

(which Yadin describes as “a long metal scourge or a long baton”)<sup>86</sup> a warrior neither cut nor stabbed his opponent but broke his bones and beat him to death. The rod was evidently more than a meter in length and had a diameter of two or three centimeters.<sup>87</sup> Although a standard weapon of native Egyptian infantrymen, it apparently found no favor elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. The Egyptian infantryman used the rod with a smiting or clubbing motion, beating his opponent while protecting himself with an oblong shield held in his left hand. The motion required in wielding the rod was therefore somewhat similar to that required with the slashing sword. But whereas the slashing sword could cut an opponent in half, the rod could only knock him to the ground.

Before the arrival of the Naue Type II sword, the only slashing weapon used by men of the eastern kingdoms was the “sickle sword” (see figure 3a), found all over the Near East but not in the Aegean.<sup>88</sup> This “sword,” which bears some resemblance to an American farmer’s corn knife, evolved from an axlike weapon of the Middle Bronze Age whose edge seldom exceeded 25 centimeters in length. In the Late Bronze Age the sickle sword sported a somewhat longer edge but still provided a slash within a very narrow range. The entire weapon was seldom more than half a meter long, with the handle accounting for almost half of that length. One must imagine it slicing into an opponent’s flesh rather than breaking or cleaving his bones. Although it undoubtedly served very well for cutting off an opponent’s penis or hand during the collection of trophies, it was evidently too small to cut off his limbs while the battle still raged. Nor did the sickle sword have much else to recommend it. Because of its shape it could not be used at all as a thrusting weapon, nor could it be sheathed: a soldier carrying it would never have both hands free. Despite its ubiquity from Hattusas to Egypt, it was not an impressive weapon.

Thrusting, or stabbing, weapons of the Late Bronze Age come closer to our notion of what an ancient sword “should” have been. In many of the eastern Mediterranean kingdoms a warrior might wear a dagger, dirk, short sword, or occasionally even a long rapier in a scabbard, as a personal weapon or a weapon of last resort. The *in corpore* finds indicate that daggers, dirks, and a very few short stabbing swords were the only sword-like weapons in use in thirteenth-century Greece.<sup>89</sup> Sir Arthur Evans thought that the Linear B tablets from Knossos inventoried Naue Type II swords, but that idea has long been abandoned, and Boardman suggests

<sup>86</sup> *Art of Warfare*, vol. 2, 249.

<sup>87</sup> According to Wolf, *Bewaffnung*, 79, the single specimen preserved intact measures 1.26 meters.

<sup>88</sup> On the sickle sword see *ibid.*, 66–68; Maxwell-Hyslop, “Daggers and Swords,” 41–44; and Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, vol. 1, 206–7, and, vol. 2, 475.

<sup>89</sup> Sandars, “Later Aegean Bronze Swords,” 130.

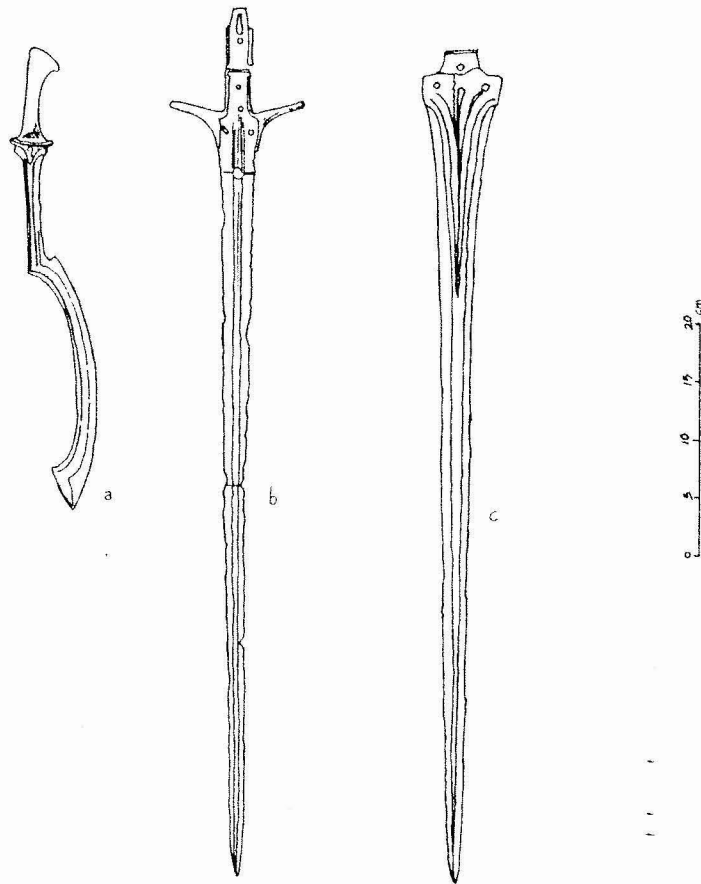


FIGURE 3. Eastern Mediterranean swords of the Late Bronze Age  
 a. Sickle sword from tomb of Tutankhamun  
 b. LH II rapier from Plovdiv, Bulgaria  
 c. Anatolian rapier found near Boghazköy (ca. 1400 B.C.)

that the *phasgana* (*pa-ka-na*) were in fact daggers.<sup>90</sup> In the Pylos “Battle Scene” fresco, while one of the palace’s men thrusts his spear into a savage, two other Phylians attack with daggers or short dirks.

A much longer thrusting weapon (see figure 3b) was evidently carried for self-defense by early Mycenaean charioteers. In the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C. many rapiers (some over a meter in length) were elegantly made, but the costly hilt was so precarious that it is doubtful they were meant for serious fighting.<sup>91</sup> From the LH IIIA and IIIB periods *in corpore* rapiers have not been found in Greece, but vases continue to portray charioteers carrying such weapons in tasseled scabbards suspended from the shoulder. For the Near East we have less evidence for the long rapier in the Late Bronze Age.<sup>92</sup> A fine specimen, however, was found in 1991 by road workers near Boghazköy.<sup>93</sup> Measuring 79 centimeters in length, the Boghazköy tapier (see figure 3c) has a narrow blade that tapers sharply from 7.5 centimeters at the hilt to 3 centimeters at a quarter’s length and 2 centimeters at the midpoint. An Akkadian inscription proclaims that King Tudhaliyas (Tudhaliyas II, ca. 1400 B.C.) dedicated “these swords” to the Storm God after conquering the land of Assuwa (probably “Asia,” in western Asia Minor). The dedication suggests that these tapiers too were costly pieces as well as useful weapons.

The traditional weapons of the eastern Mediterranean kingdoms continued in use until the twelfth century. A relief of Ramesses III on the north wall at Medinet Habu shows twenty native Egyptians, all hand-to-hand warriors, guarding a line of captives. Each Egyptian carries a spear in his right hand and another weapon in his left. Of the weapons in the left hand, six are dirks, six are rods, and seven are sickle swords.<sup>94</sup> Not one of the Egyptian infantrymen carries a long sword.

A few men did use a long sword in Late Bronze Age battles in the eastern Mediterranean, but these were *shardana* skirmishers in the Egyptian chariot corps. Many of the *shardana* carried (often in a scabbard across the

breast) a dirk or short thrusting sword. The Abydos reliefs (see plate 5) show warriors with horned helmets, quite certainly Sardinians, serving as bodyguards for Ramesses the Great before the Battle of Kadesh in 1275, and each of them holds a dirk or short sword in his hand.<sup>95</sup> Another relief of Ramesses the Great, however, this one depicting the storming of a city in Syria, depicts *shardana* brandishing long swords.<sup>96</sup> In the following century, some of Ramesses III’s barbarian skirmishers (see plates 6 and 10) are likewise armed with the long sword, some of them almost a meter in length. The Egyptian reliefs suggest that these long swords of the skirmishers were rapiers rather than slashing swords. The artists portray an occasional skirmisher turning his sword through an opponent, but no skirmisher slashing off an opponent’s head or arm. Although it is possible that the reliefs are misleading and that the long swords of the skirmishers were indeed used for cutting as well as for thrusting, it is safer to suppose that the *shardana* normally used their weapons—whether dirks or long swords—with a thrust. There is no independent evidence on Sardinian long swords of the second millennium, although a series of statue-menhirs from Corsica indicates that the long swords then in use on the latter island were cut-and-thrust swords rather than rapiers.<sup>97</sup>

A preserved long sword with a continuous taper was found at Bêt Dagin, near Gaza, in 1910, and is now in the British Museum. Although originally thought to be a great spearhead, it was identified as “a broadsword,” and more particularly as “a Philistine sword of ‘Shardana’ type” by H. R. Hall.<sup>98</sup> Subsequently it has come to be called simply “the Shardana sword,” and on the basis of this association has conventionally been dated to ca. 1200 or the early twelfth century. That dating, however, is apparently incorrect. A spokesman for the British Museum notifies me that “recent analytical work undertaken on this piece has demonstrated that it is in fact to be dated to the third millennium BC.”<sup>99</sup> We therefore have no *in corpore* specimen of the kind of sword that Egyptian artists portray in the hands of Sardinian skirmishers in the thirteenth century.

There is one representation of a native Egyptian wielding a long sword in the Late Bronze Age, and it dates to the eve of the Catastrophe. A relief at Karnak, depicting the siege of Ashkelon, shows an Egyptian soldier (in

<sup>90</sup> John Boardman, *The Date of the Knossos Tablets* (Oxford, 1963): 78–80.

<sup>91</sup> Sandars, “Later Aegean Bronze Swords,” 117; Sandars argues persuasively (127–29) that even in the later fifteenth century, by which time the hilt problems had been overcome, the elaborate thrusting swords from the Warrior Graves at Knossos were essentially status symbols.

<sup>92</sup> Under her Type 48, Maxwell-Hyslop (“Daggers and Swords” 54–55) included only two entries dating from before 1200, both from Asia Minor.

<sup>93</sup> I thank Richard Beal for calling to my attention the preliminary publication by Ahmet Ünal et al., “The Hittite Sword from Boğazköy-Hattusa,” *Müze (Museum)* 4 (1990–91): 50–52. The commentary on the sword misleads only in stating (p. 52) that “as a cut-and-thrust weapon the sword is evidently important as the basic weapon of the Hittite army.” The Boghazköy sword has too narrow a blade to have served as a cut-and-thrust weapon; and there is no evidence for its use in the Hittite army.

<sup>94</sup> Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, vol. 2, 252–53; Sandars, *Sea Peoples*, 127, fig. 80.

<sup>95</sup> Sandars, *ibid.*, fig. 66.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 12.

<sup>97</sup> Trump, *Prehistory of the Mediterranean*, 201, 219, and fig. 45.

<sup>98</sup> Hall, *Aegean Archaeology* (London, 1915): 247n.1. Maxwell-Hyslop, “Daggers and Swords,” 59, lists the Gaza sword as the first example of her Type 52. For a good illustration of the sword see Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, vol. 2, 344. On analogy with the Egyptian reliefs, Maxwell-Hyslop dated the Gaza sword to 1200–1150.

<sup>99</sup> Personal correspondence (10 July 92) from Mr. Jonathan N. Tibb, in the British Museum’s Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities.