

PLAYING BY THE RULES: SWORDS AND SWORDFIGHTERS IN THE MYCENAEAN SOCIETY

ALEXANDRA ȚÂRLEA

When the problem of Mycenaean swords is discussed, three functions are usually considered: military activity, social life, and cult. In other words a rapier could play the role of a weapon, a prestige item, or an object used in cult activities. Naturally, such a statement raises a series of questions. Are all these possible dimensions of the sword really active? If they are not, which one is in use in the Mycenaean society? If they are, are all three of them of equal importance or not? And again, can it be established which one is prevalent and why? This kind of questions doesn't have always easy answers.

It must also be emphasized from the beginning that the specialists have not arrived yet at a real agreement on this subject; because either they are not ready to accept the existence of this plurality of functions for the Mycenaean sword, or they have different points of view regarding the prevalence of one or another of these functions. So, the aim of this paper is to bring together all the categories of information available at this moment on the subject and try to reach some useful conclusions.

The sword as a weapon

One fact that can be noticed is how often doubts are expressed with regard to the qualities of this type of sword as weapon. These cover a whole scale, from total rejection of a successful use in battle of such a sword to an unwilling acceptance of the martial aspect, but with reserves for their efficiency. Maybe this wouldn't be so surprising if it didn't come in contradiction with a statement on which everybody agrees: the fact that the sword represents the first weapon to serve exclusively the war.¹ In this way the rejection of the martial dimension of the Mycenaean sword leads in fact to the negation of the primordial quality of this category of objects.

Anyway, it must be reminded here that not only the Late Bronze Age rapiers from the Aegean have their martial function put under question, but also the Late Bronze Age European swords are sometimes declared unfit for battle, the idea of the ritual war being advanced. Analyzing the situation for Central Europe, K. Kristiansen denounces this "cultural prejudice", emphasizing that the results of experimental archaeology are often ignored. In order to sustain his opinion, he demonstrates through empirical observation of some hundreds of pieces that the LBA swords are functional and efficient weapons.²

Unfortunately, there are not similar studies on the swords from the Aegean, at least not to the extent of Kristiansen's work on the cut-and-thrust and slashing swords of Central Europe. So, we depend only upon the information we have so far: the features which tend to individualize the rapiers (thrusting swords) in comparison with other sword types; the way in which the Mycenaean society perceives their role (with the help of the iconography and literary sources).

Of course, such an approach leaves place to many interpretations and hypotheses. The rapiers are considered as either prestige objects, never to be used in real fights, or the different types are analysed separately. It exists a tendency to consider the type A sword very impractical as a weapon, the type B coming as an attempt to improve it and make it more suited for the battlefield.³ But there is also another

¹ A.D. Alexandrescu, SCIV, 7, 1956, 3–4, p. 238; R.Osgood, S.Monks & J.Toms, *Bronze Age Warfare*, Oxford, 2001, p. 123.

² K. Kristiansen, OJA, 21, 2002, 4, p. 319–320.

³ A.M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks*, London, 1982 (first print 1967), p. 16.

opinion, that these swords, no matter their type, are combining the functions of a weapon and a prestige good, to which, at least for the type A, a cultic dimension can be added.⁴ Even more, in some cases some of the rapier types are thought to be the only weapons able to indicate a true martial activity, like the types C and D in the vision of J. Driessen and C. Macdonald: “In this paper, which discusses LM II–IIIA swords and warrior graves from the whole Aegean, only men buried with ‘horned’ (types C and G) and ‘cruciform’ (type D) swords and dirks will be called warriors, since these are the only weapons we can be sure were made primarily for combat”.⁵

To begin our discussion on the martial character of the Mycenaean rapier, it should be seen if there are such weaknesses in its construction as to lead to its disqualification as a weapon.

The reproach in the case of *the type A swords* (Fig. 1, a, b) is that they have a fatal weakness in the hafting system: being protected only by fragile organic hilt-plates, the narrow and quite short tang presents a high risk of breaking, leaving the warrior unarmed.⁶ More, the exaggerate length of the blade is thought to reduce the sword’s practical value, existing the danger of breaking into pieces, after a lateral blow.⁷

The type B swords (Fig. 1, c, d) are perceived as more fit for battle, thanks to their smaller size, their wider breadth, their hafting system including rivets and flanged borders; but it is also considered that the rivet-holes are too big, leaving the metal weaker and more liable to break.

Closely examining the hafting methods of the type B swords and daggers, J.R. Weinstein comes with some interesting conclusions. She agrees to the fact that the defining features of this type – the long, broad, sometimes flanged tang and the square, flanged shoulders – are significant technological innovations, to become standard features for later swords and daggers (types C–H, after Sandars). Still, at a more careful examination of the type B weapons from Mycenae, Weinstein notices some technological deficiencies, resulting exactly from the way the hafting is made. At the type A swords, with unflanged shoulders and flat tang, the one-piece plate comes down and grips the tang and the shoulder. At the type B swords, the grip contains two hilt-plates which keep in the middle the tang and the shoulder (“sandwich” style), the plates being in their turn framed by the flanges. Coming down straight over the shoulders, the grip is fixed with the help of the rivets.

From the point of view of the grip’s form and the rivets’ arrangement on the shoulders, two groups can be noticed. The first includes weapons having the haft like a reversed T, fastened on the shoulder with a row of three rivets. The second includes weapons with the haft in the form of an “arrow”, which demands the presence of a fourth rivet centrally placed under the row of three. The first type of hafting seems to be characteristic for the long swords with midrib (type B rapiers), the other for shorter, flatter blades (type B daggers). This means that the difference between the two hafting systems can be explained on the basis of technical considerations only. A long blade needs a strong midrib, and the grip must be adapted to its presence. In the meantime, the grip must outrun the shoulder as much as possible, making the junction stronger. This way, the type B swords have a problem, because their grip can’t surpass the midrib, the result being that the midrib must start lower than the hilt-plates. From this perspective the sword-makers have two possibilities: either the midrib starts as low as possible, which implies the existence of a weak point in the area between the shoulder and the blade; or the grip starts as high as possible, leaving place for the midrib, but weakening the overlapping of the grip on the shoulder. The craftsmen choose to give up to the fourth rivet, in order to shorten the grip’s overlapping on the shoulder and to allow the midrib to start higher. Weinstein considers that the resulted weakness makes the type B swords so unpopular outside Mainland Greece.⁸ It seems probable that the high variation in the hafting system and midrib’s general aspect noticed inside this type shows exactly the attempt to correct this problem.⁹

⁴ I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, in R. Hägg, G. Nordquist (eds.), *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid*, 1990, p. 157.

⁵ J. Driessen & C. MacDonald, *BSA*, 79, 1984, p. 56.

⁶ N.K. Sandars, *AJA*, 67, 1963, p. 117.

⁷ A.M. Snodgrass, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁸ J.R. Weinstein, *TUAS*, 6, 1981, p. 48–49.

⁹ It can be noticed that, despite the fact the type B has the smallest number of representatives, the variation inside the group is the highest.

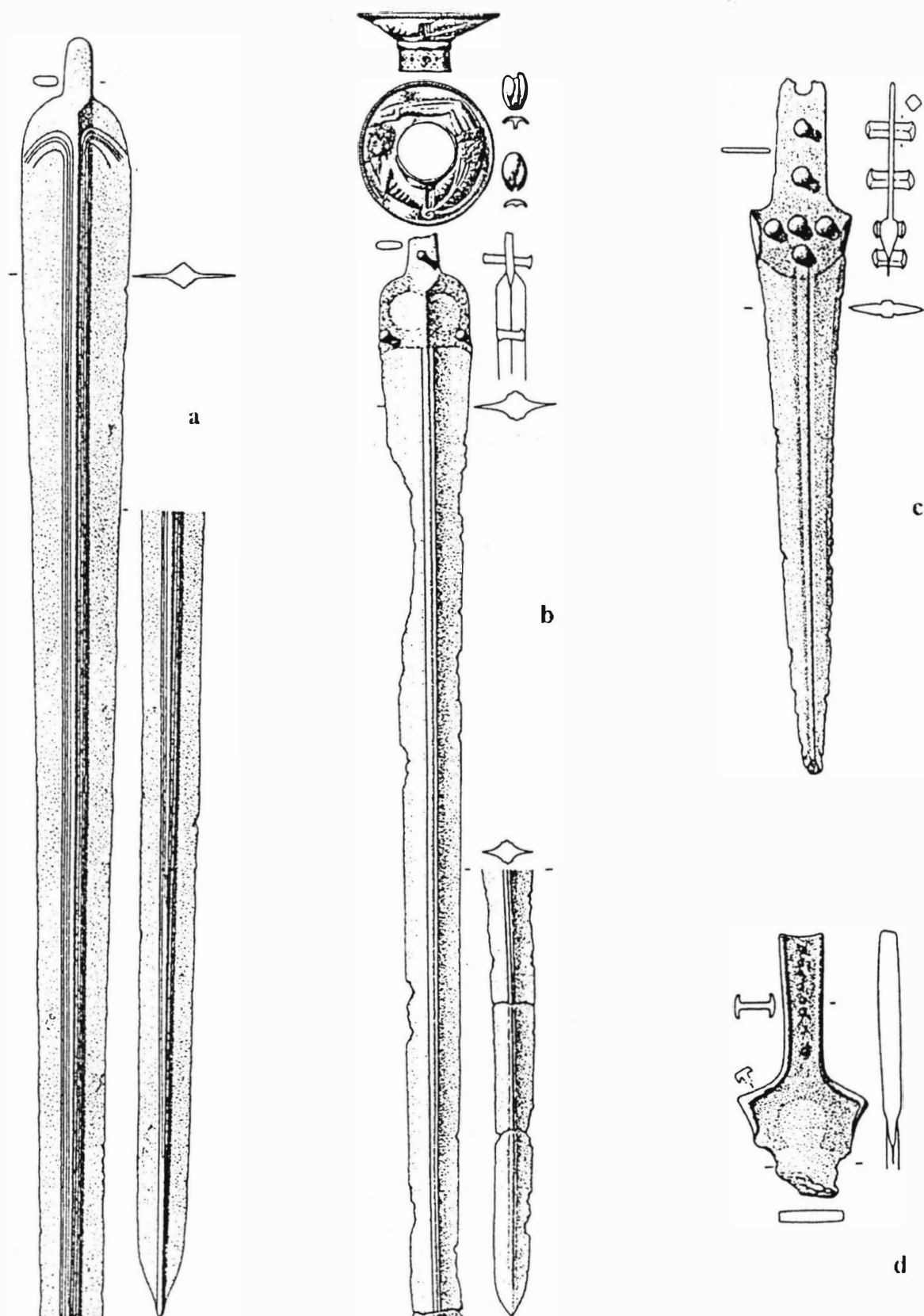


Fig. 1. a) Type A sword from Arkalochori, Crete; b) Type A sword from Mallia, Crete; c) Type B sword from Kameiros, Rhodes; d) Type B sword from Thera (after Kilian-Dirlmeier, PBF IV, 12, nos. 24, 33, 47, 48). Scale 1:3.

The later Aegean sword types, C and D (Fig. 2, a-c), are considered usually as being just the result of the experiments made in order to improve the older sword types. The C and D types seem to be a lucky combination of the best features of type A and B swords: long, broad, flanged tangs and flanged shoulders from the type B; the superior hafting system of the type A (giving up the fourth rivet; the presence of the hilt-plate opening, permitting the midrib to start higher). These two later types, the “horned” and the “cruciform” ones, are seen as more appropriate for battle. As further arguments for this point of view stand their smaller size and the enhanced protection of the fighter’s hand, by adopting the “horned”, respective “cruciform”, guard.

In my opinion, all these discussions on the qualities and (especially) weaknesses of the rapiers lead sometimes to confusions or rather to the conviction that their weak points disqualify them as *weapons* from the start. I suggest that this situation can disqualify them rather as *efficient* weapons, and this is a different matter.

Obviously, interest is put also in determining the rapiers’ efficiency in battle. On the one hand, it is considered that, because of the blade’s excessive length compared to the grip, these swords are unbalanced. On the other hand, the narrowness of their cutting-edges and the height of their midrib could permit the swordfighter only to provoke some bruises on his enemy’s body. In fact, Schliemann is the first to notice that the rapier blades – very long, extremely narrow, with prominent midrib – make them no slashing weapons. It is clear that they can be used only as thrusting weapons. But, in this way, given the extreme narrowness of the blade, they are able to provoke only very narrow wounds. That’s why it is thought that the probability to leave the vital organs undamaged is pretty high. In order to be really efficient, a thrust must be deep and precise.¹⁰

Sometimes a conclusion is reached, that all these characteristics and weaknesses are the reason for the abandon of the Aegean rapiers in favor of the slashing swords coming from Central and South-Eastern Europe. It is believed that the adoption of the new type of sword (Naue II) represents in fact the adoption of a new way of fighting, of a new tactics. Its superiority seems to be proved by the quickness of the adoption, as well as by the number of experiments made on the Aegean sword, in an attempt to make it equally efficient.¹¹

After considering the main points of view on the subject, I would like to continue with an *analysis of the swords* themselves (from the hafting system to the tip), in an attempt to review their weak points and strong points.

Starting with the *hafting system*, the almost general consensus seems to be that it presents a lot of deficiencies, in the tang and rivets (their size and position). As regards the tang, it is seen as too fragile and short to cope with the shocks received during a battle. The fact that, when swords are excavated, they often have their tangs broken or damaged can be a serious argument. But we mustn’t forget that usually it is impossible to say if the damage was produced before or after the deposition of the sword. It is quite logical to presume that, at least in some cases, the chemical and physical action of the soil, as well as other kinds of interventions, played their role. The same reason can be invoked when the riveted area is found damaged.

Finally, the grip is considered unfit for battle in its whole: too short in its upper part to be convenient for the warrior’s fist;¹² too short as an overlapping on the blade, in comparison to the latest excessive length; too fragile, because of the hilt-plates made of organic materials.

As for the *blade*, it is clear that its cutting-edges are too narrow to permit lateral strikes, which would be stopped anyway by the high midrib. The result is that the only possible blows are the thrusting ones, but these are seen as having uncertain results and being hazardous for the person who applies them. Even more, the blade’s excessive length would lead to a lack of balance and a higher risk of breaking at a strong impact.

¹⁰ A. Harding, in J. Carman, A. Harding (eds.), *Ancient Warfare. Archaeological Perspectives*, 1999, p. 166.

¹¹ N.K. Sandars, *OJA*, 2, 1983, p. 44.

¹² K. Kristiansen, *OJA*, 21, 2002, 4, p. 320.

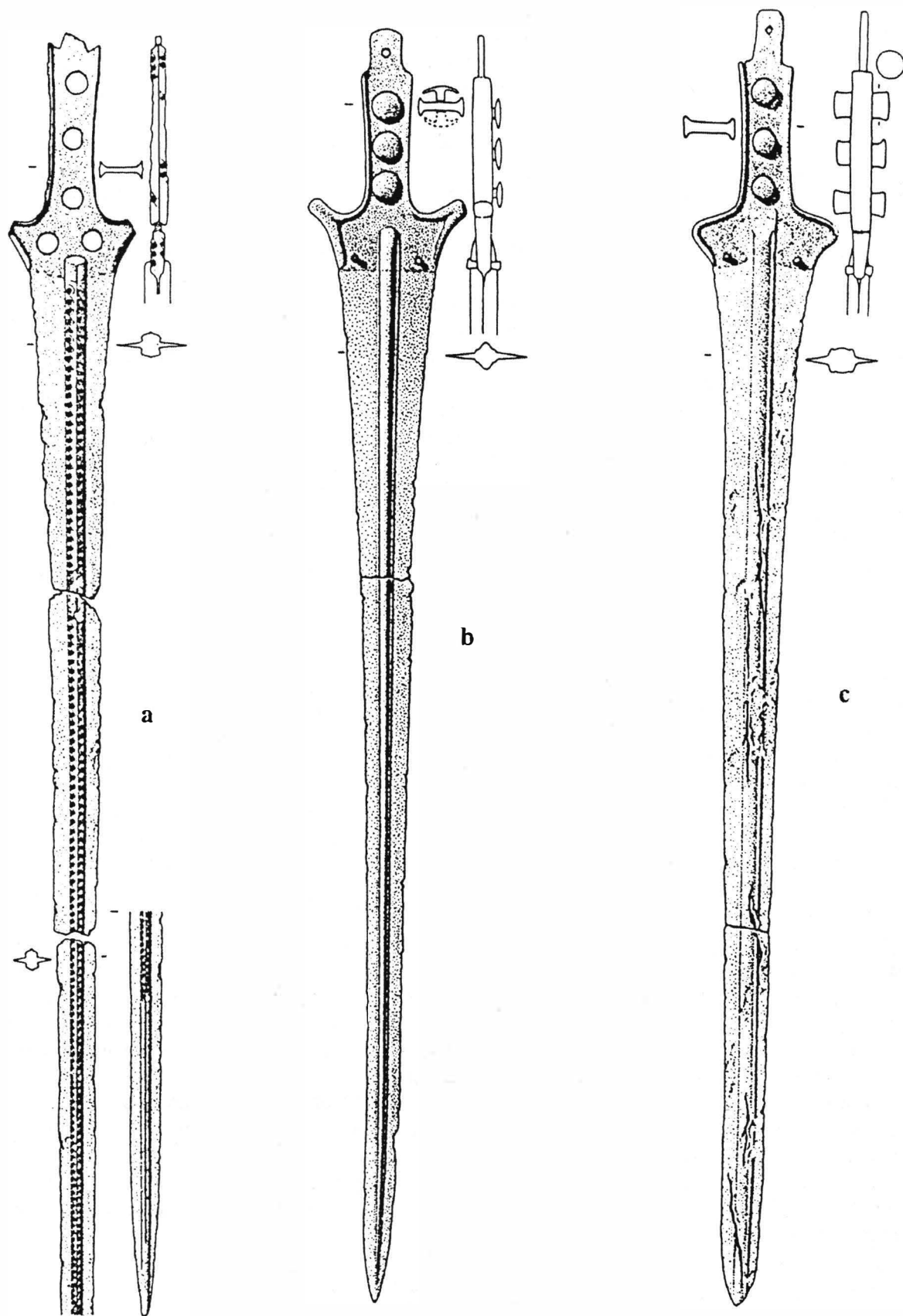


Fig. 2. a) Type C sword from Zapher Papoura, Knossos, Crete; b) Type C sword from Knossos; c) Type D sword from Ayios Ioannis, Knossos, Crete (after Kilian-Dirlmeier, PBF IV, 12, 1992 nos. 53, 56, 111). Scale 1:3.

The few metal analyses conducted so far on the swords show a variation of the tin percentage in the alloy between 7% and 15%. Theoretically, this concentration makes the metal highly resistant and lasting, but here appears also a question mark, regarding the metal processing after casting, because the bronzes with tin concentrations of more than 10% cannot be usually subject to cold hammering, without the risk of breaking.¹³

All these observations made during time are undoubtedly true, still some questions must be asked, before jumping to conclusions. Is our own vision on sword fighting identical or at least sufficiently similar with the Mycenaean society's vision? Or are we tempted to apply our own value system on a very different reality? My opinion is that a lot depends on our way of seeing things and, like in a game of mirrors, choosing the right angle could lead to a surprise: to see that what we tend to consider weakness represents in fact the qualities of a type of weapon we are not familiar with, anymore.

Of course, such an affirmation needs to be sustained. What seems obvious to me is that the more or less general trend of considering the Mycenaean swords inefficient is a twentieth century trend. Perfectly normal, in fact, if we remember that this is the century which sees the flourishing of the research on the Mycenaean civilization. Still, it would be interesting to turn to the moment of the first find of this type of sword in the Aegean; in other words to turn to H. Schliemann and the Circle A from Mycenae. Although he expresses his astonishment and admiration for the quality and beauty of the swords, he never shows doubts with regard to their *function*. Let's see Schliemann's own words on this subject: "Here I draw attention especially on the extraordinary narrowness of all the Mycenaean swords and on the huge length of most of them, which in many cases would have surpassed 3 feet (0.94 m); in fact, in most cases, these swords are not broader than our own rapiers. As far as I know, until today no swords were found either of this shape, or of this length. Newton remarks very correctly: 'At some of the Mycenaean swords, the prominent back from the middle of the blade goes down so much, that we must suppose that this weapon was used, as a rapier, only to thrust'".¹⁴

So, things seemed to be quite clear in the beginning. Could it be presumed that the problems begin to show because the view on what a sword should mean and how it should be used in battle changes? I would answer affirmatively to this question. Almost all the criticism regarding the Bronze Age swords (not only the rapiers) seems to indicate this fact. It could be said that the Bronze Age swords (like many other weapons of the period; like the whole concept of war, in fact) have a hard time "fighting" against the image left by their medieval "relatives".

When the small dimensions of the grip are criticized, the fact is not taken into consideration that we do not deal with medieval weapons and that, unlike these, no matter the bronze swords' weight, they are still projected to be handled with one hand. In such circumstances, a big handle would rather hamper the fighter's movements, instead of helping him. The Bronze Age swords' grip has exactly the necessary size to fit the fighter's fist. And if this fact is demonstrated for the slashing and cut-and-thrust swords, with their balance point down on the blade (closer to the tip) – due to the peculiarities of their use – it is just more justified for rapiers, which, being thrusting and not slashing weapons, have their balance point much closer to the grip. This means that, in their case, the stress on the grip is even less accentuated than in other types of swords' situation. Their shape is also of great help in this respect, because, being very narrow and long, the rapiers' weight is smaller and better distributed, and their balance point, placed near the grip, diminishes the fighter's effort, compared to the slashing swords.¹⁵

In fact, connected with the problem of a proper distribution of weight, we should ask ourselves if a hafting system based on organic hilt-plates does not represent the best solution found by the sword makers, in their attempt to create a sword with the best balance possible. Or, for a rapier, with its balance point placed so high on the blade, a heavy grip would just lead to unbalanced weapons. In other words, we could find out that, independently of the bronzesmiths' technical means, no other grip type is better suited for a rapier.

¹³ H. Mangou & P. Ioannou, *OpAth* 27, 2002, p. 106–107.

¹⁴ H. Schliemann, *Pe urmele lui Homer*, I, 1979, p. 308.

¹⁵ A. Müller-Karpe, in *Orientalisch-Ägäische Einflüsse*, 1990, p. 432 (a weight of 0.688 g for an almost 0.80 m length).

Another aspect to be shortly discussed at this point regards the material used for making the hilt-plates. Usually, the frailty resulted from the use of wood, bone and ivory for this purpose is emphasized. But, maybe we should keep in mind the fact that experimental archaeology proved many times the superiority of the defensive equipment made of organic materials over those made of bronze,¹⁶ due to their increased capacity of damping the blows. One could at least consider, as a hypothesis, the idea that the organic hilt-plates had the advantage of absorbing the shock caused by the impact of the sword's tip with a hard surface (and protecting in this way exactly the most exposed part of the weapon: the tang and the riveted area).

There are other possible aspects to look at: the variation in number, place and size of the rivets can be seen rather as a result of the same attempt to improve the hafting system, than to change trends in fashion. For the number of rivets, there are variations inside the type A swords group – from swords with no rivets to swords having 4 or 5 – and type B swords group (the highest variation).¹⁷ For the rivets position, again the type A and B swords are more ready to register a change.¹⁸ The rivets' size also varies, different combinations being noticed,¹⁹ until the situation seems to be stabilized with the types C and D, for which the combination of 3 thick rivets in tang and 2 thin rivets in shoulders is preferred. As a rule, the types C and D are seen as inheriting the best parts of the previous hafting systems: the form of the hilt-plates, with their oval or kidney-shaped opening; the number and position of the rivets from type A; the flanged tang and shoulder, longer and broader tang from type B.

Exactly this permanent attempt of the Aegean bronzesmiths to improve the hafting system should be seen as the most powerful argument in favor of a real use of the Mycenaean rapiers in combat. The changes made on the Aegean rapiers for some hundred years can't be seen otherwise than a struggle to make them more competitive. Because these modifications do not aim at an improvement of their decorative aspect – the motives, means, materials do not change for the better over time –, nor of the blades characteristics;²⁰ instead they focus on the hafting system, which seems to have the highest risk factor. Or, if these swords are only prestige items, the logic of change disappears, while in this situation it is dictated by *practical*, not *aesthetic* reasons. The role of a prestige object being first of all linked to the parade, normally the aesthetic changes should intervene, in order to affect the general image of the object, and not technological improvements. The presence of the latest can only be an attempt to increase a weapon's efficiency (this doesn't mean necessarily that the improvement will be successful, but the fact the try is made is in itself essential).

Now, after analyzing those features of the Mycenaean swords connected with a possible martial function, let's try and see how the rapiers could be really used in combat, in what circumstances and, above all, how efficiently.

First of all, it should be said that the comparison made sometimes between the rapiers and the slashing swords seems to be in the first's detriment. It is sometimes noticed that the blow of a slashing sword has more chances to meet some part of the opponent's body, than the "sting" of a rapier.²¹ But an opposite point of view has been also expressed. Discussing the concept of "primitive war" and its ways, H.H. Turney-High says: "A lesson which both nonliterate and civilized soldiers had a hard time learning and retaining is that it is not the edge of a shock weapon which is dangerous but the point. Anyone who tried to train cavalry recruits a few years back knows how hard it was to keep them from slashing. The only good function a cutting edge has is to enable the assailant to withdraw his weapon from the spasmodically grasping tissue of his victim. A slashing blow is easily seen, dodged or parried. It rarely hits a vital spot and therefore only wounds the enemy without killing him. He may be left not only alive, but very angry and vengeful. Any slashing blow leaves the body of the slayer without guard unless he can cover with a shield, a miserable and clumsy substitute for skill".²²

¹⁶ J. Coles, in V. Markotic (ed.), *Ancient Europe and the Mediterranean. Studies presented in honour of Hugh O. Hencken*, 1977, p. 56.

¹⁷ E. Cline, *BSA*, 91, 1996, p. 138.

¹⁸ Especially the type B, for which it seems there is no standard position of the rivets.

¹⁹ Type A2: 2 thin rivets in tang and 2 thick rivets in shoulders; Type A3: 3 thick rivets in tang and 2 thin rivets in shoulders.

²⁰ For example, if found without the specific "horned" shoulders, a type C sword can't be distinguished from a type A sword.

²¹ Sandars, *OJA*, 2, 1983, p. 51.

²² H.H. Turney-High, *Primitive War*, 1971, p. 13.

Taking a closer look at the two kinds of sword's features, it seems that Turney-High has some point, because everything in their construction shows that they are created having in mind two different ways of fighting.

The slashing swords, through their nature, tend to have no or very low midrib and to be stouter and heavier (it can be easily observed how this final feature accentuates during time, reaching real exaggerations during the medieval period). Only the cutting-edges being used, it is expected the blows come from the lateral. On the one hand, this leads to the placement of the balance point to the sword's tip, in order to increase the force of the blow. On the other hand, this means that a fighter has especially the lateral parts of his own body exposed to the opponent's strokes: the exterior side of his arms and legs, neck and head. Moreover, he should probably expect also his enemy to hit the top of his head or to attempt to cut his tendons at the back of his knee. All these lead necessarily to an increased role of the defensive equipment: helmet, greaves, breast-plate and especially the small shield, to take over the first shock of the strike.

The rapiers, through their shape and qualities, indicate a different kind of combat. The narrow cutting-edges and the high midrib make them totally unsuited for lateral blows, which would have only a negligible effect. Even more, the attempt of hitting laterally could prove risky, because, despite the blade's flexibility and midrib's resistance, it is almost certain that the sword wouldn't survive the shock. But their shape makes them ideal as thrusting swords, this leading to the preference for the blows coming directly from the front. The balance point, situated near the grip, makes the withdrawal of the weapon easier after the stroke, being also helped by the narrow sharp cutting-edges and the small weight of the blade. Logically, the fighter will focus in this situation on other parts of the opponent's body. The thrusts will aim especially at the face (eyes or mouth in order to reach the brain), neck (the jugular artery), chest and stomach, liver and spleen, the thighs' joint with the body (the femoral artery).

Looking on this list of possible target points, the superiority of the rapiers becomes obvious, the chance of a rapier to reach a vital organ being incredibly high compared to the slashing sword.

On the other hand, a blade with such a sharp tip and small breadth can provoke only a very narrow wound. It was already noticed that the thrust must be very precise and very deep in order to have effect (see *supra*, note 10). But this can be obtained through training and practice. Exactly for this reason I consider that wielding a rapier supposes to reach a greater ability than in the case of using a slashing sword.

Also, the way the strokes are applied involves differences in the defensive system. First of all, the helmet has no real use, so long as it is conceived with the purpose of protecting the skull. For rapier fights, the blows coming from the front, in case that the eyes are the target, it is the same if the fighter wears a helmet or not. The protection of the body could be ensured by the help of an oxhide breast-plate, maybe fastened with metal stripes, but there is not much information on this point. The greaves, which appear sometimes in the iconography, seem to be used especially as protection against other weapons. The shield is a part of the defensive equipment which, in my opinion, normally would be left outside in case of a rapier fight. Especially when we are talking about the Mycenaean shield which, no matter the shape (the 8-shaped shield or the great "tower" shield), covers the warrior from neck to ankles. These shield types are a wonderful defensive system against arrows and spears, but it is difficult to imagine a duel during which the fighters try to "sting" each other with the rapier's tip from behind some shields covering them almost completely. More, if we take into consideration that such a shield, even made only with oxhide fixed on a wooden frame, at this size must be heavy enough to hamper quick movements, diminishing at the same time the sword's action range. Even if the shield is a small round one, like those making team with the slashing sword,²³ the advantages would be surpassed by the disadvantages, because it would hinder exactly the watching of the enemy's movements, a lot more difficult to observe and parry than the ample lateral blows of the slashing swords.

The impression left after all these observations is that fighting with a rapier is closer to the contemporary idea of a duel than the fight with a slashing sword. The opponents must show aptitudes and abilities most probably gained after years of trainings and successful fights. Very possibly exactly these duelist qualities are in the foreground. The ability proved by the fighter when he manages to send a fatal blow to the enemy must be doubled by the ability of protecting himself in front of his counterstrikes. The

²³ Like in the scene depicted on the Warrior Vase.

result consists in some kind of an art of the duel, between two warriors protected only by their own skills, who rather cross their swords, both of them trying to block the opponent's sword by doubling it as closer as possible with his own sword. Fact which can explain also very well the necessity of protecting the hand with the help of the splay of the sword's shoulder (which appear more clearly for types C and D), because in this case the enemy's sword would be very often able to reach the warrior's fist, grasped on the grip of his own sword.

Finally, the duel with the rapier seems to be the kind of combat which creates and develops a certain set of rules, which presumes a certain elegance of the fight and the achievement of a certain degree of ability in wielding the sword, for a warrior to come out untouched and victorious from such a confrontation.

Now, the analysis of the rapier's features done, it is time to find out in what degree this information is confirmed or not by other categories of sources: the iconography and the literature.

In the Aegean world there are a number of images, on different kinds of support, which seem to present martial activities, but without the sword to appear every time.²⁴ The most beautiful war scenes implying rapiers are to be found on seals, these presenting also in some cases scenes with swords in other contexts than combat.²⁵

The situation, more or less complete at this moment, is this: from a total of 39 seal impressions with the sword present, 25 represent fight scenes. These can be in their turn divided into three categories:

- 1) scenes presenting a battlefield or a duel (in accordance with the number of characters and the general aspect of the scene);
- 2) scenes presenting a man-lion fight (single or doubled);
- 3) hunting scenes.

1) There are 12 scenes in the first category, found either on seals (made of gold, amethyst, lapis lacedaemonius, agate, chalcedony, carnelian), or as seal impressions on clay, dated in the Late Helladic and Late Minoan.²⁶

Here the sword appears more often in face-to-face confrontations, when both fighters are armed with rapiers (Cat. Nos. 2?, 4?, 7, 8, 11). Usually the warriors are presented very easily dressed, wearing only short skirts or even only belts, and generally having the sword as unique weapon (sometimes its sheath also appears). If the defensive equipment is still present, this is represented more often by the helmet. Only in two cases the two warriors wear also 8-shaped shields, but once these are kept on the back (Cat. No. 6), and in the second the characters are so schematized that it is practically impossible to determine how the shields are held (Cat. No. 4).

There are some other images from the same category, with the difference that, while in the anterior cases the fight is still taking place, here one of the opponents is already defeated (Cat. Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5).

In some cases a fighter with a sword faces an opponent armed with a spear (most probably, because the image is often very unclear), usually the latter having a more elaborate defensive equipment, with helmet and an 8-shaped shield (Cat. No. 5) or the big square shield (Cat. Nos. 9, 12).

Some common details are evident for this category of impressions:

- the sword fighters are lighter equipped than the spear fighters;
- the equivalence of the equipment when two swordfighters face each other (mirror image);
- the swords can have different lengths (fact that could depend on the existing space), but not in the same image (similar swords for the two opponents) – when the concern for detail exists, the swords show prominent pommels and accentuated guard;
- the sheath is worn at the belt or on the back;
- the favorite variants: the mirror image (the opponents make the same move and menace the same body part); one of the fighters clearly shows his superiority, menacing with his sword a defeated enemy, usually disarmed;
- the favorite strokes are those menacing the face of the enemy or the point between neck and shoulder;

²⁴ This is the case of the frescoes with possible war scenes and of some vessels, like the Siege Rhyton and the Warrior Vase.

²⁵ Published in the *Corpus der minoischen-mykenischen Siegel*, series founded by F. Matz.

²⁶ CMS I/11–12, I/16, II/6/15–18, V/643, VII/129, IX/158, X/134, XII/292.

- the sword can be handled with the right or the left hand (there seems to be no rule);
- in many cases, the fighter keeps his adversary with his free hand, which should normally indicate the preparation for the final stroke;
- when the swords are not crossed the blows come from an apparently strange position, the arm with the weapon being held overhead, with the elbow pushed way back (which should also suggest a final stroke, otherwise the warrior being left with the face and breast totally unprotected);
- all the images presenting the confrontation between warriors wearing different equipment (usually sword vs. spear) show a clear superiority of the swordfighters (the spear warriors are depicted in clear defensive postures).

A special case, which deserves a short discussion, is represented by a seal (Cat. No. 8) with a scene unique until now between the Mycenaean and Minoan seal impressions: a fight between two warriors, each armed with two swords. Spiridon Marinatos brings this scene near another one, described as “a characteristic detail for the Greek mythology”, the hero fighting with two swords. He compares the fight style of the Greek heroes with this image from a seal found at Pylos, Koukounara, using as a comparison piece a bronze plaque from Olympia (middle of the seventh century B.C.), which shows the lapite Kaineus’s fight with two centaurs. This is the only time when this hero is shown fighting with two swords, in the rest of his iconography being presented with the usual equipment of the period, shield and spear. Here, in the oldest representation, Kaineus is depicted in the centre of the scene, between his two enemies, in the moment when he starts to sink into the ground, under the tree trunks’ blows of the centaurs. He fights back, stabbing the centaurs with his swords under one of their front legs, with such a force that the swords’ tips can be seen showing on the other side of their bodies.²⁷ I agree with the unique character of this seal impression, but I rather disagree with the possible descent of the later scenes from this one (including the bronze plaque from Olympia). On the seal impression from Pylos the fighters have a *long sword*, thrusting the opponent’s jugular and, respectively, underarm, and a *short sword* (or dagger), used for parrying.²⁸ It is the so-called “mirror image”, the warriors making the same movements and wearing the same weaponry. The essential difference between this scene and the one from Olympia consists in the fact that, while the Pylos warriors fight with two swords of *different length* (the short one used, as it seems, only for protection), Kaineus uses two swords of *equal length*, which indicates a different way of swordfight.

2) The second category of seal impressions consists in man-lion fight scenes. There are 14 pieces (Cat. Nos. 13-26) with more uniform representations, despite the stylistic differences between them.

This scene, the confrontation from equal positions between a warrior and the “king of the beasts”²⁹, seems to be one of the favorites during the Mycenaean times, if judged after its frequency. Even more, if the find place can be considered as an argument, it seems that this image is clearly preferred on the Mainland (it appears already on seals in Circle A from Mycenae), from Crete coming very few pieces, and not the most successful ones.

The main features of the man-lion fight scenes are:

- usually the characters are only two, the man and the lion;³⁰
- some seals present double scenes: two men fighting two lions in symmetrical scenes (Cat. Nos. 17, 25) or two men fighting one lion (Cat. Nos. 18, 24);
- in only two cases the men are accompanied by a dog (Cat. Nos. 14, 24);
- usually the warriors are not better equipped than in normal duel scenes, in other words they have only the sword as weapon and not a lot of clothes;³¹
- parts of the defensive equipment shown in only two cases: 8-shaped shield (Cat. No. 15), helmet and armor (Cat. No. 23);

²⁷ S. Marinatos, in J. Boardman, M.A. Brown & T.G. Powell (eds.), *The European Community in Later Prehistory. Studies in honour of C.F.C. Hawkes*, 1971, p. 54, fig. 7.

²⁸ S. Marinatos himself emphasizes the fact.

²⁹ N. Marinatos, in R. Hägg, G. Nordquist (eds.), *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid*, 1990, p. 146.

³⁰ Cat. Nos. 13, 15, 16, 19–23 (8 from a total of 14).

³¹ Cat. Nos. 13–14, 16–19, 21–22, 24–26 (11 from a total of 14).

- the scenes seem to sustain the equality of forces between the swordfighter and the lion, in some cases even to emphasize the superiority of the first (sometimes the lion is depicted down or clearly hurt);
- the target body parts: the lion's head, mouth, breast (under the front legs);
- the final stroke is given with the arm raised over the head and the elbow pushed a lot back;
- swords are of different lengths and are used with the right or the left hand (there is no rule).

Some conclusions can be drawn at this point. There are clear parallels between the duels shown on the seals from the first category and the man-lion fights: the absence of a defensive equipment, the type of strike, the general position of the fighter, the body parts preferred for the thrust, the type of weapon.

Adding to all these the rampant position of the lion in front of the warrior, that also emphasizes the impression of equal forces, we can suppose only that these scenes, either real or imagined, do not make anything else but to express in this extreme form the image of the Mycenaean society about the swordfighters: characters able to confront the most dangerous beast, the lion, and to demonstrate in this way that they possess the same qualities as this one.

3) The third category contains, as far as I know, only two seals (Cat. Nos. 27-28). On the first, a man hunts a stag, armed only with a short sword, possibly a dagger. The standard for hunting scenes (excluding the man-lion scenes) is to show animals (wild boars or horned animals) hunted with the spear. Even the artist's hesitation in drawing the weapon makes me believe that the use of the sword in hunting activities is not a habit. The second seal impression is again not a very reliable example, while the sword, though present, is not actually used in hunting.

Let us see now if and how the data brought by the seal impressions confirm the anterior observations on the rapier's technological features and pattern of use in combat.

It seems that the following aspects are confirmed: the use of the sword in duel-like fights; the lack of defensive weapons; the favorite body parts to constitute a target (face, neck and chest); the style of the stroke (thrusting – see the fighter's specific position of the sword); the strokes are always coming from the front.

An aspect not fully confirmed regards the assumption that a rapier is used in battle only against another rapier. The evidence consists in three seal impressions showing a swordfighter confronting a warrior armed with a spear (Cat. Nos. 5, 9, 12). But, in the meantime, these three seals are a good hint for the way the rapier is perceived in the Mycenaean society: as a weapon of unchallenged superiority. All these scenes give the impression that the spear fighters are in defensive positions. Even more, in the case of the seal from New York (Cat. No. 12), the character fighting with the rapier is shown oversized compared to his adversary who – despite his "tower" shield and his helmet – does not look very safe, he rather hiding behind the huge shield.

Another aspect to be underlined connects to the fact that in many scenes the enemies are depicted grasping each other with one hand, while thrusting with the sword kept in the other hand. What is impossible to say is whether these scenes present us the final stroke in a sword duel, or we deal with a kind of combat known from Homer's *Iliad*.³²

In this epic dedicated to the siege of Troy many fights between chieftains are described.

As a first example, I take the fight between Paris and Menelaus (*Iliad*, III, 340-380), which has to last until the death of one of them. Being a duel which should decide the fate of the war, the other fights are stopped during this time and the warrior to strike first is established by the odds. Paris gains and attacks with his javelin, which is stopped by Menelaus' shield. It is now the Menelaus' turn to use his spear, more successfully, while he manages to strike through Paris' shield and leave him unprotected. This way Menelaus has also the final blow against his defenseless opponent, and he uses "his sword, drawn from a silver sheath". Fortunately for Paris, the Atrides strikes his helmet's crest, and the sword is thorn to pieces.

Also an interesting duel, left undecided, is the one between Hector and Ajax the Telamonian (*Iliad*, VII, 258-278). The fight starts with spears' blows. When these weapons become too affected by the contact with the shields, the warriors take each a great stone and use them to destroy the opponent's

³² I will not discuss at this point the Linear B tablets, which do not offer information connected to sword fighting. As for Homer's *Iliad*, I use the ancient Greek text from Teubner's edition, 1931, and the translation by George Chapman, in Wordsworth Classics, 2003.

shield. Fighting on, the warriors prepare themselves to attack each other with the swords (verse 273: καὶ νύ κε δὴ ξιφέεσσ' αὐτοσχεδὸν οὐτάζοντο), but the combat is stopped by the heralds calling an armistice.

Another unfinished duel, this time because of the gods' interference, is the one between Aeneas and Achilles, who entered the battlefield to revenge the death of his friend (*Iliad*, XX). The confrontation starts with spear blows, which leave Aeneas' shield affected. He throws his damaged shield away and tries to hit Achilles with a great stone. In reply, Achilles prepares himself to thrust his enemy with the sword, but the duel is interrupted (verse 459: οὐτάζων ξιφεί μεγάλῳ ἐξαίνυτο θυμόν').

From the same book, it is worth reminding a scene with Achilles as the main character. After his attempt to fight with Hector is stopped by Apollo's intervention, the hero, in a state of killing rage, takes his revenge by killing some Trojans. Interesting is the way he acts: Demochus, Philetor's son, is struck with the spear in his knee, and then killed with a sword thrust. He is followed in death by two chariot fighters, one killed with the spear, the other with a close blow with the sword. Then, Troos is killed with a thrust of sword reaching his liver. Mulius is killed with the spear, which enters from one of his ears to the other, and Echelus is struck in the forehead, between the brows, with the sword. Deucalion's hand is pierced by a blow, then Achilles thrusts him with the sword and cuts his head off. The last two opponents, Rhigmus and Areithous, are speared and took off their chariot.

Later (*Iliad*, XXI, 114-121) Achilles kills with no fight Lycaon, son of Priam. The fatal stroke reaches the jugular artery: "...His foe yet leaves his lance/ And forth his sword flies, which he did in furrow of a wound/ Driv'n through the jointure of his neck..." (verses 116-118: ...'Αχιλλεύς δὲ ἐρυσσάμενος ξίφος ὄξυ / τύψε κατὰ κληῖδα παρ' αὐχένα, πᾶν δέ οἱ εἴσω / δὺ ξίφος ἄμφηκες ...)

The next to be killed is Asteropaeus, after a duel where the spears are used first (thrown this time – so they are probably javelins). When these miss their target, Achilles takes the sword from his belt and cuts his opponent's belly.

All these scenes we've been through can be put in two categories: on the one hand, confrontations during the battle between warriors who find themselves in front of each other by pure chance; on the other hand, duels decided through common agreement, with a chosen adversary. In both cases, the fight tends to have the same pattern, with the only exception that for the established duels the odds decide who strikes first. Otherwise, the action is very similar. The fight starts with spear blows or throwing the javelins. Only very rarely this first blow is totally efficient, as long as the warriors are usually protected by helmet, shield and greaves. The spear seems to have no other effect than to damage the shield, but in its turn it is destroyed by the impact. Often enough, the fighters find then an instant, if not very elegant, solution to continue the combat: striking the opponent with a big stone, which tends to produce serious damages to his defensive equipment. Only in the end the sword intervenes, as a last resource and/or the weapon to give the final stroke. Its thrusts look for the forehead, chest or stomach, but the favorite part of the body seems to be the junction between neck and shoulder (the jugular artery).

Comparing now the information from the *Iliad* with the other sources, discussed earlier, it can be noticed that some of them match the archaeological finds and the iconography.

The swords are described as of great size and sharp (description that could match many kinds of swords), embellished with gold or silver rivets, with grips covered with precious metals, kept in sheaths decorated with golden plaques. They are worn at the belt or on the back.

The favorite blows are directed to the head, chest, stomach, liver, jugular artery (with a special accent on the last one) and are coming always from the front. From the more detailed scenes it can be concluded that they are thrusting blows, practically the sword piercing totally the opponent's body, sometimes with the whole blade. In fact, only once the cutting-edge of the sword is used, when Menelaus hits Paris' crested helmet. Anyway, this stroke is described as entirely inefficient, the sword breaking into pieces at the contact with the Trojan's helmet.

What brings nearer the fight scenes from the *Iliad* to the seal impressions is the fact that the sword is used as a final choice, and for the final stroke. This means that, at the moment when the swords join the action, the warriors are usually lacking any other kind of military equipment, offensive or defensive.

The only hypothesis not sustained by the epic is the one of a duel fought from the beginning to the end only with the rapier.

After this whole discussion, it seems more clear that the success of the slashing sword, which finishes by replacing the rapier in the Aegean, does not necessarily imply its intrinsic qualities or the superiority of a new fight tactics. It only means that, in the confrontation between two different types of swords, the less specialized will prevail upon the other one.

Why that? Earlier I presented some of the rapier's obvious qualities, but these can't hide its greatest disadvantage, usually passed unmentioned. This consists in the rapier's high specialization, which makes the duel's rules strictly respected. A lot of things are limited: the type of strokes (always from the front, never from the lateral); the possibilities of parrying (impossible to do by striking from the lateral the other's sword blade); the pieces of defensive equipment. Another important consequence is the limit imposed to the number of adversaries: the fight can be carried on only between two warriors at a time. In conclusion, such a specialized way of sword fighting can't resist when an intruder like the slashing sword enters the scene. It is not more sophisticated, it does not require special abilities or unusual talents compared to the rapier. It is quite the opposite. But exactly this fact makes it more dangerous. In a world of elegant duels comes a heavy, stout weapon, with a useless tip leaving the active role to the cutting-edges.

In order to realize how such a weapon can impose itself, we need only to imagine a fight taking place between a man armed with a rapier and another armed with a slashing sword. It is clear that, if the rapier does not thrust from the first in a deadly manner – and, because of the small shield accompanying the slashing sword, it is very uncertain that the first stroke will be fatal – the rapier finds itself disadvantaged. A lateral blow is enough and the heavy slashing sword will leave the warrior keeping only the grip of his rapier. This seems to be the main danger: not the way in which a sided stroke affects the warrior's body, but the way in which it affects his sword, especially when this is less resistant to such shocks.

Here we can add the disorientation caused to the rapier fighter both by the change of the opponent's position and the change of the strike direction. As already emphasized, a warrior used to fighting with a rapier expects to sit face to face with the enemy, with the blows coming also from his front. In exchange, a warrior fighting with a slashing sword will be less "specialized" from this point of view. He is accustomed both to sit face to face with his enemy and to move on his sides, in an attempt to find his weak points. As a result, he will expect strokes coming both from his front and from his lateral, and he will act in consequence.

There is still one aspect where the slashing sword represents an advantage. Due to its construction a rapier is fit only for a duel. Instead, the slashing sword is more suited for battle. The difference is that the warriors with slashing swords can engage a fight with more than one enemy at a time. This could be the secret of the successful carrier of a sword created to be used in the chaos of the battlefields in front of a sword created to submit especially to the rules of the duel.

If these observations are correct, it means that at some point the Aegean world meets a new way of fighting a war. The result can be read in the technological changes of the rapiers: desperate attempts to modify the existing sword types, with the hope that they'll be more suited to confront the adversary seemingly coming from the North. The swords become shorter, stouter, broader, they change their hafting system, lose their midrib. But despite all these, they still remain unfit to confront the European slashing sword and fight after new rules. Finally, the local sword types will yield and the Aegean will also begin to produce the new type of sword.

The rapier as a prestige item

The second function attributed to the Aegean sword is that of a prestige object, sometimes this aspect being considered even more important than its martial function. In order to see if the facts confirm this impression, I will discuss first the swords' aspect, finding contexts and associations with other categories of objects, which can reveal some more on the subject, then the iconography and the literary sources.

On the Mainland, the swords found so far come almost entirely from the *funerary space*.³³ The same situation characterizes the Aegean islands, a slight difference being noticed for Crete.³⁴

³³ Except the swords from the sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas. Anyway, it must be remarked that many swords have no known finding place.

Since the custom of depositing swords in graves covers not only this wide space, but also an important chronological span (the seventeenth-thirteenth centuries B.C.), the phenomenon's image can't be perfectly homogeneous. Still, some of its features are more or less unchanged over time.

For the Mainland Greece, the present image on the funerary space is quite unequal, because on the one hand some areas are better known than others (the case of Argolid), on the other hand the research focused mainly on the palatial structures, the rural space being neglected.

In the first place, it must be seen if there is any clear connection between the tomb type and the deposition of the swords. The types of tomb in use during the Mycenaean period are: Shaft-Graves (which tend to be abandoned after LH I), Chamber Tombs (LH I – LH IIIB), Tholos Tombs (LH II – LH IIIB), cist graves and pit graves (of Middle Helladic tradition).³⁵ The first three tomb forms have in common the fact that are planned to receive successive burials, for many generations, while the pit and cist graves contain almost always a single burial.

Based on an analysis made on almost 1,000 graves from Mainland Greece, Kazimierz Lewartowski observes that the main difference, from the inventory's point of view, between the two kinds of tombs is this: in case of the multiple burial tombs there are more skeletons accompanied by weapons, tools, mirrors, seals and buttons, while in case of the simple graves the accent is put on jewels (rings, spirals, pearls), pottery, and cloth-fasteners.³⁶ The fact can be linked to the author's conclusions regarding the individuals buried in simple graves. He considers that these people belong to stable communities, capable to spend enough energy building the graves, but with no need to own multiple burial tombs, in use generation after generation.³⁷ In other words, the simple graves maybe indicate the presence of a part of the Mycenaean society less interested in the public emphasis of its lineage. Quite in opposition, the multiple burials may represent exactly that segment of the society profoundly interested to express the affiliation to a certain family or group, calling automatically the importance granted to a certain social status. In this situation, the funerary display of wealth comes also to underline this affirmation of the social position, started with the building of a family tomb. All the categories of objects already mentioned as part of the graves' inventory are destined to become also signs of the deceased person's status.

The swords seem to have a special place, even when found together with other weapons, especially spears/javelins and/or daggers.³⁸ Sometimes the deceased is accompanied in the grave by a pair of swords (long sword/short sword). In undisturbed funerary depositions³⁹ the position of the weapon can be determined: either near the body, along the hand or leg, or on or beneath the deceased's body.

This category of weapons is the most liable to be embellished. Many swords have rich decorations, both on grip and blade; gold plates; gold and silver capped rivets; ivory, agate or rock crystal pommels, becoming real works of art. The most beautiful examples are some of the earliest type A rapiers, found in the Circle A of Mycenae (for instance, the sword decorated with horses in flying gallop or the one decorated on the whole blade with a row of gold 8-shaped shields).⁴⁰ It is clear that the owners are very concerned about the aesthetic qualities of their weapons, which often give the impression of some parade objects.

Usually, but not always, these swords are found in tombs furnished with a great number of luxury and imported goods.⁴¹ Unfortunately, with rare exceptions, it is quite impossible to determine the associations between the objects and between the objects and their owner, the problem being the special

³⁴ Although the ratio is still in favor of the funerary finds, there are a lot more votive depositions and civil contexts than in Mainland Greece.

³⁵ S. Voutsaki, in: R. Laffineur & W.-D. Niemeier, *Politeia. Society and State in the Aegean Bronze Age*, 1995, p. 58.

³⁶ K. Lewartowski, in: R. Laffineur & W.-D. Niemeier, *Politeia. Society and State in the Aegean Bronze Age*, 1995, p. 107.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

³⁸ Usually the swords are not associated with arrowheads.

³⁹ Especially the case of the last inhumation.

⁴⁰ I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, PBF, IV, 12, 1993, p. 146 (Karo's Cat. Nos. 748, 404).

⁴¹ I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, in: R. Laffineur & W.-D. Niemeier, *Politeia. Society and State in the Aegean Bronze Age*, 1995, p. 158.

way of treating the multiple burials (pushing aside the old skeletons and their belongings, in order to make room for the next burial). Anyway, where the determination is assured, the swords are associated with men burials.⁴² Even more, in the situations when not only the sex, but also the age of the deceased is determined, it can be noticed that the presence of the sword is associated with a certain age group. This is the case with the men buried in Circle B at Mycenae, where the swords are part of the inventory of men aged between 28 and 49 years old.⁴³

The situation from the Mainland repeats itself, on a smaller scale, in the islands. The few swords found in the archipelagos (Dodecanese, Cycladic and Ionian Islands), Euboia and Lesbos come from the graves (excepting the cases with the finding place unknown).⁴⁴ All these pieces are normally accompanied by objects produced in the Mycenaean workshops and dated in times when the Mycenaean influence in the Aegean is attested.

In Crete, the situation is slightly different, because the ratio between the number of swords found in graves and the number of swords from other types of contexts is more balanced than on the Mainland.⁴⁵ Although Crete is considered the place of birth for the type A rapiers, only in very few cases they are placed in graves. But we do find them in civil areas, more exactly inside the palatial structures from Mallia and Kato Zakros,⁴⁶ situation which emphasizes their character as prestige goods.

The type B swords have not been found in Crete up to present day, but in turn we have a great number of type C and D swords, concentrated mainly in the Knossos area, leading to the opinion that a specialized workshop existed near the palace. These rapiers are considered to be the only weapons attesting with certitude the warrior character of the owner. It is believed that, though many burials with daggers or spearheads can also belong to military men, a life connected to war is more probable for men buried with swords, because their main functions are limited: they may be prestige items representing the military standing or weapons used only by few in battle (see *supra*, note 5). These swords make their appearance in the Cretan burials beginning with LM II, the custom of their funerary deposition continuing during LM IIIA1, while the Mainland's influence is growing.

The swords are placed in the same tomb types like in Greece (Shaft-Graves – which seem to have a longer existence here – and Chamber Tombs) and in similar associations of grave goods. Equally, in many cases they are accompanied by daggers and spearheads. Again, not all the burials with swords (“warrior graves”) are rich in non-military goods, and not all the rich graves have military appearance. In some cases, the swords are associated with possible symbols of a wealth-based status (gold necklaces), but there are also necklace graves totally non-military (2 out of 5). The conclusion can be that the men from the rich graves with weapons might be part of an aristocracy, but the exclusive military character of such a social group can't be demonstrated. That is why it is preferred to consider the individuals buried in the “warrior graves” as officials of different ranks in the military organization of the palace, coming from different levels of the society.⁴⁷ The literary sources (the Linear B tablets from Knossos) seem to support this opinion, indicating a quite clear control of the palace on the military equipment production (swords, helmets, chariots),⁴⁸ which would lead theoretically to the idea of a control of the palace also on the distribution.

⁴² T. Papadopoulos, PBF, VI, 11, 1998, p. 47 (the graves 31 and 32 from The Tholos Tomb of Myrsinochorion-Routsis, both belonging to women, contain each a weapon, but in both cases this is a dagger).

⁴³ I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, PBF, IV, 12, 1993, p. 147; G. Mylonas, *Ancient Mycenae. The Capital City of Agamemnon*, 1957, p. 131–159.

⁴⁴ Dodecanese – Karpathos (1 type C: burial), Kos (1 type C, 1 type D: burials), Rhodes (1 type B: provenance unknown; 3 type C: burials; 4 type D: 2 from burials+2 provenance unknown); Cycladic – Amorgos (3 type A: provenance unknown), Naxos (uncertain), Thera (1 type B: provenance unknown); Ionians – Ithaka (1 type A: burial); Leukas (2 type A or C: burial); Euboia (1 type C: burial); Lesbos (1 type C: provenance unknown).

⁴⁵ From 17 type A swords 2 are from burials, 4 from civil context, 9 (at least) from votive depositions; there are no type B swords; 16 type C swords: 10 from burials, 3 from votive depositions, 3 with unknown context; 20 type D swords: 15 from burials, 5 with unknown context.

⁴⁶ I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, PBF, IV, 12, 1993, p. 8.

⁴⁷ J. Driessen & C. MacDonald, BSA, 79, 1984, p. 66–67.

⁴⁸ A. Morpurgo-Davies, in *Colloquium Mycenaeanum*, 1975, p. 101; J. Driessen & C. Macdonald, BSA, 79, 1984, p. 64.

The situation from Crete can't be however generalized for the other areas in the Aegean, due to the lack of evidence. Still, the opinion is that, for the case of the Mycenaean palaces, the political hierarchy is based on the intensification of the display of the wealth and power of the elites, including in this way: elaborated ceremonies connected to death and burial are used as means of reaffirmation of the elite's group identity, strengthening the power and passing it to the heirs. In this context, the frequent presence of the weaponry in the funerary inventories and in the iconography would eventually support the idea that a military or protection force existed too.⁴⁹

Following this idea, a look at the changes produced in time shows that, after 1400 B.C., on the Mainland a modification occurs in the number and general aspect of the swords deposited in tombs. The rich decorated weapons are replaced with plainer ones, and their number decreases. Together with other changes which seem to indicate an increased role of the palatial centers, it is possible that the suppression or limitation of the status weapons is in fact a way to emphasize who is in charge at the moment. Likewise, the plainer weapons can suggest a reform of the military "class" and of the political stage.⁵⁰ Hartmut Matthäus speaks even about a change in the fighting manner at the same time with an incisive social change.

As for the *iconography*, the images presenting swords not engaged in a fight are very few and usually put serious interpretation problems. The best known is the scene from a steatite vase from Ayia Triada, in which a man, richly adorned with necklace and bracelets, and a young man carrying a sword on his shoulder stand in front of each other. Although the meaning of the scene knows some different interpretations (military commander and officer; sacrifice for a king-god; tribute scene; initiation), the common aspect is the fact that we deal with a difference of age (emphasized by the different hair style) and of rank (emphasized by the presence of the jewels). Not as clear is unfortunately the role played by the sword (pure military function or status indicator).

Here a fresco fragment from the Knossos palace can be also mentioned, showing a male character with a sword on his shoulder sitting on an X-legged chair. Having the sword in this scene is important, because the presence of this type of chair indicates that we deal with a high status person. But again there are multiple interpretations of this scene, thought to depict a high status person, a warrior or a priest. Still, comparing this piece of evidence with other scenes from craters found at Ialysos (in Rhodes), Ugarit or in Cyprus, showing persons sitting (for example in chariots), it seems probable that the sword is not only a weapon, but also a status sign.⁵¹

The same uncertainty appears in the case of other scenes, this time on a few seal impressions. There are 5 possible examples (Cat. Nos. 29-33), from which one coming from the Mainland (Mycenae) and four from Crete. Cat. No. 32, from Kato Zakros, presents some similarities with the steatite cup scene from Ayia Triada, depicting what seems to be a conversation between two male characters, one of them carrying a long sword on his shoulder. As for the details, maybe the stripes around their necks depict necklaces, but they can as well represent in fact their cloths' collars. Anyway, the men's cloths are identical – long, with folds and belts – and indicate rather non-military attributions. The hair style being also identical, it looks like the two men have not only the same rank, but probably the same age. The question mark is connected then with the sword's role (but, because the clay impression is broken so that the character from the left side of the scene can't be seen completely, we can't be absolutely certain that he isn't carrying also a sword).

Another interesting scene, unique so far, is represented again by a clay impression, found at Chania, Crete. Here a man, in the left hand with an object that can be interpreted as a long sword (other possible interpretation: a long stick), runs to the right side of the scene, keeping in his right hand the ends of two ropes, used to pull two men tied by their necks. The scene can be linked to military activities (taking prisoners), but in the meantime seems to contain a strong message of superiority, in the martial domain, but not only.

⁴⁹ M. Dabney, in: R. Hägg, G. Nordquist (eds.), *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid*, 1990, p. 50–52.

⁵⁰ G. Kopcke, in R. Laffineur & W.-D. Niemeier, *Politeia. Society and State in the Aegean Bronze Age*, 1995, p. 90–91.

⁵¹ H. Matthäus, BSA, 74, 1984, p. 169.

Other two seals (Cat. Nos. 30-31) are very unclear, for different reasons. In the first case, the character is so schematized that it is practically impossible to say if he really keeps a sword in each hand. I propose this interpretation for two reasons: in the first place, even schematized, the character's proportions are correct, or in this case his hands would be extremely long; in the second place, these "hands" are sharpening at the top, creating the impression of some blades. On the other seal the picture of the character is very detailed, particulars like the horned helmet, the long beard, and the triple belt being clear; less clear are the objects held in his hands. If these truly are a sword and a horn, the scene can have a cultic message, especially while the man is kneeling. But the scene can as well present an archer. Interesting and unique for the seal impressions is the presence of the horned helmet.

Finally, the seal found at Mycenae (Cat. No. 29), in a Chamber Tomb, depicts a young man, with long hair and a belt, keeping a short sword in his left hand. Interesting in this case, but not at all helpful for the interpretation, is the position of the character's hands, bent from the elbows and with their palms towards his waist.

All the iconographical scenes set forth by now seem to represent, more or less clearly, an underlying role of the sword as a prestige object. But I think that these few examples are not the only arguments at our disposal. In my opinion, all the seal impressions discussed earlier, depicting fight scenes, duels, or man-lion confrontations, beyond their martial side, emphasize too this second function of the sword. The martial activities, real or just assumed, are part of the activities creating prestige, and the role of the rapier can't be denied.

In the *Iliad*, too, the special situation of the sword is clearly stated, even if the spear is the unchallenged leader as number of appearances, being the most used weapon on the battlefield. I consider that we deal with a domain for which not necessarily the frequency of the presence is the essential factor, the circumstances and the way in which each weapon is presented being more important. First of all, although there are no duels fought entirely with the rapier, it still has the role to apply the final stroke, at the end of fights between warriors of equal status (fights between the chieftains). Secondly, while for the spears the accent is put on their murderous efficiency, in the description of the swords the aesthetic qualities are also emphasized. Finally, the element which seems to indicate most clearly the fact that the sword is indissolubly tied to the display of status: it is the only weapon kept by the chieftains while in conference (see Achilles, who wants to attack Agamemnon just on the conference place; *Iliad*, I, 193-195), so outside the battlefield, or taken when they address the army (Agamemnon; *Iliad*, II, 32-36).⁵² The sword tends to become part of the heroes' personality, both from the warrior's and the chieftain's perspective.

Resuming the data analyzed during this chapter, it seems that a leading line exists: the rapier is perceived by the Mycenaean society as an object containing and creating prestige. For its entire existence, the sword shows itself in contexts emphasizing this reality. But what is necessary to be noticed is that this function of the rapier, as a status indicator, does not manifest to the detriment of its martial function. Quite the opposite, the prestige role of the sword is born from its martial qualities. I consider this opinion integrates in the logic of a world which exalts in every way those activities meant to put into evidence the force, the skills and the ability not only to survive, but to win, activities like war and hunting. So it can be presumed that the ownership of a rapier draws attention on two different, till connected, aspects of the owner. On the one hand, while the skills necessary for sword fighting need long trainings, the sword becomes a clear signal of the owner's talent as a warrior. On the other hand, exactly the necessity of these long and sustained trainings shows the public that that man can afford to lose a lot of time in martial activities, meaning that he also had the material meanings to do that.

The rapier as a cult object

In order to determine whether and how the rapier has a role in the religious life of the Mycenaean society, I will analyze first those of its features and finding contexts able to offer some information on this subject, and then the iconography.

⁵² Here I give the verses: Πηλείωνι δ' ἄχος γένετ', ἐν δέ οἱ ἦτορ / στήθεσσιν λασίοισι διάνδιχα μερμήριξεν, / ἧ ὃ γε φάσανον δ' ἔρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ / τοὺς μὲν ἀναστήσειεν, ὃ δ' Ἀτρεΐδην ἐναρίζοι, / ἦε χόλον παύσειεν ἐρητύσειέ τε θυμόν (*Iliad*, I, 188-191); ἔζετο δ' ὄρθωθεῖς, μαλακὸν δ' ἔνδυνε χιτῶνα / καλὸν νηγάτεον, περὶ δὲ μέγα βάλλετο φᾶρος / ποσσὶ δ' ὑπὸ λιπαροῖσιν ἐδήσατο καλὰ πέδιλα, / ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' ὤμοισιν βάλετο ξίφος ἀργυρόηλον / εἴλετο δὲ σκῆπτρον πατρώιον, ἀφθιτον αἰεὶ / σὺν τῷ ἔβη κατὰ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτῶνων (*Iliad*, II, 42-47).

From the beginning, it must be specified that a cult function was proposed and sustained only for some pieces, all of them of type A. As already mentioned, the oldest type A swords come from Crete. It is remarkable that, from a total of 17 pieces, only two are from funerary contexts, both dated very late. The earliest swords of this type come from civil contexts or votive depositions.

The swords from the *civil contexts* were discovered inside the palatial structures from Mallia and Kato Zakros. It is believed that the two swords from Mallia fell down to the ground floor, when the ceiling collapsed, they being originally in a first floor's room.⁵³ O. Pelon, analyzing the room's furniture, believes that this was not a simple storeroom where the cult objects or special insignia were stored, but a room where cult activities took place.⁵⁴ From a similar context come the two swords from Kato Zakros, found also in closed vicinity (together with 6 bronze bars, bronze vessels, and an unprocessed elephant tusk). While the details of the room's architecture remain unknown, it is not certain whether this room had also a special role, or it was only a storeroom. No swords from civil contexts were discovered on the Mainland.⁵⁵

As for swords as part of the *votive depositions*, again this segment is better illustrated in Crete. One of the best investigated and in the meantime rich deposits is at Arkalochori. The pottery and the stone objects are very weakly represented in this cave. The majority of the finds consist in bronze, gold, and silver objects, both in natural size or miniatures (double-axes, knives, daggers, swords, bars). What is obvious is that almost all the objects can be tied to martial activities. This is the reason why it was hypothesized that in the Arkalochori Cave a deity was adored as protector of warriors, the weapons being offered with the hope of receiving protection in battles. As concerns the swords, together with the 9 type A swords of natural size, a great number of miniatures made from bronze and gold sheet were found. Even these 9 big swords are considered to have the blades too thin to be used in fight (adding to this aspect also the fact that they have no rivets). The most probable explanation, although their length overtakes one meter, is that they were also made especially to be consecrated to the deity.⁵⁶

Another cave with rich votive depositions is the one from Psychro, here the variety of the finds being greater. Important quantities of pottery (MM III – LM III) were found, as well as small stone offering tables (from which 3 with inscriptions), anthropomorphic and zoomorphic bronze figurines (bulls, stags, and birds), goat horns, double-axes (the majority especially made for votive purposes: miniatural items or in natural size, but made of very thin bronze sheath), pincers, pins, fibulae, finger-rings, earrings, bracelets, and more than 200 blades (considered also for votive purpose only, for the same reason as the double-axes) represented by swords, daggers, knives, spearheads, arrowheads.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, there are no detailed descriptions of the swords; so that it can't be determined which types were present.

There are also other Cretan caves with sacred depositions, like those from Patsos, Skotino or Petsofas (Sitias), but the only blades mentioned to be found are the dagger blades.

Leaving now Crete for Mainland Greece, here only one votive deposition has been known until now, the one from the sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas, placed on the heights of Kynortion, Epidaurus. It is an open air sanctuary which functioned during the Mycenaean, Late Geometric, Archaic, and Classical periods. Here two layers of ashes were discovered, the upper one corresponding to the Archaic and Classical periods, the lower one to the Mycenaean and maybe earlier periods. The ashes were full of animal bones (horned cattle and goats), pottery sherds and votive objects. Together with a number of fragmentary rhyta, early seals, and a long series of bronze double-axes of Minoan influence, Mycenaean weapons were also found: real or votive bronze swords, daggers, spearheads.⁵⁸ Here I present a short description of the swords, after Lambrinudakis' photos (fig. 13, p. 65), unfortunately having no scale: two type D swords, from which one broken into three, no tip and tang preserved, rounded shoulders and flat, broad midrib; the other complete, with the exception of the tang and a lateral break, smaller than the first, with more angular shoulders and flatter midrib. Besides these two swords, there were also found a tang

⁵³ H. van Effenterre, BCH, 106, 1982, p. 163.

⁵⁴ O. Pelon, BCH, 107, 1983, p. 679.

⁵⁵ I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, PBF, IV, 12, 1993, p. 149.

⁵⁶ B. Rutkowski, *The Cult Places of the Aegean*, 1986, p. 58–59, 67.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

⁵⁸ V. Lambrinudakis, in: R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds.), *Sanctuaries and Cults in the Aegean Bronze Age*, 1981, p. 59–62.

with pommel-tang and two big rivet-holes (possibly from one of the swords presented before), a T-shaped tang with a small rivet-hole for the pommel and three other fragments (tip, fragment from the middle, unidentified fragment).

Ending here the presentation of the sacred depositions with swords, I move further, analyzing the *iconographical evidence* on swords possibly implicated in cult activities.

First of all, here two fragmentary frescoes could be mentioned, one from Thera, the other from the Mainland, from Mycenae.

The first case consists in a frieze from Xeste 3, Room 4 (dated LM I), depicting a monkey(s) playing the lyre or harp and holding a sword(s), in a mountainous landscape. The scene was interpreted also as depicting a lyre or harp monkey-player, accompanied by several monkey-dancers, holding swords in their hands. L. Kontorli-Papadopoulou considers that there is no clear evidence that these monkeys are involved in a religious activity, but S. Marinatos sustain that the monkeys belong to a frieze at the end of which a great female figure is present, possibly a goddess. On the same line, N. Marinatos considers that the animals are in the middle of some ritual contests, to entertain the goddess.⁵⁹

The second fresco comes from Mycenae, The Citadel House, from the eastern wall of Room 31 (The Room of the Frescoes, dated LH IIIB). In this small, rectangular room, on the eastern wall there is a stucco bench or altar, decorated with a frieze surmounted by three pairs of consecration horns. Above the altar, in an architectural frame consisting in two spiral columns, there is a fresco depicting two women in almost natural size, having between them a huge sword with midrib, kept with the tip down. Also in the space between them two miniature figures, one red and one black, are floating. The woman from the left wears a blue straight dress; the woman from the right wears a Minoan dress, and in her hand she seems to have a scepter.⁶⁰ While the scepter is kept by the woman from the right side of the picture, it would be perhaps logical to consider that the sword is handed by the woman from the left. It is supposed that the fresco depicts two goddesses or a goddess and her priestess.

Another category of iconographical evidence is represented by 6 seal impressions, 2 from Crete (Cat. Nos. 34, 36), one from Naxos (Cat. No. 35), one from "Mycenae" (Cat. No. 38), and 2 of unknown provenance. Even so few, they still could form three groups, based on the subject of the scene.

The first group contains two seals presenting possible cultic activities, but interpreted in this way only on the basis of the characters' attitude or because of some unusual details.

The seal found in the Knossos civil settlement (Cat. No. 34) is, until present, the only one depicting a woman handing a sword. She wears a dress with ruffles, a veil covering it, belt, and maybe arm-rings. Her hair seems to be dressed with a loop on her nape. It is believed that she is a priestess, caught in the middle of a cultic activity. She moves, keeping in her left hand an object like a sickle (?) and in her right hand a sword with its tip up. Her position can suggest eventually even a dance.

Also from Crete, but with no other information on the finding context, comes a second seal (Cat. No. 36) showing three men in a row, the last one keeping a sword with the tip up. It is difficult to determine exactly what they are doing.

The second group contains two seals depicting clear scenes of sacrifice.

For the seal from Naxos (Cat. No. 35) the interpretation of the scene is lightened by the presence of the palm tree and the offering table (or altar). Also the vessels (rhyton, jug, two-handled cauldron) represent those categories with possible use for the offerings. Associated with them, the sword seems to have a cultic function too. More difficult to interpret is the male character, with helmet and spear, present in this scene (priest, person bringing offerings?).

On the seal from "Mycenae" the presence of the divinity is again suggested by the existence of the palm tree. This time, on the offering table or altar is depicted also the sacrificed animal, a horned animal looking like a combination between a bull and a goat. It looks like the sacrifice has just taken place, the victim still having the neck stabbed with a short sword.

The third group contains two seals with unknown finding place.

⁵⁹ L. Kontorli-Papadopoulou, *Aegean Frescoes of Religious Character*, 1996, p. 54, 154–155.

⁶⁰ S. Immerwahr, *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age*, 1990, p. 120–121; L. Kontorli-Papadopoulou, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

About one of them (Cat. No. 37) it is said it represents either a panoply or a warrior goddess, because of the presence of the plumed helmet and the 8-shaped shield, completed with two hands, each keeping a sword with the tip up.

The last seal to be discussed (Cat. No. 39) depicts an adoration scene, with two griffons placed with the front legs on an X-legged table or altar. Above this there is a sword with its tip down, surmounted by a striped helmet and three pairs of horns.

Summing the information gathered by now in this chapter, it is time for some temporary conclusions on the role played by the Mycenaean swords in the cultic activities.

First of all, we deal with the sword as a *subject of a votive deposition*. In this category are included both pieces created originally as weapons (but ending their carrier as votive depositions) and swords (of natural size or miniatures) thought from the beginning as gifts to the gods. As arguments for this affirmation are the finds from the Cretan caves and from the sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas.

Secondly, there is the sword as an *object used in cultic activities*. Here we have the type A swords from Mallia and Kato Zakros, as well as iconographical information, like some of the seal impression just presented. The swords are depicted carried by persons implicated in religious activities, together with other objects used in cult, or even as sacrificial weapon. Unfortunately, in the seals' case it is impossible to determine the type of these swords.

Thirdly, there is the sword as an *attribute of a feminine deity*. This aspect creates the most problems, from various reasons. On the one hand, the scenes connecting the sword directly to the goddess' image are very few and damaged. The most certain is the one from the Mycenae fresco, where two women face each other, one holding a long sword, the other a scepter.⁶¹ Extremely incomplete, the scene leaves place to interpretations, problems arising with the interpretation of the characters: two goddesses or a goddess and a priestess. From my point of view, the first variant seems more probable, but I admit that the arguments to support this idea are few and not impossible to defeat: the fresco is just above the altar (and for this reason it should be an image dedicated to the cult and not describing the cult – so depicting the deities to be adored), the characters have the same size and seem to adopt the same posture (the only difference being the clothes' style and the object they keep in their hands). On the other hand, it seems that the sword is not the only attribute of the goddess, for this idea pleading other fresco fragments, also from Mycenae: one shows a female character wearing a helmet made of boar tusks, and possibly keeping a griffon in her arms; the other presents an 8-shaped shield adored by two women (although, in this case, it is not very clear what determined the specialists to consider that it is a female deity depicted).

But, as fragmentary as they are, these representations help us make a step ahead: it is possible that in some circumstances the weapons themselves may appear instead of the goddess' image, in other words the sword, together with some other parts of the military equipment, becomes the *symbol of the goddess*. To this conclusion could bring us a comparison of the frescoes with the seal impressions. From the first it could result that a warrior goddess is adored, having as attribute the sword, the boar tusk helmet, and the 8-shaped shield.

As for the seals, we have interesting examples. Cat. No 37 is interpreted usually as a military panoply or warrior goddess, but at this point the second interpretation seems to be closer to reality (because the boar tusk helmet, the 8-shaped shield and two swords are again depicted).⁶² The second relevant seal (Cat. No. 39) presents weapons again: the boar tusk helmet and the sword. The shield is missing, but other elements offer more interesting details to this scene. First, the X-legged altar, table, or chair appears, leading both to religious and status affirmation aspects. Then, the helmet is depicted in a unique manner, not only because it has horns, but because above these there are also the double horns (the so-called "snake frame"), always present (together with the double axe) on the heads of the deities (both male and female) called "Master of Animals" or "Mistress of Animals". Finally, the presence of the two griffons in adoration position speaks for itself, because they accompany the deities in the same position and arrangement.

⁶¹ An interesting thing is the association of the sword with the scepter, sending us perhaps to the way Agamemnon presents himself in front of the army (see note 53).

⁶² Remarkable here is the association of two swords, like in the cases of Mallia and Kato Zakros.

Conclusions

Here I reach the end of my discussion, with the hope that it can be a modest contribution brought to a better understanding of the problems put by the triple role played by the sword in the Mycenaean society. On the basis of all the information gathered in this paper, it is emphasized that the sword's functions in the domains of martial activity, prestige goods and religious activity can be seen as interconnected and influencing each other.

At present, it is almost impossible to state with sufficient certitude which was the initial goal for which so many efforts were made in the creation of rapiers, what vision they translated into reality, what need they were designated to fulfill: the necessity to obtain a more efficient weapon, an object to affirm a stronger status of the owner, or an object to have a part in cultic activities.

If we consider carefully the finding contexts of the first rapiers, the type A swords from Crete, we could conclude that, at least for this space and this society, at that time the cultic aspect prevails. But maybe the turning point in the rapier's carrier is not represented by its birth in the middle of the Minoan society, as being the essential detail apt to help us in defining the rapier's role played in the Aegean for some centuries. My opinion is that the true birth of the rapier (or the essential "second birth") takes place on the Mainland. The Mycenaean society is the one which takes over the rapier, through this adoption conferring it new functions or underlining the existent ones. In this society, found at the moment of its birth, on the way to define its own patterns, the rapier comes to support an elite still in formation, which tries – sometimes desperately – to display and strengthen its newly gained status. And it will continue this way, coming in the completion of the elite's stating its political power and capacity of focusing the forces within the society – expressed through structures both for the living (the palatial structures) and for the dead (the tombs with their display of wealth) –, enhancing the image of this social group, interested in highly specific activities, like war and hunting. Symbol of the warrior's skills, of the leading qualities, of the social status and of the participation in religious acts, the rapier will be a faithful companion for the Mycenaean elite – so interested to ensure its survival and emphasize its characteristics –, from its birth till its end.

The rapier becomes one of the most defining features of a society creating its own rules and proudly playing by them, no matter if in its martial, civil, or religious life. The changes registered by the Mycenaean society over time are promptly signaled by the changes in the sword's appearance and role. When the rules of war dramatically change, the rapier loses its position and finally disappears, but not without fighting.

CATALOGUE OF SEALS

Fight scenes

1. CMS II6/15

Iraklion (HMs 526/1-3.595.596)

Ayia Triada (exact provenience unknown)

Clay impression

The scene: The background is hard to determine. In the first plan, two warriors wearing belts move from left to right. The warrior from the right is running; he doesn't seem to have any weapon in his raised hands. He is followed by the second warrior who, after the position of his right hand (raised over his head, with the elbow bent), seems to keep a sword very vaguely depicted; his left hand is holding out to the enemy's head.

2. CMS II6/16

Iraklion (HMs 1653)

Ayia Triada

Clay impression

The scene: Duel between two warriors wearing short skirts. It is possible they may wear helmets (unless they are depicted with square heads). The warrior from the left

seems to be fallen down. He supports his body weight with the left arm, while holding out the right arm to his enemy's right elbow. He has apparently no weapon. The standing warrior is attacking his fallen adversary. He has two swords, the one from his left hand with a profiled guard; the other sword's blade is hidden behind the fallen enemy's body.

Observation: It is possible that the second sword may be in fact collected from the fallen warrior (it is kept with its tip up).

3. CMS II6/17

Iraklion (HMs 483)

Ayia Triada

Clay impression

The scene: There are three male characters. Down on the right side, a man wearing a plumed helmet is fallen with his head to the right. Next to him, standing, the second character, also wearing a plumed helmet, with a knee slightly bent, keeps a weapon in his right hand, stretched a lot to the back (it looks like launching a javelin or preparing an attack with a sword). On the left side of the scene, the third character can be seen only from the neck

downwards. He looks fallen on the ground, his gesture showing rather the intention to surrender.

Observation: it looks like the second warrior is protecting the first wounded one.

4. CMS II/6/18

Iraklion (HMs 459/1-10, 460/1-4, 593, 594, RMP 71976)

Ayia Triada

Clay impression

The scene: Very schematized; there are many lines impossible to interpret. There are two men wearing 8-shaped shields. It is highly possible that the two crossed lines may represent the swords of the fighters.

5. CMS I/11 (Fig. 3, a)

Athens

Mycenae, Circle A, Grave III

Gold seal-ring

The scene: On the right side of the scene a warrior wearing a belt strikes with his sword his enemy's neck; on his back the sheath of the sword can be seen. He keeps the sword in his left hand, while with the right he grasps the other's body or shield's frame. His adversary has a high plumed helmet and an 8-shaped shield, covering him from neck to ankles; in his right hand, stretched to the back, he keeps a sword or a spear.

6. CMS I/12 (Fig. 3, b)

Athens (IN 116)

Mycenae, Circle A, Grave III

Amygdaloidal (almond-shaped) carnelian

The scene: Two warriors wearing helmets and carrying 8-shaped shields on their back. Both wear short skirts, and the one on the right side has also a necklace. The warrior from the right side strikes his adversary at the junction between the neck and the shoulder with his sword kept in his left hand; with his right hand he seems to grasp his adversary's helmet. The sword is quite long and with profiled shoulders; it is kept over the head, suggesting a dagger-type strike (a stabbing). The warrior from the left has no weapon in his hands and looks like he starts falling on his knees; with his left hand he grasps his assailant sword's blade. It is a very beautiful scene.

7. CMS I/16 (Fig. 3, c)

Athens

Mycenae, Circle A, Grave IV

Gold seal-ring

The scene: There are four warriors present. Down on the right side, a warrior wearing helmet is fallen. On the left side, a warrior with a plumed helmet and rectangular shield throws a javelin. In the middle a duel takes place: on the right a fighter with skirt and helmet with horizontal stripes keeps in his left hand a rather short sword; while with his right hand he grasps his opponent's neck, with his left he starts a stroke from the back of his head; one of his knees is slightly bent. His adversary's knee is strongly bent (practically he is kneeling); he also wears a skirt, but doesn't seem to have a helmet; with his left hand he grasps his opponent's underarm, while with a long sword in his right hand he strikes the other's face. The big pommels of the swords can be noticed. The scene is very lively.

8. CMS V/643 (Fig. 3, d)

Pylos (IN 13)

Koukounara, Tholos Tomb Gouvalari 1

Amethyst

The scene: Two warriors probably wearing helmets, with belts and skirts; from their belts hang the sheaths of their swords. Both are armed with two swords, a long one and a short one. The impression left by this scene: the warrior from the right stands with his back to the on-looker, so that he has the short sword in his right hand and the long one in his left hand (the short sword being hidden by his belt). The warrior from the left faces his opponent, with his short sword also in his right hand and the long one in the left. The short swords are crossed in the warriors belly area. With his long sword the fighter from the right thrusts the other's left arm, and this one, in his turn, strikes the first in the chest.

Observation: It is also possible that what is interpreted as sheaths may be in fact some scarves tied at the swords' grips.

9. CMS VII/129

London, British Museum (B.M. (G.R.) 1874.4-5.5)

Crete

Carnelian

The scene: On the right side there is a warrior with a helmet (?), a rectangular shield, covering him from the neck to his knees, and a long spear. On the left side a warrior with a plumed helmet (?), skirt, belt, and the sheath of the sword on his back, attacks with the sword kept over his head, while with the left hand he grasps his adversary.

Observation: The shield seems to be kept so high in order to protect the warrior's face.

10. CMS IX/158

Paris, Cabinet des Medailles (CdM N 3377)

Provenience unknown

Chalcedony

The scene: In the center, a warrior, with belt and probably a short skirt, moves to the right, against an adversary wearing a plumed helmet. He keeps the sword in his right hand, raised over the head. The sword is not very long, with profiled shoulders and prominent pommel. On the left side of the scene the legs of a fallen warrior can be noticed.

11. CMS XI/34

Berlin, Staatl. Museen, Antiken-Abt. (IN FG6)

"Athens"

Lapis Lacedaemonius

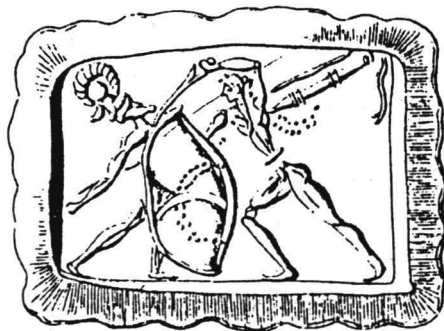
The scene: Two men wearing belts seem to run towards each other. With one hand they reach the other's head, while with the sword in the other they try to thrust each other in the chest. The man from the right has his head turned to the right, as if his opponent pushes him. They are very strangely drawn: if they grasp with their right hands the other's head, this means that they are depicted as if they have the hands with the swords wrapped up on their bodies. The fact can be seen either as a mistake or the warrior from the right keeps the sword in his right hand and his adversary in his left hand. The swords are quite short, with prominent shoulders and pommels.

12. CMS XII/292

New York, Metropolitan Museum (IN 26.31.262)

Lentoid chalcedony

The scene: On the right side, a shorter male character with helmet and a spear hides himself behind a rectangular shield, which covers also his face. On the left side, a taller male character, with skirt, keeps his adversary with his left hand, while thrusting him with a short sword kept in the right hand, raised above the head. On his shoulder hangs the sheath of the sword.



a



c



A. n.

Man-lion fight scenes

13. CMS I/9 (Fig. 3, e)

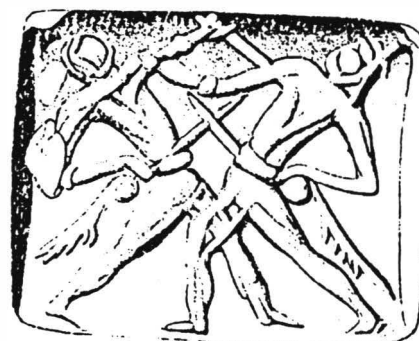
Mycenae, Circle A, Grave III

Gold seal-ring

The scene: The warrior is on the right side of the scene, wearing a long ruffled skirt. The lion stands with his front legs on the man's bent knee. The warrior grasps with the right hand the lion's neck, while with the left hand he thrusts the animal in the jaw with a long sword.



b



d

e

Fig. 3. a) CMS I/11, Mycenae, Grave Circle A (Cat. No. 5); b) CMS I/12, Mycenae, Grave Circle A (Cat. No. 6); c) CMS I/16, Mycenae, Grave Circle A (Cat. No. 7); d) CMS V/643, Koukounara, Gouvalari I Tholos Tomb (Cat. No. 8); e) CMS I/9, Mycenae, Grave Circle A (Cat. No. 13).

14. *CMS I/165*

Athens (IN 7630)

Mycenae. The Lower City

Clay impression

The scene: The man, on the right side of the scene, runs towards the rampant lion; he is accompanied by a dog. With the sword in his left hand he strikes the lion's chest or neck.

15. *CMS I/228*

Athens (IN 1783)

Vapheio

Hematite

The scene: A man with an 8-shaped shield, on the left side of the image, strikes with the sword kept in his right hand above the head. The target seems to be the rampant lion's forehead.

16. *CMS I/290*

Pylos, Grave Delta

Amethyst

The scene: The man, on the left side, wearing belt and short skirt, strikes with the sword kept in his right hand. On his belt can be seen the sheath of the sword (sometimes interpreted as a second sword). The man bends his left knee and raises the sword over his head. He thrusts the rampant lion in the mouth.

17. *CMS I/307*

Athens (IN 8477)

Pylos, Palace, Archives Room 7

Clay impression (fragmentary)

The scene: There is a symmetrical scene, with two men standing back to back in the middle, each attacked by a lion. Both men wear short skirts. Both are bitten on the arm. The eventual swords are not left on the impression, but the man on the left has his hand raised over his head, as if he strikes with a sword.

18. *CMS I/331*

Athens (IN 8482)

Pylos, Palace, Room 99

Clay impression

The scene: The rampant lion is in the middle of the image, facing left. On the left side, confronting the lion, a man with a belt raises his hands (possibly holding a spear). On the right side, a second man thrusts the lion in the back of its neck with his sword.

19. *CMS I/359*

Pylos, Palace, Room 105

Clay impression (very fragmentary)

The scene: A man wearing a belt running or falling in front of a lion. No weapon can be seen.

20. *CMS II/3/14*

Iraklion (IN 1756)

Knossos, Small Palace

Steatite

The scene: A male character, with long skirt, keeps in his right hand a short sword or dagger. On the right side, in front of him, a lion which looks defeated.

21. *CMS IV/233*

Iraklion, Metaxas Collection (IN 298)

Hematite

The scene: A man, on the left side of the scene, strikes with a short sword a rampant lion. His arm is stretched to the back, the right knee slightly bent, the thrust starts from above his head and looks for the lion's forehead.

22. *CMS VS.IA/135*

Chania (Chania-Kastelli) (IN 15591)

Clay impression

The scene: On the right side of the image, a man with short skirt and possibly the sheath at his belt. With his right hand he grasps the lion's front legs, while with the left hand raised over his head he strikes with a short sword to the animal's mouth.

23. *CMS IX/152*

Paris, Cabinet des Medailles (CdM.M6673)

Sitia

Red jasp

The scene: A warrior, with a plumed helmet, possibly breastplate (shown by horizontal stripes) and short skirt, strikes the lion, found on the left side of the image, with a long weapon (sword or perhaps a spear, because it is kept with both hands).

24. *CMS XI/33*

Berlin, Staatl. Museen, Antiken-Abt. (IN FG7)

"Symi"

Agate

The scene: In the center there is a rampant lion, body from profile, head from the front; a dog tries to bite it. On both sides of the lion a man with a short skirt. The image is quite symmetrical: the man from the left grasps the lion's head with the left hand, while with the sword kept in his right hand he stabs the animal under its forelegs. The man from the right seems to act in a similar manner (hard to say because of the bad preservation condition of the seal).

25. *CMS XI/208*

München, Staatl. Antikensammlungen (IN 681)

Kakovatos, Tholos Tomb

Agate

The scene: Fight between a man and a rampant lion. The lion is on the left of the image, with its tail between the legs. The warrior, dressed with a short skirt and belt from which hangs the sword's sheath, grasps the lion with his right hand, while with his left hand raised above his head he directs a strike to the animal's open mouth. The sword looks short, stout, with a big pommel. Behind the man a Ta-urt demon also appears, with his hands raised.

26. *CMS XI/272*

Péronne, Rathaus, Musée Danicourt (no IN)

"From a grave from Saloniki" (1874)

Gold seal-ring

The scene: It is symmetrical, presenting a double fight. Two men show in the middle of the scene, each facing a lion. Both men wear skirts and have long hair, dressed in a loop. The lions are rampant and each bites the shoulder of one man. The warrior from the right is bitten on the left shoulder while he thrusts the lion with his sword in the

forehead; the strike comes from above his head, and the sword looks long and stout. The warrior from the left is bitten on the right shoulder while with his left hand thrusts the lion in the chest with a shorter sword. The scene has also a background with two small trees and a frieze as the ground. It is a very beautiful scene.

Hunting scenes

27. *CMS V/656*

Rhodes (IN 3653)

Ialysos, Makri Vounara, Grave 21

Agate

The scene: The hunter comes from the left side of the image with a short sword in his right hand (unusual form, more like a spearhead) and an unidentified object in his left hand. The stag attacks him with its very long horns, while a dog bites the animal's belly.

28. *CMS VII/131*

London, British Museum (B.M. (G.R.) 1854.5-17.147)

Agate

The scene: A man, on the left side of the image, strikes with the spear the neck of an ibex antelope. The sword hangs on the man's belt.

Scenes with the sword as a prestige item

29. *CMS I/68*

Athens (IN 2446)

Mycenae, Chamber Tomb 27

Agate and gold

The scene: A man with long hair and belt is shown with the head and legs from the profile, the body and arms from the front. He moves towards the right side of the scene, keeping in his left hand a short sword.

30. *CMS I/414*

Athens (IN 4580)

Crete

Steatite with three facets

The scene: On facet B is depicted a schematized human figure, who seems to keep in each of his raised hand a sword with its tip down.

31. *CMS II/6/144*

Iraklion (HMs 508)

Ayia Triada

Clay impression (incomplete)

The scene: An image with interpretation problems. A male character seems to kneel, facing the left. He has a long beard and wears a horned helmet and a belt. Possibly he keeps in his left hand a sword or a stick, and in the right hand a horn.

Observation: Because of the lack of clarity of the scene, it is equally probable it may depict an archer.

32. *CMS II/7/18*

Iraklion (HMs 70)

Kato Zakros, House A, Room VII

Clay impression (?)

The scene: Two male characters seem to have a conversation. Both wear long ruffled clothes. The man from the right, facing the on-lookers, carries on his back a long weapon (which I see as a sword).

33. *CMS VS.1A/133*

Chania (Chania-Kastelli) (IN 1559F)

Clay impression (?)

The scene: It is unique until now from the point of view of the theme. A man with a short skirt and belt runs to the right side of the image. In his left hand he keeps a sword or a long stick; with his right hand he keeps two ropes, which tied the necks of two men (prisoners?).

Scenes with cultic character

34. *CMS II/3/16* (Fig. 4, a)

Iraklion (IN 1279)

Knossos (the settlement)

Sard

The scene: A female figure moves to the left of the scene. She wears a skirt with three ruffles and a veil tied over her breasts and covering the skirt. She has also a belt and arm-rings (?). In her right hand she keeps a raised sword, with big pommel and prominent shoulders.

Observation: A dance scene may be suggested.

35. *CMS V/608* (Fig. 4, b)

Naxos (no IN)

Aplomata, Grave B

Agate

The scene: On the right, a man with short skirt, belt and headdress (possibly a plumed helmet), keeps in his right hand stretched forth a spear with its tip up. Between the man and his spear a small table or altar can be seen, on which lie: a sword with its tip up (with profiled shoulders and big pommel), a conical rhyton, a two-handle vase, and a jug (although these objects seem rather to hang on the wall). On the left side of the scene there is a big palm tree.

36. *CMS VII/130*

London, British Museum (B.M. (GR/R) 1874. 4-5.4)

Crete

Sard

The scene: It shows a row of three men, all wearing short skirts and belts. The first one, on the left side, also facing left, stands with his knees bent and both hands stretched down before him, as if preparing himself to lift something. The second character, who seems to wear a helmet, moves to the left, in a manner very similar with the famous "Egyptian walk". The third character seems rather to stand still. His right hand is bent from the elbow in front of him (like the character no. 2). In his left hand, bent from the elbow to his back, he keeps a sword with its tip up.

37. *CMS VII/158* (Fig. 4, c)

London, British Museum (B.M. (G.R./R) 1935.4-30.1)

Amethyst

The scene: Panoply or warrior goddess. It presents an 8-shaped shield, surmounted by a plumed helmet. Two hands raising from behind the shield keep two swords with prominent pommels and tips up. On the down side of the scene there appears something usually interpreted as lion heads.



a



b



c



d

Fig. 4. a) CMS II3/16, Knossos, Settlement (Cat. No. 34); b) CMS V/608, Aplomata (Cat. No. 35); c) CMS VII/158, provenience unknown (Cat. No. 37); d) CMS VIII/39, Rhodes (Cat. No. 39).

38. CMS XI/52

Berlin, Staatl. Museen, Antiken-Abt. (IN FG22)
"Mycenae"
Agate

The scene: Sacrificial scene. On a four-legged offering table lies a horned animal (with the horns of a goat and the tail of a bull), with the head to the right side of the scene. A short sword (or dagger), with profiled shoulders and prominent pommel, is still stabbing the animal's neck. On the left side of the scene a palm tree is depicted.

39. CMS XIII/39 (Fig. 4,d)

Cambridge, Fogg Art Museum (IN 1960.641)
Lentoid hematite

The scene: Cult scene with an altar (X-legged table or stool), above which stands a sword with big pommel and profiled guard, tip down. On the top of the scene appears a horned boar tusk helmet with a "snake frame". Two griffons with opened wings stand in the adoration posture.