

# LIONS FROM TELL EL DAB<sup>c</sup>A

By Nanno Marinatos

## THE FRAGMENTS AND THE GENERAL FEATURES OF THE LION COMPOSITION

Over three dozen fragments of lions have been identified in the material from Tell el Dab<sup>c</sup>a, all found together in a dump in sector H/I. While their precise location within the palace is impossible to identify, some facts are clear. The lions and leopards belonged to a set of friezes all of which dealt with the theme of predatory hunt. This composition, in turn, was related to a frieze of human hunters and dogs engaged in ungulate hunt. Finally, all these compositions were stylistically and thematically associated to the frieze of bull leaping.<sup>1</sup> The unifying element – apart from the homogenous style – is the landscape.

The lions are very incompletely preserved. Although many fragments exist, the joins are disappointingly few. Nevertheless, the following information has been yielded by the pieces.

1. Approximately ten lions were involved in the scene. This number represents the minimum possible restoration since as many fragments as possible have been combined in any single lion (Fig. 1). But if we have three right paws, for example, we need to reconstruct three lions accordingly.
2. Most animals are in flying gallop, as can be judged by the extended posture of the legs. There is some slight variation, as for example the springing posture of lion 2 (Fig. 7).
3. The lions are located in at least two types of landscape: rocky mountain and marshy terrain. The background is yellow or red. In one instance, a change of background from yellow to red is evident within the same fragment (Fig. 12).
4. The lions hunt prey. On one well preserved fragment, the lion is biting its prey (Fig. 27). As well, the two preserved heads of lions have

open mouths; this means that they were in a hunting mode (Figs. 1, 9).

5. The prey was bull, goat or deer. All of the above species are represented among the wall painting fragments from this area of the site, and is also confirmed by *comparanda* of lion pursuit on seals, daggers and other media (see MORGAN in this volume). Goat, deer and bull are the usual prey of lions (lions never chase birds or rabbits, for example).

The five points presented above constitute the basis for the reconstructions of the predators and prey in marshy and rocky landscapes.

## LION 1

Several fragments have been combined to reconstruct this leftward moving lion painted against a red background. The largest piece consists of a paw and hind legs the direction of which show that the beast was in flying gallop above a cluster of reeds (Figs. 1, 5, 6). Several additional fragments of reeds have not been included in the reconstruction but they indicate that the landscape was lush.

The style is exquisite. The mane is painted with great detail; the belly has fine oblique red hairs, their slant indicating the direction of the animal's movement towards the left. The open mouth, laced with white fur, shows that the lion was after prey (Fig. 4). The fore paws and hind legs are drawn with great detail and precision (Figs. 5–6). The pieces of the landscape reveal that the lion was galloping above a soft undulating yellow ground from which reeds grow. The terrain must have been close to a river.

## LION 2 (Fig. 7)

Three fragments have been combined to reconstruct this rightward moving lion: the tip of a tail, a hind leg and paw and the neck. The most distinctive feature is the curvature of the hind-leg

<sup>1</sup> BIETAK, MARINATOS and PALYVOU 2007, F 100 p. 98; F 136, p. 104.



Fig. 1 Reconstruction of Lion 1 in a marshy Landscape (scale 1:2)



Fig. 2 F 46 (mane) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 3 F 91 (belly) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 4 F 314 (snout) (scale 1:1)

which suggests that the lion was springing. The fragments have been combined because they all have a rightward direction and a red background.

The reconstruction has been based on the gold inlay lions from the daggers of Mycenae, Shaft Grave III (Fig. 25, below).



Fig. 5 F 71 (hind-



Fig. 6 F 333 (forepaw) (scale 1:1)

**LION 3** (Figs. 8–12)

Four fragments belong to this animal: snout, foreleg, paw and hind-paw. The pieces belong together because they are painted against the same yellow background and all have a leftward direction.

The extended forelegs (Fig. 8) show that the lion was in flying gallop. All the pieces have very precise and fine outlines. The blue claws in this fragment are executed in a fine manner. Also the snout is very subtly painted with its accentuated nose and its white outlining of the mouth (Fig. 9). A trace of white below the snout indicates an open mouth. As well, the toe has very fine outlines (Fig. 10).

There is no indication of the type of landscape in which this animal was hunting, but the red colour above Fig. 9 shows that there was a change of background from yellow to red within

the same scene (Fig. 12). This detail helps determine the location of this lion within the overall composition and shows that red and yellow backgrounds were interchangeable.

**LION 4** (Figs. 13–14)

The head of this lion was particularly difficult to make out because of the worn surface of the fragment. The red and blue colours of the background, above the predator's head, show without a doubt that the landscape was a rocky one. A blue rock has been here reconstructed accordingly (Fig. 14). Mane, belly, hind leg and forepart are represented in tiny fragments. All but fit the general template of the other lions.

Lion 4 gives us information about the general look of the rocky landscape of the Feline Frieze.

**LION 5**

Two pieces have been combined to form lion 5. It may be deduced from the preserved paws that it gallops towards the left against a yellow background above red ground interspersed with white pebbles (Fig. 15). The forepaws and part of the elbow are executed in rough red outline. This outline is probably a remnant of the fore-sketch and was not meant to be visible in the final ver-



legs) (scale 1:1)

sion. The artist must then have painted the yellow of the lion's body over the red sketch. Thus, this fragment provides evidence of the stages of how the painting was executed.

Good parallels for pebbly ground can be found among the Knossos taureador frescoes, and the paintings of the palace of Pylos.<sup>2</sup>

#### LION 6 (Figs. 16–19)

Three fragments have been combined in Lion 6 (F 79, 80, 120 Figs. 16–19). All show a rightward direction against yellow background. A fragment of the neck shows the same conventions of white fur noticed in other mane fragments (compare Figs. 16, 17 and 19). We find here the white underbelly (Fig. 18) and the red outline.

The landscape consists of blue rocky terrain interspersed with streaks of red (Fig. 19).

#### LION 7

Of this animal only the extended forelegs remain. They are executed in a rough manner and inferior style. As well, there is less detail (Fig. 20) and the

size is larger. Still, the painter is true to the rules of the lion formula, being careful to draw the major anatomical features, such as the blue pads. On the upper left of the plaster fragment a few dots of blue are discernible. They must have belonged to tall plants, which would have risen above the lion's head; of the stem only a faint red trace is preserved.

#### LIONS 8 and 9

In this scene, fragments belonging to two different lions have been combined for reasons that will become obvious below. One fragment F 45 has been assigned to lion 8 and yields a wealth of information about the composition (Fig. 21). Unfortunately, it is very a badly preserved piece, and it took many seasons of careful study to determine how it should finally be drawn.

It depicts a lion's head with a rich mane and an open mouth. The lion is attacking a prey the back of which was black. The lion is biting it and red blood is streaking down. Note that in the present state of preservation of the fragment, the black pigment has dissolved into small blotches; yet, the

<sup>2</sup> LANG 1969, pl. 99, 14.



Fig. 7 Reconstruction of Lion 2 (scale 1:2)

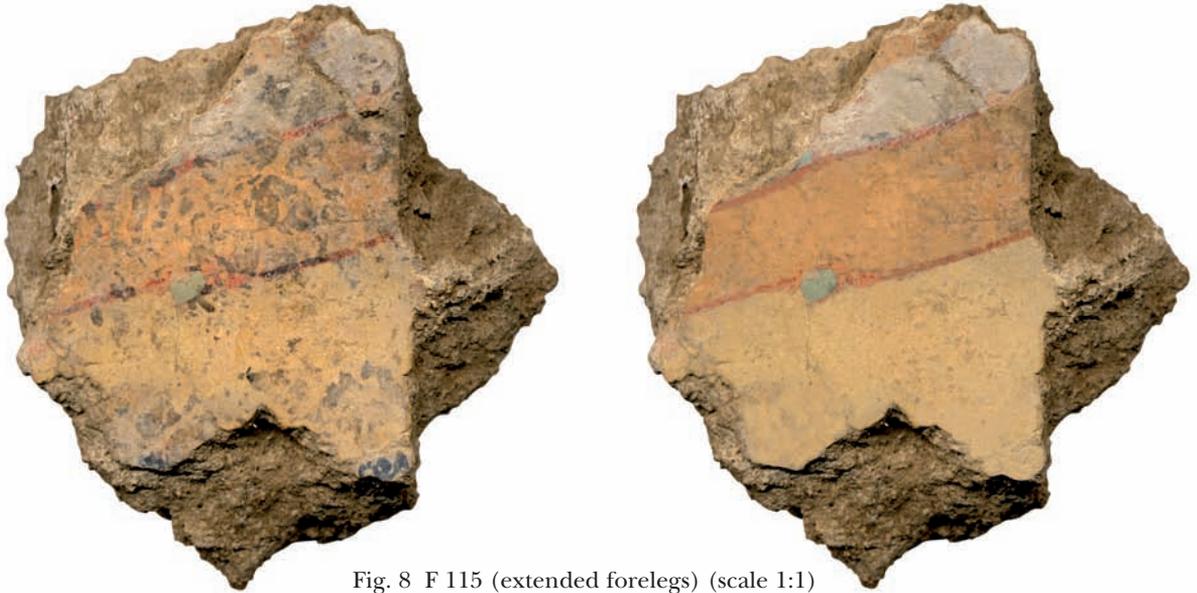


Fig. 8 F 115 (extended forelegs) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 9 F 71 (snout) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 10 F 776 (toe) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 11 F 72 (paw) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 12 Reconstruction of Lion 3 (scale 1:2)



Fig. 13 Reconstruction of Lion 4 (scale 1:2)



Fig. 14 F 121

original was solid black. The prey could only have been a bull with large black spots because no other type of animal among the Tell el Dab'a paintings has this color. Of the lion we see only the upper jaw. Above the lion's mouth, at the upper left edge of the fragment, we see the right forepaw of the animal; presumably it was clawing down its prey.

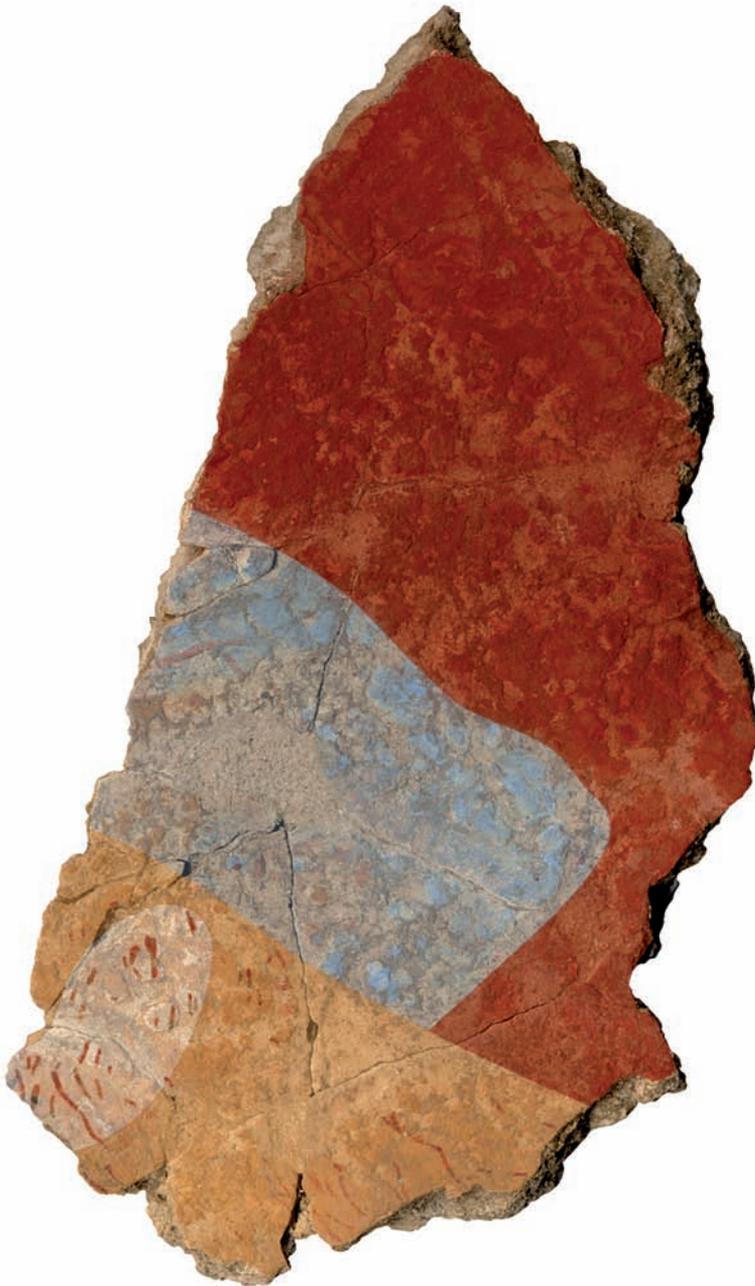
Another piece, F 45B, discernible on the reconstruction (Fig. 22), shows the lion's belly and also a tiny piece of the same bull's back just below it. This fragment may belong to the same animal, namely lion 8. There is also a third piece F 312 (Fig. 22) which we must assign to a different

lion however, because it is beneath the bull, not above it. We deduce this from the position of the lion's back under the bull.

The conclusion affects the overall restoration of the scene because we must conclude that a second lion was attacking the bull and that the two predators collaborated. The reconstruction shows how the fragments can be combined (Fig. 22).

#### LION 10

Three fragments have been combined to reconstruct a lion in flying gallop. All pieces have a yellow background and indicate a direction to the



(mane) (scale 1:1)

left (Figs. 23–24). The largest piece represents an extended foreleg and underbelly of a lion and a rocky landscape underneath. The outline of the body is thick without the details of fine red hairs. The hind-paws, however, are finely painted (Fig. 24) so the possibility that they belong to another lion must be left open.

The landscape is rich, containing tall plants, which grow from the rocky terrain. We see here a

typical Minoan formula, “lilies plus rocks” reminiscent of the wall painting from Thera.<sup>3</sup>

A reconstruction of a larger composition may now be attempted. We cannot be sure if the prey of the lions was just bulls, or if goat and deer were included. The latter animal is likely because the leopards in the neighbouring frieze surely hunt both (see MORGAN in this volume). It is also possible that lions and leopards collaborated in their

<sup>3</sup> MARINATOS and HIRMER 1976, pl. xxxvi–xxxvii; DOUMAS 1992, 100–105.



Fig. 15 Reconstruction of Lion 5 (scale 1:2)

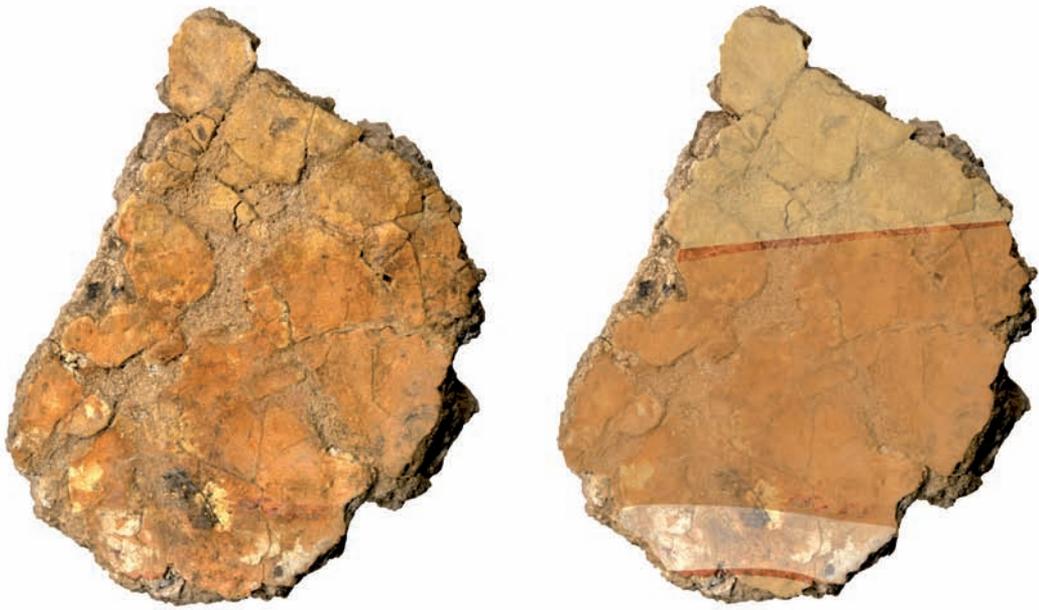


Fig. 16 F 79 (body) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 17 F 80 (neck) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 18 F 120 (underbelly) (scale 1:2)

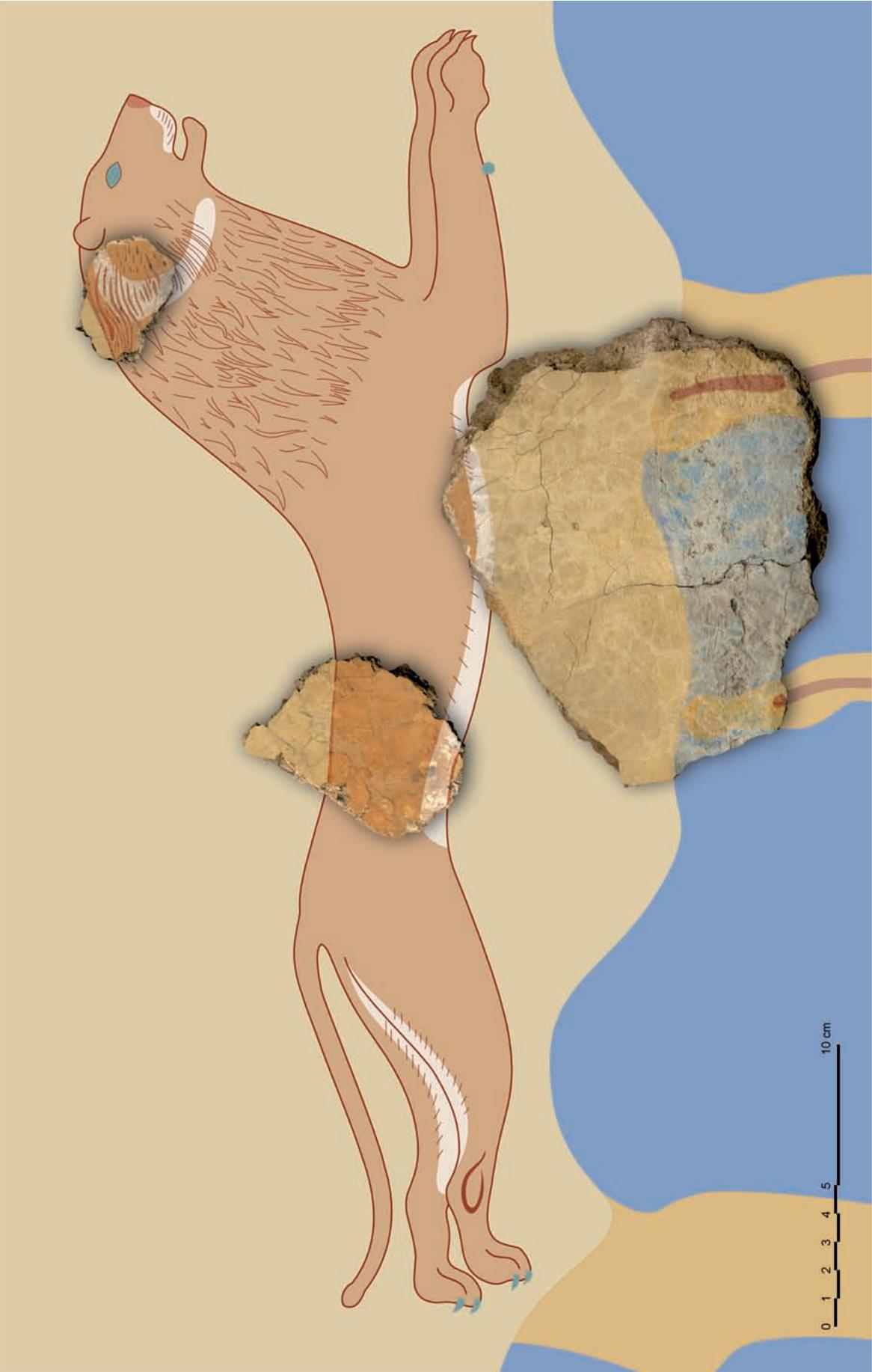


Fig. 19 Reconstruction of Lion 6: F 79, F 80, F 120 (scale 1:2)

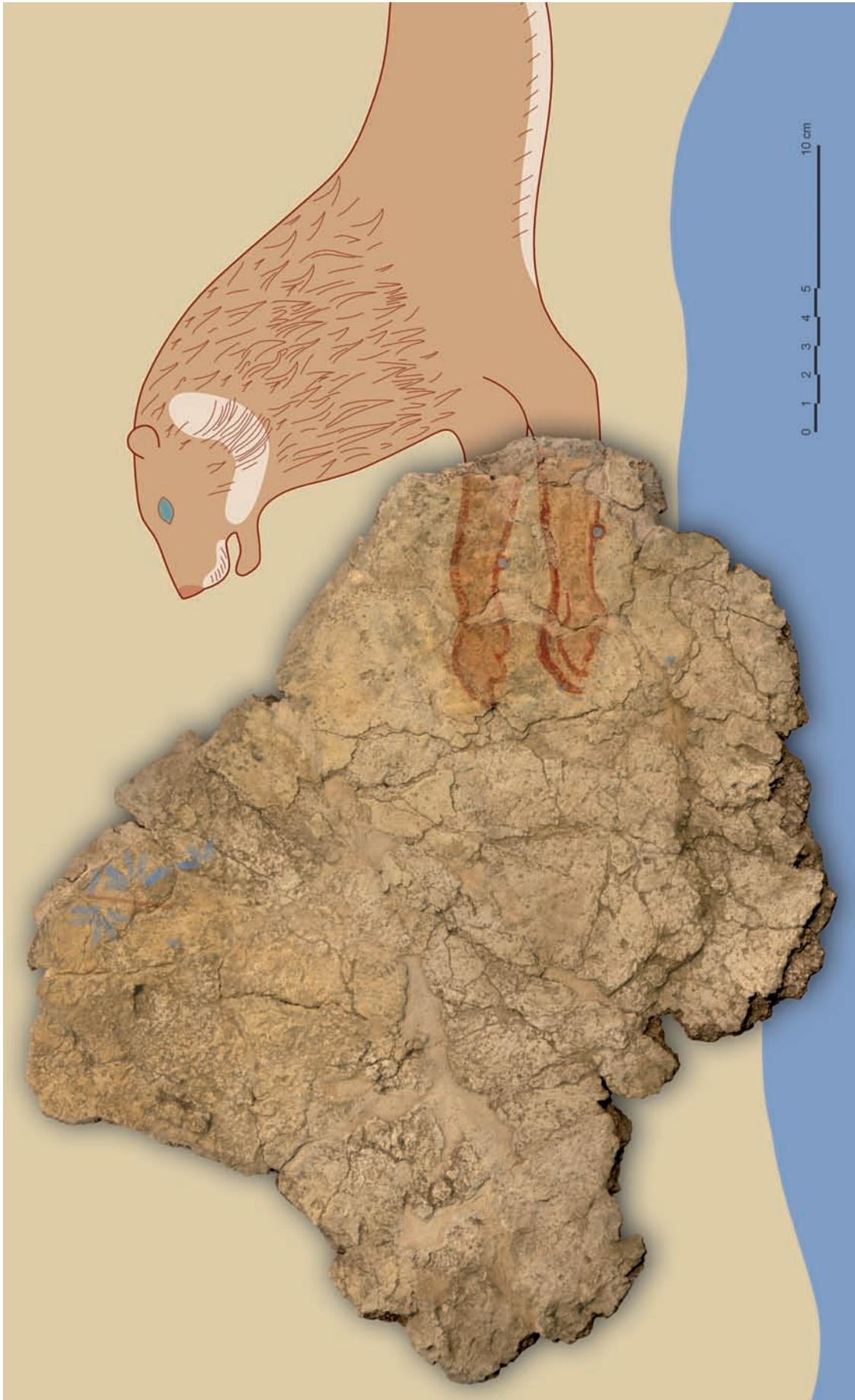


Fig. 20 Reconstruction of Lion 7: F 97 (scale 1:2)



Fig. 21 F 25 (head and neck) (scale 1:2)

hunt. Although this is counter-intuitive such a possibility cannot be excluded because of certain parallels (see Fig. 26, below).

A close parallel to our lion hunt is furnished by the inlaid dagger from Mycenae (Fig. 25).<sup>4</sup> Another one is the gold foil inlay of a box from Shaft Grave IV (Fig. 26). The Mycenae inlay box depicts lions converging on prey from two directions.

On the basis of these examples which I believe are Minoan although found on the mainland (see below), I suggest the reconstruction of Fig. 27 in which several lions converge on a bull against a yellow background. Another composition, against red background, shows Lions 1 and 2 (Fig. 28). They must have been on a different section of the wall.

#### THE PLANNING OF THE FRIEZE AND ITS MINOAN PARALLELS

Some general questions now, regarding the number of artists and the planning of the friezes. When all the pieces are viewed together, it is evi-

dent that some fragments are painted in a very fine style, whereas others are coarser without details, such as the individual hairs of the fur. Also, there exist differences in scale, since Lions 7 and 10 seem to be a little larger than the rest. Lion 7 (Fig. 20), for example, is larger and its outlines are thicker than those of the other beasts. We can see further differences between the coarser and finer style if we compare two sets of limbs. The forelegs of Lion 3 (Fig. 12) are very finely executed, but those of Lion 7 (Fig. 20) are drawn with a thick brush and without much detail. Despite this slight variation, there is general homogeneity in the lions. All animals are painted in the same hue of yellow ochre; they all have black or red outlines; the claws are always blue. The pad that conceals the wrist bone is always rendered as a blue dot, as is the pad of the dew-claw (thumb). The mane is always rendered as individual hairs with a collar of white fur wrapped around the neck. This particular rendition of the mane and the light colored snout is amazingly close to reality (Fig. 29).

<sup>4</sup> KARO 1930, pl. xciv, nos. 394, 395.

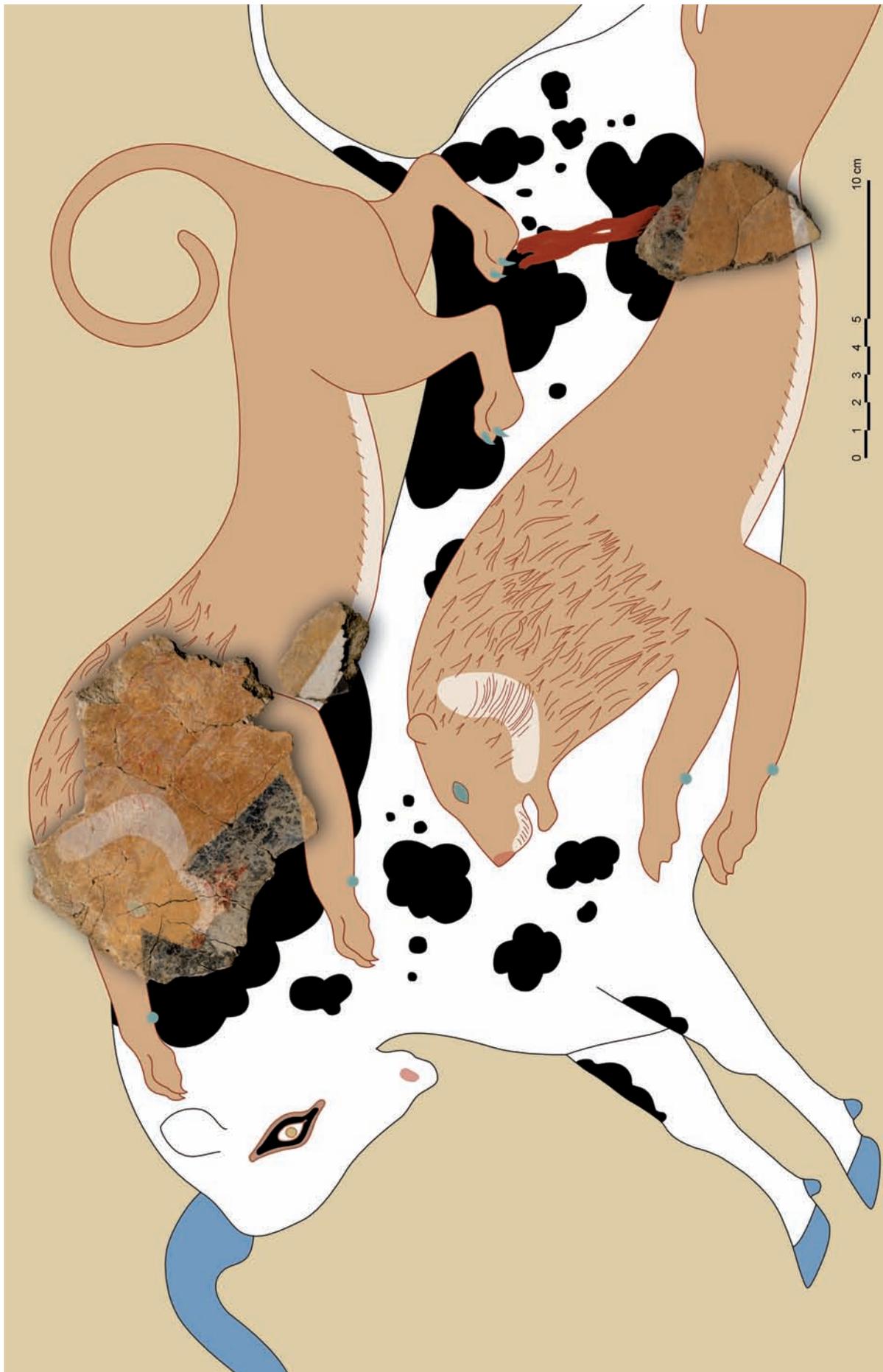


Fig. 22 Reconstruction of Lions 8 and 9 (scale 1:2)



Fig. 23 Reconstruction of Lion 10 (F 491 (body) F 73 (Hind paws) and F 74 (hind paws) (scale 1:2)



Fig. 24 F 74 (hindpaws) (scale 1:1)



Fig. 25 Lion Dagger from Mycenae, Shaft Grave IV (MARINATOS and HIRMER 1976, pl. XLIX)



Fig. 26 Inlay Box from Shaft Grave III, Mycenae (MYLONAS 1973, pl. 11)

The high quality of the execution suggests that one single master painter was in charge but that he had one or two assistants who did the rougher work. He will have sketched out the entire composition first, either on papyrus or parchment, and subsequently will have transferred the scheme on to the wall. As the team began work-

ing, individual tasks were allotted to each artist. We may thus speak of a working team, a master painter and his assistants.

The next question concerns the practical details. The study of the Bull and Maze fresco has taught us that string lines were used to plan the maze scene as well as the rosette frieze below it.<sup>5</sup> In fact, a few plaster fragments from this latter composition have peg holes, and this shows that wooden pegs were affixed into the wall for the attachment of strings. The same phenomenon was noted on the wall paintings of Xeste 3 at Thera.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of the strings, I believe, was to define the areas of painting by dividing the surface into horizontal and vertical units. We may imagine that this method made it easier for several painters to work simultaneously, each executing his unit of the frieze.

<sup>5</sup> BIETAK, MARINATOS and PALYVOU 2007, fig. 47.

<sup>6</sup> I personally observed the correspondence between peg-holes in the Theran and Avaris mural fragments. I

thank Andreas Vlachopoulos and the restoration team at Akrotiri who made inspection possible.

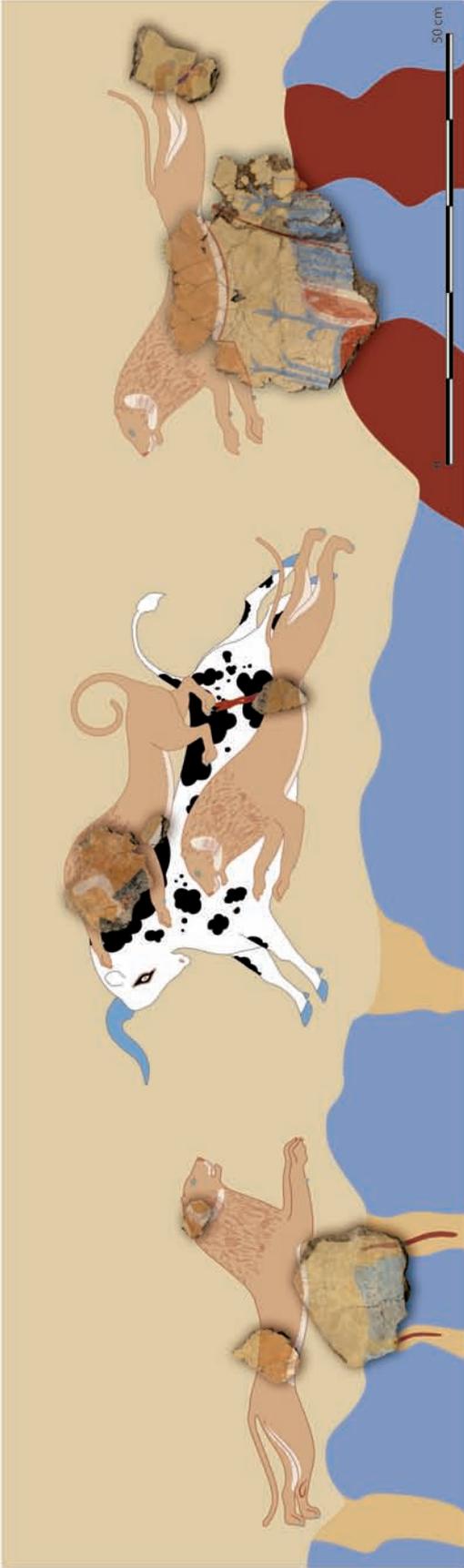


Fig. 27 Reconstruction of Lions biting prey against yellow (Lions 6, 10, 8, 9)

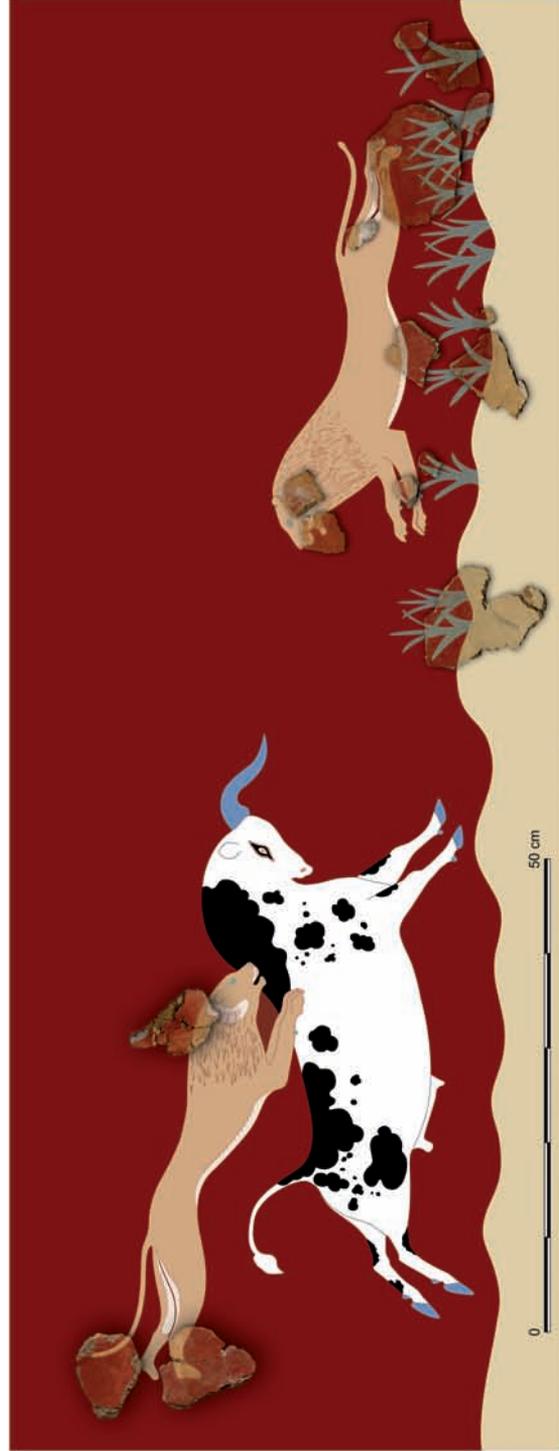


Fig. 28 Reconstructions against red (Lions 1, 2)

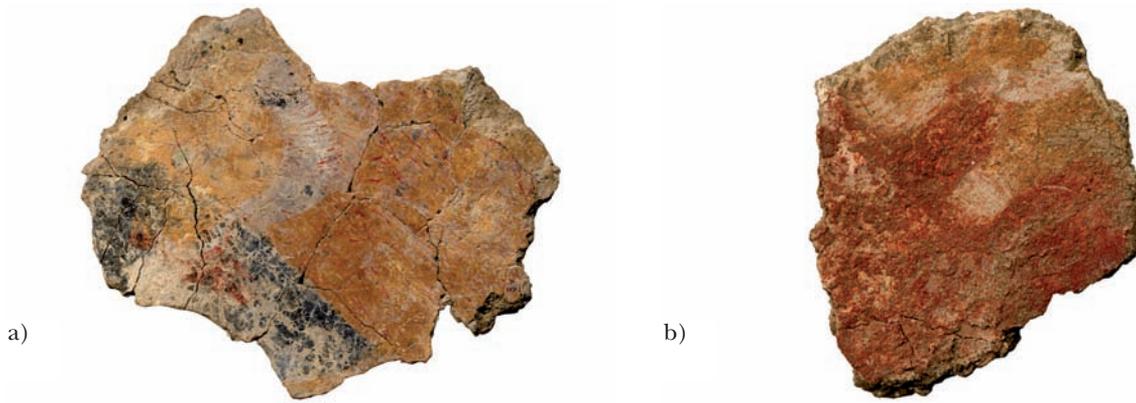


Fig. 29 a) F 45 (hindpaws) (scale 1:2); b) F314 (snout) (scale 1:1)

The length of the lion frieze may be roughly calculated. Let us say that each animal was approximately 35cm long, allowing for the fact that there are two scales of lion sizes within our painting, and that bulls are larger than lions. If we add up lions, prey and leopards, we arrive at a length of at least five or six meters. On the basis of this reckoning, it is certain that two or more walls were covered with the feline hunting scene.

The focal point of the frieze(s) must have been the predatory attacks of lions and leopards on prey. How many were there? Quite a few: this is certain.

Another interesting feature is that several lions attack their prey together, in what we may interpret as a collaborative effort. The reconstructions

here presented (Figs. 27, 28) are paralleled in art of this period. Two Shaft Grave objects have already been mentioned above (Figs. 25–26).<sup>7</sup> Some few additional examples exist. Several lions simultaneously attacking a bull are depicted on a seal from Midea (Fig. 30, CMS I, 186) and a ring impression from Tylissos (Fig. 31, CMS II. 6, 274).

#### LIONS IN MINOAN TRADITION AND THE IDEOLOGY OF POWER

Lion iconography has a long history in Minoan Crete since the first Palace period. A scene of lions galloping amidst palm trees, reminiscent of the Tell el Dab<sup>a</sup> murals, is attested on a seal from Zakros (Fig. 32a). A ring impression from Zakros



Fig. 30 Seal from Midea  
(CMS I, 185)



Fig. 31 Tylissos Ring Impression  
(CMS II. 6, 274)

<sup>7</sup> See also CMS II. 6, 233; VS1B, 59; XIII, 20 etc. See PINI 1985a and b for an overview.

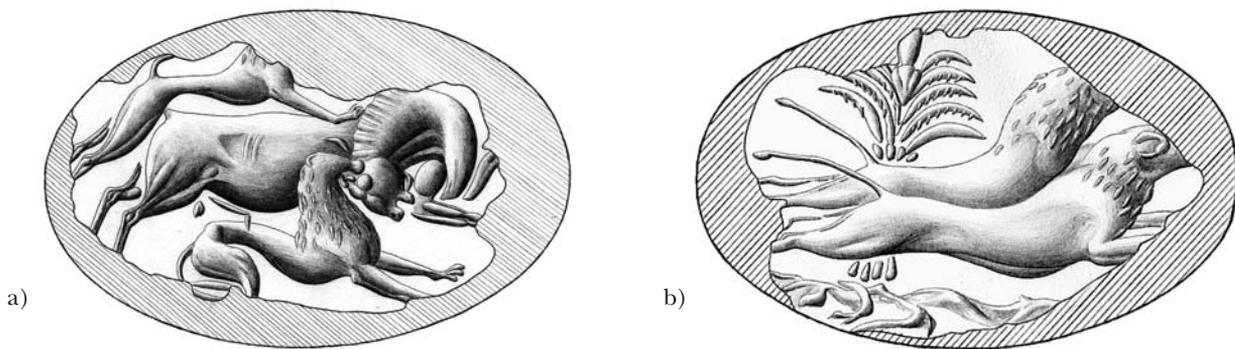


Fig. 32 a) Seal from Zakros (CMS V.S.IB, 331); b) Ring Impression from Zakros (CMS II.7, 71)

shows lions above a rocky terrain against a backdrop of palms (Fig. 32b). The rocky terrain on this latter image is reminiscent of the landscape of Lion 6 (Fig. 33).

In view of this evidence, the old (and almost established) hypothesis that the origin of lion imagery is Mycenaean needs to be revised. It will have been noticed that many of the parallels here cited stem from the golden age of Minoan art, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC. This fact has not been observed, however. For example, E. Vermeule wrote in 1964 that the Shaft Grave art was “attributed irrationally to Crete” (she must have alluded to Evans’s theories here). She adds that this could not be the case, since the lion hunt was a subject matter dear to the Mycenaeans.<sup>8</sup> R. Laffineur wrote in 1984: “the nature of the [lion] designs fits well into the essentially emblematic and conceptual character of Mycenaean art.”<sup>9</sup> S. Immerwahr noted in 1990 that Mycenaean painting had more emphasis “on hunt and warfare.”<sup>10</sup> G. Kopcke stated in 1999: “This kind of hunt is more mainland than Minoan in character.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the general opinion that lion emblems are more at home in the Mycenaean rather than in the Minoan repertoire, seems to persist.

Evans knew better, however. He had observed the emblematic character of lion imagery in both Crete and in the art of its neighbours. Further, he

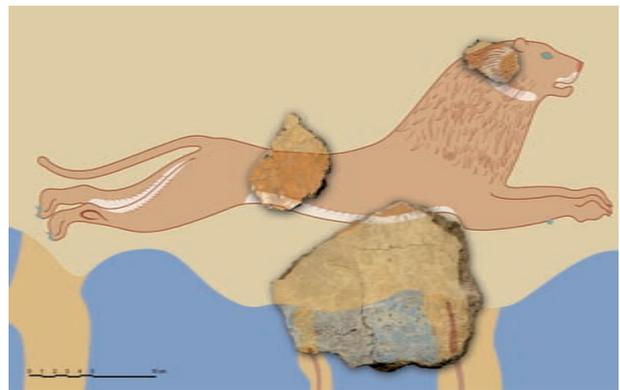


Fig. 33 Lion 6 with rocky landscape

argued that the motif had arrived to the Levant and Crete from Mesopotamia since the third millennium BCE, and that it had become part of a common visual and symbolic language.<sup>12</sup> And in 1983, Ingo Pini showed in a thorough article that lion imagery was very much at home in Crete. Minoan prototypes had inspired the imagery of the mainland and not vice versa, he wrote: “Die frühen Wiedergaben von Löwenüberfällen auf den Grabstelen von Mykene sind auf dem Festland ohne die Kenntniss des Minoischen Motivrepertoires... kaum denkbar.”<sup>13</sup>

The Mycenaeans, then, borrowed the concept from the Minoans, not *vice versa*.

<sup>8</sup> VERMEULE 1964, 98.

<sup>9</sup> LAFFINEUR 1984, 134–136 discusses the lion motif on daggers and on the ships from Santorini (Thera); IDEM 1985, 247; XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985, 298 sees the lion motif on a gold inlay box from Shaft Grave V at Mycenae as purely Mycenaean, although she does not exclude an Minoan connection.

<sup>10</sup> IMMERWAHR 1990, 109.

<sup>11</sup> KOPCKE 1999, 343.

<sup>12</sup> EVANS *PM IV*, 528–540; 559, figs. 522 a, b. For a comparison between Aegean and Egyptian lion motifs see KLEINSGÜTL 2000, 699–708.

<sup>13</sup> PINI 1985, 153–166 at 166. See also MÜLLER 2000.

This observation leads to another issue, which pertains to how we view the role of Minoan art in the shaping of Aegean traditions. I myself strongly resist the idea that we call Minoan art “Aegean” (pace MORGAN in this volume). The Tell el Dabca paintings are *Minoan*. I insist on this because I believe that the homogenous style and idiom of Aegean art, is due to Minoan influence over the entire Aegean area and that, because this homogeneity is attested *only after* the establishment of the Minoan domination overseas, Evans was right in insisting on Minoan cultural domination and the use of term Minoan.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, I believe that the presence of Minoan painters at Avaris shows clearly how powerful and influential Knossos was.

Another question now arises. If the origin of the lion frieze is Minoan, where is its Knossian equivalent? The answer is that there exists indeed a relief mural fragment of a lion at Knossos, and it is likely that there existed many more; it is only an accident only *one* has been preserved. The lion relief in question was excavated by Evans under the southeast staircase of the palace. The surviving fragments depicted a lion’s mane and a leg<sup>15</sup> but only the first of the two pieces was published (Fig. 34 a). Evans suspected at first that they belonged to a composition of lions guarding the goddess, and dated them on stylistic grounds to MMIII in *Palace of Minos II*. Some years later, however, he changed his mind. In *Palace of Minos IV*, he raised the possibility that the fragment represented a lion attacking a prey, possibly goat. He reconsidered the matter because of a suggestion which was made by Spyridon Marinatos in 1928 that the lion was a predator attacking the relief bull of the Northern Entrance of the palace. When the mural was torn from the wall, wrote Marinatos, the fragments of lion and bull had been separated and were thrown into different dumps.<sup>16</sup> Evans rejected this part of the suggestion because the find spots of the pieces were far apart. Yet, he conceded that a scene of predation was involved and that the lion’s victim was indeed a bull.<sup>17</sup> Consequently he emended his view in *Palace of Minos IV*.<sup>18</sup> The Tell el Dabca frieze shows that Marinatos’s insight had been partially correct (Fig. 34 a, b).



Fig. 34 a) Lion’s Mane, Knossos (EVANS, *PM II*, fig.188);  
b) Fragment from Tell el Dabca F 80

More evidence exists to prove the emblematic nature of the lion-predator in the Minoan world. The miniature frieze from the West House at Thera includes a lion stalking two fleeing deer within a landscape of wild life (Fig. 35). What is the lion doing here and why was it included in the frieze? I have argued repeatedly that the purpose of the motif was to symbolize power, and that the pursuit reflects the aggressive and military character of the Theran fleet (Fig. 36).<sup>19</sup> The discovery of the Tell el Dabca murals has justified my suggestion because we see more evidence of how the lion was utilized as a royal power-emblem of aggression in nature. A further observation is that the admiral of the Theran fleet was associated with lilies which adorned his cabin. Was he a Knossian prince like the Prince of Lilies? Is this the reason that his ship was decorated with lions?

The parallels from the Shaft Graves suggest that royal lions were in fashion also on the mainland. Evidently, the Mycenaean were inspired by

<sup>14</sup> EVANS, *PM IV*, xiv.

<sup>15</sup> EVANS, *PM II*, 333–334; *PM IV* 1935, 538, fig. 489.

<sup>16</sup> MARINATOS 1928; cited by EVANS *PM IV*, 172, n. 1.

<sup>17</sup> EVANS, *PM III*, 172–176.

<sup>18</sup> EVANS, *PM IV*, 538 with n. 3.

<sup>19</sup> MARINATOS 1984, 54–55; MARINATOS 2000. For a ceremonial interpretation see MORGAN 1988. See now ALEXIOU 2005 who arrives at similar conclusions as myself.



Fig. 35 Miniature from Thera. Lion (DOUMAS 1992, 71-72, fig. 36)



Fig. 36 Admiral's ship Miniature Frieze, South Wall of Room 5, Thera (DOUMAS 1992, 75-76, fig. 37)



Fig. 37 Lion stele from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (EVANS 1935, *PM IV*, 251, fig. 189)

Knossian and Egyptian courts (and not *vice versa*). One of the Shaft Grave *stelai* from Grave V exemplifies this perfectly.<sup>20</sup> It shows the king in his horse-driven chariot represented in a manner similar to the Egyptian pharaoh of 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty New Kingdom seals.<sup>21</sup> The Mycenaean stele shows the king riding above a rocky terrain; below him is a lion chasing a deer (Fig. 37).

Many scholars were puzzled by this combination. Georg Karo thought that the subject was the defeat of human enemies by the king whom he pursued by chariot. But he could not understand what the lion was doing there; it was not organically connected with the composition.<sup>22</sup> In later years, Agnes Xenaki-Sakellariou (followed by myself) found a way out. She interpreted the two circular designs beneath the chariot as the contour of a shield of a fallen warrior.<sup>23</sup> She and I took Karo's suggestion literally and reconstructed a fallen warrior whom the king pursued. But later, I realized that the circular designs cannot be the shield of an enemy; they are simply rocks and that any attempt to find a narrative, an "organic" con-

nection between king and lion is misguided. Rather, the scene must be regarded as a visual simile presenting the lion as the king's double in nature and representing him as a king of the animal world.<sup>24</sup>

Karo was right in another matter, however. He suggested that the scene may have had Minoan prototypes.<sup>25</sup> Nobody followed his suggestion, but it is worth giving it some thought in light of the new evidence from Tell el Dab<sup>c</sup>a.

In conclusion, a common ideology of royal power, expressed through lion imagery, is found in Egypt, Syria, Knossos, Thera, and Mycenae.<sup>26</sup> A historical pattern of interconnections emerges through this analysis. It betokens the establishment of common Minoan and Mycenaean royal ideology to which we shall turn next.

#### THE FELINE FRIEZE IN ITS NEAR EASTERN AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

We must now broaden our perspective and move outside the boundaries of the Minoan world. The vocabulary of lion attacking prey was utilized

<sup>20</sup> KARO 1935, 35, pl. VII.

<sup>21</sup> LITTAUER and CROUWEL 1985.

<sup>22</sup> KARO 1935, 35: "... ganz unorganisch steht das Kampf-bild ...".

<sup>23</sup> XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985, 307–309, fig. 20; MARINATOS 1990, 143–144, fig. 1. Compare the drawing made by Xenaki-Sakellariou with the photograph published by

KARO 1935, pl. VII. The so-called warrior is too large compared to the man on the chariot. Also the supposed 8-shaped shield is not symmetrical.

<sup>24</sup> MARINATOS 1990, 143ff.; MORGAN 1995.

<sup>25</sup> KARO 1930–1933, 35.

<sup>26</sup> LANG 1969, pl. 57.

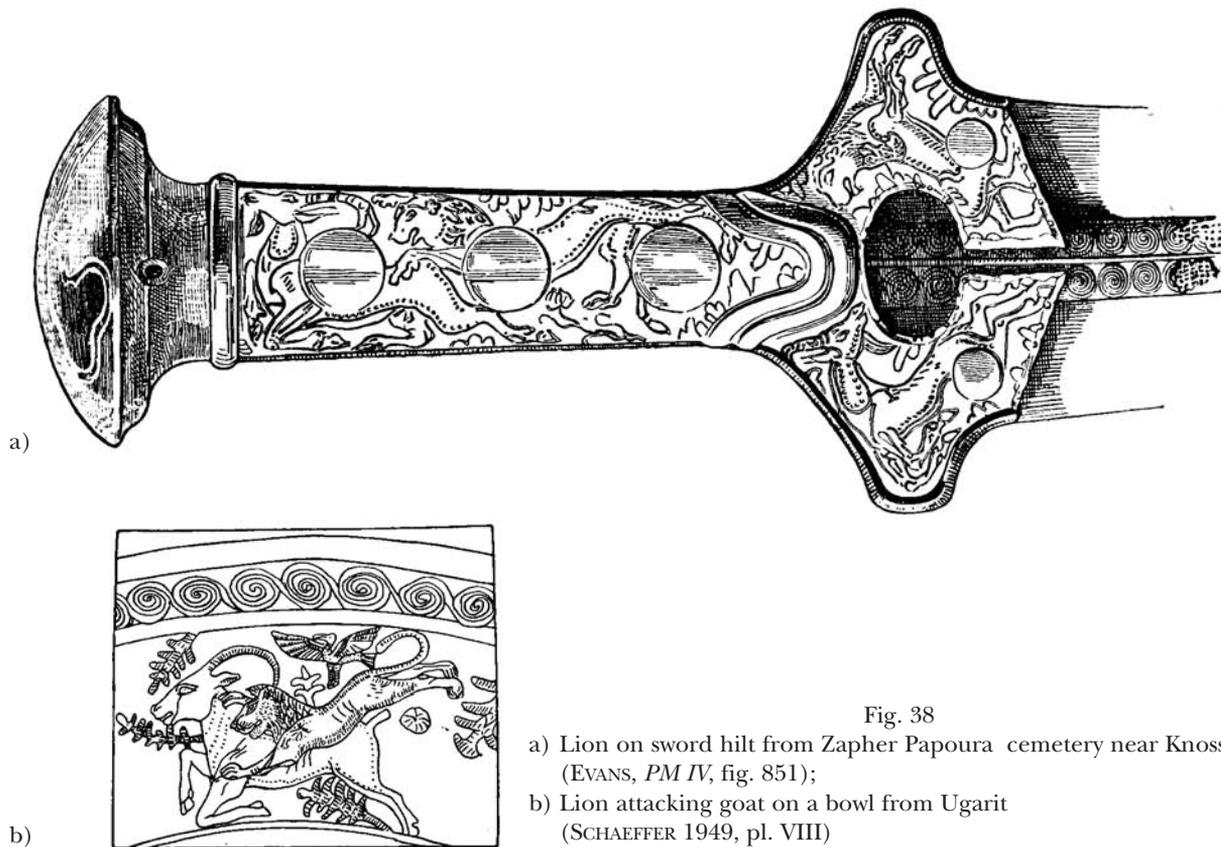


Fig. 38

a) Lion on sword hilt from Zapher Papoura cemetery near Knossos (EVANS, *PM IV*, fig. 851);

b) Lion attacking goat on a bowl from Ugarit (SCHAEFFER 1949, pl. VIII)

throughout the kingdoms of the east Mediterranean and Near East for over a period of thousand years and more, as Evans was the first to note. We find it in Ugarit, Carchemish, Ebla, Qatna, in Boghaz Köy and, of course, in Egypt.<sup>27</sup> As an example of this international vocabulary I juxtapose two representations dating to about 1400 BCE. One comes from an Egyptian bowl, dating to the time of Tutankhamon, found in Ugarit; the other comes from the hilt of a sword found at the cemetery of Zapher Papoura near Knossos. Both show a lion attacking a wild goat, and their style is so similar, that it is difficult to differentiate the ethnic background of the artists involved (Fig. 38 a, b).

The similarity in the style and composition shows that a visual *koine* was operative, a vocabulary of images and symbols common to royal kingdoms around the east Mediterranean. The power of the lion as a predator was deemed appropriate to the objects it decorated, and no doubt

bestowed prestige on its owners. Let it be noted that I am less interested in what originated where, although I believe in the primacy of Minoan over Mycenaean. My question rather is *why* there was the commonality of motif and what it reveals about power-symbolism. My answer is that there was a common royal ideology expressed through the lion throughout the Mediterranean.

I also believe that the griffin, treated by L. MORGAN in this volume, had a similar function. A key to the griffin interpretation is not only its association with the lions and leopards but with the rosette attested for one of the Tell el Dab<sup>c</sup>a fragments.

The above questions affect our interpretation of the lion frieze in Tell el Dab<sup>c</sup>a. The historical circumstances which brought the Minoan artisans in the Delta of Egypt to paint Minoan style lions will be better understood if we take into account interrelations between royal courts. Two further issues shall be addressed:

<sup>27</sup> On Minoan contacts with North Syria at Ras Shamra see EVANS, *PM IV*, 557. On Lions in the entire east Mediterranean see the thorough study of BUCHHOLZ 2005, 27–217.

1. The nature of international relations in the East Mediterranean.
2. The role of itinerant painters in the formation of international iconography.

As far as international relations go, W. Stevenson Smith's excellent work on the interconnections between the Aegean and the Near East has shown that artistic representations shared similar stylistic and compositional features on both sides of the Aegean. Smith's work however is purely art historical; he is interested in style, rather than the *meaning* of the vocabulary and what it may imply for the history of the times. Also, he thinks that the peak of the international relationships was reached in the 14<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE, the period when chariot imagery is dominant throughout the region, and when letters were exchanged between kings of the Mitanni, Hittites, Egyptians, Cypriots and peoples of Ugarit. Yet we can push this scenario of interconnections much earlier, to the beginning of the second millennium, at the time when the first palaces emerged in Minoan Crete.

Smith himself mentions that a statuette of the seated Egyptian official Weser of the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty was found at Knossos.<sup>28</sup> What was the significance of the statuette? It is not enough to ascribe it to mere trade. Who would have traded it and why? It is better to regard it as a gift of a symbolic nature commemorating a visit or perhaps sealing a treaty. Perhaps it was an expression of guest friendship and hospitality.<sup>29</sup> In any case, the presence of such a gift testifies to an international milieu of relationships in the east Mediterranean as early as the Middle Kingdom in Egypt and the first palace period on Crete. As well, Crete had diplomatic connections with Mari during its Old Palace period, as is testified by evidence of Keftiu in the Mari archives.<sup>30</sup>

We now move to the New Palace period, which is most relevant for our discussion. This seems to have been an era of intense royal contacts between the Aegean and the Near East. Marc Van de Mieroop, who surveyed the interconnections between kingdoms, suggests that momentum picked up in the 15<sup>th</sup> century as is made clear

from the way kings interacted with each other in diplomatic and military terms. They also shared a common ideology of power. While the political organization of the states varied, they were all characterized by an enormous discrepancy in access to wealth between the numerically small elites and the mass of the populations. The international elite class had more in common with each other than with the lower classes at home.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Stevenson Smith's art-historical approach focusing on the 14<sup>th</sup> century is restrictive historically and interpretatively.<sup>32</sup> Sir Arthur Evans, on the other hand, stressed the close contacts between Knossos and Egypt from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries:

"The intimate relations between Crete and Egypt were, as we see, continued under the earlier historic dynasties as well as throughout the Middle and New Empire. They are marked, moreover, by a deep-lying religious tradition from that side, to which the dual character of the temple Tomb is itself a witness. The New Dynasty of Knossos, to judge from the strong influence of Egyptian models at this time visible in the Palace Art, seems to have strengthened its relations with the rulers of the New Empire: the repeated missions, indeed of the Keftiu chieftains to the Pharaoh's viziers strongly bear out this conclusion."<sup>33</sup>

Keeping this background of international royal contacts in mind, we come to the subject of the itinerant painters and the question why Minoan artists were chosen to decorate Palace F at Tell el Dab<sup>a</sup>. International diplomacy involved not only exchange of goods and prestige wares, but also exchange of artists. Contacts encouraged competition as each king tried to show that he was equal or better than his neighbour. He wanted to have his palace decorated with the most spectacular wall paintings, executed by the best craftsmen. Prestige was communicated by style and content as well as through common metaphors, such as the lion hunt.<sup>34</sup>

Why Minoan artists came to Tell el Dab<sup>a</sup> may possibly be answered by reference to some surviving documents. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE, king Hammurabi of Babylon sent a letter to king Zim-

<sup>28</sup> SMITH 1965, 14.

<sup>29</sup> ARUZ 2008, 91–118.

<sup>30</sup> SCHAEFFER 1939, 53, thinks that the Minoans had an impact on Ugarit already in the first half of the second millennium. See also SAKELLARAKIS and SAKELLARAKIS 1984.

<sup>31</sup> VAN DE MIEROOP 2004, 137.

<sup>32</sup> SMITH 1965, 30–31.

<sup>33</sup> EVANS PM IV, 986–987

<sup>34</sup> MORGAN 1998.



Fig. 39 Half Rosette Frieze from Tell el Dab'ca

rilim of Mari expressing the desire to see the latter's palace – which is ironical since Hammurabi eventually sacked this very palace.<sup>35</sup> The desire for emulation was surely a form of flattery on the part of Hammurabi at the time, but it was not flattery alone. It expressed admiration for the wonderful palace of Zimrilim. Further evidence is a letter of the Hittite king Hattusilis who asked a Kassite king to lend him a Babylonian sculptor.<sup>36</sup>

Consider also some evidence from the Hebrew Bible in later times. When king Solomon decided to build the temple at Jerusalem, he asked king Hiram (or Hiram) of Tyre to lend him craftsmen. Hiram very graciously accepted and wrote back:

“I have dispatched Hiram-abi, a skilled artisan, endowed with understanding, the son of one of the Danite women, his father a Tyrian. He is trained to work in gold, silver, bronze, iron stone, and wood ... crimson fabrics and linen, and to doll all sorts of engravings and execute any designs that may be assigned to him...” (2 Chronicles: 2.13).

There is much to be learned from such stories which cover a long period from the second millennium to the Iron Age. We learn that good artisans were important for the prestige of the king.

Some of them were the monopoly of the king and could travel only by his permission. This state of affairs contrasts with the freedom of wandering freelance artisans in the later Greek city states. In the *Odyssey*, for example, we read that craftsmen had the ability to move (*Od.* 17, 382–86). Even as late as that time, however, the situation was different on the other side of the Aegean. In the Persian empire, a valued artisan was a slave of the king. Most notorious is the case of the Greek doctor Democedes of Croton, who was not allowed to leave the court of Darius and return to his native land (*Herodotus* 3. 129–135).

So why did Minoan artists come to Avaris to decorate the palace with a frieze of lions and leopards and bull leaping and rosettes? Bietak has suggested that there was a Minoan princess in the Avaris court and that this made the presence of Minoan painters desirable.<sup>37</sup> W.-D. Niemeier has presented the alternative hypothesis that the Minoan painters were sought after by many different courts throughout the Aegean, in Alalakh, Kabri, and Qatna because Minoan art was fashionable.<sup>38</sup> Both scholars present plausible cases and ones that are not mutually exclusive. Quality is an aspect of prestige but ideology is also important.

<sup>35</sup> VAN DE MIEROOP 2005, 64–78.

<sup>36</sup> SMITH 1965, 31. See also NIEMEIER 1991; NIEMEIER and NIEMEIER 2000.

<sup>37</sup> BIETAK 1994; 1995; 1996.

<sup>38</sup> NIEMEIER 1991; NIEMEIER and NIEMEIER 2000.

The foreign painters must represent the ideology of the ruler who employs them otherwise the message of the ruler is not effectively communicated. So in the end, Bietak's hypothesis, that there existed ties of kinship between the royal courts of Avaris and Knossos, has much to recommend it.

There is one additional element which supports the hypothesis of a common ideology between Crete and Egypt. The Bull Leaping frieze of Tell Dab<sup>ca</sup> was decorated with a series of half rosettes beneath the main scene (Fig. 39). I have suggested elsewhere that the rosette was an internationally recognizable symbol among the peoples of Syria, the Levant and Egypt, and that it designated there the sun or a star.<sup>39</sup> The rosette appears also on the shoulder blade of Egyptian



Fig. 40 Lions of Horizon from Illustrated Papyrus of Anhai (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) (WILKINSON 2003, fig. 181)

lions where it represents a star.<sup>40</sup> Here I juxtapose two images: an Egyptian lion and a Minoan griffin from the Throne Room of the Palace of Knossos (Figs. 40, 41). Both have a rosette decorating their shoulders. Is this an accident or is there common symbolism involved?

In conclusion, lion, griffin, bull, leopard and rosette constitute the visual vocabulary of royal and divine power which was not restricted to Crete alone but was international. This is one of the many historical lessons which the Tell el Dab<sup>ca</sup> frescoes have to teach us, perhaps the most important one.



Fig. 41 The Griffin with rosette from the Throne Room, Knossos (EVANS 1935, *PM IV*, fig. 884)

## Bibliography

ALEXIOU, A.

2005 I Nautiki toixografia tes Theras, 89–95, in: R. GIGLI (ed.), *Megalai Nesoi, Studi dedicati a Giovanni Rizza per il suo ottantesimo compleanno*, Catania.

ARUZ, J.

2008 *Marks of Distinction. Seals and Cultural Exchange Between the Aegean and the Orient*, CMS Beiheft 7, Mainz.

BIETAK, M.

1994 Die Wandmalereien aus Tell el Dab<sup>ca</sup> / 'Ezbet Helmi, Erste Eindrücke, *Ä&L* 4, 44–81.

1995 Connections between Egypt and the Minoan World: New Results from Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup>/Avaris, 19–28, in: W.V. DAVIS and L. SCHOFIELD (eds.), *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant*, London.

1996 *Avaris. The Capital of the Hyksos. Recent Excavations at Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup>*, London.

<sup>39</sup> Full argumentation in MARINATOS 2010, 131–139. For Syrian art see OTTO, 2000, 230–232. For the Avaris rosette see MARINATOS in: BIETAK, MARINATOS and PALYVOU 2007, 145–150.

<sup>40</sup> See WILKINSON 2003, 180–181 for the leonine associations of the sun god.

- BIETAK, M., MARINATOS, N. and PALYVOU, C.  
2007 *The Wall Paintings of Avaris I: Taureador Scenes in Avaris and Knossos*, UZK 27, Vienna.
- BUCHHOLZ, H.-G.  
2005 Beobachtungen zur nahöstlichen, zyprischen und frühgriechischen Löwenikonographie, *UF* 37, 27–219.
- CROWLEY, J.L.  
1989 *The Aegean and the East. An Investigation into the Transference of Artistic Motifs between the Aegean, Egypt, and the Near East in the Bronze Age*, Göteborg.
- DOUMAS, C.  
1992 *The Wall-Paintings of Thera*, Athens.
- EVANS, A.J.  
1921–1935 *The Palace of Minos I–IV*, London.
- IMMERWAHR, S.  
1990 *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age*, London.
- KARO, G.  
1930–35 *Die Schachtgräber von Mykenai*, Munich.
- KLEINSGÜTL, D.  
2000 Some Remarks on the Felids of Thera, 699–708, in: S. SHERRATT (ed.), *The Wall Paintings of Thera. Proceedings of the First International Symposium*, Vol. II, Athens.
- KOPCKE, G.  
1999 Male Iconography on Some LM Signets, 341–346, in: R. LAFFINEUR (ed.), 1999.
- LAFFINEUR, R.  
1984 Mycenaean at Thera: Further Evidence, 133–139, in: R. HÄGG and N. MARINATOS (eds.), *Minoan Thalassocracy: Myth and Reality*, Skrifter Utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen 4, 38, Stockholm.  
1985 Iconographie Minoenne et Iconographie Mycénienne, 245–265, in: P. DARQUE and J.-C. POURSAT (eds.), *L'iconographie minoenne. Actes de la Table Ronde d'Athènes (22–22 avril 1983)*, BCH suppl. 11, Paris.
- LAFFINEUR, R. (ed.)  
1999 *Polemos. Le contexte guerrier en Egee a l'age du Bronze. Actes de la 7<sup>e</sup> Rencontre egeenne internationale, Université de Liège, 14–17 avril 1998*, Aegaeum 19, Liège.
- LANG M.L.  
1969 *The Palace of Nestor at Pylos in Western Messenia II, The Frescoes*, Princeton.
- LITTAUER, M.A. and CROUWEL, J.H.  
1985 *Chariots and Related Equipment from the Tomb of Tut<sup>c</sup>ankhamun*, Tut<sup>c</sup>ankhamun Tomb Series VIII, Oxford.
- MARINATOS, N.  
1984 *Art and Religion in Thera*. Athens  
1990 Celebrations of Death and the Symbolism of the Lion Hunt, 143–148, in: R. HÄGG and G. NORD-QUIST (eds.), *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid*, Skrifter Utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen 40, Stockholm.
- 2000 Nature Landscape and Ideology on the Thera Ships, 907–913, in: S. SHERRATT (ed.), *The Wall Paintings of Thera. Proceedings of the First International Symposium 30 August–4 September 1997*, Vol. II, Athens.
- 2010 *Minoan Kingship and the Solar Goddess*. Ubana/Champaign, Ill.
- MARINATOS, S.  
1928 Rekonstruktion des Stierreliefs von Knossos, *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 102–111.
- MARINATOS, S. and HIRMER, M.  
1976 *Kreta, Thera und das Mykenische Hellas*, Munich.
- MORGAN, L.  
1988 *The Miniature Wall Paintings of Thera. A Study in Aegean Culture and Iconography*, Cambridge.  
1995 Of Animals and Men: The Symbolic Parallel, 171–184, in: C. MORRIS (ed.), *Klados. Essays in Honour of J.N. Coldstream*, London.  
1998 Power of the Beast: Human-Animal Symbolism in Egyptian and Aegean Art, *Å&L* 7, 17–31.
- MÜLLER, W.  
2000 Zu Stil und Zeitstellung des Bildthemas Herr der Löwen, 181–194, in: I. PINI (ed.), *Minoisch-mykenische Glyptik, Stil, Ikonographie, Funktion*, CMS Beiheft 6, Berlin.
- MYLONAS, G.E.  
1973 *O Tafikos Kyklos B ton Mykenon*, Athens.
- NIEMEIER, W.-D.  
1991 Minoan artisans travelling overseas: The Alalakh frescoes and the painted plaster floor at Tel Kabri (western Galilee), 189–201, in: R. LAFFINEUR and L. BASCH (eds.), *Thalassa: L'Egée préhistorique et la mer*, Aegaeum 7, Liège.
- NIEMEIER, W.-D., and NIEMEIER, B.  
2000 Aegean Frescoes in Syria-Palestine: Alalakh and Tel Kabri, 763–802, in: S. SHERRATT (ed.), *The Wall Paintings of Thera. Proceedings of the First International Symposium 30 August–4 September 1997*, vol. II, Athens.
- OTTO, A.  
2000 *Die Entstehung und Entwicklung der klassischen Syrischen Glyptik*, UAVA 8, Berlin.
- PINI, I.  
1985 Das Motiv des Löwenüberfalls in der Spätminoischen und Mykenischen Glyptik, 153–166, in: P. DARQUE and J.-C. POURSAT (eds.), *L'iconographie minoenne. Actes de la Table Ronde d'Athènes (21–22 avril 1983)*, BCH suppl. 11, Paris.
- SAKELLARAKIS, E. and SAKELLARAKIS, Y.  
1984 The Keftiu and the Minoan Thalassocracy, 197–203, in: R. HÄGG and N. MARINATOS (eds.),

*The Minoan Thalassocracy. Myth and Reality, Proceedings of the Third International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 31 May–5 June, 1982, Stockholm.*

SCHAEFFER, C.

1939 *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra-Ugarit*, London.

SMITH, W.S.

1965 *Interconnections in the Ancient Near East. A Study of the Relationships between the Arts of Egypt, the Aegean and Western Asia*, New Haven and London.

VERMEULE, E.

1964 *Greece in the Bronze Age*, Chicago.

WILKINSON, R.H.

2003 *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London.

VAN DE MIEROOP, M.

2004 *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323 B.C.*, Malden, Mass.

2005 *King Hammurabi of Babylon*, London.

XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU, A.

1985 Identite minoenne, identite mycenienne, 293–309, in: P. DARCQUE and J.-C. POURSAT (eds.), *L'icônographie minoenne. Actes de la Table Ronde d'Athènes (21–22 avril 1983)*, BCH suppl. 11, Paris.

