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# Shifting Relations in Bronze Age Gaza: An Investigation into Egyptianizing Practices and Cultural Hybridity in the Southern Levant During the Late Bronze Age

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## Abstract
This article explores how material culture is used to shape, mediate and transform social relations within contact zones. The aim is to highlight cultural hybridity, namely the material expression of new social practices within a colonial third space. It focuses on the Gaza region of the southern Levant during the later 2nd millennium BCE, a cosmopolitan period, illustrated by large-scale movement of goods, raw materials, and exotic luxuries over vast distances around the East Mediterranean resulting in cultural connectivity. The Late Bronze Age in the Gaza region is also characterized by Egyptian colonial activity. Consequently, this article examines material evidence for the development of new social practices in the region and in particular the adoption of Egyptian(izing) exotica in the creation and mediation of new hybrid identities. Specifically, it explores the social life of objects at two important Late Bronze Age sites in the region: el-Moghraqa and Deir el-Balah.

## Introduction
The Gaza region (Fig. 1) has long been an arena of intense cultural contact. It lies at the interface between the African and Asiatic landmasses and the Mediterranean world and during antiquity acted as a gateway community to the southern Levant. Over the millennia countless traders, nomadic tribesmen, soldiers, and other travelers have traversed the Ways of Horus, the sandy desert route along the north Sinai connecting the Nile Delta and the Wadi Gaza, carrying with them goods, social practices, and ideas. In this paper I am defining the Gaza region as the lands bordering the mouth of the Wadi Gaza, from the old city of Gaza in the north to Deir el-Balah in the south, partly reflecting a modern political reality (part of the territory of the Gaza Strip), but also focusing on material that is archaeologically accessible. This is an excellent place to explore cultural entanglement, colonial encounters, and how these affect different communities, in particular due to the presumed cultural pre-eminence of Egypt. Previously, I have discussed culture contact in the region through the lens of Mycenaean pottery,[1] and Celia Bergoffen has discussed the distribution and use of Cypriot imported wares at Tell el-ʻAjjul in some detail;[2] this discussion, however, will focus on Egyptian(izing) material culture to explore hybridity within a shared cultural milieu.

## Cultural Hybridity
The Gaza region was the ultimate contact situation—a place where individuals from different communities, and with very different social practices, come into close contact with each other. Postcolonial theory (specifically recent discussion of hybridization and creolization) allows us to move beyond the bold reality that colonialism was imposed upon a passive native population and

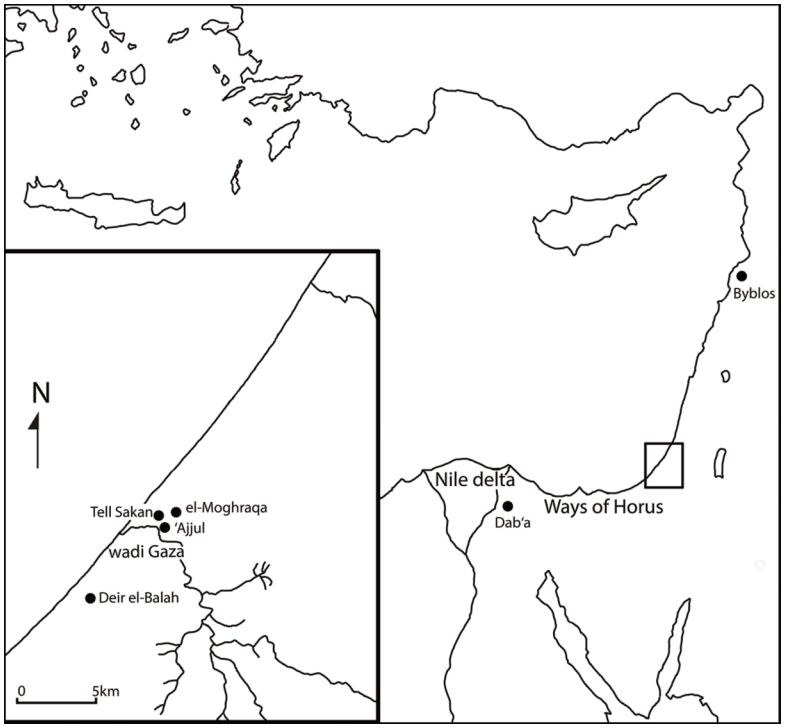



**Figure 1:** Map of the Gaza region.

enables us to explore the material consequences of this contact. The emphasis is on the local context, exploring interaction, social relations, and negotiations of identity not only on the part of the colonial newcomers but also the native population; thus, it recognizes the agency of both the colonizer and the colonized. Colonization is shaped by the entangled connections between different communities.[3] Hybridization considers the experience and agency of the colonized and explores how people in colonial situations actively rework their social identities drawing upon existing practices and new ideas. Structuration theory[4] helps us to place this cultural interaction within a social context: one where the influence of new customs and objects might bring about many small and daily acts of change in repeated activities, resulting in new and hybrid practices. Conversely, creolization examines the world as a continuum of cultures, which are neither distinct nor bounded but instead merge into and mutually change each other.[5] Colonial situations therefore are a complex mix of both local and intrusive cultural elements that combine together to create something new. This might be manifested in the development of new or modified customs and social practices, or in the adoption of new items of material culture; "cultural mix... is the effect of the practice of mixed origins."[6] Even so, while the inventiveness and agency of the native population is highlighted within such approaches, we should not overlook the physical reality of the colonial world, which remains essentially a power relationship: on one side the assertion of authority and on the other, varied responses including marginalization, resistance and submission.[7]

This melding of cultures has become known as the "middle ground"[8]—a creative space where people of diverse cultural backgrounds with different social practices and ideologies, come into contact with each other and, perhaps more importantly, in which no one group is subordinate or predominant. This middle ground is typically viewed as an in-between or liminal space where two (or more) cultural identities come into contact and overlap or mingle, described by Stockhammer[9] as "a place of encounter" but without any political (or colonial) dimensions. Certainly, a significant element of the middle ground is the inability of either side to obtain what they want through the application of force;[10] instead, people learn to accommodate very different values whilst at the same time applying their own. Accordingly, they adopt, reinterpret and frequently misconstrue each other's social practices, values and ideologies, a process that gradually results in the creation of shared new social structures and practices. Thus, the middle ground assumes a mutually beneficial social interaction between the native and the incomer and the formation of a new system of values. In addition, we might expect the exchange of culturally appropriate gifts legitimizing the social ties between both parties and at the same time impacting upon their material world.

Another sphere of colonial interaction, which might be appropriate to the Late Bronze Age (henceforth LBA) in the Gaza region, is Gosden's notion of a shared cultural milieu.[11] Rather than a

contact situation where the unknown meets the unknown, the shared cultural milieu refers to interaction between communities who share similar cultural values, social practices, and material culture. In this specific contact situation, it is the local elites who benefit; they acquire exclusive access to new forms of social and cultural capital that they then manipulate in internal social strategies of differentiation and power. Giddens highlights the connection between agency and power, namely the ability "to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention"[12] to achieve a desirable social outcome and so to effect change. Such power relations are mediated through the manipulation of resource (or capital), which might be expressed through privileged access to, or control of exotic or enchanted objects,[13] or otherwise be symbolized architecturally within the social production of space.[14] Even within the middle ground access to, and equally exclusion from, exotic power symbols might be controlled physically or spatially, thus placing limitations on cultural coalescence within the wider community beyond the elites.

Cultural hybridity does not refer to the creation of hybrid, mixed objects that draw upon diverse cultural traditions, although this might well be an end result of cultural entanglements and is certainly a phenomenon we can identify in the material world of the ancient East Mediterranean.[15] Instead, cultural hybridity allows us to explore how foreign objects are assimilated within the habitus of a recipient community, how their function and meanings might be transformed as they are incorporated within new social practices. "In the moment of encounter, we do not trigger a change in the object, but the object changes us."[16] The object itself passes into a new stage of its social life as it is reinvented in its new cultural setting.[17] This approach to understanding the mix of cultural influences is particularly appropriate to the cosmopolitan worlds of the LBA Levant, where the foreign was readily adopted and adapted into daily practices over many generations. As such, cultural hybridity and transculturalism are gaining some traction in archaeological interpretations of the entangled worlds of the Near East and wider East Mediterranean.[18] However, discussions of Egyptianizing practices and objects in the LBA Levant tend to be rich in description but otherwise untheorized or alternatively, framed within more traditional acculturation narratives.[19]

The following discussion will examine how specific aspects of Egyptian material culture were incorporated within social practices in the Gaza region (the Egyptian gateway to Canaan) during the 2nd millennium, specifically drawing upon material from the little know site of el-Moghraqa and nearby Deir el-Balah. I have chosen not to include material from the better-known site of Tell el-'Ajjul, due to the complications surrounding its excavation and publication. These objects will be examined as evidence for social practices. As a result of increased contact with Egyptians from the mid-2nd millennium BCE the local population had become increasingly familiar with different ideologies and different ways of doing things; moreover, Egyptian practices and the associated paraphernalia were particularly prized because of the perceived cultural pre-eminence of Egypt.[20] Thus, these exotic new practices were increasingly adopted and adapted by the native population, which ultimately resulted in the development of Egyptianized objects in the southern limits of the Levant.

## LBA: Colonial Contact in the Gaza Region

A destruction horizon separates the MBA and LBA levels in parts of the southern Levant; although debated, this has commonly been attributed to Egyptian military activity following the expulsion of the Hyksos.[21] Culturally there is no significant change—the same daily utensils were used within the household and there is likewise continuity in the use of space, both public and private. Even so, the flourishing urban centers were greatly diminished, especially following the establishment of the Egyptian Empire during the Thutmosid period.[22] The extent of Egyptian administrative practices in the southern Levant is unclear, but this appears to have been distinct from the more structured, direct imperial activity in Nubia.[23] In contrast to Nubia, there are no extant monumental Egyptian constructions such as temples in the Levant, although there is a reference to a temple of Amen at *Pa-Canaan* (sometimes read as the city of Gaza, but more probably referring to the wider land of Canaan) in the Papyrus Harris.[24] Even so, a number of Egyptian residencies and military establishments have been identified in the southern Levant,[25] which appear to illustrate intensification of Egyptian imperial activity from the late Eighteenth Dynasty and especially in the Nineteenth and Twentieth

Dynasties. These include one at Deir el-Balah,[26] south of the Wadi Gaza. Although Egyptian officials were undoubtedly active at many sites in the southern Levant, for the most part imperial rule was mediated via the local petty rulers, many of whom are recorded in the Amarna letters.[27]

The Gaza region was of prime importance during the LBA. It was a major nexus of communication between Egypt and the Levant, lying at the Canaanite terminus of the "Ways of Horus" and was crucial for the movement of traded commodities as well as military and administrative personnel between Egypt and Canaan. The city of Gaza (*gꜣḏt*) is named in Egyptian texts,[28] but other than soundings in the early 20th century and survey work in the late 1990s the LBA settlement remains virtually unknown archaeologically.[29] Tell el-ʻAjjul, established during the MBA,[30] continued to be the pre-eminent site in the region in the earlier part of the LBA, with extensive trading relations not only with Egypt but also with Cyprus and the Aegean.[31] The wide range of imported goods, in particular Cypriot pottery, found both in the settlement and in the adjacent cemeteries clearly show how the exotic was incorporated within the daily practices of the site's inhabitants. Some 500 m to the north of ʻAjjul was the lesser-known satellite settlement of el-Moghraqa.[32] The main period of occupation at el-Moghraqa dates to MB IIb–c, but there is also evidence for LBA activity at both sites. By the 13th century BCE, however, the main focus of occupation around the Wadi Gaza had shifted south to Deir el-Balah,[33] which current archaeological evidence suggests remained a leading settlement in the Gaza region to the end of the Bronze Age.

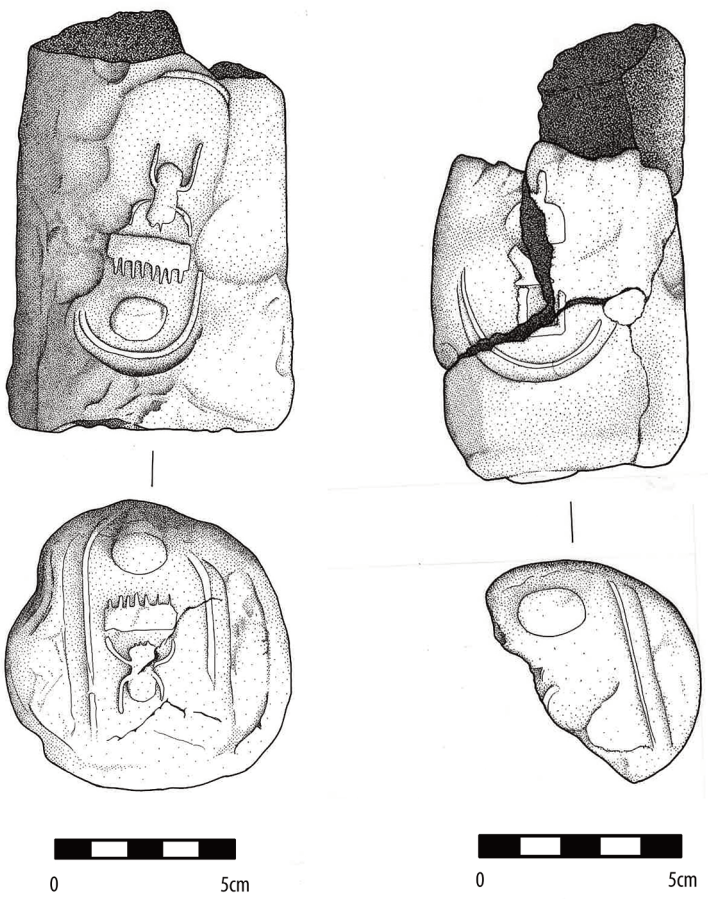
## Material Evidence for Hybrid Practices in the Gaza Region during the LBA

### "Funerary" Cones

The little-known site of el-Moghrqa is particularly significant for understanding early Egyptian imperial activity in the Gaza region. Here some twenty incomplete terracotta cones (Fig. 2), and numerous small fragments from cones, have been recovered from the upper deposits in survey and excavation.[34] These were found at the interface between an aeolian deposit (ancient sand dune) with mixed Bronze Age and Byzantine pottery and a layer of decayed mud brick overlaying a LBA surface,[35] on which were found several copper/copper-alloy arrowheads[36] and a tall goblet with a pedestal base.[37] While the remains in the underlying MB strata are suggestive of a workshop area[38] the nature of LBA occupation at el-Moghraqa is still unclear.

To date, the cones from el-Moghraqa are unique in the Levant; however, they closely resemble Egyptian funerary cones typical of Eighteenth Dynasty Thebes.[39] The Gaza cones, which were made from coarse, reddish-yellow clay and covered

**Figure 2:** Cones from el-Moghraqa inscribed with prenomen of Thutmosis III (MOG1-99-1-4) and Hatshepsut (MOG1-99-1-9).



with a red slip, were stamped on the round face and upper side with a single cartouche before firing. Unfortunately, due to the deteriorating political situation following the 2000 excavations it was not possible to conduct any NAA or petrographic analyses of the cones, nor indeed of the associated pottery, and their current condition and whereabouts are unknown. Thus, we cannot comment with any degree of certainty as to the origin of the materials from which these were made and whether they were locally manufactured or Egyptian imports. In most cases the cartouche encloses the prenomen, or "throne-name," of Tuthmosis III (*mn-ḫpr-rˁ*, Menkheperre) but two fragments are inscribed with the prenomen of Hatshepsut (*mꜣˁt-kꜣ-rˁ*, Maatkare), indicating that some cones date to the co-regency. It is unclear whether the cones can also be related to Thutmosis III's Gaza campaign in years 22–23 of his reign.[40] They were consistently broken off at a length of around 10 cm; moreover, while projecting round stamped faces have survived in large numbers, only two of the cone tips survive. This implies that the cones may have been employed as an architectural feature projecting from the facade. They would have been dismantled from this architectural structure and dumped over the debris of the Middle Bronze Age settlement at el-Moghraqa at a later date, which cannot be precisely determined from the stratigraphy at the site.

These cones demonstrate either the introduction of elite Egyptian practices to el-Moghraqa or otherwise some knowledge or understanding of such practices. Within the Egyptian social world funerary cones were exclusively associated with Upper Egypt and for the most part with Thebes, home of the Eighteenth Dynasty,[41] where they were used from the Eleventh Dynasty.[42] A small number have also been identified in the New Kingdom cemetery at Tombos, in Nubia,[43] another colonial periphery of the Egyptian state. In Egypt the cones had a specifically funerary function and were likely to have marked ownership of an official's tomb. From the Seventeenth Dynasty they were typically stamped on the circular face with the name and titles of the tomb owner, and it is accepted that they were inserted in large numbers into the tomb's façade, although in only two cases have they been found in situ.[44] Notwithstanding that we do not fully understand what these objects signified, we can explicitly link them in time and place to a specific group of individuals; within Egypt they were intrinsically associated with the Theban elite and administrative hierarchy. The funerary cones from Tombos have been interpreted as a deliberate expression of Egyptian identity in Nubia, an interpretation that gains credence given the associated pyramidal tomb structure, resembling contemporary tombs of the nobles from Thebes.[45]

Should we then interpret these cones from el-Moghraqa as the funerary equipment of an Egyptian official in the Gaza region, presumably from Thebes, who chose to adorn his tomb with specifically Theban funerary equipment? Within such a narrative we might view the subsequent dismantling of the tomb structure and dumping of the cones as a deliberate act of resistance against the Egyptian administration. Certainly, contemporary sources suggest the presence of an Egyptian governor at Gaza during the Eighteenth Dynasty,[46] but physical evidence for this official's tomb has yet to be identified.[47] Instead, while the el-Moghraqa cones might in fact be the clearest and most convincing evidence for the existence of an Egyptian governor's tomb in the Gaza region, there is perhaps more evidence that the cones reflect hybrid cultural practices—the adaptation of specifically Theban materials and actions by a local resident elite. There are in fact a number of substantive distinctions between these cones and the Theban (and Nubian) material that might suggest the el-Moghraqa objects were used by individuals who did not have the cultural competence to fully understand their signification and function. The cones from el-Moghraqa were stamped twice—on the round end and the upper side—but the Egyptian funerary cones were only ever stamped on the round face. Moreover, the Egyptian inscriptions listed the name of the tomb owner, his titles, and sometimes his parentage, but none of the Egyptian examples were stamped on the side or had an inscription that solely comprised the pharaoh's name. These distinctions suggest that the cones were not created for an Egyptian but rather for a Canaanite, who might perhaps have visited Thebes and viewed some of the tombs adorned with cones, and who consequently had some understanding of Theban demonstrations of status and wished to emulate them. As noted by Kopytoff: "[w]hat is significant about the adoption of alien objects—as of alien ideas—is not the fact that

they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use."[48]

We cannot in fact be sure that these cones were intended to mark a tomb, and there is certainly no evidence for elaborate built funerary structures anywhere in the Gaza region. The function of these objects might well have been misconstrued outside their Theban context; rather than a marker of an individual's persona in death, they may have been reinterpreted as a symbol of prestige and authority, which had specific associations with Egyptian royal power. I would suggest that the el-Moghraqa cones in fact were intended to seal some other type of building, presumably located in a prominent public place (perhaps at nearby 'Ajjul) and proclaimed its owner to be a significant personage within the newly established Egyptian administration. Closer inspection of the inscription likewise suggests the cones had been deliberately altered for a Canaanite audience. The written message is straightforward and uncomplicated; the signs simply convey the throne name of Tuthmosis III (and Hatshepsut) without use of the royal title (*nỉsw bỉty*). They were designed to convey Egyptian royal authority succinctly for a non-Egyptian and largely non-literate audience.[49] Thutmosis' prenomen would probably have been widely recognized as a mark of his authority, even if the actual signs could not be read. Presumably the owner of the building aspired to acquire prestige and standing by means of the use of the royal name, through which they claimed some association with the Egyptian ruling dynasty. The cones from el-Moghraqa therefore display some degree of cultural hybridity. An example of an originally Theban funerary object taken out of its social context to be manipulated and reinvented within the changing social world of the southern Levant in the formative stages of the New Kingdom Egyptian empire.

### Burials at Deir el-Balah

Further evidence for hybridized social practices and the reshaping of the material world is evident in the LBA cemeteries of the southern Levant.[50] This discussion focuses on aspects of the material culture from the cemetery at Deir el-Balah,[51] but similar incorporation of Egyptian objects and/or referencing of Egyptian social practices (such as the incorporation of lead net sinkers, arrowheads, and fowling bolts in emulation of the Egyptian practices of fowling and fishing as represented on the walls of the tombs of the nobles) has likewise been identified at 'Ajjul.[52] The cemetery at Deir el-Balah was used in the latter part of the Egyptian Empire in the Levant; the excavator originally suggested the site was established during the later Eighteen Dynasty (14th century BCE) and used throughout the Ramesside period (13th century) down into the 12th century;[53] however, subsequent reassessments of the stratigraphy and the pottery indicate it was founded in the 13th century as part of a more formal implementation of Ramesside imperial policy throughout the southern Levant.[54] There is clear evidence at the site for a significant change in local traditions surrounding the disposal of the dead and the introduction of new elements that mimicked Egyptian practices, in particular the use of clay anthropoid coffins. Dothan has suggested that the Deir el-Balah cemetery was the burial ground for Egyptian military and administrative officials stationed at the site,[55] in particular because of the adoption of the new type of funerary container for the body. The presence of similar coffins at other sites in the southern Levant with strong Egyptian connections has likewise been attributed to the burial of Egyptian soldiers and other officials.[56] Likewise, drawing on the ceramic evidence, Martin has argued that Egyptians, who had died while stationed at Deir el-Balah, were numbered amongst the individuals buried in the cemetery.[57] Here, however, I want to explore alternative interpretations, which allow for a more nuanced understanding of hybrid (or transcultural) practices in the southern Levant. In particular, I would like to consider the possibility that *(some of)* the occupants of the tombs were not necessarily Egyptians stationed at the site, who received an abbreviated version of normal Egyptian funerary rituals (as a result of the lack of specialists with the necessary skill sets to perform the appropriate rituals and processes), but instead might represent the burials of a local population group with knowledge of certain Egyptian practices. The latter might well include Canaanites who had spent some time resident in Egypt.[58] The funerary context at Deir el-Balah, as much as at other Canaanite settlements where there is evidence for strong Egyptian links, should be considered the ultimate middle ground where mutable hybrid identities were enacted.

First, I would like to highlight the absence of a

number of Egyptian funerary prerequisites in the Deir el-Balah burials. For example, in contrast to the posited Egyptian burials at Tombos in Nubia, which were equipped with a typical range of Egyptian funerary equipment and placed in Egyptian style pyramidal tombs,[59] the Deir el-Balah burials were not provided with certain items necessary to prepare an Egyptian for the afterlife. There was for example only one *ushabti*;[60] there were no canopic jars and no heart scarabs. In contrast, several *ushabtis* are recorded in the Egyptianizing burials at Beth Shan[61] Moreover, although burials were typically placed within clay coffins, there is no evidence for the mummification of the body, nor was the body adorned with the full array of amulets that might be expected in the wrappings of an Egyptian mummy.[62] Moreover, several aspects reflect Canaanite practices. The simple pit graves recall those from the LBA cemetery at nearby 'Ajjul.[63] Deposition of the grave goods was structured; the coffin was placed in a shaft at the bottom of a larger shallow pit and large storage vessels containing dipper juglets were placed above the coffin.[64] Smaller vessels were placed within the coffin. As is typical for burials throughout the wider East Mediterranean at this time, the pottery was a mix of local Canaanite wares and imports from Cyprus and the Aegean—truly a reflection of a shared cultural milieu. This blending of cultural traditions at the site is further reiterated by the number of locally manufactured vessels that imitate Cypriot and Egyptian forms.[65] Given the full complement of grave goods at Deir el-Balah, which was not fully in keeping with Egyptian funerary practices, I would suggest that these were (or included) the burials of highly Egyptianized native Canaanites rather than of a resident Egyptian population; however, the people buried in these tombs had access to some Egyptian materials which they actively incorporated within the creation and expression of their own hybrid identity.

Typically, the deceased at Deir el-Balah were buried in anthropoid coffins of clay (Fig. 3). There were two main types: most common were the mummy-shaped coffins with clearly delineated head and shoulders, whereas the head and shoulders of the second type were not delineated. Some were naturalistic and closely mimicked their Egyptian prototypes, while others were more stylized and seemingly "grotesque."[66] While the lids may have been kiln fired, the bases were fired in open pits at a low temperature, resulting in a brittle fabric liable to fracture if transported over any distance. For this reason, it is suggested they were made locally.[67] Anthropoid coffins were an intrusive tradition in the Levant, but these are attested at a number of Egyptianizing sites. These coffins became more

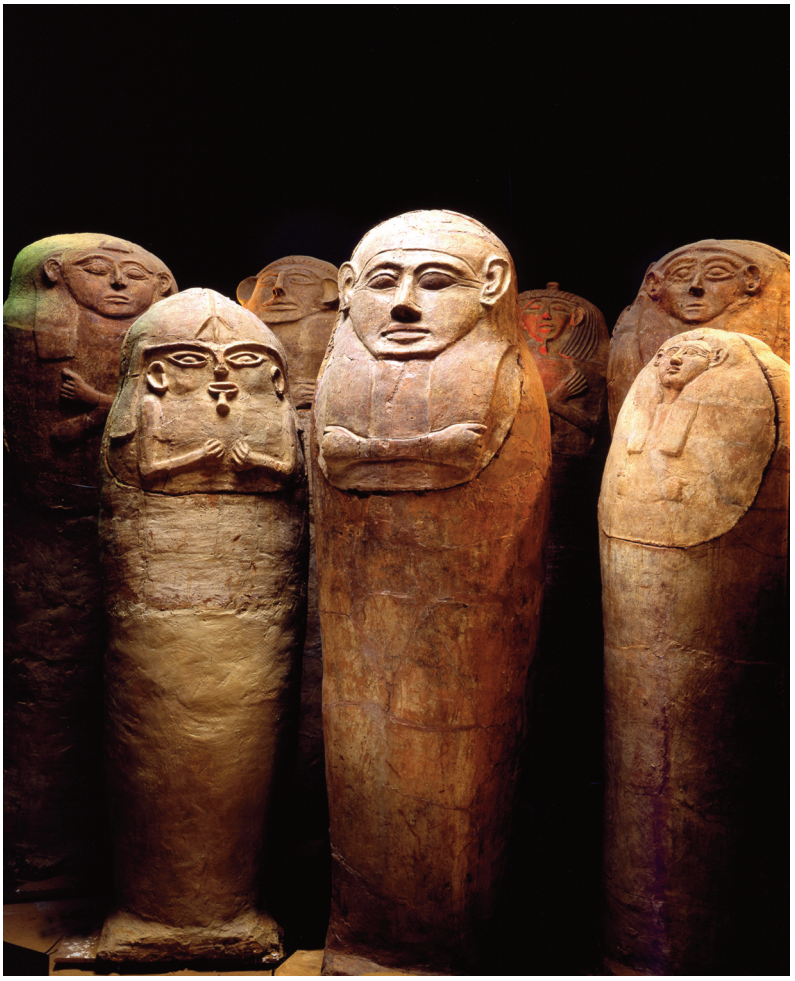


**Figure 3:** Coffins from Deir el-Balah (© The Israel Museum).

widespread during the latter part of the LBA and are attested at sites such as Tell Far-'a (south), Lachish, Beth Shan, Tell Shaddud, and as far east as Pella.[68] For the most part these are later than the earliest coffins from Deir el-Balah, and at none of these sites was there such a wide variety of coffin types.

Anthropoid coffins developed in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom,[69] where they were typically made of sycomore wood or cartonnage. From the Eighteenth Dynasty they were also made from clay. For the most part, anthropomorphic coffins are a northern phenomenon, being concentrated in the Nile Delta,[70] but they are also attested in Nubia.[71] These objects therefore belonged to the periphery of Egyptian society and represent adaptations of an established Egyptian practice in social worlds where there were blurred cultural boundaries, in places where Egyptians and non-Egyptians inevitably came into close cultural contact. In this respect I would suggest that the anthropomorphic coffins in the Delta, Nubia, and also those from Deir el-Balah are more a manifestation of creolization than hybridity. They illustrate the fluidity of cultural boundaries at the periphery of Egyptian society and merging social practices.

Egyptian(izing) objects were commonly selected for inclusion in the burials at Deir el-Balah. As noted above, the pottery placed in the tombs was of varied origin from around the East Mediterranean, including Mycenaean and Cypriot imports[72]—the type of object that would be readily available to the mercantile class throughout the Levant. Trade in these Mediterranean vessels continues into the LB II period (13th century) in the Levant, whereas in Egypt Cypriot imports appear largely to cease after the Amarna period.[73] The typical range of Canaanite vases (bowls, jugs, storage jars and locally-made dipper juglets) were an important element of the funerary equipment showing some continuity of local practice,[74] but the inhabitants of the site also chose to use more exotic items in ritual performance at the graveside and to provide for the afterlife. Among these were numerous local imitations of Egyptian ceramic forms such as the V-shaped bowls, frequently perforated at the base, drop-shaped jars, and most commonly the so-called beer bottle.[75] These comprise a range of vessels associated with beer production and consumption that are typically found at sites with strong Egyptian connects, such as nearby 'Ajjul, Beth Shan, Megiddo, and Jaffa.[76] Clearly the material world of the southern Levant (the Gaza region) was transformed through contact with Egypt at various levels. The pottery assemblage illustrates the integration of Egyptian-style materials in quotidian traditions associated with household activities and the consumption of food and drink. More unusual were the bronze lotus jug and platter from Tomb 114 (Fig. 4) and the wine set, comprising a bowl strainer and jar,[77] from Tomb 118, which both belong to an Egyptian cultural register. Indeed, Stockhammer has suggested that in the Levant wine was largely restricted to the elite and more usually people consumed beer from large jars, drinking through straws,[78] from which we might deduce that the presence of the Egyptian drinking equipment demonstrates the deliberate adoption of very different (and possibly restricted) practices of wine

**Figure 4:** Bronze jug and cup from Deir el-Balah Tomb 114 (© The Israel Museum).

consumption by high-status individuals. Similar objects are occasionally attested at other LBA sites in the southern Levant with strong Egyptian connections, including the so-called Governor's Tomb at 'Ajjul, Megiddo, and Beth Shan, as well as on the island of Cyprus.[79] In the southern Levant these are primarily associated with sites where there is evidence for an Egyptian presence (military and/or administrative), but their spread to Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Transjordan) and Cyprus illustrates the dissemination of certain cultural practices between elites within a shared cultural milieu.

Items of personal adornment also illustrate the assimilation of Egyptian materials and ideologies at Deir el-Balah.[80] Quantities of beads, necklaces, and amulets fashioned from gold and carnelian can be attributed to the site and were probably placed in tombs. These small, portable objects, usually crafted from costly materials, were eminently exchangeable and permeated not only throughout the southern Levant[81] but far beyond the limits of the Egyptian empire, where they were valued for their exoticness and material properties rather than any intrinsic understanding of their use and meaning at home;[82] however, in the middle ground of the Gaza region we might expect some sharing of cultural knowledges.[83] Certainly, Pierce notes that the three most common materials used for amulets in Egypt, namely carnelian, gold, and faience, were paralleled at Deir el-Balah,[84] possibly suggesting some sharing of the significance of these materials. The range of Egyptian items includes necklaces with lotus seed beads, *wadjet* eyes, scarabs, gold embossed palmettes, and a gold Hathor pendant. In an Egyptian burial their placement was prescribed according to the Book of the Dead and many were tucked into the linen mummy wrappings,[85] a practice that does not appear to be documented at Deir el-Balah. Nonetheless, the inhabitants of Deir el-Balah had access to a range of Egyptian-style jewelry and amulets that seemingly parallel Egyptian practices. We should note however, that these Egyptian objects, including the theomorphic and apotropaic amulets, were widely distributed throughout the major centers of the southern Levant, suggesting local Canaanite demand for such objects.[86] These might be considered potent or symbolically charged items because of their Egyptian associations, but it is unclear whether their amuletic connotations[87] were transmitted, although Pierce notes that the female associations of Hathor and Bastet current in Egypt is also evident at Deir el-Balah.[88] In contrast, the hoop and drop earrings were more typically an expression of local Canaanite identity. The combination of Egyptian and indigenous elements in personal adornment, through which the community at Deir el Balah staged a new identity and emphasized their knowledge of Egyptian practices, further reiterates the hybridity of this funerary material—a mixing of social practices in which the uses and traditions of material objects were reshaped.

Although extremely rare, four Egyptian funerary stelae are also attested at Deir el-Balah.[89] These limestone, or *kurkar,* stelae, dating to the Ramesside period, were dedicated to the cult of Osiris; typically, they depict the named deceased worshipping Osiris and making offerings. They were designed to be freestanding objects embedded into the ground and facilitated not only a cult of the dead but also the cult of Osiris. Stelae were an essential item of Egyptian funerary furniture with an ancient pedigree. Frequently they record offerings to the tomb owner, and from the New Kingdom depictions of the funerary deities Anubis or Osiris receiving offerings from the deceased were common.[90] Possibly these objects attest the presence of Egyptian burials at Deir el-Balah; certainly, the recorded names are of the deceased are Egyptian rather than Canaanite, and these objects proclaimed a distinctively Egyptian identity for at least some of the community of Deir el-Balah. This provides us with the mix of population living (and dying) alongside each other, who shared materials, ideas and practices within a colonial place of encounter.

The evidence for colonial encounter at Deir el-Balah allows us to explore how certain cultural practices were observed and emulated by the local elite. These individuals were thus able to select specific objects to incorporate within their own funerary ritual, specifically to stage an exclusive (hybrid) identity. Following Giddens, I would argue that the choice to place a specific type of amulet or pot with the burial is an example of a seemingly small act that ultimately effected social change.[91] This suggests a blending of cultural knowledges at the site that fits with the idea of the middle ground as a contact space in which all participants were equal agents. The adoption and (in some cases) adaptation of Egyptian items of material culture in the burials at Deir el Balah demonstrates the mix of cultural practices typical of cultural hybridity.

## Discussion: Cultural Hybridity in the LBA Gaza Region

During the LBA in the Gaza region therefore, we see the appropriation of Egyptian objects, which are transformed, or reinvented, within a new cultural context and accordingly incorporated within new social practices and/or ascribed new meanings: this is a classic example of hybridity within a colonial third space. The types of object I have focused upon—funerary objects, eating/drinking equipment and items of personal adornment—are of specific interest for exploring culture contact, as these are embedded in material habitus, activities that are culturally learned, sedimented in body knowledges ,and repeated unconsciously.[92] People engage with such objects "in a way that is specific to their social background, often without being aware of this and without acknowledging the important influence of their material surroundings on them. These material surroundings shape the habitus, where things are integrated within social practices."[93] Are we looking at the spread of Egyptian cultural practices, learned within a middle ground, or simply the exchange of exotic objects that were incorporated within new lifeways in the southern Levant? Jane Carter suggests that Egyptian officials were responsible for introducing Egyptian wine sets to the southern Levant.[94] This plausibly would create a social space (or middle ground) within which Egyptian officials and high-status locals might come together, interact and share/learn social practices within the context of hospitality. For the Canaanites involved in such "exchanges," access to these exotic objects and knowledge of how to use[95] them would serve to highlight their illustrious position within the new social order. We might imagine similar social transformations surrounding the consumption of Egyptianizing items of personal adornment. As Stockhammer argues, it is the object itself that changes people; simply the presence of a "foreign" or exotic object changes social space and the actions of people within these spaces. The result is the entanglement and modification, or hybridity, of social practices. This might be achieved through incorporation—learning the correct way to handle or use an object—or transformation—attributing new meanings to "exotic" objects and using these to construct new traditions.[96] The adoption and adaptation of specific elements of Egyptian funerary practices at Deir el-Balah, and likewise the use of the so-called funerary cones at el-Moghraqa, served to emphasize the very close ties binding the local elite with their Egyptian rulers, demonstrating their knowledge of Egyptian ways of doing things. Much as Schiestl has argued for MBA Byblos, the LBA elites of the Gaza region "produced their own version of Egyptian culture, in which they lived, and chose to be surrounded with in death."[97] Intriguingly, at el-Moghraqa we also have hints of resistance toward the Egyptians, suggested by the deliberate dismantling of the structure associated with the cones, hinting toward a darker side to Egyptian colonial activity in the region.

The cultural hybridity identified in the Gaza region during the LBA was not unique within the Levant. We have already noted the adoption of Egyptianizing clay coffins at a number of sites with strong official Egyptian connections in the Jezreel valley, such as Beth Shan and Tell Shaddud[98]—that is to say, within a colonial middle ground or third space, areas where the local population and Egyptian incomers were likely to come into close contact on a regular basis. There is, however, a particularly strong entanglement of Egyptian and Canaanite cultural elements evident in the sites clustered around the Canaanite end of the Ways of Horus.

## Concluding Remarks

The communities occupying the Gaza region during the LBA drew heavily upon Egyptian cultural traditions, which consequently played a key role in reshaping their experience of the material world. To some degree the communities at either terminal of the Ways of Horus, both in the Nile Delta and around the mouth of the Wadi Gaza, were creolized; their traditions and materials occupied a cultural continuum albeit at one end with a stronger Egyptian identity and at the other with a Canaanite character. The region therefore was a contact zone, a place of entanglement where people interacted, engaged with and learnt from each other. Hybrid practices are evident in various aspects of the material world, for example in pottery production and personal adornment. These changes to social practices and the reshaping of cultural traditions were effected through the agency of individuals.[99]

Certain aspects of Egyptian culture, such as the coffins and the bronze drinking equipment, were appropriated by the elites to demonstrate their

exclusivity and their knowledge of exotic practices, and thus to distinguish themselves from the wider community. The cones from el-Moghraqa appear to illustrate a degree of ambiguity in the adoption of new social elements (and their final deposition perhaps also expressing resistance to the Egyptian colonial powers), while "cultural appropriation and admixture"[100] are perhaps more evident in the commemoration of the dead at Deir el-Balah; here, alongside the integration of Egyptian practices within existing rituals, the local community also selected Egyptian materials amongst their multi-cultural grave goods. The resulting cultural hybridity of funerary ritual demonstrates how the "exotic" was incorporated within daily activities, thereby reshaping the local Canaanite social world.

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## Notes

1 Steel 2002.

2 Bergoffen 2001a; 2001b; see also Steel 2008 for Cypriot and Mycenaean pottery from Deir el-Balah.

3 Gosden 2004; Silliman 2005; van Dommelen 1997.

4 Giddens 1984.

5 Eriksen 2007; Stewart 2007.

6 Friedman 1997, 88.

7 Gosden 2004, 25; see also Silliman 2005. In the Egypto-Canaanite context, see discussion in Koch 2018, 24-26.

8 Gosden 2004; White 1991.

9 Stockhammer 2012, 49.

10 White 1991, 52.

11 Gosden 2004, 32–33.

12 Giddens 1984, 14.

13 Gell 1992; see also Helms 1988.

14 Maran 2006a; 2006b.

15 See, for example, Feldman 2006; Steel 2012; Stockhammer 2012a

16 Stockhammer 2012a, 50.

17 Cf. Kopytoff 1986.

18 E.g., Hitchcock 2011; Hitchcock and Maier 2013; Killewbrew 2014; Knapp 2012; Panagiotopoulos 2011, 2012; Steel 2012; Stockhammer 2012b, 2013.

19 Such as Higginbotham 2000; see, however, Pierce 2013, who focuses on issues of material culture and the expression of identity, and the recent discussion of Egypto-Canaanite relations by Koch 2018. See also Braunstein's discussion of Egyptian(izing) objects from the burials at Tell Far'a (south) (Braunstein 2011, 2–4).

20 Koch 2018, 24.

21 Cf. Dever 1990; Hoffmeier 1990, 1991; Weinstein 1991.

22 Weinstein 1981.

23 Smith 1997; see also Sparks 2013b, for discussion of Egyptian imperial writing systems in Canaan.

24 See discussion in Hasel 2009, 12–13.

25 For example, Mazar (2011) puts forward a case for the establishment of an Egyptian military base at Beth Shan in the Eighteenth Dynasty, with evidence for greater Egyptian presence in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties. Burke et al. 2017 discuss the excavations of a unique New Kingdom Egyptian fortress at Jaffa. See overview in Morris 2005.

26 Dothan 1973, 1979, 2008; Killebrew et al. 2006.

27 Koch 2018, 26.

28 Hasel 2009, n. 50 for occurrences of Gaza in Egyptian texts.

29 Phythian-Adams 1923a, 1923b; Clarke, Steel and Sadeq 2004.

30 For excavations at 'Ajjul, see Petrie 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934; Petrie et al. 1952; Tufnell 1984, 7–23.

31 Bergoffen 2001a; 2001b; Steel 2002.

32 Steel et al. 2002, 2004a, 2004b.

33 Killebrew et al. 2006.

34 Steel et al. 2004a, 62–64, 75, table 1; 2004b.

35 Steel et al. 2004a, 46–47, fig. 12.

36 Steel et al. 2004a, 68, fig. 32.1–6.

37 Steel et al. 2004a, 56, fig. 27.5.

38 Steel et al. 2002; Steel et al. 2004a, 84.

39 Davies and MacAdam 1957.

40 Steel et al. 2004b, 327–329.

41 Davies and MacAdam 1957; Kampp 1996, 66–68.

42 Hayes 1959, 34.

43 Buzon 2006, 687.

44 Davies 1938; Dibley and Lipkin 2009, 4; Hayes 1959, 34; Reeves and Ryan 1987.

45 Buzon 2006, 687.

46 Redford 1992, 199–203.

47 Steel 2002, 41–44.

48 Kopytoff 1986, 67.

49 See discussion in Sparks 2013b.

50 See discussions in Braunstein 2011 and Pierce 2013.

51 Dothan 1972, 1973, 1979. See Braunstein 2011 for a parallel discussion of the use of Egyptian(izing) objects in the cemetery at Tell Far'a (south).

52 Steel 2002, 42; Sparks 2013a.

53 Dothan 1979, 103.

54 Killebrew et al. 2006, esp. 117; Martin 2011a, 211–212, 214–215.

55 Dothan 1979, 98–104; 1982, 288.

56 Galal and Aston 2003; Gonen 1992, 28–29; James et al. 1993, 239; Killebrew 2005, 65, 67; Mazar 2011, 176; Oren 1973, 142–146

57 Martin 2011a, 214.

58 See discussion in Sparks 2004.

59 Buzon 2006.

60 Dothan 2008, 149.

61 Pierce 2013, 84, 96, 97, 98, 101, 102, 104, 106.

62 Taylor 2001, 201–206.

63 Gonen 1992, 70–80.

64 Dothan 1979, 71.

65 Dothan 2008, 132–140.

66 Dothan 2008, 94–95; Pierce 2013, 118.

67 Dothan 1979, 98; 2008, 24, 94.

68 Dothan 1982, 60–79; Oren 1973; van den Brink et al. 2017.

69 Hayes 1953, 303–312; Ikram and Doson 1998.

70 E.g. Gander 2009; Pouls Wegner 2015; van den Brink et al. 2017, 131.

71 Cotelle-Michel 2004; Dothan 1982, 279; Pouls Wegner 2015; van den Brink 2017, 131.

72 Steel 2008.

73 Merrillees 1968, 190, 202.

74 Dothan 2008, 118–121.

75 See Dothan 2008, 134–140; see also Martin 2011b, 251–252.

76 Burke and Mandell 2011, 265.

77 Dothan 2008, 34–35.

78 Stockhammer 2012b, 24–25, fig. 5.

79 Carter 1998, 174–175; Higginbotham 2000, 182–183.

80 Dothan 2008, 150–155.

81 See, for example, McGovern 1985, 15–28.

82 See, for example, discussion of the movement of scarabs to the Aegean and Cyprus in Steel 2012.

83 See for example Pierce's discussion of the "multifacted cultural identities" of the individuals buried in Tomb 118 at the site, 2013, 269–270.

84 Pierce 2013, 258: noting 103 items of carnelian, 26 of gold, and 18 of faience.

85 Andrews 1994, 6; 1998, 38; Taylor 2001, 201–206.

86 McGovern 1985, 15–28.

87 See Andrews 1994.

88 Pierce 2013, 261.

89 Dothan 2008, 155–157; Ventura 1987.

90 Taylor 2001, 155–162.

91 Cf. Giddens 1984.

92 Bourdieu 1977.

93 Stockhammer 2012b, 9.

94 Carter 1998, 175.

95 Cf. Helms 1988.

96 Stockhammer 2012b, 15–16

97 Schiestl 2007, 270.

98 See van den Brink et al. 2017.

99 Cf. Giddens 1984.

100 Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 113.