

WAR-SHIPS ON SHERDS OF LH III C KRATERS FROM KYNOS

Ladies and Gentlemen

Working on this paper I was astonished to find out how meagre the evidence available is as far as the real picture of Late Bronze Age ships is concerned.

When I am speaking of Late Bronze Age I have in mind mainly the correspondant period of Mainland Greece and of what we call conventionally Mycenaean period.

Though we can obtain a faint idea of how ships looked like generally during that period and we are aware from other elements that Mycenaean were involved in maritime enterprises and that seafaring must have played an important role for the expansion of Mycenaean civilization, we still cannot say much about warships.

Until now we didn't have a secure example of a war ship and the theories expressed were all based on different indications found on different items, such as vases, seals, clay models, and often of a different period.

I was lucky enough to find recently during my excavation in Pyrgos Livanaton¹ two sherds of two big kraters of LHIII C period upon which are preserved the picture of two war-ships.

Pyrgos Livanaton is a small hill at the seashore north-east of the modern village Livanates and is identified by many scholars with Kynos, the main port of Opountian Lokris, referred to by Homer². Opountian Lokris in Central Greece opposite Euboea is the homeland of Ajax and Kynos was settled by Pyrrha and Deukalion or by Lokros and the ancient writers report that on Kynos the tomb of Pyrrha was to be seen.

The sherds were found in the debris thrown into a deposit after the destruction of a building caused by fire and they were together with ashes, animal bones, shells and a very big quantity of sherds from vases dated from LHIII B2 until the middle of LHIII C periods.

The excavation is still going on and it is premature to say anything about the history of the

place.

It could be also regarded as premature the fact that I am presenting these two sherds before the other material of the excavation is studied. But I have an excuse, I think. Having in hand such an evidence as these two ships which are unique until now to my knowledge I thought and I know that it would be useful for other scientists specialized in ancient shipbuilding to be aware of these new examples.

That the ships are war ships is obvious not only because of their general characteristics but also because upon them warriors in full action are represented.

On the first sherd is preserved the right part of a ship with shallow hull³ (Photo 1).

The ship and the fighting warriors on it are not executed very skillfully but still many characteristics are exact though others aren't.

The question is what part of the ship is pictured? The prow or the stern? The absence of steering oar at this part of the ship speaks for the prow, which is raised well above the gunwale and the deck and at the end turns inward forming a horn with a small bulbous end⁴.

This feature, the high curving stem and the presence of a horn at either prow or stern or both, was thought as non existing on Mycenaean ships or that their presence was doubtful⁵. However some ships of LHIII show equally high stem and stern. Some other examples show one end higher than the other and the determination of this higher end as prow or stern it was an object of controversies among the scholars⁶.

From other examples of the same period namely that of Skyros⁷ and Asine⁸ we have the proof that prow could be higher than the stern and to my opinion at the Asine example an attempt to shape the prow like horn is to be seen⁹. Many scholars agree that the ships of geometric period have many characteristics inherited by the Late bronze Age and Sub-mycenaean ones, in other words they see a continuous development of the form from late Bronze Age ships to the geometric ones¹⁰. Since, then, the high horn shaped prows of the last ones is a standard feature fully developed why can't we suspect that such a prow existed already during the Late Bronze Age? I think that now with the help of Kynos example and taking into consideration as an intermediate example the ships on the protogeometric krater from Knossos¹¹, we are permitted to support that horn shaped prows existed on Late Bronze Age ships, and they were developed through the Early Iron Age into the form pictured by the geometric artists.

Could, otherwise, this part of the Kynos ship be the stern? We know that many LHIII ships have equal high stem and stern, and the Protogeometric ship from Knossos mentioned above shows that horn shaped could be both stern and prow. The other features of the Kynos ship don't help to decide. The structure near the prow or stern could belong to foredeck as well as to afterdeck¹². It could be a deck-house for the helmsman¹³ or a platform¹⁴ or a seat¹⁵ or a ladder to a cabin under the deck¹⁶. The man upon this structure, with his dramatic posture shows that he can't be the helmsman.

The scene which is depicted on the deck is very provoking so that one can bring in mind the description of the capture of the ship of Ajax by Hector in Iliad¹⁷ and interpret the horn shaped prow as a stern. But scientist must have more secure proofs to speak for one or another solution.

So I think that this is the prow. And the reason why, is given by a detail on it. The fringes along the inside face of the horn. The same fringes can be seen on the inner face of the prow

of the second ship (Photo 2). And same fringes decorate the shields the helmets and the border of the clothes of the warriors.

It is known that helmets of this period were made of hide either of goat, ox, hedgehog¹⁸. Also shields were made mainly of leather with the hair on the outer face of them¹⁹. Warriors used to wear a chiton of leather, a jerkin with fringed border²⁰. Some examples of these items in the mycenaean painting are rendered in the same way fringed. Also the hair of animals is usually pictured in the same way²¹.

After that do you find it non logical to interpret these fringes on the prows as covers of leather?

Leather should be to my opinion, an important material for the shipbuilders of prehistoric periods because first of all is water proof. It is otherwise accepted by many scholars that leathers were used on different parts of ancient ships²². Was then this custom of using animals' skins to cover the prow which is always the very first part of a ship that comes into the water and takes in all weathers the first shock of the waves, that was transformed to the prows decorated with animals' characteristics?

The ship on the other sherd (Photo 2) is better preserved and many of her features are already known from other examples of the same period. She is both oar and sail propelled. She has a mast fastened at the bottom of the hull. Ring at the top of the mast to suspend the forestay and two brails.

It is remarkable that the backstay is not pictured. Platforms or seats or compartments with a bulwark at both after and fore deck can be found on others examples too²³. Steering oars are to be seen often and even with a tiller like Kynos example²⁴.

What new then offers this recent find?

First the helmsman, a person that to my knowledge is for the first time appearing in the Mycenaean iconography. Then come the oarsmen again for the first time pictured. Where are they? They are sitting immediately above the gunwale facing the prow²⁵. That these are oarsmen is concluded from their position which is the same as this of the helmsman and from the fact that the number of the lines under the keel, which are obviously oars, correspond exactly to the oarsmen. The ship has 19 oars at each side and the number is not very usual but still existing²⁶. Where are the heads of the oarsmen? Not cut of course but hidden behind a zone filled with antithetic semicircles, which runs along the side of the ship. This zone that lies under the deck perhaps can be interpreted as a screen for the protection of the oarsmen. What are these semicircles? Decoration, smaller leather screens or bags²⁷ or shields²⁸. Shields slung along a rail above the gunwale can be seen on a fibula from Boeotia of geometric period and earlier on the well known reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib²⁹.

One astonishing feature of this second ship is the total absence of a ram. The stem seems to be angular like the stems of the claymodels from Athens³⁰ and Keos³¹ which also are of LHIIIC period. The small protrusion seen in the middle of the stem can't be a ram but perhaps a zoster or a belt³² or an horizontal plank which reinforced the sides, the deck and the cabins of the ship³³.

The sherd unfortunately is broken at the point where the end of the prow and of the stern were. It is however sure and can be seen that both were high enough above the deck³⁴. The prow seems to be a little thicker and more resistant than the stern a device that characterises a high level of knowledge of seafaring at that period and it was thought as a geometric

development³⁶.

But though we can't say anything about the end of the stern we can be sure how the prow looked like. A sherd from the same krater preserves the end of the prow of another ship which had an opposite direction (Photo 3). So the prow was crowned by a bird's head whose beak turns upwards like a horn. If this is a bird's head or a monster or a hippocampus cannot be decided but since the existence of bird shaped prows in the Aegean tradition as early as Early Minoan period³⁶ and through the whole Bronze Age³⁷ is testified, it is likely to describe this prow as bird shaped³⁸.

I think that you agree that much time would be needed to discuss every detail of these ships and the problems arisen by them are worth for deeper and more detailed elaboration.

For the moment and assuming the evidence given by these new sherds we can be guided to the following conclusions.

First that there existed war-ships in Late Bronze Age with distinguishable characteristics and function.

Second the presence of the oarsmen and above them the warriors engaged with military actions or fighting on the first sherd presupposes the existence of a kind of deck, which means that war-ships of Mycenaean period were not totally undecked.

Third the absence of the ram, means that actually war ships of Mycenaean period did not have rams and consequently they did not know the function of the ram for the naval battle.

When projections like rams are to be seen on other examples, there is nothing but an extension of the keel and it has to do with ship building techniques and it was not a normal equipment of war ships having nothing to do with the tactic of naval battle at that time.

Fourth Naval battles took place in Mycenaean period and this is proved by the presence of the opposite ship on the krater of Kynos upon which warriors in attacking position are pictured. That the ships were in battle situation is also proved by the fact that helmsman and the oarsmen are at their place and the sail is taken down²⁵.

Fifth the war-ships had high prows and sterns, hornshaped, a feature that until now was thought as characteristic of geometric ships only and the description of Homer of ορθοκραί-ράων νῆων or κορωνία νηυσί was believed as suiting to the ships of geometric period.

Now that we have the evidence that horn shaped prows existed already in the 12th century and the war-ships of this period didn't have rams, Homer sounds trustworthy describing ships of the Achaeans and not of his time.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Sherd of LH IIIC krater with part of a ship.
2. Part of a LH IIIC krater with a ship.
3. Part of LH IIIC krater with the prow of a ship and a warrior.

NOTES

1. F. Dakoronia, Kynos, *Deltion* 40, 1985 (under press) *Deltion* 41, 1986 (under press) *Deltion* 42, 1987 (under press) *Deltion* 43, 1988 (under press).
2. *Ilias* B, 531 W. Oldfather Kynos *R.E.* 29. A. Philippson, *Die Griechischen Landschaften* 1, 2, 348, 360. W. K. Pritchett, East Lokris revisited, *Studies in ancient Greek Topography*, V, 79ff.
3. Ships of small height are believed as suitable for war, Cecil Torr, *Ancient Ships*, Chicago 1954, 20.
4. Such a bulbous end is observed at the stern post of the ship pictured on a pyxis from Pylos. K. Kourouniotis, *AE* 1914, 107ff. figs 13-15. E. Vermeule - V. Karageorgis, *Mycenaean Pictorial Vase Painting*, Harvard 1982, 144ff, 224, XI 92.
5. D. Gray, *Seewesen*, *Arch. Hom.* I. G. Göttingen 1974, 57, 95, 137. J. S. Morrison - R. T. Williams, *Greek Oared Ship*, Cambridge 1968, 38.
6. So Gray states that the stern was higher than the prow s.a. *Seewesen*, 54, The same opinion has Kirk s. G. Kirk, *Ships on geometric Vases*, *B.S.A.* 44, 1949, 118, 125-127. Casson on the contrary has the opinion that the Bronze Age ships had a lofty prow. s. L. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in Ancient World*, Princeton 1971, 39.
7. s.a. Gray, *Seewesen*, fig 15C. Vermeule - Karagiorgis s.a. 145, 225, X195. L. Parlama, Η Σκύρος στην Εποχή του Χαλκού *Aθήνα* 1984, 146ff, plates 31-32 figs 62-64.
8. O. Frödin - A. Persson, *Asine*, Stockholm 1938, 300, fig 207;2. Morrison - Williams s.a. pl. lc.
9. Frödin - Persson s.a. 301. Morrison - Williams s.a. 10, BA3. Casson s.a. 32, Kirk s.a. 117, Gray s.a. 53.
10. Kirk s.a. 95, 135. Morrison - Williams s.a.44. Lucien Basch: *Le musée imaginaire de la Marine Antique*, Athènes 1987, 148.
11. Gray s.a. 21,1 Abb. 16a.
12. Morrison - Williams s.a. 44. Kourouniotis s.a. fig 13-15. Basch s.a. fig. 298.
13. Torr s.a. 57-58.
14. Casson s.a. 51.
15. Torr s.a. 57.
16. Sp. Marinatos, La marine-Créto-mycénienne, *BCH* 57, 1933, 195.
17. *Ilias* XV, 716-717.
18. Jürgen Borchhardt: Helme in *Arch. Homeric* I, E1, 58 & 66 Vermeule-Karageorgis s.a. 217, fig. X31, 220 Fig XI, 1B, 222 fig XI, 45, 222 fig X157. A. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks*, 1976, 31-32.
19. Heide Borchhardt: Frühe griechische Schieldformen in *Arch. Hom I*, E1 2&9. H. Lorimer, *Homer and the monuments*, London 1950, 195.
20. H. W. Catling: Pawzer in *Arch. Hom.* I. E1, 105. Vermeule-Karageorgis s.a. 222 fig, X142. 223 fig X1, 59 220 fig X10, 1A.
21. Vermeule - Karageorgis s.a. 220 fig X1, 21.
22. Fik. Meijer; *A history of seafaring in the Classical World*, London 1986, 5. Basch s.a. 70, 73.
23. Perhaps the Homeric "ικρία" (*Ilias* XV, 435). Basch s.a. 142 fig. 298 Gray s.a. 20 No 56.
24. For example on the ship of the pyxis Tragana s.a. footnote 23.
25. The opinion that from about 1250 B.C. crews are represented rowing with their faces towards the stern (Cecil Torr, *Ancient Ships*, Chicago 1954, 2) is not based on real examples since we don't have representations of oarsmen oaring from LHIII-B-C period. Meijer has a different opinion s.a. 14.
26. Casson s.a. 54.
27. Torr s.a. 43 & 52. The practice is known from the Athenian ships of classical period. Even by Homer are referred such screens (*Odys.* V, 256-57). Also Casson s.a. 48. Kirk s.a. 138.
28. Kirk s.a. 137. Basch s.a. 180.
29. See above footnote (28).
30. *Hesperia* 8, 1939, 407 fig. 89v. Gray s.a. 53, Taf. Gic.
31. *Hesperia* 31, 1962, 273, pl. 99f. Gray s.a. 53, Taf. Gld.
32. Torr s.a. 40 footnote 99, fig 20-23 & 26 & 29. Basch s.a. 199 fig 420.
33. Basch s.a. 199 fig 420.
34. Gray s.a. 54. Morrison - Williams s.a.8
35. Casson s.a. 49.
36. Ι. Σακελλαράκης: Ελεφάντινον πλοίον εκ Μικηνών, *AE* 1971, 211 κε Εικ. 10.
37. Σακελλαράκης s.a. 216, Parlama s.a. 196 pl. 31-32 figs 62-64.
38. Similar "bird" shaped is the end of the prow on the ship of Tragana, which is interpreted as ακροστόλιον by Korres s. G. Korres: Νέαι παρατηρήσεις επί της παραστάσεως πλοίου της ΥΕΙΙΙ Γ 1/2 πυξίδος εκ Τραγάνας Πύλου, *Τροπικ* 1, 1989, 188.
39. s.a. foot note.



FIG. 1



FIG. 3



FIG. 2