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A SWORD TYPE ON THE CHIEFTAIN'S CUP (HM 341)*

The conventions of Minoan artists are often alien to us, and call for close and systematic observation.¹ Here the convention used for a type of sword will be studied, with reference to frescoes from Thera and a figure on the Chieftain's Cup from Ayia Triada.

In Xeste III, room 4, we have a large fresco of monkeys holding one or more musical instruments² and at least two different types of sword. One sword is darker in colour and has fewer items attached than the other. The second has a tuft at one end, and a type of a rope or lace in two bows (perhaps in a bow knot). Both tuft and bows, as they hung loose, would swing more than the sword, and as they are different in colour, could enhance the overall effect. Perhaps, these were used on some ceremonial swords only.

The example from the procession of the staircase of Xeste IV³ includes a great tuft which is attached to its support by a clasp decorated in a very abstract design of little coloured squares. A close observation will reveal that in fact there are five tufts that spring from five clasps. Each tuft has a slightly different colour, whereas all of these clasps are very similar. The clasps are decorated by three groups of squares: 1) black, blue with black lines, black, 2) red,

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¹ On the net pattern convention for sea and on the rock coral motif for seaside see E. Hallåger, *The Master Impression: a Clay Sealing from the Greek-Swedish excavations at Kastelli, Khania, SIMA 69*, Göteborg, 1985, p. 16. On the convention of few rocks for land (as opposed to sea) see PM IV p. 955. On other conventions of small scale iconography (miniature frescoes) see L. Morgan (*supra*). On the conventions for different types of material on clothing (*ibid.*, *supra* pp. 99–101). For conventions of the dress of leaning figures, see E. Kyriakidis, *Nudity in LM I seal iconography*, *Kadmos* 36, 1997, pp. 119–126.

² J. G. Younger, *Music in the Aegean Bronze Age*, *Jonsered*, 1998, p. 66, no. 28.

³ C. Doumas, *The Wallpaintings of Thera*, Athens, 1992, p. 178.

yellow with a red line, red, 3) black, blue with black lines, black. The clasps also are rendered in different widths, to show that some are behind others. The comparison of these tufts and clasps with the sword tuft of room 4, Xeste III, demonstrates that the items carried in this procession are five swords, possibly sheathed. The depiction of swords being carried in such a procession if considered together with the existence of a three Minoan swords deposit at Syme⁴ argues in favour of the use of swords as gifts or votives (roles not far apart).

The above observations on the Thera frescoes may also throw light on the well-known Chieftain's Cup from Ayia Triada, if swords of this type existed in both regions (and that is almost certain as swords have disseminated widely in the Aegean).⁵ The Chieftain's Cup (HM 341) from Ayia Triada is contemporary with the Thera frescoes. On it, five males are depicted, three with "hides",⁶ and two facing each other. One of the latter is holding with his right hand, and resting on his right shoulder, what seems to be a sword. With his left he also holds something that rests on his left shoulder. The left hand is clenched at the same height as the right hand. It has often been assumed that the 'ponytail' above this person's head is a part of his coiffure not belonging to the item on his left shoulder. This type of male coiffure, however, has never been attested before. The observation that there existed, on contemporary Thera, swords or sheaths with a tuft at their end makes it much more probable that the item resting on the left shoulder is either a second sword or a sword-sheath and that the tuft belongs to it.

It is interesting to note that, without the 'ponytail', this head resembles⁷ the cap-like coiffure of the marching men on the Harvester vase (HM 184), which also comes from Ayia Triada. The similarity with the Harvester vase, however, does not stop there. The three men in 'hides' also exist in both vases. Moreover, the relatively higher

⁴ G. Papasavvas, P. Muhly, A. Lebessi, Three Knossian Swords from the Syme Sanctuary, *Aegaeum* 20, 1999, pp. 641–649.

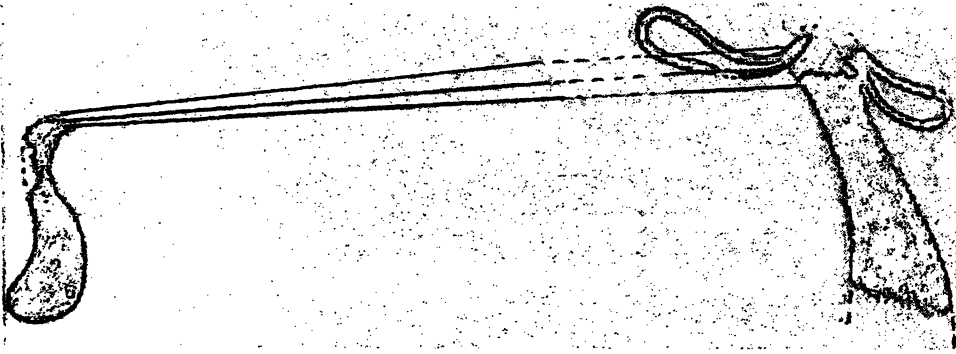
⁵ See I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, *Prähistorische Bronzefunde. Die Schwerter in Griechenland (außerhalb der Peloponnes), Bulgarien und Albanien*, Stuttgart, 1993, pp. 17–30, type A (and B), esp. pp. 17–19 and 38; for the dissemination of swords in the subsequent periods see J. Driessen, C. Macdonald, Some Military Aspects of the Aegean in the Late Fifteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries BC, *BSA* 79, 1984, pp. 49–74, esp. 56–74.

⁶ S. Hood, *The Minoans*, London, 1971, fig. 97.

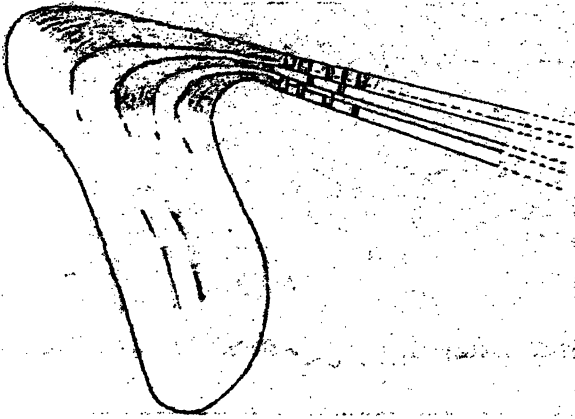
⁷ R. B. Koehl, The Chieftain Cup and a Minoan Rite of Passage, *JHS* 106, 1986, pp. 99–110, esp. 103.

status male on the Harvester vase is the only one who does not carry a winnowing trident, but a staff. This is again comparable to a higher status male holding the staff on the Chieftain's Cup. It is possible that the two vessels belong to the same iconographical cycle.

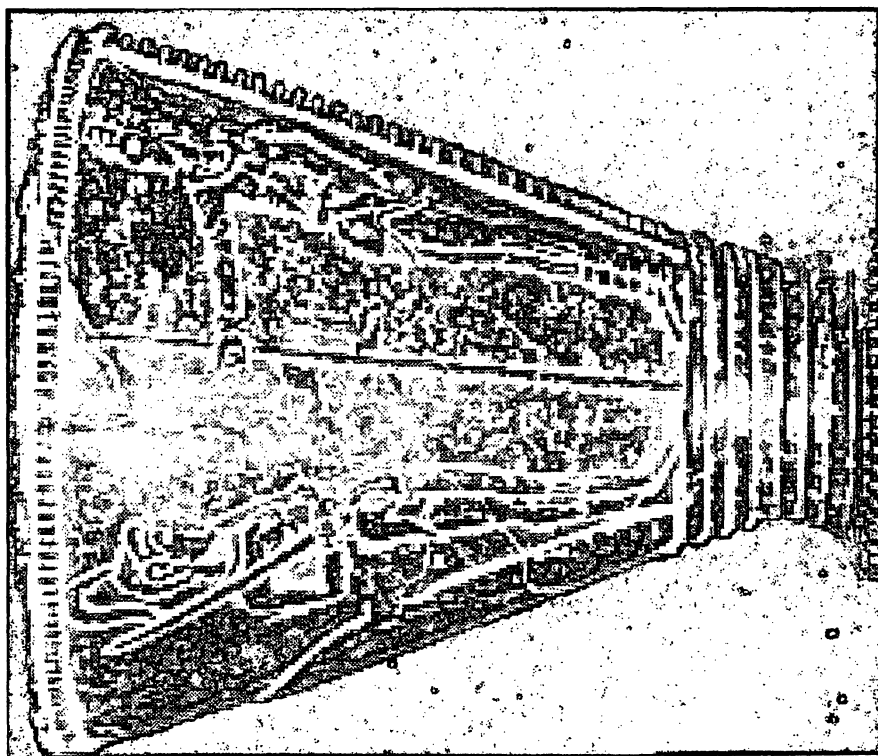
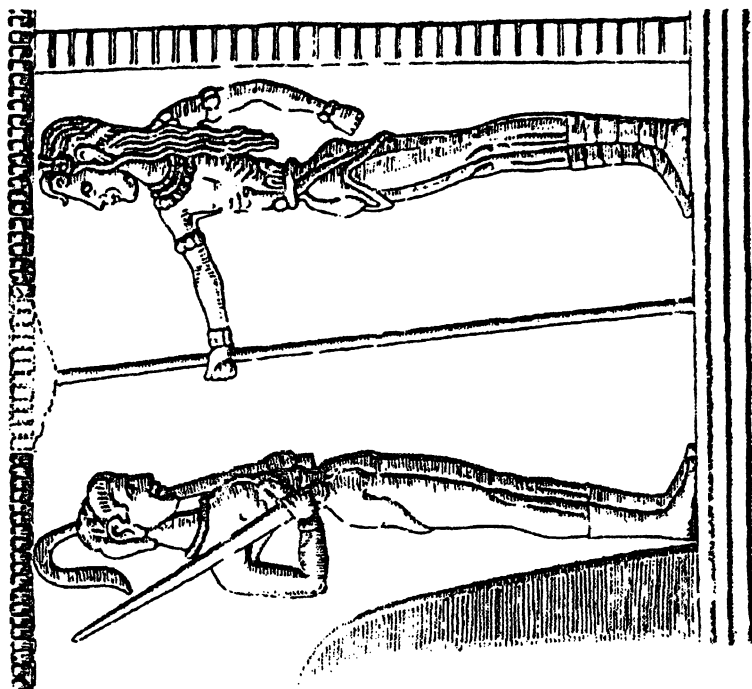
Addendum: Since the original submission of this note to Kadmos, Rehak identified the tuft as an indication of a sword type in his article "The Mycenaean 'Warrior Goddess' Revisited", *Aegaeum* 19, 1999, pp. 227-239, pll. 46-48.



Thera – Fresco from Xeste III Room 4



Thera – Fresco from Xeste IV Staircase



The Chieftain's Cup from Ayia Triada