

IL RHYTÒN DEI LOTTATORI E LE SCENE DI COMBATTIMENTO:
BATTAGLIE, DUELLI, AGONI E COMPETIZIONI NELLA CRETA
NEOPALAZIALE

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ABSTRACT

In the first part of this paper, an iconographical analysis of the so called Boxer *Rhytòn* of Haghia Triada is carried out. While the scenes of the lower registers, much better discussed, are fairly clear in their interpretation, the upper register, neglected in the archaeological bibliography due to its poor state of preservation, has received little attention. On the left of a column, two men are fighting, while on the right there is a group of three men, unfortunately bad preserved, one of which is however surely an archer. The stance suggests a link with representations of context between two groups of warriors, introducing a strong character of violence more similar to war scenes than to context scenes.

In order to achieve a deeper understanding of the whole iconographical repertoire of the Boxer *Rhytòn*, Aegean representations of fightings are reviewed. Four cycles of context representations can be distinguished: boxer/wrestler, duel, group contexts, siege. Context scenes are not a Mycenaean prerogative, on the contrary, they were perhaps created in Crete during the beginning of the Bronze Age. If siege scenes are surely referring to true war action (intersocietary war), other explanation for the other three groups can be proposed so that it is not possible to trace a sharp separation line between war and not war scenes. In particular, the action in the sealing AT 113, with two men fighting and a third dead man lying in the nearby, seems to be performed in a closed space, so that a ritual character is suggested, even if it is only possible to speculate about it is very nature (initiation rites? Ritual fighting?). On the other hand, an iconographical link can be detected among a few combat scenes and hunting scenes. The conclusion seems unescapable that at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age physical strength and weapon knowledge are widespread among the members of Cretan elite, and their practice is encouraged through a complete set of physical exercises, hunting activities and bull games, which includes also, at their climax, the violent encounter among opposite groups, from which a deadly result was not excluded. This interpretation fits well in the new perspective of Minoan society as based upon social conflicts and factional competitions.