

THE MYCENAE FIGURES

With the full publication¹ of the material from the Temple Complex of the Cult Centre at Mycenae, it is possible to assess the terracotta figures more accurately than previously. I was responsible for the initial cleaning and mending of the figures on site and my personal reactions to them have always been influenced by my extensive knowledge of figurines.² Thus I have always seen a close relationship between the figures and figurines but did not elaborate on this point in my paper in *Sanctuaries and Cults*.³ Others however have emphasized what they saw as the “anthropomorphic ferocity.”⁴

The evidence of the 21 figures may be summarized as follows:
The figures are of *two types*:⁵

1. *Type A* are canonical examples of known figurine types but at a somewhat larger size. Such figures are known not only from Mycenae but from several sites.

2. *Type B* have:

two body types: the pigeon chested and those with a pinched upper body.⁶

three arm gestures: raised arms, arms grasping something, and what for convenience may be nicknamed the flagbearers.⁷ None have the mourning gesture of touching the head or hat which is known in a few figurines.⁸

two hand types: open “mitten” hands and hands clutching something.⁹ The true Psi type is not represented.¹⁰

two hair types: none showing (though there is no evidence for a shaven head)¹¹ and plastic curls and/or plaits¹² with some having painted detail also.¹³ None of Type B have hats.

These features have been discussed previously and are considered in some detail by Moore.¹⁴ It must be emphasized that as yet this type of figure is known only from Mycenae and only from this one context at Mycenae. There are no parallels of any kind from anywhere. The sample is small but sufficient for preliminary analysis.

However apart from generalisations no attention has been paid to the actual *faces* and their decoration. These are of *two types*: completely monochrome like the bodies¹⁵ or monochrome with reserved areas.¹⁶ Of the former there are 5 examples and of the latter 13

1 A.D. MOORE and W.D. TAYLOUR, *Well Built Mycenae Fascicule 10: The Temple Complex* (1999).

2 E.B. FRENCH, “The Development of Mycenaean Terracotta Figurines,” *BSA* 66 (1971) 101-187.

3 E.B. FRENCH, “Mycenaean figures and figurines, their typology and function,” in *Sanctuaries and Cults* 171-177.

4 This description is used by L. Morgan in her forthcoming paper for the Festschrift to Mark Cameron. Both G.E. Mylonas and W.D. Taylour are even more forceful.

5 Originally defined FRENCH (*supra* n. 3).

6 FRENCH (*supra* n. 3) figs 11-12.

7 FRENCH (*supra* n. 3) figs 14, 13, 12.

8 E.g. M. BENZI, *Rodi e la Civiltà Micenea* (1992) pls 18a,c,d,e; 61q.

9 FRENCH (*supra* n. 3) figs 14-13.

10 Contrary to what I said (*supra* n. 3, 173) as the arms are clearly stretching forward (MOORE and TAYLOUR, *supra* n. 1, fiche p. 390-391). Moore is in fact incorrect in pairing directly 69-614 with 68-1586 [*supra* n. 1 pl. 14] as they are only comparable in some of the methods of manufacture.

11 FRENCH (*supra* n. 3) fig. 11.

12 FRENCH (*supra* n. 3) fig. 12.

13 MOORE and TAYLOUR (*supra* n. 1) fiche p. 340.

14 MOORE and TAYLOUR (*supra* n. 1) 47-50.

15 FRENCH (*supra* n. 3) fig. 11.

16 MOORE and TAYLOUR (*supra* n. 1) pl. 18a.

of which only one, the largest,¹⁷ can really be considered “ugly” - indeed she was nicknamed Clytemnestra for this reason.

Monochrome representation of faces is widely found both in wall painting and vase painting but very few figurines are treated in this way. The normal decoration for the faces of Mycenaean figurines is a monochrome head representing hair with the facial features simply painted: a dotted eye, line for the nose and a cross line for the mouth. Many have a “side-burn” effect which may represent a hair style, a beard or be a simple outline for the face.¹⁸ A fringe of hair is sometimes shown.¹⁹ A plastic or painted plait becomes a common feature.

It is my contention that this is the tradition which governs the decoration of the figures with partially reserved faces. The reserved areas serve to allow the representation of eyes, nose and mouth in paint.

There is no evidence for any form of apotropaic representation in Mycenaean art²⁰ and no archaeological evidence for this interpretation of the Mycenae figures can be deduced from their find circumstances and context.

Figurine (Athens NM 1260) (H. 0.035m)

One further point may be noted. All the figures of both types have strong chins as do many figurines and representations in other media. On the figures of Type B the chin is made separately and attached as a hollow appendage to the head.²¹ Some of Type A, like the Lady of Phylakopi, have this feature emphasized in paint in what may appear a rather strange way. We now know from anthropological work²² that at least some of the skeletons from GCB had a noticeably strong chin. But there is another type of Mycenaean: the “chinless wonder.” These people appear widely in wall painting²³ and particularly on vases²⁴ though they are not as commonly represented in figurines. One small example, however, (one of those registered under Athens NM 1260) has, as well as a necklace, a painted spot on a distinctly chinless profile (Fig. above). It seems odd that this feature should be shown at all unless there were two groups of Mycenaean of two facial types between whom it was necessary to distinguish.

Elizabeth B. FRENCH

17 FRENCH (*supra* n. 3) fig. 10.

18 FRENCH (*supra* n. 2) pl. 24a.

19 FRENCH (*supra* n. 2) pl. 16d.

20 As far as I can discover - the only items quoted are these figures and the snake figures found with them, both of which can be explained in quite different terms.

21 Thus necessitating the firing holes to allow the steam to escape. For the formation of the chin as a separate piece see MOORE and TAYLOR (*supra* n. 1) fiche p. 340.

22 As noted by ANGEL and MUSGRAVE (*BSA* 90 [1995] 115-122).

23 Of recent discoveries this is clearly shown in the small deity from the Room 31 at Mycenae who forms the logo for this conference.

24 The best known example is, of course, the Warrior Vase.