

MYCENAEAN FIBULAE

Date of their entrance into the Mycenaean World

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The Origin of the Fibulae:¹ The exact spot where fibulae of the Mycenaean type were invented is still a moot question. Archaeological evidence points decidedly to a northern origin. Similarity of shapes and the fact that the development of one shape to another can be traced without a break indicates a common beginning. The region north of the Alps but not very far north was probably the original home of the primitive brooch. Bow shaped fibulae were found in the lower Danube country as well as the valley of the Po and south Italy. A connection between the northern and southern groups (including the comparatively scanty finds in Mycenaean settlements on the Greek mainland) is not to be ignored. The fibulae north of the Alps were much farther advanced than at a corresponding age in the south. Hence, the credit of invention may be given to a northern race.

The Development² is easily seen. The immediate ancestor of "the safety pin" was a translation into metal of the thorn or skewer of wood or bone with which the native of central Europe fastened his cloak. (Montelius, La Civilization primitive en l'Italie, 1895, 1,2). Either by accident or by a stroke of genius, at length somebody bent the pin until the single spiral top and point met, thus catching the clothing more securely. Very soon the idea of a central twist

1. Vorgeschichte - Fibulae A and B

2. Ridgeway, Early Age of Greece, 553

(forming a spring), no doubt suggested itself. At first, bow and pin were parallel like a violin bow. The bow was of plain or twisted wire. The catch at first was a single turn of the wire. A little later this developed into the flat, spiral disk. In Greece, this type was very rare; one at Mycenae in which the coils are distinct. In Italy, this became a solid disk. This type, however nowhere survived the Bronze Age. The flattened clasp developed perhaps a little later than the disk and was used far down into Roman times. The bow became in the more advanced style a flattened surface, narrow at both ends widening at the middle. The plane was often decorated with incised lines. Mycenae yields one example of this and Delphi another and Therapne a third.

The violin bow type did not prove adequate, so the bow was arched until the actual bow shape was obtained. This type proved popular as it caught more cloth. Hence, it superceded entirely the violin bow and the elaborate and decorated fibulae of the Iron Age are variations of this. In Italy, the type had progressed far before the end of the Bronze Age. In Greece, only the simple early ones are found at the transitional period.

A brief survey of the distribution of the fibulae belonging to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age in Greece should be noted, taking into account similar finds in other countries.

Derivatives¹ of the simple kind were unearthed in Hungary and Bosnia. The violin bow fibulae were found scattered over all Italy

1. Ridgeway, Earliest Age in Greece, pp. 555, 557, 560; Dictionnaire des Antiquities grecques et romaines, 1104

with particular reference to the terramare of Bologna and the palafittes of Peschiera and Corcelettes. The semicircular arch brooch which is nearly always decorated with parallel cordings is located also in Italy. It is likewise found in the Balkans, on the coast of Asia Minor mostly in ancient cemeteries of the Caucasus, especially Koban. The ancient Italian types are rare west of Bavaria but common in Austria (Hallstatt) and Carniola (Watsch). At Hissarlik, straight bronze pins with decorative heads evidently hair ornaments were found but no fibulae. The Far East seems to have had no connection with them. A few examples of late date were found in Egypt evidently of western origin.

In the Greek mainland, barring for the present the fibulae found at Mycenae and the Aegean world, the situation is as follows:

(a) At Delphi¹ in 1887 some Mycenaean fibulae were discovered and dated as belonging to the end of the period. The most elaborate of the fibulae had a body broadened at the centre and tapering at both ends like the unique example of this type found at Mycenae, which will be described later.

(b) At taphos A, Kolonaki² was found a small fibula resembling the one found at Delphi mentioned above. It is about an inch and a half long and has a wider back in proportion than the Delphi one. There are no decorations.

(c) At Tiryns³ one rather unimportant example was found. This

1. Fouilles de Delphes, V, 7; Tsountas and Manatt, Mycenaean Age, 167
 2. Deltion, 1921
 3. Stais, Collection Myceniennne, II, 194-5 (pin not mentioned)

is too fragmentary for study. Its type is the early violin bow. The other finds of Tiryns are Late Mycenaean and Transitional.

At Pronoia¹ a suburb of Nauplia, rock hewn tombs of the Mycenaean type were excavated. In general, their contents were Mycenaean pottery mixed with bones, many terracotta objects, gold rosettes, two circles of gold leaf; of bronze, a brooch and a mirror; engraved gems with Mycenaean animal devices. The gems, brooch, and mirror date these as later than the shaft graves of Mycenae and put them at the same period as the beehive and chamber tombs.

(e) In the prehistoric site of Korakou² near Corinth a small fibula of twisted wire was obtained from the rear chamber of House M which is dated as Late Helladic III in the same publication.

(f) In Attica no fibulae were found belonging to the Bronze Age. Brooches belonging to the Iron or Geometric or Dipylon Age were plentiful.

(g) In the early Iron Age at Theotoku³ in Tomb A, were found four bronze fibulae. They show a slight advance over the first bow fibulae. These examples in which the bow is already present, but the pin plate clearly in the first stages. Taking them in connection with the geometric pottery, Mr. Wace suggests that the Dorians may have already been in Greek territory or at least only just outside.

(h) Salamis⁴ furnishes five examples of the bow fibulae in tombs dated transitional because both inhumation and cremation were

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1. Tsountas and Manatt, Mycenaean Age
 2. Blegen, Korakou, p. 109, fig. 133, no. 6
 3. Wace and Thompson, Prehistoric Thessaly
 4. Ridgeway, Earliest Age in Greece, 561

practised. These will be discussed in chronological relation with the Mycenaean ones. At Enkomi near Salamis the bow type (two examples) were found with iron; another had the bow rising toward the foot.

(i) In the excavations at Caria¹ fibulae were found in all cases with iron. In tomb C was one example. Tomb M yielded a similar one. In tomb N was one with a larger spring than the others. The fibulae were all bow-shaped, comparatively early with knob decoration. They were found with iron weapons. The bodies were burned.

(j) The 1900 excavations at Karvousi² Crete yielded pottery of Mycenaean shape with geometric decoration in which curved lines were preferred to straight ones. Hence, the nearest in time to the Mycenaean Age. There were also Bügelkanne, three bird forms, two gourds, primitive amphora without base, teapot like one from Mycenae, low jars like Tiryns and Premycenaean Corinth, two-handled cup like those of Mycenae and Rhodes, bronze fibulae like the Salamis one, though the bow is more bent in a second variety of the twisted bow type and a third has the bow flattened, a slight advance over the symmetrical, simple twisted wire type of Salamis.

(k) The tomb of Milatos³ contained specimens of the later ceramic style. The decoration of the stirrup vases was identical with those of the vessels discovered at Muliana in Eastern Crete. With these were the fibulae arch bow shape with two knobs one above the spring and the other above the stilt of the catch plate, representing a later development of the fiddle bow.

Note: Two gold fibulae of the same type accompanied by a very

1. J.H.S., 1887, 70-74

2. Excavations at Kavousi, Crete, A.J.A., 1901, 135

3. Evans, Prehistoric Tombs of Knossos, 131

late stirrup vase were located in the tomb at Old Paphos (J. Anth. Inst., XX, 104). There were similar ones in the chamber tombs of the Late Bronze Age or transitional period when iron was coming into use in Sicily and Italy (Coloni, Bull. di Pal., 1905, pp. 45, 46-58, fig. 155).

Note: A fibula resembling this with knobs was found by Miss Boyd in a tomb at Kavousi belonging to the Latest Bronze Age of Crete (A.J.A., 1901). In a tomb at Assarlik, again in Caria, the type occurred with sub-Mycenaean pottery and iron weapons, J.H.S., p. 74, fig. 17.

(1) At Cyprus¹ there were a few examples in Mycenaean tombs, but the Bronze Age (Mycenaean) continued here later than on the mainland.

(m) In Crete Miss Boyd excavated at Vronda² (1900) with late Mycenaean pottery, fibulae of the plain semicircular type of Salamis, the Balkans, Hungary, and Italy. Two others of the same shape have the bows considerably thickened and are thus later than the types represented at Salamis and Mycenae.

(n) The Mycenaean site leads in numbers and types represented. The shaft grave circle had none. Several were found on the acropolis but outside the grave circle in the ruins of a house dated in the transitional period and among chance finds. The chamber tombs of the lower city contained some. A dozen almost perfect safety pins

1. Ridgeway, Earliest Age in Greece, 562

2. ibid., 563

were found at Mycenae from the earliest Peschiera type to the bow type of Salamis besides some fragments.

In connection with the presence of the fibulae in the Aegean and Mycenaean world comes the interesting question as to the dating of their entrance. It will be well to notice here some opinions on the subject.

Sir Arthur Evans¹: "This type (arched bow) in Crete and elsewhere marks the very close of the Minoan and Mycenaean Bronze Age and survives into the earliest Iron Age. There can be little doubt that the safety pin reached Crete from a mainland source. The non-occurrence of the fiddle bow and allied forms in the Knossian cemetery when contrasted with their occasional occurrence in the contemporary graves of the Lower Town of Mycenae is a negative phenomenon of some importance."

Ridgeway²: "In the Aegean area the brooch does not appear till the Iron Age, but when we pass to northern Italy, we find that not only the primitive safety-pin, but several very marked modifications of it were in full use before the end of the Bronze Age."

Montelius³ argues that they were rare in Greece and imported and belonged to the late but not the latest part of the Mycenaean Age. They were found in graves containing Bügelkanne and other pottery belonging to the late but not the end of the Mycenaean Age. That the fibulae found in Greece were not contemporaneous with the

1. Prehistoric Tombs of Knossos, 132
2. Ridgeway: Earliest Age in Greece, 552
3. Vorklassische Chronologie

end of the Mycenaean Age follows from the fact that in the citadel of Mycenae a fibula of much later form was excavated (bow). The Peschiera type were frequently found with Mycenaean things and but a couple of times with the transitional. Therefore, the earliest can't be contemporaneous with the end of the period. The Muliana fibula (bow type) was found with a sword dated before the end of the Mycenaean Age. The great contrast between the early ones and those of the Geometric period would throw the former much earlier. The Peschiera type (simple violin bow) were in use about 1400 B.C. as finds in Greek areas and Egypt show.

Hall¹: "Hardly any trace of iron has been found among the remains of this (Mycenaean) date, and it seems that the Mycenaeans lived in what might be called the Middle Bronze Age; none of the elaborate pins, fibulae, and weapons which are so characteristic of the later Bronze Age in the north have been discovered in their graves and houses; the only Mycenaean fibulae known are of very simple form and were found with the remains of the later Mycenaean period. Iron apparently came to the Mycenaeans at an earlier period than it did to the northerners, and cut short the career of the Bronze Age in Greece before it has had time to reach the stage of elaboration which is revealed to us in Bavaria and Scandinavia."

Harland²: In "Peloponnesus in the Bronze Age," states that the fibulae came to Greece in 1400 B.C. with the Achaian Invasion.

The fibulae come near enough the end of one age to be forerunners of the next. They indicate a break in civilization. The ques-

1. Hall, Oldest Civilization in Greece, pp. 29-30
 2. Harvard Studies, XXXIV

tion is whether they came at the beginning or end of Late Helladic III or more specifically fourteen hundred or eleven hundred B.C. Using the traditional terminology, are they an archaic or Dorian importation?

Between 1600-1100 B.C. there is nothing to indicate a sharp break such as we have between 1100-1000 when the Mycenaeans and their splendor became only a memory of departed glory - a theme for bards. Nor can they be taken too seriously. Homer while he chants of Mycenae rich in gold and describes palaces such as have been excavated at Mycenae and Tiryns, describes dress, weapons, and burial customs which belong to his own age, that is, the Iron Age. Buck¹ through linguistic evidence gives the dates for Late Helladic III 1600-1100 B.C. not 1400-1100 B.C. as Harlan does. Nor has such a break at 1400 B.C. been proved on archaeological grounds. Indications point otherwise, on the contrary. There may have been an Achaian Invasion about 1400 B.C. but there is as yet no evidence that it revolutionized the native culture of the Peloponnesus. The conquerors seem rather to have settled with the conquered and adopted their customs with a few modifications. The pictures on the vases (e.g. the Warrior Vase found at Mycenae and dated in Late Helladic III) show the same type of sewn, unpinned dress for men and women. The shaft graves of Middle Helladic II (1800-1600 B.C.) give way to the beehive and chamber tombs, but the mode of burial, inhumation, is unchanged. Also, the beehive tomb was known in the Middle Helladic II. The pottery is decadent, lifeless in shape, tasteless in decoration, but this is due to the deterioration which follows the zenith of an art. This may be seen by

1. Classical Philology, Jan. 1926, Language Situation in and About Greece in the Second Millenium B.C.

comparison with the Geometric art which marks the beginning not an end.

Taking up the case of the fibulae in particular, Montelius would make their appearance in Italy about 1500 B.C. He allows one hundred and fifty years to each type and would date deposits by the fibulae found in them. That they came first to Italy can be seen for the many elaborate ones found throughout Italy in comparison with the scant primitive finds of Greece. Deposits in Italy show a gradual change from Bronze to Iron while in Greece the transition was much more rapid.

The Mycenaean fibulae barring a few fragments may be arranged in a chronological sequence.

22 (under case 55) no. 2483, 2484. Two examples of the straight pin, the ancestors of the safety pin. ca. 0.12m. and 0.16m. Found in graves at Mycenae, 1887-88.

22 (under case 55) 2389. Peschiera type, violin bow, ca. 0.08m. Found at Mycenae in Tomb 8, with stones, ring, three gold leaves, four glass jewels, beads, paste objects. Published in Eph. Arch. 1888; illustrated pl. 10. 2(8), 3 (8)4; clasp formed by a single twist of wire.

22 (under case 55) 2808, ca. 0.2m. or eight inches. Found in a grave in the lower city, Mycenae, 1887-88.

22 (under case 55) 2388 ca. 0.09m. Found Mycenae, graves, 1887-88. Published in Eph. Arch. 1888; pl. 9.1. Found in a chamber tomb with bracelet, paste ornament, bronze earring, spiral, glass jewels, skeletons of men and animals, gold leaves, stone arrow point, bronze disk, gem (Pl. 10.261 (29)), bronze box, half sphere, bronze needles, flowers, octopus, ivory relief (Plate 8.4 (29)).

The fibula was found at the dromos door at the height of the lintel with the black earth from the pyre. Its date is therefore not the date of the tomb, necessarily. Simple v.b. type.

22 (under case 55) simple violin bow type found in a grave in the Lower City of Mycenae.

22 (under case 55) 2809. The above fibulae have the single twist of the wire for a catch. This one has the wire twisted into a flat spiral disk, an unique example in Greece but common in Italy and the north where this type of catch developed into a flat plate disk. This type of catch did not survive the Bronze Age. This example is v.b. ca 0.2m. or eight inches long.

Case 55, 2545. Fragments of what appear to be the Peschiera type of v.b. Found outside the Grave Circle on the acropolis at Mycenae in 1890.

Case 22 (under case 55) Peschiera type. Flattened clasp an advance over the more primitive twist. Wire of back twisted. Found in a grave in the lower city in 1887-88. ca 0.07m. in length. 2456.

Case 66, 3259. Violin bow type; ca 0.07m. in length. Found at Mycenae on the acropolis outside the Grave Circle, 1895.

Case 54, 2563, Mycenae, 1889, v.b., twisted wire (broken).

Case 55, 2564. Clasp gone, back broken; ca 0.14m. in length. Back more advanced than the above-mentioned; wide in center, narrow at ends with incised decorations. Found in the ruins of a house dated by Tsountas as the transitional period. Example like those of the terramare. Corresponds to the pure (not later)

Bronze Age in Italy. With it was found a broken fibula with a button decoration at one end (mentioned later). A similar fibula was found at Delphi with Mycenaean objects. Another one like it was excavated at Therapne near the Menelaion of the same date as the Warrior Vase of Mycenae (Late Mycenaean), Eph. Arch., 1891.

Case 57, 2622. Catch missing. Back broken in middle. At one end a small knob for decoration. Answers description of the one found with 2564. With it an advanced example of the v.b. type.

Case 66, 1350. Pointed back as if a step in the transition to the bow-shaped \approx 0.11m. flat clasp. Found, Mycenae Acropolis, 1895.

Case 66, 1349. Bow shaped like those of Salamis (transitional); \approx 0.07m. long. Found on the acropolis, outside Grave Circle at Mycenae in 1895.

Case 73, 3580. Length \approx 0.05m. Found with four similar bronze fibulae; 3583, length \approx 0.05m. Unnumbered, \approx 0.045m. in length; unnumbered, \approx 0.045m. in length; unnumbered, \approx 0.05m. in length; all bow shaped.

These were found in graves excavated at Salamis in 1893. The pottery with them was transitional and imitation Mycenaean. Both cremation and inhumation were practised as both cinders and bones were found. This is another mark of the transition from bronze to iron. Other finds with the pins were some bronze rings,

1. La Grèce Préclassique, Montelius, 172

a semicircular globe, small spiral rings made of gold thread, a lead ring, a bone pin.

These fibulae without doubt belonging to the transitional period (ca 1100-900 B.C.) may be taken as a means of dating the fibulae of the Mycenaean Age.

The Achaians did not bring the fibulae:

1. Tradition places the Achaian expansion in 1400 B.C. Montelius dates the invention of the fibula 1500 B.C. Tradition also puts the home of the Achaeans in Thessaly. This leaves a wide geographic gap, a very short period for contact without any proof of contact with the inventors of the fibula north of the Alps.

2. No change in dress was made until the end of Late Helladic III. Pottery shows the Mycenaean, the Minoan, Cycladian with their sewn chitons and flounced skirts which had no need for safety pins. The presence of these in tombs would indicate some use in life. Thus, we may conclude a partial adoption of the fibulae which would indicate in this case, the end of one age or the transition to another.

3. If the fibula had been brought in as early as 1400 B.C., development would have been contemporaneous with Italy. Instead, we find pins which in Greece are clearly of the Iron Age corresponding to those in Italy which are of the Bronze Age.

4. Pottery shows a very close connection between L.M., L.C., and L.H. In these regions the fibulae were found only with iron. Considering the close trade relations of the three, had the fibulae appeared on the mainland at all near the beginning of the period,

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they would have been more plentiful throughout the whole Aegean world.

5. The fibulae were rare at other prehistoric sites on the mainland.

6. Their scarcity in number for the Bronze Age in comparison with the proportion of gold, paste, pottery, and bronze implement finds would indicate an introduction late in the Bronze Age.

7. Their scarcity in the Bronze Age and their abundance in the Iron would suggest a closer connection with the latter.

8. In Thessaly, the traditional home of the Achaians, the fibulae were found only with iron. Had they been known and used by the Achaians, it is reasonable to expect they might have left some there.

9. In Salamis fibulae date the bow type in Greece as transitional, that is, ca. 1100-900 B.C. If we accept Montelius's calculation and allow one hundred and fifty years to each type, the violin bow types would come well toward the end of Late Helladic III.

The Dorians brought the fibulae to the south:

1. A large number of elaborate and advanced fibulae were found with iron weapons and geometric pottery.

2. They suited the dress described by Homer, which belonged to the Iron Age.

3. The fibulae in great numbers, changes in dress and burial (cremation instead of inhumation, revolution in shape and decoration of pottery are associated in the transition from the Mycenaean Bronze Age to the Iron Geometric. The Achaians came in smaller bands and so absorbed the native culture to some extent. The Dorians came in too

large hordes for this, hence they overwhelmed it.

4. With the fibulae - their extensive use - is the marking of the end of the old and the beginning of the new. A cruder civilization had taken the place of the old which was different in racial predominance, dress, mode of burial, with scarcely the rudiments of art. They were to develop practically independently of the past, an entirely different culture.

5. In conclusion, we may assume that the Dorian Invasion was not an organized, systematic army, but came in marauding bands. It is conceivable that an isolated band of Dorians brought the fibulae to the Peloponnesus where they were adopted to a certain limited extent. Different bands may at different times have brought the two distinct types of fibulae. More likely, the use of the two overlapped as the bow type in its earliest stages only is found at Salamis. Even the simple knob decorations did not come in until iron weapons. On the heels of these forerunners came their kinsmen in greater hordes who soon submerged entirely the old order.

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