

'Tall fish' tales? Marine life, Fishing and strange happenings at sea in the Aegean Bronze Age.

A fishy business? Ancient attitudes and activities related to fish, seafood and fishing

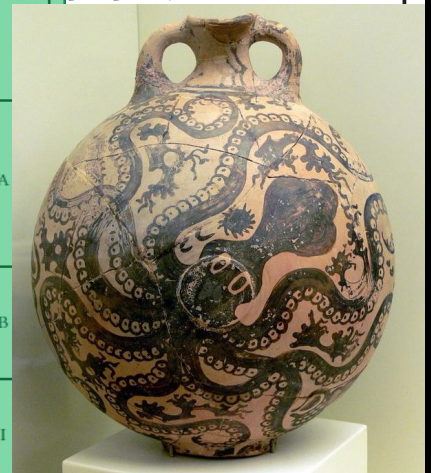
Christopher Nuttall
Uppsala Universitet



Objectives

- Representations of fish and marine life – what, when and how?
- Fishing iconography – what is represented?
- Strange happenings at sea
- Focus is Early Bronze Age I to Late Bronze IA
- How common were representations of marine life before the appearance of LM IB ‘Marine style’

Chronology		Crete	Cyclades	Greece	Egypt			
High	Low							
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	3000							
	2900							
	2800							
	2700							
	2600	EM IIA	EC II	EH IIA				
	2500							
	2400							
	2300	EM IIB		EH IIB				
	2200	EM III		EC III			EH III	
	2100							
	2000							
	1900	MM IA	MC I	MH I	Middle Kingdom (2116-1795)			
	1800	MM IB	MC II	MH II				
	1700	MM II						
1700	MM III	MC III	MH III	2 nd Intermediate Period (1795-1540)				
1600	LM IA	LC I	LH I					
1500								
1500	LM IB	LC II	LH IIA	New Kingdom (1540-1070)				
1400	LM II		LH IIB			Hatshepsut/ Tuthmosis III	1479-1425	





Archaeological background – Early Bronze Age (3300 – 2200 BCE)



"Frying pan" from the
Cyclades

- Introduction of bronze tools
- Emergence of elites – rich burials
- "International spirit" in EB IIA
- Centrality of the sea to maritime narratives – inter-Aegean contact
- First complex societies – collapsed on the Mainland

Archaeological background – Middle to Late Bronze Age I (2200 – 1500 BCE)

- “Dark Age” outside of Crete – new evidence challenges this picture
- Administration and small states on Crete
- Contact with the Levant and Egypt
- Development of the ‘Minoan thalassocracy’
- Emergence of the Mycenaeans towards the start of the Late Bronze Age
- Thera volcanic eruption – devastation on Crete



Thera Cataclysm

Marine life iconography
from EB I – LB I (3300-1500 BCE)

Early Bronze Age - Cyclades

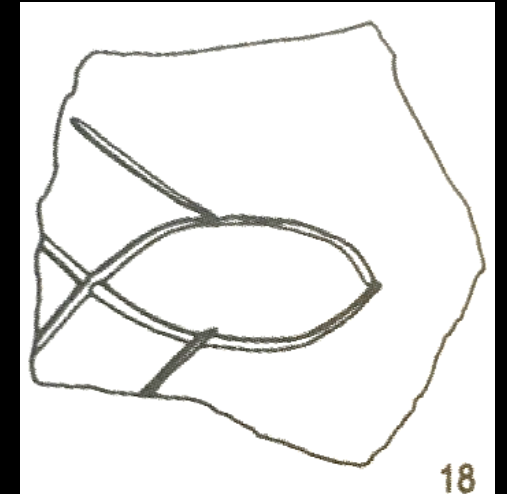
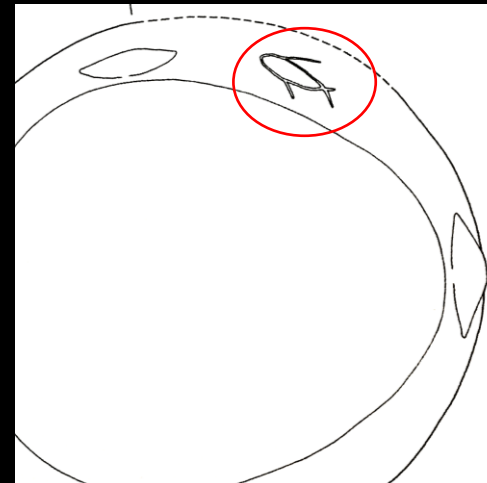
EC IIA 'Frying Pans' from
Chalandriani, Syros



Early Bronze Age - Cyclades

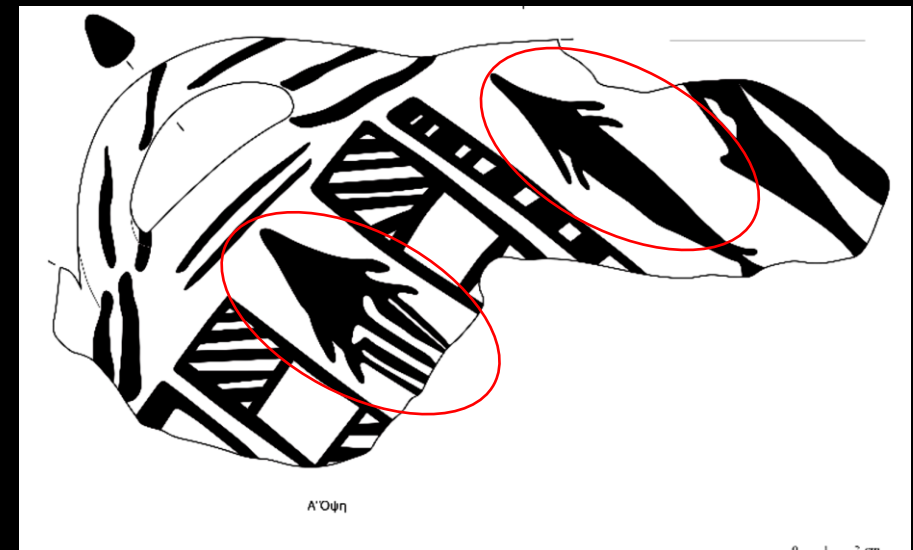


EC IIB Incised fish from Markiani,
Amorgos



EC III fish? from Phylakopi, Melos

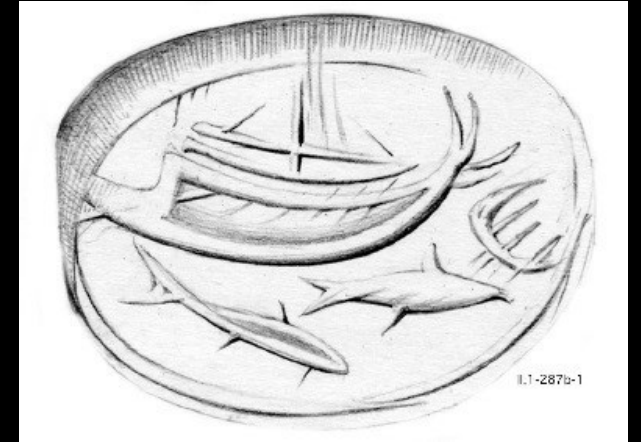
Early Bronze Age - Cyclades



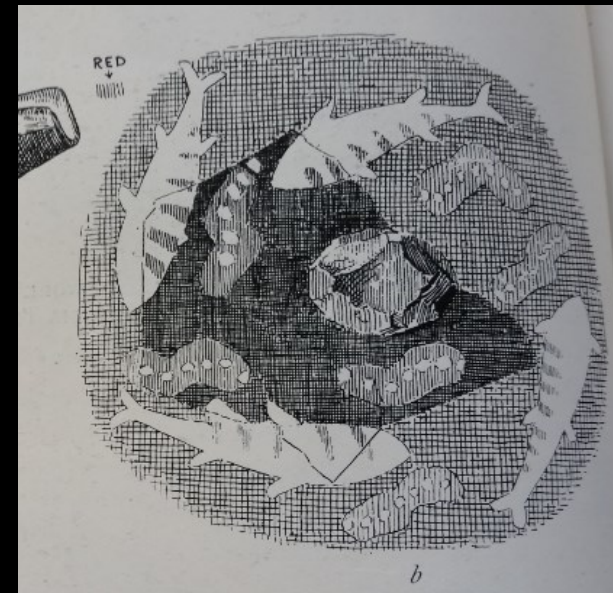
Middle Bronze Age – MM I-II Crete



Vasiliki

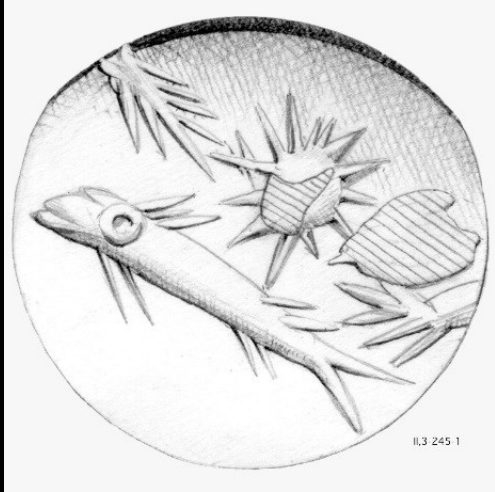


Platanos



Knossos

Middle Bronze Age – MM III Crete



Gournia: Sphoungaras



Pacheia Ammos

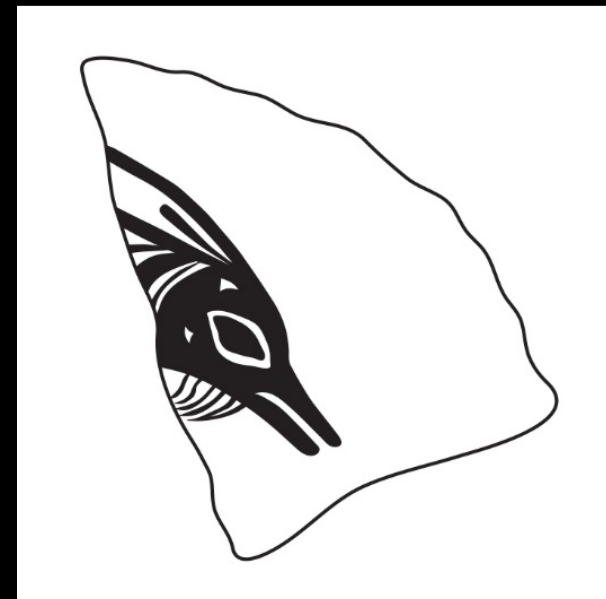
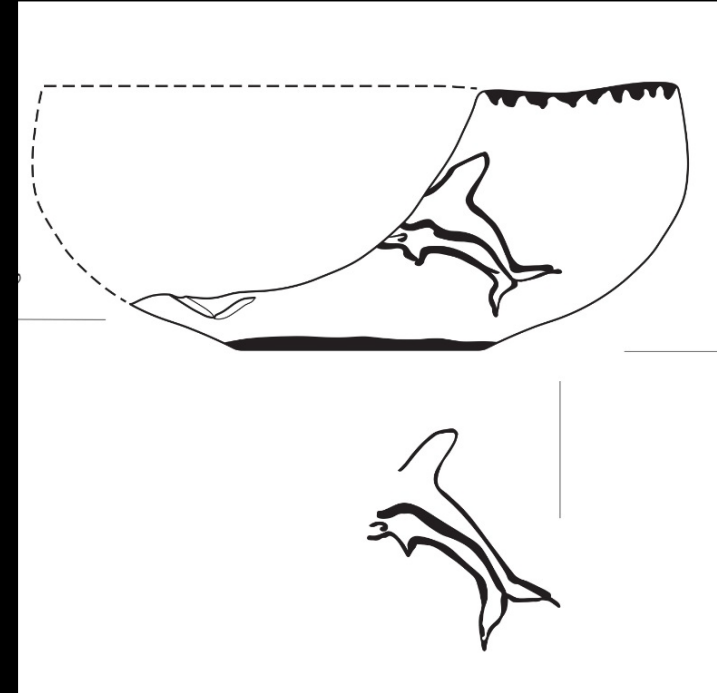
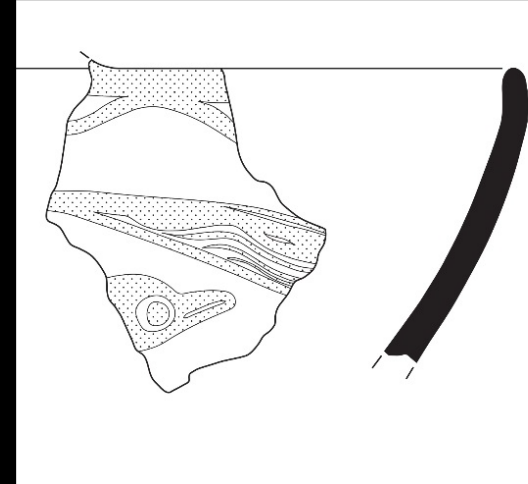


Phaistos

Middle Bronze Age – Greek Mainland



Middle Bronze Age Cyclades

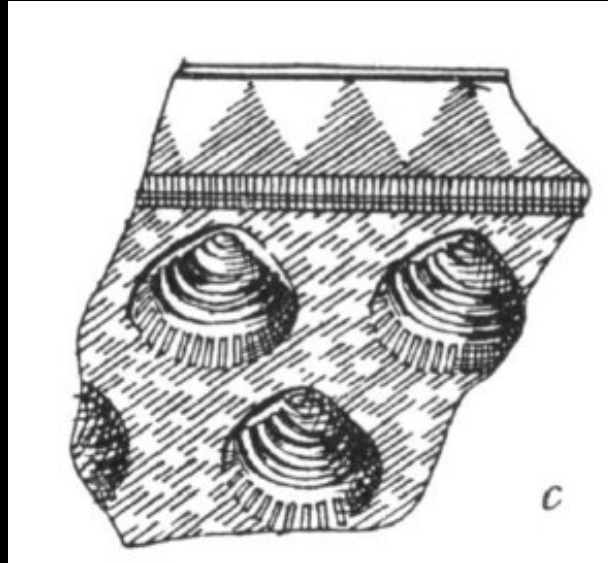


Late Bronze Age I - Crete

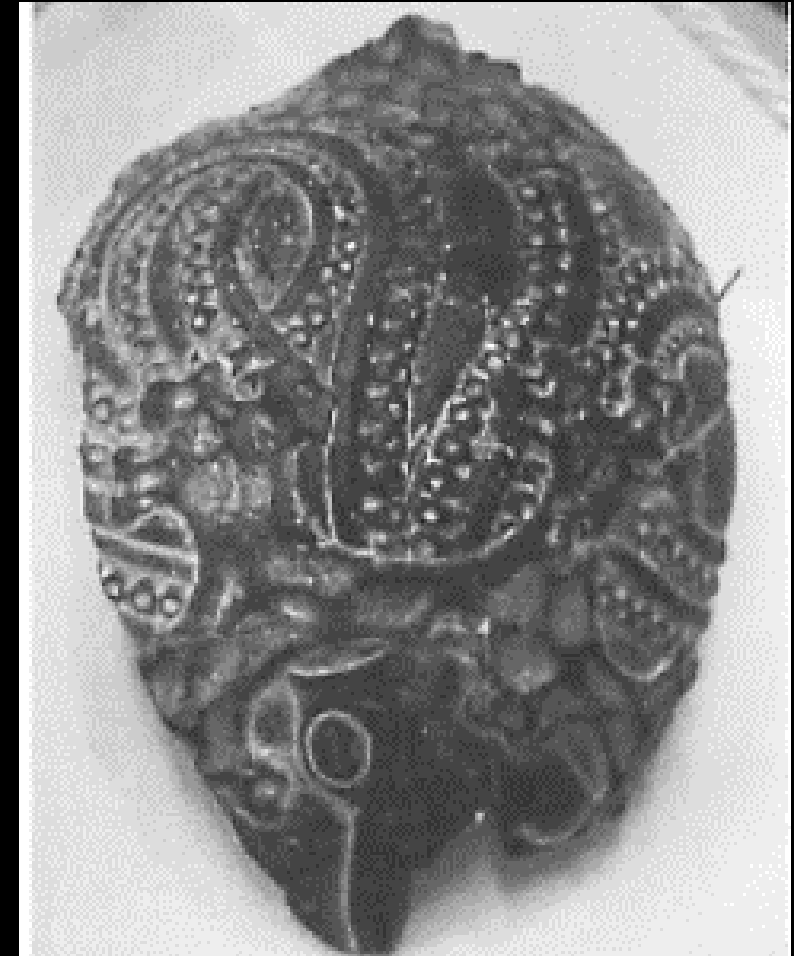
'Ambushed Octopus' - Knossos



Dolphin rhyton - Zakros

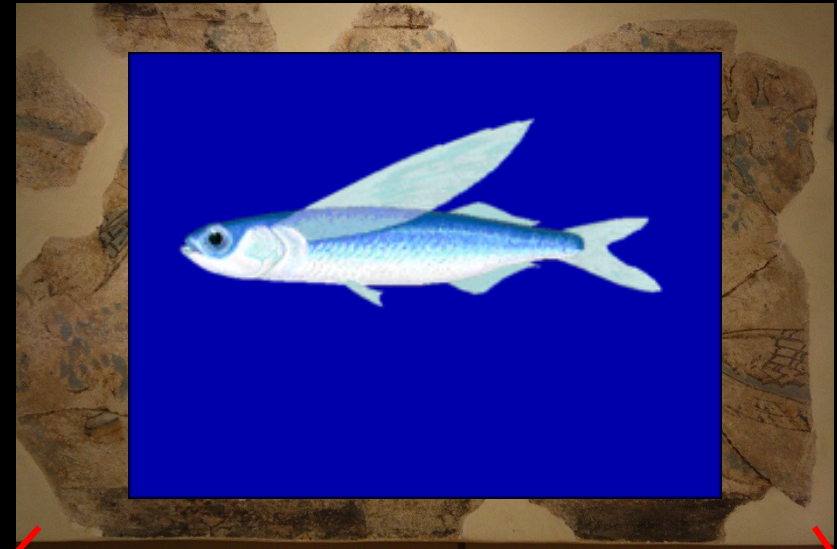


Shell
repousse -
Mallia



Late Bronze Age I - Frescoes

'Flying fish' fresco - Phylakopi



Late Bronze Age I - Frescoes

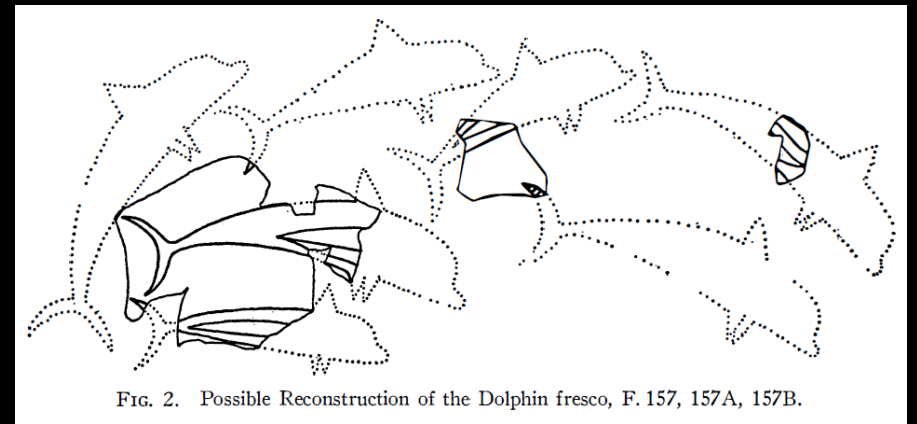


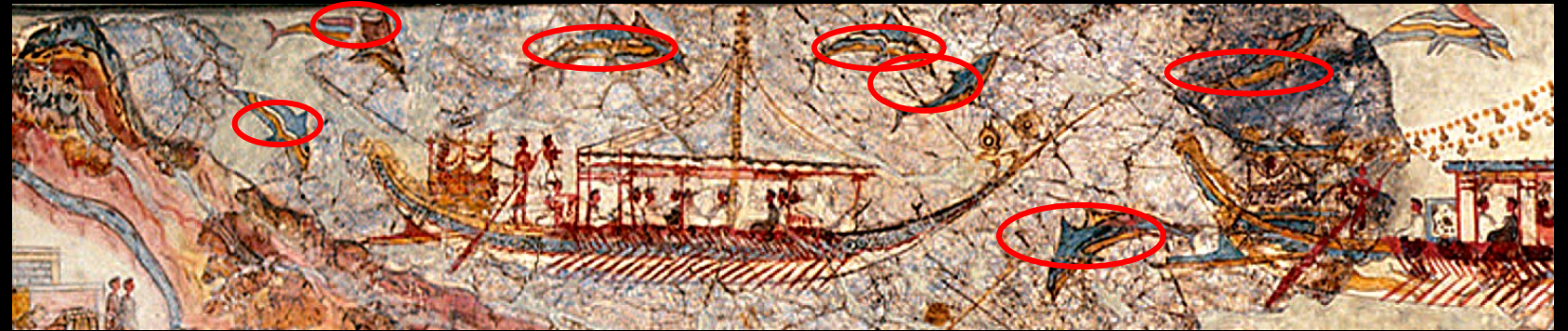
FIG. 2. Possible Reconstruction of the Dolphin fresco, F. 157, 157A, 157B.

Dolphin fresco – Agia Irini, Kea



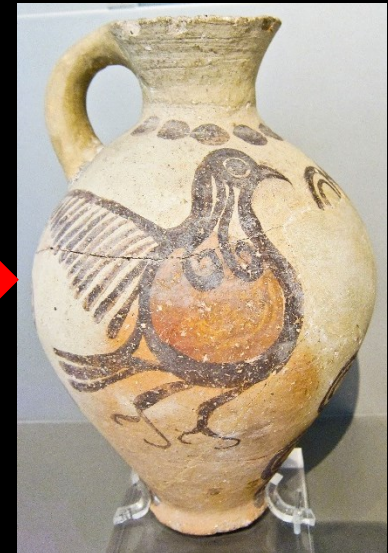
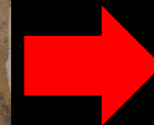
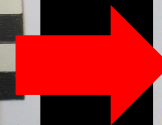
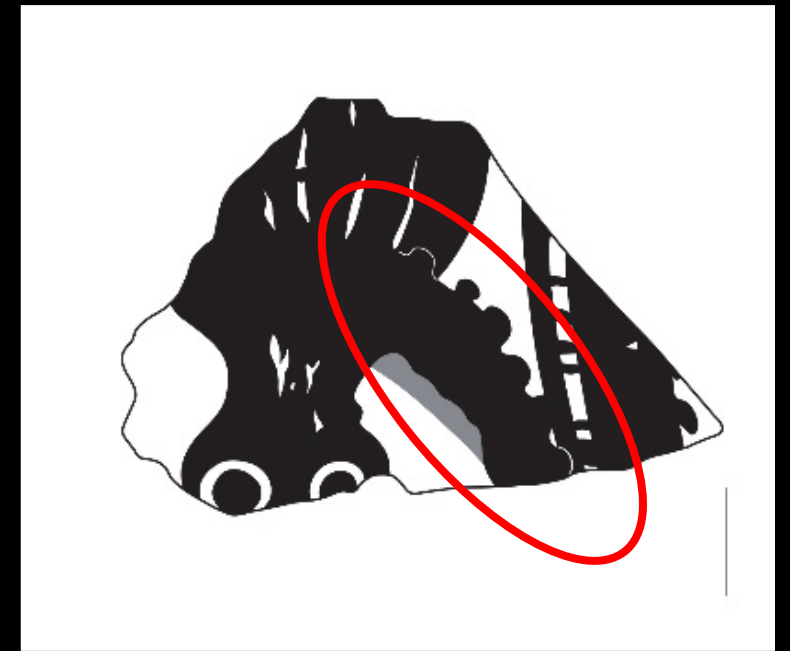
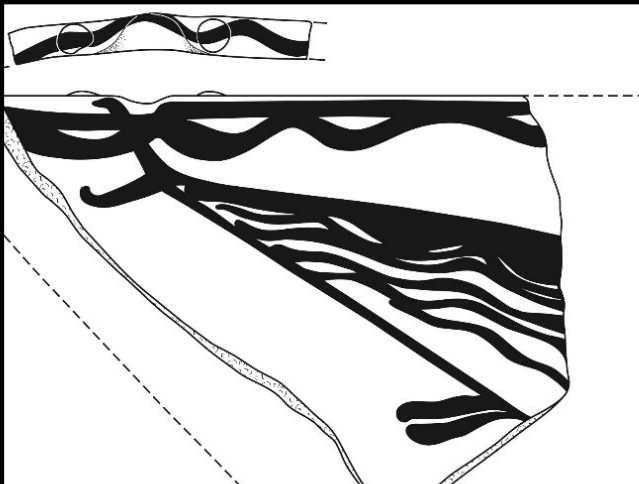
Dolphin fresco - Knossos

Late Bronze Age I - Frescoes



Flotilla and
Fisherman
fresco -
Akrotiri

Late Bronze Age I - Cyclades



Late Bronze Age I - Cyclades

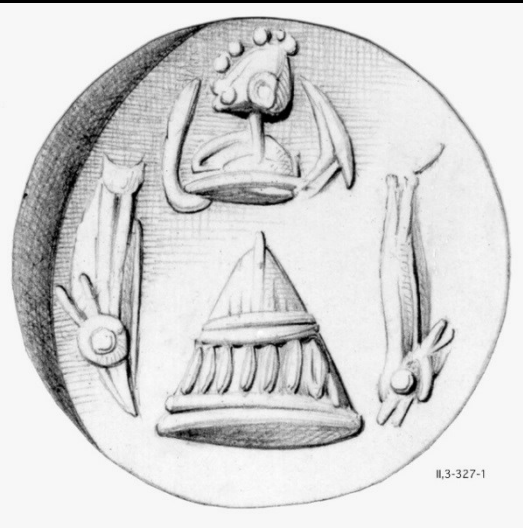


Sea Creatures in iconography

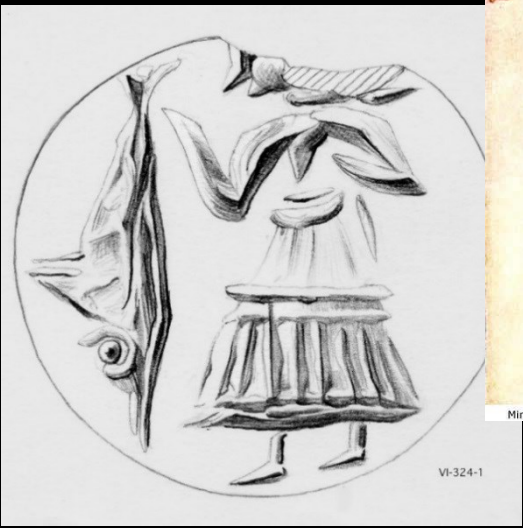
- Increase and quantity and accuracy of marine representation into the Late Bronze Age
- Concentration is focused mostly in the islands, as well as Crete.
- Fish but later includes dolphins and octopodes
- Focus of marine motifs in a funerary context at Pacheia Ammos and Gournia
- Marine representation found not only at coastal sites on Crete
- Little evidence on the Greek mainland.

Fishing iconography

Fishing on Minoan seals



CMS-II,3-327-1



CMS VI, 324-1



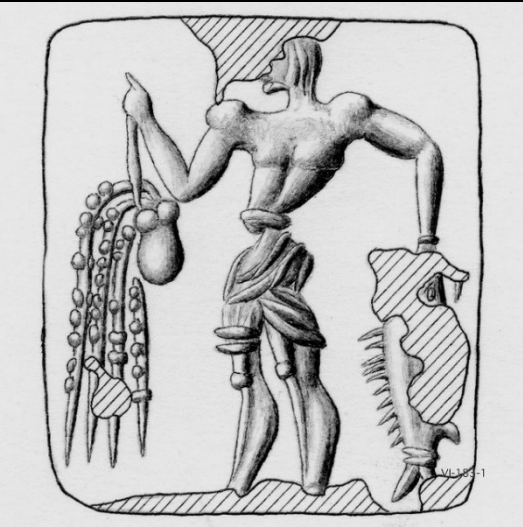
Minoan Snake Goddess from the Palace at Knossos, Crete



CMS-X-144-1



CMS-VII-088-1



CMS-VI-183-1



CMS-II,2-174a-1

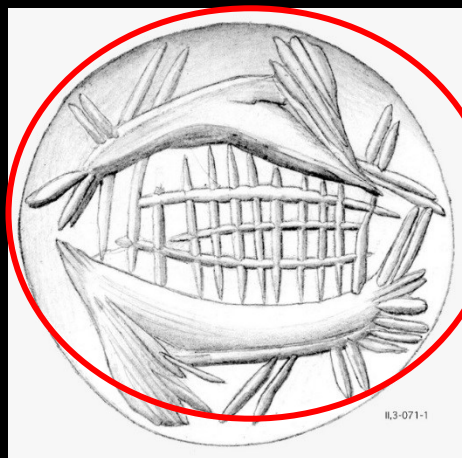


CMS-V-181-1

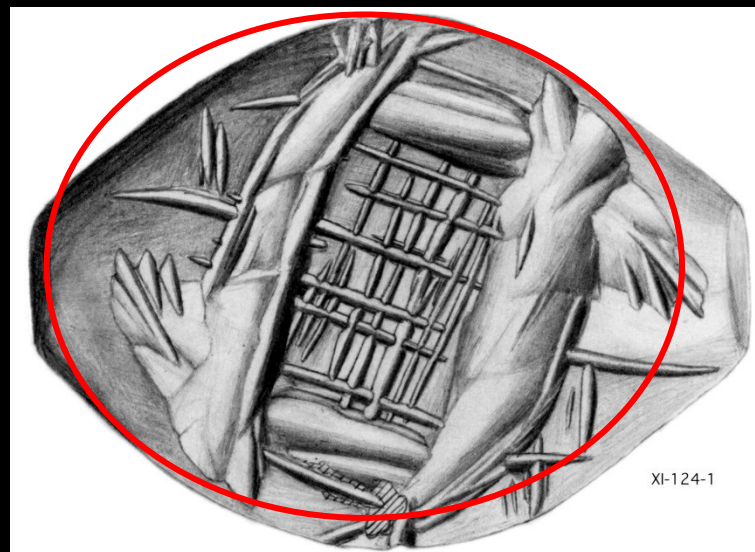


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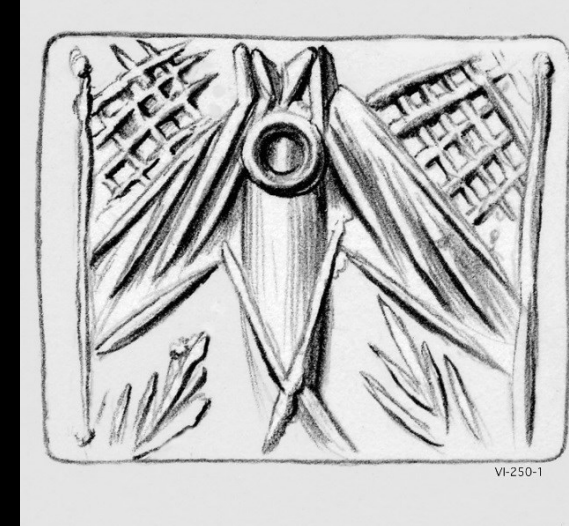
Fishing traps?



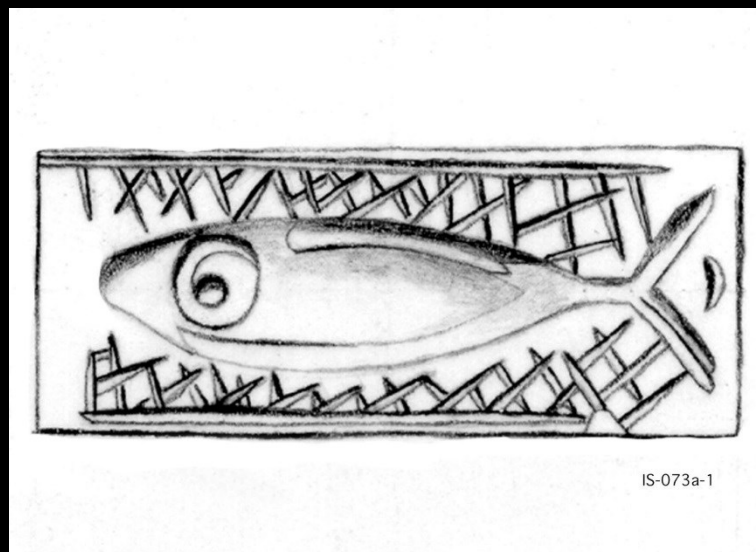
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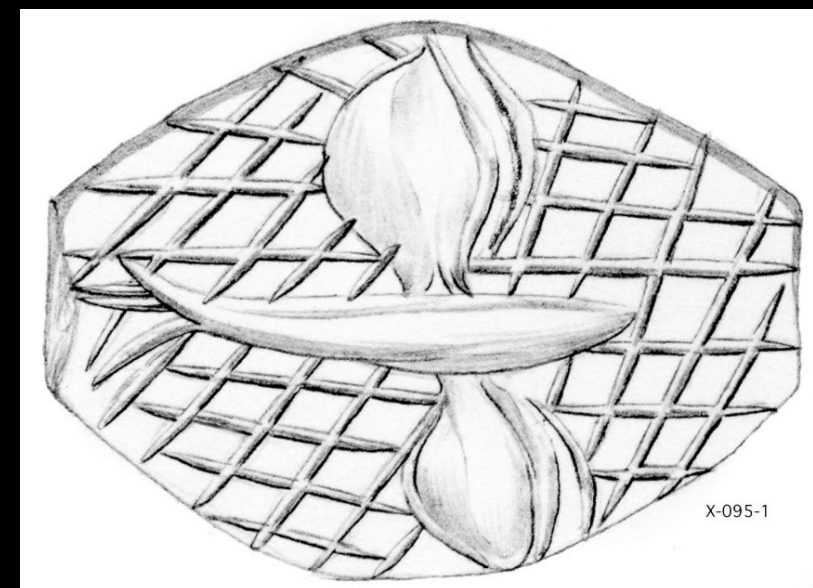
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CMS-VI-250-1

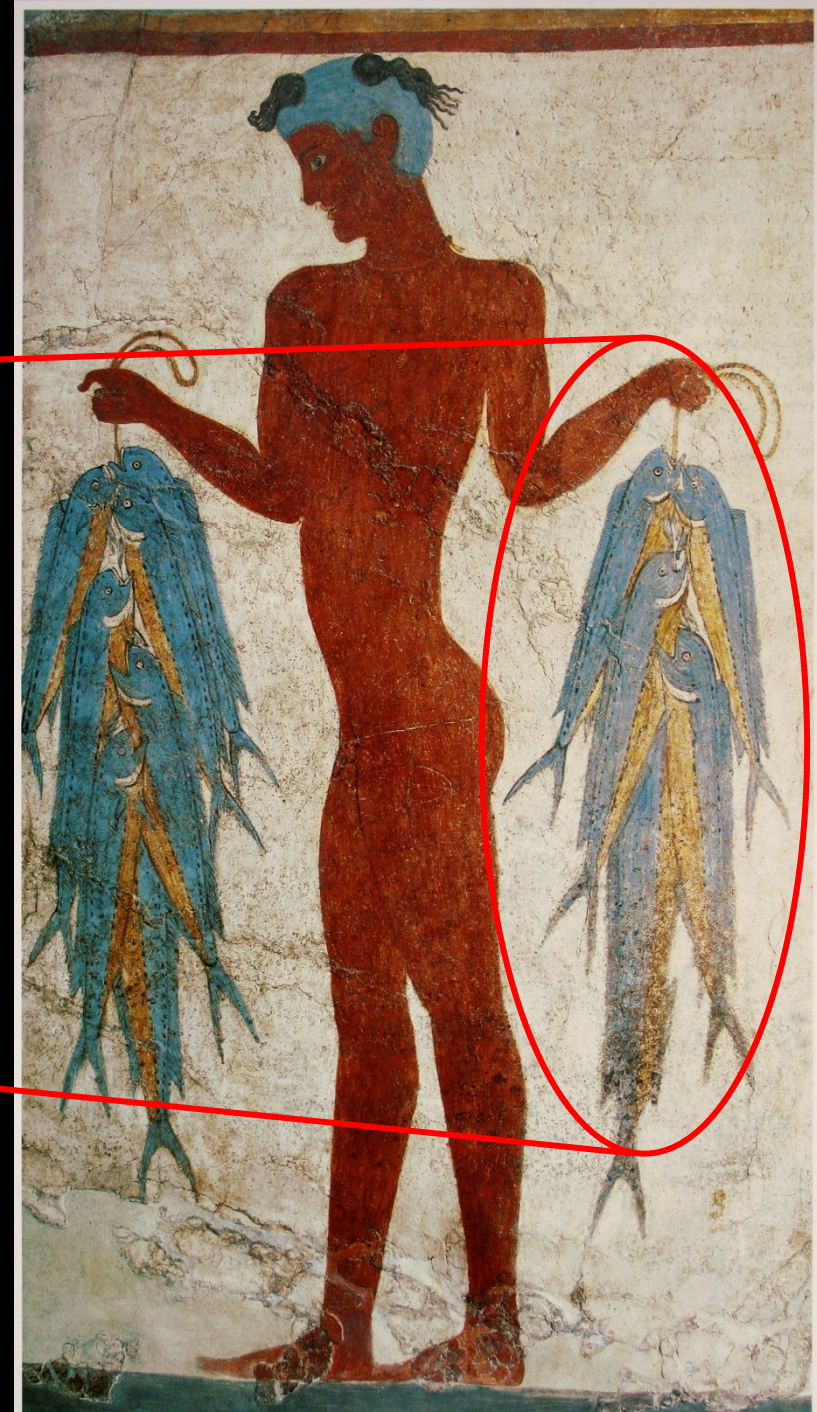


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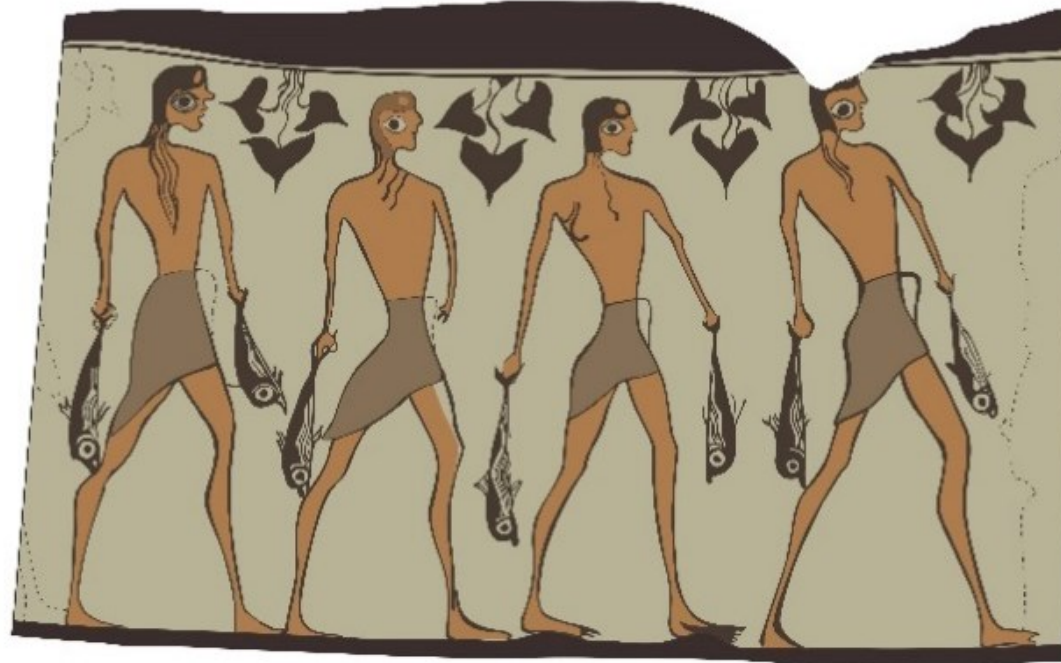


CMS-X-095-1

Akrotiri – Fisherman Frescoes



Phylakopi – Fishermen Vase



Courtesy of Kalliopi Theodoropoulou and Robin Barber

Fishing

- Fish identification vague
- Focus on bigger fish
- No dolphins
- No visual representation of humans in the present act of fishing
- Focus on the 'catch'
- Roughly 50-50 distribution of men to women from the Minoan seals
- Not a gendered practice?

Strange happenings at sea?

Phylakopi sea 'goblins'





Figure 6. Evolution of double axes to winged 'goblins', from sealings and vases (reproduced with permission, from Evans 1921: fig. 527)

Borrowed motif or indigenous concept?



Marine Style – LM IB



Palaikastro



Phaistos



Knossos

Conclusions

- Marine themes become more common during the Middle Bronze Age
- Not a dominant iconographic theme on Crete
- Not common on the Greek mainland despite the presence of several long-lived coastal settlements
- Concepts incorporated more into identity in islands and Crete?
- Focus on the 'smaller' details over time
- Dolphins occupy the pelagic zone – viewed mostly from boats?

Phylakopi: some thoughts

- Faunal assemblage from Phylakopi mostly focused on Ovicaprids (sheep-goat) (Gamble 1982)
- Few small fish bones recovered despite sieving (though not wet-sieve)
- Absence or technique?
- Despite the predominance of land-based animals - No representations of land animals in iconography...
- Sea-focus for identity?



Thanks for your attention – any questions?