



Encounters with
Ancient
Egypt

Ancient Perspectives on Egypt

Edited by Roger Matthews and Cornelia Roemer



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CHAPTER 3

EGYPTIAN STONE VESSELS AND THE POLITICS OF EXCHANGE (2617–1070 BC)

Rachael Thyrsa Sparks

Introduction

Egyptian workshops had been manufacturing stone vessels since the predynastic period: for everyday use, for ritual purposes such as foundation deposits and temple votives, and as essential equipment accompanying the deceased on their journey to the afterlife (for corpora of Egyptian stone vessels, see Aston 1994; Kaplony 1968; el-Khouli 1978; Lilyquist 1995; Petrie 1937). A wide variety of different stone types was available either in Egypt itself or in its desert periphery, while growing involvement in long-distance trade networks increased the range of materials available for exploitation (Aston *et al.* 2000; Harrell 1989; Klemm and Klemm 1993). Despite great variability in stone use in the early periods of production, especially in the first and second Dynasties, Egyptian calcite came to dominate stone vessel assemblages from the Old Kingdom onwards (Aston 1994: fig. 21). This was probably due to a combination of ready availability, ease of manufacture and a visual appeal that satisfied consumer demands (Sparks 1998: 308, fig. 44). The more exotic stones tended to be reserved for social elites such as the royal family and high ranking officials.

High production output led to standardization of methods from an early period, the mechanics of which are illustrated by debris at production sites, and depictions of stone vessel workshops in numerous tombs (Caton-Thompson and Gardner 1934; Stocks 1988: 173–174). Several attempts have been made to determine the physical parameters of this technology through replication experiments (Gorelick and Gwinnett 1983; Stocks 1988, 1993). Methods changed little over the course of one and a half millennia, the main developments appearing to be the introduction of the tubular drill bit around the first Dynasty (Lucas and Harris 1962: 425), the handle-driven drill mechanism some time between the third and fifth Dynasties (Stocks 1988: 170), and a shift from using multiple weights to a single weight fitted onto the drill shaft by the New Kingdom (Stocks 1988: 176; 1993: 598).

Although most Egyptian stone vessels were uninscribed, a small percentage carried hieroglyphic inscriptions naming the Egyptian pharaoh or members of the royal family; these are found primarily in royal burials and temples (e.g. Leeds 1922: pls. I–II; Lilyquist 1995; Pinch 1993: 17). They were occasionally trimmed with precious metals, and many represent oversized versions of forms more commonly

known from middle ranking burials (cf. Petrie and Brunton 1924: pl. XLI.30, ht. 48 mm, with el-Khouli 1993: cat. 2, ht. 399 mm). Smaller model versions of traditional forms such as the concave-sided cylindrical jar were also produced for use in foundation deposits outside tombs and in temples (e.g. Adams 1975: fig. 3; Hayes 1959: 128; Mond and Meyers 1940: pl. 23.40.17, 41). The significance of the inscription itself varies depending on the purpose for which a vessel was made. Some contain formulae and titles that indicate that the objects were designed for funerary use, such as the epithet “justified before Osiris” which treats the individual named as deceased (Lilyquist 1995: 4). Some are labels which inform of the vessel capacity and contents (e.g. Lilyquist 1995: 16–17), while others are less specific in intent. The use of inscriptions was not purely a royal phenomenon, and stone vessels with inscriptions naming private individuals are also known, often associated with funerary contexts (e.g. Jacobsson 1994: 20, cat. 80; Lilyquist 1995: 62, figs. 154–155). In general, the presence of a royal cartouche may be a means of indicating that these goods were made within a royal workshop, either for use by members of the royal family, or for distribution by them as rewards for loyalty and outstanding service (e.g. Lilyquist 1995: cat. 43; for a similar gift in silver, Breasted 1906–1907: 231).

Egyptian stone vessels in the Levant

Egyptian stone vessels were popular elsewhere in the Near East, as recent catalogues of examples from Cyprus and the Levant indicate (Jacobsson 1994; Sparks 1998). These are usually distinguished as Egyptian through a consideration of their shape, decoration and the technology employed in their manufacture, although it has been suggested that Egyptianizing stone vessel workshops became active in the Levant at some stage in the Late Bronze Age (Lilyquist 1996). If this was the case, these must have operated using imported raw materials and under heavy Egyptian artistic influence, with close links being maintained with stylistic developments back in Egypt itself (Sparks 1998: 194–201). There is no evidence at present to suggest that this was the case for the stone vessels bearing Egyptian inscriptions.

Stone vessels naming private individuals are extremely rare (e.g. Edel 1983: cat. 98; Jacobsson 1994: cat. 80). Some may have been traded to the Levant as a by-product of tomb robbing.¹ Inscriptions naming pharaohs or members of the royal family are more frequent, although with only 69 provenanced and identifiable examples known from the Levant during the entire third and second millennia BC, they were never common (Appendix). At Ugarit (Figure 3:1), where Egyptian stone vessels were most popular, royal inscriptions are found on only 4.4 per cent of the total assemblage (Caubet 1991 – 19 out of the 427 fragments published). Royal name stone vessels are even scarcer elsewhere in the Near East, with four examples in Mesopotamia, two examples from Crete, and single examples known from Cyprus and Anatolia (von Bissing 1940: figs 1–4; Cline 1994: cat. 680, 742; Jacobsson 1994: cat. 79; Lilyquist 1995: cat. 1, 12, 95 and cat. A). It is this very scarcity that commands attention, and raises the question of how and why this kind of object found its way into foreign assemblages, and whether they had the same meaning there as back in Egypt.

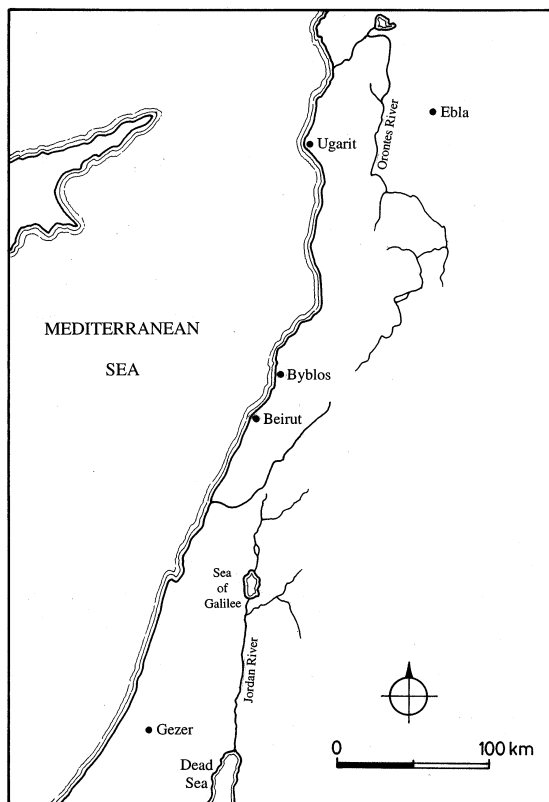


Figure 3:1 Map of sites mentioned in the text. Ugarit covers the area of modern Ras Shamra and Minet el-Beida.

Mechanisms of distribution

There are many ways in which Egyptian inscribed stone vessels could have been distributed outside Egypt. This could have been through some kind of formal exchange, whether as gift exchange between royal courts, or as a more commercial form of trade. The vessels could have been transferred as valuable objects in their own right, or as containers for some other product. In either case, the transfer of the object from the Egyptian palace would be a deliberate act, and as such, would carry considerable meaning in terms of international diplomatic relations. Stone vessels could have been sent as parts of larger consignments designed to accompany diplomatic marriages, or as greeting gifts that were often directed at specific individuals within the court, such as the royal wife, chief sons, or high officials. The intent of this kind of exchange was to impress the recipient with the resources at the command of the sender, and in this context, marking the exchange with a royal cartouche would presumably have been particularly appropriate, as it would serve as a reminder of the origin of both gift and obligation.

An alternative mechanism would be through more aggressive activities such as the seizure of war booty, or the exaction of tribute or taxes from a conquered state. This may have become a factor in the secondary distribution of Egyptian goods once

they had entered the Levant. It is only likely to have been a significant mechanism for the initial export of material outside Egypt itself in periods of civil unrest, such as during the First Intermediate Period or under Hyksos rule in the late Second Intermediate Period (Ryholt 1997: 143–148). It may be difficult to identify goods which have circulated through military activities, as opposed to traded or gifted items, except for those rare occasions where the seizure of booty has been commemorated by additional inscriptional evidence on the object itself, as illustrated by a series of stone vessels found in Mesopotamia which were inscribed “booty of Elam” and “booty of Magan” (Potts 1986, 1989).

Tomb robbers may also have had a role in disseminating luxury goods, some of which may have been lying dormant in the ground for many years (Phillips 1992). Some of the looted material would only have survived for a short time after being placed in the tomb, as was probably the case with precious oils stolen out of calcite jars in the tomb of Tutankhamun (Reeves 1990: 96–97). Yet stone vessels could equally have been a target: they survive burial well, and the raw material from which they were made seems to have maintained its value as a commodity throughout the pharaonic period, guaranteeing a market for this kind of object (see below). Vessels looted from tombs may be more noticeable in the archaeological record than those taken from temple or palace treasuries, as in Egypt this kind of material sometimes carried inscriptions testifying to its original function as a funerary offering. Even uninscribed vessels may be identifiable as coming from burials, if it can be demonstrated that their shapes predate their archaeological contexts by several hundred years. This is seen in several examples of predynastic or early dynastic type found in late bronze age deposits in the Levant (Sparks 1998: 128–130). It is perhaps more likely that these came back into circulation after this kind of looting, rather than surviving above ground as heirlooms (Jeffreys 2003c) over such a long period of time (Phillips 1992: 168–172, 173–181).

Stone vessels found in the Levant with royal name inscriptions are unlikely to have been derived from such sources for a number of reasons. First, they do not bear the types of funerary formulae that one would expect of objects taken from burial contexts. Second, the penalties for despoiling royal burials in the Bronze Age would have been severe, as suggested by papyri describing trials of tomb robbers during the late Ramesside period (Breasted 1906–1907: 245–273, sections 499–556; Phillips 1992: 160; Reeves 1990: 97). Therefore if such looting did take place, it seems logical that anyone attempting to trade in such risky material would take the precaution of obscuring its origins by removing incriminating inscriptions or converting the vessel into smaller objects such as amulets or inlays. In this case, the royal origin of the stone vessel would not be detected. The source of those jars which can be identified as royal was therefore probably quite different. It seems likely that they were selected from workshop or palace stock, or on rare occasions commissioned especially for particular individuals (e.g. Bordreuil and Pardee 1989: 97, fig. 26; Caubet 1991: 213; Desroches-Noblecourt 1956: 179–220; Schaeffer 1956: 40–42, figs. 118, 126).

If it is valid to associate such objects with Egyptian royal workshops, and if it can be demonstrated that they did not get exported through foreign or non-official channels, then it seems likely that their distribution abroad is somehow related to Egyptian foreign policy and diplomatic activities, particularly as they usually appear

in palace or temple contexts abroad. This raises a number of questions, not the least being how to determine the intent behind sending such an object to a foreign court, let alone the manner in which it was received. If the gift was valued, was it because of its Egyptian origin or character, because of the status of the sender, or because it was inherently valuable? The question also remains as to what happened to the object in the period between arriving in the Levant and entering the archaeological record there, and whether there was any shift in the manner in which these vessels were used. Archaeology is quite capable of quantifying the physical attributes of an object; but to understand the significance of that object in its contemporary context is a more difficult task.

The meaning behind the cartouche

Investigating the purpose behind inscribing royal cartouches on stone vessels leads on to a wider methodological problem: how should other objects with royal labels be interpreted? The addition of a royal name or insignia to an object could have a variety of meanings, depending on context and the nature of the object itself. It is important to consider the way in which different object classes would have functioned in their original setting to understand these differences. Some categories of object may reflect the making of a political statement, such as boundary stelae, inscriptions erected or displayed in a public place, or goods presented to a foreign ruler in diplomatic gift exchange. Others may reflect the process of government, with the royal name being used as a proof of authority or authenticity, such as when used to seal an official document on behalf of the pharaoh or the royal household. Royal seal impressions found on the handles of storage jars may have been a means of marking produce that belonged to the king or came from royal estates (Higginbotham 2000: 254). Use of the royal name could also be an official device for dating transactions, such as the collection of the grain tax by Egyptian officials in Ramesside Palestine (Goldwasser 1984). Cartouches on monumental architecture may have signified that the pharaoh had ownership of a building, or control of the activities that took place within it. The hieroglyphic inscriptions found in Iron I Beth Shan and Ashdod are good examples of this kind of material (Dothan and Porath 1993: 109–110; James 1966: 5–8). Finally, in a religious context, cartouches could be used to mark votive offerings made on behalf of the pharaoh, or which reflect the cult of the living or deceased king (e.g. Schulman 1988: 114–145).

The majority of these object classes share in common the presence of a royal cartouche which seems to act as an official statement, whether the aim of that statement be for propaganda, administrative or religious purposes. One type of object where the formal nature of this statement is less clear is that of royal name scarabs. In the past, these have often been interpreted as indicating some degree of royal influence or political authority, as in the case of the distribution of Hyksos royal scarabs in the southern Levant during the fifteenth Dynasty (Weinstein 1981: 8–10). Yet it has been argued on a number of occasions that this assumption is not justified (Ben-Tor *et al.* 1999: 53–55 and references). Unlike most other classes of objects with royal cartouches, in the Levant these scarabs appear to be distributed amongst the local population, rather than being confined to elite, temple or palatial contexts.

Actual impressions are extremely rare, as opposed to the scarabs themselves, suggesting that they were used mainly as amulets or items of jewellery. At Tell el-'Ajjul, for example, out of the 1,244 scarabs and seals recently republished by Keel, only one royal seal impression is recorded, compared to 103 royal name seals (Keel 1997: cat. 319). Moreover, while other types of scarab appear to be evenly spread between settlement and burial deposits, royal name scarabs appear primarily in tombs, with 70 being found in burials, compared to 14 from stratified deposits and 20 from unknown locations.

This association may argue for a specifically funerary role for many examples, which seem most likely to have had a protective function associated with royal cult, calling on the pharaoh in his role as a god, a power which could go well beyond his reign, as illustrated by the ubiquitous scarabs of Tuthmosis III (Ben-Tor *et al.* 1999: 54). Whatever the actual function of a royal name scarab, particularly in a Levantine setting, the evidence points to a somewhat different mechanism for distributing such objects across the region than for other classes of material, inscribed stone vessels in particular. This is illustrated by the different types of contexts in which the two groups appear at individual sites, as well as by the fact that royal name scarabs appear at a much larger number of settlements and are more evenly spread across the region. For all these reasons, it can be argued that this kind of object should be treated as distinct, when considering issues such as the extent of Egyptian influence or domination over the Levant during the Bronze Age.

Royal name stone vessels, on the other hand, appear to have functioned in a much more restricted setting within the Levant. Archaeological evidence shows a tendency for this kind of object to appear in elite contexts such as palaces, temples and royal tombs, and even then they are rare (see Appendix pp. 53–56). In cases where the size of the vessels can be determined, it would appear that inscriptions tend to be placed on large or monumental jars that represent a considerable investment of resources. This suggests that they were reserved for the highest grade of export, rather than being a common element in stone vessel production. This points to the addition of royal cartouches as a deliberate occurrence.

It is also evident from a variety of textual sources that even without a royal inscription, stone vessels were accorded a comparatively high status in bronze age society. The raw material had an intrinsic value of its own. Unworked blocks of stones such as calcite, malachite and lapis lazuli were often singled out in tribute and in offering scenes (e.g. Breasted 1906–1907: sections 30, 231, 234, 245, 446), while finished vessels from these and other materials such as *marhallu*-stone, *hiliba*-stone and *hulalu*-stone appear in booty lists and amongst the various precious objects provided as dowries accompanying diplomatic marriages of the eighteenth Dynasty (e.g. Moran 1992: EA 22 sections II.67–68, III.10). They appear in these lists not only as containers for a variety of precious oils and perfumes, but also without contents, indicating that the vessels were considered desirable in their own right (e.g. Moran 1992: EA 14, section III.47–73). This is also suggested by evidence that stone vessels frequently remained in circulation for long periods of time, sometimes necessitating repairs and modifications of damaged areas to allow the object to remain functional (e.g. el-Khouli 1993: cat. 19, 53, 55, from the Tomb of Tutankhamun, with mended rims, bearing inscriptions dating to the reigns of Tuthmosis III and Amenophis III). The materials

involved may have had some role in determining the value of individual items, and considerations such as the rarity of the stone and how difficult it was to obtain, as well as its physical appearance and the amount of time and skill invested in crafting, it may have contributed to the inherent desirability of a particular object. Texts such as the Amarna Letters suggest that in the Late Bronze Age the values placed on stone vessels were shared across different cultural boundaries, as they were involved in exchanges both to and from the Egyptian court (Moran 1992: EA 22, EA 25, EA 14).

If it is accepted that stone vessels were highly valued by bronze age society, the question remains as to why some of these were marked with an Egyptian royal inscription. It seems probable that the message being conveyed by hieroglyphic inscriptions would be intelligible only to Near Eastern scribes trained in foreign languages, and yet it seems unlikely that they would have been intended as the main audience for this kind of artefact. More likely, the function of marking an object with an inscription, particularly one naming an Egyptian pharaoh, would be twofold. The visual appearance of the script, intelligible or not, would have conjured up associations with the culture and power behind it. It would be recognizable as Egyptian from its style alone, distinctive from contemporary scripts such as cuneiform. At the same time, the object beneath the ‘message’ bore its own cultural stamp, both in its physical shape, product of an Egyptian milieu, and in the high standard of craftsmanship that went into its creation. This visual ‘signature’ would have been especially powerful during the Old and Middle Kingdom periods, when Levantine contact with Egyptian artistic styles was more restricted, and such objects still a rarity. By the New Kingdom, Egyptian objects and motifs were more widely disseminated, as physical and diplomatic expansion of Egyptian borders into Syro-Palestine led to the Egyptianization of some aspects of Canaanite material culture and the development of a more hybrid style of art, often called the “intercultural style” (Higginbotham 1996, 2000; Kantor 1947). This occurred not only through direct exchange of goods, but through the movement of skilled craftsmen across the empire and between allies (Moorey 2001; Zaccagnini 1983). As a result, Egyptian-style objects, such as stone vessels and jewellery, may have become less powerful symbols than previously, as they became more widely available and produced in centres outside Egypt itself.

Nonetheless, the inclusion of a royal cartouche would have helped maintain the special character of an Egyptian gift. It would serve as a kind of validation, proof that the object came direct from one ruler to another. To display actively such a vessel in the palace of a Near Eastern ruler would be a statement in itself. It could be a visual symbol of an allegiance to Egypt and tacit support of Egyptian foreign policy or involvement in the region, a display intended to convey a message to Egyptian messengers or representatives visiting the court of an Asiatic king. This is the kind of support that some rulers felt the need to reiterate verbally in their written correspondence with the Egyptian pharaoh (e.g. Moran 1992: EA 45; 48; 49 from the king and queen of Ugarit; EA 119 from Rib-Hadda of Byblos). The importance of maintaining good relations between royal houses is emphasized in texts such as the Amarna Letters, where Asiatic rulers make a point of reminding the pharaoh of past treaties and ties, to elicit more favourable trade relations, or as a justification for present behaviour (Moran 1992: EA 9; EA 16: 19–31). Yet to an internal audience of subjects and family dependents, or visiting diplomats from other nations, the message

conveyed could be quite different, showcasing their own power and influence through their success at obtaining such a strong ally as Egypt. In slightly different circumstances, such as when these objects were obtained through conquest, the message would be one of superiority over a vanquished enemy.

Inscribed stone vessels and chronology

Much importance has been placed on the chronological value of Egyptian objects with royal inscriptions when found outside Egypt itself. These have been especially popular as means to anchor the relative chronology of other regions to the absolute chronology of Egypt. The calcite lid of the Hyksos ruler Khian found at Knossos is a case in point, being used to argue that the LMIA period had to postdate his reign (Betancourt 1987: 46; Manning 1999: 79; Warren 1995: 3; Warren and Hankey 1989: 56, 136–137). However, in order for this kind of link to be established, it must be demonstrated that object, inscription, and archaeological context are contemporary. This is by no means always the case. An inscription can be added to an object at any time after its manufacture, something that is particularly easy and cost-effective to do with stone vessels, which typically feature large undecorated surfaces. Appropriating an object can also be a simple matter of erasing and modifying existing names and titles, a practice familiar to many Egyptian pharaohs (e.g. el-Khouli 1993: 16 cat. 30, 40; Lilyquist 1995: cat. 49; Schneider 1996: pls. 24.262, 25.262, 71.262).

The first point that needs to be established is whether the inscription was contemporary with the object on which it appears, or whether it was added at a subsequent date. A study of inscribed stone vessels from royal burials in Egypt suggests that it was common practice for this kind of material to remain within the royal household for several generations (e.g. el-Khouli 1993: cat. 49; Lilyquist 1995: 3, cat. 81, 94, all from the tomb of Tutankhamun). In these circumstances, it seems quite probable that inscriptions of royal names may sometimes have been added to previously undecorated vessels from earlier periods. Lilyquist has suggested a similar reworking of a mottled stone vessel from Kamid el-Loz (e.g. Lilyquist 1993: 44; 1994: 217). It may be difficult to detect this kind of modification, unless both shape and inscription can be dated independently of one another, and with reasonable precision.

The contemporaneity of the archaeological context and of the inscription also needs to be established. Not only may objects of high value be kept in circulation for considerable periods of time, but they may also be brought back into circulation after their initial deposition, through processes such as tomb robbing and looting of temple storerooms. There needs to be some means of establishing an independent date for associated material. This is particularly important when studying the chronological distribution of stone vessels with royal names outside Egypt. The problem is illustrated by the contents of room 30 in the royal palace at Ugarit, which featured a mix of inscribed material including objects dating to the reigns of Amenophis II, Nefertiti and Ramesses II, covering a potential range of over 200 years (Caubet 1991: RS 15.201–203). These objects may have been retained because they were gifts reflecting a diplomatic relationship formed between Ugarit and Egypt in the past. As discussed earlier, texts such as the Amarna Letters show that traditional links of this kind were valued and often used as bargaining points in later diplomatic negotiations.

When an inscribed stone vessel antedates its archaeological context by a considerable period, this raises the issue of when and how it first reached the site in question. It is necessary to find some means of distinguishing between objects sent direct to a site, and material acquired through secondary channels, such as via looting. Failure to make this kind of distinction has led to errors in the past, such as the use of Egyptian statues of private officials found in the southern Levant as proof of some kind of Middle Kingdom Egyptian empire in Syro-Palestine (Ben-Tor 1997; Weinstein 1975; Wilson 1941). The Egyptian stone vessels found at Palace G at Ebla are also a case in point (see below). Understanding of Early Bronze Age international relations between Egypt and the Eblaite state varies, depending on whether objects were traded direct to Ebla, or whether Ebla obtained them from a third party. Where there is no additional textual evidence to fall back upon, and where no known local rulers are implicated in the inscriptions themselves, it may not be possible to discover the true state of affairs.

The distribution of Egyptian stone vessels with royal name inscriptions in the Levant

The Old Kingdom

Stone vessels with royal name inscriptions first appear in the Levant during the Early Bronze Age at Byblos, probably as a phenomenon resulting from the special relationship between Byblos and the Egyptian court. This relationship had developed out of Egypt's interest in a range of Lebanese products, including cedar wood, which was of sufficient size and strength to be used in architecture and for building seagoing vessels, and various associated resins and oils which were required for mummification and other ritual purposes (Prag 1986: 59; Wright 1988: 146). The majority of these stone vessels were recovered from around the temple complex of Baalat-Gebal; additional material purchased on the open market may also come from

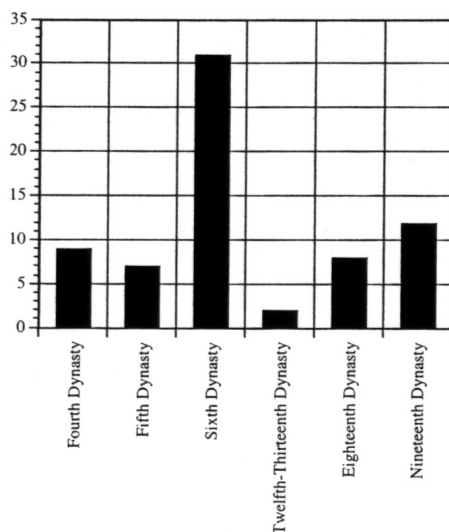


Figure 3:2 The chronological distribution of stone vessels with Egyptian royal name inscriptions found in the Levant.

Byblos, but has not been included here because of its lack of archaeologically derived provenance (Nelson 1934). The most notable characteristic of the provenanced group of material is its quantity, and the concentration of examples dating to the sixth Dynasty, especially to the reigns of Pepi I and Pepi II. This period represents a definite peak in terms of the distribution of stone vessels from Egyptian royal workshops abroad, unmatched in subsequent periods (Figure 3.2, Appendix, cat. nos. 18–47). The true number of actual examples is probably higher than represented here, as many inscriptions are incomplete and the cartouches have not survived.

Several theories have been offered to explain how, and indeed why, these inscribed stone vessels came to Byblos (see Wright 1988: 150–151). The concentration of material within the temple area suggests that most of these had been intended as votive offerings. If this was indeed the case, it is difficult to determine whether the offerings were being made by Egyptians, who had brought the items with them, or by Byblite rulers or officials who had obtained them from the Egyptian pharaoh or his representatives. The implications of these two scenarios are quite different. In the first instance, the actual gift of the stone vessel would have been to an Egyptian, and the circumstances behind the presentation need not have concerned the role of that individual in an international setting. The act of offering therefore would indicate only an Egyptian presence at Byblos, and their use of cult facilities there. In the alternative interpretation, the gift would have been from one ruler to a foreign court, and the transaction may well have had implications for international politics.

An additional, smaller group of stone vessels with royal name inscriptions was excavated at Ebla, in the Syrian interior (Appendix, cat. nos. 4, 31). These bore inscriptions of the pharaohs Khéphren (2562–2537 BC), and Pepi I (2342–2292 BC). They were discovered on the floor of royal Palace G, in a destruction level that marked the end of this phase at the site and dating to around 2300/2280 BC (Astour 1992: 36–37). The lamp bearing the name of Khéphren had therefore already been in circulation for well over 200 years before entering the archaeological record. It has been suggested that these vessels may have been obtained from Byblos rather than direct from Egypt, in which case they cannot be used to draw conclusions regarding Egyptian diplomatic involvement beyond the Lebanese coast (Scandone Matthiae 1982: 128, 1988). Two further inscribed vessels of archaic form were also found at Kamid el-Loz in Late Bronze Age contexts (Lilyquist 1996: pls. 28–29); however these may represent looted material rather than Early Bronze Age links with Egypt. In any case, neither features a royal inscription, and the date of the inscriptions themselves has also been questioned (Lilyquist 1993: 44, 1994: 217, 1996: 154–155).

The Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period

The association between Byblos and Egypt may have continued or have been re-established during the Middle Kingdom, as some inscribed stone vessels and objects dating to pharaohs of the twelfth and thirteenth Dynasties also appear at the site (Montet 1928: cat. 610–611, 614; Naville 1922; see also Albright 1964; Lilyquist 1993: 41–44; Appendix, cat. nos. 48–49; Tufnell 1969). A close relationship is attested from evidence such as the adoption of hieroglyphic characters for Byblite inscriptions, use of the Egyptian title of ‘mayor’ (*ḥ3ty*-ꜥ) by Byblite leaders, and even adaptation of Egyptian formulae for their own purposes (Kitchen 1969: 86; Redford 1992: 97). One

calcite vessel fragment from tomb IV names a Byblite ruler, *h3ty-ε* Yantin, raising the question of whether this object was produced or inscribed locally, rather than in Egypt (Lilyquist 1993: 42; Montet 1928: pl. CXVII.787). The degree of Egyptianization evident in the ruling elite at Byblos may be a product of the long history of contact with Egypt. It has been suggested that some of the Egyptian objects with royal name inscriptions may have been sent as gifts to Byblite princes to celebrate their accession (Helck 1971: 63–64). There are no further stone vessels naming later kings of the Second Intermediate Period in the region, although examples bearing inscriptions of the Hyksos ruler Khian were excavated at Knossos and Boğazköy (Lilyquist 1995: cats. 1, A; Warren 1969: 113). If contemporary with their findspots, these may point to sporadic diplomatic activity abroad.

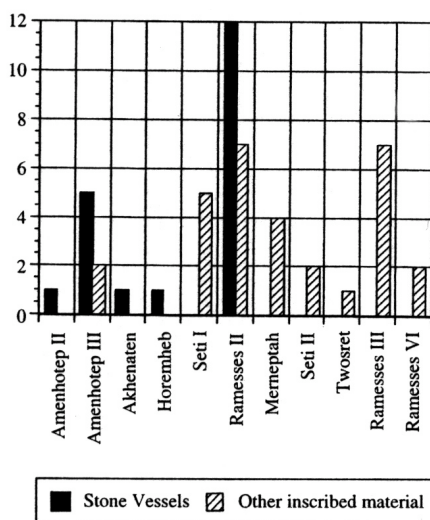


Figure 3:3 Frequency of objects (excepting scarabs) with New Kingdom royal inscriptions found in the Levant.

The New Kingdom

With the rise of the eighteenth Dynasty and the expulsion of the Asiatic rulers from the Egyptian Delta, Egypt once again began to concern herself with international affairs. This is reflected in intensive military involvement abroad, primarily in Egypt and Syro-Palestine, and in a series of diplomatic ties that were enhanced through trade missions and royal marriages. Inscribed Egyptian stone vessels had their part to play in this process, although material of this kind is initially rare in the Levant, with solitary examples from the reigns of Ahmose and Tuthmosis III known from Cyprus and Crete respectively (Lilyquist 1995: cats. 12, 95; Warren 1969: 113). Although Schaeffer mentioned stone vessels with inscriptions of Tuthmosis III found at Ras Shamra he did not list registration numbers for these examples, and they do not appear in Caubet's inventory of stone vessels from the site (Caubet 1991; Schaeffer 1954: 41). The apparent absence of material relating to Tuthmosis III suggests that despite intensive military involvement in the Levant, this presence had little archaeological impact, at least where objects bearing royal inscriptions are concerned (Weinstein 1981: 11–12). It seems likely that any exchanges that occurred were one-

sided, with material being taken back to Egypt as tribute and war booty rather than given out as diplomatic gifts.

The earliest confirmed royal name stone vessels found in the Levant date to the reign of Amenophis II, with sporadic occurrences continuing down to the time of Ramesses II (see Figure 3:3). This material was mostly recovered from Syria, focusing on large coastal entrepôts such as Ugarit and Byblos. At the former, finds were largely confined to the royal palace (courts II, IV, V, rooms 30, 31, 37, 68 and the archives; Caubet 1991: 214). Other examples were found in the 'South Palace', a building interpreted as a private residence attached to the court (Caubet 1991: 214), and in the '*maison aux albâtres*', interpreted as the possible residence of an Egyptian, although Caubet (1991: 214) suggests that this example may have found its way there through a secondary deposit. The presence of inscribed stone vessels is therefore very much a 'royal' phenomenon within Ugarit. This contrasts with the more general distribution of non-inscribed Egyptian

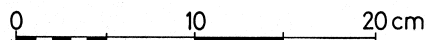
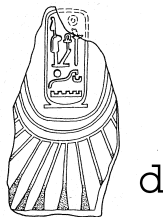
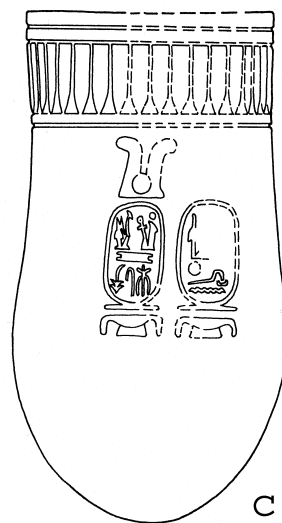
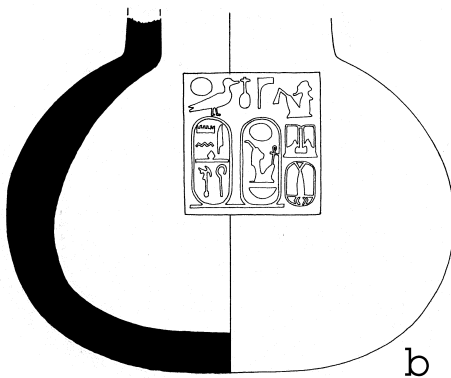
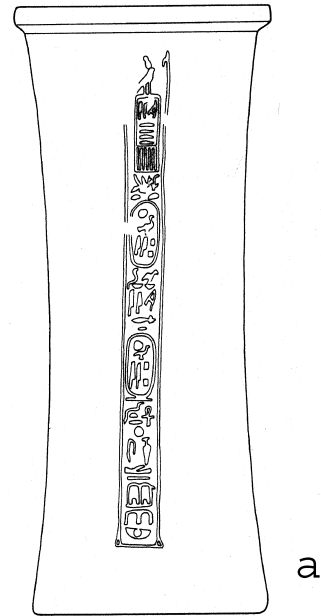


Figure 3:4 Stone vessels with Egyptian royal name inscriptions. a: Byblos (cat. 28, Minault-Gout 1997: fig. 3), b: Ras Shamra (cat. 51, after Caubet 1991: pl. XI.7), c: Beirut (cat. 58, after Saidah 1993-94: pl. 23.1.1), d: Gezer (cat. 69, after Macalister 1912: pl. XXIV.1).

stone vessels at the site (Sparks 1998: fig. 71, table 20). A similar pattern is seen at Byblos, where royal name vessels appeared primarily in the Royal Tombs (Tombs I, II, IV and V). At Beirut the situation is more ambiguous, with an inscribed stone vessel of Ramesses II appearing in a tomb whose owners were clearly wealthy, but not necessarily royal (Figure 3:4c; Appendix, cat. no. 58). Overall, the distribution focuses on sites of both commercial and strategic importance, perhaps pointing to Egyptian concerns with maintaining maritime access to the northern Levant for Egyptian troops and supplies, as well as for exploiting the rich trade potential of the region.

Stone vessels bearing cartouches of Amenophis III and Ramesses II are particularly common (Figure 3:3). One possible explanation could lie in the relative length of both reigns, 38 and 66 years respectively. It is possible that contact over a longer period resulted in a larger number of such objects being exchanged over time, and hence their greater visibility in the archaeological record. However, if reign length were the sole criterion, one might expect to find a greater representation of inscriptions belonging to other pharaohs who were in office for considerable periods, such as Amenophis II (27 years), Akhenaten (16 years) or Haremhab (28 years). As this is not the case, an alternative explanation could be that these peaks reflect periods of genuine intensification in diplomatic contact. Conversely, the limited amount of royal inscriptions from the time of Akhenaten down to the early nineteenth Dynasty may bear some relationship to the political climate of the period, particularly regarding the more limited involvement of Ugarit in Egyptian foreign affairs after it had become a vassal of the Hittite empire.

A comparison of these stone vessels with other objects bearing Egyptian pharaonic inscriptions also reveals interesting patterns (Figure 3:3). Although royal-name stone vessel imports appear to cease after Ramesses II, this was not the case with other inscribed classes of material such as faience vessels, plaques, sculpture, stelae and architectural elements (Weinstein 1981, 1992). These other classes of object could have reached the Levant by different means, and for different purposes. If stone vessels were used as political tools their absence may reflect a diminution in diplomatic traffic between the regions, particularly in the northern Levant. It has been suggested that Egyptian influence in this area was much reduced by the end of the nineteenth Dynasty (Weinstein 1992: 143). This suggestion is supported by what is known of Egyptian military campaigning during the reign of Merenptah which focused on the southern Levant (Singer 1988). This in turn may relate to a change in the nature of empire, and Egypt's growing focus on Syro-Palestine at the expense of her military aspirations in the north. The destruction of Ugarit in ca. 1190/1180 BC may also explain the apparent absence of later inscribed material in the region.

In contrast to the evidence from coastal Syria and Lebanon, stone vessels with royal name inscriptions were almost entirely lacking in the southern Levant. The only provenanced example bearing an Egyptian cartouche was a fragment dating to Ramesses II, found amongst cistern debris dug into an earlier cave tomb at Gezer (Macalister 1912: 94; Figure 3:4d; Appendix, cat. 69). While it is difficult to generalize on a single piece, this lacks any association with the local ruling class found in the material from further north, perhaps suggesting that this vessel reached the southern Levant by different means, or was accorded different status. It may have arrived there as the result of commercial or secondary trade rather than as a royal gift. The paucity

of inscribed stone vessels in the southern Levant may also reflect the different relationship between Egypt and her Canaanite vassals. In this instance, Egypt was very much the superior partner in any exchange, and probably did not see the necessity of sealing communications with diplomatic gifts or bribes.

Conclusions

This survey has demonstrated how the distribution of stone vessels with royal names illuminates aspects of Levantine foreign relations during the second millennium BC. It has been argued that such objects had a specific role to play in the various gift exchanges which often accompanied Egyptian diplomatic missions to foreign courts, whether as vessels in their own right, or as containers of other luxury materials. Egyptian artefacts with royal inscriptions have been linked to these kinds of missions elsewhere in the Mediterranean (Cline 1987, 1995; Warren 1995: 3). The distribution of such finds indicates that contact was focused on the sites of Byblos during the Egyptian Old and Middle Kingdoms, and at Ugarit from the time of Amenophis II down to Ramesses II, although with some discontinuities. This may reflect Egypt's interest in maintaining a presence at these two sites. Ensuring open trade links to the Syrian interior and cross-Mediterranean routes was economically advantageous. During the New Kingdom these sites also became strategically important as the Egyptians came into direct conflict with the expanding Mitannian and Hittite empires (Warburton Chapter 5, this volume), significant both as a point of entry for Egyptian military expeditions arriving by sea and as a supply centre for Egyptian vassals in the region. The loss of Ugarit to the Hittite empire must have come as a particular blow to Egyptian military aspirations there, and it is possible that objects such as these inscribed vessels are traces of diplomatic efforts to maintain contact and win back local support. The chronology of these objects would support this interpretation, with exports of inscribed stone vessels appearing to cease after the time of Ramesses II. Once a political and military *status quo* had been reached between Egypt and the Hittites, it is possible that these kinds of manoeuvrings took on a less vital aspect, and that diplomatic gifts of stone vessels to north Levantine rulers were no longer deemed necessary. In contrast, the scarcity of this kind of material in the southern Levant probably reflects the different relationship between Egypt and her Canaanite vassals, where the language of diplomacy was that of master to vassal, rather than to a potential ally. In this climate, relations were maintained through the threat of force, rather than by gifts or promises. The types of royal objects that are found in the south therefore reflect a different type of activity, revolving around an active Egyptian civil and military administration within the region.

Appendix: catalogue of stone vessels with royal inscriptions found in the Levant

Dates in the following catalogue are according to Kitchen 2000.

No.	Inscription Date	Provenance	Shape	References
UP TO THE END OF THE OLD KINGDOM: Fourth Dynasty				
1	Queen Hetepheris	Byblos, level XXII, 3/7	Diorite vessel fragment	Dunand 1958: fig. 1045.17538
2	Kheops (2593–2570 BC)	Byblos, level XXII, court A	Calcite globular jar	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXIX.4506
3	Queen Meritytis	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Calcite vessel fragment	Montet 1928: fig. 23.64
4	Khephren (2562–2537 BC)	Ebla, floor of Palace G	Diorite lamp	Scandone Matthiae 1988: pls. XI.3–4, XII.1
5	Mykerinos (2537–2519 BC)	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Diorite vessel fragment	Montet 1928: fig. 21, pl. XXXIX.45
6	''	Byblos, level IV, room E	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXIX.1794
7	''	Byblos, level VII	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXIX.2367
8	''	Byblos, level VIII	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXIX.2471
9	''	Byblos, level XXVI, room B	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXIX.5120
Fifth Dynasty				
10	Neferirkare Kakai (2494–2484 BC)	Byblos, level XXIII, room B	Calcite cylindrical jar	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVI.4909
11	Neuserre Ini (2470–2439 BC)	Byblos, wall removal, levels XI–XX	Calcite cylindrical jar	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVII.4030
12	Unis (2392–2362 BC)	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Calcite jar fragment	Montet 1928: fig. 21.46, pl. XXXIX.46
13	''	Byblos, level XIX	Calcite globular vase	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVIII.3867
14	''	Byblos, level XX	Calcite globular vase	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVI.3980
15	''	Byblos, level XX	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: 278 cat. 3981
16	''	Byblos, wall removal, levels XI–XX	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVI.4029
Sixth Dynasty				
17	Teti (2362–2350 BC)	Byblos, level XVIII, room F	Calcite offering plate	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVII.3753

No.	Inscription Date	Provenance	Shape	References
18	Pepi I (2342–2292 BC)	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Stone vessel fragment	Montet 1928: pl. XXXIX.47
19	''	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Calcite cylindrical jar	Montet 1928: 71 cat. 48
20	''	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Calcite offering plate	Montet 1928: pl. XLV.49
21	''	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Calcite offering plate	Montet 1928: fig. 22.50
22	''	Byblos, level I, room B	Calcite cylindrical jar	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVII.1359
23	''	Byblos, level VII	Calcite plate	Dunand 1939: 161 cat. 2359
24	''	Byblos, level VIII	Calcite jar	Dunand 1939: 169 cat. 2466
25	''	Byblos, level IX	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: 183 cat. 2865
26	''	Byblos, level XXI, room B	Calcite cylindrical jar	Dunand 1939: 309 cat. 4147
27	''	Byblos, level XXI, room B	Calcite plate	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVI.4149
28	''	Byblos, level XXII, room C	Calcite cylindrical jar	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVIII.4366; Figure 3:4a
29	''	Byblos, level XXVI, room F; level XXVII, room E	Breccia jar	Dunand 1939: 145 cat. 5141, 349 cat. 5191
30	''	Byblos, trench 63, surface find	Calcite plate	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVIII.6496
31	''	Ebla, floor of Palace G	Calcite lid	Scandone Matthiae 1988: pl. XII.3
32	Pepi I or II	Byblos, surface find, temple region	Calcite cylindrical jar	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVI.1113
33	''	Byblos, surface find, temple region	Calcite spherical jar	Dunand 1939: fig. 13.1114
34	''	Byblos, surface find, temple region	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: fig. 13.1116
35	''	Byblos, level IV, east of room D	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: 117 cat. 1742
36	''	Byblos, level XV	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVII.3530
37	''	Byblos, building XVIII, room B	Diorite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVII.3792

No.	Inscription Date	Provenance	Shape	References
38	''	Byblos, level XXIII, east of room C	Calcite cylindrical jar	Dunand 1939: 231 cat. 4941
39	''	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Calcite vessel fragment	Montet 1928: pl. XLV.51
40	''	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Calcite zoomorphic jar	Montet 1928: pl. XL.57
41	''	Byblos, level XXII, 3/7	Calcite plate	Dunand 1958: fig. 1044.17540
42	Merenra Nemtyemsaf I (2297–2287 BC)	Byblos, level VI	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: 133 cat. 1940
43	Pepi II (2287–2193 BC)	Byblos, level VI	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVI.1927
44	''	Byblos, level VII	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVII.2365
45	''	Byblos, level IX	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVI.2874
46	''	Byblos, building XVIII, room B	Calcite lid	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVIII.3800
47	''	Byblos, foundation deposit, temple of Baalat Gebal	Stone zoomorphic jar	Montet 1928: pl. XL.56
MIDDLE KINGDOM AND SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD				
48	Amenemhet III (1853–1808 BC)	Byblos, tomb I	Obsidian and gold cylindrical jar	Naville 1922: fig. 8.1; Montet 1928: cat. 610, pls. XXXVIII–LXXXIX
49	Twelfth to thirteenth Dynasties	Byblos, tomb II	Grey stone shouldered cylindrical jar	Montet 1928: fig. 70, pl. XCI.614
NEW KINGDOM: Eighteenth Dynasty				
50	Amenophis II (1427–1401 BC)	Ras Shamra, palace room 30	Calcite vessel fragment	Caubet 1991: 230, RS 15.202
51	Amenophis III (1391–1353 BC)	Ras Shamra, lower city west	Calcite flask	Caubet 1991: pls VI.2, XI.7, RS 11.329; Figure 3:4b
52	''	Ras Shamra, palace room 68	Calcite lid	Caubet 1991: 233, RS 17.476
53	''	Ras Shamra, ridge NW tell?	Calcite lid	Caubet 1991: pl. VI.6, RS 1–11.116
54	''	Ras Shamra, palace court IV	Calcite lid	Caubet 1991: 232, RS 16.340
55	Amenophis III and Tiy	Ras Shamra, palace court V	Calcite lid	Caubet 1991: 232, RS 17.058

No.	Inscription Date	Provenance	Shape	References
56	Nefertiti	Ras Shamra, palace room 30	Calcite lid	Caubet 1991: 230, RS 15.203
57	Haremhab (1323–1295 BC)	Ras Shamra, palace?	Calcite lid	Caubet 1991: 233, RS 17.477
Nineteenth Dynasty				
58	Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC)	Beirut, tomb 4	Calcite drop jar	Saidah 1993–4: pl. 23.1.1; Ward 1993–4: pl. II.3–5; Figure 3:4c
59	''	Byblos, tomb V	Serpentine vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: 93 cat. 1360
60	''	Byblos, tomb V	Calcite juglet	Montet 1928: pl. CXLII.883
61	''	Byblos, trench 61, 1 m depth	Calcite vessel fragment	Dunand 1939: pl. XXXVIII.6031
62	''	Byblos, tomb V	Calcite vessel fragment	Montet 1928: fig. 102.890
63	''	Ras Shamra, ridge NW tell	Calcite footed jar	Caubet 1991: pls VI.3, XI.6, RS 11.848 and 869
64	''	Ras Shamra, palace, west archives	Calcite vessel fragment	Caubet 1991: pl. VI.1, RS 11.261
65	''	Ras Shamra, ridge NW tell	Calcite vessel fragment	Caubet 1991: pl. VI.5, RS 1–11.115
66	''	Ras Shamra, tomb 4912	Calcite vessel fragment	Caubet 1991: 241, RS 34.030
67	''	Ras Shamra, ridge NW tell	Calcite vessel fragment	Caubet 1991: pl. VI.4, RS 11.869
68	''	Ras Shamra, palace room 30	Calcite vessel fragment	Caubet 1991: 230 RS 15.201
69	''	Gezer, cave 15.II	Calcite vessel fragment	Macalister 1912: pl. XXIV.1; Figure 3:4d

Note

- 1 This is a calcite offering plate inscribed with the name Nefer-Seshem-Ra. It has been suggested (Dunand 1939: cat. 5366; Wright 1988: 150) that this official was a scribe who was posted to Byblos and who placed the offering plate in the temple himself. This is plausible, as the temple was full of Egyptianizing and Egyptian material, the plate seems to be contemporary with the use of the temple, and is a type of object that is appropriate for use as a votive offering; nor does it bear any funerary formulae/epithets to suggest that it had seen prior use in a tomb.

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Note: references to chapters and books in the *Encounters with Ancient Egypt* series are denoted in bold type.

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