

## SOME HINTS ABOUT EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN MYTHOLOGY\*

The decipherment of the Mycenaean script has strengthened the already existing evidence about the close relationship between the Greek and the Mycenaean world. Perhaps there is no field in which this relationship is more prominent than that of the wonderful Greek mythology. It is enough to remember only, that the drama is a most characteristic feature of world - literature. The drama is an achievement of the Greek spirit, but it has its roots almost exclusively in the Mycenaean civilization. Similarly deep are the roots into the Mycenaean world of epic poetry and of the whole heroic mythology.

Now, it is a curious fact, observed already by scholars, that we have no mythology in Mycenaean (and Minoan) art. The famous Swedish scholar M. NILSSON states, that «the historical background of Greek heroic mythology is amply proved by its correspondence to the geographical distribution of Mycenaean civilization». But, he states on the other hand, mythological scenes have been eagerly sought for, but none of them found in Minoan - Mycenaean art. There are hardly two or three representations upon rings or seals which were claimed to have a possible mythological significance<sup>1</sup>.

This is true if we understand mythology as we understand it in Greek art. Surely we don't have the life and exploits of gods in Mycenaean art, such as we have in Egyptian, Accadian and Sumerian, Chetite and other minor fields of art. Equally we have not great heroes and their deeds, such as Gilgamesh or Engidu or the «Protector of the beasts»<sup>2</sup>. This is really curious for a period, in which, according to deep - rooted Greek belief, all great heroes were born. Moreover it is sure that, for the Mycenaean also, some mighty ancestor heroes must have preexisted. Nestor remembers of generations of such overwhelming personalities<sup>3</sup>. We can offer the explanation that myths of this kind were by no

\* A lecture delivered in the Wise Auditorium of the Jerusalem University (May 12th 1965) on the opportunity of the official opening of the University Museums.

1 M. NILSSON, *The Myc. Origin of Greek Mythology*, 29-30.

2 Doubts begin as soon as we meet some few Mycenaean fighting scenes engraved upon rings or seals. The persons fighting against other warriors

or against beasts (almost exclusively lions) may be, of course, mortals. The scenes may be the glorification of a specific historic fact; or may be ideal cases without a historic background. But it is equally well possible, that all or some of them depict famous stories of mighty persons who lived sometime. If so, we have already the first creation of the heroic personality.

3 II I 266f., VII 137f.

means popular, because they belonged to the war - aristocracy of the Mycenaean period; and, if we have any of these representations at all, they are found upon rings, precious gems and other precious materials or even on wall - paintings of the palaces.

There exists, however, another kind of myths or tales, which are more akin to popular surroundings and folklore. Often they become typical tales and they are known in surprisingly wide areas among most different peoples. Their subjects are monsters or animals or birds and even trees. They are found upon handi-craft - products, such as pottery, just because they are popular and they render pottery commercially more interesting. Under these presuppositions we will try to



Fig. 1. Marine monster pursuing men. Cypromycenaean crater.  
(After Vermeule, *Greece in the Bronze Age*, pl. XXXII B.)

examine some of these works and to show that they depict ideas common to the whole Mediterranean world.

Upon a Cypromycenaean crater from Encomi<sup>1</sup> we see the following scene: A chariot, upon which two men fly in terror, is pursued by a huge marine monster (Fig. 1). This has a great, circular eye, a long and strong beak - like mouth and seems to have four feet rather than fins.

The question is now, whether such representations can be mythological or not. Only rarely have scholars discussed this possibility; but, I believe, we are justified in trying to explain such scenes, especially if they are rather unusual. We have to recur to popular tales and we have to be more broad - minded, than we have been hitherto. Let us try it just in this scene:

One of the most popular tale - motifs, possibly constituting a hazy reminiscence from the very beginning of man's memory, is the monster appearing from the mystery of the waters. While stirring the minds up to our own days (mon-

<sup>1</sup> E. SJOQVIST, *Problems of the Late Cypriot the Bronze Age*, 1964, Pl. XXXIIB and p. 204-5. *Bronze Age*, fig. 20,3 = E. VERMEULE, *Greece in*

ster of Lake Loch Ness!), it is equally characteristic for the Ten Kings before the Flood. Berossos's Text runs thus:

...After Amelon ruled Ammenon from the Chaldean stock of the town Pautibblon; he has ruled 12 sars; in his days appeared a monster, the name of which is Idotion; it came out of the Red Sea and it had the forms of both, man and fish.... Then came the kingship of Daonos the Shepherd, from the town of Pautibblon; he ruled also 10 sars. In his days appeared again from the Red Sea and with the same forms of man and fish, four mighty beasts. Then ruled Euedorachos from the town of Pautibblon for 18 sars; and in his days again appeared from the Red Sea another Being in form of fish and man, the name of which was given, Odakon... (After two further kings, so runs the story, came Xisuthros, and in his days happened the great Flood)<sup>1</sup>.

In cuneiform texts we have the fragments of another similar story, in which some god (name lost) succeeds in wounding mortally the huge monster Labbu, which was the terror of mankind. It was created by the Sea and its picture, «designed by Enlil upon the Sky, was 50 elbows long». When it was wounded «its blood run for three years, three months, a day and X double hours»<sup>2</sup>.

These literary traditions are already enough for justifying the idea, that the representation upon the Cypromycenaean crater was not meaningless. It was easily understandable by people, who possessed such tales. It is characteristic, that the home of these craters is Cyprus, where Oriental and Mycenaean elements coexisted.

The present case is a happy one and is chosen exactly, because it gives us the chance to follow the further development of the tale from the purely Mycenaean to the Greek world: from the standard mythology most fitting is the tale about Poseidon and the sea-monster (ketos). This creature, «carried up by a flood, snatched away the people of the plain»<sup>3</sup>. Its next development is, that it became the ketos of Hesione, killed by Heracles; another version is the ketos of Andromeda, killed by Perseus. In all these cases the scene of the event is the East; and the fact that it was a common Oriental property, is shown by the details of localization: Hesione is on the shore of Troas; Andromeda is the daughter of the king of the Ethiopians; but, as other writers state, the episode happened in Syria. Indeed, on the shore and the sea - rocks at Ioppa, the traces of Andromeda's adventure and fetters were still visible, Josephus states<sup>4</sup>. The tale was at home everywhere.

Sometimes the story is mentioned without Hesione, but as a fight between

<sup>1</sup> See B. MEISSNER, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, II, 112f.

<sup>2</sup> L. c. 182.

<sup>3</sup> APOLLOD. II 5, 9.

<sup>4</sup> JOS. Bell. Jud. III 92. FRAZER, *Apollod.* I, p. 159. PAUSANIAS (IV 35. 9, transl. Frazer) states that «Red water, red as blood, may be seen in the

land of the Hebrews, near the city of Joppa. The water is hard by the sea, and the local legend runs that when Perseus had slain the sea-beast, to which the daughter of Cepheus was exposed, he washed off the blood at the spring». Cf. STRABO 759 (XVI, 2 28): *Ἰόππῃ... Ἐνταῦθα δὲ μυθολογοῦσι τινες τὴν Ἀνδρομέδα ἐκτεθῆναι τῷ κήτει.*

Heracles and the ketos. Our oldest authority was Hellanicus (5th cent.); but a black-figure cylix of Attic workmanship found in Taras shows, that about one hundred years earlier the tale was already popular. The picture is extremely vivid (Fig. 2). Enough to see only the huge dimensions of the fish-like ketos, for feeling ourselves transported to the very days of the Creation. The mighty Heracles, compared to the monster, is a tiny being. Courage, however, did not abandon him. He tries to cut the spectacular tongue of the monster with a sickle. There is no doubt at all, that the painter was aware of the version mentioned by Tzetzes and by the scholiast of Homer (Il. XX 146). According to it Heracles, realizing that the

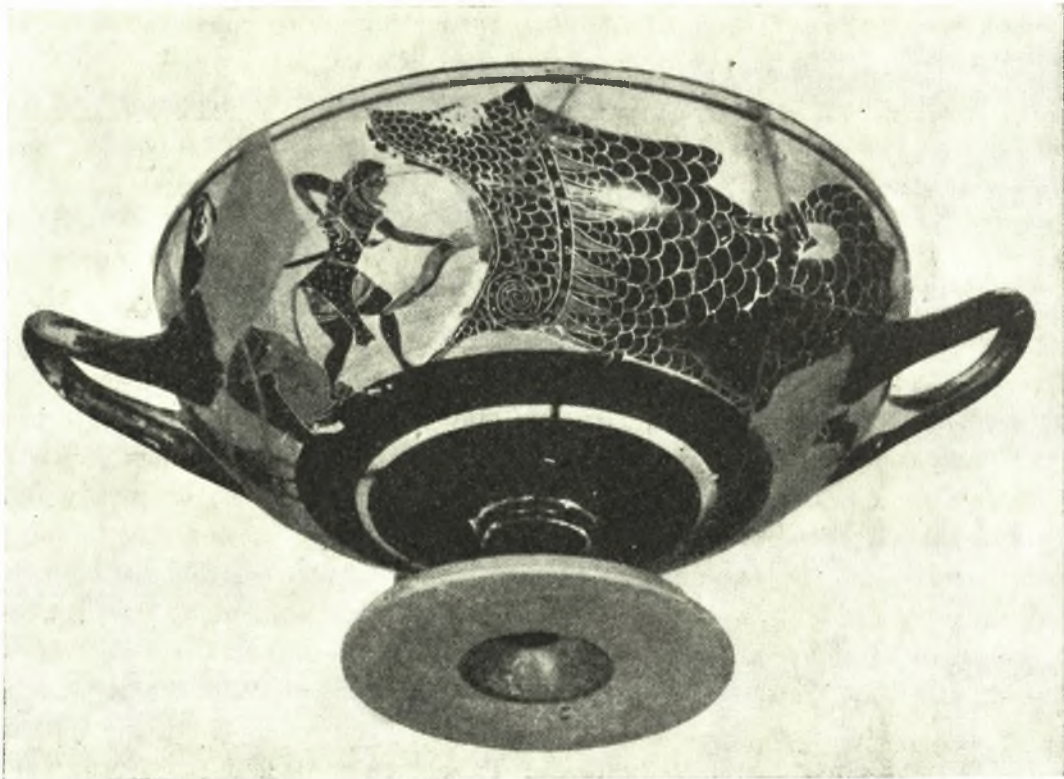


Fig. 2. Heracles and the Ketos. Black-figure cylix from Taras.  
(After Brommer, *Marb. Winck. Progr.* 1955.)

monster was invulnerable, decided at once to kill it from within. What he is doing now, is opening his way by cutting the perilous tongue of the ketos. Then, «Heracles, in full armour, leaped into the jaws of the sea-monster, and was in its belly for three days hewing and hacking it... At the end of the three days he came forth without any hair on his head» (FRAZER). We are told, that the tale of the ketos exists in different versions in many lands, even in Germany, up to our own days; and we have seen, that it starts from the immemorial times before the Flood.

We have, on the other side, the amazing discoveries at Jericho, Jarmo, Ha-

çilar and Çatal Hüyük. It is in these lands, that man abandoned the nomadic life sometime in the 8th millenium. He became a permanent inhabitant of these districts and, owing to the development of agriculture, he passed from the food-gathering to the food-producing conditions. He did not as yet know, however, how to manure his fields. Earth, therefore, soon became barren. In waves these primitive laborers started to move to the West. They brought to Thessaly their preceramic Neolithic, then the Protosesklo and the Sesklo ceramic periods. Soon followed the Dimini period; these same people advanced as far as Central Europe, Italy and Sicily during these and the early bronze period. They are the settlers of the -nth and -ss toponymics, which cover a huge area on the maps, from Asia Minor to the above mentioned European districts. Is it not natural to suppose, that together with these elements they brought some of the tales and traditions of their Oriental home? Here we have before us a tale, which, partly through art, and partly through literary sources, can be followed from the Flood traditions down to our own days; and is it not a characteristic fact that the Flood tradition of Greece roots mainly in Thessaly, in this very land of the earliest Oriental settlers?<sup>1</sup>

From further versions we can mention here, that the above exposed and rather latent adventure of Heracles is better known from the Jonas parallel story of the Bible, who sojourned another three days in the belly of the ketos. The only difference is that, according to each one's profession, Heracles hacked and bored, while Jonas prayed (Jon. 2, 1 - 11). The Greek tradition has still more to tell about Heracles. Enough to say here, that the genuine tradition about the «forms of man and fish» of the ketos lived still vividly when the Greeks were building the old poros temple of Athena upon the Acropolis of Athens. Only the names changed, for Odakon was then called Triton<sup>2</sup>.

Akin to this tradition is the tale of the huge serpent. In Oriental sources we hear about the «Great Serpent». It was a parallel to the Labbu story, but unfortunately the text is badly damaged<sup>3</sup>. We see in Mycenaean art serpents, which have no apparent connection to the chtonic cults etc. A further meaning is not excluded a priori<sup>4</sup>. The subsequent mythological developments are broad. The serpent takes more phantastic forms and functions: it is usually designated as «drakon». Gods and kings are concerned in fighting it (Apollo, Kadmos). It enters popular tradition of all periods and is preserved down to our own times. It plays a role in religious traditions. The typical representation of St. George is that of fighting the dragon.

Most interesting for primitive man is the life of birds. Indeed, birds can

<sup>1</sup> Full bibliography about Hesione's and Andromeda's art representations: F. BROMMER, *Marb. Winkelmann Progr.* 1955. Cf. FRAZER, *Apollod.* I, 207-8. About the archaeol. question F. SCHACHERMEYR, *Die Aeltesten Kulturen Griechenlands*, 37f. and E. VERMEULE, *Greece in the Bronze Age*, 6f.

<sup>2</sup> Good pictures: LULLIES-HIRMER, *Griech. Plastik*, pl. 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> MEISSNER, *Bab. und Ass.*, II, 182.

<sup>4</sup> See the motives of serpents FURUMARK, *Mycen. Pottery*, 255 fig. 31.

fly; and this was the great dream of the whole mankind. Most of the gods are identified with or represented by birds. Many functions or miraculous qualities are attributed to birds. Curiously enough, ancient Near Eastern literature has yielded very little about birds. We can remember of the storm-bird Zû, which had great abilities and ambitions indeed. It desired to ensure the possession of



Fig. 3. Bringing down a cinnamon nest.  
(After T. H. White, the Bestiary etc.)

We have, however, later Near Eastern tales, which partly fill the gap. Retrievers of precious things, which man can not find, are great birds. In the tale of Sindbad the Sailor there is the miraculous bird, which brings diamonds; the same tale is to be found in Marco Polo. Herodotus tells us about another arabic tale, according to which when cinnamon was not accessible to man, it was available through some birds, which employed cinnamon among other things for making their nests<sup>2</sup>.

How persistent these tales are is shown by Medieval manuals of Zoology («Bestiaries»). In one of them is described an «Arabian bird, the Cinomolgus... because he builds his nests in the very highest trees, making them of cinnamon». The accompanying picture (fig.3) shows two men trying to bring down the nest by sling-shots<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> MEISSNER, *Bab. u. Assyr.*, II, 182.

<sup>3</sup> T. H. WHITE, *The Bestiary...* (Putnam, New

<sup>2</sup> HEROD. III, and comp. the commentary of HOW and WELLS on the locus York 1960) p. 129.

Again we are helped through these tales to go beyond the common and trivial explanation with a logical degree of probability: Birds are an extremely common motive in Bronze Age art generally. Upon a pictorial-style Mycenaean crater found in Koukounara (Pylos) we see the following scene: two huge, long-necked birds, carry in their beaks some root-like objects (Fig. 4). The first impression is of course: «straw or grass for their nests». If we look for a parallel in art, we may explain the object as wool (upon fleeces, for instance on the H. Triada Sarcophagus) or as a kind of flower, known already to Middle Mi-



Fig. 4. Birds on a Mycenaean crater. Koukounara, Pylos.

noan potters<sup>1</sup>. But, according to the facts exposed above, it is at least legitimate to see in this object a possible precious condiment as cinnamon was or as the sorrow-stopping, miraculous drug *nepenthes* was. This was given Helen in Egypt and she has put it in the crater in order to bring forgetfulness to Menelaos and



Fig. 5. Birds life on a Mycenaean crater. Koukounara, Pylos.

to Telemachos (Od. IV 220 ff.). After all, according to the character of Mycenaean art, it is not easier to accept the narrative subject of birds building their nests (which are not present upon the vase). If we prefer to recognize roots in the objects carried by the birds, we have again in the *Odyssey* the miraculous root of moly (X 305) which Hermes gave to Odysseus as a remedy against harm of sorcery. This name was given to the plant by the gods, who could get it, as it was hard for men to find. These epic tales may be well Mycenaean in origin.

There is another crater of the same class and from the same tholos tomb (Fig. 5). It represents a marine landscape with fish, swimming swans (a cygnet upon the back of its father) and a wheel. Would it be a ligature of a whole chariot? The ques-

<sup>1</sup> So ÅBERG, *Bronzezeitl. u. früheisenzeitl. Chronologie IV*, 191 and fig. 354-56. See also FURUMARK, MP 282, fig. 40, mot. 17, 8.

tion is complicated by the fact, that a single wheel can represent the solar disc <sup>1</sup>.

Modern scientific observation can help us in understanding some vase paintings. So we know for instance, that the gander is very aggressive and it can be dangerous owing to sudden blows inflicted with its breast. Ostrich is again very dangerous and in protecting its eggs it can break a man's skull with a blow of its fearful paws. We are now prepared to examine two vases:

A Cypromycenaean crater (Fig. 6) shows a huge bird pursuing two flying men upon a chariot. A mythological meaning has been already supposed for this and for other vases showing great birds <sup>2</sup>.

There is a curious vase from Mycenai (Fig. 7) known as «The Circus Vase».



Fig. 6. A huge bird pursues men. Cypromycenaean crater. (After Karageorghis, AJA 62)

It will be best understood as a further version of the above mentioned Cypromycenaean crater. It is painted in the s. c. «wild style», with strong deformation and lack of discipline <sup>3</sup>. The painter has decomposed here the elements, which we see in a logical unity upon the vase from Cyprus. The Mycenai jug shows in «Children Style» the following subject: Men in chariot (or in two chariots) are attacked by two big birds. Only the central scene preserves the discipline necessary to be easily understood: the bird, flying and crying, attacks a man gestic-

<sup>1</sup> See both pictures in: To Ergon (of the Arch. Society etc.) 1963, 87, fig. 89 and 91 (this last upside down). BCH Chron. 1963, 750.

<sup>2</sup> KARAGEORGHIS, AJA 62, 1958, 383 f. and 64,

1960, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> WACE, Chamber Tombs at Mycenae, pl. 18 and p. 176f. Cf. E. VERMEULE, Greece in the Br. Age, 313 fig. 50c and f.



ulating in despair. The rest of the scene is painted in «memory - style» indicating merely chariot, bird, women(?) flying in terror. A goat, besides a grass motive, are added. The bodies of the one bird, the «woman» and of the goat are filled with lines out of every style, so that they remind us of some «X-rays» primitive designs, which indicate ribs, intestines etc. of the animals represented. It is clear in any case, that the «wild-style» painter designed a scene half way between that of the Cyprus - vase and the pigmies and cranes tale; here chariots

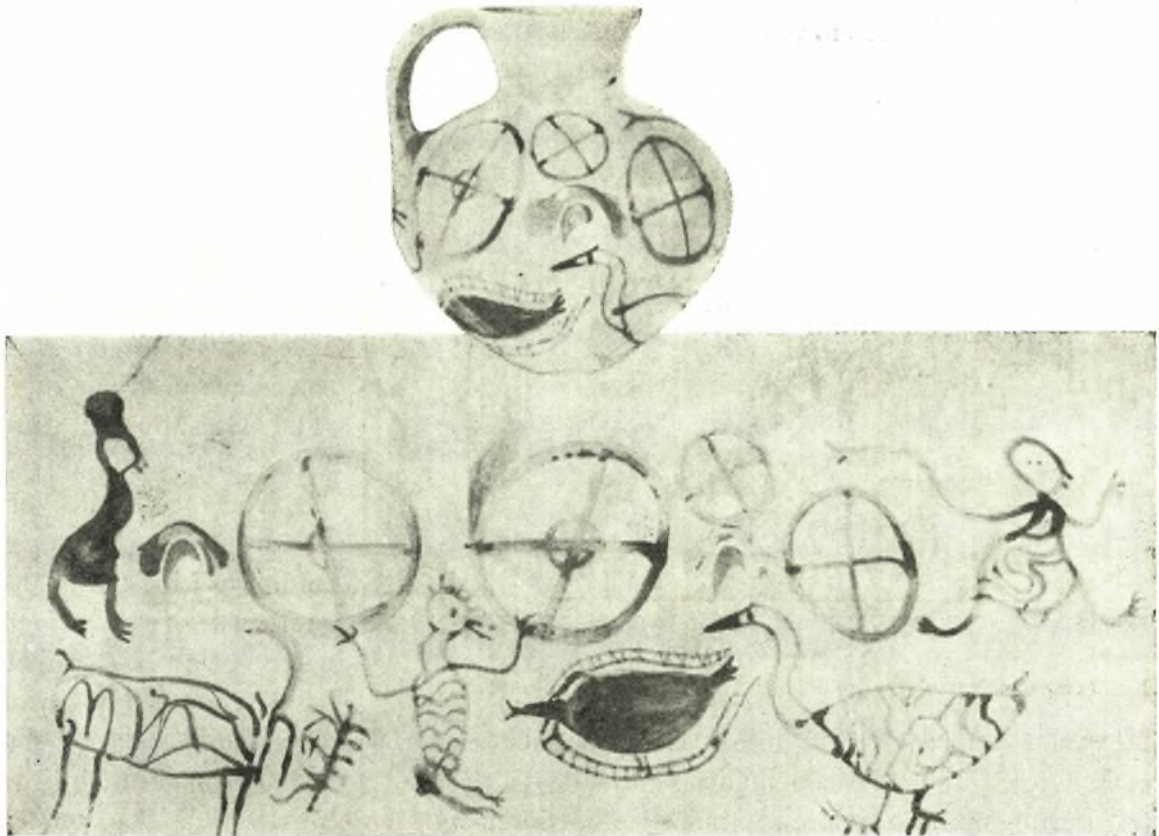


Fig. 7. The «Circus Vase». Mycenae. (After Wace, Chamber Tombs at Mycenae.)

and aggressive birds played a prominent role. He has reduced the chariots to mere wheels. This is a well known phenomenon in primitive art<sup>1</sup>. The goat-like animal, painted possibly in «X - rays» style, may have been added to indicate an element of landscape. Fig. 8 shows possibly another «X-rays» scene<sup>2</sup>.

1 See (about such phenomena in primitive art and in children designs) the important book of H. SCHÄFER, *Von Ägypt. Kunst*, p.p. 100f.. 162 f.

2 About such designs, intended to show what the artist not merely sees, but what he knows about a living being, see SCHÄFER, l.c. p. 110f., fig. 59-61. See also the important book of L. ADAM, *Primitive Art* (Pelican), p. 38f. and figures 3, 8, 37.

The artist depicts in such paintings details of the body such as backbone, ribs, intestines etc. «because he regards these as no less important than the characteristic features of man's outward appearance». The goat of the Mycenai-Jug shows some analogy to the kangaroo design ADAM p. 179, fig. 37. Similarly could the design upon the jug To Ergon 1963, 86, fig. 88 (=BCH Chron. 1963, 749

We will close this survey by discussing a further aspect of the birds representation. This is the close connection of birds with mourning and with the ceremonial of death. On the H. Triada Sarcophagus birds perch upon the double axes and there are other clay sarcophagi, where birds are represented. They perch sometimes upon papyrus thickets as if they were Holy Spirits near the heavenly ocean in the fields of Ialu. Two questions arise: Regarding these phenomena one remembers, that birds with human head represent the soul of the dead in Egyptian art<sup>1</sup>. The creature thus born («Seelenvogel») bears the name Sirene in Greek language<sup>2</sup>.

The second and more interesting question is, that the Mycenaean mythology is



Fig. 8. A female and two male birds upon a jug. Koukounara, Pylos.

full of myths concerning transformation of men and women into birds. The chief reason for this transformation is sorrow and mourning. There existed an epic about these transfigurations under the characteristic title «The Creation of the Birds» (Ornithogony). The poet was Boios or possibly Boio (a lady). Antoninus Liberalis made ample use of this poem in his own Manual of Transformations. Sorrow-

ful events ended very oft into transformations birds (Minyades, Prokne, Philomela etc.). Exceeding and deep mourning owing to death of a dear person resulted in a transformation into a special kind of bird, chosen by the god. Aisakos, for instance, son of Priamos, lost his wife Asterope; he mourned for her for long time, until he

fig. 9) show a female bird (four eggs in its belly) pursued by two male birds. (Here fig. 8). There is some further similar material, but the question needs a special treatment, which is not possible here. As to the wheel as abbreviation of the chariot it is to observe, that the explanation «Sun» is not possible here, since we have four wheels. A similar abbreviation is the column with a piece of entablature upon it as a picture of the palace. At Archanes (near Knossos) a huge building is being excavated actually, possibly the summer residence of the Knossos King. A kind of gate has been brought to light recently (still unpublished), which shows four Minoan concave-sided poros altars in situ. We can

therefore see in works like the ivory from Ras-Shamra (BOSSERT, *Altkreta*, 3rd ed. 503) the abbreviation of a whole mountain-sanctuary like the one represented upon the magnificent stone rhyton newly found by D' PLATON in Zakro (*To Ergon* 1963, σ. 174 εικ. 187 (= BCH Chron. 1963, 843 fig. 13), where all the elements: sanctuary, altar, goats appear in organic unity.

1 See the nice sculpture from Thut-ankh-Amun's tomb bei NOBLECOURT, *Vie et mort d'un pharaon*, 1963, colour-plate LIV opp. p. 259.

2 The fundamental book remains always *Der Seelenvogel* by WEICKER (1902). For questions of style and date KUNZE, *Sirenen*, AM 57, 1932, 124 f.

was turned into a bird<sup>1</sup>. A similar case is that of Meleagros's death. The women, who mourned the dead great man, were turned into birds bearing his own name<sup>2</sup>.

Some of the Mycenaean bird - representations can now gain a new interest. One of the best examples is perhaps a newly found clay sarcophagus (Fig. 9) from near Tanagra in Boeotia (possibly the Homeric Eleon), a picture of which appears in the preliminary publication by Prof. E. VERMEULE<sup>3</sup>. That the painting shows mourning persons there is no question. Between and near the mourners there are some pendant objects known from the H. Triada Sarcophagus and from clay sarcophagi found in Crete. They are objects akin to death ceremony, either tresses



Fig. 9. Clay larnax with a death-ceremony from near Tanagra Boeotia.  
(After Vermeule, *Greece in the Bronze Age.*)

of hair or taeniae<sup>4</sup>. The two mourners, clad in short chitons, walk to the right where the altar or the tomb of the dead is to be supposed. To judge by the differences in hairdressing they may be father and son.

Behind these persons a huge bird, occupying a good half of the whole scene, follows them. It is just coming out of a papyrus - thicket, as Hathor in the form of a cow does on the famous Egyptian sculpture of Deir El Bahri<sup>5</sup>. May

<sup>1</sup> APOLLOD. II p. 45 (Frazer) with details of the myth.

<sup>2</sup> L. c. I, 71 with further details and references.

<sup>3</sup> *Gr. in the Br. Age*, pl. XXXV B.

<sup>4</sup> *Gnomon* 32, 1960, p. 646. MARINATOS - HIRMER, *Crete and Mycenae*, pl. 126 below and col. pl. XXVII, XXIX A. *BCH Chron.* for 1963, 846 fig. 4.

<sup>5</sup> ERMAN-RANKE, *Aegypten, etc.* pl. 22 opp. p. 305.

we conclude that here, too, it is the papyrus thicket of the Greek - Egyptian Ialy, the Elysion Pedion? The bird emerging is long - beaked and scroll - decorated. This scroll or spiral is characteristic only of divine beings, such as sphinxes and griffins<sup>1</sup>. It never appears on usual birds. We must suppose, therefore, that the present bird is not a mere motive. Is it the soul of the dead, recalled through the ceremony? Or may it be even more, a member of the family, mother, sister or wife just in the moment of her aporneosis? Perhaps one day we will be able to say more.

There is no room for discussing here further similar problems. For instance, it is possible to give a better definition to the monsters surrounding the king's throne. Myths or tales may lie behind riding male or female figures. There is an elegant Mycenaean lady riding upon a strange animal (Fig. 10), which has been compared to the Sarrush, the Dragon of Babel<sup>2</sup>.



Fig. 10. Goddess or heroine upon a legend-monster. Mycenae. (After Matz, CMS).

Similarly we are obliged to let aside the discussion on literary parallels between the Mycenaean and Near Eastern worlds. Some of them have been discussed elsewhere<sup>3</sup>. A broader investigation on this subject would be of great interest. Many a motive has already been observed and discussed on different opportunities: Connection between physical strength and man's hair is the basis of narratives like that of Samson and of Nisos, king of Megara. Owing to a forbidden turn of the head, Lot has lost his wife as well as Orpheus has lost Eurydike. The story of David and Goliath has a good parallel in the Iliad, where

Nestor, when still young and not yet a king, killed the huge Ereuthalion, who wore a famous armour (Il. VII 155). Anteia, the wife of king Proitos of Tiryns falls in love with Bellerophon. She tries to seduce him, but he resists because of his honesty, and suffers much when Anteia falsely accuses him. All this happened to Joseph in Egypt in exactly the same manner in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39, 7 ff.). Anteia's origin was from Lycia, from where the story may have been transported to Argos<sup>4</sup>

It is well known, that agriculture tools were sometimes used as weapons.

<sup>1</sup> See for instance EVANS, PM IV, 910 or MATZ CMS I Nr. 282 or 271 (Pylos) or the fresco of the Pylos Palace, VERMEULE, l. c. pl. XXX C.

<sup>2</sup> See D. LEVI, Studies Robinson, 108 f., idem Ephem. 1953-4, part 3 p. 49 f. Further bibliography CMS I, Nr. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Studies Robinson I, p. 126f. I have treated material partly similar to that here discussed in a lecture before the IV Intern. Congress for Folk-

Narrative Research, held in Athens from 1 to 6 Sept. 1964 under the title: On the track of Folklore Elements in Bronze Age Art and Literature. It will be published soon in the Proceedings of the Congress.

<sup>4</sup> A lot of parallels between Homer and the Near Eastern cultures (in a preliminary form however), are given by Prof. GYRUS GORDON, Introd. to Old Testament Times, p. 89 f.

The sickle-sword is a special Near Eastern weapon. The Greeks called it *harpé*; it is used by Heracles and Perseus as well as by other gods and heroes. Uranos was castrated by Kronos with a *harpé* and we know now, that there is a parallel, though more wild and primitive legend in the Chetite Kumarbi-story. Primitive sickles were made of the jaw-bone of an animal, in one case at least of an ass. We read now in the Judges (15, 15), that Samson found the jawbone of an ass and killed promptly with it 1000 Philistines. This has been already brought in connection with the *harpé*; but there is another, far more curious cross-reference between the Bible and the history of Greece: an early hero of Israel, Samegar son of Dinah, killed about 600 of the enemies with the foot of a plough (Judges 3,31). Many centuries later, during the «Battle which saved the Western Civilization», the Battle of Marathon, a mysterious warrior emerged, «with a rustic appearance and dressing, who, after having killed numerous barbarians with a plough, he became invisible after the victory». The God was asked, but the oracle gave no other answer, except of ordering to honour Echetlaios. Echetle is the handle of the plough (Paus. I 32, 5). Are we not justified to recognize here the ghost of Samegar? <sup>1</sup>.

Common moments of the most stirring human trial attract our attention as they run parallel <sup>2</sup>. At the beginning of the Trojan Epic (roughly at the end of the 2nd millenium) stands the episode at Aulis. The tragic father Agamemnon must sacrifice his daughter. Artemis supplies a deer at the last moment. Another tragic father stands at the beginning of Genesis. Abraham must sacrifice his son under similar conditions. Again at the last moment appears a ram, chained in the plant savek. The scene is about 1000 years earlier; and about another 1000 years earlier still, the excavations reveal to us the same motif in Ur, the home country of Abraham.

The excavations of WOOLLEY have brought to light, among so many other treasures, two masterpieces in gold and silver and lapis lazuli. They represent the

<sup>1</sup> See about sickle, *harpé* and the Samson story J. MAKKAY, Early Near Eastern and South East European Gods, Acta Archaeologica Acad. Scient. Hungaricae 16 (1964, Budapest) 24 f. 36 f. 42 f.

<sup>2</sup> There are some papers concerning Mycenaean Mythology. E. VERMEULE's observation may be cited, that «myths with folklore colouring are probably more antique than Mycenai in many cases. They are essentially independent of religion and culture» (Class. Journal Dec. 1958, 98-108). KARAGEORGHIS in the papers already mentioned (AJA 62 and 64) saw mythical subjects upon Cypromycaean vases, rightly, I believe, regardless of the special meaning of each representation. Very few of these tales may correspond to what we know from classical Greek tradition. A broad survey among Oriental literature and archaeology, as we have tried to do here, may give us further help:

and it is sure, that some tales (for instance the chained bird) will escape us forever. Compare further WEBSTER, Minos IV (Homer and Eastern Poetry), BANTI, AJA 58 (Myth in Preclass. Art). SACCONI, Par. del Passato, 72 etc. A bibliography on the subject has been compiled by KARAGEORGHIS, Kypriakai Spoudai 25, 1961, p. II. Purposedly I have left out of consideration the late traditions about Ophion («The Snake-man») as first ruler of the world, to whom Kronos and Zeus succeeded. The original source may be Pherekydes of Syros. There were further connections of phoenician origin and scholars compared the O.-myth to that of *Marduk* and the snake-like *Tiamât*. See RE s. v. *Ophion* (E. WÜLST). Magic explanation of the Orpheus-Euridike event (RÖHDE, Psyche<sup>3</sup> II, 85-6) is not probable. Comp. RE s. v. *Orpheus*, p. 1269-70.

animal of sacrifice chained upon a thicket, which WOOLLEY aptly designed as «Ram caught in a thicket». (Develop. of Sumer. Art, pl. 56 opp. p. 78).

We have here before us the same motive, the same religious idea. The first act at the necropolis of Ur, third millenium. The second act in the Syrian desert, second millenium. The third act at the bay of Aulis toward the turn to the first millenium. This is indeed an excellent example of what may be called the common intellectual background of the Eastern Mediterranean world.

SPYRIDON MARINATOS