

FIELD REPORT

New Fragments of Aegean-Style Painted Plaster from Tel Kabri, Israel

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Abstract

During the 2008 and 2009 excavations at Tel Kabri, more than 100 new fragments of wall and floor plaster were uncovered. Approximately 60 are painted, probably belonging to a second Aegean-style wall fresco with figural representations and a second Aegean-style painted floor. A date within the Middle Bronze II period, probably in the 17th century B.C.E., may be suggested for the Kabri frescoes, which makes them significantly earlier than the Tell el-Dab'a and Qatna frescoes and roughly contemporary with the Alalakh Minoan-style frescoes. That there are at least four Aegean-style frescoes found to date at Kabri (two painted floors and two wall paintings) may hint that either the palace was decorated with a single Aegean pictorial plan in mind—an ambitious undertaking by a unique Canaanite ruler—or that different paintings were commissioned in different episodes and executed by different Aegean (or Aegean-trained) artisans. Whichever the case, the close resemblance of the Kabri miniature fresco found by Kempinski and Niemeier to that in the West House at Akrotiri on Santorini, and the resemblance of the new figurative fresco to various Aegean paintings, provides hints as to the origin of the artisans (or single worker) at Kabri, who may have been an itinerant recruited in the Cyclades through Cypriot middlemen trading with Kabri.*

INTRODUCTION

Excavations conducted by Kempinski and Niemeier from 1986 to 1993 at the site of Tel Kabri—now identi-

fied as the capital of a Middle Bronze Age Canaanite kingdom located in the western Galilee region of modern Israel—revealed the remains of a palace dating to the Middle Bronze (MB) II period (ca. 1700–1550 B.C.E.). Within the palace, Kempinski and Niemeier discovered an Aegean-style painted plaster floor and several thousand fragments originally from a miniature Aegean-style wall fresco. The painted floor was discovered in situ within Ceremonial Hall 611, while the fragments from the wall painting were found both in and next to Threshold 698, located between Ceremonial Hall 611 and Room 740, where they had been reused as packing material (fig. 1).¹ These have been much discussed in the years since their initial discovery, since Kabri is one of only four sites in the eastern Mediterranean to have such Bronze Age Aegean-style paintings and may well be the earliest.²

A new project codirected by Yasur-Landau and Cline began at the site in 2005.³ During the 2008 and 2009 seasons, two separate excavation areas (D-West and D-South) were investigated; it is in these areas that more than 100 new fresco fragments were discovered.⁴ All 45 of the fragments found in 2008 were unpainted, while nearly all of the 60 pieces found in 2009 were painted. The fragments themselves vary in size and quality of preservation, yet this small assem-

* Previous versions of sections of this paper were presented at the Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in January 2009, the Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research in November 2009, and the University of Pennsylvania in November 2009. We would like to thank audience members at those presentations for their very useful feedback and suggestions, some of which have been incorporated herein, and Philip Betancourt and Elizabeth Shank for reading and commenting on a rough draft of the manuscript. Color images of some of the figures herein can be found on the AJA Web site (<http://www.ajaonline.org>).

¹ Niemeier 1995; Niemeier and Niemeier 1998, 2000, 2002; Kempinski et al. 2002a, 254, 266–67. On the identification of Kabri as the capital of a Middle Bronze Age Canaanite kingdom, see Yasur-Landau et al. 2008.

² Niemeier and Niemeier 2002; see also Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007 (with previous bibliography).

³ Reports can be found at <http://digkabri2011.wordpress.com/previous-results/>.

⁴ The summer 2008 and summer 2009 excavation seasons at Tel Kabri were undertaken with grants from the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP), with additional funding provided by the George Washington University, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Haifa University; equipment was provided by Alon Shavit, director of the Israeli Institute of Archaeology; assistance in conservation and storage was provided by the Leon Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies, directed by Yaacov Kahanov. We are most grateful to all. Senior staff members included Nurith Goshen of the University of Pennsylvania, Alexandra Ratzlaff of Boston University, Inbal Samet of Haifa University, Helena Tomas of the University of Zagreb (Croatia), Neculai Bolohan of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (Romania), and Celia Bergoffen of the Fashion Institute of Technology (New York).

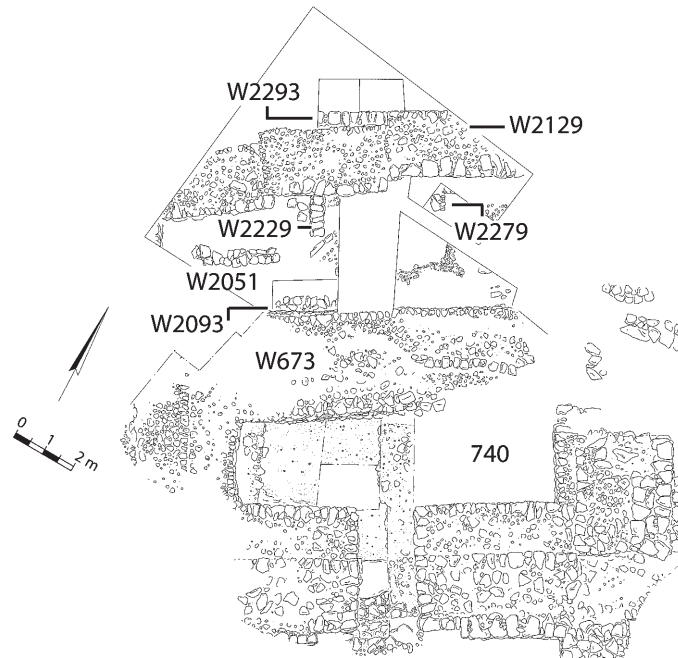


Fig. 2. New plan of the MB II palace at Kabri, showing the northern closing wall (W673) and stone foundation (W2129).

of the walls of earlier small structures. It is different from any other construction in the palace at Kabri, for it is built as a series of segments; that is to say, rather than proceeding in a straight line, the foundation proceeds in an almost zigzag fashion, with each segment stepping out about 0.5 m farther to the south from the previous (fig. 3). Strangely, the entire feature has only one course of stones. In addition, the southwestern segment is 7 cm lower than the rest of the feature and is separated from it by a small step leading down.

At this point, we would suggest two possible interpretations for this stone foundation: either it was a foundation for a perimeter wall encircling the palace or it was the foundation for a road or a causeway adjacent to the palace. If it is a wall, parallels can be found, for example, at Megiddo in the Middle Bronze fortification wall of stratum XII and the external wall of the stratum IX Late Bronze (LB) I palace.⁶ The single course of stones, however, hinders its identification as part of a fortification wall. If it is a road or causeway, parallels can be found elsewhere, including in the Minoan palaces on Crete, such as at Knossos and Phaistos.

We have described both the external (northern) wall of the palace and this enigmatic stone foundation in some detail because a deliberate fill, which contained mudbrick and plaster fragments, was uncovered in 2008 and 2009 in this region. It had been placed between the external wall and the stone foundation sometime prior to the final destruction of the palace. The fill consists of the same material that was used to level the area during the construction of the stone foundation and was deposited in this area in two distinct layers (loci 2027 and 2033/2047).

Embedded within this fill and recovered in 2008 were at least 45 fragments of high-quality wall plaster, primarily unpainted; one of the fragments (3055-13a) seems to have a string impression on its surface that is consistent with Minoan fresco-painting techniques. Most of the fragments were found in the uppermost layer (locus 2027), with considerably fewer found in the lower layer (locus 2033/2047).

When excavation continued in this area in 2009, additional fragments of wall plaster were recovered, at least one of which is painted (2119-7).⁷ Some fragments (e.g., 2141-2, 2141-4, 2143-2, 2159-2, 2159-5)

⁶E.g., Loud 1948, fig. 381.

⁷The identification system for the individual fragments consists of the locus number in which the fragment was found

followed by the fragment number (according to the order in which it was found) after the dash.



Fig. 3. Unusual stone foundation to the north of Wall 673 (i.e., outside the palace).

were found within fill, in loci located on the southern side of the stone foundation (loci 2141, 2143, 2157, 2165, 2179, 2227, 2265); others were found in a limited probe dug on the northern side (2143–2).

Of particular interest are numerous pieces of wall plaster (e.g., 2111–2, 2117–2, 2119–2, 2119–3, 2119–4, 2119–6, 2119–7) that were found on top of the stone foundation in at least six locations. These include fragment 2119–7, discussed in greater detail below, which is probably from the same miniature-style fresco as the fragments discovered by Kempinski and Niemeier under Threshold 698, to judge from the quality of the plaster, the pigment application, and the color.

Area D-South

The 2009 excavations in area D-South had multiple goals, including the linking of our 2005 excavation area with Kempinski and Niemeier's area F located immediately to the south. We also wished to uncover more of the intriguing stone structures that were only partially revealed in D-South during the 2005 season.⁸

To further explore the stone structure (locus 17006) at the eastern end of square 17 in D-South, a new area immediately to the east was opened, which was dubbed D-South 1 (DS-1). It quickly became clear that this structure was in fact a corner created by the meeting of two walls, one (W3041/3017) running diagonally southwest–northeast across the more northern square 6 and the other (W3043), now partially robbed out by the Iron Age pit (locus 3013), running northwest–southeast into the more southern square 5 (fig. 4).

Unlike the very thick (width. ca. 3–4 m) walls seen elsewhere in the palace (in area D-West), these thinner walls (which are, nevertheless, still quite sturdy at ca. 1 m thick) in area D-South could not have supported more than one story. Their proximity to the supposed southeastern border of the palace suggests that the rooms defined by these walls may have been service rooms in the southern wing of the palace, perhaps connected with the entrance to the complex.

Within squares 5 and 6 in this area, a room was uncovered whose floor was sealed by mudbrick collapse during the final destruction of the palace. Numerous

⁸The report from the 2005 season can be found at <http://digkabri.wordpress.com/previous-results/>.

fragments of restorable pottery were recovered from the southwestern part of square 6, lying directly on the crushed limestone floor (locus 3055). In the same area, and in the same locus, were numerous fragments of painted wall plaster, found lying face down on top of the same unpainted floor. They did not appear to be a part of the collapse but rather were in secondary use as mending pieces for the white plaster floor, for they were all, without exception, placed face down, filling crevices in the plaster floor. Indeed, by placing them face down, the plain white color of the back of the fragments was visible and blended perfectly with the white floor, while the colorful front side was hidden. Thus, chronologically, they do not belong to the destruction period of the room but to an earlier period. We note that this secondary use as mending material is reminiscent of the reuse of the fragments found by Kempinski and Niemeier under Threshold 698, by Ceremonial Hall 611. Both findspots suggest that the paintings were removed from the walls prior to the last phase of the palace and were recycled and reused.

The reuse of old plaster fragments in later plaster contexts, such as floors, has been noted at several sites including Miletus, Qatna, Tell el-Dab'a, Tiryns, Thebes, and Phylakopi.⁹ A particularly close parallel was found in the palace of Pylos, in an area northeast of the wine magazines. There, the floor was paved with a layer of fresco fragments, which, in an older phase of the palace, had adorned the nearby walls.¹⁰ Those fragments, like the ones at Kabri, were intentionally placed with their colored face down so as to blend with the white plaster floors. Therefore, the reuse of fresco fragments for building material generally and for paving material specifically is not a phenomenon unique to Tel Kabri and may specifically suggest connections to Aegean practice.

The excavation of this room in area DS-1 was not completed during the 2009 season, nor was that of the rooms around it. It is very likely that additional fresco fragments will be discovered once this room is fully excavated and in other contexts within the immediate vicinity.

THE PAINTED FRAGMENTS

Regarding the painted plaster fragments from area D-West, of immediate interest is one fragment (2119–7), about 4 cm in size, with red or brown paint possibly in true fresco technique (i.e., painted while

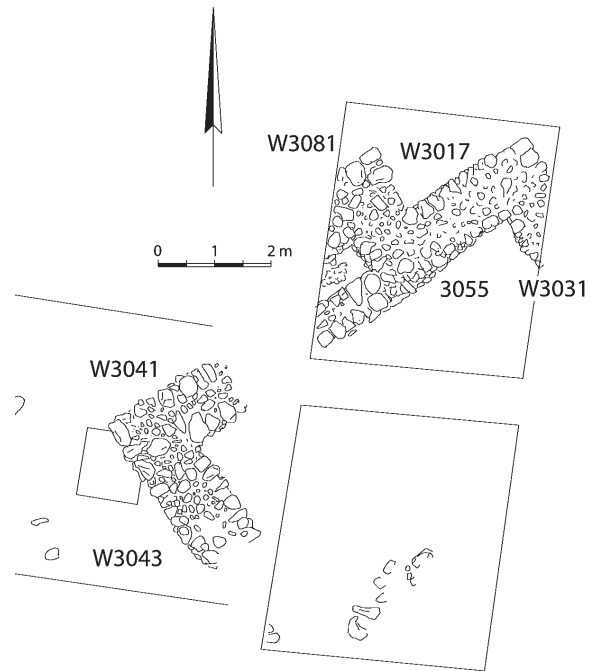


Fig. 4. Plan of area D-S1, showing wall (W) numbers.

the plaster was still wet) on part of the piece and with exposed white plaster elsewhere (fig. 5).¹¹ No border line is used to define the transition from one color to the other. In all likelihood, this belongs to the miniature wall fresco whose fragments were deposited in Threshold 698 and excavated by Kempinski and Niemeier.¹² We base this assumption both on the proximity of the findspot to Threshold 698 and on stylistic and technical grounds. For instance, the reddish-brown color is compatible with the color on the fragments found during previous excavations. The lack of border line is also compatible with the style of previously found fragments, as is the physical nature of the plaster, according to macroscopic observation, including the thickness of the plaster layers, its quality, and the fineness of the top layer on which the pigment is applied.

We suggest that the fragment comes from the depiction of a hilltop within the landscape illustrated in a miniature composition (fig. 6). The Kabri miniature scene is painted according to Aegean conventions for depicting landscapes; for instance, knoblike protuberances are used to represent the seashore, while

⁹ Brysbaert 2003; 2008, 114.

¹⁰ French 1993–1994, 33.

¹¹ At least two additional fragments (2119–3, 2119–4) from

area D-West clearly also have paint on them, but the exact color and design will only be determined after further cleaning.

¹² Niemeier and Niemeier 2002, 266–67, pl. 34.



Fig. 5. Painted plaster fragment (2119–7) with red or brown paint in a miniature style, from area D-West.

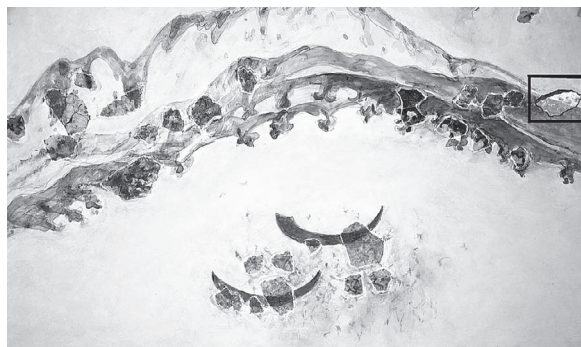


Fig. 6. Suggested reconstruction and placement of Fragment 2119–7 from area D-West, as part of a hilltop within the landscape depicted in a miniature composition.

seawater is rendered using a net pattern. Moreover, the isodomic masonry and flying swallows are closely correlated to Thera art.¹³ Others have suggested that this type of landscape was perhaps used to depict specific views in the Aegean such as on Thera and Kea.¹⁴ Similarly, we believe that while the Kabri scene could be a depiction of Aegean terrain, it could also possibly be connected to the actual landscape around Kabri, a theme that would have been perhaps more appealing to the local residents.¹⁵

¹³ Niemeier and Niemeier 2002, 266–67.

¹⁴ See Warren (1979) and Morgan (1998, 203) on the connection of the depicted landscape in Kea to the real land-

All the remaining painted plaster fragments were found in area D-South, in locus 3055 within the southwestern part of square 6, lying face down on the unpainted crushed-lime floor. These fragments can be divided into four main groups based on stylistic grounds:

1. Twelve fragments with blue pigment, white pigment, and black outlines.
2. Four fragments with red, blue, and black pigment.
3. One fragment of thick plaster with a dark, perhaps black, band.
4. Three fragments with red, orange (or yellow), and black pigment and 18 additional very small fragments with orange pigment.

The Painted Plaster Fragments: Group 1

Fragments from the first group, although found scattered over the floor, as a whole present the most elaborate details of any composition so far found in the palace at Kabri (figs. 7, 8). Of these, the most intriguing collection is composed of five joining fragments that together measure about 8 cm wide x 6 cm high (see fig. 7). On these pieces, a white subject with black linear details and outlines is shown against a blue background.

The artistic skill of the painters who created these new fragments at Tel Kabri was of high quality, to judge by the thinness of the painted lines and the great precision of the brush strokes in the application of the paint, demonstrating good control over the brush. A single curved black line applied on top of the blue area defines the border between the white plaster area and the light blue-colored zone. On the white area, four black curved lines, joined at one end by semicircular curves, are painted. Each line is painted using a single stroke. The plaster itself, when viewed in section, was applied in multiple layers, with the thin topmost layer painted, just as would have been done in the Aegean.

In the current state of preservation, many interpretations and reconstructions of the fragments are possible. For example, on the five joining fragments, the four black lines ending in a semicircular curve are reminiscent of a wing with three feathers. The white-and-blue color scheme on these fragments is commonly used in the Aegean to depict animals, such as in the “Blue Monkeys” frescoes from Akrotiri and Knossos, the “Saffron-Gatherer” from Knossos, various

scape, as viewed from the windows of these rooms.

¹⁵ Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007.



Fig. 7. Joining fragments (3055–15a, 3055–16f) of painted wall fresco, with blue, white, and black decoration, from area D-South.



Fig. 8. Additional fragments (3055–10, 3055–15) of painted wall fresco, with blue, white, and black decoration, from area D-South.

animals in the “Nilotic Scene” in the West House at Akrotiri, and dolphins depicted at both Knossos and Akrotiri.¹⁶ It therefore seems most likely that an animal is depicted on these fragments, and one might suggest that it could be either the wing of a griffin like that from Late Helladic (LH) IIIB Mycenae,¹⁷ the wing of a bird such as that of the flying duck in the Late Cycladic (LC) I/Late Minoan (LM) IA “Nilotic Scene” at Akrotiri,¹⁸ the wing of a bluebird such as those from the Middle Minoan (MM) IIIB–LM IA House of the Frescoes at Knossos,¹⁹ or the fin of a flying fish such as the example from LC I Phylakopi on Melos (fig. 9).²⁰

Nevertheless, there are other possibilities. For example, the four curved lines could belong to three fingers from the hand of a female figure, depicted against an area of her body, such as her neck. If so, each is portrayed without a fingernail. This is perhaps not a problem, since although fingernails are often depicted in Aegean art,²¹ there are also examples without such details. Among these are the hands belonging to the “Ladies in Blue” fresco from Knossos,

which bears a close resemblance to our fragments.²² Another possibility is that the black lines may represent the fronds of a palm tree such as in the Nilotic Scene from the West House at LC I/LM IA Akrotiri or a stylized “fan” such as at LM I Tyllissos.²³ Nonetheless, we would privilege the suggestion that we have here the depiction of a winged bird or animal as the most likely reconstruction.

There are also additional fragments that cannot yet be joined to the above five pieces but are clearly from the same image, to judge from the technique and color scheme (3055–10, 3055–13, 3055–15, 3055–16, 3055–23) (see fig. 8). These may well depict the limbs or the body of a horse or griffin, complete with a portion of what may be the animal’s tail (cf. the griffin from Mycenae in fig. 10).

The evidence is too fragmentary to enable an exact identification of the scene being depicted. Moreover, we should not expect to find an identical match with anything anywhere—indeed, it would be surprising if we did. Still, the painting style points, as in the case of the miniature fresco and the painted floor found

¹⁶For “Blue Monkeys” frescoes from Akrotiri and Knossos, see Immerwahr 1990, 170 (Kn No. 2), 185 (Ak No. 1); see also Doulas 1992, 120–21. For the “Saffron-Gatherer” from Knossos, see Evans 1921, 256; Immerwahr 1990, 170 (Kn No. 1), pls. 10, 11. For the “Nilotic Scene” in the West House at Akrotiri, see Immerwahr 1990, 187 (Ak No. 12), pl. 14; see also Doulas 1992, 64–65. For the dolphins at Knossos and Akrotiri, see Evans 1928, 242; 1930, 375–78; Immerwahr 1990, 171 (Kn No. 6), pl. 31; 187 (Ak No. 12), pl. 14.

¹⁷Immerwahr 1990, 121, 192 (Myc No. 9).

¹⁸Immerwahr 1990, 187 (Ak No. 12), pl. 14; Doulas 1992, 64.

¹⁹Cameron 1968, 1–31; Immerwahr 1990, 170 (Kn No. 2).

²⁰Immerwahr 1990, 47–8, 189 (Ph No. 1), pl. 16.

²¹For examples, see Immerwahr 2005.

²²Immerwahr 1990, 172 (Kn No. 11).

²³For Akrotiri, see Immerwahr 1990, 187 (Ak No. 12), pl. 14; Doulas 1992, 64. For Tyllissos, see Immerwahr 1990, 184 (Ty No. 2).



Fig. 9. Flying fish from a fresco at Phylakopi on Melos. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 5844 (courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Athens; © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism/Archaeological Receipts Fund. With thanks to P. Proskynitopoulou, L. Papazoglou-Manioudaki, and C. Paschalidis, National Archaeological Museum, Athens).

previously by Kempinski and Niemeier, to an Aegean origin. While the miniature fresco found in Ceremonial Hall 611 was most likely executed in a Cycladic style,²⁴ parallels for the new fragments found at Kabri in 2009 can be found on Crete and in the Cyclades, as well as on the Greek mainland.

For example, the use of a blue background is frequently found in Minoan paintings (e.g., the MM IIIB–LM IA “Ladies in Blue” fresco and the LM II–IIIA Toreador fresco, both at Knossos),²⁵ although it also appears later on the Greek mainland (e.g., the LH IIIA Toreador fresco from Pylos and the LH IIIB Mycenaean genii from near “Tsountas’ House” and the LH IIIB Goddess fresco from the Cult Center at Mycenae).²⁶ However, the use of a reserved white area not covered with any pigment was identified by Davis as a characteristic of Cycladic painters.²⁷ Black outlines have close parallels in the miniature fresco from Akrotiri on Santorini and the flying-fish fresco from Phylakopi from Melos, both located in the Cyclades. The



Fig. 10. Griffin from a fresco at Mycenae, with fragments from Tel Kabri in upper right for comparison. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 11652 (courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Athens; © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism/Archaeological Receipts Fund. With thanks to P. Proskynitopoulou, L. Papazoglou-Manioudaki, and C. Paschalidis, National Archaeological Museum, Athens).

²⁴ Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007, 164; previously Negbi 1994; contra Niemeier and Niemeier 2000, 792.

²⁵ For the “Ladies in Blue” fresco, see Immerwahr 1990, 172 (Kn No. 11). For the Toreador fresco, see Immerwahr 1990, 175 (Kn No. 23).

²⁶ For the Toreador fresco from Pylos, see Immerwahr

1990, 196 (Py No. 1), pl. 17. For Mycenaean genii from near “Tsountas’ House,” see Immerwahr 1990, 192 (My No. 8). For the Goddess fresco from the Cult Center at Mycenae, see Immerwahr 1990, 191 (My No. 3), pl. 20.

²⁷ Davis 1990, 214–18.

animals depicted on Crete, such as those from Knossos in the House of the Frescoes or the stylized birds in the caravanserai, are more picturesque, insofar as the colors themselves are used to create the forms. While some Cretan examples do exist, such as the dolphin fresco from Knossos, it is Cycladic art—such as in the West House and Buildings Beta and Delta at Akrotiri on Santorini—and later Mycenaean art that more usually relies on outlines to create the animals.

Since the painted plaster fragments at Kabri belong to the Middle Bronze Age—perhaps as early as the 17th century B.C.E.—it is unlikely that the Mycenaean comparanda from Late Bronze Age mainland Greece are relevant; and yet it has been noted by other scholars that in the art found on the Cycladic islands, many characteristics of later Mycenaean art first appear.²⁸ Thus, similarities between Kabri and mainland examples seem plausible. The winged griffin accompanying a female figure wearing a boar-tusk helmet (perhaps a goddess),²⁹ found by Mylonas in the South Building of the Cult Center at Mycenae (see fig. 10), is one of the best and closest stylistic parallels to the pieces under discussion, despite that it is separated from the Kabri fragments by nearly three centuries.

The subject matter in this fresco is clearly at a larger scale than that in the miniature fresco found previously by Kempinski and Niemeier in our area D-West. For example, the possible “wing” motif that we have on the recovered fragments measures about 6 cm in height and about 8 cm in width, as mentioned above, suggesting that the size of a complete animal would have been about 12 cm tall and 20 cm wide. In the miniature frescoes at Knossos and Akrotiri, human figures average only 10 cm in height and 2 cm in width, while the average building size in the miniature fresco previously found at Kabri is only about 5 cm high and 5 cm wide.³⁰ Thus, we can assume that these fragments come from a different wall fresco, perhaps a second fresco from the same palace. It should be noted that in the Aegean, large-scale representations are often found at the same site as miniature compositions, as can be seen at Akrotiri, Ayia Irini, and Knossos.³¹

The Painted Plaster Fragments: Group 2

The second group of fragments (3055–16c) is also interesting, in part because of the complexity of the execution (fig. 11). On these, red pigment is laid on top of blue, and black paint is used for outlines and



Fig. 11. Plaster fresco fragment (3055–16c) with red, blue, and white paint, from area D-South.

details on top of the red pigment. The red area is bordered on one side by a blue area and on the other side by a white area. The borderlines form straight angles, which again bring to mind the representation of small-scale architecture in the miniature frescoes from Akrotiri, Ayia Irini, and Knossos.³² Such pieces are also reminiscent of the fresco fragments found earlier at Kabri by Kempinski and Niemeier, some of which may depict architecture but which do not seem to be as brightly colored as these new fragments.³³

It is unclear at the moment whether the fragments with possible architectural motifs from this second group come from the same scene or even the same fresco as those from the first group, which possibly depict human figures, flora, or fauna. Given the find-spot within the same room and on the same floor within area D-South, however, we suggest that these fragments are all from one fresco, although not necessarily from the same scene. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that these fragments with architecture are from a miniature fresco, or from a fresco painted at a different scale that may or may not join with the fragments previously excavated by Kempinski and Niemeier.

The Painted Plaster Fragments: Group 3

The third group consists of a single piece of plaster almost 2 cm thick, nearly four times thicker than any of our other fragments (3055–13a) (fig. 12). The thickness of the plaster strongly suggests that this fragment

²⁸ Brysbaert 2008, 155, 158, 191.

²⁹ Immerwahr 1990, 121, 192 (My No. 9).

³⁰ For Knossos, see Evans 1930, 34–5. For Thera, see Doumas 1992, 58–64.

³¹ Evans 1930, 31–106; Marinatos 1974, 34, 38–57; Abramovitz-Coleman 1980; Morgan 1990, 257; 1998.

³² Morgan 1988, 71–5; Immerwahr 1990, 126.

³³ Niemeier and Niemeier 2002, 267, pls. 28, 29, 31.



Fig. 12. Fragment (3055-13a) of thick white plaster decorated with a dark band, perhaps brown or black, possibly a fragment from a painted floor, from area D-South.

is from a painted floor, but it is not from the floor in Ceremonial Hall 611. This would mean that more than one floor in the Kabri palace had been decorated with Aegean-style painting.

The white plaster surface is decorated with one dark band, perhaps brown or black, about 2 cm wide.³⁴ The painted band is separated from the white area by an incised line, which is typical of Aegean painting techniques.³⁵ In the Bronze Age Aegean, border depictions are frequently multicolored and elaborate, but single monochrome lines, such as on this fragment, were also used. The closest parallels for the use of such single lines are found in the Cyclades, in particular at Ayia Irini on Kea, Akrotiri on Santorini, and Phylakopi on Melos.³⁶

The Painted Plaster Fragments: Group 4

The fragments of the fourth group are too small to allow any stylistic interpretation of the scene(s) or object(s) being depicted (fig. 13). They clearly differ, however, from the fragments belonging to the other three groups in that they feature red and orange (or

yellow) paint, separated in each case by a thin band of brown or black paint.

Overall, it may be noted that the palette of colors used on these fragments included blue, black, red, yellow, and orange, as well as white for the reserve plaster area. These colors agree with the contemporary palette used in the Aegean and in other Near Eastern sites with Aegean art, such as Alalakh, Qatna, and Tell el-Dab'a.³⁷ Moreover, it is clear that these are most likely fresco paintings, executed in an Aegean manner (i.e., with the color applied while the plaster was still wet), because of the presence of incision lines that were used as guidelines and because of the distortion of the plaster by brush strokes, which can be clearly seen on some of the fragments.³⁸ Thus, we may be confident that we are looking at additional artworks within the Canaanite palace at Kabri that were executed by Aegean methods and perhaps even by Aegean craftsmen. It should not be surprising that we now know of multiple Aegean-style compositions at Kabri, decorating different rooms or buildings; at Tell el-Dab'a, both Palace F and Palace G were decorated with Aegean-style wall paintings.³⁹ It seems safe to assume, therefore, that these paintings at Kabri were not decorations dedicated to a single exotic space in the palace but rather were part of a broader artistic plan.

CHRONOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

It is important to note that one fragment (2119-7), probably belonging to the Aegean-style miniature fresco found earlier by Kempinski and Niemeier, was discovered outside the palace in 2009, within a deliberate fill that was put into place while the palace was still in use. This lends strong support to the idea, previously suggested by us elsewhere, that this miniature-style wall fresco went out of use before the latest phase of the palace and that most of the fragments were deposited in Threshold 698 as packing material during an earlier renovation phase conducted during the MB II period.⁴⁰ It also argues against the connection between the miniature Aegean-style fresco and Ceremonial Hall 611, so that we are left with the possibility that we might need to look elsewhere in the palace for the original location of the miniature fresco whose fragments were found in a secondary use under Threshold 698.

³⁴ Unfortunately, the exact color of the band cannot be determined before further cleaning of the fragment.

³⁵ Brysbaert 2008, 113–16.

³⁶ For Ayia Irini, see Abramovitz-Coleman 1980, pl. 10b; Morgan 1990. For Akrotiri, see Davis 1990, 215; Immerwahr 1990, pl. 8. For Melos, see Immerwahr 1990, 189 (Ph No. 1),

pl. 16.

³⁷ Brysbaert 2008, 116, 129–39.

³⁸ Brysbaert 2008, 113–16.

³⁹ Bietak 2007a.

⁴⁰ Cline and Yasar-Landau 2007.

Moreover, that none of the fragments found in area D-West to the north of the palace appears to have been found in situ in its primary context, and that none join, indicates that they had not fallen directly from a wall to which they had been attached. It is more likely that they were reused as temper within mudbrick material, just as the similar fragments discovered earlier by Kempinski and Niemeier were found reused as fill within Threshold 698. Those found in the deliberate fill may have been within such mudbricks, while those found on top of the stone foundation may have been used in mudbricks that once stood on top of the foundation or perhaps in the bricks of a high wall—perhaps the external wall of the palace—which fell on top of the enigmatic stone foundation located just outside the wall.

Similarly, the new fragments from area D-South, the first found in this part of the site, can only have arrived at the secondary context in which they were found via human agency. It appears that they were reused to patch the white plaster floor of the final palace and were positioned so that only their white backs would have been visible. Other, unpainted plaster fragments from this room may have been reused as temper in mudbricks that subsequently fell onto the crushed limestone floor during the final destruction of the palace.

This scenario suggests that the Aegean-style paintings adorned the penultimate palace of Kabri and were removed during the subsequent renovation phase of the palace, which was undecorated.⁴¹ We would, therefore, like to briefly present a few additional pieces of data that have emerged from our renewed excavations and studies and that are relevant to the various chronological questions surrounding the history of the palace and frescoes at Kabri.

First and foremost, we agree with Kempinski and Niemeier's suggestion that the final destruction of the palace at Kabri occurred during the later MB II period; this is Kempinski's phase 3c.⁴² While a fair amount of imported Cypriot White Painted Ware typical of the Middle Bronze Age was found during the excavations by Kempinski and Niemeier, as well as in our excavations,⁴³ LB I wares, such as Cypriot White Slip

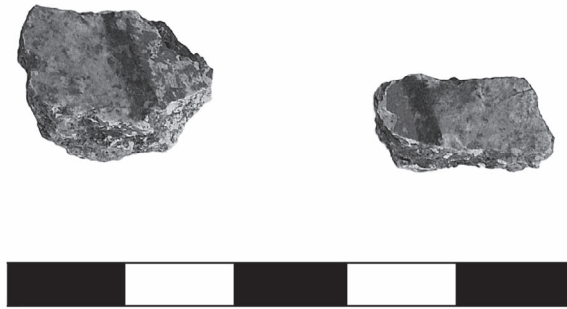


Fig. 13. Fragments (3055-16b, 3055-16d) of painted wall fresco, with red, orange (or yellow), and black decoration, from area D-South.

I, Base Ring I, and Bichrome Handmade Ware, were not found in the palace; therefore, it must have been destroyed and/or abandoned at some point prior to the LB I period.⁴⁴

One unique vessel found in the destruction level of the palace was a large amphora in Ceremonial Hall 611, decorated in a style similar to Chocolate-on-White Ware.⁴⁵ As the shape of this vessel is not typical to the Chocolate-on-White style,⁴⁶ and not even a single fragment of more typical Chocolate-on-White Ware has been found among the many thousands of sherds discovered in the palace, it, on its own, does not merit lowering the chronology for the destruction of the palace. Furthermore, the lack of clear evidence for typical wares of the latest MB II period, such as early Bichrome Wheelmade, canonical Chocolate-on-White bowls, Cypriot Proto-White Painted, and perhaps even early Cypriot White Slip I Ware,⁴⁷ may hint that the palace was destroyed sometime before the end of the Middle Bronze Age, prior to the transition to the Late Bronze Age.⁴⁸ At any rate, a destruction date within the first half of the 16th century B.C.E. seems the most plausible option.

It is possible, however, that activity at Tel Kabri continued for a short time after the palace was destroyed. Tomb 902 in area B, located some 200 m northwest of the palace, yielded Chocolate-on-White bowls and Black Lustrous Wheelmade jugs, perhaps indicating

⁴¹ Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007.

⁴² Kempinski et al. 2002b, 120.

⁴³ Kempinski et al. 2002b, 117–20.

⁴⁴ Another possible import is an unpublished fragment of a Bichrome Wheelmade Ware krater, from the earlier excavations, found in Ceremonial Hall 611 (Bietak 2007b, 272 n. 25). When published, and if indeed this is a Bichrome Wheelmade Ware krater, it may be the first such vessel found at the site. However, Bichrome Wheelmade Ware appears already

in the late Hyksos stratum D/2 at Tell el-Dab'a (Bietak 2007a, 17; 2007b, 271 n. 21), and thus its presence does not indicate a date in LB I or the 18th Dynasty in Egypt.

⁴⁵ Kempinski et al. 2002b, fig. 5.62.

⁴⁶ It is defined as an "imitation" by Bietak 2007b, 271.

⁴⁷ Manning 2007, 121.

⁴⁸ This option was suggested by Maeir (forthcoming, ch. 4). We would like to thank Maeir for permission to cite his forthcoming book.

an end date for the use of the tomb in the MB III or LB I period.⁴⁹

Second, our excavations in areas D-West and D-South have shown that none of the Kabri wall frescoes can be dated to the final phase of the palace (phase 3c); instead, all belong to a preceding phase. They may well date to the penultimate phase of the palace (which correlates to Kempinski's phase 3b), at the end of which an extensive renovation program occurred. We have excavated several deposits belonging to this penultimate phase, below the phase 3c floors in Rooms 740 and 694. The pottery, which is still being studied, seems to belong to the MB II period. Below these levels, we have excavated floors and deposits belonging to the transitional MB I–II period, in Rooms 740 and 694 and in Corridor 2048.⁵⁰ If the Kabri frescoes—both those found in the previous excavations and those excavated in 2008 and 2009—belong to phase 3b, they should date to several decades or more before the final destruction of the palace at the end of phase 3c. Since we suggest a date for this final destruction in the first half of the 16th century B.C.E., a date within the late 17th century B.C.E. should be seriously considered for the use period of these frescoes.

Third, also important is the relative chronology of the Kabri frescoes, both old and new. The Kabri frescoes can now be compared with the other three instances of Aegean fresco art in the Orient at Tell el-Dab'a in Egypt and at Qatna and Alalakh in Syria.

At Tell el-Dab'a, the Aegean-style frescoes that decorated Palace F and parts of Palace G in the early palace phase C/3 (stratum d) are now dated by the excavator to the early Thutmoside period, most likely during the early part of the reign of Thutmose III in the 15th century B.C.E.⁵¹ At Qatna, the wide range of scenes on painted plaster, in both Aegean and local styles, may well belong to the Late Bronze Age, either the 16th–15th centuries B.C.E. or the 14th century B.C.E., depending on which interpretation one follows.⁵² At Alalakh, the Minoan-style fresco belongs to the stratum VII palace. However, while much is known about Alalakh from a historical point of view, it is very difficult to match the historical and archaeological records in order to reach a close-fitting absolute dating for the frescoes.⁵³ The start of stratum VII is pegged to Yarim-Lim's reign at Alalakh, ca. 1710–1650 B.C.E.; yet, of course, even this date is dependent on the ab-

solute chronology scheme that one adopts for the Old Babylonian period (i.e., middle or low).

The hypothesized terminus post quem for the use of the stratum VII palace at Alalakh is its destruction by Hattusili I in his second year, somewhere between 1628 B.C.E. (middle chronology) and 1575/64 B.C.E. (low chronology). This dating is problematic for two reasons: first, the "Hittite destruction" is an assumption resting on historical record rather than on any archaeological evidence from the palace itself. Second, even if the terminus for the end of the palace is accepted (with its inherited wide range), the frescoes themselves could have been painted anytime during the long life of stratum VII.⁵⁴ The uncertainty about the absolute chronology of stratum VII is magnified by the fact that, to date, there are no unambiguous correlations through imported pottery between this stratum and other sites with clearer chronology, such as Tell el-Dab'a, although stratum VIA at Alalakh has yielded Black-on-Red and Monochrome Ware, and stratum VIB has yielded Late Cypriot IB pottery such as White Slip I, Base Ring I, and Bichrome Ware that can give some idea of a terminus post quem predating the Late Cypriot I period.⁵⁵

Thus, a date well within the MB II period, as suggested here for the Kabri wall frescoes, both old and new, makes them significantly earlier than the Tell el-Dab'a and Qatna frescoes and roughly contemporary with the Alalakh Minoan-style frescoes. Does this chronology for the Kabri frescoes have an impact on Aegean chronology?

The new Kabri frescoes and our redating of those previously found by Kempinski and Niemeier have strong implications, as Kabri is to date the only site in the ancient Near East that continues to yield Aegean-style frescos dating to the Middle Bronze Age and is thus of tremendous relevance for the Theran debate. The Tell el-Dab'a and Qatna frescoes, although found in excellent stratigraphical contexts, clearly date to the Late Bronze Age, and to a period postdating the Theran eruption, perhaps by as much as a century.

It has long been known that the miniature fresco found next to Ceremonial Hall 611 at Kabri has clear similarities to the West House frescoes in Santorini, which date to the LC I/LM IA period.⁵⁶ Raising the chronology of the Kabri miniature fresco to place it securely within an MB II context rather than later

⁴⁹ Kempinski et al. 2002b, figs. 5.60, 5.61; Bietak 2007b, 272–73.

⁵⁰ Yasur-Landau and Cline 2008, 2009.

⁵¹ Bietak 2007a, 38.

⁵² Bietak 2007b, 280–82; Brysbaert 2008, 99–100; Pfälzner 2008a, 2008b, 2008c.

⁵³ Manning 1999, 349.

⁵⁴ Heinz 1992, 207; Manning 1999, 346–64; Niemeier and Niemeier 2002, 270; Bergoffen 2005, 56–57; Bietak 2007b, 270–71; Brysbaert 2008, 98.

⁵⁵ Manning 1999, 359–60.

⁵⁶ Niemeier and Niemeier 2002, 266–67.

could potentially affect our understanding of Theran chronology. Thus, the fact that the deposition of the Kabri miniature fresco, as well as that of the newly found figurative fresco, predates the Late Bronze Age I by what seems to be at least one Kabri stratum is a possible indication that it preceded the advent of the New Kingdom in Egypt. If the Kabri frescoes were deposited in the early 16th century, they could have been painted in the 17th century, thus leaving open a chronological scheme that will fit the “high” chronology for the Theran eruption.⁵⁷

At the same time, we should make a cautionary remark regarding the direct chronological value of styles of wall painting. The tendency to attribute frescoes of Aegean nature in the Near East to the LM I period, simply because most of the examples of Minoan as well as Cycladic frescoes are usually dated to this period, may be erroneous in this case. For instance, the Knossian “Saffron Gatherer” fresco may well date to the MM IIIB period, as might the “Sacred Grove and Dance” fresco from the same site.⁵⁸ The floral fresco fragments from Galatas originate from both MM IIIA and MM IIIB–LM 1A contexts,⁵⁹ the former being the earliest figurative fresco with secure dating as well as possibly heralding the miniature fresco genre.⁶⁰ It is not out of the question that Aegean-style frescoes were painted in the Levant already during the long MM III period, and the frescoes, if indeed painted during this period, could support equally either the high or low chronological scheme in the Aegean.

Hence, it is still too early to decide whether the Kabri record supports the high or the low Aegean chronology, yet this discovery opens up interesting new routes for investigation anyway. It is possible that new insights will be gained after we process our ¹⁴C samples from the various Kabri palace phases. Such ¹⁴C dates, however, should be cautiously treated in view of the consistent difference between the ¹⁴C and historical dates shown not only at Akrotiri on Santorini but also at Tell el-Dab’a and Palaikastro, Crete.⁶¹ Direct chronological correlation through Egyptian objects may also help in correlations with Egypt, as opposed to the Aegean. Such objects include scarabs found in the Kabri tombs (although none has yet been found in the Kabri palace). Despite that the Neo-Palatial period was the

heyday of Egyptian imports to Crete,⁶² the correlation between Egyptian and Minoan chronology is extremely shaky for this period because of the lack of well-dated Egyptian objects in securely stratified, contemporary contexts on Crete, or of Minoan objects in Egypt, as recently noted by Phillips: “There appear to be no direct correlations between Egyptian and Minoan material in cross-cultural context for this period, either on Crete or on Egypt.”⁶³

THE ROLE OF AEGEAN ART AT KABRI

The new discovery of additional Aegean-style fresco fragments from Kabri, probably belonging to at least one more wall painting and one more painted floor, brings the total number of Aegean-style paintings at the site to at least four. This is astonishing, especially since these are the only form of monumental art found in the palace, which has not yet yielded any Canaanite- or Syrian-style sculpture. One must wonder why the rulers of Kabri were so preoccupied with commissioning Aegean art.

We would like to offer two preliminary and complementary reasons for this artistic choice. The first is the apparent reluctance of the Canaanites to depict their rulers, or scenes of rulership, in the Middle Bronze Age or the earlier part of the Late Bronze Age. The second is the apparent willingness of the Kabri rulership to manifest an association with a Mediterranean, rather than a Near Eastern, political narrative.

In the other Near Eastern palaces in which Aegean art has been found, it is usually accompanied by Syrian-style art; for example, in the temple at Alalakh, excavators found the head of a diorite statue, and in the royal tomb at Qatna were found twin male statues made of basalt.⁶⁴ The Syrian palaces, as well as their decoration and palatial figurative art in the Middle Bronze Age, reflect the power ideology of the rulers.⁶⁵ And indeed, the artistic programs everywhere in the palace of Mari were heavily concerned with the interaction between rulership and the divine, as clearly seen in the paintings from the Court of the Palms and the palace’s shrine.⁶⁶

Similarly, at Ebla during the MB II period, images of the rulers frequently appear in the form of block statues, and there are elaborate scenes carved on lime-

⁵⁷ Manning 1999, 2007; Friedrich et al. 2006.

⁵⁸ Immerwahr 1990, 170, 173 (Kn Nos. 1, 16).

⁵⁹ Rethemiotakis 2002, 57, pls. 16a–17a.

⁶⁰ We are grateful to Philip Betancourt for his comment on this subject.

⁶¹ Bietak and Höf meyer 2007; Bruins et al. 2009. See the article in *Science* (Bronk Ramsey et al. 2010), which implies that the ¹⁴C data from Tell el-Dab’a may be out of line with

that from the rest of the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean and that the Thera eruption may have taken place during the Hyksos period; see also Bruins 2010.

⁶² Phillips 2008, 230.

⁶³ Phillips 2008, 220.

⁶⁴ Al-Maqdissi 2008, 218, f.g. 72; Yener 2008, 197, f.g. 64.

⁶⁵ Margueron 1995, 898.

⁶⁶ Winter 2000, 748; Margueron 2004, 512.

stone and basalt basins that depict royal banquets.⁶⁷ The only site that reflects similar practices in Canaan is Hazor, where basalt statues of rulers and a LB I bronze plaque with an image of a noble were found.⁶⁸

The iconographical evidence for Canaanite kings and rulers at other sites apart from Hazor is very scarce, similar to the situation in the Aegean, where we have the case of the Minoan “missing ruler.”⁶⁹ Aegean pictorial art, with its well-known lack of images of rulership, would therefore be a perfect choice for Canaanite rulers who did not wish to employ the Syrian style of art, which glorified the king. At the same time, it may well be that the rulers of Kabri never felt the need to acquire Syrian art, since they never belonged to the Syrian system of city-states, as Hazor did. The absolute absence of cuneiform tablets, inscriptions, seals, and sealings at Tel Kabri strongly suggests that the Kabri palatial economy was different from the literate economies of Syria, such as at Ebla and Alalakh, and also from that of Hazor, which yielded cuneiform tablets relating to economic administrations from both the Middle and Late Bronze Age.⁷⁰

As we suggested in an earlier article,⁷¹ the willingness of the Kabri rulers to acquire Aegean art may have represented their desire to compete with larger and more powerful polities. Kabri, despite its prominent position as a gateway community and the most powerful polity in the northern Canaanite littoral,⁷² was only a secondary player compared with huge international and commercial powers such as Hazor and Tell el-Dab’a. Therefore, the king of Kabri—unlike the ruler of Hazor—is unlikely to have had the means to acquire and commission the highest forms of Syrian art. Moreover, he could have competed with neither the resources of a kingdom such as Hazor, which had a center more than twice the size of Kabri (ca. 80 ha), nor with the “old money” (centuries-old wealth) that resulted from continuous trade with Mesopotamia. Similarly, the king of Kabri did not have direct access to the artistic riches of Egypt, as did the Hyksos rulers.⁷³

Kabri’s rulers, therefore, may have chosen another venue for impressing peers and attracting clients. The choice of Aegean art, perhaps a repeated choice reflected by at least four different Aegean-style paintings in the palace, was therefore deliberately aimed at demonstrating contacts that most other polities did

not have and was perhaps a manifestation of the rulers’ aspiration to belong to a more “cosmopolitan” Mediterranean narrative, as well as to show their difference from the Syrian city-states to the northeast.⁷⁴

The fact that currently at Kabri there are probably four Aegean-style frescoes (two painted floors and two wall paintings), each painted in a different style, may suggest that either the palace was decorated with a single Aegean pictorial plan in mind—an ambitious undertaking by this Canaanite ruler alone—or that different paintings were commissioned in different episodes and executed by different Aegean (or Aegean-trained) artisans. Whichever the case, the close resemblance of the Kabri miniature fresco found by Kempinski and Niemeier to that in the West House at Akrotiri on Santorini and the resemblance of the new figurative fresco to both Cycladic and Cretan paintings provide clues to the origin of the artisans working at Kabri. It is certainly not difficult to envision an itinerant artisan or artisans,⁷⁵ who may have previously decorated the houses of the wealthy on Santorini, Kea, Melos, or elsewhere,⁷⁶ working for a time at the palace of Kabri.

It is intriguing that the effort to adorn the Kabri palace with Aegean-style paintings was limited to a single phase. The vast architectonic changes that ended this phase resulted in a larger and more massive palace. However, lack of funds, severing of the connection to the Aegean, or simply Aegean art going out of style at Kabri left the newly remodeled palace without such wall decorations. Instead, the builders reused, without sentiment, the pieces of painted plaster from the previous phase as construction material. Interestingly, the Aegean-style paintings at Tell el-Dab’a and Qatna, as well as perhaps Alalakh, were also all found torn from the walls and already discarded. One wonders, therefore, not only why the trend of Aegean-style painting at these sites came into being in the first place but also why it came to an end at each so soon thereafter.

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⁶⁷ Matthiae et al. 1995, 410–11, 421–22, 432.

⁶⁸ Beck 1983, 78–80; 1989, pl. 330; Cline and Yásur-Landau 2007, 160–61.

⁶⁹ Davis 1995, 11–20; Koehl 1995, 23–35; Cline and Yásur-Landau 2007, 161 n. 31.

⁷⁰ Horowitz and Oshima 2006, 75–87.

⁷¹ Cline and Yásur-Landau 2007, 163–64.

⁷² Ilan 1995, 306; Maeir 2000, 43–5.

⁷³ Cline and Yásur-Landau 2007, 163–64.

⁷⁴ Knapp 1998, 195; Niemeier and Niemeier 1998, 96; 2002, 285; Cline and Yásur-Landau 2007, 163–64; Feldman 2007.

⁷⁵ Cline 1995.

⁷⁶ Negbi 1994.

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