWEL 1985, pl. XLII (w); ARUZ, BENZEL and EVANS 2008, 390, fig. 122 (colour). A second gold-foil chariot attachment, partially destroyed, has a lion with what may be a griffin above: LITTAUER & CROUWEL 1985, pl. XLII (v); FELDMAN 2006, fig. 4V.



Fig. 6 Griffin beak, F 779 (scale 1:1)



Fig. 7 Griffin head, F 181 (scale 1:1)

**THE TELL EL DAB<sup>ca</sup> GRIFFIN AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION (Figs. 1, 2, 6, 7, 11)**

The particular characteristics of our griffin comprise a recognizably Aegean idiom, with the beak of a vulture, crest, spirals, raised bent wings and flying gallop. All Aegean griffins share at least some of these features and all but the anomalous Knossos and Pylos Throne Room griffins are winged.

The beak is large in relation to the head, which is delicately painted, with carefully defined eye and fine hairs marked by short red lines (Figs. 2, 6, 7).

A large black oval defines the face area. On the head is preserved the beginnings of a crest, with small spirals on the head, rising into plumes. Hanging from below the head is a blue area with short red lines. The whole form is not preserved. It may be a plant, or a wattle belonging to the bird head. The shoulder and near wing are picked out in black spirals with red centres and red between the curves, forming triangular borders (Figs. 2, 7, 11).

At the right-hand edge of the wing fragment is an area of blue with fine black lines, belonging to the far wing, overlapped by the near. A second fragment of blue has been added further up the wing. No fragments of the plumes of the wings have been found.

Beneath the beak is a brown area, which should be interpreted as the prey. It is the same orange-yellow ochre colour as some of the deer fragments from the frieze, but these are against a red background, rather than yellow. Most likely the prey here was also deer. To date, no other pieces of this particular prey have been identified and no attempt has yet been made to reconstruct it. It should, however, be imagined, as it provides the contextual evidence for the predatory action of the griffin.

**CRESTED HEAD**

The blue crest (which is only partially preserved) is formed by five feathers divided by black lines. Along the base of this crest is a running spiral,

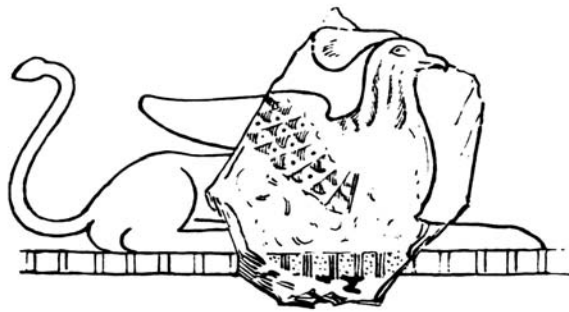


Fig. 8 Miniature Fresco from Knossos  
(EVANS, *PM I*, 549, fig. 400)



Fig. 9 Seal from Phaistos, MM II (*CMS II.5*, 317)

with a black outline and red centres, matching the spirals on the neck and wing. This feature, though not always applied to Aegean griffins, is characteristic and appears with the very earliest examples. It may reflect the crested head of the hoopoe bird, as depicted in the Caravanserai frieze.<sup>33</sup>

Of the earliest griffins, the two on the seals from Mallia and Phaistos (MM II) have a crest made up of individual feathers (Fig. 9), while those in the Knossos miniature fresco fragments (MM III) appear as a solid bunch of feathers (Fig. 8). These two types remain the norm, the latter developing into a wedge shape, delineated with feathers within. Occasionally the individual feathers curve high on the head as in Figs. 23, 24.<sup>34</sup> On a seal impression from Zakros the crest feathers end in circles<sup>35</sup> and on two pithoi from Akrotiri Thera (MC III–LC I) and a jar from Ayia Irini, Kea (LC I), the feathers end in spirals<sup>36</sup>. On the small surfaces of seals, less than half of all griffins have a crest, though more than half of the earliest seals (MM II–LM I) from Crete do so. Interestingly, none of the Shaft Grave griffins are crested (Figs. 12, 21) and nor is the Xesté 3 griffin (Fig. 4) (the West House griffin's head is reconstructed). A crest appears to have been the norm for Mycenaean ivory carving. Spirals at the base of the feathers have only one



Fig. 10 Seal Impression from Zakros, MM II  
(*CMS II.7*, 87)

surviving parallel – on the LH II–IIIA ivory pyxis from the Athens Agora (Fig. 14).

#### Wattle (?)

Immediately below the head of the griffin is an area of blue with small black and red markings. While this might represent a plant, it is conceivable that it is actually a wattle hanging from the griffin's neck. Parallels for this would be extremely rare, existing only (to my knowledge) on the MM II seal from Phaistos (Fig. 9), where the 'wattle' looks like a large pouch attached to a collar, on a seal impression from Pylos and one other seal.<sup>37</sup> There are remarkably few birds on which such a feature might have been modelled.<sup>38</sup> The alternative possi-

<sup>33</sup> Caravanserai: EVANS, *PM II*, 109–116, figs. 51, 52 and frontispiece; SHAW 2005. Hoopoes in Egyptian art: HOULIHAN 1986, 118–120; SHEDID 1994, Abb. 111 (Beni Hasan).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. a gold seal and a seal impression from Pylos, *CMS I*, 293 and 304.

<sup>35</sup> *CMS II.7*, 163.

<sup>36</sup> Thera: PAPAIOANNOPOULOU 2008a, 436–439, fig. 40.5–40.11. Kea: MARTHARI 1998; MORGAN 1988, 51, fig. 40; CUMMER & SCHOFIELD 1984, pl. 79 (1318). Marthari argues for the manufacture of the jar in a Thera workshop.

<sup>37</sup> *CMS I*, 316 (Pylos), *CMS III*, 372.

<sup>38</sup> One might have thought of the Red Junglefowl, the descendant of the domestic chicken, except that there is no indication that it was imported to the Aegean during the Bronze Age and the evidence in Egypt during the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty is unclear (HOULIHAN 1986, 79–81). Other (none too likely) options would be the Helmeted Guinea fowl (HOULIHAN 1986, 82–83) or the Lammergeier Vulture (HARRISON and GREENSMITH 1993, 92).





Fig. 11 Griffin wing fragment, F 15 (scale 1:1)

bility of a plant is suggested by the proximity of the palm leaves in the Zakros seal impression in Fig. 10. Given the uncertainty, I have chosen not to attempt to reconstruct this feature.

### Wings

On the neck and upper section of the near wing of the griffin is a running spiral in black with a solid red circle at the centre of each spiral (Figs. 2, 7, 11). A thick black outline encompasses the area and each spiral extends down from the upper line. The first, just beyond the head (F.181), runs clockwise. The next, on the shoulder (F.15), runs anticlockwise. The adjoining third and fourth spirals (F.15) return to the direction of the first.

Between each spiral (except the first two on the neck) is a red triangle. Red continued below the spirals but is preserved in only two areas. Probably the lower red was continuous, as in the wavy blue area below the spirals on the Xesté 3 griffin (Fig. 4). The Xesté 3 griffin provides the best comparison for the wings, as the West House griffin has only two spirals surviving (Fig. 13). A single diamond shape in blue, situated between the neck and wing spirals, offers the only analogy for the red triangles between the spirals on our griffin. On both Theran griffins, the direction of the spirals changes from neck to wing. Those on

the Xesté 3 griffin follow the pattern of the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a griffin, with neck spiral anticlockwise, wing spirals clockwise. The West House griffin – which moves from left to right instead of right to left – has the same change from neck to wing, but in reverse, appropriate for the griffin's orientation.

The far wing of our griffin is painted blue, with a thick black outline. The angle indicates that the wing was bent. At the juncture of the far and near wings are several short black lines apparently representing feathers. This is directly paralleled in the Xesté 3 griffin, on which the far wing is also blue and, more naturalistically, is covered in fine black feathery lines. The large scale griffin from Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a has the same combination of black spirals with red between and blue for the far wing (Fig. 3).

Both Theran griffins have the 'notched plume' pattern along the upper wing feathers, a feature also visible on the Knossos miniature griffins, but otherwise somewhat rare on griffin wings.<sup>39</sup> No evidence for these feathers and no pieces of 'notched plume' were found at Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a.

Spirals are missing from the wings of the very earliest Aegean griffins, but from LC I/LM IA–B/LH I–II they appear on the two Theran griffins, seal impressions from Knossos (Figs. 16, 25), Zakros (Fig. 23) and Ayia Triada,<sup>40</sup> mainland seals

<sup>39</sup> The notched plume is the identifying feature of the griffin from House A at Kea. It is apparent on an ivory from Mycenae (POURSAT 1977, pl. XXXIII, no. 312/3215).

<sup>40</sup> Knossos: CMS II.8, 186 (Fig. 16), 313, 359–360 (Fig. 25); Ayia Triada: CMS II.6, 99; 101; 102. Zakros: CMS II.7, 94; 96 (Fig. 23). On Fig. 10, from Zakros, the spirals are abbreviated into circles; cf. CMS II.7, 163 (Zakros), CMS II.8, 182, 194 (Knossos).

(Fig. 17)<sup>41</sup> and all the Mycenaean Shaft Grave griffins (Figs. 12, 21).<sup>42</sup> They occur on approximately one third of griffins on seals (a small scale for such a detail), are an integral part of griffins on Mycenaean ivories (Fig. 14) and also appear on the Mycenaean wooden pyxis lid found at Saqqara (Fig. 22). In all examples where the spirals are clearly visible, the direction of the spiral changes from the neck to the wing. To my knowledge, the only certain examples of griffins in which the direction changes twice, as at Tell el-Dabca, are on the Ahmose axe (Fig. 5), the Athens ivory pyxis (Fig. 14), and a seal from Vapheio, on which the griffin accompanies a male figure (god, king or priest?) wearing a distinctive robe.<sup>43</sup> However, the neck spiral on the Thera hunting griffin is not preserved (that on the Xesté 3 griffin poorly preserved) and it is quite likely that it too matched the wing rather than the shoulder spirals.

### Flying gallop

The so-called flying gallop is a posture redolent of pursuit. It was used by Aegean artists to express swift motion of animals as predator or prey. Both hind legs and forelegs are extended outward in the instant of a gallop in which all four legs are off the ground at the same time. Different animals gallop in different ways and this form of extended gallop is most characteristic of felines. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate to the lion, leopard and lion-bodied griffin. Also appropriate to dogs, the posture is less true to life in the case of hoofed animals. Aegean artists nonetheless used this expressive pose for boar, deer, goats and horses, though Minoan artists were more circumspect than Mycenaean, who distinguished less between different animal movements. One can see from the Thera hunt scene that the griffin's legs are more acutely extended than those of the deer (Fig. 13).

While the forelegs of the Thera feline are bent (MORGAN this volume, fig. 15), those of the Thera griffin are virtually straight (Fig. 13). Both postures



Fig. 12 Gold cut-out of a griffin. Shaft Grave III, Mycenaean, LH I; Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: TAP)

are used by Aegean artists for griffins but the bent legs are more characteristic (Figs. 12, 15, 23, 26), particularly in the context of the hunt, in which the legs are poised to pounce on the prey. Of the Tell el-Dabca griffin, the ankles of the forelegs, though not the paws, are preserved (F.306), and their angle indicates that the creature's legs were even straighter than those of the Thera griffin.

Only a small proportion of griffins on seals are depicted in flying gallop, mostly hunting prey or associated with a lion (Figs. 15, 16, 18, 23, 24, 26).<sup>44</sup>

All but one<sup>45</sup> of the Shaft Grave griffins are in flying gallop (Figs. 12, 21), as are the griffins on the Melian jug and two of the Thera pithoi (note 17), and the miniature griffin held by a helmeted female in a painting from the Cult Centre at Mycenaean.<sup>46</sup> One of the griffins on the Athens ivory pyxis (Fig. 14) extends hind legs and far foreleg in a flying gallop, raising the near foreleg to anchor its prey.

### THE CLOSEST PARALLELS

Given the relative paucity of well preserved griffins in Aegean painting (as opposed to glyptic art and ivories), close parallels are hard to come by.

The griffins on the Athens Agora pyxis (Fig. 14) – with spirals along the crest, neck and wing spirals which change direction twice, a curved surround to its face, and one in flying gallop attacking a deer with its beak – provide a striking parallel for the Tell el-Dabca griffin. It dates to LH II–

<sup>41</sup> Vapheio (LH II): CMS I, 223. Rutsi (LH I): CMS I, 269; 271; (LH II): I, 282; 285. Karsarma (LH I–II): CMS V, 583; 584. Koukanara (LH I–III): CMS V, 642 (Fig. 17). Mycenaean (LH II–III): CMS I, 85; 98; 102; Midea (LH II–III): CMS I, 196; Prosymna (LH II–III): CMS I, 206. Tiryns (LH II–III A1): CMS VS.IB, 429.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. KARO 1930, pl. XXVI (47).

<sup>43</sup> CMS I, 223. Colour: ARUZ, BENZEL and EVANS 2008, cat.no. 78.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. CMS I, 341 (Pylos). II.6, 265, (Sklavokambos). II.7, 94 (Zakros). II.8, 187, 193 (Knossos). VS.IB, 229 (Armeni). VII, 116. IX, 162. MARINATOS 1993, 164, fig. 152 (Archanes).

<sup>45</sup> KARO 1930, no. 47, pl. XXVI, gold cut-outs of seated griffins.

<sup>46</sup> KRITSELI-PROVIDI 1982, pl. 2a; (= MORGAN 1988, pl. 157).





Fig. 13 Griffin chasing deer.  
Detail from the miniature frieze, West House, Akrotiri, Thera. LC I (DOUMAS 1992, pl. 32)

LH IIIA. A century earlier, the Aegean style griffin on the Ahmose axe (Fig. 5) already has a double change of direction to the neck and wing spirals. We should, therefore, imagine earlier prototypes for these features, most likely in lost wall paintings. Closer in date are the Theran griffins (Figs. 13 and 4). The West House hunting griffin is in flying gallop with raised wings (head not preserved), while the internal details of the Xesté 3 guardian griffin's head and wing afford a close comparison, as demonstrated by Bietak (note 1). With the fragmentary griffin from the 'Porter's Lodge' (note 19), this represents an unusual concentration on the creature at a single site.

#### SYMBOLISM OF THE GRIFFIN AS PREDATOR

The griffin's two major roles in ancient art are as predator and protector. The prime examples of both appear in the Theran paintings from the West

House and Xesté 3 respectively. In the Throne Rooms of Knossos and Pylos, and perhaps in the large scale griffins of Kea and Tell el-Dabʿa (Fig. 3), the protective or guardian role is evident. On Aegean seals the griffin takes both roles but is frequently depicted alone, as it is on some Mycenaean ivories. One should not, however, think that the symbolic associations are not then in play. They would certainly have been so. The griffin on its own is an image rich in reflected meaning. Clearly, as with lions, the dual roles of the griffin are complimentary. It is the most powerful who are most able to protect.

In this article, I will not be addressing the full symbolic range of the griffin within the Aegean and the Near East. Its widespread role as guardian of divinities, its royal symbolism and solar associations, its attachment to pillars and chariots, are all aspects beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>47</sup> Rather, I

<sup>47</sup> These aspects were discussed at a Symposium held at the University of Illinois, Chicago, in April 2008, organized by Nanno Marinatos. Papers: C. Palyvou, 'Griffins in their Architectural Setting'; E. Shanks, 'Griffins in the Palaces of Pylos and Knossos' (cf. SHANKS 2007); A. Vlachopoulos, 'Griffin, African Palms and Monkeys in Thera' (with responses by A. Chapin and L. Morgan)

(cf. VLACHOPOULOS 2007); N. Wyatt, 'Grasping the Griffin: Identifying and Characterizing the Griffin in West Semitic tradition' (now WYATT 2009); R. Wilkinson and N. Marinatos (delivered by Marinatos), 'The Solar Connotations of the Griffin in Egypt and Minoan Crete: A synthesis and a koine of Religious Symbolism'.



have focused on the context of predation and the hunt, to which this particular griffin belongs.

#### PREDATOR AND PREY IN AEGEAN ART

In wall painting, the griffin as hunter appears in the Aegean only at Thera (Fig. 13). With raised wings and neck, in the full spread of its ‘flying gallop’, the creature is close to, but not yet on, its prey. A doe or fawn flees below and the tension of the scene rests upon an anticipation of the outcome. The Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a griffin, while moving in the opposite direction, likewise has raised neck and wings and is in ‘flying gallop’. It is probable that the prey is the same – a deer – with the major difference that the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a griffin appears to have caught the animal, held beneath its beak and no doubt its paws.

The best parallels for these two scenes are the wooden pyxis lid found at Saqqara and the ivory pyxis and lid from the Athens Agora (Figs. 22, 14). On the wooden lid (which presumably had a corresponding scene of feline hunt on the body of the pyxis) a griffin with crest and wings with spirals prowls (leopard-like) towards a goat, already falling as though caught and wounded. The distance between them relates the scene to the Theran hunt.

The ivory pyxis and lid also has lions (here relegated to small scale along the top of the pyxis) but the main protagonists are the griffins and their prey. This is a unique scene in that no less than three griffins are depicted. All have felled their prey, one of which is clearly a fallow deer, fallen and turning its head back to look at its attacker.

Two of the griffins have typically Aegean wings, while one has them spread in a combination frontal

and side view, like the wings of the Middle Kingdom griffin. All the griffins have long beaks, crests with spirals and spirals along the wing, in typical Aegean idiom. One of the griffins (right in Fig. 14 below) attacks in flying gallop, with raised neck and wings. One foreleg fells a deer below and the other grabs a deer above, into whose flesh the sharp beak is aimed. This double attack is unique, but the animal lifted into the air and attacked with beak and foreleg provides a partial explanation for the pinkish-orange colour below the beak of the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a griffin. There the prey was presumably held below the griffin by both beak and forelegs.

The griffin as hunter is more prevalent on seals. Almost forty seals portray the griffin as a predator – around a quarter of all glyptic griffins. The majority hunt the usual Aegean prey of deer, goat or bull<sup>48</sup> – precisely the animals of the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a Hunt Frieze. A few hunt with or attack lions (see below). On one seal the prey is a mythical beast.<sup>49</sup> On another the griffin attacks a deer, which is poised above a sacrificial table.<sup>50</sup> Two scenes possibly associate the griffin as predator with man as hunter or herder. On a seal from Knossos, a man stands before a bull, which is attacked from above by a griffin (?).<sup>51</sup> On a broken seal impression from Pylos<sup>52</sup> two men run amongst griffins and horses (?). The scene is unique and ambiguous, but significant in its inclusion of human hunters. Usually the griffin is the sole predator. Rare examples of two appear on seal impressions from Knossos (Figs. 16, 18),<sup>53</sup> Zakros and Mycenae, and a seal from Brauro,<sup>54</sup> as well as on the Athens pyxis (Fig. 14). This norm of a single griffin accords well with both the Theran and the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a paintings.

<sup>48</sup> It is not always clear which animal is depicted. Some of the following are likely, others certain: *Deer*: CMS II.3, 25 (Knossos); CMS II.4, 50 (‘Mallia, uncertain griffin’); CMS II.8, 192 (Knossos, Fig. 18); CMS III.2, 375; CMS V, 642 (Koukounara, Fig. 17); CMS V, 675 (Thebes, cylinder seal); CMS VII, 94 (cylinder seal); CMS IX, 20D; CMS X, 126; CMS XI, 41; CMS XI, 308. *Goat*: CMS IS, 19 (Tiryns, cylinder seal); CMS II.6, 96; CMS II.7, 92 (Zakros); CMS II 7, 95 (Zakros); CMS VS.1B, 197 (Angelliana, cylinder seal); CMS VII, 174 (cylinder seal), CMS VII, 174 (cylinder seal). CMS XI, 302. *Bull*: CMS II 3, 334; CMS V, 216 (Brauro); CMS V, 596 (Mycenae); CMS VII, 116; CMS X, 125; CMS XII, 228; CMS XII, 228. CMS II 3, 25 is two sided: on one side griffin and deer, on the other griffin and boar. CMS XI,

195 has a goat on one side and a griffin and indeterminate prey on the other.

<sup>49</sup> CMS XII, 291.

<sup>50</sup> CMS IX, 20 D. N. MARINATOS interprets this as “an analogy between the laws of nature and the human institution of sacrifice, the sacred form of violence” (1986, 44, fig. 29 and p.49).

<sup>51</sup> CMS II.3, 9. The creature is leonine or canine with pointed snout / beak and what look like plumes on its back.

<sup>52</sup> CMS I, 324.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. CMS II.8, 193 from Knossos, in which a pair of griffins in flying gallop pull a chariot.

<sup>54</sup> Zakros: CMS II.7, 98. Mycenae: CMS V, 596. Brauro: CMS V, 216.



Fig. 14 Ivory pyxis and lid, Athens Agora, LH II–III A  
a) Photo: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Agora Excavations  
b) Drawing: Piet de Jong, American School of Classical Studies at Athens

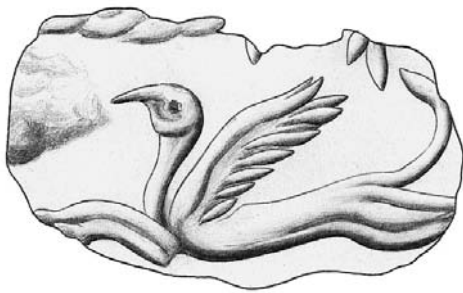


Fig. 15 Seal impression, Zakros, LM I (CMS II.7, 93)



Fig. 16 Seal impression, Knossos (CMS II.8, 186)



Fig. 17 Seal, Koukounara, LM I–II (CMS V, 642)



Fig. 18 Seal impression, Knossos (CMS II.8, 192)

The peculiar constraints of the small circular surface of a seal, provide more opportunity for torsion than for elongated action. The disposition of predator behind, prey in front, both in flying gallop, such as we see in the Theran hunt is, therefore, absent from glyptic art. Instead, the griffin mounts the back of the animal (Fig. 18),<sup>55</sup> grabs its prey upright in its beak (Figs. 17, 23),<sup>56</sup> or is placed in mirror image to its prey, upside down or back to back.<sup>57</sup>

From the surviving evidence, it appears that the theme of hunting griffin was more popular in Minoan glyptic art than in Mycenaean.<sup>58</sup> The majority of the examples from Crete date to Late Minoan I, half being from Zakros, the ultimate repository of fantastic beasts.

#### PREDATOR AND PREY IN SYRIAN-LEVANTINE GLYPTIC

While the concept of the griffin and its guardian role travelled from east to west, the predatory nature of the griffin was developed and made explicit in the Aegean, before, in turn, influencing Eastern Mediterranean imagery.

On Syrian cylinder seals of the 18<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the griffin takes a relatively subsidiary, though nonetheless potent, role. It appears (singly or heraldically) in juxtaposition with active lion hunts, predators by association, yet passively seated in guardian pose.<sup>59</sup> In contrast to Aegean seals, where it appears in juxtaposition with a prey animal, the Syrian griffin is only minimally active. It sits on its haunches, usually with one front paw raised above a seated ungulate.<sup>60</sup> The posture, which matches that of Syrian sphinxes, is one of subduing, rather than hunting. On a seal from



Fig. 19 Syrian cylinder seal (COLLON 2000, fig. 6)

Kültepe in Anatolia, a griffin mounts the back of a bull in predatory association, but still couchant.<sup>61</sup> The specifically Syrian format of griffin subduing prey continues on Mitannian seals.<sup>62</sup>

To my knowledge, only on one earlier seal is the hunt more explicit. A griffin in a restricted version of the flying gallop, with hind legs on the ground, places both front paws on the back of an ungulate (Fig. 19).<sup>63</sup> While the prey remains seated, head turned back, its front leg is bent upwards, giving a sense of collapse rather than repose. Despite the early dating of 18<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century attributed to this seal, the wings of the griffin are raised and bent, in the subsequent Aegean idiom, rather than straight, as with other Syrian griffins. It is anomalous in both posture and wing, anticipating the Aegean predator griffin, though not yet in full flying gallop.

A Syro-Minoan cylinder seal dated to LM IA–B, recently excavated in a tomb at Poros (Herak-

<sup>55</sup> Cf. CMS II.3, 334; CMS III.2, 375; CMS VI, 395; CMS X, 125, 126; CMS XI, 41, 308; CMS V, 216 (Brauro).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. CMS V, 675 (Thebes, cylinder seal). CMS XI, 195; CMS XII, 291.

<sup>57</sup> CMS II.3, 25 (Knossos); CMS II.7, 95 (Zakros). CMS XII, 228.

<sup>58</sup> Crete: CMS II.7, 95, 96 (Fig. 23), 98, and perhaps 93 (Fig. 15) and 94 (Zakros); CMS II.3, 25 (Knossos); CMS II.8, 192 (Fig. 18 Knossos); CMS II.4, 50 ('Mallia'); CMS II.6, 265 (Sklavokambos); CMS VS.1A, 202 (Phylaki (Chania); CMS VS. IB, 197 (Angelliana, cylinder seal). Mainland: CMS I, 19 (Tiryns, cylinder seal); CMS V, 596 (Mycenae); CMS V, 642 (Koukounara); CMS V, 216 (Brauro); CMS V, 675 (Thebes, cylinder seal).

<sup>59</sup> FRANKFORT 1939, pl. XXXI a; TESSIER 1969, 56, no. 35.

<sup>60</sup> FRANKFORT 1939, pl. XLII o (heraldic); ARUZ 1995b, fig.

20 (single griffin hunt, with heraldic lions above). Syrian sphinxes: TESSIER 1969, 145–148. The griffin may also be seated with front and hind legs on the ground, its prey oblivious to its presence (TESSIER 1969, 69, no. 94); or above the oblivious prey (*ibid.* .53, no. 23; 70, no. 102).

<sup>61</sup> ARUZ 2008, fig. 235.

<sup>62</sup> COLLON 1987, No. 270 (= FRANKFORT 1939, pl. XLIII.1), here juxtaposed with a man hunting prey. COLLON dates the seal to Period Vb, Period V covering c.1500–1000 BCE.

<sup>63</sup> FRANKFORT 1936, fig. 18 = FRANKFORT 1939, pl. XLI f, dated to his 1<sup>st</sup> Syrian Group (c.1900–1700); COLLON 2000, fig. 6, related to the Aleppo workshop (c. 1720–1650). Manfred Bietak (personal communication) brings the range to c. 1750–1550.





Fig. 20 Griffin and dog attacking ibex. Gold foil horse harness, Tomb of Tutankhamun. Photo: Griffith Institute, Oxford

leion),<sup>64</sup> is of significance for the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a paintings, with which it is closely contemporary, as it juxtaposes a griffin hunting an ungulate with the image of an acrobat. The griffin has straight, raised wings and hind feet on the ground, in Syrian, rather than Minoan idiom.

#### PREDATOR AND PREY IN EGYPTIAN ART

In origin, the Egyptian griffin is a hunter. In Predynastic art, it attacks its prey alongside both lion and leopard predators (note 10). The griffin in Middle Kingdom paintings is a mythical beast aloof from the kill, standing above the actual hunt, in a position signifying the farthest reaches of the desert (note 13).

Uniquely, the griffin from the Tomb of Tutankhamun (Fig. 20) attacks its prey from above while a dog wearing a collar attacks from below. This combination unexpectedly brings the griffin

into the realm of human (here royal) hunting. In a posture which originated in Aegean art, the prey kicks its legs up behind and bends its forelegs in the beginning of a fall, while turning its head to look at its attackers; and just as in Aegean art, the dog bites the underbelly of the animal. The hunt takes place in a landscape of plants. This remarkable scene, so Aegean in conception, is unique in Egyptian iconography and (like the other hunt scenes from the tomb, with lions and leopards as predators) clearly owes much to earlier Aegean prototypes, of which the Hunt Frieze from Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a is the prime example.<sup>65</sup>

#### GRIFFINS, HUNTING AND HUMAN AGGRESSION

As with lions, there is an underlying association between the hunting griffin and warfare, both in Egypt and the Aegean.

The clearest indication of such an association within the Aegean, comes from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae. A sword from Grave Delta has griffins in flying gallop on the blade and lion heads on the hilt (Fig. 21), while a dagger from Grave V has griffins in flying gallop on the blade, heads down, beaks pointing the way.<sup>66</sup> Like the lion daggers from Shaft Grave IV<sup>67</sup> (see e.g. MARINATOS, this volume, fig. 25), the predators gallop towards the tip of the blade as ready to attack as the weapon itself. Later, the association is implied in the wall painting from the Cult Centre at Mycenae in which a helmeted white-skinned figure holds a miniature griffin, and in the faience fragments of griffin and lion from the House of the Shields at Mycenae which was found in association with fragments of warriors.<sup>68</sup>

In Egypt, the role of hunter is extended on a pectoral of Sesostri III to show rampant griffins wearing the royal Atef crown trampling on the enemies of the pharaoh.<sup>69</sup> Here the griffin as hunter symbolizes the king as conqueror. This explicit association recurs with the Aegean-style griffin on the Ahmose axe blade (Fig. 5) – a ceremonial weapon. Just as griffins run down the blade of the swords and dagger in the Mycenae Shaft Graves, pointing towards the direction of

<sup>64</sup> RETHEMIOTAKIS 2007. I am grateful to Nanno Marinatos for drawing my attention to this seal.

<sup>65</sup> MORGAN 2006; this volume p. 292 and n. 72.

<sup>66</sup> KARO 1930, 135–136, Abb. 51, pls. XCI, XCII (747).

<sup>67</sup> MARINATOS and HIRMER 1976/86, pl. XLIX centre and pl. L; pl. XLIX below and pl. L1 below.

<sup>68</sup> MORGAN 1988, 53. Cult Centre: KRITSELL-PROVIDI 1982, A-6, col.pl. Ba, pl. 2a. House of the Shields: A.J.B. WACE, *BSA* 49 (1954) 235–238; *BSA* 50 (1955) 180–184; *BSA* 51 (1956) 15–113 (pl. 17 = warrior fragments).

<sup>69</sup> LANGE & HIRMER 1968, pl. XIV (centre). MORGAN 1988, pl. 62.

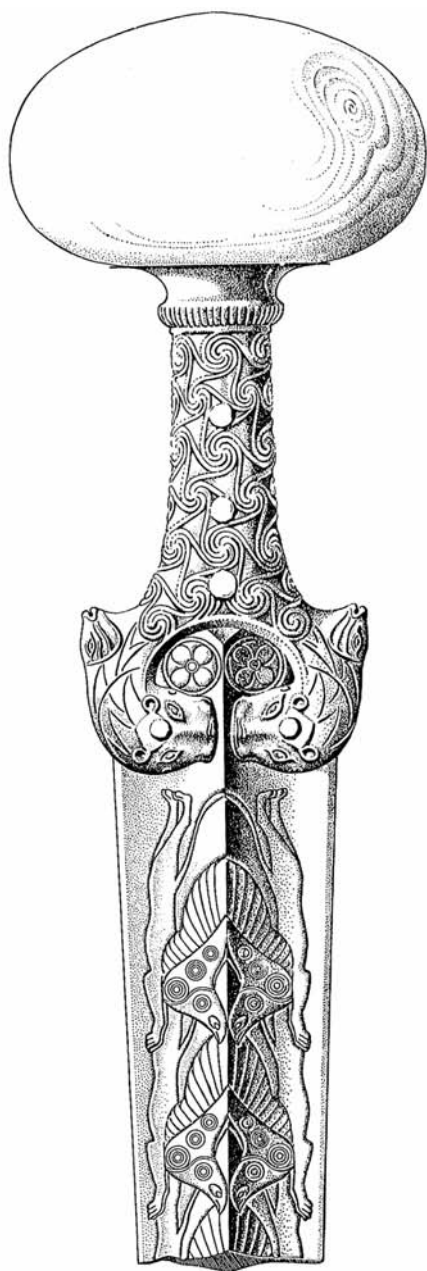


Fig. 21 Dagger with lions on hilt and griffins on blade. Shaft Grave Delta, Mycenae (MYLONAS 1973, 86, pl. 8)

the antagonistic cut, so the posture of the griffin follows the curved line of the cutting edge of the axe. The forelegs of the griffin are raised with the curve and echo the outstretched arm of the king conquering his Asiatic foe immediately above.

Taking the same position as the sphinx on the reverse, who holds up the head of a defeated enemy, the Aegean griffin as hunter here symbolizes the king as conqueror. The griffin is designated in the accompanying text “beloved of Montu”,<sup>70</sup> the god of war, and the axe as a whole refers to the expulsion of the Hyksos. Such precise iconography is, in my view, unlikely to be coincidental and speaks of a significant association between the Aegean and Egypt.

#### GRIFFIN AND LION

A special relationship exists in Aegean art between the lion and the griffin.<sup>71</sup> The griffin’s power as a hunter comes from its composition of two predators – the head and wings of a bird of prey and the body and legs of a lion. The prey of both lion and griffin is the same – bull, deer, goat – all of which were present in the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a frieze.

The theme of griffin and lion as parallel hunters is most evident on the wooden pyxis lid found at Saqqara (Fig. 22). The lid is spatially divided into four compartments by a rock pattern, but the four animals interact with one another across the divisions. A griffin stalks a goat, which is already falling in defeat; a lion stretches its neck, tongue lolling, towards two gazelle. The protagonists enact their drama amidst a landscape of plants, which are themselves not without significance. The griffin walks over ivy and past a wadj-papyrus, while its prey falls beside palm trees. In iconographic, as in environmental, terms, the ivy is essentially Aegean, while the wadj-papyrus and palm are essentially Egyptian, appropriated by Aegean artists. The palm in Aegean art is associated with lions, and occurs in association with griffins on the seal impression from Zakros in Fig. 10, on one of the Theran pithoi (note 17), and in the Theran miniature frieze (Fig. 13 and MORGAN this volume (Leopards) fig. 16). Papyrus is also associated with griffins.<sup>72</sup> Both plants occur in the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a Frieze. Behind the lion is a trefoil plant, which matches the plant accompanying our Leopard 1 (MORGAN this volume, figs. 2, 8). The gazelle is an Egyptian prey animal, the goat,

<sup>70</sup> FRANKFORT 1936, 112. WYATT (2009, 35, n. 15) interprets the formula (*mri mntw*) as a royal cognomen, “identifying the king as embodied in the griffin”.

<sup>71</sup> MORGAN 1988, 52–54.

<sup>72</sup> The Theran painting (DOUMAS 1992, pl. 30. Mycenae ivory (POURSAT 1977, pl. XXXIII, no. 312/3215); cylinder seal from Hagia Pelagia (MARINATOS 1993, 154, fig. 130).



Fig. 22 Wooden pyxis lid found at Saqqara in Egypt, LH II–III A (KANTOR 1947, pl. 24A)

Aegean. One might speculate that the lid holds a particular message of association: the Aegean griffin and goat paralleled with the Egyptian lion (international) and gazelle. Like the Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a Frieze, this wooden lid was executed by an Aegean artist, using iconography at home in both the Aegean and Egypt. It may be no coincidence that it too was found in Egypt.



Fig. 23 Seal Impression, Zakros, LM I (CMS II.7, 96 )



Fig. 24 Seal impression, Ayia Triada (CMS II.6, 103)

The Athens Agora pyxis (Fig. 14) also parallels griffin and lion, but there the griffin is the main protagonist and its prey is the Aegean fallow deer. The small lions along the top of the pyxis are associated with a less clearly determined ungulate. This parallelism of the hunt recurs on a cylinder seal, dated stylistically to LM IB, with two hunts back to back – griffin against deer/lion against agrimi or ibex.<sup>73</sup>

In Aegean iconography the association between griffin and lion is particularly strong. It dates back at least to the LC I/LM I A/LH I period, one of the earliest being a painted pithos from Akrotiri, Thera.<sup>74</sup> Griffin and lion appear together on two seals from Zakros and one from Ayia Triada (Figs. 23, 24).<sup>75</sup> Both griffins and lions adorn weapons from the Mycenae Shaft Graves and on a gold pin-head from Shaft Grave IV one side has two lions, the other two griffins, all galloping around the circular surface of the object.<sup>76</sup> In the programme of the Theran miniatures, griffin and leopard-like cat hunt their prey on the east wall, moving towards the south, while a lion chases its prey on the south wall, moving towards the east (MORGAN this volume (Leopards), fig. 16). This parallelism is probably what we have at Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a, each predator hunting its own prey.

Griffin and lion do not usually hunt the same prey.<sup>77</sup> The two hunt separately but in juxtaposition

<sup>73</sup> CMS VII, 94.

<sup>74</sup> See note 17. PAPAIOANNOPOULOU (2008, 438–439) dates it to MC/LC I, but notes its context as LC I.

<sup>75</sup> Zakros: CMS II.7, 96 (Fig. 23), 97; Ayia Triada: CMS II.6, 103 (Fig. 24).

<sup>76</sup> KARO 1930, pl. XXXII.

<sup>77</sup> Possible exceptions: CMS VII, 116 (LM II), frontal face bull flanked by griffin and lion, a formulaic structure in which the hunt is implied; CMS VII, 260, poorly preserved seal (LM II), lion and griffin(?) attacking prey ('griffin' unclear). A later, 13<sup>th</sup> century, ivory from Byblos influenced by Mycenaean art, clearly has griffin and lion attacking a bull together (A. CAUBET in ARUZ, BENZEL and EVANS 2008, 611, cat.no. 264).





Fig. 25 Seal impression, Knossos, LM I (CMS II.8, 359)

(as we have seen), are associated without prey,<sup>78</sup> or actively hunt one another. In one instance (LM IIIA), the griffin attacks a lion as the lion attacks a fallow deer.<sup>79</sup> Since the deer is commonly the prey of griffins, this looks like rivalry. On other seals, the griffin simply attacks the lion. From the LM I period, the lion as prey is clear on the Ayia Triada seal impression in Fig. 24, as it is on a slightly later seal.<sup>80</sup> Also from LM I, on a seal impression from Zakros the griffin attacks what appears to be a lion (the head is missing), while a bull runs in the opposite direction below (Fig. 23).<sup>81</sup>

Two seal impressions from Knossos clearly depict a lion attacking a griffin (Fig. 25).<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, the outcome on the seal in Fig. 26 is ambiguous. The format parallels that of the seal impression from Zakros in Fig. 23, in which the griffin attacks a lion (?) while a bull runs away. Here a lion runs away while a griffin and lion are in combat, the griffin in flying gallop, beak aimed at the lion, while the lion is twisted upright, like prey, but with jaws on the griffin's back.

From the surviving evidence, it seems that just as the theme of hunting griffin was more prevalent amongst Minoan glyptic artists, within the Aegean the theme of griffin and lion is almost exclusively Minoan in glyptic art.<sup>83</sup>



Fig. 26 Seal, LM I-II (CMS XI, 244)

In Syrian glyptic, a griffin occasionally attacks a lion, front paw resting proprietarily on its back, head held high, without contact.<sup>84</sup> An exception to this passivity, is the scene of griffin attacking lion on a seal acquired in Membij, Syria, and now in the Ashmolean, on which the animals rear up, with outstretched legs (Fig. 27). According to Joan Aruz, the seal is “the work of a Minoan carver in Syria”, Aegean/Mitannian imagery of the Late Minoan I period.<sup>85</sup> An explicit hierarchy of predation arises from the juxtaposition of images, the griffin hunt being heraldically placed adja-



Fig. 27 Cylinder seal acquired in Syria, Ashmolean Museum (ARUZ 2008, fig. 357)

<sup>78</sup> CMS II.7, 97 (Zakros); CMS IX, 148.

<sup>79</sup> CMS VS.IA, 202, from Phylaki (Chania).

<sup>80</sup> CMS XI, 45 (LM / LH II-III A1).

<sup>81</sup> Cf. CMS II.6, 265, a seal impression from Sklavokambos, on which the griffin attacks a lion (or dog), and CMS VI, 394, where the griffin's beak attacks the exposed belly of a fallen lion.

<sup>82</sup> CMS II.8, 359 (Fig. 25), 360.

<sup>83</sup> Fig. 26, with the two lions, may be a single exception. It is thought to be LH I-II, but is not from a known context.

<sup>84</sup> (TEISSIER 1996, no. 165 (18<sup>th</sup> c. Period IIA); TESSIER 1996, no. 166 (18<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c. Period IIB) – juxtaposed with lion attacking prey, a ‘heroes’ combat scene, and (significantly for the Tell el-Dabca paintings), bull-leaping. Cf. ARUZ 2008, fig. 288 (Syrian, unknown provenance), two rampant griffins with lion beneath.

<sup>85</sup> ARUZ 1995a, 20, fig. 17; 1995b, 36, fig. 10; 2008, fig. 357, cat.no. 189. The seal was previously dated by Frankfort to his 2<sup>nd</sup> Syrian Group (17<sup>th</sup> c): FRANKFORT 1939, pl. XLII I; KANTA 1947, pl. XXIII B.

cent to a lion attacking bull, while, beneath, a bull attacks its prey next to another lion hunt.

The theme of griffin versus lion recurs in Mycenaean art, on a faience vase from Mycenae,<sup>86</sup> where the two may be in mutual combat or the griffin may be winning (the fragmentary nature of the piece makes it ambiguous), and, considerably later, on an ivory plaque from the Artemision, Delos, where a lion unequivocally attacks a griffin.<sup>87</sup> The equally late ivory mirror handle from tomb 24 at Enkomi, which has a lion attacking a bull on one side and a warrior attacking a griffin on the other<sup>88</sup> reflects the original hierarchy of Aegean power: man/lion and griffin/bull.

#### CONCLUSION

The griffin as predator is usually the sole representative of its mythical species. By association it hunts alongside other felines. Its place within the Hunt Frieze cannot be in doubt, although exactly

how it related to the lions and the leopards remains unclear. Both the yellow background and the iconographic repertoire suggest that it was associated with the lions. While the lions hunt bulls, the griffin may have been attacking deer.

What is particularly interesting is that all these felines were associated with hunters and dogs in the Frieze (though perhaps not on the same wall). Both griffins and lions – in Aegean and Egyptian art – usually hunt in the wild (unless themselves hunted by men). The major exception is when there is an association with warfare. Such an association expresses an extension of the predatory powers of the feline. In the Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> paintings there is no indication of human fighting, but the juxtaposition of the hunters and dogs with the feline predators nonetheless places the natural hunting prowess of the feline within the symbolic sphere of male aggressive endeavour.

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<sup>86</sup> WACE, *BSA* 51 (1956, pl. 21b); SMITH 1965b, fig. 68.

<sup>87</sup> MORGAN 1988, pl. 66.

<sup>88</sup> MORGAN 1988, pls. 71, 72.

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