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Shifting meanings and values of Aegean-type pottery in the Late Bronze Age Southern Levant

Introduction

For a long time, the meaning and value of pottery of Aegean-type at the Southern Levant has been perceived as relatively stable through all the Late Bronze Age. In contrast to that, a radical re-evaluation of this pottery was seen due to its production at the beginning of the supposed Philistine settlements at the onset of the Early Iron Age. In my contribution, I would like to replace this simplifying notion with a more complex model of the historical development. I will identify several shifts in the meaning and value attached to the Aegean imports from the 15th to the early 12th century BC on the basis of settlement contexts. Whereas first Aegean imports – almost all of them of Cretan origin – can clearly be associated with a particular value, the mass import of Mycenaean pottery led to a severe devaluation of the Aegean pottery at the Southern Levant in the 14th century BC and at the same time triggered the local production of Aegean-type vessels. Societal changes in the Aegean resulted in a subsequent shift of meanings and values of Aegean-type pottery in the second half of the 13th century. In this line of thought, the appearance of the so-called Philistine pottery does not represent a radical brake, but just another step in a history of continuous re-interpretation of Aegean-type pottery at the Southern Levant.

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Preamble: terms and concepts

In the framework of my research, I am always using the term "pottery of Aegean-type" instead of "Mycenaean pottery", as my analyses include vessels of diverse origins from the Eastern Mediterranean – be it the Aegean, Cyprus or the Levant. Therefore, Aegean-type pottery comprises all vessels produced in a Mycenaean or Minoan tradition of forming – irrespective where such vessels were actually produced (cf. also Sherratt 1991; French and Tomlinson 2004: 18 n. 1).

In order to show the shifting meanings and values of the pottery, I want to analyse selected processes of appropriation of Aegean-type pottery. This process of appropriation of the foreign is triggered by the moment of encounter with otherness (Stockhammer 2012a; 2012b). Most often, "foreignness" is not an attribute with which objects or social practices are permanently connected. The perception of foreignness is usually just a very short moment before the formerly other is integrated into the mental spectrum of the own. Foreignness is, therefore, no state, but only a moment of individual, emotional perception. By labelling objects or practices as "foreign" by archaeologists, they transform this momentary perception into a timeless attribute. This notion of quasi eternal foreignness goes hand in hand with the idea of a likewise eternal and singular meaning and function of an object or practice. They tend to forget the myriad changes of functions and meanings of the objects which are the part of their itinerancies (Hahn and Weiss 2013; Hahn 2015; Stockhammer 2016). However, functions, meanings and values are permanently created by individual actor's practices with the object (Stockhammer 2015) which happens within the framework of the live world, the so-called *Lebenswelt* (Schütz and Luckmann 1979; Habermas 1981) of the individual actor. Aegean-type pottery at the Southern Levant is a perfect example to go beyond the notion of a stable function, meaning and value of a certain type of object.

State of research

For a long time, there had been a rather simple understanding of the interaction with Aegean-type pottery in the 15th to 11th century BC Southern Levant. It was generally assumed that until the end of the 13th century B. C. a great amount of mostly Argolid imports was acquired by almost all communities at the Southern Levant. Due to the appearance of the Philistines, the 12th century seemed to be characterised by open vessels of Aegean type inside the Philistia in contrast to the surrounding Canaanite communities – now with hardly any Aegean-type pottery. For almost a decade, however, more differentiated views have been presented.

In 1998, Ann Killebrew (Killebrew 1998) differentiated between three different phases of "Aegean-style assemblages" in the Southern Levant. Her phase 1 is

characterized by the rich LH IIIA2/B imports from the Aegean, especially the Argolid (Killebrew 1998: 159–61). These imports comprised mostly small transport vessels like stirrup jars, flasks and alabastra as well as amphoroid kraters. Killebrew's phase 2 is defined by the decline of quantity and quality of Aegean-type pottery in the late 13th century (Killebrew 1998: 159–62; 2008: 56–57). This phase is dominated by small "Simple Style" stirrup-jars and flasks. Following Sue Sherratt (Sherratt 1998; 2000), she argues that the breakdown of the palatial trade enabled peripheral groups to take over the local production and distribution of Aegean-type pottery. According to her, also the richly decorated stirrup jars of Cypriot origin as known from Tel Keisan and other sites are part of this phase.

The last phase, phase 3, is marked by the locally produced, so-called "Mycenaean IIIC:1b", the appearance of which she connects with the arrival of the Philistines at the Southern Levant (Killebrew 1998: 159–66; 2003: 121; 2005; 2006/07; 2008: 57–59).

Gunnar Lehmann (2007) intensively discussed Killebrew's ideas and defines five groups – in order not to confuse his terminology with the one of Killebrew. Lehmann's group 1 equals Killebrew's phase 1, i.e. the rich and mostly Argolid imports until the late 13th century BC. However, he further subdivides her phase 2 into two different groups, i.e. group 2 and 3. His group 2 comprises the Simple Style stirrup jars. His group 3 concerns the richly decorated stirrup jars of Cypriot White Painted Wheel-made III origin known from Tel Keisan and other sites. Following Lehmann, this pottery must not be confused with his group 4, i.e. the locally produced "Philistine Monochrome" pottery. The coexistent groups 3 and 4 were then replaced by group 5, i.e. Aegean-type pottery of Proto White Painted style.

In the following, I would like to present the results of my research on Aegean-type pottery in Israel which I have conducted since 2008 (Stockhammer Forthcoming a). I have defined four different horizons of interaction with Aegean-type pottery. These horizons go hand in hand with shifting patterns of interaction with this pottery.

Horizons of interaction with Aegean-type pottery

Cretan horizon

The first horizon which I want to define is the so-called Cretan Horizon which started already during the MBA and continued until around 1350 BC. This horizon is characterized by the dominance of imports from Minoan Crete to the Levant.

Already during the MBA, a small number of Cretan imports – most of them part of the so-called Kamares ware – reached the Eastern Mediterranean. So far, only two Kamares finds are known from Israel, namely from Hazor and Ashkelon (Dothan et al. 2000; Stager 2002: 357; Merrillees 2003: 135–36). Both fragments are from secondary

contexts and cannot provide further insights into the functions and values of this pottery in Southern Canaan. Cretan vessels continue to dominate the Aegean imports also during LB I and well into LB IIA. During the 15th century BC, first imports from Mainland Greece appear, albeit still in small numbers.

During the Cretan Horizon, most of the Aegean imports occur in exceptional contexts, e.g. in the Schatzhaus in Kamid el-Loz (Penner 2006: 180–81 with fig. 107) or the so-called temple building at Amman airport (Hankey 1967: 130; 1974). The particular valuation of the Aegean style is also mirrored by the frescoes of Aegean-type e.g. from Kabri and Qatna. In this time, local elites at the Levant show a particular interest in Aegean styles and motives – probably due to their exotic appearance. As the mass import of Aegean pottery has not started in this period of time, the rarity and peculiarity of the vessels seem to have been crucial for their selection for elite treasuries and practices as well as ritual depositions.

Most important insights for the better understanding of the functions and values of these early Aegean imports has recently been provided by two exceptional finds from Tel Beth-Shemesh.

They were found in Level 9 of the 14th century-BC palace (Level 9; LB IIA) that can be attributed to the queen Bēlit-labiat as argued by the excavators (Bunimovitz et al 2013). In one of the rooms, two Cretan conical cups were found close to each other. The cups – definitely used as a pair together – can be identified as LM IIIA1 conical cups. These vessels were very probably produced in the area of the palace at Knossos on Crete, thus enabling us to determine the exact place of origin as well. The excavators interpreted them as royal gifts of the ruler of Knossos to the queen of Tel Beth-Shemesh (Bunimovitz et al 2013) or maybe her predecessor, depending on the duration of her rule, which is unfortunately unknown[1]. Due to the extraordinary context and its documentation, these two cups allow a unique insight into local processes of appropriation of the formerly foreign vessels. In the Aegean, we have clear indications that drinkers sat in pairs opposite each other consuming beverages from pairs of nearly identical drinking vessels (Stockhammer 2008: 297–307). Thus, for the Aegean gift-giver, it was natural to send such a pair of vessels as a gift. The queen of Tel Beth-Shemesh obviously kept the cups together as a pair as well. Drinking from cups, however, was not a common practice during feasting in the Levant.

By examining the two cups closely, I was able to identify that on both cups the handle had been most probably chipped away. In other words, the users of the cups had transformed them into bowls. This fits very well with the common drinking practices in the Late Bronze Age Southern Levant, where drinking bowls were

1 As the vessel were most probably produced ca. 1430–1380/60 BC and the Amarna correspondence should not have started before 1350 BC, one can speculate if the rule of queen Bēlit-labiat bridged the possible gap between the two ranges of date or if the recipient of the cups was her predecessor.

held in the palm of the hand, as it is depicted on the Megiddo ivories (Yasur-Landau 2005: 172. 174; 2008: 356). Thus, the use of foreign drinking vessels and the idea to use a pair of almost identical vessels was appropriated by the users. The users manipulated vessels by transforming them from cups into bowls in order to fit more closely into what they perceived as the correct social act of drinking.

It is most interesting to note that the destruction of the palace of Tel Beth-Shemesh took place several decades after the production and probably also the appropriation of the cups by the queen. The itinerancy of the cups continued in the palace after their arrival. The Aegean-type sherds from the mudbrick walls of the palace date are younger (i.e. ca. 1380/60–1320/10 BC; the ceramic phase LH IIIA2 in the Aegean) than the Minoan cups (ca. 1430–1380/60 BC; the ceramic phase LM IIIA1 in the Aegean). Before they were embedded in the walls of the palace, these LH IIIA2 vessels also had to be transported to Tel Beth-Shemesh, had to be used and broken in order to then get mixed with the clay used to repair the walls of the palace, which had deteriorated over time and requested some repair. Therefore, the Minoan cups were probably used for several decades. Moreover, they were still in use after 1380/60 BC, when the mass importation of Aegean-type pottery to the Levant started which led to a severe devaluation of these vessels and a loss of interest of Southern Levantine elites in these later imports (Stockhammer 2012c; Forthcoming a). In contrast to the overall mass of Aegean-type pottery, the two cups had not lost their particular value – probably due to their specific itinerancy and their already established use for drinking practices within the palace.

This difference of function and value of the LM IIIA1 imports in contrast to the LH IIIA2 imports in Tel Beth-Shemesh best exemplifies the shifts that took place from the Cretan Horizon to the second horizon of imports, i.e. the Horizon Tell Abu Hawam.

Horizon Tell Abu Hawam

Around 1350 BC, the quantity and kind of imports of Aegean type shifted dramatically. Whereas the Cretan Horizon is marked by a broad range of vessel shapes of mostly Cretan origin, the Horizon Tell Abu Hawam is characterized by a completely different pattern: i.e. the mass importation of very standardized, high quality products of the palatial workshops of the Argolid, i.e. of Mainland Greek origin. In the decades, when this shift of power took place in the Aegean, the ceramic styles shifted from LH/LM IIIA1 to LH/LM IIIA2. Therefore, the hallmarks of the Horizon Tell Abu Hawam are the small transport vessels like stirrup jars, piriform jars, alabastra and flasks of Argolid origin as well as the amphoroid kraters. Other shapes also reached the southern Levantine settlements, albeit in small numbers. Due to its prominence and richness of finds, I chose Tell Abu Hawam as the eponymous site (Balensi 1980).

This sudden and complete shift of imports needs explanation. I see the reason for this change in political upheavals in the Aegean: in the early 14th century, the leaders of the political centers on the Greek Mainland managed to conquer Crete (Niemeier 1985: 139–41. 195–217). This shift of power is marked by the replacement of Minoan pottery by Mycenaean pottery all over the Aegean. After 1350 BC, the only Cretan vessels which were exported in larger numbers, are Minoan transport stirrup jars, a shape which was developed after the conquer of Crete as a standardized container for olive oil which Crete had to deliver as tribute to the Mainland palaces (Maran 2005: 427; Stockhammer 2008: 277). These transport vessels also reached the Southern Levant – probably in secondary use and were found at a considerable number of sites, e.g. at Ashdod, Ashkelon, Aphek, Beth-Shean and especially at Tell Abu Hawam (Rutter, personal communication; Stockhammer 2014: 217 no. 59; Forthcoming a).

During this horizon, Aegean imports appeared at almost every site at the southern Levant – even in small sites like Qubur al-Walayida. For a long time, these imports were interpreted as the wish of local Levantine elites to integrate Aegean dishes into their feasting practices (e.g. Leonard and Cline 1998; Steel 2002; van Wijngaarden 2002: 95–96). My re-evaluation of the Aegean-type pottery at the sites of Hazor and Megiddo which were used by Leonard, Cline and van Wijngaarden for their argument, clearly shows that there is absolutely no connection between the elites of the late 14th and 13th century BC and Aegean-type pottery (Stockhammer 2012c). The best evidence for the respective disinterest of the Southern Levantine elites is provided by the "Royal Precinct/Ceremonial Palace" in Hazor. There, 781 completely preserved vessels were found together with a considerable number of exceptional small finds (Zuckerman 2007a, 623. 626; 2007b). There is no doubt that this complex provides a unique insight into the role of material culture within elite rituals. Despite this exceptionally well-preserved context, not one Aegean type vessel has been found complete or at least as multiple sherds. Around 90 single Aegean type sherds – often very fragmented and badly worn – were discovered which were clearly found in a secondary position, often in Iron Age layers (Josephson Hesse 2008: 131–32. 144; Zuckerman, personal communication). At both sides, the sherds found within the area of the palace reached this space incorporated within the mudbrick – and the excavator of the Megiddo palace even mentions that he pulled an Aegean-type sherd out of one of the mudbricks (Loud 1948: pl. 137:5). These sherds are, therefore, all in a secondary position and must not be taken as an indicator of the use of Aegean-type vessels in 13th century BC palaces[2].

2 However, we have to be aware that this Southern Levantine evidence should not be taken for granted for the Levant as a whole. Carol Bell (2006) has already pointed out to the necessity to distinguish different regions and Reinhard Jung (2015) has further underlined this evidence by pointing to the continuous use of Aegean-type pottery by Northern Levantine elites until the end of the Bronze Age.

Moreover, we must be aware of the fact that although Aegean-type pottery was acquired in large numbers, this does not mean that practices which are connected with these vessels in the Aegean were also appropriated. I have intensively dealt with the change of functions and meanings of imported amphoroid kraters and kylikes in several publications and do not want to repeat all of my argument here (Stockhammer 2011; 2012a; Forthcoming a). There is very clear evidence that amphoroid kraters were not used for mixing water and wine at the southern Levant, but to drink beer from them with straws. A similar change of function can be shown for the kylikes, which were most probably used as incense burners like the similar stemmed bowls of Canaanite type.

It is most interesting to see that already during the Horizon Tell Abu Hawam the production of Aegean-type pottery started at the Southern Levant, i.e. long before the supposed Philistine settlements. One of the regions of the early production of seems to have been in the central hill lands around Jerusalem. The small locally produced piriform jar from the cave tomb of Nahalat Ahim could be one of the earliest examples, as the other vessels from the tomb are from the 14th and early 13th century BC at the latest (Amiran 1960, pl. 3:53). This small vessel can be termed a hybrid or material entanglement, as it combines the upper part of an Aegean-type piriform jar with the lower part of a miniature Canaanite amphora (Stockhammer 2012b: 55). A very similarly entangled vessel is known from a tomb in nearby Gibeon (Pritchard 1963; Hankey 1967, 142; Gonen 1992: 61–62).

The earliest evidence appearing to copy Aegean models can be found in Hazor. In Area C, House 6063, Room 6063, Stratum 1B a highly interesting in situ inventory was excavated (Yadin et al. 1958: 77). The finding of two potter's wheels helped to identify the context as the workshop of a local potter. Stone benches are interpreted as places for drying and depositing the vessels which were found in large number in this room. The corpus of pottery also comprised one straight-sided alabastron of Aegean origin (Yadin et al. 1958: pl. 86, 3). This vessel was obviously not produced by the local potter, but the potter had nevertheless acquired this foreign pot. As the straight-sided alabastron – better known as pyxis in the Levantine terminology – is the most frequently produced Aegean shape in the Southern Levant, we might have found one of the earliest evidences for a local potter's interest in this shape in this floor context in Hazor.

Around 1250 BC, we can see a sudden decline of Argolid imports to the southern Levant. There is only a very small number of Argolid imports which can be clearly attributed to the second half of the 13th century. Again, this sudden transformation of the network needs an explanation. The reason may be found in the major earthquake which heavily affected the Argolid, especially Mycenae and its surrounding potters' villages but also Tiryns around 1250 BC (Kilian 1988: 121 fig. 2; 134; French and Stockhammer 2009: 183 tab. 4; Stockhammer Forthcoming a). The destructions of the potters' villages around Mycenae sharply reduced the output of fine tableware and there was probably not enough capacity anymore to produce large numbers of vessels for export, or the palaces did no longer have the ability or interest to export pottery in larger amounts.

Horizon Nami

In spite of the end of the mass import from the Argolid, there are vessels of Aegean-type that were obviously distributed during LH IIIB2 and LH IIIC Early and which can help us to understand the network of exchange in the second half of the 13th and the early 12th century BC. The relevant shapes are shallow bowls FS 296 with interior decoration and/or white paint on the interior bands and the Simple Style stirrup jars. Both shapes start around 1250/1230 BC and continue well into the first half of the 12th century. It is almost impossible to differentiate the latest LH IIIB and the earliest LH IIIC on the basis of Aegean-type pottery – in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as in the Aegean (French and Stockhammer 2009).

Shallow bowls FS 296 with interior decoration have so far been documented at Tel Dan within the so-called "Mycenaean Tomb" and in the settlement strata (Ben-Dov 2002: 117 fig. 2.85: 105–106), from Aphek, Stratum X11 (Guzowska and Yasur-Landau 2009: 343 tab. 9.1: 15) and the third phase of the Fosse temple in Lachish. Moreover, I identified them also at Tel Nami, Area G/3 and Dor, Area G/11 (Stockhammer Forthcoming a).

Small Simple Style stirrup jars have so far been published in large numbers from sites at the Carmel coast, the Jezreel valley and the Jordan valley. They are most numerous in the cemeteries of Tel Nami (Artzy 2006: 53 fig. 6.14:17), Megiddo (Stockhammer 2011) and Tel Beth-Shean (Stockhammer 2014). Studying the new findings from the Megiddo settlement, I could identify 18 further vessels which can clearly or most probably be classified as Simple Style stirrup jars (Stockhammer Forthcoming b). In Locus 2 in Area K, four complete or largely preserved ones were found together in situ. The Simple Style stirrup jars continue in Megiddo well into the 12th century: one complete stirrup jar and fragments of several others were found in the old excavations in Megiddo in Stratum VIIA and I identified several fragments from K-7 of the recent excavations (Stockhammer 2011: 285–87). Therefore, there is very clear evidence for the use of this Aegean-type vessel until at least the mid of the 12th century BC.

We have a very clear zone of interaction which links the Carmel region on the one hand to Cyprus and the Northern Levant and on the other hand via the Jezreel valley with the Jordan valley, as it has already been proposed by Michal Artzy (Artzy 1990a; 1990b; 1994; 1998). In her view, this route was most important in the aftermath of the breakdown of Eastern Mediterranean palatial trade and was crucial for the transport of incense and scrap metal. The Simple Style stirrup jars, therefore, mirror a group of highly mobile individuals with close connections to Cyprus. However, it would be completely oversimplifying to attach any ethnic or location-dependent name. The evidence from the Nami settlement and other related harbor sites like Dor or Ashdod South shows that this group can best be understood as a transcultural amalgamate of highly mobile agents of very different origin – Artzy's

"Nomads" and Sherratt's "Mafiosi" (Artzy 1997; 1998; Sherratt 2000: 88).[3] They defined themselves by their international material culture and related social practices.

However, already in the second quarter of the 12th century, my fourth horizon of interaction started, i.e. the so-called Phoenician Horizon.

Phoenician Horizon

It is most interesting to see that the most considerable evidence for the Simple Style stirrup jars is found at those sites, where shortly afterwards the "Northern Skyphoi" (Gilboa 2005; 2006/07, Gilboa and Sharon 2008; 160; Gilboa 2009) appear, i.e. at Dor, Megiddo and Tel Beth-Shean. The same is true for the richly decorated stirrup jars of the Tell Keisan type, e.g. from Tell Keisan and Tel Beth-Shean (Mountjoy 2005; 2011) as well as further elaborately painted stirrup jars of the same time, e.g. from Megiddo K-5 (Yasur-Landau 2006). The appearance of the Northern Skyphoi has been connected with feasting practices of small groups of foreigners at Dor by Ayelet Gilboa (Gilboa 2005; 2006/07; Gilboa and Sharon 2008: 160; Gilboa 2009). Also in Tel Beth-Shean there are indications for the small-scale presence of foreigners with Aegean and/or Cypriot connections (Sherratt 2009; Stockhammer 2011). In contrast to the entangled Nami phenomenon, we can now trace a different group of foreigners which were brought up in Aegean-style drinking practices and kept these practices. However, they obviously did not live in those settlements which we attribute to what we call the Philistines.

The Philistia

It is most interesting to compare the evidence of my Horizon Nami and the Phoenician Horizon from the Carmel coast and the Jezreel and Jordan valleys with what we call the Philistia. When we date the beginning of the production of Philistine I pottery in the early 12th century BC, we have to ask, why the "Philistines" did not use Simple Style stirrup jars (Dothan and Zukerman 2004) in spite of their connection to Cyprus and the availability of these stirrup jars all around the Southern Levant. The lack of Simple Style stirrup jars and stirrup jars of Tell Keisan type in Philistia comes as an even larger surprise, as several authors argue for a Cypriot or at least partly Cypriot origin of the Philistines (Killebrew 1998, 159–60; 162–66;

3 One must not confuse Artzy's "nomads" and Sherratt's "mafiosi" with the "pirates" proposed by Hitchcock and Maeir 2014, who associate the phenomenon of the "Sea Peoples" with piracy. With their pirates, Hitchcock and Maeir 2014 subsume two very different phenomena – my Horizon Nami and the so-called Philistines – into one group of people. However, both phenomena have to be kept separate.

2003: 121; 2005; 2006/07; 2008: 57–59). How can we then explain the evidence? One may either argue 1) that Cypriots only produced Simple Style pottery for export and never used it themselves (so why should they start using it abroad?); 2) that it was a conscious choice of the Philistines not to use these Cypro-Aegean vessels; 3) that the Philistine settlements started later than LH IIIC Early 2 in the Argolid, i.e. after the mid of the 12th century BC; 4) or that the Philistine ceramic repertoire should not be interpreted as a typically Aegean-style repertoire, where stirrup jars definitely played an important role.

I would like to further elaborate on the last point. In my view, we have to differentiate more clearly between the Aegean style of the pottery in its appearance, i.e. its materiality and the style of the practices connected therewith. So far, it has been taken for granted that Aegean-type pottery was also used for Aegean-type eating and drinking practices. I have already pointed out that the Philistine feasting dishes of Aegean-type must not be understood as a copy of the contemporaneous ceramic inventory in the Aegean, but as the product of transcultural entanglement (Stockhammer 2012a; 2013: 18–23). It is most obvious that key vessel shapes of the Aegean are almost completely missing in the Philistine settlements, especially the Aegean drinking vessels like the kylix and the cup and the stirrup jar (Dothan and Zukerman 2004). On the other hand, decorated bowl shapes – like the linear shallow carinated bowl FS 295C – are far more common in the Philistia then in the Aegean. I interpret this evidence as the translation of Canaanite practices into the stylistic vocabulary of Aegean-type pottery (Stockhammer 2013). Canaanite feasting dishes are dominated by countless shallow and deep bowls of small and medium sizes and do not differentiate between a particular shape for eating and a particular shape for drinking. This is exactly mirrored by the Philistine feasting dishes.

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