

Part II

Middle / Late Bronze Ages

Egypt and Lebanon: New Evidence for Cultural Exchanges in the first half of the 2nd Millennium B.C.

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The contact between Egypt and the Levant is an long ongoing story, which started already in Predynastic times. It is the period of the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period, where these connections intensified. The well stratified site of Tell el-Dab'a in the north-eastern Nile delta with its ethnic Asiatic population, provides the ideal place to compare Levantine material in Egyptian contexts. From the late Middle Kingdom until the beginning of the New Kingdom Asiatics, probably from the Lebanese coast, settled at the ancient harbour town of Tell el-Dab'a and built up an intensive network of trade between the Nile delta and the Levant. Later they incorporated also Cyprus into this network. The imported and locally produced MB material found in the settlement layers as well as amongst the tomb material of Tell el-Dab'a leads to conclusions about Egypt's trading partners and the up and downs of sea trade and diplomatie connections. Exported Egyptian or Egyptianising objects of this period found in Lebanon provide an interesting insight into the political and economic exchanges of these two powerful regions in the 2nd millennium B.C.

The contacts between Egypt and the Near East are well known since the 5th millennium B.C.¹ (**Fig. 1**) By the Old Kingdom these contacts are well established (see recently Forstner-Müller & Raue 2008 with bibliography.) One of the main partners in the Levant in this period, especially in the late Old Kingdom, was the city-state of Byblos. After a decline in the First Intermediate Period the rulers of the first half of the 12th dynasty renewed the old trading connections with the city-states along the Lebanese coast. (**Fig. 2**) This is reflected in the famous tale of Sinuhe and in the annals on a stela of Amenemhet II found in Memphis, which indicates commercial as well as military activities in this region (Altenmüller & Moussa 1991, on the maritime aspects s. recently Marcus 2007)².

In the earlier 12th dynasty, however, Byblos does not have the outstanding position as main trading partner with Egypt (s. also Marcus 2007: 176). Other sites like Sidon became equally important (Forstner-Müller & Kopetzky 2006). Only during the later 12th Dynasty the close contact between Egypt and Byblos was re-established. Perhaps this may be linked to a historical text which is known from a mastaba at Dahshur (Allen 2008). The owner of the mastaba, Khnumhotep, a vizier under king Senwosret III and probably Amenemhet III, comes from a noble family at Beni Hasan who were traditionally in charge of dealing with the Levant for the Egyptian crown (this seems to be so important that an expedition of visiting Asiatics is even depicted in the tomb of Khnumhotep II, s. Newberry 1893: pl.

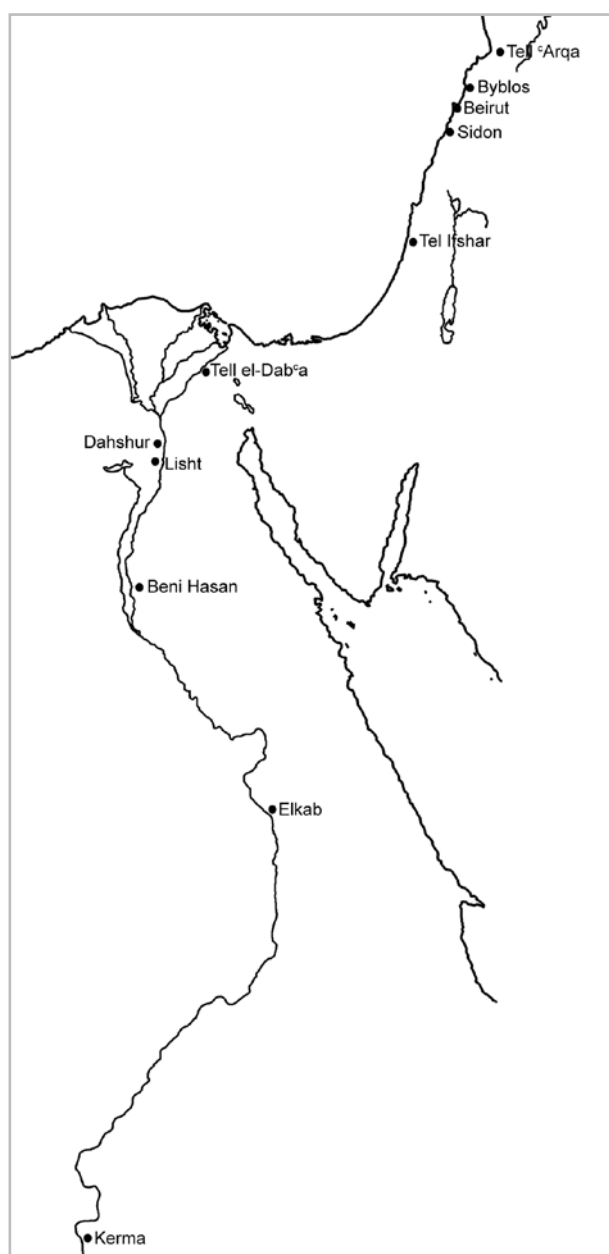


Fig. 1- Sites mentioned in the text.

XXX). The Dahshur text describes a conflict between Byblos and Ullaza (possibly located near Tripoli in Northern Lebanon) in which the king of Byblos asks the Egyptian king for help against Ullaza. It seems that Byblos was more independent at that time, perhaps this event was the starting point for Egypt to gain more control over its old trading partner.

Until recently archaeological evidence for these activities was scarce. During the first half of the 12th dynasty imports from the Lebanese region into Egypt can be cited from a tomb in Lisht North (**Fig. 3:1**). A

	B.C.	EGYPT RELATIVE CHRONOLOGY	TELL el-DABA PHASES
	1410	Dyn.	
LB I	1440	AII	C / 2
	1470	XVIII H TIII	C / 3
MB III	1500	TII ITI	D / 1.1
	1530	AI	D / 1.2
	1560	AHMOSE	D / 2
MB II	1590	XV HYKSOS	D / 3
	1620		E / 1
	1650		E / 2
MB I-II	1680	KING- DOM OF AVARIS NEHESI	E / 3
	1710		F
MB I	1740	XIII	G/1-3
	1770		G / 4
	1800	ISo IA IV	H
EB IV	1830	A III	I
	1860	S III	K
	1890	XII IS II A II	L
	1920	S I	M
	1950		N / 1
	1980	AI	N / 2-3
	2000	XI	
	2050	X	

Fig. 2- The historical chronology of Egypt and the stratigraphy of Tell el-Dabca.

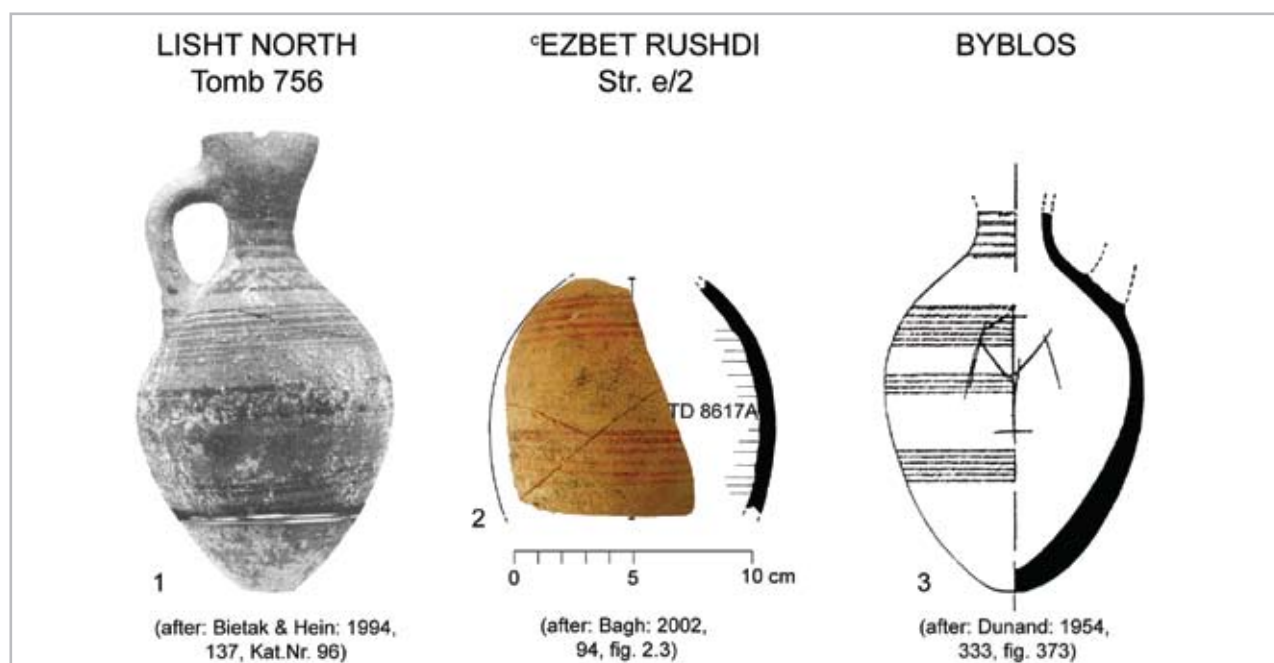


Fig. 3- Levantine Painted Wares from Lisht, Tell el-Dabca and Byblos.

chamber of this multi-chambered shaft tomb contained two “Levantine Painted Jugs” in association with Egyptian pottery which dates the burial into the period between Amenemhet II and Senwosret III (Arnold *et al.* 1995: 17: fig. 2). Fragments of similar pieces come from a settlement excavated in ‘Ezbet Rushdi (**Fig. 3:2**) in the north-eastern Nile delta (Bagh 1998: 48: fig. 22.1–4; 2000: 94: fig. 2). This settlement – beneath a temple- is dated to the period of Amenemhet II until Senwosret II³. At the site of Tell el-Dab‘a fragments of these jugs appear in the settlement layers until the very late 12th dynasty (Bagh 2002: 98: fig. 4:4). Several examples of similar jugs were found by Dunand at Byblos (**Fig. 3:3**).

While in this early stage of the MB I Levantine Painted Ware was imported into Egypt, Upper Egyptian jars were exported to the Levant. In Sidon a complete example of a globular jar with a triangular modelled rim and a round base (**Fig. 4:1**) was found just above a warrior burial in the early MB I period (Forstner-Müller & Kopetzky 2006: 54). A similar piece (**Fig. 4:2**) comes from Tel Ifshar phase B (Marcus *et al.* 2008: 208: fig. 3:1) where it was found in an early MB IIA context in association with Levantine painted

ware (Marcus, Porath & Paley 2008: 234: fig. 10; 237: fig. 11). In Egypt these jars appear in settlements (**Fig. 4:4**) and tombs (**Fig. 4:3**), from Nubia they are known only from tombs (see bibliography in: Forstner-Müller & Kopetzky 2006: 54). Whereas in the main land they seemed to be restricted to the period between Amenemhet II and Senwosret III, in the south they appear in connection with Kerma material, which partly seems to date into the early 13th dynasty (Bourriau 2004: 6–9). Obviously already out of production and use in Egypt, the Kerma people seemed to value these jars and passed them on through generations so that they became heirlooms in the burials of the late 12th and early 13th dynasty.

The most practical vessel and therefore also most popular vessel used by the Egyptians to export goods were containers made of Marl C fabric (**Pl. 1:1-2**). During the firing this fabric becomes very dense, ideal for the transport of liquids or solid food.

In the second half of the 12th dynasty a huge zîr reached Sidon (**Fig. 5**) and was reused there as a burial container (Bader 2003). This type of large storage jars shows a significant development from the period of its first appearance in the early 12th until the

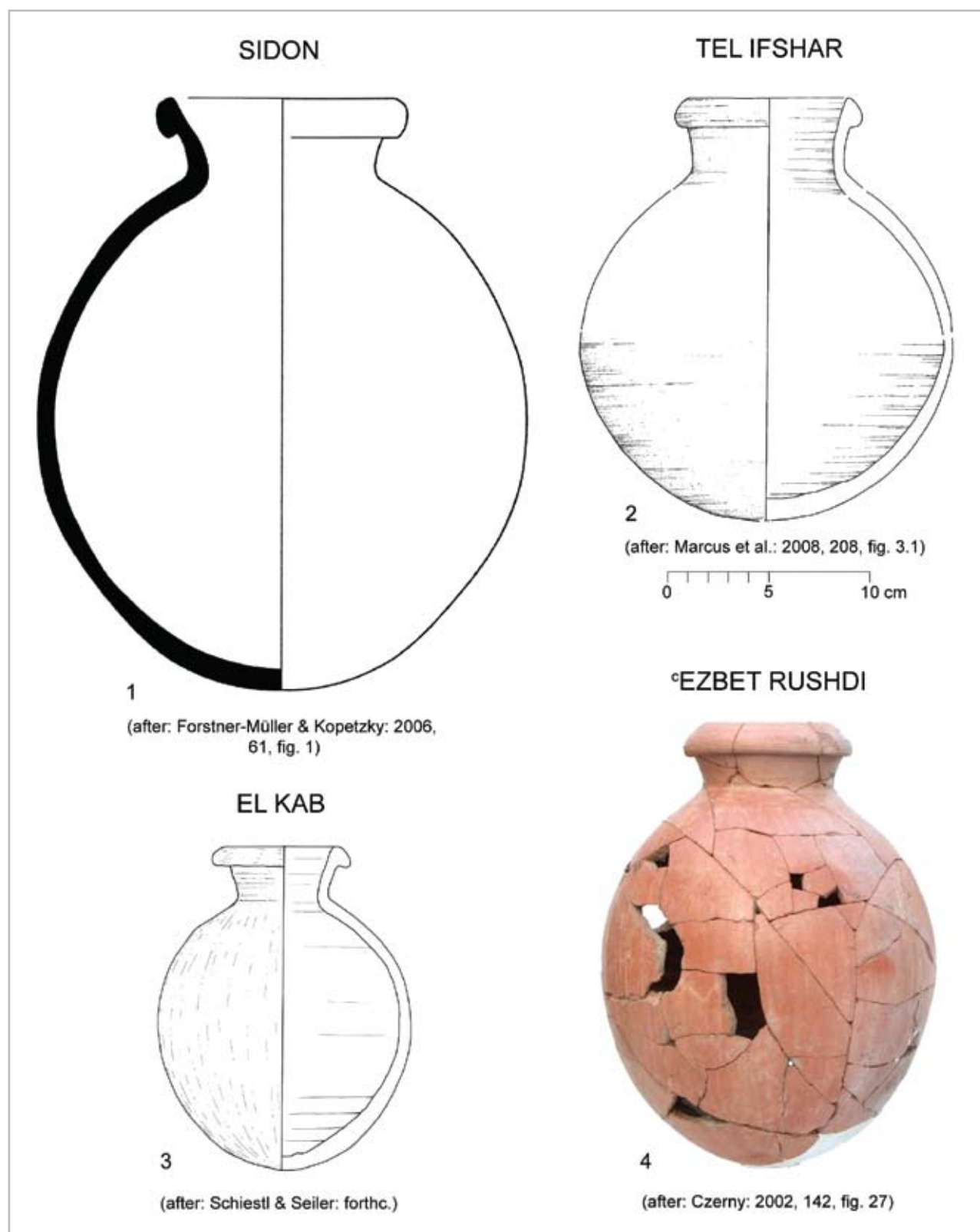
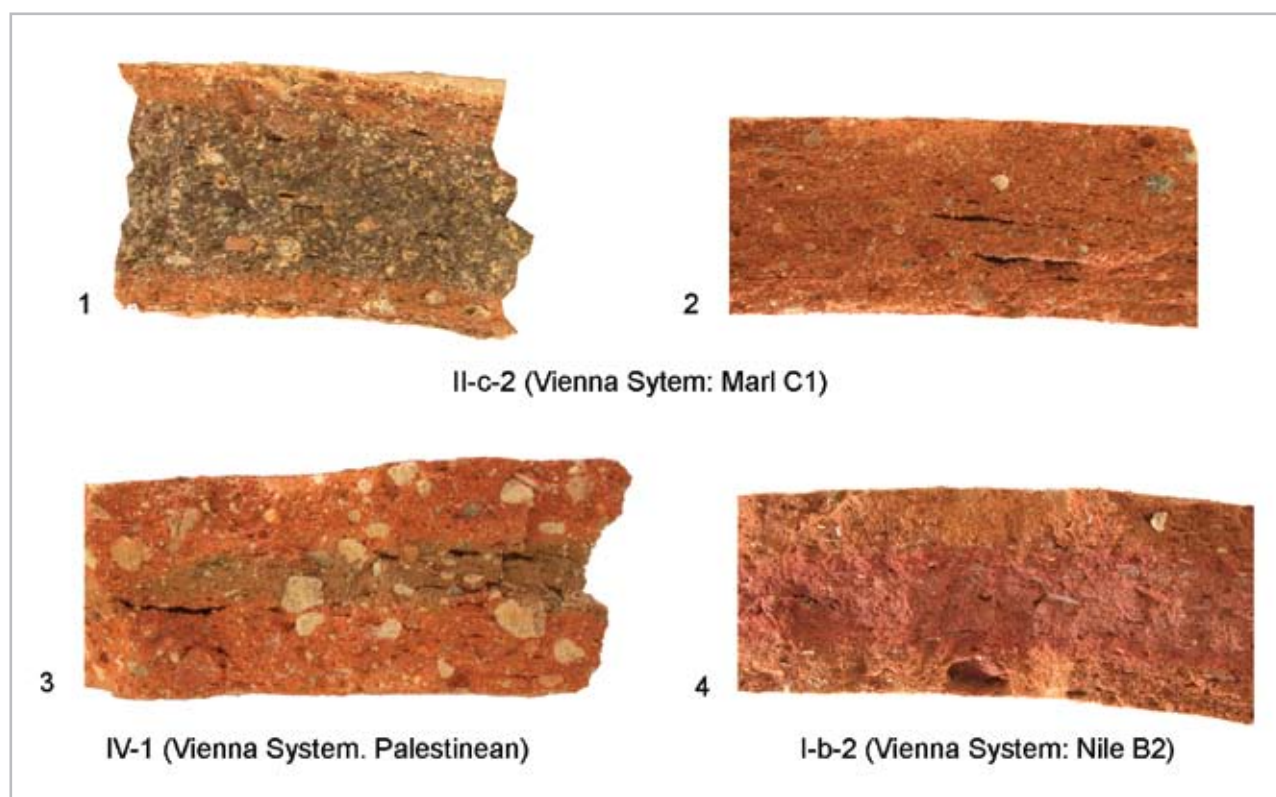


Fig. 4- Marl A jars from Sidon, Tel Ifshar, El Kab and Tell el-Dabca.



Pl. 1 - Sections from Egyptian (Marl C1 and Nile B2) and Levantine fabrics.

middle of the 18th dynasty. Its evolution is basically established on the basis of its rims⁴ (Forstner-Müller *et al.* 2006: 55: fig. 6). As a general rule there is a tendency that during the course of time the bases of these vessels get smaller, their rims narrower and bend more and more outside, while the vessels body changes from globular bag-shaped in the 12th dynasty towards biconical stretched in the New Kingdom. An example (**Fig. 5**), which was found in the tombs of Byblos and is depicted on one of Montets' plates (Montet 1928: pl. CXXIV. upper row, third vessel from left) fits into the New Kingdom group. Its tilted and stretched rim, biconical body and most likely rounded or tipped base is typical for the early 18th dynasty. A good parallel is known from the settlement of Ajjul (Petrie 1933: pl.XXXIII. 31Y²⁰ right).

Another group of Marl C vessels are large jars with corrugated necks and egg-shaped bodies. In Egypt they are known from the period of Senwosret III until the middle of the Hyksos period, with their predecessors

already during the reign of Amenemhet II. The earlier type with the upper most ridge right below the rim (**Figs 6:1 and 2**) is attested already in Sidon Phase 4 (Forstner-Müller *et al.* 2006:53: fig. 3) and found in Egypt until the middle of the 13th dynasty. The younger type - with the first ridge much lower (**Fig. 4:4**) and in most of the cases with a more sloppier finishing - appears in the middle of the 13th dynasty and occurs until the middle of the Hyksos period. A parallel is known in an early Phase 13 context at Tell Arqa (Charaf: this volume) (**Fig. 6:3**). Both vessel types, zirs and jars with corrugated necks, have a handmade body with their rims attached on a turnable device.

It was - most likely - under the auspices of the royal administration that traders from the Levant settled at the end of the 12th dynasty in the north-eastern Nile delta at a place which is known nowadays as Tell el-Dab'a. From that period onwards until the end of the New Kingdom and perhaps again in the 26th and 27th Dynasty (Forstner-Müller 2009) this place became an

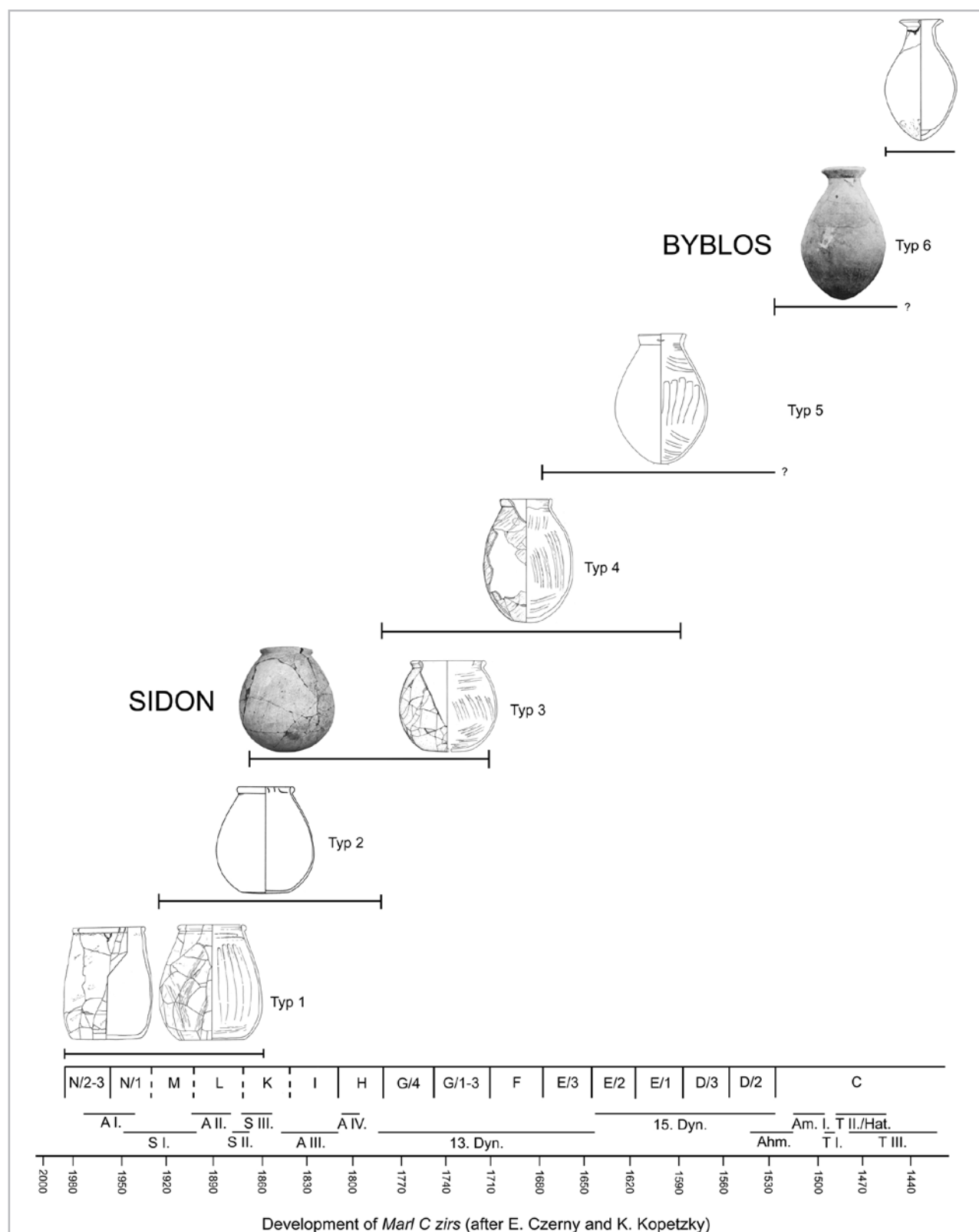


Fig. 5- Typological and chronological development of Marl C zirs.

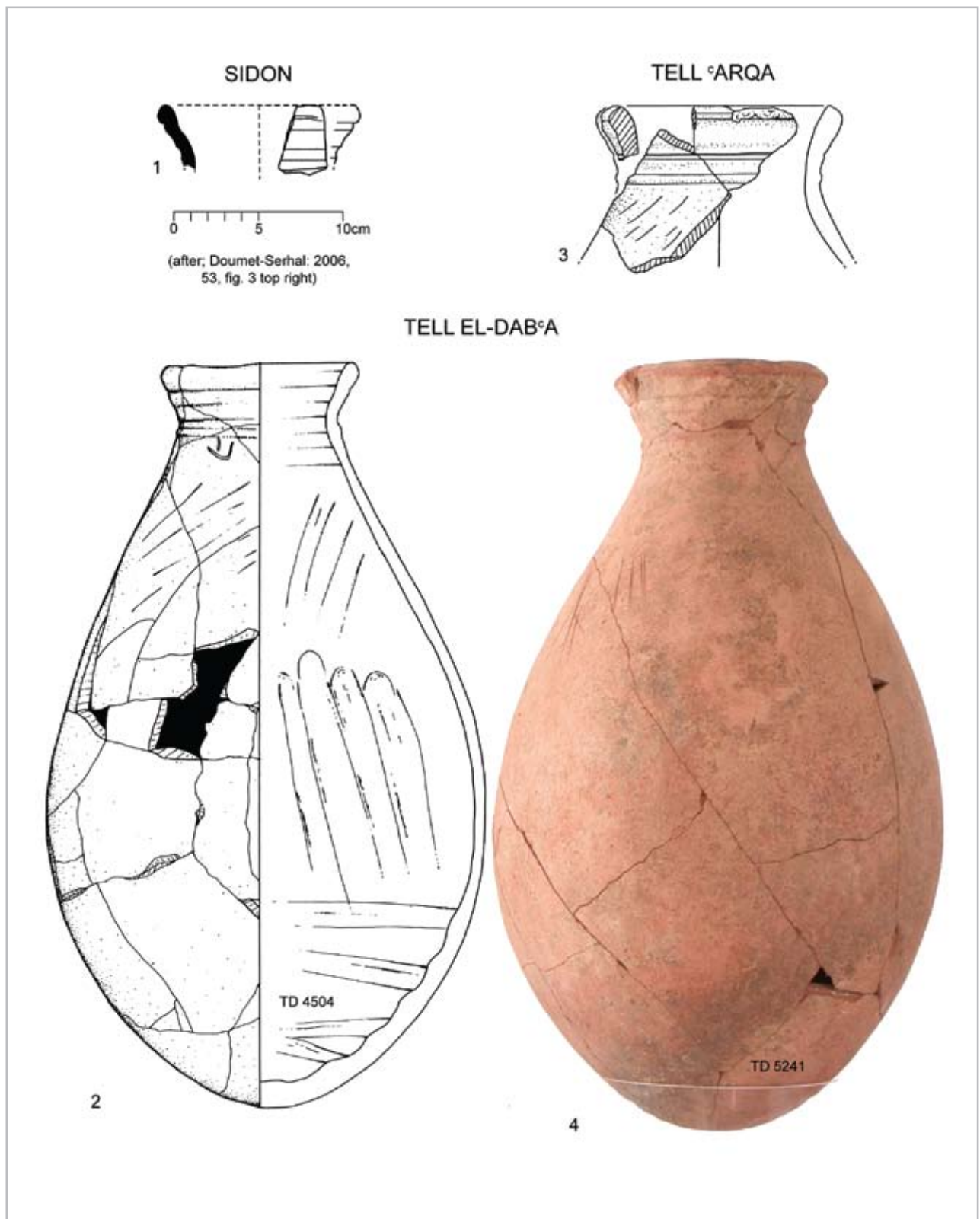


Fig. 6- Large Marl C jars with corrugated necks from Sidon, Tell Arqa and Tell el-Dabca.

important harbour in Ancient Egypt. It is therefore no real surprise that at this site a very high percentage of imported goods was found, mainly pottery, but also weapons and small finds. A Canaanite storage jar with two vertical handles, an everted elongated rim and a nearly ovoid body was located in a burial of the early 13th dynasty (Schiestl 2009: 425, Abb. 378). Above the handle this jar is incised with a pre-firing potter's mark in the shape of a crescent and a short vertical stroke beyond it (**Fig. 7:1**). The fabric is a orange-red firing *terra rossa* clay with large pieces of crushed limestone and ferrous particles (**Pl. 1:3**). The same potter's mark (**Fig. 7:2**) was found on a similar jar excavated by R. Saidah in the Kharji-tombs in Beirut (Saidah 1993-94: 151: pl. 7).

Typical for the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt are hemispherical cups made of Nile B fabric. They are the most common drinking vessels used in that time. Made on the slow wheel they have a straight rim and a round bottom which was shaped and trimmed with a knife. In the late 12th and 13th dynasty the rims are often covered with a red wash, thus creating an up to 1,5cm broad red band. Over time they develop from an open shallow bowl in the 12th dynasty to a deep and closed cup in the later 13th dynasty (**Fig. 8**) (for "cup index"

s. Arnold 1982: 61, Abb. 17; Bietak 1984: 481: fig. 2). An imitation of this kind of vessel was found in a tomb in Sidon, which contained two burials (Doumet-Serhal 2004: 139, 130: fig. 73). Although this piece is locally produced on the fast wheel, it shows the same trimming technique at the base and a broad red band at the rim (**Fig. 8** above) as the Egyptian prototypes. With its vessel index of 138,6⁵ this cup fits into the time range of the middle of the 13th dynasty, where the other objects of the tomb should be placed as well.

Quite uncommon are vessels with heads of ducks or geese attached to them, either as handles or as other decorative elements. The handle of an imported jug or jar in the shape of a goose's neck and head (**Fig. 9:3**) was found in the first half of the 15th Dynasty (phase E/1) at Tell el-Dab'a. This piece was painted with black colour and burnished. From a system of large pits which cut into a palace of the later Hyksos period, most probably belonging to king Khajan (Bietak & Forstner-Müller in preparation; Forstner-Müller 2009), two heads of these animals are known which were most likely attached to imported vessels (**Figs 9:1 and 2**)⁶. The habit of using heads of ducks or geese as decorative motives is also known from MB layers at Byblos (**Figs 9:4 to 6**) (Dunand 1950: pl. 176) either broken or attached to bowls.

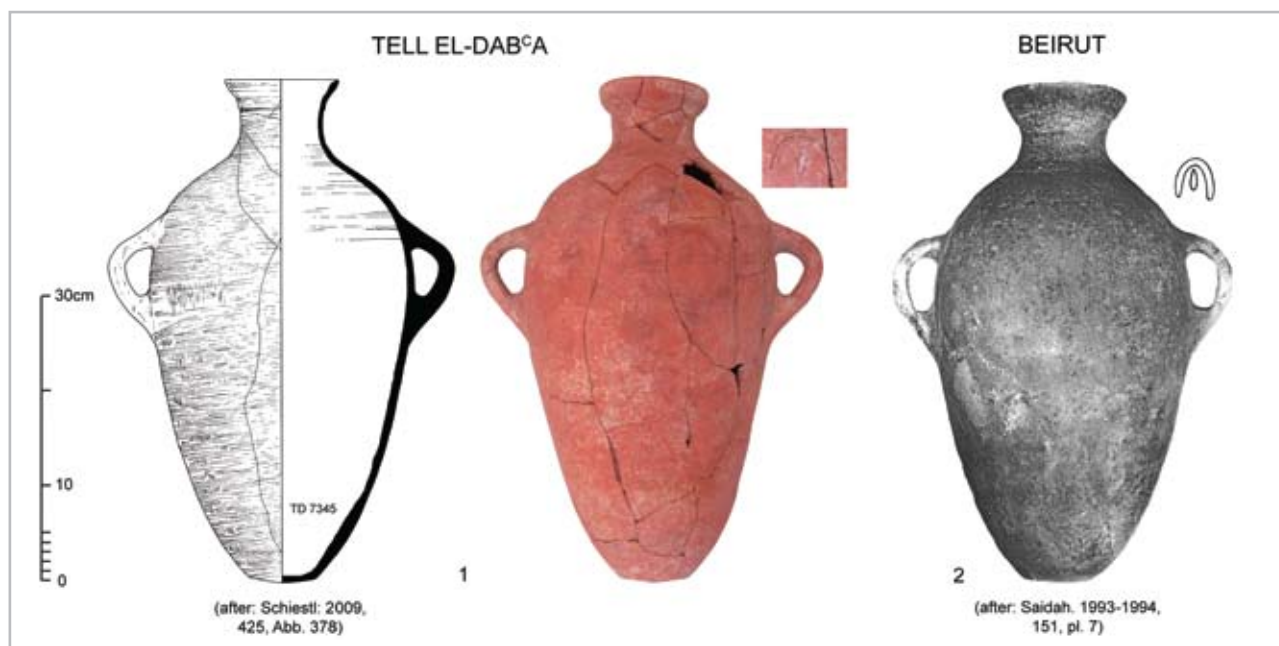


Fig. 7- Canaanite storage jars from Tell el-Dabca and Beirut.

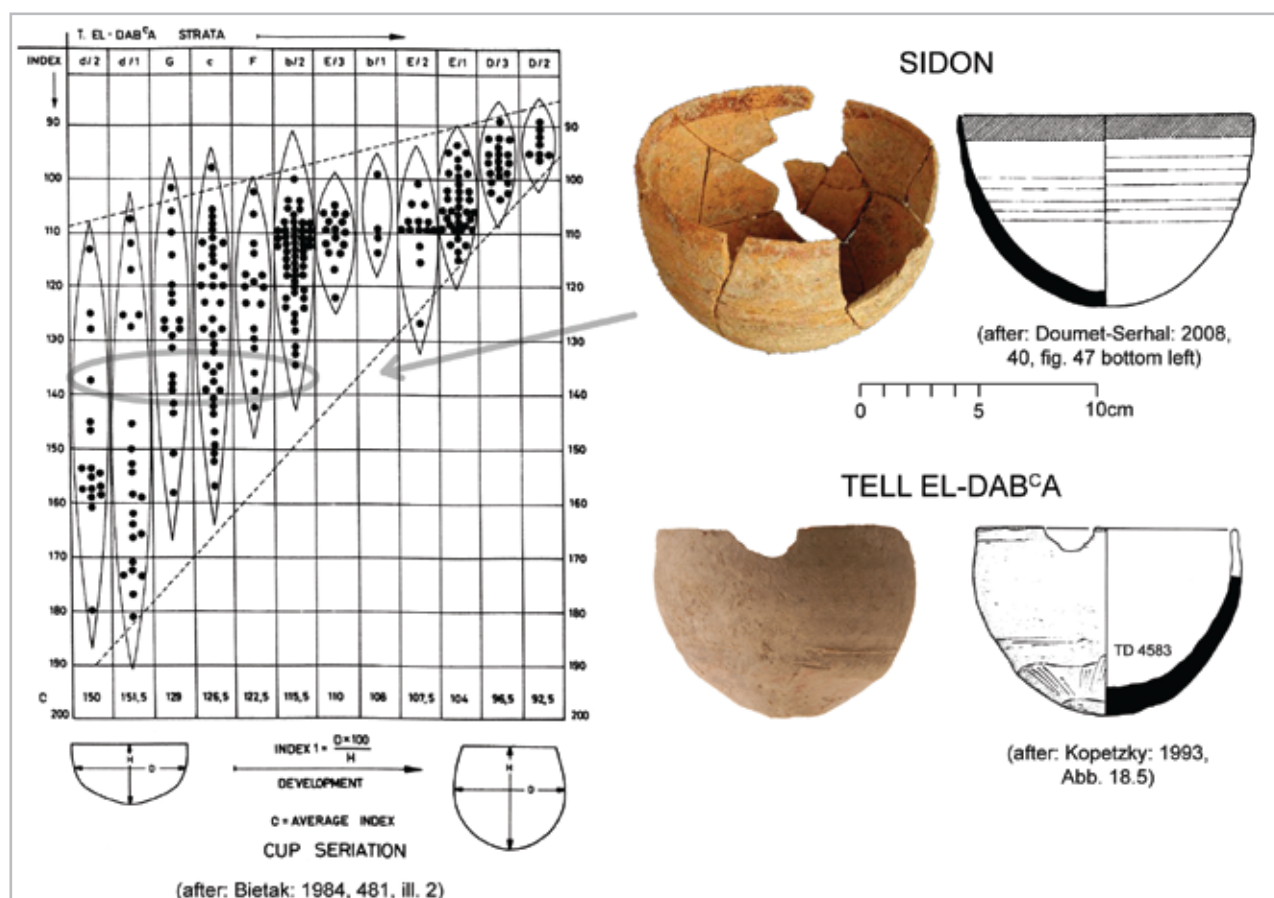


Fig. 8- Seriation of cups from Tell el-Dabca and a Sidonian imitation.

A typical “Hyksos” shape is a large storage jar made of Nile B-2 fabric (**Pl. 1:4**). This vessel appears for the first time at the beginning of the 15th Dynasty (phase E/1) and is produced until the period of Tuthmosis III (phase C). In the course of time its shape changes from a more narrow and squat jar to a large and elongated form (**Fig. 10** above). Typical for all vessels of this type is a high shoulder and a cylindrical neck with a rolled rim. In most cases the upper part of the vessel is covered with a red wash or red burnishing. In late MB Sidon such a jar (**Fig. 10:1**) was reused as a burial container (Doumet-Serhal 2004: 139). An example of a similar shape was found at Tell el-Dab’a in a layer of the early New Kingdom (**Fig. 10:2**). The Sidon piece is a good example of an early 18th dynasty find in the late MB II period and emphasizes the fact that this period lasted into the early New Kingdom.

It is rather difficult to look at the amount of goods that had been exchanged during the above discussed period, simply to the fact that most of the organic goods are not preserved and a lot of the inorganic imports were raw materials which were processed in their particular country of destination. For the time being our information depends mainly on written records like the above mentioned annals of Amenemhat II. Nevertheless the site of Tell el-Dab’a has many containers preserved in which some of these goods were imported. While the origin of many of these vessels is still under investigation, for some of them a more precise picture can be stated. Although Tell el-Dab’a was an important point of reloading goods and therefore has a much higher amount of imports preserved than many other sites in Egypt, one has to keep in mind that during the late 12th dynasty

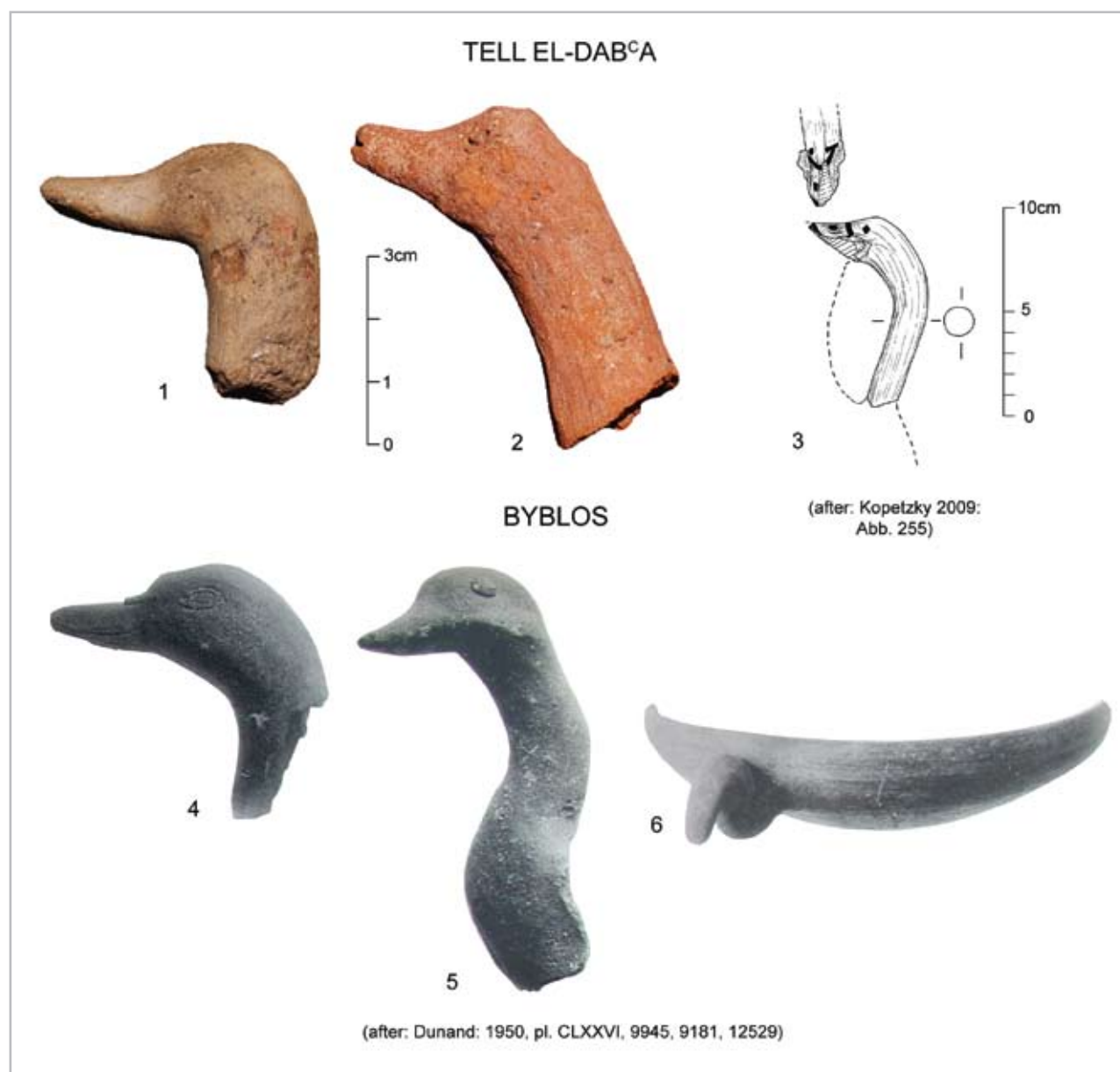


Fig. 9- Vessel applications in the shape of ducks and geese from Tell el-Dabca and Byblos.

(ph. H, s.: fig. 2) most of these imports did not stay in ancient Avaris, but were shipped southwards to the capital *Iṭ-tawy* and from there distributed all over the country. At the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th dynasty the archaeological evidence reflects the textual sources. The bulk of the imported Canaanite storage jars and juglets seem to come from the Lebanese region (**Fig. 11**), with Byblos being

most likely the main trading partner (TD fabric: IV-1). Imports from the Akkar plain (TD fabric IV-5) are not so common though attested through this period at the site (Kopetzky 2007/2008).

This picture changes (**Fig. 11**) with the middle of the 13th dynasty (ph. F), presumably at the time when the capital near Memphis was abandoned by the Egyptian crown and therefore lost its importance.

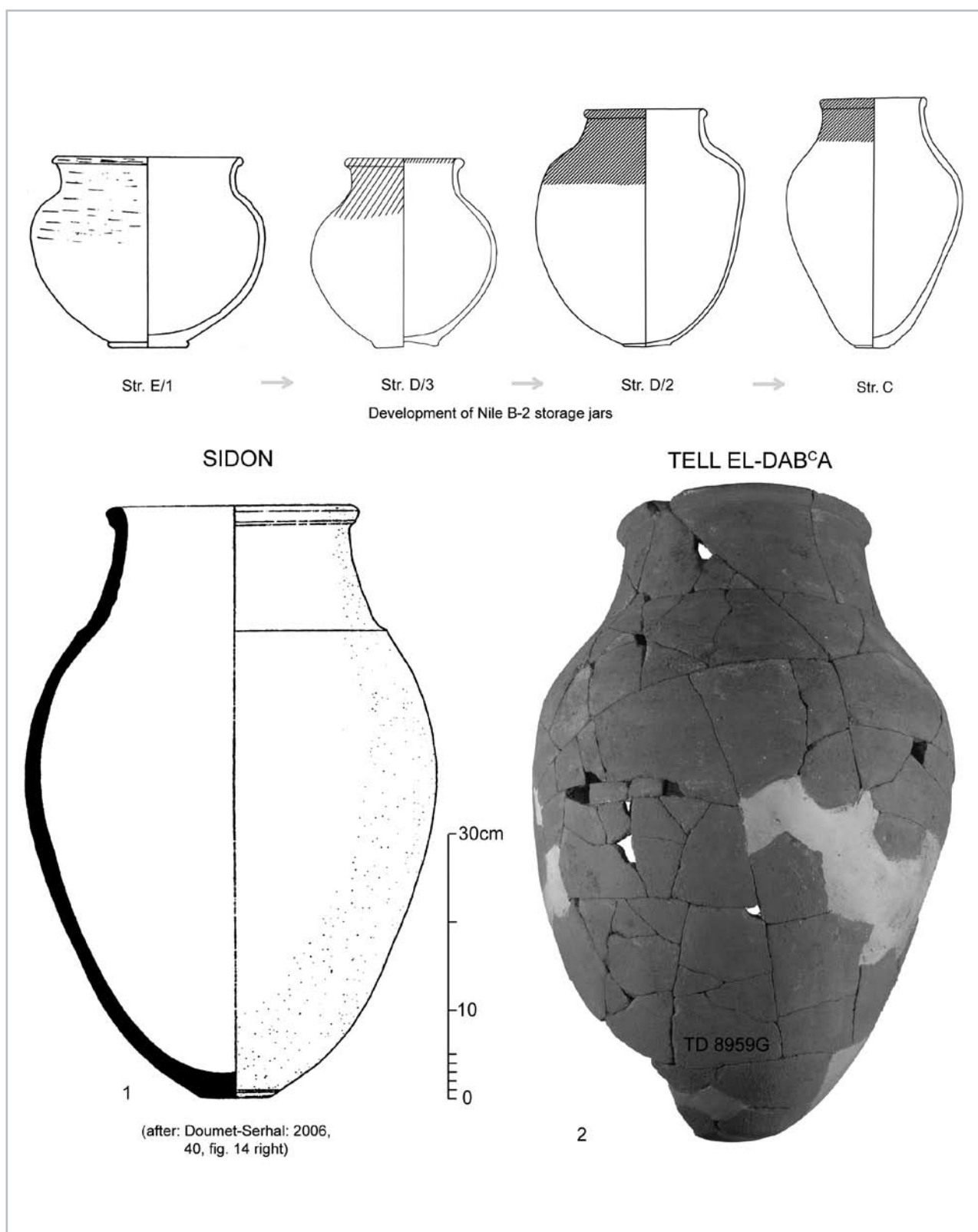


Fig. 10- Typology of large Nile B2 storage jars with early 18th dynasty examples from Sidon and Tell el-Dabca.

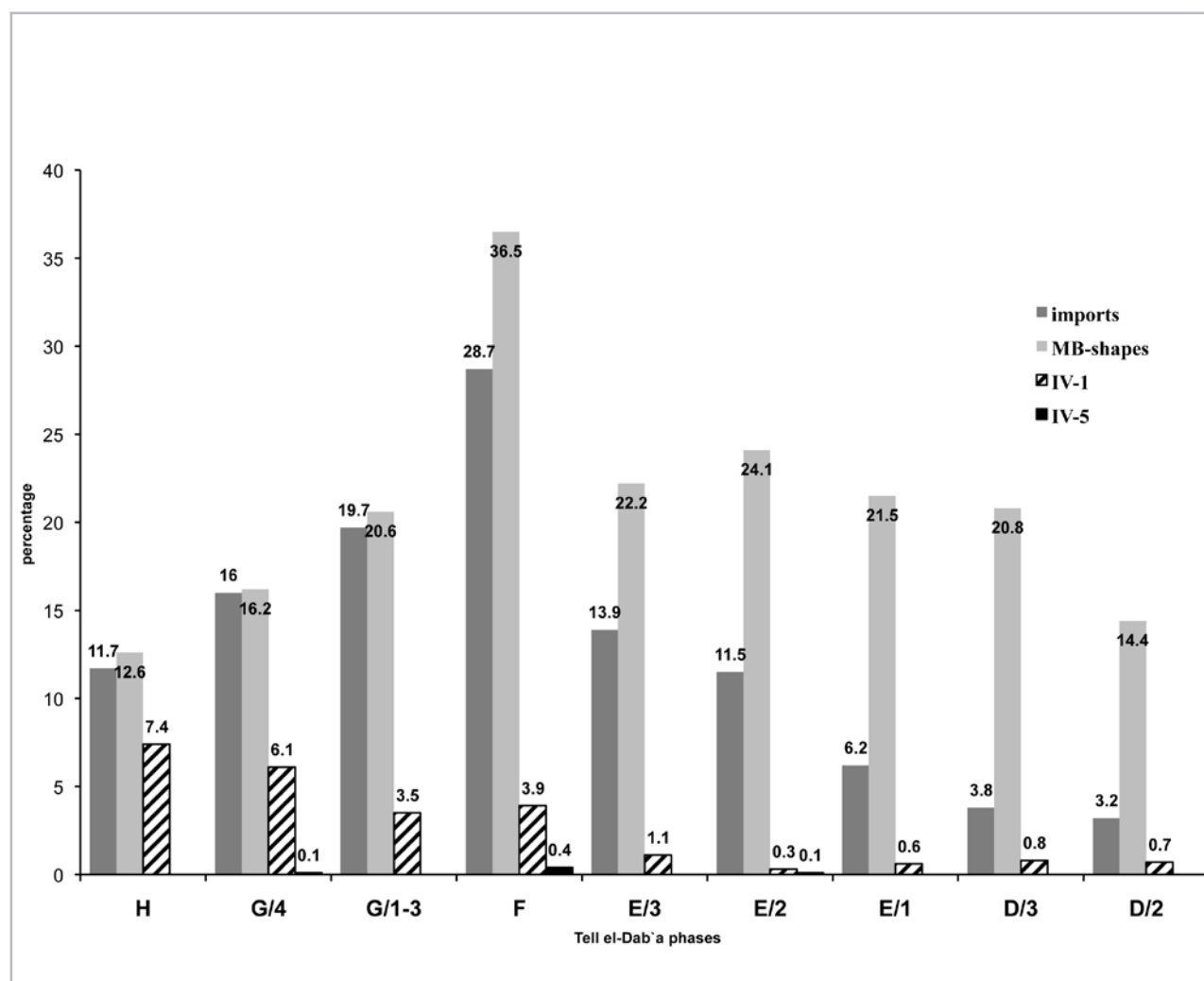


Fig. 11- Statistical development of all imports, all MB-shapes (imports and local production), imported Canaanite storage jars from the region of Byblos and the Akkar plain to Tell el-Dabca.

From that point onwards a lot of goods stayed in the meanwhile wealthy town of Avaris, which had become the trading centre for sea-going ships to the Near East.

The climax of the imports is during the middle of the 13th dynasty, followed by a constant decline during the MB II until the end of the Second Intermediate period. The lack of the whole country of Egypt as a hinterland and political problems including trading blockades with the powers in the South (Thebes) during the Second Intermediate Period lead to a decrease of commercial consumers and consequently to a steady

decline of imported goods from the Levant. In this period the sea-trade shifted in favour of Cyprus which had become one of the main trading partners for the Hyksos kingdom. Nevertheless the contacts between the port of Avaris and the Lebanese coast continued, although on a much smaller scale than before. They seem to be quite intense during the very beginning of the 18th dynasty (Kopetzky 2009) as the Egyptian pottery found at Sidon and Byblos indicates. This is also supported by the textual evidence known from the early 18th Dynasty⁷.

Notes

1- The first imported vessel is attested in the Badari culture (Friedman 1999: pl. II-3). For this reference we are indebted to N. Math.

2- Recently discovered ships found at the Red Sea Coast at Wadi Gawasis and Ayn Sukhna show that the Egyptians had a broader knowledge and skills in seagoing business than thought before. For Wadi Gawasis s. recently Bard & Fattovich 2008, for Ayn Sukhna Pomfrey 2009.

3- For this information we are indebted to Ernst Czerny.

4- Only a handful of complete vessels have survived, while fragments of broken rims exist in nearly every pottery collection of these periods.

5- According to the cup index which is valid for the northern part of Egypt which was most likely the trading partner for the Levant. (For the discrepancy in the development between Northern and Southern Egypt since the ongoing 13th Dynasty s. Seiler 2005: 130-31)

6- For using this material for this article we thank David Aston, who is publishing the material of this pit.

7- Kopetzky 2008: 226-227.

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