

Royal Gift Exchange Between Mycenae and Egypt: Olives as "Greeting Gifts" in the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean

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Abstract

Contact between Egypt and the Aegean during the Late Bronze Age, especially the relationship between Minoan Crete and New Kingdom Egypt, has been the subject of much study. The relationship between the Greek (Mycenaean) mainland and Egypt is generally regarded as a more elusive topic, and most scholars seem to consider interaction between the two a matter of irregular exchange via middlemen (e.g., on Cyprus, in the Levant), rather than direct contact. This paper seeks to stimulate new thinking on this subject by positing the possibility that exchange between the two was more than a haphazard phenomenon, arguing that it was, instead, a highly organized system that involved the active engagement of the ruling elite at Mycenae as well as the pharaonic court. Using both archaeological and paleobotanical data and focusing my examination on the import into Egypt of Mycenaean pottery, particularly stirrup jars, which are known generally as containers for olive oil, I demonstrate that olives and/or olive oil were a crucial part of this Late Bronze Age interstate connection.*

INTRODUCTION

The Egyptian New Kingdom (ca. 1550 B.C.E.–1150 B.C.E.) covers most of the Late Bronze Age in the Aegean; it saw the rise of the Hittite empire in Anatolia, the formation of the Mycenaean palatial states in Greece, and the rise of the Middle Assyrian empire in Mesopotamia.¹ The New Kingdom commences with the expulsion of the Hyksos, a people of Levantine origin who had seized power in the Nile Delta after

the collapse of the Middle Kingdom, under the command of Ahmose, the first king of the 18th Dynasty. Under his successors, Egypt's borders were pushed south—well into Nubia—and east, with Thutmose III (ca. 1479–1425 B.C.E.) even crossing the Euphrates River. It was during one of his campaigns in the Levant that Thutmose received an envoy coming from a hitherto unknown land across the "Great Green" of the Mediterranean.

The *Annals of Thutmose*, describing in considerable detail his exploits in the Levant, refer only briefly to the event. Messengers from a land called *Tnj*, usually vocalized as Tanaju, came to the pharaonic court and brought greeting gifts from their king to the great Egyptian conqueror. These gifts included a silver jug in Kefitiu style and what is usually translated as three copper cups with silver handles.² Haider, however, reads "iron" cups, which would make the gift even more extraordinary, as iron at this early stage was an extremely rare commodity and difficult to work.³

This reference is the first attested contact between the Egyptian court and Tanaju and should be dated to the 42nd regnal year of Thutmose, ca. 1437 B.C.E. Tanaju only sporadically appears in the Egyptian sources, and its location has been a matter of debate. From a later text at the temple in Kom el-Hetan dating to the reign of Amenhotep III (ca. 1390–1352 B.C.E.), it is known that it was the Egyptian designation for a region in the Aegean, including Mycenae and Nauplion (i.e., the

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¹For the reign of Egyptian kings, this paper follows the chronology presented in Shaw (2000) and that of Warren and Hankey (1989) for Aegean Bronze Age chronology. I am aware of the discussion regarding, especially, Aegean Bronze Age chronology (cf. Manning 1999; Bietak 2004; Manning et

al. 2006), but this seems mainly concerned with the earlier part of the Late Bronze Age and only minimally affects the period investigated here.

²Haider 1988, 10; Latacz 2001. Most of the relevant Egyptian texts regarding Kefitiu have been published in Vercauteren 1956. Tanaju appears for the first time in the Egyptian record during the reign of Thutmose III. Almost all Egyptian references to the Aegean (Kefitiu, Tanaju, and "the islands in the midst of the Great Green") are found in Cline (1994, 108–20), the most recent compilation.

³Haider 1988, 10.

Argolid), Kythera, Messenia, and a number of regions more difficult to identify (fig. 1).⁴ As the annual point to a king of Tanaju (who is sending greeting gifts to the Egyptian court), it appears likely that Tanaju was a state rather than just a geographical region, at least in Egyptian eyes.

Tanaju is referred to in several later texts, but these generally are regarded as copies of geographical lists like the one mentioned above, originally dating to the reign of Amenhotep III.⁵ The Greek mainland in effect only appears in Egyptian written sources in the period between Thutmose III (ca. 1479–1425 B.C.E.) and Amenhotep III (ca. 1390–1352 B.C.E.). Much later, during the reign of Ramesses III (ca. 1184–1153 B.C.E.), the Ekweh, who are listed as one of the invading Sea Peoples, may represent a group from the Greek mainland, but then we are dealing with a people rather than a state.⁶ Direct contact between Egypt and the Greek mainland is only attested in the textual sources for the period from Thutmose III to Amenhotep III. During this period, contact was—at least on one occasion—of a formal nature, involving the exchange of prestige goods between the king of Tanaju and the king of Egypt. The presence of the well-known faience plaques with the royal cartouche of Amenhotep III on the citadel of Mycenae is more likely than not a marker that these formal contacts continued until the reign of this king.⁷ On the whole, however, there is little if any proof in the archaeological record that there was direct contact between Egypt and the Mycenaean mainland, although it is doubtful that this kind of contact could ever be deduced from the archaeological record alone. Because of the absence of clear archaeological evidence, the idea of direct contact between the Mycenaean world and Egypt has often been criticized. There has been, as a result, a widespread view that any contact between the two lands is more likely to have been a matter of irregular exchange, probably not direct exchange but via middlemen on, for example, Cyprus and in the Levant.⁸ There is perhaps one em-

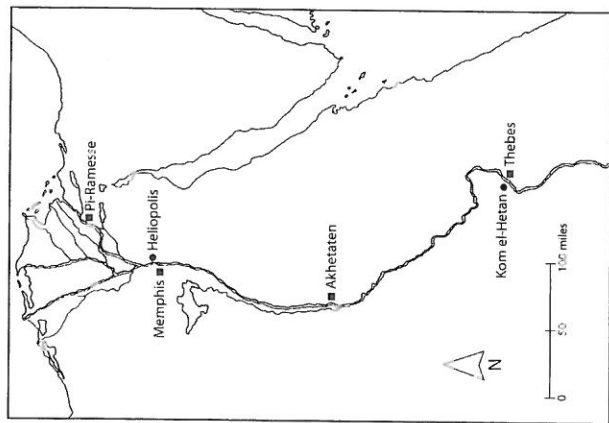


Fig. 1. Map of New Kingdom Egypt. Squares represent major urban centers; dots represent sites yielding textual evidence discussed in this article.

pirical sticking point for such a view: the corpus of Mycenaean pottery at El Amarna, the site of Akhetaten, capital of Egypt's heretical King Akhenaten.

MYCENAEAN STIRRUP JARS IN EGYPT

In 1981, Hankey (now deceased) noted that the corpus of Mycenaean pots at Amarna is exceptional.

⁴ Although it has been proposed that *Taj* refers to a region in northern Syria/Cilicia (cf. Edel 1975: 63), the identification of various Mycenaean centers and regions in the list strongly indicates that *Taj* should be sought in the Aegean. See Haidinger (1988: 8) for extensive evaluation of the arguments. That the messengers from Tanaju in the *Annals of Thutmose III* brought a vessel in Keftiu style may strengthen an Aegean identification of Tanaju. Edel (1986) proposed the following identification for these names: Amnisos, Phaistos, Kydonia, Mycenae, Messenia, Nauplia(?), Kythera, Ilios(?), Knossos, Amnisos, and Lykos. The enigmatic *dp* (*di-qa-as*) has been identified by Heck (1992: 13) as *Alarata*, and by Edel (1988: 30) as the Thebaid. The latter identification seems to have been

generally accepted. The identification of Ilios for *wp-ti-ia*, however, is not generally accepted (Heck 1995: 25–6). *Wp-ti-ia-ja* has also been identified as Aulis (Goedicke 1969: 10), which—if correct—would fit nicely with Edel's identification of *dp*, as Aulis is supposed to have been the principal harbor of Thebes; it has most recently been identified as Elis (Latacz 2001: 163). The identifications of Amnisos, Kydonia, Mycenae, Messenia, Kythera, and Lykos have not been opposed (cf. Haidinger 1988: 9).

⁵ See discussion in Cline 1998.

⁶ Cf. Ekweh with Hittite *Abhiyawa* (Heck 1935).

⁷ Phillips and Cline 2005: 327.

⁸ Cf. Bass 1967: 14–18; 1993: 184–87; Merrillees 1968: 195; Sherratt 1999: 2001: 224–54.

both in amount and in homogeneity.⁹ She also pointed out that the types of vessels present in the corpus are virtually all closed shapes, with pilgrim flasks and stirrup jars prevailing. It is difficult to extrapolate the precise dimensions of those vessels on the basis of the extant sherds, but most stirrup jars appear to have been relatively small (diam. ca. 30 cm) and of relatively good quality (fine ware) with simple, linear decoration. Large coarse ware stirrup jars appear to have been rare at Amarna.¹⁰

Compared with the then-known corpora in the Levant, the prevalence of closed shapes in the Amarna corpus is remarkable, since the Levantine corpora usually display a more diverse range of shapes, including open-shaped vessels (e.g., *kylikes*, *rytha*, *kraters*). More recent research elsewhere in Egypt has, however, demonstrated that all corpora in Egypt are dominated by closed-shaped vessels (e.g., stirrup jars), and that the Amarna corpus, in this respect at least, does not stand out as much as had been previously thought.¹¹

The Amarna corpus comprises a relatively large number of Mycenaean sherds, estimated between 1,500 and 2,000 and thought to represent at least 600 whole pots. The Amarna corpus also is remarkable because of the archaeological context of most of the sherds, for the bulk of Mycenaean pottery at Amarna has been found in the Central City.¹² By far the majority (more than 1,300 fragments) was found in large rubbish heaps to the east of the police barracks and the offices of the royal scribes (known as the Record Office). Smaller quantities of Mycenaean pottery have been found elsewhere in the Central City, including the magazines, the military and police quarters, the Royal Esate, and the Great Palace. Notably, no fragments of Mycenaean pottery have been found in the Great Temple of Aten or its dependencies or in the Small Temple of Aten. The southern suburb has yielded a small number of fragments of Mycenaean pottery, but to my knowledge, there were no more than

approximately 15 sherds. A slightly larger number of fragments has been found in the northern suburb, but there, too, the total was quite modest. The Royal Palace in the North City may have yielded a small amount of Mycenaean pottery (a distribution map of the city used by Hankey in a 1981 lecture seems to indicate this), but there are no corroborating references in the excavation reports. Mycenaean pottery, then, seems to have been used, to whatever end, in the administrative and ritual heart of Amarna-age Egypt—the Central City of Akhetaten. Its distribution in the surrounding districts seems markedly limited. As a consequence, it appears that Mycenaean pottery at Amarna was closely associated with court display.

Elsewhere in Egypt and in other (later) periods, Mycenaean pottery may have been used more widely. This was noted by Bell, although her argument, which is based on the observation that Deir el-Medina had access to approximately 120 vessels of Late Helladic (LH) IIIA2 and LH IIIB style,¹³ ignores that these vessels may have been imported to the village over the course of more than a century (as opposed to the 20-year period for the 600 vessels or more thought to be present in the Amarna corpus), and that this site (the home of the workmen constructing the tombs of the kings and queens) can hardly be regarded as presenting a normal Egyptian settlement; it seems instead to be closely related to (funerary) court display.

The finds at Amarna do not represent the first examples of Mycenaean pottery to arrive in Egypt, although they are certainly the earliest pieces to appear in large quantities there. The Mycenaean pottery found at Amarna generally follows the style of LH IIIA2, although one or two pots may be dated to LH IIIB.¹⁴ Earlier attestations of Mycenaean pottery in Egypt include LH IIA/Late Minoan (LM) IB pottery at Saqqara, Abydos, and Dra' Abu el-Naga, and LH IIIB pottery at Saqqara, Memphis, Kahun, Gurob, Gurnah, and Malqata.¹⁵ Virtually all these early pieces

also Hankey 1993.

⁹ For an extensive discussion, see Hankey et al. (forthcoming). The best introduction on Akhetaten and the relations between the various quarters of the city is found in Kemp 1989.

¹⁰ Cf. Hankey 1981: 41–6; 1993: 114. Malqata itself has yielded little, if any, well-documented Mycenaean pottery (a Mycenaean cup attributed to Malqata [Helck 1995: 91] probably was found at nearby Dra' Abu el-Naga [von Bissing 1990]). But Mycenaean pottery has been found just south of and contemporary with Malqata (Kemp 1977: 75; see also Merrillees 1968: 22, 195; Warren and Hankey 1974: 146–47; For Kahun/Lahun, see Hankey and Tufnell 1973; For Sediment, see Perle and Bruntun 1994: 23, pls. XLVIII, LXXV, LXXV.9c. For Gurob, see Bruntun and Engelbach 1997: 9, pls. XXIX–XXX 79b, XIII 4.

¹¹ Hankey 1981.

¹² Pendlebury (1951: 237–38, pl. CIX 4.292) identified only two sherds of the larger coarse ware transport stirrup jars at Amarna (but see Hankey 1973: 129).

¹³ Cf. Podzuweit 1994: 466.

¹⁴ The Mycenaean pottery found at Amarna is first presented in Perle 1994: 17; see also Borchardt 1913: 29, 29–32; Peet and Woolley 1923; Pendlebury 1933, 1951; Rose 1987: 119. Since then, more Mycenaean material has been found in Amarna, though the general pattern of distribution (with a clear concentration in the Central City) has not changed.

¹⁵ Cf. Bell 1982. Since Deir el-Medina was deserted during the reign of Akhetaten, it seems most plausible to ascribe the LH III.2 material at that site to the reign of Tutankhamun and, perhaps, Aye and Horemheb. The LH IIIB material may have been imported over the course of the 19th Dynasty; see

were of closed shape (alabastron-shaped jars [FS82], pyxides [FS92], pithoid jars [FS21]), or squat, one-handled jars.

Although Mycenaean pottery evidently did find its way to Egypt before the Amarna era, the quantities are very small, rarely including more than a few pots per site. Amarna marks the advent of Mycenaean pottery in the Egyptian archaeological record, after which it is found at sites throughout Egypt until the end of the 12th century B.C.E. Quantities vary, and most sites have yielded only a dozen or so pots, though larger amounts have been found at several major sites.¹⁶ Most notable among these sites are Pi-Ramesses, the Ramesside capital in the eastern Delta, and Deir el-Medina, in the hills near the Theban Valley of the Kings. While the two other major centers of New Kingdom Egypt—Memphis and Thebes—have, unfortunately, suffered as a result of later occupation and rising groundwater, the Necropolis of Memphis at Saqqara has yielded a small corpus of Mycenaean vessels, with material from LH IIA to LH IIB2.¹⁷

Pi-Ramesses

The Mycenaean pottery from Pi-Ramesses (modern Qantir) has, unfortunately, been only partly published. In 1993, Hankey presented a sample from the corpus that included 97 sherds. Mounjov and Mommsen, in a more recent study, published 100 sherds and a whole pot from the site.¹⁸ It is difficult to estimate the size of the corpus of Mycenaean pottery at the site, but it may be several hundred sherds.¹⁹ The corpus includes a relatively wide range of shapes. Pusch noted the presence of kylikes and even kraters at Qantir, whereas Hankey identified several stirrup jars.²⁰ Other shapes, including pithoid jars, alabaster, jugs, cups, and possibly a rhyton, are also present.²¹ For most of the vessels, one pot may have come from Cyprus. There is even suggestion of some local (Egyptian) manufacture of Mycenaean-style pots at the site.²² The material found at Qantir ranges from LH IIA2 to LH IIB2 (with possibly some late LH IIB2). The center of Ramesses' royal city lies under the modern village of Qantir, but an old city stretched farther away, to the nearby village of Tell el-Dab'a.

¹⁶ Including Deir el-Medina (supra n. 12), Saqqara (Warren and Hankey 1974, 148–50; Marin 1976), and various smaller sites in the eastern delta (van den Brink 1987).

¹⁷ Cf. Warren and Hankey 1980.

¹⁸ Cf. Mounjov and Mommsen 2000.

¹⁹ The occurrence of Mycenaean sherds in the hinterland of Pi-Ramesses may suggest that Mycenaean pottery was imported in relatively large numbers (cf. van den Brink 1987).

²⁰ Hankey 1993; Pusch 1999, 29.

in Early Bronze Age strata, suggesting the widespread exploitation of the fruit at this early stage in the history of the settlement.²³ This thus supports Renfrew's thesis and allows for an even earlier date for the exploitation of the olive on Crete.²⁴ However, evidence that the olive was used at an early stage of the Aegean Bronze Age does not imply early domestication. Thus, Melana proposes a 7:2 ratio of wild vs. domesticated olives in the palatial oil production, suggesting that the Mycenaeans seem to have used wild olives on a far greater scale than the domesticated variety.²⁵

While the date for domestication of the olive remains open for debate, the use of the olive is slightly clearer. Linear B texts indicate that olive oil was used for a variety of purposes. There is good reason to assume that it was used as an unguent (i.e., based on evidence from Pylos),²⁶ but more mundane uses, such as cooking oil, cannot be excluded.²⁷ Olive oil, perhaps perfumed, was used for the preparation of special dresses for festivities at the palace of Pylos, sometimes as an offering to a deity (e.g., PY Fr 1225 makes reference to "perfumed oil for textiles" as an offering to *u-pi-jo po-ti-u-jo*).²⁸ Large quantities were also given to sanctuaries,²⁹ to the point that a practical use of the oil on such a massive scale seems implausible. We know that olive oil in Egypt—perfumed or not—was used to fuel the lamps of temples, which accounts for Egypt's continuous need to import or later produce

oil. A similar scenario may have existed in Greece, in which case the large quantities of oil given to the gods may have been burned.

In Egypt, the picture is clearer. Egypt lies outside the ecological environment of the wild olive, and its arid climate does not favor olive growth. Olives must, therefore, originally have come from elsewhere, and the Levant seems to be the most likely candidate, since there, the use of olives is attested from Chalcolithic times (3700–3500 B.C.E.) onward.³⁰ But there are also some indications for domestication of the fruit in the Levant during the Early Bronze Age.³¹ The oldest olive remains found in Egypt are thought to have come from the Levant; they have been found in 13th-Dynasty levels at Kom el-Rabi'a (Memphis)³² and, dating to the late Second Intermediate Period, at Avaris in the eastern Delta.³³ On the whole, the olive seems to have made its way only very rarely to Egypt before the New Kingdom.

Although sporadically attested at sites from the early New Kingdom, the olive really makes its appearance in the Egyptian record during the reign of Akhenaten (ca. 1352–1336 B.C.E.).³⁴ On the walls of the Great Temple of Aten in his newly founded capital, Akhetaten, the king is shown offering an olive twig to his god, and an olive tree is shown on an Amarna mural painting (fig. 2).³⁵ Olive twigs figure prominently in the funerary bouquets found on the coffin of his successor,

strata, such as Gurnah. It has been claimed that the product *b. k.*, attested from the Middle Kingdom onward, was olive oil, but this identification is open to debate; in fact, others claim that it was muringa oil (cf. Serpico and White 2000, 399).

There can be no doubt, however, that olives were a very rare commodity, which accounts for the scarcity of references to, or depictions of, olives in New Kingdom Egypt (cf. Schweinfurth 1886; Newberry 1890; Germer 1988, 14, 28). A wreath of olive leaves found on the mummy of Amenhotep II at Deir el-Bahari may or may not date to the 22nd-Dynasty relocation of royal mummies (cf. Germer 1988, 25, fig. 22).

³⁰ Frankfort 1929, 25, 15, pl. 9C. The depiction of an olive tree, in combination with the occurrence of olive stones at the workers' village and the olive wreath elsewhere in the city, raises the possibility that olives were grown in Egypt from the reign of Akhenaten onward. Olive trees stem from cultivars, not seed, and the mural painting at Amarna (see fig. 2 here-in), though preserved only as fragments, may depict one of these young olive trees perhaps originating from the Aegean. Since olive trees take some 20 years to bear fruit, and even then only every other year, the installation of extensive olive orchards for the production of oil must have been a large undertaking. During the reign of Ramesses II, Egypt must have possessed olive orchards that were sufficiently large enough to produce olive oil, as indicated by jar docks from Deir el-Medina. Prior to that, it appears unlikely that the Egyptians had extensive olive orchards, although there may have been small-scale olive groves comparable to, e.g., Hashepsut's garden at her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari.

²³ Isotop 2003, 481.

²⁴ Cf. Moody and Rackham 1996.

²⁵ Melana 1983, 97–103.

²⁶ Cf. Sheldermine 1983, esp. 107–11.

²⁷ But see Melana (1983, 123), who notes that the Mycenaean tablets reflect an interest in olive oil more for industrial purposes than for food.

²⁸ Cf. Weidharter 2005, 225. In the Linear B tablets, the product of the "unguent/perfume boilers" appears to have been divided into two categories: as a pourable liquid or as an unguent (Bunimovitz 1987, 13). The division of perfumed olive oil into two groups seems reflected in the two groups of closed vessels exported to the Levant. See Leonard (1981), who argues that stirrup jars and flasks contained the thin, pourable oil, while pithoid jars, alabaster, and pyxides served as containers for the thicker, more viscous oil or unguent.

²⁹ Weidharter 2005, 227.

³⁰ Frankel 1999, 37.

³¹ Zohary and Hopf 2000, 149.

³² Murray 2000, 610.

³³ Newton et al. 2006b, 407. More recently, studies based on geometrical morphology of modern olive cultivars and archaeological remains of olive stones have tried to shed light on the period when olives were introduced in Egypt and on which varieties were selected. The results of these studies, however, are inconclusive and suffer from insufficient quantities of archaeobotanical remains (cf. Newton et al. 2006a).

³⁴ Several olive stones in the Doki Agricultural Museum are said to come from an early New Kingdom context. Moreover, olives are reported at a few sites with early 18th-Dynasty

²¹ Mounjov and Mommsen 2000, 146.

²² Mounjov and Mommsen 2000, 139.

²³ Bietak 1975, 208.

²⁴ van den Brink 1987.

²⁵ Renfrew 1972, 287; Rummels and Hansen 1986, 301.

²⁶ Bietak 1993, 165.

²⁷ Cf. Rummels and Hansen 1986, 302–3; Halsard 1994; Hamblaks 1996, 2.

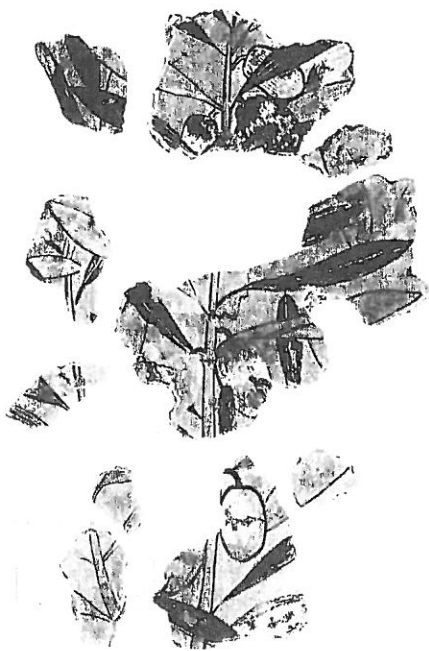


Fig. 2. An olive tree on a mural painting at El Amarna (Frankfort 1929, pl. 9C; courtesy Egypt Exploration Society).

Tutankhamun.⁴¹ Moreover, a wreath of olive leaves was found in a house in the Central City at Amarna.⁴² Olives may have come from other places than Greece, as they are found virtually everywhere in the (eastern) Mediterranean. Because this relief represents the first depiction of an olive tree and olives in ancient Egypt, and because Mycenaean pottery appears for the first time in large quantities in the same city, there is reason to consider the olives offered to Aten as arriving from the Mycenaean world.

Although the absence of Mycenaean pottery in the temple rules out the possibility that the pots or their contents played a religious role in the solar cult, there does seem to be an argument in favor of the olive and its oil as a conspicuous royal commodity. The presence of olive stones at the workmen's village at Amarna⁴³ and later at Deir el-Medina⁴⁴ could arguably be seen in the same royal context. It is at these places, after all, that work on the final resting place of the king took place. The presence of olive twigs in the funerary bouquets on Tutankhamun's sarcophagus demonstrate that olives were important in Amarna-age royal display.

Clearly, then, Amarna marks the advent of the olive in Egypt. That does not mean that the Egyptians had

⁴¹ One wreath of olive leaves was found on the sarcophagus, and three more were found elsewhere in the tomb, near the canopies of the king (Germer 1989, 90–5).

⁴² Pendlebury 1951, 118, pl. 78.

⁴³ Renfrew 1985, 158.

⁴⁴ Bell 1982, 153.

⁴⁵ Breasted 1906, 3:208.

⁴⁶ Breasted 1906, 3:239, 241, 4:236.

⁴⁷ Bell 1982, Tablet 2003, 265–69.

Before the reign of Ramesses II, it seems that olive oil had to be imported.

THE IMPORTATION OF OLIVES INTO EGYPT

If olive oil predating the reign of Ramesses II had to be imported, there would have been several areas from which the Egyptians could have acquired it. Olives were grown in the Levant, where Egypt ruled various principalities. Yet olive oil does not appear to have been extracted from these Levantine dependencies. There are no references in the Egyptian sources to olive oil coming from the Levant and no lists of tribute with olive oil in it. This does not exclude the possibility that Levantine oil did make its way to Egypt, but it suggests that this did not occur on a great scale. Moreover, the elevated context in which olives and olive oil appear at Amarna indicates that these goods were something of a novelty, a prestigious commodity coming from afar.

If the olive (oil) in Egypt did not come from the Levant, we must ask where it did come from and how it got to Egypt. Cyprus certainly produced olive oil during the Late Bronze Age. Facilities for its production and storage have, for example, been found at Kalavassos-Ayios Dhimitrios.⁴⁸ Monumental ashlar buildings suggest that, here, olive oil was part of a centralized bureaucracy that was more likely than not engaged in (overseas) exchange.⁴⁹ It is thought that Cyprus may well have been the last port of call of the Uluburun ship, and, if true, one might perhaps consider the olive

⁴⁸ Smith 1980; Kessani 1992.

⁴⁹ Although Steel (2004, 159–61) argues that there is virtually nothing to suggest such a concept, pointing out the lack of major redistributive centers controlling the agricultural produce of the various inland sites and that there is no evidence for a systematic sealing system (as opposed to the Aegean and the Near East). The recent discovery that the center of Alashiya—known to be a major state from the Amarna Letters—must be situated at an inland site (probably the site known as Alashi), however, contradicts this notion, and there now seems to be a good argument in favor of a strongly centralized, supraregional state in—perhaps encompassing all of—Cyprus during the Late Bronze Age (cf. Goren et al. 2003, 2004, 45–75).

⁵⁰ Although in this specific case, the export of Cypriot olives was directed to the Aegean, rather than to Egypt (cf. Haldane 1993). Bachhuber (2006, 347) notes that Cyprus is likely to have been the last port of call of the ship before it sank off the coast of Lycia.

⁵¹ Podawiltz (1994) argues for Beirut as the center of manufacture of the stirrup jars.

⁵² Cf. Hankey 1981. Despite unsubstantiated claims that exchange between the Greek mainland and Egypt was always indirect, via Rhodes, Cyprus, and/or the Levant (cf. Merrillees 1972, 180–81), there is really nothing to support that minimalist scenario (as had already elegantly been noted by Podawiltz [1994, 468 n. 68]: “Diskutiert bei R.S. Merrillees ... wo

remains found in the wreck a testimony to Cypriot olive export.⁵⁰ Cypriot products certainly reached Egypt with great frequency, judging from the amount of Cypriot pottery found at various Egyptian sites. Moreover, two Amarna Letters (EA 34, E35) refer to Cypriot “sweet oil” being sent to the Egyptian court in the context of royal gift exchange. At Amarna, however, where the olive makes its first full-blown appearance in the Egyptian record, Cypriot pottery is present but clearly overshadowed by Mycenaean vessels. Consequently, there is reason to consider that the olive depicted on the wall of the Great Temple of Aten at Amarna came not from Cyprus but from Greece.

If so, how did the olive come to Egypt? There are two primary options: via private exchange or via diplomatic/royal exchange. Olives may have come to Egypt via private exchange in different ways: directly, by ship from the Aegean, or indirectly, via Cyprus or the Levant.

In the case of Amarna, the Argive provenance of the Mycenaean vessels suggests that Akhenaten's olive oil came from the Argolid.⁵¹ The uniformity of the corpus, already remarked upon by Hankey, adds to the impression that the entire corpus represents one shipment sent directly from the Argolid to the Egyptian court.⁵²

Although the nature of the Mycenaean economy and the degree of palatial control over the flow of resources is a matter of discussion,⁵³ it is clear that the Egyptian economy was extremely centralized. The palace controlled what was imported, when, and where.⁵⁴

man für keine These, sei es Syrien, Zypern oder Rhodos, Argentinien erkennen kann.”)

⁵⁵ For various discussions on the extent and nature of palatial control over the hinterland, see Gdaly and Parkinson 1993; see esp. Halstead 1989; Parkinson 1993; Small 1999.

⁵⁶ During the New Kingdom, the word *ḥwy* (trader) always designates a state employee, and as such, all trade outside Egypt is done on behalf of—and under strict supervision by—the palatial administration. Unofficial contacts and exchange of goods between members of the entourage of visiting potentates and common Egyptians cannot be excluded, but it must have occurred on an extremely limited scale (cf. Shaw and Nicholson 1995, 294–95). There are, however, some indications that some (esp. coastal) communities may have had access to imported goods without strict palatial supervision during the 19th Dynasty. At a recent conference at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, Steven Snape presented some of the finds from the excavations at the fortress at Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham on the Egyptian west coast, which included quantities of Mycenaean pottery. It appears likely that the Mycenaean pottery at Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham was the result of “private exchange,” rather than royal supplies for the local garrison. Similarly, the distribution of Mycenaean sherds in the eastern delta might suggest that, at least by the time of Ramesses II, Mycenaean imports were more widely available in Egypt than had hitherto been the case.

Though it can be argued that some degree of private exchange, with little or no palatial interference, took place in the Aegean, this seems highly unlikely in the case of Egypt. Moreover, the strikingly royal connection of virtually everything related to olives or olive oil (or, for that matter, anything Aegean) at Amarna makes the concept of private exchange, in this case at least, extremely unlikely.

ATTENDED ROYAL MISSIONS BETWEEN THE MYCENAEAN WORLD AND EGYPT

The olive's emphatically royal connection does make the scenario of a diplomatic mission attractive. In 1981, Hankey suggested a scenario in which Amenhotep III, residing in his palace at Malkata (near Thebes), sent messengers on an official mission to Mycenae. Here, they left the famous faience plaques with his cartouches on them as a greeting gift and returned with an extraordinarily large shipment of olive oil, stored in simple stirrups and flasks. Upon their return to Malkata, these messengers would have found that the king had died, and that his son had moved his seat to the new capital of Akhetaten. Thus, they sailed back north to deliver their goods to the new capital but not before leaving a description of their itinerary in the base of a colossal statue of the old king, at his mortuary temple at Kom el-Hetan.⁵⁷

Hankey's scenario has been criticized, most fully by Wachsmann, who argues that there is no evidence that the faience plaques at Mycenae arrived there as greeting gifts.⁵⁸ He suggests that these objects might have arrived at Mycenae as collectors' items, probably of even en masse but one by one. His critique is, I believe, overcautious and ignores the important fact that the plaques at Mycenae are unique.

Excavations at Mycenae have uncovered various fragments of these faience plaques bearing (various arts of) the name of the Egyptian King Amenhotep I. Recent studies indicate that the fragments represent at least 11 plaques, found in various deposits on the slope of the citadel. The faience fragments (1 Sou-

tas 1-7, Mylonas 1a-2, Tavlour 1-2) take their names from their excavators (Christos Tsountas, George E. Mylonas, and Lord William Tavlour).⁵⁹ None of the published plaques has been found in a context contemporary with Amenhotep III, and although it has been proposed that the plaques originally adorned an Egyptian room (embassy?) on the Mycenaean acropolis, there is no compelling evidence for a single original context on the citadel. Most of the plaques appear to have been found in fill levels, possibly originating from the citadel.⁶⁰

There are no direct comparanda for the plaques, not even in Egypt, although bricks with the royal cartouches of 18th- and 19th-dynasty pharaohs have been found as temple/building deposits within Egypt. Those bricks were, however, stamped on only one side, not on both sides, as is the case with the plaques at Mycenae. As a result, some scholars have proposed that the plaques might not be of Egyptian manufacture at all but perhaps of Levantine or even Mycenaean origin, although the quality of the paleography on the plaques seems to suggest an Egyptian origin.⁶¹ The sheer uniqueness of these plaques and their clear reference to Egypt seems to suggest that Egypt was of particular interest to the elite of Mycenae, while the Kom el-Hetan text indicates Egyptian interest in the Mycenaean world.

This is not to say that the Egyptians actually installed an embassy at Mycenae, as Helck has proposed.⁶² It does mean, at least in this case, that direct diplomatic contact between Mycenae and the Egyptian court is extremely likely. Despite all that, Hankey's theory is not without flaws. It is especially the "return" part that seems unlikely, if only because the returning Egyptian messengers would surely have heard upon their return to Egypt that the political situation had changed. Moreover, on their way to Thebes, they would actually have passed the newly built capital of Akhetaten and surely would have stopped there. Thus, a connection between the text at Kom el-Hetan and the Mycenaean vessels is improbable. As a result, the Kom el-Hetan

⁵⁷ Hankey 1981 (with references). See supra n. 4 for the final piece found in a stratum more or less contemporary with Amenhotep III. As a result, it can now be safely assumed that the plaques were sent to Mycenae no later than the reign of Akhetaten (contemporary with LH IIIA₂).

⁵⁸ A large fragment was found by Tavlour in a crumpled lead alabastron on the LH IIBB (middle) floor of the "room with the fresco," whereas the two barely joining fragments of Mylonas I were found in an LH IIBB (late) deposit next to an internal structure against the north wall of Room 2, in the north of the citadel (Phillips 2007: 482-83).

⁵⁹ Cf. Likhstein 1999; Phillips 2007: 482-83.

⁶⁰ Helck 1995: 80.

text and the Mycenaean vessels at Amarna represent two different missions: one sent during the reign of Amenhotep III and one sent during the reign of his successor, Akhetaten. That interest in the Aegean persisted in Akhetaten's time is documented by a papyrus found at Amarna depicting Mycenaean warriors,⁶³ as well as by the numerous Aegean features in Amarna art, especially wall painting.⁶⁴

As a result, it is possible to tentatively identify three separate diplomatic missions between the Aegean and Egypt (table 1):

1. Messengers from *Tij* reach the court of Thutmose III on campaign in the Levant, bringing precious metal vessels as a greeting gift (attested in the Annals of Thutmose III).
2. Messengers sent by Amenhotep III visit *Tij* and bring faience plaques to its capital at Mycenae as a greeting gift (extremely plausible, considering the uniqueness of the faience plaques and the clear Egyptian interest in the Aegean, as reflected in the Kom el-Hetan text).
3. Messengers (whether Egyptian or Mycenaean cannot be established) bring a large quantity of Aegean vessels containing (perfumed) olive oil to Akhetaten as a greeting gift.

The last admittedly remains hypothetical, but it appears to be a plausible explanation for the sudden presence of the large collection of Mycenaean pottery at Amarna and the equally sudden appearance of references to the Aegean in Egyptian iconography.

⁶¹ The papyrus fragments were found by Pendlebury in December 1936, in House R33.2, on the eastern edge of the Central Area at Amarna, in association with (the remains of) a wooden shrine, various cultic items, a complete Mycenaean vase, and an inscription mentioning the "great statue which the king caused to be made" (Pendlebury 1931: 140-41). It is likely that the building served as a chapel for the divine king (Amenhotep III or Akhetaten), and that the artifacts found inside the building played some role in that context. Although the papyrus survived only in fragments, it appears to have been purely pictorial, showing a battle between Egyptians and Libyan warriors. Coming to the aid of the Egyptians are a number of warriors, who, while wearing typical Egyptian white kilts, are equipped with helmets and various types of what is likely leather armor. Both the helmets and the two identifiable types of armor are not present elsewhere in the Egyptian iconographical record, and they seem to identify a people other than those usually shown in Egyptian paintings. It has been forcefully argued that the helmets portrayed on the papyrus should be identified as boat's tusk helmets, and that the armor worn by the warriors has close parallels with known Aegean types of armor (Parkinson and Schofield 1991, 1995). As a result, the warriors on the papyrus most likely represent Mycenaeans, apparently in the service of the pharaoh. This identification is strengthened by the find of a piece of boat's tusk, with perforations for attaching it to a leather frame, dur-

Immediately after Amarna, there is no clear indication of ongoing diplomatic contact between Egypt and the Mycenaean world. This does not necessarily mean that contact was severed, although one could imagine that the Egyptian court was, at that time, preoccupied with its influence in the Levant, which was threatened. It is only during the reign of Ramesses II that there may be an argument for resumed diplomatic contact. In her tomb in the Valley of the Queens, Nefertiti—the Great Wife of Ramesses II—is shown four times wearing precious silver earrings of Aegean type (fig. 3). Koehl suggests that these may have been part of a greeting gift from the Aegean, donated to the queen on the occasion of her husband's coronation.⁶⁵ This would imply ongoing diplomatic contact between Egypt and an Aegean court until the reign of Ramesses II. Although this is an intriguing possibility, there is no reference to the Aegean in texts dating to Ramesses' reign (apart from texts dealing with invading Sea Peoples, most notably the Ekwesh, but here we are dealing with roving bands rather than states).

Thus, there are strong indications in the Egyptian record for direct missions to and from the Aegean from the reign of Thutmose III until the reign of Akhetaten. It is also possible that direct contacts between Mycenae and the Egyptian court endured until the reign of Ramesses II. The argument for the latter is the substantial amount of Mycenaean pottery that was—and still is—found at present-day Qantir, the former Pi-Ramesses and once capital of Ramesses II. As

ing excavations at Qantir, the site of the Ramesside capital, Pi-Ramesses, in the eastern delta (Pusch 1985: 254). It seems that this piece was part of the famous boat's tusk helmets worn by the Mycenaean elite. If one accepts that the papyrus depicts Mycenaean warriors coming to the aid of Egyptian soldiers, it follows that Mycenaeans were actually settling in Egypt in the service of the pharaoh's military. That the kings of the 18th Dynasty had a distinct interest in the Aegean, not only for oil but possibly also for seaborne military support, has already been proposed by Clère (1998: 250) and is now stressed by the attested presence of Minoan shipwrights at Peru-Nefter (Haider 1990: 19-22; 1996: 144-45), formerly seen as the harbor town of Memphis but now demonstrated to be the harbor town of Wariis (Bietak 2005: 17). The concept of Mycenaeans fighting for the pharaoh is not new, as, e.g., the wealth in the shaft graves at Mycenae has (incorrectly) been seen as evidence for early Mycenaean nobility working as mercenaries for the first kings of the 18th Dynasty in their struggle against the Hyksos. This view has now been abandoned, but Ramesside inscriptions mentioning Sherden mercenaries fighting for the Egyptian kings indicate that the concept of foreigners from afar fighting in the pharaoh's service is not wholly hypothetical.

⁶² Cf. Crowe 1998: 177 (with references).

⁶³ Koehl 1999: 424.

Table 1. Attestations of Olives and Related Events in the Egyptian Record, Following the Chronology of Shaw 2000.

Years	Ruler	Iconography	Text	Botany	Archaeology
1479-1425	Thutmose III	-	-	-	-
1425-1400	Amenhotep II	-	-	-	-
1400-1390	Thutmose IV	-	-	-	-
1390-1352	Amenhotep III	-	-	-	-
1352-1336	Akhenaten	olive twig on wall of Great Temple of Aten	<i>Tj</i> references, mainly at Kom el-Hetan	olive stones at the Dokki Museum?	11 plaques with royal cartouches at Mycenae
1338-1326	Nefertari	-	-	olive leaf wreath in the Central City of Amarna	numerous Mycenaean vessels at Amarna; Mycenaean warriors on a papyrus
1336-1327	Tutankhamun	-	-	-	-
1327-1323	Aye	-	-	4 olive leaf wreaths in the royal tomb	-
1323-1295	Horemheb	-	-	olives at Deir el-Medina	numerous stirrup jars at Deir el-Medina
1295-1294	Ramesses I	-	-	-	-
1294-1279	Seti I	-	olives in the rations of high courtiers	-	-
1279-1213	Ramesses II	Nefertari's Aegean earrings depicted in her tomb	olives (Egyptian?) at Deir el-Medina	-	-
1213-1203	Merenptah	-	-	-	-
1203-1200	Amenmesse	-	-	-	collapse of Mycenaean palatial society
1200-1194	Seti II	-	-	-	-
1194-1188	Siptah	-	-	-	-
1188-1186	Tausret	-	-	-	-
1186-1184	Sethnakht	-	-	-	-
1184-1153	Ramesses III	Aegean amphorae on walls of the royal tomb	olive groves at Heliopolis	-	-

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is the case elsewhere in Egypt, the corpus comprises predominantly closed shapes, although the total range of shapes, including vessels that cannot have served as containers, is far wider than usual in Egypt.

CONCLUSION

The combination of archaeological data and textual evidence strongly suggests that there was direct diplomatic contact between Mycenaean Greece and Egypt between the reigns of Thutmose III and Akhenaten. It is possible that this contact continued thereafter, until the reign of Ramesses II. During this period, three separate missions can be tentatively identified, and there may have been more.

During the earliest contacts, the Mycenaeans clearly followed the Near Eastern practice of bringing high-valued metal objects, such as the drinking set mentioned in the *Annals of Thutmose III*, as greeting gifts. During the Amarna age, the focus clearly had shifted toward olives and olive oil, the local produce of the Aegean. The point of origin for the stirrup jars at Amarna suggests that the shipment came from the Argolid, from the kingdom of Mycenae, which, according to the Kom el-Hetan text, represented the core of the kingdom of *Tj*.

Although olive oil clearly was of importance in the diplomatic contacts and exchange of goods between Amarna and Mycenae, other goods may also have been exchanged at the same time. In addition to prestige goods, these might have included elite troops, as in sixth-century Egyptian-Aegean contacts. This may explain the appearance of Mycenaean warriors on an Amarna-age papyrus.

Olive oil from the Aegean, transported in stirrup jars, continued to be imported in Egypt after the Amarna period, as indicated in the deposit at Deir el-Medina and later at Pi-Ramesses. It remained a product for the elite, although it may have lost its exclusively royal connotation at some point, for olive wreaths are found on nonroyal mummies from the late 19th Dynasty onward. That it was an exclusive product is attested by the few references to olives, olive groves, or olive oil production, which are all directly related to the king or his entourage. At the same time, the royal interest in olives and olive oil from the Amarna age onward, the appearance of an olive tree and an olive twig on the temple walls at Amarna, and the presence of olive leaves in the wreaths on and near Tutankhamun's sarcophagus clearly suggest that olive trees were planted on the banks of the Nile beginning in the reign of Akhenaten. The very Mycenaean connotation of anything related to the olive at Amarna suggests that the introduction of the olive in Egypt was Aegean-inspired, if not facilitated.



Fig. 3. Queen Nefertari wearing Aegean-type earrings, as depicted on the walls of her tomb.

That is not to say that with the installation of olive groves in Egypt, the pharaoh lost his interest in importing Mycenaean olive oil. Mycenaean perfumed olive oil remained a valued luxury item until the final years of the Bronze Age in the entire eastern Mediterranean, while Egypt never produced enough oil to cover even its basic demands—a situation that persisted well into the Classical period. Consequently, a case can be made for a connection between the sudden installation of large olive groves at Heliopolis in the reign of Ramesses III and the collapse around the same time of the Mycenaean palatial society that ended the import of Mycenaean olive oil.

In sum, a plausible case can be made for regular, direct contact between Egypt and Mycenae during the 18th Dynasty. This contact continued until the end of the Mycenaean palatial world, ca. 1200 B.C.E. Beginning in the reign of Akhenaten (ca. 1352-1336 B.C.E.), the Mycenaeans brought (perfumed) olive oil and possibly living olive trees to Egypt, where these Mycenaeans became closely associated with Egyptian court display. The introduction of the olive in Egypt and the installation of large "olive-lands" during the reign of Ramesses

III (ca. 1184–1123 B.C.E.) may well have been the result of these early Aegean-Egyptian contacts.

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Roussa Ekklesia, Part 1: Religion and Politics in East Crete

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Abstract

Analysis of voices from a sanctuary site near Roussa Ekklesia in east Crete sheds valuable light on archaic, classical, and Hellenistic cult practices. Part 1 of this study, the present article, presents a large collection of terracotta plaques and figurines from the sanctuary (ca. 630–150 B.C.E.). Part 2, to appear in a forthcoming issue of the *JMA*, will deal with a much later assemblage of lamps and pottery (ca. 500–150). These assemblages span a critical period in Cretan religious history and mark a transition from an oralizing to a classical form of worship. Discussion here focuses on the art historical and religious significance of the terracotta plaques and figurines as well as the political dimensions of cult. The topography of the plaques hints at male rite of passage ceremonies at a simple spring sanctuary of a goddess charged with natural fertility and human growth. She is depicted in the seventh century as a frontal nude crowned by a polos, an assimilation of a Near Eastern type. It is argued that Roussa Ekklesia functioned as a territorial marker for the state of Praesos, with the beginning of cult activity coinciding with the rise of this polis as a regional power. This study also examines the impact of representational styles as constituents of civic and ethnic identity.*

INTRODUCTION

The modern village of Roussa Ekklesia lies in the foothills of the east Sittia mountain range (Ziros highlands) approximately 9 km southeast of Sittia, the capital of the easternmost administrative district of Crete (fig. 1). Another 2 km east of Roussa Ekklesia, above the church of Timios Stavros, are the remains of an ancient sanctuary. A footpath from the church winds around the mountain crags for approximately

300 m before passing the ancient site. An elliptical outcropping on the exposed side of a natural hollow formed by a ravine delineates the sanctuary area. This location offers views of the nearby peaks of the east Sittia range to the south and the lower foothills and sea to the northeast. Known locally as Anoixe (spring), a freshwater spring feeds a line of reeds in the crevice of the ravine. Residents give another reason for the toponym, punning on the secondary meaning of Anoixe (open) to refer to the unpredictable flow of the spring; it "opens" or "closes" without warning. If the spring ebbed and flowed in antiquity as well, it might have contributed to the association of the place with the divine by conveying the unpredictable natural powers in need of appeasement. A combination of features—spring, sheltered hollow, and elliptical outcropping—makes this a suitable location for a simple, open-air cult. Two large trees mark the approximate area of the excavated votive deposits, with modern terrace walls and a low field wall encircling the rock (fig. 2).¹

Illicit digging brought the site to the attention of Platon, who began systematic excavations in 1952 by clearing out much of the material from the two votive pits. He published a brief account of his work and description of the finds, including drinking cups, kernoi, lamps, and terracottas of orientating style.² They were stored in the Herakleion Archaeological Museum until a new facility in Sittia made possible their return to east Crete. Papadakis, the late epigrapher of antiquities for east Crete, resumed excavations at the site in 1982 and al-

* This work is dedicated to the memory of Nikos Papadakis. My involvement with Roussa Ekklesia began in 1998, when Papadakis invited me to collaborate on publication of material from his and Platon's excavations. Papadakis' death in 2000 is a great loss for Cretan archaeology. Unfortunately, his notes and drawings on Roussa Ekklesia have been lost, so this account of his excavations depends on conversations and written communications to supplement brief published reports. I would like to thank Villy Apostolakiou and the staff of the 24th Epiorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities for their help in securing permits. This study would not have been possible without their kind assistance. I thank Chronis Papanikolaopoulos and the INSTAP Study Center at Pachia Ammos for assistance with photography. I am also grateful to Ralph

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¹ Older residents of Roussa Ekklesia remember these constructions dating to the early or middle part of the 20th century, when they used the spring to water a small garden plot. For the sake of convenience, Roussa Ekklesia is here used to refer to the ancient sanctuary site.

² Platon 1954. Earlier archaeologists, including Schachermeyr (1938: 474–77) and Walter (1940: 305), saw voices from what may have been Anoixe, although they do not specify the location.