

The Minoan Genius in Mycenaean Greece: a review¹

An interesting paper on this subject was recently published by F. T. van Straten (hereafter referred to as v. S.). It is the first study for considerable time, concerned with the Aegean Bronze Age, to appear in our country. I thought it useful to review the more important of v.S.'s findings, some of which stand in need of comment or correction. After the introduction v.S. divides his paper into two parts, dealing first with the archaeological evidence for the functions of the Genius and secondly with its possible ancient name. I shall do the same and examine afterwards some further points raised by v.S., not directly relevant to the Genius.

PART I: FUNCTION

The archaeological evidence has been collected and discussed in an admirable study by Miss M.A.V. Gill and v.S. rightly relies heavily upon it. He makes (v.S. p. 111, n. 10) some additions to her list of representations which I would like to augment with the following:

1. Steatite mould from the citadel at Mycenae (from a LH III B context)².
A Genius is holding a libation-jug in front of a palm-tree.
2. Haematite cylinder-seal from Cyprus (no exact provenance)³.
Two Genii holding jugs stand at either side of a divine figure.

1. I am very grateful to Dr. H. W. Catling for comments on a draft of this text, and to Miss C. Bradshaw for improving upon the phraseology.

The following abbreviations are employed in addition to those in standard use:

- CMP A. Furumark, *The Chronology of Mycenaean Pottery*, Stockholm, 1941.
- CMS *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*, Berlin, 1964-.
- Gill M.A.V. Gill, *The Minoan Genius*, *AM* 79, 1964, 1ff.
- Marinatos-Hirmer S. Marinatos-M. Hirmer, *Kreta und das mykenische Hellas*, München, 1959.
- v.S. F. T. van Straten, *The Minoan "Genius" in Mycenaean Greece*, *BABesch* XLIV, 1969, 110ff.

2. *Archaeological Reports* 1966-67, 9 with fig. 13. Glass-paste ornaments featuring Genii and cast from such moulds have been found at Mycenae, cf. v.S. figs. 13-4.

3. V. E. G. Kenna-O. Masson, *BCH* xci, 1967, 251-4 with figs. 1-2.

3. Fragmentary haematite cylinder-seal from Enkomi (no context reported)⁴. A Genius is holding a jug in a religious scene.
4. Fresco-fragment from Pylos (found outside the palace and somewhat earlier than the end of LH IIIB which is the assumed date of its fall)⁵. Miss Lang in her publication tentatively suggests that the remains belong to a woman holding a skirt in her hand. Her illustrations and description remind me however of a fresco-fragment from Mycenae where Genii are clearly shown⁶. This leads me to suppose that a Genius was also depicted here.
5. Steatite cylinder-seal from Palaikastro in Crete (see Addenda).

As both Miss Gill and v.S. point out, the great majority of representations show one or more Genii in a sacerdotal role, superior to man and animals but subservient to the gods. One large class has the creature carrying a libation-jug in the presence of either a deity, a tree or branches, stone cairns or altars of some sort (*e.g.* v.S. figs. 1-5, 10, 12-14, 16). The other large class shows one or more Genii together with animals, mostly bulls but sometimes lions or stags. Often the animals are dead and being carried, at other times they are led walking along (*e.g.* v.S. figs. 15, 17-21, 23, 25-26). In most cases it can be assumed that the animals are to be sacrificed to the gods. The frequent association of the first class with a tree and branches suggests that the Genius played a role in the promotion of vegetation. This aspect is not appreciated by v.S., though underlined both by Miss Gill and S. Marinatos in a stimulating contribution to the subject⁷. Not all representations fall nicely into either of the two classes. I am thinking of a few scenes from the Greek mainland where the Genius seems to stand apart from the general pattern. These modify to a certain extent v.S.'s generally correct conclusion (p. 119) that there are no significant differences in outward appearance or functions between representations found on the Mainland and in Crete.

As far as the outward appearance is concerned there is one feature which on present evidence is confined to some of the representations found on the Mainland only. This is the excrescence on the head, mentioned by Miss Gill but not touched upon by v.S.⁸ It can curl both forward and backward:

4. V. Karageorghis, *Mycenaean Art from Cyprus*, Nicosia, 1968, 42, no. 4 with pl. xxxviii.

5. *The Palace of Nestor at Pylos in Western Messenia*, vol. II, Princeton, 1969, 79, no. 40 Hne with pls. 26 and C.

6. Marinatos-Hirmer, pl. XLIII, below.

7. Gill, 8-9. Marinatos, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium on Mycenaean Studies*, Cambridge, 1966, 265ff.

8. Gill, 13, 14.

- Forward curl:
1. Seal from the tholos at Vaphio (v.S. fig. 1).
 2. Seal-impression from the palace at Pylos⁹.
 3. Fresco-fragment from Mycenae (referred to above)¹⁰.
- Backward curl:
1. Gold ring from Tiryns (v.S. fig. 4).
 2. Steatite mould from Mycenae (referred to above)¹¹.
- Direction uncertain: fragmentary ivory plaque from Thebes¹².

This excrescence occurs first on one of the earliest representations of the Genius itself on the Mainland, the Vaphio-seal which has a context datable to LH IIA, the earlier fifteenth century B.C.¹³ Nothing much can be made of this feature. It seems to be a variation applied by some artists presumably working on the Mainland. In one respect it is of particular significance: the backward curl on the new mould from Mycenae provides another argument in favour of the authenticity of the Tiryns-ring¹⁴.

Turning now to the activities of the Genius in scenes found on the Mainland two examples stand apart from the rest. The first is a cylinder-seal from Kakovatos, which presumably had a LH IIA context like the Vaphio-seal (v.S. p. 117 with fig. 29)¹⁵. It shows a Genius almost certainly acting as the protector of a "hero" in combat with a lion. Scenes of men fighting lions are quite common on the Mainland but only here is a superhuman protector depicted. Could we then have evidence for an as yet unique "Mainland" function of the Genius? The iconographical elements of the cylinder from Kakovatos are very interesting: the awkward position of the fore-paws of the Genius clearly reflects the way in which the creature is normally shown carrying a libation-jug, while the lion rearing high on its hindlegs returns on other seals from the Mainland¹⁶.

There is also a particular similarity to the lion fighting men on a stela from Grave-circle B at Mycenae¹⁷. I note here that this motif is also present on a few seals said to be from Crete. Their authenticity, I feel, is not above all

9. v.S. fig. 15 reproduces the drawing in CMS I, no. 379. The curl is not shown there but appears on the photo to the right. The drawing in Gill, Beil. 7,1 shows it clearly.

10. *Supra* n. 6.

11. *Supra* n. 2.

12. E. Touloupa, *AD* 20, B2, 1965, 235 with pl. 280, b.

13. *CMP*, 49.

14. For a discussion see Gill, 12-3, Cat. no. 26.

15. Findcircumstances in Gill, 21 with n. 69, Cat. no. 50. For date of tholos-tombs at the site *CMP*, 47.

16. *E.g.* CMS I, nos. 228 (Vaphio) and 290 (tholos at Pylos).

17. Most recently discussed by G. E. Mylonas, *Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age*, Princeton, 1966, 107-8 with fig. 104.

suspicion¹⁸. In conclusion I would say that the artist of the Kakovatos-cylinder has combined two familiar motifs, the jug-holding Genius and a man-lion combat, into a totally new composition. The scene on this cylinder might be an invention of the individual gem-cutter but quite conceivably we have here a glimpse of a heroic myth. In this context reference could be made to a seal-impression, not from the Mainland but found at Zakro in Crete (v.S. p. 117 with fig. 24). There a Genius is personally fighting a wild animal: it thrusts a spear into a bull which in turn is collapsing on top of a heap of stones, presumably indicating, as v.S. says, a rocky landscape rather than an altar. This might be a representation of the killing of the sacrificial bull which the Genius is shown carrying on other seals (v.S. fig. 18, 23, 25).

The other representation from the Mainland to be considered is the already mentioned fresco-fragment from the citadel of Mycenae¹⁹. Preserved is most of three Genii walking to the right, one behind the other, and carrying what seems to be a long rope over their right shoulder. Its slight slope to the left and regularly spaced oblique striation argue against the interpretation as a wooden pole²⁰. Because of the fragmentary character it is not really possible to reconstruct the action in which the Genii were originally engaged. It is perhaps most likely that they were pulling something which was attached to the left end of the rope. If so, this fresco would conceal still another activity of the Genius. I note that the painter presumably drew not upon pictures only but his own visual experiences too: the Genii have distinctly asinine heads; at the same time people and animals hauling on ropes must have been a common sight at Mycenaean palaces, transporting for instance the large beams and stones needed for the construction of buildings²¹.

There seems to be then evidence for a limited iconographical transformation

18. First there is an amygdaloid of haematite recently acquired for the Collection Metaxas (no. 298) and said to be from Sitia, cf. CMS IV, no. 233. Its shape, subject and style are very close to the amethyst seal from Pylos referred to supra n. 16. The worn surface not necessarily proves its authenticity. Then there is a flattened cylinder, for long in the Cabinet des Médailles at Paris (no. 6984), cf. A. Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, IV, 2, London, 1935, 576 with fig. 556 and D. Levi, *Annuario* . . ., 8-9, 1929, 197-8 with fig. 245. This seal owes much to the famous Lion-hunt dagger from Shaft-grave IV at Mycenae. Finally another seal, also in the Cabinet des Médailles (no. 6673), is a lentoid of unreported material, cf. Evans, *ibid.*, 575 with fig. 555 and Levi, *ibid.*, 198, n. 1.

19. *Supra* nn. 6 and 10.

20. Discussion in Gill, 12, Cat. no. 25. I cannot support her view that each Genius is carrying a short pole. The paint filling the dorsal appendage was as she says added after the outlines of the rope had been drawn but this does not imply that separate poles were meant. Poles are drawn differently on Mycenaean frescoes; a good example is G. Rodenwaldt, *Tiryns*, II, Athen, 1912, 118-9, no. 152 with pl. XI, 6.

21. A. B. Cook a long time ago suggested the pulling of a well-rope, cf. *JHS* XIV, 1894, 101. He also rejected a pole, because of the oblique markings.

of the Genius on the Mainland. The great majority of scenes however are not distinguishable from those found in Crete. Where it for these only it could be argued that the Genius never played a part in the religious world of the Mycenaens but was confined to the artistic repertoire. Nonetheless the exceptional pieces I have discussed above are perhaps evidence not just for an iconographical transformation but also for actual religious belief.

PART II: NAME

Since neither later texts nor the archaeological record provide any evidence that the Genius survived into the historical period, an attempt to trace the name used by the Bronze Age people must be based upon the Linear B texts. It is good to realize the hazards involved in assigning words on the tablets to divine beings presented by the archaeological evidence (so also v.S. p. 120). In this respect I note that practically no such proposed identifications have found general acceptance. There appears to be an almost unbridgeable gap between the tablets and iconography. Regarding the only previous attempt made for the Genius, by S. Marinatos, v.S. (p. 120) rightly rejects a link with the word "dipsioi" found on tablets from Pylos²². This word is interpreted by v.S. following other scholars as Greek for "the thirsty ones" and thought to indicate the dead (v.S. pp. 120-1 with n. 71). In support of this, reference is made to a few rather late Greek texts. I cannot believe that we have here sufficient evidence to maintain that the Mycenaens referred to their dead in this way. According to v.S. the notion of the dead as being thirsty might even go back to Middle-Helladic times, if only because of drinking cups figuring prominently among the generally scarce grave-offerings of that period. It is however true that other types of vessels were also deposited at that time²³. v.S. (p. 121) proposes another name for the Genius taken from a tablet at Pylos, Fr. 1205. The word involved which (accidentally?) has not turned up at Knossos is "amphiq^uoloi" and can be explained as Greek for "servants, attendants". The Fr-series of tablets records offerings of olive oil to individual deities and groups of what on internal evidence appear to be divine beings of some sort. The matter is made more complex since "amphiq^uoloi" occur on two more Pylos tablets, Aa 804 and Ad 690, where as v.S. observes (p. 121) they almost certainly denote groups (again groups) of mortal women. Are the "amphiq^uoloi" of Fr. 1205 so totally different from these as v.S.'s theory would imply? I doubt it. Tablet Fr. 1205 almost certainly records oil for anthropo-

22. Marinatos, *supra* n. 7.

23. For instance, the tombs at Prosymna referred to by v.S. p. 121, n. 72, have a relatively large quantity of jugs as well.

morphic figures which might well be female. They are either divine "servants" or, perhaps less likely, mortal priestesses. A similar group could be indicated by the "dipsioi", already mentioned above who also figure in the Fr-series. Apart from this there are two more queries which prevent me from accepting v.S.'s theory: first, would the palace scribes at Pylos refer to the Genius in the plural and under such a general term as "the servants"²⁴; secondly, is it likely that the Genius itself was the object of a cult involving offerings of oil?

Finally, I should like to examine some other points raised by v.S. not directly relevant to an understanding of the Genius. v.S. (pp. 111-2) is inclined to see the same divine figure on a cylinder-seal (v.S. fig. 5), acquired in Crete but claimed to have been made in Cyprus²⁵, and the wellknown bronze statuette from a shrine at Enkomi (v.S. fig. 6). He bases this identification which would be of considerable interest if demonstrable on an assumed similarity of the headdress and position of the arms. However, the sketchy execution of the head of the personage on the seal surely does not permit such a conclusion. If anything, the position of his arms looks different, even allowing for the limitations put upon the seal-engraver. It is shared by another intriguing figure, on a cylinder-seal from Astrakous in Crete²⁶.

A further identification of human figures on two different classes of objects proposed by v.S. (pp. 112-3) cannot be demonstrated either. This concerns the seated persons, respectively on the gold ring from Tiryns (v.S. fig. 4) and a clay vase, the so-called Homage-krater from Aradippo in Cyprus (v.S. fig. 8)²⁷. In both cases the seated figures are being approached by a procession, on the ring of jug-carrying Genii, on the vase consisting of armed men. On the vase the scene is shown twice at one side, while the badly damaged opposite side has a different decoration²⁸. One of the two seated figures there is accompanied by a bird which is sitting on the top of its chair. A bird is also present on the Tiryns-ring, shown behind the chair. The common element between the ring and the vase is then the procession theme in association with a bird. v.S. assumes the central figures represent one and the same goddess. Indeed the one on the ring is most likely female because of the hair and head-cap and also probably

24. This relates to a problem presented by the archaeological record: the number of Genii varies though all Genii perform the same act on each single scene. Does this mean that the basic conception was that of one Genius which could be "duplicated" or rather that of a class of identical creatures?

25. Kenna, *AJA* 72, 1968, 331.

26. Discussed a.o. by Kenna (*supra* n. 25) 330-1 with pl. 107, fig. 17. A better parallel for the Enkomi bronze might be seen on a cylinder seal from Jalysos in Rhodes, cf. G. Jacopi, *Annuario* . . ., 13-14, 1933, 278, with fig. 24.

27. Good new photos in Karageorghis, *supra* n. 4, pl. IV.

28. I had an opportunity to examine this vase in the Louvre (no. AM 676) thanks to Miss A. Caubet.

divine because of its context²⁹. However there is no ground for assuming as v.S. and others do that the two seated figures on the vase are female too. Their long spotted garments are the same as those worn by several of the male figures in the processions whereas their heads are also not distinguishable. Such long-robed figures appear frequently on Mycenaean vases in the pictorial style of LH III A-B, either on foot or in chariots and in one case riding a horse³⁰. Women seem only very rarely to have been shown³¹. For these reasons I think the seated figures on the Homage-krater are males. The presence of a bird on the chair of one of them presumably indicates that the scene has a religious character, with the seated man perhaps being a deity³². Both men on the vase are drawn without arms. The simplest explanation of this is perhaps the most likely: the painter was not concerned with giving them arms since, unlike the armed men in the processions, they were not holding anything. A parallel might be seen in the standing figure on the Aghia Triadha sarcophagus who is also armless³³. Definitely male because of the red colour of the face, he is wearing a long garment without showing the arms. The generally accepted interpretation is that of a deified dead person of great importance receiving the homage of the living at his tomb³⁴. It cannot be excluded that similar dead men are shown on the vase³⁵. One more comment on the vase: the high chairs on three legs with a summarily rendered footstool have a remarkable parallel in a terracotta model from Attica. It was found, apparently with LH IIIB pottery, in a chamber-tomb at Alikí³⁶. On the chair is seated a woman who is holding a baby against the breast. In his paper v.S. includes (p. 114 with fig. 16) the Genii shown on two handles of a large bronze vessel from Cyprus, almost certainly belonging to the rich inventory of tomb 40 at Kourion-Kaloriziki. The find-context apparently

29. The cap reminds me especially of the one worn by the white-plastered and therefore female head from Mycenae, cf. Marinatos-Hirmer, pls. xli-ii. Incidentally, this head probably belongs to a woman and not to a sphinx as has often been assumed. The rosettes on the cheeks are paralleled on a recently found female statuette, also from Mycenae, cf. Lord William Taylour, *Antiquity* XLIII, 1969, 92 with pl. XIII, c.

30. See the study by V. Karageorghis, *BCH* LXXXIII, 1959, 193ff. The horse-rider appears on a krater in the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam (no. 1856), cf. idem, *BABesch* xxxiii, 1958, 38ff. with figs. 1-3.

31. They have been collected by H. W. Catling in *AA* 1970, 24ff.

32. For the possible meaning of birds in such scenes cf. v.S. p. 113, 115 and 112 with references in n. 14.

33. Marinatos-Hirmer, pls. xxxvii and xxix, above.

34. See especially M. P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion*, Lund², 1950, 426 ff., and F. Matz, *Götterscheinung und Kultbild im minoischen Kreta*, Abhandlung der Akademie Mainz, Geisteswiss. Klasse, 1958, no. 7.

35. An intriguing question is whether statues are shown on any of the representations mentioned here. Marinatos (supra n. 7) 269 suggested this for the lady on the ring. I would rather opt for the man on the sarcophagus if asked to speculate.

36. J. Papadimitriou, *Praktika* 1955, 78ff. with pl. 26, a.

dates to the earlier eleventh century B.C. v.S. tacitly assumes this to be the date of the vessel as well. He does not observe that if true we would have here one of the very last representations of the Genius known at the moment. However, the vessel almost certainly was not manufactured around that time. In his thorough discussion H. W. Catling comes out in favour of a date ca. 1250-1150 B.C.³⁷. I would go back even further, as far as the fifteenth or very early fourteenth century, believing with Catling that the vessel was made in Crete or on the Greek Mainland. The principle of such decoration of metal vases was quite frequently applied at that time. On the handles of our vase is a scene of marine life with octopi and rockwork in the space below the Genii. Subject and style of this scene are directly related to clay vases of the Minoan Marine style and its Mainland and Cretan derivatives in the fifteenth century³⁸. A very close parallel in metal is supplied by a gold cup from the tholos-tomb at Dendra found in a context apparently of LH IIIA: 1 date, therefore belonging to the late fifteenth or early fourteenth century B.C.³⁹ I do not know of any clay or metal vases decorated in this style of a definitely later date. The Genii on the handles of the Kourion vessel are seen in pairs, apparently saluting a tree trunk. They resemble the jug-holding ones on the seal from Vaphio (v.S. fig. 12) which has a context of the earlier fifteenth century⁴⁰. This supports the theory of an early manufacture of the Kourion vase. Another related vessel with decorated handles from Cyprus, possibly Kition, can also be dated early on the basis of its motifs⁴¹. These vases must have been kept as precious heirlooms for several centuries before being deposited in tombs on Cyprus. Their shape is that of a krater, presumably necked, with wide vertical handles riveted on to a flat rim. Such metal vases can be regarded as the prototypes of clay kraters which first appear in the Aegean towards the end of the fifteenth century or early fourteenth, only to disappear completely by the end of the next century. Some of the earliest specimens in clay reflect this origin in having "rivets" at the attachments of their handles⁴². This evidence also supports the early date I would attribute to the metal kraters found in Cyprus. v.S. (p. 116 with fig. 21) thinks the rudimentary figure-of-eight shield on a seal reputedly from Melos possibly refers to what he calls "the Mycenaean shield-goddess". I do not want to discuss here the possible existence in Minoan-Mycenaean iconography of a deity or deities

37. *Cypriote Bronzework in the Mycenaean World*, Oxford, 1964, 156ff. (these handles are his no. 3) with pl. 24.

38. So also Catling (*supra* n. 37) 159-60. One example in Marine style is Marinatos-Hirmer, fig. 87.

39. Marinatos-Hirmer, figs. 196, below and 197. For the date cf. CMP, 53.

40. CMP, 49.

41. Catling (*supra* n. 37) 157ff. (his no. 2) with pl. 23, b-c.

42. For the clay vases and their origin see Catling (*supra* n. 37) 160 and Karageorghis, *Nouveaux documents pour l'étude du Bronze Récent à Chypre*, Paris, 1965, 220ff.

directly connected with a figure-of-eight shield. Be that as it may the shield on the seal which is shown in an inconspicuous place is better explained as no more than a filling motif of a vaguely sacred nature. As such it also appears on several of the cylinders presumably made in Cyprus (*e.g.* v.S. figs. 5, 10), and on Aegean seals where it is generally more carefully rendered⁴³.

The bronze kriophoros mentioned by v.S. (p. 116 with fig. 7) and said to be from a site near Rethymnon in Crete is a freak. I have doubts about its authenticity and even more about the proposed date, LM III. Nothing similar is known to me that is definitely datable to that period or to Minoan times in general⁴⁴.

Oxford/Amsterdam

J. H. CROUWEL

ADDENDA

In the list of added representations should be included as no. 5 a steatite cylinder seal found many years ago by British archaeologists at Palaikastro in Crete. Its context was reported as a LM III larnax-burial. One Genius, without a jug, is present in a religious scene. Its presence on the cylinder which seems to have Cypriote connections was only recently noted by v.E.G. Kenna⁴⁵.

Since the above was written a new short contribution by Miss Gill has appeared⁴⁶. She adds two seals, one from Palaikastro and the other without provenance, to the list of representations⁴⁷. Like me she regards the fresco-fragment from Pylos (see above p. 24, no. 4) as showing the remains of a Genius⁴⁸.

43. *E.g.* CMS I, nos. 41, 75, 105, 115, 132, 182, 216, 412.

44. I am equally doubtful about the remarkably similar statuette, said to have been found by chance at the same site, Grivila or Griviglia, cf. *Marinatos-Hirmer*, fig. 121, and *BCH* LXXXVI, 1952, 240 with pl. X, b.

45. Kenna (*supra* n. 25), 331 with pl. 108, fig. 22. Earlier report on the seal in *BSA* XL, 1939-40, 47, no. 27, with fig. 17.

46. *AJA* 47, 1970, 404ff.

47. *Supra* n. 46, 406, nos. 56 and 57, referring resp. to Kenna, *BICS* 13, 1966, pl. 7, 572 and *CMS* VIII, no. 65.

48. *Supra* n. 46, 404 and 406, no. 55.