

discussion article

Gert-Jan van Wijngaarden **An archaeological approach
to the concept of value** Mycenaean pottery
at Ugarit (Syria)

Abstract

Value is one of the concepts which are of importance in the way people structure their material surroundings. According to the philosophy of Georg Simmel, value finds its origins in the tension between the desire for objects and access to them. The dimensions of desirability and accessibility may be investigated archaeologically, in order to approach the concept of value. Such a perspective is taken in this article with reference to three different classes of imported Mycenaean pottery, which have been found in the Late Bronze Age levels of the site of Ugarit at the Mediterranean coast of Syria. It is concluded that various vessel types were appreciated differently at the city. The meanings imposed on these imported objects derived from the roles they played in the local cultural context.

Keywords

value; material culture; consumption; Mediterranean Bronze Age; Mycenaean pottery; Ugarit

Introduction

The idea that material culture is not only a passive reflection of social reality, but participates actively in creating it has become a well-established theme in the social sciences and in archaeology (Bourdieu 1977, 91; Wiessner 1989; Hodder 1992, 12–16; Melas 1993, 373). The manipulation of material goods makes it possible for people to define relations with other people, with official institutions, with customs and traditions and with the spiritual world of gods and supernatural powers. People order their material surroundings in ways that suit their world-view, thus creating and manipulating their place in society. This ordering of the world of goods is, to a large extent, carried out by comparing objects to each other on scales of value. It follows that the transference of value upon objects is one of the principals by which the material world is structured. The term value refers to the total of associations that become attached to an object. Not only material properties are of importance, but also the symbolism of an item.

The concept of value has been applied in archaeological research mainly in reference to items of high status. In particular, the emergence and legitimization of élites through manipulation of the possession and exchange of materials such as (precious) metals and objects such as jewellery, metal vessels and arms has been investigated (for example, Kristiansen 1989; Renfrew 1986; Sherratt and Taylor 1989). Important insights into the role of these materials

in the construction of identities by aristocracies through competitions in consumption and display have thus been obtained. The idea that not only élites, but people from *all* social groups construct their identity through the manipulation of material goods, however, has received much less archaeological attention (Bourdieu 1984, 208–225).

In this article an attempt is made to employ the concept of value with respect to a class of archaeological artefacts which is not evidently part of an exclusively aristocratic life-style. At the Late Bronze Age site of Ras Shamra, ancient Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of Syria, as well as at the neighbouring harbour town of Minet el-Beida, large numbers of ceramic vessels have been found which originate in contemporary Mycenaean Greece. The spatial and contextual distribution of this pottery at the sites indicates that it was used widely among the inhabitants. This class of imported ceramic vessels, therefore, was part of the material surroundings of urban social groups at different levels in Ugaritic society. It is my intention to approach the subject of the value of this material by investigating its place in the cultural context of Ugarit.

The concept of value

A good starting point for any study dealing with the concept of value is Georg Simmel's *Die Philosophie des Geldes*, which was first published in 1907. In the first chapter of his analysis, Simmel makes the observation that the value of an object is not one of its properties, but a judgement made about it by people (Simmel 1922, 5–8). In his opinion, value finds its origins in the distance that separates the object of desire and the subject who wants it (Simmel 1922, 20; 46). This distance can be understood as the difficulties that exist for a person to obtain the desired item. Value varies in accordance to this distance, although it is not without limits: objects which are highly desirable but can be readily acquired have no value, while objects which are impossible to obtain are, literally, invaluable. The distance between subject and object becomes objectified in the sacrifice a person is willing to make to obtain the item. In the interval between desire and sacrifice the economic value of a commodity is determined.

Simmel's emphasis on desire as the source of value seems to be in contrast to Marxist theory, which sees the input of labour as elementary to the construction of value. However, Marx stated specifically that only at a definite stage in a society's economic development does the labour spent in producing an article become expressed as its value (Marx 1971, 67). It can be questioned whether the Marxist notion of labour is applicable to non-monetary societies, where the distinction between productive and unproductive work is less clear and obedience to social duties and rites are of great importance (Bourdieu 1977, 175–176). In such situations, the view that the amount of work invested to produce or obtain a product constitutes its cost and signifies its elementary value is invalid. Rather, the *relevance* of the fruit of labour has to be taken into account (Voutsaki 1995, 8).

The distinction made by Simmel between desiring subjects and a world of objects which are desired has been considered to be at odds with anthropological views on the nature of

exchange in archaic societies (Bloch and Parry 1989, 5–7). Based on the works of Mauss and Malinowski in particular, non-monetary exchange has for a long time been equated with gift exchange, in which objects always retain an element of its (former) owners (Mauss 1954, first published in 1925; Malinowski 1922). Increasingly, however, the polarization between the circulation of gifts and commercial trade is seen as artificial (Bloch and Parry 1989, 7–8; Gell 1992; both with bibliography). Trade relationships in systems of non-monetary barter can be highly personalized and politically very important, while purely economic concerns may play a major role in the circulation of gifts. With this in mind, it is clear that in Simmel's work subject and object are not necessarily separated. Rather, the embodiment of former owners within an object may increase – or, indeed, decrease – its desirability (cf. Parry 1989, 66–77).

The two dimensions of value which can be inferred from Simmel's definition, then, are desirability and accessibility. At first glance, this could be taken as synonymous with the notion of 'supply and demand' which prevails in modern business economics. However, essential to non-monetary situations is the fact that both dimensions of value are culturally constructed.³ The difficulties to obtain materials may in part be purely physical. Raw materials, for example, can be located far away, or crops may not grow in certain climates or seasons. To a large extent, however, access to goods is the result of social strategies. In many societies the flow of goods is restricted by mechanisms which reinforce the existing power structure (Appadurai 1986, 21–23; Voutsaki 1995, 9–11). Royal monopolies, restricted spheres of exchange and sumptuary regulations which limit the consumption of certain goods to specific people or groups all serve as such. The desire to obtain material goods is socially regulated as well and cannot be attributed solely to individual needs or circumstances. The reasons why people want to possess specific objects are, in general, related to the cultural associations attached to these items, which have to do with their effectiveness in reproducing the identity of the consumer (Bourdieu 1984, 100–101; 174–175; Thompson 1979, 9). Dominant groups within societies determine the suitability of different classes of objects to serve in such strategies.

Desirability and accessibility are closely related to existing power structures. This does not mean that value systems within societies are fixed. Different groups within a community may attach different cultural associations to one and the same class of objects (Thompson 1979, 52). The value of specific material goods, therefore, may vary according to social group. In specialized urban societies, such as those existing in the ancient Near East, several groups were in control of different sectors of the community. In such a situation, we can expect more than one – possibly overlapping – value system operating at the same time. These value systems are connected to groups in society and dominating systems can be modified or abandoned altogether as the result of shifts in political power.

The cultural associations attached to objects are tied to their origins and the circumstances of acquisition (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992, 3; Hugh-Jones 1992, 43; 58; Strathern 1992, 185; Appadurai 1986, 44). Imported objects, in particular, have the ability to refer to relationships with people in far-away, mysterious places and to make the owner share in the world from which the objects derive. They may also symbolize that the owner was able to extract such objects from that world (Strathern 1992, 177). It is for these reasons that imports may exceptionally be suited to serve in strategies for social reproduction. In order to

be effective, however, they need to be assimilated into existing categories in the indigenous value systems (Thomas 1992, 35–36). During this assimilation, transformations of the original object occur in the sense that associations are imposed on it that were not part of the object's identity in its previous cultural setting. The value of an imported object, therefore, is a cultural judgement made in the receiving society and should be investigated in that cultural context.

The question arises how such an understanding of value can be employed archaeologically. A first observation is that it does not seem feasible to try to reconstruct the direct economical value or *exchange ratio* of things. Archaeologists retrieve only part of the results of the exchange process, e.g. the distribution of certain materials. The absence of perishable materials and of services in the archaeological record and the fact that the precise contents of specific exchanges are not known makes it impossible to answer questions of the nature 'how many oxen was this statue worth' (cf. Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992, 10). Moreover such a question would bypass the nature of non-monetary exchange, in which the ratio by which goods change hands is not fixed, but can vary considerably from transaction to transaction.

The fact that value is a culturally constructed judgement about goods means that we should approach this concept within its particular cultural context. In order to determine the value of a class of archaeological artefacts, its place in the material record of the society in which it occurs ought to be assessed (cf. Voutsaki 1995, 13). The spatial distribution of the artefacts and fluctuations in their deposition among different kind of contexts could indicate the extent to which objects were available to different social groups. For example, finds may or may not be present in certain kinds of buildings within a settlement, or they may be restricted to specific types of tombs. Associations between different groups of materials could reflect the social and symbolical dimensions of the artefacts under consideration. If certain classes of objects are generally found together with objects of a religious nature, a function in the local cults may be supposed. Thus, information would be provided about the cultural construction of the two dimensions through which value is objectified: the desire to obtain and the difficulties to do so.

Mycenaean pottery in the Mediterranean

Pottery made in Greece during the Late Bronze Age (ca 1600–1050 B.C.) is generally referred to as 'Mycenaean' or 'Late Helladic'. Typological and stylistical research of this pottery has been carried out ever since Heinrich Schliemann discovered the Bronze Age civilisation of Greece by excavating at Mycenae. The result has been a detailed typology, based on the monumental work of Arne Furumark, who classified all vessels known to him in a framework of shapes and decorative motifs (Furumark 1941). This typological framework has been elaborated upon ever since (for recent overviews, see Mountjoy 1986; 1993). The relative chronology of the Mycenaean culture is, to a large extent, based upon this typology, which consists of three successive chronological styles, each with subphases (figure 1). The absolute chronology and the duration of the ceramic phases are a matter of debate (Manning

Late Helladic I	1600-1500/1510 BC
Late Helladic IIA	1510/1500-1440 BC
Late Helladic IIB	1440-1390 BC
Late Helladic IIIA1	1390-1370/1360 BC
Late Helladic IIIA2	1370/1360-1340-1330 BC
Late Helladic IIIB	1340/1330-1185/1180 BC
Late Helladic IIIC	1185/1180-1065 BC

Figure 1. Chronology of Mycenaean pottery (after Warren and Hankey 1989, 169)

1988; 1989; 1990; 1991; Kuniholm 1996, 332-334). The absolute dates provided in figure 1 represent a traditional view (Warren and Hankey 1989, 169).

Late Helladic pottery has been found on some four hundred sites in Anatolia, Cyprus, the Levant, Egypt and the central Mediterranean (Mee 1978; Åström 1972; Leonard 1994; Hankey 1993; Vagnetti 1993) (figure 2). The majority of the sites in the Mediterranean with such pottery have yielded only a few specimens. In all regions, notable quantities of Mycenaean ceramics, up to hundreds of vessels in some cases, come from a minority of sites. From a chronological point of view, it is evident that early pottery (LHI-LHIIIA1) is less abundant than that of later periods (LHIIIA2-LHIIIC). The fact that early vessels have been discovered in all areas in the Mediterranean which have produced Mycenaean pottery indicates that a wide dispersion was characteristic of the distribution from early on. The import of Mycenaean pottery sharply increases during the LHIIIA2-LHIIIB periods, which coincides with the *floruit* of the Mycenaean palaces. Not only have vessels in these ceramic styles been found at the majority of sites, the quantities of vessels that are found are larger as well. Pottery in LHIIIC style, the period after the collapse of the Mycenaean palace system, is less widely dispersed. It is absent in Egypt, while only sporadic finds have been made in the Levant. Extensive local manufacture of LHIIIC pottery occurred in Cyprus and Italy, which is consistent with the idea that the export from the Aegean had diminished (Sherratt 1980, 196-197; Kling 1989, 133-134; Jones and Vagnetti 1991, 131-134).

The *corpus* of Mycenaean pottery found in the eastern Mediterranean differs from that found in its area of production. One of the most readily apparent differences is that it almost exclusively concerns decorated fine wares. The only coarse ware vessels which have been discovered in any notable quantity are large, decorated transportation jars (Haskell 1990). The large majority of the Mycenaean vessels are of fine, hard-baked, well-levigated clay, decorated with geometrical and floral designs (figures 5, 7, 9); in some cases the decoration consists of pictorial representations (figure 7). Differences between Greece and the areas of export are also visible in the occurrence of vessel types. A number of pot shapes, referred to as 'Levanto-Helladic' vessels, which are comparatively rare in Greece itself have been found in quantity in the eastern Mediterranean (Karageorghis 1965, 204-228; Sherratt 1980, 195-199; Leonard 1994, 6-7). Since scientific analysis of the fabrics of such vessels, as well as stylistic research, point to a manufacture in Greece, it has been suggested that specialized production of pottery for the eastern Mediterranean took place in the Mycenaean world, at least during the LHIIIA2-LHIIIB period (Sherratt 1982, 183; Jones 1986, 599-600). The repertoire of

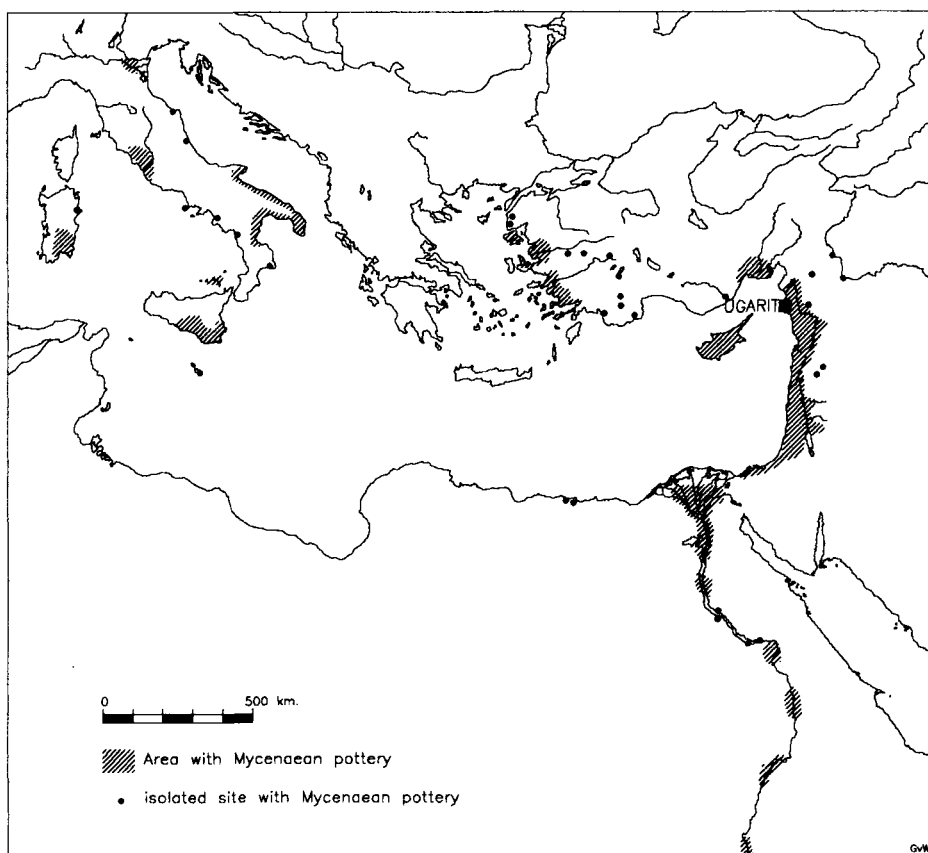


Figure 2. Distribution of Mycenaean pottery in the Mediterranean

Mycenaean pots is not the same for all sites in the eastern Mediterranean. For example, at Tell Abu Hawam in Israel open pot shapes are more numerous than closed vessels, which contrasts with most sites in the Levant (Balensi 1980, 485). At Tell el-Amarna in Egypt, the most common vessel type was the vertical flask, whereas it was the stirrup jar elsewhere (Hankey 1973, 130). These variations in the frequency of certain vessel types among sites, indicate that importing societies could exert preferences for specific products, which suggests the possibility of specialized distribution mechanisms in the exchange of pottery.

If specialization in the manufacture and distribution of Mycenaean pottery is considered, questions may be raised about the place of ceramics in the international exchange of the Late Bronze Age. Epigraphical evidence, such as the clay tablets found at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt and Bogazköy in central Anatolia, indicate that a large variety of goods was exchanged among the states surrounding the Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age, in particular metals and finished luxury goods (Zaccagnini 1976; Heltzer 1978, 17-52; Liverani 1987; Knapp 1991). Pottery is hardly mentioned in these texts, although substances which could be contents of ceramic containers do figure (Heltzer 1978, 83).

Evidence for international exchange also comes from four Late Bronze Age shipwrecks which have been excavated in the Mediterranean. Of these, the ships near Cape Gelidonya and Ulu Burun in southern Turkey, as well as the one found near Haifa in Israel were metal

carriers containing relatively small amounts of pottery (Bass 1967, 44–45; 1991, 74; Galili, Shmeuli and Artzy, 1986). The excavation of a wreck near Point Iria in Greece has revealed that goods were transported in both Mycenaean and Cypriot containers, but little else is known about the rest of the cargo (Lolos, Pennas and Vichos 1995; Pennas, Vichos and Lolos 1996). It is commonly accepted that in the societies of the eastern Mediterranean international exchange could be conducted outside the sphere of the aristocracy (Zaccagnini 1976, 468; 567; 1984, 159). Raw materials and (semi-)elaborated goods functioned as exchange goods not only among élites, but also among lower strata of the populations. It is entirely possible that pottery was part of exchange networks which were not under direct high-level control.

In spite of its obscurity among the epigraphical and archaeological evidence of exchange, Mycenaean pottery has repeatedly been referred to as highly valued by the élites of the Levant (see for example Keswani 1989a, 562–565; 1989b, 58–69; Leonard 1987, 264–266). Such arguments usually include references to pictorial representations of bulls and chariots which adorn a number of vessels, mainly large kraters, and which would fit in with the lifestyle of aristocrats, for whom such symbols refer to power and prestige. However, most Mycenaean vessels lack such pictorial decoration. The argument, therefore, does not suffice to ascribe high value to all Mycenaean pots. Moreover, the iconography of Mycenaean pictorial vessels shows a remarkable homogeneity, with a limited, standardized range of scenes (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982, 1). On LHIIIA2 vessels, chariots, men, bulls, birds and fish were the most frequent scenes, while during the LHIIIB style, archers, boxers, sphinxes, griffins and hunting scenes were added to this repertoire. These representations are distributed widely in the eastern Mediterranean, with no apparent preference for specific subjects in certain geographical areas. It may be questioned whether these scenes were appreciated in the same way in all the different regions and it cannot automatically be assumed that everywhere they are indicative of élite – or any other – status.

The place of Mycenaean (and Cypriot) pottery in the international exchange of the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean is approached from a different perspective by Susan Sherratt. According to her, pottery is a perfect example of the concept of *added value*: it derives its desirability not through preciousness of its raw materials, but through manufacture and through its association with products of different materials, metals and textiles for example (Sherratt 1994, 62–63). The international distribution of goods in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean was determined by the demand for raw materials and finished objects of prime or convertible value, in particular metals and finished luxury goods. Sherratt regards pottery as an import substitution, e.g. aimed at social groups who could not afford truly precious objects, or at situations in which such products were not available (Sherratt 1999). The range of Mycenaean vessel shapes exported to the eastern Mediterranean is rather large and the shapes and decorations vary highly. In my opinion, the superimposition of *added value* upon these pots through their association with other materials cannot have been the same for all vessel types concerned. The notion of *added value*, therefore, implies that a differentiation within the repertoire of Mycenaean pottery is necessary.

Ugarit was one of the major importing cities of Mycenaean pottery in the Levant. In order to assess the value of these vessels at the town, I will conduct an analysis based on the

two dimensions of value which arise from Simmel’s treatment of the concept, the cultural accessibility of the pots and the social and ideological construction of demand.

For the reasons discussed above, I will not treat Mycenaean pottery at this site as a homogeneous class of material. The analysis will be directed at three different vessel types, which all occur in substantial quantities: small stirrup jars (Furumark Shape 165–184), amphoroid kraters (FS 53–55) and conical rhyta (FS 199).

Ugarit

The sites of Ras Shamra and Minet el-Beida are situated in the Syrian coastal plain, ca 12 kilometres north of the modern harbour town of Lattakia. Minet el-Beida is the name of a bay near which an urban zone has been excavated, less than a kilometre away from the tell of Ras Shamra which is located somewhat inland.³ The sites have been excavated since 1928 by successive French missions, who have continued the research up to the present day.⁴ Ras Shamra was the capital of the kingdom of Ugarit, which is mentioned in cuneiform tablets found at a number of places in the eastern Mediterranean. From these texts and from the extensive archives discovered at Ugarit itself, the history of the city during the Late Bronze Age has been reconstructed (see, for example, Liverani 1979; Yon 1992a). The picture which

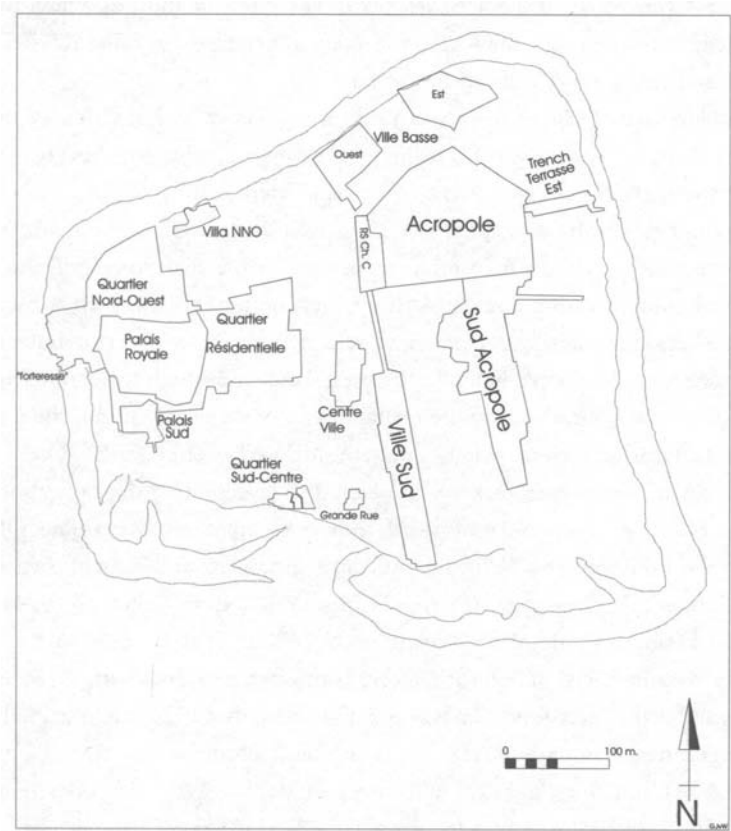


Figure 3. Ras Shamra: the excavation trenches (after Yon 1995, 428)

has emerged is that of a city-state ruled by a dynasty of kings. Although subject to Egyptian and Hittite domination successively, the kingdom enjoyed relative autonomy and was heavily involved in overseas diplomacy and trade, for which its location at a cross-roads of maritime and overland routes provided good opportunities.

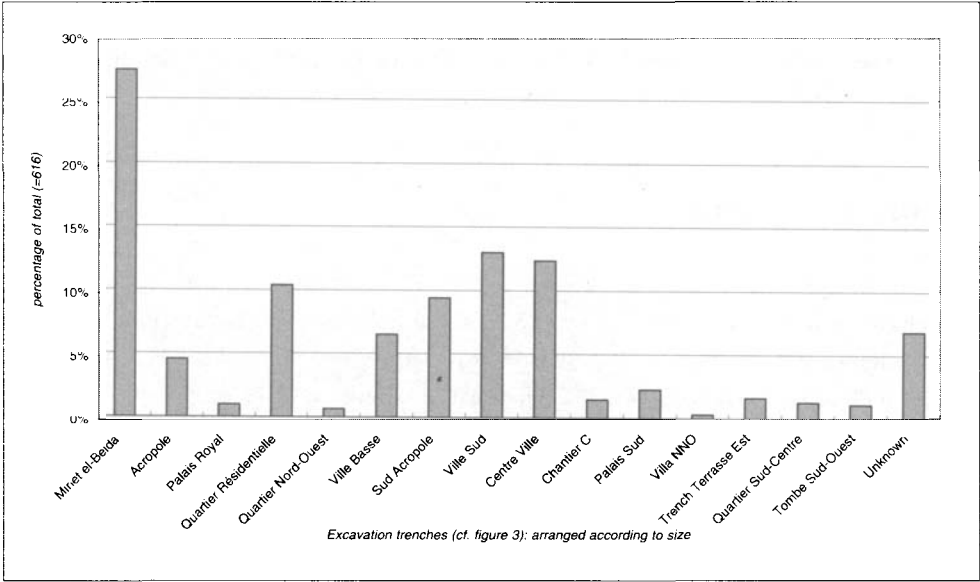
The site at Minet el-Beida was explored between 1929 and 1935. Even though a site plan has never been published, it is clear from the description by the excavators, that tombs, houses, storehouses and workshops were discovered, as well as spaces designated to ritual practices (Courtois 1979, 1283–1287; Saadé 1995). The *tell* of Ras Shamra encompasses ca 26 hectares, all of which are covered by Late Bronze Age remains (figure 3). The western part of the site is occupied by the vast royal palace, which contained ninety rooms and six courtyards (Courtois 1979, 1218–1222). The palace was the only area at Ras Shamra that can be considered a specialized zone, designated for specific social groups and functions (Callot 1986, 753–754; Yon 1992b, 26–27; Callot and Yon 1995, 161). The other excavation trenches have exposed tightly-knit urban zones, in which buildings meant for habitation were interspersed with shops, workshops and religious structures. Four buildings with cultic functions can be identified with certainty at Ras Shamra. However, it is clear that religious rites were practiced outside structures with explicit cultic functions as well (Tarragon 1995, 209–210). Notable at Ugarit are the vaulted tombs, which were situated underneath the buildings. More than thirty of such funeral cellars have been discovered, while Minet el-Beida has produced seven of them (Courtois 1979, 1201; Salles 1995). These tombs, most of which were pillaged long before excavations began, were used for many generations; in some cases evidence was found for several centuries of utilization.

Within the society of Ugarit there was a distinction between the ‘people of the king’ and ‘free people’ (Liverani 1979, 1333–1341). The royal palace ranked above these two groups with an almost divine status for the king. The ‘free people’ were mainly farmers, who lived in villages among their estates. In the capital of Ugarit lived the ‘people of the king’, who were, at least partly, dependent on the palace for their income. More than forty different professions have been distinguished within this social group, varying from artisans such as bakers and carpenters to high-ranking military personnel, merchants and priests. The material record of Ras Shamra indicates that the people living in the capital enjoyed a high standard of living (Callot 1994, 200–201). Even houses that can be qualified as modest are of good architectural quality and have produced inventories testifying to a considerable level of wealth. The whole population of Ras Shamra may, therefore, be considered as representing the upper social strata of the kingdom. However this population seems to have been internally stratified. Olivier Callot has classified the houses of the *Ville Sud* into three groups on the basis of their architecture and the archaeological inventories: rich, middle class and modest (Callot 1986, 744–746; 1994, 199–201). In addition, a group of large mansions close to the palace constitutes a special class, testifying to a wealthy social group with strong connections to the court.

The epigraphical tablets found at Ras Shamra show that Ugarit maintained diplomatic and commercial relations with a great many regions, among which were Egypt, Anatolia, Cyprus (Alashiya) and the Canaanite city-states of Byblos, Tyre and Akko (Heltzer 1978; 1988). Only one Late Bronze Age reference to the Aegean exists in the records: tablet PRU III 16.236 refers to a ship returning from Crete (Heltzer 1978, 134; 1988). The internation-

al orientation of Ugarit is reflected in the material remains at Ras Shamra and Minet el-Beida. Imported objects from many areas of the Mediterranean have been discovered and, even though they constitute only a small proportion of the total of finds, imports were an integral part of Ugaritic material culture (Courtois 1979, 1283–1284). Mycenaean pottery is only one group of such imports. A total of 616 Mycenaean pots, sherds and ceramic figurines have been published, of which 168 derive from Minet el-Beida, while 443 have been found at Ras Shamra (five examples may derive from either of these sites). Although the earliest Mycenaean vessels are in LHII style, the great majority of pots date from the LHIIIA2 and LHIIIB periods. The vessels which can be considered latest in date on stylistic grounds are in LHIIIB style, but show features of the beginning of LHIIIC (Courtois 1973, 149–150).

It is clear that these 616 Mycenaean ceramic items do not represent all the Mycenaean pottery at the sites. Two *corpora céramiques* have been published, covering the campaigns from 1929–1938 and 1959–1968 respectively (Schaeffer 1949, 131–301; Courtois and Courtois 1978). The campaigns from 1978–1984 have also been extensively published (Yon (ed.) 1987). The discoveries from twenty campaigns have been published in preliminary reports only. The possibility that Mycenaean finds have been thrown away cannot be excluded, especially for the earlier campaigns. In Minet el-Beida, for example, the archaeologists working at the site in the 1930s thought for a long time that they were excavating a necropolis and realized only much later that they had actually discovered an urban area (Saadé 1995, 213). Apart from the probable loss of Mycenaean pottery, the methodology of the earlier campaigns has had severe consequences for the amount of contextual information. In particular the lack of attention during the campaigns before the 1970s to undecorated pottery of local manufacture prevents comparisons between the deposition of imported and local pottery (Monchambert 1983, 26).



Mycenaean pottery has been reported from all excavated parts of Ras Shamra and from Minet el-Beida, as indicated by figure 4 (cf. figure 3). In considering the frequencies in fig-

ure 4, one should keep in mind that the extent to which the different areas have been published varies, as does the quality of the excavations themselves. Moreover, finds from all archaeological strata have been included. Nevertheless, the figures show that such pottery was not concentrated in specific areas, but widespread among the inhabitants. The well-published excavations of the *Centre Ville*, likewise, show a widespread distribution of Mycenaean pottery, with vessels in many rooms and courtyards, generally associated with domestic finds (Yon, Lombard and Renisio 1987, 22–23; 40; 46; 53–55; 79; 98–99; 103–104). Remarkable in figure 4 are the low frequencies of Mycenaean finds from the royal palace and the *Quartier Nord-Ouest*, part of which was included in the royal zone during the latest phase of the city (Callot 1986, 748–749). Probably, this is due to a large extent to the fact that the excavations in these areas are not included in one of the *corpora céramiques*. In any case, it appears that Mycenaean pottery was rather common at Ugarit and was used in the everyday-life of various urban social groups.

Although common, there is evidence that the possession of Mycenaean pots was not without cultural significance for the inhabitants of Ugarit and could become part of social strategies. The presence of Mycenaean pottery in tombs shows a fairly homogeneous pattern: almost all tombs have produced a few Mycenaean vessels, among which stirrup jars, bowls, cups and kraters are the most frequent vessel types. Five tombs, however, deviate substantially from this pattern: tombs III, IV, V and VI in Minet el-Beida (Courtois 1979, 1283–1284) and tomb 2698 in the *Ville Sud* (Courtois 1973, 152; Courtois and Courtois 1978, 302–303 no. 11; 321–322 no. 18; 332–333 no. 9; 342–343 nos. 1–12; 344–345 nos. 2, 3, 6; 352–353 no. 10). In these tombs, far larger quantities of Mycenaean pottery have been found, in some cases also including Mycenaean terra-cotta figurines. Most of these exceptional tombs possessed many objects imported from elsewhere as well. It appears that a minority at Ugarit and its harbour town chose to reflect international relations in their funerary ceremonies. It is of significance that none of these tombs are directly associated with the royal palace. Even though they testify to considerable wealth, we cannot automatically assume that these tombs belong to aristocratic groups in the society.

Small stirrup jars

The stirrup jar is one of the most frequent vessel types in all parts of the Mycenaean world. It is characterized by a false neck, topped by a disc from which two handles join the shoulder (see figure 5). The type has a large, coarse ware version, which may be interpreted as vessels for bulk storage and transportation. The smaller variety, ca 10–15 centimetres in height, generally has a globular body (FS 171–173), decorated with linear bands on the belly and floral and geometrical motifs on the shoulder. Vessels of similar size but with squat (FS 178–180) or piriform (FS 182–183) bodies have also been discovered. All small stirrup jars have very narrow openings in their spouts, making them suitable as containers for fluids: it is generally believed that oil, probably perfumed, was transported in these vessels (Tournavitou 1992, 190–195; Negbi and Negbi 1993, 324–325; Leonard et al. 1993, 105–106).

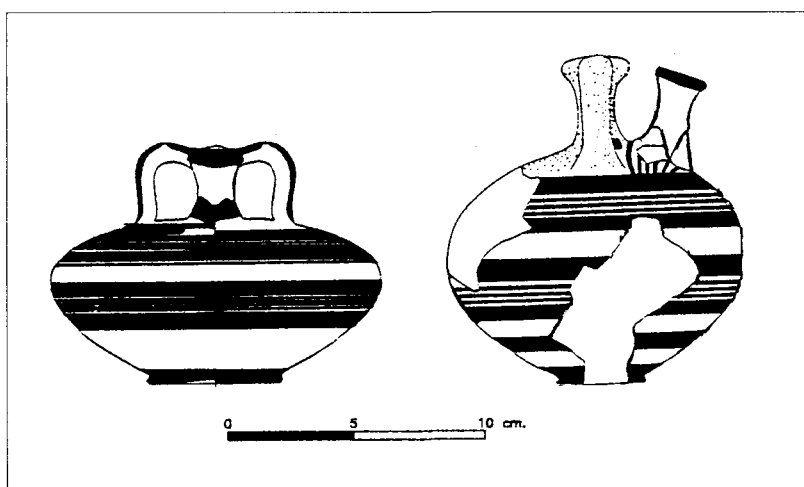
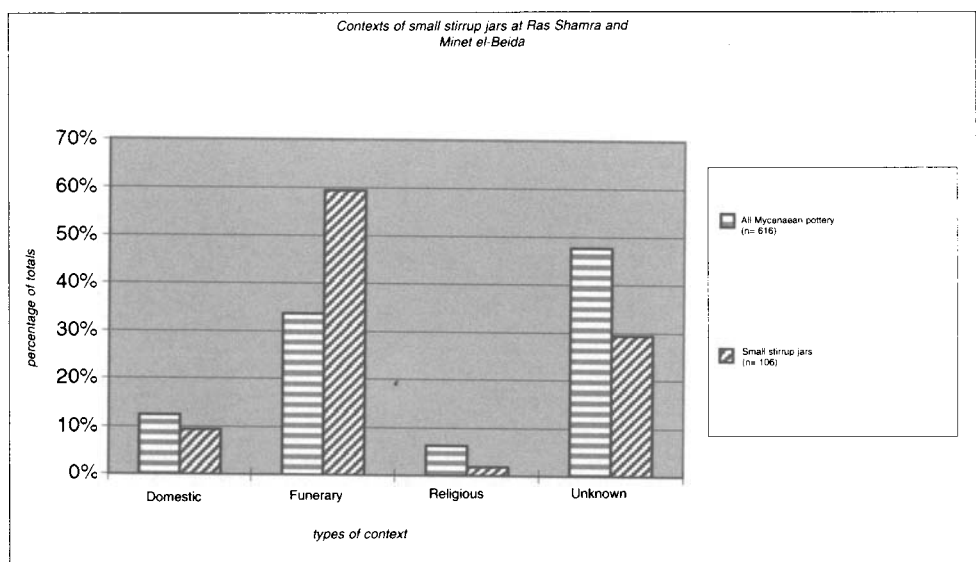


Figure 5. Two small Mycenaean stirrup jars (after Courtois and Courtois 1978, 305, 343)

This type of pot is the most frequent of all Mycenaean vessel types at Ugarit: a total of 106 have been published from the city and its harbour town. They have been found in most of the larger excavation trenches at Ras Shamra and occur in all types of houses. Even though they are absent from the *Palais Sud*, one of the large mansions in the vicinity of the royal palace, such vessels have been found in other large mansions, for example in the house of tomb 50 in the *Quartier Nord-Ouest* (Contenson et al. 1973, 126) and in the villa at the north-western edge of the tell (Margueron 1977, 181). We may assume that the use of these vessels among the population of Ugarit was not restricted to specific social groups.

As is the case for Mycenaean pottery at Ugarit in general, the find contexts for a large number of stirrup jars are unknown. This is probably caused by the number of finds made in surface or levelling strata, while methods of excavation, registration and publication during the earlier campaigns are probably to blame as well. When looking at stirrup jars for which



the find contexts are known, it becomes apparent that most of them have been found in tombs (figure 6). Of the forty tombs in Ras Shamra and Minet el-Beida from which Mycenaean pottery has been reported, a majority of twenty seven included stirrup jars in their funerary inventories.

On the basis of figure 6, one could conclude that the primary function of the stirrup jar at Ugarit was funerary. However, the presence of such vessels in domestic contexts shows that this was not exclusively the case. Rather, we should see the role of these jars within the funerary ceremonies in relation to their contents, presumably oil. There is some epigraphical evidence that the bodies of the deceased were treated with oil during their deposition in the funeral cellar.⁵ Apart from the Mycenaean stirrup jars, the tombs have produced other pots which also may have contained oil, such as Cypriot Base-ring jugs and Syrian elongated flasks. It appears that Mycenaean stirrup jars were included in the funerary inventories for their function as oil containers.

Such a functional approach to Mycenaean stirrup jars can also be deduced from those specimens found in non-funerary contexts. In House A in the *Centre Ville* such jars were found in the cooking area and in a room which is described as a hallway; in both cases they were associated with local domestic pottery, as well as with some Cypriot tableware (Yon, Lombard and Renisio 1987, 40, 55). Two stirrup jars were found together in House B in a refuse pit, associated with Syrian and Cypriot plates and jugs (Calvet and Geyer 1987, 144). Another stirrup jar was found isolated in a refuse pit, likewise in the *Centre Ville*, while two such jars were found in a domestic space in House E (Yon, Gachet and Lombard 1987, 172–173; Yon, Lombard and Renisio 1987, 102–104). One small stirrup jar has been discovered in a sanctuary: the *Temple aux rhytons* (Mallet 1987, 233 note 51). It was found in a small room and was associated with Mycenaean, Cypriot and Syrian vessels. Religious associations are likely as well in the case of a stirrup jar discovered in a pit in the *Maison au prêtre Hurrite* (Schaeffer 1963, 210–211; Courtois 1969, 108–109). It was found together with two gold bowls, a local pictorial mug and models of liver and lungs. Moreover, this pit was located in the proximity of an archive with literary and magico-religious texts. Epigraphical evidence shows that oil was used in libation rituals during religious ceremonies (Kinet 1981, 146–147). The presence of two Mycenaean stirrup jars in a religious context may be considered as an additional sign that these vessels were appreciated primarily for their function as oil containers.

It must be remembered that imports in general constitute only a small proportion of the total of finds at Ras Shamra and Minet el-Beida. Nevertheless, the presence of Mycenaean small stirrup jars in the majority of tombs suggests that these vessels were available to many inhabitants of Ugarit. This impression is strengthened by their widespread occurrence in the domestic inventories of average houses. The demand for this type of vessel appears to derive to a large extent from the different uses of oil in the society of Ugarit. However, as oil containers were certainly available locally, a functional approach cannot fully explain the widespread occurrence of this Mycenaean type. It is likely that the Mycenaean containers served as a kind of trade-mark by which good quality oil could be recognized (Leonard 1981). The shape and decoration of Mycenaean stirrup jars are completely different from the local ceramic tradition, which suggests that the imported character of these pots and their contents played a role in their use and appreciation. The presence of a few stirrup jars in contexts with

strong ritual associations shows that they were considered suitable to serve in ceremonies of a highly symbolical nature. The same is suggested by their occurrence in the tombs. We may, therefore, conclude that Mycenaean stirrup jars were rather common among the inhabitants of Ugarit, but at the same time possessed some special significance. They are best understood as luxury examples of every-day items.

Amphoroid kraters

The amphoroid krater (FS 53–55) is a two-handled vessel, ca 30–50 cm. in height, with a pronounced concave neck and a piriform body (figure 7) (Morris n.d., 63–68). The shape of the amphoroid krater makes it suitable for liquids such as water and wine, either for short-term storage, or for mixing and serving. In many cases these vessels are pictorially decorated in the belly area. At Ugarit, representations of various creatures such as bulls, horses, birds, fish, octopi or a combination of these occur. The most frequent theme, however, is the chariot scene, showing a two-wheeled chariot, usually accompanied by a procession of men (figure 7). A few vessels show men engaged in different activities.

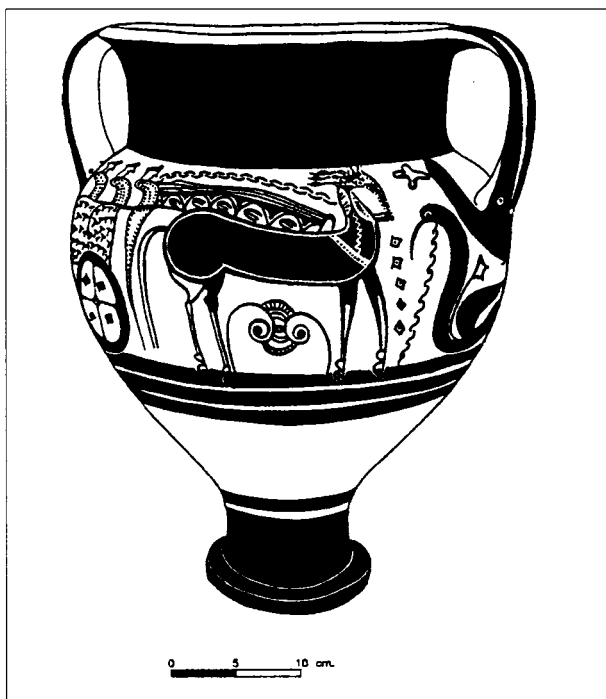


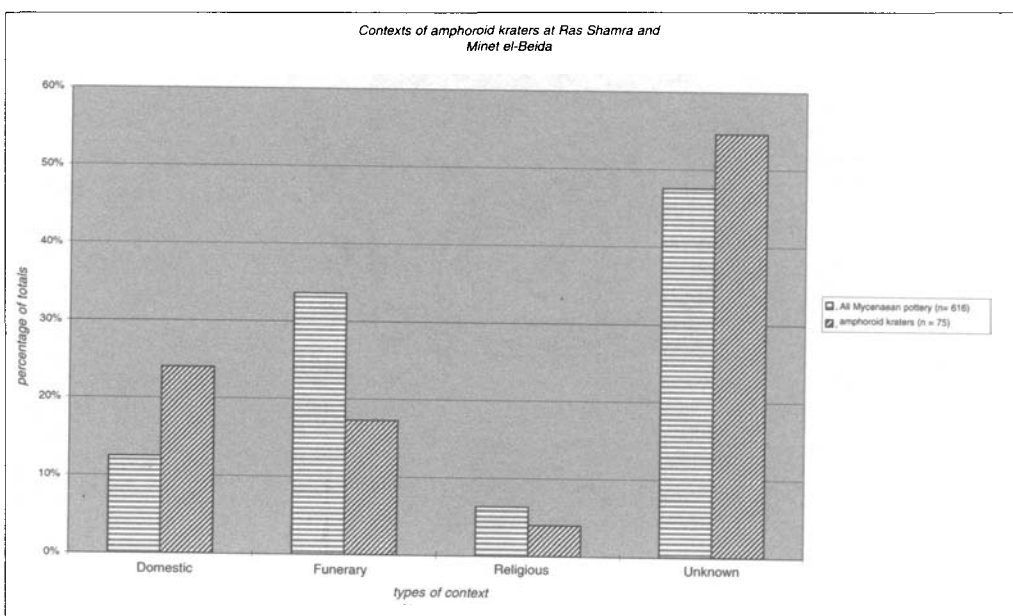
Figure 7. Mycenaean amphoroid krater with chariot scene (after Schaeffer 1936–1937, 213)

The pictorial kraters, especially those depicting chariots, have been extensively discussed (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1981, 8–9; Crouwel and Morris 1985, 96–98; both with bibliography). An important theme in these discussions has been the fact that such representations are more often found in the eastern Mediterranean than in Greece itself. It has been suggested that these chariot kraters were specifically produced to appeal to the Near Eastern

élites. Their shape would allow these vessels to be displayed in ceremonies of drinking and conspicuous consumption by these groups (Keswani 1989a, 566–567).

At Ugarit, seventy-nine Mycenaean amphoroid kraters have been found, of which forty-four are pictorially decorated. Of three amphoroid kraters the decoration is not known to me, while thirty-two such vessels are decorated with linear, floral or geometrical patterns. Most of these are only fragments, which may derive from pictorial vessels. Amphoroid kraters occurred in most major excavation trenches and in Minet el-Beida. These vessels have not been reported from the royal palace, but a LHIIIB fragment of such a krater was found in the imposing fort in the northwestern part of Ras Shamra, which served as an entrance for the royal zone during the later part of the thirteenth century (Schaeffer 1949, 226–227, no. 27). A difference with the general distribution of Mycenaean pottery at Ugarit is the absence of amphoroid kraters in the area of the *Ville Basse*, north of the acropolis. This may be significant, as this area reveals a tightly knit plan of very small dwellings, especially in the eastern part, which may be interpreted as a less wealthy town quarter (Courtois 1979 1246–1249; Callot 1994, 200, note 16). There do not seem to be significant differences between the distribution of amphoroid kraters in general and that of pictorially decorated ones.

Those amphoroid kraters with a known find context are more frequent in domestic than in funerary contexts (figure 8).



The minority of thirteen amphoroid kraters from a funerary context are not equally distributed in the tombs of Ugarit, as they have been reported from six tombs only: tombs III, IV and VI in Minet el-Beida produced two specimens each, just as tomb 1 at the *Acropole*; tomb 4642 at the *Quartier Résidentiel* yielded one amphoroid krater, while no less than four such vessels were found in tomb 2698 in the *Ville Sud* (Schaeffer 1949, 144–145 nos. 17, 19 [tomb III]; 150–151 nos. 29, 32 [tomb IV]; 156–157 nos. 19, 21 [tomb VI]; 160–161 nos. 4, 24 [tomb 1]; Courtois and Courtois 1978, 296–297 no. 3 [tomb 4642]; Courtois 1973, 152;

Courtois and Courtois 1978, 332–333 no. 9; 334–335 no. 2; 344–345 no. 2 [tomb 2698]). It is probably not a coincidence that four of these funeral cellars (tombs III, IV, VI and 2698) are among the few which testify, by the quantity of finds, to Mycenaean pottery being used in strategies of funerary display. Even though amphoroid kraters are in none of these tombs the most frequent vessel type, it is clear that they were considered suitable to serve in such strategies. Only two of the amphoroid kraters from funerary contexts showed chariot scenes. These were not discovered in the funeral cellars which have produced the large quantities of Mycenaean finds, but in tombs 1 and 4642. It seems, therefore, that in the strategies of display of which these tombs testify, chariot scenes were not of importance.

The eighteen amphoroid kraters to which a domestic context can be assigned have been found in eight different buildings. This suggests a restricted distribution of such vessels, even though the many specimens with an unknown provenance argue for caution in this respect. Three amphoroid kraters have been discovered in the large mansion known as the *Palais Sud* (Courtois and Courtois 1978, 321–323 no. 38; 346–347 nos. 1, 2). The size of this building, its proximity to the royal palace and the wealth of its inventory, among which is an archive, all suggest a high status for its inhabitants (Courtois 1979, 1235–1240). Other houses which have produced amphoroid kraters likewise indicate that these vessels were in use among high-ranking citizens. In 1988 such a vessel was discovered in a house in the *Quartier Sud-Centre* (Yon et al. 1990, 20). This mansion, in which at least four additional amphoroid kraters were discovered during the 1994 campaign, contained the most extensive archive outside the royal palace (Yon 1995, 427). From this archive it can be deduced that the building belonged to a certain Ourtenu, a trader who had assembled considerable wealth. Two amphoroid kraters were found in a building in the *Sud Acropole*, which is called the *Maison de Patilu-wa* after an inscription on a gold ring (Courtois 1979, 1277–1278). The architectural quality of this house, as well as its inventory point to considerable wealth. Another amphoroid krater from the same excavation trench was found in a building which produced an archive with many medical and magical texts (Schaeffer 1966, 131–137; Courtois and Courtois 1978, 318–319 no. 1).

The presence of Mycenaean amphoroid kraters in these buildings shows that these vessels were in use among high-ranking members of Ugaritic society. At the same time, however, there is little evidence that these objects served prestige purposes. Two of the vessels in the *Palais Sud* have been found among local storage pottery, while a third was discovered in an area that can be identified as the kitchen (Courtois 1979, 1235–1240).⁶ The krater in the house with the medico-magical texts was discovered on a floor near a drain. In the house of Ourtenu, an amphoroid krater was associated with local and Cypriot ceramics, a bronze spoon and a mould for jewellery, but the stratigraphy in the room concerned was unclear. From these find circumstances it appears that Mycenaean amphoroid kraters primarily possessed domestic associations.

A few amphoroid kraters have also been discovered in domestic contexts which do not indicate a high status. A krater elaborately decorated with a chariot scene was found below the floor of a rather average house in the *Ville Sud* (Courtois and Courtois 1978, 300; Callot 1994, 69). A non-pictorial example was found in a courtyard in house E in the *Centre Ville*, together with local and other Mycenaean pottery (Yon, Lombard and Renisio 1987, 99; 101).

This house is described as average by the excavators and apparently served exclusively domestic functions. A curious find is the concentration of eight sherds of amphoroid kraters in a pit in Minet el-Beida (Schaeffer 1949, 232–233). The edges of these sherds had been smoothed and holes pierced through the centres. The function of these re-used items is not known, but it is certainly remarkable that all are amphoroid krater fragments, suggesting that this vessel type was chosen deliberately. Although the nature of this deposit is impossible to assess without further information about its context, it does indicate that amphoroid kraters could be endowed with a special significance.

The limited occurrence of Mycenaean amphoroid kraters in the tombs of Ras Shamra and Minet el-Beida, as well as their restricted distribution among domestic contexts, indicate that these vessels were not available to all inhabitants of Ugarit. The evidence shows that those wishing to express international relations in their funerary ritual were able to use amphoroid kraters, as was a group of wealthy citizens high in the social structure of Ugarit, who included them in their domestic inventories. With regard to the cultural construction of demand, it is important that amphoroid kraters have not been reported from several large mansions and wealthy tombs. The rich *Maison d'Albâtres* and the mansion at the northwestern limit of the *tell* have not produced such vessels (Contenson et al. 1974, 5–25; Margueron 1977, 169–180), nor has tomb 50 in the *Quartier Nord-Ouest* (Schaeffer 1938, 317–320). It appears that not all groups within the aristocracy made use of these vessels. Epigraphical evidence reveals that, with the growth of commerce during the Late Bronze Age a class of wealthy traders developed within Ugaritic society (Heltzer 1978, 128–130; Yon 1995, 442, 449). It is possible that the restricted use of imported amphoroid kraters in tombs and houses can be associated with the life-style of this professional class with extensive international relations. The fact that they are absent in some contexts indicative of wealth may point to the existence of different value systems within the society of Ugarit.

This being said, it needs to be reiterated that the funerary and domestic evidence also indicates that these vessels were not completely restricted to wealthy social groups. Moreover, it has been established that the amphoroid kraters found in the wealthier buildings were part of the domestic inventory. It seems best, therefore, to characterize these vessels as low-value items, to be associated with large quantities of other imports in tombs and with domestic objects in houses.

Conical rhyta

18

The conical rhyton is a one-handled vessel, ca 25–40 cm. in length, with a wide opening at the top and a small opening at bottom (figure 9) (Koehl 1981). It is most often decorated with linear and abstract designs, but a fair number are pictorially decorated. The vessel type could be employed as a funnel, but is generally believed to have fulfilled cultic functions in the Aegean.

A total of forty conical rhyta have been published from Ras Shamra and Minet el-Beida. Thirteen of these are pictorially decorated, a rather high proportion in comparison with the Aegean. They have been discovered in most major excavation trenches, with the exception of the *Acropole*. Neither have they been reported from the large *Palais Sud*, or the mansion at

the extreme North-West of the tell. The royal palace and the *Quartier Nord-Ouest* each have produced one conical rhyton. From the test trench leading to the eastern edge of the tell, the *Trench Terrasse Est*, three such vessels have been reported, a high figure in comparison with the total number of Mycenaean finds from this trench. Most rhyta, however, have been found in the recently excavated trench of the *Centre Ville*, all associated with one building: the *Temple aux rhytons* (Yon 1987).

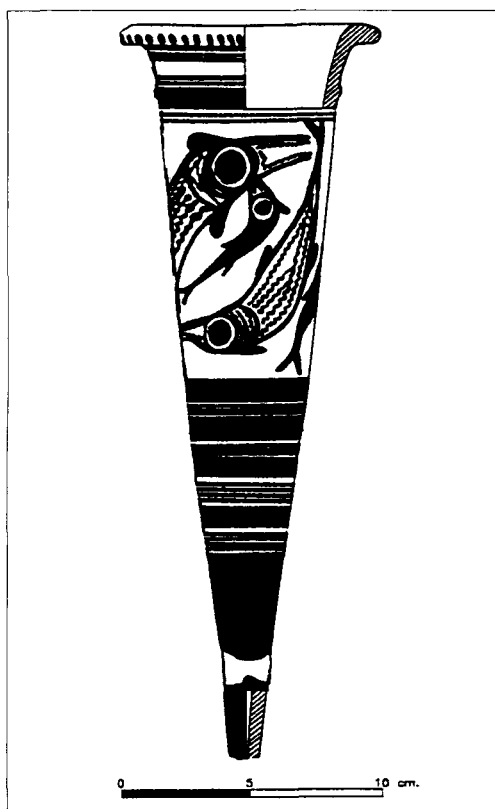
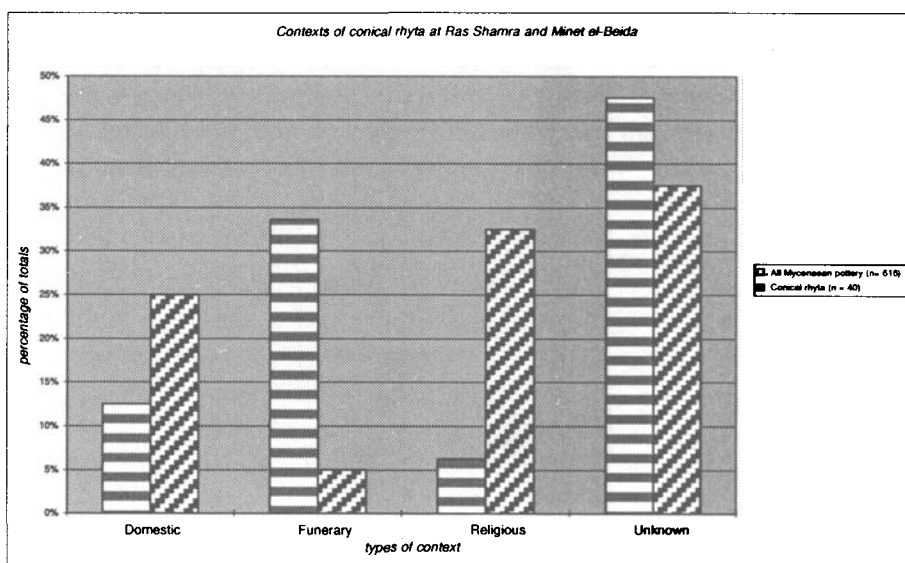


Figure 9. Mycenaean conical rhyton (after Courtois and Courtois 1978, 311)

As in the case of Mycenaean pottery in general, the contexts in which many of the conical rhyta have been found is unknown. Comparatively few of these vessels have been found in a funeral cellar (figure 10). In fact only two tombs produced a single piece each: tomb V in Minet el-Beida and tomb 4642 in the *Quartier Résidentiel* (Schaeffer 1949, 152–153 no. 8; Courtois and Courtois 1978, 308–309 no. 15). As seen above, tomb V is one of those distinguished by their wealth of imported objects.

The *Temple aux rhytons* consists of seven rooms grouped around a larger hall, in which an altar and ritual benches have been identified (Mallet 1987, 216–226). Within the temple five Mycenaean conical rhyta were discovered, none of which in the central hall. Moreover, seven such vessels were found in the vicinity of the building. According to the excavators, these were dispersed after the building was abandoned and pillaged (Yon 1987, 343). Four Syrian rhyta were also discovered directly outside the temple. The concentration of eleven rhyta



associated with this sanctuary is unique in Ras Shamra and points to a special function for this vessel type in the building. It is unknown which cult was practiced here, but the absence of a courtyard indicates that animal sacrifices, often mentioned on cuneiform tablets, were not (Tarragon 1995, 204–20). The location of this sanctuary in a dense habitation area and its rather inconspicuous architecture in comparison with other temples excavated at Ras Shamra, make it conceivable that the building served for religious gatherings rather than as a true temple.

The description of the benches in the central hall of the *Temple aux rhytons* resembles that of an area excavated in Minet el-Beida in 1931 (Schaeffer 1932, 4). In that year, similar benches were discovered, on and around which ceramics had been deposited. Adjacent to this area was an ashlar-built structure in which an ovoid stone altar stood. At its base lay pebbles, weights and several rhyta, among which was one of conical Aegean type, decorated with an octopus. The harbour town produced another conical rhyton, which, likewise, was found in the vicinity of a possible altar (Schaeffer 1949, 218–219 nos. 7, 15). A cultic context may also be assigned to three conical rhyta from the *Maison au prêtre Hurrite* (Schaeffer 1963, 206–215; Courtois 1969, 91–119; 1979, 1277). One Mycenaean rhyton was found on the floor of the archive, near the votive pit referred to above. In the same room a stone libation tube was present. Two conical rhyta were discovered together in a cellar just north of this room, in association with several pithoi and a stone basin. These examples clearly show that Mycenaean conical rhyta were associated with local cultic practices.

A special regard for this type of vessel can be induced from its occurrence in domestic contexts. Three conical rhyta were found in the *Maison d'Albâtres* in the *Quartier Résidentiel* (Contenson et al. 1974, 5–25). This large building is situated next to the royal palace and can be classified among the large mansions associated with wealthy social groups. The northern part of the structure is considered to have been an industrial zone, while the southern part constituted the private quarters. The three Mycenaean rhyta were found together in a room

in the South-West, which was very rich in other finds as well: pearls, amulets, a stone statue and a variety of ceramic imports. Possibly, a similar situation occurred in the *Maison aux frites* in the western part of the *Ville Basse*, excavated in 1935 (Schaeffer 1936, 138–139). Here, fragments of a group of polychrome figurines in frit were discovered, representing two male figures, a horse's head and a chariot. Two conical rhyta were associated with this group, one of Mycenaean and the other probably of local manufacture. Yet another conical rhyton was found in the wealthy *Maison de Patilu-wa* (Courtois 1979, 1277–1278), while a house of good architectural quality in the *Quartier Résidentiel* also produced such a vessel (Courtois and Courtois 1978, 308–309 no. 18). The exclusive appearance of conical rhyta in wealthy houses shows that they were in use among high-ranking social groups at Ugarit. Moreover, in several cases they were associated with other objects of special significance, indicating that these vessels were highly appreciated by their owners. Most likely, this high appreciation is related to their cultic function, which is evident from their occurrence in religious contexts.

The concentration of Aegean conical rhyta in find contexts associated with cult and wealth indicates that this vessel type was available only to wealthy citizens and to religious institutions. With regard to the cultural construction of demand for conical rhyta, two things may be noted. Firstly, in most situations where Mycenaean conical rhyta have been discovered, Levantine examples of the same vessel type were also present. In the case of the *Maison du prêtre Hurrite* a stone libation tube, which could fulfil a similar function, was found associated with the Mycenaean rhyton. Only from the *Maison d'Albâtres* have local varieties of the rhyton not been reported. This suggests that the high esteem for Mycenaean rhyta derived primarily from the functions they fulfilled, rather than from their character as imports from Greece. The association of Mycenaean rhyta with locally made counterparts in a temple of otherwise purely Canaanite character, testifies that these vessels were employed in local practices of libation. At Ugarit, as elsewhere in the Canaanite area, libations of wine, honey, ghee and milk as part of ceremonies in which the gods were ritually fed had a long history (Van der Toorn 1995a, 2053, with bibliography). The fact that most of the rhyta found in association with the *Temple aux rhytons* were of Aegean manufacture testifies of the extent to which these vessels had become part of the local material culture, even if their nature as imports was part of the identity of these vessels. Secondly, it is remarkable that no Mycenaean rhyta have been reported from the three other temples identified at Ras Shamra. In fact, from the *Acropole*, where two large temples were located, no conical rhyton has been reported at all. In Syria during the Late Bronze Age, a distinction can be made between official religious activities associated with the state and carried out in monumental temples, clan cults at the level of group relations within the urban community and family cults connected to the family (Van der Toorn 1995b, 48). It is likely that at Ugarit activities associated with cult and religion were also practiced outside the official temples (Tarragon 1995, 209–210). On this basis, the *Temple aux rhytons* has been interpreted as an assembly of a *confrérie* rather than a true temple. It may well be that Mycenaean conical rhyta were associated with the practice of cult at group and family levels, which took place in assembly halls and in private houses. In any case, they can be regarded as objects of high value and prestige.

Conclusions

The concept of value has been approached here as a judgement about goods which is objectified by desirability for them and accessibility to them. At Ugarit, the desire for and access to Mycenaean pottery varied according to vessel type. Small stirrup jars were available to many social groups and were primarily desired for their function as effective oil containers. Vessels of this type are best understood as luxury examples of everyday objects. In contrast, the use of Mycenaean amphoroid kraters was restricted to social groups who lived in large houses and of whom the tombs contained a variety of imports. Such vessels were desired mainly because they could be associated with large quantities of other imported objects in tombs and with domestic equipment in houses. Mycenaean conical rhyta were available only to religious institutions and to wealthy citizens, who assembled them in their houses. The desire for these vessels derived from the function they served in cultic rituals. They possessed a special significance at Ugarit and can be considered as prestige items.

Desire for and access to material goods are culturally constructed and actively related to social structures. The restriction of Mycenaean amphoroid kraters and conical rhyta to wealthy groups at Ugarit shows that access to these goods was determined by power relations in the society. The desirability of the various vessel types derives, to a large extent, from the cultural associations attached to these objects. The differences in the contexts in which these vessels were used indicate that they varied in their suitability to serve in social strategies. However, the unequal occurrence of different types of Mycenaean pottery at Ugarit also actively affected the workings of the society in which they were imported. For example, the growing importance of a wealthy trading class may have been enhanced through the use of Mycenaean amphoroid kraters by a group of inhabitants, who distinguished themselves with objects that were not associated with the royal court, but with international relations. Similarly, the practice of religious rites outside the direct realm of temples may have been influenced by the use of prestigious Aegean conical rhyta.

In a complex society, such as that of ancient Ugarit, we may expect more than one – possibly overlapping – value system operating at the same time. The existence of five tombs possessing a far larger quantity of Mycenaean pottery than all others indicates that such vessels were for some social groups more suitable to be employed in consumptive strategies than for others. The fact that not all wealthy inhabitants of Ugarit made use of Mycenaean amphoroid kraters, likewise, suggests that the value of these vessels was not the same for all groups in the society. With the present evidence, it is impossible to establish whether there was competition among various value systems at Ugarit. However, the relative paucity of Mycenaean pottery reported from the royal palace suggests that the value system in which these ceramics circulated was different from the one operating at the royal court.

The cultural associations attached to the Mycenaean pottery at Ugarit derive from the local culture in which these imports arrived. Small Mycenaean stirrup jars served in local funerary ceremonies and were used in many houses for domestic activities. Amphoroid kraters have been discovered together with large quantities of other imports in tombs and with local domestic materials in houses. The high esteem for Mycenaean conical rhyta derived from their function in local religious practices. From these examples it is clear that

the imports from the Aegean were assimilated into existing indigenous categories of value. It seems logical to assume that it is for this reason that these vessels could become part of strategies by which individuals manipulated their place in the social structure of their society.

Even though imports constitute only a small proportion of the total of finds made at Ras Shamra and Minet el-Beida, the occurrence of objects from many different areas is a characteristic of the material culture of these sites and a sign of the cosmopolitan culture of the Levant in general during the Late Bronze Age. Within such a material environment, ceramic vessels of the Aegean constitute only a small part of the total body of imported goods. The value of the Mycenaean vessels at Ugarit was a culturally constructed judgement made through their incorporation into indigenous value systems. The social practices of which these imports became part gave a local meaning to these objects. In this sense these ceramic vessels became *Ugaritic* instead of *Mycenaean* upon their arrival in the town.

Notes

¹ This article is based on research conducted by the author for a dissertation concerning use and appreciation of Mycenaean pottery outside Greece. I wish to thank Dr. Jan Paul Crielaard and Professor Joost Crouwel for their useful comments on a preliminary version.

² Of course, supply and demand in modern societies are culturally constructed as well, as is shown by Miller (1995), for example. The point made here is that the construction of value in non-monetary situations is carried out through different mechanisms than in modern economies (Appadurai 1986, 31–32).

³ I will use the name Ugarit to indicate both sites, even though it is actually the ancient name of Ras Shamra and the kingdom of which it was the capital. The ancient name of Minet el-Beida was most probably Ma'hadou, which is mentioned in cuneiform tablets from Ras Shamra and Ras Ibn Hani (Astour 1970, 113–127).

⁴ Until 1969 Claude A. Schaeffer was director of the excavations. Since 1978 the *Mission de Ras Shamra* has been under the responsibility of Marguerite Yon, who has not only continued the excavations, but also instigated the re-investigation of areas that had been excavated earlier with modern approaches and techniques.

Reports of the excavations have appeared regularly in the journal *Syria* since 1929. Studies of several aspects of the archaeology of Ugarit have appeared in the series *Ugaritica* (vols I–VII) and, since 1983, in the series *Ras Shamra-Ougarit* (vols I–XII).

⁵ Tablet RS 25.460: '...my wives pour (?) fine oil (?) on my (body already) laid out in the tomb (?)'. However, this tablet is presumed to be a copy of a Mesopotamian text. For the possibility of the practice of embalming at Ugarit, see Salles (1995, 176). Libation pits have been found in several tombs (Margueron 1987, 17–19). Libations with wine, oil and water were practised during fertility cults, which were closely related to the cult of the dead (Kinet 1981, 146–147).

⁶ One of these kraters is the famous *Maître des Cheveaux*, which depicts a man training or controlling horses (Courtois and Courtois 1978, 346–350).

discussion

THE BURDEN OF BEING MYCENAEAN

Francis A. De Mita Jr.

Van Wijngaarden offers an important and instructive attempt to re-situate the study of Bronze Age 'imports' away from the dominance of prestige commodity studies, using the particularly thorny example of Mycenaean ceramics. Traditional approaches, as van Wijngaarden points out, have tended to assign a uniformity of value and unchallenged prestige status to all Mycenaean imports. The reason for this reflexive recourse to prestige in the presence of Mycenaean pottery has more perhaps to do with the evolution of the discipline of archaeology in the East Mediterranean and a desire to find a precursor to the highly evolved city states of the Classical world than to any objective assessment of the objects themselves. Analytical frameworks which contextualize imports and exotica into the greater scheme of a robust and diverse material culture are critical steps in the development of the theoretical evolution of the study of the Late Bronze Age. However, van Wijngaarden's efforts also illustrate the methodological challenges encountered when isolating a single subcategory of artefact for examination. The blame lies not so much with van Wijngaarden's analysis as with the problem of what can be said to constitute value in a prehistoric context and how value, once defined, can be kept separate from other interrelated concepts.

Two essentially different definitions of value are offered by van Wijngaarden: value as the 'total of associations that become attached to an object', and Simmel's formulation recast as the desirability and accessibility of an object (basically amounting to an object's exchangeability). If the definition proffered in the first case is accepted, we end up with an interesting concept of little practical value; the definition offered in the second instance is in most cases inaccessible to the archaeologist working with prehistoric materials. Out of necessity, van Wijngaarden adopts a third position for purposes of his analysis, an implicit definition of value founded in the object's functional properties and context. Ultimately this is a minor weakness, because his analysis of Mycenaean ceramics at Ugarit is a provocative and valuable contribution to understanding how certain categories of imported goods may have been perceived and deployed by the merchant classes of the Late Bronze Age East Mediterranean.

Value is not an absolute, but rather the sum of a various socially relevant judgements about the subjective and objective qualities of material goods. Like symbolic meaning, value is contested by members of society. Competing sets of values exist side by side within any given culture as social groups seek to establish identification with or distinction from others. Value is but one of many stages upon which power relationships are defined and renegotiated within society. Individuals also conform and dissent to the value systems appropriate to their social group, and order their material world in accordance with these processes. In this regard value is seen to be a property of material objects that is contingent and contextual as opposed to inherent. The problem that arises in any analysis that attempts to segregate value out of the archaeological stew is how to avoid conflating value with function, prestige, scarci-

ty, and symbolic meaning. Value strikes me as inherently problematic for the archaeologist in this context because it represents an attempt to extract a static meaning from an aspect of a dynamic cultural assemblage.

The example of conical rhyta is a useful illustration. It is clear that ritual function can be attributed to this particular ceramic form given its consistent context and the other forms and vessels found in association with it. Thus we are able to discern a functional role for the rhyton. Can we conclude from this that we know something of its value? Here I think we are confronting two very different concepts. A religious article is not automatically a prestige article. It is not the rhyton itself that is exclusive, but rather its performative association with a ritual. Ceramic rhyta were in all likelihood more readily obtained substitutes for rhyta made of precious metals. As such, they may have made possible greater access to certain ritual practices, or at a minimum the incorporation of an 'exotic' foreign instrument into a local practice. Likewise, the vessel may well have been accessible to many more people than its archaeological context suggests, but the ritual with which it is associated was an activity reserved to the few rather than the many. The critical nexus between assemblage frequency, context and 'desirability' appears to be absent in this instance. Mycenaean conical rhyta are telling us more about the adoption of certain ritual practices or an integration of foreign elements into local ritual practice. Here the notion of value serves to distract us from making sense of imported objects in their contexts by broader scrutiny of assemblage composition and patterning.

The object, as van Wijngaarden correctly notes, is a dynamic participant in societal interactions. It is quite literally an 'empty vessel' into which multiple, concurrent meanings are poured and whose meanings themselves shift over time. I would disagree that all objects are in possession of a value with which they can be compared to other objects. To the contrary, value, as a quality of an object, becomes relevant and discernible at particular moments in the object's life: moments of exchange, display, and competition. The very utility of the value concept is called into question in the absence of the context of acquisition (i.e., exchange, or gift). As Nicholas Thomas has argued, 'objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become' (Thomas 1991, 4). While van Wijngaarden attempts to side-step this issue, in so doing he creates a trap for himself. Value, while defined as 'the total of associations that become attached to an object', ultimately is reduced to a functional/contextual analysis that can only attempt conjecture at how an object was finally deployed. The flaw thus lies not so much with van Wijngaarden as with the instability of the concept of value outside of the exchange context.

The concept of value is most relevant in the analysis of objects as commodities, in other words, objects at that point in time when their exchangeability for some other object becomes socially relevant (Appadurai 1986, 13). Whenever artefacts are examined in isolation there is often an implicit assumption that objects constitute an apparently 'innocent' factual category, one that offers the advantage of 'clarity of realism' (Miller 1987, 106). Such clarity is in fact an illusion, for in every sense objects are neutral actors whose uses are social, serving both to create commonality and establish difference (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, 12). Away from the immediate context of exchange, the object can play a central role in the construction of multiple social realities arising from different social positions. As such, it is

able to straddle temporal, cultural and social factors that are inextricably interwoven (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987; Thomas 1991). The fluid meanings of objects can thus serve to create and reinforce within both individuals and communities as a whole notions of identity and difference, consonance and opposition. The object can in essence signal both identification with the properties it possesses (its foreignness or exclusivity, for example) and a distinction drawn between those very properties and the identity of the individual (such as retaining membership in a differently constituted social realm) (Thomas 1991, 25). In this sense the object serves as a 'temporal conduit' through which shared histories and topographies transcend time and place, enabling meanings to emerge that run counter to official cultural codes. Objects are dynamic components of the social realm; rather than merely passively reflecting pre-existing social codes and norms, they can also embody social narratives that fall outside the bounds of the official and institutional. In this view, the object can transmit not only power, as is seen in models of prestige economies, but also knowledge of the world and indigenous culture histories (Seremetakis 1994, 135). The creation and recovery of memory, identity, and value are culturally mediated material processes activated by objects.

The present study has the considerable merit of recognizing the paradoxical nature of ceramics as an artefact category. Their ubiquity in the archaeological record elevates their utility to the archaeologist as markers of chronology and spatial mapping of cultural interaction, but this very ubiquity is a prime indication of their fundamentally nominal status within the societies that deployed them. Cross-categorical analysis of different vessels and their frequency in different contexts has the salutary effect of showing just how unexceptional certain Mycenaean forms were in Ugarit society. The privileged position of Mycenaean ceramics is shown to be a modern historiographic construct rather than an archaeological 'fact'. Not surprisingly, van Wijngaarden reports that Mycenaean ceramics are essentially invisible in the extensive archives recovered from Ugarit. The inescapable conclusion is that these ceramics were of no great importance in and of themselves. That is not to say that they are insignificant, but rather that their significance lies in their role in suggesting other, less visible forms of exchange and consumption. Among the likely possibilities are that ceramics were a more accessible substitute commodity for those who lacked the means or access to precious metals or other 'luxuries', that the decorative motifs on the vessels carried cultural or ideological significance otherwise manifested in foreign components of ritual practices, or that the vessels are but the surviving material correlates of consumption behaviour involving perishables such as food and textiles. Similarly, ceramics reflect the sensory qualities of other goods through their decoration, finish, colour and context. They would have evoked a response separate and apart from their status as ceramics, and therein would lie their value.

The location of value within the contemporary cultural sphere of Ugarit society is confounded by the very abstraction of the concept being employed. Ultimately van Wijngaarden oversteps the evidence he has ably produced for differential distribution and context. A basic problem with his conclusion regarding value is that it does not appear possible, at least on the basis on the extant archaeological evidence, to relate the occupants of the elite houses with the occupants of the tombs. We do not know to what extent, if any, the value system at work in the domestic context was complementary to or in conflict with

the value system employed in the mortuary context. In this regard, van Wijngaarden predicated his conclusions on a single and by no means inconsequential assumption, namely that the élite domestic architecture and the tombs represent one, coherent unit of Ugarit society.

The received view of Mycenaean ceramics as prestige objects in and of themselves has left us with decades of specialist studies analysing every aspect of their fabrication, ornamentation, and distribution. Such a 'literalist' approach simply reinforces the view that the ceramics themselves held a special place within the repertoire of Late Bronze Age material culture. The more interesting idea – that the ceramics are markers of a subtle and embedded ideological 'trade' – has emerged only with the integration of richer theoretical approaches into the archaeological discourse of the East Mediterranean. The naive view that in some real sense the artefact 'speaks' for itself is gradually giving way to more sophisticated, self-critical approaches that attempt to move beyond typology and chronology. It is fair to say that what has been demonstrated beyond doubt are the inherent limits of a methodology that seeks to isolate one component of material culture. Van Wijngaarden is to be commended for bravely setting out for this still underexplored epistemological territory.

VALUE BEYOND UGARIT

Sofia Voutsaki

I should start by saying how refreshing it is to see Mycenaean pottery, a body of material discussed usually in terms of ever more refined and accurately dated typological sequences, being examined in its context and in the light of a sophisticated theoretical approach.

Before I address the archaeological study case, let me make a few comments on the definition of value adopted in this study. Simmel's approach to value arose out of a critique of historical-materialist definitions of value, such as Marx's theory of value as invested labour, or value defined by utility and scarcity. These theories have dominated economic and social theory for a long time, while Simmel's contribution to economic and social theory is only now being more widely recognised (see the Introduction in Simmel 1990; Poggi 1993). His main point, that value is a judgement made by people rather than an inherent property of objects, is absolutely crucial for our understanding of value. However, when Simmel's definition is detached from his complex philosophical discussion about the nature of economic action, or the debate about subjectivity and objectivity in the valuing process, it somewhat loses its potency: saying that value is defined by desirability and accessibility sounds somewhat bland, not to say tautologous. Moreover, when his notion of value is transferred into archaeological material with its much longer time-depth, it proves to be a rather static theoretical tool. While I fully agree with van Wijngaarden that value is culturally constructed and socially regulated and that the value of an imported object should be investigated in the context of the receiving society, this approach cannot fully explain changes through time nor shifts in demand. Assessing value is an important step forward, but understanding how value and demand are *created* in the first place is perhaps even more essential (see Voutsaki 1993; 1997). To put it simply, we also need to address how and why objects *became* desirable, as well as how and why they *became* accessible.

It is better to address these questions in the specific case: the value of Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit. Let me first make some comments on the analysis and interpretation of the data.

van Wijngaarden has carried out the kind of contextual analysis we need in order to interpret the appreciation of Mycenaean ceramics abroad. Of course his data are problematic, and he is aware of that: he is dealing with old excavations and therefore rather unreliable data; the extent of the excavation and the quality of the information available are uneven; what is more important, the comparison is based on the quantity of Mycenaean pottery rather than its proportion to local wares. It is true that this kind of criticism could be levelled against most attempts to discern patterns in an archaeological distribution. We never have ideal data; information from old excavations is notoriously difficult to use, and even today most excavations do not take post-depositional processes into account nor do they study the plain local wares closely. We simply have to start from somewhere and make some assumptions. Still, in this particular case, a certain grading of the quality of contextual information, and the adoption of different resolution levels in the analysis would help controlling the problems of uneven information and might bring any patterns more into relief. It would be useful, for instance, to study the proportion of imported Mycenaean versus local ceramics even in one or two of the more recently excavated and better recorded areas – if, of course, this information is available. Or, it would be useful to analyze in more detail (i.e. in terms of presence/absence, co-occurrence with other imported objects or mutual exclusion, ‘value’ of the other imports, etc.) the Mycenaean pottery found in the few tombs that are intact and well documented – as long as these better documented cases are not considered representative of the entire site. It is important to assess in more detail the value of Mycenaean ceramics in relation to other local and imported ceramics; otherwise, we might not be able to depart significantly from earlier studies that examined Mycenaean pottery in total isolation.

The mention of graves brings me to my next reservation: the importance of sumptuary behaviour in shaping the archaeological data. There is an implicit assumption here that the archaeological record (a record of discard, loss and only sometimes purposeful and deliberate deposition) reflects directly the circulation of goods. But this is not always so. Objects will enter the archaeological record in different ways and rates, depending on their use in social practices. To give a simple example, objects that are deposited in sealed contexts, such as tombs, are more likely to be recovered than objects found in settlement rubbish tips or those deposited as votives in open air shrines. Thus, any comparison of the quantity of objects across different contexts (burial, settlement, sanctuaries) needs to take sumptuary rules into account. This leads us to another question: why was Mycenaean pottery deposited in Ugaritic graves and what did it signify in this particular context? We cannot take it for granted that Mycenaean pottery or other imported objects in graves signalled the burial of a merchant, unless we carry out a fuller analysis of mortuary practices in Ugarit and conclude that social status in general, and specialized status or merchant activities in particular, *were* expressed through the deposition of wealth or of specific imports in tombs. If there is one thing the recent discussions about the active role of material culture have taught us, it is that treatment at death does not necessarily faithfully reflect roles held in life (Hodder 1982, Morris 1992). And what about other tombs in the Near East that contain several Mycenaean vases (Gilmour 1995)? Should they be considered the resting place of Levantine merchants as well?

Having said that, the conclusions reached in this study are convincing: stirrup jars were more generally available and imported primarily for their contents; amphoroid kraters were more exclusive and obviously exchanged for themselves, while rhyta, which by definition can only have a very specialized function, were more restricted and might have had a special religious significance. They dispel earlier ideas about the high value and central role of Mycenaean pottery which, I suspect, were derived more from a Aegeo-centric view of trade in the LBA than from actual observations of the data. (I should point out, however, that the logical extension of the approach adopted in this study does not allow us to generalize: what was perhaps not quite so valuable in the cosmopolitan harbour of Ugarit might have been coveted in Transjordan). But they are not very surprising, and in many ways the use and appreciation of those objects in the mainland was (*mutatis mutandis*) not that radically different. In this case then, we do not really observe a drastic redefinition of value, perhaps not even a radical redefinition of function and use, although of course these items were integrated in local practices. Mycenaean pottery was, as van Wijngaarden points out, simply *one* of the categories that were there and could be obtained.

Surely the next question should be: how and why did Mycenaean pottery become accessible? How and why did it become desirable? Unless we ask these questions, the study will remain static and, to a certain extent, descriptive. I do not think we can fully understand the appreciation of Mycenaean pots in LHIIIA2-B Ugarit unless we widen the scope of the discussion to understand the creation and cessation of demand for Mycenaean ceramics. A discussion of demand, however, will inevitably raise the problem of supply, i.e. the modes of production and distribution of Mycenaean pottery.

To take the first point, I believe that the study should be extended to include imports in the earlier and later periods as well as local imitations. Admittedly the early imports are few, but a comparative analysis in terms of presence/absence of categories might allow us to document better the tentative initial stages and will bring into relief the formalization of distribution mechanisms in the LHIIIA2-B period. An examination of local imitations can give us invaluable insights into the integration of Mycenaean ceramics in the indigenous value systems. Finally, the differences in the distribution of LHIIC imports might tell us whether the collapse of the Mycenaean palaces had any effects on the distribution of Mycenaean pottery in the eastern Mediterranean.

The uneven distribution of Mycenaean pottery types between regions and sites of the eastern Mediterranean (as van Wijngaarden points out on p. 6) suggests that demand determines to a large extent the presence of Mycenaean pottery abroad. But demand is not constructed in the confines of each cultural unit, at least not in the LBA. We cannot separate demand in Ugarit entirely from supply from the Mycenaean centres, for the simple reason that in this period we are dealing with a fairly sophisticated system of production and distribution, where supply is tailored to demand and vice versa: certain types of pottery, such as Pictorial pottery and the so-called 'Levanto-Helladic' types, are produced in the mainland for export to eastern markets. The question is: Was this system under central palatial control? It has already been proposed that the *production* of fine pottery for export was controlled by the Argive centre(s) (Sherratt 1982). The almost exclusively Argive provenance of imported fine LHIIIA2-B pottery in the eastern Mediterranean (Sherratt 1982, 181, with references; Jones

1986, 542–71), the chronological coincidence between the appearance of larger quantities of Mycenaean pottery and the *floruit* of the palatial system, the increase in the number of local imitations after the collapse of the Mycenaean palaces, all these support the idea of a special relationship between the Argive palaces and pottery production. Did the Argive centres, however, exert a monopoly over the *distribution* of pottery to the eastern markets? This is a vexed question, complicated further by the mixed cargoes in BA shipwrecks that defeat any attempt to conclude on the ethnic identity of traders (*if* such a notion was considered important at the time), and not helped by the puzzling silence on both trade and pottery in the Linear B records (see Knapp 1991, 44; Halstead 1992, 64–65). I submit that a detailed discussion lies beyond the scope of this article, but the problem should at least be raised; van Wijngaarden's rather vague statement that pottery might have circulated in exchange networks which were not under direct high-level control (p. 8), glosses over it and over the differences between mainland Greece and the Levant. Fine pottery must have circulated under central control in some parts of the Aegean: the importation to Rhodes of fine pottery exclusively from the Argolid in LHIIIA (Jones 1986, 501) should indicate a directional exchange network (Voutsaki 1993, 153). Outside the Aegean, the discovery of large amounts of pottery in Cyprus and of Cypro-Minoan marks on pottery produced in the Argolid (Cline 1994, 54) confirms that this pottery was produced with the Cypriot market in mind. Beyond Cyprus, however, matters get more complicated: we cannot exclude that Mycenaean pottery entered the eastern networks through the initiative of Cypriote or Levantine traders (for a longer discussion see Knapp and Cherry 1994, 129). On the other hand, the concentration of Syro-Palestinian imports in Mycenae in LHIIIB in particular (Cline 1994, 58) should also be noted. A case can be made then for centralized control over pottery trade on the Aegean side, at least as far as Cyprus, but the situation in the Levant was probably different and more complex.

The main point I want to make is that the appreciation of Mycenaean pottery cannot be examined only in the Ugaritic context. When discussing demand and value, we need to take into account the entire life cycle of objects. In the case of Mycenaean pottery this would involve its production in mainland Greece, its dissemination into the eastern Mediterranean, and its consumption in Ugarit. Why Mycenaean pottery became accessible and desirable cannot be explained only in reference to local needs and conditions; it also has to do with the fact that the Mycenaean palaces became integrated into the wider world of the eastern Mediterranean in the LBA, that they became a player, though undoubtedly a marginal and inferior player, in the international game of economic exchanges, diplomatic negotiations and political rivalry. Ultimately the discussion is about the LBA phenomenon of intensification of trade, increased circulation of raw materials, artistic skills and finished products as well as increased interaction and mobility; about the creation of a wider world where both large empires and smaller autonomous or semi-autonomous polities had to negotiate their position.

To conclude: The kind of contextual analysis and theoretically informed discussion offered by van Wijngaarden in this article are badly needed in Mycenaean archaeology. It is absolutely essential to avoid sweeping generalizations and to place our analyses in the local cultural and social context – but we should not neglect the wider historical context. These

localized studies should urge us to address and reformulate the broader questions: the historical changes that brought about the creation and dissolution of exchange networks; the mechanisms of exchange in the Mycenaean world and the eastern Mediterranean as a whole; the extent of central control over trade. Admittedly a full discussion of these problems is beyond the scope of a short article – but my aim here is to stimulate further archaeological dialogue, an apt purpose in this context.

VALUE, MEANING AND CONTEXT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF MYCENAEAN CERAMICS

Todd Whitelaw

The present article is a welcome contribution to the study of Mycenaean ceramics and to the study of East Mediterranean production, consumption and distribution systems. The general argument for an archaeology of value has wide-reaching relevance, while the specific case study usefully raises general issues of approach and methodology.

Since, for the archaeology of most regions and periods since the Neolithic, ceramics form the bulk of our artefactual evidence, it is surprising how little information, in general, we try to squeeze from them. Because of the relatively fine-tuned chronology which has been developed for the sequence of Mycenaean ceramic stylistic change, these vessels have become crucial for chronological dating well beyond the Aegean. Perhaps because of this particular attention, and the limited range of shapes of Mycenaean vessels found abroad, interest is increasingly focusing on the role that Mycenaean vessels played in inter-cultural contact. This has principally been considered in terms of the nature of the materials exchanged: the vessels themselves or their contents, or if the latter, what sort of contents. In the paper under discussion, the author has usefully broadened this question much further, to begin to consider the meaning of the vessels, and particularly to explore the potential for identifying the systems of value within which Mycenaean vessels were consumed.

While the focus of the exploration is concerned with concepts of value, it becomes clear, particularly when considering the association of conical rhyta with ‘ritual’ contexts, that ‘value’ is used in a variety of ways which extend beyond the distinctions drawn in the introductory discussion, becoming more synonymous with ‘meaning’. While this substitution might be held to make the discussion considerably more broad (though at the same time commensurately more vague), it would appear to be more compatible with the patterns of use defined, and the types of perceptions suggested, for the different types of vessels analyzed. Some of the theoretical and methodological implications of such a search for ‘meaning’, are worth considering explicitly. The success of any archaeological investigation depends on an effective articulation of theory, methodology, and data. In this particular case, I believe that achieving the author’s objectives hinges crucially on our understanding of the context of the Mycenaean vessels – without this, we can only talk of patterns in the associations of different characteristics of the archaeological data. In this case, the author clearly demonstrates different patterns in the archaeological recovery of different types of Mycenaean sherds and/or vessels (see endnote). While appreciating that the data from Ras Shamra are far from ideal, I am concerned as to whether we understand enough about either the archaeological or cul-

tural contexts of these patterns. Whether they (yet) tell us anything about emic perceptions of value/meaning needs serious scrutiny.

The argument depends on documenting the differential distribution of specific Mycenaean vessel types, in different contexts across the site of Ras Shamra (and the neighbouring site of Minet el-Beida). Sensibly, for an initial investigation, the author focuses his analysis on the three most commonly occurring shapes, for which distinct functions (and meanings) can be anticipated, as they are distributed among broadly categorized depositional contexts. The selection of data for analysis, and the categories through which it is analyzed, raise a series of sampling concerns. While a wide range of depositional contexts has been sampled at the site, contexts with distinctively different characters (the palace, specific residential quarters, the port, tombs) were excavated at different times, using different recovery standards and are documented to very varying degrees. These can be presumed to have significantly biased the archaeological data recovered and available for analysis, and some form of assessment of these potential biases, and the ways in which they may have affected (creating or masking) the patterns that can be identified, needs explicit consideration, if we are to have confidence that the differences in documented distributions relate to past depositional practices, rather than to such recovery biases. While laborious, various approaches to such assessments might be considered, such as by assessing the recovery rates for Mycenaean sherds in comparison with other materials, such as other relatively frequent imports (Cypriot), or particular categories of local vessels. Conversion of counts to densities relative to the (approximate) amount of deposit of the relevant date excavated, would also help to indicate whether low counts of Mycenaean vessels in specific excavations were an accurate representation of past depositional patterns, or more likely to be due to recovery bias.

At a more detailed level of archaeological context, it is not usually clear what kind of depositional context individual vessels were found in. Some, perhaps most, of those deposited in tombs, were complete, purposeful depositions, in the approximate positions and with the associations in which they were recovered. It is clear from the Ras Shamra publications that many others are individual sherds which may or may not have been recovered in or near their original context of deposition, which itself may or may not relate directly to their context of use/consumption. Throughout the analysis the context of recovery is presumed to represent the context of consumption. This may have a fair degree of reliability, since only broad distinctions of context (domestic, funerary, religious) are drawn, but one would have more confidence in the patterns identified had this been explicitly considered. For example, the recovery of eight smoothed and pierced sherds from amphoroid kraters, recovered from a single pit at Minet el-Beida, suggests that those items would have had a value/meaning quite distinct from complete vessels, and their find location should not be considered to represent the location of consumption of complete examples of such vessels. This suggests a need to critically evaluate each example and its context.

Shifting from archaeological recovery context to ancient social context, raises a series of further concerns for any analysis and interpretation of meaning. The Mycenaean vessels considered range from LHII to late LHIIIB, potentially spanning a period of three centuries. During this period, as the author notes, the nature of Mycenaean society changed signifi-

cantly, and from what we can see of the patterns of importation of Mycenaean vessels in the Levant, the meaning attached to Mycenaean vessels across this region would seem at least to have been open to change. Given the relatively tight chronology of Mycenaean styles, it would seem appropriate to ascertain whether the patterns of deposition of Mycenaean vessels at Ras Shamra remained stable, or changed through time. Because the pattern of Mycenaean interaction with the region changed during this time span, this might be expected to have an impact on the local perception and ascribed value/meaning of Mycenaean material culture. As such items became more familiar, they may have become less exclusive and more consistently interpreted, and we might anticipate that they would become integrated into local systems of meaning and patterns of behaviour in an increasingly consistent way; many of the 'exceptions' to such patterns might be early, when the local meaning of the vessels was still being negotiated.

There is a widespread dilemma which faces archaeologists wrestling with the meaning of materials or behaviour in the past, since our understanding of the meaning depends on our understanding of its context. Aside from simply asserting this (a mantra of post-processual archaeology), there is a very real element of opening Pandora's Box involved. This is not to suggest that this particular Box should not be opened, but that, contrary to hopes, it really isn't possible just to peek in a little. In the present paper, interpretations of the meanings of particular Mycenaean vessels are based on the differential distribution of different shapes in different excavated contexts, and the specific meanings attached to those vessels, depend on our understanding of those contexts. The difficulty is that the latter have not, in the main, been subjected to a similar sort of critical assessment: we somehow 'know' which structures represent élite, and which represent more common residences; we 'know' which are palaces, and have expectations about the type of individuals who resided there, and in what ways their value systems may have differed from those of other residents of the community. Similarly, we assume that the specific structures we have identified as religious had coherence as a category in the minds of the ancient inhabitants, and that they behaved in comparable ways in those contexts. Simply to pursue this last example, the distribution of rhyta documented by the author suggests significant differences in the patterns of behaviour between the *Temple aux rhytons* and those on the *Acropole*. This is surely a warning that lumping these contexts under the single heading of 'ritual' is inadequate, particularly if it is the meaning of these vessels which is under investigation. In another specific example, it is assumed that burials with a range of foreign imports are those of a class of individuals wishing to express their international relations – this assumes, for the context of the Mycenaean vessel, precisely the value or meaning which the analysis aims to establish for the vessel. Can we get away from such assumptions? Perhaps not, but the interpretations we construct will carry more weight when they are grounded in a thicker web of inter-relations among different kinds of archaeological materials which demonstrate consistent patterns. In this case, one would need to embed the analysis of Mycenaean material within the context of a series of parallel studies of other imports, and a broader consideration of mortuary behaviour. A site with a contemporary documentary record, such as Ras Shamra, holds out the additional promise of emic contextual information from textual sources, to provide contextual information independent of our

assumptions about the material record. In the present paper, the specific meanings attached to vessel forms are nuanced with a subtlety which goes well beyond what our understanding of their contexts would seem to justify.

Finally, it is worth returning to the issue of value versus meaning: what are we actually learning about the differential meanings of Mycenaean vessels at Ras Shamra, from the preferential use/consumption/deposition of different vessels in different spatial and cultural contexts across the site? The analytical categories of domestic, funerary and religious contexts, are meant to define types of spaces where different types of activities, and different sets of concepts, were enacted and invoked by the past inhabitants of the site. These are functionally-specific contexts of deposition, yet they need not be mutually exclusive spheres of activity for different individuals or groups of individuals, and so need not represent different perceptions or value-systems held by different social groups within the community. We might anticipate that the residents of the larger houses, and those of the smaller houses, were not the same individuals, though some of those who lived in smaller houses, but did not have particular types of Mycenaean vessels in their own homes, may have used them and had perceptions of their value, in other contexts. In contrast, we do not know who specifically interacted with these vessels in the ritual contexts – were these individuals who did or did not have similar vessels in their own residences, or rulers who did not have them in the palaces? In other words, whose value systems are the different depositional patterns informing us about?

Similarly, if the distributions of different vessel forms are largely function/activity based, are the distributions telling us about how specific groups of individuals understood those vessels, or are we simply seeing, less directly, that certain activities were undertaken by, or considered appropriate for, different groups within the society? For example, if conical rhyta are only found in a few of the larger domestic contexts, is this telling us that only the wealthier residents wanted them or could get access to them, or is it telling us that within larger domestic establishments, some activities linked to ritual were performed that were not an integral part of smaller establishments? Such alternative suggestions for the differential distributions of such a class of vessel are likely to have very different implications for our understanding of the value or meaning of such artefacts.

Essentially, once one cracks the lid on ‘meaning’, it is difficult to start to define what sort of ‘meaning’ the patterns we might document are actually informing us about. Similarly, at this stage in research on such issues, it can seem almost impossible to start, since no meanings – whether of specific artefacts, or their contexts – can necessarily be assumed as a basis for further interpretation (the Post-processual ‘Catch-22’). On the other hand, one has to start somewhere, and it is surprising that we have been able to avoid such issues – at least explicitly – for as long as we have. The author has made an excellent case for the need for such a perspective – and bravely, having opened the lid and had a peek inside, didn’t simply slam the lid in horror. The difficulty I see is that we cannot just open the lid on ‘meaning’ a crack – to fully see the scope of the problem, as well as the potential, we need to grasp it firmly and open it fully – which will require a thorough assessment of our theories, assumptions, methods and biases, as well as a critical appraisal of the data we have available, and what inferences we can realistically base upon them.

That the author has been able to define several clear patterns in the deposition of different Mycenaean vessel forms at Ugarit despite relatively poor chronological resolution, often vague evidence for deposit formation, very uneven documentation and partial publication, is a tribute to his perseverance, and testimony to the value and potential of such an investigation. I think, however, that we will need to be able to bring a wider set of contextual information to bear on these patterns, if we are to understand the meaning(s) or value(s) of these vessels to the ancient inhabitants of Ugarit. This article has effectively defined a crucial set of questions, and has begun to outline an approach to dealing with them.

Note

On a purely technical note, the differences in the distributions of the three types of vessels are significantly clearer when the percentage distributions across contexts, are calculated excluding the unprovenanced examples, which in this analysis are simply 'noise'.

THE VALUE OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACH: A REPLY

Gert-Jan van Wijngaarden

Frank De Mita, Sophia Voutsaki and Todd Whitelaw, obviously, took the article for what it was meant to be: not a final assessment of the use of the concept of value in archaeology, nor a definitive analysis of the Mycenaean pottery at Ugarit, but an attempt to explore these issues as a basis for further discussion. Consequently, it is difficult for me to react to their comments. I can only nod in agreement to many of the points they raise and I feel that I just ought to thank them and go back to work with their valuable insights in mind. Instead of taking such an easy way out, however, I will react to some of the general issues raised by the three critics. Before doing so, I will briefly elaborate on the reasons why I chose Ugarit as the site to conduct my analyses. I feel this is necessary, because some of the criticisms derive from the difficulties inherent to the material of this site and below I will, unfortunately, repeatedly be forced to point to the limitations.

As is stated in the article and in the comments, the nature of the excavations at Ugarit, as well as the scanty record of documentation and publication has caused the quality of available archaeological information for the different areas at the site to be highly unequal. Whereas the excavations of a large part of the *Centre Ville* have been well published with equal attention for different classes of pottery (Yon (ed.) 1987), the older excavations have been published in preliminary reports and a number of synthesizing studies, which are all highly selective. It has been estimated that imported pottery, of which the Mycenaean vessels are only a part, constitutes approximately one percent of the total ceramic record at Ugarit (Monchambert 1983, 26). One glance at the two *corpora céramiques* suffices to show that the proportion of published Mycenaean vessels exceeds such a figure by far. In fact, Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery constitute the majority of the published ceramic record. It may be inferred that much attention

was devoted by the excavators to Mycenaean pottery, which, taking into account the clearly visible distinctions between Aegean and local wares, makes it plausible that not much of this material has been thrown away – even though an unknown quantity remains unpublished. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the local pottery, because of which important contextual information is not available.

It may be stated that such a site is not well suited for a contextual analysis of the kind I am trying to conduct. However, there is no denying the importance of Ugarit in the distribution pattern of Mycenaean pottery in the Levant. In terms of the quantity of Mycenaean material it is rivaled only by Tell Abu Hawam in the harbor of Haifa, Israel. Any discussion of Mycenaean pottery in the eastern Mediterranean should take Ugarit into account and instead of dismissing the site, we should find ways to deal with the problematic archaeological information. Moreover, the presence of extensive cuneiform archives as well as the extent and duration of the excavations and the sheer quantity of publications about Ugarit ensures that a good deal of unique evidence concerning the cultural context of the Mycenaean vessels is available.

The bias created by the inequality of the data for the different areas of Ugarit is large. This is the main reason why a purely statistical approach towards the on-site distribution of Mycenaean pottery is not feasible. Only very marked quantitative differences have been taken into account, which, through investigation of the individual contexts, have been examined on the extent to which they are the result of archaeological phenomena rather than of insufficient and unequal data. For this very reason, also, only broad contextual categories – domestic, funerary, religious – have been employed. Many nuances in the deposition of these vessels remain invisible because of this methodology. However, the general patterns stand out quite clearly and are reliable.

The concept of value All three critics comment on the main argument in the article: the suitability of an archaeological application of the dimensions of desirability and accessibility to gain insight in the concept of value. They feel that such an approach makes the concept static and is not suited to explain how material items acquire value, nor does it encompass all the possible meanings with which objects may be endowed at various stages and in different situations. I am fully aware that there are many more connotations attached to the concept of value than desirability and accessibility, as De Mita shows convincingly. Objects may mean many things to different people and may be involved in a multitude of strategies in manifold ways. In addition such meanings may change rapidly over time. Even though all the various possible meanings may ultimately affect the archaeological record, it seems impossible to include them all into archaeological methodology.

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I have been looking for dimensions by which the value of objects is objectified and which may be grasped archaeologically. Desirability and accessibility are such objectifications, which is not to say that they are unambiguous and straightforward. The tension between the desirability and accessibility of goods is not a *definition* of value, but a specific conceptual *framework* which allows us to look at this concept archaeologically, in full realization that other perspectives need to be taken into account as well. Voutsaki shows the flexibility of my approach by modifying the notion through asking how objects acquire desirability and accessibility.

Assessments of the context The patterns in the distribution of the different Mycenaean vessel types acquire meaning only through an interpretation of the specific contexts. All three critics seem to feel that my assessment of the three broad categories of contexts is oversimplified and should consider other categories of objects, in order to interpret the find contexts, their relations with the Mycenaean pottery and the way they may have functioned in cultural strategies. Even though I have tried to argue that Mycenaean pottery cannot be considered to constitute simply one class of archaeological material, this criticism is well taken by me and I agree that find complexes should be evaluated thoroughly. An additional reason to do so is that value is essentially a relative concept which is active through comparisons within and between categorizations (Thompson 1979, 7–8).

The practical difficulties involved in comparing the depositional patterns of different classes of Mycenaean pottery at Ugarit with those of locally produced ceramic classes have already been outlined. Probably, such comparisons would have been a possibility for parts of the Cypriot ceramic repertoire found at Ugarit. In that particular case, however, we should first assess whether our distinctions on the basis of provenance between two classes of imported decorated pottery was culturally significant, especially considering the fact that they may have been brought by the same merchants (Yannai 1983). All this would have been outside the immediate scope of the article. Instead, the three different classes of Mycenaean pottery have been compared to one another. Not only spatial distributions have been considered, but individual find contexts have been investigated as well.

A number of find contexts were to some extent relatively clear. The size and inventory of the *Palais Sud*, for example, leave little doubt that this was a high-status residence, which in fact also becomes clear from its archive (Courtois 1979, 1235–1240). What is uncertain, however, is the significance of this fact for inhabitants of – or visitors to – ancient Ugarit. The fact that Mycenaean amphoroid kraters are associated with such a building, and others like it, does not automatically imply that these objects were less accessible for people living in other types of houses. It is, however, an element within a depositional pattern which may be tested on other parts of the archaeological record of such a building. Similarly, the fact that only a few of the Ugaritic tombs possess large quantities of imports does not automatically imply that international relations were important in funerary practice, as Voutsaki rightly points out. It is, however, a pattern that could be an element of the archaeological reconstruction of funerary practice at Ugarit. The absence of complete data – inherent in the discipline of archaeology – forces us to make general assumptions. By doing so, I am not particularly worried about cases such as the *Palais Sud*. The existence of many less clear cut cases, which border on a variety of different contextual categorizations will be more problematic.

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Change over time I also agree with the commentators that it would have been interesting to include some kind of chronological separation in order to present a more dynamic picture. At many places at Ras Shamra, three successive floor levels have been distinguished within the last phase of the Late Bronze Age (Courtois 1974, 100). However, it has been impossible to correlate the Mycenaean pottery to such a stratigraphy. The long period of use of the tombs, likewise, prevents a chronological ordering without more knowledge of their inventories (cf. Keswani 1989b). It is perilous to use the stylistic chronology of the Mycenaean vessels them-

selves. At the Amman Airport-site, LHII-LHIIIA1 finds have been discovered in contexts which should be dated to the end of the thirteenth or even the beginning of the twelfth centuries BC (Hankey 1974, 131; Van der Steen 1996, 57). This example, to which other may be added, shows that Aegean ceramics in some cases could circulate for long periods of time, or were kept as heirlooms or antiques. In any case, the many small sherds which cannot be dated more securely than LHIIIA2-LHIIIB make it difficult to differentiate between these two ceramic phases.

Eight Mycenaean finds from Ugarit, however, can be ascribed to ceramic styles earlier than LHIIIA2. In comparison with the large quantity of Mycenaean vessels dated to the later periods, this number is small and it is possible that they arrived at Ugarit together with the later material. One of these early finds is an LHIIIA1 conical rhyton (Schaeffer 1949, 218-9, figure 91 nos 7, 15), which was discovered in 1931 near an altar in Minet el-Beida. Little else is known about this deposit and it is impossible to assess its stratigraphy. If, however, this find was deposited not too long after its manufacture, it would suggest that religious connotations were already attached to this vessel type at an early date.

Value beyond Ugarit Voutsaki is correct in emphasizing that the value of Mycenaean pottery at Ugarit is dependent not on local factors alone, but, ultimately, should be related to the inter-regional connections in the Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age. Before making sweeping generalizations, however, we need to be aware of the regional complexity. At Kalavassos-Ayios Dhimitrios in southern Cyprus, small Mycenaean container vessels were widely distributed in the Late Cypriot II settlement, while dinner vessels were concentrated in the elaborate building X (South and Russell 1993). A similar pattern is not visible at Enkomi on eastern Cyprus, where Mycenaean cups, bowls, kraters and jugs are as widely distributed in the settlement as containers (Dikaios 1969-1971). Such a difference, between two sites which may be considered centres in regional systems of distribution (Keswani 1993; 1996), even on a relatively small island such as Cyprus indicates that local and regional factors play an important role in the circulation and consumption of Mycenaean pottery. The fact that Cypro-Minoan marks appear to be present on pottery produced in the Argolid (Hirschfeld 1993), in my view, indicates the importance of such local and regional factors, rather than central control by Argive palaces.

Part of the complexity in the circulation of Mycenaean pottery becomes visible when discussing Aegean-type vessels of non-Aegean manufacture. In my opinion, far too often such pottery is referred to as 'local imitations'. We should, instead, acknowledge that from the late thirteenth century BC onwards Aegean-type pottery was produced in Cyprus and the Levant and could circulate widely (Leonard et al. 1993; Killebrew 1998). Whether this should be related to the demise of the Aegean palaces as Voutsaki implies, or to the success of Cypriot middlemen in acquiring control over the supply of a commodity as Sherratt (1999) has recently suggested, is open for further discussion. Moreover, the variety of Mycenaean-type derivations is wide, ranging from the adoption of certain decorative motives in local wares to true imitation (Åström 1998). It would be extremely interesting to investigate differences in the appreciation of these classes at Ugarit. The basis of such an investigation, however,

ought to be a large scale analytical program such as the kind carried out for the pottery at Broglio di Trebasacce in Italy (Jones and Vagnetti 1991; Jones et al. 1994).

In the *Maison au frites* at Ugarit, two Mycenaean conical rhyta were found together, one of which was thought to be of local manufacture (Schaeffer 1936, 138–139). These vessels were discovered in direct association with a group of frit figurines. In the same area, but somewhat further away, two Aegean-type zoomorphic rhyta were found together – one of original Mycenaean fabric and the other probably local. It is not known whether this deposit may be considered representative. For now, however, I think that classificatory distinctions were made on the basis of vessel type, style and function, rather than on the basis of origin.

The archaeology of meaning Frank De Mita and Todd Whitelaw both imply that more should be done to arrive at an archaeology of meaning, and I agree fully. As aptly shown by Bekaert (1998) in a previous issue of *Archaeological Dialogues*, one phenomenon may have a variety of meanings – on different epistemological levels. Moreover, there are complementary scientific approaches to investigate meaning! In order to deal with such a chaos coming out of Whitelaw's Pandora's box, we need to arrive at a tool kit consisting of a range of interpretative frameworks. These should allow us to distinguish between meanings that can be tackled through archaeology and others which remain beyond our grasp. Various complementary frameworks would each reveal different parts of ancient meanings. Possibly the concept of value as approached here could be one of the items in such a tool kit.

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