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Consuming Passions: A Contextual Study of the Local Consumption of Mycenaean Pottery at Tell el-'Ajjul

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Abstract

This paper re-examines the little known corpus of Mycenaean imports to Tell el-'Ajjul. Specifically, it evaluates the evidence for the incorporation of this imported pottery within everyday life and death at the site in order to assess the extent to which it impacted local culture. While Mycenaean imports denote privileged access to the luxury commodities of Mediterranean trade in the later second millennium BC, the main axis of external contacts in the Gaza region is constructed within the context of the Egyptian New Kingdom state. Localized patterns of trade, especially with Cyprus and the Jordan valley, are more apparent in the context of the southern limits of the Levant. Egypt, however, was the major cultural referent in the construction of local identities. This is reflected in the range of Mycenaean pottery found at 'Ajjul which largely parallels that found in Egypt.

Introduction

Evidence for wide-ranging maritime trading contacts is one of the defining characteristics of the archaeology of the eastern Mediterranean during the later second millennium BC. Studies of this maritime trade have emphasized its economic aspect, prioritizing modes of exchange, reciprocity and bulk commodity trade (Larsen 1987; Zaccagnini 1987; Liverani 1990; A. Sherratt and E. Sherratt 1991; Snodgrass 1991; Knapp 1993; 1998; Warren 1995; 10-12; E. Sherratt 1999). These approaches are grounded in concepts of production and exchange, rather than in contrasting patterns of consumption, and the cultural consequences of international commerce largely have been excluded from the discourse (but see Steel 1998; van Wijngaarden 1999a; 1999b). Yet the massive scale of second millennium BC trade in the east Mediterranean would have necessitated close contact between populations with widely differing socio-economic and cultural

experiences, presumably precipitating varying degrees of acculturation.

This paper examines the interface between the Mediterranean world and the Asian land-mass, specifically the site of Tell el-'Ajjul, to evaluate the cultural consequences of close economic interaction on the cities along the coastal strip of the Levant. It is proposed that detailed analyses of distribution patterns of imported pottery, in this case from the Aegean, and a study of the contexts in which they were found, should help establish the social impact of external cultural influences on the inhabitants of a clearly defined geographical region.

Theoretical Perspectives

Cross-Cultural Consumption or Hybridization
In his discussion of the objectification of culture, Miller (1987: 130) notes that material culture is embedded within the construction of culture and human relations. Human percep-

tion of objects is culturally variable and will be informed by specific social contexts. 'Societies have an extraordinary capacity either to consider objects as having attributes which may not appear evident to outsiders, or else to ignore attributes which would have appeared to those same outsiders as being inextricably part of that object' (Miller 1987: 109). Material culture is ascribed values and encoded with meaning, and as such becomes an important vehicle of social communication. The messages transmitted by objects are protean, arbitrary and culturally specific, depending upon diverse types of internal socio-economic organization (Hodder 1987: 2). In turn, archaeological identification of the symbolic aspects of material culture is dependent on contextualizing artefacts, placing them within their particular socio-economic and cultural framework(s). Given that social messages are contained within material culture and that these are culturally specific, the question remains what happens when different types of object move from their indigenous environment into alternative cultural contexts? This is particularly relevant for the east Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age (LBA), a period which was characterized by cosmopolitan diplomatic and trading networks over a large area incorporating geopolitical units with widely differing economic and cultural backgrounds.

The anthropological concept of 'hybridization' or cross-cultural consumption (Howes 1996) is particularly useful for interpreting the large-scale movement of commodities during the second millennium, with a continuous circulation of goods crossing many cultural boundaries. It cannot be assumed that these commodities necessarily retained the same social meanings invested by the producer society when integrated within new cultural settings (Arafat and Morgan 1994: 108). Numerous anthropological studies have shown that imported goods will be transformed to varying

extents according to the values of the recipient culture, 'acquiring new uses...[and being] imbued with alternative meanings upon incorporation into a new cultural setting' (Howes 1996: 5; Seip 1999). Material culture may be thought to possess 'ascribed, but redefinable, social identities' (Arafat and Morgan 1994: 108), the perceptions of which are culturally specific (Seip 1999). The social meanings, the use of an object and its ascribed value therefore are culturally constructed and will be subject to renegotiation when the object moves through cultural barriers (Thomas 1992: 35). 'Once the exotic is locally "tamed", it can begin a new phase of its biography' (Chapman 2000: 32).

The extent to which one culture will adopt elements from another culture and the manner of this appropriation are dependent on the role that these artefacts play in the adoptive society. Selectivity is a pertinent characteristic of this process. Thomas (1992: 36), for example, notes discrimination in the adoption of certain facets of Europeaness as Tahitian political symbols, in particular the substitution of alcohol for the local *kava* within ceremonial contexts. The exotic alcohol is ascribed high value in relation to the ceremonial and political significance of the commodity for which it is substituted. The 'otherness' of these imports and the esoteric knowledge implicit in their use, however, are pertinent to the adoption of foreign objects (Helms 1988; Thomas 1992: 37). The advantage of the hybridization model is that it takes account of the internal process of transformation and thus of the innate creativity of the recipient culture. It also recognizes the use of imported, exotic commodities in the construction of cultural identities (Thomas 1992: 36; Howes 1996: 8; Knapp 1998: 195).

The consumption of food and drink is closely intertwined with the creation of cultural identity (Rice 1984: 245; 1987: 463; Osborn 1989: 151-53; James 1996: 78-82), as are the associ-

non, attitudes to the exotic in fact vary greatly between societies, and many cultures regard foreign artefacts and styles with suspicion or at best ambivalence. Cultural ambivalence to the exotic is demonstrated by Athenian attitudes to oriental art at the beginning of the Archaic period. In contrast to contemporary Corinth, the Athenian elite kept the new Orientalizing, Proto-Atrac style on the edges of daily life, restricting it to liminal and prestigious contexts: wealthy burials and sacred deposits (Whitley 1994: 61). This ambivalent attitude to the exotic, which cannot be fitted easily into pre-existing social structures, is replicated among many pre-market economies (Appadurai 1986: 31-48).

The spread of cultural influences is commonly assumed to be 'uni-directional', moving from a more politically or economically evolved society to a passively recipient, or less advanced culture (see, however, Whitley 1994: 62; Steel 1997: 44). Such attitudes stem from diffusionist thought in archaeology and from models that emphasize an east-west transmission of culture: from Egypt to Phoenicia and subsequently to the Aegean world, or from classical Greece and Rome to 'barbarian' Europe. It is ironic that recent studies of Minoanizing wall paintings in the east Mediterranean (Bietak 1995: 26; Morgan 1995: 29-31; Niemeier 1995a: 10; 1995b, 260; Warren 1995: 4-5) are now being used to demonstrate cultural and artistic influence in the opposite direction. Opposition to such models, however, is already growing (E. Sherratt 1994: 238-39; Knapp 1998: 201). Certainly, in the second millennium BC Mediterranean acculturation, or hybridization, appears to have been multi-directional. Recently both E. Sherratt and Knapp have proposed a more syncretic model for this phenomenon, suggesting the adoption of a cross-cultural iconographic *koine* by the elite of the Levantine coast, the Aegean, Cyprus and Egypt (E. Sherratt 1994; Knapp 1998: 202-204 n. 74). This aristocratic symbolism is demonstrated by the iconography

of accoutrements for their preparation, service and consumption. Consequently, changes in dietary practices, and thus the appearance of novel elements in the pottery repertoire, are often attributed to the arrival of new population groups. There are countless examples in the archaeological literature of transformations in pottery repertoires (wares, technologies and forms) that have been attributed to demic diffusion. One of the most frequently cited is the introduction of the Philistine ware to the southern Levant at the beginning of the Iron Age (Stone 1995). Another example is the development of the Red Polished ware in Bronze Age Cyprus, which has been attributed to Anatolian immigrants (Frankel *et al.* 1996: 43).

An alternative approach prioritizes the transmission of esoteric knowledge surrounding the use of intrusive pottery styles. These approaches allow for the element of human agency and choice, and explore changing styles in the context of internal social transformations. The dissemination of the ceremonial consumption of alcohol from the Near East to Europe in the 4th-3rd millennium BC illustrates changing dietary habits as a result of acculturation (Manning 1993: 45; Herscher 1997; A. Sherratt 1997). Other examples include the transmission of the symposium (Murray 1983; Carter 1995) and the practice of dining in a reclining position from the Orient to the Greek world during the Orientalizing period. Likewise the impact of Roman patterns of consumption and household organization on native settlements comprises a vital element of 'romanization' in the western provinces (Meadows 1999).

The extent to which one culture adopts elements from another and the mode of adoption is dependent on the role that the adopted elements play within the recipient society. Varying attitudes to exotic styles and commodities will determine the pace, nature and extent of hybridization. Although this process is usually viewed as a natural and beneficial phenomenon

employed on Mycenaean pictorial vase painting (Steel 1998: 292-94) and other classes of prestige goods in circulation during this period (Knapp 1998: 203). The circulation of commodities aimed at the mercantile and administrative classes rather than the highest echelons of society also fits a multi-directional hybridization model: for example, the assimilation of the Mycenaean stirrup jar within the presumed ethnically exclusive world of ancient Egypt. The popularity of the pottery containers is easily explained by the novelty of the otherwise unavailable olive oil (Hankey 1970-71: 19 n. 7; 1995: 117). Egyptian imitations of the form in other media, such as faience and even porous calcite (Hankey 1995: 117, 123 pls. 23, 24), illustrate the wider incorporation of this exotic form within Egyptian life-ways. While these appear to have had a limited impact upon Egyptian negotiations of cultural identity, they do demonstrate hybridization in the direction of the apparently more complex society.

Contextual Archaeology

Detailed analysis of the social context and function of imported commodities is one means of evaluating the social impact of international exchange in the east Mediterranean basin during the second millennium BC. A basic tool for such analysis is the contextual approach, which assumes that the archaeological context of an individual artefact will elucidate its function and social significance. This presupposes an inherent relationship between the production, acquisition, consumption and ultimately the deposition of artefacts; it also presumes that these processes are dependent on the function and social value of the artefacts within a specific society. Moreover, the contextual approach implies that the purpose for which artefacts were produced, acquired and used can be inferred from their find context. In effect, an archaeological context is the material record of social behaviour and, as a corollary, individual artefacts

cannot be understood in isolation from the contexts in which they are found (Hodder 1982; 1986: 118; 1987; 1991).

Context can be subdivided into broad oppositions: settlement or funerary, public or domestic. Even at this basic level analysis should reveal significant trends in the use of specific artefact types. More subtle distinctions can be made, however, which will illustrate further the social use of artefacts. Settlement contexts can be subdivided to demonstrate differences between domestic contexts (further refinements might be made according to specific location within the household—public or private space, activity areas, reception areas, etc.), public contexts including open spaces, administrative buildings, industrial installations and ceremonial contexts (temples and associated structures). Funerary contexts include not only the mortuary facility, which itself can be subdivided into types (including pit grave, shaft grave, chamber tomb, built tomb), but also attendant structures such as funerary chapels or cenotaphs. Nonetheless, the assumption that an artefact's find context equates automatically with its context of use is overly simplistic and ignores the various taphonomic processes inherent to an archaeological site. Site formation processes cover three main phases in the use of the settlement—habitation, abandonment and post-abandonment—and can be subdivided into two main categories: accretion processes and depletion processes (LaMotta and Schiffer 1999: 19-20). Primary, *in situ* deposition within the context of use is extremely rare for household objects. Instead, these are more likely to be removed from the habitation area and deposited in secondary contexts, such as middens or pits. Objects found on or above floors are most likely to be associated with the abandonment of the structure. In such cases it is probable that the assemblage had been heavily depleted, with the removal of portable, usable and valuable items, unless abandonment had been rapid (LaMotta and Schiffer 1999: 21-22, 24).

are exogenous to the society in question. Fine wares, for example, should be contrasted with utilitarian coarse and plain wares, imports with native products. The presence of luxury exotica, weapons and tools should be incorporated into the analyses. Methodologically, therefore, the contextual approach requires both qualitative and quantitative analyses to demonstrate variable patterns of deposition and possibly of ancient use and signification.

The application of contextual archaeology within the Levant, where so many sites are multi-period tells, however, proves to be somewhat problematic (see, for example, van Wijn-gaarden 1999b: 11, 13). Contextual data are frequently non-apparent for these sites. Early excavators tended not to record finds according to their context, and it is unrealistic to expect more detailed information concerning non-artefact debris (floral remains, animal bones, etc.). The publication of these sites continues to be artefact-oriented and in the hands of numerous different specialists. Indeed, it is rarely possible to reconstruct an archaeological context from the available published information—not indeed from archival material from earlier excavations—or even to develop a comprehensive database of artefact associations. Consequently, although a full contextual analysis would be much preferred in any attempt to reconstruct the social life of an object, it is rarely possible to go beyond attribution of certain classes of artefact to particular types of context. Indeed, on occasion even that is impossible.

Mycenaean Pottery in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Summary

Detailed analyses of the components of second millennium trade in the eastern Mediterranean reveal distinctive patterns of contact reflecting internal consumption of externally acquired commodities. Prior to the LBA, contact between the Aegean and the east Mediterranean was on a very small scale and within the

The life use of an artefact might influence its distribution within specific archaeological assemblages. Pottery vessels used repeatedly in a domestic context, especially for the preparation of food, will have a shorter life than vessels whose use was more restricted, such as ceremonial vases, which were typically curated. Consequently, there will be a greater proportion of the more frequently used domestic wares, which will likewise be more fragmentary, in the archaeological record (Short 1996; Varlen and Potter 1997). In addition to primary or pristine depositional contexts, analyses should also consider secondary deposition. Wells, pits, latrines, rubbish dumps, streets and fills sealed beneath new construction phases are rich sources of artefactual debris frequently dismissed for not being *in situ*; in fact they can help to inform a complete biography of material culture. Although such contexts will not necessarily demonstrate the primary use of artefacts, detailed analyses will indicate varying patterns of disposal, possibly reflecting the social importance of these artefacts in their pristine state.

Another aspect to be considered is the mutability of settlement and funerary contexts. Funerary remains comprise elements that are intrinsic to burial ritual and those that are incidental. Certain personal items belonging to the deceased (personal adornment and possibly small weapons) will be included by default within a mortuary context, without necessarily being an integral element of the funerary ritual. Other elements of the funerary equipment might be more plausibly considered as grave gifts specifically manufactured or acquired for inclusion within a mortuary environment (O'Shea 1984: 24). There is a possibility, however, that domestic material will be incorporated amongst those grave gifts intentionally selected as funerary offerings.

The contextual approach also implies qualitative and quantitative analyses of artefact associations. Artefact types should not be considered in isolation, especially those that

Aegean was dominated by Minoan Crete (Warren 1995: 2-5). Interaction was largely restricted to the Minoan palace centres, Egypt, and the large, prosperous towns of the Levant—Ugarit, Alalakh and Byblos (Figure 1). It was conducted purely at an elite, administrative level. In contrast, LBA trading links were established between the Mycenaean world of the Greek mainland, the Levant and Egypt. The Mycenaean pottery found in the LBA east Mediterranean is a clear marker of large-scale commodity trade (most recently E. Sherratt 1999). The distinctiveness of this pottery class, however, has resulted in studies of Mycenaean imports dominating discussions of international trade. To a certain extent Mycenaean pottery is a red herring; although clearly identifiable, it is always found in minute quantities, being imported and consumed as an exotic. Other,

possibly more significant, elements of this exchange are excluded from the discourse because of their archaeological elusiveness.

Very little Late Minoan (LM) / Late Helladic (LH) I-II pottery has been found in the Levant, although there are a few imports from major urban centres: Alalakh and Ugarit in Syria, Byblos in Lebanon, and 'Ajjul, Ta'anek and Lachish in the southern Levant (Hankey 1970-71: 15; 1993a: 104). LM/LH I-IIA imports are equally scarce in Egypt (Hankey 1970-71: 15 n. 2; 1993b: 112) and Cyprus (Portugali and Knapp 1985: 71-72, cat. nos. 4-29). Two main types of vases were imported to the Levant: the three-handled alabastron (Furumark Shape [FS] 82-83) and the pithoid jar (FS 24) (Hankey 1970-71: 15). It appears, therefore, that only small quantities of high status Aegean vases were exchanged with the Near Eastern elite of the major urban centres, in essence continuing export patterns established for the Middle Minoan Kamarese (Warren 1995: 3). Instead, the main commercial trade networks of the LB I east Mediterranean operated between Cyprus, Egypt and the Levant, and continued trading initiatives established during the Middle Bronze Age (MBA). The circulation of perfume juglets, for example, illustrates complex trading patterns specific to the region, which excluded the Aegean during the transitional MB-LB era (Maguire 1995: 55, 63, fig. 12). The distribution of Bichrome ware reflects a similar trade network specific to the eastern rim of the Mediterranean basin during this period (Epstein 1966: map facing p. 188 [map has no fig. no.]).

The main influx of Mycenaean pottery to the east Mediterranean dates to LH IIIA-B (Stubbings 1951: 59-87; Hankey 1967: 1970-71: 18-21; 1993a; 1993b; Leonard 1994) and marks a fundamental change in the organization of large-scale, long-distance trade in the Mediterranean. Over one hundred sites in the Levant are known to have Aegean imports at

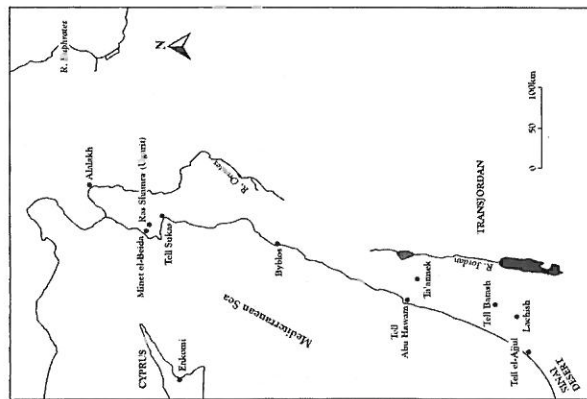


Figure 1. Map of the Levantine coast showing major sites with Mycenaean imports.

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this time (Hankey 1993a: 105-107). Distribution is concentrated along the coast, but imports penetrated inland to urban centres lying along the major wadi systems. Small numbers of imports reached as far inland as Transjordan, where they were deposited largely in tombs or sanctuaries (Leonard 1987). Two sites—Tell Abu Hawam (Balensi 1980) and Ugarit (Schaeffer 1949; Courtois and Courtois 1978: 292-363; Yon *et al.* 2000)—stand out in particular, both for the large quantity of Mycenaean pottery imports and for their wide range of forms, including several unusual or rare vessel types. Both sites appear to have functioned as large Mediterranean trading emporia and primary nodes of exchange with the Levantine hinterland.

Mycenaean pottery also has been found in significant quantities in Egypt (Hankey 1993b; 1995; Hankey and Aston 1995). A LH IIA-B horizon is apparent at Saqqara, Memphis, Kahun and Gurob in Lower Egypt, and it penetrated the Theban area at Deir el Medina and Dra Abu el-Naga. The main influx of Mycenaean pottery to Egypt, however, dates to the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC (LH IIIA:2-B) and the most significant deposit remains that at Amarna (Hankey 1973; 1995). The main shapes found are flasks and stirrup jars, the latter imitated locally in faience (Hankey 1995: 117, pl. 23). Mycenaean pottery was imported to Cyprus in very large quantities, mainly to the coastal urban centres but also filtering inland (Cadogan 1993: 93-94). In many respects the quantities and wide distribution in Cyprus point to the island's privileged role in the development of LBA maritime trade in the east Mediterranean. On the other hand, Mycenaean pottery is found in minute quantities along the southern coast of Anatolia and in the central Anatolian plateau (Mee 1978), and only occasional imports penetrated inland to the Euphrates (Woolley 1952: 235, pl. 68a;

Caubert 1982: 76 n. 56). The peak of Mycenaean trade with the west Mediterranean likewise dates to the LH IIIA-B period (see discussion in Vagnetti 1993; van Wijngaarden 1999a: 261-91).

The most popular Mycenaean forms imported in the Levant were closed vessels, usually assumed to be containers of luxury perfumed oils (Hankey 1970-71: 18-19). Straight-sided alabastra (FS 94-5) with wide apertures, suitable for a viscous unguent, and narrow-necked stirrup jars (FS 166, 171, 179-82) and flasks (FS 189) more suited to pouring a thin oil (Leonard 1981: 91-94), were the preferred shapes. Analyses of the Linear B archives of Pylos indicate that the palaces strictly controlled the production and dissemination of these oils and unguents (Shelmerdine 1985: 7, 41, 63). Recent organic residue analyses of Mycenaean vessels from the Greek Mainland indicate that some stirrup jars actually contained wine, rather than the perfumed oils that might have been expected (Tzedakis and Martlew 1999: 196, no. 180). However, analyses of Minoan 'unguent vases' (similar in form to their Mycenaean counterparts) from the LM III cemetery at Armenoi substantiate the use of aromatics, including iris (Tzedakis and Martlew 1999: 55). Larger containers were also imported—pithiform jars (FS 45) and larger stirrup jars (FS 164). Presumably, such contents form the rationale behind the trade in Mycenaean pottery; however, this was only the first stage in the life cycle of these vessels. Although open forms are less common than the containers and more restricted in range, drinking equipment is more common than was previously thought, in particular cups (FS 220), kylikes (FS 256-257) and shallow bowls (FS 295) (Hankey 1993a: 104; contra Hankey 1967: 145). In general, however, there was a marked preference for local or Cypriot tablewares in the Levant.

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Consuming the Other: Mycenaean (LH) Pottery from 'Ajjul

To consider all the issues raised above, I present here a case study of the Canaanite centre at Tell el-'Ajjul (Figure 2). Although this site is not one of the pre-eminent nodal points of 'Mycenaean' trade, it did play an important role in forging Mediterranean trade routes at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. The enormous quantity of Late Cypriot I-II pottery in particular suggests the establishment of important maritime trade routes around the east Mediterranean. In conjunction with the role played by Gaza in establishing the Egyptian New Kingdom in Syro-Palestine, we might expect that the incorporation or exclusion of exotica would be an important element in the negotiation of cultural identity within the region.

Petrie recovered only a small quantity of Mycenaean pottery at 'Ajjul, some 68 vessels in total, according to the published data (Table 1).

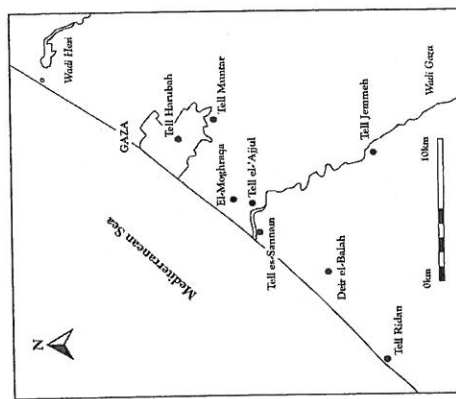


Figure 2. Detail of the Gaza region, showing important archaeological sites, including Tell el-'Ajjul.

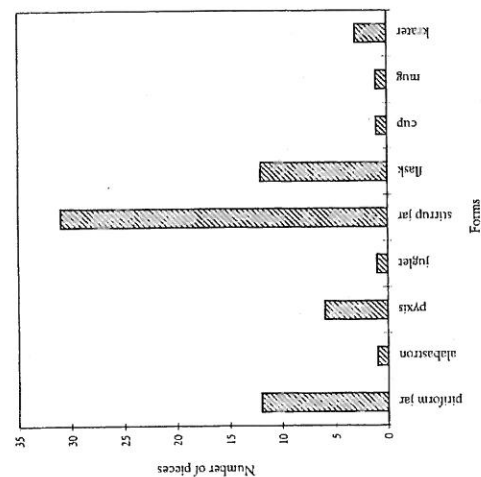


Figure 3. Proportional occurrence of Mycenaean forms at Tell el-'Ajjul.

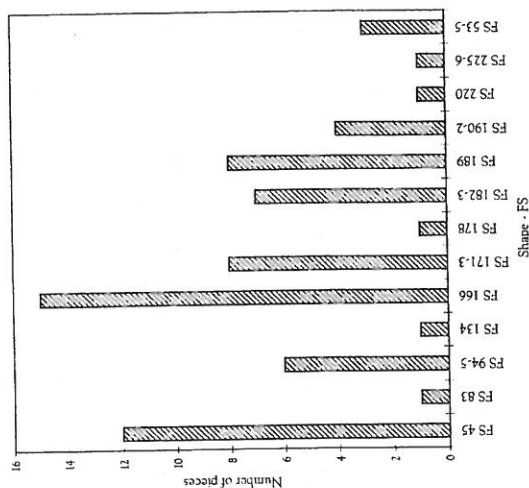


Figure 4. Proportional occurrence of Mycenaean forms at Tell el-'Ajjul, broken down into FS (Furumark Shape) numbers.

It is impossible to gauge accurately the proportion of imported Aegean wares in relation to indigenous Canaanite pottery and imports from Cyprus and Egypt. The minuscule quantities involved imply a figure of less than 1% of the total LBA pottery assemblage at the site, considerably less than the quantities of Cypriot LBA imports. The earliest Aegean import is represented by a sherd from a LM I/LH II alabastron (FS 83), but for the most part the Mycenaean imports date to LH IIIA.2 with a few LH IIIB pieces. The range of forms (Figures 3, 4) is very limited and only 13 main types have been identified. These are the amphoroid krater (FS 55), the squat alabastron (FS 83), a variety of stirrup jars (FS 166, FS 171-73, FS 178, FS 182-83), two types of flask (FS 189, FS 190), small piriform jars (FS 45), straight-sided alabastra (FS 94) and a single example each of a beaked juglet (FS 134), a cup (FS 220) and a mug (FS 225-226). Closed vessels are predominant, comprising 93% of the Mycenaean repertoire from the site. No examples of Mycenaean figurines were recovered from either settlement or funerary contexts. This, however, is not too surprising. Although there is a concentration of Mycenaean figurines in the northern sites, clustered around Minet el-Beidha, Ras Shamra and Tell Sukas, very few have been found farther south than Tell Abu Hawam. Indeed, in the southern Levant (south of Tell Abu Hawam) they exist in small quantities at only seven sites (each with between one and three figurines). This would suggest that Mycenaean figurines were not incorporated amongst the symbolic referents of the majority of the Canaanite urban centres.

Not surprisingly, given the limited number of imports at 'Ajjul, the Mycenaean style had a very limited impact on local pottery production and only a small number of Mycenaean-style vases of apparently 'local' manufacture have been identified. Whereas for the most part the Mycenaean pottery from 'Ajjul seems to have been imported from the Greek main-

land, the origin of some of the vessels is problematic. Countless projects have examined the chemical composition of Mycenaean pottery throughout the east Mediterranean, especially Cyprus, and several possible sources for imitation Mycenaean pottery have been suggested, including Cyprus and Syro-Palestine. (For a summary and bibliography of provenience studies on Late Bronze Age Cyprus, see Knapp and Cherry 1994.) At present there is no evidence to support the presence of a workshop based in 'Ajjul, or elsewhere in the greater Gaza region, which manufactured Mycenaean style pottery. Instead, I prefer to view Mycenaean and 'Mycenaeanizing' vessels from 'Ajjul as exotics that were extraneous to the site, albeit possible elements of a wider east Mediterranean syncretic style.

Although ideally contextual analysis should incorporate as much information as possible from the find spot of individual artefacts, given

the limitations of the excavations and publication of 'Ajjul it has only been possible to draw broad inferences from the material. Figure 5 gives a simple breakdown of the various Mycenaean forms according to settlement or cemetery context and Figure 6 a more detailed breakdown of the various forms according to different settlement contexts (redeposited, surface, shaft grave and the so-called Governor's Tomb).

A View from the Settlement

Only four Mycenaean sherds, and no complete vessels were recovered from settlement deposits on the mound of 'Ajjul during Petrie's excavations. The rarity of Mycenaean pottery from settlement contexts almost certainly reflects the true distribution of Mycenaean pottery from Petrie's excavations at 'Ajjul since, as Petrie (1934: 35) stated, 'no more [Mycenaean sherds] could be found,

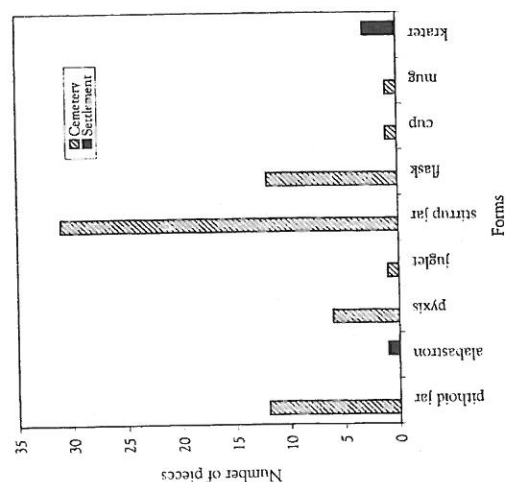


Figure 5. Distribution of Mycenaean forms from Tell el-'Ajjul according to settlement or funerary context.

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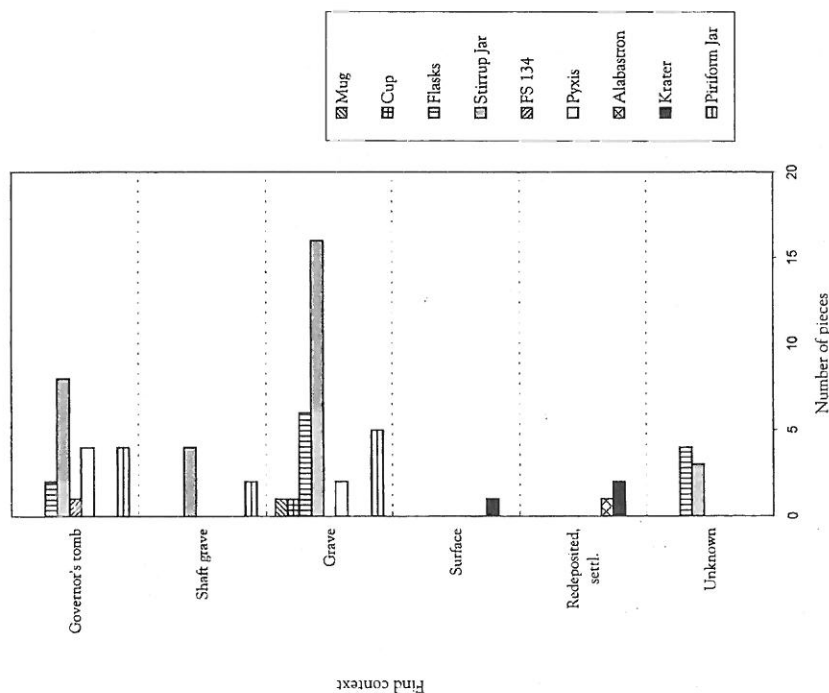


Figure 6. Detailed distribution of Mycenaean forms from Tell el-'Ajjul according to context.

although special reward was given for such pieces'. Recent excavations by the Palestinian-Swedish Expedition to 'Ajjul have only identified minimal quantities of Mycenaean pottery from the tell: a partially preserved LH IIIB pithoid jar (FS 48) decorated with the scale pattern (FM 57) (Fischer and Sadeq 2000: fig. 8.8) and four body sherds. This vessel type was used in the Aegean to store liquid

such as wine, oil and possibly water. Although not predominant in settlement contexts it is relatively common during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC (Mounjoy 1993: 120-23). In contrast to the tiny quantities of Mycenaean pottery, some 941 pottery imports (vessels and sherds) from Cyprus, Egypt and the Jordan valley were identified in the 1999 and 2000 seasons

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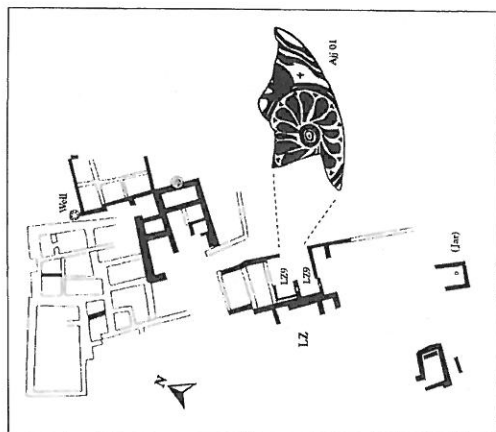


Figure 7. Detail of area LZ and Aji 01 at Tell el-Ajjul.

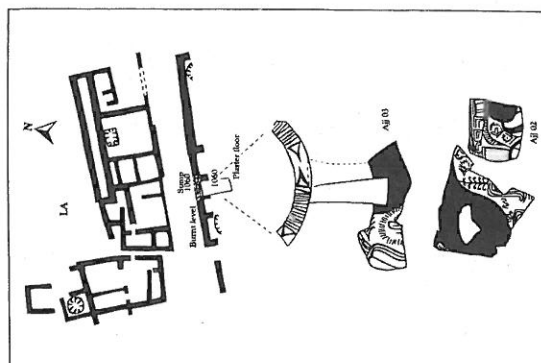


Figure 8. Detail of area LA and location of Aji 02-03 at Tell el-Ajjul.

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(P. Fischer, personal communication). Contextual information awaits full publication of the finds, but the degree of preservation and limited quantities of Aegean material supports observations deduced from Petrie's material.

Given the available information it is not possible to contextualize fully the settlement pottery from 'Ajjul, either in quantitative terms or according to associated finds and exact find spots. Even so, it is clear that Mycenaean imports are statistically insignificant within settlement contexts and represent an exotic rarity that had a limited appeal or use within the LBA occupation of the site. The few finds known are very fragmentary and were found in secondary deposits, suggesting that they were used, broken and discarded within the living space of the settlement. Only three shapes are represented, and it is significant to note that these do not replicate the forms recovered within tomb groups.

A sherd from a squat alabastron (FS 83; Petrie 1933: XLII, LZ9 1032) was found in room 9 of building LZ, part of a complex which extended south of the 'palaces' and continued in use into the LB II period (Figure 7). The proximity of building LZ to the 'palace' or patrician structures to the north-east should be noted, possibly indicating the elite aspect of the building. The alabastron belongs to the LB I occupation of the tell and dates to the earliest phase of Mycenaean imports to the east Mediterranean (Hankey 1970-71: 15; 1993a: 104). During the LB I period unguents of Aegean origin were highly esteemed in the Levant and it is probable that these exotics were moving within the context of high-level gift exchange. The presence of this early Mycenaean form at 'Ajjul illustrates the importance of the site as a major urban centre at the very beginning of the LBA (comparable with Alalakh, Ugarit and Byblos), one which participated in international elite exchange.

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The other Mycenaean shape represented on the tell, by three sherds, is the pictorial amphoroid krater (FS 53-55; Petrie 1934: pl. XLVI.34, 35; Mackay and Murray 1952: pl. XXIX.21). Two sherds, probably belonging to the same vessel, were found near the 'sump' in the street running east-west at the northern limits of the southern city in area LA, and overlying wall Z south of the street (Figure 8). This represents a secondary deposit, which dates to the period of abandonment in area LA, before the roadway became filled with debris (Petrie 1934: 2, 34-35). The amphoroid krater was rarely imported to the southern limits of the Levant but instead was primarily targeted at the Ugaritic and Cypriot markets (Steel 1999: 807, pl. CLXXXIa). The chariot krater is only found in settlement contexts at 'Ajjul, and its proximity to the southern town suggests that the shape was used within the urban space rather than in the fortress, although it should be emphasized that this is a secondary deposit. The other krater sherd was a surface find (Mackay and Murray 1952: 19) and thus tells us little beyond confirming the settlement use of FS 53-55.

Whether the krater was used to mix wine, as appears to be the case farther north in the Levant and on Cyprus, cannot be determined from the available evidence. Cumulative evidence from Deir el-Balah and 'Ajjul, however, suggests that Egyptianizing wine sets were preferred in the region around the *wadi* Gaza (Steel 1999: 807). It should be noted that the krater is one of the Mycenaean forms that was not exported to Egypt, indicating that Aegean patterns of wine consumption did not penetrate the Nile valley. As has been discussed above, diet is an important means of expressing cultural identity and underlining cultural differences. These differences will be expressed through shared patterns of preparation and consumption (Osborn 1989: 152-53; James 1996: 78-79), what is considered clean or

unclean, edible or inedible, and the actual mechanics of dining. The preference for Egyptianizing bronze wine sets, rather than Mycenaean drinking equipment centred around the chariot krater, signals a clear choice in the expression of local identity. At 'Ajjul it seems apparent that patterns of feasting emulated Egyptian customs and were clearly differentiated from the fashions more prevalent in the northern city kingdom of Ugarit and on Cyprus. The few examples of Mycenaean pictorial kraters that penetrated the Gaza region were oddities. Possibly they arrived in the region as rare examples of internal gift exchange between the Canaanite city kingdoms (hence their proximity to the elite area of 'Ajjul); however, they were not commonly integrated within local dining customs, nor were they carefully curated.

The fragmentary nature of the Mycenaean pottery from the settlement and its occurrence within secondary deposits argue against the curation of these vessels as an exotic, a valued prestige item, or an object invested with symbolic or ceremonial connotations. This contrasts with the consumption of Mycenaean pottery in other Levantine contexts, most notably the single, complete alabastron found in the parician's house at Tell Barash (Kelm and Mazar 1995: 63, fig. C10), which clearly had been carefully curated throughout its period of use, and the concentration of rhyta found in the *Temple aux Rhytons* at Ugarit (Yon 1987). Instead, it appears that the Mycenaean pottery found within the settlement of 'Ajjul was used frequently and disposed of when no longer functional. Alternatively, it is possible that small quantities of Mycenaean pottery had been in circulation and were removed along with other portable valuables prior to the abandonment of the site. Given the limitations of Petrie's publications it is not possible to pursue this hypothesis further. While the Mycenaean imports were clearly being used and broken within the area of the settlement, albeit in

small amounts, the limited number of Mycenaean sherds is in stark contrast to the greater quantities of the domestic wares, which were in frequent use. Likewise, this contrasts with the prevalence of Mycenaean imports within domestic contexts throughout the settlement at Ugarit (Yon *et al.* 2000: 7-10), a site where Mycenaean pottery was closely integrated within local patterns of consumption. The overall impression of the material record from 'Ajjul is that Mycenaean pottery was available in small quantities and was used sparingly, but was not specifically curated as an exotic. Rather, there appears to be a certain degree of ambiguity in how this pottery was perceived and rather more selectivity (compared to the northern Levant) in how it was consumed by the LBA inhabitants of 'Ajjul.

With the obvious exception of the alabastron sherd there is little evidence that Mycenaean unguent containers were used within the settlement at 'Ajjul, although their contents would have been suitable either as toiletry articles for cleansing and bathing or as food condiments. (For the use or otherwise of oil as a foodstuff in the Bronze Age Aegean, see Hamilakis 1996; 1999.) The piriform jar fragment found in the 1999 excavations does appear to fit into the general patterns of consumption of Mycenaean pottery within the settlement discussed above. Although it implies a greater range of available Mycenaean forms in circulation, the overriding impression is that the inhabitants of 'Ajjul exercised great selectivity in the incorporation of Mycenaean pottery within the practices of daily life. Despite the many problems inherent in interpreting the excavation material from 'Ajjul, Mycenaean pottery is sufficiently distinctive that we might expect Petrie to have identified more from the settlement if it had been present. Since he did not, it seems reasonable to conclude that Mycenaean imports were not used in everyday life at 'Ajjul but were restricted to funerary con-

funerary gifts. By LH IIIB the stirrup jar has become predominant in Aegean funerary contexts, although the piriform jar and alabastron remain common (Mountjoy 1993: 127).

The prevalence of the stirrup jar, in a diversity of forms, is typical of Mycenaean imported pottery throughout the east Mediterranean and along the Nile valley. The range of Mycenaean pottery from the 'Ajjul tombs closely parallels the range of Mycenaean imports found in Egypt and no doubt signals smaller patterns of circulation within the larger Mediterranean exchange routes. It also implies shared patterns of consumption of 'exotics' and similar expressions of choice in Egypt and the extreme southern limits of the Levantine littoral. It is commonly accepted that the circulation of stirrup jars reflects the trade of Mycenaean perfumed oil, which textually can be demonstrated to be one of the principal products of the palace at Pylos (discussion in Sheldermine 1985). Hamilakis's study of the social consumption of oil within the Aegean is pertinent to the perception of this commodity within the Aegean and possibly its value once transmitted beyond its indigenous context. Within the Bronze Age Aegean, Hamilakis (1999: 45) suggests that perfumed oils and ointments would have been incorporated within rituals of competitive consumption, a prime commodity in gift exchange. These perfumes might be used to anoint the body and high status textiles, and certainly played an important role in funerary ritual. The sensual use of these aromatic unguents when used within a liminal and ritual space, such as in a funerary context, would have had a tremendous impact, specifically in terms of bodily memory (Hamilakis 1999: 47, 49). Within the Aegean, therefore, such oils and ointments would have been highly prized and some of these prestige connotations appear to have filtered through to the cosmopolitan city-states of the Levant. Even so, the consumption of this form and its contents (likewise, the other

texts beyond the boundaries of the ancient city. This is in contrast to the situation in Egypt, where Mycenaean pottery is found in a variety of settlement contexts—from palatial and official establishments to humble domestic establishments—and in both primary and secondary depositional contexts (Hankey 1993b: 111). Whereas in Egypt this style was thoroughly integrated into daily life within a variety of social contexts, its use was strictly controlled in Egypt's major stronghold in the southern Levant.

A View from the Cemetery

The XVIIIth Dynasty cemetery on the northern edge of the mound comprises some 167 tomb groups (C. Bergoffen; personal communication), mostly dating to the LB II period and contemporary with the influx of Mycenaean pottery to the east Mediterranean. Mycenaean vases were found in thirty separate tomb groups (18%) within this cemetery. Even so, 87% of the Mycenaean vases from 'Ajjul have a secure mortuary context implying that Mycenaean pottery primarily had a funerary function there, although it was not a prerequisite element of the mortuary assemblage. Of the tombs furnished with Mycenaean pottery, most contained only a single vessel. However, four (T. 1035, 1514, 1632, 1696) were furnished with a pair of vessels, and T. 1166 and T. 1116 had three and four Mycenaean vessels respectively. Consequently, the concentration of 19 Mycenaean vases in T. 419 (the so-called Governor's Tomb) stands out from the usual funerary repertoire at 'Ajjul, although it should be emphasized that these vases were found in three separate burial layers, each housing several interments. The preferred Mycenaean form was the stirrup jar, but piriform jars, straight-sided alabastra and flasks also occur. These are common shapes in funerary contexts in the Aegean. During the LH IIIA period in the Aegean the piriform jar is predominant in burial groups, but the alabastron and stirrup jar are common

closed shapes) beyond the immediate context of the Aegean still needs to be addressed. Specifically, is it the imported unguent that is deposited within a tomb group; or are the vessels reused, possibly over an extended period, before being deposited? The popularity of the Mycenaean stirrup jar might suggest that its form in effect advertised the desirable contents. In fact it comprised a symbolic language that was widely understood and reinterpreted throughout the east Mediterranean, in much the same way that the Coca-Cola bottle is understood and (re-) interpreted today in diverse cultural settings (Howes 1996: 3).

The only Mycenaean open shapes to be deposited in the tombs at 'Ajul were a cup (FS 220) and a mug (FS 225-226), in T. 1632 and T. 1514 respectively. The mug may have been used as a drinking vessel; however, in the Linear B archives it denotes a unit of measurement (Mountjoy 1993: 123). This economic and culturally defined function of the mug is unlikely to have been transmitted to the Levant, and in Near Eastern contexts it is probable that the mug's function shifted. The form resembles 'mugs' and tankards produced in a variety of wares in the Near East and was possibly incorporated within indigenous patterns of feasting. Even so, at 'Ajul the preferred type of eating/drinking equipment comprised locally produced bowls. It should be noted, however, that bowls are found in only nine of the thirty tombs furnished with Mycenaean pottery (including a Cypriot Base Ring II carinated cup in T. 1119). From this we might infer that provision of vessels associated with consumption of food or liquids was not a prerequisite for LBA burials at 'Ajul.

The full range of mortuary facilities in the XVIIIth Dynasty cemetery is difficult to assess from the published information (discussion of funerary assemblages is restricted to those containing Mycenaean vessels). For the most part the burial facilities in the cemetery appear to

comprise earth-cut graves, although there were also larger, more elaborate facilities such as shaft graves with steps leading into the burial space (Ts. 1035, 1098, 1166), and a chamber tomb (T. 1080). One pit grave was furnished with a single Mycenaean vessel, a piriform stirrup jar (FS 166). The modest range of grave goods deposited in this grave (a Cypriot Base Ring II carinated cup, a Buchero jug, and a single bronze earring) reflect the simplicity of its funerary architecture. There is no coherent pattern linking the distribution of Mycenaean pottery and distinct tomb types, but it is possible that some control was exerted over access to specific Mycenaean forms. For the most part the funerary assemblages at 'Ajul are very modest, being equipped only with ceramic grave goods, including Cypriot and less frequently Mycenaean vessels. The presence of a Mycenaean vessel might in itself signify prestige associations, but it is not always possible to demonstrate this conclusively within the context of the burial assemblages. Eighteen of the tombs that have a Mycenaean offering (60%) are in fact modestly furnished with a limited range of pottery vessels, but with no other grave goods. Typical local forms are jugs, dipper and flasks. Bowls are rare in most tomb groups, but concentrations are found in the wealthier tombs (Ts. 419, 1166, 1514), discussed below. Possibly these were intended for offerings of food, and if this is the case the practice does not appear to be widely replicated. Cypriot Base Ring I, II and Buchero jugs and jugs are commonly deposited, and a typical burial assemblage is equipped with between one and three Cypriot imports. Four tombs (Ts. 1004, 1087, 1098, 1643) are only equipped with a single Mycenaean stirrup jar. For the most part the non-ceramic offerings found in the other 12 graves are very simple and mainly comprise personal ornaments: gold or bronze rings, earrings and beads in Ts. 286, 1089, 1119 and 1966. These probably represented the personal belongings of the deceased

1932: pl. XV/84). There was also a cluster of scarabs and inscribed plaques, several bearing the *praenomen* of Tutmosis III, *mn-kpr-r*' (Petrie 1932: pl. VII/81-101). These inscribed objects are of special interest for their high iconographic and symbolic content, not least the use of Egyptian hieroglyphs. The concentration of these seals in T. 1166 implies that the individuals buried in this tomb had privileged access to the esoteric knowledge inherent in the transmission of Egyptian inscribed material. Within the funerary arena, therefore, there is evidence for disproportionate access to luxury imports and exotica, including a range of Egyptian/Egyptianizing inscribed goods incorporated into competitive funerary display. The main referent for this display was Egypt rather than the Aegean, and the inclusion of Mycenaean pottery amongst the grave goods probably denotes little more than privileged access to Mediterranean traded commodities.

The largest concentration of Mycenaean pottery (19 vases) was in T. 419, the so-called Governor's Tomb. This structure stands out from the other LBA mortuary facilities at the site in terms of its size and construction, the diverse range of funerary equipment, its metallic wealth, and the provision of exotic paraphernalia with high iconographic content. Petrie assumed that this tomb housed the burial of the Egyptian governor in Gaza and his family, largely because of the presence of Egyptian status symbols. However, it is clear that Gaza (Tell Harubah) was occupied during the LBA (Clarke and Steel 1999: 218) and may well have been the seat of Egypt's New Kingdom administration in the region. As the greater part of the LBA remains of Gaza lies beyond the reach of archaeological investigation, however, this cannot be demonstrated archaeologically (Phythian-Adams 1923: 29; Clarke and Steel 1999: 217-19).

T. 419 was in use over a long period (the funerary furniture suggests that this spanned much of the 14th and 13th centuries BC) and

rather than intentional elements of funerary display (O'Shea 1984).

The piriform jar (FS 45) is demonstrably associated with funerary display. A single piriform jar was deposited in T. 1080, together with a gold signet ring (Petrie 1932: pl. VII/44), two gold beads and a gold earring (Petrie 1932: pl. III/22). In addition there were 31 bronze arrowheads and one bronze fishhook. These grave goods, in particular the inscribed material and the cache of arrowheads, have specific elite connotations and refer to an Egyptian aristocratic lifestyle (discussed below). The only other pottery offering was a single Cypriot Base Ring I jug. The piriform jar in T. 1035 was likewise associated with a wealthy burial assemblage, including four scarabs, a piece of steatite engraved with quadrupeds (Petrie 1932: pl. VII/12-16), an alabaster vase and two Cypriot Base Ring I imports (a jug and juglet). Although the burial assemblage in T. 1966 did not incorporate obvious high status socio-technic paraphernalia, the correlation of a piriform jar with a gold bead and three Cypriot imported vases (two Base Ring II jugs and a Buchero jug) is worthy of comment. The largest concentration of piriform jars (four in the middle burial layer of T. 419) is indisputably associated with a high status deposit (discussed below). However, Ts. 197, 1077, 1632 and 1665 (each equipped with a single piriform jar) are otherwise furnished only with pottery vessels.

There is some apparent correlation between the distribution of Mycenaean pottery and concentrations of exotica. For the most part only a single Mycenaean vessel would be deposited in a funerary context, but in some tombs between two and four vases were deposited. Of these, Ts. 1166 and 1514 stand out for the accumulation of high status, prestige goods. T. 1166 was particularly wealthy, being equipped with six alabaster vases (Petrie 1932: pl. XXIII/35, 37, 38) as well as a few pieces of gold, bronze, and stone jewellery, and a bronze mirror (Petrie

signifying the leisure pastimes of the Egyptian aristocracy. This complement of equipment reflects the Egyptianizing lifestyle of the local elite at 'Ajjul—a local aristocratic family emulating the activities of the Egyptian upper classes—although the possibility that such activities were practised along the banks of the *wadi* Gaza should also be considered. Certainly the range of Egyptianizing equipment in the tombs implies privileged knowledge of the activities of the Egyptian nobility.

In the middle burial layer (2) there were three inscribed cylinder seals, a gold scarab ring (the scarab was missing) and a fine array of gold jewellery: a headband, ring and an ear-ring. Pottery provisions include five vases of local manufacture, one Cypriot import and seven Mycenaean imports. The Mycenaean vases comprised three piriform jars (FS 45), a pair of flasks (FS 189) and three piriform stirrup jars (FS 166) (Petrie 1933: pl. XI/56Y, 56O, 56AR, 50T, 50U, 57R, 57S, 57M) of LH IIIA:2-B date. The final burial level (1) was characterized by a large number of bronzes. In addition to the arrowheads (and lead weights) mentioned above there were also two bronze daggers (one of Egyptian type) (Petrie 1933: pl. XI/21), a bronze mirror, a bronze knife, and a pair of bronze armlets (Petrie 1933: pl. XI/23, 26, 36). Three sheet gold rosettes, clothing ornaments designed to be sewn onto garments, likewise indicate the wealth of the incumbents of this burial phase. A paste scarab of Ramesses II (Petrie 1933: pl. VIII/4) and a locally manufactured stone scarab, bearing a falcon framed by dotted circles (Petrie 1933: pls. VIII/5, X), were also found in the uppermost level. The pottery deposited in the final burial level numbers six vases of local manufacture and four LH IIIB or local imitation globular stirrup jars (FS 171) decorated in the simple style.

The profile of Mycenaean vases deposited in the tomb changes between the lower and upper burial levels, but the forms are all explic-

itly associated with unguents or perfumes, which were possibly used as part of the funerary ritual. Small jugs, holding limited quantities of a precious commodity, had been a consistent element in tomb assemblages in the southern Levant since the Early Bronze Age (EBA) (Maguire 1995: 55) but the second millennium descendants of this population had access to exotic unguents. The choice of a Mycenaean container was to advertise explicitly access to these luxury imports. Epigraphic and archaeological evidence suggests that treatment of the corpse with oil or libations was an integral element of funerary ceremonies at Ugarit (van Wijngaarden 1999a: 14 n. 5) and perhaps also in Cyprus (Keswani 1989: 59-60). These practices can be extrapolated throughout the wider Levant. It is particularly interesting to note the extent to which the Mycenaean vases supplanted indigenous flasks and Cypriot imports as the preferred funerary unguent, slotting into the well-established MBA trade networks discussed by Maguire (1995). In the context of funerary ritual Mycenaean pottery had a clear impact on various societies in the southern Levant.

In the lowest level of T. 419 (3) there were four straight-sided alabastra (FS 94-95). Although this shape is widely disseminated throughout the Levant it is relatively rare at 'Ajjul, and otherwise is only found in two pit graves, T. 368 and T. 1810 (Petrie 1933: pl. XXXVIII/55P10), equipped with a modest range of pottery grave gifts. The piriform jars (FS 45) and piriform stirrup jars of the middle level are more widely distributed at the site, occurring in eight and ten tombs respectively. The diversity and large number of Mycenaean forms deposited in the second burial level, however, is unparalleled at the site, from which we might infer that the ability to acquire large quantities of such vessels was restricted to a small elite group at 'Ajjul. The final deposit of pottery in the tomb includes a simple range of small stirrup jars, in contrast to the sheer

probably housed several successive generations. Petrie identified three separate burial levels, but no burial was found *in situ* and the exact association of funerary furniture and individuals cannot be reconstructed. Indeed, there are a number of discrepancies between the register of the tombs (Petrie 1933: pl. L), the description of the tomb contents (Petrie 1933: 5-6) and the published plans (Petrie 1933: pl. XII).

The range of equipment deposited in T. 419 is particularly diverse and reflects changing funerary practices and prestige requirements during the use of the tomb. The grave goods in the lowest layer (3) consist of an array of imported and local wares: five Mycenaean vases, six Base Ring I jugs and 10 vessels of local manufacture. In addition, there was a fine range of luxury exotica. These include a gold signet ring inscribed with the cartouche of Turankhamun (Petrie 1933: pl. VIII/2), a bronze signet ring, a bronze scarab ring (the scarab was missing), a bronze wine set (Radwan 1983: 162-63, pl. 78/450-2), two glass vases, a basalt bowl, an alabaster bowl and an alabaster duck-shaped cosmetics vase. The five LH IIIA:2 vases comprise four straight-sided alabastra (FS 94) and a single beaked juglet (FS 134) (Petrie 1933: pl. XI/60Z, AD, AU, AM, 64AA). This range of funerary furniture was unparalleled at 'Ajjul. The only other gold signet ring, in T. 1080 (Petrie 1932: pl. VII/44), does not compare with that from T. 419 either in terms of weight or socio-technically, since the one in T. 419 was marked with royal Egyptian insignia. In general, the funerary paraphernalia from the lower level of T. 419 was very Egyptianizing, in particular the wine set and alabaster vases. Many of the bronze arrowheads and lead fishnet weights appear to be associated with the lowest level (cf. Petrie 1933: pl. XII). Hunting, fowling and fishing scenes were popular choices to decorate Egyptian tombs of the nobility during the Middle and New Kingdoms (Aldred 1980: 123, 162, ill. 124),

wealth deposited in metals. A similar shift in status symbols by the later 13th century is apparent at Enkomi on Cyprus, where a variety of bronze objects had become prerequisites for elite burials, in what has been seen as part of a newly emerging system of wealth-finance (Keswani 1989: 66-67). It is interesting to note that the changing repertoire of Mycenaean grave goods deposited in T. 419 closely mirrors the shifting patterns of funerary deposition in the Aegean (Mountjoy 1993: 127). Certainly, the increasing predominance of the stirrup jar in the latest burial level, at the expense of the other containers, reflects changing modes of production and consumption within the Aegean that were transmitted to the Near East during the 13th century BC.

The exceptional range of objects (including imported and Egyptianizing exotica) deposited in T. 419, the full complement of which was restricted amongst LBA burials at the site, testifies to the wealth and position of the individuals buried in the tomb. Although there were fewer exotics and prestige items in the upper two levels, the sheer quantity of metals, in particular the array of bronzes in the upper level, can be viewed as status markers. The signet ring and the Ramesses II scarab should be interpreted as socio-technic prestige symbols, in common circulation (at an elite level) throughout the Near East during the LBA. These are comparable, for example, to Egyptian royal scarabs and signet rings found in tombs at Enkomi (Keswani 1989: 63). It is evident, therefore, that individuals buried in T. 419 belonged to the highest stratum of society. They were able to maintain an elaborate burial facility, had access to luxury imported exotica from Cyprus and the Aegean, were aware of and emulated Egyptian customs, and could afford to remove large quantities of metals from circulation as part of their funerary rituals. In such a context, the quantity and variety of Mycenaean vases included amongst the funerary furniture was one of a number of means used to demon-

- University of Edinburgh focused on issues of consumption of Mycenaean pottery in Cyprus and the Levant. Since 1998 she has co-directed excavations at the Late Bronze Age site of el-Moghraqa as part of the Anglo-Palestinian Gaza Research Project.
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- exchange were assimilated but these were kept very much at the limits of social life.
- While it has not been possible to contextualize fully the Mycenaean pottery, given the limitations of the original excavations and the publication of the material, this study has revealed some clear patterns in the use of Mycenaean pottery at the southern limits of the Levant. It is hoped that future recovery of material from the site will further elucidate the nature of Late Bronze Age occupation and international exchange in this region, against which these results can be tested further.
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- to the adoption of specific elements of foreign material culture.
- In contrast, the relative abundance of Mycenaean pottery, specifically of containers, in mortuary contexts is significant (Figure 5). It is probable that the contents of these vases played an important role in funerary ritual, in the treatment of the corpse (and its clothing?), in libation ceremonies, and possibly as a bodily mnemonic aid. It has not been possible to demonstrate a lifecycle of use of these vases within the limits of the settlement during the 14th and 13th centuries BC. The inference is that the Mycenaean style had an explicitly funerary connotation at 'Ajul. Mycenaean pottery was acquired specifically to be incorporated amongst the funerary furniture. Such use can be extrapolated to the wider Gaza region, as is perhaps best demonstrated by the burials at Deir el-Balah. The specifically funerary use of the Mycenaean perfume bottles reflects an ambivalent attitude to an exotic commodity, something that was valued in death but that was kept beyond the limits of daily life (Appadurai 1986: 31–48; Whitley 1994: 61). The luxury connotations of Aegean perfumes is well established and it is probable that specific pottery forms advertised particular highly valued types of unguents and perfumes. Although this is the one area where the impact of Mycenaean influence is clearly identifiable, the question remains: whom were the inhabitants of 'Ajul emulating? Their integration within the Egyptian milieu, so clearly indicated by the range of exotica accompanying the LBA burials, might illuminate the choice made by a select group of individuals to incorporate an exclusive range of exotic perfumes within funerary ritual and amongst the grave furniture. Rather than direct influence from the Aegean, this situation might instead reflect another element of 'Egyptianizing' behaviour, specifically the choice of small stirrup jars, a type widely used by Egyptian officials. A few pieces with very clear exotic associations and common elements in gift

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