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INTERCULTURAL CONTACTS IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

Proceedings of the International Conference at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, 25th to 29th October 2008

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TOKENS OF A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP? MYCENAEANS AND EGYPTIANS

Gert Jan VAN WIJNGAARDEN

Introduction

The study of intercultural communication and the exchange of goods in the Bronze Age Mediterranean has a long and respectable academic history. Research in this field was prompted by the discovery of epigraphic archives at el-Amarna in Egypt and at Bögazköy in Anatolia in 1887 and 1907 respectively (Moran 1992: viii; Brandau and Schickert 2001: 25-35). Both archives contained a multitude of documents referring to diplomatic contacts among rulers and states. The cuneiform documents from the Levant, and notably those from Ugarit that have been uncovered since 1929, have added significantly to our knowledge of these contacts (Liverani 1972; 2000). The formal language used in the documents indicate that long-distance communication and exchanges were carried out within the framework of ceremonial and diplomatic relations among rulers. However, it is also clear that economic motives played a major role, notably the need to acquire specific raw materials or goods (Zaccagnini 1973: 117-121). Large quantities of goods, raw materials as well as finished objects, could be involved in the transactions between rulers and states. However, exchanges that took place outside this formal sphere are difficult to detect in the epigraphic record (Zaccagnini 1976: 501).

The archaeology of long-distance contacts in the Bronze Age Mediterranean has an equally distinguished tradition. Already in 1890 Flinders Petrie identified imported Aegean objects at Kahun and Gurob (Petrie 1890: 273-274), arguing that they were the result of intercultural contacts between Egypt and the 'European civilisation'. Tracing the diachronic and spatial distribution of specific classes of archaeological artefacts with a variety of origins has enabled the identification of wide-ranging exchange networks (cf. Merrillees 1968; Eriksson1993; Leonard 1994; 1995). In these networks, objects and goods circulated which are not (often) mentioned in the epigraphic record, such as glass and faience, metal tools and pottery (Heltzer 1978: 83). The excavations at the Uluburun shipwreck have provided us with a view on the actual transport within

these networks (Pulak 2001; 2008). The fact that the ship's cargo originated in a wide variety of regions in and beyond the Mediterranean has often been emphasised. Of equal importance is the fact that large quantities of raw materials were shipped together with clear prestige objects and with a range of manufactured items not of valuable material, such as pottery. Objects that could be considered to belong to separate spheres of exchange (cf. Knapp and Cherry 1994: 152-155; Artzy 1997: 9) were obviously transported together.

The long tradition of research in the field of long-distance exchanges in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean is an example of a fruitful combination of linguistic, historical and archaeological approaches. If anything, the epigraphic and archaeological records emphasise the complexity of these communications and exchanges. A wide variety of goods and artefacts were transported and circulated in a very wide geographical area (Aruz *et al.* 2008: 161-433). Many different people participated in the international exchange networks: absolute rulers and kings, emissaries, merchants and individual sailors (Zaccagnini 1973; Panagiotopoulos this volume). The motivations to participate in such exchanges appear to have varied from the purely ceremonial to the purely utilitarian.

In spite of the long tradition of research in this field, it appears that we cannot do much more than identify cases of exchanged objects and recognise the complexity of long-distance communications and exchange in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean. The *relevance* and *significance* of the interactions and their impact on the societies involved are not clear at all and are often a matter of debate. Two examples may serve to illustrate this point. Both are related to the main topic of this article: the role of Mycenaeans from mainland Greece in the international networks of the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean.

At Mycenae in Greece, faience plaques have been discovered with the cartouche of Pharaoh Amenhotep III (Lilyquist 1999; Phillips and Cline 2005; Phillips 2007). A total of eleven fragments have been found, the largest of which measures 11.3 × 6.2 cm. All but one are inscribed. These plaques are unique in the Aegean archaeological record and at least some of them were found in a fill layer in the main cult centre of the citadel in Mycenae. Unfortunately, the archaeological context of most fragments is unclear. Various scholars have interpreted these plaques as evidence for diplomatic contacts between the Egyptian court of Amenhotep III and the rulers of Mycenae (Hankey 1981; Cline 1994: 39-42; Kelder 2009). In this view, the exceptional character of these items in an Aegean context and the fact that they are concentrated at Mycenae is emphasised.

Ch. Lilyquist (1999), however, has pointed to the fact that such items in Egypt are not extremely valuable, and that they were reworked or broken and were deposited in Mycenae probably quite some time after their manufacture. She raises the possibility that these objects were produced in the Levant. Instead of diplomatic gifts, she interprets these objects as low-value bric-a-brac related to international trade. It is clear that imported objects themselves do not allow an interpretation of their cultural significance in the receiving society.

The second example concerns Mycenaean pottery in the Mediterranean. Elsewhere, I have argued that these vessels could acquire varying culturally significant roles in different geographical regions (Van Wijngaarden 2002; 2007). In a recent article, S. Manning and L. Hulin (2005: 282-286) have criticised my conclusions by pointing to the low number of items involved. Even though some sites in Cyprus and the Levant have yielded hundreds of Mycenaean ceramic imports, the material usually occurs in very small numbers: 72 percent of all sites have less than ten Mycenaean finds. Even at sites with larger quantities, the Mycenaean pottery never constitutes more than one percent of the total ceramic assemblage. On the basis of these low quantities, Manning and Hulin argue against a significant role for long-distance contacts in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, they do not give sufficient attention to the fact that Mycenaean pottery was distributed in the Mediterranean from the beginning to the end of the Late Bronze Age. This long period of several centuries indicates stable long-distance networks. Moreover, Mycenaean pottery was imitated in various regions and incorporated in different ways in the local ceramic productions of Cyprus, the Levant and Italy (Van Wijngaarden 2008). In my view, quantities are not the most important criterion to assess the significance of imported and exported objects (Arafat and Morgan 1994: 123-124).

Theory

The examples above show that neither archaeological objects that can be interpreted as imports and/or exports themselves, nor their spatial and diachronic distribution suffice to assess the relevance and significance of long-distance contacts in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean. The problem, of course, is caused by the fragmentary nature of the archaeological and epigraphic record. In a famous letter from el-Amarna, EA 35, the king of Alashiya asks for large quantities of silver, oil, timber, livestock and people (Moran 1992: 107-109). None of these requested goods will

have survived in the archaeological record as recognizable imports and exports. In addition to raw materials and finished objects, people also circulated in the ancient Mediterranean: as traders, craftsmen and slaves (Michailidou and Voutsa 2005), but possibly also in larger groups as settlers or colonists. It is clear that the archaeological remains that we have represent only a (very?) small part of one of the results of very complex international and long-term processes of interactions. There is an inherent gap between the archaeological remains and fragments of texts and depictions that have survived the millennia, and the dynamics of intercultural interaction in the past.

Long-distance interactions and communications in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean are documented by different types of evidence: epigraphic sources (see above), artistic depictions of foreigners (cf. Vercoutter 1956), shipwrecks and their cargo (cf. Bass 2005; Pulak 2008) archaeological objects identified as foreign imports (on this term, see Cline 2005; Laffineur 2005), stylistic influences in the material record (cf. Burns this volume) and, ultimately, changes in society that can be related to foreign contacts. In order to bridge the gap between present-day archaeology and the dynamics of intercultural interaction in the Bronze Age, these varying types of evidence need to be qualified: of what type or aspect of interaction in the past are they the result?

Recent research within the field of *Material Culture Studies* has drawn attention to the fact that objects are not mere symbols of social relations, but indeed are very active elements in them (Gell 1998; Latour 2005; Hoogsteyns 2008). Objects have material characteristics which make them active partners in social relations between people and, to an extent, manipulate people into a certain kind of behaviour. A good example is the telephone, which, due to its technological properties, has fundamentally changed the way in which people make contact and communicate in the modern world (Ihde 1993: 116; Verbeek 2000: 57; Hoogsteyns 2008: 38). Artefacts do not only represent social interactions; their material properties are essential for the way in which such interactions originate and develop.

Objects that can be classified as *imports* have been removed, at least once, from a context in which they were produced and have been re-contextualised in a new cultural setting (see Antoniadou 2007: 484-486). Such processes of re-definition and re-contextualisation are not limitless, but depend on the material characteristics of the objects concerned. To qualify archaeological objects that have been identified as imports and exports, a theoretical framework that takes into account this *materiality* appears suitable.

Relationships between Mycenaean Greece and Egypt are documented by a variety of epigraphic, iconographic and archaeological sources (Lambrou-Phillipson 1990; Cline 1994; Kelder 2009: 35-44). In this article, I aim to qualify the Mycenaean imports in Egypt and the Egyptian imports in Mycenaean Greece by emphasising the material aspects of the artefacts involved. In order to make a clear argument, I will concentrate on two periods and then contrast them: the period before the Mycenaean palaces, the Late Helladic (LH) I and LH II (*c.* 1600-1400 BC) and the Mycenaean palatial period LH IIIA and LH IIIB (*c.* 1400-1180 BC). A comparison will also be made with the evidence available for the Mycenaean relations with Cyprus and Syria-Palestine that I have described in detail elsewhere (Van Wijngaarden 2007).

Aegean finds in Egypt before the Mycenaean palatial period

Identifiable Aegean objects from before the Mycenaean palaces have been identified at fourteen sites in Egypt (appendix 1). In all cases, we are dealing with decorated ceramic vessels in Late Minoan (LM) I or LH II style. The various Minoan finds dating to the Middle Bronze Age (Kemp and Merrillees 1980) are not included here, just as the Minoan wall paintings from Tell el-Dab'a are excluded here (Bietak *et al.* 2008). The total number of LM I/LH II finds is not very large: less than twenty individual pots. The majority of these vessels come from tombs, but in Tell el-Dab'a, Memphis and Kerma they were discovered in settlement contexts.

Perhaps remarkable for such a small number of Aegean imports from this period is their relatively wide distribution (Fig. 1): they have been found in single pieces from Tell el-Dab'a in the Delta to Kerma in Nubia. We are dealing in this early period with a relatively wide distribution of small numbers of pottery. Such a distribution pattern suggests that very small numbers of these vessels became part of Egyptian systems of goods distribution. The chronological correlations between the ceramic styles of these vessels and their deposition context has been much debated (Hankey 1987; Bietak 2003: 28-30). But some of these vessels circulated for a very long time. For example, a LH IIA piriform jar was found in a tomb in Dra Abu el-Naga in Western Thebes that dates to the mid-18th dynasty (Merrillees 1968: 195; Kemp and Merrillees 1980: 253). Its deposition in the tomb took place several decennia after its production. For the Levant we also have evidence for very long circulation of Mycenaean pots (Van Wijngaarden 2005).

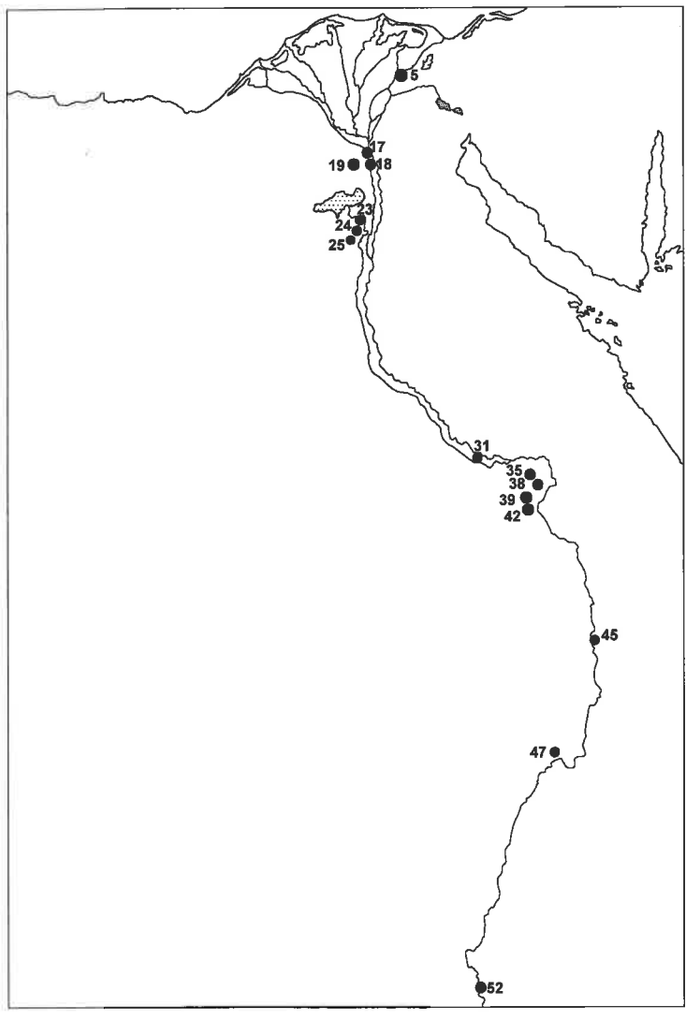

Fig. 1: Sites in Egypt with LH I and LH II finds (cf. appendix 1).

Even though among the Aegean vessels in Egypt of this period a cup and a jug have been reported (Merrilees and Winter 1972: 117), the majority of the vessels involved are small storage jars, probably made to contain unguents and perfumed oils (Leonard 1981; Tournavitou 1992). Considering their long circulation, it is likely that they were *refilled*,

perhaps several times. Even though it is possible that there were large containers with Aegean perfumed olive oil available in Egypt at this time, it is more likely that these pots were filled with whatever oil or unguent was available.

The early Mycenaean and Late Minoan vessels are all decorated with simple patterns of geometric and floral motives. Such a decoration is not very descriptive. But the lustrous glaze and the hard-baked fabric do make the vessels stand out among Egyptian wares. They convey an atmosphere of relative quality, without being geographically specific. Considering that they circulated widely, were refilled and ended up in single pieces in a wide geographical area, the non-specific quality of these objects suggests that they ought to be considered in much the same way as modern perfume bottles: the package itself, rather than the contents make these objects stand out as exotic ceramics.

The distribution pattern of LM I and LH II pottery in Egypt is actually more or less the same as that of similar vessels in Cyprus and the Levant (Van Wijngaarden 2007: 457-462). Here too, there are very small numbers of Minoan and Mycenaean pottery from this period, which are widely distributed. The type of pottery is also the same: we are dealing primarily with small storage vessels, but there are also some cups and jugs. All are decorated with simple abstract and floral patterns. An exception is the LH IIA jar from Amman, which is a special case in many respects (van Wijngaarden 2005).

Egyptian imports in mainland Greece before the Mycenaean palaces

Egyptian objects on the Greek mainland in contexts dating to the period before the Mycenaean palaces are very limited in number (appendix 2). More than twenty objects can be identified, which have been found at eight sites in mainland Greece (Fig. 2). All Egyptian objects on the Greek mainland from this period have been found in tombs. There is definitely a concentration at the site of Mycenae: seven Egyptian objects have been found in the Shaft Graves at Mycenae. Among these objects, there are a number of ostrich egg rhyta (Lambrou-Phillipson 1990: cat.nos. 464-466), which were not necessarily imported from Egypt. In any case, several of these were modified in Minoan Crete (Sakellarakis 1990: 306), which may indicate an important Minoan role in the distribution of Egyptian objects on the Greek mainland in the first part of the Late Bronze Age. In contemporary Crete, more than seventy objects of Egyptian origin have been found dating to this period (Phillips 2008).

Fig. 2: Distribution of Egyptian imports in Greece (cf. appendix 2).

A few of the Egyptian objects from this period in Greece may be considered valuables. In the cist grave that was in the floor of the Vapheio tomb, a very wealthy tomb dating to LH IIA, a silver spoon has been found of probable Egyptian manufacture (Tsountas 1889: Plate VII no. 17; Kilian Dirlmeier 1987). From Shaft Grave V in Mycenae came a wooden box with ivory appliqués, which may be of Egyptian origin as well (Lambrou-Phillipson 1990: cat.no. 433). If it is, it must have been an antique during the time of its deposition, since it dates stylistically to the early dynasties. Apart from these probable valuables, the remaining objects constitute and odd collection: a number of alabaster and stone jars and bottles, which probably contained unguents (Cline 1994: cat. nos. 246, 257, 258, 396, 597), as did an inscribed faience pyxis (Cline 1994: cat. no. 700). Some faience bowls and vases (Cline 1994: cat. nos. 482, 626, 730) and an alabaster jug (Cline 1994: cat. no. 631), which cannot have served as containers. And there are some stone and faience scarabs and amulets (Lambrou-Phillipson 1990: cat. no. 516; Cline 1994: cat. nos. 122, 152). It is hard to qualify these objects in terms of their

materiality. What is remarkable is that they are all of material that was not available or abundant in contemporary Mycenaean Greece itself: ostrich egg, Egyptian-type stone and faience. Perhaps the exotic raw material stands out as the defining material characteristic of the Egyptian objects in Early Mycenaean Greece.

Very few Levantine and Cypriot finds have been made on the Greek mainland dating to this early period (see Van Wijngaarden 2007: 455-457). In addition, there are a few finds from Mesopotamia, mostly faience beads, and a few valuables from Anatolia. As is the case for the Egyptian objects, all these artefacts were found in tombs, in most cases in single examples. In contemporary Crete the collection of objects from the Levant and Cyprus is somewhat wider, including ceramic vessels and stone seals (Lambrou-Phillipson 1990; Cline 1994). In general, the Egyptian objects in the Aegean in this early period do not seem to differ from the other imports. They all convey the same impression of prestige items that circulated among a limited number of Mycenaean centres.

In terms of its material aspects then, the archaeological evidence for perhaps indirect, intercultural interaction between the Mycenaean world and Egypt consists both in the Aegean and in Egypt of non-specific exotica that circulated in very small numbers. This is the same picture as emerged from the material evidence for contacts between Mycenaean Greece and Cyprus and the Levant in the same period. The prime aspect of materiality from the imports and exports in this period appears to be their exotic origin (cf. D'Altroy and Earle 1985). But it is to be questioned whether this exoticness was geographically very specific. In other words, in my opinion in all these cases it mattered that these objects were from far away, rather than that they were from a specific area.

Egyptian imports in mainland Greece in the Mycenaean palatial period

With regard to Egyptian objects in Greece during the Mycenaean palatial period, the picture does not really seem to change fundamentally (appendix 2). The catalogues of Lambrou-Phillipson (1990) and Cline (1994) mention some thirty Egyptian objects from this period on the Greek mainland at twelve archaeological sites (Fig. 3). Again, there is a concentration in the Argolid and in Mycenae in particular. Many of the Egyptian imports on the Greek mainland come from tombs, but they have also been found in settlement contexts, notably in Mycenae, for example in the House of Shields (Cline 1994: 164, cat. nos. 251-253). In the Palace of Pylos, fragments of an early-dynastic stone bowl were found in

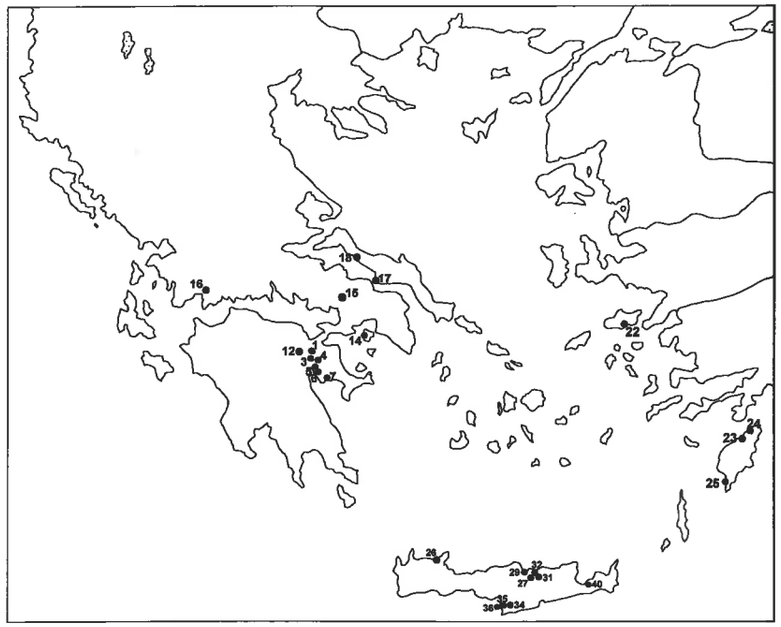

Fig. 3: Distribution of Egyptian objects in the LM/LH III Aegean (cf. appendix 2).

the portico of the megaron (Blegen and Rawson 1966: 65). In the same period, Minoan Crete has more than forty Egyptian imports (Cline 1994: 259-262), but many of these are ceramic finds from the harbour site of Kommos (Watrous 1992: 162-163). If these are excluded, it is clear that LM III Crete did not receive substantially more imports than contemporary mainland Greece.

The collection of Egyptian objects from the Mycenaean Greek mainland contains many of the same type of objects as in the previous period. There are several stone alabastra (cf. Cline 1994: cat. no. 247, 251-255), and a few faience and stone bowls or vases (cf. Lambrou-Phillipson 1990: cat. nos. 463, 552; Cline 1994: cat. no. 483). The actual numbers of such objects are not much larger than in the period before the Mycenaean palaces. What is to be noted, however, is that there is a much higher proportion of objects without a utilitarian function, notably scarabs and figurines from faience, ivory or stone. Many of these objects are inscribed, as are the famous faience plaques discussed above, which also

belong in this class. Indeed, with regard to their materiality, an essential characteristic of these objects appears to be the writing. Some of these objects have inscriptions that do not follow proper conventions or are illegible (i.e. Cline 1994: cat. nos. 118, 143, 144, 152). These are probably imitations made either in the Aegean or elsewhere in the Mediterranean (Lilyquist 1999: 305-306). The fact that the writing itself rather than the content is imitated emphasizes, in my view, their role as exotica, but made geographically specific. They refer to an area with a specific kind of writing: Egypt.

Such an emphasis on non-utilitarian, symbolic objects cannot be seen if we look at the Cypriot and Levantine objects in the Aegean from the same period (Van Wijngaarden 2007: 462-463). The numbers of Cypriot and Levantine objects in Mycenaean palatial contexts from the Greek mainland are not much larger than that of Egyptian objects. There are a few bronze figurines that may be Levantine; for example from Tiryns (Cline 1994: 134, cat. no. 17). A number of Levantine seals have also been found at different places in Greece, notably in Boeotian Thebes (Porada 1981). However, a far larger number of the Cypriot and Levantine finds in Mycenaean palatial Greece are of a more utilitarian nature: faience and ceramic vessels, including Canaanite storage jars. The fact that some of these storage jars have been found in tombs shows that they could have been endowed with significances that went beyond their utilitarian function. The Cypriot wall brackets should probably also be considered in this class of utilitarian objects (Caubet and Yon 1974).

LH IIIA and LH IIIB imports in Egypt

With the exception of the spindle whorl from Gurob (Hassler, this volume) all Mycenaean or Mycenaean-type objects in Egypt from the period of the Mycenaean palaces are pottery finds. In a quantitative sense, the distribution pattern of this type of material in Egypt is completely dominated by el-Amarna (site 28 in Fig. 4), where some 1,500 sherds have been found, probably representing some 600 pots (Hankey 1973; 1981). The capital of Akhenaten is a special case in Egyptian archaeology in many respects and this also appears to be the case with regard to the Mycenaean pottery. It cannot be considered representative.

In addition to el-Amarna, Aegean pottery in LH IIIA and IIIB style has been found at 35 sites from the Delta to Nubia (appendix 1). As in the previous period, there is a relatively wide distribution from the Delta all the way south to Nubia (Fig. 4). The quantities are somewhat larger

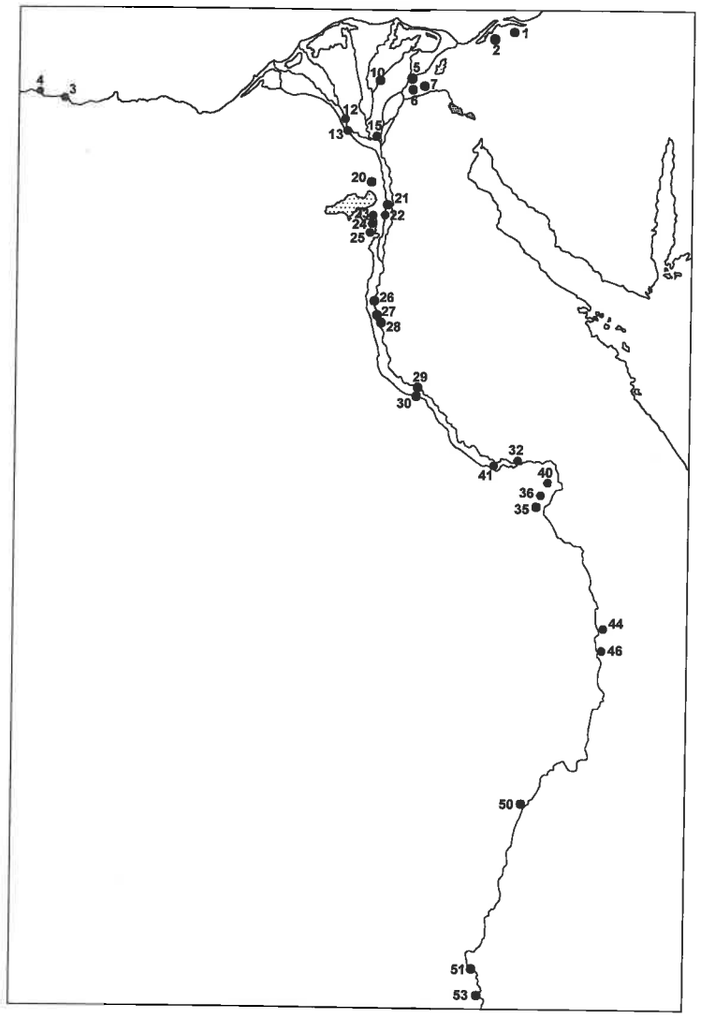

Fig. 4: Distribution of LH IIIA and LH IIIB pottery in Egypt.

than in the previous period. At Deir el-Medina some 120 Mycenaean fragments have been found, dating to LH IIIA2 and LH IIIB (Bell 1982). Similar quantities of Mycenaean pots have been found in Qantir-Piramesse, but the material there seems to be rather later, with an emphasis on the later phases of LH IIIB (Mountjoy and Mommsen 2001). Elsewhere, we are

dealing with individual finds, or with quantities in the twenties or thirties. At Gurob, some 60 Mycenaean finds have been made (Stubbings 1951: 94; Buchholz 1974: 445-447). Even though the numbers appear to have increased since the previous period, they are still not very large in comparison to el-Amarna or to the quantities in contemporary Cyprus and the Levant. The majority of the Mycenaean pots from this period in Egypt come from tombs, but they have also been found in settlement contexts: in the royal stables, for example, at Qantir,[1] but also in residences, such as the workman's village of Deir el-Medina. It is clear that they were used by different social strata among the Egyptian population (cf. Hankey 1993: 111).

The repertoire of pots consists mostly of small closed vessels that served as containers for oil and unguents (cf. Stubbings 1951: 99-101; Hankey 1993: 112). There is a relatively large number of vertical flasks, but stirrup jars abound as well. There are a few open shapes such as cups, bowls and jugs, which must have served as drinking and dining equipment, but these are a minority. All these vessels are decorated, albeit with simple floral and abstract patterns. El-Amarna aside, the Mycenaean pottery from the time of the Mycenaean palaces has the same material characteristics as that of the previous period. It is more abundant, but in general of the same non-specific quality. Its wide distribution in small numbers suggests that it was part of regional systems of distribution.

In contrast to Egypt, the Mycenaean pottery in Cyprus and the Levant increases enormously in quantity with the onset of the Mycenaean palaces during LH IIIA (Hankey 1967; Van Wijngaarden 2007). In addition, the Mycenaean pottery in Cyprus and the Levant encompasses a much wider variety of shapes and styles than that of Egypt. A particular group of Mycenaean pots in the Eastern Mediterranean is much more abundant in the east than in Greece itself, and these seem to have been produced specifically for export (Karageorghis 1965: 204-225; Sherratt 1980: 195-199; Leonard 1994: 6-7). This group of vessels comprises many non-storage vessels such as amphoroid kraters, shallow bowls, conical and zoomorphic rhyta, chalices and others. Even if one fragment at Qantir

[1] P. Mountjoy and H. Mommsen (2001: 124) suggest that the pottery in the stables was the result of the use of oil for the horses. Horse stables require intensive cleaning and regular refreshment of floor materials. It is entirely possible that rubbish was used as floor material in stables. If this was the case, the Mycenaean pottery could have originated from the cleaning of domestic contexts (cf. La Motta and Schiffer 1999: 21). The situation may be comparable to the rubbish tips of el-Amarna, which also produced many Mycenaean finds (Hankey 1973).

may represent an amphoroid krater (Mountjoy and Mommsen 2002: 148), these specialised types are virtually absent in Egypt. In the Levant and Cyprus, the LH IIIA and LH IIIB comprises a large proportion of open dinner and drinking vessels. At several sites these constitute more than 50 percent of the material (Van Wijngaarden 2002: 109-111, 184).

In the period of the Mycenaean palaces, there is a substantial difference regarding the materiality of the Mycenaean finds between Cyprus and the Levant on the one hand and Egypt on the other. The specialised Mycenaean pottery shapes from this period in Cyprus and the Levant, and especially the dinner vessels, possess a highly specific materiality. They are suited to serve cultural practices of drinking, dining and grooming of the urban elites and sub-elites (Sherratt 1999). In comparison, the Late Helladic material in Egypt is much less abundant, and constitutes 'a limited repertoire of shapes and styles and of poor quality' (Hankey 1981). In terms of materiality these pots represent the same non-specific exotic quality as in the previous period.

Mycenaean pottery at el-Amarna

El-Amarna is special because of the quantities of Mycenaean pottery found there (Hankey 1973; 1981). Flinders Petrie found 1,341 fragments of Mycenaean pots, in most cases very small sherds (Fig. 5). In subsequent excavations and surveys, additional Mycenaean finds have been made, bringing the total up to some 1,500. A rough estimate is that these represent some 600 Mycenaean pots, which makes el-Amarna comparable, in a purely quantitative sense, with sites such as Enkomi and Kition in Cyprus and Ugarit and Tell Abu-Hawam in the Levant (Van Wijngaarden 2002: 16-20). But we must bear in mind that these vessels arrived in el-Amarna over a much shorter period — less than twenty years — against several centuries for the Cypriot and Levantine centres. The quantity of Mycenaean pots at el-Amarna, therefore, is remarkable, both in Egyptian and in Mediterranean terms.

The Mycenaean pottery in el-Amarna appears to have been widely used in the city of Akhenaten. The majority of the finds, 1,329 sherds, were made by Petrie on the rubbish dumps that can be related to the royal palace (Hankey 1973). Later excavators have been finding small numbers of Mycenaean pottery in every area of the town, in administrative and military structures, as well as in wealthy and modest domestic contexts (Hankey 1973: 128-129). In the recent excavations at the site by Barry Kemp and his team, small numbers of this type of pottery are being found

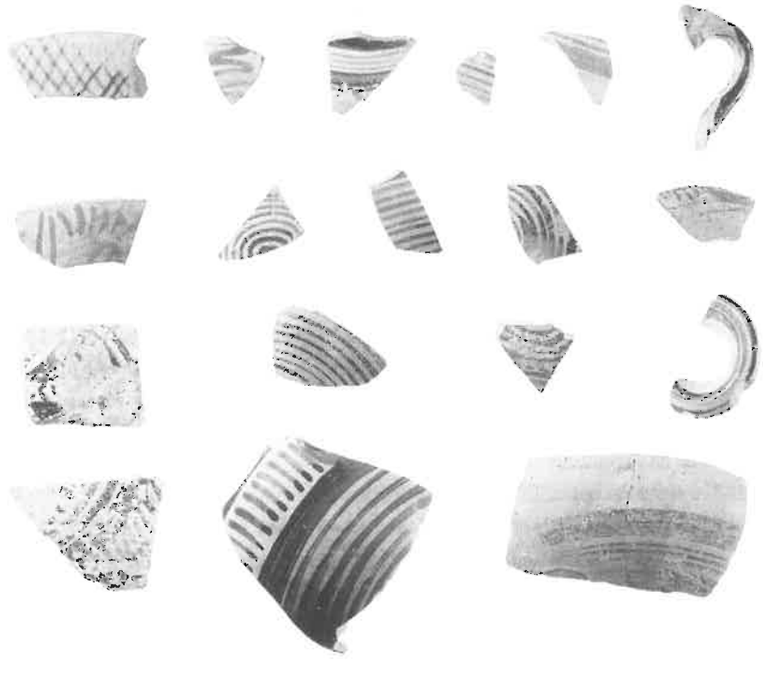

Fig. 5: Mycenaean pottery from Amarna. Courtesy of the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam.

in almost every campaign (personal communication). In total, they have a record of 26 Mycenaean fragments, of which seven come from the residence of a military officer at 'Grid 12'. Obviously, it was used by many different social groups in Akhenaten's capital.

The Mycenaean pottery repertoire in el-Amarna contains some drinking and dinner vessels (Hankey 1973; 1997; Podzuweit 1994: 458-465). However, by far the greatest number of pots are the same small closed flasks and stirrup jars that we have seen before. As elsewhere, these vessels are decorated with very simple geometric patterns. Mycenaean pots with elaborate patterned decoration or pictorial scenes are absent at el-Amarna, as they are in the rest of Egypt. The difference between the Mycenaean pottery in el-Amarna and that in the rest of Egypt is one of quantity rather than quality. The specialised shapes and the general specific quality that the Mycenaean pottery has in the large centres of Cyprus and the Levant are lacking completely at el-Amarna and in Egypt in

general. It is hard to conceive of these pots as the result of deliberate and specific high-level gift exchange such as represented in the Amarna letters (*contra* Kelder 2009: 82, 90). Instead, the population of Akhenaten's capital appears to have had sudden and wide access to this class of unspecific exotica.

Discussion

The conclusion is that the material properties of the primary evidence for intercultural relations between Egypt and Mycenaean Greece in the second part of the Late Bronze Age are different from those of Cyprus and the Levant. Both the Egyptian imports in Mycenaean Greece and the LH IIIA and IIIB pottery in Egypt lack the specific and utilitarian character of contemporary objects from Cypriot and Levantine exchanges with the Mycenaean world. Instead, the non-specific and exotic nature that was characteristic of the Egyptian and Mycenaean imports in the period before the Mycenaean palaces appears to have continued.

The modest Mycenaean pots that have been found in Egypt and the collection of alabastra, faience plaques and inscribed scarabs that have come to light in Mycenaean Greece, are a far cry from the large quantities of silver, oil, timber, livestock and people, which are discussed in the epigraphic record. The majority of the Egyptian and Mycenaean imports discussed here should, in my opinion, not be considered as bulk trade goods, nor as highly prestigious gifts. Instead, they appear to be part of a collection of low-value manufactured objects that circulated widely in small numbers in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean (Van Wijngaarden 2007: 467). Other objects in this class of materials are Cypriot wall brackets, Levantine and Mesopotamian cylinder seals and bone combs. Such objects derive their value not from the scarcity of the material from which they are made, nor from the quality of the manufacturing techniques. Their non-utilitarian material characteristics make them excellently suited to serve as exotica in local domestic consumption practices.

Such exotica could have an effect on local material culture (cf. Burns, this volume). In addition to stylistic influences, there are many examples of clear imitations of foreign materials. Mycenaean pottery, for example, was imitated by local potters in all Mediterranean areas where it was imported, even though the social significance of these imitations varied widely (Van Wijngaarden 2008). In Egypt, there are a number of cases in which Mycenaean-type pottery was produced in faience and stone (Hankey 1995: 117-123, Plates 23-24), as were Cypriot Base-Ring wares

(Karageorghis and Merrillees 2007). Such imitations were not only used locally, but could themselves circulate widely in the Mediterranean. Mycenaean-type pottery made in Cyprus, for example, has been found as far away as Eboli in Italy (Vagnetti 2001, 82). Similarly, Egyptian-type objects were made in the Levant and distributed widely (Ward 1997; Lilyquist 1999: 306). The possibility for skilled craftsmen to reside and work elsewhere has become evident from the Minoan-style wall at Tell el-Dab'a (Bietak *et al.* 2008). Resident foreign craftsmen working in their native or in hybrid traditions would blur even more the geographic specificity of the low-value manufactured objects that have been discussed here.

For many of the Mycenaean and Egyptian imports, it is the perception of foreignness that appears to be the prime aspect determining their appreciation. From the overview given in this paper it has become evident that small numbers of these low-value manufactured exotica began circulating in the Mediterranean as early as the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. In the second part of the period, during which the Mycenaean palaces developed, the distribution of these types of objects in Greece and Egypt increased in quantitative terms, but the objects remained the same as in the period before: exotica. In both areas, various members of elites and sub-elites appear to have been collecting such exotica.

While I emphasize the relatively mundane character of the low-value manufactured objects that constitute the prime evidence for interconnections between Mycenaeans and Egyptians, this does not mean that these objects should be dismissed as unimportant (cf. Cline 2007: 199). The material characteristics of the evidence at hand suggest that the relationships Mycenaean Greece had with Egypt during the Mycenaean palatial period were of a different nature than those with Cyprus and the Levant. In the latter case, there appears to have been a concerted and specialised effort by Mycenaeans to suit Levantine and, especially, Cypriot cultural practices that indicate almost commercial enterprises (Dabney 2007). Relationships between Egypt and Mycenaean Greece, however, appear to have operated on a less economic and more subtle level. Mycenaeans and Egyptians probably regarded each other primarily as distant and highly exotic.

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Appendix 1

Sites in Egypt with Aegean Late Bronze Age objects
(based on: Kemp & Merrillees 1980; Van Wijngaarden 2002).

		Before Myc palaces	Palatial	Post-palatial
Sinai				
1	Bir el Abd		X	
2	C86		X	
Western Desert				
3	Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham		X	
4	Marsah Matruh		X	
Nile Delta				
5	Tell el-Dab'a	X	X	
6	Qantir-Piramesse		X	X
7	Tell el-Rataba		X	
8	Ali Mara			
9	Tell ar-Rubai			
10	Tell el-Muqdam		X	
11	Az-Zaqaziz			
12	Tell Om Harb		X	
13	Kom Abu-Billa		X	
14	Kom Firin			
Lower Egypt				
15	Tell el-Yahudiyeh		X	
16	Heliopolis		X	
17	Abusir el-Meleq	X		
18	Memphis-Kom Rabi'a	X		
19	Saqqara Teti-area	X		
20	Saqqara N.K. Necropolis		X	
21	Riqqeh		X	
22	Meydum		X	
23	Gurob	X	X	X

24	Kahun	X	X	
25	Sedment	X	X	
26	Zawyet el-Amwat		X	
27	Tuneh el-Gebel		X	
28	Tell el-Amarna		X	
29	Assyut		X	
30	Rifeh		X	
Upper Egypt				
31	Abydos	X		
32	Balabisch		X	
33	Deir el-Ballas			
34	Komel Abd			
35	Deir el-Medina	X	X	
36	Naqada		X	
37	Qasr al-Aguz			
38	Gurna	X		
39	Dira Abu n Naga	X		
40	Malkata		X	
41	Karnak		X	
42	Armant	X		
Nubia				
43	Awan			
44	Arabi Hilla		X	
45	Daqqa	X		
46	Qubban		X	
47	Aniba	X		
48	Arminna			
49	Debeira			
50	Buhen		X	
51	Sesebi		X	
52	Kerma	X		
53	Tabo		X	

Appendix 2

Sites in Greece (MBA, LBA) with Egyptian and Egyptian-style objects (based on the catalogues by Pendlebury 1930; Lambrou-Phillipson 1990; Cline 1994).

		Before palaces	Palatial period	Post-palatial
Argolis				
1	Mycenae	X	X	X
2	Argive Heraion	X		
3	Prosymna		X	
4	Dendra	X	X	
5	Tiryns		X	
6	Nafplion		X	
7	Asine	X	X?	
Laconia				
8	Vapheio	X		
Messenia				
9	Pylos-Osamanaga	X		
10	Pylos-Livaditi	X		
11	Pylos-Ano Engliada	X		
Korinthia				
12	Aidhonia		X	
Attica				
13	Perati			X
14	Kanakia Salamina		X	
Boeotia				
15	Thebes		X	
Phocis				
16	Aghios Ilias		X	
Euboia				
17	Chalkis		X	
18	Vromousa		X	

Aegean				
19	Melos			X
20	Thera: Akroteri	X		
21	Kythera: Kastri	X		
Eastern Aegean				
22	Kos: Langada		X	X
23	Rhodes: Kamyros		X	
24	Rhodes: Ialysos		X	X
25	Rhodes: Kattavia		X	
26	Khania		X	
27	Knossos	X	X	X
28	Mavrospilio	X		
29	Katsamba	X	X	
30	Archanes	X		
31	Isopata	X	X	
32	Amnisos		X	
33	Phaistos	X		
34	Ayia Triadha	X	X	
35	Kalyvia		X	
36	Kommos	X	X	
37	Malia	X		
38	Palaiokastro	X		
39	Kato Zakro	X		
40	Papoura		X	
41	Pyrgos	X		