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Review of the Master Thesis by Monika Matoušková, “The Use of Symbols in Minoan and Mycenaean Iconography”, Univerzita Karlova, Praha 2020

This MA thesis, written in English, consists of two volumes: the text of 231 pages and a comprehensive catalogue of 298 pages that presents the most essential information and illustrations of the examples, organised by symbols and along chronological periods. This study in the field of Aegean iconography and symbolism is devoted to the forms and functions of the ten most prominent, as well as less prominent, symbolic motifs: the double-axe, the figure-of-eight shield, the helmet (especially boar's tusks helmets), horns of consecration, the impaled triangle, the incurved altar (together with the so-called 'half rosette' motif), the leg symbol, the pillar (including the column), the sacral knot and the so-called Snake frame. A concluding chapter contains an analysis of the combination and interaction of these symbols. This study encompasses the entire Aegean Bronze Age, the 3rd and 2nd mill. BCE, and is mainly based upon pictorial examples in seal glyptic, but also including all other artistic media such as decorated pottery, mural paintings and three-dimensional objects.

In this very systematic study the author is summarising the evidence and critically discussing the history of research and of interpretation. The methodological approach of morphological und contextual analysis, by focusing on the (mostly Near Eastern) origin and the chronological development of the distinct symbolic motifs and by the inclusion of helpful synoptic tables, is well chosen. In a very fruitful way, the author approaches the meaning(s) of the ten symbols by analysing the iconographic contexts and their association with figures (mostly animals) and other symbolic motifs, by the frequent use of statistics, and by considering their Near Eastern (mostly Egyptian) comparanda. By doing so, Miss Matoušková found a well-balanced way between a general presentation and a convincing deep-going study; it must be highlighted that a thorough, detailed analysis of these ten mostly popular symbolic motifs of the Aegean would go by far beyond the scope of a MA thesis. Of particular interest is the individual analysis of the 16 examples of the 'leg symbol' (attributed to cattle and lion): as far as I am aware, this is the first time that this symbol, with good reasons, is defined and discussed as a real group. A surprising result is the occurrence of the figure-of-eight shield form as early as in the Prepalatial period of Crete. Of special significance is the result that groups of symbols, a "Minoan iconographic system" (p. 210), can be deduced from the iconographic material as outlined in the final chapter of this study.

The author has an excellent knowledge of the wide-spread material, the literature and the actual state of research. She is well aware of the problems of Aegean archaeology and iconography. Although this comprehensive study, on the MA level, is excellent, one could criticize that the unequal frequency of distinct symbols makes a comparison difficult when, for example, the high number of double-axes is due to their frequent occurrence as decorative motif on pottery. However, due to the absence of any written sources that permit deeper insight, this is a common problem in Aegean archaeology where our methodological paths are restricted to studying the iconography as systematic as possible. Perhaps, it would have been useful to add a chapter where the results of this study are presented in the broader context of the history of the Aegean Bronze Age, for example, by challenging the question of a contrasting meaning of distinct symbols in Minoan Crete and on the Mycenaean mainland; this, however, would have expanded the length of this MA thesis even further what is not necessary. Therefore, the wording "the use of symbols" in the title does perfectly conform to the aim of this study. The bibliography is up to date, and the selection and quality of the numerous illustrations (those in the text as well as those in the catalogue) are excellent. Of special interest is the very appealing graphic

documentation that is of high value for following the arguments and conclusions by the author.

In conclusion, it is beyond any doubt that, for a MA thesis, this very systematic and stimulating study is excellent. Miss Matousková should be strongly encouraged to continue her academic career with a PhD dissertation in Aegean Bronze Age studies or in any other field of Classical Archaeology. Additionally, it is worth considering by the author whether the results of this study should be enhanced and published, perhaps in concentrated form or in a series of articles.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Kelly

The seal is circular with a double-line border. The outer ring contains the text "INSTITUT FÜR KLASSISCHE ARCHÄOLOGIE" at the top and "UNIVERSITÄT WIEN" at the bottom. The inner circle features a central figure, likely a classical deity or scholar, seated and holding a staff or scepter. The figure is flanked by two columns or architectural elements.