

The Enigma of the Hyksos
Volume I

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Edited by Manfred Bietak

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A Maritime Approach to Exploring the Hyksos Phenomenon

by Ezra S. Marcus¹

Abstract

The Hyksos phenomenon is one of the most enigmatic, but provocative episodes in the history of the 2nd millennium eastern Mediterranean: a Levantine population settles gradually within the deltaic realm of the powerful Egyptian Middle Kingdom and, while still maintaining cultural and economic relations with its region of origin, assimilates and penetrates the Egyptian social, economic and political milieu, culminating in a Canaano-Egyptian hybrid population that ascends to dominate Egypt after only a little over a century. Numerous models have sought to explain this immigrant success story, which lasted several hundred years. However, most of our evidence, both textual and material, comes from Egypt and the Egyptians, which after successfully expelling these illegitimate foreigner usurpers left behind a biased record that continues to taint historiography. In this article the role of trade as a factor in the success and demise of the so-called Hyksos is explored, placing their settlement within a larger phenomenon of Middle Bronze Age maritime coastal settlement and trade. This paper will examine the current state of research, and present the approach and proxies that may be employed in reconstructing patterns of trade in this period and their relevance to the Hyksos question.

Introduction

Among the enigmatic, but historically prominent, 'peoples' that antiquity has bequeathed upon modern scholarship, the so-called Hyksos continue to be an issue of ongoing research. Historiographically, they have long been perceived, pejoratively, as a dynasty of foreign usurpers, based in the Egyptian Delta during the 17th and 16th centuries BCE until their expulsion by Ahmose following a momentous and celebrated struggle. Archaeological excavation and Egyptological research, however, both in Egypt and the Levant, but primarily at the Hyksos capital of Tell el-Dab'a, have all contributed significantly to broadening our understanding of their complex and constructive role in Egypt.² More significantly, these efforts also have aided in elucidating the Levantine cultural origins of the Hyksos and their concomitant transmigration within the Egyptian milieu, while still maintaining an affinity, diachronically, to the broader eastern Mediterranean Levantine littoral and Near Eastern worlds.³ Today, as a result of this extensive research, a material cultural commonality, or *koiné*, should be recognized from the

Delta of Egypt to the deltas of Cilicia, which is reflected in numerous and varying ways, inter alia, in the form of public (e.g., religious), elite and funerary architecture, burial traditions, ceramic forms, metallurgy and other small finds.⁴ All attest to ongoing lifeways that underscore an intensity of interaction, communication, shared beliefs and identities.

Maintenance of these levels of interaction over such great distances required regular means of communication that could transport materials and finished products to be used, consumed and, in some instances, produced locally, as well as the transfer of people, who emigrated, immigrated, or merely conveyed ideas and fashions. Distinguishing and even quantifying these foreign and mixed manifestations within the Egyptian material cultural milieu has been readily enabled by the former's distinctive 'foreignness'. In contrast, while such interactions clearly occurred all along the Levant, their origin and occurrence and their corollaries are often blurred within that material cultural *koiné*, except where well-stratified contexts and material analysis can serve as arbiters. Ultimately, communication – terrestrial and, to a greater extent, seaborne movement – lay at the basis of these cultural transfers. Given that the main locus of Hyksos activity was in the eastern Delta on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, Egypt's principal gateway to the Mediterranean, viewing these enigmatic people and their relations with the eastern Mediterranean within a maritime context offers avenues of research that may shed new light on their origins, relations with the Levantine littoral and the history of their presence in Egypt. The following summarizes some of the evidence to date and outlines approaches to elucidating this aspect of the Hyksos phenomenon.⁵

1 ezra@research.haifa.ac.il.

2 BIETAK 2010b; 2011.

3 BADER 2011; 2012; 2013; MOURAD 2015; CANDELORA 2017.

4 The literature in this regard is copious and implicit in nearly every typological comparanda proffered, in every specialist study, whether organized by material or analysis of form; however, the picture is far from complete and lacking in systematic material analysis, making the overall synthesis an on-going work in progress. In general, see the various volumes in the *Tell el-Dab'a* series, e.g., KOPETZKY 2010, the very up-to-date overview by MOURAD 2015. For specific studies on various wide-ranging cultural phenomena and artefact types, see, e.g., VAN DEN BRINK 1982; PHILIP 1989; 2006; BIETAK 2009; SHALEV 2009; ASTON and BIETAK 2011; BAGH 2013. See, as well, BIETAK in this volume, PRELL in this volume and PRELL and RAHMSTORF in this volume.

5 Among the important issues that will not be discussed here are the trade in metals and the circulation of Middle Cypriot pottery.

The Longue Durée of Egyptian-Levantine Maritime Relations

In order to better contextualize the characteristics of the Hyksos as a maritime phenomenon, it is crucial to view them within a deep-time perspective and in references to the rhythms of Egyptian-Levantine relations.⁶ Such an approach will identify some of the economic and social foundations of this relationship.

As the sole land bridge between Africa and Asia, the littoral zone that extends northwards from the Sinai Peninsula was, from time immemorial, the perennial route for terrestrial movement between the Nile Valley and south-western Asia. Naturally, irrespective of the archaeological or historical period in question, the speed and carrying capacity afforded by such movement were restricted by the anatomical limitations of human-borne and animal-borne transport.⁷ Such limits, which manifest in speed, size, number and mass, could only be overcome with the advent of maritime transport. In fact, the seafaring capabilities to transcend some aspects of that transport threshold were already demonstrated in the Mediterranean basin at least by the Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods, based, respectively, on the evidence from, initially, episodes of island exploitation and, finally, actual settlement.⁸ Ironically, despite millennia of riverine and littoral life, the antiquity of seafaring in the context of Egyptian-Levantine relations can only be documented, archaeologically, in the Predynastic period (Naqada I–IIb?) and, then, only by a single jar containing Nilotic *Chambardia rubens*, which was found off the Carmel Coast of Israel.⁹ The vessel and its originally live cargo were roughly coeval with the occurrence of the very same mollusca at the site of Maadi, along with imported and locally produced Levantine material culture (e.g., elliptical and subterranean architecture, pottery, chipped stones and imported copper and Dead Sea bitumen) and, apparently, Asiatics (from the southern Levant) themselves.¹⁰

These early relations and ostensible migration of southern Levantines to Egypt are followed by the more artifactually substantial and seminal Egyptian sojourn (emigration?) to the southern Levant, namely, the well-documented Egyptian colonial entity that lasted some two centuries in the southern Coastal

Plain of modern Israel and the Gaza Strip.¹¹ Given the concomitant occurrence in Egypt of Levantine jars, with their chemically demonstrable contents, and other imports, and the character of the Egyptian presence in the southern Levant, this phase is presumed to have reflected their increasing direct interest in imports from the Mediterranean zone and its margins, including primarily, but not exclusively, horticultural products (e.g., olive oil and wine), coniferous longwoods (especially cedar) and their by-products (e.g., resins and juices) and metals.¹² Whether these imports were transported by sea at this particular time remains solely a supposition, as no finds of a size or mass that could not have been transported terrestrially have been found. However, two sporadic deep-water ceramic finds lend credence to the notion of contemporary seafaring.¹³ Moreover, given the large quantity of Levantine jars found in royal and elite tombs, as well as the deleterious impact of a long desert transshipment on the quality of some of the organic products, the likelihood is high that the terrestrial route was eschewed for more the efficacious and rapid sea route.

The generally held scholarly view is that the increasing demand for and even dependence on Levantine imports, both in quantity and size, spurred royal initiatives to exploit the more plentiful sources in the northern Levant and, thus, contributed to a greater reliance on maritime transport.¹⁴ The salient importance of shipping and the increasing scale of the imports during the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom (OK) periods is amply reflected in royal textual, pictorial and archaeological evidence. Among the highlights of this bustling Egyptian-Levantine seatriade, are the recording of maritime expeditions in both royal and elite inscriptions, the detailed portrayal of a flotilla of seagoing ships dispatched during the reign of Sahure along with their return laden with, at the very least, Levantine jars, bears, and men, women and children, as well as the scale of cedar capable of being transported (viz. 50 tons per Cheops boat, of which there were at least three, with at least one beam of 23 m length!).¹⁵ Moreover, the development of deltaic ports in this period is indicative of the regular flow of sea-going traffic and the need to maintain a permanent presence within reach of the Mediterranean.¹⁶ One of these possible ports, Tell Ibrahim Awad, only 9 km from Tell el-Dab'a, has produced Near Eastern

6 BIETAK 2010b.

7 Humans can typically carry 20–30 kg at a rate of 20–30 km/day, depending on distance, terrain and climate (DORSEY 1988, 895; MURNANE 1990, 95; BRODBANK 1995, 54; 2000, 92; MARCUS 1998, 90, table 4); while beasts of burden can add load capacity, rate of movement is limited by human movement capabilities.

8 MARCUS 2002, 404–405. See, also, summary and references in BRODBANK 2013, 148–156, 173–178, 188–189, but note the recent Palaeolithic evidence from Crete (STRASSER et al. 2010; RUNNELS et al. 2014).

9 SHARVIT et al. 2002; VAN DEN BRINK and BRAUN 2003, 83–84, 87.

10 HARTUNG 2013.

11 LEVY and VAN DEN BRINK 2002.

12 HARTUNG 2002; DE MIROSCHEJJI 2002; PORAT and GOREN 2002; and other contributions to VAN DEN BRINK and LEVY 2002.

13 MARCUS 2002, 407; GOPHNA 2002.

14 MARFOE 1987; DE MIROSCHEJJI 2002; MARCUS 2002; and exhaustive summary in SOWADA 2009.

15 MARCUS 2002, 407–411 and references.

16 BUTZER 2002, fig. 4.5; STANLEY 2002; BIETAK 2015, fig. 135.

religions architecture, from which the presence of Asiatics may be surmised and reflect their involvement in maritime activity (commerce, shipwrights), as hinted by their appearance on the Sahure relief.¹⁷ Given the many textual references to Byblos and the enormous quantity of Egyptian objects and influence discerned at the site, most scholars would presume that it was the sole destination for ships departing or returning to the Delta. The recent publication of the 6th Dynasty biographical inscription of Iny has confirmed Byblos's central role in maritime commerce and gateway for a Near Eastern hinterland that stretched beyond Mesopotamia (viz. the supplying of lapis lazuli), but also demonstrates that other coastal and, possibly, inland regions and cities were frequented by Egyptians, and goods were brought back to Egypt from them.¹⁸ This text also underscores the important role of royal agents in obtaining trade goods, as well the prestige and accolades they enjoyed; presumably, while not explicitly mentioned, these individuals enjoyed material remuneration commensurate with their achievements.

Thus, from Predynastic times until the fall of the Old Kingdom, Egyptian maritime relations with the Levant increased in scale, scope and intensity, owing to the growing reliance by the crown and the elite on Mediterranean imports that ultimately served a variety of political, economic, social and religious purposes. The importance of maritime transport is reflected in royal and elite memorialization that focuses primarily on the Egyptian involvement in those initiatives. Nevertheless, the depictions and presence of resident foreigners in Egypt may hint at the role of Asiatics/Levantines in such activities as well. This deep-time perspective should be viewed as the foundation for the behaviour of Middle Kingdom (MK) rulers, the presence and role of Levantines, and even other foreigners, in the Delta, and as a maritime background for the Hyksos phenomenon.

Early Middle Kingdom Egyptian-Middle Bronze (MB) IIA Levantine Maritime Trade

In contrast to the Old Kingdom (and to the subsequent New Kingdom), no royal depictions of sea-going expeditions have survived from the Middle Kingdom, probably owing to the poor preservation of monumental architecture in the capital of Memphis; a similar lacuna also exists among elite tombs.¹⁹ However, knowledge of MK maritime trade has increased greatly in the last few decades owing to newly available textual evidence

as well as the on-going analysis of finds from the Levant and from a half century of excavation at Tell el-Dab'a.

The two most important textual sources for understanding Egyptian maritime activity during this period are the **Mit Rahina inscription** and the **mastaba inscription of Khnumhotep III**.²⁰ The first is a surviving portion of the Annals of Amenemhet II and includes the earliest (c. 1908 BCE) account of MK Egyptian military and commercial maritime expeditions to the northern Levant. The relevant sections report the dispatch of ships and the regions and cities visited, detail the varied cargo (e.g., cedar, metals, stones, organic products, etc.) brought back to Egypt, according to number, weight or volume, and provide some descriptions of its distribution. In particular, the expedition's itinerary demonstrates that Egyptian interests in the Levant were wide ranging and not negotiated solely through its presumed partner harbour of Byblos, which is conspicuously and inexplicably absent from the text. Instead, a generic region, **Hnty-š**, which is generally identified with **Lebanon**, serves as the primary source of the imported goods. **Two conquered cities (ports?)**, **Iw3i** and **I3sii**, from which goods and numerous people were conveyed, were previously identified, albeit problematically,²¹ as Cilician Ura and Alashiya (Cyprus), respectively. Instead, a more plausible identification for these two toponyms has been subsequently suggested by Gubel and Loffet, who interpret them, respectively, as **Iaa**, a region known from the Tale of Sinuhe, and **Ullaza**, which figures prominently in the Khnumhotep III text discussed below.²² In addition to providing the earliest known 'bill of lading', the Mit Rahina inscription also offers insight into the apportioning of imported goods by the king as endowments to the Temple of Montu (viz. the Tòd treasure), as distributions to the state administration, and as rewards to soldiers and other officials for services rendered. Moreover, although not explicitly stated, the large quantity of imported cedar and its potential uses in Egypt – Mediterranean and Red Sea-going ships, royal, religious and elite monumental construction and its use in funerary contexts – should be presumed to have had a multiplier effect on the power and prestige of the regent and strengthened the economic resilience of the state.²³

17 BIETAK 1988; 2003; 2009; 2010a; 2010b, 142–144.

18 MARCOLIN 2006; MARCOLIN and ESPINEL 2011.

19 The arrival of foreign ships and foreigners bearing imported goods is a common theme of New Kingdom elite tombs in western Thebes. The reason for the lack of such MK depictions is unclear and may be remedied by future serendipitous discoveries.

20 For the Mit Rahina inscription, see MARCUS 2007 and references. For the Khnumhotep III mastaba inscription, see ALLEN 2008.

21 MARCUS 2007, 146–148, 157.

22 The location of Ullaza (also rendered Ullasa) is unknown, but has been suggested to be identified in the Akkar Plain, either with a site near the mouth of the Nahr al-Bared (GETOSO SINGER 2008, 188; THALMANN 2000, fig. 1, Site 28) or Tell et-Taalé (GUBEL and LOFFET 2012, 86). FORSTNER-MÜLLER and KOPETZKY (2009, 144) note its possible location near Tripoli.

23 MARCUS 2007, 173–175.

Approximately a half century later, the strategic importance of Egypt's maritime ventures would be manifested explicitly when the city of Byblos sought to disrupt Egypt's supply of cedar from Ullaza sometime during the reign of Senusret III. Although the text is fragmentary, the mastaba inscription of Khnumhotep III at Dahshur, as reconstructed masterfully by Allen, demonstrates that, at the very least, as already hinted by the Mit Rahina inscription and other evidence,²⁴ Egyptian relations with Byblos at this time were hardly cordial, let alone exclusive. The complex relationship between the two, which is open to different interpretations,²⁵ may have only become formalized following the latter's defeat in what amounts to a trade-based war. Indeed, the projection of power by land and sea for securing Egyptian economic interests may not have been exceptional and may have precedent already in the Old Kingdom,²⁶ and in one of Amenemhet II's aforementioned initiatives. If Gubel and Loffet's identification of Ullaza in the Mit Rahina inscription is correct, then that, too, may have been a relationship similarly born of coercion. Clearly, the events described on Khnumhotep's mastaba were 'worthy of saga', from a royal historical perspective, as evinced by the monument's location near Senusret III's pyramid.²⁷

During the period covered by these two texts, significant developments occurred in the Egyptian Delta and along the coastal plains of the Levant, including the founding and intensification of settlement in the littoral zone and material evidence for maritime trade. In the Delta, the early MK sequence at 'Ezbet Rushdi in the Tell el-Dab'a region, which spans the late 20th through the first half of the 19th century BCE, has produced the earliest MB Levantine imports in the form of monochrome Levantine Painted Ware jugs and juglets and storage jars/amphorae. The petrographic analysis of ten of these imports demonstrated that the painted wares (N = 3) originated in the northern Levant, while the amphorae (N = 7) reflected origins along nearly the entire coastline from the southern coastal plain of Israel to Cilicia, including the Akkar Plain, where Ullaza may have been located.²⁸ Clearly, the location of 'Ezbet Rushdi, near a reconstructed deltaic harbour basin on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, was intended to serve as Egypt's principal maritime gateway with the Mediterranean.²⁹

Contemporary Egyptian ceramic exports from both Upper and Lower Egypt in well-stratified contexts in the Levant are limited to two vessels in Sidon's cemetery and three fragmentary examples in the latest

fills beneath the Phase B elite building at Tel Ifshar.³⁰ Regarding Byblos, the Montet Jar's 'Early Scarab Series' scarab seals still remain the most reliable early MK Egyptian import at that site. While this scarab group's date range indicates their use from the early 20th century until the mid-19th century (c. Senusret III's reign), as has been previously argued, the Montet jar's date should be limited to the 19th century BCE, based on the dating of the jar's cylinder seals by Porada already in 1966.³¹ In addition, Nigro has presented chronological comparanda from Ebla for some of the jar's finds that further support Porada's date.³² Given the contemporary political and economic relations between Egypt and Byblos, reflected in the textual record, the occurrence of these scarabs in Byblos at this time is enigmatic and may be a reflection of the latter's expectations of trade with Egypt or, alternatively, hint at indirect contacts that were not dependent on Egyptian initiatives.

Late Middle Kingdom Egyptian-Levantine Maritime Trade

Beginning with 'Ezbet Rushdi, the flourishing of the Tell el-Dab'a region is amply demonstrated by the founding of the main tell and by the increase in the size of this deltaic port city over the course of the 19th and subsequent centuries, as well as by the quantity and range of the imports. What sets Tell el-Dab'a apart from the preceding millennia of Egyptian-Levantine relations is the scale of the settlement and its harbours, as well as the scale and range of the foreign component of its material culture.³³ Analyses of imports and locally produced foreign forms have been the basis for suggestions of the origins of the users of MB culture and/or their lifeways, in some cases to specific subregions, such as might be deduced from a cooking pot from Tell Arqa or some other site in the Akkar Plain.³⁴ In contrast, remains of transport containers can be indicative of the drop-off of imports within the riverine transshipment network up the Nile Valley, as well as local consumption. The initial settlement strata (H-G/4), which ranges chronologically from the late 19th through the early 18th centuries, presented a material cultural assemblage of nearly 20% Levantine ceramic forms rising to 40% in the 18th and 17th

24 MARCUS 2007, 171–173.

25 FLAMMINI 2010.

26 DE MIROSCHEDJI 2012.

27 ALLEN (2008, 36) notes that it is likely these events are the military conflict referred to in the Khusobek stela, which occurred during Senusret III's reign.

28 COHEN-WEINBERGER and GOREN 2004, table 1a.

29 BIETAK 2017, 59–62, figs. 3–4.

30 For Sidon, see BADER 2003; FORSTNER-MÜLLER and KOPETZKY 2009; KOPETZKY 2011/2012. For Tel Ifshar, see MARCUS et al. 2008a. The earliest Egyptian pottery at Ifshar dates no earlier than the reign of Amenemhet II, which is preceded by a single radiocarbon determination from the incipient horizon of the Phase A settlement levels; that offers a maximum 2σ terminus post quem for the founding of the site in the last third of the 20th century BCE (MARCUS 2013).

31 MARCUS 2007, 172–173; PORADA 1966.

32 NIGRO 2009.

33 BIETAK 2018.

34 KOPETZKY 2007–2008, 38, 42, photo 1, fig. 25.



Fig. 1 Tel Ifshar Phase B Building 955 (prepared by S. Haad)

centuries (G/3–E/1), only decreasing slightly in the tail-end of the Hyksos period (D/2).³⁵ Detailed macroscopic fabric and petrographic analyses enable these trends to be explored through regional frequency mapping. Petrographic analysis by Cohen-Weinberger and Goren of the bichrome Levantine Painted Wares (N = 12), other non-painted open vessels (N = 3) and amphorae (N = 4), from the founder Stratum H (= d/2), all derive from the northern Levant; only a single amphora and a cooking pot were produced, respectively, in the Central Coastal Plain of Israel and the Carmel Coast.³⁶ This trend continues in their analyses of subsequent periods, albeit utilizing cruder differentiation between the strata, with imports from the northern Levant dominating the sample, but with not entirely insignificant imports from a range of locations in the southern Levant: Stratum G (13th Dynasty) at 68% (N = 109); Strata F–E/3 (late 13th Dynasty/14th Dynasty) at 60% (N = 53); and Strata E/2–D/2 (15th Dynasty) at 76% (N = 59).³⁷ As the sample comprises primarily Canaanite jars (respectively, 83%, 77% and 78%), its utility is largely in demonstrating the range of consumable Mediterranean products, rather than household, feasting or drinking wares. It should be noted that, of the entire sample, only two Canaanite jars in the G strata, representing 3% of the northern Levantine imports (and only 2% of all the imports in this period), originate from Byblos itself (their Group C).³⁸ This paucity from Byblos during a period ostensibly seen as the heyday of its relations with Egypt does not preclude other wares having been transhipped via its harbour from inland sources, such as the Beqa'a Valley (Group D), of which there were 36 examples in the study, 22 of which appear in the same Stratum G. These represent 30% of the imports from the northern Levant and 20% of the total assemblage from this period. The limited representation of ceramic imports from Byblos could be the result of sampling size or bias, or the limits of petrofabric differentiation, or the degree of specialization in exports to Egypt from Byblos; however, its overall paucity does preclude any bias owing to residuality. These caveats notwithstanding, it should not be overlooked that many of the long-held scholarly assumptions regarding Byblos's relations with Egypt have been challenged quite effectively, as noted above. In particular, the systematic reanalyses by Kopetzky of the contents of the Royal Tombs of Byblos, which she has demonstrated belong not to the Middle Kingdom – as the Amenemhet III cartouches had always suggested – but to the Hyksos period and later, have sobered and should revolutionize our

understanding of Egyptian-Byblian relations.³⁹ In contrast, it must be noted that her macroscopic fabric analysis, based on the Vienna System, of the Canaanite amphorae found in settlement contexts showed a relatively higher percentage from the coastal region from Byblos to its north (south of the Akkar Plain) in Stratum H (68%), declining subsequently through the remainder of the stratigraphic sequence from 42% to as low as 3% in Stratum E/2, rising again slightly to 22% and 11% at the end of the Hyksos period.⁴⁰ Here, too, as in the petrographic analysis, areas of the northern Israeli/southern Lebanese coast dominate the imports to Egypt. Note that, in general, the percentage of jars in the assemblage rises until it peaks (24%) in Stratum F (13th Dynasty) and then declines rapidly, reflecting changes in the overall intensity of trade as well as sources of imports.

At the beginning of the late Middle Kingdom (Levantine MB IIA), Egyptian ceramic exports to the Levant increase somewhat and are more widely distributed. In the second half of the 19th century, variously fragmentary, complete and restorable examples of both Upper and Lower Egyptian vessels in a variety of shapes and sizes (N = 6) were found in or in association with a series of two elite buildings (Phases B and C) at Tel Ifshar; an additional three fragmentary sherds have been identified from the roughly contemporary 'Palace I' phase at Tel Aphek.⁴¹ A complete Marl C *zir* from the Sidon cemetery is also ascribed to the late Middle Kingdom, to which should probably be added numerous other closed and open Marl C forms that span the late 12th and 13th Dynasties, but for which precise local phasing seems to still be unreported.⁴² Sidon appears to have been the recipient of the largest quantity of MK ceramic exports.⁴³ The Ashkelon moat deposit and initial gate complex, which marks the earliest excavated MB features, are dated to the 13th Dynasty based on Egyptian sealings and have produced four *zir* fragments and three other Marl C vessels.⁴⁴ Whereas no additional MK imports were found at Tel Ifshar after Phase C, both Ashkelon and Sidon have Egyptian imports occurring throughout their MB sequences.⁴⁵ Additional MK pottery is known from Tell Fadous/Kfarabida and Arqa, but none at Byblos until the MB IIB.⁴⁶

35 BIETAK 1991; 2010b.

36 COHEN-WEINBERGER and GOREN 2004, table 1b.

37 COHEN-WEINBERGER and GOREN 2004, tables 1c–1e, 2. Note that the substrata of general Strata G/4–1 (= d/1–c) were lumped together in their study and are not separated out here.

38 COHEN-WEINBERGER and GOREN 2004, tables 1c: 22, 25; 2

39 KOPETZKY 2015; 2016.

40 KOPETZKY 2010, 254–255, figs. 66, 67. The percentages of the fabrics among the amphorae were calculated from Kopetzky's percentage of the total assemblage.

41 MARCUS et al. 2008a; 2008b; MARCUS 2013. The absolute date range for Phases B and C is based on a combination of Egyptian synchronisms and radiocarbon determinations. The examples from Aphek are being prepared for publication.

42 BADER et al. 2009; KOPETZKY 2011/2012.

43 KOPETZKY 2011/2012.

44 STAGER and VOSS 2011.

45 STAGER and VOSS 2011; KOPETZKY 2011/2012.

46 FORSTNER-MÜLLER and KOPETZKY 2009; KOPETZKY 2010/2011.



Fig. 2 A selection of imports from Tell Arqa (Akkar Plain) to Tel Ifshar Phases A-C (photos by Yoram Porath and S. Breitstein; drawing and layout by S. Haad)

Levantine Coastal Cabotage

While Egyptian and other easily detectable imports tend to attract attention, little effort has been made towards investigating intra-Levantine trade or ceramic circulation among forms that are nearly indistinguishable. This lacuna has been partly a result of a former scholarly bias towards the role of seafaring and maritime trade in cultural and other processes during the Middle Bronze Age, particularly in the southern Levant, but also owing to a lack of emphasis on the systematic study of ceramic fabrics. Occasional petrographic analysis has revealed imports, such as the monochrome Levantine Painted Ware juglets analysed at Kabri, which derive from the northern Levant north of Byblos.⁴⁷ In contrast, the pottery assemblages studied and analysed petrographically from the recent excavations of the late MB IIB Kabri palace demonstrate a very homogeneous fabric for all forms with the only Levantine imports coming from the nearby Galilee.⁴⁸ However, to date, the only published systematic macroscopic fabric analysis focusing on the MB Levant is Kopetzky's study of the storage jars from the Ashkelon gate complex and moat.⁴⁹ There she found the percentage of amphorae in the early phases

(14–12 = late MB IIA to transitional MB IIA–IIB) ranged between 28.9% and 37.5% and then sharply declined in the MB IIB, a trend that parallels the Tell el-Dab'a sequence.⁵⁰ Another similarity between the sites is that northern Levantine amphorae imports dominate the initial gate phase (14), representing over 40% of the jars and then decline to some 30% in Phase 13 and to less than 5% in Phase 12, with a slight revival at the end of the Middle Bronze Age.⁵¹ In summary, although the trends in trade demonstrated at Tell el-Dab'a and Ashkelon are highly instructive, other Levantine coastal sites have to be similarly studied in order to elucidate further intra-Levantine cabotage trade, the possible origin of the culture and the peoples who settled the southern Levantine coastal regions, the relations they maintained among themselves and, by extension, their cultural and economic relations with the coastal regions of Egypt, namely Tell el-Dab'a. Thus, as may be discerned from the aforementioned studies, the ebbs and flows of Tell Dab'a's flourishing must have reflected developments on both sides of Egypt's and the Levant's relationship. Material analysis of the trade in ceramics in the latter region, both in frequency and, especially, variability of sources, can be used as a measure to gauge the rise and decline of trade and its impact on economic, cultural and social processes within the Hyksos phenomenon.

To these ends, the ongoing study of the finds at Tel Ifshar and their preparation for final publication, as

47 GOREN and COHEN-WEINBERGER 2002, 440–441.

48 SAMET 2014; 2016; YASUR-LANDAU et al. 2015, 615. Further diachronic material analysis would be welcome from Kabri, at the very least integrating the aforementioned results with a systematic material analysis of the earlier MB finds from the preceding Tel Aviv University excavations.

49 KOPETZKY 2018.

50 KOPETZKY 2018, fig. 5.1.

51 KOPETZKY 2018, 209–211, fig. 5.2.

well as other sites in the central Coastal Plain of Israel, may be utilized to explore these and other issues. Among the ceramic proxies for this study are the various northern Levantine imports, amphorae and the so-called Levantine Painted Wares, which are being studied utilizing macroscopic fabric and petrographic analyses in collaboration with Paula Waiman-Barak. The initial focus has been on Tel Ifshar, a 4.4 ha site in the Sharon Coastal Plain of Israel, excavated by Y. Porath and S. Paley, which has produced an eight-phase MB IIA occupational sequence in Area C on the eastern side of the site, beginning with a modest founder settlement in Phase A and followed by a series of elite buildings in Phases B, C and E, which, like the final Phase G rural settlement, were all destroyed in fiery conflagrations.⁵² For the purposes of the current study, this site has the advantage of large well-preserved ceramic assemblages, including demonstrable imports from both Egypt and the northern Levant, and a robust chronology based on both chrono-typological ceramic dating and radiocarbon determinations. As already reported in previous publications, imports from the northern Levant (pottery and charred cedar) and Egypt occur already in Phase A, and are well represented in the first elite multi-storied, c. 600 m² middle-courtyard building in Phase B, dubbed Building 955 (Fig. 1). These include pottery from the Akkar Plain of northern Lebanon, if not from Tell Arqa itself, of which five confirmed examples were found (Fig. 2), from the earliest Phase A deposits on the natural hill through Phase C; this includes one reconstructed profile (H: 39 cm) from the destroyed stairwell of Building 955. Other Phase B intra-Levantine imports include pithoi and squat onion-shaped jars with a basaltic fabric (Fig. 3), which probably come from Lebanon; indeed, Byblos provides the only morphological parallel for this unusual form.⁵³

Among the results of the diachronic study are a class of what have been termed handleless cylindrical jars (Fig. 4). Schiestl was the first to refer to a broad class of slender handleless Levantine jars with parallels from the northern and southern Levant, the region of Ugarit, Amuq and Cilicia being the likely source identified by Cohen-Weinberger and Goren for the example from Tell el-Dab'a.⁵⁴ Based on a number of complete examples (H: 51–59 cm), from Ifshar Phases B and C, it was possible to associate a specific rim types with these vessels, all of which have a visibly non-local fabric with a pale yellow-to-beige colour peppered with dark and red grits. These first appear in the 'Phase A late' fills underneath Building 955, where they represent 23% of the total number of

storage jars (N = 100). In Phase B they represent 20% of the storage jars (N = 148) and then just by only a few sherds in subsequent phases and one reused as a burial jar. Initial petrographic analysis has shown their fabric to be consistent with the description for the example from Tell el-Dab'a and is still being studied. The origin and frequency of this form over at least two phases suggest a close and sustained relationship with a particular location or locations in the northern Levant. Moreover, the fact that this vessel is handleless is a priori counterintuitive to the notion of the character of a maritime storage jar/amphora.⁵⁵ Clearly, the contents of this vessel and/or the region from which it derived were of some significance to those using this elite building. While a full diachronic study of the Ifshar sequence is still being carried out, it is clear that maritime trade was a facet of life for this, the earliest dated settlement in the southern Levant, at its inception and for at least through Phase C, and probably at its inception, and for at least Phase E, that is into the 18th century BCE.

Seeking a Maritime Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris

In 2006, the present author suggested that Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris should be viewed as a sort of 'Venice on the Nile',⁵⁶ owing largely to its location as a gateway to the Mediterranean and to its physical configuration upon 'turtleback' islands in a deltaic environment. Like Venice, Tell el-Dab'a presents the appearance, based on the Egyptian textual record and archaeological remains, of being a maritime commercial power (viz. the claim of capturing 300 ships filled with the wealth of the Levant in Kamose's Second Stela),⁵⁷ and possessed a cosmopolitan population. Despite a half century of excavation and analysis, much is still to be learned, but what is clear is that of all of the sites outside of the Levant and Cyprus, Tell el-Dab'a has produced the largest quantities of those regions' material cultures outside their locus of origin.⁵⁸ While certainly non-Egyptians may have dwelled in other parts of the Nile Valley and served various roles,⁵⁹ in no other location in Egypt were so many foreign attributes present or foreign residents concentrated. Clearly, their presence was not just tolerated, but encouraged by the Egyptian state, enabling the formation of a cosmopolitan Egyptian-Mediterranean population whose neighbourhoods, workshops (potters, smiths, etc.) and religious activities have and continue to be identified.⁶⁰ However, in the absence of any local

52 MARCUS et al. 2008a; 2008b; MARCUS 2013 and references.

53 SAGHIEH 1983, 95, pl. XLI.3639.

54 SCHIESTL 2002, 346–350, fig. 13.1. COHEN-WEINBERGER and GOREN (2004, 93, Table 1c:17); an example from Tel Aphek, some 40 km south of Tel Ifshar, is also reported to be non-local (BECK 2000, 180).

55 MARCUS 2002, 409–411.

56 MARCUS 2006.

57 HABACHI 1972.

58 MAGUIRE 2009.

59 MOURAD 2015, 189–213.

60 BIETAK 2018.



Fig. 3 Onion-shaped jar and pithos from Tel Ifshar Phase B (photos by Yoram Porath)

written records and evidence of administration,⁶¹ reconstructing the economic foundation of the site is a challenge and has relied on the historiographically biased Egyptian record, on the one hand, and the often equivocal archaeological finds on the other. As a nexus between the Nile Valley and the eastern Mediterranean, Tell Dab'a's size and floruit surely must have had an economic basis, predicated on maritime activity, despite the fact that many of the maritime cultural

and religious attributes are lacking.⁶² Our knowledge of what Egypt received from the Levant is certainly much richer, if not clearer, than what they offered. If Egypt's enmity or amity were not the currency, were gold, ivory and other transhipped African products, finished goods a sufficient explanation for Levantine interaction, let alone settlement in and emigration to the Delta? A number of maritime-oriented explanations, some speculative, may be offered to further explore these questions:

(1) As alluded to above, the Egyptian elite and regent developed a dependence on Levantine products, which maintained the social, religious and political

⁶¹ Only in the last two decades of excavation was an ingenious method devised for discerning and recovering impressed mud sealings from the moist to waterlogged sediments at Tell el-Dab'a (KOPETZKY and BIETAK 2016, 357) and so an inestimable amount may still be gleaned from the hundreds of sealings that were found in this manner.

⁶² MARCUS 2006, 188. See, however, the maritime scene in PORADA 1984. See, also, BRODY 1998, 18, 29. An additional seal impression from Tell Dab'a of the king smiting the storm god (BIETAK 2006) might reflect maritime symbolism.

order whether through monumental construction (cedar), religious ceremony (resins, spices, etc.), funerary practices (inter alia cedar wood), elite social interaction and feasting (wine, oils, etc.), the equipping of the military (copper, bronze, etc.) and supplying any requisite raw materials for the Nile Valley's workshops and craftsmen needed. The supply of these materials in size and quantity was clearly dependent on maritime transport, which the state benefited from and hence supported by maintaining the supply of longwoods, which were used in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea (Punt). As long as the demand was there for this import-based structure, the seaways would have been bustling and the Egyptian and Levantines would have enjoyed maritime commerce. That the latter benefitted from this trade and were not coerced is at the very basis of the actions of the Byblians vis-à-vis Ulazza in the Khnumhotep III mastaba inscription. As soon as the State collapsed with the rise of the Hyksos, those social, religious and other demands would have dissipated, leaving the Levant suppliers without their primary market. This may be what is reflected in the declining and realigning of ceramic circulation in the Hyksos period.

(2) From the Levantine perspective, from Predynastic/Early Bronze Age times, until the appearance of the Hittites, Egypt was the sole political and economic superpower on the shores of the Mediterranean, a role it owed to its surplus agricultural potential, which supported a stratified society with the largest population in the region. In addition to being a geographical nexus between African and south-western Asia, Egypt was a climatic and hydrological nexus between the unreliable Mediterranean dry farming world, which is watered by the irregular low pressure systems that are fed by the North Atlantic lows, and the Nile, whose waters derived by the ENSO-driven monsoons.⁶³ Thus, potential climatic teleconnections notwithstanding, long before it became the breadbasket of the Roman world, Egypt could have provided relief in times of Levantine famine. The Egyptian historical and biblical records are replete with the tradition of Asiatics going down to Egypt to break the famine, but that was only an option for mobile groups or individuals. It would be difficult to imagine a local ruler of an elite building or palace or any holder of property simply leaving the Levant and sojourning in the Nile Valley, while their fields are brought back to productivity in their absence. Instead, if maritime transport were a mainstay of eastern Mediterranean life, we should imagine edible products – and not merely edible Nile mollusca – and, when necessary, surplus grain being exported to the Levant as a possible exchange item. Moreover, even without such staple exports being shipped from the Delta, the maintenance of relations with Egypt would have been an additional component in the overall risk abatement strategy of Mediterranean communities and rulers. Although

textual evidence for the maritime transport of grain is not documented until the Late Bronze Age, there are no technological limitations that may have precluded it from occurring in earlier periods.⁶⁴

(3) Finally, even though the presence of foreigners in Egypt, and the Delta in particular, is part of the *longue durée* of Egyptian-Levantine relations, the scale and longevity of the Levantine presence in the Middle Bronze Age represents an unparalleled iteration, and one in which political circumstances allowed, enabled or forced the Asiatics resident in the Delta to exert political control over Egypt. Given the relative size of these populations, could it really have been carried out and rule maintained solely by military agency? Did the new Levantine rulers cause disruption or fill a vacuum? Unfortunately, the contemporary historical record is mute. However, given the locus of this phenomenon at the primary choke point of Egyptian-eastern Mediterranean maritime trade, and not somewhere else up the Nile, an economic foundation for the Hyksos phenomenon is probable and should be explored within the wider context of the resettlement and seemingly rapid demographic growth of the coastal plains of the southern Levant. Nothing is known regarding the reasons for the Levantine immigration to the Delta, which could have been the result of developments in the Levant, such as overpopulation in the narrow coastal plains, imbalance in gender demographics that led males to migrate elsewhere in the Levant or to Egypt,⁶⁵ itinerancy as a result of local competition for markets among craftsmen and their progeny, or the intentional placement of traders from kinship-based merchant groups, as known from the Old Assyrian merchant caravan trade in MB Anatolia. Clearly, the growth of expatriate communities in the Delta was gradual and may have been ongoing, punctuated by occasional massive influxes, as may have been archaeologically detected in the late 13th Dynasty (Stratum F). The MK Egyptian inscriptional and pictorial record shows Asiatics to have filled a variety of roles and positions that ranged from low-skilled to skilled labour, and some gained high positions.⁶⁶ However, while their distribution and acculturation

63 WEISS 2001; GUTZLER 2001, 216–217.

64 Such texts typically relate to the Hittite request for grain. See MONROE 2007; FINKELSTEIN et al. 2017, 255. Unfortunately, there are insufficient systematic archaeobotanical studies for this period, and those that have been carried out, such as at Tel Ifshar (e.g., CHERNOFF 1988; 1992; 1998), have not produced evidence (e.g., Nile Valley weeds) that might support this argument. The presence of a house mouse on the Uluburun ship, which typically infests grain (CUCCHI 2008), might hint at a cargo of grain for trade or as provisions for the final or one of the preceding voyages.

65 Sexual dimorphism has long been noted in Tell el-Dab'a's population suggesting foreign men took Egyptian wives (BIETAK 1991, 29). However, the presence of Levantine cooking ware may suggest otherwise.

66 MOURAD 2015, 189–213.

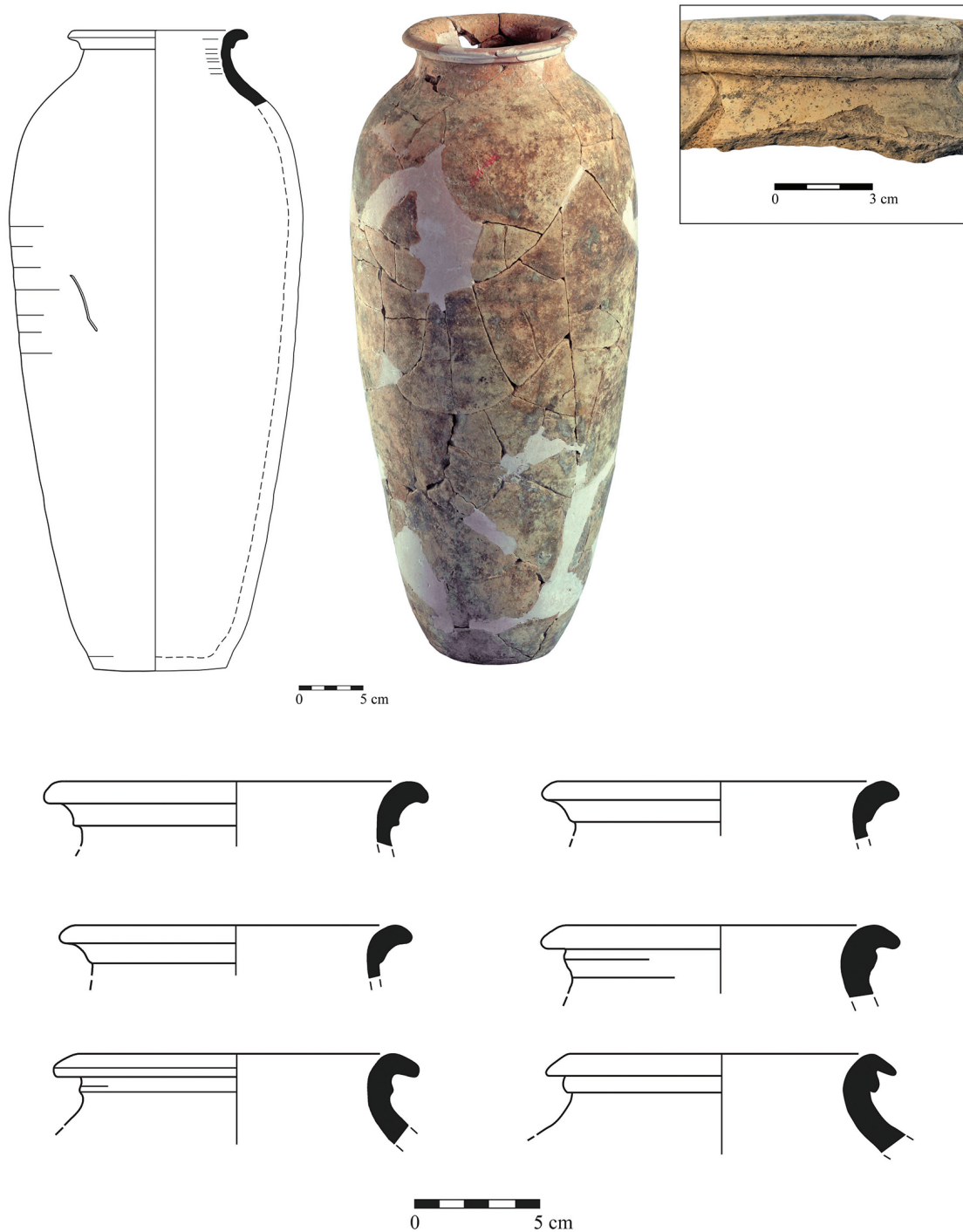


Fig. 4 An example of a cylindrical jar and range of rim sherds from Ifshar Phases A late to B (photos by Yoram Porath and S. Breistein; drawing and layout by S. Haad)

within the Nile Valley may have begun following their arrival at Tell el-Dab'a, they were not the basis for the latter's large permanent populations and its affluence. More likely as a peripheral, liminal border area, the port city of Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris was a place where

the Egyptians permitted a large foreign population to coalesce in order to support the strategically important maritime trade with all of its logistical, technical and organizational complexity. Regarding this last point, private entrepreneurial activities, i.e.,

maritime merchants, may have existed, as they are known in the New Kingdom,⁶⁷ or even encouraged alongside the royal initiatives, the latter of which are the only ones recorded by the crown. Such agency may have made some foreign merchants in Egypt and their partners abroad quite affluent. These trading partners were presumably extended kinship relations, upon which each side's family bonds could rely on the other's for the successful completion of the high-risk, long-distance and long-period transaction that is the nature of maritime commerce. Such relations would explain the multigenerational culturally hybrid population that existed for centuries in the Delta and materially reified their perception of a cultural homeland. Moreover, with affluence comes power and in the turmoil of the collapsing 13th Dynasty, with all that it meant for Egypt and its trading partners, it would have required or enabled such successful individuals to have risen to the task and become what they called themselves: 'Ruler of Foreign Lands' – a term that enabled them to negotiate their fluid identity and role between the Egyptian and Near Eastern worlds.⁶⁸ If, indeed, the Nile Valley fulfilled the role of 'breadbasket' for the Levant in times of famine, then the power of the Hyksos in the eastern Mediterranean maritime network would have been extraordinary.

In conclusion, a maritime approach to the Hyksos need not comprise consideration of the physical remains of ships or harbour-works, above or below the waterline, and the ritual activities of sailors, such as temples bearing ex-voto anchors or boat models. 'Approach' is about reorienting and reframing the discourse and the data analysis, as well as the consideration of palaeo-landscape and seascape, all of which can be done within the study of the enigma that is the Hyksos. Sufficient small finds exist at the relevant archaeological sites to employ an approach that considers the social and cultural aspects of these finds, as well as the economic implications of maritime trade. While it is easy to view the Hyksos phenomenon as a crescendo in light of preceding Egyptian-Levantine relations and their collapse as a coda, in many ways, this foreign commercial enclave is a precursor of Iron Age Canaanite (read Phoenician) maritime commercial expansion and far-flung settlement. More generally, in the context of the Mediterranean, it is an overture for maritime processes and characteristics that will shape the cosmopolitan character of this region throughout its history, until the post-colonialism processes of the 20th century CE.



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67 CASTLE 1992.

68 CANDELORA 2017.

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