

Consuming Material Ambiguity: The Social and Symbolic Implications of Mycenaean Pottery in Ugarit

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Introduction

'I consume therefore I am' or –to put it in a different way- the social implications of consumption is in essence the main aim of this study. Humans have always been tied to their material culture through the immediacy of the latter not only to denote itself by its physical and external presence but also to represent a world of articulate symbolism. This assumption about the dual nature of material culture provides a baseline for gaining insights into both the practical utility of an object but mainly -through complex connotations and cognitive links- to interpretations that are embedded in economic, social and ideological structures.

In this paper interest focuses on consumption, a period in the life time of the vessels that I perceive as quite underestimated or at least a bit neglected. Here, I shift the research target from matters of production and circulation to issues of consumption so as to see in which perspective pottery obtains a symbolic and ideological weight, apart from any practical utility.

The study of Mycenaean pottery and its diffusion throughout several parts of the Mediterranean, however wide and possibly thorny it might be, is a stimulating challenge in understanding how certain categories of goods have been perceived and deployed in places where they have been imported. Usually the presence of Mycenaean pottery has been used as a widely accepted chronological demarcator but also as one of the elements to define the geographical extent of the Mycenaean culture (Gates 1995: 289-90). Despite this pervasive concern with Mycenaean pottery I consider such an approach as being not in accordance with modern anthropological theories of interaction and exchange or the idea of 'consuming the other' that include a whole web of parameters and complexities, following the old-school conservatism and Helleno-centrism of this notion. The argument that 'objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become' (Thomas 1991: 4), and my perception of this class of objects as not being impervious and/or amenable to law-determined processes, are set as the starting points of this essay. Ugarit, not only one of the most important and wealthy cities of the Late Bronze Age but also a place where imported Mycenaean pottery has been found more than anywhere else in the eastern Mediterranean, is the intriguing case study of this paper, for the reasons aforementioned.

More or less the questions of this study are somehow perpetual and find an especially fertile ground for discussion in the post-industrial era: what do goods mean for people? How is material culture representative of our personality, wealth, status, ideology, desire? Do we enhance objects with power or vice-versa? And finally, why and how did this taste for Mycenaean pottery develop in Ugarit to such a considerable degree?

My attempt to offer some possible answers to these questions will be based initially on the analysis of types of Mycenaean ware found in Ugarit (shape and decoration) as well as on their spatial distribution in the city.

My aim is to make clear that material culture and consumption are inherently linked with deeply rooted societal schemes and social phenomena which occur in an organised political structure such as the city of Ugarit. But more than that, their importance derives from the ability to act as a bridge (Miller 1987: 99) not only between the mental and physical worlds but also more unexpectedly between consciousness and the unconscious. Using material culture and consumption theory as my departure point, I shall then proceed to their linkage with concepts of art, ideology and power in order to raise a series of thoughts of how I perceive the presence of Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit.

Although my analysis entails a somewhat complicated, multi-influenced and entangled approach to the material, I consider it as proper an advance in order to decipher the ambiguous and sometimes purposefully vague nature of the meaning of things.

Mycenaean Pottery and Patterns of Distribution in the Levant

There are some 348 sites in Anatolia, Cyprus, the Levant, Egypt and Italy where Mycenaean pottery of the LH I – LH III B periods has been found. A steady increase of Mycenaean pottery exports to the East is generally acknowledged for the LH II-III periods (Warren *et al.* 1989: 137-69). Distribution patterns vary from site to site (located both on the coast and in the interior) from a single sherd to hundreds of vessels. Of these sites 111 are situated in the Levant with 30.6% of them showing a frequency of more than ten Mycenaean finds (van Wijngaarden 2002: 16-7). Following and actually leading the pattern of concentration of Mycenaean pottery in settlements along the Levantine coast (map 1), Ugarit displays a total of 443 ceramic finds coming from the Greek mainland whereas 168 finds of the same quality and provenance are found in Minet el-Beida. Out of these 616 finds in total, 554 are pots and sherds and 62 are figurines (van Wijngaarden 2002: 39, 42). At almost the same time with van Wijngaarden's account on exported Helladic pottery the picture of Mycenaean finds in Ugarit became more complete following the publication (Yon *et al.* 2000) of 496 vases and fragments of vases made in or in imitation of the Mycenaean style which were found in both sites but remained stored in the showcases and basements of the Louvre museum, most of them (421) unpublished; this collection almost doubles the amount of Mycenaean and Mycenaeanizing sherds found both in Ugarit and Minet el-Beida and increases by almost one-quarter the number of known Aegean sherds unearthed in the Syro-Palestinian coast (Hirschfeld 2000: 67). Based on this total amount of finds, a re-assessment of the types of the ware published (shape, form, decoration, spatial distribution) is set as the essential starting point before I proceed to my approach of their social importance and value.

What distinguishes Mycenaean pottery from the local coarse ware is the generally hard-fired and fine material as well as the lustrous painted surface usually enriched with decorative patterns (Hirschfeld 2000: 67).

However, what makes an attempt to distinguish and speak about Mycenaean pottery complicated is the fuzziness of how we define a vessel as Mycenaean, as this is not at all clear where the demarcations between 'Mycenaean', 'Mycenaeanizing', 'derivative Mycenaean' and 'local Mycenaean' lie (Hirschfeld 2000: 70). Numerous hypotheses have been offered on that matter in an endeavor to explain how, for example, a 'Mycenaean' stirrup jar was found in Ugarit: was it made in the Argolid and then exported there? Was it made in another location? Was it made in Ugarit by a 'Mycenaeanizing' local potter or an immigrant (or itinerant) Mycenaean potter? Nevertheless in the present paper the aim is not to speak about practical matters of provenance but about the acceptance from the people of Ugarit of a Mycenaean form with various distinct shapes and decorative patterns -of a foreign style in general- as a means of dealing with the social parameters of consumption.

Moreover, this study will not be concerned with the detailed issues (and complications) of terminology, such as Simple Style, Rude Style, Marine Style, Koine and Derivative Mycenaean, encountered when dealing with Mycenaean pottery found in Syria-Palestine. Nonetheless reference has to be made to the term 'Levanto-Mycenaean' or 'Levanto-Helladic' that implies a number of originally twenty shapes considered by Furumark to have been characteristic of the 'Levanto-Mycenaean' style, as they are more frequently found in Syria-Palestine than in Greece, implying that they were specifically made for the eastern markets and not the place of manufacture (Leonard 1994: 7).

Apart from the generally fine quality of Late Helladic ware found not only in Ugarit but also in most reported sites with Mycenaean pottery outside Greece ('Levanto-Helladic' material in mainland Greece is still thin on the ground, although finds from Tiryns provide the exception, Knapp 1990: 122), several special characteristics Levanto-Helladic pottery may be observed as well: the most eminent is the range of shapes and their decoration. Amongst the twenty shapes referred to, the most prominent are stirrup jars, amphoroid kraters, piriform jars, flasks, straight-sided alabaster and rhyta (figs. 2, 3), whereas there is a variety of decorative schemes with the patterned type being the most famous. In conspicuous demand seems to be especially pictorial decoration and in particular chariot scenes (fig. 3), which are, intriguingly, rarely found in Greece.

This phenomenon is chronologically situated during LH IIIA2 and LH IIIB periods: LH IIIA2 is the phase of the greatest Mycenaean expansion directed both eastwards and westwards (Egypt, Near East, the Aegean, Italy) and in LH IIIB Helladic pottery is established in these areas, and is usually found in quantities (Mountjoy 1993: 172-173). Ugarit with its harbour, and situated at a point of geopolitical importance, was a huge commercial centre stimulated not only by the growth of trade but also by political situations, especially in LH IIIB when - after the battle of Kadesh - Rameses II made a treaty with the Hittites resulting in an even more flourishing city. Surely the people - or at least some of them - living in this wealthy and cosmopolitan trading centre must have developed a respectively wealthy and cosmopolitan 'lifestyle' and distinct consideration of material culture as a result both of their activities and stimulus.

Ugarit

Excavations began at Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra in Syria) in 1929 following the chance discovery of a tomb dated in the Late Bronze Age at Minet el-Beida on the north Levantine coast. Our knowledge concerning this exceptional settlement has been enhanced after the discovery of valuable finds uncovered with the excavation of almost the one-sixth of the mound which covers more than 25 hectares. The tell of Ras-Shamra was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Ugarit, owing its prosperity to a number of factors: agricultural resources, industrial activity but most importantly because of its access to major trade routes at the intersection linking the maritime channels of eastern Mediterranean with the inland caravan roads. The extent of the territory embraced by the state of Ugarit is not completely certain but it certainly included Minet el-Beida, the primary port of the state, a second one, Tell Sukas and Ras Ibn Hani where several tablets written in Ugaritic were found (Kuhrt 1995: 301). Evidence speaks for an advanced and complex society, socially stratified, with an elaborate administrative system supported by numerous archives and exercising diplomatic and commercial relations with other states (as seen in the Amarna letters and the Boghazgoy archives, Zaccagnini 2000: 141) until it was absorbed by the Hittites and became a loyal vassal state (Cohen et al. 2000: 9). In the general environment of prosperity and wealth of the Late Bronze Age and especially in the period between the 14th and the 12th centuries B.C., Ugarit flourishes commercially, trading not only with the other Near Eastern kingdoms but also with the west.

Foreign trade was a royal monopoly operating alongside a rural community of peasant landowners. During the period 1400-1200 it is estimated that almost a third of the population consisted of royal dependents organized into professional groups supervised by royally appointed 'managers' or 'headmen' who often were allotted land as *ex officio* conditional holdings (Heltzer 1996: 177).

Mycenaean pottery has been found in all excavated parts of Ras Shamra (map 2) and in the harbour town Minet el-Beidha, placing this class of material on a basis of common demand and access not limited to specific areas. A short assessment of the findings in different areas of the city corroborates this observation.

A remarkably small amount of Mycenaean vases was believed to have been found within the 'Palace Royale' (which is a remarkably spectacular monument in terms of its size and quality of construction, Yon 1997: 259) until the publication of the Louvre collection where a number of 118 vases indicates a palatial provenance (Hirschfeld 2000: 68). Mycenaean pottery has been found in the palace dispersed widely among courtyards and rooms suggesting that this type of pottery was widely used by many people in the palace (van Wijngaarden 2002: 64).

In the 'Centre Ville' a widespread distribution of Mycenaean ware is evident, often occurring in association with ritual contexts, consisting of balanced quantities of dinner and storage vessels. Tomb finds are limited. 14 rhyta have been found in ritual contexts, 11 of them from the 'Sanctuaire aux rhytons' (van Wijngaarden 2000: 48), an edifice of presumably ritual character.

This area shows a great interest as it possesses a variety of buildings with a variety of findings respectively:

- 'Maison A' is an average house with utilitarian functions. Findings vary from a LH III B stirrup jar and a Mycenaean fragment of unknown pot shape, to Cypriot pottery, local ware, stone tools and a bronze pin all of them found in the hallway. In the area described as the kitchen, were found together a quantity of local coarse ware, a LH III B stirrup jar, a krater fragment, Cypriot Base Ring II vessels and a tablet with a seal impression. In the southern area of the building (storage area) a Mycenaean krater was found in association with Cypriot pottery and local vessels. In general, the context in which these findings were found reveals a domestic character.
- 'Maison B' is larger and of better quality than 'Maison A'. Mycenaean pottery (a LH III B ring-based krater and two LH III B stirrup jars found in a room and two pits respectively) is found together with Cypriot pottery. The tomb of the house produced no Mycenaean pottery. Generally, Mycenaean storage and dinner vessels found in 'Maison B' were clearly part of the everyday domestic life of the building (van Wijngaarden 2002: 59).
- 'Maison C' is a modest house consisting of five rooms. Two complete straight-sided alabastra were found, which is remarkable as it is a rather rare pot shape in Ugarit. (van Wijngaarden 2002: 59)
- 'Maison E', which is still partly excavated shows signs of domestic function. Nevertheless there seems to be a relative abundance of Aegean finds (a LH III B jug, a LH III B amphoroid krater, a LM III A-B large stirrup jar, two LH III B stirrup jars and a LH III B shallow cup) in comparison with other buildings of the Centre Ville (van Wijngaarden 2002: 60).
- 'Le sanctuaire aux rhytons': a building that has been interpreted as a sanctuary, with 12 rooms around a large central room, an altar, benches and a number of rhyta. Of 33 Mycenaean pottery finds associated with the building, eleven are conical rhyta (only 4 found in the building), and they were found together with a smaller amount of Syrian rhyta. Among the other pots we see 5 kraters, 2 stirrup jars, one globular jug, one straight-sided alabastron and a figurine (van Wijngaarden 2002: 61).

Almost all Mycenaean finds from the 'Ville Basse' were found in funerary context (van Wijngaarden 2002: 45). In the 'Maison aux frites', the type of which is the most usual in Ugarit, a number of Mycenaean rhyta (four) were found in association with Mycenaean figurines the rarity of which might be of some importance for the evaluation of the rhyta (van Wijngaarden 2002: 55).

In the 'Sud Acropole', dinner and storage vessels are balanced, whereas a low number of tomb finds has been found (van Wijngaarden 2000: 47). In this building an occurrence of stirrup jars is also observed, all of which are large with painted decoration but their origin is mainly Minoan (van Wijngaarden 2002: 49).

In the 'Maison au prêtre Hurrite' which consists of the northern part (8 rooms, two courtyards and a cellar in which several pithoi and storage jars were found) and the central part (which consists of the room above a tomb and the so-called Cella). Tablets with literary texts were found in the Cella in association with a stone libation tube, a conical rhyton and below the floor –in a pit– more tablets were found, two bowls, a model of livers and lungs, a local pictorial mug, Cypriot White Slip II pottery and a LH III B stirrup jar. A LH III A2 stirrup jar, a LH III A2 piriform jar and a LH III B bull's head rhyton come from unknown contexts (van Wijngaarden 2002: 56). Finally, the south-western part (paved area) revealed a LH III B pictorial amphoroid krater.

In the 'Palais Sud' (or 'the small palace') there is an absence of storage vessels and rhyta (van Wijngaarden 2000: 47-8). Yabninu was probably the owner of this large mansion as the cuneiform documents found there inform us. Twelve specimens of Mycenaean pottery and three figurines are associated with this edifice. The krater was a favoured shape sometimes found in storage areas and the kitchen, whereas all the Aegean vases coming from the Palais Sud are dinner vessels. In the cellar a large number of local storage jars were found as well (van Wijngaarden 2002: 64).

'Quartier Résidentielle: Maison d'Albâtres': this large mansion consisting of more than fifty rooms, adjacent to the royal palace can be divided in four different parts: funerary (no pottery), domestic (abundance of finds: three conical rhyta, one hedgehog rhyton, a locally made amphoroid krater, 67 ceramic vessels of local and Egyptian manufacture, pearls, amulets and a steatite statue), industrial (oil production, no Mycenaean pottery). It is of importance that four conical rhyta were found together in the wealthier part of the building (room BD in the domestic quarters).

The city plan of Ugarit incorporated several occupation zones (Yon 1997: 260-261). One part of the urban area was reserved as the palace zone which spread over 10.000 sq m and was isolated architecturally from the rest of the city. It is believed that royal power was expanded in the course of the 13th BC, a conclusion confirmed by the archives found in the palace and the physical extension of the palace in relation to the rest of the city.

The acropolis was an area associated with cultic functions as indicated by the so-called Temple of Baal and the Temple of Dagan. The tower forms of the temples in correlation with the quality of the offerings (gold vessels, anchors etc.) indicate the importance of the cult.

The residential areas reveal no regularity and appear in various parts of the city. What is important is that in this area a clear social overlapping appears; the social rank or function of the owners can be deduced from the presence of archives as well as, I would add, from an approach to the material culture in general, being assimilated here in the presence of Mycenaean pottery.

But before proceeding with possible interpretations based on the distribution of the different types of Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit I think it is necessary to present a summary of these patterns.

Until Yon et al.'s publication (2000), Mycenaean vessels were mainly referred in funerary contexts. This publication, however, drastically changed the picture; domestic contexts are now seen to contain the main bulk of findings, with funerary, ritual and settlement contexts respectively following the distribution pattern. Most of the findings are still to be found in LH IIIB period. The most usual shapes are stirrup jars, amphoroid kraters, cups and kylikes, piriform jars and rhyta. Dinner and storage vessels are the main preferences amongst all shapes and in all contexts, whereas pictorially decorated pottery (depicting various animals, bulls, men and chariots) seems to be in high demand amongst the other decorative patterns, linear, plastic and worn off. Generally, at Ugarit, Mycenaean pottery, especially small stirrup jars, is found in every type of context and among all social classes (van Wijngaarden 2002: 112). However there is a restriction of large amphoroid kraters and conical rhyta to wealthy groups implying that access to these goods was channeled by power relations in the society (fig. 2-4) (van Wijngaarden 1999: 23).

The distribution patterns of Helladic ware in Ugarit and the different contextualization depending on the pottery type are set as my departure points in offering a possible scenario to account for the existence of such differentiation.

Approaches to Material Culture

Material culture is what is revealed first to the eyes of the archaeologist and what s/he struggles with until the end of his pursuit to reconstruct past societies. An elaborate definition of our discipline which is in accordance with the scope of this paper is the following: archaeology is the study of material culture as a manifestation of structured symbolic practises meaningfully constituted and situated in relation to the social. Such an approach conceives material culture as a signifying system in which the external physical attributes of artefacts and their relationships are not regarded as exhausting their meaning (Tilley 1989: 418-421). It is possible to view material culture as part of cultural expression and conceptual meaning and go beyond the immediate physical uses and constraints of objects to the more abstract symbolic meanings (Hodder 1995: 11).

Drawing on this theoretical perspective, material culture is 'purified' from the functional weight of its materiality whereas it avoids inviting the risk of appearing fetishistic by being concerned with the object *per se*. Moreover, although functional purposes must impose a certain constraint on the shape and form of an object, the relation between its form and function becomes more loose and wide (Miller 1987: 116) and is elevated to a legitimate indicator of social, economic and ideological qualities.

In Hodder's theoretical scheme, three points are made: (1) material culture is meaningfully constituted but it can be given conceptual meanings in different ways; (2) material culture has to be studied contextually; and (3) material culture is active, not passive (Hodder 1995: 12-15).

The first point can be related to the linguistic notion of polysemy which has been integrated into archaeological theory by Tilley (1989: 423); any object has no ultimate or unitary meaning that can be held to exhaust it. Rather, any object has multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings depending on a whole host of factors. Generally, objects are open to different meanings and to different categories of meaning (Lunt 1995: 247). Meaning is neither fixed and formularized nor can it be considered as an inherent and physical-like property of the object. Multiple levels of explanation can be accorded to objects which in this approach become disconnected from their inherent characteristics like material of manufacture or form, but simultaneously owe their semantic properties to parameters of context. By placing an object in a context, the context is itself changed; there is a dialectical relationship between object and context; the context both gives meaning to and gains meaning from an object (Hodder 1995: 15). This interaction between them testifies to the dynamic structure of their relationship and is in accord with the idea that material culture is active, not passive. Consequently material culture has a dual nature, both as the organised result of conceptual schemes and as its being the objectification of social being (Criado 1995: 196).

We have reached the point of accepting that objects exist in a constant dialogue with the subjects through their ability to transform their existence and to negotiate a variety of identities deriving from their same materiality and their placement in a world of functions, needs and values. Thus objects (can) become carriers of a potentially wide index of information and social negotiation codes and (can) attest to material culture's stubborn resistance to meaning in terms of functionalist use-value (Buchli 2000: 374). On the contrary, meaning is created and read into things from different sets of subject-object relations with subjects working on objects in order to produce meanings which change according to the circumstances of the subject (Tilley 2000: 79). Meaning is first and foremost the result of the interplay between the social actors inculcated in their everyday transactions and discourses almost in the same way that different theoretical perspectives on material culture can lead to radically different interpretations of archaeological evidence (Parker Pearson 1995: 205). Totally different meanings can be given even to the same set of objects depending on a number of parameters or otherwise the nature of each context. Meaning does not inhere in symbols but must be invested in and interpreted from symbols by acting social beings. However contradictory it might sound, material culture is mainly defined by its fluidity.

Our longing for tidy explanations and literal representations of the object, however, should not monopolize our scope or blind us to the slippery nature of material culture. A study of consumption which extends beyond the physical properties of the object as such and its utilitarian appreciation and function will help our understanding on how it can be shaped by broad social, political and economic processes.

Consumption

Objects are not objective in the ordinary sense of the word, that is independently of the interest and tastes of those who perceive them, and they do not impose the self-evidence of a universal, unanimously approved meaning (Bourdieu 1984: 100). This argument bears the imprint of my theoretical trajectory and legitimizes my interest and focus on consumption as a means to decipher the abundance of Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit. Consumption

is part of a process that includes production and exchange, all three being distinct only as phases of the cyclical process of social reproduction in which consumption is never terminal (Gell 1986: 115). The consumption of foreign objects in particular, in correlation with the aforementioned polysemy of the object, becomes more problematic — or at least more complex — since it is recontextualised, i.e. detached from the cultural settings in which it was created and becomes part of a new context where the judgement made about it by people might be totally differentiated, especially as the distinct type of every society. But still, consumption goods are more than mere packets of neutral 'utility'; they are objects made more or less desirable by the role they play in a symbolic system (Gell 1986: 110). Moreover, they carry the cost of selection of the owner: apart from subsistence they make and maintain social relationships whereas their choice creates certain patterns of discrimination, overlaying or reinforcing others (Douglas *et al.* 1996: 44). The selectivity of the consumer is a potential indicator of her/his power and will to integrate as many as possible desired and dissimilar elements in her/his personal environment and subsequently either to enforce the given meanings of an object and/or to enrich it with new ones. 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. To follow such a culturally informed biography of an object would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories (Kopytoff 1986: 67-68). Consequently every object can be singularised and be used even as complex layer of rhetoric, depending on the intention of the user; we could say then that the uses of an object depend more on our own social complexity than on the mere functional and interpretive capacities of logic. To put it simply, let's try the classic Lévi-Straussian idea that commodities are good for thinking and treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty (Douglas *et al.* 1996: 41).

It becomes apparent that the value of an object does not emerge solely by virtue of its functional usage and/or its exchangeability. Of course it would be arbitrary to mitigate the fact that economic exchange creates value that is embodied in commodities that are exchanged (Appadurai 1986: 3). On the contrary commodities have a social life partly deriving from their economic value, a fact which plays an active - though not unique - role in their transition from the level of commodities to the level of luxuries. As Appadurai (1986: 40) puts it: 'the fact is that the line between luxury and everyday commodities is not only a historically shifting one but even at any given point in time, what looks like a homogeneous, bulk item of extremely limited semantic range can become very different in the course of distribution and consumption'. Consequently, as Kopytoff (1986) maintains in his study, things can move in and out of the commodity state and such movements can be slow or fast, revisible or terminal, normative or deviant.

In other words, every object has embedded within it the potential ability to carry any potential meaning, including that of a luxury object, or a 'work of art' in Gell's words (1986: 115), functioning like all genuine works of art to negate/transcend the real world. The decision for that will be made by the human (f)actors; as people are social beings we can never explain demand by looking only at the physical properties of the goods (Douglas *et al.* 1996: 67). Rather, regarding luxury goods not so much in contrast to necessities but as goods whose principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs; the necessity to which they respond is fundamentally political (Appadurai 1986: 38). It has to be stated though that my perception of an object as a candidate work of art does not lie in its embodied aesthetic value or rarity but in its projection to an abstract and not impervious insight toward its ambiguous nature. Since objects have a 'double life' and since mention has already been made of its material perspective, an 'artistic' approach is not that arbitrary (and surely not axiomatic) but might be helpful in gaining some remarkable insights in a level of a symbolic sphere of codification.

Following this theoretical perspective, goods are not only carriers of meaning but also symbols of ideology. The multiple meanings of goods, frequently combining utilitarian, ornamental and private associations and connected to notions of identity and social ideology, can lead us to the final step of our theoretical discourse: how this transubstantiation of objects can be translated into and used as an indicator of power, especially in societies where the web of social relations is rather complex.

Art, Ideology, Distance and Power

We have already accepted that material culture is not a passive reflection of social reality but one that participates actively in creating that reality. Artefacts support, contextualise and facilitate social action, and thus can be viewed as intermediates of social agency. Their function as signposts endows them with ideology: ideology is a form of signification, a 'pure ideographic system' where the signifier becomes the very presence of the signified concept; that signification is carried out through a signifier (word, object) connotating a signified concept (Parker Pearson 2000: 247).

A commonplace in anthropology is the definition of ideology as a system of knowledge that legitimates the social order by building up schemes about the nature of the world which place authority at the source of all good things (Bloch 1985: 33). This conjunction of subjective and objective aspirations both reifies the innate human need for connection with the intangible qualities of this world whereas at the same time it serves as a stepping-stone for the acquisition of properties of a more rationalistic character and practical nature. Ideology is an essential component of the dynamics of a society, the latter consisting of the following three dimensions: economic power, societal power (including ideological) and political power. This tripartite division does not serve as a means of separating them but its components reinforce each other and constitute a coherent entity (Yoffee 1993: 69). It is, therefore, obvious that ideology is a component of power directly connected with the rise of complex societies and the evolution of state societies.

We have also accommodated the argument that any object is a potential 'work of art' since both commodities or art objects are physical entities that mediate between two things and therefore create a social relation between them, which in turn provides a channel for further social relations and influences (Gell 1992: 172-173). According to Gell (1998: 4), art (and culture by extension) has no existence independently of its manifestations in social interactions. Gell (1998: 7) defines his 'anthropology of art' as the theoretical study of 'social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency'. The axiom that directly relates art to material culture is that both are concerned with the maintenance of personal identity; objects in general include encoding of personal history, ideal self, significant others and self-expression (Kamptner 1989). In complex prehistoric societies art should be viewed as a stylistic reflection of social ordering or structure and as an activity that is related to standardized symbolism and therefore of some underlying social perceptions (Shanks and Tilley 1987: 155). Material culture, with its ability to transcend identities and meanings, links social characterisation to everyday cultural practises through the capacity of consumer goods to express wealth, social standing and cultural position (Glennie 1995: 178). In some ways, consumption is translated as a form of ritual which serves to contain the drift of meanings (Douglas et al 1996: 43). What these rituals do is actually to enable power to assert itself symbolically by insisting on its right to singularize an object or a set or class of objects (Kopytoff 1986: 73).

Finally there is another factor that legitimizes the symbolic function of some objects through a kind of ritual and enriching them with connotations of power - that is distance and the incorporation of this geographical definition with issues of power and knowledge.

Drawing on the ethnographic literature, Helms (1988: 261-3) demonstrates that objects, information and experiences obtained from afar are imbued with latent power and have the capacity to increase the prestige and status of those who acquire them. These distant contacts are also surrounded by a vague sense of ritual: faraway lands, people and their culture are seen on a mystified and mysterious level: this lack of direct and immediate contact is the reason for considering the unknown other as either superior, or dangerous or exotic. Helms (1992: 159) explores this connection by drawing on two imaginary axis, the one for horizontal distance (geographical distance) and the other for vertical distance (ritual distance). The more distant the place of acquisition of, for example, an object, the easier it may be associated with ritual capacities that are consequently transferred to its owner, usually a member of the elite within a society. This is not, however, an unknown tactic of politically influential persons or persons attempting to bolster their intra-societal influence by external contacts with outsiders believed to be mystical-

ly or magically powerful, even dangerous (Helms 1992: 160). The distance factor is also seen in Appadurai's (1986: 44) classic essay, where he notes that under pre-modern conditions, the long-distance movement of precious commodities entailed costs that made the acquisition of them in itself a marker of exclusivity and an instrument of sumptuary distinction. He is also concerned with ascertaining that relatively complex, long-distance, intercultural flows of commodities are accompanied by peculiarities of knowledge; as distances increase, so too the negotiation of the tension between knowledge and ignorance itself becomes a critical determinant of the flow of commodities (1986: 41). The recipient of a foreign object consciously (even if unconscious levels of meaning cannot be excluded – Yates 2000: 167) consumes them since s/he appropriates them as part of her/his persona (Gell 1986: 112) and simultaneously defines a specific ideology as s/he uses this symbol in relation to her/his interest (Hodder 1995: 208). In that way, the person displays an aversion to different life-styles which is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes (Bourdieu 1984: 56), thus manifesting an individual's personal power.

By consuming these goods, people make firm and visible a particular set of judgements in the fluid processes of classifying other persons and events (Douglas et al 1996: 45).

To sum up the argument to this point: material culture is the prime component of this analysis but specifically with reference to its symbolic nature, setting aside its economic aspects. Through a conglomeration of key-ideas as sign, consumption, art, ideology, distance and power, I am pursuing a multi-faceted approach and an indirect link to the phenomenon of the consumption of Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit. Of course such an endeavour, especially when dealing with ambiguous definitions, could lead to infertile generalisations. Thus I consider it useful to present an overview regarding the general picture of the Late Bronze Age (LBA) in the eastern Mediterranean. In that particular context, and with a more focused interest in the relations between Mycenaean Greece and the Levant, the incorporation of my theoretical perspective should prove to be more fruitful.

Late Bronze Age Exchange Issues and Mycenaean Pottery: An Overview

In the preceding section, I purposely approached consumption through a multi-layered and purely theoretical prism, focusing exclusively on archaeological theory but also on anthropological as well as in sociological discussions where special emphasis tends to be placed on those theories that relate consumption to issues of identity and, within this, to those that represent consumption as an activity which conveys information about the consumer's identity to those who witness it (Campbell 1995: 111). At this point it becomes necessary to refer to more practical issues and more archaeologically-based notions of consumption that relate to the functional side of LBA exchange patterns as well as to patterns of consumption that have been observed elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Since exchange, however, is a universal feature of human social life, and according to some theorists lies at the very core of it (Kopytoff 1986: 68), it is often impossible to keep distinct the line between its practical and its social nature. Both sides are deeply interrelated, and thus it would be ideal to keep them in balance in order to offer a satisfactory answer to the issue of consumption of Mycenaean pottery.

The archaeological evidence we possess regarding the interrelations between the states and kingdoms of the LBA suggests that during this period there was a brisk seagoing trade of raw materials and valuables such as metal items throughout the Mediterranean (Melas 1991: 390). The publications of the LBA shipwrecks of Ulu Burun and Cape Gelidonya, both off the southern coast of Turkey, clearly demonstrate such a commercial activity in a variety of materials including Mycenaean pottery (Pulak 1988; Bass et al 1989; Bass 1991). Evidence for exchange is not only provided by the remaining material culture but also by texts or pictorial representations which call for the recognition of a wide and complex web of interconnections. Nonetheless it is a commonplace in interaction studies that societies rarely stay isolated from one other, especially during the LBA when are not dealing with static nations but entities whose fortunes and interactions with one another waxed and waned for nearly a

millennium (Cline 1994: 1). LBA Mediterranean societies were well aware of each other, they traded, they fought, they created political, diplomatic and economic relations. The exact nature of Mediterranean trade, however, is unknown. Was it uniform and officially established? Was it reciprocal, redistributive, ceremonial, symbolic or something else? Studies of LBA maritime trade have emphasized its economic aspect, prioritising modes of exchange, reciprocity and bulk exchange (Knapp 1993; Sherratt and Sherratt 1991; E. Sherratt 1999).

The attested transactions between the Aegean and the Levant are indicative of this complexity, not least as we have seen in the bulk of Mycenaean pottery found at Ugarit. Schaeffer (1939: 53-106), who began excavating Ugarit in 1929, already in 1939 wrote about the relations between the Aegean and Ugarit, based mainly on the abundance of Helladic wares in the region (for other studies following Schaeffer on the issue of interrelations between the Aegean and Ugarit see: Kantor 1947; Gordon 1966; Astour 1973; more recent studies include: Caubet *et al.* 1995; Cline *et al.* 1998, with references). Both areas had a state-centred economy which resulted in the loading of the royal storehouses. It has to be noted, however, that even at the height of the Mycenaean palaces no place in the Aegean matches the concentrated commercial wealth represented by the storehouses at Ugarit; its culturally independent growth can only be understood in the context of its interactions with the larger economic structures of the East (Sherratt and Sherratt 1991: 354). Nonetheless Aegean kings — as opposed to Aegean goods and services — do not seem to have held special importance for Egyptian and Levantine powers, at least inasmuch as those kings do not appear in Near Eastern texts (Morris 1990: 60; cf. the possible existence of the royal name *Kadmu* [=Kadmos?] in one of the letters exchanged between the kings of Ahhiyawa and the Hittites). Another exception may be provided by a text referring to Crete (Caphtor) and concerning a ship of one of the richest men in Ugarit returning from a voyage to *Kaptaru* (Astour 1981: 29). What seems necessary now is to assess the imports into Mycenaean Greece from the Levant in order to make the picture of this interaction more complete.

In its extension throughout the eastern Mediterranean, Ugaritic maritime commerce probably reached the Aegean via Rhodes; the major part of this commerce involved oil (mainly perfumed), textiles and wine as the output of Mycenaean production extending beyond mere subsistence (Knapp 1991: 40-42). Unfortunately, Linear B documents are silent regarding merchants and trade, although it is assumed that the acquisition of luxury goods and commodities was state-controlled (Knapp 1991: 41, 47). The same has been proposed by Sherratt (1982), who argues that the production of fine pottery was controlled by the Argive centre(s).

According to Cline (1995: 91-96), 82 objects he terms 'Orientalia' have been discovered in good LH I-III contexts at Mycenae; of these 37 come from Syria-Palestine and the remainder from Egypt (29), Mesopotamia (9), Cyprus (4) and Anatolia (3). From this multi-period total of Syro-Palestine imports, 27 are found in LH IIIB contexts and mainly consist of faience vessels (20) and Canaanite jars (9); the latter might be indicative of exchange as they have no intrinsic value. In addition, 23 items of Orientalia are found in tombs whereas there is a concentration of these imported artefacts in the Citadel House Area at Mycenae, a principal religious area. Cline (1995: 93) suggests that the majority of the Orientalia at Mycenae are the 'bric-a-brac' of international trade, remnants derived from the principal trade in metals, wine, oil, grain and textiles.

At first sight, the proportion of items exchanged between Mycenaean Greece and the Levant seems asymmetric as it is difficult to connect the bulk of exported LH pottery with the comparatively few imported Near Eastern artefacts. This is the point where world-system theory might seem to offer an appropriate perspective; at the same time, however, it would be very easy to be driven into serious misconceptions if no account was taken of the symbolic use as well as the symbolic consumption of things: Mycenaean pottery could (hypothetically) then be (mis)treated as simply a functional tool, necessary for the transport of goods which is additionally supported by the fact that it is relatively abundant in Ugarit. Pottery is often the victim of debates over the relation between form and function, functionality and symbolism etc. In this case, it is helpful to draw on the parallel of the 'consuming passion' of Mycenaean pottery, clearly displayed in Cyprus. But what relates the Cypriot example with Ugarit is

not only this similarity. Rather, what gives an associative content to draw on such a parallel is also the fact that almost in any context in Ras Shamra there is a co-occurrence of Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery. Several discussions have taken place about the role that Cyprus played in the distribution of Mycenaean pottery in the Levant, because there is such a close relationship between the Mycenaean imports found on Cyprus and along the Levantine coast, implying that both areas were the focus of a single trading endeavour. Cyprus was apparently the more important or primary recipient of Mycenaean pottery and perhaps controlled this aspect of trade with the Aegean (Steel 1998: 287; further discussion in Knapp and Cherry 1994: 129).

For the considerable quantities of Mycenaean pottery that have been found in Cyprus, Steel (1998: 286) argues that since they have moved from their original environment to a new cultural setting, they have been attributed with new meanings. Thus their distribution and context should be indicative of their new status. Mycenaean imports are particularly rare in settlement deposits and rubbish dumps and are most frequently found in ceremonial and more specifically in funerary contexts.

The most popular shapes are closed vessels but fine drinking sets were also imported; indeed one of the most characteristic imports in Cyprus was the pictorially decorated amphoroid krater (fig. 3, 4), a pattern that to some extent was paralleled in the Levant (Steel 1998: 291). These vases were more or less related to Cypriot elites but it is interesting that even container vases which comprise the vast majority of imports appear to be incorporated within a pre-existing framework of funerary ritual. It seems that in Cyprus Mycenaean pottery qualifies either as luxury imports or as goods whose principal use is rhetorical and social (Steel 1998: 292).

Mycenaean Pottery as a Luxury Good

During the course of this study I have deliberately avoided any extensive reference to Mycenaean pottery (and actually to any specific object) as a functional, economic commodity. It is not that I undermine this aspect in exchange patterns — especially between different geographical and cultural areas — but here I have chosen to treat objects with respect to their symbolic and ideological function, almost as ‘works of art’ (in Gell’s words) or as luxury goods. Finally, I personally consider as art or luxury what I choose to baptize that way, whatever might be my impulse: economic purposes, ideological currents, cultural traits, emotional connections.

In this section I refer to a set of criteria that call for the ambiguity of every ‘onomatopoieia’ referring to qualities like ‘luxury’ or ‘necessity’. The first comes from an established cultural view on economy (Appadurai 1986) and the other from the discipline of art theory. However irrelevant they might sound, they can give us different aspects on what can be called ‘luxury’.

Appadurai (1986: 38-40), argues for five signs of register on what objects can be attributed the label of luxury:

1. restriction, either by law or by price, to elites
2. complexity of acquisition, which may or may not be a function of real ‘scarcity’
3. semiotic virtuosity, that is, the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages
4. specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their ‘appropriate’ consumption, that is, regulation by fashion
5. high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person or personality.

According to what we have seen until now either from the archaeological record or from a theoretical perspective, Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit can be in several circumstances regarded as a luxury set of objects. But I would add that there is a sixth sign of register accounting for their symbolic differentiation that can be related to their lux-

urious (or other) nature and this is a balance between two dynamic forces: differentiation and similarity (Csikszentmihalyi *et al.* 1981). If a sign (object) is what it is by virtue of its differences from all other signs, then each sign must be made up of a vast and never-ending network of differences from other signs (Tilley 2000: 423), such that its use will promote different identities. Salient identities develop where people recognize that their own interests are served best by repeatedly uniting with holders of the same identity in opposition to members of other social identities (Schortman 1989: 55). Especially in cases where societies are increasing in complexity they require greater amounts of external input in the form of goods to supply growing populations and meet the status-differentiation needs of developing social classes (Blanton *et al.* 1984).

People have the ability to be selective, and according to their aims and incentives they develop a specific taste in order to become part of a social category; and nothing so acutely expresses social class as taste (Bourdieu 1984). This taste has the ability to act in a dual manner, both through the adoption of different levels of uniformitarian tendencies: to bring the carriers of this taste under the roof a commonly shared identity and to differentiate them from the rest of a society that does not follow this pattern.

What I consider as a special characteristic of the Mycenaean pottery as a means to influence and/or form the taste of its consumers in Ugarit is decoration. As we have already seen, a considerable amount of this class of ware is decorated with a particular preference to chariot scenes. Imagery, however faithful it may be in the depiction of a subject, cannot restrain itself from being a carrier of a message or a notion, therefore constituting an idea. Idea itself as a term comes, as Mitchell (1986: 5) reminds us in his study on iconology, from the Greek verb 'to see' and is frequently linked with the notion of the 'eidolon', the 'visible image' that is fundamental to ancient optics and theories of perception. His statement that the notion of ideology is rooted in the concept of imagery (Mitchell 1986: 4) is rendered as a firm viewpoint in this essay to support the notion that art is a potential means of ideology assignment. Gell defines his 'anthropology of art' as the theoretical study of 'social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency' (Gell 1998: 7).

His action-centred approach to art is inherently more anthropological than the alternative semiotic approach because it is preoccupied with the practical mediatory role of art objects in the social process, rather than with the interpretation of objects 'as if' they were texts (Gell 1998: 6).

The quintessential pictorial scene, the chariot, offers an explicit reference to an aristocratic lifestyle and used in hunting or warfare, thus creating direct connotations to elites (Steel 1998: 293). Moreover the fact that chariots originated in southwest Asia (Moorey 2001: 8) is an indicator for explaining both why the Levantine market and especially the high ranks of the society welcomed this motif and probably why Mycenaeans chose to use it on their pots, as a potential means to attract the market.

There is a point that has to be made here, however, which in a preliminary observation might seem contradictory with the special use of Mycenaean pottery in the Near East. This is the fact that it shows standardization of production directly related to specialization. The large numbers of Mycenaean ware produced at a limited number of centres probably was the result of a large-scale industry and indicates a high degree of craft specialization or even a monopoly on the production of these vessels (Killebrew 1998: 161). Specialization has been defined as the production of durable goods for consumption by someone other than the producer (Clark *et al.* 1990), or as production in excess of local needs (Arnold 1987), or as repeated production for exchange (Shafer *et al.* 1991), or as differential participation in specific economic activities (Costin 1991). Do these definitions and the standardization of form and value of a set of objects defined by their specialized production exclude a discursive role for these commodities? My point here is that even if we hypothesize that Mycenaean pottery leaves Greece under the label of a 'commercialized commodity of standardized nature', it is totally irrelevant to the new label it will receive outside its place of production, and its new definition could easily be accommodated under various categorizations including that of luxury objects.

Mass-produced pottery only makes sense within an assured market of a certain size (Sherratt and Sherratt 2001: 21). Demand, however, is neither a mechanical response to the structure and level of production nor a bottomless natural appetite. It is a complex social mechanism that mediates between short and long-term patterns of commodity circulation (Appadurai 1986:40-41). Demand for different objects and by different social classes has the potential to act as a variable in embedding objects on a level of value. The fact that the elite of Ugarit showed a conspicuous preference to a specific range of shapes and decoration clearly denotes that material objects have different meanings in different contexts; these meanings are ‘evoked’ out of the wide range of practical uses and implicit associations of the symbol when that appears to be in active use. The singularization of a specific type of objects by a certain group not only draws a distinctive line between them and ‘others’ but also sets them on an elaborate level of interpretation. Elites nominate their luxury objects as such through their tendency to politicise value, retain power and build barriers against the rest of the society. In this perspective, the singularization of a group of ware forms indicates that these objects might have been used as luxury objects, indicating their powerful status.

Discussion

In the discourse of this study my emphasis has shifted –to put it in Baudrillard’s terms- at the emergence of the object, that is, a thing that is no longer just a product or a commodity but essentially a sign in a system of signs of status (Baudrillard 1981). A major factor that enables the object to enter the sign stage is consumption, a kind of ‘rite de passage’ for its social life and its potential conversion into hypothetically numerous transformations.

Consumption is an active process in which all social categories are being continually redefined, the very arena in which culture is fought over and linked into shape (Douglas *et al.* 1996: 37, 45). Yet there may be conceptual meanings that are not recognised by both the makers and the users of objects. Different people might link the same object to different conceptual schemes (Hodder : 12). In this paper, my interest has focused on the way(s) that a specific class of objects -Mycenaean pottery- might have been perceived in a specific cultural environment and from different social classes. Instead of recapitulating what has been discussed thus far, first I will proceed with a schematic description of the way in which I suggest that the recipient culture received Mycenaean pottery, based on the dual nature of objects — material and ideological. The following table does not intend to be an axiomatic scheme but serves as an indication of the potential uses both of material culture and of the process of consumption. The terms used in both columns are also intended more to declare a mutual process of interaction than a passage from one stage to another.

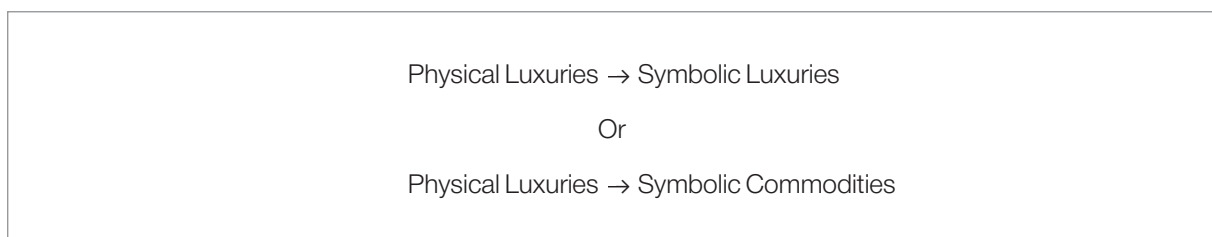
Objectivity ↔ Subjectivity
Object ↔ Sign
Choice ↔ Meaning
Economic value ↔ Symbolic value
Geographical distance ↔ Symbolic distance
Secular ↔ Ritual
Standardization ↔ Singularization
Access ↔ Power
Eating/drinking ↔ Ideology
Commodity ↔ Luxury

The left side of this table represents the real, pragmatic stage of the object whereas the right side stands for the judgement made by people at the moment and thereafter of consumption. Of course this general categorization is not so sharply distinguished. There is a stage during consumption where a kind of a buffer zone exists, when meanings are redefined and becoming ready for use. In addition, the distinction presented in this table by no means implies that such a categorization is absolute. The status of an object is infinitely negotiated and renegotiated by being placed in a context; the dialectical relationship between them both gives meaning to and gains meaning from each other. In other words, objects that have moved to another place beyond that of their production go through a process of creolization. Goods always have to be contextualized (given meaning inserted into particular social relationships) to be utilized and there is no guarantee that the intention of the producer will be recognized, much less respected, by the consumer from another culture (Howes 1996: 5). Of course the possibility of similar adoption of meaning should not be excluded. The case of conical rhyta, used as ritual paraphernalia in Greece and associated with ritual contexts in Ugarit (van Wijngaarden 1999: 21) corroborates this argument.

The case of Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit is, I believe, a perfect example of value-added objects, especially when we consider that pottery is not usually traded for its intrinsic value. In this case study there is a whole range of values -mostly based on symbolic connotations- that might have been imbued in this class of objects.

At this point there is another issue that, in my judgement, appears naturally in the course of this study.

A discussion on LBA exchange has already been made but there is an issue that requires further elaboration. In a very influential article, Sherratt and Sherratt (1991) argued convincingly for the transformation of luxuries into commodities through time. Here, I wish to suggest another scheme related to the appreciation of material culture at the first stage of its 'life' after its consumption, and to connect this with the use and appreciation of Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit. This scheme supports the notion that in this case (but for a vague period of time), a transformation of the material might follow this direction:



The first part of these inductions remains the same as I think that perfumed oil and textiles were imported to Ugarit having a luxurious nature with a differentiation occurring in the second part which, however, is more the result of a linguistic ambiguity than a pragmatic one as it is symbolism that gives the final meaning to an object. What is important, nevertheless, is the fact that when an object enters the sphere of symbolism, it can be related (through the complex balance of issues already discussed) with issues of identity that endow it with a different kind of value, more intricate to attain through solely economic transactions.

Symbolism is essentially a system through which ideas circulate; since objects are able -under specific circumstances- to enter the sphere of symbolism and manifest ideology, the ideas that are reinforced through them can themselves be treated as commodities. Moreover, although the issue of 'luxury' has already been discussed, a distinction should be made. Psychological value can also denote luxury and it can be clearly demonstrated by a modern example: a wedding-ring given as a gift from mother to daughter and from generation to generation is a carrier of memories, family values, love, thus a unique symbolic object although the same ring might have been produced in large quantities. More or less in the same way, a Mycenaean stirrup jar, despite the fact that it was

imported to Ugarit in bulk and was usually valued for its content, might have been interwoven with symbolic connotations and value that transformed it into a 'symbolic commodity': exceptional despite its existence amongst similar others, priceless despite its fixed 'real price'. The social psychology of material possessions (Dittmar 1996) is an issue not to be ignored in the relations between human and material culture.

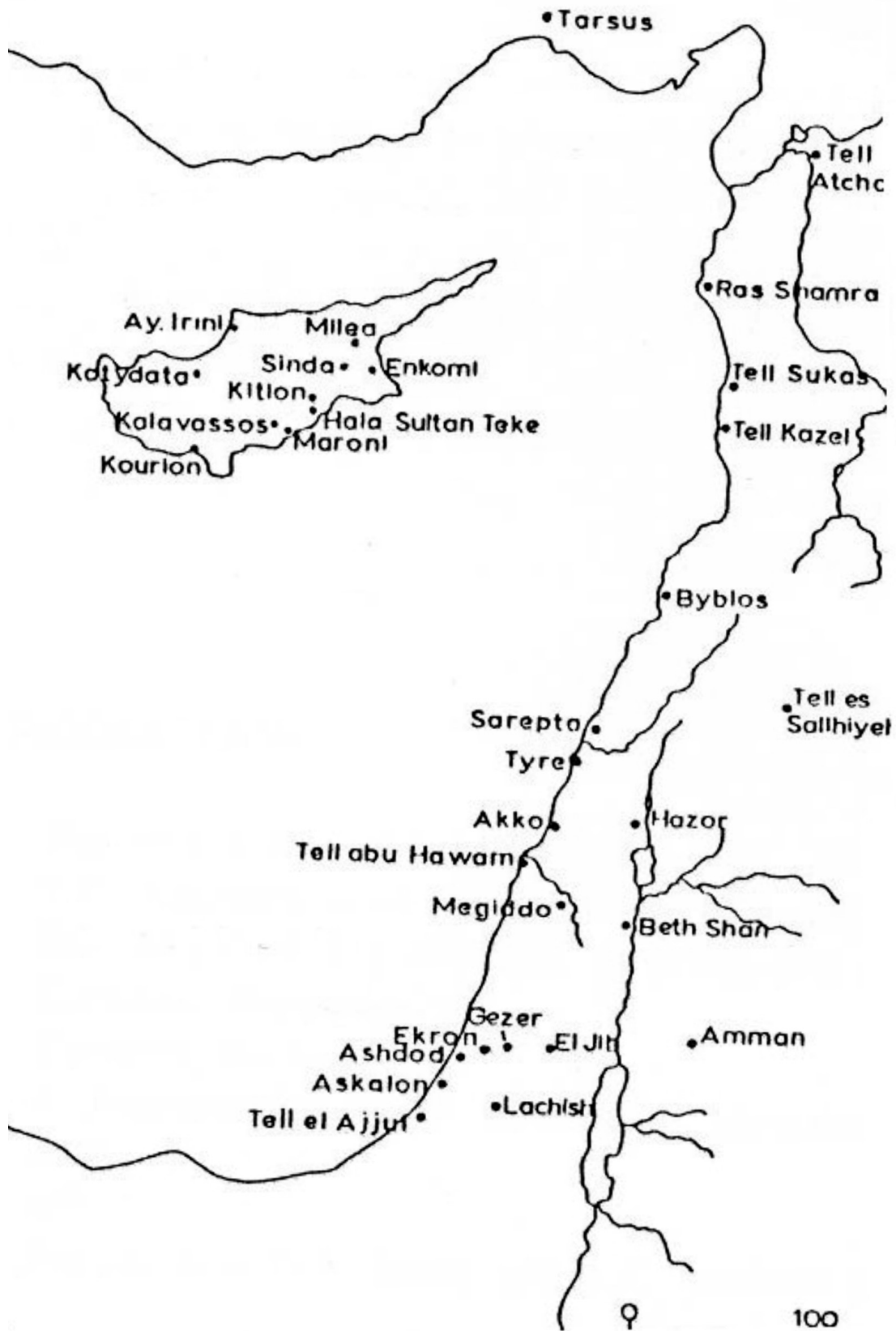
In the case of this study, however, there is an eminent differentiation in the pattern(s) through which this class of objects is distributed. Although Mycenaean pottery in general is found in all social classes, the preference of the elite for specific shapes indicates, I would argue, that the concept of value is formed on two levels. On the first level, which applies to all vessels and social classes, what gives value to the object is its provenance and its content. On the second level, which applies only to the wealthy classes as a means of sumptuary differentiation, there is the size of the object, the access to a more specialized content, the rarity of the object which is regulated by the economic power of the owner as well as its incorporation within patterns of social activity directly linked with more complex symbolic actions. To put it more simply, a middle-class citizen who chooses to possess a small Mycenaean stirrup jar denotes both his level of economic power and the integration in his everyday life of a foreign object associated with a distant culture, thus incorporating a degree of symbolic power in his social status. On the other hand, a member of a wealthy elite is declaring his higher status by assimilating goods that are more easily connected with his economic power as well as with these symbolic connotations that are sufficient to denote his societal power. An alternative scenario, based on the previous hypothesis, might be that this selective distribution of Mycenaean pottery implies the emergence of a new middle-class or a sub-elite, which in an effort to emulate elite habits adopts this set of objects (possibly amongst others) as a means to denote social status via the symbolic dynamics of material culture. I reckon that both scenarios might be applied in Ugaritic society without running the risk of being arbitrary and superficial.

Far more sophisticated than anything available in the Near East -in ceramic terms (Steel 1998: 293)- Mycenaean pottery with its fine quality and its distinct decoration would have been eagerly welcomed by the citizens of Ugarit but mainly by their elite. This elite presumably included merchants, a group that figures prominently in Ugarit's archives and not necessarily the 'people of the king' (Kuhrt 1995: 302). The selective distribution of this pottery not only manifested economic power but also brought under the same social edifice those who owned it. Even after the use of their contents these vessels retained a part of their original value. The reason for this is twofold: first, because they remained attached to the symbolic importance of their contents. Issues of corporeality connected to dress, food or bodycare have their own ideological weight, enhancing these goods with symbolic power (see Miracle *et al.* 2002; Rautman 2000; Barthes 1990; de la Haye *et al.* 1999). Second, because they become the reminders of their owner's power and status, consequently they could have acquired a special significance, being transformed into social markers denoting power, differentiation, meanings, and thus the identity of the owner. The suggested axiom: 'to have is to be' seems to find here a faithful ally.

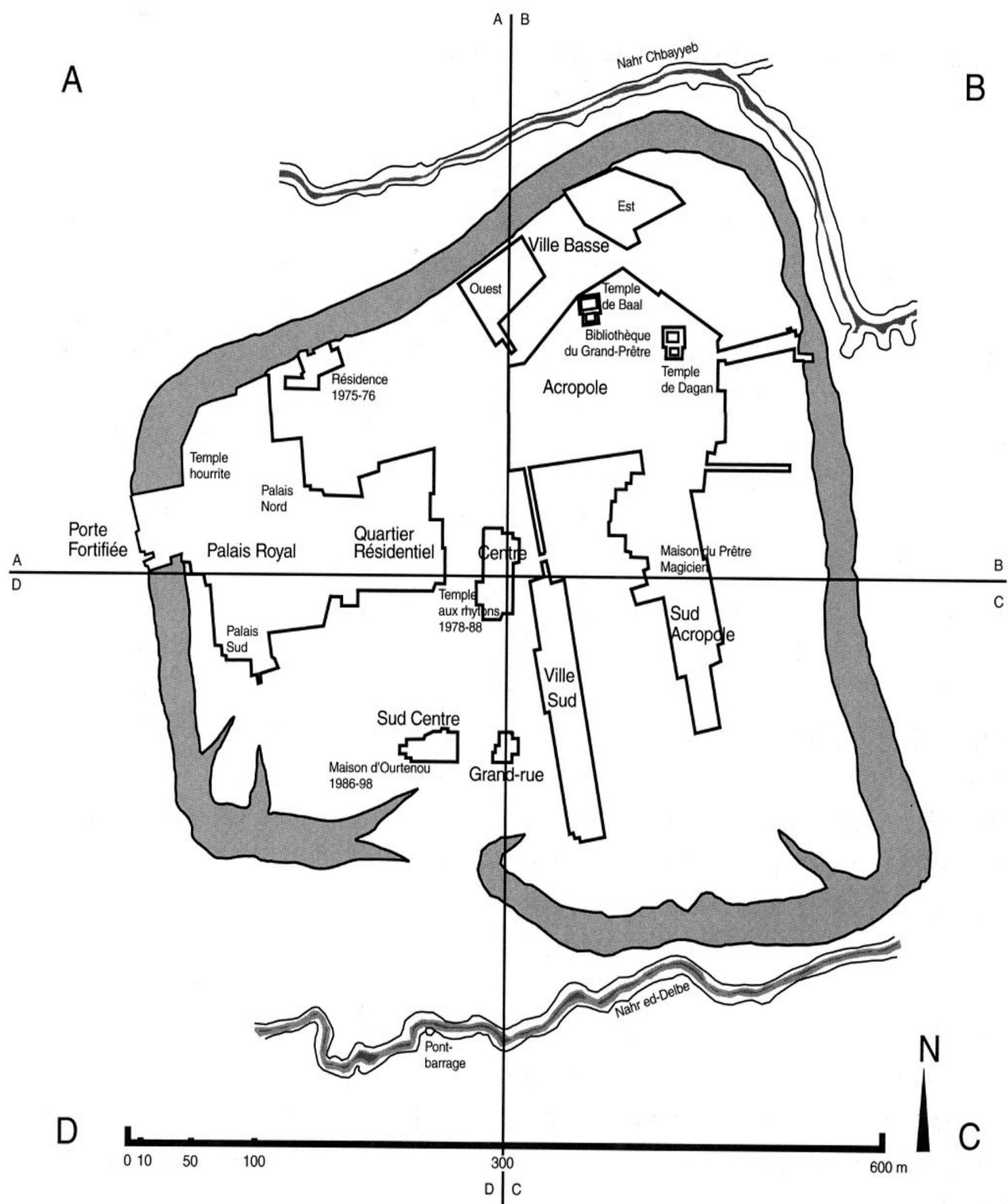
Conclusion

There can be little doubt of an increased level of interaction between the Aegean and the Levant during the Late Bronze Age. The nature of their exchanges implies that commercially oriented trade systems co-existed with gift exchanges. In this political and economic environment, the elites of different areas throughout the eastern part of the Mediterranean found a fertile ground to better their status in contradistinction to the lower classes of each society. To root their position deeper in the structure and consensus of their area of influence, they created a virtual 'shield of protection' around them that functioned on the basis of a complex and wisely-structured ideology. A means to decipher such an activity lies in a sophisticated attempt to reveal the symbolic nature of material culture and its consumption. Mycenaean pottery provided the people of Ugarit and especially the elite with an arsenal of elements pertinent to the creation of communication channels through which their power was more or less flow-

ing. In that way, that is, by enhancing an object with a range of meanings, they attempted to maintain and/or reinforce their status, codify aspects of their ideology and make their power visible through the objects' ambiguity, which serves as a critical component in status negotiations. Miller's (1987: 108) argument that the two main characteristics of the artefact are extreme visibility and extreme invisibility, no matter how abstract it sounds, not only corroborates the flexibility of Mycenaean pottery in Ugarit but also reinforces the archaeologist's quest for 'listening' to the multivocality of a deceptively mundane object.



map 1.



Map 2 (from Yon 1997)

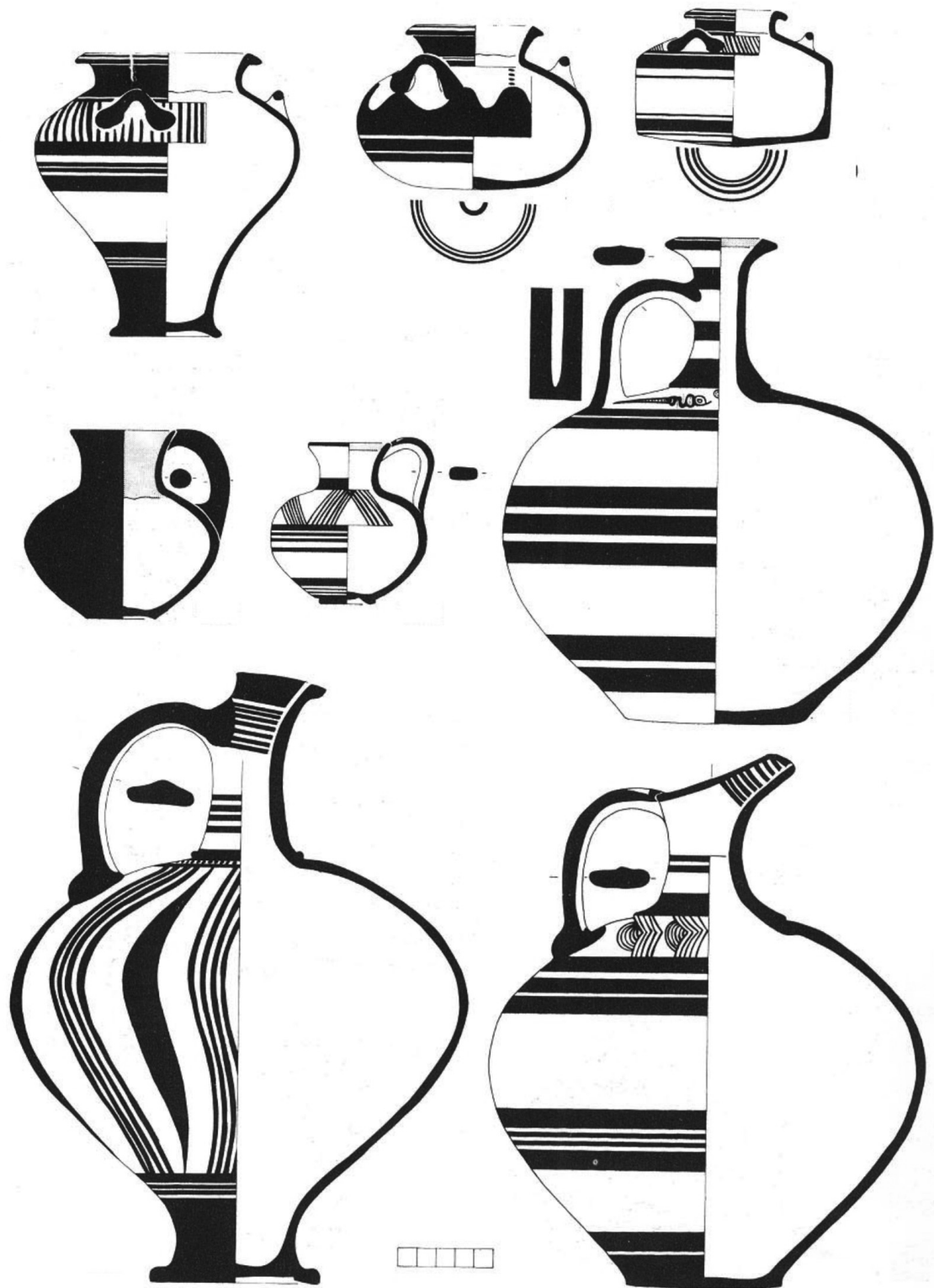


fig. 1 (from Mountjoy 1993)

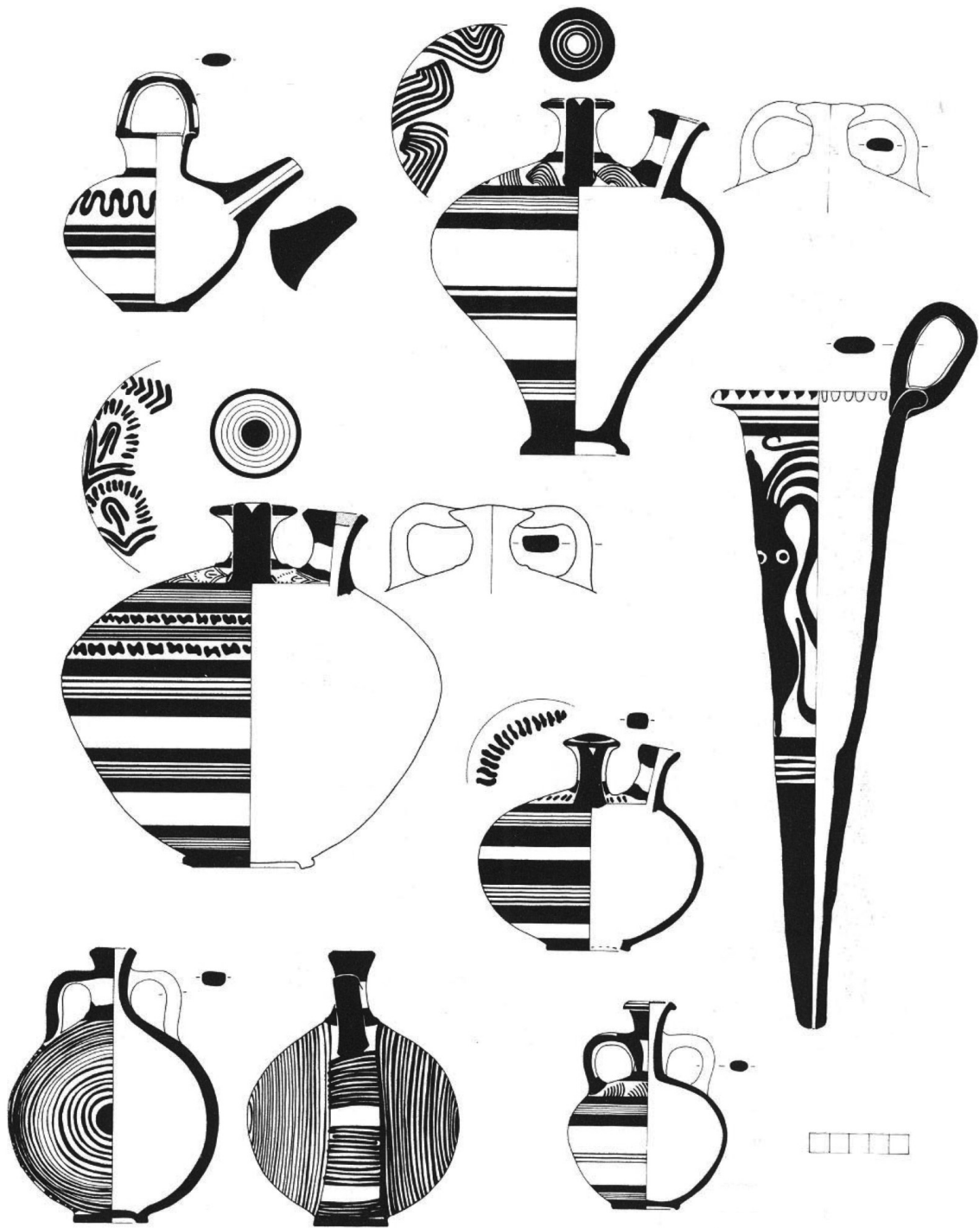
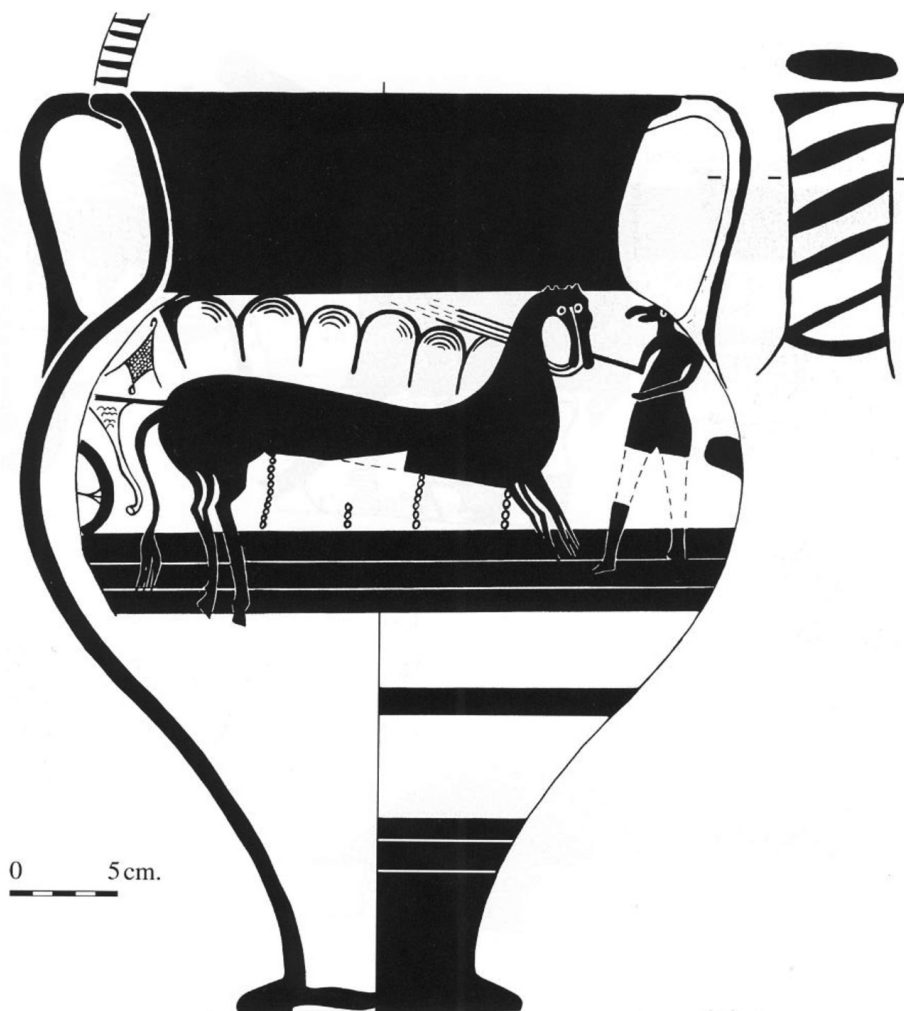
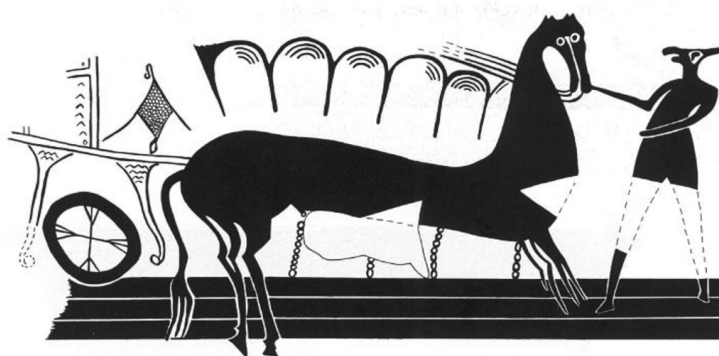


fig. 2 (from Mountjoy 1993)



Cat. no. 37



Cat. no. 37 scene A

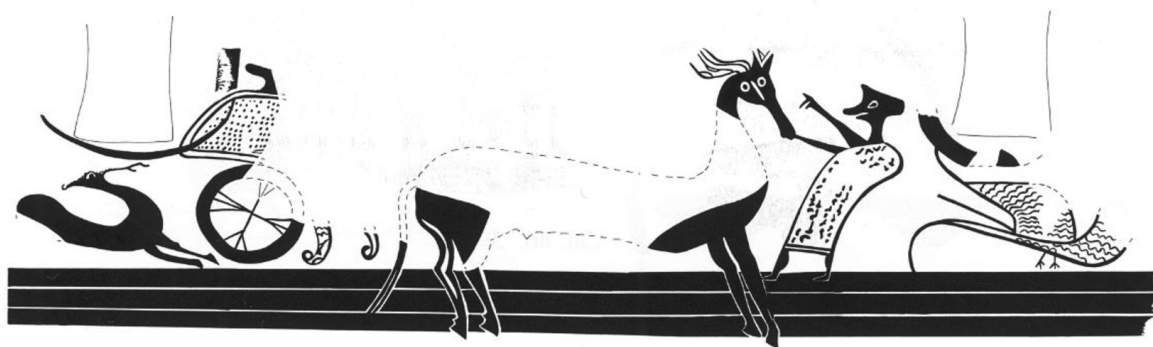


fig. 3 (from Mountjoy 1993)

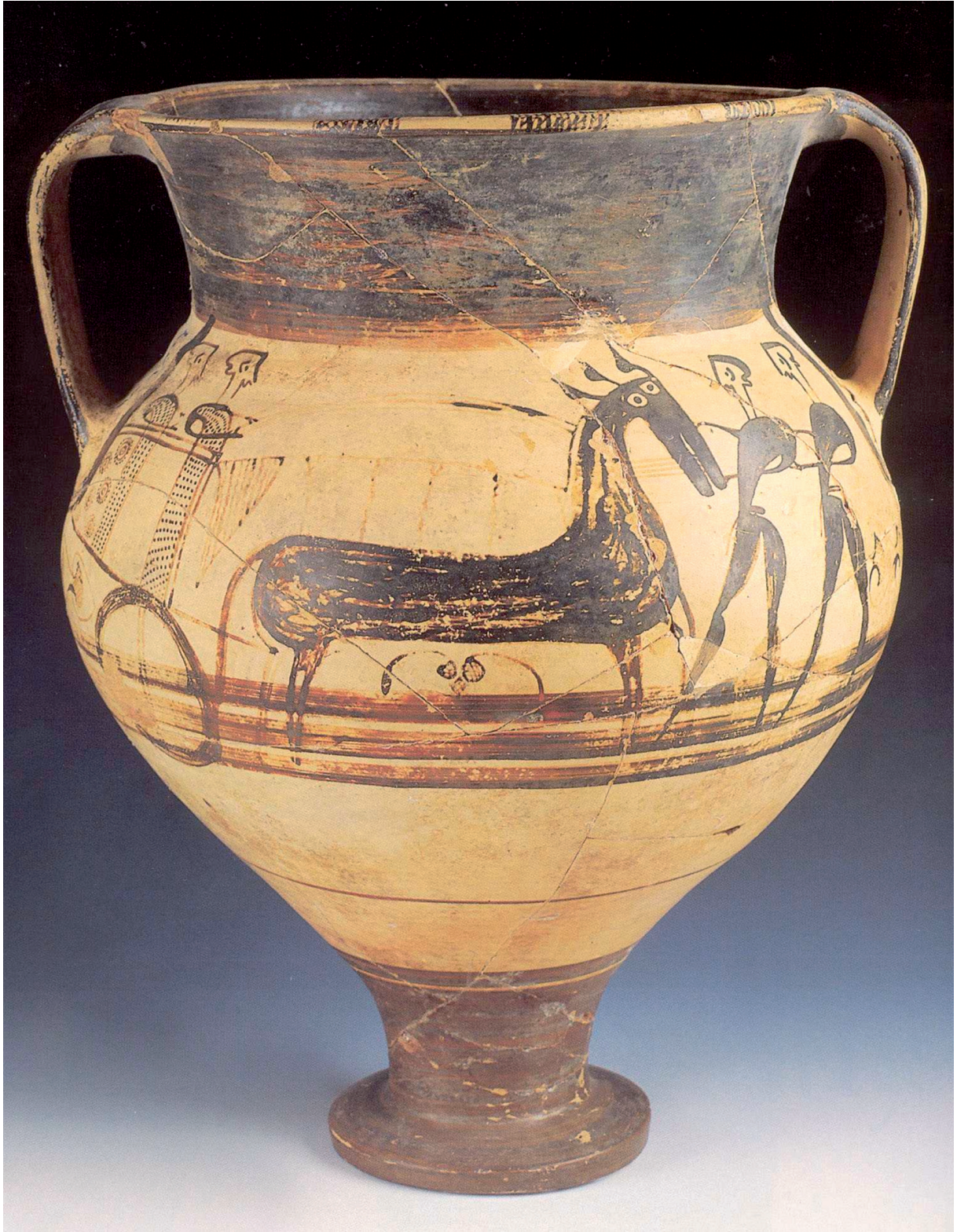


fig. 4 (from Fortin 1999)

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