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JAN BOUZEK

WHEN DID IRON AGE GREECE START AND HOW ARE ITS BEGINNINGS TO BE SEEN ?

For many of us Iron Age Greek art started with the Geometric period, with fine rectilinear decoration, wide use of meander and creation of the structure of space which formed the background for all later Greek artistic development. But Iron Age Greek civilization obviously started in the eyes of most of us with the use of iron. The Protogeometric period was the first in which iron was generally used for weapons, axes and even partly for dress fasteners and other objects. It also shows clearly the new trends in Greek Iron Age art: geometric structure of decoration and space, use of compass, exact calculation of proportions, humanization of artistic objects so that even vases remind us of the proportions of human body.

The Protogeometric style started at Athens, in the city, which was the main capital of Classical Greek culture. It is no wonder that the full story of any book on Iron Age Greek art starts with the Protogeometric period as with the stage that prepared later development of Archaic and Classical Greek art. The earliest Greek sanctuaries built in the prehistoric technique of posts and wattle-and-daub construction of walls also belong to this period (Samos, Thermon, Heroon of Lefkandi etc.), as well documented now by A.J. Mazarakis Ainian (1997). The Incised Wares of Attica and of the Aegean have parallels both in the Apennine culture in Italy and in the Balkans, and the 'dolls' with suspended legs in the Central Balkans (Bouzek 1997, 83–4, 88). This class seems to represent clay imitations of wooden dolls, connected with some rituals of the female world, as they were found in graves of women, together with large numbers of clay beads decorated in the same technique.

But we can go a little further back and see the beginnings of the new world in the Submycenaean necropoleis. They cemeteries with individual inhumations only, usually on stone cists, showed the importance of the individual persons, no longer considered only as members of family groups, as it was manifested earlier by collective chamber tombs. The main pottery shapes characteristic for later development are already present here, they even attempt to be structured in the way later accomplished in the Protogeometric style. The same may be said of pottery decoration: the old spirals are already cut into concentric circles and

semicircles; the continuous cycle expressed in spirals was interrupted, as if the individual life, the individual human story had changed from its repeating pattern of evolution and involution into separate and unique events. And iron was already known and used, even if not as generally as later. The Dark Age settlement pattern of small villages and more cattle-breeding than agriculture already existed in Greece, as we know e.g. from Nichoria Dark Age I and from Kastanas (Bouzek 1997, 21). It was also the time when the offerings began to be presented in most of the later main Greek sanctuaries (Mazarakis-Ainian 1997), and the time when the series of clay figurines in these sanctuaries, notably at Olympia, may well have begun their development towards Greek Geometric sculpture, if this did not happen even slightly earlier (Bouzek 1997, 140–147).

Nevertheless, we can see that the Submycenaean culture was the result of a process, which apparently took place earlier, but did not manifest itself fully, being bound to express itself in the frame of an earlier tradition. If we look after LH III C artistic expressions, we may often be surprised how many phenomena were already present in Greece like seeds that had to remain underground in the Greek soil for several centuries in order to reappear much later in mature Geometric art. The only partly published Tanagra sarcophagi (Spyropoulos 1969, 1970; Demacopoulou – Konsola 1981) show us in their subjects many iconographical predecessors of Middle and Late Geometric representations: mourning women, prothesis, Oedipus and Sphinx (Immerwahr 1995, Cavanagh – Mee 1997, here *Fig. 1*). Large part of them seem to be of LH III C style, but some are apparently earlier. The Thebes museum catalogue (Demacopoulou – Konsola 1981) mentions that the pottery from the cemetery with larnaces dates from L H III A 1 – III B 1, and that the larnaces started in the middle of use of the cemetery, i.e. probably prior to LH III B 1 already. They are very alien to Cretan larnaces of the period in question (Marinatos 1997).

Even the Warrior Vase and Warrior Stele from Mycenae with their marching warriors and the woman waving them farewell show an imagination characteristic later for Iron Age Greek art, but the Tanagra sarcophagi go more specifically into this new air. While the sarcophagi are, however, bound to the stylistic language of Mycenaean Greece, there are several pottery fragments found at Kynos, in the frontier area between central and northern Greece, which are also in their style close to Ripe Geometric art. It is difficult to believe that there was a gap of three centuries between them and MG II (Dakouronia 1987; Bouzek 1997, 143 Fig. 161, here *Fig. 2*). On the other hand, these pictures resemble rock carvings in Scandinavia and engravings on portable objects on bronze and clay in various parts of Central Europe. Similarly, this is precisely the time when we encounter the first clay figurines (esp. at Phylakopi) much resembling the European wooden idols made of tree trunks with parts of branches, and the similar clay figurines from various parts of Europe (Bouzek 2000). It seems reasonable to see in them relatives of the first crude xoana (whose worship started in the newly founded or newly re-arranged sanctuaries); similar relations show simple clay figurines, too (*Fig. 3*). Long pins, fasteners of the ‘Dorian’ peplos, show a new fashion very different from the earlier tradition in Greece.

Various features on pottery start at LH III C: specific handles shaped as animal heads with horns, bosses on broad belly-handled amphorae and some other shapes of ‘feminine’ character (*Fig. 4*). The powder pyxidae FS 12, many elements reminding one of wooden vessels and leather bags (Bouzek 1985, 201–2), and figurines, like the angular and barrel-shaped bull figurines, appeared. Another new phenomenon is the he general popularity of bird representations (Bouzek 1997, 141–2), which were also characteristic for early Philistine pottery and for the prows of Late Mycenaean and Sea Peoples’ ships (Wachsmann 1998); and sun barque with birds was a very popular subject in all provinces of the European Urnfield cultures.

The first cremations, reminding one of the tradition of European Urnfields, also appeared in Greece just in LH III C, and the main economic and cultural changes revealed at Kastanas (Hänsel 1989) belong to this period. The weapons and armour in LH III C Greece were nearly identical with those used generally in the European koine of weaponry, and the dress fasteners, notably the fibulae, show similar wide distribution, suggesting that the Dorian peplos was in fashion in most parts of the same territory, as was the armour and weapons of this koine. The new megara in Tiryns, Berbati and elsewhere remind one of the description of Homeric palaces (Mazarakis-Ainian 1997, 270–76), but they were also predecessors of EIA temples. (Mazarakis-Ainian 1997, 305–357). Several phases of LH III C experienced several destructions: a time of consolidation on poorer conditions in early III C, revival at the middle period, and further destructions later.

We can also observe, however, that many of the elements generally represented in L H III C were already known in LH III B. Th Circus Pot of Mycenae represents an attempt to illustrate some story very alien to the traditional imagination of Mycenaean potters. The weaponry and the dress fasteners with European links were rather commonly used already in LH III B. The Barbarian Pottery with close Italic and West Balkan parallels was frequent in most Mycenaean centres (Bouzek 1985, 92–175). The fine ‘palatial’ art of gem engraving ceased to exist, the religious rituals took over some “barbarian” or also East Mediterranean traits (Albers 1994; cf. also at Mycenae, Moore. and Taylor 1999, Whittaker 1997); they were, however, quite different from later Greek sanctuaries, while deriving mainly from primitive European wooden post-houses. The Barbarian ware became rather common, as did the new “guerilla” warfare with weapons derived from the European tradition.

Some Mycenaean citadels may have been destroyed by earthquakes, but against whom they were built and who benefited from their destructions, after which the traditional structure of Mycenaean civilization declined sharply? There were certainly many causes of this development, but it is very unlikely that they were all of internal character only, if we have so many parallel events in world history where large part of the causes of similar process was foreign attacks from abroad.

Even so, if we start to observe the situation in Greece more carefully, we may easily find some other elements, which later became common, but which al-

ready had started there in LH III A 2. Here we find, after a long interruption, the bird askos (*Fig. 5*) and the Φ,Ψ and T figurines. The bird askoi resemble Balkan bird vessels of the Bronze Age (Bouzek 1997, 129–130). This also the time of the first changes in Aegean warfare, and the possibly earliest date of the new social hegemony of the E–QE–TA (Degger–Jalkotzy 1978). The barbarization of Mycenaean culture began then, as seen in many fields. The new ‘European’ pottery shape FS 214 may reflect some foreign influence; it reminds one of European bronze cups of the Friedrichsruhe type.

The careful study of fortified and refuge settlements in Late Minoan to Protopotometric Crete (Nowicki 2000) has shown a very dramatic situation during this period (LH III B–C): abandoning of coastal sites, settlements of refugees on defensible hills in the mountains, and also pirates’ nests on the coast, similar to those known in Cyprus (Maa–Paleokastro). It is very unlikely that this would reflect inner tensions only. This general situation most likely suggests the presence of invaders or looters, or both. General changes in Greece can best be explained by similar phenomena, and many parallels from historically known similar situations show that what happened in Greece at the end of the Bronze Age cannot be explained without strong foreign involvement (cf. Bouzek 1996).

There were also economic troubles caused by climatic changes, earthquakes and the political difficulties of the old centralized systems of the Bronze Age (Betancourt 2000). They could not be adapted to new conditions, to the new human identity, where individuals felt free to act on their own behalf (Bouzek 1997, 51–2). This change of mind also explains the new phenomenon of the Sea Peoples, in which men of different blood relations, of different origin, could join in common military activities. This surprised all the reporters of their raids and attacks in Ugarit, Egypt and with the Hittites. A new survey of Sea People ships of S. Wachsmann (2000) shows again that also central European people participated in these activities: Goliath’s armour, Naue II swords, long pins and fibulae support the evidence equally well (Bouzek 1985, 92–176); there is much more material evidence of their participation than for ex. of the Normans or the Vandals in Italy and North Africa.

It may be useful to compare the decline of Mycenaen Greece and of other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean (as a process in which several phenomena played substantial roles, and the downfall had several phases with ups and downs, roughly as now sketched by S. Deger–Jalkotzy 1998) with different models known historically. If we should look after a similar model, so good parallels offers the closing period of the Roman empire in the west. First, barbarians are invited as mercenaries, later they acquire higher positions; this may correspond to LH A 2 and III B 1 developments in the Aegean. Their more barbarian relatives follow them, and, when given a chance, they try to size power. The LH III B 2 situation with many “European” weapons, armour and dress fasteners, and with the main destructions of Mycenaean citadels, which were later no more repaired, offers such a picture. Then the more barbarian (and barbarized) warriors came to power in some parts of Greece, but they still had to come to terms with the older élite, and to use local craftsmen. In some parts the

descendants of the old élites persisted, in other parts the “nouvelle élite” stylized itself as the successor of old kings, as did Theodoric of Ravenna. Preparation for the New Iron Age started on the ruins.

Why cannot something that is so obvious in analogous historical situations as invasions and migrations be accepted as explanation by many of us now? – (with a few exceptions, cf. now even among New Archaeologists, for ex.. Burmeister 2000, with bibliography). We are afraid of recent dramatic situations, and prefer not to see too many in the past. Another obvious reason is the abuse of the Dorian migration theory from Europe by Nazi ideology. We are all ashamed that this happened, and our fear of being linked to this dirty history makes this idea ideologically unacceptable. Even more, we are afraid of being accused of racism, and any point of view which can be accused of racism, is unacceptable for us now. Besides this, computers force us to think in their binomial polarizing system.

From all our experience of life we know nothing is quite black or quite white, while most things are lighter or darker grey. In real events, there are always so many phenomena involved that a simple formula of cause and effect can only work when these two phenomena are separated artificially in the laboratory or in our minds. Yet the structure of more general laws exists, and we are all studying phenomena in order to catch some part of the general rules and laws behind them one day, to uncover the historical truth. The absolute truth may be inaccessible to us, but we have to try honestly to overcome our inclinations and immarure hypotheses to find as large a share of it as our human forces allow. Anyway, the decline and fall of Mycenaean Greece was a complicated process, which lasted a long time, and in which many factors played a role.

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Figures:

Fig. 1. Tanagra larnaces, LH III B (?). 1. Sphinx and 'Oedipus', 2 Sphinx, 3. mourning women, 4 prothesis.

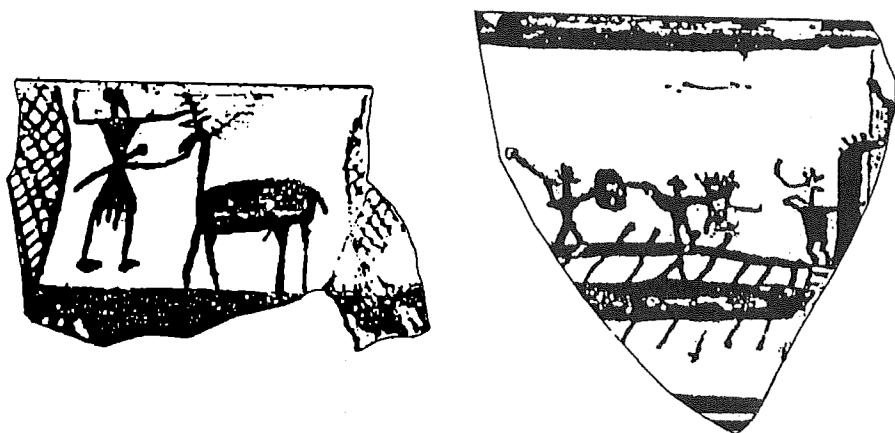


Fig. 2. LH III C pottery fragments with figural representations from Kynos (left hunting scene, right fighting on a ship).

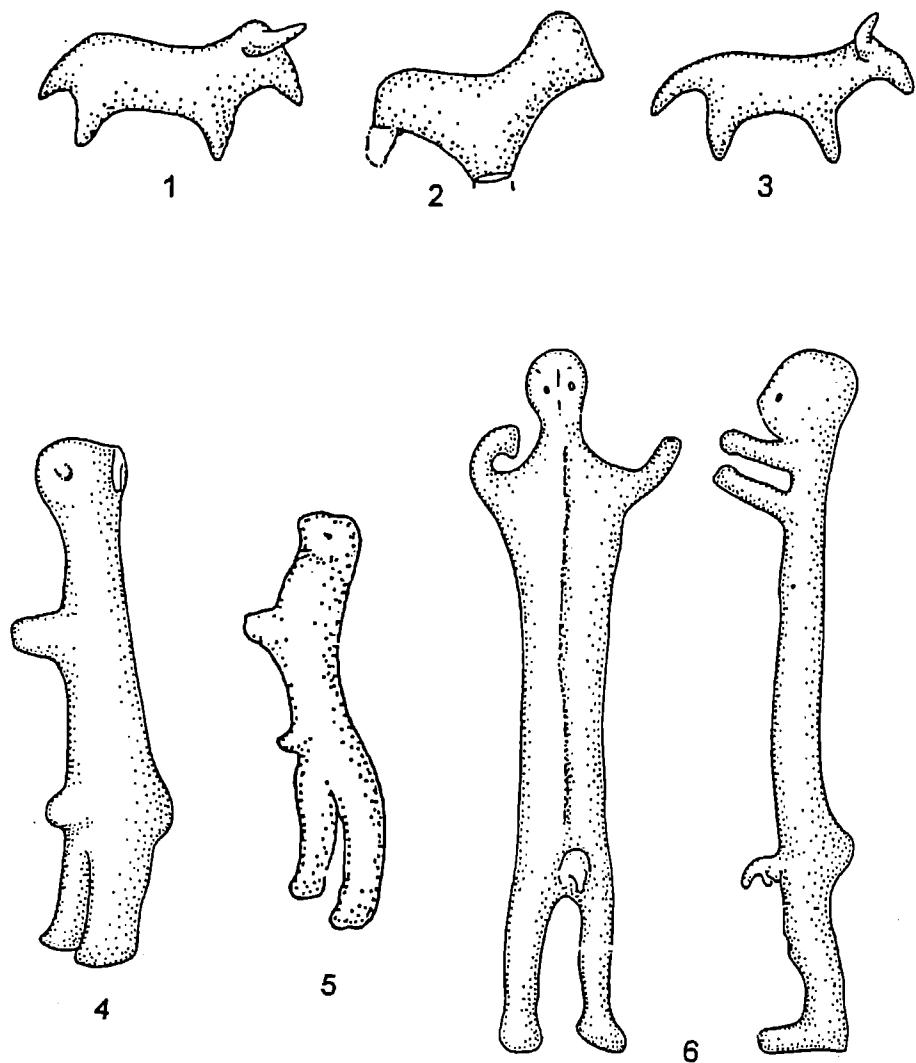


Fig. 3. Primitive clay figurines. 1, 3–4 Olympia, 2 Stránky, Bohemia, 5 Bavaria, 6 Phylakopi on Melos.

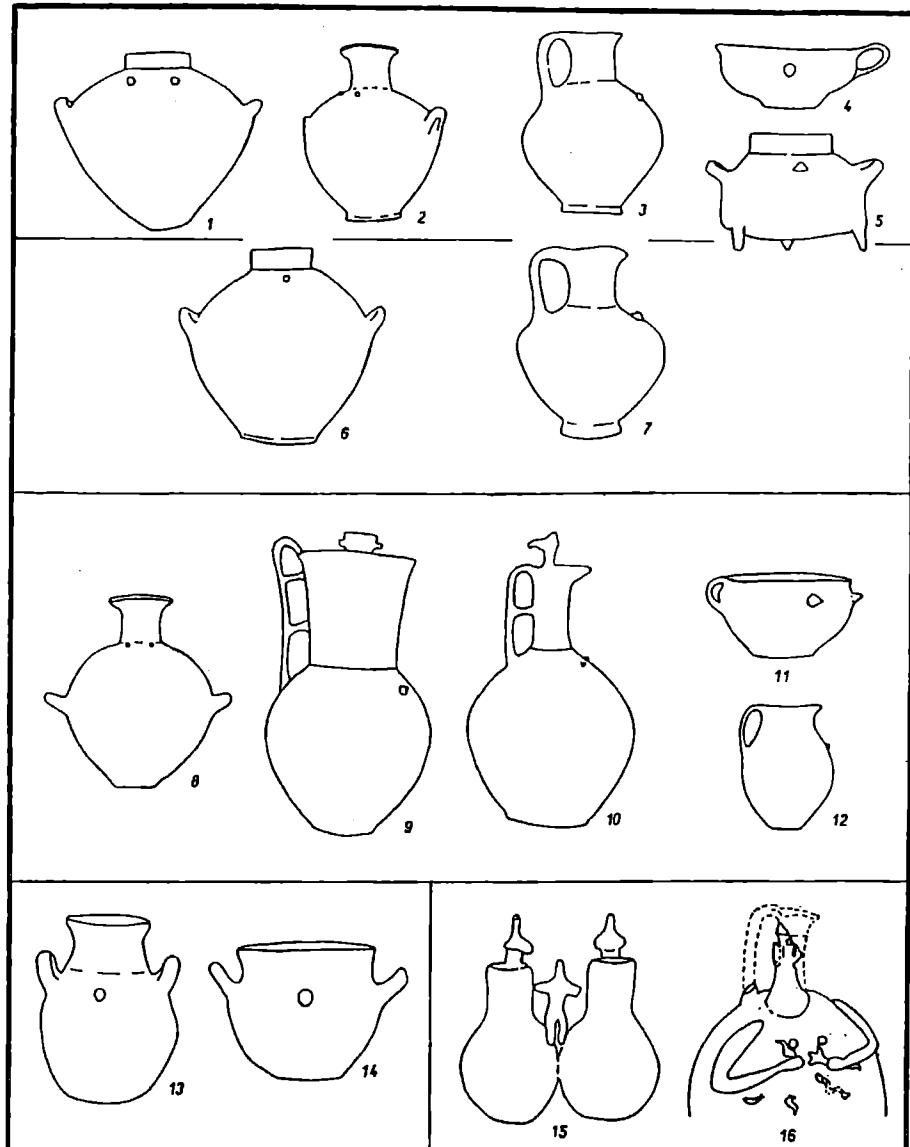


Fig. 4, Late Mycenaean, Geometric and Macedonian vessels with bosses. 1 and 3 Mycenae, 2 Asine, 4 Vourvatsi, 5 Ialyssos, 6 Kerameikos, 7 Salamis, 8 Corinth, 9–11 Attic Geometric, 12 Protoattic, 13–14 Vergina, 15 Athens, 16 Ialyssos.

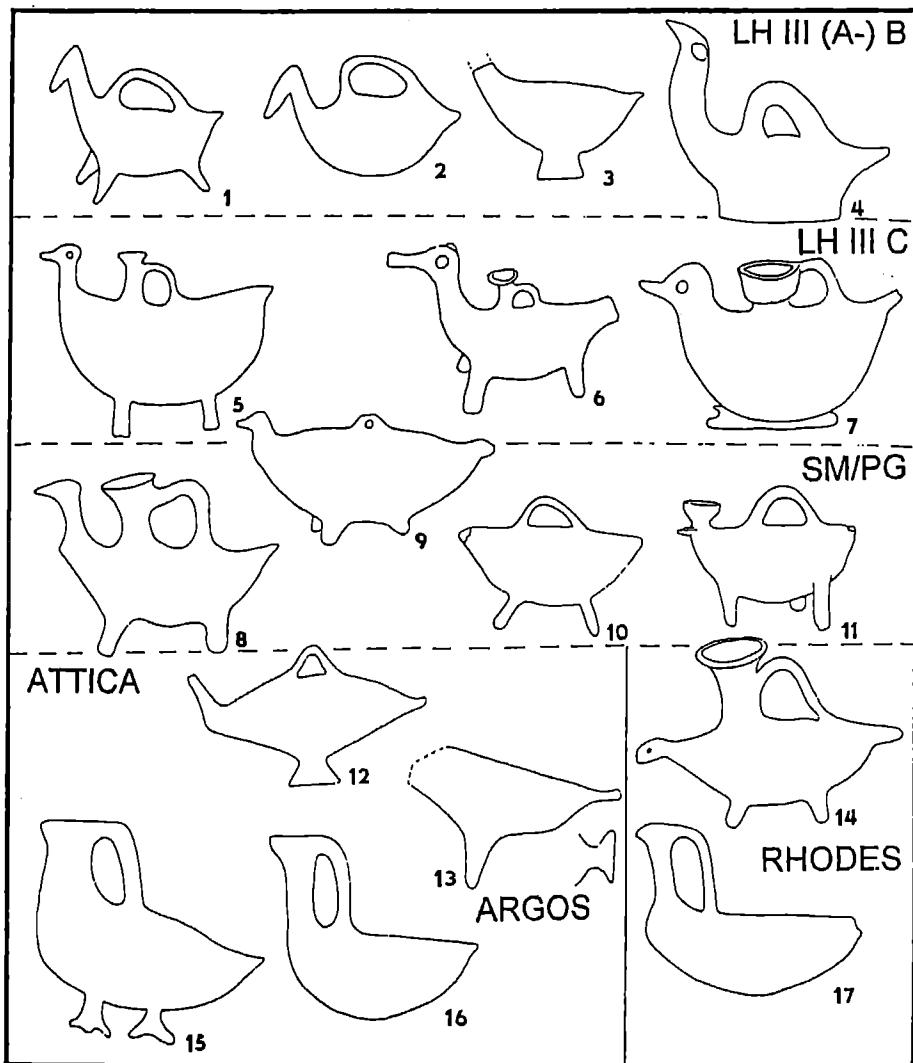


Fig. 5: Development of bird askoi in Greece. 1–2 Mycenae, 3 Prosymna, 4 in Munich, 5–6 Achaera, 7 Ialyssos, 8 in Heidelberg, 9–10 Kerameikos, 11 Assarlik, 12 Marathon, 15–16 Athens, 13 Argos, 14 Ialyssos, 17 Vroulia.

Figs. 1–5 after Bouzek 1997.