

# The Last Man Standing – Body Poses of Victorious and Defeated Warriors in Late Bronze Age Aegean Iconography and Their Egyptian Comparanda

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**Abstract** *This paper analyzes the body poses of victorious and defeated warriors depicted in Late Bronze Age (LBA) Aegean iconography. It argues that early LBA Aegean depictions of victorious swordsmen defeating enemies represent an appropriation of the Egyptian motif of a ‘pharaoh smiting his enemies’. Moreover, through a comparative analysis of the depictions of defeated warriors in Egypt and the Aegean, this paper examines cultural connotations that different body poses might have had in different parts of the LBA Eastern Mediterranean. Finally, it addresses the connection between body poses, movement and changing ideologies in the LBA Aegean.*

## Introduction

Warrior iconographies played an important role in the formation of male identities in the Late Bronze Age (LBA) Aegean (e.g. Hiller 1999; Molloy 2012; Franković and Matić 2020). This paper examines the representations of body poses of victorious and defeated warriors, as well as their mutual relationship. Through a comparative analysis of such representations in Egypt and the Aegean, it aims to provide a better understanding of the cultural connotations of different body poses in different parts of the LBA Eastern Mediterranean. Finally, the paper addresses the connection between body poses, movement and changing ideologies in the LBA Aegean.

## The Aegean Victorious Swordsman as a ‘Pharaoh Smiting His Enemies’

In early LBA Aegean iconography, swordsmen are treated as superior to warriors armed with other weapons in representations of battle (Franković and Matić 2020, 356–360). More precisely, only swordsmen defeat other swordsmen (*CMS* I, nos. 11 [Fig. 1], 12, 16 [Fig. 2]; II 6, no. 15 [Fig. 6]; V, no. 643; VII, no. 129; IX, no. 158; XII, no. 292; Pylos Combat Agate). The similar is the case with swordsmen fighting lions (*CMS* I, nos. 9, 228, 290; IV, no. 233; V Suppl. 1A, no. 135; XI, no. 208). Differently armed warriors are never depicted defeating swordsmen or clearly defeating a lion. Aegean depictions of victorious swordsmen represent an appropriation of the ‘pharaoh smiting his enemies’ motif, which is attested in earlier and contemporary Egyptian iconography (Franković and Matić 2020, 362–363; also Marinatos 2010, 173–175) in connection to representations of victorious pharaohs, princes and soldiers. It appears already in Tomb 100 in Hierakonpolis, as well as on the famous Palette of Narmer (Hall 1986, 4–5, figs. 6 and 8). Egyptian soldiers in the same pose are depicted in the Tomb of Inti at Deshasheh, dating to the Old Kingdom Egypt (Bestock 2018, 228, fig. 8.3). The most famous representations from the New Kingdom Egypt are those depicted on various representations dating to the reigns of Sethos I, Ramses II and Ramses III. However, there are also numerous examples contemporary to the early LBA in the Aegean (e.g. Hall 1986, 16–28; Heinz 2001, 69–75), such as the depiction on a battle axe representing pharaoh Ahmose, the first king of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. It was found in the tomb of Ahhotep I, possibly Ahmose’s mother, in Dra Abu el-Naga in western Thebes (Hall 1986, fig. 27).

The similarities between Egyptian representations of ‘pharaoh smiting his enemies’ figures and Aegean representations of victorious swordsmen are mostly attested in their dominant stance

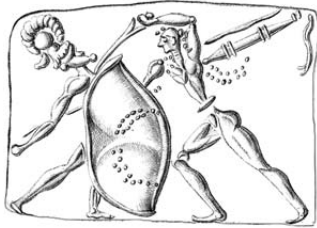


Fig. 1: Sealstone from Mycenae, LH I (CMS I, no. 11; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 2: Signet-ring from Mycenae, LH I (CMS I, no. 16; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

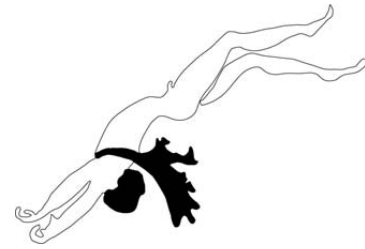


Fig. 3: Falling warrior from the Ship Procession Fresco from Thera, LM IA (redrawn after Morgan 1988, pl. 3).

and movement towards the defeated warrior. They are depicted stepping forward and delivering their deadly blow with a weapon from above. In Egypt, the ‘pharaoh smiting his enemies’ figure is commonly represented holding the defeated warriors’ hair and sometimes their arms. In the Aegean, the victorious warrior is depicted holding his opponent’s head (CMS I, no. 12; II 6, no. 15 [Fig. 6]), helmet crest (Pylos Combat Agate) or hair (Fig. 2; CMS I, no. 16). In some cases, the position of the victorious warrior’s hand is not visible, as it is located behind the defeated warrior’s shield (CMS I, no. 11 [Fig. 1]; VII, no. 129; XII, no. 292). The position and orientation of the victorious warrior’s arm suggest that the hand is reaching towards or holding the defeated warrior’s neck.

Representations of battles are not present in the iconographic repertoire of the Final Palatial period on Crete. The same is true for most of the Palatial period (*i.e.* LH IIIA1–LH IIIB1) on the Greek mainland and other islands, with the exception of an LH II–LH IIIA1 seal-stone (CMS XI, no. 34) from Attica, probably from Athens. In all regions, representations of warriors are restricted to depictions of marching or running warriors. However, they change again on the Greek mainland at the very end of the LH IIIB period. LH IIIB2 frescoes from Pylos (Lang 1969, 71–75) and Mycenae (Rodenwaldt 1921, pls. II–IV) return to representations of warriors engaged in battle. In contrast to the early LBA period, the depictions focus on battles between two groups of warriors instead on accentuating an individual warrior’s superiority. Nevertheless, even in this case, one group of warriors clearly dominates the battle.

### Defeated Warriors in the Late Bronze Age Aegean Iconography

Defeated warriors are represented on a variety of different media, mostly dating to the early LBA. Most of the depictions show warriors defeated by a swordsman in the ‘pharaoh smiting his enemies’ pose. The defeated warriors are depicted in several different body poses, *i.e.* falling, kneeling, lying, sitting or fleeing from the battle.

They are often represented falling, most commonly upside-down. Three defeated warriors on the LM IA Ship Procession Fresco from Akrotiri on Thera are represented in a falling body pose (Fig. 3; *e.g.* Morgan 1988, 150). A similar scene is probably depicted on a fragment of a stone vase from Epidaurus (*e.g.* Morgan 1988, 151, fig. 194), the Silver Siege Rhyton (*e.g.* Davis 1977, 227–230, no. 87, figs. 179–180), as well as two seal-stones (CMS I, no. 263; IX, no. 158).

Despite the lack of continuity of defeated enemies’ depictions in LH IIIA, fragments of the LH IIIB Mycenae megaron frieze (Rodenwaldt 1921, pl. 2) and Pylos battle frescoes (Lang 1969, 71–74) suggest that the falling body pose was also associated with the defeated warrior iconography at the end of the LH IIIB period. In Egyptian iconography, this body pose symbolizes defeat and/or death. Falling warriors are depicted already in the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Tomb of Inti at Deshasheh and the 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Tomb of Intef at Thebes (Bestock 2018, 228–236, figs. 8.3 and 8.7). In New Kingdom Egypt, warriors falling upside-down appear in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty mortuary temple of Thutmose II at Thebes (Spalinger 2005, 60, fig. 3a–b, block no. 6 in the image), as well as in various depictions dating between the reigns of Tutankhamun and

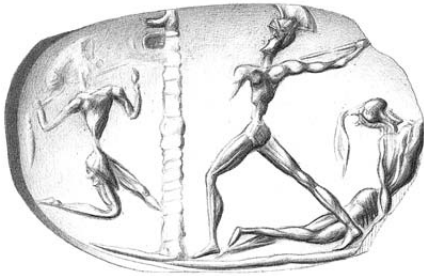


Fig. 4: Sealing from Agia Triada, LM IB (CMS II 6, no. 17; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 5: Right side of the chariot of Thutmose IV (1400–1390 BCE) from his tomb (KV 43) (redrawn after Carter and Newberry 2002, pl. X).

Ramses II (Hall 1986). Falling warriors are represented in the depiction of the First Lybian War of Ramses III at Medinet Habu (Heinz 2001, 79–81, fig. 65). Already Gerhart Rodenwaldt (1921, 56–57, fig. 29) noticed the similarities between the falling warrior represented on the LH III B fresco from Mycenae and the defeated warriors on the representation of the Battle of Kadesh.

Four LH I–LH II examples of glyptic art (CMS I, nos. 11 [Fig. 1], 12, 16 [Fig. 2]; Pylos Combat Agate) depict defeated warriors falling on their knees. In Egyptian iconography, kneeling enemies appear already on the Palette of Narmer. The scene remains in use in the Old Kingdom Egypt, as attested in the Tomb of Inti at Deshasheh. The most famous New Kingdom representations are those of pharaohs smiting enemies, depicted at various sites dating to the reigns of Ahmose, Hatshepsut, Thutmose III, Sethos I, Ramses II and Ramses III (e.g. Hall 1986, 16–42 with corresponding figures; Heinz 2001, 69–75, 235–322 with corresponding figures).

Defeated warriors are depicted lying on the ground on two LM IB sealings from Agia Triada (Fig. 4; CMS II 6, no. 17) and Kato Zakro (CMS II 7, no. 20), as well as the LH IIA Pylos Combat Agate (Stocker and Davis 2017). The LH I Silver Siege Rhyton also depicts the legs of a figure which is possibly lying. Nude lying human figures leaning on their arms are depicted on an LH IIA bronze dagger from Vapheio (e.g. Evans 1930, 128, fig. 81). In most cases, the warriors lying on the ground are probably dead (e.g. Pylos Combat Agate). However, the Vapheio dagger might represent dying, but still alive, individuals.

In Egyptian iconography, dead enemies lying on the ground appear already on the Palette of Narmer. New Kingdom examples include those depicted on the sides of the chariot of Thutmose IV (Fig. 5; Spalinger 2005, 119, fig. 7.2 and 7.3) or in the representation of the Conquest of Satuna at Luxor from the reign of Ramses II (Heinz 2001, 73, fig. 44, cat. no. VIII.17). The latter includes an especially interesting depiction of a defeated warrior, as he seems to still be alive and leaning on one of his arms, in a manner similar to the individual depicted on the Vapheio dagger. A similar depiction is attested already in the Tomb of Inti in Deshasheh.

A defeated sitting warrior represented on an LH I signet-ring from Mycenae (Fig. 2; CMS I, no. 16) is alive, but seems to be disabled from further participation in battle. In the LBA Aegean art, this way of representing is also attested in depictions of athletic activities, such as boxing (e.g. Warren 1969, 85, no. P 469). Therefore, this body pose probably suggests that the warrior is disabled, but not killed. The best New Kingdom Egypt parallels for the Aegean sitting warrior and boxers are various representations of sitting (and/or squatting) figures dating to the reigns of Thutmose IV (e.g. sides of his chariot; see Fig. 5), Sethos I and Ramses II (Heinz



Fig. 6: Sealing from Agia Triada, LM IB (CMS II 6, no. 15; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 7: Enemy depicted en face, temple of Thutmose II (1482–1479 BCE), western Thebes (re-drawn after Spalinger 2005, 60, fig. 3a–b, block no. 6 in the image).

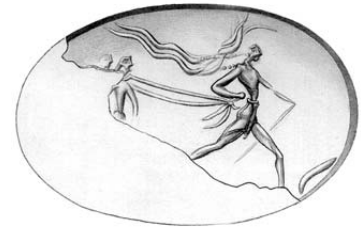


Fig. 8: Sealing from Chania, LM IB (CMS V Suppl. 1A, no. 133; courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

2001). Interestingly, there seem to be no clear Egyptian predecessors to the Aegean representations, since Egyptian depictions post-date the Aegean examples.

A male individual armed with a sword in pursuit of another human figure is depicted on an LM IB sealing from Agia Triada (Fig. 6; CMS II 6, no. 15). The other individual is running away from the pursuer. This is the only definite depiction of a person fleeing from battle in LBA Aegean art, although fleeing individuals might have also been represented on the more fragmented part of the LH I Silver Siege Rhyton. The earliest depiction of fleeing enemies in Egyptian iconography originates from the Palette of Narmer. New Kingdom Egypt examples are represented in the Temples of Derr and Beit el-Wali/South dating to the reign of Ramses II (Heinz 2001, 261–263). An interesting feature of the depiction on the Agia Triada sealing (Fig. 6; CMS II 6, no. 15) is the position of the fleeing figure's head, probably represented *en face*. In the New Kingdom Egyptian art (e.g. temple of Thutmose II in Thebes [Fig. 7]; the Painted Box of Tutankhamun), defeated enemies are represented this way to signify fear (Volokhine 2000).

Since the end of the Old Kingdom Egypt, both male and female prisoners of war are depicted in Egyptian iconography as tied together and pulled after one another, with a rope commonly tied around their necks and waists. The scene is represented already in the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Tomb of Inti at Deshasheh, but parallels contemporary to the LBA Aegean iconographic sources are attested in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Theban Tombs of Huy (TT 40) and Anen (TT 120) (Hallmann 2006). There are two LBA Aegean depictions which might represent tied individuals (see also Marinatos 2010, 174–176). The first is an LM IB sealing from Chania (Fig. 8; CMS V Suppl. 1A, no. 133) depicting a male figure holding a staff in one hand and a leash in the other. The leash is wrapped around the necks of at least two individuals of uncertain gender. The second is a stylistically dated LH I–LH II signet-ring from Athens (CMS V, no. 173), which represents a man holding two women on a leash. Although it is impossible to assert whether the Aegean scenes depict prisoners of war, it can be argued that the leashed individuals are deprived of their freedom.

### Concluding Remarks – Bodies, Movement and Appropriation of Ideology

In this paper, we explored the use of body pose, stance and movement in the expression of victory, domination, defeat and submission in the LBA Aegean iconographies of war. In the early LBA, the Egyptian motif of a 'pharaoh smiting his enemies' is appropriated into Aegean iconography in the form of the victorious swordsman. Such depictions accentuate the superior status of the victorious swordsman in comparison to all other warriors. In iconography, this is achieved through his posture and/or aggressive movement towards his enemies. The motif was first intro-



duced into Cretan Neopalatial ideology, possibly as a result of the early LBA Cretan diplomatic visits and correspondence with Egypt accompanied by the exchange of objects and artisans. Nevertheless, the introduction of Aegean-type swords, costumes and beauty ideals in the victorious swordsman iconography suggests a significant adaptation of the scene, as well as the influence of local elite ideologies. The motif was subsequently transferred to the Greek mainland as part of the large consumption of Cretan iconography during the early stages of the LBA. In this gradual process, a considerable change in the understanding of such depictions most probably happened in different parts of the Aegean.

In addition to the possible transference of the iconographic motif of the victorious warrior, it seems that the iconography of defeat was also transferred. In Egyptian iconography, various body poses symbolize defeat, death, fear and deprivation of freedom in representations of war. Defeated warriors in same or similar body poses are represented in early LBA Aegean iconography. While the transfer of a specific motif does not necessarily suggest a simultaneous transfer of meaning, the Egyptian connotation of the victorious warrior was introduced to Aegean iconographic sources, which likely suggests that connotations connected to the iconography of defeated warriors were also transferred.

The absence of battle representations on Crete since the LM II period onwards and on the Greek mainland in LH IIIA1–LH IIIB1 suggests that the original connotations of defeated warrior's body poses gradually lose their importance. In the context of Crete, the abandonment of battle iconography is probably connected to the change in the ideological employment of iconography by the newly emerged elite of the Final Palatial period. Since Crete was the main source of iconographic inspiration for depictions distributed on the Greek mainland in the early LBA, such a change on Crete in the later phases of the LBA possibly affected the iconographic production on the Greek mainland as well. However, the Greek mainland also went through a series of socio-cultural transformations in the transition from early LBA chiefdoms to state-like polities of the Palatial period. Therefore, notions of domination of a specific individual over others, largely communicated through body pose and movement of depicted figures, were abandoned. Instead, iconographies of the Final Palatial period on Crete and Palatial period on the Greek mainland focus on the military might of the assembled army, usually depicted as marching or running. A different ideological message is also conveyed through the body pose and movement. While body poses of early LBA warriors were used to contrast victorious and defeated individuals, the coordinated movement and similar body poses of later warriors probably express unity and common might of the army in service of the palaces.

Another change is introduced at the very end of the Palatial Period (LH IIIB2) on the Greek mainland. Defeated falling warriors re-appear in frescoes from Mycenae and Pylos. Current evidence suggests that these examples represent a re-introduction into Aegean iconography, possibly again after Egyptian prototypes, rather than continuity in depiction. However, although the body pose of the falling warriors continues to communicate defeat, its symbolic connotation in Aegean contexts is significantly different than in the early LBA iconographic contexts. More precisely, it is no longer used to communicate superiority or inferiority of individual actors, but rather to communicate the domination of one warrior group over the other.

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