On the Anatolian Origins of Some Late Bronze Egyptian Vessel Forms

Hélène Bouillon
### TABLE DES MATIERES

Hélène BOUILLON,
On the anatolian origins of some Late Bronze egyptian vessel forms .................................................. 1

Agneta FRECCERO,
Marble trade in Antiquity. Looking at Labraunda .................................................................................. 11

Şehnaz ERASLAN,
Dionysus and Ariadne in the light of Antiocheia and Zeugma Mosaics .............................................. 55

Ergün LAFLI et Gülseren KAN ŞAHİN,
Middle Byzantine ceramics from Southwestern Paphlagonia ................................................................. 63

Mustafa AKASLAN, Doğan DEMİRCİ et Özgür PERÇİN en collaboration avec Guy LABARRE,
L’église paléochrétienne de Bindeos (Pisidie) ......................................................................................... 151

Anaïs LAMESA,
La chapelle des Donateurs à Soğanlı, nouvelle fondation de la famille des Sképidès ......................... 179

Martine ASSENAT et Antoine PEREZ,
Localisation et chronologie des moulins hydrauliques d’Amida. A propos d’Ammien Marcellin,
XVIII, 8, 11 ........................................................................................................................................ 199

Helke KAMMERER-GROTHAUS,
»Ubi Troia fuit«
Atzik-Köy - Eine Theorie von Heinrich Nikolaus Ulrichs (1843) .......................................................... 213

### CHRONIQUES DES TRAVAUX ARCHEOLOGIQUES EN TURQUIE, 2015

Sami PATACI et Ergün LAFLI,
Surveys in Ardahan on the turkish-georgian borderline in 2013 and 2014 ........................................ 229

Çiğdem MANER,
Preliminary report on the second season of the Konya-Ereğli survey (KEYAR) 2014 ....................... 249

Dominique BEYER, Can KARAVUL, Françoise LAROCHE-TRAUNECKER et Aksel TİBET,
Rapport préliminaire sur les travaux de la mission archéologique de Zeyve Höyük-Porsuk 2014 .... 275

Jean-Charles MORETTI avec la collaboration de Nicolas BRESCH, Isabel BONORA,
Jean-Jacques MALMARY et Olivier RISS,
Claros, le temple d’Apollon : travaux réalisés en 2014 ...................................................................... 291

Olivier HENRY et Erika ANDERSSON, Christophe BOST, Ömür Dünya ÇAKMAKLI,
Angela COMMITO, Mélissa CORMIER-HUGUET, Peter DE STAEBLER, Pierre DUPONT,
Duygu ERGENÇ, Axel FREJMAN, Banu KEPENEK, Pascal LEBOUTEILLER, Haral NILSSON,
Felipe ROJAS, Baptiste VERGNAUD,
Labraunda 2014 ..................................................................................................................................... 301
New Kingdom Egypt has long been thought to be an Empire, whose political power extended over Nubia and a great part of the Levant. While the expression ‘Egyptian influence’ is in fact quite vague, and fails to describe a well-defined phenomenon, Egypt’s cultural impact on the Near East remains a topic that is commonly used to explain many iconographies and artistic forms. One of the most characteristic subjects of this supposed Egyptian prestige is luxury vessels. Current research, however, has tended to reappraise Egypt’s influence. Late Bronze Age artefacts are now being placed in a broader spectrum of investigation about contacts, exchange and international trade and diplomacy.

The Egyptian tradition of vessel-making is very ancient. During the Badarian period (late 5th - early 4th millennium B.C.) the first appearance of luxury vessels is linked to the beginning of a social hierarchy visible in cemeteries. The most important tombs contain the first Egyptian stone vases, but also the first zoomorphic ivory vases. The first use of metal in the manufacture of vessels took place during Nagada II (3500-3200 B.C.): gold and silver leaf adorns the lip or handles of the vases. Tombs and cultic contexts of the following Dynasty I (3000-2890 B.C.) introduced small vessels in faience. The major innovation of the Old Kingdom (2686-2160 B.C.) was the development of metalwork. It allowed the production of powerful tools for drilling and shaping stone vases, and soon, artisans also created vases entirely in metal. Thus appeared the first imitations of metal vases in other materials, including ceramics of high quality, commonly known as *Meidum ware*. This phenomenon of imitation, already observed in earlier times between ceramic forms and stone vessels, is one of the keys to the typological study of luxury tableware in Ancient Egypt. Metal and stone were the two materials of choice for luxury vessels. Unfortunately, the recyclability of the former usually prevented its preservation. Thus the typological study of luxury vases necessarily relies on stone vases forms.

The evolution of Egyptian vessel forms from Neolithic times onwards has been studied since the end of the XIXth century, essentially as a clue for dating. During the New Kingdom (1550-1069 B.C.), corresponding to the Late Bronze Age, many new forms and techniques appeared in Egypt (Fig. 1), most of them during the reigns of Hatchepsut (1473-1458) and Tuthmosis III (1447-1425). We can recognize the same forms on wall-paintings and reliefs in tombs and temples, among the gifts presented to

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3) Shaw 2000: 224 (map).
9) British Museum AE 63057 (Harrell 2012: fig. 22).
11) Vandier 1952: t.2, fig. 523.
12) Produced between 2650 and 2250 B.C., approximately (Kammerer-Grothaus 1998).
13) Bissing 1907; Reisner 1931: 130-177; Petrie 1937; El-Khouli 1978; Aston 1994.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stone Vase examples</th>
<th>Form description</th>
<th>Primary material and first attestation</th>
<th>Last appearance in Egypt</th>
<th>From appearance in stone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perforn vase</td>
<td>Globular vase</td>
<td>Reign of Ramses II (type without sand)</td>
<td>in Egypt: reign of Thutmosis I</td>
<td>- in Egypt: reign of Thutmosis I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphora with horizontal handles</td>
<td>Ceramic (21st millennium BCE)</td>
<td>Reign of Merenptah</td>
<td>- in Egypt: reign of Hapshetsut</td>
<td>- in Egypt: reign of Hapshetsut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantastatic amphora</td>
<td>Glass, wood</td>
<td>Glass</td>
<td></td>
<td>Glass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphora with vertical handles</td>
<td>Metal (except for decoration)</td>
<td>Metal, glazed stoneware, wood</td>
<td></td>
<td>Metal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form description</td>
<td>Stone Vase examples</td>
<td>1st appearance in stone</td>
<td>Last appearance in Egypt</td>
<td>Primary material and first attestation</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Bilbil’</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>- in Egypt: Amenhotep I or Hatchepout</td>
<td>Reign of Tutankhamun</td>
<td>Ceramic (L.B 1 in Cyprus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flask</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>- in Egypt: Thutmose III</td>
<td>Reign of Sety II</td>
<td>Ceramic (Western Anatolia, EB III)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalice</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>- in Egypt: Thutmose III</td>
<td>XXIst dynasty</td>
<td>Metal, ceramic?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1: Table of new forms of Egyptian luxury vases in the New Kingdom.
the king or the gods, or brought by merchants (Fig. 2)\(^{14}\). Some of them are of well-known origin. For example, the *bilbil* form derives from the *Base Ring* juglets of the LB I and II in Cyprus\(^{15}\), used, according to R. S. Merrillees, for opium trade and imported to Egypt from the Second Intermediate Period to the reign of Amenhotep IV-Akhenaton\(^{16}\). Other forms are more difficult to trace. Such is the case for the horizontal loop-handled amphora and the flask.

The ceramic amphora with horizontal loop handles first appears in Egypt in the tomb of Maiherperi (KV 36)\(^{17}\), but an earlier, Second Intermediate period example from Nubia is reported by R. Holthoer\(^{18}\). The first example in stone was found in Saqqara and bears the cartouche of Tuthmosis III\(^{19}\). The last ones come from Memphis and date to the XX\(^{th}\) dynasty\(^{20}\). The stone amphorae are usually big, but a miniaturized form was adapted for glass. This type is often called an *amphoriskon*\(^{21}\). We also find rare examples in faience\(^{22}\). The horizontal loop-handed amphora could be sealed with a lid, like the fake vessels found in the tomb of Amenhotep III’s father in law, Yuya\(^{23}\).

The type evolved during the Late Bronze, becoming less globular and with a broader neck and smaller handles\(^{24}\). The stone amphora is also well known in the Levant, south and north\(^{25}\). The glass type has rarely been found in the Near East, but two examples are known from the Aegean: in Rhodes and Kalyvia (Attica)\(^{26}\). There also is a Levantine stone type, called *lugged-flask* or *lugged-pyxis*, on which the handles are very small\(^{27}\).

The lentoid flask is a second common form of luxury vessel in the Late Bronze Age. The first attestations in stone in Egypt date from the reign of Tuthmosis III in Abydos and Gurob\(^{28}\). One of them is a variant called a *Ring flask*, comprising a tubular

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14) PM I-II, IV-VI; Montet 1937; Vercoutter 1956; Wachsmann 1987.
17) Daressy 1902: pl. IV, n° 24009, pl. V, n° 24021 and 24023.
19) Bissing 1907: pl. IV, n° 18734; Daressy 1897: n° 1 51.1.
22) Petrie 1891: pl. XX, 2.
23) CG 51102 in Cairo Museum (PM I.2: 562-564).
24) Aston 1994: 152 (shape 176 b)
25) From Ain Shems (Sparks 2007: cat. 580); Ashod (Sparks 2007: cat. 571); Beth-Shan (Sparks 2007: cat. 572); Tell el-`Ajjul (Sparks 2007: cat. 570); Gezer (Macalister 1912: pl. CCXII); Kamid el-Loz (Sparks 2007: cat. 574); Lachish (Sparks 2007: cat. 575); Megiddo (Sparks 2007: cat. 576); Minet el-Beida (Caubet, 1991: 224, pl. III:13 and pl. III:14); Ras Shamra (Caubet 1991: 241, pl. IV.7).
27) Pella (James and McGovern 1993: fig. 111); Pella (Bourke and Sparks 1995: fig. 7); Tell Deir Alla (Franken 1992: 64).
28) Garstang 1901: pl. 18; Petrie 1891: pl. 27.4.

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**Fig. 2**: Canaanite merchants represented in the tomb of Kenamun TT162 (Grimal and Menu 1998: 162).
body\textsuperscript{29}. Faience\textsuperscript{30}, glass\textsuperscript{31}, or even ivory\textsuperscript{32} examples have also been discovered in Egypt. Furthermore, the flask is well known in the Levant and the Aegean in the entire range of materials\textsuperscript{33}. During LB IIB, corresponding to the early Ramesside period in Egypt (ca. 1300-1100 B.C.), the body of the stone version became elongated, and no longer circular\textsuperscript{34}. Although the production of stone flasks seems to cease after the Late Bronze Age, the ceramic and faience industries maintained this form until the end of antiquity\textsuperscript{35}. Metallic examples are rare, undoubtedly due to the recyclable nature of metal. One tin example with a lid was discovered in a tomb of the XVIIIth dynasty in Abydos\textsuperscript{36}. It is worth noting that the only other metallic flask attested so far was found in the Uluburun wreck\textsuperscript{37}.

Whether the original material for these two vessel types was ceramic or metal is difficult to determine. However, because examples in clay are more numerous, the ceramic corpus can help to indicate the geographical origins of the form. A first direction in which to is towards the nearest neighbors in ancient Palestine and south Syria: the Canaanites, who seem to have introduced to Egypt many new practices and fashions during the Hyksos period\textsuperscript{38} and in the following centuries. A familiar instance of such borrowings is the Canaanite jar\textsuperscript{39}.

The first attestations of horizontal loop (or basket\textsuperscript{40}) handles on amphorae (also called kraters) in the Levant date from MB II\textsuperscript{41}; but most of them belonging to the Late Bronze Age, in other words, the same period as their equivalents in other materials. As for the flask, small handles placed on either side of the neck are already visible on amphoriska produced in Canaan during EB I (ca. 3200-2900 B.C.)\textsuperscript{42}, and the tradition continued throughout the Early Bronze Age\textsuperscript{43}. The body of these vessels is round or oval and the bottom is flat. Their production was abandoned during the Middle Bronze Age, when Palestine potters began to create more jugs and jars, such as the Canaanite jar already evoked. When the pilgrim flask appeared, at the end of MB or the beginning of LB I, it was already the type called pilgrim flask\textsuperscript{44}, with a lentoid body not previously known in Canaan. Thus, Tomb 57 at Ugarit (MB III – LB I), contained a flask with a ring-shaped body\textsuperscript{45}; whereas a flask in the later Tomb 75 (LB I) was lentoid with three handles: two placed symmetrically on the shoulder, and the third on the more concave side of the vase, between the neck and the body\textsuperscript{46}. Consequently, flasks with two symmetrical handles from neck to shoulder became widely distributed from Ugarit to Tell el-Ajjul\textsuperscript{47}.

These new ceramic types seem to have entered the northern Levant first\textsuperscript{48}. It is thus logical to look farther north for the possible origin of these forms. According to R. Amiran, the origin of the flask is mysterious but that of the krater could be the Aegean\textsuperscript{49}. P. Betancourt links them to the relations between the Levant and the Minoan world during the
Middle Bronze Age\(^{50}\). M. Guichard’s study of the Mari tablet corpus dealing with the furnishing of tablewares for the palace shows that most of the luxury vessels derived from international trade and exchange\(^{51}\). Minoan vases were imported but also imitated, and the main source of supply was in the northwest: from Aleppo to the south of Anatolia. Aleppo and Karkemish were the big centers at this time\(^{52}\), when they oversaw the trade system between Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Aegean. To their north, Anatolia is a region or rather a congregation of regions where ceramic traditions were varied and rich, and where horizontal loop handles are known from the end of the Late Neolithic – through the Early Bronze Age\(^{53}\), together with the flask (Fig. 3)\(^{54}\). In the Aegean world, the horizontal loop handles were adopted with other new shapes and features of Anatolian origin during EM I (3200-2600 B.C.)\(^{55}\). The horizontal loop handles became a common feature during the Middle Bronze Age in Anatolia as well as in the Aegean\(^{56}\), where the ceramic form was imitated in stone\(^{57}\). It was also among the forms applied to Kamares Ware amphorae, which were imported to the Levant and Egypt\(^{58}\). The use of these imports indicates, as R. S. Merrillees states, middle class rather than royal connections\(^{59}\). However, some of these forms were copied in more luxurious materials, such as the silver vessels found in the tombs I and II (ca. 1830-1770 B.C.) of the royal necropolis of Byblos\(^{60}\), and the faience vessel found in ‘Knossos treasury’, compared by A. Evans to the Gyblite vessels even if from a more recent context (Fig. 4)\(^{61}\). The silver vessels from Byblos were contemporary with the archives from the royal palace of Mari, and can be

\(^{50}\) Communication from P. Betancourt to Lilyquist (Lilyquist 1995: 9).
\(^{51}\) Guichard 2005.
\(^{53}\) Alacahöyük: Chalcolithic (Koşay and Akok 1966: pl. 148) and EB I (Koşay 1938: pl. LXIX, LXXII); Beycesultan EB II (Lloyd and Mellaart 1962: pl. IX, XIII, XVI).
\(^{54}\) The EB I flasks discovered in Beycesultan are globular (Lloyd and Mellaart 1962: pl. XVIII), but they become lentoid in the MB Karum period (Schoop 2011: 253).
\(^{55}\) Betancourt 2008 : 70-71, fig. 5.32.
\(^{56}\) MacGillivray 1998: 80, 106.
\(^{57}\) Cf. two jars in chloritite from Knossos and Mycenae (Bevan 2007: 117, fig. 6.13).
\(^{58}\) Merrillees 2003.
\(^{59}\) Merrillees 2003: 139.
\(^{60}\) Montet 1969: pl. CXI, CXII.
\(^{61}\) Evans 1928: 825, fig. 541.
considered an illustration of ‘Minoan type’ metal vases used in a royal context.

As for the lentoid flask, the form is undoubtedly of Anatolian origin: it is found in Western Anatolian sites like Troy starting with EB II (2600-2250 B.C.), and shortly thereafter in Central Anatolia at Acemhöyük and Kültepe. The lentoid flask was eventually adopted and developed in the Karum Period, and maintained during the Hittite Period (Fig. 5). Whereas the little symmetrical handles of the so-called pilgrim flask were popular throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, the vertical handle and the ring-body seem to be northern features found mostly in Anatolia and the North Levant. The ring-flasks, even more ancient, were rarely adapted to materials other than pottery.

It appears that this generation of new luxury vessel forms was related to international trade. This intensified in the Near East during the Middle Bronze Age, at the instigation of Assyrian merchants during the Karum period (ca. 1950-1770 B.C.), and later—in the hands of north Syrian kingdoms such as Ugarit and Aleppo. The new forms that flourished during this period were the ones adopted by the Egyptian kings of the New Kingdom and their courtiers, including the three Asiatic wives of Tuthmosis III and the general Djehuty, ‘overseer of the northern countries’ for the same king.

Fig. 4: Faience vase from the Knossos treasury (Evans 1928: fig. 541b).

Fig. 5: Lentoid flask from Hattusha (Schoop 2011: fig. 5).

64) Kulakoğlu 1998.
Why is it so important to trace back the first appearances of these features and forms? They don’t say much about the techniques in use, or the artisans and workshops. The issue instead applies to ‘style’ or even ‘fashion’. The fact that very ancient Anatolian shapes were imitated and transformed in North Syria, the Levant, the Aegean and Egypt, to become one of the most characteristic forms of Egyptian luxury vases, provides significant evidence of a different sort: it reflects the scope of artistic influences, and to some extent, counterbalances the archaeological data for Near Eastern luxury items, whose paucity blurs our perception of artistic exchange and influences.

H.B.

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détail de la mosaïque ornant le sol de la nef centrale, 4e s. ap. J.-C.