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# Were the Sea Peoples Mycenaeans? The Evidence of Ship Iconography

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*The origin of the Sea Peoples remains one of the most perplexing questions pertaining to the great migrations that marked the end of the Bronze Age. Little attention has been given, however, to the possible contribution of their seagoing ships in determining Sea Peoples' origins.*

*Study of the Medinet Habu naval battle scene reveals that the prototypical Sea Peoples' ship depicted there was a galley that finds its closest parallels in contemporaneous Aegean (Mycenaean) ships. Additionally, the bird-head device capping the stems of the Medinet Habu ship depictions is similar to Aegean stem devices.*

*The Medinet Habu ships are unique among twelfth century B.C.E. Mediterranean ship depictions, however, in having an additional bird-head device facing outboard from the sternpost. This makes them similar to the central European "bird-boat" (Vogelbarke), and suggests a more northern origin for parts of the Sea Peoples' coalition.*

The geographical and ethnic origins of the groups of foreign invaders that washed over the Levant in the waning years of the Late Bronze Age and beginning of the Iron Age remains tantalizingly enigmatic. To the Egyptians they were known as "Sea Peoples" (Redford 1992: 243 note 14). This term is echoed and amplified in a document uncovered in Ugarit and addressed to the prefect of Ugarit from the king of Hatti, who describes one group—the Sekels who later settled at Dor—as "those who live on their ships" (RS 34.129; see Deitrich and Loretz 1978; Lehman 1979; Rainey in Wachsmann 1982: 304 n. 1; Hoftijzer and Van Soldt 1998: 343). Presumably, these are the "alien enemies" (as opposed to local enemies?) mentioned in at least one other Ugaritic text (RS 20.162; Izre'el 1991: 100; Hoftijzer and Van Soldt 1998: 341).

We hear of these groups of ship-based marauders as early as the fourteenth century B.C.E., when the king of

Alashia (Cyprus) complains of seasonal raids on his land by the Lukka (EA 38: 10–12; Wachsmann 1982: 298). Later, these periodic raids evolved into a land and sea-based migration that delivered the deathblow to a number of Late Bronze Age cultures and, in doing so, changed the face of the Levant forever.

Actual Mycenaean warriors may have served as Egyptian mercenaries as early as the Amarna period (Parkinson and Schofield 1993a; 1993b; 1995; Schofield and Parkinson 1994). The "mišī-people," a group appearing repeatedly in the Amarna tablets, seem to have a connection with ship-based warfare (EA 101: 4, 33; 105: 27; 108: 38; 110: 48[?]; 111: 21[?] and 126: 63). Säve-Söderbergh (1946: 65–66 n. 1) proposes that they were early forerunners of the Sea Peoples.<sup>1</sup>

Who were the Sea Peoples? What were their ethnic origins and where did they come from? Archaeologists, not-

<sup>1</sup> See, however, the comments by Lambdin (1953). More recently, Moran (1992) translates them as "ships of the army."



Fig. 1. Ramses III's naval battle scene as portrayed on his mortuary temple at Medinet Habu. From *MH I*: pl. 37.

ing remarkable similarities between the material culture of the Mycenaean Greeks and the Sea Peoples—from the way they built cities and houses, to the type of pottery they used—have proposed an intimate connection between these cultures (Dothan 1982; Dothan and Dothan 1992; Stager 1995 and there additional bibliography). Notes Stager (1991: 14):

As a logical inference from the archaeological evidence, we may add the following: If the makers of the local monochrome Mycenaean pottery (III C:1) settling along the coast from Cilicia in Anatolia to Cyprus and Israel are not Mycenaean Greeks themselves, then we must conclude that they studied their potmaking in Mycenaean workshops. And then they somehow convinced all of their “barbarian” consumers that this pottery is what they should use. Throwing caution to the wind, I am willing to reject these possibilities and state flatly that the Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, were Mycenaean Greeks.

I am willing to speculate even further: When we do discover Philistine texts at Ashkelon or elsewhere in Philistia (and it’s only a matter of time until this happens), those texts will be in Mycenaean Greek (that is in Linear B or some related script). At that moment we will be able to recover another lost civilization for world history.

Could these foreign invaders indeed be Mycenaean Greeks who had fled in the wake of the turmoil that affected their homeland at the end of the Bronze Age?

This question may be approached from numerous directions of research. In the following pages I propose to

examine it from one—admittedly narrow—aspect: a comparison of the ships used by the Mycenaeans and the Sea Peoples based on contemporaneous iconography.

### THE SHIPS OF THE SEA PEOPLES AT MEDINET HABU

Let us first examine the ships used by the Sea Peoples. The most detailed depiction of ships that can be assigned definitely to Sea People contingents are engraved on the outer wall of Ramses III’s mortuary temple at Medinet Habu. Here the pharaoh’s artists portrayed two engagements in which Ramses repulsed the northern invaders: one by land, the other by water (*MH I*: pls. 33–34, 36–37, 39).

The latter scene consists of nine ships arranged in three vertical rows (fig. 1). Four of the ships are Egyptian, the remaining five are crewed by contingents of Sea Peoples. In and around the combatant ships are the bodies of the dead and the dying invading warriors.

To the eye of the casual observer there is a distinct “snapshot” quality to the scene, suggestive of a single moment in the mêlée of battle. Nelson (1943), however, has admirably demonstrated that this scene is structured around three distinct conceptual themes: spatial, ideological and temporal (fig. 2).

The Egyptian ships have their sails furled, but are propelled by oarsmen, protected behind a screen placed above the caprail. The ships of the Sea Peoples are also depicted with their sails furled, but no rowers—nor oars—are visible; in other words, they are stationary in the water. The

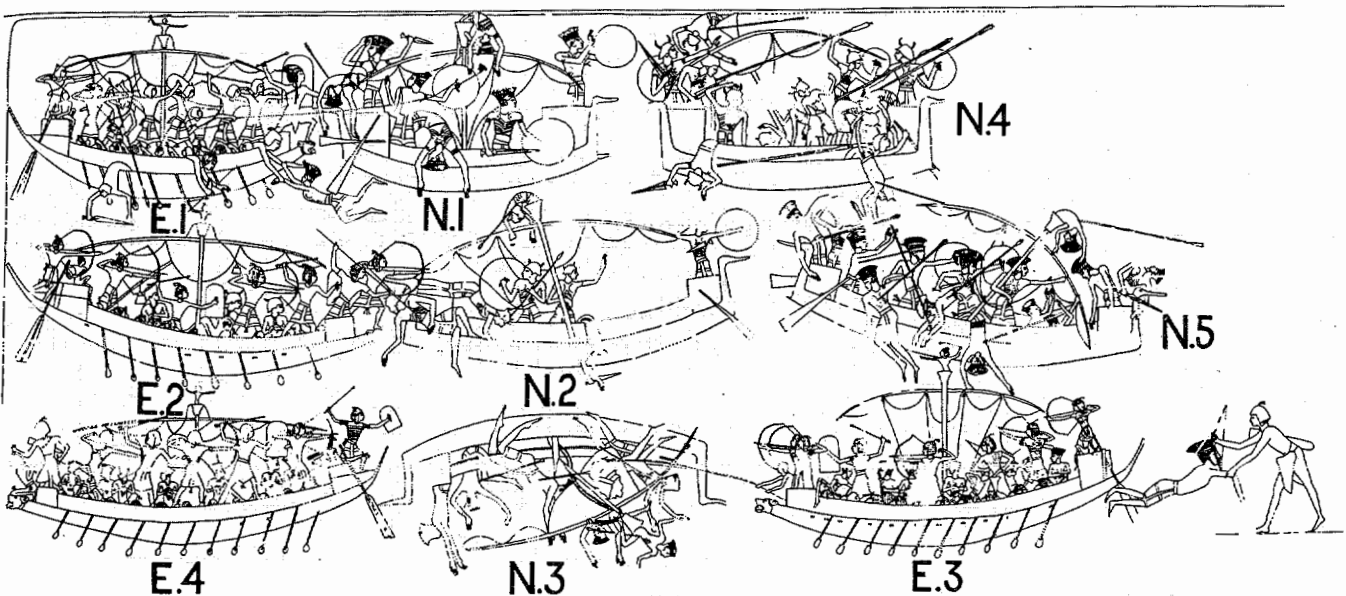


Fig. 2. The naval battle with the floating bodies removed. From Nelson (1943: fig. 4).

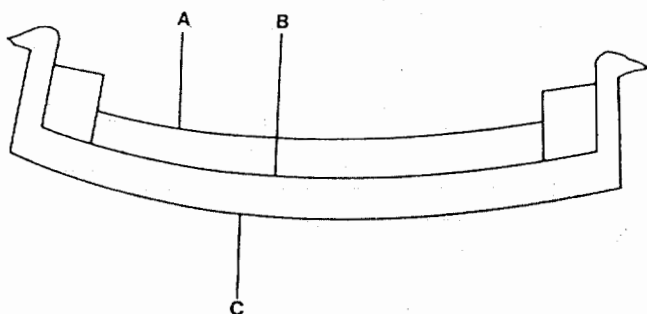


Fig. 3. The horizontal lines on ships N. 1–2, 4–5.

accompanying inscription conveys the sense of a surprise attack sprung by the Egyptian forces on the invading fleet, perhaps when they were at anchor (*BAR* 4: § 65; Casson 1995: 38).

In 1981 I proposed that at Medinet Habu the ancient Egyptian artists had supplied us with invaluable clues for understanding the construction of the Sea Peoples' ships.<sup>2</sup> The hulls of four of the ships—Nelson's N. 1, N. 2, N. 4 and N. 5—are defined by three horizontal lines (figs. 1–3). Were these ships our sole evidence, these lines could easily be misconstrued as a hull (Area BC), surmounted by a screen attached above the caprail (Area AB). If such were the case, then the invading ships would be similar to those used by the Egyptians.

These ships have curious anomalies, however. In one (N. 4), the helmsman and a dead shipmate protrude above line B which would, according to this interpretation, indicate the juncture of the caprail and the bottom of the screen (Wachsmann 1981: 193 fig. 6: B, C). Furthermore, in ship N. 2, one crew member sits on this same line, while another seems to be "falling" into it (Wachsmann 1981: 192 fig. 4: A, B). Curiously, something seems to be missing in these ships.

The missing component is an additional horizontal line that is *now* present in only one ship, the one that has capsized, N. 3 (fig. 4). A study of how the warriors are positioned—which body parts are visible, and which disappear behind parts of the hull's structure—teach us about the ship's construction.

Three crew members are wound around the upper and lower horizontal parts of the ship (AX and BC), but their limbs reappear in the central area (XB) (figs. 4, 5: A–D). These three independent clues clearly indicate that Area XB

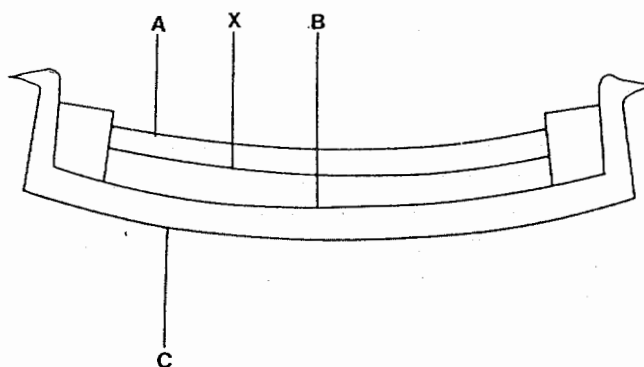


Fig. 4. The horizontal lines on ship N. 3.

was open to view. In other words, these ships must have had an *open rowers' gallery* (figs. 6, 7). Furthermore, the manner in which the three warriors are contorted around the ship's parts indicates that the ship had only a partial deck; it probably ran the entire length of the hull, but not its entire breadth.<sup>3</sup>

Stanchions would have been needed to support the screen and the deck beams, yet they are nowhere to be seen at Medinet Habu. Why are they missing?

Nelson (1929: 22–31) emphasizes that much of the final version of this scene no longer exists, having fallen victim to the vicissitudes of time. This scene belongs to the form of Egyptian art that is both carved and painted. In this art form carving had a status equal to, or even lesser than, painting. Thus, many details existed solely in paint and, with its loss, these details have disappeared. The stanchions, together with at least some of the other missing details on the Sea Peoples' ships originally may have existed only in paint at Medinet Habu.

Additionally, corrections to the drawing were made by plastering the wall and carving details into it (Nelson 1929: 22–31). Through time, the plaster has crumbled, and together with it, the final versions of the ships.

The degree of detailed information that may have been lost is considerable. This is vividly illustrated by the following description of another battle scene from Medinet Habu that has been better-preserved. Writes Nelson (1929: 22):

Here, in the upper portions of the relief, even the water-color paint is unusually well preserved, and we find that the bare sculpture has been extensively supplemented by painted details distinctly enriching the composition.

<sup>2</sup> See also supplemental materials in Wachsmann (1982).

<sup>3</sup> Compare this with Casson's reconstruction of an Attic Greek Geometric galley (1995: 71–74, fig. 69).

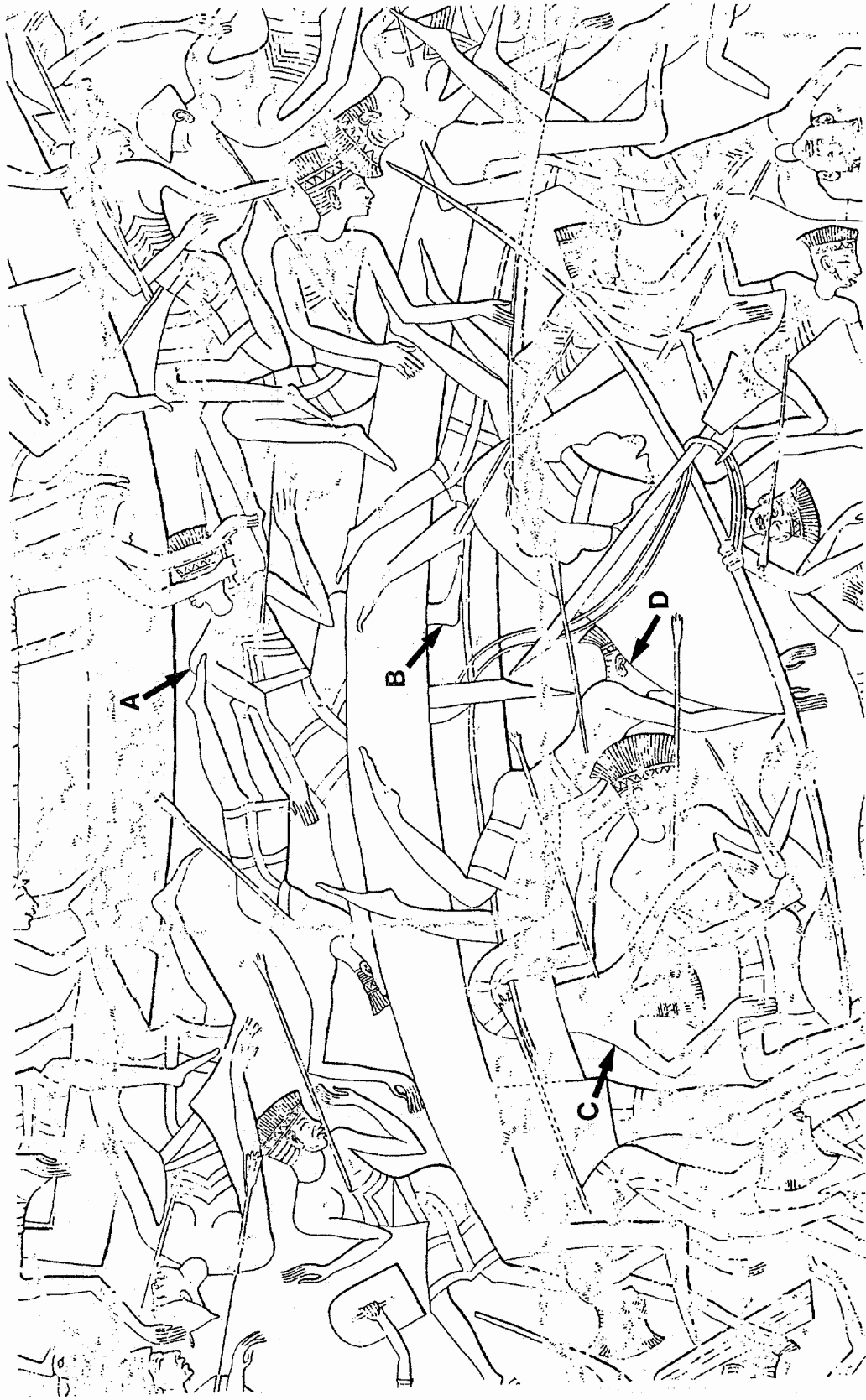


Fig. 5. Ship N. 3. Detail from MHI: pl. 39.

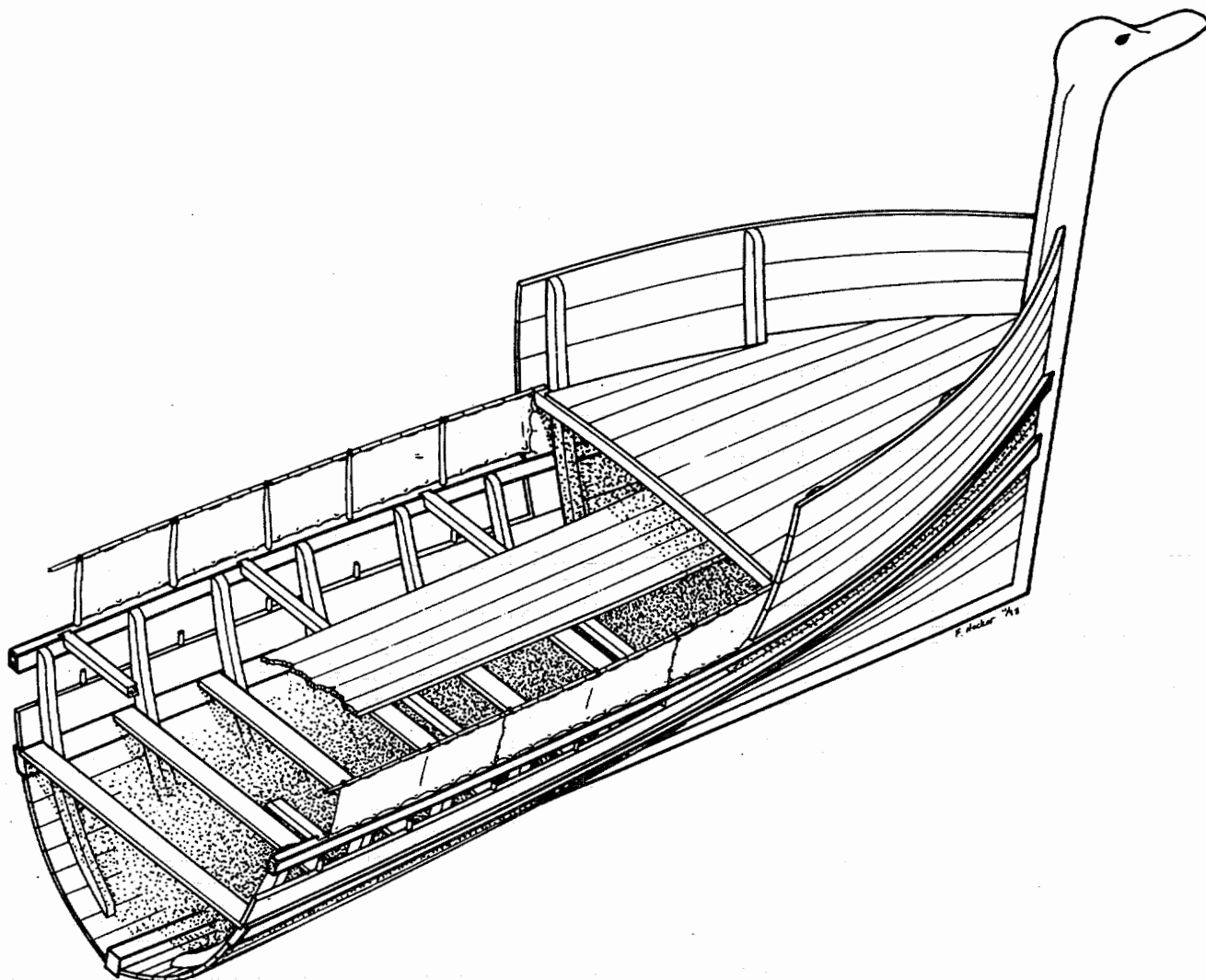


Fig. 6. Tentative isometric reconstruction of a Sea Peoples' ship. Drawing: F. M. Hocker. Courtesy Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA).

The colors of the garments worn by the Libyans stand out clearly. Between the bodies of the slain as they lie upon the battlefield appear pools of blood. The painter has suggested the presence of the open country by painting in wild flowers which spring up among the dead. Moreover, it is apparent that the action takes place in a hilly region, for streams of blood run down between the bodies as the enemy attempt to escape across the hills from the Pharaoh's pursuing shafts. The details of the monarch's accouterments are indicated in color, relieving him of the almost naked appearance often presented by his sculptured figure when divested of its paint. It is not infrequent to find such details as bow strings or lance shafts partly carved and partly represented in paint. The characteristic tattoo marks on the bodies of the Libyans are also painted in pigment only. When all these painted details have disappeared, though the sculptured design may remain in fairly good condition, much of the life of

the original scene is gone and many aids to its interpretation are lost.

There are numerous indications that much is missing in the naval battle scene. Thus, for example, the helmsman in ship N. 4, holds the loom of the quarter rudder with his right hand while his left wraps around a now nonexistent tiller that must have been painted but not carved (fig. 8). Cases of asymmetry of the ships' accouterments are perhaps also due to a loss of painted detail. On ship N. 5, for example, the bird head stern device lacks an eye, while on N. 2 and N. 4 the stern device has one and the brails (the lines used to raise and lower the loose-footed sail) are depicted on only one side of the mast.

How do these compare with contemporary Mycenaean ships?

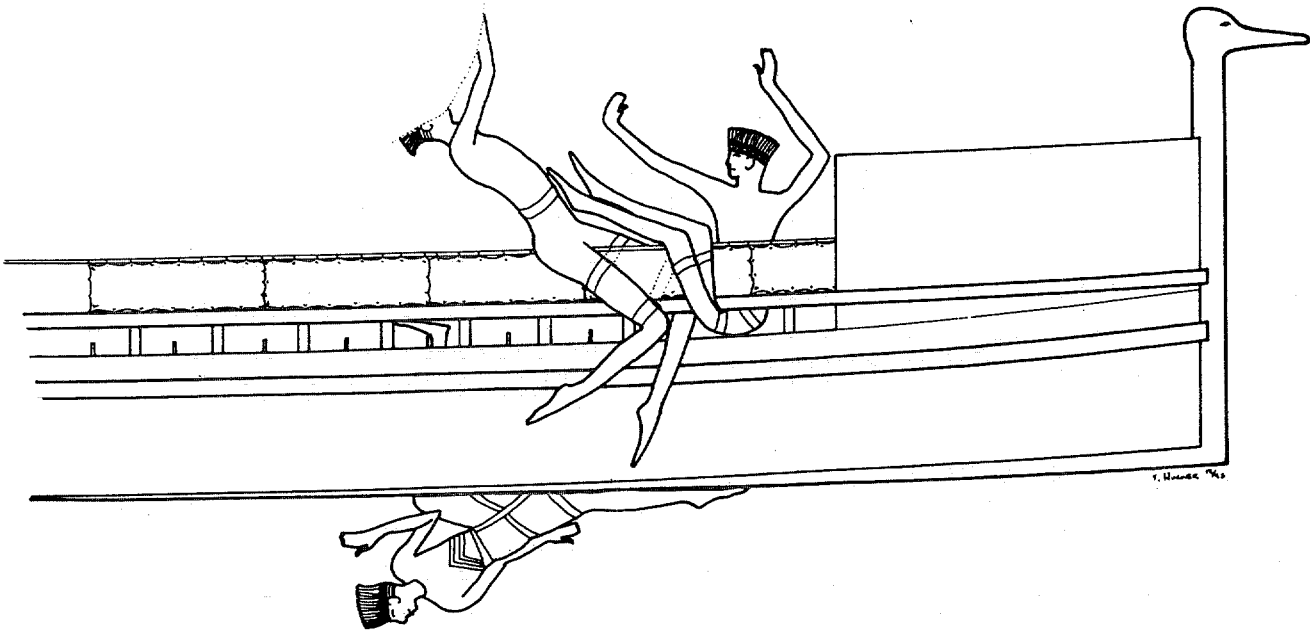


Fig. 7. Sheer or profile view of a Sea Peoples ship showing the manner in which the bodies of the warriors depicted by the Egyptian artists are situated in relation to the ship's structural details. Note that the human figures are drawn to a scale larger than that of the ship. Drawing by F. M. Hocker. Courtesy Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

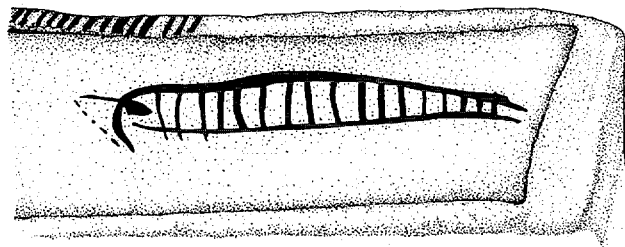


Fig. 8. The helmsmen of ship N. 4. Detail after *MHI*: pl. 39.

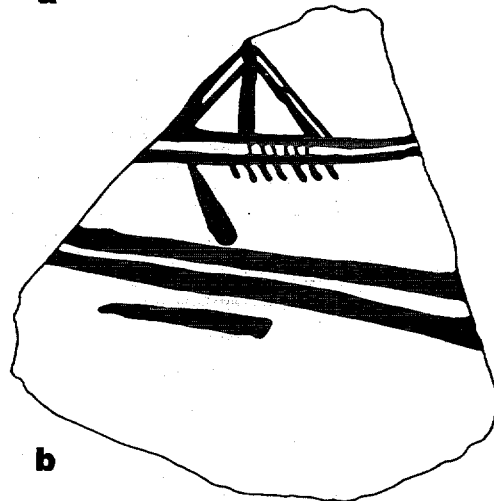
**MYCENAEAN SHIPS:  
THE CASE OF THE HEADLESS OARSMEN**

Artists of all ages tend to focus on certain specific elements of the ships' structure or rigging that most caught their eye. For example, during the Bronze Age, artists were at pains to depict the lines that were used to support the yard and boom, called lifts, in the boom-footed sail used during that period (Neville 1898: pls. LXXII-LXXV; Säve-Söderbergh 1946: 14, fig. 1).

If we were standing on an Aegean shore, gazing out over the water some 3,200 years ago—give or take a cen-



a



b

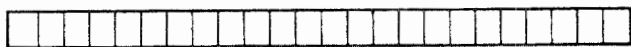
Fig. 9. a) Ship drawn upside down on the interior of a Late Minoan lamax. After Gray (1974: G47, Abb. 11); b) Galley under oar painted on a sherd from Phylakopi on Melos. After Marinatos (1933: pl. XIII: 13).





Fig. 10. Ship painted on the side of a *larnax* from Gazi, Crete. Late Minoan IIIB.

tury—at a Mycenaean vessel, the predominant element of the ship’s structure would most certainly have been something that looked rather like a ladder lying horizontally on its side:



We know this because the majority of depictions in our large corpus of Mycenaean ships bear this element. At times the entire ship “becomes” this quintessential element, as for example on a schematic graffito of a ship painted upside down inside a Mycenaean *larnax* or a ship painted on a sherd from Phylakopi on Melos (fig. 9; *Larnax*: Gray 1974: G19 no. 40a; Phylakopi: Marinatos 1933: 172 no. 13). Instances of the appearance of this “horizontal-ladder motif” are numerous on Late Helladic/Minoan IIIB and IIIC ship depictions, like those from Gazi, Tragana and Hyria, for example (figs. 10, 11; Gazi: Alexiou 1970: 253–54, 1972: 90–98; 1973; Hyria: Blegen 1949; Basch 1987: 143–44, figs. 300–2). This same motif is also painted on Mycenaean ship models, as on a Late Cypriot III *askos* and two terracotta ship models from Tanagra (Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973: 470 fig. 1720; Basch 1987: 141 fig. 293: 1–2). In the

latter two models, the vertical lines inside the hull do not coincide with the frames painted inside the hull, indicating that the external vertical lines do not represent the ships’ frames in an “X-ray” view as proposed by Basch (1987: 141).

What then does this ubiquitous “horizontal-ladder motif” represent? Until relatively recently it was impossible to answer this question definitively because, despite the large corpus of Mycenaean ship depictions, not one was sufficiently clear to indicate the purpose of this architectural element. This situation changed when Dakoronia (1990; 1993; 1995), excavating at Pyrgos Livanaton, a site identified as the Homeric Kynos, found several ship depictions painted on Late Helladic IIIC sherds. One representation contains sufficient detail to permit an interpretation of the horizontal-ladder design.

The ship faces left (fig. 12). Three horizontal bands define its features (fig. 13). Area BC, which represents the hull from the line of its keel/keel-plank to the caprail, is depicted in dark paint. Above this is a horizontal unpainted area (XB) intersected by nineteen vertical lines next to each of which is positioned a lunette with its convex side facing aft. One additional line represents the mast.



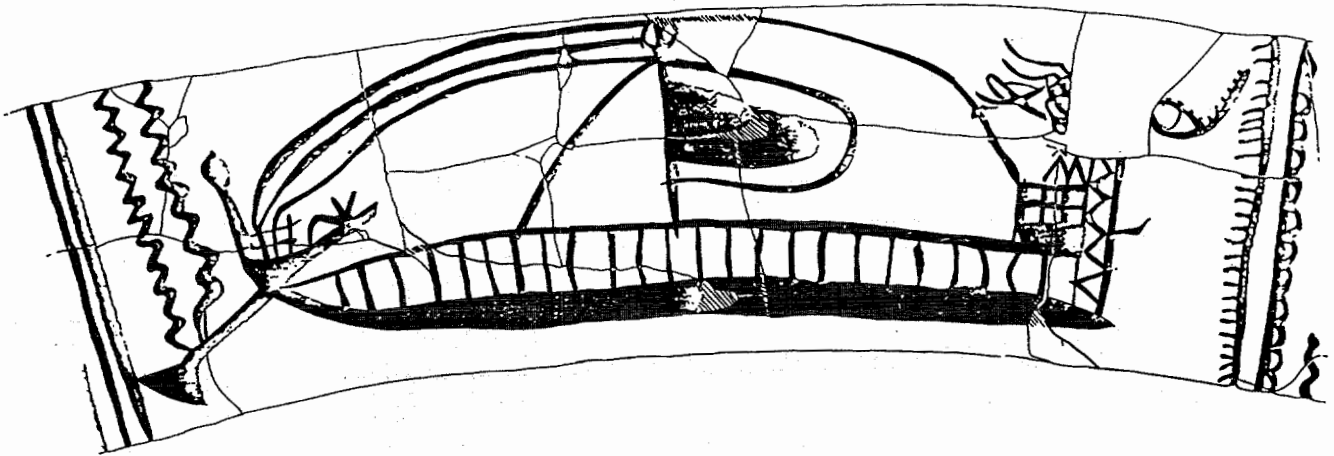


Fig. 11. Ship painted on a ceramic pyxis found at Tragana, near Pylos. Late Helladic III C. After Korrés (1989: 200).

Above Area XB, the third and final horizontal one, Area AX, is decorated with two bands of semicircles. Perhaps this indicates that the screen was made of leather for this motif commonly appears in Mycenaean art on the hide of bulls as well on the (leather) sides of chariots (Furumark 1941: 245 fig. 27: 6, 8; 332 fig. 18.). Line X continues forward, across the bow, possibly representing a strong free-standing wale; this would have been required to support the beams bracing the partial deck upon which the central figure stands.

Three figures stand on, or above, the ship. Two armored warriors—one positioned on a light forecastle, the other abaft

the mast—brandish short throwing spears and shields. In the stern, a helmsman sitting (?) on a stern castle, hunkers over his single quarter rudder. Unless these figures are portrayed having a particularly bad hair day, all three appear to be wearing helmets with numerous protuberances. Such helmets are reminiscent of the feather (?) helmets worn by contingents of the Sea Peoples at Medinet Habu (figs. 1, 2, 5) as well as by seafarers depicted on Late Helladic III C sherds from the Seraglio at Kos (Morricone 1975: 360 figs. 356, 357a-c, 358–360).

The artist supplies several compelling clues indicating that the lunettes in Area XB represent oarsmen seen through an open rowers' gallery intersected by vertical stanchions that support the ship's superstructure:

- Each of the nineteen lunettes is "attached" to an oar.
- The oars' blades are angled towards the stern, indicating that the oarsmen are depicted at the end of their stroke, when they are leaning backwards as they pull on their oars. In this position, later Geometric artists depicted rowers with their far shoulder jutting forward (fig. 14).

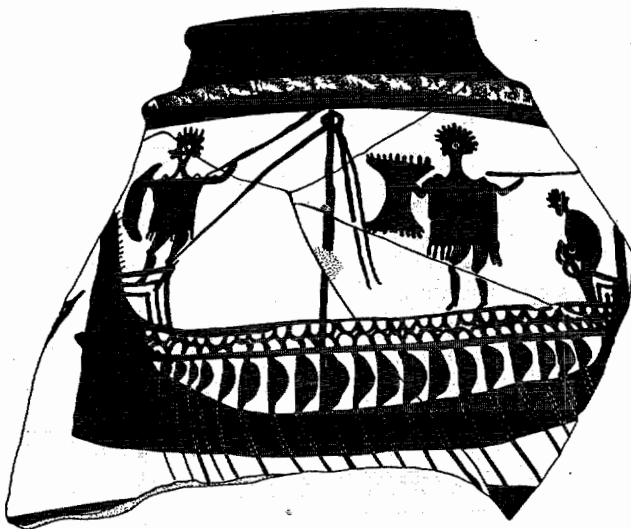


Fig. 12. The most detailed published depiction of a Mycenaean ship appears on a LH III C sherd from Kynos. After Wachsmann (1988: 131 fig. 8:A). Drawing by K. Bowling.

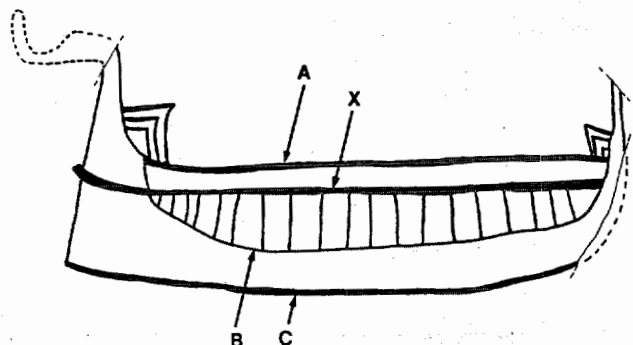


Fig. 13. Constructional details of the Kynos ship.



Fig. 14. A rower, depicted on an Attic Late Geometric I sherd, reaches the end of his stroke. After Basch (1987: 166 fig. 338).



Fig. 15. Detail of the helmsman on the Kynos ship.

- Furthermore, the manner in which the helmsman is portrayed indicates that the artist depicted the *unarmored* male body in a curvilinear and sinuous manner (fig. 15).

Thus, we may identify the “lunettes” as rowers’ torsos—from the neck to the waist—albeit represented in a very schematic form. The oarsmen’s lower body parts are hidden behind the hull while *their heads disappear behind the screen* (fig. 16).

Ideally, it would be possible to find parallels to these “headless oarsmen” in the numerous depictions of oared ships in Geometric art, which, authorities agree, are derived from Mycenaean prototypes. Any parallel to Geometric art would be suspect, however, as none of the experts who have dealt with the oared ships in Geometric art agree as to how they are to be interpreted (Kirk 1949: 123–31; Morrison and Williams 1968: 12–17; Casson 1995: 71–74; Basch 1987: 161–70).<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, towards the end of that period, in the closing decade of the eighth century B.C.E., a new type of oared ship appears, which, all agree, represent the *dieres*: a type of ship bearing two superimposed banks of oars on either side of the hull.

One of the earliest depictions of a *dieres*, on a Proto-Attic sherd from Phaleron, is analogous to the Kynos ship;

the rowers’ torsos in the lower banks appear in the open rowers’ gallery while their heads disappear behind the superstructure (fig. 17; see also, Morrison and Williams 1968: pl. 7: e–f). Thus, we may conclude that this ship depiction from Kynos indicates that the ubiquitous “horizontal-ladder pattern” on Mycenaean ship iconography represents an open rowers’ gallery crossed by numerous vertical stanchions.

A deck, situated above this probably ran the length of the hull from stem to stern. It could not, however, have run across the entire breadth of the ship. Some room must have been left out along the sides, to allow space for the rowers. Similarly, Casson (1995: 51 n. 58) notes that in some Greek Geometric depictions of oared warships, warriors are seen standing on the rowers’ benches in an area not covered by a raised deck.

From the above considerations we may conclude that in all major discernible architectural aspects, the hull structures of Mycenaean ships were identical to those of the Sea Peoples’ ships depicted at Medinet Habu. That is, the Sea Peoples were either using actual Mycenaean oared ships, or had adopted/adapted the Mycenaean galley design to the degree that today we are unable to differentiate—in macro terms—between them vis-à-vis their hull construction.

<sup>4</sup> The interpretation given here to galleys of both the Mycenaean and the Sea Peoples agrees completely with, and further supports, Casson’s interpretation of Greek Geometric galleys.

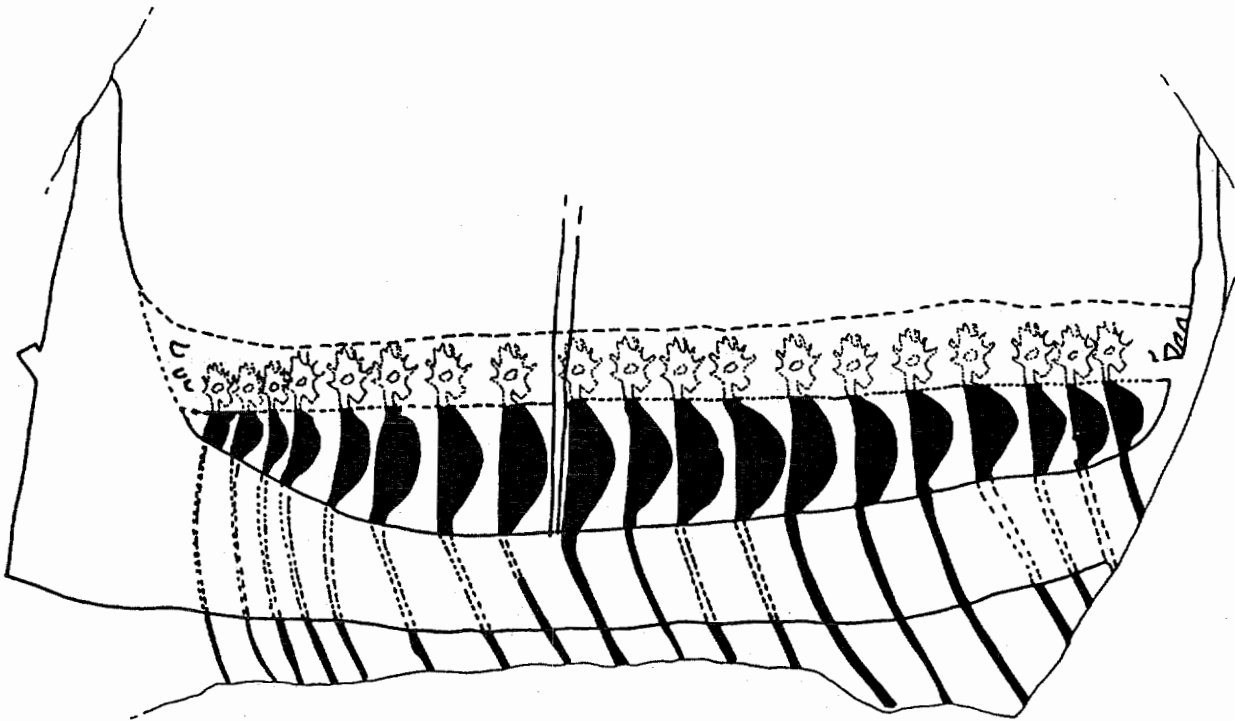


Fig. 16. A hypothetical reconstruction of the Kynos ship in fig. 12, illustrating the position of the rowers. Assuming that Area AX in fig. 13 is a screen beginning at deck level, then it would hide the heads of the oarsmen.

Using hull construction to determine ethnic identity is speculative at best, however. Peoples bearing no ethnic, or regional connection could adopt and adapt ship types to their own uses. In later times, for example, the pragmatic Romans were particularly noted for adopting foreign ship designs (Casson 1995: 105 n. 41, 141–42).

### BIRD HEADS

There is, however, an additional similarity between the ships of the Mycenaean and those of the Sea Peoples. On all five of the invading craft depicted at Medinet Habu, water-bird head devices cap the stem and stern posts (fig. 18; Wachsmann 1996). During the Late Bronze Age, similar bird-heads are a distinctly Aegean, and more specifically Mycenaean, characteristic on Mediterranean ships.

The earliest bird-head known appears on Middle Helladic sherds from Aegina (Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973: 301 fig. 869). Thereafter, particularly from the thirteenth century B.C.E. and later, the head of a water bird, often with a strongly up-curving beak, appears regularly facing forward on the stems of Mycenaean ships (figs. 19, 20).<sup>5</sup>

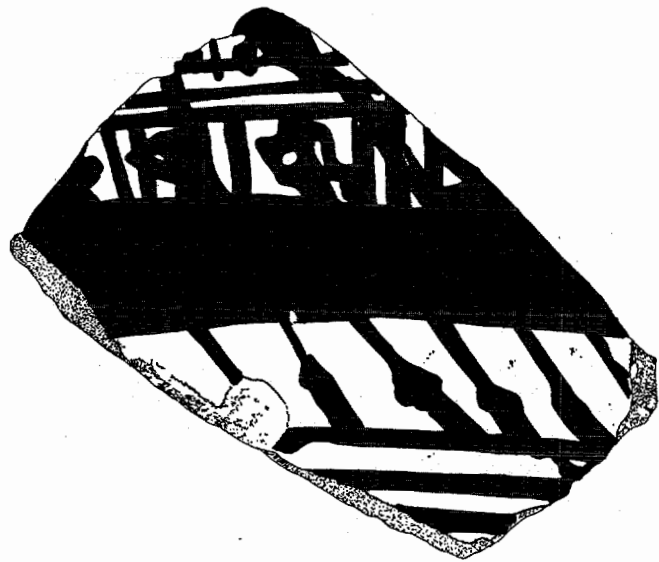


Fig. 17. Proto-Attic sherd from Phaleron bearing part of a *dieres*. Note how the heads of the oarsmen in the lower bank disappear behind the superstructure. After Williams (1959: 160 fig. 1).

<sup>5</sup> A Late Helladic IIIC: 1b sherd of a bird-head ship ornament with the legs of a man standing on the curving post was found in an unstratified context at Ashkelon. My thanks to Dr. Stager for bringing the sherd to my attention. See Wachsmann (1998: title page, 201–2; in press).

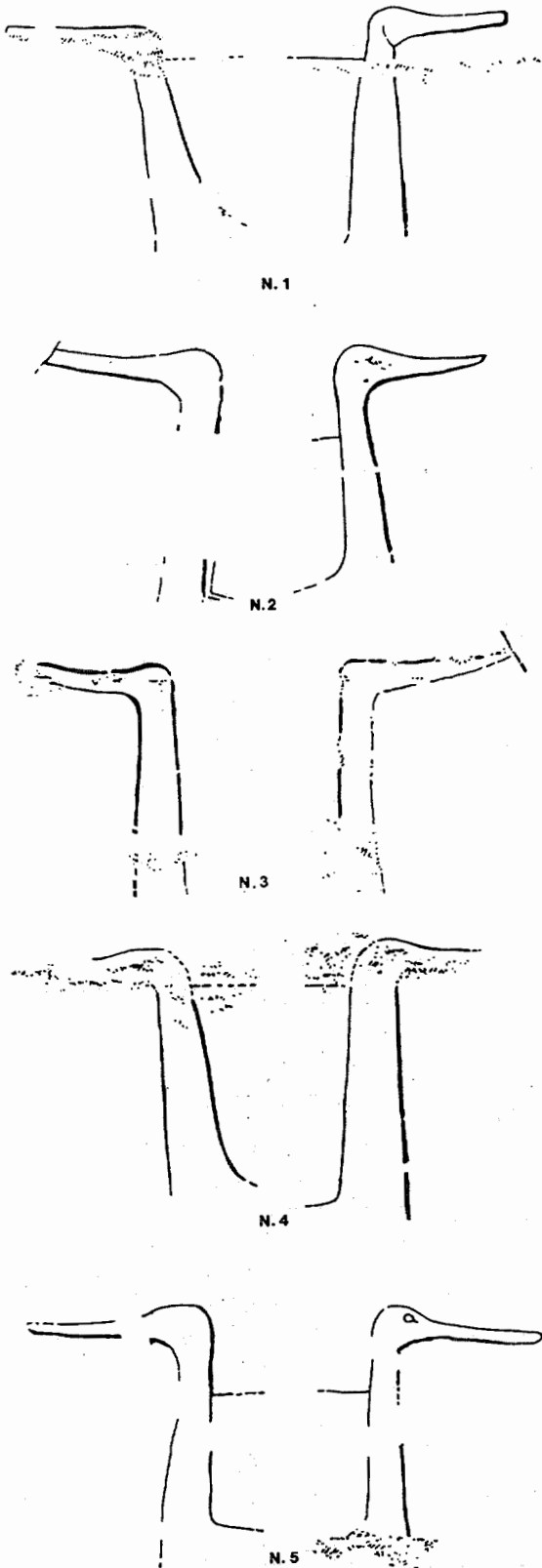


Fig. 18. The bird-head devices on the Sea Peoples' ships at Medinet Habu. After Nelson, et al. (1930: pl. 39).

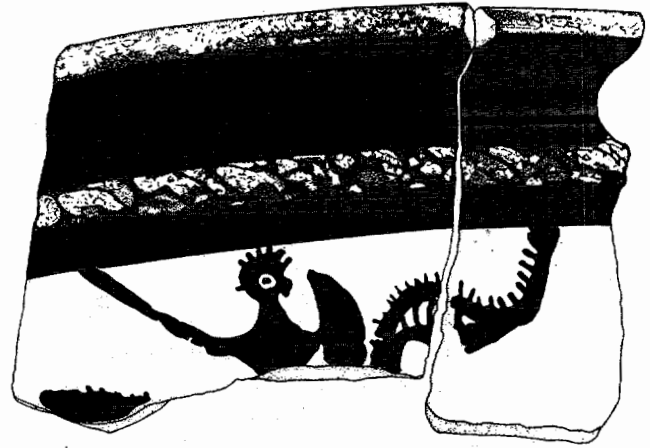


Fig. 19. Bird-head stem device painted on a sherd from Kynos. Late Helladic IIIC. After Wachsmann (1998: 134 fig. 15). Drawing by K. Bowling.

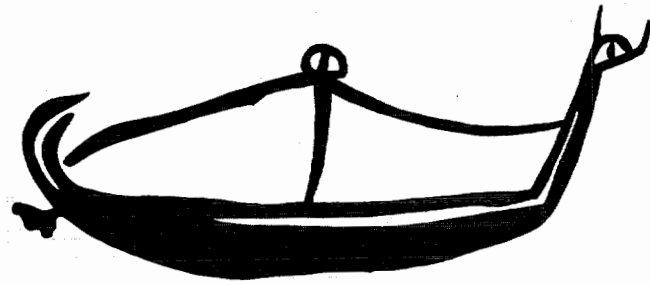


Fig. 20. A ship painted on a stirrup jar from Skyros bears the typical bird-head stem device. After Hencken (1968: 537 fig. 486).

At times, in place of a bird-head the actual body of a bird is placed on or near the stem, as for example, on the Late Helladic IIIC Tragana ship, or on one of the Mycenaean ships painted on an Late Helladic IIIB amphoroid krater from Enkomi (figs. 11, 21).

Inevitably, this device represents water fowl: the same type(s) of bird(s) that are commonly depicted on contemporaneous Mycenaean and Philistine ceramics (Furumark 1941: 253 fig. 30, 255 fig. 31: nos. 36–52; Benson 1961; Dothan 1982: 201–2 figs. 61–63).

Despite the obvious similarities, however, there is one significant difference between the manner in which the bird-heads are arranged on ships represented on Late Helladic/Late Minoan IIIB/C pottery as opposed to the manner in which they appear on the Sea Peoples' ships at Medinet Habu. On representations of Mycenaean ships the bird-head/birds are always positioned atop, or near, the stem. At first they inevitably face forward; subsequently, bird-head de-

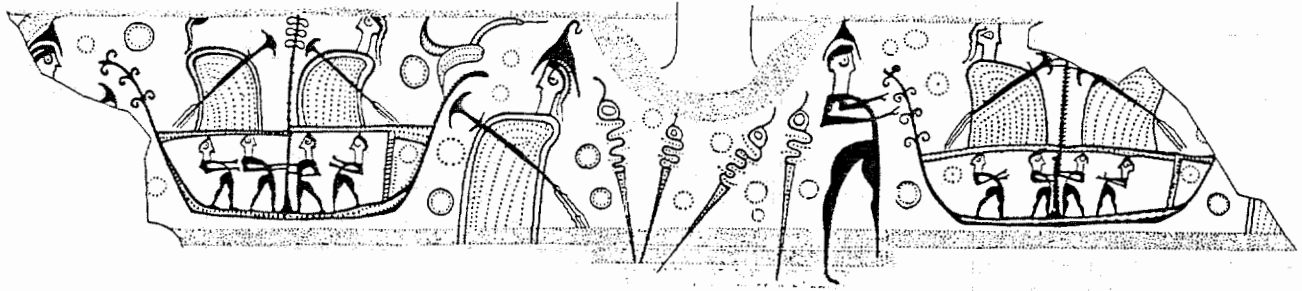


Fig. 21. Scene of ships depicted on a Late Helladic III amphoroid krater from Enkomi. Note the bird device surmounting the (stem) post of the ship on the left. After Sjöqvist (1940: fig. 20: 3).

VICES also appear atop the stem facing inboard (Göttlicher 1978: 35 no. 149).<sup>6</sup>

In the case of the Sea Peoples' ships at Medinet Habu, however, the bird-heads are situated *on both the stem and the stern, facing outboard*. For (numerous) exact parallels to this configuration we must search farther afield: to the Urnfield cultures of Central Europe.

#### THE URNFIELD CULTURE CONNECTION

The striking similarity between the manner in which the bird-head devices are positioned on the Sea Peoples' ships at Medinet Habu to the "bird-boats" (Vogelbarke) of the central European Urnfield Cultures was first discussed by Hencken (1968: 568–70, 625–28).

Bouzek (1985: 178), who also notes this parallel, dates the earliest bird-boat ornaments, from the Somes River at Satu Mare in northern Rumania and from Velem St. Vid in Hungary, to the European Br D period (ca. 1250–1200 B.C.E.; figs. 22, 23).<sup>7</sup> A bird-boat ornament from Grünwald, Bavaria, dating to the Halstatt A1 (ca. twelfth century B.C.E.) is only slightly later (fig. 24). Subsequently, the bird-boat motif continues to appear in Urnfield and Villanovan art (fig. 25). Bird-boats are not commonly a Mycenaean symbolic device, although a bird-boat-like decoration does appear on a Late Helladic IIIC krater fragment recovered at Tiryns (fig. 26). In this case, however, the artist may have been unaware of its prototype (Bouzek 1985: 178).

Thus, although the invading *ships* depicted at Medinet Habu are built in what appears to be a Mycenaean tradition, they bear a prophylactic "bird-boat" *symbolology*. This argues strongly for the ship's crew having religious beliefs associated with bird-boats, thus reflecting an Urnfield ethnicity. This does not mean, however, that the entire fleet was made up of ships manned by Urnfielder warriors. Far from it.

In attempting to put the Medinet Habu naval battle scene into its proper historical perspective it is imperative to be aware of a schematizing tendency on the part of its artists. The tableau supplies us with a "fleet" of five ship images attributable to the Sea Peoples. This is misleading, for all five images are almost certainly reproductions derived from a single prototype ship (Wachsmann 1981: 191). Similarly, only one type of Egyptian ship is represented in the scene—albeit four times—even though three types of Egyptian ships are recorded in the accompanying inscription (BAR 4: § 65).

Furthermore, two groups of Sea Peoples, distinguishable by their different head-gear—horned-helmeted in N. 2 and N. 4, while feather(?)—helmeted in ships N. 1, N. 3, and N. 5—are depicted in this single type of ship. This in itself, seems highly unlikely.

It is also imperative to understand the likely source for these images. Presumably, following the battle an Egyptian army artist sketched studies of one such ship. These studies would have served as a resource for the artists creating the naval battle scene.<sup>8</sup> We have examples of artists accompa-

<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, such inboard curving bird-heads evolved into the curved stem and sternpost finials on Greek Geometric ships (Wachsmann 1998: 185–86). Homer, in describing his warships, uses the adjective *κορῶνις*, which most probably means "having curved extremities." A similar word, however, is the name of a seabird: *κορῶνη*. It is possible that this is a deliberate play on the two similar words, and that *κορῶνις* is intended to imply "having curved extremities that are bird-shaped" (Lenz 1998).

<sup>7</sup> The chronology of the Br D, to which most of the classical comparisons with the Late Helladic IIIB materials are found, may be slightly higher than previously thought (Bouzek 1994: 217).

<sup>8</sup> On the use of source materials in Egyptian tomb art see Wachsmann (1987: 12–26).

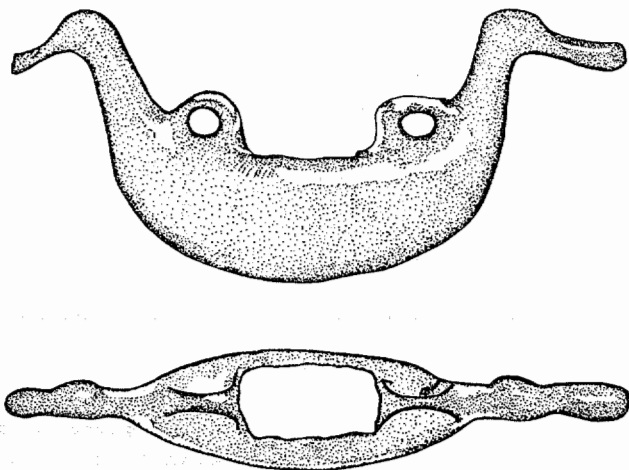


Fig. 22. Bronze bird-boat found in the Somes River, at Satu Mare in northern Romania. European Br D (?). After Göttlicher (1978: Taf. 33: 439).

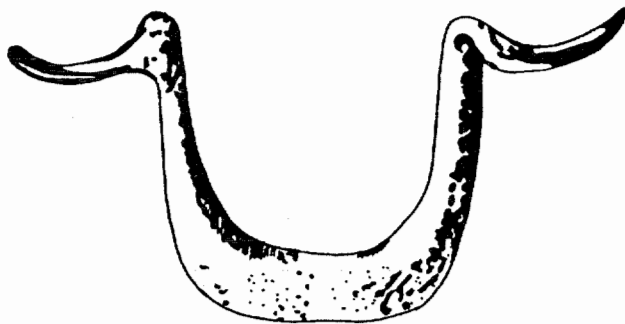


Fig. 23. Bronze bird-boat ornament from Velem St. Vid in Hungary. European Br D (?). After Göttlicher (1978: Taf. 34: 440).

nying army and trade expeditions, as witnessed by the Red Sea fishes swimming beneath Hatshepsut's Punt ships at Deir el Bahri and the Syro-Canaanite flora and fauna in Thutmose III's botanical garden; furthermore, details in the scene of how the Egyptians capsized at least one of the enemy ships with a grapnel suggests that artist(s) were present during the action itself (Wachsmann 1987: 5–16; 1995: 22, 33–34; 1998: 19, 22, 55, 317–19).

Thus, following a minimalist approach, we may conclude that the tableau at Medinet Habu supplies us with information pertaining to *only one ship belonging to the defeated invading fleet*. It is not necessarily clear that this was a common type of vessel in the fleet. The choice of which ship to record may have been based on any number of considerations that we cannot, at a distance of over three mil-

lennia from the event, determine. Indeed there may be a degree of serendipity in the artist's decision to record this particular ship.

Turning to the *archaeological* evidence of Sea Peoples settlement in the Levant, the impression is clearly that stated by Stager. In other words, Mycenaean cultural traits predominate. This evidence argues for Urnfielders comprising a relatively limited aggregate within the mass of moving peoples who reached eastern shores. Nevertheless, there is one additional component in this equation worthy of contemplation: the urnfield cremation cemeteries at Hama.

Hama F (early phase, equivalent to Period I of the cremation cemeteries) contained nearly 1100 urns related to cremation burials (Ingholt 1940: 69–84, pls. XXI–XXVI; Riis 1948). This manner of burial is intrusive and entirely exceptional to local traditions. Components of the material culture of this group, such as fibulae, flang-hilted swords, and the urnfield burials themselves, are clearly of European tradition and indicate the arrival of an intrusive element at Hama. The Danish excavators connected the urnfield level at Hama to the migratory upheavals that ended the Late Bronze Age. Of particular interest is a typical Mycenaean/Sea Peoples ship—complete with the ubiquitous “horizontal-ladder design” and a bird-head stem ornament—which is painted on one of the cremation urns (fig. 27; Ingholt 1940: 71, pl. XXII: 2; Riis 1948: 48 fig. 25, 97 fig. 130B: 112, 105–106, pl. 12C—no. G VIII, 551 [5B902]; Hencken 1968: 627).

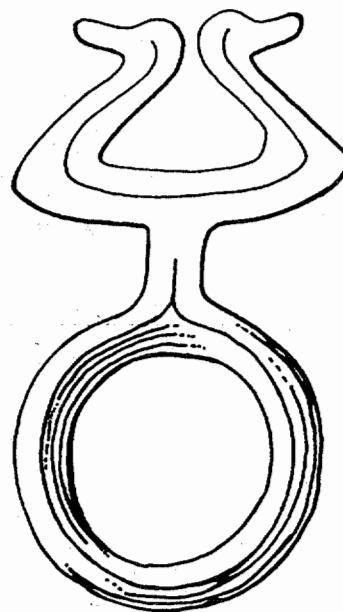
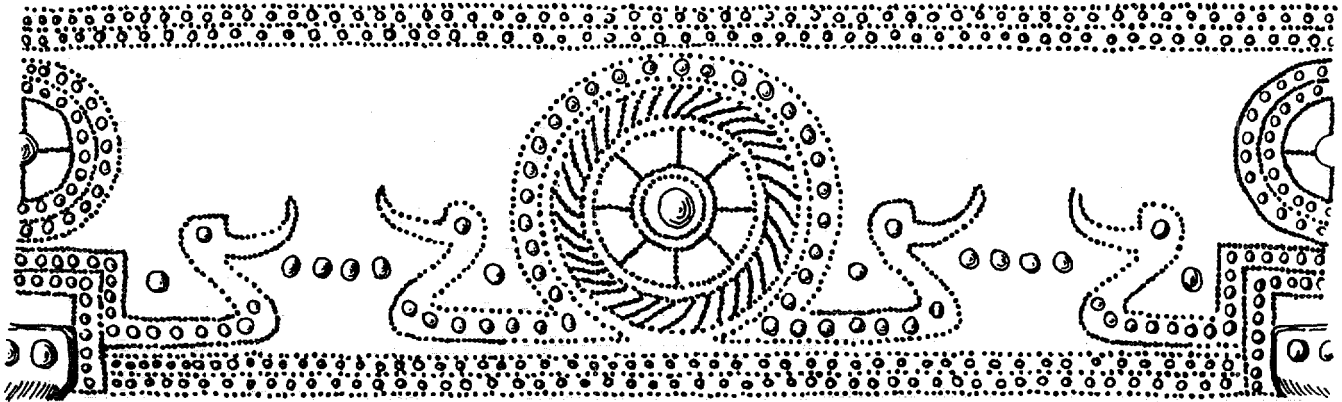
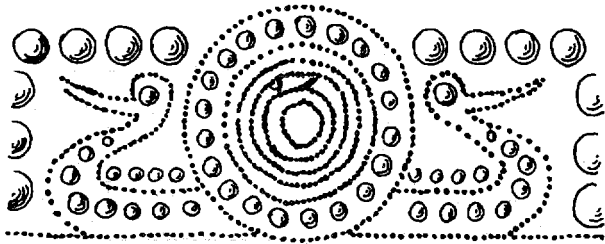


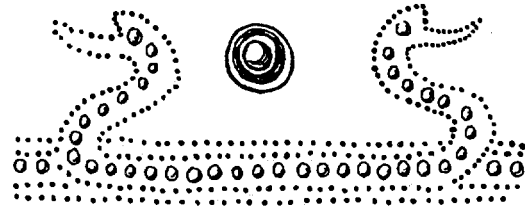
Fig. 24. Bird-boat ornament from Grünwald, Bavaria. Halstatt A1. After Hencken (1968: 516 fig. 478: f).



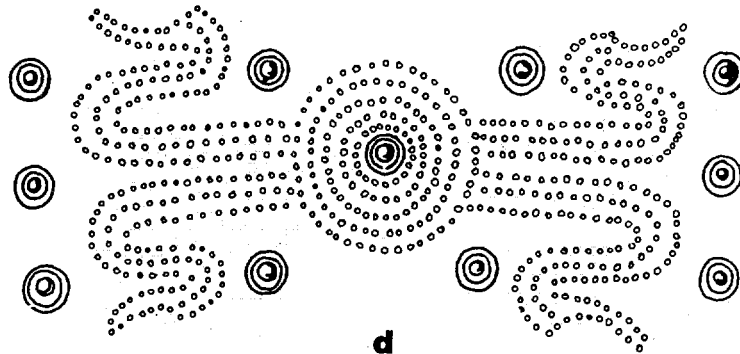
a



b



c



d

**Fig. 25.** Single and double bird-boats represented in embossed Umfield ornaments; a) from Lavindsgaard, Denmark. Halstatt A2.; b) from "Lucky," Slovakia. Halstatt A2.; c) from Rossin, Pomerania. Halstatt B; d) from Este, Italy. Este II (= Villanovan II). After Hencken (1968: 516 fig. 478: a, b, e and g).





Fig. 26. Bird-boat (?) painted on a krater sherd from Tiryns. Late Helladic IIIc. After Bouzek (1985: 117 fig. 88: 6).

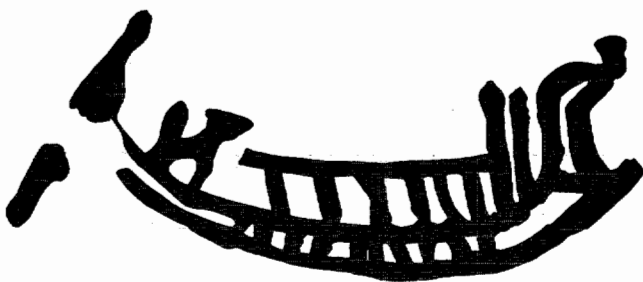


Fig. 27. Ship with a bird-head device capping the stern depicted on a funerary urn found at Hama. Ca. 1200–1075 B.C.E. After Ingholt (1940: pl. XXII: 2).

## CONCLUSION

This review of ship iconography confirms the strong inter-relationship between Mycenaeans and Sea Peoples, so well-documented in other manifestations of material culture. However, it indicates in addition that, together with Mycenaean elements, the invading fleet of the Sea Peoples included persons whose origins are to be sought farther north. This consideration should not prevent us, however, from an awareness that there may have been additional ethnic groups, some perhaps of Anatolian descent, that participated in the coalition.

Indeed, the absorption of polyglot elements into the Sea Peoples naval coalition may have been its hallmark. This is eloquently documented in an Ugaritic text in which Eshuwara, the chief prefect of Alashia informs the king of Ugarit that men and ships of Ugarit committed undefined transgressions against their own kingdom, perhaps indicating that they had joined the enemy (RS 20.18; Hoftijzer and Van Soldt 1998: 343).

One receives the impression of something akin to a snowball rolling down a hill and taking up along the way various elements until, by the time it reaches the bottom of the hill, it has become something more—and different—than the sum of its aggregate parts.

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