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Trade goods reproducing merchants? The materiality of Mediterranean Late Bronze Age exchange

Gert Jan van Wijngaarden

The concept of *materiality* is by no means clear and undisputed, either in social theory or in archaeology (Hoogsteijns 2008). The central idea seems to be that the material world shapes human actions. A materiality approach means taking an interest in the ways objects influence, or, indeed, manipulate, human practice. Objects are not simply vehicles, or symbols, for meaning and identity, but they determine behaviour through their material characteristics. However, scholars differ enormously in their ideas about *how* the material world influences human action. There are fundamental differences, for example, in approaches based on Daniel Miller's objectification compared with the symmetrical approaches inspired by the work of Bruno Latour in particular.

An important characteristic of the ways objects are able to shape human action is that they do so collectively. Categories of objects influence groups of people. As an example, consider the automobile: a world without cars is fundamentally different from a world with cars (Miller 2010, 59). The technical development of the automobile has changed patterns of human mobility and irreversibly affected the physical landscape. Mobile telephones are another good example of collective material action: by their material properties, these devices have fundamentally changed the ways in which people communicate and behave (*cf.* Ihde 1993, 116; Verbeek 2000, 57; Hoogsteijns 2008, 38). Of course, individual items can be endowed with multiple meanings and they can be reinterpreted to act specific cultural roles in different contexts (Hodder 1987; Thomas 1991). On a collective level, however, objects affect social and cultural practices by exercising influence on human behaviour through material properties and technical possibilities. The collective power of goods implies that collections of objects are particularly significant. In archaeological terms, this means that particular attention

should be given to situations where assemblages appear to have been meaningfully constituted.

Our material environment is often inconspicuous and familiar (Miller 2010, 50–51). The whole system of things and goods, the internal order of collections of objects, are part of people's *habitus*. The important influence of objects on human behaviour becomes apparent in situations where changes take place in the established material order (Latour 2005, 79–80). When objects and/or people move into a different cultural context, a crisis in the established material order occurs, leading to new associations among objects and people. Foreign and exotic objects are particularly able to upset existing material relations and create new ones.

In this article, I will focus on assemblages of exotic objects, which have been found in different parts of the eastern Mediterranean (see Fig. 7.1 for location of sites). Such assemblages, characteristically, have their own internal structure, consisting of dependent and hierarchical positions of objects towards one another (Robb 2004, 134). These dependencies and hierarchies within material assemblages are object of study here. They vary according to cultural context and, consequently, their effect on the social world will also be different in different societies. Hopefully, these variations in the social impact of collections of exotica will shed light on the ways in which they allowed social groups to express identity. This article should be considered exploratory and experimental for reasons that are outlined below.

Exotic objects in the eastern Mediterranean

Long distance communications and the exchange of goods in the eastern Mediterranean during the second part of the

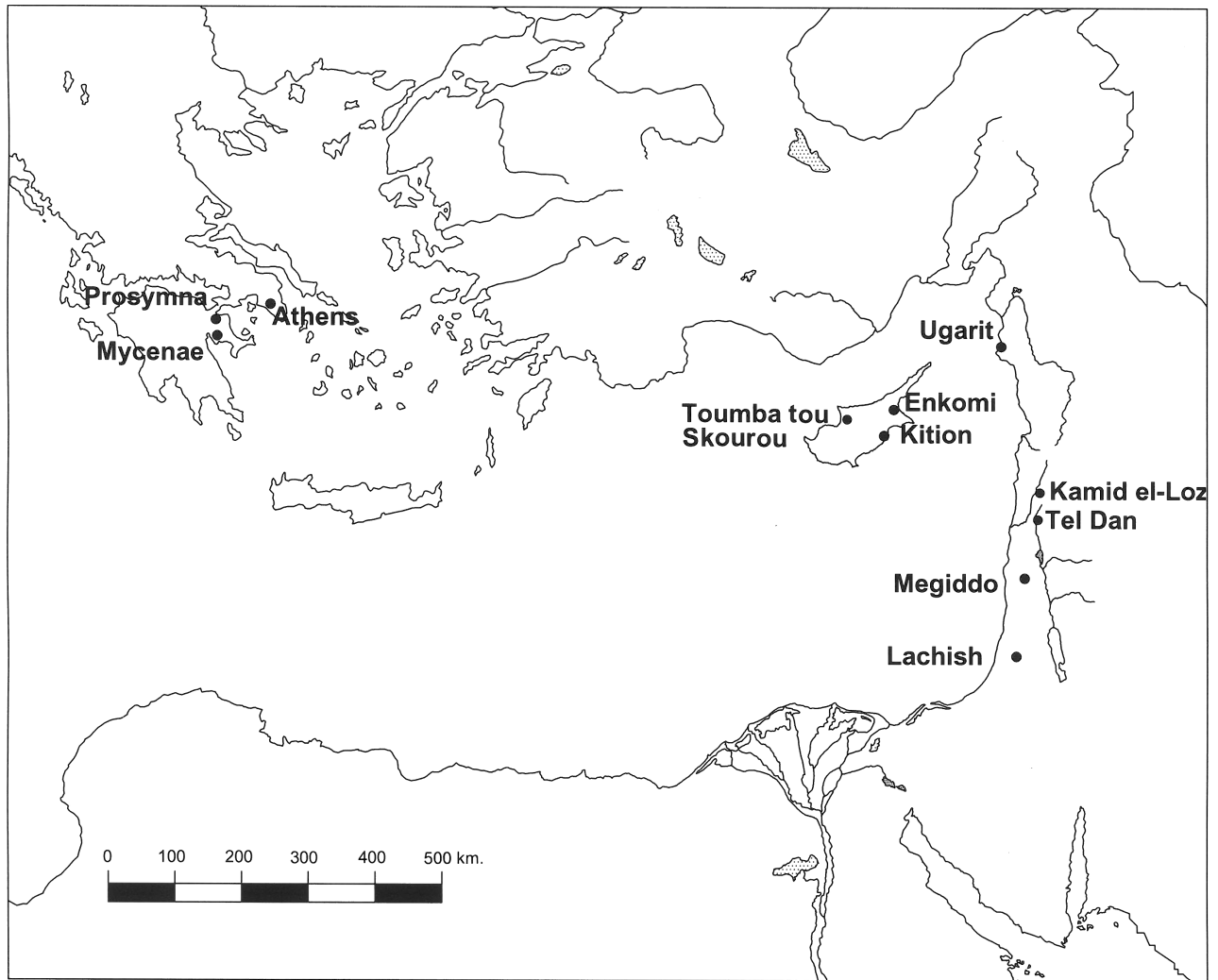


Fig. 7.1: Map indicating places mentioned in the text.

Late Bronze Age, was a highly complex affair. Epigraphic as well as archaeological sources show that a wide variety of goods circulated in extensive networks (Zaccagnini 1973; Liverani 2008, 161–168). Large amounts of goods were involved, both raw materials and manufactured items. The ceremonial language used in the available correspondence between rulers indicates the diplomatic nature of many of these transactions (Liverani 1972; 2000). However, it is also clear that, by the Late Bronze Age, economic motives played a major role even in the ceremonial exchanges between rulers (Zaccagnini 1973, 117–121). The archaeological distribution of goods and objects, which are not (often) mentioned in the epigraphic records, suggests that exchanges also took place outside the formal control of state powers. The extent of the exchange system is such that many people must have participated in it: kings and rulers, emissaries and merchants,

artisans and sailors, all participated in a system that surpassed their actions to an extent unknown to them.

The excavations at the Ulu Burun shipwreck have provided us with a view of the actual transport within these networks (Pulak 2001; 2008). The fact that the ship's cargo originated in a wide variety of regions in and beyond the Mediterranean has often been commented upon. Of equal importance, in my opinion, is the fact that large quantities of raw materials were shipped together with clear prestige objects and with a range of manufactured items made of less-valuable raw materials, such as pottery. Objects that could be considered to belong to separate 'spheres of exchange' (*cf.* Knapp and Cherry 1994, 152–155; Artzy 1997, 9) obviously were transported together.

One of the results of these exchange networks is cross-cultural consumption of manufactured items. This is

archaeologically visible in the existence of a class of so-called *international objects*: objects that occur frequently in different geographical parts of the Mediterranean (Heymans and van Wijngaarden 2011). Among these international objects are imports and exports (*cf.* Cline 2005; Laffineur 2005), but also so-called imitations and derivatives (*cf.* Papadopolous 1997, 450; Åström 1998), as well as objects in native traditions incorporating foreign stylistic or material elements. Several objects from different parts of the Mediterranean show a convergence of stylistic and material traits up to the point that it is impossible to identify the cultural source of manufacture (Crowley 1989; Feldman 2006). This so-called *International Style* in artistic production is an indication of the high degree of appropriation of foreign cultural elements in many parts of the Mediterranean during this period. Although these international objects are proportionally a very small part of the archaeological record in all areas (Manning and Hulin 1995, 282–286), their wide occurrence in a large area and over a long period of time shows their cultural significance.

Among these international items are a range of manufactured objects, which occur relatively frequently (van Wijngaarden 2007, 467; Heymans and van Wijngaarden 2011): Mycenaean dinner and storage vessels, Cypriot Base Ring ware and White slip II bowls, but also wall-brackets, Egyptian faience or stone scarabs and faience or alabaster vases, cylinder seals from Syria and Mesopotamia, many worn and antique, bone or ivory combs and other implements. Some of these items were produced at specific locations within the Mediterranean and could be transported over large distances (Knapp and Cherry 1994). However, many objects were also imitated and varieties of them were produced in different parts of the Mediterranean. Egyptian style faience scarabs, for example, were produced in the Levant and possibly on Cyprus (McGovern, Fleming and Swann 1993). Imitations, or, rather, foreign interpretations, could also occur in different materials, as is, for example the case for the faience and stone versions of Mycenaean stirrup jars (Hankey 1995, 117–123; Matoian 2004). Such material derivatives from exotic objects could themselves circulate, as is evident from the presence of Syrian-made faience stirrup jars of Mycenaean shape on Cyprus (Peltenburg 1976, 105). The degree to which the cultural origin of these objects was of relevance for the way they were appreciated is difficult to assess (van Wijngaarden 2008).

In terms of materiality, it should be noted that these objects are, for the most part, not made from very precious materials, nor do they require highly specific artisan skills. In terms of function, it is worthy of note that many of these objects are associated with cultural practices that are culturally highly specific and variable according to practice: bodily adornment (combs, beads, unguent-containers, containers for perfumed oil), dining and drinking (fine drinking, pouring and eating

pottery) and symbolic referencing (seals, scarabs). In other words, these objects are exceptionally suited to be culturally reinterpreted and assigned with new meanings (Antoniadou 2005). However, the prime material characteristic of these objects is their foreign raw material, technique, or style. They are exotics, with connotations of luxury and a wider world of long-distance contacts (Heymans and van Wijngaarden 2011, 125).

Tomb assemblages

Low value manufactured items are often found together in assemblages, notably in tombs. Funerary contexts are, of course, highly specific in the sense that they constitute intersections between life and death (Parker Pearson 1993, 203–205). Rituals surrounding death and burial create connections between material objects and living and dead human actors and the supernatural world. Through these rituals funerary assemblages are meaningfully constructed, even though they may constitute different material realities than those in everyday life.

The majority of the tombs with exotics considered in this paper were used for multiple burials. In the Levant, Cyprus and Greece, the use of built tombs during the Late Bronze Age often spanned several generations (Gonen 1992a, 9–15; 1992b; Keswani 2004, 31–36; Mee and Cavanagh 1998). These collective burial practices often resulted in earlier burials being disturbed by later internments and it is extremely difficult to relate individual finds to single burials or individuals. To complicate matters, it is possible that rituals of exhumation and/or secondary burial took place, during which new material items were added or removed from the funerary assemblages (Gallou 2005, 112–117). Assemblages of objects in a tomb are the result of human actions but, taken as a whole, they are not consciously constructed. They are the outcome of slow processes, which span generations and involved a number of different episodes of selection. It is unclear to what extent the assemblages as a whole were perceived as such in antiquity, whether anyone ever was conscious of the full range of the assemblage. The fact that most of the tombs discussed here have been subject to looting adds to the character of these assemblages as open archaeological contexts. One reason why this paper should be considered as experimental is because I will use these open contexts for archaeological analysis.

The open character of the assemblages is counterbalanced by the fact that they are associated with single tombs. The precise ways in which the tombs in the three areas are relating to the societies of the living is not altogether clear. At Ras Shamra-Ugarit in Syria, the tombs are situated below the houses (Salles 1995; Marchegay 2007; 2008). Even though not

all houses have a funerary cellar, we may assume a relation between the inhabitants of the house and the occupants of the tomb. At various other sites in the Levant and Cyprus, tombs are also associated with houses in an urban settlement. However, a large number of Late Bronze Age collective graves in the areas under consideration are situated outside of settlements. Since the use of funerary spaces is a highly ritualized activity (Bloch 1971; Laneri 2007), it is likely that there are strictly regulated ties among the living and the dead subjects and the material objects, which are connected to the tomb. It is assumed here that all tombs under consideration can be associated to specific groups in society, most likely kin-based groups (*cf.* Keswani 2004, 33–34; Gallou 2005, 135–137). The rituals by which individual members and material items are placed in (or removed from) the tomb serve to reproduce the collective identity of a group over a long period of time. By placing deceased individuals among his or her ancestors, continuity within the group is created (*cf.* Boyd 2002, 94–95). Rather than static representations of social status, our tomb assemblages should be considered as dynamic sets of material relations between objects and dead and living actors that shape diachronic collective cultural strategies.

In order to assess material relations among individual elements within tomb assemblages incorporating international objects, various points will be taken into account here: the presence of clear wealth indicators, notably gold and silver jewellery and metals; the presence of exotica and the quantities in which they were present with regard to the tomb assemblage as a whole; and the presence of locally made prestige items and/or pottery. The objective of this analysis is to establish structural associations and hierarchies among materials by noting which items frequently occur together. This will provide clues about the ways in which tomb assemblages acquire internal structure, which is the origin of the collective impact on the social world. An additional reason to consider this article as experimental is the large area that will be covered: tombs in the Levant, Cyprus and the Aegean will be included in the study. Hopefully, the comparative perspective adopted here will reveal variations in the transformative capacities of material assemblages of exotics.

The Levant

Ras Shamra-Ugarit in Syria and its harbour town Minet el-Beida are critical sites with respect to our understanding of Late Bronze Age Mediterranean interconnections (Caubet 2007; Calvet and Yon 2008; Routledge and McGeough 2009). Since the discovery of Ugarit in 1929 by Claude Schaeffer, much emphasis has been put on the cosmopolitan character of the town. Tombs, as well as settlement contexts, have yielded

a wide variety of artefacts imported from many different areas or imitations thereof. Cross-cultural consumption of exotics seems particularly well established at Ugarit. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that imports and exotica are a very small part of the total material record, even at Ugarit: less than one percent (Monchambert 1983, 25–45). Cross-cultural consumption is primarily a qualitative aspect.

A notable feature of Ugarit and its harbour town are the funerary cellars, which were mostly situated below the houses (Marchegay 2007; 2008). The archaeological analysis of these tombs is seriously hindered by the fact that almost all had been looted and because the publication of the funerary inventories of the earlier campaigns is fragmentary. It is clear that in all Late Bronze Age tombs local pottery, both coarse and painted, is most abundant in a quantitative sense. However, small numbers of imports and exotica are widely distributed. Many Late Bronze Age tombs at Ugarit contain small quantities of imported items or exotics, very often Cypriot and Mycenaean pottery and Egyptian alabaster vases. A typical example is tomb no. 13 in Ras Shamra, which was excavated in 1936 and which was, according to the excavator, undisturbed (Schaeffer 1936a, 139). In addition to a large quantity of Syrian bowls and jugs, a few Cypriot and Mycenaean pots were found, as well as an Egyptian alabaster jug. Considering that in this tomb the remains of 44 individuals have been identified (Vallois and Ferembach 1962, 566), the number of exotics can be considered to be low indeed.

Including small quantities of exotics in burials was a widespread custom in Late Bronze Age Ugarit. In itself, the inclusion of exotics is not a reliable indicator of social status. Some tombs with many valuables, such as the recently excavated grave 1008 at Minet el-Beida, yielded relatively few exotics (Marchegay 2004), whereas some relatively poor tombs, such as tomb 13 or 36, did have exotics (Schaeffer 1938, 201). Including small numbers of exotics in tombs was a widely shared practice among different social groups in Ugaritic urban society during the Late Bronze Age (Marchegay 2008, 109).

A small minority of tombs appears to deviate from the general pattern of tomb assemblages comprising a limited number of exotics only. In particular at Minet el-Beida, ancient Ma'hadou, some tombs contained very large quantities of exotic objects (Marchegay 2008, 112). The large tomb VI, which was excavated in 1930, contained large numbers of Mycenaean and Cypriot pots and even a possible Anatolian Grey ware krater (Courtois 1979, 262). Tomb III in Minet el-Beida (Table 7.1, below) also yielded large quantities of Cypriot and Mycenaean pottery, but also faience stirrup jars, Egyptian faience objects, gold pearls, a hematite cylinder seal and the famous ivory pyxis lid with a seated goddess (Schaeffer 1936b, 19–21; 1949, 144–149).

There are at least four of these exceptional tombs in

Minet el-Beida: tombs III, IV, V, and VI. It should be noted that other tombs in Minet el-Beida yielded smaller quantities of exotics, as was, for example, the case with the tomb that marked the discovery of Ugarit in 1929 (tomb I; Albanèse 1929) and in tomb 1008, which was excavated in 1998 (Marchegay 2004). The inventory of tomb 2698 at Ugarit has only been fragmentarily published (Courtois and Courtois 1978, 342–345), but included remarkably many Mycenaean pots, indicating that, perhaps, it too is one of these tombs with exceptional quantities of exotic objects. In these exceptional tombs exotics appear to have been collected in large quantities. It may be of significance that these tombs are not situated in or near the royal palace of Ugarit, but in the harbour town. In spite of their wealth, these tombs did not necessarily belong to the upper élites in the society of Ugarit. Collecting large quantities of exotic goods in funerary ritual appears to have been a practice of specific groups in the urban population of ancient Ugarit.

Elsewhere in the Levant, we find a similar pattern in the Late Bronze Age II period: many tombs with small numbers of exotics, often not more than one or two scarabs and some faience beads. An example is tomb 501 at Tell ed-Duweir, ancient Lachish (Tuffnell *et al.* 1958, 236), which contained a few bronze objects; some pottery imports and imitations, beads, and a series of scarabs and seals. The somewhat wealthier tomb 216 at the same site yielded Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery, and small quantities of exotic objects, among which were ivory artefacts (Tuffnell *et al.* 1958, 232–234). However, at various sites in the Levant Late Bronze Age tombs have been discovered that can be compared to the funerary cellars III–VI at Minet el-Beida in the presence of large quantities of exotics. Examples are the cave at Sarepta in Lebanon (Baramki 1956–1958), the so-called ‘Mycenaean tomb’ at Tel Dan (Biran and Ben-Dov 2002, 33–228) and tomb 912B at Megiddo in Israel (Guy 1938, 69–72, pls. 124–132).

An interesting clue about the social groups, which can be associated with these exceptional tombs may come from Tell es-Saidiyeh in Jordan, where fifteen Late Bronze Age II graves were discovered (Pritchard 1980, 28–30). The wealthiest of the tombs, number 101, yielded objects in silver, electrum, carnelian, bronze and ivory. This tomb was in the centre of the necropolis and had some special architectural features. Somewhat away from this tomb was grave 117, which was special because it contained a number of imports: Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery, an alabaster goblet, a faience bowl. Even though the quantities are much lower than in a large centre such as Ugarit, tomb 117 also seems to constitute one of those tombs with a special role for imports and exotics. It is of significance that this is not the wealthiest grave *strictu sensu*, but a tomb somewhat distinguished, with a highly specific material assemblage.

With regard to tomb assemblages of exotics, the general pattern in the Late Bronze Age II Levant is one of many tombs with small numbers of exotics and a few in which they appear to have been collected in large quantities. In social anthropology, a distinction is made between *things of quality* on the one hand and *quantifiable things* on the other (Thompson 1979; Gell 1998, 17–20; Gosden 2004, 36–39). Things of quality are heavily embedded in social relations and acquire value through immaterial aspects such as origin, previous owners *etc.* Quantifiable things are largely disembedded from the social universe and have a more economic value, which can be manipulated through quantity and variety. In all the tombs that have been discussed, exotic objects have the quality to refer to other worlds and far-away contacts. In some tombs, this symbolic significance is enhanced firstly through quantity and, secondly, through the combination of different types of exotics. This practice indicates that, in a social sense, some people were able to quantify exotic objects.

The specific pattern of quantification of exotic goods in a limited number of tombs appears to be characteristic of the Late Bronze Age II period. With the possible exception of the so-called *Schatzhaus* in Kamid el-Loz (Adler 1994), such quantification cannot be recognized in earlier tombs. The evidence from Minet el-Beida and from Tell es-Saidiyeh shows that this type of quantification is related to specific groups among the urban elites of the Levant. For the identification of these groups, it may be of significance that in Akko, several sets of weights were found in a funerary chamber with many imports (Ben Arie and Edelstein 1977, 8). The extraordinary tomb 912B in Megiddo also yielded weights (Guy 1938, 69–72), while in Minet el-Beida, weights were found in a funerary pit associated with one of our exceptional tombs (Schaeffer 1931, 2).

To assess the collective power of objects, the internal structure of the assemblages is of importance. There is great repetition in the type of exotics that occur in the Levantine Late Bronze Age tombs (see also Heymans and van Wijngaarden 2011 125–127): Cypriot and Mycenaean pottery and figurines; Egyptian alabaster vases, faience beads and faience or glass vessels, stone and faience scarabs; stone cylinder seals, often old and worn and, finally, a range of ivory implements. In tombs in which clear valuables, such as gold and silver or bronze vessels, are present, ivory implements, such as plaques, pyxides or boxes are present as well. When valuables are not present in tombs, usually only faience and glass beads, scarabs and amulets and Egyptian alabaster vases have been found, in addition to imported pottery: Mycenaean and Cypriot vessels occur together. The material dependencies and hierarchies within funerary assemblages in Late Bronze Age Levant are summarized in Table 7.1.

- Ivory implements (boxes etc)
- Cylinder seals
- Alabaster vessels
- Stone and faience Scarabs
- Faience beads and vessels
- Cypriot Base Ring pottery
- Cypriot White Slip II pottery
- Mycenaean drinking and storage pottery

Table 7.1: Material relations and hierarchies among exotics in Late Bronze Age Levantine tombs.

Mycenaean Greece

If we look at the presence of imports and exotica in mainland of Mycenaean Greece, the first thing that strikes us is that there are far fewer such objects than in the Levant and that their distribution shows a concentration in, and around, the Argolid and near Thebes and Pylos, not surprisingly, in the general area of the palaces (Heymans and van Wijngaarden 2011). One reason for this quantitative difference with the Levant is the fact that Mycenaean pottery, obviously, cannot be considered as exotic on the Greek Mainland. But even allowing for this difference, it is clear that absolute numbers of exotica in Mycenaean Greece are much lower than in the contemporary Levant. Interestingly, Cypriot pottery is also quite scarce, especially in tombs.

Despite their relative scarcity, exotics do occur in several Mycenaean tombs, and not only in tombs that can directly be associated with the Mycenaean centres of power. Indeed, small quantities of low-value manufactured exotics occur in tombs with little or no indications for wealth, such as in tombs VII and XXIII in the Athenian Agora (Immerwahr 1971, 183–190, 218–221). Interestingly, the few conspicuously wealthy tombs in the Agora, tombs with much metal and precious jewellery, do not seem to contain substantially more manufactured exotics than modest tombs. Tomb III, for example, is a very wealthy tomb, without exotics (Immerwahr 1971, 170–177). Tomb I, also very wealthy, contained two intricately worked and unique ivory pyxides, in addition to a single large Canaanite jar (Immerwahr 1971, 158–169).

More detailed information about the role of exotics in Mycenaean Greek tombs is obtained from Prosymna, near Argos. The cemetery, excavated in the 1920s by the American School of Classical Studies under the direction of C. Blegen, is the largest of Mycenaean Greece, which has been fully published (Blegen 1937). Most of the LH (Late Helladic) IIIA–LH IIIB tombs at Prosymna contain some metal goods, and low-value manufactured exotics. Of particular interest is that almost all tombs contain glass paste beads or beads of semi-precious stones, often carnelian. Such glass beads could very well have been produced locally or elsewhere on the Greek mainland (Hughes-Brock 1999, 289–290), but the

technique is supposed to have come originally from Egypt (Higgins 1980, 40).

Two conspicuously wealthy tombs (II and III), characterized by their many gold and bronze artefacts, contained a wider variety of exotics, among which was a carnelian hippopotamus figurine from Egypt found in tomb III (Cline 1994, cat. 32). However, there are several explicitly wealthy tombs, for example tomb XXXVII, with many wealth indicators and only a few exotics (Blegen 1937, 123–128). And there is a group of tombs at Prosymna without specific wealth indicators but with exotics. An example is tomb XXXVIII, which contained a few bronzes and a large number of exotics, of which some of high quality (Blegen 1937, 71–74).

In Late Helladic III tombs on Mainland Greece, there is not a clear correlation between the presence of low-value manufactured exotics and wealth indicators such as gold and silver jewellery or quantities of metals (Heymans and van Wijngaarden 2011). Exotic objects are present in a wide variety of tombs. Obviously, various social groups within Mycenaean society were associated with the symbolical expression of distant worlds through exotics in funerary assemblages. There are various wealthy LH III tombs without imports or exotics, but when they do have them, they are usually exceptional, notably elaborate sets of ivory (Konstantinidi 2001, 250–253). A larger variety and quality of exotics appears to have been related to some groups among the Mycenaean elites. Interestingly, in the period before the Mycenaean palaces, manufactured exotics in tombs do appear to correlate with the presence of wealth indicators. The Shaft Graves at Mycenae contained a wide range of exotics (Voutsaki, in press), while the tholos tomb at Vapheio also contained valuables in association with manufactured exotics, such as Egyptian stone vases and a Levantine axe (Kilian Dirlmeier 1987, 198–201). Interestingly, the Vapheio tomb also contained a set of lead weights. The relatively widespread social role of exotics in Mycenaean funerary ritual appears to be characteristic of the Mycenaean palatial period.

The exotic objects in Mycenaean Greek tombs during the palatial period show various archaeological associations (Heymans and van Wijngaarden 2011, 127–129). Glass, faience and stone beads are most abundant. Seals are less common. Possibly, many of these were made in the Aegean, sometimes from exotic raw materials. Others were worn and clearly old by the time they were deposited in the grave. Single bone and ivory objects do occur repeatedly, but elaborate sets of ivory are limited to tombs with wealth indicators. The internal hierarchy within the funerary assemblages (Table 7.2) resembles that in the Levant (Table 7.1). However, the repertoire of artefacts is much more limited in the Aegean and imported pottery did not serve as an exotic element in Mycenaean funerary rituals. What is altogether

- Elaborate sets of ivory
- Small ivory implements
- Stone cylinder seals
- Scarabs and faience amulets
- Glass, faience stone beads

Table 7.2: Material relations and hierarchies among exotics in Mycenaean Greek tombs.

lacking in Mycenaean Greece, is the type of quantification of exotic goods by specific social groups that we could see in the Levant.

Cyprus

In the archaeological record of Late Bronze Age Cyprus exotic goods appear to have had a prominent role (Steel 2004, 169–171; Bevan 2007, 152–156). The quantity and the diversity of such items are much higher than in the Aegean or in many areas of the Levant. In particular, there are many faience and stone vessels, imported from Egypt and the Levant, but also produced locally (Peltenburg 1974). And there is a substantial amount of Mycenaean pottery on the island (Steel 1998; van Wijngaarden 2002, 125–202), both imported and, towards the end of the thirteenth century, produced locally. Of course, exotics are a very small percentage of the total material record at Late Bronze Age Cyprus, but their wide geographical and contextual distribution shows that their significance derives not from quantities.

During the LC (Late Cypriot) IIC period many burials in the large urban centres of Cyprus were equipped with imported valuables and other prestige goods. It is of interest to note that there is a very clear correlation in the occurrence of manufactured imports and exotics with wealth indicators. Tombs that can be considered as very wealthy because of the presence of metals and jewellery, generally, also yielded a large quantity and wide variety of exotics. An example is the upper burial layer of tomb 9 in Kition, which contained large quantities of gold and silver, as well as a large quantity and wide range of exotics from different parts of the Mediterranean (Karageorghis 1974, 42–94).

The tombs at Enkomi *Ayios Iakovos*, varied considerably in the presence of wealth indicators and the presence of exotics. Fairly simple tombs, such as Swedish tomb 7A and Swedish tomb 13 still contained imports and exotica, often pottery, faience vessels and seals (Gjerstad *et al.* 1934, 498–500). Some of the less distinguished tombs had nice arrays of glass bottles, ivory boxes or faience containers and bowls. Wealthier tombs at Enkomi, such as Swedish tomb 3 (Gjerstad *et al.* 1934, 475–487) show a larger quantity and

- Elaborate sets of ivory
- Small ivory implements
- Mycenaean pictorial kraters
- Stone cylinder seals (often imported, but reworked locally, such as gold-capping)
- Stone and faience scarabs
- Faience flasks, beads
- Mycenaean containers and Egyptian alabaster vases

Table 7.3: Material relations and hierarchies in Late Cypriot tombs.

a wider variety of exotics. Tombs that can be considered as very wealthy, such as Swedish tombs 11 and 18 (Gjerstad *et al.* 1934, 546–559) and Dikaïos' tomb 10 (Dikaïos 1969, 357–394) showed a remarkable variety of exotics, including unique specimens such as ostrich eggs or gold-capped cylinder seals (Keswani 1989, 58–59, 63–64, 77–79; Aruz 2008, 144).

The important role for imports and exotics in tombs in Cyprus and the clear association between exotics and wealth indicators originates already in the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. A number of LC I tombs at Dromolaxia and Klavdhia have yielded rare finds of imported Syrian and Egyptian pottery and Near Eastern cylinder seals (Keswani 2004, 98). At Toumba tou Skourou, the wealthy tomb 1, dating to LC I–IIA, contained silver objects, as well as a range of exotic imports, for example LM (Late Minoan) IB dinner vessels (Vermeule and Wolsky 1978, 381–383). Although the absolute numbers of exotics and imports in LC I–II tombs are lower than in later periods, it is clear that such objects were collected and included in tombs by quantity and in wide varieties. The conclusion is that the practice of quantification of exotics in funerary ritual occurred in Cyprus much earlier than in the Levant, and was more widespread socially during LC IIB–C.

The internal archaeological associations of the funerary assemblages of LC II–IIIA, indicate a material hierarchy in which ivories were highly valued (Table 7.3). The same can also be said for Mycenaean pictorial kraters (Van Wijngaarden 2001). However, Mycenaean pottery in general is used widely in tombs on Cyprus, especially small closed vessels. There appears to be a difference between the distribution of Mycenaean drinking sets and storage vessels in Late Cypriot tombs (van Wijngaarden 2002, 201–202). Cylinder seals, especially imported ones, often antique and frequently reworked on Cyprus, are found in substantial quantities in the richer tombs. They may occur in fewer numbers also in tombs with few exotics. Faience beads, scarabs, Egyptian alabaster vases and Mycenaean containers, occur in many tombs, even in relatively poor ones.

The material hierarchy of the Late Cypriot tomb assemblages resembles that of the Levant closely. The wealthier tombs on Cyprus contain quantities and varieties of exotics and imports that equal or even supersede those of the exceptional tombs at Minet el-Beida or elsewhere in the Levant. However, while the quantification of exotics in tombs was a limited practice in the Levant, the correlation between exotics and wealth indicators in Cypriot tombs shows that many different social groups on the island can be related to such quantification practices.

Merchants in the Mediterranean

The overview above shows that the presence of a wide variety of manufactured exotics during the Late Bronze Age resulted in material expressions in tomb assemblages, which were similar but not identical, for various groups of people in different parts of the Mediterranean. By including elements from a coherent range of artefacts in funerary rituals, social groups associated with these tombs were identified with long-distance communication and exchange. Because of the long duration of tomb use, these choices were made by different people in successive generations. Tomb assemblages serve to connect individual actors of different generations into identifiable social groups. The resulting assemblages of exotics constitute highly specific material ‘fingerprints’ for such groups.

The groups of people that can be associated with these tombs in which international connections are expressed may have had different positions in the Levant, Greece and Cyprus, but they were not (only) among the ruling elites in each area. It is logical to think of the people, who were themselves involved in international communication and the exchange of goods. Merchants are well represented in the epigraphic record of the Late Bronze Age Near East (Knapp and Cherry 1994). Most of the kings had their own merchants who left the palace with a royal endowment and had to bring back raw materials and merchandise unavailable at home (Zaccagnini 1973). In the Amarna letters, these merchants also act as ambassadors and messengers for their king.

The relation of these Near eastern merchants with the state/king has been widely debated, especially with regard to the possibilities for private enterprise in long-distance exchange (Knapp and Cherry 1994, 125–155; Routledge and McGeough 2009). In recent research, the sharp distinction between state- and private trade is increasingly put into question (Schloen 2001, 254; Monroe 2009, 151–206). Instead, we should see a chain of command from rulers downwards, in which there is ample space for private enterprise. Interesting in this respect is the case of the trader Sinnaranu at Ugarit, who is mentioned on several tablets

(Libolt 1985, 236–242). In one of the available texts a ship of his is returning from Crete (Kapturi), an expedition for which he is exempted from paying taxes. Even though he is also known to be associated to the palace, the tax exemption shows a form of private enterprise at the same time.

The case of Sinnaranu at Ugarit reveals a complex organization of maritime exchange, with distinct roles for merchants, traders, sailors, investors, emissaries, *etc.* Merchants are usually identified in the archaeological record by sets of weights and/or by scaling pans (Hafford 2001; Alberti 2003). Considering the complex organisation of exchange in the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean, we should rather expect a range of varying material relations to the international world of communications and exchange. The varying patterns of material associations within the tomb assemblages of exotics that have been investigated here, show the capabilities of these objects to represent collectively the specific social role of international contacts for different groups of people.

The practice of collecting large quantities of exotics in tombs in the Levant and Cyprus discussed in this paper is significant. The large quantities of exotics found in association with wealth indicators and prestige items highlight the increasing wealth and power of some of the groups of people involved in maritime exchange. This practice is most marked in Cyprus, where it was widespread among different social groups and originated at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. The widespread quantification of exotics in tomb assemblages highlights the important role of international objects in the social representation of the Cypriot people (Antoniadou 2007, 499–501). Trade and traders appear to have occupied a central place in Late Cypriot society. In the Levant, the practice of collecting exotics in large quantities is also visible, but it is much less common and it appears to be restricted to specific groups among the urban elites. This may indicate that even though many different social groups were involved in trade and international exchange (Bell 2009), mostly sub-elites regarded this involvement as a source of group identity and status. Similar practices of collecting by quantity did not occur in Greece, which suggests that international trade and exchange were not as prominent as a label for group identity and status in Mycenaean society. Perhaps, this is the result of a more peripheral position of merchants and trade in the Mycenaean world in comparison to the Levant and, especially, Cyprus.

Concluding remarks

The experimental approach of this article was emphasized at the outset. If only for the sheer scale and diversity of the area dealt with, the conclusions of this paper must be treated

as indicative and hypothetical at this stage. Nevertheless, it is clear that the availability of a wide variety of low-value manufactured items enabled various groups of people in the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean to identify themselves with the world of international communications and exchange. Through the wide range of available artefacts, different groups of people were able to select (and exclude) specific items to be included in collective tomb assemblages. The results of such selection processes, which took place over many generations, are material expressions highly specific to particular social groups.

The material hierarchies that are visible in the tomb assemblages that we have looked at appear roughly similar in the Levant, Cyprus and the Aegean. Ivory implements and seals are to be more closely associated with wealth indicators than alabaster vessels and imported pottery. Faience and glass beads and scarabs were most common. The repeated occurrence of similar material combinations in the assemblages is evidence of a shared material culture (van Wijngaarden 2007). However, the tomb assemblages do show some geographical differences in material hierarchies. In Cyprus, for example, there was a particular appreciation for Mycenaean pictorial kraters. Local values and practices were able to differentiate within the general framework of material hierarchies to make assemblages more culturally specific.

The major observed difference among the three areas concerns the practice of collecting exotic goods in tombs in large quantities. It is postulated here that the collection of large quantities of exotics in funerary assemblages may be a practice of people who were themselves involved in the complex organization of overseas communications and contacts. The fact that these assemblages of exotics were constructed during successive funerary rituals spanning several generations, indicates that they were instrumental in providing identity to these traders as recognizable social groups. Since the assemblages vary considerably from tomb to tomb, it is logical to assume that these groups were hereditary and probably kin-based. The degree to which these social groups were able to quantify exotics varies in the three areas under investigation, suggesting a different social role for traders and trade in the respective societies.

The wide availability of small quantities of low-value manufactured exotics in the LBA eastern Mediterranean had an impact on funerary practices in the area. The material and functional characteristics of many of these objects depended highly on social practices, which made them suitable for cultural reinterpretations in many different contexts. The inclusion of small numbers of such exotics in collective tombs became a widespread practice in the eastern Mediterranean during this period. The objects related groups of people to a wider world of international contacts. Even though for

many of these people such contacts may not have been real or frequent, the wide range of objects available allowed them to be specific in their associations by selecting and avoiding certain items.

The collective power of these international objects becomes visible especially in cases where they were quantified. The elaborate assemblages of exotics in Cyprus and the Levant contained objects from multiple regions of the Mediterranean. Through the practice of collective burial, these assemblages also covered a wide chronological range. The variations in the individual elements from which the assemblages were constituted created social differentiations according to the various ways in which people were involved in long-distance exchange and communication. The material, geographical, and temporal dimensions of the assemblages of exotics transformed and strengthened the social role of trade and traders in their respective societies.

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