

MITTEILUNGEN

A POSSIBLE 'SHIELD-GODDESS' FROM CRETE

H.-G. Buchholz in the first volume of *Kadmos* (Band I/Heft 2, 1962) publishes a cult axe from the Mesara, now in the Herakleion Museum (Inv. No. 2404), and there offers his interpretation of the pictures engraved on its sides¹ (Fig. 1). In his description, he focuses his attention on one object in particular, which appears twice on side A and once on side B. After noting a superficial resemblance between this object and the birds' heads on a Late Minoan vessel from Kydonia², he discusses briefly the ideas of Platon and Matz. Finally, rejecting the object's identification with the "sacral knot," he concludes that it does however represent a cult garment, with a long pin stuck through the upper part. The pin, admittedly, is a unique feature.

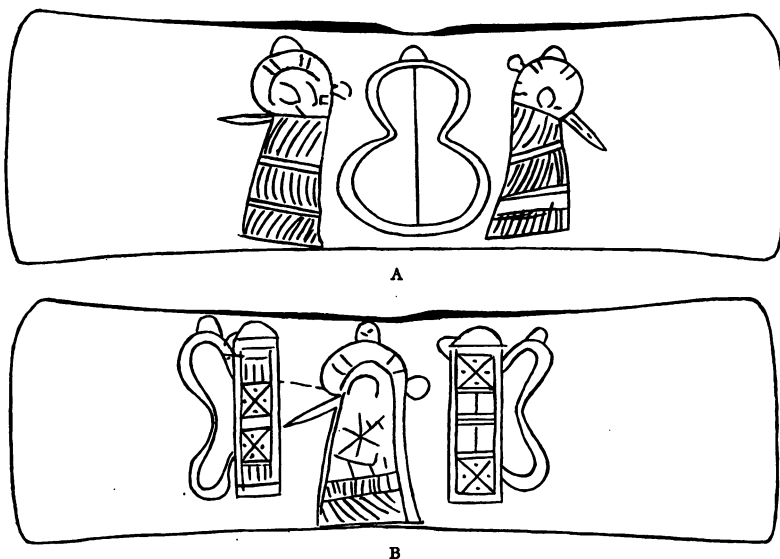


Fig. 1. Bronze Cult axe from the Mesara. Form Vorou, probably LM III.
(Herakleion Museum, Inv. No. 2404)

¹ *Kadmos* I, 2 (1962), 166—170. Mr. Buchholz dates the axe to LM III, well after the Mycenaean arrival in Crete.

² F. Matz, *Forschungen auf Kreta*, 1942 (1951), pl. 3,1 (= 50). P 740

Another look at the engraved pictures may indicate still another interpretation of the objects and may clarify their relation to the scene as a whole. Side A shows the curious object twice, flanking a figure-of-eight shield in heraldic opposition; side B shows the object again, with a different internal pattern, as the central figure in another heraldic composition. I would take this puzzling object to be neither a sacral knot nor a cult garment, but a rudimentary sketch of a human figure.

Such a figure would be clad from neck to feet in a long, flowing robe (perhaps a "cult garment") with no visible belt. The upper torso is indicated only by a rearward bulge in the garment between the shoulder and the waist. The robes on side A are clearly adorned with several bands of decoration extending from the "foot" to the "waist", in accordance with the usual Minoan fashion. The robe on side B has only two decorated bands around the bottom, the upper part being filled with other patterns. That long robes were indeed worn in Minoan ceremonies is shown by the young lyre player on the Hagia Triada sarcophagus, by the old man who leads the procession on the Harvester's Vase, and by the figures on various Minoan seal-stones. A youth on a green jasper seal from Knossos³ (Fig. 2a) wears a long ceremonial robe and a fringed cloak which recalls the garment on the Mesara axe. Another jasper seal, from the Vapheio tomb⁴ (Fig. 2b), shows a man in a similar robe.

If the object on the Mesara axe may be taken for a human figure, then the long, pointed "pin" becomes a sword, and the round ball on the opposite side of the figure becomes the pommel. This would be the characteristic Minoan rapier with long blade and large rounded pommel. It is noteworthy that in all three representations this pointed thing is shown projecting from the "waist", exactly where a sword should be worn.



Fig. 2a. Robed youth on a green jasper seal from Knossos (after Evans)



Fig. 2b. Robed male on a jasper seal from Vapheio (after Evans)

³ V. E. G. Kenna, *Cretan Seals*, Pl. 11, No. 293

⁴ A. Evans, *Palace of Minos IV*, 412, fig. 341; also A. Sakellariou, *Corpus der Minoischen und Mykenischen Siegel*, I, 257, No. 223

An interesting parallel to the Mesara figure appears on a Levanto-Helladic amphoroid krater from Enkomi, Cyprus⁵ (Fig. 3). Here various people are shown, some of them aboard ships, others merely standing by. Conspicuous among them are several long-haired individuals with pointed caps, individuals whose sex is not certain, though they would seem to be warriors. They, like the figures on the Mesara axe, wear a long, formless robe which covers the body from the collar on down, and here again the rearward curve of the shoulder is the only indication of the body underneath. Neither hands nor feet are shown. These curious robed people also wear swords, which here pass in front of the body rather than behind. Their swords extend before them in a crescent-shaped pommel, behind them in a thin point decked with tassels. In each instance the robed figures are placed in heraldic opposition, but unfortunately the meaning of the scene is obscure.

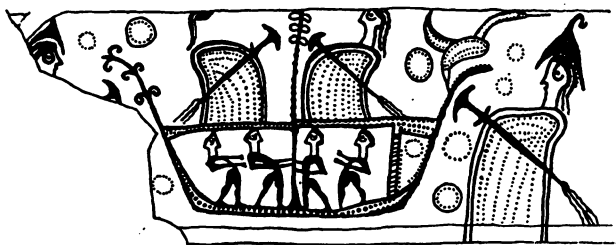


Fig. 3. Robed swordsmen on a Levanto-Helladic amphoroid krater. Enkomi, Cyprus (after Sjöqvist)

As for the heads of the Mesara figures, I can do no better than to suggest that the circular loop incised above the "shoulders" of each figure is a crude suggestion of a human head. It is strange that the head should receive such cursory treatment, that not even so much as a neck or an eye should appear. The figure on side B seems to have a scratch or two within the outline of his "head", but even these cannot be taken for facial features. Curiously enough, Late Minoan bead seals frequently reduce the human head to "a mere knob"⁶ without features, though this practice is apparently due to the small size of the gems and to the failing competence of the stonecutter's art.

This "loop" which I take for a head was puzzling to Mr. Buchholz and he did not venture to interpret it, having noted that it reappears above the snakelike objects on side B and above the shield on side A. The

⁵ E. Sjöqvist *Problems of the Late Cypriote Bronze Age*, fig. 20, 3. Tomb 3, No. 262, dating to LH III A: 2 — III B

⁶ Evans, *BM IV*, p. 168

shield itself is worthy of note. It is the typical Minoan figure-of-eight shield so common in cult scenes and therefore an appropriate decoration for a cult axe. But if the "loops" above the flanking figures represent human heads, so must the "loop" above the central shield. The result is unmistakable, a figure-of-eight shield with a head. A striking parallel is found on a small sprinkler vase from Keos, painted with shields in a style imitating LM IA or IB⁷. The illustrated shield (Fig. 4a), its outer face covered with spotted ox-hide, has a rather good-sized "loop" extending above the upper edge. Here, however, the simple loop shape has become a wavy line marking off three distinct lobes above the shield. Could this too represent a head, adorned with a trilobate headdress? Such three-lobed crowns were frequently worn by Cretan deities, especially by the Master of the Animals⁸.

A comparable figure appears on a late amethyst seal-stone of unknown origin (but certainly Mycenaean in inspiration) (Fig. 4b)⁹. The central motive is a figure-of-eight shield surmounted by a Mycenaean helmet, the only indication of a head. Below the shield are vestigial feet, and from its sides extend two arms and hands which grasp round-pommeled rapiers. Probably this figure represents a deity whose special attribute or aspect was the figure-of-eight shield, a deity who, with arms and feet, appears in a form more human than the one on the Mesara axe. Still more human is the deity on a LH III painted stucco tablet found in Tsountas' House at Mycenae (Fig. 5)¹⁰. Here the central figure is a goddess whose head and arms and feet extend out from behind a large figure-of-eight shield. Two adoring women approach her from either side, just as the figures on the Mesara axe approach the central shield-figure. The presence of a small altar on the painted tablet confirms the religious nature of the scene.

Concerning side B of the Mesara axe there is little to add. Here the robed sword-bearer is the central figure, between two rectangular objects with snake-like attachments. Mr. Buchholz wisely compares these attachments with Evans' "snakeframes,"¹¹ but he goes on to call the rectangular objects next to them "Schlangengefäße". These might conceivably be pictures of Minoan "snake tubes", but they look rather more like architectural elements, perhaps gates or towers. But if these objects do represent some architectural structure, I cannot explain the presence of the snakes (if that is what they are), nor can I account for the "loops" (heads?) above their serpentine curves.

⁷ J. Caskey, *Hesperia* 31 (1962), Pl. 96a, p. 272

⁸ J. Chittenden, *Hesperia* 16 (1947), p. 109 ff., Pls. XVII, XVIII

⁹ *British Museum Quarterly* X, 3 (March 1963), 123, Pl. XXXIV, 3

¹⁰ Ch. Tsountas, *The Mycenaean Age*, Pl. XX, p. 299; also Taylour, *The Mycenaeans*, Pl. 9

¹¹ Evans, *PM* IV, 168—171



Fig. 4a. Figure-of-eight shield painted on a sprinkler from Keos, LM IA or IB



Fig. 4b. Amethyst seal-stone of unknown provenance (British Museum)



Fig. 5. The "Shield-Goddess" and attendants, from a painted stucco tablet. Mycenae, LH III

The figure-of-eight shield in some respects seems to be a symbol of divine protection, and the goddess associated with it, a divine protectress. Here again on the Mesara cult axe the Shield-Goddess may appear, as she does on Tsountas' painted tablet, on the amethyst seal-stone, and on a gold signet ring from Mycenae¹². On the axe her worshippers are armed with swords, perhaps indicating a Mycenaean extension of her protective power to a martial power as well. Certainly the Greek Athena was both protectress of the city and warrior-goddess¹³. If this interpretation is correct, it shows that a "Shield-Goddess" was worshipped by the Mycenaeans in Crete as well as their kinsmen on the mainland, and perhaps on Keos as well.

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¹² Taylour, *The Mycenaeans*, Pl. 8.

¹³ I will not stress the connection between Athena and the snakes and the city gates, nor the fact that "Lady Athana" was worshipped by Mycenaeans at Knossos before 1400 B. C.

EIN VORSCHLAG FÜR DIE TRANSKRIPTION DER LINEAR B MASSE UND GEWICHTE

Die Transkription der Linear B Maße und Gewichte ist ein noch ungelöstes Problem. Von den schon üblichen Transkriptionssystemen ist m. E. das von Emmett L. Bennett¹ in seinem Artikel "The Landholders of Pylos" AJA 60, 1956, 103—133, und, nach ihm, von anderen Forschern gebrauchte das trefflichste. Es läßt aber die Art der Maße und Gewichte nicht bestimmen und das ist ein schwacher Punkt².

Dieser Mangel könnte überwunden werden, wenn die Maß- oder Gewichtsgrößen wie folgt miteinander verbunden wären:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| a) Im Falle von Trockenmaßen mit einem Querstrich: | (/) |
| b) Im Falle von Flüssigkeitsmaßen mit einem Bindestrich: | (-) |
| c) Im Falle von Gewichten ³ mit einem Strichpunkt: | (·) |
| z. B.: Trockenmaß 1 / 0 / 2 / 3 | |
| Flüssigkeitsmaß 1 - 2 - 0 - 3 | |
| Gewicht 2 ; 5 ; 0 ; 4 ; 1 | |

Fehlende Wertgrößen sind, wie schon bei Bennett, mit 0 zu bezeichnen, die Null kann aber am Ende einer Größengruppe weggelassen werden⁴.

So wird es möglich, die Art und die relative Größe der Linear B Maß- und Gewichtsdiagramme zu bezeichnen ohne den Gebrauch von Zusatzzeichen — wie es bei der heute verbreiteten sog. Wingspread Konvention⁵ der Fall ist — ohne jeden Parallelismus mit einem der bekannten Maß- und Gewichtssysteme und vor allem, ohne zur absoluten Größe dieser Maße und Gewichte Stellung zu nehmen.

PH. P. KATZOUROS

¹ Schon Ventris (BICS 1, 1954, 6) hatte dieses System, aber mit Hilfe von Bindestrichen statt Querstrichen vorgeschlagen.

² Vgl. *Études Mycéniennes* 233—235

³ Um jedes Mißverständnis und Verwechslungen mit den Dezimalbrüchen zu vermeiden, ist der Gebrauch von Punkt oder Komma in dieser Hinsicht nicht zu empfehlen. Auch der Doppelpunkt könnte mit dem Divisionszeichen verwechselt werden.

⁴ Ist wegen einer Beschädigung der Tafel nur das Maß- oder Gewichtszeichen ohne folgende Zahlen übriggeblieben, so kann man die entsprechende Ideogrammnnummer der Liste von Bennett benutzen.

⁵ E. Bennett, *Mycenaean Studies* 12. Auch der Gebrauch der Anfangsbuchstaben der lateinischen Maß- und Gewichtsnamen oder von Zusatzzeichen macht eine Verwechslung mit den sog. Linear B Determinativen möglich.