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The dog pursuit scenes from Tell el Dab^ca and Kea

Nanno Marinatos and Lyvia Morgan

THE DOG PURSUIT SCENE FROM TELL EL DAB^cA

Nanno Marinatos

There exist several hunting scenes from Tell el Dab^ca which include lions and leopards, wild goats, bulls and other ungulates, human hunters and dogs with collars. Here one large fragment (F 33) will be treated, PLATE 15.1.¹ Its narrative context is not yet understood but the fragment is large enough to merit a reconstruction, even at this stage of the work.

Two large animals (probably wild goats but they could also be wild antelopes) are pursued by a dog. The body and legs of the prey animals are grey, outlined in black, exactly as on the antelopes from Thera, Room B 1.² The reason we could not determine with certainty whether the ungulates are antelopes or goats is because both animals have the same distinctive markings on their bodies and legs. Compare with the ungulate from the faience material of the Temple Repositories Knossos.³ All in all, the Minoans took liberties especially with the horns, as we can tell by comparing the goats from the Temple Repositories with those in glyptic scenes.⁴ Since glyptic scenes show goats being pursued by dogs most frequently, we opted for the wild goat alternative for our animals.

A bit of a horn is preserved against the body of one of the Tell el Dab^ca animals. It was curved and blue. There is no head left, but it is almost certain that both heads were turned backwards, the animals facing their pursuer. This posture is in fact formulaic. It occurs on seals,⁵ on a gold plaque from the Shaft Graves⁶ where a lion chases a goat, etc. Another representation of a goat with its head turned comes from a fragmentary seal impression from the Temple Repositories at Knossos.⁷ The turned head can be seen as a convention for the pursued and defeated, as though the animal wants to know its killer, or better yet, to rebuff the predator with its horns.

The first animal of the Tell el Dab^ca painting, on the left edge of the fragment, was clearly broken down. His hoofs are well preserved and they show that it was in a kneeling position. As no dog is evident, it is likely that it was struck by a missile.

To the right, and overlapping the broken down ungulate, is a second one. His front legs are well preserved

and upright. His body, however, rises upwards and he must have been in a flying gallop. His head is not preserved but it is likely that it was turned backwards for the reasons explained above. The fleeing animal is bitten by a large grey dog of which only the silhouette, the forepaws and red collar are preserved. The latter is important because it shows the position of the neck. Red blood is trickling from the victim's wound.

Below the animals is a landscape. The terrain is rocky; the rocks are oval, painted blue highlighted with green, which has now turned into black, like the leaves of the plants. There is quite a lot of undulation suggesting uneven ground hills. Plants are growing from the soil. They originally must have had blue/green leaves with red stalks. Now the leaves are black, due to the discoloration produced by chemical reactions with the soil.

It is possible that men also featured in this scene since the dog has a collar and should have been accompanied by a master, but no human figure in a scale matching the animals has as yet been identified.

The closest parallels for our scenes are furnished by glyptic art. On a seal from Crete, dated by Evans to MM II, a goat in flying gallop is bitten by a dog.⁸ On a seal from Koukounara near Pylos, the same pattern is repeated but the goat's horns are different.⁹ A dog attacking a goat occurs on a seal found at Mycenae.¹⁰ The goat turns to face the dog who is biting its body. This representation is a good parallel for the Tell el Dab^ca painting because of the turned head of the victim and because the dog bites its victim in approximately the same spot.

1 Bietak 1995a, pl. 4, 1. See also Morgan 1995a, 36.

2 Doumas 1992, pls. 82–4.

3 *PM* I fig. 366.

4 For discussion of these animals in Aegean art see Morgan 1988, 41–67.

5 *CMS* I no. 372; V no. 656; V Suppl. 1A no. 105; V Suppl. 1B no. 74; XIII no. 71.

6 Marinatos and Hirmer 1960, pls. 198–9.

7 Pini 1990, pl. VI a = *CMS* II.8 no. 530.

8 *PM* I 716, fig. 539 c; *CMS* VII no. 35.

9 *CMS* V Suppl. 1B no. 190.

10 *CMS* V Suppl. 1B no. 74.

The Minoans evidently did not shrink from showing the moment of attack which can also be deduced from the numerous seals showing men with collared dogs, or scenes of goats pursued by dogs. However, none of the glyptic scenes can render the sense of drama that the painting imparts. The red blood, dripping from the animal's wound cannot leave the spectator unaffected.

Turning now to further comparanda in glyptic art, it is noteworthy that dogs can be shown as either companions of their masters or as sole protagonists of the chase. Of great interest is a hunting scene on a seal-impression from Palaikastro where two dogs attack a large goat, the first from the front, the second from the back.¹¹ A man (or is he a god?) looms large in the background, perhaps holding a missile and extending his arm in a gesture of command. Whatever his nature, he is the master, at the top of the hierarchy, the dogs being under his command.¹² Also impressive in its execution is the seal (impression) from Chania, where a hunter is trying to control his dog.¹³

Other examples include bull, dog and hunter,¹⁴ ungulate and dog,¹⁵ solitary dog,¹⁶ hunter, goat and dog,¹⁷ two hunters, a lion and a dog.¹⁸

Finally, we have hunters without dogs in Minoan iconography, as when a hunter steps on the belly of a huge defeated up-side-down goat.¹⁹ Ring and seal impressions from the Temple Repositories, Knossos, also furnish us with related scenes. We conclude that hunters and dogs were firmly embedded in the repertoire of Aegean iconography and it should be stressed that several of the glyptic scenes discussed above *originate in Crete* itself. The Tell el Dab^a paintings confirm what had already been suggested by the seals, namely that hunting iconography is embedded in *Minoan tradition and is not a Mycenaean invention*.

THE DOG PURSUIT SCENE FROM KEA

Lyvia Morgan

Amongst the miniature wall paintings of Ayia Irini, Kea, is a scene of white dogs in pursuit of fallow deer (PLATE 15.2). The scene is presented here by way of comparison with the dog pursuit scene recently discovered at Tell el Dab^a.

As Nanno Marinatos points out, both dogs and the hunt, though long associated with Mycenaean art, have a Minoan tradition, in glyptic art in particular.²⁰ It was apparently a less popular theme for the Cretans than the mainlanders, as the imagery of the Shaft Grave art and the wall paintings of Tiryns, Orchomenos and Pylos remind us, and it was never such an integral part of iconographic cycles of paintings as it was in Egypt, yet the tradition was shared. What is particularly interesting in the dog pursuit scenes from Tell el Dab^a and Kea is that they are the earliest extant wall paintings of this theme by Aegean artists. Since they are virtually contemporary in date, a comparison is worthwhile.

The miniature friezes were painted around the walls of a large hall (N.20), the windows of which would have afforded a clear view of the entrance to the settlement, the harbour and the coastal land.²¹ The scenes are alive with activity: women in the settlements, men in procession, dancing, climbing over rocks or near water, cooking in large cauldrons, bringing the kill from a hunt, propelling boats and ships. Numerous (fragmentary) animals may be part of a herding scene, horses are associated both with settlements and a chariot. The setting is a rich tapestry of landscape, unparalleled in its complexity: the sea and coast, a riverine landscape and marshy land with riverlets, various plants and multi-coloured rocks, blue sky with billowing clouds. The hunter has captured a deer, which hangs lifeless from a pole; he walks near the chariot and horses in the direction of the cauldron scene, presumably delivering the main delicacy of the feast for the festival which the paintings celebrate. The hunter came from the south-west part of the room, moving eastwards towards the cauldrons. The dog pursuit scene came from the west wall and the protagonists move towards (i.e. behind) the hunter.

Despite the rich settings of the paintings, the scene of dogs pursuing deer is devoid of any landscape details. It is painted on a plain yellow ochre background. The scale of the animals is larger than that of the rest of the miniature scenes. The pursuit is therefore somewhat set aside from the rest, and one is reminded of the miniature hunt scene from Thera, in which cat and griffin hunt birds and deer.²² Though these animals are set in a lush riverine landscape, this scene too is set aside from the rest of the miniatures in that the landscape is different and the animals are again on a larger scale. I speculate that the reason is the same in both cases: that the scene is thought of as taking place beyond the vision of the eye. At Kea, while feasting, festivities, buildings and ships could all most likely have been seen from the windows of the painted room (which I think was a banqueting hall), a deer hunt, had it taken place, would have been beyond the settlement. The landscape of the paintings is closely reflected in the bay, marshy coast and (now dried-up) river bed immediately next

11 CMS V Suppl. 1B no. 341.

12 See also Pini 1992, pl. I, e = CMS II.8 no. 236.

13 CMS V Suppl. 1A no. 174.

14 CMS II. 3 no. 9.

15 CMS XIII 71.

16 CMS II.3 no. 160.

17 CMS V no. 656.

18 CMS XI no. 33.

19 PM IV 577, fig. 559.

20 Cf. Morgan 1995a, 34.

21 Morgan 1998b. Final publication of the miniature paintings will appear in a volume of the *Keos* series: Morgan in preparation.

22 Doumas 1992, pls. 30–34; Morgan 1988, 146–50 (deer: 54–6).

to the settlement, and the marshes of Kea had wild animals in them until as recently as 40 years ago.

The question of landscape is, however, circumstantial, since the paintings are fragmentary and it could be that it is simply an accident of preservation that the pieces of the hunt are devoid of vegetation, water or rocks. It will be noted that the Tell el Dab^a hunt is also painted on a yellow ochre ground and had the fragment in PLATE 15.1 been broken higher up, that too would have appeared to be on a plain ground. Yet from this and other hunt pieces, it is clear that a landscape setting has been provided. The question of scale, however, is more conclusive, and it is interesting to note that at Tell el Dab^a, as at Kea and Thera, the animals of the hunt scene are on a somewhat larger scale than other scenes. Only at Tell el Dab^a do there appear to be hunters directly associated with the hunt, at Kea the narrative is sequential — a hunter has killed his prey and is bringing it to the cooks — and at Thera the hunt is devoid of human intervention.

What is specific to these scenes from Kea and Tell el Dab^a is that the predators are dogs. The prey are, in both scenes, ungulates: goats or antelope at Tell el Dab^a, fallow deer at Kea. At Tell el Dab^a, the dogs are not the only predators, lions and leopards form an important part of the composition. At Kea, the dogs are the only attackers. In both, the presence of man the hunter is implied by the dogs and confirmed by their existence elsewhere in the scenes. This presence is made explicit in the Tell el Dab^a scene by the inclusion of a red collar around the neck of the dog.

The first question to ask is why fallow deer are portrayed in the Kea scene, and goat/antelope in the one from Tell el Dab^a. The next question is whether there is any notable difference in the portrayal of the dog.

That the animals in the Kea painting are fallow deer is evident from the coloration and spots. The pubic tuft on one of the animals clearly indicates a male fawn, but the others (there are further fragments beyond those in PLATE 15.2) could be either fawns or does in summer. There are no antlers amongst the fragments, but the adult male sheds his antlers each April. The white underbelly and the spots indicate a summer coat (May–October) in the adult, or a juvenile.²³ A summer setting is therefore indicated, no doubt the season in which the hunt was most favoured. As so often in Aegean painting, the animal is therefore closely observed. Whether or not fallow deer existed on the Cycladic islands in the Bronze Age is a moot point, but that it did elsewhere in Greece and was the chief prey in the drama of the hunt in Aegean art is not in doubt.

In contrast, deer were apparently rare in ancient Egypt and there are relatively few representations of them in either offering or hunting scenes from the 4th to the mid-18th dynasty, when they disappear altogether.²⁴ The painting from Tell el Dab^a is indisputably Aegean in idiom, iconography and technique, yet a characteristic of both the Tell el Dab^a paintings and those

from the Aegean, is that the artists were always careful to include species of animals and plants which would be at home in the setting of their physical space. The plants and animals in the Tell el Dab^a paintings are all familiar to the artistic vision of Aegean painters; equally, they are at home in Egypt. Notably, there are no crocuses — a favourite of Minoan painters but not part of the indigenous flora of Egypt. However, some fallow deer fragments survive from the paintings; my study of them began while this book was in press.

The dogs are similarly distinguished, although the fragmentary nature of both paintings makes the comparison incomplete. Both dogs are slender with long legs and narrow muzzle, of greyhound type, akin to the most common varieties in Egypt, the *tesem*, which has pricked ears and curled tail, and the *saluki*, which has drop ears and loose tail.²⁵ The ears of the Kea dogs have not survived, but may, like that from Tell el Dab^a, be at intermediate height, applicable to either but more characteristic of the prick ears, stretching back as the animal rushes forward. The curved but loose tail identifies the Kea dog as a greyhound (which has pricked ears but loose tail) or *saluki*. In the Tell el Dab^a fragment the tail is missing, but other fragments of the painting display a tightly curled tail of the *tesem*. These varieties were used in Egypt for hunting in the desert, the *tesem* being popular in the Old Kingdom, *saluki* in the New Kingdom. Greyhounds, though less popular, appear with both other types in Middle Kingdom paintings.

What distinguishes the Tell el Dab^a dog from that of Kea, is the markings — black on white — and the collar. Both features are common in Egyptian paintings and in later Mycenaean paintings but are absent at Kea. Again, it is likely that the painter wanted the dogs to be recognisable as types to an Egyptian as well as an Aegean observer, and has modified accordingly.

The dogs in both paintings are in ‘flying gallop’, a characteristically Aegean animal movement, based in reality on the feline run but applied indiscriminately to all quadrupeds. In deference to the realities of animal movement, in the Kea fragment the dog is in a wider gallop than the deer. In the Tell el Dab^a fragments the goats/antelopes have already been felled, one standing still, the other collapsing on to its forelegs. In both cases, the dog springs forward to bite the underbelly of the deer, almost there in the case of Kea, triumphantly drawing blood in the case of Tell el Dab^a. Both of these features — the flying gallop and the underbelly bite — are specifically Aegean.

Painters from the Aegean and Egypt clearly exchanged ideas, viewed one another’s work, adopted and adapted motifs in a spirit of international exchange.

23 Walker *et al.* 1975, 1387.

24 Osborn and Osbornová 1998, 153–4.

25 Osborn and Osbornová 1998, 59–66.

Yet the language of art was shared only on certain levels, in scenes which are not restricted by specific religious iconography to a particular time and place but which, like the hunt, pertain to life experiences. It was, therefore, perfectly possible for the painter of the dog pursuit scene at Tell el Dab'a to create a picture as much at home in Egypt as in the Aegean yet in specifically Aegean idiom.

These two paintings, of the same period but from widely different geographical locations, provide a clear example of a shared tradition. One in which Aegean artists working far afield from the epicentre of Minoan culture and from one another, use a common language of themes and idioms; a language which is adaptable according to the location of the painting, yet remains recognisably Aegean.