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HALBERDS, DAGGERS AND CULTURE CONTACT

Keith BRANIGAN - Bristol

In a recent volume of *Origini* Lawrence Barfield provided a valuable catalogue and typology of early Italian halberds¹. Whilst some of the blade types listed were clearly halberds, Barfield acknowledged that others, notably the Villafranca and Remedello types, were probably hafted as both daggers and halberds. It is these two types which, as daggers, seem to have parallels, but not necessarily prototypes, in the East Mediterranean and the Aegean, and I have myself argued for a relationship between Remedello metalwork and that of the Early Bronze III period in the Aegean². In addition I have recognised three or four daggers found in Crete as being of Italian origin, but this particular claim has been both disputed and misunderstood³. The purpose of this short paper is therefore to set out clearly the reasons for recognising these blades found in Crete as imports from Italy, and to briefly examine the evidence for halberds in the Aegean and to see what, if any, relationship exists between them and their early Italian counterparts.

ITALIAN DAGGERS IN CRETE

Barfield mistakenly thought that I attributed all the Aegean daggers of Renfrew's type IVA (my type 3) to an Italian origin⁴, but this is not the case. I have suggested that if the Italian and Aegean daggers

¹ L. Barfield, in *Origini* III (1969) 67ff.

² K. Branigan, in *Bullettino di Paleontologia Italiana* 75 (1966) 97ff.

³ Barfield, *op. cit.* n. 1, p. 77, n. 8, and rejected in private correspondence and conversation by two eminent Mediterranean prehistorians.

⁴ My type 3 includes some daggers which Renfrew would class as his IVA, but in fact very few Minoan daggers have flat heels.

of this type have any relationship, and that is doubtful, that it is a case of Aegean influence on the Italian examples rather than *vice-versa*⁵.

This conclusion is based almost entirely on the early appearance of the type in the Aegean (EC. II and certainly EM. II, possibly EM. I)⁶, which suggests that the earliest Aegean examples antedate the earliest Italian ones.

The daggers which I claim to be of Italian origin are in fact somewhat similar to my class 8 daggers⁷ and Renfrew's class VII⁸. They share with these daggers a high mid-rib (as opposed to a mere ridge) and more or less straight edges⁹. The three blades in question however possess three features which mark them out as something distinctive, and which suggest that they do not belong in the Aegean tradition of metalworking. These three features are their proportions, their rivetting systems and their profiles.

Proportions. A visual comparison of the two silver daggers from Koumasa and the copper/bronze one from Agios Onouphrios with the Minoan daggers of class 8 is sufficient to demonstrate that they differ markedly in their proportions. The Minoan daggers are long and narrow, and the three other daggers are shorter and decidedly plump (*fig. 1*). In more precise terms we can compare the length/maximum width ratios of the Minoan daggers with those of the three suspected imports. Koumasa daggers 212 and 213 have l/mw ratios of 2.83 and 3.0 respectively. The fragment from Agios Onouphrios is too badly broken to be able to give precise figures, but the surviving part of the blade suggests a l/mw ration in the order of 2.5-3.0. The four extant Minoan daggers of class 8 have proportions of 5.0, 7.84, 7.26, and 8.18. This difference is a very marked one, and in itself is sufficient to look elsewhere for parallels to the Koumasa and Agios Ono-

⁵ Branigan, *op. cit.* n. 2, 97.

⁶ The earliest Minoan examples are probably the typologically and technically primitive ones from Salame. They were found in association with EM.I-II material, mainly EM.I.

⁷ K. Branigan, *Copper and Bronzeworking in Early Bronze Age Crete* (1968) 15, 78.

⁸ C. Renfrew, in *AJA* 71 (1967) 11, pl. 7.

⁹ Most of Renfrew's class VII daggers have curved edges, but straight edges are a *type characteristic* of my type 8.

uphrios blades. The Remedello parallels, of which there are now at least five examples¹⁰, provide much closer parallels in terms of l/mw ratios. The three examples for which I have figures, Buccino, Monte Bradoni, and Villafranca¹¹, have ratios of 4.4, 3.8, and 3.6 respectively. Even these it must be acknowledged are all slimmer than the three blades from Crete. Apart from the other two features which the Italian

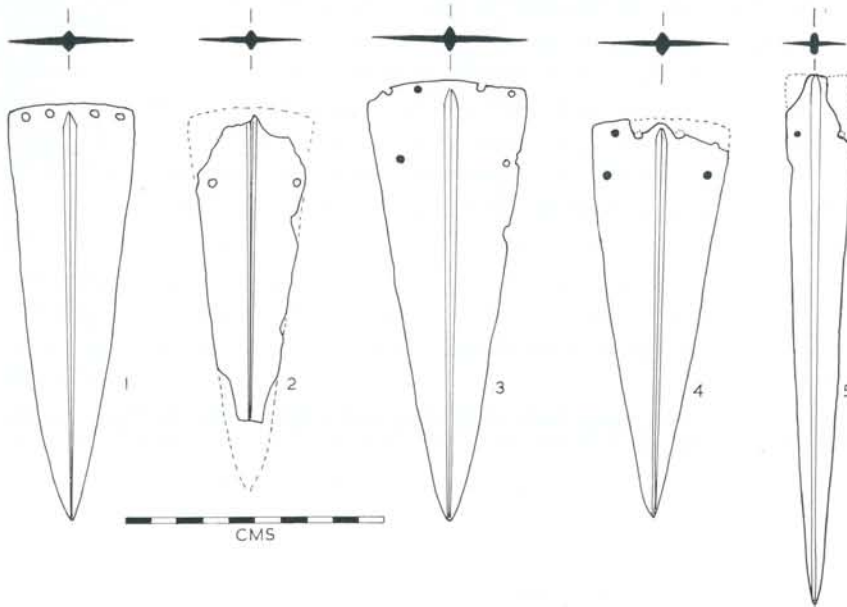


Fig. 1 - Dagger/halberds from Remedello (1), Agios Onouphrios (2) and Koumasa 3, 4) and a Minoan type VIII dagger from Tekes (5).

and the Koumasa and Agios Onouphrios daggers share however, there is one other point we might bear in mind. In Italy, the small group of Villafranca type daggers/halberds (as Barfield labels them) are outnumbered by a seemingly contemporary dagger/halberd type, which Barfield names after the site of Remedello. These daggers show a greater variety of proportions than do the Villafranca type, varying between approximately 2.5 and 4.0. They do however seem to be

¹⁰ Barfield, *op. cit.* n. 1, lists 4 and a possible fifth. To these may be added another certain example from Buccino, R. Holloway, in *AJA* 74 (1970), pl. 36, fig. 6.

¹¹ Lawrence Barfield very kindly supplied details of the Villafranca weapon.

related to the Villafranca type, not only culturally but typologically, sharing with them the straight edges, triangular mid-rib and straight base. Proportionally therefore, the three daggers found in Crete are very much more within the Italian tradition than the Minoan or Aegean one.

Rivetting systems. The two Koumasa daggers are both damaged at the base of the blades, so that precise information about their rivetting systems is not possible. Koumasa 212 however is sufficiently intact to show that it originally possessed four rivets placed in line along the base and two further ones about 3cms further down the blade. That all six rivet holes were in use simultaneously is highly unlikely, and certainly no comparable rivetting arrangements can be cited from Crete. Koumasa 213 also has two rivets placed some way down the blade from the base (c. 2.5 cms) but the number and position of its other rivets is uncertain. One survives near the edge of the base, whilst the broken edge elsewhere along the base suggests the presence of at least two more rivet-holes originally. Since two of these three rivets fall to one side of the mid-rib, it seems reasonably certain that there would originally have been two the other side. In other words, 212 and 213 seem to have identical rivetting arrangements, each with a total of six rivets. If all six rivets on each blade were not contemporary, as I have suggested, then we must attempt to establish which was the primary arrangement and which the secondary. The answer is clear, since on each dagger the broken rivet holes are those along the base; that is to say, it was the breakage of some of the rivets along the base which must have occasioned the insertion of two extra rivets, in each case further down the blade where a repeat of the damage was much less likely. Whilst the secondary arrangement corresponds to the standard Aegean and Minoan practice of a roughly four-square system of rivets, the primary one, with four rivets in line, does not. The four copper/bronze examples of my type 8 daggers all have two rivets¹², while the single silver example of the type has a four-square system¹³. For parallels to the Koumasa daggers we again have to turn to the Villafranca daggers/halberds of Italy where we find examples with three-in-a-line and four-in-a-line arrangements¹⁴.

¹² Branigan, *op. cit.* n. 7, 78.

¹³ Branigan, *op. cit.* n. 7, 63.

¹⁴ e.g. Buccino (3) *supra* n. 10, Monte Bradoni (4), Barfield, *op. cit.* n. 1, fig. 4E.

Profiles. Both the Italian daggers/halberds of the Remedello and Villafranca types, and the Minoan ones of my type 8 have distinct mid-ribs, as opposed to mid-ridges, and the Koumasa and Agios Onouphrios daggers share this feature. But the mid-ribs of these latter daggers are not such close parallels to those of the type 8 daggers as a casual comparison might suggest. The type 8 daggers all have a straight-sided mid-rib, quite high, with a rounded, almost semi-circular top (fig. 1, 5). The Koumasa and Agios Onouphrios weapons have mid-ribs with sloping sides, relatively low, and with a sharper, more pointed top; I have previously called them « triangular », which seems an accurate enough description (fig. 1, 2; 3; 4). This « triangular » type of mid-rib is in fact characteristic of the Villafranca and Remedello types of dagger/halberd, though it does not appear on other contemporary types of Italian daggers and halberds (fig. 1, 1).

Summary. The Koumasa and Agios Onouphrios daggers do not fit into the Aegean and Minoan traditions of metalwork, but can be seen to be closely related to the Villafranca and Remedello dagger/halberds of chalcolithic Italy. This relationship is demonstrated through the three features — proportions, profile, rivetting system. There seems little room for doubt that these three weapons were imported into Crete from the Italian peninsular, and more specifically from either Tuscany or the Po Valley.

The question of chronology is obviously one of paramount importance here; are the find contexts in Crete compatible with the dates for the Remedello-Rinaldone complex in Italy? The Agios Onouphrios dagger is of little help, since the deposit from which it came included not only material covering the whole of the Early Bronze Age but some of Late Bronze Age date too¹⁵. The two Koumasa daggers however were found in tomb Gamma from which eight other artifacts are recorded. These are:

1) An elaborate *kernos*, rather like a condiment set. The closest parallel elsewhere is from Phylakopi, but clay *kernoi* of this broad class are quite common in Crete and mostly date to EM. II¹⁶.

¹⁵ A. J. Evans, supplement to *Cretan Pictographs* (1899).

2) A small, handled cup painted with horizontal brown lines. The style of decoration and the shape suggest an EM. II date¹⁷.

3) A spherical pyxide with dotted and herringbone decoration. Some of these may date as early as EM. I, but herring-bone decoration is typical of a group in fine grey ware of early EM. II¹⁸.

4) and 5) Two small green chlorite boxes. Warren has studied these and similar ones from other EM. sites and dates them to EM. II¹⁹.

5) A marble figurine of Cycladic type. This is one of the *Koumasa* variety of folded-arm figurines recently recognised by Renfrew²⁰. In Crete it is found in deposits of EM. II and mixed deposits dating from that time onwards²¹.

6) A broken copper/bronze knife. Although Minoan parallels for this piece are scarce in the Early Bronze Age (one possible example from Porti) it is paralleled in both the Cyclades and the Troad in Early Bronze 2 and in deposits of later date²².

7) A razor of my type 4. None of the Cretan examples, except perhaps this one, are closely dated, though they all occur in deposits of EM. II-MM. I/II. A closely related scraper type (4) appears at both Koumasa and Platanos²³. Both these and the razor may well have been in use before EM. III, as was another related form, razors of type 3²⁴.

The evidence from the associated finds is not entirely unambiguous, but it certainly points to an Early Bronze Age date for the silver-daggers, and there is a good chance that they may be more precisely dated to EM. II. If that is so, their date would lie within the brackets c. 2600-2200 BC.

This fits remarkably well with the carbon dates for the Italian chalcolithic, namely Grotta Romita di Asciano, 2298±115 BC, and

¹⁶ S. Xanthoudides, *The Vaulted Tombs of Mesara* (1924) pl. XXV, 4194.

¹⁷ Xanthoudides, *op. cit.* n. 16, pl. XXVII, 4248.

¹⁸ Xanthoudides, *op. cit.* n. 16, pl. XXV, 4187.

¹⁹ Xanthoudides, *op. cit.* n. 16, pl. III, 846, 847.

²⁰ C. Renfrew, in *AJA* 73 (1969) 18-20.

²¹ Xanthoudides, *op. cit.* n. 16, pl. XXI, 126.

²² Xanthoudides, *op. cit.* n. 16, pl. XXIXb, 1173.

²³ Branigan, *op. cit.* n. 7, 95.

²⁴ Xanthoudides, *op. cit.* n. 16, pl. XXIXb, 1172; Branigan, *op. cit.* n. 7, 39.

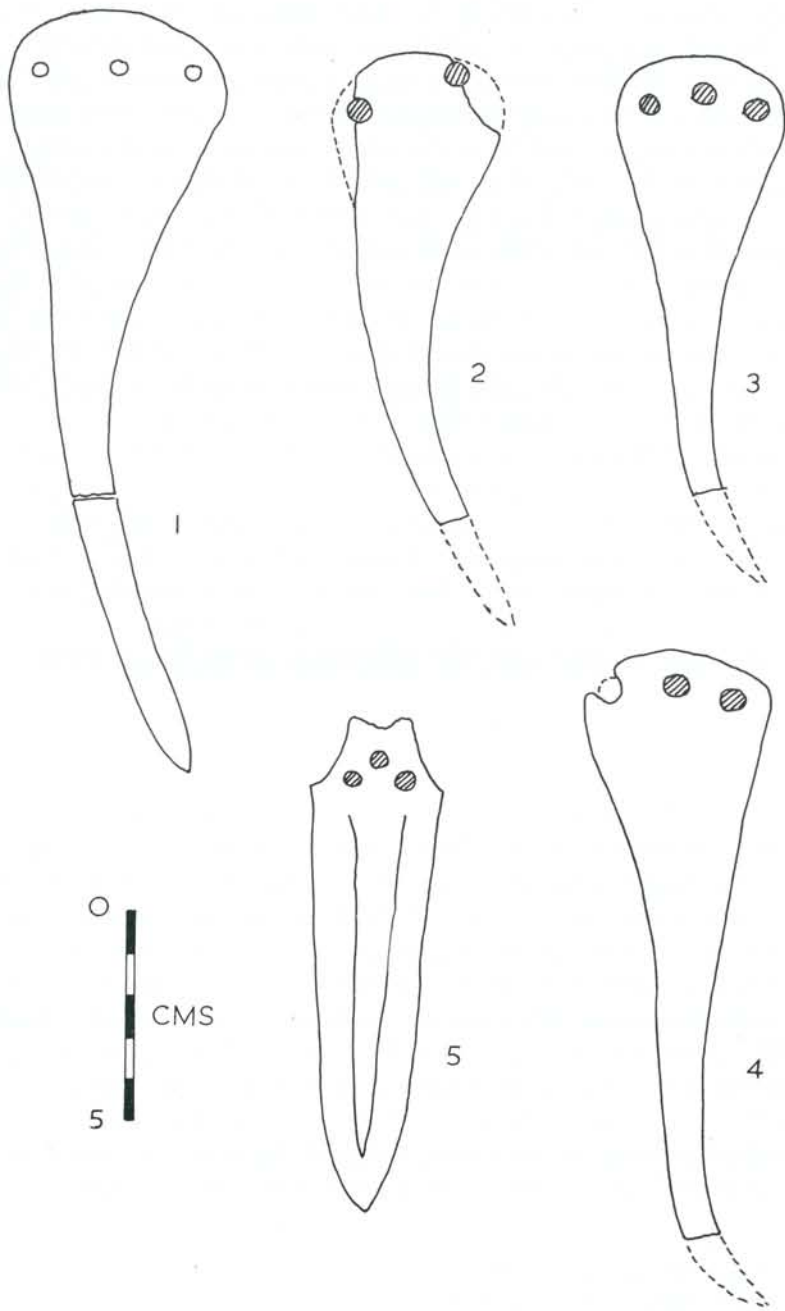


Fig. 2 - Four Aegean blades possibly hafted as halberds.

Grotta Piccioni, 2356±105 BC²⁵. This suggestion that EM. II and the Remedello-Rinaldone complex of Italy are approximately contemporary is of some importance, since I have previously argued that the typical EM II triangular daggers of Crete inspired the Remedello and Rinaldone flint ones²⁶. At the time I suggested that this must have happened in EM. III, when the last of the triangular daggers were in use, principally because in 1967 Remedello-Rinaldone seemed to be placed at the end of the third millennium BC. Now, it seems that this influence, if such existed, can be placed alongside at least three examples of an actual exchange of metal objects between Crete and Italy. Other connections between Italian and Minoan metalwork which I postulated in 1967 may also perhaps be related to this period c. 2600-2200 BC when the Aegean seems to have blossomed very rapidly into an urban civilisation with widespread contacts between at least the different parts of the Aegean itself. Particularly relevant to the possibility of Minoan-Italian trade and or connections at this time is the evidence for Minoan trade with Kythera and with Levkas in EM.II²⁷.

These two islands would have formed natural stepping-stones to Italy, and the Koumasa and Agios Onouphrios daggers at least, suggest that the Minoans took the opportunity which offered itself.

AEGEAN AND ITALIAN HALBERDS.

It is well known that the Aegean tradition of metalwork did not include the production of halberds, and in this respect the recognition of three dagger/halberds of Barfield's Villafranca type in Crete is obviously of some importance. If the Koumasa and Agios Onouphrios blades were indeed hafted as halberds, it might well explain why the Minoans thought them worthy of import, for they would of course have been weapons not normally available in the Aegean. Barfield rightly champions the claim of Italy to be the home of the European halberds, and certainly no rivals can be found in the Aegean or east Mediterranean, but there is a small group of blades from the Aegean which seem likely to have been hafted as halberds, and which might be considered in relation to the Italian chalcolithic examples.

²⁵ Barfield, *op. cit.* n. 1, 77.

²⁶ Branigan, *op. cit.* n. 2, 98-100.

²⁷ G. Huxley and N. Coldstream, in *Illustrated London News* Aug. 27 (1966), P. Warren in *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.* 33 (1967) pl. IV, LI.

1) Lerna. Trench J. *Hesperia* 24 (1955) pl. 23b, p. 46. Early Helladic II.

A very narrow, curving blade which widens rapidly and asymmetrically at the base. The base itself is asymmetrical and has three rivet holes in line across it. The blade cannot be paralleled among contemporary Aegean metalwork, either as a dagger or a knife (all of the latter being single-edged). No visible haft mark remains to suggest the method of hafting but the unusual form of this blade and the asymmetry visible in blade, sides and base all suggest that this was more probably a halberd than either a dagger or a knife. Its identification as such is perhaps strengthened by its similarity to the next example.

2) Palaikastro, Block ξ. Unpublished; drawing in Bosanquet's notebooks²⁸.

The size of the two rivets suggests a Middle Minoan date, and the context was in fact MM.II. A narrow, curving blade, broader than that of the Lerna example but with a similarly rapid and asymmetrical broadening at the base. In this instance the two rivets are clearly set asymmetrically. The rivets are thick, like those common in MM.III-LM.II, but first appearing on daggers in MM.I-II, and on razors in EM.II²⁹. The asymmetrical blade *and* rivet setting on this blade strongly suggests its use as a halberd.

3) Palaikastro, B50. *BSA*. Supplement I (1923), pl. XXIV, H. Middle Minoan II.

A blade almost identical with the last but with three rivets. The rivets are again thick, and the blade curves asymmetrically from a broad butt.

4) Unprovenanced. Giamalakis Collection (Iraklion Museum 653).

This blade is very similar to the last, although one of the three rivets has been broken. The rivets again are of sufficient thickness to suggest a date no earlier than MM.I-II, and this is supported by its typological relationship to the two Palaikastro halberds of MM.II. There is a possibility that this item in fact came from a Middle Minoan pithos burial in a rock shelter at Mathia (Pediadhos), along with some

²⁸ Permission to study and use these notebooks was kindly given by the Managing Committee of the British School at Athens.

²⁹ Branigan, *op. cit.* n. 7, 46, table 12, and Razors III, 2 and 4.

other daggers of MM type and some small single-axes also known only in MM.I-II contexts (see Hood in *Archaeological Reports 1957* (1958) p. 17).

The remaining blade is more tentatively identified as a halberd.

5) Psychro. *BSA* 6 (1900) fig. 42, and 63 (1968) fig. 3, 23. Not earlier than MM.I.

A broad-bladed weapon with either a thickened profile or a mid-rib. The heel is of uncertain shape but seems to form a very broad tang, in which are set three large rivets in triangular formation. A fourth rivet may have been set in the end of the tang, which is broken off.

As I have commented previously, this blade is a most unusual one with no close parallels at all from Crete or the Aegean³⁰. The broad tang with four rivets, and a blade with a central mid-rib, are in fact reminiscent of Irish halberds of type 2³¹, and although there is no reason to see any link between the Cretan and Irish blades, a similar function may be postulated for the blade from Psychro.

The Psychro blade apart, we are left with four reasonably certain examples of Aegean halberds, which would all seem to belong to a single type. Three of the halberds can be dated confidently to MM.I-II, and perhaps to MM.II. alone (c. 1900-1700 BC), while the fourth with much thinner rivets comes from a deposit early in EH.II (c. 2600-2400 BC)³².

This latter blade, from Lerna, seems likely to be some two centuries or more earlier than the first Italian halberds from the Remedello-Rinaldone cultures. However, this would not alter the position of the Italian halberds at the head of the European halberd tradition. The Lerna halberd is an isolated occurrence in the Aegean, at least half a millennium earlier than the Middle Minoan halberds, and it cannot be considered as ancestral to the Italian halberds. It may be that in both the Aegean and Italy in the mid third millennium BC, experiments were made with blades mounted transversely to the shaft. In Italy the idea seems to have been adopted and developed, while in the Aegean it was forgotten, briefly revived, and then finally abandoned. The basic idea behind the halberd is so simple that spontaneous and

³⁰ K. Branigan, in *Annual of BSA* 63 (1968) 191.

³¹ e.g. V. G. Childe, *Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles* (1940) fig. 32; S. P. O'Riordain in *Archaeologia* 86 (1937) fig. 42, 11, fig. 43, 13.

³² For C. 14 dates for Lerna, E. Kohler and E. Ralph in *AJA* 65 (1961).

independent experiments in this direction seem a distinct possibility. The alternative perhaps, is to see Minoan contacts with Italy, as exemplified by the Koumasa and Agios Onouphrios daggers (and possibly other metallurgical connections), introducing the concept of the halberd into the Aegean from Italy, and possibly even actual examples of the weapon, if the Koumasa blades were themselves mounted as halberds like other examples of the Villafranca type.

It is interesting to note however that the Aegean halberd is of a type unknown in Italy, and probably derived from the standard Aegean long dagger with rounded heel. The three examples of Middle Minoan date might be contemporaries of the Italian EBA examples, and the popularity of the weapon in Italy and elsewhere in Europe might have stimulated its brief re-appearance in Crete. It is one of a series of short-lived experimental weapons typical of the period c. 2000-1700 BC, several of them seemingly produced under a stimulus from beyond the Aegean³³.

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³³ Branigan, *op. cit.*, n. 30, 221.

SOMMARIO

Il lavoro spiega le ragioni per cui tre pugnali trovati nelle regioni meridionali di Creta, debbano ritenersi importati dall'Italia Calcolitica, e mette in rilievo il possibile parallelismo cronologico tra l'Antico Minoico II e le culture di Remedello e di Rinaldone. Si passa quindi ad analizzare i pochi esemplari noti di alabarde egee ed a considerare le relazioni esistenti tra queste ultime e le alabarde del Calcolitico e del Bronzo Antico italiano, arrivando alla conclusione che le due serie rappresentano sviluppi paralleli.

SUMMARY

The paper sets out the reasons for identifying three daggers found in southern Crete as imports from Chalcolithic Italy, and points to the chronological compatibility of Early Minoan II and the Remedello and Rinaldone cultures. It then proceeds to discuss the few known examples of Aegean halberds and to consider their relationship to the halberds of the Italian Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age, concluding that the two series were probably independent developments.