

“Monkey Business in the Bronze Age Aegean: The Amenhotep II Faience Figurines at
Mycenae and Tiryns”
Article Review

This article looks at the figurines discovered dating to the Bronze Age depicting monkeys inscribed with the cartouche of Amenhotep II. Written by Eric H. Cline in 1991, the article discusses what the possible reasoning for the appearance of the faience figurine in the Aegean and how this showed the wide-ranging network links between different civilisations. An Egyptian faience figurine is a manufactured glassy substance made through the process of grinding quartz or sand crystals with different substances such as potassium and copper oxide; it would then be workable to shape and heat, which would bring out the bright colour in the figurine. The figurine featured in the article is that of a monkey, though the figurine is fragmented and missing a partial amount of the back, with the left side of figurine being in a better-preserved condition than that of the right; the legs of the monkey are also missing.

The figurine is, due to its design and the cartouche featured on the monkey's arm, undoubtedly of Egyptian origin; monkeys and baboons were a prevalent animal in Egypt, due to the trade around the continent of Africa including exotic animals from other areas. Ancient Egypt has a polytheistic religious system with Gods being thought of as anthropomorphic and represented by different animals seen in or around Egypt; and as the Gods were thought to live among humanity, animals of a species associated with a God were believed to be a manifestation. Monkeys and baboons, while also representing the God, Babi who was the deified representation of the hamadryas baboon, they are also the main animal representation associated with the God Thoth. In the article, Cline refers about how there were very little depictions of monkeys in Mycenae culture and never feature in the paintings found on walls. This fact can be seen as an example of the links between Egypt and the Aegean, as Cline discusses in the article, because of the possible significance the figurine possessed. Monkeys, due to their links to Thoth and the lack of familiarity people of the Aegean had with the animal, would have been seen as an exotic and expensive gift to receive as a faience figurine. Alongside this, the cartouche was inscribed with the name of Amenhotep II, who was the seventh ruling Pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty in the New Kingdom. To receive an object bearing the name of royalty was seen as a potent gift, diplomatic envoys between civilisations would deliver gifts of these magnitude to other rulers, as a show of the authority and wealth of that ruler. Cline discusses in the article that the significance of the figurine may have a great value in establishing networks between Egypt and other civilisations. The figurine depicts an animal scarcely known in the Aegean and linked to a prominent God in Egyptian religion (Thoth was believed as the creator of writing and languages, and a God of the Moon) while being inscribed with the cartouche of a Pharaoh from the Eighteenth dynasty, which features Egypt's most well-known and wealthy Pharaohs. This would have been a powerful gift to give as a diplomatic show of power from Egypt to the Aegean.

The article looks in depth at the possible reasonings for the appearance of the undoubtedly Egyptianized figurine of the monkey and cartouche of Amenhotep II. It looks at the

possibilities that significance of the monkey has as a gift, collectable item or as pieces of a royal game set. There are known links between the Aegean and Egypt, with the New Kingdom period being the most well networked period of Egypt, most likely due to its vast wealth compared to those period previously (especially following the Second Intermediate Period and its non-Egyptian monarchies). There is good detail and discussion given to the contextual evidence and the different possibilities of the purpose the figurine served at the time of its exchange. The Aegean and Egyptian links were seen across both civilisations history in different ways and capacities, therefore the idea that the figurine served as a gift, either of greater significance between high status individuals, as a game, or 'bric-a-brac' (to be displayed as a collectable item) would not be unfounded.

The article states about how, due to the rarity of monkeys and baboons being seen in the Aegean, that the two discovered figurines would most likely have been exchanged or imported from Egypt to Mycenae and Tiryns at around the same time, which serves as a representation of how, at the time of exchange, far the links Egypt had with those civilisations as far out as the periphery of Egypt's network links.

Overall, the article does well at looking at the different ideas relating to the relationship and link between the Aegean and Egypt, during the reign of Amenhotep II, by looking at the significance and intent behind the figurine of the monkey. The idea of there being strong links, furthered by small gifts such as this with such significant context (i.e. the inscription of royal cartouches) is one that can be seen and backed up by the article, other contextual evidence and discoveries; though the idea of the figurine possibly simply being a collectable item does offer a different side to the relations between Egypt and the Aegean.

Eric H. Cline, "Monkey Business in the Bronze Age Aegean: The Amehotep II Faience Figurines at Mycenae and Tiryns", 1991, *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30102870>
WorldHistory.com, Joshua J. Mark, "Egyptian Faience", 2010, Available at: https://www.worldhistory.org/Egyptian_Faience/