

SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

NO MYCENAEAN CENTAURS YET

IONE Mylonas Shear claims in her article in *JHS* 2002 that two Mycenaean animal figurines from Ugarit, only one of which has been previously published, represent Mycenaean centaurs and are thus predecessors of centaurs of the historical period.¹ It is quite clear, however, that both belong to the so-called 'abbreviated group' figurines, which consist of driven oxen – 'plough' (PLATE 8a) – or single chariots, as identified by E.B. French and further defined by me in my work on the terracottas from the Sanctuary of Aphaia on Aigina.² In an abbreviated group there is only one animal instead of two, with one human, sometimes two, standing at the rear of the animal, in or behind a small or almost non-existent box or balustrade. According to what animal head is at the front of the figurine, either horse or bovine, it is an abbreviated chariot or, much more commonly, a driven ox. In the fully preserved pieces the head of the driver always faces towards the animal head.

The part of the figurine described by Mylonas Shear as the front, and thus the torso of the centaur, is in fact the stylized and abbreviated box and driver on the rear of the animal, with the driver facing along the animal's body. On the Aleppo example the curved shape and the solidly painted wings of the box are clearly visible, while a vertically attached strip of clay with linear decoration on the back of the box renders the lower body of the driver.³ On the other piece from Ugarit the box and the driver have merged into one, although the wings of the box are still discernible.⁴

Similar specimens have been discovered at the Sanctuary of Aphaia, where the development from the more naturalistic to the abbreviated form can be observed.⁵ One of the Aphaia pieces (PLATE 8b) is larger and more elaborate than the Ugarit pieces but it clearly shows the box with broken-off wings and the single driver facing the missing head of the horse. The other Aphaia example is simpler (PLATE 8c) and has closer parallels to the second piece from Ugarit discussed by Mylonas Shear. In recent years many well-preserved examples have been found at the Mycenaean sanctuary of Ag. Konstantinos on Methana and on Phylakopi.⁶

There is an inherent danger in drawing far-reaching conclusions and interpretations based on very fragmentary pieces. Unfortunately, most Mycenaean terracottas are in a fragmentary state, unless found in funerary contexts, so their interpretation is usually based on parallels with well-established types. The chariots and their abbreviated versions are such a type, less common than the regular female or animal figurines, but nevertheless widely discussed – indeed, their identification goes back to von Merklin in 1909.⁷ Until a Mycenaean piece that can be confidently claimed as a centaur is found, we had perhaps do best not to raise hopes of a continuity of images across the divide between the Bronze Age and the historical period.

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¹ I. Mylonas Shear, 'Mycenaean centaurs at Ugarit', *JHS* 122 (2002) 147-53, pl. 3a-f; J.-C. Courtois, *Ugaritica* 7 (Paris 1978) fig. 55:5.

² E.B. French, 'The development of Mycenaean terracotta figurines', *BSA* 68 (1971) 165-6; K. Pilafidis-Williams, *The Sanctuary of Aphaia on Aigina in the Bronze Age* (Munich 1998) 67-70.

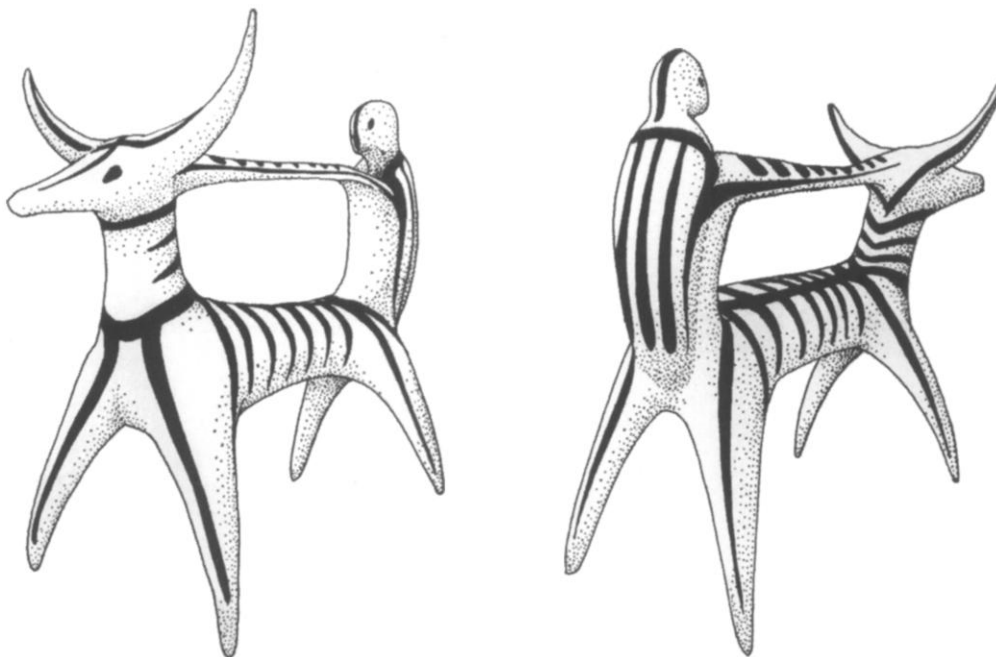
³ Mylonas Shear (n.1) pl. 3a-c. The photograph suggests that it is of this type, viz. the body modelled with an extra strip of clay; in more stylized figurines, the added body of the charioteer/driver is merged with the box and it is impossible to tell that there is a person attached unless the head is preserved.

⁴ Mylonas Shear (n.1) pl. 3e-f.

⁵ K. Pilafidis-Williams (n.2) 70, nos. 510, 511, 512; pls 3, 54.

⁶ For Methana: E. Konsolaki, *ADelt* 46 (1991) 71-4, pl. 41b; *ead.*, 'A Mycenaean sanctuary on Methana', in R. Hägg (ed.) *Peloponnesian Sanctuaries and Cults*, Proceedings of the 9th International Symposium at the Swedish School in Athens (Stockholm 2002) 25-36, fig. 12; *ead.*, 'Τά Μυκηναϊκά εἰδώλια ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιο Κωνσταντῖνο Μεθάνων', in E. Konsolaki-Iannopoulou (ed.), *Αργοσαρωνικός, Πρακτικά 1ου Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Ιστορίας και Αρχαιολογίας του Αργοσαρωνικού, Πόρος, 26-29 Ιουνίου 1998*, vol. A (Athens 2003) fig. 20 (MP 5494), fig. 21 (MP 5502, 5503), and fig. 22 (MP 5496, MP 5500). For Phylakopi: E.B. French in C. Renfrew, *The Archaeology of Cult. The Sanctuary of Phylakopi* (London 1985) 260 (SF849), pl. 44c.

⁷ Von Merklin, *Der Rennwagen in Griechenland* (Leipzig 1909) nos. 3 (NM 3493) and 4 (NMA 10139).



(a) Reproduced from A. Tamvaki, 'Some unusual terracottas from the Citadel House Area', *BSA* 68 (1963) fig. 17. By kind permission of the Mycenae archive and Dr E.B. French

(b & c) Reproduced from K. Pilafidis-Williams, *The Sanctuary of Aphaia on Aigina in the Bronze Age* (Munich 1998) pls 3 & 54

(b) Temple of Aphaia 510



(c) Temple of Aphaia 512

