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## A NEW HIEROGLYPHIC SEAL FROM MOCHLOS

### The Discovery

In the summer of 1971 the Greek Archaeological Service undertook an extensive programme of cleaning and consolidation of the house-tombs of the early cemetery on Mochlos, which had been excavated by R. Seager at the beginning of the century and since abandoned. During these operations, several pieces of EM gold jewellery and a number of seals were recovered from the spoil earth of the tombs, or from incompletely excavated places inside the tombs. These new finds, now in the Hagios Nikolaos Museum, enrich considerably the corpus of material from Mochlos. Among them was a seal of outstanding quality, recovered from the spoil earth at the north-west area of the cemetery, not far from the high cliffs which form its northern limit (Pl. I)<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, the spoil earth where the seal was found cannot be associated with any particular tomb. Mochlos has already produced a number of seals, the earliest of which are datable to the EM II period<sup>2</sup>.

### Description

Hagios Nikolaos Museum Inv. 3114. Elongated three-sided prism bead with rounded ends. Black-green steatite. Length 0.022 m., width 0.011 m., diam. of string-hole 0.003 m. Middle Minoan III.

Side A (Pl. IIa, Fig. 1a). A fine study of three aquatic birds, which are represented schematically the one on top of the other. The lower one is standing on its feet and looks slightly upwards.

<sup>1</sup> The find was reported in *Amaltheia* 2, 1972, 52; *Arch. Deltion* 26, 1971, B 2 (in print).

<sup>2</sup> Seager, *Mochlos*, 1912, 96; Evans, *PM I* 74; Kenna, *Cretan Seals*, 1960 (hereafter CS), 13f., 15ff., 72; Warren, *Kadmos* 9, 1970, 30 ff. For other seals found during our operations at Mochlos see Davaras, *Ephemeris* 1973, Nos III and IV (in print). Other Mochlos seals: Seager l. c. 91, 110; Kenna, *The Cretan Talismanic Stone in the Late Minoan Age (SIMA XXIV)* 1969, 13 f.; Hughes and Warren, *Kret. Chron.* 17, 1963, 352-5, pl. 1 H.

Its beak is half open and its long neck forms a pronounced curve. The bird in the middle looks upwards and has its wings closed but its feet drawn up beneath the belly as if in flight, presumably because the artist had no space available to represent the bird standing. The same convention is applied to the topmost bird, which is looking over its back.

This elegant composition represents each bird in a different way and is adjusted to the shape of the seal, leaving no empty space in the field.

Side B (Pl. II b, Fig. 1 b). Two trumpet-like scrolls or bugles antithetically disposed and joined by their stems through a long spiral enclosing a small circle, making a formal whirling design. The scrolls are hatched horizontally and their broad ends are straight.

Side C (Pl. II c, Fig. 1 c). Four hieroglyphic signs arranged in such a way as to fill the field completely. From left to right are represented: (i) the 'plough' (N<sup>o</sup> 27); the stone is here slightly damaged but the picture is clear; (ii) the 'mountain' or 'territorial' sign (N<sup>o</sup> 114); (iii) above this, a variant of the 'palm branch' (N<sup>o</sup> 100); (iv) the 'mallet' sign (N<sup>o</sup> 24).

### Commentary

The three-sided prism bead is peculiarly Cretan and comes mainly from Eastern Crete<sup>3</sup>, where Mochlos belongs. Several opinions about its origin have been expressed<sup>4</sup>. Kenna attributes to it an amuletic value<sup>5</sup>.

Side A. Bird studies on Bronze Age seals of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean have been examined by V. E. G. Kenna<sup>6</sup>, who has shown that this motif originates in Crete, where it appears as early as the EM III period. The birds on our seal have a form easily recognizable on some EM III seals<sup>7</sup>. They are in fact water fowl—or possibly swans—rendered with a happy combination of naturalism and abstraction, which makes them one of the best avian studies known at present. The outstanding quality of their execution

<sup>3</sup> A. Xenaki-Sakellariou, *Sur le cachet prismatique minoen*, *Minoica*, Festschrift Sundwall, 1958, 458

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. Chapouthier, *De l'origine du prisme triangulaire dans la glyptique minoenne*, *BSA* 46, 1951, 42—44; A. Xenaki-Sakellariou l.c.; Kenna, CS 29f. thinks that it may derive from an organic form such as an upper vertebral bone.

<sup>5</sup> CS 20ff., 33 and *passim*

<sup>6</sup> *Studies of birds on seals of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze Age*, *OpAth* 8, 1968, 23—38

<sup>7</sup> Cf. mainly Kenna, CS K 9 and especially K 10

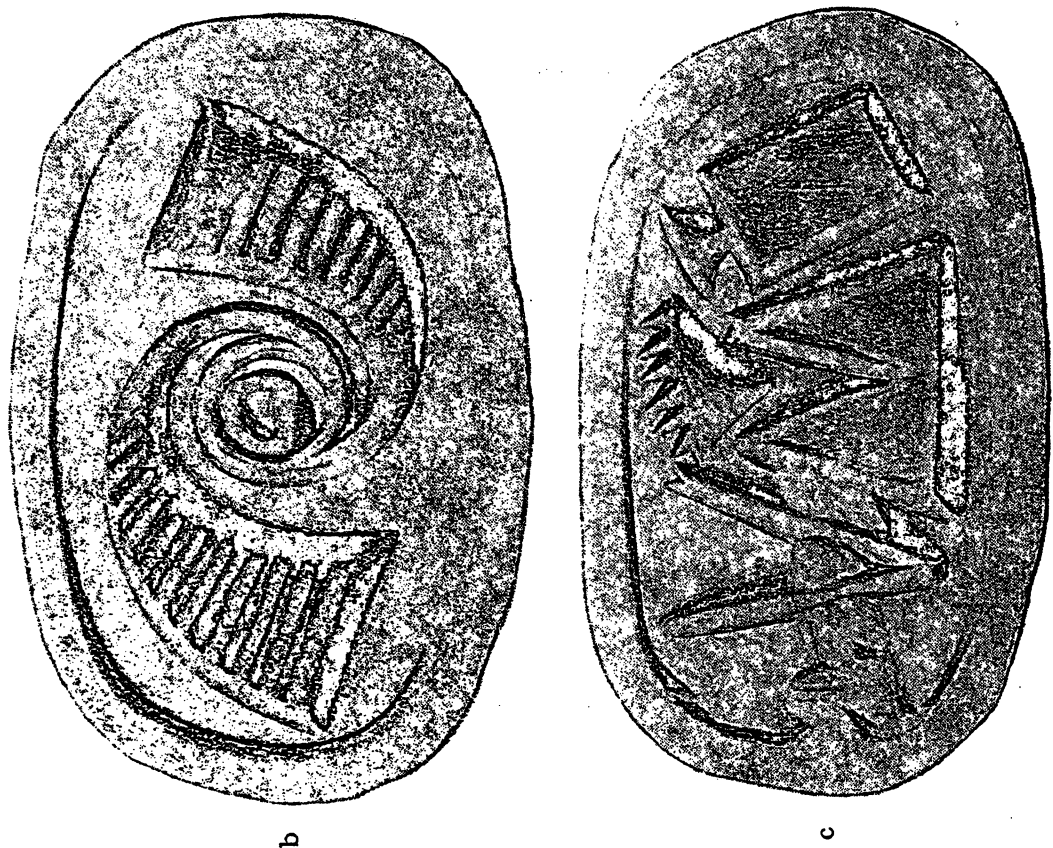
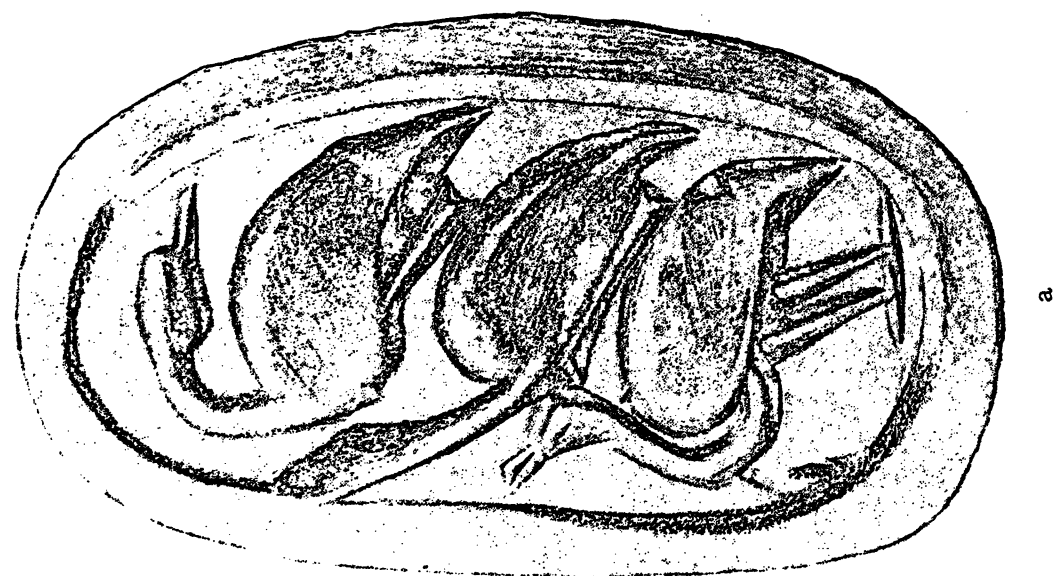


Fig. 1. Hag. Nik. Hus. 3114

is quite comparable with that of their sphragistic descendants, the purely naturalistic water-fowl on the splendid sealing from the Armoury Deposit<sup>8</sup>.

Side B. Here is a fine new variant of the whirling motif of trumpet-like scrolls or bugles, which can be seen on several three-sided prism beads<sup>9</sup>, some of which go back to MM I times, and once on a MM II signet<sup>10</sup>. This motif is related to single or double leaves or scrolls on other seals<sup>11</sup>. All of them share a practically similar form, but they can be classed as 'scrolls' or 'bugles' with their ends forming a straight line, as on our seal; or alternatively as 'leaves' or 'fronds' ending in a curve, or more rarely in a point. As a rule they bear an almost identical horizontal hatching and very often are combined in a whirling motif. Their prototype might be ibex horns—the hatching is in favour of this interpretation, and sometimes the resemblance is clear<sup>12</sup> — but some 'leaves' or 'fronds' seem to be related to the 'racquet and ball' pattern in the repertoire of the Kamares Ware<sup>13</sup>.

Side C. The 'plough'<sup>14</sup> and the 'mallet'<sup>15</sup> show the standard form. The 'mountain or territorial' sign<sup>16</sup> of Evans has been differently interpreted by Grumach<sup>17</sup> who identified it with N<sup>o</sup> 4, the 'woman's breasts', as it often has a rounded outline and summits resembling nipples. Grumach therefore proposed to cancel N<sup>o</sup> 114 and to transfer its examples N<sup>o</sup> 4. This solution may be generally valid, but not in the case of our seal, with its straight and high side-lines and absence of 'nipples'. The 'palm branch'<sup>18</sup> above it is a short, solid and

<sup>8</sup> Evans, PM III, 117, fig. 67; IV, 615, fig. 602; Kenna, CS 58, 147, N<sup>o</sup> 51 S, fig. 122, pl. 17

<sup>9</sup> Evans, SM (I) 150, N<sup>o</sup> P 7c (Herakleion Museum) from Kritsa; Kenna, CS K 98c, pl. 5; CMS VII, 20c; CMS XII, 65 and 70

<sup>10</sup> CMS XII, 90

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Evans, SM 149, N<sup>o</sup> P 3b; A. Xenaki-Sakellariou, *Les cachets minoens de la Collection Giamalakakis, Etudes Crét.* X, 1958, N<sup>o</sup> 17; CMS II. i. 90, III, 247, 275, 301, 383b; CMS VII, 24 and 214a; CMS XII, 61. An antithetical disposition can be seen on the signet CMS I, 430 from Crete.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Kenna, CS K 98c, pl. 5. These horns do not end in a straight line.

<sup>13</sup> Evans, PM II, 216f. A. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1.1

<sup>14</sup> Evans, SM 190f., N<sup>o</sup> 27. Grumach, *Kadmos* 2, 1963, 9f., believes that N<sup>o</sup> 27 should not be separated from N<sup>o</sup> 28, being identical with it.

<sup>15</sup> Evans, SM 190, N<sup>o</sup> 24

<sup>16</sup> Evans, SM 223f., N<sup>o</sup> 114. Cf. F. Chapouthier, *Écritures minoennes, Etudes Crét.* II, 1930, 45

<sup>17</sup> l. c. 7ff.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, SM 218f., N<sup>o</sup> 100

triangular variant of the sign, which is thought to convey a loosely attached secondary element of meaning, denoting some such idea as 'holy, sacral'<sup>19</sup>, which regularly accompanies the hieroglyphic version of the 'first libation formula'<sup>20</sup>.

The 'mountains' (N<sup>o</sup> 114), the 'mallet' (N<sup>o</sup> 24) and the 'plough' (N<sup>o</sup> 27), as Evans observed<sup>21</sup>, are very often seen together in several groups<sup>22</sup>, but here they are for the first time accompanied by the 'palm branch'.

It has been supposed that these hieroglyphic groups, as a rule found on seals and sealings, contain traditional names or titles, or, with less probability, magical formulas<sup>23</sup>. The addition of one more hieroglyphic seal to those coming from Eastern Crete supports Kenna's argument<sup>24</sup>, that this area should be included in the region where these seals were used.

<sup>19</sup> Bossert, MAOG VI 3, 1932, 7ff.; Grumach, Minoica, Festschrift Sundwall, 1958, 188; Kadmos 7, 1968, 11f.

<sup>20</sup> Grumach l. c. fig. 1—2; Davaras, Kadmos 11, 1972, 107f., fig. 2

<sup>21</sup> SM 224, 262f., table XXI, fig. 118

<sup>22</sup> Evans, SM P 22b; P 26b; P 29c = Grumach, Kadmos 2, 1963, fig. 1b; P 44d = Grumach l. c. fig. 1c; Kenna, Europa, Festschrift Grumach, 1967, N<sup>o</sup> 162B, fig. 2 = Kadmos 8, 1969, 108, fig. 2 = Grumach l. c. fig. 1e = CMS XII, 89c; perhaps from Pachyammos, according to Kenna.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Grumach, Minoica 173 with n. 26; Kenna, Minoica 179; CS 38, 44; Kadmos 1, 1962, 8ff.

<sup>24</sup> Kadmos 8, 1969, 108. A MM III hieroglyphic signet from Mochlos is Herakleion Museum Inv. 748: Seager l. c. 38f., fig. 14.