

THE ISLAND SANCTUARIES GROUP: DATE AND SIGNIFICANCE*

BY JOHN G. YOUNGER

In 1973 I put together¹ a small group of stylistically similar lentoids based on two seals from the Temple at Ayia Irini in Kea, CMS V 499 and 500 (*Figs. 1, 2*), and gave this group a name – The Elegant Twins from Kea. Both are of translucent limestone, and each carries an exceptionally delicate animal, a cow perhaps on one, a deer on the other. The thinness of the legs, the restrained use of dots for joints, eyes, and muzzle, the



Fig. 1 CMS V 499, impression.



Fig. 2 CMS V 500, impression.

and the smooth modelling all contribute to the gentle and exquisite effect – the name of the group seemed at that time appropriate.

By the autumn of 1976 this small group had been considerably enlarged. John Betts had added² seals to it and the British excavations in the Mycenaean Sanctuary at Phylakopi

* Sources of illustrations: fig. 16: photo author – fig. 3: photo C. Albiker – figs. 4, 5, 12, 17: photo W.-D. Niemeier – figs. 1, 2, 6–11, 13–15: photo I. Pini.

The following special abbreviation is used here:

HMs Heracleion Museum, sealing, Inv. no.

¹ "Towards the Chronology of Aegean Glyptic in the Late Bronze Age," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1973) p. 442.

² J.H. Betts, *Late Minoan-Mycenaean Gem Workshops*, BICS 23 (1976) 121–122.



Fig. 3 CMS I 139, impression.

in Melos had added two and probably three others, broadening our understanding of the group's general style and thus enabling us to enlarge the group even more. Though a presentation and a discussion of this group will appear in the forthcoming publication of the recent excavations of the Sanctuary at Phylakopi, a short list of the group's main pieces is given here for convenience. Because eight of the sealstones I have just mentioned come from five Mycenaean IIIB Sanctuaries (the House of the Idols at Mycenae, the Apollo Maleatas Sanctuary above Epidauros, the Temple at Ayia Irini, the Sanctuary at Phylakopi, and the Artemisium Deposit in Delos) and the geographical focus seems to be in the Islands, we alter the name to the Island Sanctuaries Group. Three distinct subgroups can be noted. Dates are those for the archaeological contexts.

I. The island Sanctuaries Master

CMS I 139 from Mycenae (LH III B:1) (*Fig. 3*)

I 175 from Mycenae

V 221 from the Apollo Maleatas Sanctuary, Epidauros

V 499 and 500 from the Temple, Ayia Irini in Kea (LH III A-B)

VII 250 and 251

XIII 126

Athens Nat. Museum 8802 and 8845 from Perati (LH III B:2-C:1)

Prosymna fig. 584 from Prosymna T. 33 (LH III A:2-B)

Phylakopi nos. 2 and 3 (LH III C:1 adv.) (*Figs. 4, 5*)

Associated sealings, e.g., CMS I 317 and 355 from Pylos (LH III B:2-C)

II. The Rodian Hunt Master³

CMS I 171 from Mycenae (*Fig. 6*)

I 199 from Asine (*Fig. 7*)

V 313 from the Artemisium deposit in Delos (*Fig. 8*)

V 656 from Ialysos (the namepiece) (LH III C:1) (*Fig. 9*)

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³ "The Rhodian Hunt Group", *Papers in Cycladic Prehistory* (Institute of Archaeology XIV, UCLA 1979) 97-105.

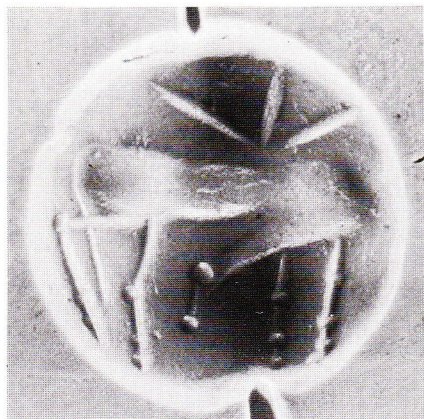


Fig. 4 Phylakopi no. 2, impression.



Fig. 5 Phylakopi no. 3, impression.

Associated sealings, e.g., CMS I 165 from Mycenae, House of the Shields (LH III B:1) and 379 from Pylos (LH III B:2-C)

III. The Miniaturist

CMS I 489 from Crete

V 528 from Midea (LH III B) (Fig. 10)

V 600 from the House with the Idols at Mycenae (LH III B:2) (Fig. 11)

Phylakopi no. 4 (LH III C:1 adv.) (Fig. 12)

The general style of the Island Sanctuaries Group is clear: thin, elegant animals lightly modelled and given simple dots only for joints, muzzle, and eyes. The Rhodian Hunt Master's compositions seem odd, while the Miniaturist works at a *tour de force* scale. The Island Sanctuaries Master, who is responsible for the enlarged, former Kea Twins group, may also be the Miniaturist – CMS I 139 from Mycenae T. 513 is surely by the Master but measures 0.8×1.2 cm. The Rhodian Hunt Master is at least a close colleague, but he could also be the Island Sanctuaries Master in a bolder idiom.

Date. The Kea seals have a mixed LH IIIA–B context; the seals from Phylakopi, Rhodes, Perati, and the House of the Idols at Mycenae, as well as the associated sealings from Pylos, all have contexts of LH III B:2 or later.

A few other seals in the Sanctuaries Group come from earlier contexts:

CMS I 139 from Mycenae T. 513 (LH III B:1) (Fig. 3)

Associated sealings from the lower houses at Mycenae, like CMS I 165 (LH III B:1)

The lentoid from Prosymna T. 33 (if the drawing is accurate) (LH III A:2–B)

In addition – a lentoid that depends on the Island Sanctuaries Group, from Midea T. 2 (LH III A:2–B:1)⁴.

⁴ A. Persson, *The Royal Tombs at Dendra near Midea*, p. 34c left. For the date: M.R. Popham, *Sellopoulo Tombs 3 and 4*, *BSA* 69 (1974) 254 (LH III A:2) or A. Furumark, *Chronology*, pp. 64–65 (LH III B:1).



Fig. 6 CMS I 171, impression.



Fig. 7 CMS I 199, impression.



Fig. 8 CMS V 313, impression.



Fig. 9 CMS V 656, impression.

The earliest contexts for members of the Island Sanctuaries Group suggest a date no later than LH III B:1, while the Prosymna lentoid and the dependent lentoid from Midea indicate that the Group may be pushed back to the beginning of that period.

There are other indications that this late XIVth century date may be correct.

From the Armenoi cemetery comes CMS V 249 (T. 19, LM III B:1) (Fig. 13) to which is related a small group by one hand consisting of:

CMS V 243 (T. 13, LM III A:2) (Fig. 14)

IV 286

IX 168

Sakellariou, Coll. Giam., no. 235

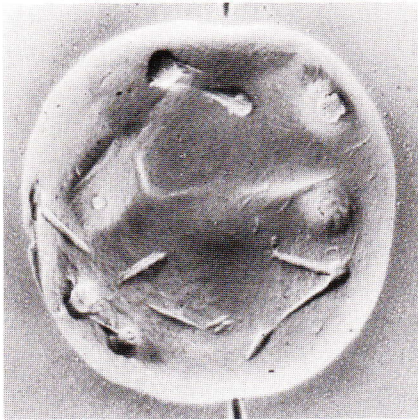


Fig. 10 CMS V 528, impression.



Fig. 11 CMS V 600, impression.

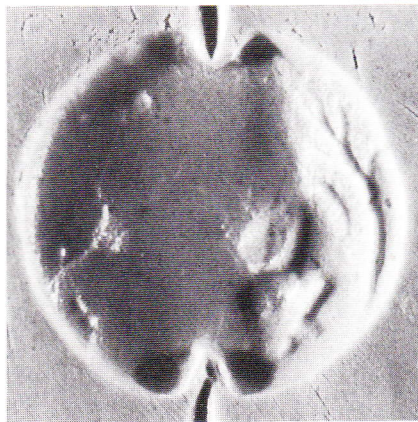


Fig. 12 Phylakopi no. 4, impression.



Fig. 13 CMS V 249, impression.

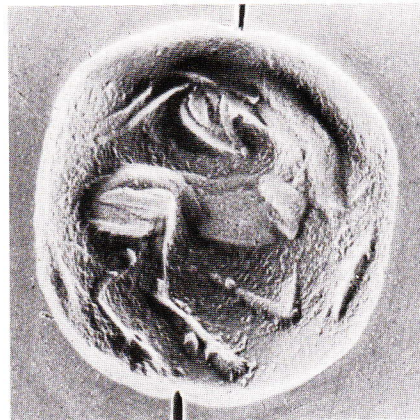


Fig. 14 CMS V 243, impression.

This small Armenoi group seems to parallel a few of the Island Sanctuaries' traits: the contorted pose, the restrained use of dots in the finer pieces, and the long angular legs that often curve. The earliest context date is LM III A:2.

One more seal, the lentoid CMS V 441 (*Fig. 15*), seems to foreshadow certain elements in the Island Sanctuaries Group, especially the Miniaturist, with its ambitious composition for such a tiny seal (D. 1,2 cm.), fairly restrained use of dots, and the linear quality to the legs. The style here, however, is more fullsome. The seal comes from the Nichoria Tholos, giving a *terminus post quem non* of LH III A:2-B:1 by context.

The Armenoi Group seems to be a close relative of the Island Sanctuaries Group, and the Nichoria lentoid a predecessor; their earliest date by context, LH IIIA:2, suggests that the development towards the Sanctuaries style occurred rapidly within the III A period. If the Sanctuaries Group is the end of a development, its beginning can be sought in the so-called Spectacle-Eye Group⁵ that dominates the Knossos sealings⁶ and occurs in the contemporary tombs at Sellopoulo (e.g., *Fig. 16*), Archanes, and Kalyvia⁷.

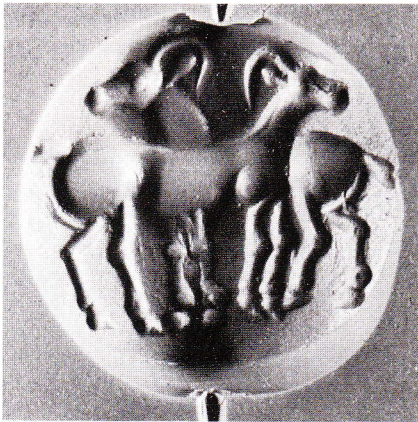


Fig. 15 CMS V 441, impression

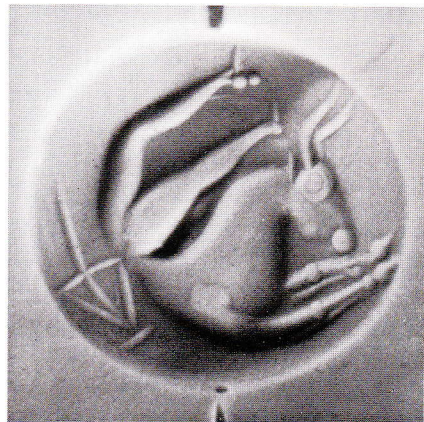


Fig. 16 HM 1865 from Sellopoulo T. 1, impression.

The Spectacle-Eye Group must have been produced before Knossos fell, say ca. 1400 B.C. The smooth modelling, dots for joints, thin bodies, more calves or cows than bulls, more hounds than lions, and the occasional complex composition (e.g. Knossos sealings HMs. 255 and Gill no. Lb on HMs. 258) all are elements which receive emphasis in the more advanced Island Sanctuaries Group. This close relationship between the two groups supports the late III A – early III B date for the Sanctuaries Group, ca. 1320–1290 B.C., a scant two or three generations after the Knossos destruction.

⁵ "Towards the Chronology of Aegean Glyptic in the Late Bronze Age," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1973) pp. 422–424 (there called the Ring-Eyed Animals).

⁶ M.A.V. Gill, *The Knossos Sealings: Provenance and Identification*, BSA 60 (1965) 58–98, nos., e.g., C51. R17. R4. R12/14/27. HMs. 414. U115. HMs. IB. Q7. R20 etc.

⁷ Sellopoulo T. 1: ArchRep 1957 pl. 1i (here *fig. 16*) and j; Archanes Tholos A: ILN 26 March 1966, pp. 32–33, *fig. 7*; Kalyvia T. 8: MonAntichi 14 (1904) 551–666, *figs. 90–92*. And there are others.

A major style to succeed that of the Island Sanctuaries Group is not, however, to be found, even though we look among the Pylos sealings, or the seals from the late cemeteries at Perati or Ialysos, or in Naxos, Aitolia, or Kephallenia.

The only candidates most often proclaimed as surely products of the IIIB and C periods are those dark steatite lentoids with schematic animals which have been brought together to form what can be termed the Mainland Popular Group⁸.

The Mainland Popular Group consists of over 150 sealstones, almost all of which are found at Mycenaean sites and in Mycenaean tombs; compare the example from Phylakopi (*Fig. 17*). Their schematic animals are simply scratched into the soft steatite in one fairly homogeneous style – so homogeneous, in fact, that it is impossible, except only in a few cases, to break this group down into separate workshops or even stylistic subcategories. They were obviously produced *en masse* by several artists, and, as the earliest context for these Mainland Popular seals is LH III A:2 (e.g., three lentoids from the Prosymna cemetery)⁹, fairly much at one time. It would seem therefore that the Mainland



Fig. 17 Phylakopi no. 7, impression.

Popular Group is actually roughly contemporary with our Sanctuaries Group, and does not represent a debased glyptic style of a later period. The reason for the schematic and hasty carving would be, then, not a result of degenerate skill, but of economics, being produced for Mycenaean of humble means.

In short, the Island Sanctuaries Group seems to include the last fine examples of prehistoric Aegean seal engraving on hard stones, and its date, ca. 1320–1290 B.C., must be close therefore to the latest prehistoric date for the art. At first, this conclusion may seem iconoclastic, but if correct, it may answer more questions than it raises.

⁸ "Towards the Chronology of Aegean Glyptic in the Late Bronze Age," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1973) pp. 439–441.

⁹ Prosymna, figs. 586, 589 and 590 from Ts. 34. 46 and 38 respectively; Furumark, *Chronology*, p. 131, gives the date.

Significance. The distribution of the Sanctuaries sealstones points to a focus away from the Peloponnese and Crete – farther east in the islands, and also to a rather specialized use of them as *ex votos* in late sanctuaries, as if they were being valued less as bureaucratic tools and more as precious objects suitable for sacrifice by Mycenaeans who were more comfortable about Aegean travel than previously. In other words, the Mycenaeans' eastern expansion into the Dodecanese can be illustrated by the spread of the Sanctuaries Group and the concentration of the Rhodian Hunt Group in Rhodes.

If, however, we are accustomed to think of seals as objects that traveled with their owners, then what are we to make of the fact that extremely few Minoan-Mycenaean sealstones have been found in Cyprus or the Near East¹⁰ – could it be that in the IIIB and C periods when Mycenaeans were active outside the Aegean they carried no sealstones because their bureaucratic uses were inappropriate there, or because none was being carved, or both? If the art was no longer being practised by the beginning of IIIB, we should expect the sealstones of a previous epoch to be considered rare and valuable, suitable for hoarding, perhaps, and for dedication to a divinity. In fact, it is probably not coincidental that the latest tombs of any wealth, the IIIC tombs at Upper Gypsades or at Ialysos, for example, hold both very early Talismanic seals as well as later ones.

We have seen, therefore, that in the course of IIIA:2 only two major groups of sealstones were being produced: the Mainland Popular Group and the Island Sanctuaries Group. The languishing demise of glyptic art in this period may also explain the sudden, contemporary rise of another art form, the figured style on pottery, which in several cases seems to preserve scenes taken directly from sealstones. If the gradual loss of the glyptic medium hastened the development of the Pictorial Style in pottery, the latter may be due to a conscious desire to keep alive some representational artistic expression¹¹.

In fact, we may go even further and suggest that the same transference of individual glyptic motifs can also be seen in many of the large wall frescoes at Pylos. The large murals in the Vestibule (Rm 6) and the Throne Room are both comprised of several individual scenes, some of which sealstones might have inspired, like the inclusions of a disproportionately large bull. Certain other individual scenes, like pairs of animals and duels are also given poses that occur elsewhere only on sealstones¹². Stylistically as well, there is a fairly uniform sleekness in the Pylos animals that bears a strong resemblance to that of the animals in the Spectacle-Eye and the Island Sanctuaries Groups. One wonders how close in time the Pylos frescoes and the Island Sanctuaries Group are.

¹⁰ Aegean sealstones come from: Cyprus – CMS VII 48. 126. 168. 173 and IX 162; near Antioch – CMS IX 156; Egypt – CS 330 (»found in Egypt«) and 39 P (»purchased in Egypt«); from Tocra (ancient Taucheira or Arsinoe), Libya – M.A.V. Gill, *Kadmos* 5 (1966) 11–12, fig. 5; Tell Brak in Northern Mesopotamia – R.B.K. Amiran, *Iraq* 18 (1956) 57–59. An Aegean cylinder from Israel now resides in Jerusalem.

¹¹ Furumark, in his discussion of Mycenaean pictorial decoration (*MycPottery I*, pp. 430–470), nowhere mentions sealstones as possible contributors of iconographic motif. This complete silence is probably deliberate; he makes almost all his comparisons refer to frescoes, though he apparently does not think their influence all important.

¹² E.g., the two hounds in 12C 43 and 21H 48 top register, the two boars in 9C 20, the two stags in 2C 2, and the duel in radial symmetry in 28H 64. Professor Lang is well aware of other connections between sealstones and the Pylos frescoes.

In both media, figured pottery and the unintegrated Pylos frescoes, it would seem that the glyptic approach, no longer practised in the IIIB period on sealstones, is given a new, though hardly a successful, opportunity for expression. The small size and the circular or oblong restrictions of the sealstone shape had previously evolved a balance in composition and a restraint in modelling and pose that are now both ignored, especially in the Rhodian Hunt Subgroup. Compositions become crowded and confused, the animals elegant and supple, as if continuing the approach of the Spectacle Eye Group, but the style hasty and nervous, as if expressing a *fin de siècle* hysteria. The end of sealstone engraving feels near, and if the date of the Island Sanctuaries Group, ca. 1300 B.C., is correct, then it should not be mere chance that it follows soon after the destruction of Knossos.

There is no real reason to assume that the Mycenaeans viewed sealstones as the Minoans did; in fact, it is more than likely that in the prehistoric period, sealstone engraving always depended on Minoan talents and therefore on the preservation of Minoan civilization – the art, as Kenna has said, is a Minoan one, tailored for Minoan tastes and Minoan bureaucratic uses. It could not have survived long after the destruction of the last Minoan center.

DISKUSSION

I. PINI bezieht sich auf zwei Punkte: 1. Stimmt er zu, daß einige der vorgeführten Siegel ein und derselben Hand zuzuweisen sind. Jedoch gibt er auch eine andere Möglichkeit zu bedenken, daß z.B. ein Typus – ein bestimmtes Tier in einer bestimmten Haltung – erfunden und durch Abdrücke oder durch Siegel, die mit dem Handel in Umlauf gekommen sind, in der Ägais verbreitet wird. So können Typen wandern. Auch aus der späteren Kunstgeschichte sind Beispiele dafür bekannt, daß die gleichen Typen, nachdem sie kurz zuvor erfunden worden waren, zur gleichen Zeit an ganz verschiedenen Orten verwendet wurden. – 2. Zum Problem, ob mit der Zeit der »Island Sanctuaries Group« die Siegelproduktion in Halbedelstein aufhört, verweist er auf die Siegelabdrücke von Pylos (CMS I 302–382), die insgesamt spät sind, wenn man nicht alle abgedruckten Siegel früher datieren will. Zum anderen gibt es eine ganze Reihe spät datierter Siegel aus hartem Stein, z.B. aus Menidi (CMS I 384–389), dem »House of the Idols« in Mykene (CMS V 596–600) und einigen anderen Orten, die alle SH IIIB-Kontexte aufweisen.

J.G. YOUNGER erläutert zu Punkt 1 noch einmal seine Terminologie: Die Bezeichnung »Master« ist auf ganz wenige Siegel beschränkt, die Bezeichnung »Group« meint eine größere Einheit stilistisch verwandter Siegel. »Island Sanctuaries Master«, »Rhodian Hunt Master« und »Miniaturist« bilden eine Gruppe, ob sie zusammenarbeiteten oder nicht. In jedem Fall haben sie ein gemeinsames Stilgefühl. Etwas weiter entfernt voneinander sind jene Beispiele, die er als »associated« bezeichnet. – Zu Punkt 2 von PINI meint er, daß es keine Siegel gibt, die später zu datieren wären als die »Island Sanctuaries Group«. Alle Siegel oder Siegelabdrücke aus späteren Kontexten, auch die Beispiele des »Mainland Popular Style« – wie Pylos, Menidi, Perati (CMS I 390–396), Aitolien (CMS V

618-625), Kephallenia (CMS V 150-172), Naxos (CMS V 604-608), Ialysos (CMS V 654-659) – sind stilistisch Gruppen zuzuordnen, für die sich schon in sehr viel früheren Kontexten Beispiele finden.

J.H. BETTS gibt zu bedenken, daß der Kontext nicht gleichbedeutend mit der Datierung ist. Er stimmt mit dem Referenten überein, daß die Siegel von Menidi und Kephallenia – letztere haben SH III A 2-Parallelen in Medeon (vgl. z.B. CMS V 165. 166 mit CMS V 395) – früher zu datieren sind als ihre Kontexte. Bei den Abdrücken aus Pylos sind jedoch sowohl die abgedruckten Siegel aus hartem Material als auch die Siegel der »Mainland Popular Group« wesentlich älter als die Abdrücke selbst.