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Emerging Civilized Values? The Consumption and Imitation of Egyptian Stone Vessels in EMII-MMI Crete and its Wider Eastern Mediterranean Context

Andrew Bevan

Introduction

The title of this paper, 'Emerging civilized values?,' picks out the rather awkward role of Egyptian stone vessels as an important piece of evidence of early cultural contact in the Aegean. In the *Emergence of Civilisation* (1972), these objects fitted into Renfrew's trade subsystem and could be seen as indicative of increasingly complex social systems and elite consumption. However, they remained awkward to interpret, not least because they might also be seen as material signatures for the diffusion of a wider civilized package (e.g., palaces, writing, some religious beliefs) to the Aegean from a Near Eastern core (Childe 1957; Evans 1921; 1928; 1930; 1935), an agenda that the *Emergence* was seeking to pull apart.

Indeed, it is no accident that stone vessels are still at the heart of debate on early contacts. Stone is a highly durable material which is well-preserved in archaeological contexts. But this durability is both a boon and a curse, ensuring a highly recognizable and often more complete dataset (e.g. than metals or organic materials), but also encouraging various forms of ancient curation and re-use that wreak havoc with our attempts at chronological control. As a result, the relatively uninformative or worse, confusing, findspots of these potentially early trade objects often leaves us little to play with in terms of their exact social context. Given these problems, if we are to control for and exploit the informational potential of these artifacts, then a comparative perspective is required that not only pays attention to contextual details where these are available, but also situates them within a wider geographical context in Crete and in the eastern Mediterranean.

This paper begins by exploring the theoretical and practical parameters of eastern Mediterranean trade. It then assesses the evidence for early stone vessel imports, starting with those sometimes assigned to Late Neolithic-EMIIA trade before moving on to consider the later Prepalatial evidence for imports and local

imitations. Finally, it addresses the thorny issue of Predynastic-Old Kingdom vessels found in unstratified or much later Bronze Age Aegean contexts.

The Movement of Goods and Analytical Scales

Before looking at the stone vessels themselves, it is worth addressing briefly three issues underpinning how we might approach these objects as trade items: i) the different ways in which goods move about; ii) voyaging parameters, trade routes and their implications in the eastern Mediterranean; and iii) the analytical scales at which we describe the causes and effects of trade.

Firstly, we can clarify the nature of how goods move about by considering a simple matrix (Figure 6.1). Goods can be exchanged either voluntarily or under compulsion and they travel either with their original owners or without them. Most analyses assume that the majority of trade between the Aegean and the Near East in the third millennium is likely to have fallen into the bottom right category in Figure 6.1. It is worth emphasizing, however, that as we move from the third to the second millennium BC and, generally-speaking, from less to more complex societies in the Aegean, particularly on Crete, the range of mechanisms involved is likely to include some or all of the other three quadrants, even if we will often find them difficult to identify archaeologically. Likewise, as the scale of trade and contact increases during the third and early second millennia, so too does the range of explanations we might plausibly assign to it.

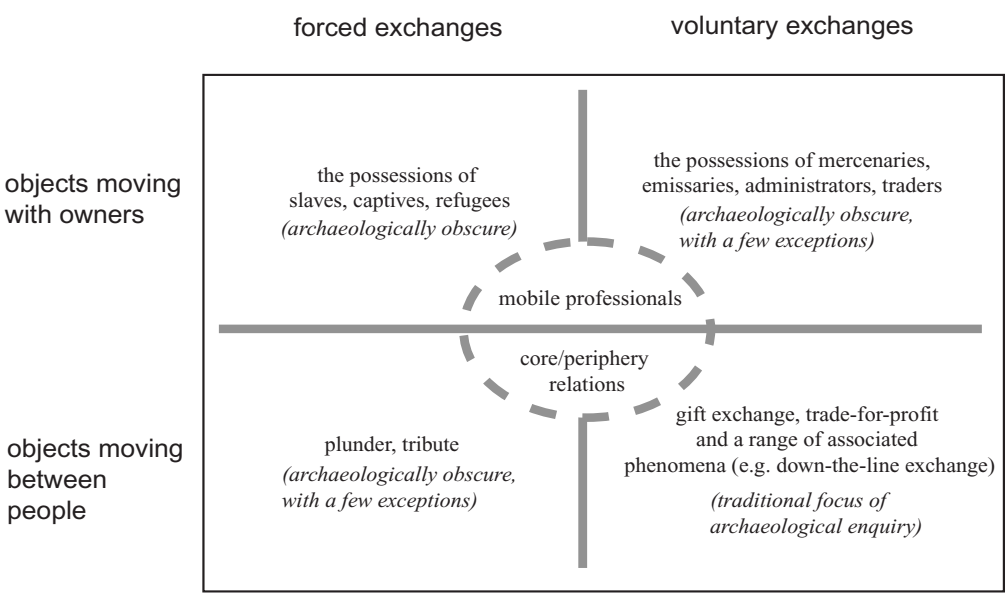


Figure 6. 1. Diagram describing the movement of goods

Secondly, we must understand the changing nature of maritime travel, more precisely the appearance of sailing ships, arguably the crucial trading dynamic in the third millennium. The first evidence for experimentation with sails is found in late fourth millennium Egyptian iconography (Bowen 1960: 117, fig.1; Casson 1995: fig.6), though a parallel, roughly contemporary invention in Mesopotamia may also have occurred. By the third millennium, large ship burials, imported artifacts and textual or pictorial references to seagoing ships (Breasted 1906: passages 324, 360; Casson 1995: 17 n.32; Faulkner 1940: 3; Marcus 1998: 112; O'Connor 1991; Wachsmann 1997: 12–18) all attest to Egyptian use of sailing ships to forge maritime links with the Levantine coast. Maritime activity appears to increase in scale, intensity and reach over the course of the millennium, gradually impacting on other regions. In the Aegean, however, maritime travel is still canoe-borne until late in the period (Broodbank 2000: 96–102). Cycladic longboat images point to one high-risk, limited range and low carrying capacity method by which extra-local maritime travel was probably conducted (e.g., Renfrew 1972: esp. 225ff), but we can identify a crucial change, sometime towards the end of the millennium, when the first sail-driven vessels appear in EB3-MB1 Aegean iconography (Basch 1991: 48–49; McGeehan-Liritzis 1996: 256, figs. 7.5.3a–b; Rutter 1993: 777–79, figs. 13–14; Yule 1980: 165–66, 28–29.52). The impact – technological, organizational and ideological – of the full-sized counterparts to these sailing images will have been profound, at least for certain communities and social groups, revolutionizing not just the speed, but also the scale of potential regional communication and exchange (Broodbank 2000: 341ff).

Nevertheless, sailing was still a form of travel and interaction which followed preferred routes reflecting the fact that eastern Mediterranean winds and currents strongly encourage *anti-clockwise* shipping (Lambrou-Phillipson 1991). Prior to the appearance of brailed sails sometime at the end of the Bronze Age – which permit more effective control of sail shape and hence allow navigators to chart a much wider range of courses in relation to wind direction (Casson 1995: 21, 273; Marcus 1998: 101; Roberts 1991: 55–56; 1995: 308–10) – this directionality is likely to have been even more pronounced and therefore we must constantly consider the Levant as a likely intermediary in trade from Egypt *to* Crete.[1] In particular, the site of Byblos, with its large numbers of early imports (see below) and association with maritime trade and travel in the early Egyptian written sources (e.g. Breasted 1906: passages 432–433; Simpson 1960), was probably a major filter.

Third and finally, the role and impact of imported items can be viewed at various analytical scales. Renfrew's *Emergence* reacted against large-scale diffusionism which linked Europe and the Near East in a pattern of inspirational dependence. However, world-systems perspectives (e.g. Sherratt 1993) have to some extent returned to this large scale, by emphasizing the search for certain commodities such as metals and the effect of Near Eastern core values on the Aegean and then later in the second millennium on a fairly extensive European margin. Certainly, at this scale, the third millennium is a period in which previously

separate regions in the eastern Mediterranean gradually become incorporated into larger networks. More direct and intensive interactions are established between Egypt and the Levant, but the degree to which this growing trade impacts on other areas such as Cyprus, western Anatolia and the Aegean is difficult to assess. As Sherratt and Sherratt (1991) point out, inter-regional trade between the Aegean and the rest of the Near East in the third millennium may have been limited in terms of the quantities exchanged, but disproportionately significant in social and political terms. This argument risks overburdening the limited evidence available but nonetheless highlights the way exotic artifacts carry disproportionate prestige value as markers of liminal knowledge and power (Helms 1988).

By contrast, the *Emergence* concentrated on the pan-Aegean scale, occasionally addressing the peculiarities of behaviour at the level of individual regions, but often synthesizing a single discursive point of view. Even so, as Renfrew recognized (1972: 446), early imports have to be explained at a smaller scale than this. For example, early imported Egyptian stone vessels and imitations, both definite and disputed, all come from Crete. Therefore, they tell a particular story about Crete's path towards greater social complexity and it would be inappropriate to build these observations into an explanation of cultural change in the wider Aegean at this time. As will become clear, we can sometimes also glimpse patterns within Crete at regional or even site-specific scales.

A Reassessment of Early Stone Vessel Imports

In the *Emergence*, Renfrew came to the sober conclusion that 'neither economically nor in terms of the flow of ideas does the trade with the east Mediterranean appear very significant in the third millennium B.C. To say this is not to underestimate the effect of stimulus diffusion, or to deny that various specific innovations were suggested by these contacts.' (1972: 474). In fact, this argument remains highly persuasive, at least for the period up until the very late third millennium. The evidence from Crete (see Warren 1995: 1–2, 12) for early contacts is almost always problematic, in terms of establishing either correct identifications or secure stratigraphic contexts, and the actual volume of objects involved is minute. In addition, there is also as yet no evidence for any return trade in Cretan material culture to the third millennium Levant or Egypt. Egyptian and Egyptianizing material on Crete can be divided into three categories (excluding looser stylistic, technological or ideological influences): i) a few portable finished products (e.g. stone vessels and scarabs), ii) local imitations of finished imports (e.g. stone vessels and scarabs), and iii) raw materials (e.g. gold, hippopotamus ivory, carnelian or amethyst) for which an Egyptian origin is possible but not certain. By MMIA our evidence for all of these categories becomes more secure, and extensive (e.g. Watrous 1994: 712, 735–36; Phillips 1996; Pini 2000), but for the preceding periods, both a relatively minimalist assessment (very few contacts

of limited overall significance) and Sherratt and Sherratt's 'low-bulk, higher impact' model remain valid interpretations.

Turning to the stone vessels in particular, there is very little evidence for imports from beyond the Aegean before EMIIB-MMI or MMII. Three fragments were found in apparent Late Neolithic (LN) contexts under the Central Court at Knossos (Evans 1928: 16–17, fig. 7a–b; also Warren 1969: 109, n.1; Warren and Hankey 1989: 125–27, pl. 1; Phillips 1991). However, two of these (Evans 1928: fig. 7b) come from the upper Central Court levels which were subject to extensive later Minoan levelling operations and may therefore also include later Bronze Age material. Indeed only one of these, a body fragment in a maroon and grey marble/limestone, can now be traced (AM 1938.653)[2] and it could well be from a (relatively elaborate) Neopalatial vessel. The third piece (also no longer traceable), a limestone base fragment (Evans 1928: fig. 7a), comes from an ostensibly more secure lower LN stratum, but is certainly not well enough preserved to support Evans' reconstruction of it as an Egyptian cylindrical jar. Rather it is likely to be a rare local product at this time or testament to the occasional trade in these items in the pre-BA Aegean (Bevan 2001: 153–54).

More convincing in terms of its stratigraphic context is a small fragment of a possible obsidian vessel from a secure EMIIA level on the Royal Road (Warren 1981: 633–34, fig. 5; 1989). However, apart from a slightly bevelled edge, this piece has no diagnostic features that identify it unequivocally as a vessel, let alone as Egyptian. It could be from the rim of a 1st Dynasty flaring cup (e.g. UC 36621) and hence already an heirloom by EMIIA, but it is sufficiently small that its identification must remain uncertain. If it is an Egyptian import, it is likely to reflect down-the-line exchange, rather than direct and bilateral trading links.

Late Prepalatial Trade and Influence

So we have three fragments from LN levels and one piece from an EMIIA level at Knossos whose contexts and/or identification as Egyptian stone vessel imports are extremely doubtful (only the EMIIA obsidian fragment is really a possibility). In the subsequent late Prepalatial period, our evidence for contact between Egypt and Crete becomes less equivocal, but it nonetheless remains difficult to gauge when within four or five centuries of the late Prepalatial period these pieces were arriving and what sort of trade they represent. Warren records a handful of definite and possible Egyptian products all from EMII(B)-MMI/II contexts at Knossos (1969: 112, D327 P604; 1981: 632–33, fig.3, pl.205b; 1989: 1, n.1). Unfortunately, none of them can be dated any more closely than this broad date range, nor are they shapes with a short period of use in Egypt. In fact, these pieces are not the most common types of material found in contemporary Egypt (late Old Kingdom–12th Dynasty). For example, there are no collared pots, splayed cylindrical jars, lamps, large jars or tables such as those found in large

numbers in Egypt and in contemporary contexts in the Levant (see below). In other words, for EMIIB-MMII, we have the tantalizing testimony of one definite and several probable imports, but these artifacts do not offer much insight into the socio-political implications of early contact or to the forms of trade involved.

While this uncertainty about the date and character of the assemblage urges interpretive caution, we should also consider the possible wider influence of Egyptian contact on the local Cretan stone vessel industry. Unlike the Cyclades, with a long, low-intensity ancestry of stone vessel use, it is only in EMIIA that the first substantial *indigenous* stone vessel industry appears in Crete (Warren 1965; Bevan 2001: 168–71). These new vessels were carved in chlorite and heavily decorated, and are unlike most Egyptian stone vessels of any period.[3] After EMIIA, and in stages during EMIIB-MMI that are difficult to pin down with chronological precision, stone vessel production changes. Not only is there a greater diversity of shape and material, but vessels are now often hollowed out by drilling with either a tubular bit (organic or copper) or an abrading stone (Warren 1969: 161; Bevan 2001: 117–19). Both these drilling methods might conceivably have been borrowed from Egyptian stone vessel-making techniques, but more likely, local priorities and demands encouraged the adaptation and refinement of known local drilling technologies (e.g. of beads) to the task of hollowing out vessels from harder stones.

So Egyptian material culture may have provided some limited inspiration for new technological choices and perhaps also for shape preferences. Certainly, amongst the range of stone forms placed in tombs, there is a greater interest in small containers possibly for oils or unguents, reflecting a cosmetic and at least partly funerary role, similar to contemporary Egypt (Aston 1994: shapes 137–141). Indeed, more informative than the actual EMIIB-MMII Egyptian imports is a range of exact and partial Cretan imitations (Warren 1969; Phillips 1996: 461, fig.3; Karetsou 2000: 42–45; Bevan 2003: figs.4:1–2). Three features stand out with regard to these local imitations: i) they concentrate at Mochlos and in the Mesara tombs, but have so far not been found at Knossos; ii) in contrast to the actual imports, they form a coherent group, copying a limited number of highly recognizable, oil container shapes; and iii) they are miniature versions of shapes produced in Egypt in a wider variety of sizes.

The Cretan vessels imitate prototypes made in Egypt during the late Old Kingdom (OK) to 12th Dynasty (Ward 1971: fig. 17), which roughly matches the EMIIB-MMII date range of their find contexts. However, specific vessel shapes allow us to suggest finer chronological (and regional) distinctions. Two imitative shapes – the splayed cylindrical jar and the collared pot (Bevan 2003: fig. 4:1) – are copies of late OK to First Intermediate Period (FIP) products, but especially characteristic of the 6th Dynasty (Aston 1994: types 35, 123–126; Petrie 1937: nos. 584–593, 650–652). Specific local Cretan stones appear to have been chosen that imitate the appearance of the two most important materials in use in contemporary Egypt, travertine and anorthosite gneiss (Aston 1994: 42–47, 63–64).

One of the two splayed cylindrical jars from Mochlos comes from an EMIIB-III context (Soles 1992: 84, fig. 33, pl. 30) and this early date, along with the 6th Dynasty style of the Mochlos jars, might suggest that this area was an important point of contact for early trading ventures. More generally, the splayed cylindrical jar and the collared jar can be distinguished from some slightly later imitations from the Mesara tombs (Bevan 2003: fig. 4:2). The cylindrical jar imitations from the latter region all have sloping sides and a short, roughly squared-off projecting rim and base which is characteristic of FIP-early 12th Dynasty prototypes. Examples in MMI-II contexts from Kamilari (Levi 1961–2: fig. 120 c6) and Kommos (Schwab 1996: 279–80) offer some confirmation that the Mesara imitations are indeed of later date. Likewise, a series of closed jars with short, everted rims are also imitating a FIP-early MK form, and a third form, the squat alabastron, might with much less confidence be linked to rare 12th Dynasty versions. The Mesara's involvement is probably both due to the emergence of Phaistos as a major island centre at this time and to the increased range of maritime exchange made possible by the regular use of sailing ships, which would have broadened the impact of Egyptian objects and ideas (Carinci 2000).

Unfortunately, we have very little contextual information with which to understand how and why these objects were being deployed. The Agia Triada Large Tholos is perhaps the most illuminating case (Banti 1930–1), boasting not only the clearest example of an early Egyptian stone vessel import (an anorthosite gneiss jar, Karetsou 2000: no.5), but also the largest number of imitations known from any single context. Unfortunately, the find spot of the actual import is not recorded, but four of the imitations were found clustered by the south wall of the tomb (Figure 6.2), amongst a group of skulls and long bones, presumably removed from an original, articulated position elsewhere. They appear to be in pairs, two cylindrical jars and two everted rim jars, one slightly smaller than the other. This disturbed context in a communal tomb should be treated with caution, but it is worth noting that the use of combinations of oils and oil jars, from sets of seven or eight to as few as two, is an important Egyptian practice. For example, we could take probable FIP tomb 5009 at Badari as a roughly contemporary example in which two cylindrical and two everted rim jars are also found together (in association with an adult female, Brunton 1927: 41, pl. xlix). It is impossible to say whether such practices were passed on from Egypt alongside the trade in actual vessels, although we can be fairly confident that they often were as far as Byblos. In Crete, the Agia Triada examples at least make us bear in mind that what was imitated may have been not only a vessel shape, but perhaps also its contents and/or a more complex consumption routine.

Predynastic and Old Kingdom-Style Imports: Antiques or Antiquities?

Apart from the probable imports and imitations from secure early contexts, there

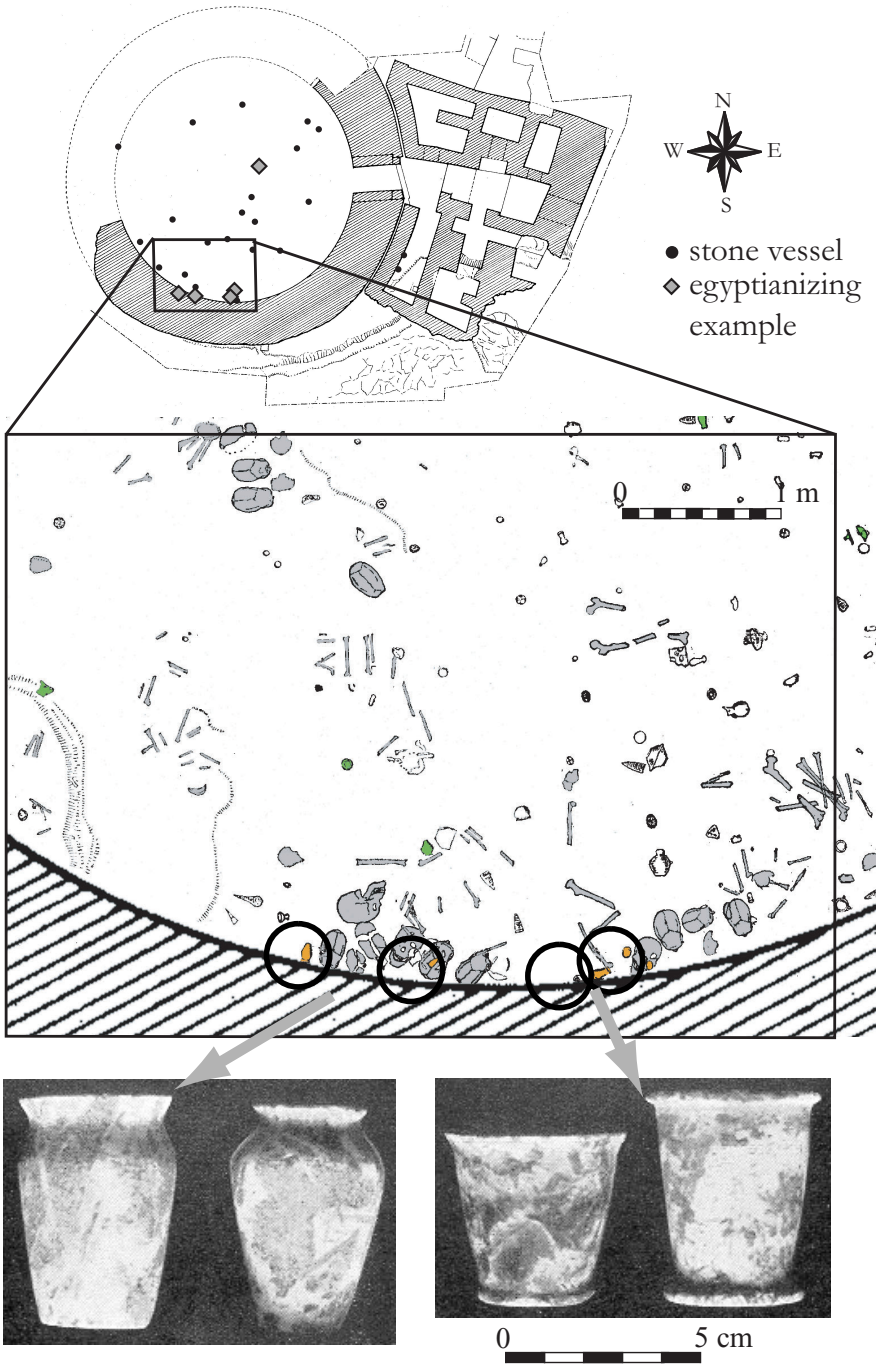


Figure 6.2. Egyptianizing stone vessels from Agia Triada Tholos A (after Banti 1930-1: figs. 2, 4-5, 50c–f)

is also a large number of Predynastic to Old Kingdom (PD-OK) vessels from unstratified or much later, *second* millennium Aegean deposits (Renfrew's 'rather unsatisfactory contexts', 1972: 214), especially at Knossos. There are by now two established and conflicting interpretations of these objects: either i) they were curated or preserved locally since their original exchange in the third millennium (e.g. Warren 1969: 106; 1981: 632); or ii) they arrived in the later Bronze Age probably as the result of tomb-robbing in Second Intermediate Period (SIP) and 18th Dynasty Egypt (Pomerance 1973; 1980; Phillips 1992: 170, 175–76).

In favour of the latter view, we can trace the appearance of such 'out-of-time' PD-OK antiques not just in the Aegean, but also at a large number of MB-LB Nubian, Egyptian and Levantine sites, suggesting a process of recirculation occurring across the whole of the eastern Mediterranean.[4] Some of these antique shapes are also imitated by Cretan artisans in this later period (Warren 1969: types 30A–C), which might point to the impact of peculiarly contemporary events. On the other hand, if any of the PD-OK-style material is to be ascribed to *earlier* trade, then it is much more likely to have occurred in the EMIIB-MMI window for which we have both direct evidence for some Egyptian imports (and imitations) in Crete and the emergence of sail-driven maritime links. Unless we assume a scale of canoe-borne exchange, as yet unwarranted by other evidence, then this discounts the possibility that some of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic-style material ever could have reached Crete at a time contemporary with its production in Egypt.

Again this issue benefits from being approached comparatively. As an example, this section focuses on a particular thin-walled, carinated bowl shape (Aston 1994: shapes 112, 117), of which at least four unstratified and one MMIII fragment are known from Knossos (Figure 6.3a–b). In Egypt, this shape forms a relatively tight 4th–6th Dynasty typological group, a fact which contrasts markedly with most of the other PD-OK types from unstratified-LBA Aegean contexts that are much earlier (Early Dynastic) in style. All the Knossos fragments are made of anorthosite gneiss. This stone (sometimes called 'Cephren diorite')[5] comes from near the Wadi Toshka in the Western Desert (Shaw *et al.* 2001) and was quarried in significant quantities during the late 2nd to 6th Dynasties for statuary, vessels and other objects (Aston 1994: 63–64; Reisner 1931: 140, 180). The late OK vessel shapes for which it was principally deployed were bowls, jars and lamps, essentially as a means of marking out the household equipment and tableware of the royal family and upper elite. Late OK examples of thin-walled carinated bowls and lamps, often in anorthosite gneiss, are known in Egypt from the tomb of Pepi II's wife, Neit (Figure 6.3e; Jéquier 1933; 1934; 1935), and private elite tombs on the Giza plateau (Reisner and Smith 1955: 100–01, figs. 145, 147, pls. 45a–c). Indeed, the use of this material and these sorts of thin-walled shapes seems to correlate strongly with high social status (except in cases of clear re-use).

We can also look to the Levant for valuable comparative evidence. Egyptian

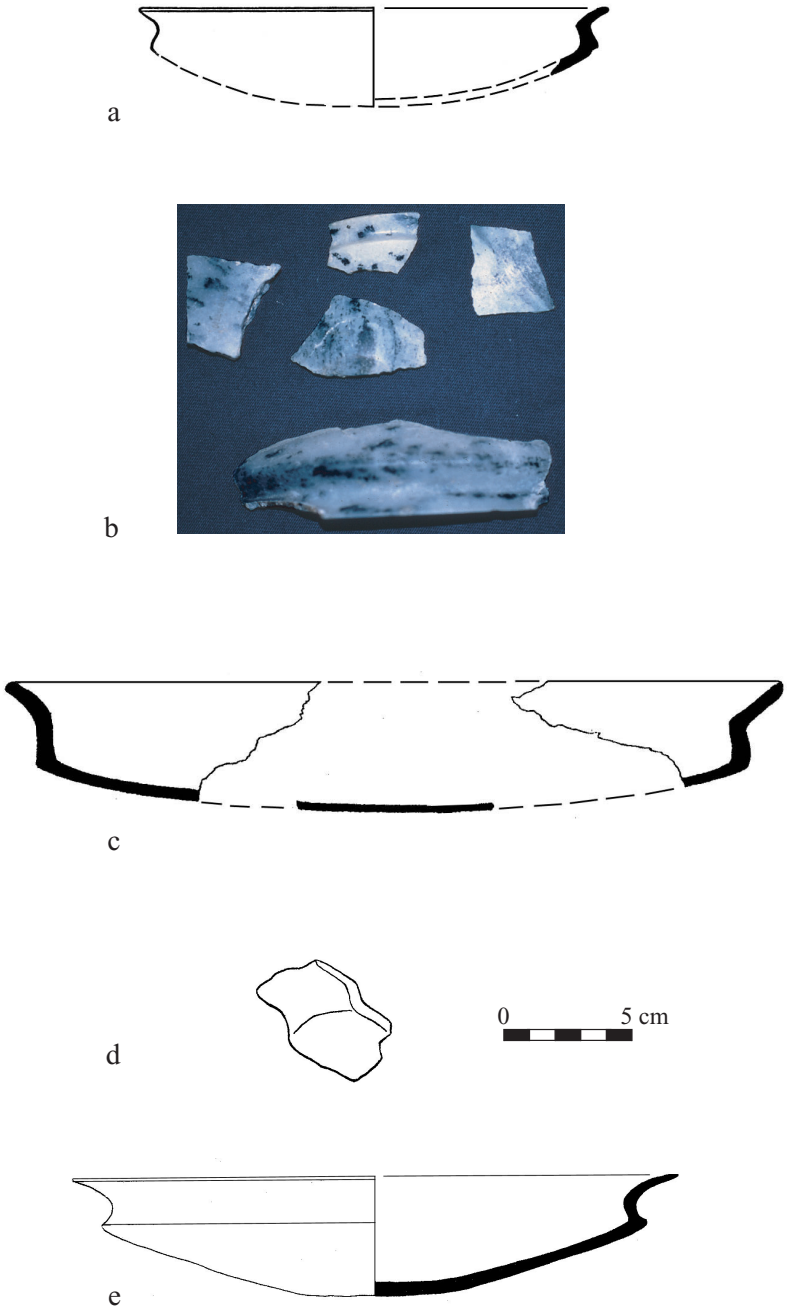
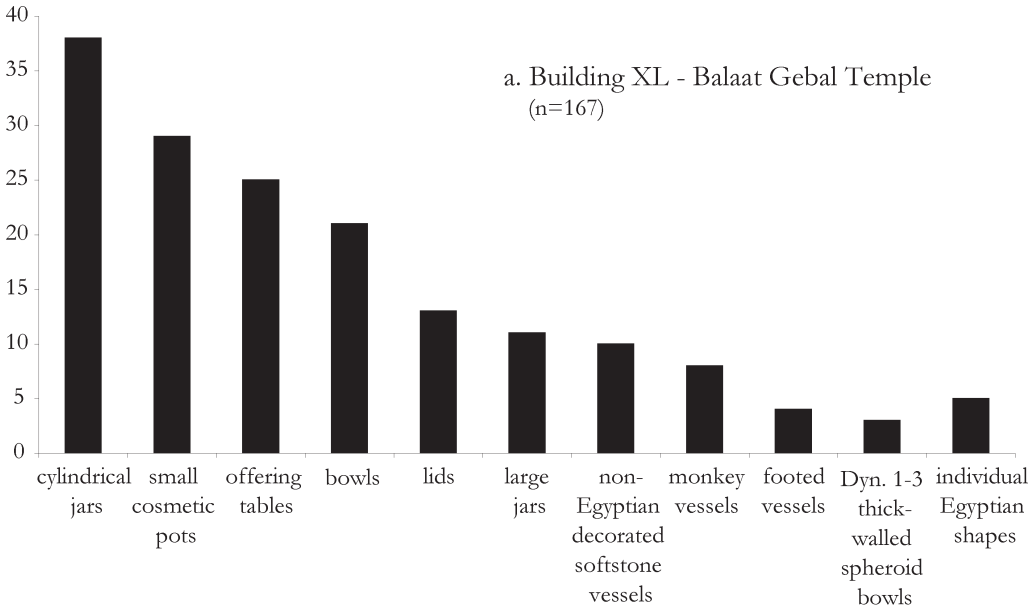


Figure 6.3. Carinated anorthosite gneiss bowls from: a) Knossos, Room of the False-spouted Vessels, MMIII (HM 590, after Warren 1969: D322), b) Knossos (AM AE 2301; 1910.283; 1938.409a, 583), c) Ebla (after Scandone-Matthiae 1981: fig.C.aa1), d) Byblos (after Montet 1928: fig. 26.114) and e) Tomb of Neit, Memphis (after Jéquier 1934: fig.15).

Figure 6.4. Plan of Byblos showing the distribution of Egyptian stone vessel finds (most of which are of Old Kingdom date). Note that three different excavation grids have been approximately combined –the irregular rectangular area around building XL is the rough location of Montet's 'Temple Syrien' sounding; the long rectangular zones are Dunand's earlier excavation zones and the squares are his later excavation grid. The overlying structures are those attributed to Saghieh's phase KIV (after Montet 1928: pl.xxii, Dunand 1939: pls.ccvi-ix, Saghieh 1983: plan 1).

stone vessels (including anorthosite gneiss bowls, Figures 6.3d-e) have been found at late third millennium Byblos and Ebla. At Byblos, stone vessel imports come from two main areas (Figure 6.4): buildings XL (Montet 1928; Dunand 1939: 288–308; Saghieh 1983: 40-45, fig.13) and XXV (Dunand 1958: 899-900; Saghieh 1983: 36-37, fig. 12a). A larger deposit comes from building XL which has been



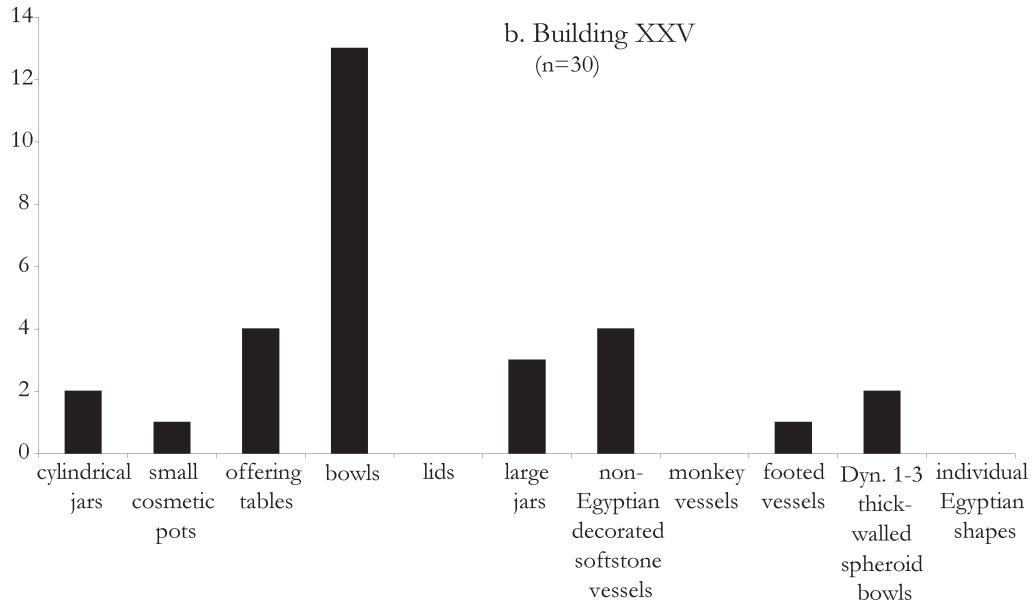


Figure 6.5. Comparison of vessel shapes from a) building XL and b) building XXV at Byblos.

convincingly identified as a temple of the Byblite divinity, Balaat Gebal. Here, there is a predominance of oil jars, offering tables and small collared pots (Figure 6.5a). The stone vessels are one of a series of indicators that link Balaat Gebal

with the Egyptian deity Hathor and it is possible that the stone vessels were originally used as ritual equipment in the temple's cult activities (Espinal 2002). Although there are examples of earlier shapes, the vast majority of the assemblage can be ascribed to the 5th–6th Dynasties based on style, material and inscriptions.

The other smaller group of stone vessels was found in building XXV within what seems to have been a large royal or elite residence (Dunand 1958: 899; Saghieh 1983: 37). Here, there is a far greater proportion of bowls and tables (Figure 6.5b) than in the Balaat Gebal deposit, suggesting these items related more to consumption. This greater emphasis, within an apparently secular context, on tableware rather than the storage or ritual dedication of oils and cosmetics, matches quite well the role of ostentatious stone bowl forms within the royal family (as in the tomb of Neit above) and among the upper elite of late OK Egypt.

Further inland at Ebla, the only other third millennium northern Levantine site to produce imported Egyptian stone vessels, 200+ travertine and anorthosite gneiss fragments were found in Palace G (Scandone Matthiae 1979; 1981; 1988). Bowls and lamps predominate (85% of the identifiable pieces) and, as at Byblos building XXV, the link with consumption in an upper elite domestic or administrative context is striking. It is significant that more than a third of the Ebla fragments are of anorthosite gneiss (also present at Byblos, but unquantifiable; Figures 6.3c–d show anorthosite gneiss bowls from both Levantine sites): in Egypt, such proportions would be typical only of the royal family or a very few powerful individuals around it (e.g. Firth and Quibell 1935: 132). In fact, in view of their find spots, shapes and materials, the assemblages from Byblos building XXV and Ebla Palace G both make good candidates for high-level transfers between royal households.

Returning to Crete, the Knossos carinated bowls could conceivably have arrived in a very similar way to the household equipment and tableware found at Byblos and Ebla, as possible official transfers (e.g. greeting gifts, marriage exchanges) cementing the types of long-range, maritime connections now possible using sailing ships. If they were early trade objects, then the Knossos bowls would probably have been stored together in an elite residential or administrative context, as at Byblos and Ebla. Such a deposit would be particularly prone to subsequent disturbance or complete destruction and, given the piecemeal preservation of EMIIB-MMI contexts at Knossos (especially under the later palace), we should not therefore be surprised that our anorthosite gneiss bowls come from secondary contexts.

The case of the carinated bowls highlights the utility of a comparative perspective and other shapes from the 'floating' Aegean group benefit from similar treatment. For example, certain PD-OK thick walled bowls and jars (Warren 1969: types 43A–B; Aston 1994: shapes 79–81, 108) amongst this group could not have arrived at the time of their *floruit* (late 4th millennium–early third millennium BC), unless we assume levels of LN-EMIIA trade unsupported by

other evidence. Such objects do occur rarely in later OK contexts in Egypt (e.g. Brunton 1927: 29–30, no. 3143, pls. xxiv.5, xlix) as well as at Byblos (Montet 1928: pls. xliii–xlv) and possibly Ebla (Scandone Matthiae 1988: pl. xii.2), and therefore a few may have made it to Crete in the EMIIB-MMI period. However, there are certainly not sufficient quantities to explain the sheer numbers (20+ examples) found in unstratified or much later Aegean contexts.

Indeed as we have seen, tomb-robbing and re-circulation of these objects later on in the Bronze Age does seem to have been occurring, to judge by their distribution over a wide range of MBA-LBA eastern Mediterranean sites and their imitation on Neopalatial Crete. So we have some evidence (both solid and circumstantial) for both the 'early contacts' and 'later tomb-robbing' scenarios, but fortunately, these two models are not as mutually irreconcilable as they might at first seem. Late Prepalatial exotica (evidence for contact with distant lands) were probably deployed and imitated as important markers of prestige and/or political legitimacy (as they clearly were at Byblos). As a result, later Neopalatial efforts at imitating and acquiring Egyptian antiquities may have been fuelled by: i) the curation of a few of these late Prepalatial trade items (though the intervening period is 500–800 years); or more likely, ii) the memory of these early links, during a period when Egypt-Crete interaction was again an important issue.

Conclusion

This paper has reassessed the evidence for imported Egyptian stone vessels and their imitations from early contexts in Crete and has adopted a wider east Mediterranean perspective on these products. While a great deal of uncertainty remains, some issues are relatively clear. Renfrew was correct to downplay the role of these objects as prime movers in the emergence of palatial society on Crete, let alone in the emergence of 'civilization' in the wider Aegean. Signs of potential Egyptian contact with LN-EMIIA Crete are extremely limited and highly equivocal. More to the point, given the transport technologies involved, any imports that did arrive at this time would necessarily have done so through down-the-line trading, deracinated of any original Egyptian social meanings. In contrast, in EMIIB-MMI some material was definitely arriving and being imitated locally, probably facilitated by the increased range and cargo capacity of sailing ships. Three regions –Knossos, Mochlos and the Mesara were involved in different ways and at different times. Comparative evidence also suggests that some material from mixed or later second millennium contexts at Knossos, such as the anorthosite gneiss carinated bowls, could plausibly have arrived as the result of late third millennium high-level exchanges. The tempo of change during EMIIB-MMI is hard to assess, but by MMIA, familiarity with Egyptian material culture was sufficiently widespread to be influencing the funerary consumption of several Mesara communities. It would not be surprising if early contacts were initiated and directed by Egyptian or Levantine travellers with Cretan shipping not

becoming involved until later, perhaps with the start of the palatial period. A likely intermediary in all such trade is Byblos, which was both the main focus for Egyptian activity in the third and early second millennium Levant and a coastal centre closely associated with ships and sailing within the wider eastern Mediterranean.

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Endnotes

1 There are winds that occasionally blow from the south towards Crete, but their frequency is low (mostly in winter) and strength unpredictable (Lambrou-Phillipson 1991: 13). Likewise, while there are plenty of examples of Classical, Roman or Medieval ships sailing from Egypt or the north African coast to Crete, these vessels were equipped with brailed sails (and sometimes also keeled hulls) and hence were much better equipped to deal with the winds changing than most Bronze Age craft.

2 The following abbreviations are used for museum accession details in this paper: AM (Ashmolean Museum; HM (Herakleion Museum); KSM (Knossos Stratigraphical Museum), and UC (Petrie Museum, University College London).

3 Comparisons have been made between the EMIIA chlorite vessels and chlorite/steatite vessels carved with decoration from Byblos (Money Coutts 1936). However, the similarities are vague and, in fact, typical of softstone vessels which can be worked with chisel and/or punch and hence, cross-culturally, encourage similar (carved, incised) decorative schemes (Bevan 2001: chapters 4-5).

4 In Nubia and Egypt, examples have been found at Badari, Deir el Ballas, Kerma, Qau, Tel el-Amarna, and Thebes (Lacovara 1991; Phillips 1992: 169-71), but this list is far from

exhaustive. In the Levant, these are known from Amman (Hankey 1974: fig. 1.1-2, pl. xxxii.a), Beth Shan (Rowe 1940: pl. 24.3, fig. 16 no.398), Ains Shems (Grant 1932: pls. xlvii.3-4), Kamid el-Loz (Lilyquist 1996: pls. 28-29), Lachish (Tufnell 1958: pl. 26.10), Tel Atchana (Wooley 1955: pl. lxxxi.9), Tel Beit Mirsim (Albright 1938: pl. 31.5) and Ugarit (Caubet 1991: pls. i.1-2, viii.12). In the Aegean, they have been found at Archanes, Agia Triada, Asine, Kythera, Knossos (with by far the most examples), Kato Syme, Katsamba, Mycenae, Myrtos Pyrgos, Palaikastro, Pylos and Zakros (Warren 1969: types 43A-E; Hankey 1972: 213, pl.78-9; Karetsou 2000).

5 Actually, there are two varieties, a lighter one which might be called anorthosite gneiss and a darker one, better termed gabbro gneiss. The lighter version is more frequently used for stone vessels.

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