

A Primate on a Fresco from the Mycenaean Acropolis of Tiryns

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The earliest Bronze Age Mediterranean primate representations on frescoes are found at the Aegean sites of Knossos (Crete) and Akrotiri (Thera). By contrast, monkeys have so far been missing from Mycenaean frescoes in mainland Greece. A fresco fragment of a cultic scene from Tiryns changes this; it depicts a bipedal partial lower body, with a hanging tail. This image, previously interpreted as a human wearing an animal hide, had already been suggested to represent a monkey. A re-examination of this miniature fresco identified various features that seem to confirm the representation of a monkey, most probably of a baboon-like primate. Assuming that the fresco from Tiryns is part of a cult scene, similar to those from Akrotiri, this adds a further image to a small corpus of Aegean depictions connecting monkeys with important female figures or deities. Furthermore, the Tiryns fresco fragment indicates that primates were not entirely absent from local Mycenaean iconography.

Keywords: Archaeoprimatology, baboon, Bronze Age Aegean, fresco, Late Helladic period, mainland Greece

INTRODUCTION

The earliest Bronze Age Mediterranean non-human primate (primates hereafter) representations on frescoes are found at the Aegean sites of Knossos (Crete) and Akrotiri (Thera/Santorini) and date to around 1650–1450 BC (for recent reviews, see Binnberg et al., 2021; Urbani & Youlatos, 2022). Even though they are generally well-known since their early discovery at Knossos (Evans, 1921, 1935), relatively recent and new descriptions of Theran frescoes depicting primates (Vlachopoulos, 2007) have been omitted in major studies concerning Minoan primates, as noted by

Urbani & Youlatos (2022). Moreover, no recent review (e.g. Papageorgiou & Birtacha, 2008; Phillips, 2008a, 2008b; Greenlaw, 2011; Pareja, 2015, 2017; Urbani & Youlatos, 2020a,b, 2022) has reported the existence of any Bronze Age frescoes depicting primates from mainland Greece, where the Mycenaean civilization flourished at that time. This is also the case of other works, such as Cline's (1991, 1995) study on the presence of Egyptian primatomorphic objects on Mycenaean sites, Wolfson's (2018) iconographical analysis on 'monkeys and simianesque creatures' from ancient Greece, and Urbani's (2021) recent comprehensive assessment on global

archaeoprimatological patterns. Thus, there is a widespread assumption that monkeys were not depicted in Mycenaean frescoes, and, consequently, that the significance of this animal in Mycenaean culture was negligible (Lang, 1969: 104; Immerwahr, 1990: 108, 162, 165; Kontorli-Papadopoulou, 1996: 123; Crowley, 2021: 202).

However, an article by Maria Kostoula and Joseph Maran (2012: 210–12) contains a discussion of a fresco fragment from the Mycenaean site of Tiryns which, according to them, shows a monkey. Since this finding was overlooked by all other analyses of primates in Aegean Bronze Age iconography, it is appropriate to discuss this fragment at greater length and highlight its archaeoprimatological and art historical significance. In the present article, this fresco will be re-described in detail, examined from a primatological perspective, and assessed within its art historical context.

PRIMATE IMAGERY IN MYCENAEAN GREECE

The relationship of the inhabitants of the Mycenaean Greek mainland with primates remains tenuous, particularly when compared with the relatively ample primate imagery of the Minoans (Papageorgiou & Birtacha, 2008; Phillips, 2008a, 2008b; Greenlaw, 2011; Pareja, 2015, 2017; Urbani & Youlatos, 2020a,b, 2022; Binnberg et al., 2021). The only other objects depicting monkeys found on Mycenaean lands are either imports from Egypt or directly influenced by Cypriot or Near Eastern artistic traditions. Among these, the urban complexes of Tiryns and Mycenae have yielded a couple of imported primatomorphic figurines that can be associated with New Kingdom Egypt (McDermott, 1938; Cline, 1991, 1995). A bluish cartouche figurine found in Mycenae in 1896 (National Archaeological Museum of Athens,

inventory number EAM 4573), bearing the name of Amenhotep II (reigned 1427–1401 BC), shows a creature (Cline, 1991: pl. 1) whose prominent lateral whiskers, high forehead, rounded head, and laterally placed nostrils suggest a papionin (*Papio* spp.). Kilian (1979: 405, fig. 30; Tiryns inv. LXI 36/88 a12.46) and Cline (1991: 34, pl. 2) describe another Egyptian primate frit figurine painted in blue with a similar name, found in Tiryns in 1977. In this object, possibly a baboon-like monkey infant is clinging to the body of its mother, but the piece is so poorly preserved that vital details that could contribute to a definitive identification are missing. From Mycenae, Sakellarakis (1976: 178, pl. IV, 9) reported a fragment of an alabaster vase depicting the side of a body, a small hand holding the body, and the left leg of a monkey-like animal (National Archaeological Museum of Athens, inventory number EAM 2657), most likely representing an infant clinging to its mother. Sakellarakis (1976: 178) also refers to another alabaster piece from Tiryns representing the right side of a face showing the ear, muzzle, and formerly inlaid eye of a possible primate (National Archaeological Museum of Athens, inventory number EAM 6250; according to Cline (1991: 38), the find location was mislabelled, and it is from Mycenae).

Tiryns also yielded another primate- or demon-like Mycenaean rhyton dating from the fourteenth to thirteenth century BC. Maran (2015: 282) commented that the object was ‘furnished with inlaid eyes and shaped like a head of a monkey or the Near Eastern demon *Humbaba*’ (the guardian of the Forest of Cedars, the place where the gods inhabited; a representation not found before in the Aegean, as indicated by Kostoula & Maran, 2012). Unfortunately, its fragmentary nature impedes an unambiguous restoration of the object (Kostoula & Maran, 2012: fig. 10). The authors suggested that this primate-like image might have served a

local Mycenaean religious purpose; that may indicate a cultural borrowing from the Near East and Egypt, where primates and humans display proven interconnections (see, e.g., Vandier d'Abbadie, 1964, 1965, 1966; Hamoto, 1995). Moreover, as the object was found in a context related to Cypriot or even Levantine artisans, it might have been influenced by Cypriot or Near Eastern imagery (Kostoula & Maran, 2012: 218). From a morphological perspective, the object featuring forward set eyes, implied high forehead, pointed nose with slightly laterally set nostrils, and prominent lateral ears cannot be unequivocally identified as a monkey, a demon, or even a grotesque human-like wrinkled face.

Finally, a small (17.5 mm long, 17.5 mm wide) stone lentoid seal depicting a human facing a monkey is kept in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (CMS I 377). Although the seal is probably of Minoan origin, the impression was most likely made at Pylos in the south-eastern Peloponnese, in the Late Helladic IIIB–C period (Tamvaki, 1985; Krzyszkowska, 2005; Philips, 2008a: n. 952; Pareja, 2015: fig. 5.10; Crowley, 2021: fig. XLI.12). In a recent review, Urbani and Youlatos (2022: fig. 10.11m), tentatively identified the monkey as a baboon, based on its long snout, waisted body, and relatively short tail with a tuft at the end.

This brief overview indicates that there are no unambiguous three-dimensional representations of primates of Mycenaean origin. However, as the next sections show, this may not be the case for a two-dimensional depiction.

MYCENAEAN TIRYNS

The Mycenaean civilization flourished in the central and southern parts of mainland Greece during the last phase of the Bronze Age (1750–1050 BC), with major centres such

as Mycenae, Tiryns, Pylos, Orchomenos, Thebes, and probably Athens (Schallin & Tournavitou, 2015). Tiryns, located in the north-eastern Peloponnese (Figure 1), was one of the main harbours of the Argolid, with strong archaeological indications of its participation in long-distance exchange (Maran, 2010, 2015). The site included several settlement areas in the lowlands around the fortified citadel, of which the Upper Citadel is one of the most impressive and best-preserved Mycenaean palaces of the Late Helladic period (LH IIIA–B, fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BC) (Maran, 2010).

Since the early campaigns of Heinrich Schliemann in 1884–1885 (Schliemann, 1886), the site has been excavated by collaborative teams of German and Greek archaeologists until today (Maran, 2010; Maran, pers. comm.). Among the pioneers was the German archaeologist Gerhart Rodenwaldt (1886–1945), who published an extensive study of the frescoes found at Tiryns (Rodenwaldt, 1912). In this monograph, a drawing of a small fragment of a fresco printed in sepia (Rodenwaldt, 1912: pl. II.7) shows a biped, of which only the lower half of the body, the two legs, and the tail are visible (Figure 2a). This figure subsequently became the subject of different interpretations. Rodenwaldt (1912: 17) interpreted it as a human/animal hybrid, while other authors identified a human wearing an animal hide (Vermeule, 1974: 50; Kilian, 1981: 50; Lurz, 1994: 128–29; Weilharter, 2007: 346; Kostoula & Maran, 2012: 211). Kostoula & Maran (2012) were the first to propose that this figure may represent a monkey and suggested a reconstruction, reproduced here in Figure 2b.

DESCRIPTION

The fresco fragment

Between 1909 and 1910, Rodenwaldt took part in the excavations of the Upper



Figure 1. Location of Tiryns within the Eastern Mediterranean. Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO Geobasis-DE/BKG, ©2009 Inst. Geogr. Nacional Mapa GISrael.

Citadel at Tiryns and two years later he published the fresco fragments found in these campaigns (Rodenwaldt, 1912). Among these, he described a small fresco fragment recovered from the debris of the palace, found at a shallow depth north-east of the Byzantine church. The dimensions of the fragment, currently in the National Museum at Athens (inventory number 58791), were recorded as 87 mm high, 62 mm wide, and around 28 mm deep (Rodenwaldt, 1912: 16). The fragment (Figure 2a) was described thus: ‘The piece is completely burnt; the originally blue background has changed to grey, the yellow stripe of the dentate band to blotchy red. The upper stripe of the

dentate band was probably grey from the start, since its colouration is different from that of the background of the picture. Its ornamentation now has a negative effect, since the intervals corresponding to the red horizontal lines of the lower stripe appear darker because the black that has broken off from the horizontal lines has taken away the grey below. The red in the image has also partially broken off and its presence can only be recognized by the different colours of the ground. White has been preserved on the back and tail of the figure and on the right edge of the object on the left. In the lower part of the grey dentate band, we see a line pressed in with a string, the preliminary drawing for the

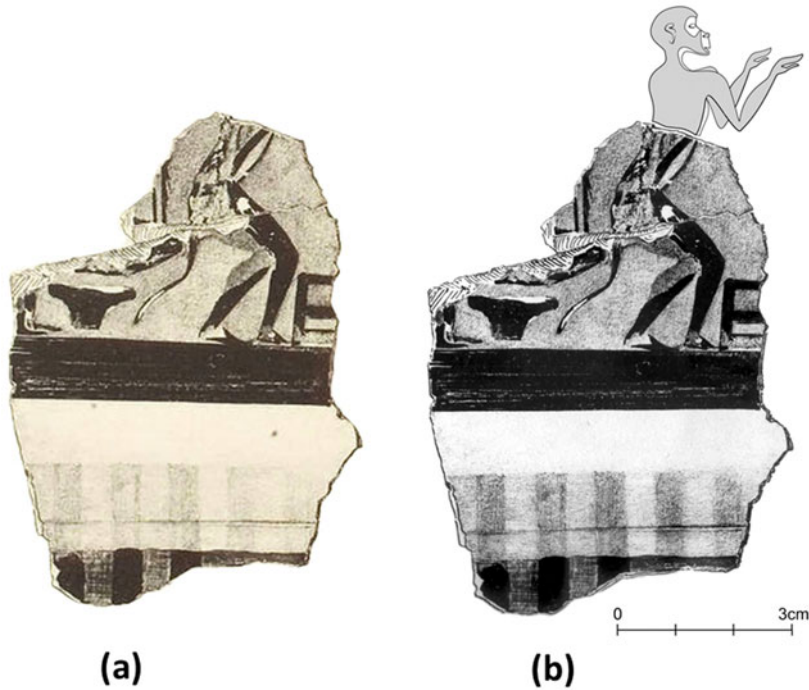


Figure 2. The tailed partial body on the miniature fresco fragment from the Upper Citadel of Tiryns. a) in sepia from Rodenwaldt (1912: pl. II.7; b) proposed reconstruction after Kostoula and Maran (2012: fig. 10b based on Rodenwaldt, 1912: pl. II.7). Image a) Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Public Domain; image b) reproduced by permission of J. Maran.

dividing line between the two dentate bands, which was not adhered to during execution. The whole fragment was covered with a solid sinter that was difficult to remove' (Rodenwaldt, 1912: 16, pl. II.7; translation by the authors). Although the find's context makes its chronological position uncertain, Kostoula & Maran (2012: 211) confidently placed it between the Early and Late Palatial Period (Late Helladic IIIA or IIIB; around 1420–1200 BC).

We re-examined the fragment (Figure 3) fully at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, re-described it and photographed it for the first time since its discovery more than a century earlier. The fragment was burnt and is in a relatively poor condition: it is broken in its upper part and has been

glued. Its actual measurements, via digital calliper (Mitutoyo™, Japan), are 85 mm high, 65 mm wide, and 25 mm deep. Most painted features are in relief, indicating a heavy layer of painting. This thick layer of paint is either destroyed (e.g. on most of the biped) or simply flaked (e.g. right leg of the figure, where the relief persists). Only a few parts indicate light painting (e.g. on the figure's belly). When originally curated, the painted side of the fragment was conserved with varnish, adding a glossy surface to the piece. A complete documentation of this miniature fresco, including a detailed chromatic record by Munsell Colour Chart™ and a photograph of the back side of the fragment, can be found in the online [Supplementary Material](#) (Table S1 and Figures S1 and S2).



Figure 3. *The tailed partial body of a miniature fresco from Tiryns, in colour. The bar equals 1 cm.* Photograph by D. Youlatos with permission from the Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο, Συλλογή Προϊστορικών, Αιγυπτιακών, Κυπριακών και Ανατολικών Αρχαιοτήτων, ©Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού/ΟΔΑΠ (National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Department of Collection of Prehistoric, Egyptian, Cypriot and Near Eastern Antiquities), ©Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/HCRMDO.

The scene

On the fragment, a bipedal figure (partial lower body, two flexed legs, and a hanging tail) is depicted leaning forward in front of a rectangular object to the right. To the left, behind the feet of the figure stands a vessel with a tapering base and flaring rim. Above, there is another, larger object with a curved base. This ‘floating’ object may represent an undetermined structure that most probably lies in the background of the scene. Further to the left, behind the vessel on the ground are two feet belonging to

another figure. The way the feet are set close to each other in contact with the ground suggests a fully standing biped, most likely to be a human. The elements of the scene are rendered mostly in dusky red set over a greenish grey background (see below).

The tailed partial body

Occupying the upper right quarter of the small fragment, the whole figure, whose head and arms are missing, measures just 40 mm in height and the body is 10 mm wide. Each thigh is 20 mm long and so is the length of each shin. The colour of the body lines, the thighs, shins, and the tail are dusky red. The damaged parts and the faded parts are greenish to bluish grey. This is also the colour of the belly, which is strongly differentiated from the dark-coloured body. The figure is leaning forward, a posture that, although possibly related to the figure’s action, is probably implying a bipedally-standing animal and not a human, who would stand more upright, as in most Mycenaean wall-paintings (see anthropomorphic images in Rodenwaldt, 1912; Lang, 1969; Brecoulaki et al., 2015; Tournavitou, 2017).

The back of the tailed body is straight, whereas the belly (bearing the colour of the background) is lightly convex. The relatively narrow waist is evident. The right leg is on the foreground and flexed; it is proximally grey, with only its dorsal part dusky red (thigh). Distally, the shin is also dusky red. The right foot is damaged and only the outline survives; it is set in full contact with the ground. The left leg is in the background but stands in front of the right leg; it is less flexed, and the dusky red colour persists throughout, until the level of the foot. The left foot seems to establish a firm contact with the ground and supports the body weight.

The tail is smoothly curved, appears flexible, dynamic, and is shown in relief. It is narrow, relatively long, but shorter than the body or the legs (the tail-leg ratio is around 0.74). The distal part appears slightly wider than the proximal part. The tail appears to develop organically from the back, and it is not in an elevated position. However, this part is partially destroyed and broken. The distal end appears to show a small difference in colouration where a whitish longitudinal stroke appears. This part is covered by soil remnants and difficult to discern but the two colours are still visible.

THE TAILED PARTIAL BODY OF TIRYNS: IDENTIFICATION

As noted by Kostoula & Maran (2012), when Rodenwaldt wrote his monograph, the primatomorphic frescoes at Knossos were yet unknown; thus he identified the figure as a hybrid involved in some kind of cult activity (Rodenwaldt, 1912: 17). By contrast, Vermeule (1974: 50) and later Kilian (1981: 50) interpreted the Tiryns figure as a man wearing an animal hide featuring a long-curved tail. As Lurz (1994: 128–29) observed, hybrid mythical beings merging human feet with an animal body are generally unknown in Mycenaean iconography, which is why he suggested that the figure was a priest wearing an animal hide who, judging from his posture, is probably depicted dancing. This opinion was shared by Weilhartner (2007: 346), who claimed that the figure is a human wrapped in an animal skin with a long tail, most probably associated with a ritual practice. After observing the image published by Rodenwaldt (1912: 16, pl. II.7) (here Figure 2a), Kostoula and Maran (2012: 211) were the first scholars to suggest that the image of this wall-painting is likely to represent a monkey, based on close

morphological and compositional similarities with the primatomorphic fresco from Room 3a, Xeste 3 at Akrotiri on Thera (Doumas, 1992: 158–59) (Figure 4). They also pointed out that this interpretation had surprisingly never been proposed before, probably because of ‘the fact that the colour of the figure does not seem to conform to the convention to depict monkeys as blue’ (Kostoula & Maran, 2012: 211).

From a primatological perspective, the Tiryns figure shows a set of physical features, such as robust thighs and body, a clearly delineated and differently coloured belly, moderately narrow waist, and a tail base located on the upper part of the rump, that appear to suggest the representation of a monkey. Moreover, the tail seems to be part of the animal, a continuation of the rump and not part of a costume, or furry garment, or attachment, which further highlights the animal nature of the bipedal figure. When compared to the descriptors suggested for Minoan papionins such as the ‘narrow waist, dorsal position of the tail base (and) elevated limb configuration’ (Urbani & Youlatos, 2020a: 3), the Tiryns image shows the general form of a baboon-like primate.

Regarding the figure’s unusual colour, Rodenwaldt’s published drawing is in sepia (Figure 2a) and his description (1912: 16, pl. II.7; see translation above) does not allow a proper chromatic characterization of the body – he only mentioned the presence of white on the figure. Yet, although Kostoula and Maran (2012) did not mention the reddish colour, they highlighted the unconventional colouration of the monkey, which might explain why no one had proposed the interpretation of a primate representation before, and suggested that this deviation could indicate a change in colour conventions in the long process of artistic transfer from the Aegean islands to the Greek mainland. Based on our own macroscopic examination of the



Figure 4. Minoan scene of ‘The Offering to the Seated Goddess’ from Room 3a, Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera. Photograph ©Klearchos Kapoutsis, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

fragment, we can confirm that the figure was mostly painted in dusky red and pink tones with some greenish/greyish veins on the belly, torso, and upper legs (see also Supplementary Table S1) which probably resulted from the damage and flaking of the surface, revealing the bluish/greenish underpainting.

While a change in artistic conventions is certainly possible, other factors may also have played a role. The fresco fragment from Tiryns is not only the first identified Mycenaean wall-painting of a monkey, but it is also the first miniature fresco with this subject in the region. It is very likely that the artist may have chosen a largely monochrome colour scheme to make the figures stand out from the background. On the other hand, the artist may have been inspired by the use of monochrome red, as

in Mycenaean pictorial vase-painting such as the red zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, and geometric motifs of Mycenaean pottery (Figure 5a–f) (Vermeule & Karageorghis, 1982; Pliatsika, 2018).

In addition to rendering physical traits of primates in a relatively naturalistic way (cf. Cameron, 1968; Masseti, 1980; Dumas, 1992; Groves, 2008; Urbani & Youlatos, 2012, 2020a,b, 2022; Binnberg et al., 2021), Minoan images of papionins also include aspects that highlight their perceived similarities to humans (see Greenlaw, 2011; Chapin & Pareja, 2021) and ‘were attributed more anthropomorphic behaviours and depicted in sacred or ritual events’ (Urbani & Youlatos, 2020a: 3). The colour red is universally associated with energy and vitality, and in Aegean wall-paintings is frequently



Figure 5. Monochrome scenes in reddish tones on Mycenaean pottery from Eastern Mediterranean archaeological sites: a) unknown location; b) Enkomi, Cyprus; c) Tiryns; d) Mycenae; e) Evangelistria, mainland Greece; f) Palea Epidavros, mainland Greece. Photographs a–e) ©Zde, Wikimedia, CC BY; photograph f) ©Schuppi, Wikimedia, CC BY.

represented as the skin colour of adult males (Morgan, 2020). Perhaps, the red fur of the Tiryns figure may have been considered appropriate for an animal that displays noticeable human traits.

In this context, it must be emphasized that the feet of the Tiryns figure (Figure 6a–b) strongly resemble human feet as they are rendered in other Mycenaean frescoes (see Rodenwaldt, 1912: 17, pls. II8, VIII, XIV12) (see Figure 6c–d). In the Minoan primate frescoes, anthropomorphic pedal traits in baboons were rendered either with flexed digits (Figure 6e) or as triangular, proportionally short, and pointy extremities, slightly resembling human feet (Figure 6f). It is likely that these traits were originally supposed to further highlight the intermediate nature of these animals. In the Tiryns fresco, the feet of the animal are human-like, a fact that prompted some scholars to see a human-animal hybrid or a human dressed in a fur. Later, the use of human feet will re-appear in primatomorphic motifs in Classical Greece (e.g. Figure 6g: Attic amphora, fifth century

BC; see Tompkins, 1994: 24). Thus, as suggested by Kostoula and Maran (2012) and in our study, the current evidence suggests that the most plausible identification of the figure on this miniature fresco from Tiryns is that it is a primate.

THE TAILED PARTIAL BODY OF TIRYNS: INTERPRETATION

Several similarities can be found among the comparanda in the record of Aegean Bronze Age primatomorphic frescoes. For example, the depiction of a lighter belly in the figure from Tiryns is comparable to the white bellies of other Aegean monkeys (Figure 7) and this colour contrast between the dorsal and ventral areas to represent the primate body was most likely an artistic convention in frescoes depicting primates in both the insular and mainland Greece Bronze Age cultures. Moreover, there are similarities with other scenes involving baboons (Urbani & Youlatos, 2020a,b, 2022). The depictions of the thigh, buttocks, and tail base are virtually

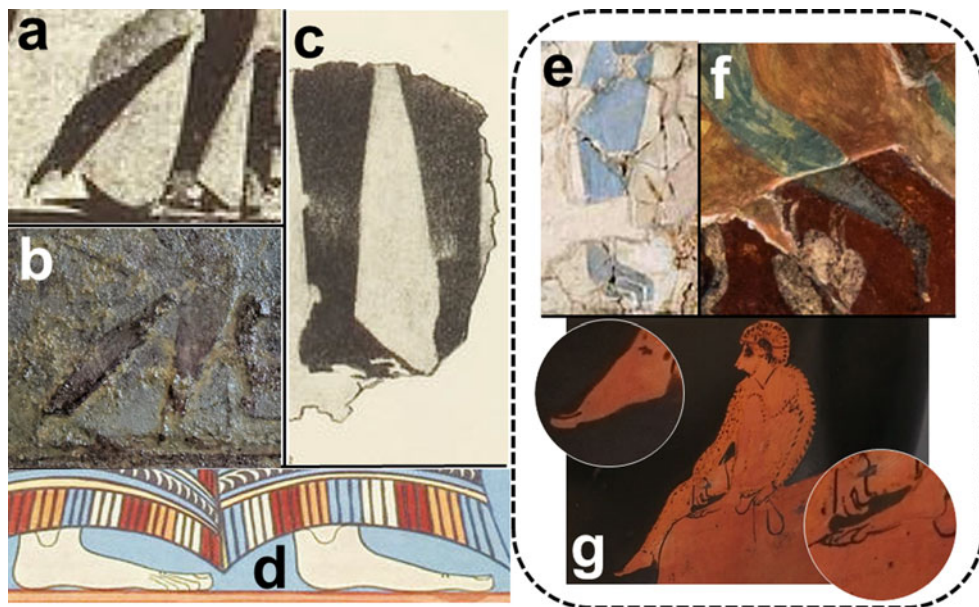


Figure 6. Mycenaean primate and human feet compared to Minoan and Greek primate feet: a) detail of the feet of the tailed Tiryns partial body (from Rodenwaldt, 1912: pl. II.7); b) photograph of the same; c) Mycenaean human feet (from Rodenwaldt, 1912: pl. II.8); d) Mycenaean woman's feet (from Rodenwaldt, 1912: pl. VIII). Minoan depictions of papionin feet: e) detail of the foot of the baboon from Room 3a, Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera (see Figures 4 and 8e); f) detail of the foot of the baboon from the Early Keep, Knossos, Crete (see Figure 8d). Greek depictions of primate feet: g) amphora of Attic origin found at Capua, (Italy), 470–450 BC, with details of the primate feet in the expanded circles (British Museum, inventory number 1873.8–20.364). Images a) and c–d) Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Public Domain; photograph b) by D. Youlatos; photograph e) ©Klearchos Kapoutsis, Wikimedia, CC BY; photograph f) ©ArchaiOptix, Wikimedia, CC BY; photograph g) ©Vassil, Wikimedia, CC BY.

identical in the Tiryns fragment (Figure 8a–b) and in the baboon from the Minoan House of the Frescoes at Knossos (Figure 8c). Finally, the lower torso of the tailed body from Tiryns is very similar in shape, position, and colour contrast to the papionin from Room 3a of Xeste 3 at Akrotiri on Thera (Figure 8e). As already observed by Kostoula and Maran (2012: 211), this latter scene (see Figure 4) displays further parallels regarding the composition and can provide clues as to the original context of the incomplete image from Tiryns (see Doumas, 1992: 158–59). In the Akrotiri fresco, a young woman is pouring crocus flowers from a basket into a large pannier on the ground. To the

right, a baboon is standing in front of a tripartite podium. Its foot is placed on the lower level of the platform right next to a smaller pannier with saffron from which the monkey has taken a bunch to offer it to a large woman (a goddess?) who is seated on the highest level of the podium. On the fragment from Tiryns, the rectangular striped object on the right may have formed part of a similar architectural structure (Kostoula & Maran, 2012: 211; cf. Militello, 2020: figs. 17–20). Moreover, the monkey standing in front of the platform is shown in a pose very similar to that of the baboon from Akrotiri. Although the Tiryns torso is preserved almost to the armpits, the arms are not

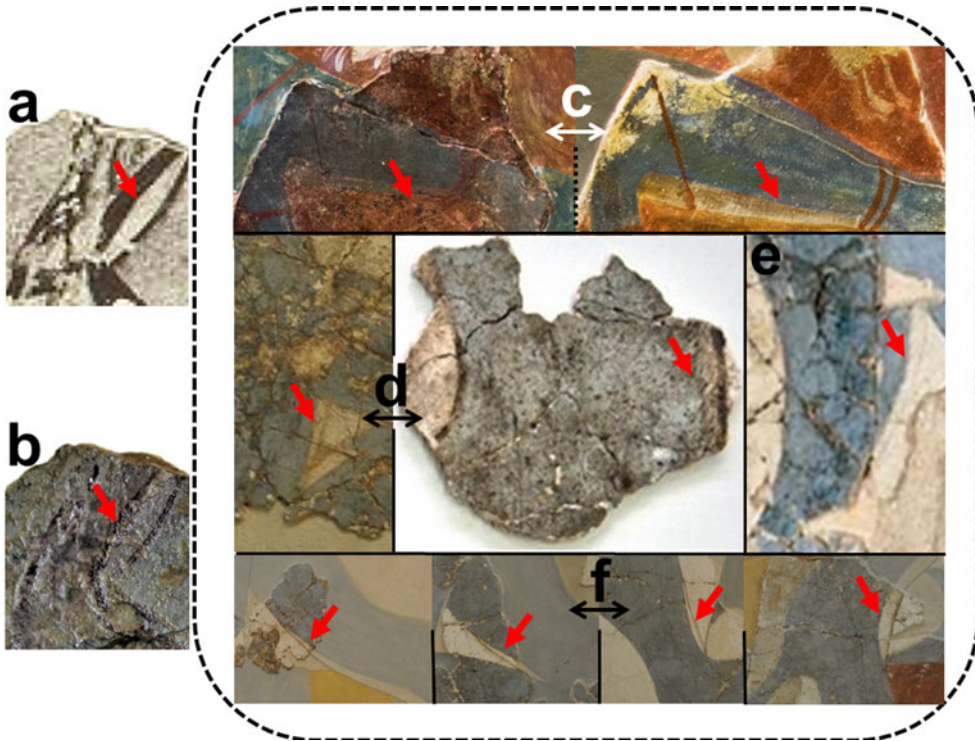


Figure 7. The lighter belly shown on Bronze Age Aegean primatomorphic frescoes (red arrows): a) detail of the belly of the Tiryns tailed partial body (from Rodenwaldt, 1912: pl. II.7; b) photograph of the same. Minoan primatomorphic wall-painting images: c) Early Keep, Knossos, Crete (left: photograph, right: photograph after reconstruction by Émile Gilliéron (1850–1924)); d) Sector Alpha, Akrotiri, Thera; e) Room 3a, Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera (see Figures 4 and 8e); f), Room 6, Complex Beta, Akrotiri, Thera. Image a) Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Public Domain; photograph b) by D. Youlatos; photograph c) (left) ©ArchaiOptix, Wikimedia, CC BY; (right) ©Zde, Wikimedia, CC BY; photograph d) (left) by B. Urbani; (right) by M. Hamaoui with permission from Andreas Vlachopoulos, Akrotiri Excavations, Thera; photograph e) ©Klearchos Kapoutsis, Wikimedia, CC BY; photograph f) by B. Urbani.

visible which could mean that they were likewise raised in an offering gesture. Based on these similarities, one could even go further and suggest that the vessel standing on the ground is a basket, comparable to the containers for gathering crocus flowers used by the women in the Thera frescoes (cf. Tzachili, 2005). Following this line of thought, the large ‘floating’ object with a curved base may be the equivalent to the large pannier into which the basket was emptied.

If we assume that the miniature fresco from Tiryns is part of a scene similar to

that shown at Akrotiri (Figure 4), this would add one more image to a small corpus of Aegean depictions connecting monkeys with important female figures or deities. This link is not only found in the Akrotiri fresco, but also, for example, on a ring from Kalyvia (CMS II,3 103), where a monkey accompanied by a woman is approaching a large sitting female figure. Moreover, the scene from Tiryns would possibly corroborate the special connection between monkeys and saffron (see Day, 2011). Monkeys picking crocus flowers in baskets are shown in the fresco from

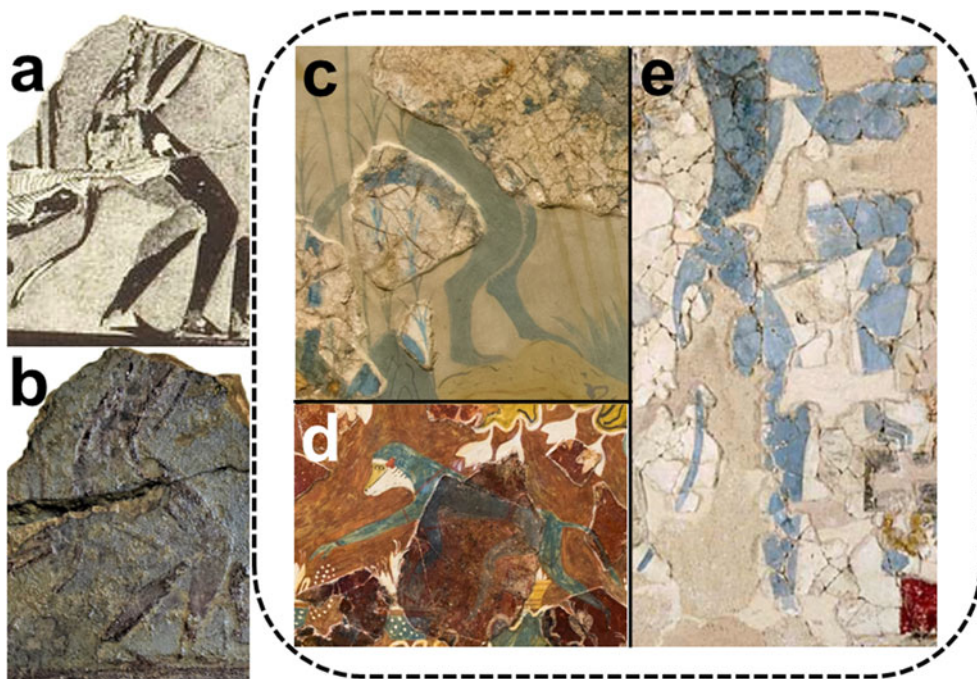


Figure 8. The tailed partial body from Tiryns and lower parts of the bodies of Minoan papionins from original fresco fragments: a) the Tiryns tailed partial body (from Rodenwaldt, 1912: pl. II.7); b) photograph of the same. Minoan primatomorphic wall-painting images: c) House of Frescoes, Knossos; d) Early Keep, Knossos, Crete; e) Room 3a, Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera. Image a) Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Public Domain; photograph b) by D. Youlatos; photograph c) ©Zde, Wikimedia, CC BY; photograph d) ©ArchaiOptix, Wikimedia, CC BY; photograph e) ©Klearchos Kapoutsis, Wikimedia, CC BY.

the Early Keep at Knossos (Figure 7e), the oldest known fresco depicting a primate from the Aegean. A monkey holding a basket for a woman gathering (crocus) flowers is also shown on a seal from Sitia (CMS III 358). It remains unknown what the specific significance of this link was, but the fragment from Tiryns may suggest that this association continued into the Mycenaean palatial period.

The Tiryns fresco fragment contradicts the widespread assumption that monkeys were not represented in local Mycenaean iconography (Lang, 1969; Immerwahr, 1990; Kontorli-Papadopoulou, 1996; Crowley, 2021). The Tiryns fragment clearly ties into an Aegean tradition of primatomorphic depictions and the scene is

likely to have been executed by a Mycenaean artist. It also adds to recent research on Mycenaean fresco iconography, which found that there is a wider variety of animals depicted than previously known. While emblematic images of lions and bulls, or hunting scenes featuring dogs, boars, and deer, have long been identified as power symbols of the palatial elite, the function of newly-discovered depictions of waterbirds (Aravantinos & Fappas, 2015: figs. 5, 10; Tournavitou & Brecoulaki, 2015: figs. 7, 10), wild goats (Tournavitou & Brecoulaki, 2015: fig. 6), snakes (Tournavitou & Brecoulaki, 2015: fig. 10), scorpions (Tournavitou & Brecoulaki, 2015: fig. 9), and marine animals (Boulotis, 2015; Egan & Brecoulaki, 2015; Tournavitou &

Brecoulaki, 2015: figs. 14–16) is often difficult to determine. This is due to the images' fragmentary condition and the fact that most of these animals are not mentioned in the Linear B sources (Duhoux, 2021). These written documents mainly deal with animal practices that are of administrative importance such as cattle herding and sheep rearing (Halstead, 1998–99), whereas the ideological or religious significance of animals is only alluded to. Thus, animals appear in lists that were drawn up in preparation for feasts, and the archaeozoological data also suggest that bulls and pigs were sacrificed (Hamilakis & Konsolaki, 2004; Stocker & Davis, 2004). Monkeys are neither mentioned in Linear B sources nor have their bones ever been found at a Mycenaean site, which makes the fresco fragment from Tiryns all the more relevant for reconstructing Mycenaean human-animal relationships.

As in the case of most Minoan monkeys, the baboon, a primate species of North African range, could have been used as the living model. As mentioned, the Tiryns miniature fresco is dated to between 1420 and 1200 BC (Kostoula & Maran, 2012: 211). Between the fifteenth to thirteenth centuries BC, material culture, iconography, and written sources confirm the existence of multiple diplomatic contacts between the Mycenaean sphere and Egypt (Merrillees, 1972; Cline, 2007; Kelder, 2009, 2013). At this time, Tiryns was the main Mycenaean harbour in the Peloponnese and a place of intense commercial and cultural exchange (Cline, 2007; Maran, 2010, 2015), a position that is further supported by the discovery of the Egyptian objects depicting baboons mentioned above. These artefacts were imported from workshops under the rule of Amenhotep II (Cline, 1991). During the same period in New Kingdom Egypt, baboons were commonly represented in art (Pio, 2018; Dominy et al., 2020;

Urbani & Youlatos, 2022): for instance, the tomb of Rekhmire (TT100), who was the vizier to Amenhotep II, includes a fresco that depicts baboons along with Puntians, Nubians, and other Bronze Age Aegean peoples paying tribute (see discussion in Binnberg et al., 2021; Urbani et al., 2021; Urbani & Youlatos, 2022). Moreover, a recent study confirmed the presence of Hamadryas baboon (*Papio hamadryas*) mummies in Egyptian tombs (KV50, KV51, and KV52) related to the reign of Amenhotep II (Dominy et al., 2020). These cultural contacts between the Greek mainland and Egypt seem to further support the identification of a baboon in the miniature fresco from Tiryns. Baboons were predominantly connected with ritual contexts in Egypt and the Near East (e.g. Hamoto, 1995; Pio, 2018; Urbani & Youlatos, 2022) and the Egyptian association was taken over by the Minoans and apparently continued by the Mycenaeans.

A TAILED PARTIAL BODY, A (STILL) PARTIAL CONCLUSION

The phenotypic, cultural, historical, and comparative evidence concerning the tailed partial body depicted on a small fragment from a miniature fresco recovered in Late Helladic Mycenaean Tiryns seems to point to the depicted animal being a monkey, as originally proposed by Kostoula & Maran (2012). After close examination, we propose that it is not only a monkey but most probably a baboon-like primate. In addition, we note that this is the first known fresco representing a primate in mainland Europe, executed almost a millennium before the Etruscan primatomorphic wall-paintings of the fifth to fourth centuries BC in the Italian peninsula (see Urbani, 2021). Unlike other objects depicting monkeys found at Mycenaean sites, it is the only

representation that is clearly dependent on the local Aegean artistic tradition. It shows a baboon similar to those in Minoan frescoes, which is actively involved in a cult scene that might once have included a female figure on a platform and vessels, as also depicted in Minoan frescoes. The uniqueness of the representation within Mycenaean iconography and its fragmentary condition, however, still limits our understanding of the relationship this society had with this mammalian group. We hope that further discoveries will shed more light on this issue; fortunately we benefit from ongoing and continuous research on Mycenaean frescoes.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

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Représentation d'un primate sur une fresque de l'acropole mycénienne de Tirynthe

Les plus anciennes représentations de primates sur des fresques de l'âge du Bronze en région méditerranéenne proviennent des sites égéens de Knossos (Crète) et d'Akrotiri (Théra). En revanche, les singes ne paraissent pas être figurés dans les fresques d'époque mycénienne en Grèce continentale. Un fragment de fresque représentant une scène de culte à Tirynthe modifie cette situation : le fragment contient une image partielle d'un bipède à queue pendante. Bien que cette image ait été interprétée comme représentant un être humain portant une peau d'animal, il avait déjà été proposé qu'il s'agissait plutôt d'un singe. Le réexamen de cette fresque miniature a identifié plusieurs traits qui semblent confirmer la présence d'un singe, probablement un primate de type babouin. Partant de l'hypothèse que la fresque de Tirynthe fasse bien partie d'une scène de culte semblable aux scènes représentées à Akrotiri, cette image s'ajoute au corpus des représentations égéennes associant les singes à des divinités ou figures de femmes importantes. De plus, le fragment de fresque de Tirynthe démontre que les singes ne sont pas entièrement inconnus dans l'iconographie mycénienne locale. Translation by Madeleine Hummler

Mots-clés: archéo-primatologie, babouin, âge du Bronze égéen, fresques, époque helladique tardive, Grèce continentale

Eine Darstellung eines Primaten auf einem Fresko von der mykenischen Akropolis von Tiryns

Die ältesten bronzzeitlichen Darstellungen von Primaten auf Fresken im Mittelmeerraum fand man in den ägäischen Stätten von Knossos (Kreta) und Akrotiri (Thera). Hingegen waren Affen auf mykenischen Fresken vom griechischen Festland bisher unbekannt. Ein Fragment eines Freskos aus Tiryns, das eine kultische Szene zeigt, ändert diese Situation; es handelt sich um die Darstellung eines Bipeden mit einem hängenden Schwanz. Das Bild, welches oft als Darstellung eines Menschen mit einem Tierfell gedeutet worden ist, ist schon früher als Bild eines Affen angesehen worden. Die Neuuntersuchung des Miniaturfreskos aus Tiryns bestätigt, dass es sich um einen Affen handelt, wahrscheinlich um einen Pavian-ähnlichen Primaten. Da das Fresko aus Tiryns möglicherweise eine kultische Szene ähnlich derer aus Akrotiri darstellt, gehört das Bild zum kleinen Korpus ägäischer Darstellungen, welche Affen mit wichtigen weiblichen Figuren oder Gottheiten verbinden. Darüber hinaus zeigt das Freskenfragment von Tiryns, dass es Affen auch in der lokalen mykenischen Ikonographie gab. Translation by Madeleine Hummler

Stichworte: Archäoprimatologie, Pavian, ägäische Bronzezeit, Fresken, späthelladische Zeit, griechisches Festland