

A Dualism of the Lily in the Aegean Seals, Ornament-Sign Concept

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INTRODUCTION

Minoan writing is still a big puzzle for researchers from all over the world. So far, many signs depicting plants have already been discovered, including the flax (CHIC no. 031), the crocus/saffron (CHIC no. 023) or the so-called branch/tree (CHIC no. 024). What about the lily? The most important flower in Minoan culture is depicted on seals in three different ways: **1.** As a full plant with a long stem, short leaves and a flower with two petals turned outwards, sometimes with a third pointing upwards. **2.** As the calyx of the flower alone without the stem. **3.** As the previous versions with two stamens. The lily was initially accepted as a sign, but now is considered as an ornament. In *Scripta Minoa I* Sir. Arthur Evans designated it as "hieroglyphic" sign no. 90, which appears only on stone seals from MM II onwards. In the same publication he included an unparalleled linear mark found on an MM II-III clay sealing and gave it no. 87 (in CHIC no. *166). Another sign that may represent a lily is AB 47 (in Bennett no. 32). Published posthumously in *Scripta Minoa II*, it was described as a representation of a tulip or iris, which did not appear in *Scripta Minoa I*. "SM II" itself was created from Evans' unfinished notes. However later scholars (e.g. Chadwick 1958; Chadwick & Ventris 1959; Younger 1988; Olivier & Godart 1996; Krzyszkowska 2005) consider it an ornament due to its lack of continuity. But is this supported by its other characteristics? This iconographic analysis begins a discussion as to whether the representation of the lily also functions as a sign.

1. SIZE PROPORTIONALITY IN THE SEQUENCE

The proportions of the lily relative to the signs varies. On certain seals the lily appears in proportion to the other signs (CMS II.2. 256; CMS II.2. 316 a, b; CMS II.2. 220; CMS II Suppl.1/CHIC #309; CMS II.8. 74; CMS II.8. 83; CMS VI.1. 100; CMS XII. 106; CMS XII. 113), whereas on others the lily occupies a smaller area of the seal (CMS I Suppl. 73 b, d; CMS II.6. 143; CMS II.8. 62; CMS II. Suppl.1/CHIC #189; CMS III. 103; CHIC #185; CMS VI/CHIC #194; CMS VI/CHIC #212; CMS XI. 299). Of course, we also know of examples where the lily is the main motif of the seal (CMS II.1. 122, CMS III.1. 19 or CMS IX. 29). In all of these cases, the flower occupies a specially reserved place for it. This means that the design was planned and the stone worked appropriately so that all the signs and decorations can fit on it. The lily was not meant to occupy spare space, as it had already been thought of and specially inserted there. The very fact that their proportions are on a par with the other signs also indicates their importance. As far as the other signs are concerned, size differences are also known to exist (e.g. CHIC #242; CMS VII, 14).

2. FILLING THE VOID

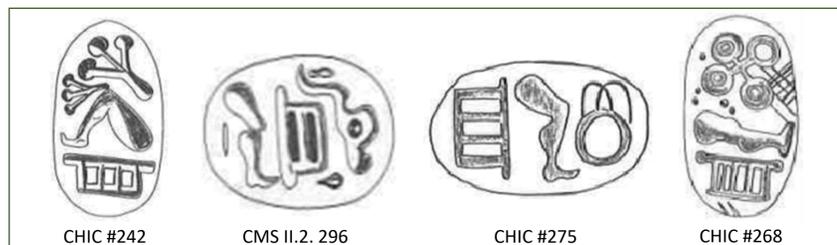
The argument that they would only served to fill empty space is also untrue. Stone seals do have empty spaces. As for filling them, we know that the Minoans used linear patterns. Yes, they were meant to fill space, but they also did so in such a way that they did not affect the perception of the foreground, i.e. the signs (e.g. CMS II.2. 256). A more elaborate type of filling is the grid-like pattern. We can see it, for example, on the sealings of CMS II. Suppl.1/CHIC #309 (with a lily) or CMS VII. 14 (without the lily). The former shows that if the lily was only an ornamental function, it would be unnecessary to add the extra filling. In addition, the flower on this seal occupies a large space and is part of a repeated signs sequence.

References:

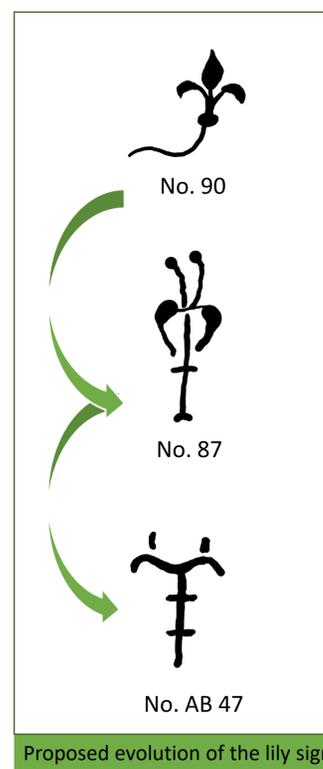
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Drawing	Signs	Number of seals
	1-2 lilies + 044 + 049	5
	010 + 1-2 lilies	4
	Animal head + lily	3

Tab.1. Three main groups of repeated sequences.



Examples of analogies for 010 + 1-2 lilies.



3. REPEATABILITY OF THE SEQUENCE

After analyzing 18 seals with representations of lilies in sign sequences, it was possible to delineate three repeated groups.

- The first depicts **one or two lilies + 044 + 049**, found on five seals: CMS I. Suppl. 73b, CMS II.2. 220, CMS II.2. 316a, CMS II.8. 83 and CMS III 103. This sequence shows a combination of lilies with arrow and trowel.
- The second group consists of four seals: CMS II.6. 143, CMS II Suppl.1/CHIC #309, CHIC #212, CMS XI. 299, which combine sign **010 + one or two lilies**. In three cases the whole is preceded by sign 038 (gate) and one begins with sign 054 (vessel/amphora). This triple sequence 038+010+lily is important insofar as it has analogous sequences. The most significant is 038+010+031, which represents the combination of a gate, a leg and another plant, the flax. The iconography of this sequence overlaps representations with the lily. The two plants may appear singly or doubly behind the leg and/or in the bend below the knee (e.g. CMS III/CHIC #242; CMS VII, 41). Other analogies may also be sequences ending with sign 012 (e.g. CMS II.2. 296), 070 (e.g. CHIC #268) or an ornament (unspecified sign?) resembling a circular purse with two stripes (e.g. CHIC #275).
- The last group is made up of four seals: CMS I. Suppl. 73d, CHIC #185, CMS VI.1. 100 and CMS XII. 113, and their sequence is an **animal head (sheep, cattle or donkey) + lily**. These may be preceded by instruments 057 (CHIC #185) and 058 (CMS VI.1. 100), sun sign 033 (CMS I. Suppl. 73d, CMS XII. 113) or 036 (CMS XII. 113), and sometimes accompanied by seal sign 056 (CMS VI.1. 100, CHIC #185).

The other five seals do not fit into any of the groups and have no analogies. CMS II.2. 256 alludes to the second group through the presence of a lily with a gate sign (038) and 077. CMS II.2. 316b has a lily, 077 and a branch/tree (029) in the sequence. CMS II.8.74 has signs 056, 009 and 061 in addition to the flower. CMS II. Suppl.1/CHIC #189 is damaged but has a lily, amphora (054) and axe (042) preserved on it. The last CMS II.8.62 is also damaged but the lily and sign 041 are visible on it.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems highly likely that the lily, in addition to its function as an ornament, may also have been a sign. On seals it is often found with religious signs such as axe, sun, sacrificial animals, tree, instruments or amphorae. Certain seals with the lilies also have cat-shaped animals, another sign associated with the goddess (CHIC #309; CMS II.2. 316 a, b; CMS VI.1. 100). The repetition of the sequences also points to this.

As for continuity in writing, it seems likely from iconographic analysis alone that the lily sign originally appeared in an elaborate form on stone seals like no. 90 (SM I). Attempts were then made to transfer it to clay such as no. 87 (SM I), until it evolved into the sign AB 47 (SM II).

This research should be continued and expanded on a larger scale, especially in terms of philology and material.

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