A Decorative Motive
in Early Helladic Painted Pottery

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The feather edge is a minor but striking element in the dark-on-light decoration of certain types of late Early Helladic pots. It consists of a se series of short slanting (rarely straight) lines which trim the outside edge of a design. There is one example in the light-on-dark technique, a fragment of a base from Corinth , but I found no other such specimens either in the publications or in the museum at Chaeronea; consequently the distribution of the pattern matches closely the occurrence of the dark-onlight technique. The greatest number of examples comes from Tiryns (16) and Lerna (15), with a few from the lews well known Early Helladic material of Mycanae . There are four from Zygouries , three from Gonia , four from Korakou, and in areas outside the Argolid and the Corinthia, two from Asea in Arcadia, one from Eutresis, one from Aegina not examined the Aegina material, and it has not all been published), and one which made its way to Kritsana in the Chalcidice. Within the limits of occasionally incomplete publication or excavation, we can say therefore that the pattern centers, and probably originated, in the Argive plain.

<sup>1.</sup> Leslie Walker-Kosmopoullos, The Prehistoric Inhabitation of Corinth, Munich, 1948, p.69.

<sup>2.</sup> Kurt Müller, Tiryns IV, Munich, 1938, fig.66, 35; Pls.XXVI 1, 12, XXVII 7, 12, XXVIII 5, 7, 10-13, XXIX 12, XXX 2, XXXI 1, 4, 5.

<sup>3.</sup> Lerna Pottery%crapbook: no.45, 4.15; no.39, 3.6; II 13&14 h; lot 43, 6.19 a; 35, 6.30 a, b, c, h; 322, 21.16; 326, 23.41 a&b; 331, 30.38 c&e; 370, 39.33; A 286, 40.38.

In Tiryns IV, Pl. XXXIII 1, 3, 8.

C.W.Blegen, Zygouries, Cambridge, 1928, Pls. XI 4, XIII 1, fig. 88, 8&11.

<sup>6.</sup> C.W.Blegen, Gonia, Met.Mus.Studies III (1930/1931), fig.22, a, f, i.

<sup>7.</sup> C.W. Blegen, Korakou, Boston, 1921, Pl.I 3, figs. 9.3, 10.1%2. 8. E.J. Holmberg, The Swedigh Excavations of Asea, Lund, 1944, fig.77 h (two pieces which do notjBin).

<sup>9.</sup> H.Goldman, Excavations at Eutresis in Boeotia, Cambridge, 1931, fig. 155.4.

<sup>10.</sup> Gabriel Welter, Aigina, Berlin, 1938, fig.10.

<sup>11.</sup> W.A. Heurtley, Prehistoric Macedonia, Cambridge, 1939, fig. 43.

The designs to which the feather edge is added are confined to a few types which in turn are the property each of a particular type of pot. The commonest are the triangles which decorate the upper half of a jug or jar, and the three bands which occur on tankards, but there are also vertical patterns used on handles and other appropriate places, and a meander-like variation of the tankard scheme of decoration For the first mentioned type of design, the shape preserved in whole vases or fragments is a round-bodied vessel with a flat bottom, a fairly wide neck, a flaring rim, and one vertical handle. (Only the example from Aegina has a slightly more elegant shape, and two pierced horizontal handles). The lower part of the vase is comered with an Urfirnis, and the upper part, between the greatest diameter and the horizontal stripes which decorate the neck, is ornamented with a series of triangles constructed each of two groups of parallel lines converging towards the apex, and there sometimes cut off before reaching an actual point (e.g. the Tiryns jug). On the jar from Aegina, the design begins somewhat above the greatest diameter. The lines may converge in a variety of ways, according to the painter's taste; usually they cross to form a diamond or a series of diamonds (Type A 1, 4, 5, 6, 7), but sometimes they simply meet (A 2). Examples from Tiryns, Mycenae, and Zygodies show occasional hatching between the parallel lines (A 8), reminiscent of the tankard type of decoration.

<sup>12.</sup> Jug, Tiryns, p.73, Pl.XXXI 4.

Jug, Lerna, no.45, 4.15.

Neck of a jug or jar, Lerna, lot 35, 6.30 c.

Neck of a small pot, Gonia, p.72, fig.22 f.

Tiryns, Pl.XXVI 1, may be a piece of a small cup.

13. Aigina, fig.10.

14. Tiryns, Pl.XXVI 1, Pl.XXVI 1 9-10.

Mycenae, in Tiryns, Pl. XXXIII 8 (27 g).

Zygouries, fig.88.8.

Aegina jar shows a secondary cross-hatched triangle (A 3) within the major one. On all these examples, the feather edge occurs, slanting upward along the two outside edges of the triangle, but it should be noted that there are many examples of this kind of jug decoration with which the feather edge does not occur.

The tankard which shows the second type of decoration is a highnecked vessel with gently sloping sides, a flaring rim, and two vertical ribbon hamdles rising from the point of greatest diameter and rejoining the vase considerably below its neck and below their own highest point. The vessel is decorated in the free style with three horizontal bands, one at the handle base, one between the handle attachments, and one just below the neck of the vase. There are from two to six stripes in each band, usually three or four, and two neighbouing stripes may be joined by slanting parallel strokes (Type B 2, 3); the slant of the feather edge where present matches the slant of these strokes. (The example from Kritsana is a neck fragment of this variety). Variations on this scheme are rare. One fragment from Tiryns covers only brief sections with slanting strokes (B 4, VIII) and shows a scallop trimming above the middle band, and one from Lerna carries the strokes across two spaces instead of one (BVI). The usual location for the feather edge is along the top of the bands which run around the top and the bottom of the vase, but on one tankard from Korakou (B III) it appears to occur on all three bands, and on one from Lerna (B VIII) on both sides of the top band only. In the decoration of this particular sort of tankard, the feather edge appears to have been con-

18. Lerna, 39, 3.6.

Tiryns, pl.XXXI 5. Scallop trimming also on tankard (?) fragments Tiryns, Pl.XXVII 13, Emil Kunze, Orchomenos III, Munich, 1934, Pl.XXX

<sup>16.</sup> Lerna, lot 35, 6.30 h. Fragment Tiryns, fig.66.5, similar. 17. Korakou, Pl.I 3.

sidered an integral part, to relieve the monotony of the horizontal
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bands, for I know at present of only one example on which it does not
occur, and that one is exceptional in other ways. An example from Tiryns
shows the feather edge as a trimming for two horizontal stripes in
another location (B 6), a rim fragment of something described as a
bottle-shaped vessel.

There is less unanimity in the occurrence of the feather edge as trimming for a vertical pattern. The strokes slant upwards, but the vessel shapes and the syntax of the patterns varies greatly; this may be connected with the inventiveness of the painters who had created the design, for the examples are nearly all from the Argive plain. A goblet fragment from Tiryns shows a long slender shape decorated with two horizontal stripes at the top, and groups of five vertical ones about the body, each group trimmed along the outside with the feather edge (Type Cla). A cup (?) handle has the same type of decoration, with the addition of short connecting strokes as on the tankards (C2). Another possible handle shows the feather edge inside the pattern, along two neighboring parallel vertical lines (CF). On a piece of a small jug from Lerna, showing a normal triangle decoration, the space between the triangles is occupied by two parallel vertical lines, trimmed along either side with the feather edge (CQ), and on another fragment from Mycenae the inside of a triangle is filled with a similar vertical element made of three lines (C8). The syntax of the rest of

<sup>19.</sup> Lerna, no.212, 38.7, an oversize tankard, the part below the handles covered with paint, the horizontal bands of simple stripes only, grouped 5-7-5.

<sup>20.</sup> Tiryns, fig.66.35, Pl.XXXI.l.
21. Tiryns, Pl.XXVIII 13. A rim fragment from Lerna (lot A 286, 40.38), belonging to a heavy bowl, shows a similar group of nine vertical lines, here meeting a large scallop decoration along the rim, and trimmed with a rather stubby feather edge.

<sup>22.</sup> Tiryns, Pl.XXVI 1.
23. Tiryns, Pl.XXVIII 7.

<sup>24.</sup> Lerna, lot B 326, 23.41 a.

<sup>25.</sup> Mycenae in Tiryns, Pl.XXXIII 3 (27 i).

the pieces is difficult to make out, but they may perhaps come from vessels designed, like the small jar from Tiryns (P1.XXX 3), with two bands starting at the point of greatest diameter and crossing at the 26 bottom of the pot. Two such possible examples from Tiryns show dia-27 gonal cross strokes between the parallet lines (C3 and 5), another has strokes at right angles forming a kind of ladder (C4), and on one 28 from Mycenae the feather edge forms a trimming for such a design while the whole is framed again by two parallet lines on either side (C 6). Finally, we must include the base fragment from Corinth, painted in a light-on-dark technique with a vertical pattern like that one the Tiryns goblet fragment, simple groups, probably three, of eight parallel lines, each group trimmed on either side with the feather edge (C 1bl).

One simple variation on the vertical use of the feather edge is the "tree" pattern, a common one in incision, and in most cases, especially 29 when it is used on handles, one with very little connection with the standard types of decoration just described. However, on the large 30 tankard fragment from Mycenae, a relation to the true feather edge is visible. The tankard is painted in the reserved style, and the "tree" is placed in a space between two parts of the decoration proper which consists of parallel lines (D 2); the location is almost a normal one.

A use of the feather edge which does not belong in any of the above 31 groups appears on a squat tankard from Tiryns. This pot is covered with Urfirnis up to the bases of the handles, and above there is, first, a horizontal band consisting of four parallel lines, the middle two of which are connected with short slanting parallel lines, and, second,

<sup>26.</sup> Tiryns, Pl.XXVIII 10, XXVII 12.

<sup>27.</sup> Tiryns, Pl.XXVII 7.

<sup>28.</sup> Mycenae in Tiryns p.110, PL.XXXIII 2.

<sup>29. &</sup>lt;u>Tiryns</u>, Pl. XXVI 12; Lerna, lot 35, 6.30 b. Type D 1.

<sup>30.</sup> Mycenae in Tiryns, Pl.XXXIII 1.

<sup>31.</sup> Tiryns, Pl. XXX 2.

an angular meander constructed of four parallel lines, and trimmed with the feather edge along the bottom edge only. Two more horizontal parallel lines complete the design (Type El). A tiny fragment from 32 Lerna may indicate a similar pattern abutting on the lines at the neck of a jar, or it may be another variation on the ordinary jar decoration, with cross line joining the bases of the triangles and carrying the feather edge across.

As these descriptions show, the inventive variety in the syntax, as well as the distribution, make it likely that the Argive plain was the home of this particular motive. It would be very difficult to make valid comparisons with similar motives in other localities, periods, or media. As Frankfort says, #It can never be stressed too much that the utmost care is needed in interpreting the simple ornaments with which in most cases the primitive pot-painter operates, and the similarities of which are very often due to convergent development from entirely different starting-points...More important than the similarities of simple isolated designs is their 'syntax'...but there is even then a danger of building wighty theories on merely accidental likesses."

He illustrates this with three Pueblo pots which have marked resemblances to prehistoric European examples. Our comparisons, then, can only be exploratory, and the resits will be dubious.

Neolithic examples in either the dark-on-light or the light-on-dark technique are few and scattered, their syntax bears no resemblance to the syntax we have described, and their distribution indicates a

<sup>32.</sup> Lerna, lot B 331, 30.38 c. See Type E?.

33. H.Frankfort, Studies in Prehistoric Pottery of the Near East II
London, 1927, p.2.

34. Dark-on-light: Corinth, Saul Weinberg, "Remains from Prehistoric Corinth", Hesperia VI (1937) p.500, 17 b and 18 b; Lianokladhi, A.J.B.
Wace and M.S.Thompson, Prehistoric Thessaly, Cambridge, 1912, fig.117 j;
Zerelia, ibid., fig.97 p, fig.98 e; Orchomenos II, Pl.XX 2, c, d, f.
Light-on-dark: Asea, fig.48; Tsangli, Prehistoric Thessaly, fig.55 h.

Thoroughly haphazard usage and even "invention".

Later examples such as the "geometric" prehistoric vases of Lianokladhi in Thessaly, and the matt-painted vases from H.Mamas in Macedonia,
show a greater similarity in syntax, particularly Lianokladhi fig.126 e,
a jar fragment decorated with fringed vertical bands constructed of
parallel lines and squates of crosshatching. But one example is hardly
enough, and we should remember that a "feather edge" is an easy motive
for a painter to conceive if he is thinking in simple geometric terms.
Most Neolithis painted pottery concerns itself with more elaborate patterns,
and the same can be said for most Mincan and Mycenaean pottery, where
the feather edge is not used. In Late Mycenaean, where the realistic
is disintegrating into its geometric elements, the "feather edge" comes
into its own again, as, for example, the trimming on an octopus from
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Calymnos.

It is conceivable that the Early Helladic painters of the Argolid may have been influenced by the designs used on incised pottery, either local ware of an earlier period, or imported contemporary ware. Certainly "feather edges" can be found all over the Aegean, from Neblithic through Early Bronze, if we allow for a wide variety of syntax.

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Early Helladic I handles which show a "tree" pattern resemble the herring-bone more closely than do their later painted counterparts, so that there is probably very little connection between them. Various other scraps of early pottery show a single "feather edge" used as trimming--pieces from Orchomenos and Sedes in Macedonia, a piece of a three-legged vase from Tsangle Level V, and a tripod leg in the Chaeronea Museum

<sup>35.</sup> Lianokladhi, Prehistoric Thessaly, fig.126 c, e. H.Mamas, Prehistoric Macedonia, figs.94 c, 95 g, h.
36. E.J.Forsdyke, Prehistoric Aegean Pottery, (B.M.C.), London, 1925, Pl.XV (A 1015).
37. Asea, fig.78. The Prehistoric Inhabitation of Corinth, fig.35.
Zygouries, Pl.IV, VI 4.

which is ornamented with waving feathery streamers --- but these may be of no significance except to show the extent of the trimming habit. That it did not die out in later days is shown by the simple branch design on an Early Helladic III tripod (?) fragment from Asine , and by a similar design on the fine water jar from Orchomenos which resembles the pattern on certain Trojan examples. Beyond the mainland of Greece, my impression from the material which I have gathered is that the incised "feather edge" is more common that n on the mainland. There are a number of examples from Troy, chiefly of the first and second cities, and still more from Neolithic Crete, and from the Cyclades. Generally speaking, the Cretan pots use a "feather edge" with strokes at right angles, not slanting, and place these strokes most commonly as decoration for a single horizontal line, susally around the neck. The Cycladic examples favor slanting strokes, while both types appear at Troy, more usually, however, the slanting. From this circumstance, and also from their wide exportation throughout the Aegean area, the Cycladic specimens offer the strongest possibility of connection with the Early Helladic painted pottery--until we look at the syntax, which is

rchomenos II, Pl.V 1 b; Prehistoric Macedonia, fig.23 b; Krehistoric Thessaly, fig.50 a. 39. Otto Frödin and Axel Persson, Asine, Stockholm, 1938, fig.169.6. 40. Orchomenos III, Pl.I. 41. H. Schliemann, Ilios, Paris, 1885, p.442, no.321. C.W. Blegen et al., Troy II, Cincinati, 1951, p.276, 245.10. 42. Ilios, p.273 no.52, p.427 no.279, p.442 no.321, p.482 no.420, p.489 no.452. H. Schmidt, Schliemann's Sammlung Trojanische Altertumer, Berlin, 1902, p.103 no.22451, Troy I, p.371, 407, II, p.276, 245.10.

43. A.E.Evans, The Palace of Minos at Knosses, London, 1921-1935, vol. I, fig. 8311, 8.8, 8.12, fig. 6.11 a. Eleven examples in the Neolithic case in the Heraklion museum. 44. Aphidna, A.M. XXI (1896), Pl.XV 2; Corinth, Hesperia VI (1937), p.515, fig.34 h; Eleusis, AJA 36 (1932), p.113, fig.11.1, 11.5, 11.7; Eutresis, fig. 97.7; Orchomenos III, Pl.XXIX 3; Rafina, Prakt. 1951, p. 87, fig.13; Troy, Ilios, p.290, no.87; Paros Museum (several fragments); Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, Excavations at Phylakope in Melos, Condon, 1904, Pl.V 1, 8, 10; Syros, Eph.Arch. 1999, p.86, fig. 11, p.90, fig.16.

well developed along quite different lines. A favorite motive is that of two or three parallel lines trimmed along both edges with the slanting "feather edge", and the whole sepeated again and again, sometimes in combination with other features, sometimes as the only element in the pattern. A "feather edge" is also a convenient method of indicating oars along the side of a ship. The branch or tree pattern occurs, but so does the herringbone, and it is often difficult to distinguish between them.

Incised examples of a later date than Early Helladic offer no valid parallels since they are confined to the northern and western wares of Macedonia and Olympia. The meander-like decoration on the Olympian vase is striking when compared to the Tiryns vase, but a connection is unlikely.

The results of this investigation show, first, that the pottery which bears the feather edge in the Urfirnis technique was made in a few specific shapes and not many variations, secondly, that it was exported occasionally to parts of Greece beyond the Argive Plain and the Corinthia, and imitated rarely, and thirdly, that the design was probably a spontaneous invention by some Argive painter. There is always the possibility that, when he sat down to complete his pattern and hit upon this design, he had in mind the Cycladic pottery which he knew. But the material will not answer this question, and even the closed group of painted examples is so small as to make all statements liable to upset by new discoveries.

<sup>45.</sup> Prehistoric Macedonia, p.207, p.222, fig.93 h; Vardaroftsa, BSA XXVII (1925-1926), Pl.XIV b 4, 7, 9; Olympia, AM, XXXVI (1911), Pl.V 8, Fig.14.

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#### DRAWINGS

The drawings are meant to be schematic, and restorations where possible, are indicated in pencil.

#### Type A

- ?
- 1. Tiryns, pl.XXXI 4. Gonia, fig.22 a. Zygouries, Pl.XI 4.
- 2. Lerna, 45, 4.15. ? Firyns, Pl.XXIX 12.
- 3. Aigina, fig.10.
- 4. Tiryns, Pl.XXVII 11.
- 5. Asea, fig.77 h.
- 5. Lerna, lot 35, 6.30 c.
- 7. Lerna, lot B 331, 30.38 e.
- 8 a. Mycenae in Tiryns, Pl.XXXIII 8.
  b. Zygouries, fig.88. Tiryns, Pl.XXVI 1, Pl.XXVIII 5.
- 9. Lerna, lot B 370, 39.33, lot B 322, 21.16.

Unidentifiable: Asea, fig.77 h. Gonia, fig.22 f. Korakou, fig.9; Lerna, lot 43, 6.19 a, II 13&14 h. Tiryns, Pl.XXVIII 12.

#### Type B:

- la. Zygouries, Pl.XIII 1. Korakou, fig.10.1. b. Korakou, fig.10.1.
- Za. Korakou, fig.10.2. Lerna, lot B 326, 23.41 b, lot 35, 6.30 h.

  Zygouries, Fig.88. Eutresis, fig.155.4. Gonia, fig.22 i (neck).

  Kritsana, Prehistoric Macedonia, fig.43 (neck).
  - b. Korakou, Pl.I 3.
- 3. Korakou, Pl.I 3.
- 4. Tiryns, Pl.XXXI 5.
- 5. Lerna, no.39, 3.6.
- 6. Tiryns, Pl.XXXI 1(rim).

Type B as grouped:

- I. Zygouries, Pl.XIII 1.
- II. Korakou, fig.10.1.
- III. Korakou, Pl.I.3.
- IV. Korakou, fig.10.2.

- V. Lerna, lot B326, 23.41 b.
- VI. Herna, lot 35, 6.30h.
- VII. Tiryns, Fl.XXXI 5.
- VIII. Lerna, no.39, 3.6.

## Type C:

- l a. Tiryns, Pl.XXVIII 13 (goblet), b. Corinth, p.69 (light-on-dark base).
- 2. Tiryns, Pl.XXVI l (handle).
- 3. Tiryns, Pl.XXVIII 10 (Body fragment).
- 4. Tiryns, Fl.XXVII 7, " "
- 5. Tiryns, Pl.XXVII 12. " "
- 6. Mycenae, Tiryns Pl.XXXIII 2. " "
- 7. Tiryns Pl.XXVIII 7. (handle?).
- 8. Mycenae, Tiryns, Pl.XXXIII 3.
- 9. Lerna, lot B326, 23.41 a.

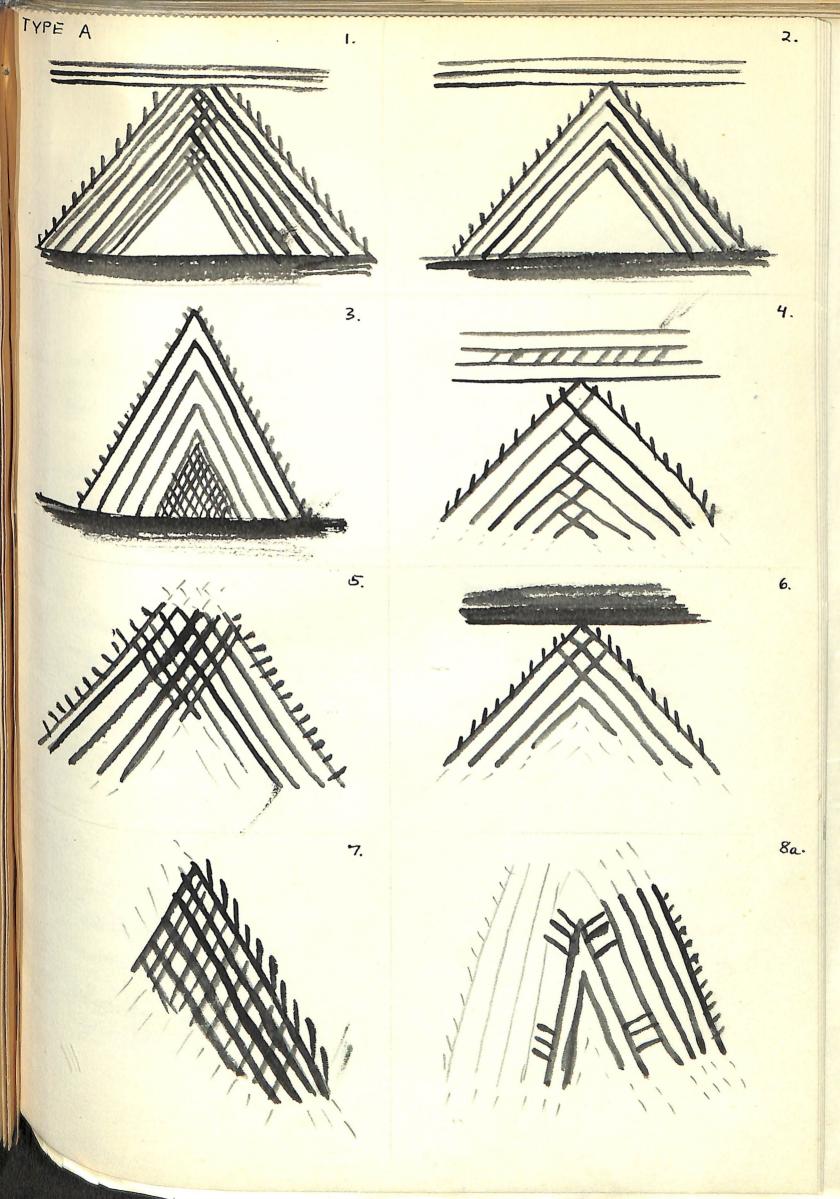
Unidentifiable: Lerna, 100t. 35, 6,30 a.

## Type D:

- la. Lerna, lot 35, **6.**30 b. b. <u>Tiryns</u>, Pl.XXVI 12.
- 2. Mycenae, Tiryns, Pl.XXIII 1.

# Type E:

- 1. Tiryns, Pl.XXX 2.
- ? Lerna, lot B, 331, 30.38 c.



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