


# SEA BROUGHT ONTO LAND: SEASCAPE IMAGERY IN THE CYCLADIC POTTERY FROM PHYLAKOPI (MELOS) IN THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, ATHENS

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*This study examines seascape depictions on pottery, including seafaring and sea creature scenes, from the 1896–9 excavations at Phylakopi on Melos, held in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. This analysis demonstrates that seascape scenes varied in character through time and were typically associated with vessel shapes connected to the pouring of liquids between Early Cycladic (EC) III and Middle Cycladic late and were later focused on basins. A focus on seafaring is evident in EC III, while later the iconographic focus on the sea concentrates on sea creatures. An iconographic interest in the sea, alongside that of birds and floral depictions, is suggestive of an interest in living forms that inhabit different places to humans (i.e., non-domestic) with different corporeality to humans. This research contributes further to the growing debate on human–animal/plant relationships and ontologies in the Aegean Bronze Age.*

## INTRODUCTION

Held in the National Archaeological Museum (Athens) is a large pottery assemblage from the 1896–9 excavations at Phylakopi on Melos.<sup>1</sup> This assemblage covers a range of Bronze Age wares, of which several carry pictorial decoration in various forms. A component of these pictorial depictions at Phylakopi are seascape representations, defined here as any representation incorporating the sea, sea creatures or boat components.

While these forms of representation have previously received scholarly attention, seascape depictions on pottery have rarely been the central focus of study, and the different forms (boat, animal, fishing) are rarely treated together. Seascape depictions have been considered a natural result of coastal life (Bosanquet 1904b, 321), with research exploring the potential for a species typology of marine creatures in Minoan iconography (Gill 1985), and a similar typological approach has been advocated in the iconographic analysis of boat depictions (Wedde 1991; 2000). Marine animal depiction was also utilised alongside faunal remains and material culture in the analysis of fishing in Bronze Age Greece (Powell 1996), and an iconography of the sea has been considered as part of an analysis of Minoan religion (Saunders 2008). The introduction of ‘seascapes’ into discourse in Classical Archaeology (Georgiadis 2003, 29–31; Vavouranakis 2011; Mylona 2020; Nuttall 2021) has prompted some to re-evaluate seascape imagery. Berg (2013, 13), for example, argues for a lack of marine knowledge evident through analysis of Minoan pictorial pottery. Haysom (2011, 153–4) argues for a land-centred worldview for Neopalatial Minoan elites based on a lack of seascape imagery in palatial contexts, and von Rūden (2015, 57) argues for a profound social interest in the marine world for Minoan society. Work on seascapes has brought

<sup>1</sup> This study is based partially on research undertaken as part of a PhD dissertation on seascapes in Aegean prehistory, as well as part of a re-assessment of the material held in the National Archaeological Museum (Athens) (Barber 2024). Most of the drawings were made by Kalliopi Theodoropoulou for the Phylakopi republication project. The following abbreviations are used in the text: EB/EBA/MB/MBA (Early/Middle Bronze Age), EC/MC/LC (Early/Middle/Late Cycladic), MM/LM (Middle/Late Minoan), and MH/LH (Middle/Late Helladic). Ceramic wares from Phylakopi are also abbreviated: DFI (Dark-faced Incised), EMP (Early Matt-painted), SMP (Soft Matt-painted), CW (Cycladic White), B&R (Black and Red), LCW (Late Cycladic White) and LL (Later Local). For Appendices 1, 2 and 3, see online-only Supplementary Material.

forward insights into the worldviews and characteristics of the societies that created these seascape depictions.

Most analyses mentioned above consider seascape representation from a Cretan standpoint, given the concentration of seascape depiction on the island. Analyses of Cycladic seascape depictions are considerably rarer and typically form part of a broader discussion of Cycladic iconography (Nikolakopoulou 2010; Marthari 2018). The present study seeks to fill this gap by analysing seascape representation in the Cycladic pottery from Phylakopi on Melos (Appendix 1: see Supplementary Material). The objective is to uncover novel avenues for interpretation that shed light on the social context and temporal evolution of the attitudes within the society that produced and consumed such imagery.

## Methodology

This analysis divides the settlement into its three constituent ‘cities’ (settlement phases) as laid out in the original excavation report (City I, II and III), each divided into their subdivisions (e.g. City II-iii), chronologically covering EC IIIB to LC II.<sup>2</sup> City III-iii has been omitted due to the more intensive penetration of non-Melian ceramic styles in the Mycenaean imported pottery, while Minoan imports between City II and City III-ii have similarly been excluded from discussion. While evidence of Melian pottery in other parts of the MC islands suggests that pre-LC II Phylakopi was not socially isolated<sup>3</sup> and local ceramic styles do pick up external influences,<sup>4</sup> locally made ceramics are more likely to be representative of local social attitudes than Minoan or mainland imports. Although Melian potters likely drew inspiration from various sources, the critical aspect is that their choices mirror the local community’s tastes in the selection of specific inspirations, concepts, and designs to integrate into their unique ceramic iconography. The destruction at the end of City III-ii serves as a neat demarcation point for considering local Cycladic pottery at Phylakopi – pottery that could still be influenced by external styles – as distinct from pottery that is exclusively Mycenaean in inspiration.<sup>5</sup>

As pictorial imagery is at the core of this analysis, a specific methodology is used to aid interpretation. The methodology taken here is a hybridisation of two approaches (Appendix 3: see Supplementary Material). Firstly, an art contextualisation of the iconography focusing on factors such as the identification of the iconographic subject, the artist’s intention, a *chaîne opératoire* of production, the social context of the depiction and its likely reception (Chapin 2020). Secondly, as the subject matter partially concerns marine animals, a ‘folk taxonomic’ view is advocated (Hunn 2007; Binnberg 2019). This perspective allows for a popular identification of species classes (i.e., small fish, large fish, dolphin, octopus) rather than a scientific taxonomic approach.<sup>6</sup> The combination of the two approaches allows for a deconstruction of imagery, without considering examples as faithful photographic rendering of past events.

The material discussed herein are ceramic vessels which were portable, functional and likely to have been consumed visually in social events (Nikolakopoulou 2010, 219). Although little is known about the contextual or stratigraphic information of the material under study, it is highly probable that most, if not all, derive from settlement contexts rather than mortuary contexts. These items are likely to have been used repetitively in social contexts and may have carried social meaning that could be communicated between individuals and groups. This approach is a helpful way of thinking about these objects, which have social meaning ‘in action’ (Malafouris 2008, 28–9),

<sup>2</sup> Mackenzie 1904, 243–72 for the three cities as determined by the original excavators. For the revised stratigraphic sequence, see Renfrew 2007, 10.

<sup>3</sup> See Abell 2016, table 2, fig. 5 for Melian/Theran imports at MC–LC I Ayia Irini; Berg 2000, appendix for MC Melian/Theran imports on the Greek mainland; Overbeck 1989, 22–3 for Melian ‘Cycladic White’ imports on Paros.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., see Barber 2007, 206–7 on the Minoan link in ‘Cycladic White’ and Earle 2018, 47–53 for the Minoan influence on LC I–II ‘Later Local Wares’.

<sup>5</sup> Barber 1987, 229; see also Cummer and Schofield 1984, 146 for the same sentiment for contemporary Ayia Irini.

<sup>6</sup> See Binnberg 2018 for ‘folk taxonomy’ in iconography.

Table 1. Overview of the examples of seascape representation on pottery from Phylakopi I.

Phylakopi I							
ID	Ware	Motif 1	Motif 2	Motif 3	Chronology	Shape	Interpretation
1	DFI	Boat	Human	Fishing trap?	EC IIIB	Pouring	Seafaring/Fishing
2	DFI	Boat?	Fishing trap?	Zigzag/Sea?	EC IIIB	Pouring	Seafaring/Fishing
3	DFI	Boat?	Rectangle	-	EC IIIB	Serving	-
4	EMP	Boat	Sea?	-	EC IIIB	Pouring	Seafaring
5	SMP	Boat?	-	-	EC IIIB / MC early	-	Seafaring
6	EMP	Fish	Octopus?	Geometric	EC IIIB	Pouring	Fishing
7	SMP	Fish	-	-	EC IIIB / MC early	-	-
8	EMP	Fish/Bird	-	-	EC IIIB	-	-
9	SMP	Fish?	-	-	EC IIIB / MC early	-	-

making them ‘partners in the social conversation of being’ (Boast 1997, 190) and therefore possessive of an agentic potential or, in other words, materiality (Wertsch 1998; Knappett 2005; Malafouris 2008; Johannsen 2012). The following section analyses the material using the outline methodology and considers the social context of the material as well as the physical characteristics of the vessels.

#### SEASCAPE ICONOGRAPHY

##### Phylakopi I (EC IIIB–MC Early; nos 1–9)

Seascape representation in Phylakopi I can be found on a range of ceramic wares, including Dark-faced Incised (DFI), Early Matt-painted (EMP) and Soft Matt-painted (SMP) Geometric.<sup>7</sup> The seascape representations in City I appear mostly on vessels connected to pouring (Table 1), such as duck vases (two examples), a beaked jug and an *askos*.

Present in seascape representation from City I are five possible boat depictions. 1 is a representation of a longboat with paddling oars and a larger steering oar (Fig. 1:1), with circular features and a schematic human figure (Edgar 1904, 90, pl. v:8c). It represents a seafaring scene, though the fact that the boat and the circular elements are decorated with dotted incisions may indicate that the circular elements are also wooden objects, potentially making these fishing traps, perhaps baskets. The boat’s shape conforms to Wedde’s Ship Type 1 and van de Moortel’s Type A2, that of a curved hull longboat (Wedde 2000, 314, no. 416; van de Moortel 2017, 265). The scene follows earlier Keros-Syros boat depictions incised on frying pan vessels,<sup>8</sup> though human figures are not incorporated in EC IIA pottery. The inclusion of the human figure with the boat is replicated in rock peckings from EC IIA Korfi t’Aroniou on Naxos (cf. Dumas 1966, 49, figs 4 and 7), though neither in the frying pans nor the rock peckings are steering oars depicted. This omission led Broodbank (2000, 343) to suggest that this example was an incomplete depiction of a masted boat rather than a longboat. There are, however, two points against this interpretation. Firstly, the depicted boat is missing any ropes extending diagonally from the stern (as seen in 4) – a common feature in masted boat depictions (cf. Soles 2012, 192, fig. 21:7; Seager 1912, 39, fig. 14; Strasser 2010, fig. 5) – and, given around half of the scene is depicted, it seems unlikely that the ropes would be present in the missing half. Secondly, a recently published rock pecking from Vathy on Astypalaia (Vlachopoulos 2012, 119–20, pl. 93a–b) has led to a convincing argument for the presence of a steering oar in an

<sup>7</sup> These are discussed extensively by Barber (2008, 51–5, 59–76), and the reader is directed there for a discussion of the features, distribution, and interpretation of these wares.

<sup>8</sup> The most canonical examples of this type come from the Chalandriani cemetery on Syros. See Hekman 2003, 330, fig. 46.

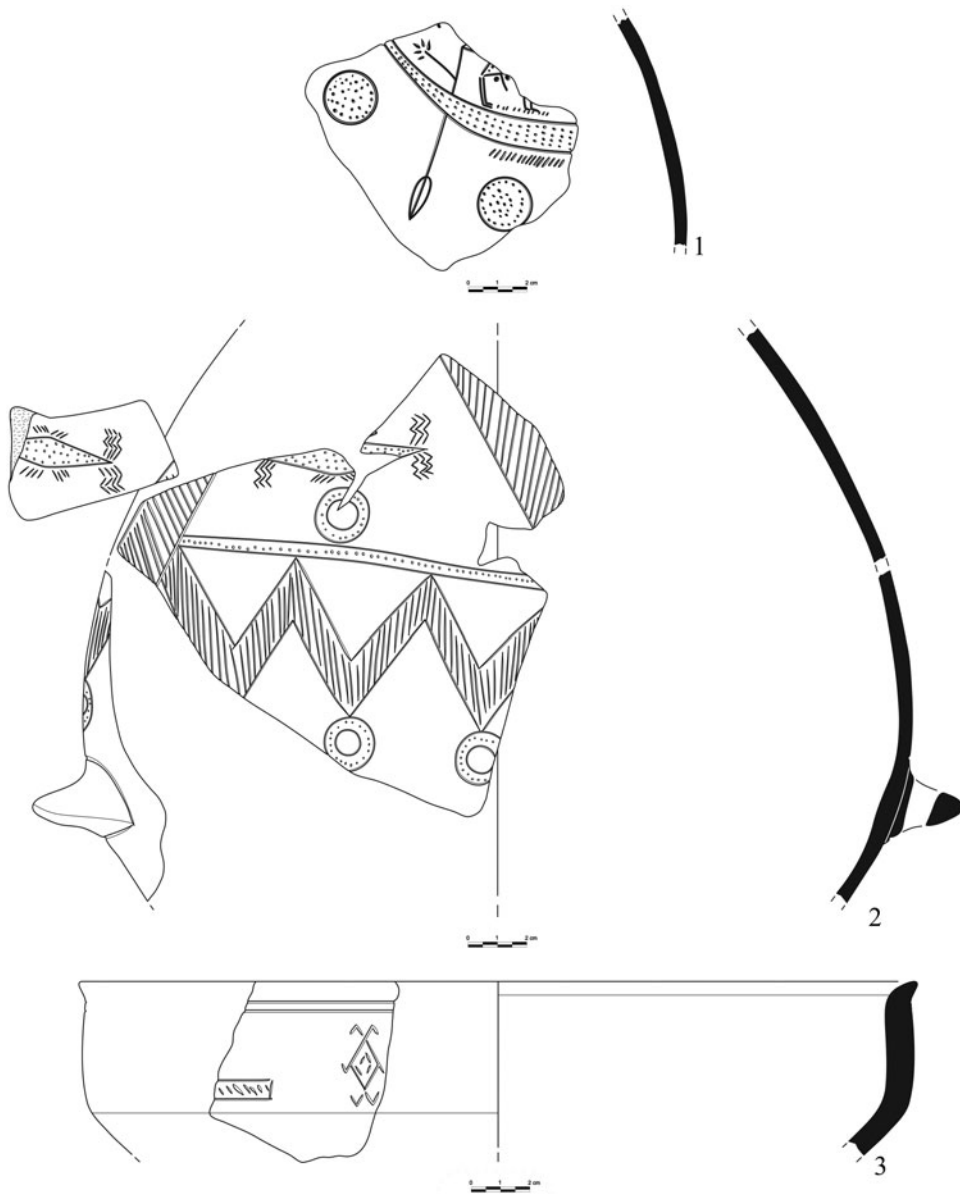


Fig. 1. Seafaring and possible seafaring depictions from Phylakopi I (EC IIIB). Drawings by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber.

EC IIA boat type (van de Moortel 2017, 264). The paddled boat is likely to have been an important symbol of the community's active role in the inter-island 'Phylakopi I trading system' (Broodbank 2000, 343).

Examples 2 and 3 are broadly contemporary with 1, though are much less clear in their rendering. The arguments in favour of supporting the diamond-shaped features of 2 (Fig. 1:2) as a sailing craft are three: first, the diamond-shape features have short strokes extending from the body which are commonly interpreted as oars as in 1; second, the diamond body is decorated with dotted incisions also seen in 1; and third, there is a coexistence of a possible boat alongside circular objects, also decorated with dotted incisions, which were interpreted as possible fishing traps in 1. Missing, however, are several of the key characteristics of contemporary boat depictions, making its interpretation as a sailing craft tenuous. 3 (Fig. 1:3) is even less

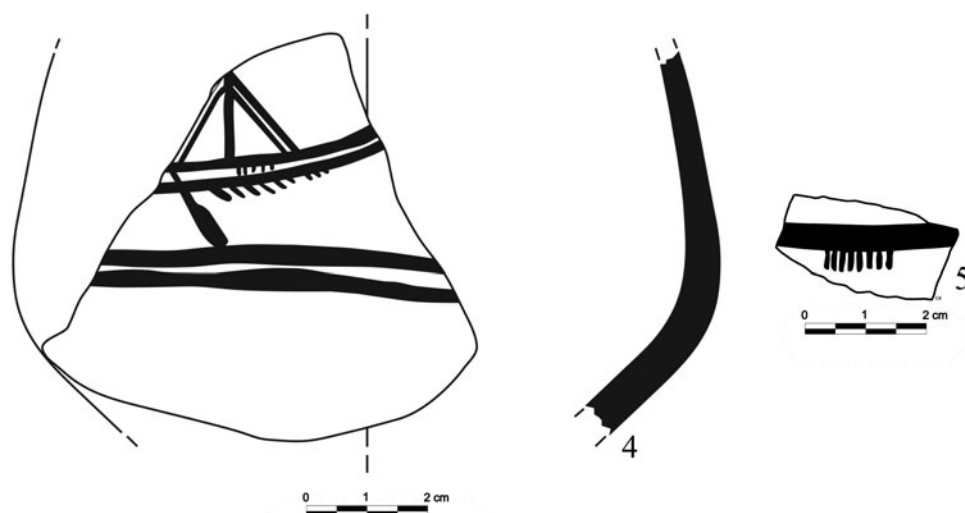


Fig. 2. Seafaring and possible seafaring depictions from Phylakopi I (EC IIIB). No. 4 by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber. No. 5 by author after photograph taken by R. Barber.

convincing – and can only be interpreted as a boat if one accepts that the diamond shape of **2** represents a boat – and this example is missing several of the features that support this interpretation in **2**.

The earliest iconographic appearance of the masted sailing boat in the Cyclades (Edgar 1904, 104, pl. xii:23; Renfrew 1972, 357; McGeehan Liritzis 1988, 254; Broodbank 2000, 343; Nuttall 2021, 224–5) is evident in **4** (Fig. 2:4). This example has a clear mast, from which diagonal ropes descend towards the stern of the boat, and has a large steering oar. Unlike **1**, this example bears no trace of human figures or any other features except, perhaps, for representing the sea or waves in the two horizontal lines. The best parallels come from broadly contemporary Minoan seal stones, which also depict curved-hull boats with a mast affixed to the stern with ropes.<sup>9</sup> **5** is unclear but could feasibly be a boat depiction (Fig. 2:5). In favour of this interpretation are the eight vertical strokes extending from the thick black line, which could represent the ship's body with oars, and the slight curvature of the possible boat body, which may indicate the straighter stern of a curved hull ship as seen in **4**. The incompleteness of the composition, however, makes this interpretation tentative.

Present in the City I assemblage are also depictions of sea creatures. Depicted in **6** (Fig. 3:6) are several long, solidly painted objects which conform in shape to large fish (Edgar 1904, 100, pl. ix:11). Supporting their interpretation as fish is the presence of a head, ventral fin, dorsal fin and caudal (tail) fin, though the first such example to the left (Fig. 3:6) could equally be a large squid with tentacles. Several geometric objects are placed between the sea creatures, some decorated and others undecorated, which border each sea creature. Though these could be convenient framing objects inserted by the artist, they could also represent fishing traps, making this a possible fishing scene. **7** is an incomplete depiction of a triangular shape decorated with cross hatches (Fig. 3:7). A marine interpretation hinges on the small depiction of a ventral or dorsal fin extending out from the body of the potential large fish. **8** and **9** are much less certain representations of sea creatures. The diamond-shaped body of **8** could be a fish (Edgar 1904, pl. vii:17, 182), given the potential presence of fins and a tail (Fig. 3:8), though the scheme could as easily depict a schematic bird. Between the wings of the chevron in **9** is a triangular

<sup>9</sup> The most contemporary example is an unprovenanced seal with a similar boat: Weiner 2013, 164, fig. 12:4. Other examples are known from MM II Crete, for example, seals from Palaikastro (CMS II.2, no. 261b), Malia (CMS II.2, no. 100a) and Mochlos (CMS II.2, no. 249).



Fig. 3. Sea creature and possible sea creature depictions from Phylakopi I (EC IIIB–MC Early). Nos 6 and 9 by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber. Nos 7 and 8 by author after photographs taken by R. Barber.

object with a small appendage (Fig. 3:9), potentially a mistake by the artist or part of a fish's caudal fin, though this interpretation is tenuous.

The sea creature depictions seen here are not of the type seen in EC IIA, which are generally more schematic and represent small fish.<sup>10</sup> A lack of attention to physical characteristics is evident in sea creature representation, making their character difficult to interpret.

### Phylakopi II (MC Early–Late; nos 10–21)

Seascape representation in City II comes exclusively in the form of Cycladic White (CW) and Black and Red (B&R) wares,<sup>11</sup> mostly from its later levels (II-ii/iii).<sup>12</sup> The seascape representations of City II come in a wider variety of ceramic forms than earlier, with pouring vessels (two beaked

<sup>10</sup> The earliest examples in ceramics come from a Kampos (EC I/II) frying pan from Louros Athalassou – see J.E. Coleman 1985, 197, no. 37, fig. 23 – a feature continued in Keros-Syros (EC IIA) frying pans. Other examples are known from EC IIB/IIIA Markiani, incised into two vessels; see Eskitzioglou 2006, 155, fig. 7:26, nos 17 and 18.

<sup>11</sup> Though see Barber (2008, 91, 297; fig. 15; 'sea creature') for an example in 'Combination ware' (Dark Burnished with Geometric painted elements) from the 2008 study of the collection held on Melos.

<sup>12</sup> These are discussed extensively by Barber (2008, 94–116, 146–52), and the reader is directed there for a discussion of the features, distribution and interpretation of these wares. There is debate about the assignment of

Table 2. Overview of the examples of seascape representation on pottery from Phylakopi II.

Phylakopi II							
ID	Ware	Motif 1	Motif 2	Motif 3	Chronology	Shape	Interpretation
10	CW	Fish	Fish	-	MC early	Storage?	Marine
11	CW	Fish	-	-	MC early	-	Marine
12	CW	Fish	Seahorse?	-	MC early	Pouring	Marine
13	CW	Gorgon	Fish	-	MC early	Pouring	Mythical
14	CW	Gryphon	Gryphon	Fish/Whale	MC early	Pouring	Mythical
15	B&R	Bird	Fish	-	MC late / LC I	-	Natural
16	B&R	Fish	Net-pattern	-	MC late / LC I	-	Marine
17	B&R	Human	Fish	Beach	MC late / LC I	Lighting?	Fishing
18	CW	Dolphin	Dolphin	-	MC early	Serving	Marine
19	CW	Bird/Dolphin	-	-	MC early	-	Marine
20	B&R	Dolphin/Fish	Fish	-	MC late	-	Marine
21	CW	Shark/Dolphin	-	-	MC early	Drinking	Marine

jugs, one bridge-spouted jar), a *pyxis* (storage), a basin (liquid), a shallow cup (food or drinking) and a lampstand (lighting) potentially suggesting a shift in the types of practices that may be associated with seascape depiction.

Seascape representation in City II solely takes the form of sea creatures, with more diversity in the features and creatures depicted (Table 2). An increased knowledge of the physical features of sea creatures is evident in the more accurate rendering of the caudal fins of fish, with examples in 10 (Edgar 1904, pl. xviii:17) and 11. The caudal fin of 10 (Fig. 4:10) is paralleled in a seal stone from Palaikastro (CMS II.2, no. 261a), while 11 (Fig. 4:11) is paralleled in a Kamares cup from Gournia (Boyd Hawes et al. 1908, 56, fig. 40:3). 12 is a probable large fish (Fig. 4:12) with caudal fins, pelvic fins, and even a possible seahorse head to the left (Edgar 1904, 116, pl. xviii:5).

13 is a particularly puzzling piece (Edgar 1904, 109, pl. xiv:6a–c). Depicted on body sherds from a nipples ewer is a representation of a winged ‘goblin’ or gorgon complete with a tail, which appears to fly over the sea, represented by the presence of small fish (Fig. 5:13). These fish are rendered similarly to incised EC IIB examples from Markiani (cf. Eskitzioglou 2006, 155, fig. 7:26, nos 17 and 18). It is unclear what exactly the winged creature represents. The presence of this depiction on a nipples ewer, a ceramic form with plastic breasts and a long beaked spout exhibiting both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic characteristics, is significant due to its possible symbolic role (N. Marinatos 1984, 176). Frequently found in domestic settings at the well-preserved site of Akrotiri (Tyler 2012, 22–30), this shape has been suggested to correlate with pouring vessels associated with a female goddess (N. Marinatos 1984, 176) and involved in ‘folk’ religious practices (Goodison 2008, 421), potentially serving a fertility function (Tzachili 1986, 102), or pertaining to divine possession (Tyler 2012, 73). This example may depict the inclusion of either a mythical event or a human–animal hybrid related to the sea in a ritual context at Phylakopi, explored in more detail below. The mythical link is also replicated in 14 (Edgar 1904, 109, pl. xiv:2), where two gryphons are depicted and a large fish or even a small whale is also depicted (Fig. 5:14), evident through the caudal and pectoral fins. This example is also depicted on a nipples ewer, suggesting a link between sea creature representations and pouring vessels.

Examples of fish are also evident in B&R ware from the latest deposits of City II. 15 bears a unique scene of a fish caught in the talons of a bird (Fig. 6:15), decorated with a red infill (Edgar 1904, 121, fig. 93). Birds are typically decorated with a red infill in B&R style (cf. Barber 1987, 150, fig. 108). In 16, a large net pattern is depicted over three large sherds belonging to one larger composition (Fig. 6:16). The net pattern is filled-in with brown paint, and it may

Black and Red in either City II or City III ware, as examples are found in deposits of both. For the sake of convenience, they have been included here under City II.

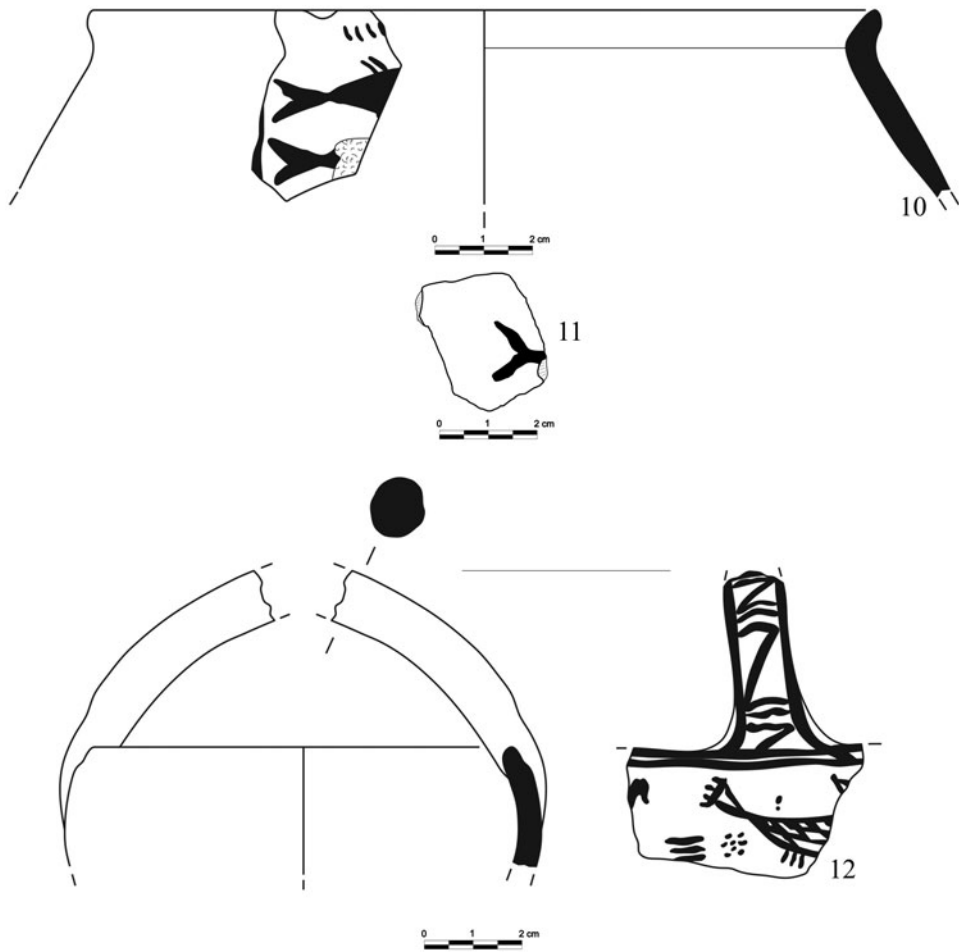


Fig. 4. Sea creature and possible sea creature depictions from Phylakopi II (MC Early-Late). Nos 10 and 12 by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber. No. 11 by author after photograph taken by R. Barber.

represent either a fishing net or the scales of a much larger fish. Included also are two fish evident through their caudal fins.

The 'Fishermen Vase' (17) has received treatment elsewhere (Nuttall and Theodoropoulou 2024), so only a brief comment will be presented here. The scene depicts four fishermen (males) holding a fish in each hand (Edgar 1904, 124, fig. 95, pl. xxii). The dotted surface beneath likely represents a sandy surface,<sup>13</sup> indicating that this scene takes place on the beachfront (Fig. 7). The significance of the 'Fishermen Vase' has been amplified by the identification of a near-contemporary thematically related scene in a fresco from the West House at Akrotiri.<sup>14</sup> As in the fisherman fresco scene, the fish represented in the 'Fishermen Vase' could be 'dolphinfish' (Mylona 2000, 565). The 'Fishermen Vase' has been here placed chronologically in City II-iii for several reasons. Firstly, it was found close to the Pillar Rooms Complex with which it is likely associated, constructed in MC late (Mackenzie 1963, 64). The representation of the human form is not as naturalistic as seen in LM/LC I/II fresco examples

<sup>13</sup> Edgar 1904, 123. A light-on-dark pithos from the cemetery at Pacheia Ammos (Seager 1916, 23, pl. XIV) depicting dolphins has the same execution for the sandy seabed below. Given that the fisherman scene is unlikely to have taken place underwater, it is argued to depict a sandy beachfront.

<sup>14</sup> Doumas 1983, 84. For further discussion of its subject theme and interpretation, see Doumas 1987, 151–9; Säflund 1981, 189–203; Mylona 2000, 565.



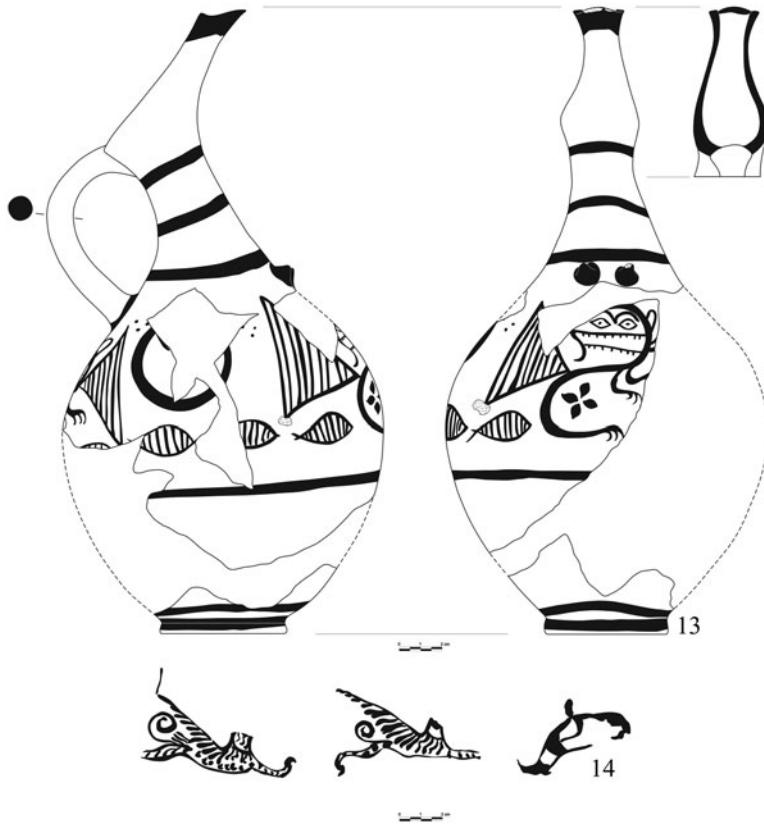


Fig. 5. Sea creature and possible sea creature depictions from Phylakopi II (MC Early–Late). Drawings by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber.

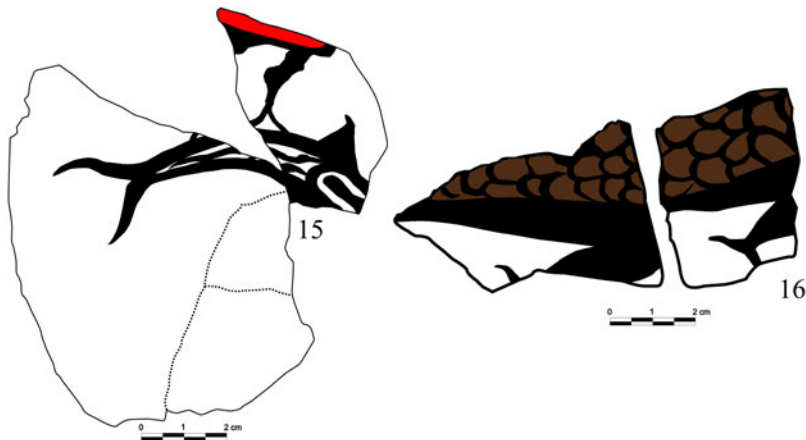


Fig. 6. Sea creature and possible sea creature depictions from Phylakopi II (MC Early–Late). By author after photographs taken by R. Barber.

and is some way between the more schematic human form of earlier periods and the naturalistic form of the Late Bronze Age (Evans 1921, 314; Herva 2006; Shapland 2010). B&R sherds have been identified in MC late stratified deposits in the most recent excavations at Phylakopi (Barber 2007, 212–13), and the scene could be contemporary with fresco fragments identified from late City II contexts at the Pillar Rooms Complex (Bosanquet 1904a; Evans 1921, 542–7; Furumark 1950, 192; Whitelaw 2005, 56). The ‘Fishermen Vase’ has been interpreted in several ways: a



Fig. 7. The 'Fishermen Vase' (MC Late). Drawing by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber.

'return of the fishermen' scene (Gerontakou 2010, 15–18), local officials performing a ritual procession (Mastrapas 1991, 35, no. 133, 101–4) and an exaggerated expression of fishing skill (Nuttall and Theodoropoulou 2024). The Pillar Rooms Complex has been argued to have been a focal structure of City II-iii (MC late)<sup>15</sup> and either an elite residence (Whitelaw 2005, 58) or a ritual complex (Hitchcock 2007, 92). The 'Fishermen Vase' may have been used in rituals mediating the relationship between humans and the sea or as an expression of a deep connection between the elite group connected to the structure and the source of their wealth, the sea.<sup>16</sup>

City II sees the first appearance of dolphin depictions in the ceramic material, and there are several parallels for these pieces from Phylakopi held in the Melos Museum.<sup>17</sup> Dolphins also make an appearance in imagery from other places contemporary with City II, such as Pacheia Ammos (cf. Seager 1916, 19, 23, pls IX, XIV) and Knossos (cf. Evans 1921, 675, fig. 495), while later examples are known from Kea (K. Coleman 1973, 294–6, fig. 2) and Knossos (Evans 1921, 346).<sup>18</sup> The dolphins from Phylakopi are all rendered with large eyes, uncommon in dolphin depictions elsewhere (cf. S. Marinatos 1999a, pl. 11:2; 1999b, 18, pl. C), where they are rather displayed as considerably smaller in relation to the size of the dolphin.<sup>19</sup> 18 is a depiction of a dolphin (Edgar 1904, 113, pl. xix:3), evident through the head, large eye and beak, swimming beside another probable dolphin (Fig. 8:18), also evident through the stripes often seen in such representations (cf. Seager 1916, pl. xiv; *Ergon* 1980, 40–1, fig. 89; S. Marinatos 1999a, pl. 11:2).

<sup>15</sup> See Whitelaw 2005, 53–60 for an extensive discussion of the Pillar Rooms Complex. It has been argued to have been an LC I construction by Renfrew et al. (2007b, table 2:2), though Brodie (2009, 51) and Whitelaw (2005, 54) have suggested a use-life between MC late and LC I/II. See also Braun 2022 for an analysis of its Minoan architectural characteristics.

<sup>16</sup> See McNiven 2003 for an illuminating case study of ritual practice in connection with the sea in northern Australia.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Barber 2007, 198, fig. 6:5, no. 67; Barber 2008, 148, pl. 20, no. 695, pl. 20, no. 696. The possible second half of a dolphin may be represented in Edgar 1904, pl. XXI:15, though this sherd was not located during the study of the material.

<sup>18</sup> Dated variously to between MM III and LM III; see Koehl 1986, 413.

<sup>19</sup> Barber (2008, 148) correctly observes that the eyes of the dolphins from the Knossos Dolphin Fresco are closer in their form to those at Phylakopi; cf. Evans 1921, 346.

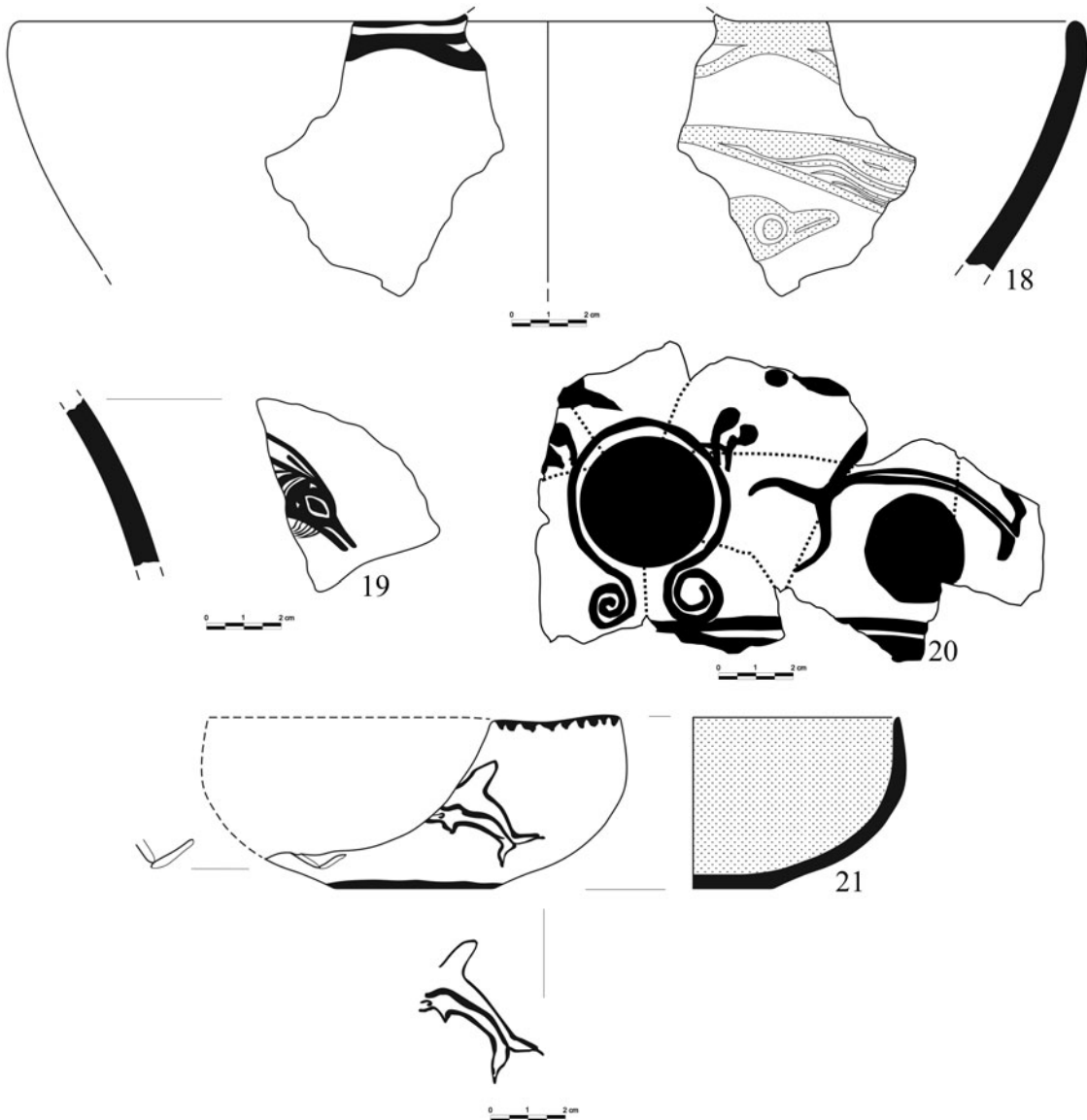


Fig. 8. Sea creature and possible sea creature depictions from Phylakopi II (MC Early–Late). Nos 18, 19 and 21 by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber. No. 20 by author after Edgar 1904, 120, pl. xxi:6.

**19** is less secure, and while it could be a dolphin (Fig. 8:19), given the large eye and beak, this example could just as easily depict a bird or mythical creature (Edgar 1904, 120, pl. xxi:6). It has been included as a dolphin based on the significant differences in depicted bird heads on contemporary sherds from Phylakopi (cf. Edgar 1904, pl. xxi:5,9,11). The reconstructed scene on **20** (Fig. 8:20) appears to depict a large dolphin with several smaller fish possibly present (Edgar 1904, pl. xxi:15). **21** is certainly a sea creature (Fig. 8:21), though its features, which include a large dorsal fin and caudal fin, are more akin to that of a shark than a fish, though there is a possibility this could be a stylised dolphin (Edgar 1904, 114, pl. xvi:21). The depiction of other sea creatures, particularly dolphins and a possible shark, suggests an interest in the pelagic zones of the sea, suggesting an increased knowledge and social interest in the deep sea.

It is worth noting that City II does not have any representations of active seafaring. This is despite the participation of Phylakopi in Aegean exchange networks, suggested by the

Table 3. Overview of the examples of seascape representation on pottery from Phylakopi III.

Phylakopi II							
<i>ID</i>	<i>Ware</i>	<i>Motif 1</i>	<i>Motif 2</i>	<i>Motif 3</i>	<i>Chronology</i>	<i>Shape</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
22	LCW	Fish	Wave/Sea	-	LC I	Serving	Marine
23	LCW	Fish	Fish	Wave/Sea	LC I	Serving	Marine
24	LL	Dolphin	Wave/Sea	-	LC I/II	Serving	Marine
25	LL	Dolphin	Wave/Sea	-	LC I/II	Serving	Marine
26	LL	Dolphin	-	-	LC I/II	Serving	Marine
27	LCW	Octopus	-	-	LC I	Serving	Marine
28	LL/LCW	Octopus?	-	-	LC I	Serving	Marine

appearance of MM (Hood 2007) and MH (Dickinson 2007) imports. This lack of seafaring representation could be explained as a result of a decline in the local importance of maritime movement as a source of social power in interpersonal dynamics.<sup>20</sup> This decline may have been caused by shifts in navigation technology from Early Cycladic paddled boats to Minoan masted sailing ships during EC III (Broodbank 2000, 341–9), relegating Cycladic mariners from leaders to participants in a wider exchange network now dictated by Crete in the MBA (Broodbank 2000, 357–61; Berg 2019, 206–13).

#### Phylakopi III-i/ii (LC I; nos 21–28)

Seascape representation in Phylakopi III-i/ii comes in the form of Late Cycladic White (LCW) and Later Local (LL) ceramic wares,<sup>21</sup> though after LC I, seascape representation can mostly be found on imported wares.<sup>22</sup> Later local ceramics also take on Minoanising influences in City III (Barber 2008, 116), particularly the naturalism seen in Minoan art (Evans 1921, 314; Herva 2006; Shapland 2010). There is a complete abandonment of seascape depictions on pouring vessels in City III, with all seascape depictions now decorating small basins. Contemporary seascape representations also come in the form of fresco paintings associated with LC I/II levels in the Pillar Rooms Complex (Bosanquet 1904a, 70–2; Morgan 2007, 381–3), suggesting a penetration of these concepts into static, elite, and ritual social contexts and not just portable media.

Seascape representation from the ceramic material consists entirely of sea creatures (Table 3). Fish are depicted on 22 (Fig. 9:22) and 23 (Fig. 9:23), with the latter possessing an odd circular feature connected to the two fish represented (Edgar 1904, 140, fig. 113). A common feature in seascape representation in City III is the presence of a wavy line which typically sits just below the painted line around the rim. It is present in 22, 23, 24 and 25 and could represent a sea-level line, an effort by the artist to depict the subject matter below the surface of the water. This feature is not evident in the near contemporary representation of birds at the end of City II (cf. Edgar 1904, pl. xxi), nor is it present in floral or abstract representation, where a non-wavy line (Edgar 1904, pl. xxvi:18; Barber 2008, pl. 14:15) or cross-hatched line (Edgar 1904, pl. xxiii:1) is preferred in the rare occasions when a framing motif is used. The function of a

<sup>20</sup> See Broodbank 2000, 249–75 for maritime movement as a source of social power in the EB II Cyclades.

<sup>21</sup> These are discussed extensively by Barber (2007, 207–13; 2008, 116–46), and the reader is directed there for a discussion of the features, distribution and interpretation of these wares. Also known as Later Local Painted; see Vaughan and Williams 2007, 102; Davis and Cherry 2007, 266–7, 279–90.

<sup>22</sup> See Earle 2018 for a discussion of LC II and the difficulties in determining a local LC II style. Barber (1974, 5) tentatively suggests that LC II is essentially a continuation of LC I styles. A problem is where to place LM IB imports in the Phylakopi sequence. Barber (1974, 44, fig. 10) places them in City III-ii (LC II), as do Davis and Cherry (2007, 296) and Warren and Hankey (1989, 71, table 2:6), while Betancourt (2007, 3, fig. 1:2) places them contemporary with 'LC IB', rather than LC II. See Mountjoy (2007, 309–10) for examples of Marine Style imported pottery from the 1974–7 excavations at Phylakopi. See Vaughan and Williams 2007, 110 for the non-local origin of these Marine Style sherds.

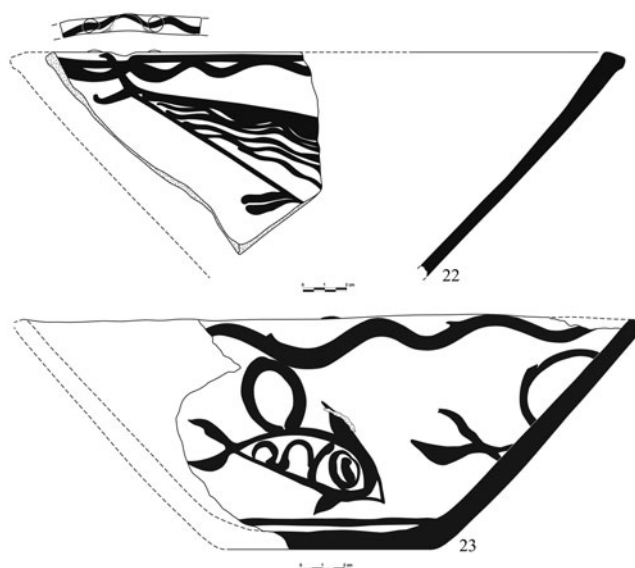


Fig. 9. Sea creature and possible sea creature depictions from Phylakopi III-i (LC I). Drawings by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber.

basin vessel is unclear, though their open shape may indicate their use as serving vessels. However, they could also have served as a proto-krater for drink mixing. This function could be hinted at with the coexistence of the wavy line depicting a liquid line and the sea creatures indicating that the vessel should be filled with liquid, an ‘iconographic reinforcement’ that has also been suggested for LM IB Marine Style vessels (Morris 1995, 193).

There are no clear representations of dolphins in the assemblage, though the presence of dolphins can be surmised. **24** is likely to be a dolphin (Fig. 10:24) based on the presence of curvilinear caudal fins and the fact that the body has been filled in with red, similar to an example from Akrotiri (cf. S. Marinatos 1999b, 18, pl. C). **25** (Fig. 10:25) and **26** (Fig. 10:26) are also probable dolphins based on the decorated, striped bodies, as also seen in other contemporary examples (cf. *Ergon* 1980, 40–1, fig. 89; S. Marinatos 1999a, pl. 11:2).

**27** is the first explicit appearance of the octopus at Phylakopi (Fig. 10:27), evident through part of a tentacle extending at an oblique angle, along with two clear eyes and a series of tentacles extending down from the main body (Edgar 1904, 141, pl. xxx:5). **28** is a less certain representation of an octopus (Edgar 1904, pl. xxx:6), though in favour of such an interpretation is the depiction of eight tentacles, which are present in other contemporary examples (cf. Schliemann 1878, 181, nos 270–1), and the schematic eye (Fig. 10:28), present also in **27**. There are surprisingly few parallels for octopus depiction in the Cyclades until this point. It anticipates the depictions seen in imported LM IB Marine Style sherds from Phylakopi (Mountjoy 2007, 309–10). Contemporary parallels are known from Pacheia Ammos (Seager 1916, 21, pl. 8:3), missing the suction pads of the octopus, though the golden cut-outs from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (Schliemann 1878, 268, no. 424) and a steatite rhyton from the Room of the Throne at Knossos (Evans 1928, 502–3, fig. 307) are the best parallels. As with the appearance of dolphins in City II, the City III depiction of octopuses marks a further development in knowledge of the sea, and artists may have been drawn to the subject theme due to their sentient and transformative capabilities.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Including the ability to hunt, manipulate objects, spew deep-coloured ink and change the colour of their bodies to blend into their surroundings. See Caldwell et al. 2015 for more on octopus behaviour.

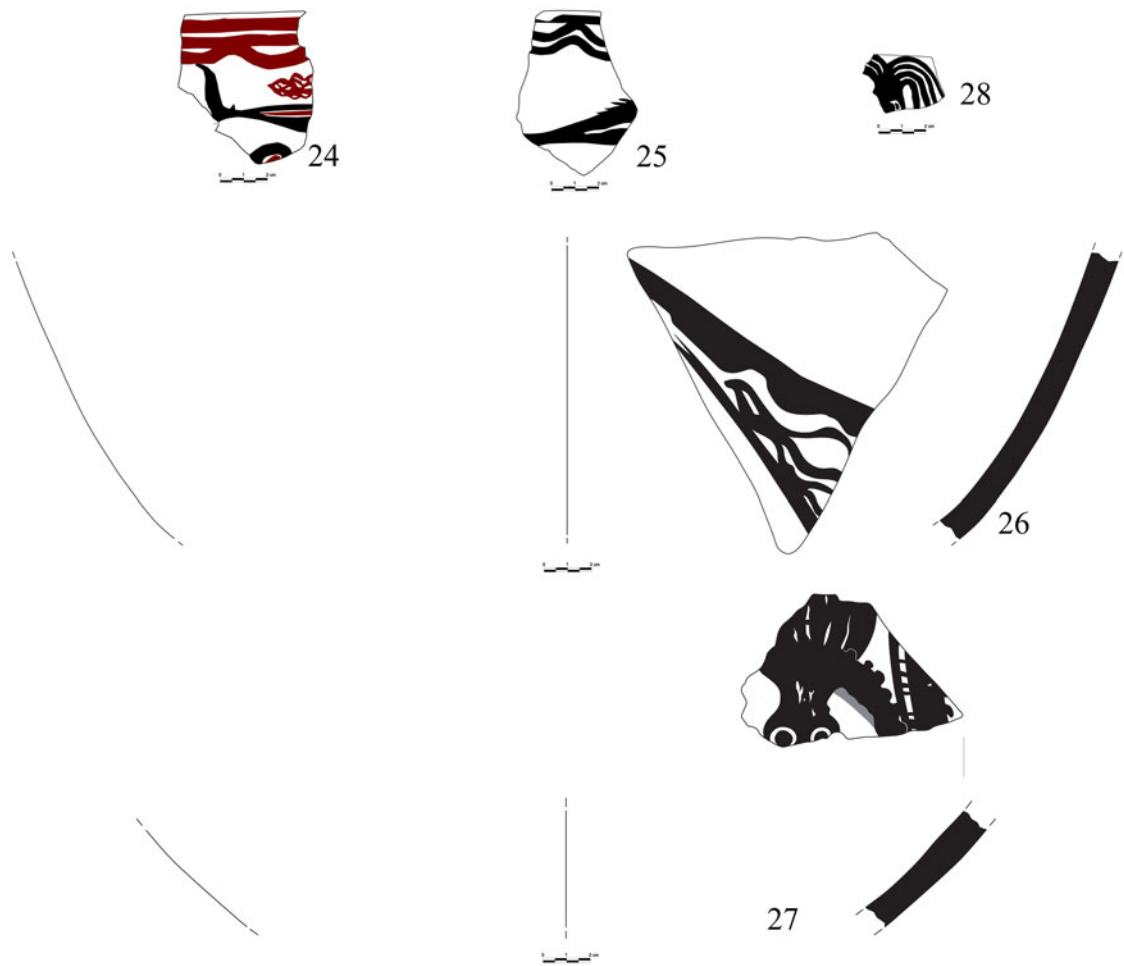


Fig. 10. Sea creature and possible sea creature depictions from Phylakopi III-i (LC I-II). Nos 26 and 28 by K. Theodoropoulou, courtesy of R. Barber. Nos 24 and 25 by author after photographs taken by R. Barber. No. 28 by author after Edgar 1904, 141, pl. xxx:6.

## DISCUSSION

This discussion attempts to interpret the role seascapes played in the community at Phylakopi following the presentation of the iconographic evidence. First, however, it needs to be ascertained why this material is significant. To achieve this, we must consider the realities of the physical environment at Phylakopi. Phylakopi is a coastal settlement, though it is not located beside the best agricultural land on Melos nor its key raw material sources (obsidian quarries). Instead the impetus for the choice of location may have been fishing and ease of access for boat navigation. The small bay beside the settlement (Davidson and Tasker 1982, 94; Whitelaw 2004, 150) is also likely to have been deep enough to encourage sailing boat visitation later. Although few fish or marine mollusc remains have been reported from the various excavations at Phylakopi, this may be due to the fact that wet-sieving was not employed during the site's early excavations, when many of the purest deposits from the site were excavated.<sup>24</sup> It has also been

<sup>24</sup> Wet-sieving was employed during the 1974–7 excavations at the site, though mention of marine faunal remains is conspicuously absent in Renfrew et al. (2007a), and Gamble (1985) mentions only three identified fish specimens. Marine molluscs are not mentioned in either report. See Nuttall 2021, 116–20 for the importance of wet-sieving programs in recovering marine faunal remains.

Table 4. Subject matter represented on the decorated locally made wares published from Phylakopi. ‘Abstract’ denotes geometric elements. Highest prevalence for each category (other than ‘abstract’) is in bold. ‘Total sherds’ indicates the total number of decorated sherds from Phylakopi published in the various articles and monographs dealing with Phylakopi. The data to support this table can be found in Appendix 2 of the Supplementary Material.

Decorated sherds							
City wares	Seascape	Animal	Bird	Floral	Human	Abstract	Total sherds
<b>City 1</b>	1.09%	1.09%	<b>2.55%</b>	0.18%	1.09%	93.98%	548
<b>City 2</b>	0.70%	0.79%	5.84%	<b>13.21%</b>	0.14%	79.69%	891
<b>City 3</b>	0.48%	0.11%	0.00%	<b>25.72%</b>	0.11%	73.56%	836

suggested that inhabitants of the site placed a considerable focus on traction animals, due to the recovery of large amounts of bovine remains (Wagstaff and Augustson 1982, 130; Gamble 1982, 168). We can assume then, that the physical setting at Phylakopi would have included sea, hills, arable land, humans, terrestrial animals, marine animals, wild animals and boats.

Pulling together the published material from several publications of the pottery at Phylakopi, it becomes possible to work out the proportion of different motifs depicted in different ceramic wares (Appendix 1: see Supplementary Material).<sup>25</sup> While we must be cognisant of the Phylakopi ceramic sample, consideration of 2275 published sherds (Table 4) provides a sufficient sample for iconographic interpretation. Among a range of motifs found in all periods, boats and sea creatures are depicted in City I, while humans, birds, floral designs, and sea creatures are depicted in City II, and humans, birds, floral designs, and sea creatures are also represented in City III. Entirely omitted are depictions of landscape features (mountains, fields), domesticated animals (bovines, caprids, sus) and wild animals (other than birds, snakes and a solitary lion). Boats were also omitted in Cities II and III, when they are likely to have been a more common sight if Phylakopi was a key node along the ‘western string’ trading route.<sup>26</sup> These omitted elements are all likely to have been daily sights for many inhabiting Phylakopi throughout its long history. Therefore, the depiction of birds, humans and sea-related content was not a passive reflection of observed life, but a culturally conscious decision embedded in a specific cultural and social setting.

Seascape representations are not especially numerous at Phylakopi when considered as a proportion of total decorated sherds and are always less numerous than plant and bird representations (Table 4), though the fact that the seascape is depicted at all is significant. Most contemporary coastal settlements on Aegean islands do not exhibit anywhere near the same iconographic investment in the sea or any other iconographic theme. The contemporary MC settlement at Paroikia on Paros does not yield one ceramic depiction of a seascape, with most iconographic decoration coming in the form of bands, panels and other abstract motifs (cf. Overbeck 1989, figs 52–84). Similarly, Thermi on Lesbos also does not provide any ceramic examples of seascape representation, and with the exception of the skeuomorphic representation of human figures in EBA marble figurines (Lamb 1936, 149–56, 177–8, pls xx–xxi), most of the pottery comes in burnished monochrome wares (Black and Red Wares for the EBA and Lesbian Red and Grey Ware for the MBA/LBA), which are only decorated by linear incisions and dots in the EBA (cf. Lamb 1936, pls viv–xv). At Poliochni on Lemnos, geometric incised and painted

<sup>25</sup> Included in this material is the 1911 material held in the Melos Museum published by Barber (2008), the relevant material published from the 1974–77 excavations in Renfrew and Evans (2007), Barber (2007) and Davis and Cherry (2007) and the material published in the original report by Edgar (1904). For a recent re-evaluation of the material held in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, see Barber 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Davis 1979; Schofield 1982; Broodbank 2004, 62; Davis and Groggianni 2008; Belza 2018. Though for a critique of the ‘Western String’ concept, see Berg 2006. For a LH IIIC kalathos decorated with boats, see Mountjoy 2007, 355, no. 478.

decorations are observed during the Blue period (EB I/II), become less common in the Green period (EB IIA), and in the Red period (EB IIB), such decorations are limited solely to *pithoi* (Doumas and Angelopoulou 1997, 543–55). The representation of seafaring (with a militaristic undertone) at MH Kolonna on Aegina (Siedentopf 1991, no. 158, pls 35–37, no. 75, pl. 14, no. 162, pl. 38) is a counterpoint, though emerges at precisely the time when it is abandoned at Phylakopi. These examples illustrate that depictions of the sea were locally inspired and reflected the unique preferences and cultural perspectives of the communities living in these coastal areas, perspectives that were subject to change over time and were not an inevitable consequence of coastal living.

In attempting to explain the role of seascape depiction at Phylakopi, we can begin with the first chronologically significant iconographic development, the depiction of seafaring. Phylakopi has two clear EC III boat representations from a period when boat iconography had ceased to be popular in the Cyclades. The EC IIA boat representations on frying pans have been taken to be part of an iconography of power and a connection to a ‘maritime ideology’ performed by a relatively small group of seafarers (Broodbank 2000, 247–75). The cessation of these kinds of boat depiction after EC IIA could represent the undermining of maritime ideology linked to the appearance of the Kastri group phenomenon (Broodbank 2000, 316), though the resurgence of boat depiction at Phylakopi in EC III requires some explanation. At Phylakopi, the longboat and masted boat varieties are depicted, illustrating that EC III was a period of shifting technologies. Phylakopi has been argued to have been a central hub in the ‘Phylakopi I culture trading system’ (Broodbank 2000, 351–6), a Cycladic-focused insular interaction zone typified by the distribution of so-called ‘Duck Vases’ (Rutter 1985). The importance of this interaction zone to Phylakopi may have led Melian seafarers, at first in longboats (1) and later in masted boats (4), to derive social capital from such trading ventures, and the deployment of symbols connected to seafaring may have been a way to mark social status. Going deeper, however, the subtle hints at links to fishing (1, 2, 6) and the representation of the sea as a place to be mastered through sailing suggest that the sea was perceived as a functional space for the inhabitants of EC III–MC early Phylakopi. As the ‘Phylakopi I culture trading system’ disintegrated (Broodbank 2000, 356–61), the significance of seafaring to the local population at Phylakopi declined, leading to a complete cessation of boat iconography in City II.

From the start of City II onwards, there was a shift toward bird, plant and sea creature depiction in figurative art at Phylakopi. Sea creatures are typically represented in some form of movement (12, 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27), indicated by the curvature of the body, and when preserved, the eyes of the sea creatures are typically large and clear (18, 19, 23, 27), even when the sea creature is presumably dead (15, 17). The depiction of sea creatures trends towards naturalism (15, 18, 21, 27) though there are exceptions (23). In interpreting the marine iconography of LM IB Marine Style pottery – a ceramic style decorating several vessel types in religious and secular contexts – Morris (1995, 193) suggested that the sea creatures served as an ‘iconographic reinforcement’ of the function of the vessels as liquid containers.<sup>27</sup> This argument centred on the high proportion of marine decoration on shapes connected with liquids found in ritual contexts (Mountjoy 1985, 231, 242). In the application of this reasoning to the sea creature representation in the pottery at Phylakopi, we can observe that the representation of sea creatures is indeed connected to ceramic shapes with a clear or possible connection to liquids (12, 13, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28). Where the iconographic reinforcement interpretation fails is when we consider sea creature iconography as part of a wider iconographic assemblage at Phylakopi, including birds (cf. Edgar 1904, pl. xxi; Barber 2008, 74, 111, 148–9), humans (cf. Edgar 1904, 124, fig. 95, pl. xxii) and plants (Edgar 1904, pl. xxiii; Barber 2008, 114, 139–40). Depictions of birds and plants are also commonly found on shapes associated with liquids, and it is difficult to understand what function a bird or plant material would indicate as iconographic reinforcement in connection to such vessels.

While iconographic reinforcement is a plausible interpretation, it does not underscore the role that such representations played in social contexts at Phylakopi. If we exclude abstract geometric

<sup>27</sup> Though see Driessen and Macdonald 1997 for an alternative view.



designs, the depiction of plants, birds and sea creatures (in order of popularity) can be said to represent the natural world. Why the natural world is prioritised over the depiction of domestic animals<sup>28</sup> at Phylakopi can only be explained by comparing the physical characteristics of plants, birds and sea creatures to those of humans. Each can inhabit places humans cannot (sea, sky and subsurface), and each has very different corporeality, allowing them to swim, fly or grow beneath the ground. The material agency of these natural world depictions could have created social situations in which humans could transcend their corporeal limitations and inhabit their world differently, connected to pouring, drinking and general consumption in social and potentially ritual events.

To highlight the role of the natural world in allowing humans to transcend the boundaries of their corporeal form, we can briefly reconsider the nipples ewer with the representation of the fish and the ‘goblin’ (13). The vessel would have been used for pouring and may have been used in ceremonies. Several commentators have recognised the anthropomorphic features of the flying creature (Edgar 1904, 109; Evans 1921, 704; Goodison 2008, 421; Lazarou 2019, 361–2; Nuttall 2021, 238). It could have been the intention of the artist to portray the flying ‘goblin’ as part human, potentially a bird–human hybrid.<sup>29</sup> This form of representation could have indicated that the flying creature was inhabited by a human, who had transcended their physical capabilities to be able to fly over the sea. It should also not be overlooked that the vessel’s physical features themselves present a human–animal hybrid, with the swollen belly and nipples associated with the pregnant female human form but the head, neck and beak of a bird. To inhabit a zoomorphic form may have been the goal of such ceremonies, and the depiction of this scene, added to the material properties of the nipples ewer, could have set the intention for such rituals.

Through this long-term overview of seascape representation on pottery from Phylakopi, as well as a ceramic analysis of published pottery, it has been possible to chart changes in the social significance of the seascape and its relation to other forms of iconographic representation on ceramics. Although seascape representations are less numerous compared to more popular themes like those of birds, flora, and abstract forms, identifiable themes can still be discerned in the character of their iconographic representation. From a place to traverse in City I, toward a place of deep interest and knowledge in City II and City III, the meaning of the seascape was consistently negotiated and revised over time at Phylakopi, eventually succumbing to replacement with Mycenaean contact after LC II. Taking a seascape perspective has generated new perspectives from old material and explored how pottery, through its materiality, could convey a message about both artist and society, each of which appears to have been socially invested in seascapes alongside the depiction of the bird and plant world in a rich iconography of their physical and cognitive environment.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068245424000017>.

Appendices 1, 2 and 3 are published as online-only Supplementary Material.

<sup>28</sup> Which are entirely unrepresented in the ceramic iconography; see Appendix 2 in Supplementary Material. Cf. Shapland 2010, 118 on domestic animal representation in Minoan iconography. Terrestrial animal depictions at Phylakopi are limited to one deer depiction (Edgar 1904, 109, pl. xv:14), two possible lions (Barber 2007, 196, fig. 6:5, pl. 24h; Edgar 1904, pl. xxi:7) and three possible snakes (Edgar 1904, 104, pl.xii:22, 152, pl. xiii:15, pl. xx:1).

<sup>29</sup> See also Edgar 1904, pl. XIV:9. There are several comparable examples of a human–bird hybrid known in Minoan glyptic, including the ‘bird ladies’ with female bodies and bird-heads (CMS VI, no. 294; II.3, no. 4; III, no. 484) and the possible ‘Bes’ depictions with bird bodies and human-heads (CMS II.7, nos 117 and 118).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Robin Barber for allowing me access to pursue a personal interest in marine iconography from Phylakopi during our work on the re-publication project and generously allowing me to use several of the excellent drawings made by Kalliopi Theodoropoulou as part of that project. I also warmly thank all the staff at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens for their hospitality during several working stints over the years. This research has benefitted from discussions with Claire Zikidi, Michael Lindblom and Gunnel Ekroth over the years. I also wish to thank the peer reviewers, whose comments have greatly improved this paper, and the editors for their patience.

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### Από τη Θάλασσα στη Στεριά: εικόνες θαλασσογραφιών στην Κυκλαδική κεραμική από τη Φυλακωπή της Μήλου στο Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο της Αθήνας

Η μελέτη αυτή εξετάζει τις απεικονίσεις θαλασσογραφιών στην κεραμική, συμπεριλαμβανομένων σκηνών πλεύσης και θαλάσσιων πλασμάτων από τις ανασκαφές του 1896–9 στη Φυλακωπή της Μήλου, που φυλάσσεται στο Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο της Αθήνας. Η ανάλυση αυτή δείχνει ότι οι σκηνές των θαλασσογραφιών ποικίλλουν στο χαρακτήρα τους μέσα στο χρόνο και συνήθως συνδέονται με τα σχήματα των αγγείων που σχετίζονται με την έκχυση υγρών, μεταξύ της Πρωτοκυκλαδικής (ΠΚ) III και της ύστερης Μεσοκυκλαδικής περιόδου ενώ αργότερα επικεντρώθηκαν σε λεκάνες. Η εστίαση στις σκηνές πλεύσης είναι εμφανής στην ΠΚ III, ενώ αργότερα η εικονογραφική εστίαση επικεντρώνεται στα θαλάσσια πλάσματα. Η εικονογραφική ενασχόληση με τη θάλασσα, σε συνδυασμό με την εικονογραφική αποτύπωση πουλιών και φυτικών απεικονίσεων, υποδηλώνει το ενδιαφέρον σε ζωντανές μορφές που κατοικούν σε διαφορετικά μέρη από τον άνθρωπο (δηλαδή μη-οικιακά) και με διαφορετική σωματικότητα από αυτήν των ανθρώπων. Η έρευνα αυτή συμβάλλει περαιτέρω στη συζήτηση για τις σχέσεις και τις οντολογίες ανθρώπων–ζώων/φυτών στην Εποχή του Χαλκού στο Αιγαίο.