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ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΟ ΤΟΥ ΤΟΜΕΑ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΤΕΧΝΗΣ  
ΤΜΗΜΑ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΤΟΥ ΕΘΝΙΚΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΠΟΔΙΣΤΡΙΑΚΟΥ  
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# Aegean influence in the Tomb of Kha?

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper argues that a pair of bronze tweezers, also known as a curling tong or 'composite tool', from the Tomb of the architect Kha at Deir el Medina may reflect early Egyptian relations with the Mycenaean world. Though the objects such as these were known and manufactured in Egypt for several centuries before the burial of Kha, the shape of this particular object, which is now in the Egyptian Museum of Turin, is remarkable and betrays Mycenaean stylistic influence. This notion is further supported by other Aegean elements in the Tomb of Kha and elsewhere at Deir el Medina.*

## GALOPPING HORSES

It is well-established that connections between Egypt and other regions in the eastern Mediterranean were remarkably close during the Late Bronze Age; the period between ca. 1600 BCE and 1100 BCE. Various studies, most notably those by Kantor,<sup>1</sup> Crowley,<sup>2</sup> Aruz<sup>3</sup> and Feldman<sup>4</sup> have highlighted how these connections forged what can be best described as an "International Style" –a composite of various regional features that manifested itself especially in luxury goods made for elite gift exchange and display. The so-called "flying gallop", which was a way of depicting an animal (either mythical or real) in motion, was a part of this international style. Though it is commonly accepted that it first developed in the Aegean<sup>5</sup> –either on Minoan Crete,<sup>6</sup> or on the Greek mainland,<sup>7</sup> the "flying gallop" does in fact already appear in Egyptian art as early as the late First Intermediate Period.<sup>8</sup> The motif is also known from a small number of objects from the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, including a Hyksos-era dagger.<sup>9</sup> However, these early instances of the motif are rare and (usually at least) comparatively

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1 Kantor 1947.

2 Crowley 1977.

3 Aruz 2008, 8.

4 Feldman 2006, 26–27.

5 E.g. Shaw 2004, 34.

6 As was first suggested by Evans (1921, 714) and later by Hood (1978, 235; 1985: 24), Negbi (1978, 651) and Crowley (1977, 111).

7 As proposed by Vermeule 1975, 41.

8 Smith 1952, 78, and 1965, 155.

9 Smith 1965, 155; cf. Morgan 2004, 294, n.34, for an overview of sites.



Fig. 1. Jasper scarab from the British Museum (courtesy Trustees of the British Museum)

"stiff". The famous "Aegean griffin" on the ceremonial axe from the Tomb of Queen Ahhotep, for example, is sometimes presented as an early example of the motif<sup>10</sup> but, with its back-paws firmly folded beneath its lower body, the figure exudes only a very limited sense of movement. From the Thutmosid period onwards, however, a true "flying gallop" appears relatively frequently in Egyptian art; often combined with additional elements, such as a shift in the axis of leaping animals,<sup>11</sup> that are most likely inspired by contemporary Aegean art. It is perhaps more than mere coincidence that the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100; dating to the reign of Amenhotep II), which is famous for its procession of Aegean tribute bearers, also sports a magnificent mural of game being hunted in

the desert, complete with gazelles, birds, jackals, and hunting dogs in flying gallop. Despite the abundance of running, crouching and galloping animals in Egyptian art at this time, galloping *horses* remain a remarkably rare sight in 18th dynasty Egyptian art. Indeed, the earliest Egyptian example of galloping horses known to me is a carving on a jasper scarab from the reign of Thutmose I (now in the British Museum; EA 17774) (Fig. 1). But the representation of the horses on this scarab remains stiff and sketchy, and is a far cry from the vivid depictions of other animals at this time.

This short note proposes that a stylized horse on a bronze tool from the tomb of the architect Kha at Deir el Medina (Upper Egypt) (Fig. 2) may represent the first example of a horse in true "flying gallop" in Egypt. Moreover, it suggests that its appearance may be set against the backdrop of developing international contacts and exchange with the Mycenaean mainland in



Fig. 2. A so-called composite tool from the tomb of Kha, topped by a figure of a horse in flying gallop, now in the Museo Egizio in Turin (after Ferraris 2018)



Fig. 3. A composite tool from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art)

the late Thutmosid period; in particular the reign of Amenhotep III. Whilst it is virtually certain that the object was manufactured in Egypt, its iconography, as well as the context in which was found, suggest an Aegean pedigree for this peculiar object.

The object measures 8.5 cm in length and is 2.8 cm high,<sup>12</sup> and is described by its excavator

10 Mendosa 2015, 405.

11 Kantor 1945, 424.

12 Ferraris 2018, 98.



Fig. 4. A composite tool crowned by a figure of a woman, now in the Brooklyn Museum (photo: Brooklyn Museum, CUR.37.654E\_erg456.jpg)



Fig. 5. A composite tool crowned in the collection of University College London (photo: UCL, UC 26935)

as made of "pure bronze".<sup>13</sup> Objects such as these are variously described as scissors (by Schiaparelli), tweezers or curling tongs, though they are probably best described as a "composite tool".<sup>14</sup> The composite tool from the tomb of Kha consists of two elongated bronze elements: one of these is a knife-like blade whereas the other, slightly convex, element is crowned with the figure of a galloping horse. These two elements are pegged together with a pin, which is visible just below the forelegs of the galloping horse. It is thought that such composite tools could be used as a pair of tweezers and even as a sort of razor, whereas the flat end of the object may have been used as tongs.<sup>15</sup> Objects such as these were made in Egypt since the 6th dynasty (though the addition of zoomorphic figure seems to have been a New Kingdom innovation), and various gold and numerous bronze examples are known. To that extent, the object from the Tomb of



Fig. 6. An ivory whip handle in the shape of a horse, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Kha is hardly remarkable. Even the presence of animals on the object is not uncommon: other composite tools with crouching animals or other zoomorphic figures are known, such as jackals, human-like figures, and even horses.

The horse on the composite tool from the tomb of Kha, however, is rendered in a remarkably naturalistic manner, which sets it apart from figures on other 18th dynasty composite tools.

13 Schiaparelli 1927, 76.

14 Tassie 2016, 2159.

15 Kozloff 1993, 365.

The jackal (Fig. 3) on this golden tool, for example, is far more stylized than the horse from the tomb of Kha, nor does it instill the same sense of movement. The female figure on this 18th dynasty bronze piece (Fig. 4) that is now in the Brooklyn Museum, seems similarly static, as does the roughly contemporary, 18th dynasty, horse on a similar composite tool from the Hildesheim Museum (RPM 5116). Indeed, even the elaborately decorated example from the University College collection (Fig. 5) seems lifeless compared to the sprightly horse from the tomb of Kha. Though many of its adornments (including the plumes around the horse's ear, and the straps and protective cloth on the horse's back) are rendered in considerable detail, the animal's posture, with its head almost flat against its neck and nearly straight, stick-like legs, is a far cry from the free-moving horse from the tomb of Kha, with its head pushing forwards and its legs curled in a more naturalistic manner.

In fact, with the notable exception of a magnificent ivory whip-handle in the shape of a horse (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and almost certainly also dating to the reign of Amenhotep III) (Fig.6), the little horse on Kha's composite tool has remarkably few comparanda in contemporary Egyptian art. Ferraris<sup>16</sup> recently noted that the piece stands out because of its artistic quality and "un gusto per il bello" which would have conferred a certain prestige to its

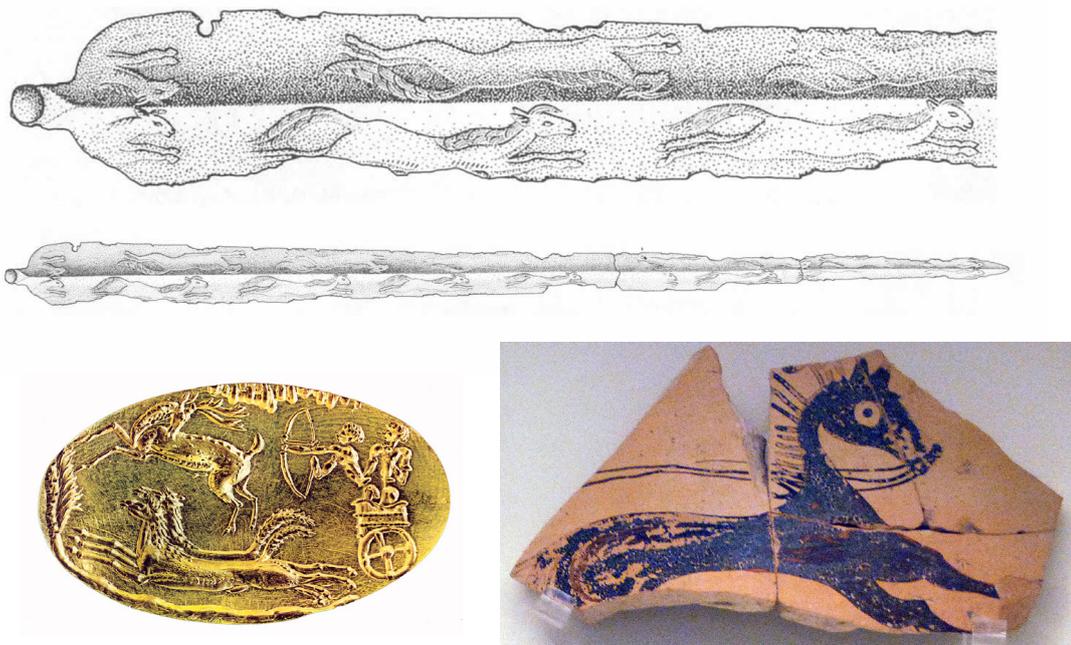


Fig. 7a. A sword from Shaft Grave V at Mycenae (after Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993). 7b. A Mycenaean signet ring from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Athens). 7c. Pictorial sherd (LH IIIC) from the Cult Centre at Mycenae (photo courtesy Professor Michael Fuller, St. Louis Community College).

owner. I agree with Ferraris' point, but suggest that it was not only the sheer artistic quality of the piece, but also its foreign associations that may have imbued it with this prestige. Indeed, the best parallels for the horse from the tomb of Kha are found in the Mycenaean world, such as the procession of galloping horses on a sword from Shaft Grave V at Mycenae (Fig. 7a), or the two galloping horses on a gold signet ring from Shaft Grave IV (Fig. 7b). Though few if any similar depictions of galloping horses from subsequent centuries have yet been found,<sup>17</sup> it is

<sup>16</sup> Ferraris 2018, 98.

<sup>17</sup> I agree with Crouwel (1988, 32 n. 28) that the vase fragments showing a galloping horse from the so-called Atreus Ridge at Mycenae are unlikely to be of LH IIIA date and more likely date to the Archaic period.

quite likely that Mycenaean artists continued to show the horse in flying gallop throughout the Mycenaean period, for the motif seems to recur on a piece of (LH IIIC–Sub Mycenaean) pictorial pottery that was found in Mycenae's Cult Centre (although it is impossible to be absolutely sure here, seeing that the horse's hind legs have broken off) (Fig. 7c). Could we thus be dealing with an Egyptian object that was inspired by contemporary Mycenaean art? In the lines below, I argue that objects from the tomb of Kha and evidence from elsewhere do indeed make such a scenario plausible and even likely.

## CONTEXT

The tomb of Kha and his wife Meryt, also known as Theban Tomb 8 (TT8), has attracted scholarly attention ever since its discovery in 1906 by Ernesto Schiaparelli. It was found undisturbed and its inventory of over 500 objects provides us with a rare insight in how a well-to-do state official in early New Kingdom Egypt lived –and planned to live in the afterlife. From inscriptions on objects from the tomb, as well as papyri and ostraca that were already known before the tomb's discovery, we know that Kha served as an architect under three kings: Amenhotep II, Thutmose IV, and Amenhotep III. Kha must have died at some point during the reign of the latter, and this means that none of the objects from the tomb are later than ca. 1349 BC (the latest regnal year of Amenhotep III).

Kha lived in an extraordinary time in Egyptian history, with Egyptian armies steadily expanding royal power throughout Nubia and in the Levant. As a result of this expansion, the Egyptians had come into contact with an ever-growing number of foreigners, including people from the Aegean, such as those shown on the walls of the aforementioned tomb of Rekhmire. The reign of Amenhotep III is generally regarded as the pinnacle of ancient Egypt's power and prestige abroad. Diplomatic contacts with foreign courts, greased by the King's appetite for foreign royal brides, not only ensured a level of stability and relative peace, but also facilitated an unprecedented flow of objects, flora, fauna, and skilled personnel. The sheer scope of Amenhotep's foreign interests is reflected in the art of his reign. Processions of foreigners bringing tribute line the walls of the tombs of Amenhotep's courtiers, whereas a whole list of the then-known world was engraved on the bases of enormous statues of the King, at his mortuary temple at present-day Kom el-Hetan. Included in this list is a kingdom called "Tnj", usually vocalized as "Tanaya" or "Tanaju". Because of its position just after Keftiu, the well-known Egyptian designation for Minoan Crete, and because a second register indicates that Tanaju included a number of cities and/or regions such as *mkí[n]* (*mw-k-i [nw]*; almost certainly Mycenae), *dqis* (*dy-kAi-iA-s*; almost certainly the Thebaid), and *mdni* (*mí-dA-nA-í*; probably Messenia), it is clear that Tanaju was the Egyptian designation for the Mycenaean mainland. Though not all of the toponyms have been identified with certainty, their order (and occasional recurrence) in this list suggest that they reflect an actual mission to the Aegean.<sup>18</sup> Such a notion may also find support in the presence of at least 11 unique faience plaques that have been found at Mycenae, and which bear the royal cartouche of Amenhotep III.<sup>19</sup> Though none of these plaques have been found in their original context, it is likely that they all stem from the citadel of Mycenae. Wolfgang Helck<sup>20</sup> even suggested that these plaques may have adorned the doorframe of an "Egyptian Room" that was donated to the ruler of Mycenae by Amenhotep III, though such a notion must remain hypothetical.

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18 Cline and Stannish 2011.

19 Phillips and Cline 2005.

20 Helck 1995, 80.



Fig. 8. Stirrup jar from the tomb of Kha, now in the Museo Egizio, Turin (courtesy Su Bayfield)

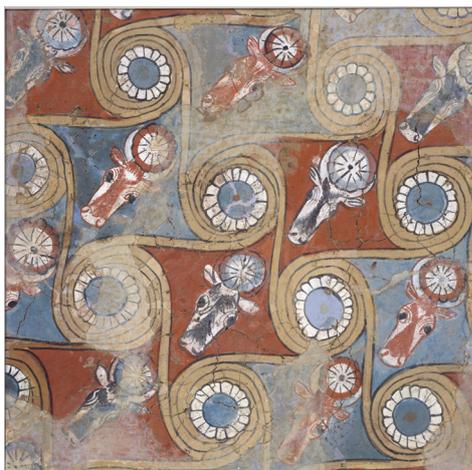


Fig. 9. Reconstructed ceiling at the palace of Malqata, with rosette and bucrania motifs (courtesy Trustees Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The Mycenaean world thus was a part of the Egyptian world during the reign of Amenhotep III, and it is indeed during his reign that Aegean-inspired motifs, including running spirals, bucrania, and the "flying galop" (such as the horse-shaped whip-handle mentioned above), are for the first time employed in Egyptian art.<sup>21</sup> Despite this, there are only few clear archaeological indications for direct contact. Indeed, it is only during the reign of the successor of Amenhotep III, the "heretic Pharaoh" Akhenaten, that the Mycenaeans really appear in the Egyptian archaeological record: most notably in the form of the remarkable corpus of Mycenaean flasks and stirrup jars that has been found at El Amarna,<sup>22</sup> the appearance of what may be Mycenaean soldiers on a papyrus from that same site,<sup>23</sup> and the introduction of the olive in both Amarna age iconography and the Egyptian palaeobotanical record.<sup>24</sup> Prior to the reign of Akhenaten, Mycenaean pottery has only been recovered from a handful of Egyptian sites.<sup>25</sup> It is therefore of interest that one of these sites is Deir el Medina. Indeed, numerous fragments of Mycenaean LH IIIA2 and (especially) LH IIIB pottery have been found at the site.<sup>26</sup> It is just possible that one of these vessels accompanied the dead architect in the afterlife, for a Mycenaean LH IIIA2 stirrup jar used to be shown in conjunction with other materials from the Tomb of Kha in the Museum of Turin (Fig. 8); though I found no reference to this vessel in Schiaparelli's excavation report and the museum's catalogue indicates that the vessel was purchased rather than found by Schiaparelli. If this vessel did indeed come from Kha's tomb, it would be one of the earliest Mycenaean pots to have been found in Egypt so far.

It is beyond the aims of this paper to speculate on the exact provenance of this vessel (though a tomb provenance does seem quite likely, seeing that the vessel is almost intact and since the vessel's likely contents, perfumed olive oil, was used in funerary rites), but the point is that, even at this early stage in Egypto-Mycenaean contacts, it is entirely plausible that Kha had access to objects from the Mycenaean world. As the foreman responsible for the construction of Pharaoh's tomb, his proximity to the Royal court facilitated the acquisition of such exotic objects. Indeed, it may be

21 Cf. Hood 1985, 24.

22 Hankey 1993; Kelder 2010.

23 Schofield and Parkinson 1994.

24 Kelder 2009.

25 Cf. Judas 2010 for the latest and most complete overview.

26 Cultraro and Facchetti 2018.



Fig. 10. Roof decoration in the chapel of Kha (photo IFAO, after Ferraris 2018)

more than coincidence that precisely at Deir el Medina, Aegean motifs appear at a remarkably early stage on locally-made pottery: Schiaparelli found fragments of two peculiar vessels, displaying Cypriot, Levantine and Egyptian elements and bearing the cartouche of Thutmose III, in the necropolis near the village, with a typical Aegean –running spiral– decoration.<sup>27</sup> It seems certain that Kha was aware of Pharaoh's interest in Aegean motifs (such as running spirals and bucrania) which were used to decorate temple furniture and a ceiling in a room of the royal palace at nearby Malqata,<sup>28</sup> for running spirals abound in Kha's own funerary chapel. Schiaparelli<sup>29</sup> already noted their presence on a section of the chapel's roof, but bands of running spirals are also present on the walls of the chapel (Fig.10).<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

In view of all this, I submit that it is entirely plausible that the little horse on Kha's otherwise very Egyptian "composite tool" may have been Aegean inspired. Its general rendering as well as its lifelike flying gallop, to my eyes at least, most closely resemble Mycenaean depictions of galloping horses. Kha's cosmetic tool would hardly be the only Aegean, or Aegean-inspired object in the afterlife for, as his chapel was decorated in Aegean-inspired motifs that were, in that same period, in fashion at the Pharaonic court. Kha may have been a trail-blazer, for running spirals remained popular, in particular at Deir el Medina, where they recurred on the walls of later tombs. Mycenaean pots, moreover, became increasingly popular in the village after the death of Kha, and numerous vessels have been recovered from late 18th and 19th dynasty contexts.<sup>31</sup> They were copied too, for a stirrup jar made of local marl clay has been identified at the site.<sup>32</sup> The horse on the composite tool from the tomb of Kha may thus be seen in a similar light, as an emblem of that international age: it is a typical Egyptian tool, with an Aegean twist.

27 Cultraro 2018; Del Vesco and Poole 2018, 120.

28 Hayes 1959, 246, 248: see fig. 9.

29 Schiaparelli 1927, 187, and fig. 166.

30 Schiaparelli 1927, 187, and fig. 166.

31 Bell 1982; Kelder 2010.

32 Bell 1982, 146.

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