

A NEW (OLD) MYCENAEAN SCENE OF WORSHIP

“Old” in the title of this paper implies that the representation which I shall discuss is already known to scholarship. “New” implies a reassessment of it.

The vase on which it occurs is a Mycenaean chariot krater of LH IIIA2 date from Klavdhia, Cyprus, now in the British Museum (Pl. CVa-b).¹ Here, on one side of the vase and alongside the chariot, is a three-figure group at the right end of the picture-field (Pl. CVc). The upper, better-preserved part of the group shows the figures in close proximity and apparently interacting, the two bigger ones surrounding the smaller one at the centre. This has given rise to a basically modern-concept interpretation along the lines of a family portrait: father, mother and child, the child being lifted between its parents.² The father, the mother and the child have even been given tentative names in accordance with Greek mythological beings.³

Children, apart from their integration into the *kourotrophos* type of terracotta figurine, are, however, rarely portrayed in Mycenaean art. Actually, the proposed family can be sanctioned only after it has been checked if the child is indeed a child and if the two other persons are of different sex. This means that we have to take a deeper look at the representation, examining also its lower part (cf. the drawing Pl. CVe).

Much is lost here and has been replaced by a plaster section. Still, something remains. Beginning with the rightmost figure, what could be the stick-like, end part of one leg comes to view; it appears inside the triple band that encircles the belly of the pot below the picture-field. Of the left-hand figure more is preserved and, despite the heavy abrasion of the colour, fairly readable thanks to the good imprint left by the paint. We can thus follow the bare, silhouette legs of the figure down into the banding as well. At the centre, however, where we expect to find nothing on the assumption that the child is lifted, our eyes are struck by human limbs in silhouette. The paint is lost but its imprint is partly preserved. One small-sized leg and foot

1 BM C342. E. VERMEULE and V. KARAGEORGHIS, *Mycenaean pictorial vase painting* (1982) 30, 198, IV.18; cf. an earlier paper by Karageorghis alone: V. KARAGEORGHIS, “Myth and epic in Mycenaean vase painting,” *AJA* 62 (1958) 385. See also E. SAPORITI, *The pictorial style in Late Bronze Age Mycenaean pot painting* (diss. 1990) (1998) 192-193, 514-518. In recent times, the vase has been drawn into focus thrice: by Ahlberg (G. AHLBERG, *Myth and epos in early Greek art* [1982] 15), by Crouwel (J. CROUWEL, “Another Mycenaean horse-leader,” *BSA* 86 [1991] 66-67) and by Hiller (S. HILLER, in press: conference paper presented in April 1999 at the Österreichischer Archäologentag: “Kleine Leute – grosse Tiere. Themen der ägäischen Bildkunst in der späten Bronze- und der frühen Eisenzeit,” which the author kindly sent me in manuscript form).

2 See VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1) 30 (no. 18): “Two adults stand side by side facing left, supporting between their short outstretched hands a little child whose arms are spread broadly in the air; *ibid.*, 198 (catalogue entry, IV.18): “two adults lifting child.” See also KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1) 385: “... two human figures, confronting each other, hold up between them a baby with outstretched arms.” AHLBERG (*supra* n. 1) speaks of “two adults and a child.” HILLER (*supra* n. 1) likewise opts for a family group (“Elternpaar mit emporgehobenen Kind”). SAPORITI (*supra* n. 1) in one place speaks of a child (517: “Between the two figures, stands the small figure of a child (?) with outstretched arms”) in another - interestingly - of an idol (192: “It is possible that the small figure here is an idol”) thereby making a reference to the idol carried on one of the painted larnakes from Tanagra.

3 VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1) 30: “Is it Hektor saying farewell to Andromache and Astyanax? ... Or, by parallel with the composition on a Geometric sherd from Athens, is it Neoptolemos taking the child Astyanax from his mother to kill him?” In their appositioned footnote 5, the two authors state that, of the two, Karageorghis is the one more open to the possibility of genuinely mythological representations while Vermeule doubts it. Ahlberg declares scepticism: “The picture can, as I think, not be connected with any particular event or person.” (AHLBERG [*supra* n. 1] 15). Still, the Hektor-Andromache-Astyanax proposal seems to have influenced both Ahlberg and Hiller in thinking that the scene could be one of departure (or return: Ahlberg).

come out rather clearly, being set in profile to the right; even the detail of the projecting heel of the foot is distinguishable. Of the second leg and foot less can be made out because of the nearby break, but its position to the right of the better preserved one is secured by way of a faintly visible contour line for the posterior part of the leg. The position of the feet is horizontal. They appear on top of and contiguous with a low form, apparently also executed in silhouette, which adjoins the upper limit of the triple band. Here even the imprint is somewhat dissipated. The best traces are found below the best-preserved foot of the figure, where one can perceive the left ending, aligning with the heel of the foot. The right ending is evasive; like the right-hand foot it seems to be cut by the break. The form represents an intervening element between the limbs and the bottom of the picture-field. It clearly elevates the figure to which the limbs belong.

This finding clearly provokes a rereading of the entire scene. The main questions which should be addressed are the following:

1. First, regarding the two framing figures: to what extent can these still be taken as reciprocal, if not as father and mother? What can be discerned with regards to bodily form, dress, stance, gesturing? And what about their sex?
2. Second, regarding the central figure: if this figure is no longer a self-evident child, what are the options opened by bodily form, dress, stance, gesture? What is its sex? How should we interpret its elevated position?
3. Third, regarding the entity: what can be inferred from all the evidence when combined?

1. It is clearly seen that the two framing figures were produced by the painter from symmetrically and antithetically corresponding designs. They are not turning in the same direction, as was once, perhaps inadvertently, maintained.⁴ That the left figure turns to the right and the right one to the left can be verified by the strong curves for the back parts of the skulls, curves which are in opposite positions in the two figures. The heads show very schematic forms for hair and features. The outlines are emphasized by a rich application of dark paint that creates a semi-silhouette effect. These heads are no different from the heads of the riders in the chariots; they represent the individual choice of the painter. The jutting angles of the profiles ought to be those of nose and chin.⁵ By their position, and by the lengthened outline of the necks towards the same side, we can see that the faces are directed upwards, towards the head of the central figure. The mutual correspondence of the figures is, furthermore, marked by their approximately equal size, the similarity in general bodily form and dress, as far as these can be judged (upper parts of torsos, arms, lowest parts of legs; torso covered by a short, sleeveless garment with a pattern of crossing lines, leaving both arms and legs bare), and the comparable stance with legs well separated, likewise judging by what is preserved. Finally, we see the very same gesturing in mirror-reversed forms. One arm is depicted as a short, straight stump issueing from the contour of the upper body, its hand opened with fingers showing; the other, as a much longer unit, also directed outwards but bent at the elbow and ending in a fist-like hand without fingers showing.

The bare legs of the left-hand figure should be a reliable guide as to its sex—there are no bare-legged figures in Mycenaean art that can be identified by other criteria as female. It was obviously based on this evidence that the paternal component of the family group was established, while the maternal one appears to have been calculated from missing evidence (a long gown where the vase is damaged). However, granted the close correspondence between several, reasonably controllable points of the two framing figures of the group, and,

4 VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1) 30: “two adults ... facing left” (cf. *supra* n. 2). But contrast Karageorghis in KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1; cf. *supra* n. 2).

5 While the lower angle/chin is big and prominent in the left-hand figure, it is less so in the right-hand one; see the drawing. The impression of equally projecting lower angles/chins which the photograph may well give depends on the interference of the pattern created by the abrasion of the paint in the face of the right-hand figure.

furthermore, on the evidence of the presumable, stick-like lower leg inside the triple banding, I would contend that the right-hand figure is to be understood as a male as well.⁶

2. The central figure was designed on a smaller scale than the other two figures, judging by its upper body. The small size of the head makes for a still higher degree of schematicism in the drawing of the features; in fact the face looks like that of a strong-beaked bird. Yet we can be fairly sure that the painter's model was the same as in the case of the framing figures, since the forms of the hair, the eye and the angled profile are basically the same; the differences lie in the omission of the chin and the still wider extent of the silhouette (two things which I believe correlate).⁷ The legs just discussed also appear small-scaled in comparison to those of the framing figures.

The most distinctive part of the body as preserved is the arms. They are stretched out symmetrically, and it would seem straightly, from the upper body, one on each side. The hands are open, with fingers showing.

The head and the legs with feet turn in the same direction, i.e. rightwards. This fact, together with the way the upper body and the legs/feet correlate in position on the vertical axis as well as in size, would make it hard not to believe that they belong together, despite the seemingly unbalanced proportions of the resultant figure (cf. below). Dress and sex still have to be determined and they are not altogether easy. We cannot even say for certain whether there was a covering dress at all, for two reasons: first, because silhouette in connection with human bodies (male figures) is generally used in Mycenaean vase-painting of the LH IIIA2-B1 stage to indicate an undressed or rather a lightly-dressed state;⁸ second, because the lowest preserved part of the figure provides unclear indications, the preserved sections of bare leg being either associated with a dress that did not reach all the way down to the feet or with the lack of a garment. As for the sex, we are in a similar, not entirely clear situation. The upper body seems to be given in profile view or else in the twisted "three-quarter" view that is occasionally used for upper bodies in Mycenaean figural vase-painting.⁹ The right contour includes a slight but incontrovertible, rounded protrusion. It *may well* indicate a female breast—but we cannot say that it *clearly does*, for the contour itself is technically not wholly uniform and so not as distinct as one would wish.¹⁰

Coming finally to the rectangular form, it is most easily accounted for as a pedestal, its size adapted to the space required by the placement of the feet. The footstool alternative is less likely, since there is no space in our image for a seated person to whom the footstool and its feet would belong. Pedestals serving standing figures may be missing as yet, both in pictorial representations and in other Mycenaean archaeological material, but we can point to an extant, material pedestal for a seated figure: the low base in serpentine for the throne connected with the first megaron of the palace at Tiryns.¹¹ This base served to elevate the living *wanax* seated on it.

6 Note the correspondence in dress (pattern of crossing lines on upper bodies) as well as antithetic stance with the two figures (allegedly belt-wrestlers) on a krater from Enkomi in Nicosia by the Painter of the Baggy Hooves: VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1) 210, under item V.14; E. RYSTEDT, "On distinguishing hands in Mycenaean pictorial vase-painting," *OpAth* 18 (1990) 170-172 with fig. 2e. The actors in the, by now, well-acknowledged boxing scenes (e.g. VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS [*supra* n. 1] V.11, V.29) should also be cited. There are thus good iconographic parallels in Mycenaean pictorial vase-painting for males placed in antithetic pairs, whatever their activity.

7 Quite the similar correlation is found in the figure on foot on the opposite side of the vase (see below).

8 There are numerous examples. Among these we may cite a parasol-bearer (VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS [*supra* n. 1] III.21), four camp-stool bearers (III.2, III.13, IV.16), several bull leapers and assistants (III.31, V.48, V.50, V.51, IX.18.1) and several boxers and other presumptive contestants (boxers: V.29, V.31, V.32; on runners and spearthrowers, see E. RYSTEDT, "The foot-race and other athletic contests in the Mycenaean world. The evidence of the pictorial vases," *OpAth* 16 (1986) 103-116.

9 This view results from a combination of a profile view (one side of the body) and a frontally unfolding one (the opposite side).

10 In its actual state, the contour is in part substantial, holding paint from more than one stroke, in part faint. The protrusion appears as such chiefly by way of the repeated painting which emphasizes its roundness, but there is also a very slight overhang over the section of fainter contour that follows immediately below.

11 *The Mycenaean world. Five centuries of early Greek culture* (1988) 100, no. 29.

3. Accepting the pedestal, or an elevating element serving similarly, it is one of five points in the picture which must now be evaluated in their corporate presence. This combination of significant elements is sufficient to suggest the contents of the picture. A simple list reads as follows:

- the central figure is placed on a pedestal/elevating element;
- its arms are held out symmetrically from the body, with opened hands;
- the two framing figures are placed symmetrically in relation to it;
- their bodies are turned towards it and their faces lifted towards its head;
- the arm of each that is closest to it is directed towards it with an opened hand, in contrast to the farther arm and hand.

Next, let us survey the same matter from the point of view of pattern of activity:

-The central figure is the focus of activity. Its position is fixed, since it is connected with a pedestal/elevating element. The profile rendering of head, legs and (?)torso is likely to be a concession to pictorial convention by a painter whose overriding idea of a frontal figure is disclosed by the symmetrically outstretched arms.

-The other two figures are the active parts. The “genuine” profile in combination with widely spread legs (left-hand figure) and asymmetrical arms are indicative: these figures have the capacity to move and thereby to act physically; they may indeed have been meant to be apprehended as moving, i.e. approaching on foot. On approaching, they direct themselves to the central figure, extending one arm towards it and looking into its face.

The conclusion is imminent: this is a *ritual performance*, the central figure on the pedestal/elevating element is a *cult image* and the framing figures *worshippers in the act*. What we see fits nicely with the criteria of the asymmetrical encounter between worshipper and worshipped as Christine Morris has expounded them.¹²

Focussing on the argued cult image, it is no handy figure to be carried in processions and/or variously disposed of in sacred premises,¹³ but a *tall, elevated figure*, the placement of which one can only speculate. The image has a stature, including the elevation, that surpasses human height as represented by the worshippers: they must look upwards to see its face. In itself, the height probably bears no relationship to either age or sex; more exactly, it neither advocates nor precludes any specific age or sex of the represented figure. The combination of a long lower body with a short upper body must likewise be considered age and gender neutral, since it is a stable trait of LH IIIA2-B figural drawing; it is especially evident in the general type of silhouette figure with its emphasis on legs. Still, on studying the upper body, we must ask ourselves why the painter made its size so small in comparison to those of the two worshippers. If those figures can be assumed to represent adults, as I think is natural, then, in the case of the central figure, age *could have been* the discriminant causing its smaller proportions. Without making specific comparisons with figurines and figures, it would still be possible to say that in the Mycenaean sacred context the pattern of symmetrically divergent arms connotes femininity. In association with the possible breast, we would thus be dealing with a *tall cult image of a young female deity*, though not without question-marks for both ‘young’ and ‘female’.

As for the figures taken to be male worshippers, a very striking and close comparison is the figure on foot placed in between the antithetic teams on the opposite side of the same vase (Pl. CVd). He wears a similarly short dress (dotted) which does much to visualize his maleness. The arms are kept in the very same positions as in the other two figures, yet both hands are open. The face is not directed upwards. There are signs that this figure comes secondary in the painting process with respect to the three-figure group on the opposite side of the vase.¹⁴ He may represent a shorthand reference to the activity of that scene.¹⁵

¹² C. MORRIS, this volume.

¹³ For movable figures, see K. KILIAN, “Mykenische Heiligtümer der Peloponnes,” in *Kotinos. Festschrift für Erika Simon* (eds H. FRONING, T. HÖLSCHER and H. MIELSCH) (1992) 20-21; R. JUNG, “Kultbilder in der bronzezeitlichen Ägäis,” in *Standorte – Kontext und Funktion antiker Skulptur* (ed. K. STEMMER) (1995) 230-231. For Saporiti’s suggestion of an idol, see *supra* n. 2.

¹⁴ The evidence will be presented in my forthcoming study of the chariot scenes of the Mycenaean kraters.

¹⁵ He is not overtly involved with the horses. Yet like other figures on foot placed alongside the chariots, he has been taken as a groom: VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1) 30 (no. 18) and 198 (no.

In presenting the material I have so far dwelt on the single elements and details, without which any coming scholarly discussion will run the risk of becoming faulty. Now it is time to step back and take the whole pictorial scene into view. Clearly, what we have before us is remarkable in several ways and will need much careful consideration. What will be said at this point will only serve as *prolegomena*.

First, as regards the evidence pertaining to cult: although the material is fragmentary, it nevertheless offers *the most comprehensive view so far of a Mycenaean ritual act*. Kilian once expressed the problem of grasping Mycenaean cultic activity in the following way:¹⁶ “Die hier behandelten Funde – Architektur, Fresken, Keramik, koroplastische Arbeiten etc. – geben für sich alleine genommen keine unmittelbaren Aussagen zu einer mykenischen Religion; erst über den Kontext lassen sie sich mit archäologischen Kriterien und analytischen Methoden als Räume bzw. Objekte oder Themen in einer Beziehung zur Kultausübung zeigen.” The image on the krater from Klavdhia is exceptional in giving direct access to the ritual transaction between worshipper and worshipped, joining the two parties in a single, visual evocation. The character of the evocation—narrative rather than emblematic—vouchsafes its analysis in the perspective of actual, Mycenaean cult proceedings.¹⁷

Second, as regards the cult image: the fact that it is anthropomorphic and of considerable size, reaching higher than the worshippers, is of course highly significant in its prehistoric, Aegean setting. The image adds important material to be analysed in conjunction with the excavated sculptural material that has figured so far in discussions of iconic cult images of some (if less than human) size, foremost a few anthropoid heads of terracotta; the issue of once possibly extant images all in wood will probably also be raised again. If the picture demonstrates the existence of cult images in fixed positions, or at least positions for which an elevating element served to stabilize the location, the questions of the physical environment and the cultic context will have to be faced.¹⁸ The image will certainly inspire those who, from the perspective of the Linear B texts, are seeking Potnia, yet it should in the first place inspire those who are looking for “purposeful ritual actions”, to use Christine Morris’ words.

IV.18); AHLBERG (*supra* n. 1) 15. In recent scholarship the rather indefinite “grooms” are, however, in the process of being redefined; it is argued that they express independent activities such as running (see RYSTEDT [*supra* n. 8]). A placement close to one or more teams is in any case not sufficient for identifying a groom. Mycenaean pictorial painting was never naturalistic or illusionistic and the picture was no reproduction of something going on within a unitary space. The birds and fish that sometimes accompany the teams on the chariot kraters were not added because they had their habitat or happened to be close to where the teams moved, but because they belonged to the repertoire of pictorial motifs from which the painter could choose and mix (this is why there is no such thing as a mythological bird chasing a team on VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1) III.6, as has been maintained). In our case, the correspondence in gesturing of the figure in question with the framing figures of the three-figure group invalidates the groom identification, for these two figures, although placed by the painter so close to a team that one hand in one figure touches the reins, are not involved with the horses but with the effigy.

16 KILIAN (*supra* n. 13) 10.

17 The painted representations on the pictorial kraters are, on the whole, more in line with the distinctly narrative arts of the Bronze Age Aegean, bearing links especially to fresco painting, than with the more emblematic world of the representations on seals. The cult scenes on Minoan and Mycenaean seals (see W.-D. NIEMEIER, “Zur Ikonographie von Gottheiten und Adoranten in den Kultszenen auf minoischen und mykenischen Siegeln,” *CMS Beiheft 3* [1989] 163-186) do not, in fact, offer significant comparanda, nor does Wedde’s systematized collection of ritual gestures occurring in glyptic material (M. WEDDE, “Talking hands: a study of Minoan and Mycenaean ritual gesture—some preliminary notes,” in *MELETEMATATA* 914 with Pl. CCX).

18 On cult images generally in the Aegean world, see B. RUTKOWSKI, “Frühgriechische Kultdarstellungen,” *AthMitt*, 8. Beiheft (1981) Ch. VII. Gottheiten und Kultbilder, 107-121, esp. 110-121; and, in particular, the recent treatment by JUNG (*supra* n. 13). On anthropomorphic cult images in the Minoan sphere (negating their existence), see N. MARINATOS and R. HÄGG, “Anthropomorphic cult images in Minoan Crete?,” in *Minoan society. Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium 1981* (1983) 185-196. On correspondent images in the Mycenaean sphere, recent discussions have been scattered and issuing from the mentioned plastic fragments (the well-known heads of terracotta and ivory from Mycenae and Asine) on the one hand and the wheel-made figures of terracotta from Tiryns etc. on the other. The diversity of the potential evidence has influenced the issue. Hiller’s belief, stated in 1983, that anthropomorphic cult images of larger size doubtlessly existed in Late Mycenaean times, although they had not been preserved (S. HILLER, “Mycenaean traditions in early Greek cult images,” *OpAth* 30 [1983] 9) appears to have been grounded in his disbelief

Third, as regards the pictorial context: the representation on the krater from Klavdhia means another, very striking addition to the series of motifs with overtly religious associations that turn up on the pictorial vases, such as the processional figures and the enthroned (?)goddess/es on the Aradhippou krater, the seated (?)goddess on the Tiryns krater published by Kilian and the goddess in her sacred abode on the recently found krater from Kalavassos (Pl. CVI).¹⁹ It remains for the scholars to try to sort these remarkably divergent motifs somehow, naturally with the prime help of their respective iconographic contexts—to reach some understanding of these pictures, they indeed have to be analysed first and foremost in relation to the other figural imagery which makes up the iconographic repertoire of the Mycenaean pictorial vases.²⁰

This all means a challenge to iconographical students and students of Mycenaean religion alike.

Eva RYSTEDT

in the function of the wheel-made figures as cult images, combined with his view of these figures as reflecting an influence of (anthropomorphic) shape from larger ones; the latter, he says, may have been of wood (*ibid.*, with n. 11). Today, the wheel-made figures have come to receive recognition as a distinct category of cult image based on size + shape + technique but also on their handling and thus their functional context; on the latter point the recent research has forwarded the ambience of the procession as of particular significance (cf. KILIAN and JUNG [*supra* n. 13]). This situation should be favourable to further attempts to set off and define other types of iconic cult images which would serve different ritual contexts.

19 VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1) III.29, K. KILIAN, "Zur Darstellung eines Wagenrennens aus spätmykenischer Zeit," *AM* 25 (1980) 21-31 and L. STEEL, "Representations of a shrine on a Mycenaean chariot krater from Kalavassos-Ayios Dhimitrios, Cyprus," *BSA* 89 (1994) 201-211.

20 On the presumption that the iconographic repertoire of the Mycenaean pictorial vases forms a consistent system of imagery. The chariot motif enjoys a position of centrality; of the enumerated religious motifs, three out of four, including the one discussed here, are associated on the pots with chariots. A study of the chariot motif (cf. above n. 14) therefore opens for the interpretative analysis of the system.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. CVa-d Mycenaean chariot krater from Klavdhia, Cyprus. LH IIIA2. BM C342. Photos courtesy of the British Museum.
- Pl. CVe Detail of the same krater. Drawing by the author.
- Pl. CVI Motifs with religious associations from three Mycenaean pictorial vases from Aradhippou, Tiryns and Kalavassos: see note 19.