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THE END OF MYCENAEAN ART

I first wish to thank Dr. Thomas for inviting me to submit a paper, even though he knows that the end of the Mycenaean period is not one I am very knowledgeable about. My own research has almost exclusively concentrated on sealstones, and these, as I have tried to demonstrate in a few other papers, probably were not engraved after ca. 1325 B.C. (Younger 1981). In recent years, however, I have begun to lift my head up above the sealstones and take a look, somewhat hesitantly, at other works of Late Minoan and Mycenaean art. The rather grand title of this paper is meant to suggest that the end of the Mycenaean style did not come about all at once, but the practitioners of first one medium then another died out; the total process may have taken over a century, beginning with the loss of sculpture and ending with the loss of pictorial vase-painting.

We take a close look at three examples of monumental art, all usually dated within the final century of the Bronze Age.

I. The Lion Gate Relief at Mycenae

Since the symposium my arguments for dating the Lion Gate to the first half of the 15th century B.C. have been published (Younger 1984: 62-63). The reader is also directed to the excellent summary of critical opinion on and the various reconstructions of the Lion Gate Relief published by Åström and Blomé (1965). Add to this summary: Kardara 1970 and Hiller 1973, the latter also with a useful bibliography.

Let me summarize then the salient points of my Kadmos article. Excavations have demonstrated that the Lion Gate was constructed in LH III B (Mylonas 1966: 15-35). The Lion Gate Relief, however, should be disassociated from the gate itself: the relief is of limestone, while the gate and surrounding enceinte is of conglomerate; the relief might not

have been sculpted in situ since no layer of limestone chips is said to have been excavated; and finally, the framing blocks do not fit snugly against the relief.

d/ If the relief can be considered separately from the gate, then the date of the relief is to be arrived at stylistically. The most important stylistic traits include: the profile lines bordering the upper forelegs and starting from a large boss under the shoulder; the double horizontal ridge at the wrist of the forelegs; and the overlapping crescent shaped wedges for toes. All these traits can be found amongst the sealstones belonging to the Mycenae-Vapheio Lion Group, which is datable to the end of the 16th and beginning of the 15th century B.C. (Younger 1984). Sealstones that are stylistically close to the Lion Gate Relief include CMS I 46 with the similar scene of two rampant lions flanking a central column, and AM 1938. 1058 (Kenna 1960: no. 315).

At the symposium, Paul Åström reminded me that the similarly early date of ca. 1500 had already been proposed by S. Ferri (1953); I have not been able to consult this paper.

II. The Master of the Mycenae Warrior Vase and Stele

S. Hood (1978: 45) noted that pictorial vase-painting continued after the burning of the palaces; the outstanding example of this medium is the Mycenae Warrior Vase, painted by the same artist who also did the Mycenae plastered stele (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: nos. XI. 42 and 43, respectively); the LH III C1 date assigned to this artist is based on its shape (FS 282). Its predecessor FS 281 is "barrel-like or biconical" and begins in III B; FS 282 is "more open and conical characteristic of the next period (III C)". Furumark (1972: 50 and 633), however, does attribute the Painter of the Tiryns Shield Bearers, whose name piece is presumed to be of the 282 shape, to III B and allows therefore the shape to have been "already in existence in III B".

There is nothing in the iconography of the Warrior Vase itself that must be solely III C; everything, including, as Furumark and Vermeule-Karageorghis admit, the birds and the helmets, are found in III B as well

as III C. One motif, the decoration that forms the border around the stele and separates its panels, I take to be, not the concentric arcs of FM 44.10 (LH III C1), but the 'adder mark' with incurving sides FM 69.1b that is found as early as on a LM II-III A vase from Zafer Papoura Pit Cave 7; the design is also found on the early tripod altar fragment (5 T sw) from Pylos.

Stylistically, both the warriors on the Warrior Vase and the deer on the stele look as if they could have stepped out of the Pylos and Tiryns frescoes. The closest vase painter to the Master of the Warrior Vase and Stele, and indeed the only one at all close, is the one who probably painted two kraters from Tiryns (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: XI.16 (and 16.1 ?) and XI.21). The horse on the second krater bears a striking resemblance to the horse heads preserved on a fresco fragment from the palace at Orchomenos destroyed at the end of III B (Spyropoulos 1974).

III. The Delos Ivories

Several ivories come from the Artemisium Deposit that was apparently put down in the Geometric period. We concentrate on the incised plaques that carry a lion attacking a griffin or bull, since people in sculpture and painting are extremely difficult to assess stylistically and therefore chronologically. The long modeled plaque, thought to come from a bed, carries a frieze of lions attacking bulls; the lumpy shape of the lions' head relates this plaque to the early 15th century Group of the Goober-Head Lions (Younger 1984: 61).

The incised plaques from this deposit are problematic. Poursat (1977: 153 f.) quotes Gallet de Santerre and Treheux's ascription of the incised Delos plaques to one artist and adds a plaque from Megiddo (from a context that contained Mycenaean III B and contemporary material); he also compares the sculpted plaques from the House of the Shields at Mycenae (LH III B 2 context): "nous avons là deux versions, en deux techniques différentes d'un même modèle" (p. 45). The incised technique of the Delos plaques and the shoulder decoration on the lions leads Poursat

to declare their artist Cypriote, and to date him to the time of the Mycenaean colonization (pp. 163 ff.), ca. 1250 B.C.

This late date seems to make Poursat uneasy for he also observes that, while the great saphena vein that occurs on these ivories appears on sealstones much earlier, the lions painted on Rude Style pottery bear little relation to those on the Delos plaques (p. 161).

Incision, certainly not a Cypriote monopoly, is found in the Aegean, and early too - within the first two or three generations of the Late Bronze Age. Metal objects can have their designs either modeled in relief (e.g., the griffin sword from Shaft Grave V) or incised (e.g., the horse sword from the same Shaft Grave, or the Lasithi dagger, assuming it not to be a forgery (Long 1978)). The stone stelai from Mycenae had their designs lightly incised first before the background was cut away to create their distinctively flat relief. And while the preliminary sketches on these stelai certainly do not constitute the proper comparanda, the broken stele from Keos, on the other hand, certainly must have been intended to be a finished work; the artist incised the profile deeply and with too sure a hand to have wanted it eventually erased. Unfortunately, the stele comes from a modern context, but it seems to have little in common with the late frescoes at Pylos, Tiryns, or Orchomenos and may be considerably earlier.

In any case, there do exist ivories with their principal motifs incised, apart, that is, from the subsidiary incision work that articulate body parts: the bone 'buttons' often covered in gold that were found in the Mycenae Shaft Graves, the many ivory furniture inlays, and the ivory pyxis with dolphins and comb with waterbirds from Rutsi Tholos 2 (LH II A context).

The so-called 'hair star' (Kantor 1947), 'hair whorl' (Vollgraeff-Roes 1953), or 'signe solaire' (Poursat 1977: 236) that decorates the shoulder of one of the attacking lions is the iconographical-stylistic trait that suggests to some scholars a mid-13th century date for these plaques. This kind of decoration is indeed one criterion for the so-called International Style of the 13th and 12th centuries, but it has a much longer history. The

'hair star' first appears in Egypt in the Second Transitional Period and it was extremely popular during the XVIIIth Dynasty.

Within the Aegean, the 'hair star' appears on a lion's shoulder only on the Delos plaques and on one sealing from Knossos (HMs 253 = Gill 1965: N1 from the Room of the Chariot Tablets) impressed by a lentoid probably made by a master within the Mycenae-Vapheio Lion School and therefore early 15th century. As a symbol of the sun, if such it is, the 'hair star' occurs in various forms and compositional contexts on other Aegean objects. For example, the sun seems to be depicted on several seals (e.g., the rings I 17 and 179, V 199, and the one that impressed Kn HMs 255 (Pini, 1973); and sealstones HM Giamalakis 3436 and 3446 = Sakellariou 1958: nos. 360 and 361). It also seems to have been an appropriate design as a gold prow ornament on the ships in the Thera Ship Frescoes (Marinatos 1974: pl. 9).

When the 'hair star', regardless of its possible symbolic meaning, is found not just on the shoulders of Near Eastern lions but also on their faces, then we can include in our discussion not only the incised swirl-rosettes that decorate the preserved foreheads of the three stone bull rhyta from the Little Palace at Knossos, the Rhyton Well at Mycenae, and Kato Zakro (late 16th - early 15th century), but also the separate rosette in gold that decorates the forehead of the silver bull rhyton from Shaft Grave IV.

The lions and griffins on the Delos plaques find close stylistic parallels on seals in the Mycenae-Vapheio Lion Group; the massive body and head, the flame-like locks for the mane, the presence of the great saphena vein, the hatched haunch, and pompon tail are found on most seals belonging to this group. The dotted whisker roots are found on ~~its~~ gold lion-head rhyton from Shaft Grave IV; the mane and head there, however, are fused and the ear assumes a trefoil form. The fact that no belly fur is indicated on the Delos lions is not, however, diagnostic - seals in the Mycenae-Vapheio Lion Group often omit belly fur. On the other hand, Mycenae-Vapheio Lion artists invariably make a clear demarcation between the head and mane of their lions and they give their ear a cordiform shape, all of which are lacking in the Delos plaques.

IV. Discussion

In each of these three examples either we have works of art, any or all of which are indeed to be redated earlier, the Delos ivories to ca. 1500-1475, the Mycenae Lion Gate Relief to ca. 1475-1450, and the Master of the Warrior Vase and Stele and his companions contemporary with the last fresco painters at Pylos, Tiryns, and Orchomenos, or one or more is an example of archaism.

It is possible of course that the Delos ivories with the lion attacking the griffin may be archaizing, if the incision technique and the 'hair star' on the shoulder must be exclusive traits of the International Style, and the Knossos sealing (presumably fired sometime within the 14th century) with a similar lion is also archaistic. The correctness of both these conditions is, however, doubtful.

Like the Delos ivories, the artist of the Mycenae Lion Gate Relief might have archaized, taking his inspiration directly from sealstones that were already heirlooms, perhaps in his possession. Benson (1961: 341) suggested something like this for vase painters, confirmed perhaps by a pictorial vase (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: V. 48) which carries a bull whose muzzle ends in three dots as on the sealstones CMS V 433 and XII 248 that belong in the early 15th century Group of the Bulls from Ayios Ioannes T. 3 (Younger 1985).

Other considerations, however, point to the relief being quite early: it is probably to be considered separately from the gate itself because of the difference in material and the lack of a close bond between it and its framing blocks; and stylistically, if the artist had indeed archaized, one would have expected him to have adhered more closely to the abbreviated details of sealstones hypothetically copied and to have elaborated rather clumsily the areas not treated in the seals, much as one sees in the ineptly painted background areas of Pompeii wall-paintings whose main subjects only were delineated in pattern books. In fact, the treatment of the Mycenae lions is a solid whole that must have sprung directly from a consonant view, not from the intentions of a copyist.

The Warrior Vase presents the knottiest problem. Stylistic considerations lead to dating it contemporary with the latest frescoes at Pylos, Tiryns, and Orchomenos; considerations based on the vase's shape lead to dating it after those palaces were destroyed and the frescoes no longer visible on the walls "to give direct inspiration", as Hood says (1978: 45). There are two possible solutions to the contradiction: either the analysis by shape is, at the present, insufficient and the vase was indeed painted late in the 13th century, or one or more of the palace frescoes was still visible to be appreciated a generation or so later, in the early 12th century. As I understand it, the recent German excavations and study sessions at Tiryns are producing hints that the palace there may have survived the general catastrophes at the end of LH III B. If so, we have a possible explanation for the clear echo of fresco painting in the Warrior Vase.

If we can generalize from our three specific examples, it seems highly likely that vase-painting out-last-ed sculpture, and perhaps by at least a century. Our last sculptural workshops were producing sealstones, at least, in the late 14th century; the pictorial vase-painters continue for at least another three, perhaps four, generations. If the Mycenae Lion Gate Relief and many of the Delos ivories can be re-dated to the 15th century there are then few pieces of sculpture available for a late date. The gypsum plaques from the Elgin collection in the British Museum A 56 and A 57 certainly need a re-publication, they and the fragments unearthed in 1952-3 from outside the Treasury of Atreus by Papadimitriou. If the BM fragments are indeed 13th century, the superb and subtle modeling of the bulls' flesh would force us to conclude that that period saw a revival of naturalistic rendering as sensitive as that evinced in the plaster bas reliefs of Knossos; such a revival seems doubtful.

If, however, monumental sculpture ends early, in the 14th century, and vase-painting later, in the late 13th and early 12th centuries then we scholars find ourselves more in harmony about the progress of Mycenaean art.

I myself have argued elsewhere for the last major group of sealstone engravers to be dated ca. 1350-1325 B.C.; John Betts and Ingo Pini both think this is plausible. Robert Laffineur (1977: 88) seems to think a similar date likely for the very end of the industry that produced

vases in precious metal. Karen Pollinger Foster (1979: 158) suggests the true end for faience manufacture to have occurred at the same time. For Peter Warren (1969: 190) the destruction of Knossos, probably sometime in the 14th century, caused the end of stone bowl carving.

Of the major art forms, then, for which we have extant examples, sculpture in most of its various guises, sealstone engraving, ivory carving, stone carving, metal chasing, and faience manufacture, with the exception of glass bead making, was probably no longer practiced in the 13th century.

Architecture, politically and militarily impressive, and painting, both wall- and vase-painting, must be then the only major monumental examples of the visual arts practiced in the 13th century. In fact, if the decline in sculpture begins early in the 14th century, then one can see the concurrent rise in vase-painting as a way, perhaps, to compensate.

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