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NEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE MYCENAEAN 'WARRIOR GODDESS'

by Paul Rehak

During the excavation of a Late Bronze Age shrine at Mycenae[1] in 1886, C. Tsountas discovered a painted plaque which bears the depiction of a cult scene (figs. 1. 2)[2]. This plaque has become a seminal piece of evidence in subsequent discussions of Mycenaean religion[3].

Illustrations are from the following sources: Fig. 1: Inst. Neg. Athens 5582. – Fig. 2: drawing of same. – Fig. 3: from Antiquity 43, 1969, 95 fig. 2. – Fig. 4: from G. Mylonas, Τὸ θρησκευτικὸν κέντρον τῶν Μυκηνῶν. Πραγματεῖαι τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν 33 (1972) pl. 13a. – Fig. 5: Inst. Neg. Athens 4848. – Fig. 6: from CMS VII 196 no. 158. – Fig. 7: from PM II 793 fig. 517. – Line drawings are by the author. Besides the abbrevations in AA 1982, 809ff. and in Archäologische Bibliographie the following have been used:

BGA = R.Hampe–E. Simon, The Birth of Greek Art from the Mycenaean to the Archaic Period (1981).

FK = B. Rutkowski, Frühgriechische Kultdarstellungen, 8. Beih. AM (1981).

GBA² = E. Vermeule, Greece in the Bronze Age² (1972).

KTMH = S. Marinatos–M. Hirmer, Kreta, Thera und das mykenische Hellas (1973).

MG = J. Hooker, Mycenaean Greece (1976).

MMA = G. Mylonas, Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age (1966).

MMR² = M. Nilsson, The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion² (1950).

MTh = G. Mylonas, Μυκηναϊκὴ θρησκεία. Ναοί, βωμοὶ καὶ τεμένη, Πραγματεῖαι τῆς Ἀκαδεμίας Ἀθηνῶν 39 (1977).

PM = A. Evans, The Palace of Minos at Knossos I–IV (1921–35).

SC = R. Hägg–N. Marinatos (ed.) Sanctuaries and Cults in the Aegean Bronze Age. Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen 4, XXVIII (1981).

TThK = I. Kritsele-Providi, Τοιχογραφίες τοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ κέντρου τῶν Μυκηνῶν (1982).

[1] This article grew out of a larger study, The Mycenaean Shrines of the Argolid, submitted as an M.A. thesis to the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology, Bryn Mawr College in May, 1980, and was written largely during my stay as a regular member of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, 1980–81. A version of this paper was presented under the title »New Observations on the Mycenaean 'Armed Goddess'« at the annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in San Francisco, December 30, 1981; AJA 86, 1982, 282. Among the professors, colleagues and friends with whom I have discussed Aegean religion in general and this paper in particular, I wish to thank S. Immerwahr, M. Lang, C. Lyons, E. Markson, M. Rechel, and especially M. J. Mellink.

[2] C. Tsountas, AEphem 1887, 162–164 pl. 10, 2. 2a: watercolor reconstruction. In The Mycenaean Age (1893) pl. 20, Tsountas referred to the building in which the plaque was found as a private house; A. Wace was the first to identify correctly at least part of this complex as a shrine or temple, JHS 71, 1951, 254. For plans of the area see: MTh 20 fig. 10, and S. Iakovides, BInstALondon 14, 1977, 138 fig. 13 (citadel); 124 fig. 11 (shrine).

[3] The plaque has been extensively published and illustrated. A partial bibliography includes: C. Tsountas, AEphem 1887, 162–164 pl. 10, 2. 2a; A. Gardner, JHS 13, 1892/93, 21–24; C. Tsountas, The Mycenaean Age (1893) pl. 20; G. Rodenwaldt, AM 37, 1912, 129–140 pl. 8; D. Le Lasseur, Les déesses armées dans l'art classique grec et leurs origines orientales (1919) 156 and n. 3; 155 fig. 63 (drawing); PM III 135f. fig. 88; E. Herkenrath, AJA 41, 1937, 413f.; A. Persson, The religion of Greece in prehistoric times (1942) 72f. 74 fig. 17; MMR² 344f. fig. 156; Wace op. cit. 254; MMA 146. 156f. fig. 131; T. Small, Kadmos 5, 1966, 103–107. 106 and n. 10; fig. 5 (drawing); M. Nilsson, Geschichte der griechischen Religion I³ (1967) 301 pl. 24, 1; E. Simon, Die Götter der Griechen (1968) 181 fig. 163; GBA² 284; P. Càssola Guida, Le armi difensive dei micenei nelle figurazioni, Incunabula Graeca 56 (1973) 164ff. no. 157 pl. 8, 1; G. v. Neumann, Probleme des griechischen Weihreliefs,

The varied interpretations of the pictorial elements of the plaque, and the more recent discoveries of comparable pieces, call for a reassessment of the case for the existence of the Mycenaean 'warrior goddess' and her relationship to Minoan cults[4].

The plaque, on display in the Mycenaean Gallery of the National Archaeological Museum at Athens, is made of stucco[5] painted around all four edges and on one face; the other face is blank. The miniature proportions and rectangular shape of the plaque approximate the size of Linear B tablets of page type[6]. Its precise function is uncertain, for it is too small to be viewed by large numbers of people at once[7]. Chipping and fading of the painted surface make interpretation of the scene difficult[8].

The edges are marked with small rectangles of paint in alternating colors: red, blue, black, and white. The painted face is bordered with an outer stripe of blue and an inner one of yellow, each with black borders and rectangular inner divisions. This framing device is seen in other Mycenaean and Minoan frescoes[9]. The use of a miniature style of painting should no longer be accepted as a criterion for an early date, as Rodenwaldt thought[10]. There is no reason to date this piece before the LH III B context in which it was found, although a III A date remains a possibility[11].

In the center of the scene is a figure-eight shield in yellow, mottled with black to resemble bull's hide[12]. The shield covers a female body of which minimal traces survive. She may be recognized by the glossy paint of the flesh surfaces which differs from the natural matt white of the plaster now exposed in patches. The base of the head, a portion of the neck and traces of the outstretched right and left arms are visible, while the feet have flaked away almost

Tübinger Studien III (1979) 13 and n. 38 fig. 11 a; MTh 28 f. 96 pl. 6; FK 111 fig. 33 no. 1 (drawing); 44 n. 121; BGA 38. 48 fig. 77, 50; TThK 32. 110.

[4] The lack of clear distinctions made by scholars between Minoan and Mycenaean elements and strata in the development of Aegean religion remains one of the greatest problems in this field of research. Nilsson's unsurpassed MMR² noted few distinctions in cult between the two cultures; Vermeule's Götterkult, Archeologia Homerica III 5 (1974) and G. Gesell's The Archaeological Evidence for the Minoan House Cult and its survival in Iron Age Crete (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1972. – University Microfilms 72–24, 792) point the way to a more fruitful methodology. See most recently Hooker's section on religion in MG, 190–208 and C. Renfrew in: SC 27–33.

[5] Inv. no. 2666. MMR² 344 f.; GBA² 284 and BGA 50 call it limestone; corrected in MMA 156 n. 91 and noted in FK 130.

[6] H 11,9 cm., W 19,0 cm., Th 2,2–2,9 cm., Rodenwaldt op. cit. (supra n. 3) 129; BGA 38.

[7] There are no marks on the back of the plaque to indicate how it might have been positioned or displayed. Like most Minoan and Mycenaean cult equipment it is eminently portable and need not have been housed in this shrine originally.

[8] A photograph of the object has not been published due to its poor state of preservation. Tsountas' original illustration (AEphem 1887, pl. 10, 2) is based on a watercolor rendering of the plaque which is slightly inaccurate in details and coloring. Most subsequent illustrations are black and white reproductions of a watercolor copy commissioned and supervised by Rodenwaldt.

[9] E. g., the 'Miniature Fresco' from the palace at Knossos, PM III col. pl. XVI; Knossos 'Taureador Fresco', KTMH 123 (with bibliography) col. pl. XVII; the Ayia Triadha Sarcophagus, KTMH 150 f. (with bibliography) col. pls. XXX–XXXIII; a procession of women from the palace at Tiryns, KTMH 180 f. (with bibliography) pl. 250 (left side) and col. pl. LIV. Cf. a similar framing device of rectangles on an inscribed bronze votive plaque pierced for attachment to another object, from the Psychro Cave on Crete, PM I 632 f. fig. 470.

[10] Rodenwaldt op. cit. (supra n. 3) 130; PM I 632 and n. 3. Simon's date of about 1500 B. C. is likewise too early, op. cit. (supra n. 3) 181.

[11] Personal communication from S. Immerwahr, American School of Classical Studies in Athens (Dec. 4, 1981).

[12] Tsountas' original illustration (AEphem 1887, pl. 10, 2) shows a red outline around the lower part of the shield which is still visible (personal observation, 1981).

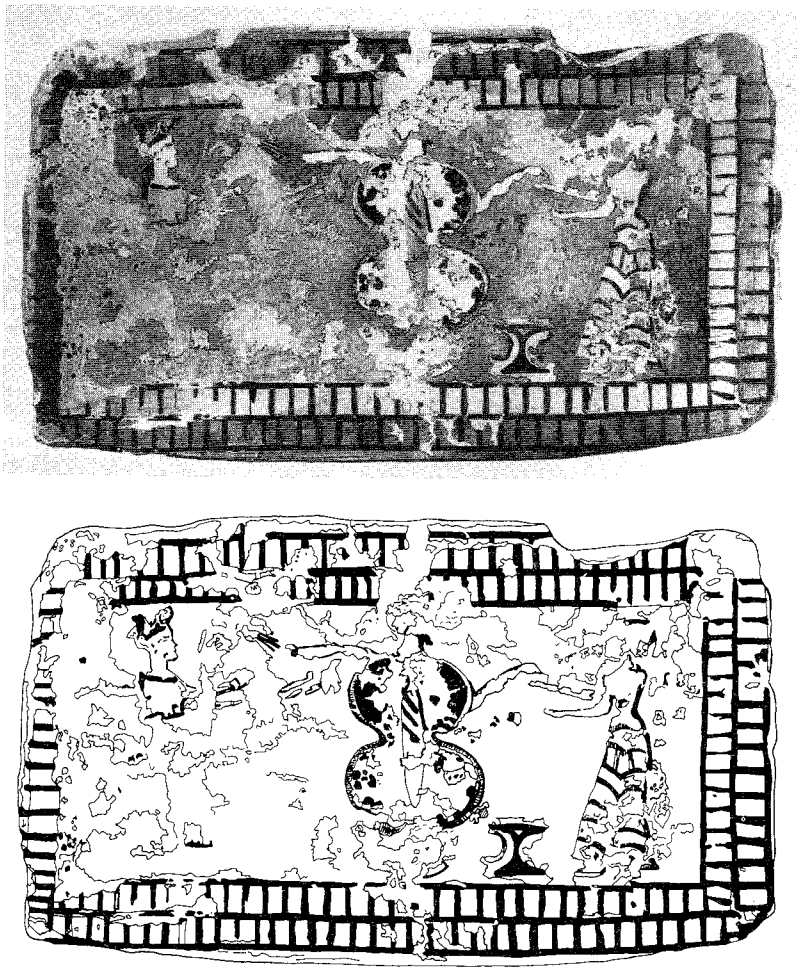

Fig. 1 and 2. Painted plaque from Mycenae. Athens, National Museum 2666

entirely. The position of the shield and the free movement of the arms indicate that the shield is probably suspended by a strap around the figure's neck and shoulders, as seen in other representations of Aegean warriors[13]. Although Tsountas and Mylonas have suggested that the object held in her right hand was a spear, its tapering yellow from bordered in black, with a midrib of the same color identifies it was a sword[14]. Thus we are clearly dealing with a female form, not an aniconic standard draped with a shield as Persson and Mylonas originally believed[15]. This identification of a female figure wearing a shield weakens the hypothesis of

[13] E. g., the inlaid dagger blade from shaft grave IV at Mycenae, KTMH 172 col. pl. XLIX (center).

[14] Persson op. cit. (supra n. 3) 73 and MMA 157 refer to it as a sword. Tsountas (The Mycenaean Age [1893] 299) compares the weapon of the figure on the plaque to that of the shielded figure on the 'Acropolis Treasure' ring (see infra n. 39) which is indeed equipped with a spear.

[15] Persson op. cit. 73; MMA 157. Mylonas later recognized the figure as that of a woman, though he refers to her representation on the plaque as an »idol« rather than a depiction of the goddess

a Mycenaean cult based purely of the veneration of arms and armor, for, although representations of weapons abound, a majority of these may be purely decorative[16].

To the right of the shielded figure is a small yellow altar of Cretan type with flat top and base and concave side walls, outlined in black. Its presence here is a specifically Minoan element, for though it finds numerous parallels on Crete both in depictions[17] and *in corpore*[18], it appears only in representational art on the mainland[19]. Two female figures at the right- and left-hand sides of the plaque, both facing the shielded figure in the center, complete the scene. These figures are poorly preserved, but their multicolored flounced skirts and bodices follow a Cretan style of dress adopted on the mainland. The raised and extended arms of these figures are usually interpreted as a sign of respect, worship, or adoration clearly directed towards the central figure[20].

Although later Greek myths mention armed females, there is little contemporary Bronze Age evidence for the existence of Amazons or huntresses[21] (only at Tiryns do fragments of a hunt scene from the palace include white female hands holding shafts, possibly of spears)[22].

herself, MTh 28f. 96. BGA 50 calls the figure a goddess.

[16] Mylonas summarized the problem in his section on »figure-eight shields«, MMA 157f., but seems nonetheless to believe in the existence of hoplolatry, in spite of the overwhelming number of decorative examples of shields as furniture inlays and the like. TThK 57. 110 follows the reasoning of Mylonas. Possible exceptions should be considered carefully on the basis of associated items of religious significance and find context. Thus T. Small, Kadmos 5, 1966, 103ff., is correct in calling the LM III double ax blade from the Mesara engraved with a shield a piece of cult equipment, but the loop at the top looks like a shield strap rather than the headdress of a figure, and other limbs are absent. The same is true of the vases decorated with shields from a ritual room at Knossos (ArchRepLondon 1980/81, 83. 84 figs. 34. 35), and a vase from a tomb at Isopata, A. Evans, Archaeologia 65, 1914, 1–94 esp. 25–28 fig. 37, a. b.

[17] E. g., a crystal lentoid seal from the Idaean Cave, PM I 221f. fig. 167; PM II 607 and n. 2; PM IV 211 and n. 1; 344 and n. 2; fig. 288; two MM III – LM I A seal impressions of animals flanking an altar from Ayia Triadha and Zakro, PM IV 611 fig. 599b. c; and the LM I A Zakro Rhyton, KTMH 145f. (with bibliography) pls. 108–109 fig. 20.

[18] E. g., a miniature base in terracotta from the MM II 'Miniature Shrine' deposit at Knossos, PM II 607 and n. 1 fig. 380; PM I 220–222 fig. 166 H; and an example in stone from the LM I A 'House of the High Priest' at Knossos, PM IV 202–215 fig. 160a.

[19] Mylonas calls this a typical Mycenaean altar (MMA 157. 162) as does Simon op. cit. (supra n. 3) 181, but the only examples of which I know are the two altars which form par of the Lion Gate relief at Mycenae (KTMH pl. 163) and three sealstones found at Mycenae showing antithetic animals flanking an altar (CMS I 62 no. 46; 89 no. 73; 114 no. 98; GBA² pl. 19 K. L; MTh 47f. 106 figs. 27–28). A 'Mistress of the animals' is seated on a similar altar on an ivory pyxis lid found at Minet-el-Beida (Ras Shamra), but this is probably an eastern work using Minoan and Mycenaean symbols; J.-C. Poursat, Les Ivoires mycéniens, BEFAR 230 (1977) 144f. 147f. 171. 230f. 243. 246 pl. 19, 1. However, MMA 162 correctly points out the Cretan origin of this piece of equipment. Rutkowski discusses this type of altar in FK, but does not comment on its origin or the relative lack of mainland examples (Ch. 3; also p. 42. 44 figs. 11, 1. 2; 12, 1–4. 6. 9).

[20] Vermeule interpreted these figures as dancers (GBA² 284) but so little remains of their lower bodies that this is questionable; some of the Kea figurines have a better claim to this pose (J. Caskey, Hesperia 33, 1964, 314–335 esp. 330 and pl. 61a–c).

[21] Nilsson notes that Atalanta, for example, may simply be »one of those folk-tale personages who were not localized originally«, and that the Amazons are linked with the Anatolian peninsula but not a specifically Bronze Age date (The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology² [1972] 91). A woman in a strange skirt on a sealstone from Vapheio may hold the shaft of a spear, CMS I 259 no. 226.

[22] G. Rodenwaldt in: Tiryns II (1912) 120f. no. 156 pl. 17, 1; 121 no. 157 pl. 14, 1. J. Anderson presented a paper on »Huntresses and the goddess of the hunt at Tiryns« at the annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in Philadel-

But even if we have Late Helladic huntresses, the central position of the female on the Mycenae plaque, her gesticulating attendants and the small altar indicate that she is a goddess.

A related wall fresco came to light in the course of W. Taylour's campaigns at Mycenae in 1968 and 1969, which uncovered two more shrines of LH III B date in the same general area of the citadel (fig. 3)[23]. In their original state, these fragments of painting decorated the

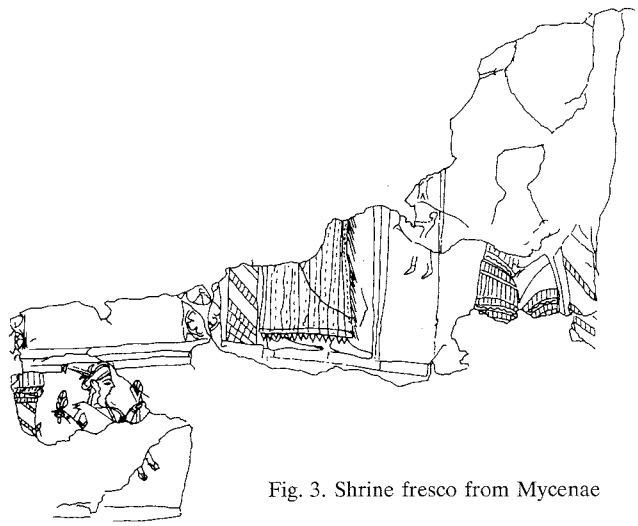

Fig. 3. Shrine fresco from Mycenae

surface of a wall above and to the side of a bench, which on analogy with other Mycenaean shrines was presumably used to support cult objects and offerings[24], following a Minoan precedent[25]. Directly over the top of the bench are two females within an architectural setting of columns and pilasters[26]. The upper half of the composition has been lost, but the female on the left is distinguished by her relatively larger scale and strange robe of vertical blue-gray panels with white dots, separated by red stripes. This costume is fringed along its

phia, December, 1982, in which he attempted to connect these huntresses with a sacrificial ritual in the field (AJA 87, 1983, 224).

[23] W. Taylour, Antiquity 43, 1969, 91–97 fig. 2 (drawing) pl. 10a; id., Antiquity 44, 1970, 270–280 fig. 1 (plan) pl. 40c; F. Schachermeyr, Die ägäische Frühzeit II. Die mykenische Zeit und die Gesittung von Thera, 309. SBWien (1976) 113 pl. 33a (reconstructed); E. French in: SC 42 fig. 1 (schematic plan); 46 fig. 9; 47 fig. 11. The fresco is on display in the Nauplion museum.

[24] Multiple benches with a terracotta figurine and clay 'offering table' were found in situ in the 'Shrine of the Idols' at Mycenae (see supra n. 23). – A LH III C shrine in room XXXII of House 'G' at Asine contained a bench which seems to have supported cult objects; O. Frödin–A. Persson, Asine (1938) 63. 74–76. 298–300. 308–310 figs. 53–54. 206. 211–212; PM IV 755–758 fig. 737. Recently R. Hägg has noted that not all of the material published as cult equipment was actually found on the bench, and that published photographs do not show all of the finds, in: SC 91–94 esp. 93f. fig. 4. – A LH III C shrine at Tiryns included a bench which may have supported the figurines and cult equipment found scattered around it; K. Kilian–C. Podzuweit, AA 1978, 449–498 esp. 460–466.

[25] Gesell op. cit. (see supra n. 4) points out that the use of benches to support cult objects begins on Crete as early as the EM II period in the domestic shrine at Myrtos (Gesell p. 32f.) and continues in use on island sites past the end of Minoan civilization (Gesell p. 192f.).

[26] Thus the cult scene depicted is clearly taking place within a building, which may not be true in the case of the plaque, where no architectural members are visible.

front edge, and decorative dress weights are suspended from the hem[27]. The unusual fringed robe is well paralleled in the costume of the seated goddess attended by 'animal demons' on the well-known gold ring from Tiryns[28].

Immediately in front of the fresco figure is the lower portion of a triangular form, tapering downwards to a pointed tip which rests on the groundline. Taylour first proposed that it was

Fig. 4. Fresco fragments from Mycenae. Nauplion, Museum 11.652

the shaft of a double ax[29], but the yellow form with tapering black outlines and a midrib unquestionably identifies this object as a sword similar to that held by the shielded figure on the plaque[30]. In spite of the differences in costume between the two, I suggest that they represent the same divine being.

The dress and pose of the smaller female in the scene also invite comparison with the attendants on the plaque. She wears a red bodice and flounced skirt; she holds her arms up and outward in front of the body[31]. In one hand she grasps a shaft which may be a spear, as Taylour thought, though the upper tip is not preserved[32].

Between these two females are the tiny figures of two males who float in the field, facing the female with the sword. The more completely preserved lower figure strides forward, head and torso tilted backwards slightly with the arms outstretched in front of him. This pose is identical with that of males in procession on a clay sealing from Mycenae[33], and clearly

[27] S. Iakovides, BSA 72, 1977, 113–119.

[28] CMS I 202f. no. 179 (with extensive bibliography); KTMH pl. 229 (top); BGA 176. 185 col. fig. 299.

[29] W. Taylour, Antiquity 43, 1969, 96; corrected by the author, Antiquity 44, 1970, 276.

[30] Taylour identified this object as a sword with a midrib, but seemed uncomfortable with its large size (Antiquity 44, 1970, 276). However, the Mycenaean swords depicted on seals and discovered in tombs are often quite long. It is interesting to note that an ivory sword pommel was found among the presumed cult contents of the shrine preserved within a bench in the room with the fresco, though this may be coincidental (Antiquity 43, 1969, 96 pl. 10b; Antiquity 44, 1970, 275). Schachermeyr recognized this female as an important goddess, but identified the sword blade as a spear, (op. cit. 113). TThK 110 surprisingly mentions this figure without commenting on the presence of the sword or connecting the female figure with the warrior goddess.

[31] Taylour originally interpreted the red bodice as a man's bare chest (Antiquity 43, 1969, 96), but restoration revealed white female feet, an arm, and a breast exposed from the bodice (Antiquity 44, 1970, 276).

[32] Antiquity 44, 1970, 276. Cf. the woman on the Vapheio sealstone, supra n. 21.

[33] E. Bennett, ProcAmPhilosSoc 97, 4, 1953, 424. 469 pl. 14 figs. 12. 13; and TransactAmPhilosSoc 48, 1, 1958, 44 figs. 74–75; CMS I 192 no. 170.

Fig. 5. 'Acropolis Treasure' ring from Mycenae.
Athens, National Museum 992

derives from Minoan representations of offering bearers such as those on a fragment of a carved steatite vessel of MM III to LM I A date found at Knossos[34]. The diminutive scale of the figures on the Mycenae fresco seems to indicate lesser status relative to the armed female, rather than a depiction of figures descending from above as on some Cretan rings which are taken to represent epiphanies of divinities[35].

In 1971, Mylonas discovered a series of fresco fragments in the same general area of the citadel which show the upper portions of a female wearing a boar's tusk helmet and supporting a baby griffin in her arms (fig. 4)[36]. Although the rest of the composition is missing, the fact that the female is armed and associated with a live griffin (it turns its head backwards to look at her) clearly removes this being from the ordinary human realm[37]. Differences in

[34] PM II 752 and n. 1 fig. 486; PM III 64 fig. 37. Similar male figures may have existed on MM III terracotta relief plaques (now armless but otherwise in correct pose) from the 'House of the Sacrificed Oxen' at Knossos, PM II 753f. fig. 487.

[35] E. g., a female divinity on a gold ring from Isopata, KTMH 147 (with bibliography) pl. 115 (upper left); and a male god on a gold ring from Knossos, PM I 159f. fig. 115. The problem of such descending figures is summarized with relevant bibliography by Hooker, MG 197–199.

[36] Ergon 1971, 132 fig. 163; Prakt 1971, 150 pl. 184b; G. Mylonas, Τὸ θρησκευτικὸν κέντρον τῶν Μυκηνῶν. Πραγματεῖαι τῆς Ακαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν 33 (1972) 29f. 39 pl. 13a; C. Long, The Ayia Triadha Sarcophagus, SIMA 41 (1974) 57 pl. 22 fig. 64; MTh 22. 92 n. 41 pl. 7; BGA 38. 46 fig. 70; TThK 21, 28–33 no. A-6; 57. 110 col. pl. B. a, IIa; Nauplion Museum Inv. 11. 652; W 10 cm., H 7,6 cm., Th 0,6–0,9 cm. Both figures are drawn in a white outline style on a blue background; the griffins wings are yellow with blue details.

[37] Griffins usually appear with figures who are distinguished by exceptional costume or pose, commonly called 'priests' or 'goddesses', e. g., the male in a long robe leading a griffin on a leash on a jasper lentoid seal from Vapheio (CMS I 257 no. 223; BGA 176, 182 fig. 285). Note that the animal turns its head to gaze at the male as on the Mycenae fresco. A gold ring from chamber tomb 91 at Mycenae shows a seated male in a long robe with a griffin on a leash (CMS I 145 no. 128; BGA 176. 181 fig. 277. A male in Minoan costume restrains a griffin on a leash on a sealstone in Heraklion, S. Alexiou AAA 2, 1969, 429–434 figs. 1–3. A 'goddess' is shown with a running griffin on a gold ring found at Archanes: Prakt 1967, 153 pl. 137a; Ergon 1967, 96 fig. 101. – A goddess different from the warrior goddess appears flanked by antithetic griffins on simi-

arms among the females cited here may be due largely to accidents of preservation, but the presence of items of warfare normally associated with males makes each one of these females unusual. Although the original location of the fresco of the helmeted female is uncertain, it is possible that it once decorated a wall in one of the shrine buildings excavated by Tsountas, Wace, and Mylonas[38].

While the existence of an armed goddess is well established within at least two cult buildings at Mycenae during the LH III B period, she may be traced in earlier representations. A large gold signet ring, part of the so-called 'Acropolis Treasure' discovered to the south of Grave Circle A, is dated on stylistic grounds to the LH II period (fig. 5)[39]. As noted by Hooker, the religious scene depicted consists of a pastiche of Mycenaean and Minoan elements, probably created for a Mycenaean by a Cretan at a time of strong contacts between the two cultures[40]. Thus, the lower register, including a figure generally recognized as a nature goddess with attendants, is almost wholly Cretan in inspiration[41]. The free-floating double ax, although Minoan, seems intrusive in this setting[42]. The disembodied feline heads in one border of the scene are likewise difficult to relate to the rest of the depiction, as is the shielded figure descending from the upper corner of the figured zone[43]. Although it carries a spear rather than a sword and the sex of the being is not indicated, the pose conforms to that of Cretan depictions of epiphanies of divinities, and it is possible that we have here an early manifestation of the armed goddess[44].

A white amethyst lentoid seal in the British Museum of unknown provenience recalls in its details the previous example, and has likewise been identified as being of LH II date (fig. 6)[45]. In the center is a figure-eight shield surmounted by a boar's tusk helmet with two plumes. Both arms are visible, extended horizontally and grasping swords with round pommels, held upright. Vestiges of small, stemlike feet remain beneath the shield. Below and to the sides of the shield are two schematic, roughly triangular shapes which defy easy interpretation[46]. Again, the sex of the being is not evident, but the frontal pose of the figure and

lar sealstones from Ialysos (PM IV 169 fig. 131), the Psycho Cave (PM IV 169 fig. 130), a warrior grave at Knossos (BSA 47, 1952, 272, fig. 16 III. 20), and of unknown provenience (CMS XIII 42 no. 39). See also: I. Sakellarakis, AEphem 1972, 245–258. – Kritsele-Providi discusses the appearance of griffins with humans or divinities (TThK 29f.), but the associations of the griffin with a 'sacral kingship' remains a highly controversial issue. A significant point concerning the Mycenae fresco is that the armed female appears to be the sole representation of a figure who actually carries a griffin, rather than escorting it on a leash or being flanked by the animal.

[38] MTh 22. 92 n. 41; TThK 21 and n. 28. There is no reason for supposing that these fragments once formed part of another plaque as Mylonas tentatively suggested op. cit. (see supra n. 36) 30. 39. TThK 32. 110 also connects the divinity on these fresco fragments with the figure on the plaque and calls both the 'goddess of war'.

[39] CMS I 29–31 no. 17 (with extensive bibliography); E. Simon, Die Götter der Griechen (1968) 181. 183 fig. 164; KTMH pl. 229; FK 111 fig. 33 no. 3; BGA 76. 180 fig. 276.

[40] MG 197–199.

[41] Mylonas summarized the opinions on the identity of the seated female, but calls her the 'tree goddess' (MMA 149f.); see also MG 198.

[42] However, a figure-eight shield and other religious symbols are used to decorate the LM III double ax from the Mesara (see Small op. cit., supra n. 3 and n. 16), so it is possible that there are religious connections among the elements on the Mycenae ring that are now unclear.

[43] CMS I 32 no. 18 shows similar animal heads on another gold ring from the same hoard.

[44] Cf. n. 35 (supra) for other examples of descending gods. Hooker is probably correct in assuming that the Mycenaeans originally had their own divinity of war (MG 199), but given the Cretan origin for the figure-eight shield and Minoan predilection for representing primarily female divinities, I disagree that the shielded figure/armed female type is necessarily a »symbol of mainland origin« (MG 198).

[45] CMS VII 196 no. 158; FK 109 fig. 32 no. 4; Small op. cit. (see supra n. 3) 106 and n. 9; 107 fig. 4b.

[46] CMS VII 196 no. 158 calls them »symbols of lion's

heraldic display of swords and flanking objects recall the arrangement of elements on the stucco plaque and make this sealstone unlike any other representations of Mycenaean warriors known to me: it may have a cultic significance.

One of the earliest examples of an armed female is on a flat rectangular seal of red carnelian with an intaglio design, found by Evans in a basement room of the so-called 'stepped

Fig. 6. Seal. London, British Museum Inv.1935.4–30.1

Fig. 7. Seal from Knossos. Heraklion, Museum 1279

portico' of the palace at Knossos (fig. 7)[47]. The shape of the sealstone and accompanying hoard of metal, stone and pottery vessels (including one painted ewer) date this deposit to the LM I A period[48]. On the surface of the stone is a woman brandishing a flanged sword with a globular pommel in her right hand. In her left hand is a short staff which terminates in a curved line, resembling a small whip like that held by the young soldier on a LM I A steatite cup from Ayia Triadha[49], rather than the *aspergillum* or ritual sprinkler suggested by Evans[50]. Heavily engraved over the woman's Minoan bodiced gown with flounced skirt are a series of angular lines which may represent a ritual robe similar to that seen on a fresco from Thera and several sealstones[51].

heads«, but they are only superficially similar to examples on other rings; see n. 36 and 39 (supra). The outward turn of the lower tip of the flanking objects on the British Museum seal does not resemble an animal muzzle.

47 PM II 632f. 792–794 fig. 517; PM IV 937 fig. 907; MMR² 349f. fig. 160.

48 PM II 631 fig. 395: ewer E, 632, 792.

49 KTMH 144 (with bibliography) pls. 100. 102 (left).

50 PM II 793. In spite of her weaponry, Evans identified her as a goddess of the underworld (632. 793. 794). MMR² 350 refers to her as the 'war goddess'. A MM III B sherd from the 'House of the Sacrificed Oxen' at Knossos shows a similar whip (PM II 793–795 fig. 519). Cf. n. 34 (supra) on the offering bearer plaques from the same house.

51 Evans interpreted these lines as a network of snakes (PM II 793), but their angularity makes this unlikely. The shape that is formed by these lines is roughly triangular or trapezoidal, like the costume of the 'priestess' from room 4 of the West House on Thera (S. Marinatos, Thera V [1971] 43 pl. 101 col. pls. J. K; Thera VI [1972] col. pl. 5; KTMH 157 pl. 153, right). Two sealstones from a tomb at Vapheio show figures often interpreted as priests: one with a griffin (supra n. 37) and the other holding an ax of Asiatic type (CMS I 257 no. 223; 258 no. 255). A sealstone similar to the latter was found at Vatheia on Crete (KTMH 149 pl. 122, center, left).

Until now, the concept of an armed goddess has been regarded as a primarily Mycenaean construct, in keeping with the stereotype of »warlike mainlanders« and »peaceful Cretans«[52]. But, even though the warrior goddess is most fully represented in LH III B contexts at Mycenae, the LH II gold ring and amethyst seal, and LM I A sealstone support the notion of an earlier genesis. At Mycenae, the majority of elements involved in the cult of this goddess are of Minoan origin, even if adopted and adapted by Mycenaeans: the preponderance of female attendants in Minoan costumes, the Cretan altar with incurved sides, and the limited appearance of males who are shown in subordinate roles. The armed female on the Knossos sealstone and other representations of women wearing helmets or necklaces of figure-eight shields[53], predating the period of heavy mainland influence on Crete, lend additional weight to the hypothesis that this goddess is actually Minoan in concept and origin[54].

Although she possesses some of the attributes later associated with the goddess Athena, it is impossible to ascertain the exact identity of the Bronze Age goddess. The attestation of the name and epithet *a-ta-na-po-ti-ni-ja* on a Linear B tablet from Knossos is not without problems[55]: if the Athena of historical times is really indicated, she seems at this earlier date to be merely one aspect of the great female deity Potnia[56]. The process of the diffusion of the cult of the warrior goddess (she has not been found yet in pictorial representations at other mainland or island sites)[57] and her survival into historical times remain problematic[58]. The importance of the present identification, however, should not be mini-

[52] For this view, see most recently TThK 57.

[53] An interesting figure on a clay sealing from Zakro clearly has female breasts and a plumed helmet, in spite of its oddly shaped head (PM IV 867 fig. 854). Cf. the somewhat similar faience plaques of women (now headless) with their hands on their breasts, wearing necklaces of figure-eight shield beads, from a MM III treasury in the propylaeum area of the palace at Knossos (PM II 702 fig. 440; K. Foster, Aegean Faience of the Bronze Age [1979] 78 and fig. 111).

[54] Thus it does not seem to be true that the Minoans lacked a warrior goddess as stated in TThK 57.

[55] Tablet KN 208–V 52; J. Chadwick, Documents in Mycenaean Greek² (1973) 126f. 311f.; and The Mycenaean World (1976) 88 fig. 37; Small op. cit. (see supra n. 3) 107; Simon (see supra n. 39) 180 and n. 5. Chadwick, Documents² (1973) 126 notes that M. Ventris also proposed the restoration *[a]-ta-na* on a fragmentary Linear B tablet from Mycenae, MY X 1 (E. Bennett, ProcAmPhilosSoc 97, 4, 1953, 428; TransactAm PhilosSoc 48, 1, 1958, 45. 112; Prakt 1950, 215 fig. 18).

[56] Hooker refers to the shielded figure on the 'Acropolis Treasure' ring (supra n. 39) as »the forerunner of Athena« or even »Athena herself« (MG 199; BGA 38. 50 concurs). But since the Knossos tablet does not separate the *a-ta-na* from *po-ti-ni-ja*, it seems likely that she is still to be regarded as one aspect of Potnia rather than a separate deity in her own right. See: J. Chadwick, Minos 5, 1957, 117–129; and id., The Mycenaean World (1976) 88. 92f. Small op. cit. (see supra n. 3) 107 interprets the figure-eight shield as a symbol of divine protection and attribute of Athena as warrior goddess and city protectress.

[57] On the possible attestation of the name of Athena at Mycenae, see n. 55 (supra). Small op. cit. (supra n. 3) 106f. proposed that the loop visible above a figure-eight shield on a LM I B vase from Kea might represent the crown of a divinity standing behind the shield, but this is problematic given the absence of other limbs; cf. n. 16 (supra).

[58] If, as I believe, the Knossos tablet witnesses the existence of Athena on Crete (albeit as an aspect of Potnia), it is interesting to note that the goddess thus surely gives her name to the mainland town of Athens, and not vice-versa. The probable pre-Greek origin of the name of Athena has been noted by J. Chadwick (The Mycenaean World [1976] 97), and more importantly, was recognized by Nilsson (MMR² 489–491) prior to the decipherment of Linear B on purely linguistic grounds. – Nilsson (MMR² 485) hypothesized a connection between the building of temples to Athena during the historical period with the remains of the palaces of the Mycenaean kings. Even at Mycenae, however, the buildings in which

mized. For once, a Mycenaean divinity can be recognized on the basis of pictorial evidence even though our textual references remain uncertain. The illustrations of the warrior goddess of Mycenae thus shed valuable light on our still imperfect knowledge of Mycenaean and Minoan religion.

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the warrior goddess was housed are not directly connected with the palace proper, and were accessible from other points within the citadel. Thus the theory that she was the exclusive patroness of the *wanax* remains unproved.