

# A MYCENAEAN RITUAL VASE FROM THE TEMPLE AT AYIA IRINI, KEOS

(PLATE 18)

DURING the 1963 excavations of the University of Cincinnati at Ayia Irini, a number of fragments belonging to a curious and important Mycenaean vase were discovered in the Temple, mostly in Rooms IV and XI where they were found widely scattered in the post-Late Minoan IB earthquake strata.<sup>1</sup> Since it is impossible to date the vase stratigraphically, it is hoped that analysis of its shape and decoration may contribute something to our knowledge of the later history of the Temple in its Mycenaean period. Unfortunately, the vase is so fragmentary and its decoration so unstandardized that this is no simple task. It is the goal of this paper to look critically at the fragments and see what they suggest for the reconstruction of the vase, its probable date and affinities, and its function in the Temple.

Following two main lines of approach, we will first attempt a reconstruction of the shape and then analyze the pictorial decoration. Both are important in determining date, possible provenience, and function. The fragments fall into three main groups: 1) those coming from the shoulder and upper part of an ovoid closed pot with narrow neck, now made up into two large fragments which do not join but which constitute about one-third the circumference (Pl. 18:a, b, c); 2) at least two fragments from the lower part of a tapering piriform shape (Pl. 18:d, *d* and *e*); 3) fragments of one or more hollow ring handles (Pl. 18:e, *a-c*). There are also other small fragments less easily placed (shown in Pl. 18:d and e), but agreeing in fabric and decoration with the others.

Both fragments of Group 1 are divided into three zones of decoration by groups of three narrow encircling lines, the uppermost zone containing floral or angular filling ornaments composed of neat rows of vertical dashes, the second the heads of a procession of figures moving to the right, and the third the continuation of

<sup>1</sup> *Hesperia* 33, 1964, p. 332, pl. 62: a. The rhyton has been given the catalogue number K.2071. When I saw the fragments in the spring of 1964 at Kea, I suggested that the shape was probably a ritual rhyton rather than a stirrup vase. Professor Caskey invited me to write a note on the vase, and furnished me with further photographs and information, particularly some very full notes and drawings he made in the summer of 1967. As a memorial tribute to Mary Hamilton Swindler I gave a brief preliminary oral presentation at Bryn Mawr College in March, 1967, but have been unable to devote sufficient time to the investigation until this summer (1975). I had hoped that the excavation would produce further fragments that would resolve some of the still unanswered questions about the shape, but this has not happened. It was possible, however, to have this manuscript checked against the fragments by Professor Caskey and to have a restored drawing of the profile made by Alice Fäthke, here reproduced as Figure 1. To both of them I offer my sincere thanks.

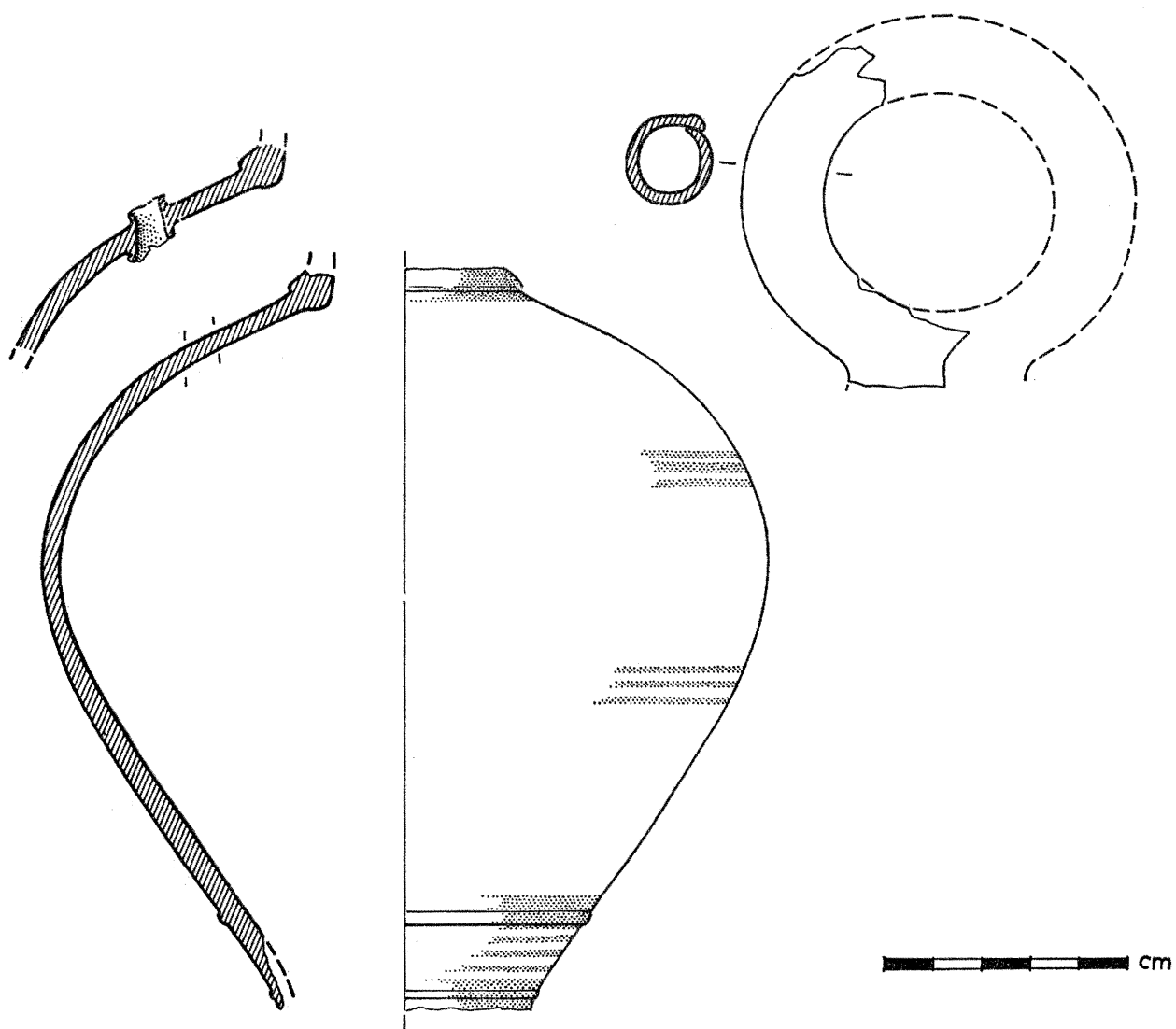


FIG. 1.

their garments, which are likewise filled with parallel rows of dashes. To these we shall return, after we have considered the shape. Placing the two fragments on a circumference,<sup>2</sup> one gets a maximum diameter of 0.148 m. which falls at about the level of the heads. It should be noted that no finished edge is preserved at the top, and that the projecting band at the upper right of Plate 18: a is part of a plastic molding often used to separate the neck and shoulder of jugs and rhyta, particularly in the earlier Mycenaean IIIA period.<sup>3</sup> The neck orifice can be calculated to have had an inner diameter of 0.029 m. It can be restored either with a single flaring mouth, on the analogy of a type represented by a rhyton of Sub-LM IA style from Palaikastro,<sup>4</sup> or with two flaring necks, one inside the other, a type found on certain other ritual jugs from the Temple.<sup>5</sup>

The two sure fragments from the lower body (Group 2) show that the rhyton tapered gradually into a piriform shape rather than into the narrower bottom spout of the more globular type (FS 201) represented in another LM IA rhyton from Palaikastro.<sup>6</sup> A slight plastic ridge at the top of the larger fragment and at the bottom of the fine banding on the small fragment next to it (Pl. 18 d, d and e) again suggests connections with metal shapes, and may be compared to a similar feature on the Sub-LM IA rhyton from Palaikastro; although earlier, this vase may actually give us a fairly good idea for restoring the general shape and neck of our rhyton.<sup>7</sup> Nothing is preserved of the base, but because of the multiple apertures suggested by the handles, one can be reasonably certain that it was pierced.

The fragments belonging to Group 3 (Pl. 18:e) show that the rhyton was equipped with two or more hollow ring handles which were placed on the shoulder and communicated to the inside of the vase through small openings (and were probably themselves pierced to the outside). It thus belonged to the class of "trick" vases recognized by Forsdyke,<sup>8</sup> Furumark,<sup>9</sup> Stubbings,<sup>10</sup> and more recently by Mari-

<sup>2</sup> The dimensions here and in subsequent places came originally from the notes of Caskey, now confirmed or only slightly altered by Miss Fäthke's profile drawing.

<sup>3</sup> Caskey's notes and drawing are definitive on this point, which had also been assumed by me in my earlier reconstruction. For the use and types of moldings, see Arne Furumark, *Mycenaean Pottery*, I, *Analysis and Classification*, 2nd ed., Stockholm 1972 (hereafter, *M.P.*), pp. 86-87.

<sup>4</sup> *B.S.A.* 65, 1970, pp. 217-218, fig. 9 and pl. 57 (rhyton NP 35 from House N).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Hesperia* 33, 1964, pl. 56:d (K.2061) which comes from the floor deposit of Room XI.

<sup>6</sup> *M.P.*, p. 67, fig. 20. Cf. *B.S.A.* 10, 1904, p. 206, fig. 4, an example found in the earlier campaign at Palaikastro and now illustrated in Marinatos-Hirmer, *Crete and Mycenae*, New York 1960, pl. 89. This is thought by Sackett and Popham (*B.S.A.* 65, 1970, p. 217) to be somewhat earlier than the new one.

<sup>7</sup> The diameter at the upper raised band (0.076 m.) is a little more than one-half the greatest diameter (0.148 m.), a proportion which agrees almost exactly with that of the new Palaikastro rhyton cited in footnote 4. The preserved height of our rhyton is a little over 0.15 m. but with the neck and ring handles it may have exceeded the 0.25 m. of the Palaikastro rhyton which had a greatest diameter of 0.126 m.

<sup>8</sup> E. J. Forsdyke, *Catalogue of Vases in the British Museum* I, i, London 1925 (hereafter *B.M.Cat.* I, i), pp. 178-179, discussing A 972, a piriform rhyton with a plastic bull's head and internal funnel, from Karpathos.

natos at Thera.<sup>11</sup> Just how they functioned remains something of a mystery, but it is perhaps appropriate to call them "ritual sprinklers."<sup>12</sup> Our vase can hardly solve this problem, for the exact number and placement of its handles must remain uncertain.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, it surely was related to a type with hollow ring handles represented by a rhyton from Halyke in Attica,<sup>14</sup> a fragment from Hala Sultan Tekke in Cyprus,<sup>15</sup> and a three-legged rhyton from a Mycenaean tomb at Volimidia near Pylos.<sup>16</sup> The occurrence of plastic animal heads on the ring handles of the Halyke and Volimidia rhyta (two stags and a bull on the latter, less recognizable types on the former) suggests a connection with the earlier Minoan rhyta from Palaikastro mentioned above, each of which has a single agrimi head attached to the shoulder, the horns branching over to touch the lip and creating a kind of rudimentary ring handle.<sup>17</sup> One wonders whether the Keos rhyton may not have had one or more plastic animal-head attachments, either on the handles or on the shoulder.

The conjectural shape of our rhyton thus suggests connections with earlier Minoan examples and with contemporary or later<sup>18</sup> Mycenaean examples which seem to have been influenced by them. The decoration ought to provide a clearer clue as to its date, but here also there are difficulties. While certainly related to decoration used on Mycenaean pictorial-style kraters, particularly of the Myc. IIIA period,

<sup>9</sup> *M.P.*, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> *B.S.A.* 42, 1947, pp. 55-58. Note especially the Berlin rhyton from Hymettos.

<sup>11</sup> Spyridon Marinatos, *Excavations at Thera VI* (1972 season), Athens 1974, pp. 31-32, pl. 70 (small pithoid jar with internal funnel and one pierced handle).

<sup>12</sup> The term used by Marinatos (*op. cit.*, p. 32) who believed that the internal funnel of his vase prevented the liquid from being emptied through the mouth, but allowed only a trickle or drop to flow through the little hole in the handle. See also Forsdyke, *op. cit.* (footnote 8 above), p. 179.

<sup>13</sup> There is only one certain opening communicating to the inside, that visible at the left in Plate 18:a and seen better in Plate 18:b. Although something large has been broken off the center of the larger fragment, there does not seem to be any trace of an aperture. Was it a conventional vertical handle or a plastic animal head? Whether the ring handles were set vertically as in the Halyke rhyton (footnote 14) or horizontally as in the Volimidia rhyton (footnote 16) is also uncertain, although Caskey has called to my attention the fact that the rings were decorated on only one side (cf. Pl. 18:e, c). This would suit better a horizontally set position where the inner side of the upward curve would have been next the neck.

<sup>14</sup> A. Furtwängler and G. Loeschke, *Mykenische Vasen*, Berlin 1886, pl. XIX: 137 and Colignon-Couve, *Catalogue des vases peints du Musée National d'Athènes*, pl. VII, no. 103. *M.P.*, Type 203:1.

<sup>15</sup> H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of Greek and Etruscan Vases in the British Museum I*, ii, London 1912 (hereafter *B.M.Cat.* I, ii), C 679. I feel less confident that this fragment belongs to the same shape, although Furumark so assigns it (*M.P.*, Type 203:2).

<sup>16</sup> Marinatos-Hirmer, *Crete and Mycenae*, pl. 235 and *Das Altertum I*, Berlin 1955, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to the two examples mentioned in footnotes 4 and 10, the earlier excavators mention the occurrence of many clay agrimi horns which may have been used for handles (*B.S.A.* 10, 1904, p. 207), and I wonder whether this may not have been the prototype for the ring handle with plastic animal heads.

<sup>18</sup> Furumark's suggested date for the Halyke rhyton is Myc. IIIB(?). Marinatos (*Crete and Mycenae*, p. 177) assigns the Volimidia rhyton to "one of the latest burials" of an Early Mycenaean tomb that had been used for generations. Its decoration is in a "wild" style, but in my opinion need not be later than Myc. IIIA.

it is in an unconventional or "wild" style. This, when coupled with the fragmentary nature of the scene, makes stylistic comparisons difficult.

The main frieze represents a procession of male(?) figures to the right, four (with traces of the head of a fifth and possibly a sixth) on Plate 18:a, three on Plate 18:c. All have short hair with a suggestion of a topknot curl or two, in one case with a distinctive curly outline in back; their noses are prominent, but only once really grotesque (the left figure on the smaller fragment); and their eyes are rendered by a large dotted circle or dotted almond, once by just a dot.<sup>19</sup> All wear long tunics, the bottom of one probably recognizable in Plate 18:d, *d*. These are covered with parallel rows of neat dashes, and in two cases the figure seems to wear a high collar of the same material. One is immediately struck by the general resemblance to the robed figures riding in chariots or walking in procession on Mycenaean amphoroid or open kraters, mostly of the Myc. IIIA period, where the decoration is usually confined to the deep shoulder zone and has adequate space without being overrun by the encircling lines.<sup>20</sup> Here not only the three lines which cut the figures below the shoulder, but the denser packing of the figures and the less schematic poses<sup>21</sup> differ from the simple paratactic arrangement found on most pictorial-style vases. One should note in particular the overlapping of the second figure from the left in each fragment which suggests some remote connection with the Minoan rendition of "crowds" as in the miniature frescoes<sup>22</sup> or on the Harvester Vase from Ayia Triada.<sup>23</sup> Since traces of eight or nine figures are found on two fragments which represent little more than a third the total circumference, one may assume a procession of twenty or more figures, unless this was interrupted by some other subject.

<sup>19</sup> The "smile" of the first figure at the left in Plate 18:a is perhaps better interpreted as the lower margin of his almond-shaped eye; on none of the other figures is a mouth indicated (cf. Furumark, *M.P.*, Motif 1, p. 238, fig. 25, "head types," in which the mouth is rarely if ever indicated). It is hard to establish a typology from the heads alone, with the exception that there is an early "fresco" type (*M.P.*, fig. 25: a, b, etc.) and a later grotesque form (fig. 25: q, r, t, ab, etc.), but there are early grotesque examples (g, h) and later more naturalistic ones (s, v, ad, etc.). Ours are fairly close to the head types on the so-called Zeus krater from Enkomi (V. Karageorghis, *Mycenaean Art from Cyprus*, Nicosia 1968, pl. I: 2) and the lack of standardization of head types on our rhyton might be construed as an early feature (see below when compared with the Tiryns rhyton, footnotes 33-34).

<sup>20</sup> Points of comparison, in addition to the garments with their neat rows of dashes or spots, are the bow-shaped chests and the extended arm with clawlike fingers of the first figure on Plate 18:c (cf. *M.P.*, fig. 25, nos. 5, 7, 12-14).

<sup>21</sup> The large figure with dark neck and shoulders (second from the right in Plate 18: a) appears to be the most important figure and is shown in an apparently frontal pose, although with profile head. The traces of an object below his right shoulder are difficult to interpret, but the hilt of a sword like those carried by the figures (*M.P.*, fig. 25, nos. 1, 3, 4, and 8) would be appropriate. I cannot suggest a better object.

<sup>22</sup> Sir Arthur J. Evans, *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, London 1921-1935 (hereafter *P.M.*), III, p. 82, fig. 45 (fragmentary fresco of javelin-throwing youths from the "miniature deposit" at Knossos).

<sup>23</sup> Marinatos-Hirmer, *Crete and Mycenae*, pls. 103-105.

The small fragment Plate 18:d, *a* which seems to show the forelegs and rump of an animal moving to the right, whose hide is covered by crescent markings, suggests that something else was indeed represented. Can it be a sacrificial bull? Before answering that question one should note the position of the "animal" in respect to the other figures. The banding at the bottom shows that it should be placed at midzone level, that is at the shoulder level of the humans, rather than on the ground line. This might imply either that the animal was being carried, or rested on a sacrificial table. Both poses are represented on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus<sup>24</sup> in conjunction with processions of long-robed figures. However, on our rhyton neither hands nor table are indicated, and since it was found in a temple, perhaps one should not rely upon comparisons with a funerary monument. There is, however, a fresco, unfortunately incomplete, from the later "Mycenaean" palace at Knossos that may be more germane. Recently assembled by Stylianos Alexiou<sup>25</sup> and Mark Cameron<sup>26</sup> from newly discovered fragments of a chariot composition and from Evans' Palanquin fresco,<sup>27</sup> the composition includes not only a horse-drawn chariot of the dual type found on Mycenaean pictorial-style vases, but crowds of figures in long robes approaching a shrine with a seated figure (Evans' "palanquin"), and at a lower level behind the chariot a bull, presumably being led to sacrifice. While obviously not agreeing in all details with the scene on our rhyton, it does provide an iconographic parallel for the crowd of long-robed figures in company with a bull.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the close association of this class of frescoes with the earliest pictorial compositions on Mycenaean vases<sup>29</sup> makes the comparison tempting and suggests that our rhyton may be early.

<sup>24</sup> Marinatos-Hirmer, *Crete and Mycenae*, pl. XXVIII (for trussed bull on altar table) and XXIX A (for two spotted bull effigies being carried to the deceased man, whose "spirit" stands in front of his tomb). See now Charlotte R. Long, *The Ayia Triadha Sarcophagus: A Study of Late Minoan and Mycenaean Funerary Practices and Beliefs* (*Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology* XLI, Göteborg 1974), and especially her conclusions (pp. 72-74) that the bull sacrifice is not specifically funerary and that there is a mingling of religious cult scenes (the altar and the sacred grove; the agrimi goddesses) with more specific funeral rites. Another possible interpretation of the pose of our bull would have him "stumbling" to the left, the legs thus being his hind legs. At any rate, he is at a higher level than the feet of the processional figures.

<sup>25</sup> *Arch. Anz.* 79, 1964, pp. 785-804, fig. 4 (in color).

<sup>26</sup> "Unpublished Fresco Fragments of a Chariot Composition from Knossos," *Arch. Anz.* 82, 1967, pp. 330-344.

<sup>27</sup> *P.M.* II, ii, pp. 770-773, figs. 502-503; IV, ii, pp. 397 f., fig. 332.

<sup>28</sup> The rather free arrangement of the figures in space with the bull at a lower level should be noted. I am, of course, not meaning to imply that this particular fresco was the basis of the painting on our rhyton, but rather this particular *type*, whether at Knossos or elsewhere. The overlapping of the robed figures on both the fresco and vase is an important stylistic feature common to both. Iconographically, cf. the fragment of an amphoroid krater from Minet el-Beida (*Syria* 12, 1931, pl. III) showing two robed figures with swords and the hindquarters of a bull; it is also early.

<sup>29</sup> See also the remarks of Mark Cameron, "New Restorations of Minoan Frescoes from Knossos," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 17, 1970, p. 165 (summary of a paper read June 3, 1970). A striking feature of the earliest Mycenaean pictorial-style vases is their close connection with palatial frescoes: the chariot compositions with oxhide-covered chariots of the

One other feature that may help to determine the date of the Keos rhyton is the pattern of the shoulder zone, seen best in Pl. 18:b and at left in Pl. 18:c. Although fragmentary and interrupted by the handle attachments, it consists of triangular areas filled with parallel rows of vertical dashes, concentric arcs with opposed dashes somewhat reminiscent of Myc. IIIA spiral bands,<sup>30</sup> and an inverted Mycenaean flower with two rows of radiating "petals."<sup>31</sup> While not exactly paralleled on any vase that I know, these motives have their closest affinities with the shoulder decoration of Myc. IIIA:2 stirrup vases, or with the filling ornaments on Myc. IIIA amphoroid kraters of the pictorial style.<sup>32</sup> And indeed the excellent technique of the fragments with hard, pinkish buff clay, lustrous orange-red glaze, accords very well with a dating in the Amarna period.

Negatively, one can state that there is nothing in the drawing of our vase that would point to a Myc. IIIB or IIIC date. A comparison with the new rhyton from Tiryns with a somewhat comparable subject, a two-tiered procession of robed male figures, reveals the differences.<sup>33</sup> There the drawing is much neater and more standardized; each figure is a repeated schema belonging to the ceramic repertory; and the scene has lost the spontaneity, along with the crudeness, and also the connection with fresco painting found on our rhyton. The Tiryns vase is dated by Slenczka to his Group VIII, 1280-1260 B.C.<sup>34</sup> In my opinion there is even less evidence to support a Myc. IIIC date. Although at that time, in all except the ceramic-inspired Close style, there is a renewed freshness of drawing, probably indicative of the influence of late mainland frescoes, the drawing is quite different.<sup>35</sup>

dual type (*Mycenean Art from Cyprus*, pl. II: 1); women in an architectural setting (*B.M.Cat.* I, ii, C 391; *J.H.S.* 77, 1957, pp. 269 ff.); acrobatic bull-leapers (the new krater from Enkomi, Tomb 10: P. Dikaïos, *Enkomi, Excavations 1948-1958* III, a, Mainz 1969, pls. 204, 204a). How can one explain this seemingly Knossian character of vases that were obviously made on the Greek mainland? One might postulate comparable early frescoes on the mainland, or an exodus of artists from the destroyed palace. Cyprus hardly enters into the picture except as the place where these vases found a ready market and have best been preserved. See now the new pictorial-style material from Tiryns (E. Slenczka, *Tiryns*, VII, *Figürlich Bemalte mykenische Keramik aus Tiryns*, Mainz 1974, especially pp. 111-152).

<sup>30</sup> I am referring to the motive at the top right of Plate 18:c which suggests the chevron fillings of *M.P.*, Mot. 46, nos. 43-44, but is apparently not the same.

<sup>31</sup> See Pl. 18 :c, top left. Cf. *M.P.*, Mot. 18, nos. 70-72, 75 and especially 97, dated to Myc. IIIA :2. Also cf. *B.M.Cat.* I, i, A 999 from Tell el Amarna.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. the use of parallel strokes and the denseness of filling ornaments on many of the earlier amphoroid kraters with chariot scenes (E. Sjöqvist, *Problems of the Late Cypriote Bronze Age*, Stockholm 1940, fig. 19:2; Slenczka, *Tiryns* VII, pl. 41: 1-4). These are all amphoroid kraters from Cyprus assigned by Slenczka to his Groups III and IV, dated to 1380-1340 B.C., that is the Amarna period (*ibid.*, pp. 149-152).

<sup>33</sup> *Tiryns* VII, no. 87, pl. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130 f. and 152.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Tiryns* VII, pl. 2:1 (no. 115A); pl. 8:1 (no. 121). See also the new material from Lefkandi (M. Popham and L. Sackett, *Excavations at Lefkandi, Euboea, 1964-66*, London 1968, figs. 35, 37-44) and of course the Warrior Vase (Athens, N.M. 1426: Marinatos-Hirmer, *Crete and Mycenae*, pls. 232-233).

I would conclude therefore that a careful analysis of the fragments suggests a Myc. IIIA date for the Keos rhyton, perhaps more specifically a mid-14th century date. This would confirm the continued use of the Temple in the Mycenaean period not long after the LM IB earthquake. Both the shape of the rhyton with its connections with the agrimi rhyta from Palaikastro, albeit transformed into a Mycenaean ring-handled type, and the possible derivation of its procession from late palatial frescoes at Knossos, show the pervasive influence of Crete in the cult of the Temple, where the vase must have served for ritual libations and may have remained in use for some time.

Where the rhyton was actually made we can only guess, but Attica seems a distinct possibility. The number and variety of rhyta and "trick" vases from Attica noted by Stubbings,<sup>36</sup> the affinity in shape to the ring-handled rhyton from Halyke, and the somewhat bizarre if not "wild" figure style employed on pictorial-style vases from this region<sup>37</sup> all lend support to a conclusion which is certainly geographically plausible.

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<sup>36</sup> See above, footnote 10.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance the krater from Markopoulo-Kopreza, which must be early Myc. IIIA (Έφ. Ἀρχ., 1895, pl. 10:9) and the unpublished strap-handled kraters in the Salamis Museum.



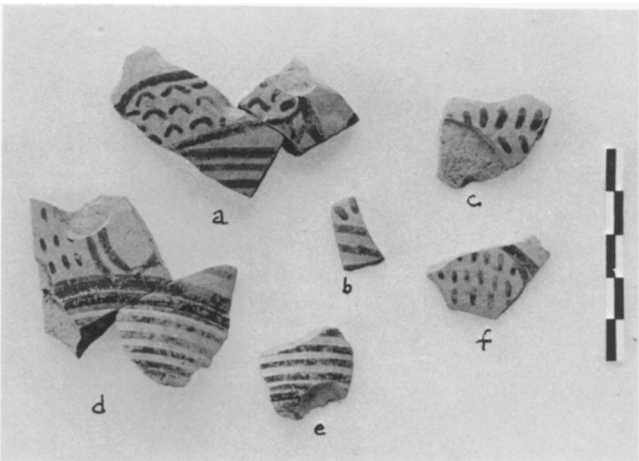
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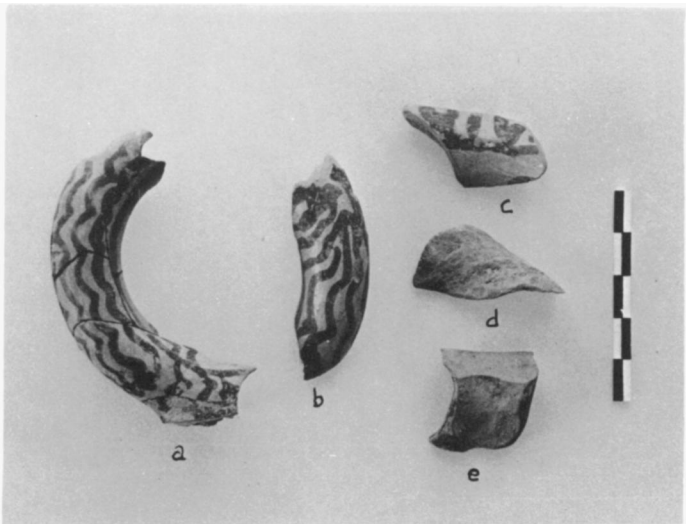
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SARA A. IMMERWAHR: A MYCENAEAN RITUAL VASE FROM AYIA IRINI, KEOS