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## BOAT, TREE AND SHRINE: THE MOCHLOS RING AND THE MAKRYGIALOS SEAL

I am considering elsewhere the group of glyptic images to which that of the Mochlos ring belongs, and there I shall also present a methodology for the study of Minoan images.<sup>1</sup> Here I shall re-consider the interpretation of the design on the Mochlos ring, which I suggested several years ago<sup>2</sup>, in the light of the similar representation on the seal more recently found in a Late Minoan I villa at Makrygialos Siteias.<sup>3</sup> This depicts a boat in which there is an altar, with next to it a palm-tree, and in front of the palm-tree a female figure making a gesture of adoration.

The suggestion I made with regard to the Mochlos ring was that the extraordinary boat thereon is an adaptation of an Egyptian motif from the Book of the Dead, which was transformed to fit the needs of Minoan religious iconography,<sup>4</sup> both in general and in regard to the particular image shown on the Mochlos ring. Thus, the snake-head of the Egyptian boat was replaced by a horse-head, for the snake in early Crete had a particular symbolic significance which, it would appear, made it unsuitable for the Mochlos boat, perhaps because it would have implied inappropriate meanings and connotations. The stepped structure was transformed into a Minoan shrine with tree, either because it was desired to represent a shrine with tree carried in the boat, or because the schema boat + stepped structure inspired the schema boat + stepped altar, as in other Minoan schemata, such as the one on the

<sup>1</sup> In a forthcoming book entitled "Reading dumb images. A study in Minoan iconography and Religion".

<sup>2</sup> In *Kadmos* 12, 1973, 149–58.

<sup>3</sup> C. Davaras, *ADelt* 28 (1973) Chron B2 590-1; id., *ADelt* 32 (1977) Chron B2, 338; id., *Guide to Cretan Antiquities* (Park Ridge, New Jersey 1976) 327 fig. 189; cf. p. 326.

<sup>4</sup> *Kadmos* 12, 1973, 152–3.

Makrygialos seal, which may or may not have had a reference in the real world of cult. I will return to this question.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to the general scene, I suggested that it was not a representation of a real cult, but an 'emblematic' image of a deity arriving by sea at, or departing by sea from, a sanctuary in which a particular ritual had taken place, or was about to take place.<sup>6</sup>

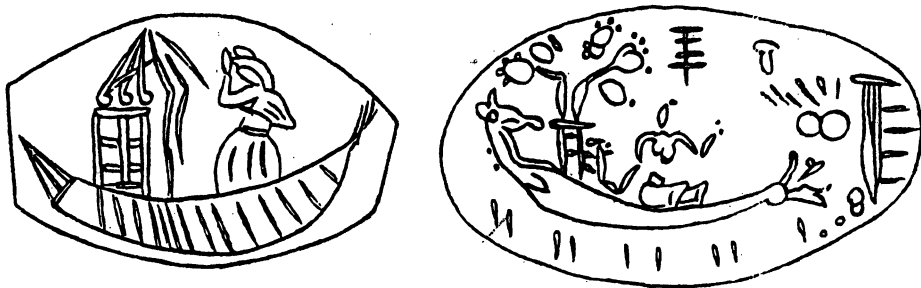


Fig. 1. Outline sketches of the Makrygialos Seal (left) and of the Mochlos Ring (right)

Have these suggestions been affected by the discovery of the Makrygialos seal?

This seal represents a boat in which there is an altar adjacent to a palm-tree, and in front of the palm-tree a woman making a gesture of adoration. Its excavator, K. Davaras, has suggested that there may have existed Minoan sacred boats, similar to those of Egypt and Mesopotamia.<sup>7</sup> This may well be right, and the Makrygialos seal may indeed represent a rite involving the transportation by sea of a shrine and sacred tree; however, on our present evidence we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that the Makrygialos image may be an iconographical construct without reference in the real world. I argue else-

<sup>5</sup> Weingarten (J. Weingarten, *Seal-use at LMIB Ayia Triada: a Minoan elite in action. I. Administrative considerations*, *Kadmos* 26, 1987, 25 n.42) comments that though the similarity between the Linear A sign L536 and the Egyptian image from the Book of the Dead which I had suggested as the source of inspiration for the ship on the Mochlos ring is undeniable, the earliest Egyptian parallel is dated c. 1450, which is too late to have influenced the Linear A syllabary, and adds that I "would have done better to quote the Middle Kingdom 'Book of Two Ways' where we can find a suitably early version" which, she adds, provides a closer parallel to L536. However, my own suggestion had not pertained to the Linear A sign, but only to the Mochlos ring, for which the model I had suggested is not too late. (On the relationship between the Mochlos ring and the Linear A sign L536 see W. C. Brice, *Notes on Linear A*, *Kadmos* 22, 1983, 94-5.)

<sup>6</sup> *Kadmos* 12, 1973, 157-8.

<sup>7</sup> *ADelt* 28 (1973) *Chron* B2 591.

where<sup>8</sup> that we must be careful not to overstress the descriptive and narrative element in Minoan glyptic art, which makes much use of the 'emblematic' mode, in which imaginative elements are combined to construct a design that conveys certain perceptions. A scene must not be presumed to represent reality, cultic or otherwise, whenever such an interpretation seems possible. For example, with regard to scenes of worship, we know that those at least which incorporate demons are not narrative but emblematic.<sup>9</sup> So we cannot be certain that the Makrygialos seal demonstrates the existence of sacred boats on which an altar and tree were transported.

Both the Mochlos and Makrygialos designs show altar + tree + boat; but there are significant differences between them:

- (1) The boat on the Mochlos ring has one animal-headed end, in the form of a horse's head; but not the boat on the Makrygialos seal.
- (2) The shrine on the Mochlos ring is a stepped version of the shrine on the Makrygialos seal.
- (3) The tree on the Mochlos scene is shown as enclosed by, and coming out of, the shrine, while on the Makrygialos seal it is represented next to, and separate from, the shrine.
- (4) The tree on the Mochlos ring is different from that on the Makrygialos seal. The latter is a palm-tree, the former a type of tree usually — and in my view correctly — identified as a fig-tree.<sup>10</sup> Both palm and fig-tree occur in ritual and generally religious contexts.<sup>11</sup>

The fig-tree is normally shown enclosed in a shrine as is the case on the Mochlos ring, while the palm is not, to my knowledge, shown in this particular schema.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Reading dumb images; cf. also "Space in Late Minoan religious scenes in glyptic — some remarks", forthcoming in: 3. Internationales Marburger Siegel-Symposium "Fragen und Probleme der bronzezeitlichen ägäischen Glyptik", Beiheft CMS, forthcoming — (hereafter "Space").

<sup>9</sup> On the category worship scene see "Space" (cf. n. 8). An example of a worship scene involving demonic beings is the Tiryns ring (CMS i. 179).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. Sir Arthur Evans, *The Palace of Minos* vol. ii (London 1928) 614–6. I discuss this question of identification in detail in *Reading dumb images* (cf. n. 1) Part Two, Section 4.

<sup>11</sup> On palms in a religious context in Minoan iconography cf. N. Marinatos, *The date-palm in Minoan iconography and religion*, *OpAthen* 15, 1984, 115–22. Examples of fig-trees: e.g. CMS i. 119; Arkhanes ring (*Archaeology* 20, 1967, 280, fig. 13). I discuss the appearance and ritual role of fig-trees in *Reading dumb images* (cf. n. 1) Part Two *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> It is shown in association with a different type of 'altar'; thus it is shown next to, and perhaps behind, certainly coming out on top of, a significantly different type

- (5) On the Makrygialos seal the female figure is standing, facing, and making a gesture of adoration towards, the tree and altar; whereas on the Mochlos ring the female figure is seated facing away from the shrine + tree and is not making a gesture of adoration.

This last difference implies that the relationship between the female figure and the shrine + tree is radically different in the two scenes; and that while the Makrygialos seal depicts a scene of worship, ritual or emblematic, the Mochlos ring does not. It may be noted that, apart from the Mochlos design, in all other instances the outline of the shrine enclosing the fig-tree is not stepped — which suggests that the real cultic equivalent<sup>13</sup> was probably not stepped.

Whether or not a rite involving the transportation of an altar and a sacred tree in a boat existed in Minoan Crete, the stepped form of the altar and the boat with an animal-headed end on the Mochlos ring seem to have been inspired by the Egyptian iconographical prototype which I earlier proposed.

Finally, the interpretation of the Mochlos motif as an emblematic scene representing a deity would, I believe, also provide a satisfactory answer to the question as to why the artist should have borrowed (and adapted) the Egyptian prototype. For while, if this scene were cultic, such borrowing may appear difficult to understand, it would make good sense if the scene represented a deity: in this context the borrowing and adaptation of the Egyptian prototype can be seen as contributing to the construction of the 'other-worldly' character of the scene by providing an unusual motif, including an extraordinary vessel, which would contribute to the distancing of the image from the world of everyday reality.<sup>14</sup>

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of altar (Marinatos (cf. n. 11) figs. 12–3), or in association with an altar/offering table (Marinatos 117–8) and with an altar/sacrificial table (Marinatos 116–7). See also another type of association *op. cit.* 120.

<sup>13</sup> In my opinion, a distinction must be made between the 'solid' altar stepped on one side only (such as that represented next to, but not enclosing, a tree on the Hagia Triada sarcophagus, or the one in the NW angle of the Central Court at Phaistos) on the one hand; and, on the other, the type seen on the sealings Chania 28 and Zakro 1, which in my view is not solid, has a stepped outline on both sides, and supports horns of consecration. I develop this argument in *Reading dumb images*, Part Two, Section 4.

<sup>14</sup> I hope to have established elsewhere that it is through small variations within the same basic schemata that different meanings are articulated in different images. See, on this methodological point, for bibliography and discussion of classical Greek iconography, my 'Menace and Pursuit: differentiation and the creation of meaning' in C. Bérard, C. Bron, A. Pömmari, eds., *Images et société en Grèce ancienne. L'iconographie comme méthode d'analyse*, Lausanne 1987, 42 and notes 10–13.