

MYCENAEAN CENTAURS STILL

FRAGMENTARY Mycenaean terracottas are unquestionably difficult to interpret, particularly when seen only in photographs. In an attempt to question the identity of the Ugarit figurine now in the Aleppo Museum as a centaur it is claimed that an added strip of clay was attached to the preserved upright portion of the figurine and that the curving sides of the upper section were painted a solid colour.¹ Both observations are incorrect. Since the new identification of this figurine is based on these incorrect observations, the new identification itself remains questionable.

The interpretation of the fragmentary Ugarit figurines in question depends on whether the front or the back of the figurines is preserved. In the groups from Aigina, cited as possible parallels, the rear legs of the figurine stretch backwards to counterbalance the added weight of the chariot whereas the front legs are more nearly vertical.² In the abbreviated examples of chariot groups, the added segment representing the charioteer or alternatively the oxen driver usually leans forward, and the entire composition faces towards the head of the animal.³ In the Ugarit figurines the legs and torsos of the restored centaurs are more nearly vertical and the figurines as a whole lack the tilt found in the chariot groups.

In the abbreviated chariot groups, the portion representing the chariot is diminutive in size and rests squarely on the rump of the horse.⁴ When viewed from the back, the chariot – often modelled separately – has a distinct ledge on which the charioteer stands and the sides of the chariot are nearly parallel to each other. The segment of the Ugarit figurines, said to be a chariot, is much larger than the reduced chariots of the Aigina figurines. The projecting sides are more oblique, and in the figurine in the Aleppo Museum they are not identical in proportions or decoration. The upper and lower sections on both Ugarit figurines flow smoothly into one another without a break and the transitions are marked only in glaze. The ledge on which the charioteer stood is missing.

Only one horse is portrayed in the abbreviated chariot groups. It was understood to represent the two horses characteristic of the more developed kind.⁵ This is clearly indicated by the decoration. A reserved, undecorated band lies along the spine of the horse to indicate the two horses, and the two sides of the animal are slightly different in their decoration.⁶ In the Ugarit figurines, the decoration on each side of the horse's body is identical and the reserved band along the spine of the horse is missing. In the figurine in the Aleppo Museum the sides of the centaur are decorated with curved lines that clearly differentiate it from the back, which was painted a solid colour, a decorative scheme that makes no sense if this part of the figurine is to be identified as a chariot.

A full discussion of the problems inherent in developing the typology of fragmentary Mycenaean figurines is beyond the scope of this short rebuttal, but in my opinion sufficient data exist in this case to suggest that these Ugarit figurines be identified as centaurs. This identification provides one more piece of evidence for the continuity of iconography and associated myths from the Bronze Age to the historical periods.

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¹ See I.M. Shear, *JHS* 122 (2002) 147-53, for original identification and K. Pilafidis-Williams, p. 165 above, for questions concerning this identity.

² K. Pilafidis-Williams, *The Sanctuary of Aphaia on Aigina in the Bronze Age* (Munich 1998) 67-70, for general discussion of her groups and pl. 53, no. 500, the back of a horse of a chariot group, to be compared to no. 502, the front.

³ This is particularly evident in the figurines from Methana published by E. Konsolaki: *ADelt* 46 (1991) pl.

41b, and 'A Mycenaean sanctuary on Methana', in R. Hägg (ed.), *Peloponnesian Sanctuaries and Cults*, Proceedings of the Ninth International Symposium at the Swedish School in Athens (Stockholm 2002) fig. 12.

⁴ Pilafidis-Williams (n.2) pl. 3, no. 510 (= PLATE 8b) and pl. 54 nos. 510-11.

⁵ See, for example, C.W. Blegen, *Prosymna. The Helladic Settlement Preceding the Argive Heraeum* (Cambridge, MA 1937) fig. 617, no. 415.

⁶ Pilafidis-Williams (n.2) 68.