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INTERCULTURAL CONTACTS IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

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EGYPTIAN IMITATIONS OF CYPRIOTE BASE RING WARE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN¹

Felix HÖFLMAYER

Introduction

The most important indicator of intercultural contacts in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean is undoubtedly the occurrence of foreign pottery, particularly during the Late Bronze Age period. Generally, pottery indicates trade of certain commodities, for which the vessel proper just served as a container. This especially holds true for closed vessel shapes like the abundant Canaanite jar or amphora as well as the Mycenaean stirrup-jar (Aston 2004; Kelder 2002-2003). Only in some cases can it be argued that it was the pottery vessel itself that was traded, especially when open forms are found. Fragments of Kamares ware found in Middle Kingdom contexts in Egypt and the Levant, or the occurrence of Late Cypriote White Slip 'milkbowls' could be mentioned as examples of pottery types which were apparently traded for their own sake (Kemp and Merrillees 1980: 1-102; Fitton *et al.* 1998; Merrillees 2003; Eriksson 2007).

Cyprus, situated in the centre of the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore a key player in the thriving trade network during the Late Bronze Age, exported pottery in abundance, for example Base Ring ware (hereafter BR), Red Lustrous Wheel-Made ware and White Slip ware among others, to Egypt, Syria and Palestine and to a lesser degree to Crete, the Aegean islands, the Helladic Mainland and Anatolia (Merrillees 1968; Eriksson 1993; Eriksson 2007). The occurrence of Cypriote pottery is not only of key importance for chronological questions but also shows the appreciation of, and demand for, Cypriote products all over the Eastern Mediterranean. Due to the widespread occurrence of the BR *bilbil* juglet, a booming trade in opium has been suggested (Merrillees 1962; Koschel 1996; Bisset *et al.* 1996).

While the presence of foreign containers can inform us about traded goods, the local imitation of foreign shapes (sometimes even in different materials) presents a more differentiated picture about the appreciation

¹ I would like to thank David Aston for correcting my English.



Fig. 1. A typical example of Egyptian BR-jug imitations made of serpentine: British Museum EA 36404. Height: 14.3 cm; Diameter (rim): 7.3 cm (Courtesy of the British Museum).

of the foreign product in the importing society. For example, imitations of Mycenaean stirrup jars in Egypt are known in various materials including pottery, faience and stone (Vermeule 1982: 153; Bell 1983). The presumed container of opium, the BR *bilbil* juglet, known in Egypt especially from funerary contexts, was also imitated in different materials, even in glass (Goldstein 1982). Another type of the Cypriote BR class, a jug classified by Robert Merrillees as type II (Merrillees 1968: 161), was frequently imitated in stone in New Kingdom Egypt (Fig. 1). Slight modifications such as a disc-shaped rim instead of an everted one and an upright rather than a sloping neck apparently happened due to technical reasons and the limitations of the material. The spatial distribution of this type is not confined to the Nile valley alone, but specimens were also found in Palestine, Syria and even in the Aegean area. This type of stone vessel is therefore of considerable interest for intercultural considerations not only because of the apparent appreciation of and/or demand for a foreign product or vessel form in Egypt, but because of the occurrence

of imitations at sites far away from the place of production. This paper aims to present an overview of the occurrence of Egyptian stone imitations of BR-jugs (type II after Merrilllees) in the Eastern Mediterranean in order to demonstrate the close connections between Cyprus, Egypt, the Levantine coast and the Aegean during the Late Bronze Age.

BR-jug imitations found in Egypt

Chronology and exact dating is pivotal for our understanding of intercultural contacts and the changing political and commercial conditions in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age. However, for stone vessels imitating BR-jugs, differing dates can be found in recent literature. While Jacqueline Phillips suggested in her revised dissertation a date during the late Second Intermediate Period (hereafter SIP) or the 18th dynasty (Phillips 2008: 132 (no. 248)), Barbara Aston dated this type in her fundamental work on Egyptian stone vessels to the 18th dynasty (Amenhotep I to Tutankhamen) (Aston 1994: 151 (type 174)). This dating was also accepted by Rachael Sparks in her work on stone vessels from the Levant (Sparks 2007: 36). Christine Lilyquist dated squat versions of this vessel type from Thutmose I onwards (Lilyquist 1996: 153). A somewhat narrower timeframe was suggested by Janine Bourriau: she dated these vessels from the time of Thutmose III to Amenhotep III (Bourriau 1982). In order to check these differing dates, the most important Egyptian contexts will be briefly reviewed.

There are no contexts in Egypt confirming an early beginning of this type during the late SIP, as proposed by Jacqueline Phillips. However, for two contexts an early New Kingdom date (reign of Amenhotep I) was suggested, implying a start of this type at the very beginning of the 18th dynasty.

The earliest vessel cited in the work of Barbara Aston, dated to the reign of Amenhotep I, comes from Western Thebes, Dra^c Abu el-Naga, tomb AN B which was excavated by Howard Carter during the winter of 1914 (Aston 1994: 151 (type 174); Carter 1916). However, there are some problems regarding the date as well as the stone vessel material itself. According to the excavation report, ‘only *débris* of broken stone vessels’ (Carter 1916: 151) was found, and the vessels depicted in the publication record only show general shapes believed to be represented in the fragmentary material and not actual objects (Carter 1916: pls. 22.1-17). In addition, it is not possible to decide which fragments came from the tomb, which were found in the vicinity, or even which were bought from a local antiquities dealer (Polz 2007: 196). Furthermore, the type cited

by Barbara Aston does not seem to be a typical BR-jug imitation. It lacks the characteristic cords around the neck where the handle is attached and the overall shape seems to be too squat. But even if this shape represented some kind of BR-jug, there remain serious doubts whether tomb AN B can really be attributed to Amenhotep I (as originally suggested by Howard Carter, see Carter 1916: *passim*). Several reasons, including location and architectural layout of the tomb, make it far more likely that it belonged to an unknown member of the royal family of the early New Kingdom (Polz 2007: 194-7; Polz 1995). Therefore, this context is not suitable to argue for an early beginning of BR-jugs in stone in or before the reign of Amenhotep I.

Another doubtful example is known from the Saqqara Teti pyramid cemetery. It was found in an unnumbered tomb at the northern enclosure of the pyramid together with a badly preserved rectangular wooden coffin, some gold or electrum, a seal of Amenhotep I, a scarab, two Cypriote Black Lustrous Wheel-Made ware juglets, some pottery and stone vessels (Firth and Gunn 1926: 68). The vessel in question was published as being a 'lower part of small alabaster ampulla (*as* pl. 44 A7)' (Firth and Gunn 1926: 68; emphasis mine). The photograph depicted on this plate therefore again shows only the vessel type which the excavators thought was represented by their fragment of the 'lower part'. The dating on the other hand rests solely on the seal naming Amenhotep I, which surely can only provide a *terminus post quem* for the time of burial. This context also cannot confirm a beginning of this vessel type at the start of the New Kingdom.

The earliest dateable example from a well-documented context seems to be a vessel found by the German excavations at Dra' Abu el-Naga in the western chamber of burial K91.5 (Seiler 1993: 71).² The vessel was made of breccia and is 19.4 cm high (Seiler 1993: 71). The tomb was used for several burials and according to Anne Seiler, who studied the objects from K91.5 and K91.7 for her M.A. thesis, it can be dated to the early 18th dynasty up to the time of Hatshepsut (Seiler 1993: 97).

More secure evidence for this vessel type comes from the reign of Thutmose III. Although the following pieces were acquired on the art market (today they are in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, the Museo Egizio in Turin and the Elsa and Dr. Pierre Bloch-Diener Collection in Bern, Switzerland), a date during the reign of Thutmose III seems most probable. The vessels can be associated with the famous General

² I thank Anne Seiler who generously sent me a copy of her thesis.

Djehuty, the 'hero of Joppa' and the tomb of the three foreign wives of Thutmose III.

Several artefacts, including stone vessels and many without clear provenance, have been associated with General Djehuty (Lilyquist 1988; Reeves 1993). According to Papyrus Harris 500, he served under Thutmose III and captured the town of Joppa by hiding his troops in baskets that were transported into the city. Two BR-jug imitations (Turin 3228 and Leiden AAL 37) mention his name and titles. The vessel in Turin, acquired in 1824 together with other stone vessels attributable to Djehuty, is 22.5 cm high and made of crystalline alabaster. The overall form is rather depressed, and the base is missing. The two cordlike belts around the neck are positioned directly under the rim (Lilyquist 1988: 11 (figs. 8-9), 58 (no. 8)). The vessel in Leiden was acquired in 1828 from Anastasi. Like the jug in Turin its material is crystalline alabaster. The vessel shape belongs to the tall variant and measures 27.5 cm in height. The cords attaching the handle to the vessel are not separated but form a single belt which is positioned in the upper half of the neck (Lilyquist 1988: 11-2 (figs. 10-1), 58 (no. 10)).

The objects from the so-called 'tomb of the three foreign wives' were also not found *in situ*, but acquired by Howard Carter from a dealer in Luxor, and, later on, by the Metropolitan Museum New York on the art market (Lilyquist 2003: *passim*). The tomb itself is located in Western Thebes (today called Wady Qurud D1) and was discovered in the winter of 1916 by locals who sold the greater part of the objects to Mohammed Mohassib, an antiquities trader in Luxor. Included in the burial assemblage were two jugs imitating BR-ware, today in the Metropolitan Museum New York and the Elsa and Dr. Pierre Henri Bloch-Diener Collection in Bern, Switzerland (New York: Lilyquist 2003: 145 (no. 83), 212 (fig. 135.b); Bern: Lilyquist 2003: 145 (no. 84), 212 (fig. 135.f)). Both vessels are made of travertine. The specimen in New York (MMA 26.8.18) is 20.7 cm high, whereas the vessel in Bern measures 29.2 cm. Both belong to an elongated variant. Christine Lilyquist argued that the three females were interred more or less at the same time and suggested a date not too long after the death of Hatshepsut, perhaps around the middle of the 15th century BC (Lilyquist 2003: 333).³ Most objects found in this tomb came in sets of three, one specimen for each of the buried wives. As only two BR-jug imitations were found, it is tempting to

³ Based on a 1479 BC date for the start of Hatshepsut/Thutmose's III reign: Kitchen 2000: 49.

assume that a third vessel was originally interred in this tomb. Interestingly, the British Museum is in possession of at least three BR-jug imitations which were acquired in the late 1920s from Mohammed Mohassib, the same dealer who sold the other objects from the looted tomb to Howard Carter (BM AE 58789 and BM AE 59071). Although there is no secure evidence that one of these jugs actually came from this tomb, it is at least a noteworthy coincidence.

In the tomb of the 'fan-bearer on the king's right hand' Maiherpri (KV 36) another example was found in a closed context (Fig. 2). This tomb was discovered and excavated in 1899 by Victor Loret for the Egyptian Antiquities Service and published a few years later by Georges Daressy as part of the *Catalogue Général* series of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Daressy 1902). The BR-jug imitation (CG 24008) was made of alabaster and is 33 cm high (Daressy 1902: 13 (no. 24008), pl. 4.24008). It is again of elongated shape, with the two cords situated on the upper half of the neck. Originally the tomb was dated to the reign of Hatshepsut as this was the only royal name found in the tomb, written on a sheet found with the mummy itself (Daressy 1902: 58 (no. 24099), pl. 12.24099). Later it was argued that it should be dated to the time of Amenhotep II or Thutmose IV because his title is not known from the time of Hatshepsut. Furthermore, it was said that his 'Book of the Dead' papyrus and the style of his coffins would also confirm a date during the reign of Amenhotep II or Thutmose IV (Reeves 1990: 146-7). Recently however, Catherine Roehrig again argued for a date during the reign of Hatshepsut or Thutmose III prior to the destruction of Hatshepsut's monuments some twenty years after her death (Roehrig 2005: 70-1). Although the date for the tomb of Maiherpri seems to be disputed, fragments of BR-jug imitations that were found in the tomb of Amenhotep II (KV 35) confirm the continued production and use of this vessel type (Lilyquist 1995: 42 (no. 99), 107 (fig. 108)).

Another example associated with members of the royal family was found in the tomb of Yuya and Thuyu (KV 46), discovered and excavated by James Edward Quibell in 1905 and subsequently published by him in the *Catalogue Général* series (Quibell 1908). The BR-jug imitation (CG 51105) was found sealed with a cloth. It was made of alabaster and is 34.5 cm high (Fig. 3) (Quibell 1908: 49 (no. 51105), pl. 26.51105).

Two further specimens come from the Saqqara tomb of the high official Aper-El, who served as a vizier during the reign of Amenhotep III and the early years of Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) (Zivie 1990: 129 (fig. 78)). One of the vessels does not have the typical cords around the



Fig. 2. BR-jug imitation from the tomb of Maiherpri (after Daressy 1902: pl. 4, no. 24008).



Fig. 3. BR-jug imitation from the tomb of Yuya and Thuyu (after Quibell 1908: pl. 26, no. 51105).

neck but surely belongs to the same type of stone vase (Lilyquist 1996: pl. 26.4).

The last vessels that can be securely dated come from the tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62), discovered and excavated by Howard Carter. Two examples of the tall variant made of calcite were found in that tomb, measuring 41 and 35.5 cm in height respectively (JE 62144 and JE 62143) (El-Khouli 1993: 24-5 (no. 49), pls. 22.a-b; 27 (no. 53), pl. 22.c). Interestingly, both vessels are inscribed with the name of Amenhotep III and his wife Tiy. They were apparently reused for the somewhat hasty burial of Tutankhamun and are not much younger than the examples from the tomb of Yuya and Thuyu.

Concerning the date range of this type in Egypt, the following points can be made. BR-jug imitations in stone are definitely attested during the reign of Hatshepsut and/or Thutmose III (Dra' Abu el-Naga K91.5, burial assemblage of General Djehuty, the tomb of the three foreign wives of Thutmose III) and were still in use in the Amarna period (tomb of Aper-El). As the specimens from the tomb of Tutankhamun were re-used

vessels, it seems that the production of BR-jug imitations ceased in the Amarna period. For the time span from the beginning of the reign of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III up to the Amarna period, a continuous production and use of this vessel type can be documented in Egypt. This date range is of course subject to modification if new finds add more evidence to the present corpus.⁴

Egyptian BR-jug imitations from the Levant and the Aegean

Egyptian imitations of BR-jugs were not confined to the Nile valley but found their way to the Levant and even to the Aegean, and reflect Egypt's economic connections abroad. It is not the aim of this paper to present a catalogue of all Egyptian BR-jug imitations found outside the Nile valley; instead, only few contexts will be discussed that seem important with regard to intercultural connections during the Late Bronze Age.

Several vessels are known from Ras Shamra/Ugarit, coming from tombs (lower city west, tomb LXXV) (Caubet 1991: 227 (no. RS 11.210); Sparks 2007: 305 (no. 321)), the town centre (fosse 1237) (Caubet 1991: 242 (no. RS 78.109 + 81.3284)) or without documented context (Sparks 2007: 305 (no. 322)). A vessel from nearby Ras Ibn Hani was found in the North Palace, room IV (Sparks 2007: 305 (no. 320)). From the Egyptian administrative centre at Kamid el-Loz, four imitations of BR-jugs have been published (Miron 402, 404, 410 and 411). They come from the so-called 'Schatzhaus', a mortuary complex in use during the 18th dynasty (Miron 402: Miron 1990: pl. 23.1; Lilyquist 1996: pls. 26.1-2. Miron 404: Miron 1990: pl. 24.1; Lilyquist 1996: 153, pl. 21.1; Sparks 2007: 305 (no. 318). Miron 410: Miron 1990: pl. 23.2; Lilyquist 1996: 152, pls. 20.1-2; Sparks 2007: 305 (no. 319). Miron 411: Miron 1990: pl. 24.2; Lilyquist 1996: 153, pl. 21.2. For the date of the 'Schatzhaus', see Hachmann 1996). Further examples come from Beth Shan (Level IX, Locus 1385) (Sparks 2007: 305 (no. 317)) and Tell el-Ajjul (Cemetery 1000 and tomb 1037) (Sparks 2007: 304-5 (no. 312-3)). At least six specimens of Egyptian BR-jug imitations were found in the mortuary

⁴ There are more BR-jug imitations known from Egypt which have not been discussed here, as they add no further information concerning the question of date; for example, vessels from the tomb of Kha (Schiaparelli 1927: figs. 120, 138), from a tomb in the Asasif (Lilyquist 1995: 6-7 (n. 39)), from Abydos tomb D11 (Randall-MacIver and Mace 1902: pl. 1) or Aniba SA 10 (Steindorff 1937: 144, 216 (no. 15)). Furthermore, there are numerous BR-jug imitations in museums all over the world without documented contexts. A complete catalogue of BR-jug imitations is currently in preparation by the author.

complex (so-called 'airport-temple') at Amman, which was discovered during bulldozing operations in 1955 (Hankey 1974: 167, 172-3 (no. 15-20), figs. 3.15-20; Hennessy 1989; Bevan 2007: 145). In this building dozens of stone vases from Egyptian and even Cretan origin were found, in addition to a large amount of Mycenaean pottery ranging from Late Helladic (hereafter LH) IIA to IIIB in date (Hankey 1974: 142). The presence of such an amount of imported material so far inland makes this site exceptional in the Near East.

Only two BR-jug imitations are so far known from the Aegean and both were found in burial contexts. One was found in the so-called 'Royal Tomb' at Isopata near Knossos, the other in chamber-tomb 102 at Mycenae. The tomb at Isopata was excavated by Sir Arthur Evans in 1904 (Evans 1905: 526-62). Located a few kilometres north of Knossos, it consists of a long dromos, a fore-hall and a rectangular inner chamber. Although it was partly destroyed and plundered, the largest assemblage of Egyptian stone vessels known from the Aegean was found in that tomb. It was apparently used for a considerable number of burials, as at least forty skulls were found during excavation. Most material can be dated to Late Minoan (hereafter LM) II and IIIA1 (the sepulchral niche in the fore-hall was still used in LM IIIC), but some objects are clearly older than the last use of the tomb. Two stone lamps have good parallels in LM IB, and a bridge-spouted jar of alabaster can also be dated to the early LM period (Driessen and MacDonald 1997: 170). A construction date in LM IA (early) has been suggested (Phillips 2008: 128 (n. 731)). It was argued that the Egyptian BR-jug imitation belongs to the earlier objects, although it remains speculative whether these represent earlier burials or heirlooms with which the final interments were equipped. The vessel (Iraklion Museum 600) belongs to the tall variant with clearly visible cords around the neck, made of travertine or limestone (Lambrou-Phillipson 1990: 204-5 (no. 51), pl. 66.51; Cline 1994: 204 (no. 629); Karetsoy and Andreadaki-Vlazaki 2000: 239 (no. 237); Phillips 2008: 132 (no. 248), 331 (fig. 248)).

The other Egyptian BR-jug imitation was found in chamber tomb 102 at Mycenae (National Museum Athens 4923) (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985: 285-6, pl. 140.4923; Lambrou-Phillipson 1990: 346 (no. 452), pl. 74.346; Cline 1994: 204 (no. 631)). This tomb was excavated by Christos Tsountas in the late 19th century (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985: 279-86). It has been noted that regarding the burial gifts, remarkable coincidences exist between the 'Royal Tomb' and tomb 102 at Mycenae: the same type of stone lamps (perhaps even from the same workshop), the same type of

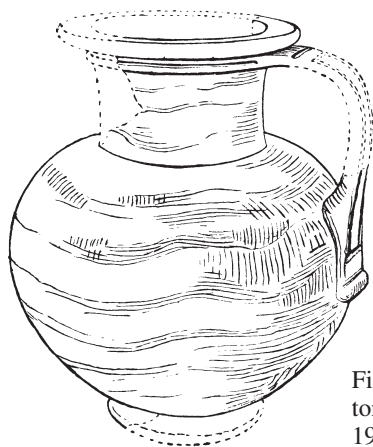


Fig. 4. BR-jug imitation from chamber tomb 102 at Mycenae (after Bosanquet 1904: pl. 14e).

bridge-spouted jar made of stone, crystal knife pommels and finally Egyptian BR-jug imitations have been found in both contexts (Driessen and MacDonald 1997: 170). The material of the vessel is given as alabaster, and it is 24.5 cm high (Fig. 4). The tomb has been dated to LH IIA (Driessen and MacDonald 1997: 170; Phillips 2008: 1289; Mackenzie 1903: 192 (fig. 10); Bosanquet 1904: pl. 13; Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985: pl. 140.5375).

Most Egyptian BR-jug imitations in the Levant and in the Aegean found their way into sepulchral contexts that can broadly be dated to the same time as they were produced and used in Egypt. The contemporary export and consumption is noteworthy, as many Egyptian stone vessels came to the Aegean centuries after their production, a phenomenon probably connected to systematic tomb-robbing (Pomerance 1978). Of course it has to be assumed that these ancient vessels were traded for themselves as exotica and not because of any commodity they may have once contained. In the case of the Egyptian BR-jug imitations however, the consumers apparently were aware of the usual content indicated by the shape and the intended use of content and jug, as they were mostly found in the same (i.e. burial) contexts as in Egypt.

General considerations

After reviewing the geographical distribution of this stone vessel type, its role in Egyptian material culture should be emphasized. In the Nile

valley, imitations by far outnumber imported Cypriote pottery BR-jugs type II. Robert Merrillees was only aware of seven BR-jug type II vessels when writing his dissertation in the 1960s (Merrillees 1968: 161). Although the number of vessels has surely increased during the last 40 years, the stone variant is still much more frequent. The British Museum alone has at least eleven BR-jug imitations in its storerooms (regrettably none with documented context: BM EA 4638, 4643, 4644, 24417, 24432, 36383, 36404, 36405, 58789, 59071 and 59271). Why do costly imitations in stone outnumber the presumably cheaper pottery variant? The production of imitations in stone is connected to the demand for the original (Cypriote) product that was transported within these jugs, as is demonstrated by the fact that with the end of pottery BR-jug imports the production of stone imitations ceased too (Bourriau 1982). It seems unlikely that it was impossible to import so many Cypriote pottery BR-jugs to satisfy the demand in Egypt, given the enormous amount of Cypriote *bilbil* juglets that found their way into the common Egyptian grave during the New Kingdom. What seems more likely is that both the Cypriote pottery vessel and the Egyptian stone vessel are imitations of a third variant, BR-jugs made of metal. It is evident that BR-vessels show features which one would expect on metal vessels. Concerning BR *bilbil* juglets, striking metal features are the dark lustrous slip, the straight everted rim, the ridge between neck and body and above all the fitting of the handle at the neck with two narrow belts which seem to resemble metal wires. Most of these features are also found on the stone imitations of the BR-jugs type II, and one could also mention the scroll design of the lower terminus of the handles.⁵ It seems reasonable to assume a trade in BR metal vessels which served as prototypes for both the pottery and the stone variants of BR vessels. The lack in the archaeological record can easily be explained by the common use of recycling the precious raw material.

The import, consumption and production of BR imitations in Egypt also had a lasting effect on some parts of Egyptian stone vessel fabrication. Hybrid forms emerged during the New Kingdom and features of Cypriote vessel shapes were merged with genuine Egyptian vessel forms; most notably the way of attaching the handle to the neck using belts or wires found its way into other Egyptian stone vessel shapes. Common Egyptian drop-shaped alabastra were equipped with handles known from

⁵ I would like to thank Susan Sherratt for reminding me of possible metal prototypes. This has also been proposed by Andrew Bevan (Bevan 2007: 136).

BR-imitations (e.g. BM EA 24418), amphorae are known with similar handles and even the two belts around the neck (El-Khouli 1993: pl. 20.d), and there are BR-jug imitations where the base is worked to fit into a ring stand (e.g. BM EA 4729 or 26962).

The short history of Egyptian BR-jug imitations and its impact on Egyptian material culture from the time of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III up to the Amarna period reflects Egypt's most intense interaction with other cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age. The Egyptian culture was not only interested in foreign products, but also accepted foreign forms and shapes and used certain features on genuine Egyptian products. The geographical distribution of Egypt's BR-stone vessels on the other hand demonstrates Egypt's far-reaching commercial activities, which saw its acme exactly in the time before the Amarna period.

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