

DIAMANTIS PANAGIOTOPOULOS

## The Enigma of the Gifts

A “Thick Description” of an Entry from the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regnal Year of the “Annals”  
of Thutmose III (*Urk. IV 733: 4–8*)<sup>1</sup>

*“Real mysteries cannot be solved,  
but they can be turned into better  
mysteries.”*

(Greil Marcus, *Lipstic Traces*)

*The impressive array of foreign “supplies” to Egypt’s royal court in the reign of Thutmose III, which is recorded with unusual precision in the so-called Annals, contains a brief entry of outmost interest to Aegean archaeologists. An Aegean centre, whose localisation still remains a matter of debate, is registered as sender of five metal vases to the Egyptian ruler. Despite its laconic character and some terminological problems, this entry provides one of the most unequivocal sources for Aegean-Egyptian relations in the Late Bronze Age. When correlated with the pertinent written and pictorial evidence (including the “Annals” themselves) and placed within the historical setting of its period, the recorded event can be linked to one of the first diplomatic enterprises of a thriving Mycenaean kingdom.*

### Introduction

In his 42<sup>nd</sup> regnal year, Thutmose III was in the apogee of his power. In his 16<sup>th</sup> – and probably last – campaign in the Levant, the Egyptian army captured Tunip, devastated other rebelling cities along the Orontes, and finally defeated Mitannian troops in the territory of Kadesh, thus consolidating the pharaonic hegemony as far as southern Syria.<sup>2</sup> The strong Egyptian presence beyond the physical limits of Egypt proper generated a constant flow of foreign raw materials, natural products, artefacts and manpower. All these “supplies” were crossing the Egyptian border as trade commodities, gifts, and tribute/taxes, vividly demonstrating the land’s uncontested leading role in the Near East.<sup>3</sup> The “Annals”, a monumental inscription carved onto the walls of two chambers in the Temple of Amun at Karnak, perpetuated this “golden era”, providing a verbal account of Thutmose’s merits and exploits. Here, the traditional rhetoric of power alternated

1 The present paper is a small token of gratitude to my academic teacher, Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, for his continuous and decisive support. I am very much indebted to my colleagues Joachim Friedrich Quack and Claudia Maderna-Sieben (Heidelberg) for their assistance in Egyptological matters.

2 Thutmose’s Levantine campaigns are well-documented both in official and private sources; see Redford 1992, 156–61; Redford 2003; Redford 2006; Spalinger 1982, 134–42; Hoffmeier 2004, 134–9; Morris 2004, 115–27; Manassa 2013, 102–16. For the events of year 42, see Redford 2003, 238–40.

3 Redford 2003, 250–4; Panagiotopoulos 2000, 147–52.

with a very pragmatic, yet not less impressive report of foreign wealth which was accumulated in the storehouses of the palace and the Amun temple. In one of the entries for year 42, the scribe recorded the reception of five metal vases sent by a land called *Tanaja*. From an Egyptian perspective, the passage is rather inconspicuous and disappears under the inscription's vast collection of similar information. Seen from an Aegean perspective, however, these lines bear a special historical value as a rare – and thus valuable – written testimony of Aegean-Egyptian relations. In an attempt to fully exploit the significance of this passage, the present paper adopts a “thick description” approach<sup>4</sup>, aiming at a comprehensive treatment of all important facets relating both to the historical event and to its treatment in this official source. The following appraisal will take a logical path, starting with the epigraphic data, i. e. the Karnak inscription and its Aegean passage, and moving to the level of historical reality, with a thorough treatment of the occasion, the gifts, and the donor. After having formulated a hypothesis about the donor's identity, this analysis will close by discussing the consequences of this identification for our understanding of a significant detail and for the wider historical context of the recorded event.

## The Karnak inscription

The so-called Annals of Thutmose III,<sup>5</sup> the longest monumental inscription known from Egypt, represent a valuable source of information not only for the campaigns of the king in the Syro-Palestinian territory but also for their direct or indirect material outcome within Egypt.<sup>6</sup> As already mentioned, extensive parts of the inscription are dedicated to the flow of peoples, animals, agricultural products, raw materials and artefacts which reached Egypt as gifts from independent and conquered countries, annual dues from obedient vassals, “plunder” or “spoil” from cities which had rebelled against the Pharaoh, and finally goods acquired during state-sponsored expeditions to foreign territories with rich natural resources.<sup>7</sup> What truly singles these passages out as a rare testimonial is the fact that the compiler of the inscription apparently had access to – and thoroughly consulted – official documents, where those deliveries were recorded in every detail.<sup>8</sup> The text itself explicitly mentions the “Daybook of the Palace” and another not precisely defined document of the Treasury.<sup>9</sup> Given this explicit indication of the inscription's sources and the realistic amounts of the registered items, there is no reason to question the reliability and accuracy of these data. It is exactly the very fact of a reliable and accurate account of foreign “supplies” to

4 The “thick description” approach, an idea first introduced in cultural anthropology by C. Geertz, strives not only to describe but primarily to understand social behaviour by applying a comprehensive, in-depth, contextual analysis, see Geertz 1973. According to Geertz's pragmatic concept, the main objective of ethnography should be to clearly explain the specific cultural meaning of symbolic actions in a given context: “My own position in the midst of all this has been [...] to try to keep the analysis of symbolic forms as closely tied as I could to concrete social events and occasions, the public world of common life [...]” (ibid., 322).

5 *Urk.* IV 647–756. “Annals” is a conventional and anachronistic term for a text which defines itself simply as *wꜥ* (“formal hieroglyphic inscription”), see Redford 1986, 96, with n. 98.

6 See Grapow 1947; Spalinger 1977; Redford 2003.

7 The omission of commercial goods, which undeniably comprised the main channel for the circulation of commodities at an interregional level, can be easily explained: Due to its profane character, trade, was hardly ever recorded in royal or private inscriptions.

8 See Panagiotopoulos 2000, 147.

9 *Urk.* IV 693: 11, 694: 7–8; see also Redford 1986, 97–9; Panagiotopoulos 2000, 147.

Egypt that remains unparalleled in the genre of royal inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> Therefore it is legitimate to regard the text as a quasi-direct historical source, not less reliable than the Amarna letters.<sup>11</sup>

## The passage

The text referring to the 42<sup>nd</sup> year's events and deliveries is engraved on the north half of the west wall of the temple's vestibule ("Western Annal Hall", Fig. 1).<sup>12</sup> This part of the inscription is well preserved and shows only a few lacunae (Fig. 2–3). Our entry displays in terms of length and phraseology no peculiar features, following the standard mode of "statistical" records<sup>13</sup> which documented the flow of foreign contributions to Egyptian institutions:



(18) [*in.w n wr*] n *Tjnʒy*  
*ḥd šwbtj m bʒk n Kftjw*  
*ḥn<sup>c</sup> ḥnw n bjʒ dr. t m ḥd 4*  
*jr n dbn 56 qd. t 3*

(18) "[gifts from the ruler] of *Tanaja*  
 a silver *shawabti*-vessel in *Keftiu* workmanship  
 along with bowls of metal with handles of silver: (total) 4  
 making 56 *dbn*, 3 *qdt*." <sup>14</sup>

The beginning of this short text is unfortunately missing; yet it can be reconstructed with certainty. Nearly all entries relating to contributions from independent regions or cities in the "Annals" are introduced with the standard formula "gifts' (*inw*) from the 'ruler' (*wr* = 'great') of [...]". The toponym *Tanaja* appears several times in Egyptian sources and has been extensively discussed in the past years. According to the *communis opinio*, it refers either to an Aegean region or to an Aegean centre which can be pinpointed with some certainty, as it shall be demonstrated below. The terms used for the shape and material of the vases present us, however, with some problems. The silver vessel is described as *shawabti*. The word is a Semitic loan which can be correlated to the Babylonian *šu-i-ib-tá*,<sup>15</sup> denoting a specific stone vessel shape. A vessel with this name appears among the numerous gifts sent by Amenophis IV to the Babylonian king Burna-buriaš II on the occasion of the royal marriage between the former and the daughter of the

10 The historical authenticity of these lists gains further credence when one compares them with goods and amounts mentioned in the Amarna letters, see Panagiotopoulos 2000, 147, n. 95.

11 For the Amarna letters see Moran 1992.

12 See *Urk.* IV 723–724 and the plan in *Urk.* IV 625.

13 See Grapow 1949, 6, n. 7.

14 *Urk.* IV 733: 4–7; see further Vercoutter 1956, 55–6; Helck 1979, 28, 30; Strange 1980, 96–7; Cline 1994, 114; Lehmann 1991, 109; Redford 2003, 96, with n. 225–6; 97–8.

15 Hoch 1994, 275, no. 392; Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 227.

latter.<sup>16</sup> The word's Semitic root has the meaning "to draw water"<sup>17</sup> which makes an interpretation of this vessel type as jug or pitcher<sup>18</sup> feasible. This hypothesis is strengthened by the Egyptian determinative  $\text{𓆎}$ <sup>19</sup> which allows for identification with a popular Minoan shape of the Neopalatial period (see below). The additional information about its design ("in *Keftiu* workmanship") indicates either that it was manufactured on Crete or in Cretan (i.e. Minoan) style.<sup>20</sup> The Egyptian terms for shape and material of the four other vases are rather generic. *ḥnw* means "vase" or – in the cases of a more specific use of the word – "bowl". *bjʿ* has to be translated as "metal" rather than "iron".<sup>21</sup> The handles of these metal vessels were made of silver. Finally, the total weight of the vessels is also mentioned in the common units of this period (c. 5.1 kg).<sup>22</sup>

## The event

The delivery of five vessels from the "great" (ruler) of *Tanaja* to Egypt can be linked with a specific form of transcultural interaction which left rich traces in ancient sources. If we accept the very plausible emendation of the entry's beginning, the inscription's phraseology leaves no doubt that the artefacts mentioned were sent as a diplomatic gift to the Pharaoh. This suggestion is corroborated by the localisation of *Tanaja* in the Aegean (see below), in other words an independent region, and the nature of the artefacts listed.<sup>23</sup> Starting with the terminological evidence, the vessels are – most probably – described as *inw* because in the "Annals" this term is, as already mentioned, the common designation for supplies from a sovereign country.<sup>24</sup> The literal meaning of the word, a perfect passive participle of the verb *ini* (= to bring, fetch), is "that which is brought".<sup>25</sup> Concomitant with its broad semantic range, the term was used in its long history in

16 EA 14: III, 61; see Moran 1992, 33, with n. 51.

17 Hoch 1994, 275.

18 See Albright 1934, 57; Strange 1980, 96, 97.

19 After an autopsy of the inscription, Vercoutter noted that he could hardly recognize any handle in the determinative, see Vercoutter 1956, 55, n. 8. He also mentioned, however, that in a photograph taken by him with oblique light, some traces of a handle were visible, indicating that the sign's original reading is correct.

20 The identification of the Egyptian geographical name *Keftiu* with Crete can be regarded as secure, see Vercoutter 1956, 33–123; Sakellarakis 1984; Wachsmann 1987, 93–9; Haider 1988, 1–8; Osing 1992a, 273–80; Osing 1992b, 25–36; Cline 1994, 32; Helck 1995, 21–30. Even Duhoux's provocative – and unconvincing – suggestion that the related term "islands in the midst of the Great Green" refers to the islands of the Nile Delta (Duhoux 2003) does not affect the identification of *Keftiu* with Crete, since he is actually implying that an expatriate community of *Keftiu* (= Cretans) was living in the Nile Delta.

21 See Graefe 1971, 26–9. The "Annals" mention a further *shawabti* vase, the hieroglyphic sign of which is rendered with yellow colour, a clear indication against a translation of the term as "iron", see *ibid.*, 161, n. 9; further Harris 1961, 58, 59. Only from the end of the second millennium BCE onwards, does *bjʿ* seem to have acquired the specific meaning of telluric iron. This linguistic interpretation is corroborated by the archaeological evidence, since iron vessels are virtually absent in the second millennium BCE. This was due to the very complex smelting and working process of iron production which advanced only later, see Ogden 2000, 166–8; further Aufrère 1991, 431–8, esp. 431–2.

22 The inscription does not mention „total in silver“, as has been ironically rendered in the German translation of the "Annals" (see Blumenthal et al. 1984, 223) but only "total". It is thus a pure indication of weight and not of value.

23 Both points are extensively discussed below.

24 See Grapow 1949, 27, 29–30.

25 See Hannig 1995, 74; Goldwasser 1995, 21–2; Persson 1942, 145 was the first who alerted the attention of Aegean archaeologists to the etymology of the word denoting "that which is brought"; see later also Strøm 1984, 193.

Egyptian texts in quite different contexts, attaining various submeanings.<sup>26</sup> In many instances, to which the Karnak inscription also belongs, *inw* seems, however, to have had a special connotation as “gift”.<sup>27</sup> It is important to stress in this respect that the Egyptian language had no other term for denoting the meaning of “gift” or “diplomatic gift”, so that *inw* appears as the only word which could match the Accadian *šulmānu* (“greeting gift”) which was used in the royal correspondence of the Amarna archive as a terminus technicus for describing the gifts exchanged between foreign rulers.<sup>28</sup> The consistent use of *inw* in the context of the Karnak inscription, being the only term which was used for denoting the items brought by the “rulers”/“chiefs” of independent countries strongly supports this interpretation. The diplomatic gifts recorded in the “Annals” include raw materials mostly of precious character, such as gold, silver, but also copper and lead, as well as lapis lazuli, ivory, wood, slaves, birds, game, plants, metal vessels and gems. Due to many lacunae in the inscription, the supplying countries or cities cannot always be identified with certainty. The gift-givers, who in every case appear only sporadically, include the kings of Hatti, Babylonia, Assyria, Ashuwa and Alalakh.<sup>29</sup>

Several studies in the past decades have already explored the character and significance of diplomatic gift-giving as the basis of a close political relationship between two independent countries at a parity level.<sup>30</sup> The exchange of valuable gifts mostly bearing a personal character and a strong symbolic content was the materialization of an alliance of friendship (“brotherhood”) between two rulers.<sup>31</sup> Through this direct personal bond at the highest social level, the harmonious political relation between two foreign countries was cemented and advanced. In the time of Thutmose III, the “Annals” are the most important, yet not the only source for this international practice. The foreigners’ processions from several Theban tombs of high officials provide a – no less important – pictorial counterpart of the Karnak inscription (Fig. 4). They visualize from an authentic, private point of view the same pattern of foreign relationship which occurs in the “Annals”.<sup>32</sup> There are several cases of a notable “intermedial reference” between both sources which suggest that the artists who created these impressive scenes may not only have been inspired directly from the historical reality as eyewitnesses of such illustrious events at the Egyptian royal court; they could have also consulted the Karnak inscription, when they needed to attribute specific items

26 See Warburton 1997, 221–36.

27 Gardiner 1947, 127; Haring 1997, 18, 47–51, 84, 183–5, 205–6, 249–50; Vercoutter 1956, 131, 133; Cline 1995, 146, n. 21 (following Schulman 1988, 73, n. 55); Müller-Wollermann 1983; Müller-Wollermann 1984; Bleiberg 1981; 1984; Panagiotopoulos 2000, 149–50; Panagiotopoulos 2001, 270–1.

28 Liverani 1990, 263; Bleiberg 1984, 158, n. 8; Spalinger 1996, 363. Be that as it may, the Egyptian audience must have perceived *inw* deliveries as tribute and not gifts, see Liverani 1990, 260–6; Panagiotopoulos 2001, 274; Feldman 2006, 111; Gordon 2014, 7 with n. 9; 10 with n. 35.

29 See the useful chart in Redford 2003, 251.

30 Zaccagnini 1973; Zaccagnini 1983, esp. 198–227; Zaccagnini 1987; Liverani 1990, 255–66; Peltenburg 1991, 167–70; Cline 1995; Feldman 2006, 105–8, 113–4, 145–56; further Cohen & Westbrook 2000.

31 This activity was normally limited to a few valuables serving as a material token of a friendly relationship between two rulers and must be clearly distinguished from royal trade, see Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 165–74; Panagiotopoulos 2001, 275–8. Only in the case of a royal marriage, did an impressive amount of gifts change hands either as dowry or as a gift by the bridegroom to the father of the bride, see Kühne 1973, 23–39; Zaccagnini 1973, 30–2; Pintore 1978, 111–23; Artzi 1987, 25, with n. 15. It is highly improbable that this channel of ceremonial gift-giving would have ever satisfied the high quantitative demands of Late Bronze Age international trade. For an emphasis on the economic dimension of this practice see, however, Pfälzner 2007.

32 These scenes provide, apart from some iconographical conventions, an accurate record of historical reality, thus enabling a valuable insight in the mechanisms of pharaonic power, see Panagiotopoulos 2001, esp. 273–5. For a different interpretation see Hallmann 2006.

to foreign embassies (see below) or to supply their pictures with superscriptions, citing ethnical names and/or places of origin.

It is very likely that the gifts from *Tanaja* – according to the established diplomatic practice of this period – were brought by an emissary or emissaries of this land or centre (see below), accompanied by a letter from its ruler which was addressed to the Egyptian king. If such a letter did exist, then it could not have been very different from the royal correspondence in the Amarna archive, a century later.<sup>33</sup> It is impossible to make any hypotheses about its content; yet we can at least assume that it could have started with the stereotypical salutation and that it probably contained a declaration of friendship.<sup>34</sup> Following the diplomatic etiquette of this period, the letter must have also mentioned the type and quantity of the gifts. Conversely, one can exclude that it contained any indication about their precise weight or value.<sup>35</sup> Their weight was obviously recorded by Egyptian officers who checked and weighed every foreign gift entering the Egyptian royal court, as can be seen in several depictions of foreign processions in the Theban private tombs.<sup>36</sup> The reason why kind, material, quantity, and weight of the gifts had to be thoroughly documented was obviously a need for estimating their material value. According to one of the – unwritten – rules of diplomatic gift-exchange, every gift had to be reciprocated by a gift of at least the same – and preferably higher – value.<sup>37</sup>

After the reception of the gifts – obviously in the course of a court ceremony in Thebes, in which also gift-giving emissaries from other foreign cities or countries may also have participated – the metal vessels were most likely dispatched to one of the royal storehouses. In their second “life” in Egypt, they probably followed the fate of diplomatic gifts which were stored as part of the royal “symbolic capital”, much in the same ways as the Homeric *keimelia*<sup>38</sup>, only to be circulated in a ceremonial context, i.e. as gifts to other rulers<sup>39</sup> or to Egyptian officials. It is rather improbable that such valuables – the “biography” of which invested them with a special symbolic value – could have ever been exchanged as commodities during the course of a commercial transaction.

33 Moran 1992; Liverani 1999.

34 Moran 1992, xxii–xxv.

35 See Panagiotopoulos 2001, 275–8. Both partners had a very clear idea about the value of the exchanged gifts; yet this value (or weight) was never explicitly mentioned. In the Amarna correspondence, there are only two exceptions to this rule which – according to their *modus operandi* and terminology – must be regarded as commercial transaction and not gift exchange, see *ibid.* 277–8.

36 See for example the scene in the tomb of Rekhmire, Wachsmann 1987, Pl. 40. Despite the fact that the depictions of foreigner processions in the Theban private tombs comprise an extremely important iconographic source of unquestioned historical value, they are less reliable as to the specific kind and quantity of foreign gifts. The scenes referred undoubtedly to historical episodes which were, however, visually rendered with a mixture of historical accuracy and artistic freedom.

37 Interestingly, several Amarna letters document complaints about the disregard of this convention, demonstrating how extremely sensitive some Late Bronze Age rulers had been in this respect, see Moran 1992, xxiv–xxv; 19 (*EA* 10: 8–24).

38 Finley 1977, 61: “The twin uses of treasure (sc. *keimelion*) were in possessing it and giving it away, paradoxical as it may appear. Until the appropriate occasion for a gift presented itself, most treasure was kept hidden under lock and key. It was not ‘used’ in the narrow sense of that word.”

39 For gifts circulating among foreign rulers see Guichard 1999, 175; Liverani 1979, 25. The “biography” of these precious objects, comprising a chain of previous – distinguished – owners, enhanced enormously their symbolic value.

## The gifts

In the context of the Late Bronze international relationships, a small group of valuables represented – in terms of kind and quantity – a normal gift.<sup>40</sup> The practice of exchanging only a few prestige objects is well documented both in the “Annals” and later in the Amarna letters.<sup>41</sup> Metal vessels belong to the most common gifts offered by Aegean embassies to the Pharaoh, as the depictions of foreign processions in the Theban wall paintings clearly demonstrate (Fig. 5).<sup>42</sup>

Any assumption about the precise type of the vessels sent by the ruler of *Tanaja* to the Egyptian king must remain highly hypothetical. The *shawabti* vessel in *Keftiu* workmanship must have been a Minoan jug comparable to those depicted in the Theban tombs among the gifts brought by Aegean – and Syrian – emissaries (Fig. 6–7)<sup>43</sup> or to silver ewers from Late Bronze Age sites in Crete and the Greek mainland (Fig. 8).<sup>44</sup> The fact that the Egyptian scribe used a Semitic term for describing the vessel does not presuppose that he copied this word from a letter written in Babylonian; it only indicates that the vase was fashioned in a shape which was uncommon in Egypt and for which there was no adequate indigenous term.<sup>45</sup> The “bowls” could have been big metal bowls or cups with one or two handles, corresponding to one-handled shallow cups, goblets, and basins or two-handled kantharoi which occur in several Late Bronze Age Aegean sites.<sup>46</sup> Similar vase types also appear occasionally in the Theban tombs among the items brought by Aegean or Syrian emissaries.<sup>47</sup> The information that the handles of these vessels were made of

40 We have no idea which was the “regular” temporal cycle for diplomatic gift-exchange. Given the difficulties and risks of terrestrial and maritime transport in the Late Bronze Age as well as the lengthy period of stay of foreign emissaries in a royal court, one can assume, that this mostly happened on an annual basis, see Kühne 1973, 120, with n. 605.

41 See Redford 2003, 250–4; Panagiotopoulos 2001, 276.

42 Wachsmann 1987, 61–71, 72–3. Several of these vases are hybrids which were obviously invented by the Egyptian artists since they have no parallels in the archaeological evidence. For artistic hybridism in the scenes of foreigner processions from the Theban tombs, see Wachsmann 1987, 4–11.

43 Vercoutter 1956, 328–33, Pl. XLIV–XLVI. Several of these jugs are made of silver, as indicated by their white colour. The vases with lower neck are closer to the Minoan type of jug (Vercoutter 1956, Pl. XLV, nos. 329, 331, 332, 334; Pl. XLVI, nos. 337, 338, 342, 344; see also Matthäus 1995, 182, Figs. 3–4) than those with high neck which resemble non-Minoan shapes (Vercoutter 1956, Pl. XLIV, nos. 319–326; for a close Egyptian parallel made out of stone see Lilyquist 1995, 62, Fig. 154; for further Egyptian or Levantine stone jugs/jars/pitchers with high cylindrical neck, yet with a more globular body see Lilyquist 1996, 152–4, Pls. 20–22, 26). Given the general tendency of the painters of the Theban tombs to create hybrid forms (see above, n. 42), these typological differences can be meaningless and should not be regarded as accurate representations of specific Aegean, Egyptian or Levantine shapes.

44 The closest parallel in terms of material, shape, manufacture and size – as indicated in the “Annals” entry or can be reconstructed in the present article – is the silver ewer from Grave Circle A at Mycenae (see Karo 1930, 148, no. 855, Pl. CXXIV; Davis 1977, 149–55, Fig. 120; here Fig. 8) and its bronze counterparts from Knossos and Akrotiri (Davis 1977, Fig. 121–122; Matthäus 1980, 178, nos. 252–253, Pl. 31); cf. also Davis 1977, 190–1, no. 65, Fig. 143. For comparable bronze ewers and jugs see Matthäus 1980, 162–206, Pl. 25–36. Silver vases in similar shape are furthermore attested in miniature size, see Davis 1977, 102–6, nos. 13–14, Figs. 76–78; 134–6, no. 29, Figs. 106–107.

45 See also Vercoutter 1956, 55; Strange 1980, 97.

46 See Matthäus 1980, 123–40, Pls. 13–18; 207–33, Pls. 37–41; cf. also several gold and silver vases in similar shapes, Davis 1977, 107–9, no. 18, Figs. 84–85; 112–6, no. 21, Figs. 89–92; 116–7, no. 22, Figs. 93–94; 157–9, no. 46, Fig. 124 (cf. also Fig. 125); 161–2, no. 48, Fig. 126; 175–6, no. 60, Fig. 143; 193, no. 67, Fig. 157; 248–51, no. 98, Fig. 195; 260–1, no. 107, Figs. 206–207; 271–5, nos. 112–115, Figs. 221–223; 286–8, no. 121, Fig. 232; 294–5, no. 127, Fig. 237–8; 297–8, no. 129, Fig. 241, 304–7, nos. 133–134, Fig. 246–9; further the silver kantharos from the Tôd treasure, whose shape and close Helladic parallels imply that the date of deposition of this impressive set of silver vessels falls in the New Kingdom, see Maran 1987, 225–7, Figs. 1a–b, 2a–b.

47 Cf. Vercoutter 1956, 41–2, nos. 382, 383, 386, Pl. LII–LIII.

silver poses a problem, since metal vessels with handles from a different material are totally absent from known archaeological finds. There are several Aegean bimetallic or even trimetallic vases in which however different metal elements are employed as a core or coating.<sup>48</sup> In several cases, copper elements are coated with silver plates or silver elements with gold plates. Most interesting for our purposes are several silver vases with gold overlay on the rim and/or handles (Fig. 9).<sup>49</sup> On the basis of this evidence, one could speculate that the Egyptian scribe – in case he could not consult any Mycenaean letter and had to describe the delivered items by himself – mistook the silver coated handles as silver handles. Interestingly, among the depiction of Aegean or Aegean-looking gifts in the Theban tombs, there are at least two instances of bimetallic vases, the handle(s) of which are rendered in a different colour than the body, indicating a different material.<sup>50</sup> Finally, judging by the total weight of the vases (c. 5.1 kg), these must have had an impressive size.<sup>51</sup>

## The donor

Among the foreigner processions from the Theban tombs, which include several Aegean emissaries, the name *Tanaja* is not attested.<sup>52</sup> Whether this is meaningful or not must remain an open question, given the fragmentary character of our evidence. Quite theoretically, the obscure geographical term “islands in the midst of the Great Green” could have been a generic term for the Aegean region beyond Crete,<sup>53</sup> including, however, the territory of *Tanaja*. Nevertheless, according to the present evidence, there is no clear indication to support this assumption. On the other hand, Minoan Crete (*Keftiu*) is curiously absent from the “Annals”; yet this may again be due to their numerous lacunae.<sup>54</sup> Wachsmann drew our attention to the entry which precedes the gifts from *Tanaja* recording 300 gr “genuine lapis-lazuli”, “heads of bulls” (apparently bull-head rhyta) and “native copper” sent as gifts by a country the name of which has not been preserved.<sup>55</sup> His suggestion that this land might have been *Keftiu* (= Crete) is an attractive hypothesis. However, the heterogeneous origin of the gifts makes any secure identification impossible.

In the last years, the problem of the localization of *Tanaja* has attracted much interest and provoked several interpretations. Meanwhile, there is a general consensus that the term refers to a centre or region of the Greek Mainland. This assumption is mainly based on the Kom-el-Hetan

48 See, for instance, Davis 1977, 260–1, no. 107, Figs. 206–207 and *passim*.

49 Davis 1977, 112–6, no. 21, Figs. 89–92; 134–6, no. 29, Figs. 106–107; 157–9, no. 46, Fig. 124; 260–1, no. 107, Figs. 206–207; 271–3, no. 112, Fig. 221; 286–8, no. 121, Fig. 223; 297–8, no. 129, Fig. 241.

50 Vercoutter 1956, 330, no. 329, 331, no. 335, Pl. XLV.

51 Although the weight of Aegean metal vases has only rarely been indicated in previous publications, there are two heavy goblets from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (Davis 1977, 204–20, nos. 82–83, Figs. 170–173) the individual weight of which is c. 1 kg, thus corresponding to the average weight of the five vessels of the “Annals” entry.

52 For Aegeans in the Theban private tombs see Wachsmann 1987; Panagiotopoulos 2001; further Pinch Brock 2000; Gordon 2014.

53 See Cline 1994, 32, 114–6, cat. nos. A32–A37; Cline 1998, 238–41; Redford 2003, 97–8. The aforementioned provocative hypothesis that the term “islands in the midst of the Great Green” refers to the region of the Nile Delta (Duhoux 2003, see also above, n. 20) is not based on solid evidence and must be rejected.

54 The total absence of *Keftiu* in the “Annals” is puzzling indeed, since in exactly this period Minoan Crete had intensive diplomatic – and obviously commercial – contacts with Egypt. Redford 2003, 251–3 provides some potential explanations, though he has to confess that none of them is very convincing; see further Redford 2006, 336–7.

55 Wachsmann 1987, 55.



inscription, where *Tanaja* and *Keftiu* appear as a sort of heading for toponyms which can be identified with sites on the Greek mainland (including the island of Kythera) and Crete.<sup>56</sup> Any attempt towards a more precise localization of the term has to take as point of departure the name *Ahhiyawa* which appears in more or less the same period in Hittite documents referring also – like *Tanaja* – to an Aegean region or centre. The plausible assumption that both names designated two different Mycenaean regions or centres opens a realistic possibility of solving this dual problem. Following Kopanias' convincing discussion, which builds up on several solid arguments of previous research, it seems very likely – though not absolutely certain – that *Ahhiyawa* was the Hittite name for the Mycenaean kingdom of Thebes and *Tanaja* the Egyptian name for Mycenae.<sup>57</sup> At the end of his excellent analysis, Kopanias emphasizes that the evidence at hand implies a certain overlapping of both geographical terms which could be explained if both referred to the same region, in other words if Mycenae and Thebes had been the centre of *Ahhiyawa* (or *Tanaja*) from time to time.<sup>58</sup> Such a dynamic reconstruction of Mycenaean history which acknowledges the possibility of conflicts and their impact on the shaping of political territories provides a much more reliable reconstruction of historical reality while overcoming some difficulties of previous explanations. Without intending to formulate a circular argument, it can be stressed at this point that the close relationship between Mycenae and Minoan Crete and the subsequent strong Mycenaean presence on the island fit perfectly with identifying *Tanaja* as Mycenae. The hypothesis of a ruler of Mycenae sending a Minoan or Minoanised vessel as gift to the Egyptian king is fully concordant with the archaeological evidence of this period, in which Mycenae's material culture stood under a massive Minoan influence, as the impressive Shaft Grave finds clearly demonstrate.

## The Minoan craftsmanship

One of the most intriguing aspects of our entry is the information that one of the vases sent as diplomatic gifts from a Greek mainland centre was manufactured in *Keftiu* (Cretan) style. Is it plausible to ascribe this precise stylistic attribution to the educated eyes of an Egyptian official who was responsible for the registration of the foreign gifts delivered to the Egyptian court? Did he indeed recognise in one of these vessels a work of Minoan origin or influence? If yes, how reliable could his stylistic judgment be?<sup>59</sup> It is very likely that in the time of Thutmose III the artistic production of *Tanaja* was hardly known in Egypt. Given the close affinities between Minoan and Mycenaean artistic idiom in this period, it would be no surprise if an Egyptian official or writer could have taken a Mycenaean product for a Cretan one. An alternative interpretation would be

56 Edel 1966; Edel & Görg 2005; Cline 1987; Cline 1994, 114–6; Cline & Stannish 2011.

57 Kopanias 2008, 65–74, esp. 72–4 with further bibliography. The equation of *Ahhiyawa* with Thebes and *Tanaja* with Mycenae had already been suggested by Latacz 2001, 150–68. For the identification of *Tanaja* with Mycenae see also Redford 2003, 97–8, with n. 238.

58 Kopanias 2008, 73–4. It should be stressed, however, that none of the three arguments which compel Kopanias (2008, 74) to question an exclusive connection of *Ahhiyawa* with Thebes and *Tanaja* with Mycenae, are convincing. In particular, the absence of *Mycenae/Tanaja* from Hittite sources, which – in Kopanias' view – is the strongest argument against their exclusive connection to each other, is not at all problematic, if we assume that Mycenae had no strategic or (direct) economic interests in Western Anatolia.

59 A more detailed description of precious vessels mostly referring to their decoration is also common in the Mari archive, see Guichard 2005, 123; for the relativity of such descriptions see *ibid.*, 123–4.

that the Egyptian scribe transferred<sup>60</sup> this information from a Mycenaean letter which accompanied the gifts to the “Daybook of the palace”<sup>61</sup> and later to the Karnak inscription. The designation of a vase by referring to its origin is a practice not uncommon in Near Eastern sources. Luxury vases recorded in the archive of the Mari palace are named by a *nisbe*, i. e. an adjective deriving from a noun, in this case an ethnicon.<sup>62</sup> Among these vases, several gold and silver items are present which are designated as *kaptarîtum* (“from Crete” or “of Cretan manufacture”).<sup>63</sup> A similar adjective appears several centuries later in Linear B tablets as a qualitative definition of craters which are named *ke-re-si-jo we-ke* (“of Cretan manufacture”).<sup>64</sup> In most of these cases, it is difficult, however, to decide whether the scribe meant the place or alternatively technique/style of manufacture, as M. Feldman has rightly pointed out:

“It is unclear, however, whether such attributions to specific places also connoted a set of shared visual or technical properties that allowed items to be easily identified in a manner similar to art historical regional styles, or whether they simply designated the location of production.”<sup>65</sup>

The “Annals” entry is one of the few instances in which there can be no doubt that the scribe meant not just the “location of production” but “a set of shared visual or technical properties” linking this item with the artistic production of Minoan Crete. Whether the scribe has just copied this stylistic attribution from an alleged Mycenaean letter or was himself able to recognize the Minoan style, must, however, remain an open question.

As already mentioned, the fact that the gifts of a Mycenaean ruler to his Egyptian partner include a Minoan or Minoanising vessel, fits perfectly with the historical setting of this period in the Aegean, where the still young Mycenaean centres were rapidly developing under a very strong Minoan influence. The label “of *Keftiu* workmanship” could have been given to most of the precious artefacts found in Early Mycenaean contexts in the Peloponnese.<sup>66</sup> The vessel could have been either a Minoan product imported to the Greek Mainland and only subsequently offered as

60 The proper term would rather be “translated”, since the letter was probably written in Babylonian (the *lingua franca* of the Late Bronze Age). However, we should not fully rule out the possibility that official correspondence between Egyptian and Aegean rulers took place in the Minoan or Mycenaean language. The fact that in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, Egyptian pupils were taught to write *Keftiu* (Minoan) personal names (see Cline 1994, 109, A.10) – and perhaps even the Minoan language – as well as the enigmatic absence of any Aegean letters in the Amarna archive could indicate that Minoan/Mycenaean rulers were corresponding with the Egyptian king in their native language. One should not forget that the Amarna letters were actually part of a Mesopotamian archive including some other texts, such as myths and epics, syllabaries, lexical texts and a god-list, see Moran 1992, xv–xvi. Even if the find circumstances of this corpus are unfortunately obscure, it is likely that all these tablets were kept in the same building of Amarna which can be regarded as a kind of a Near Eastern – and not necessarily Aegean – “embassy” or “library”.

61 See above, n. 9.

62 See Guichard 1999, 171; Guichard 2005, 163–6. The *nisbe* denoted provenance and – in the broader sense – obviously also technique/style of manufacture; see further Feldman 2006, 107–8.

63 Guichard 1999, 167, 171–4; Guichard 2005, 207–9. The entries mentioning Cretan vases are dated to the reigns of Yahdun-Lim and Zimri-Lim (18<sup>th</sup> century BCE). Interestingly, most of these vases, which in some cases are mentioned more than one time, appear in groups of two to nine items (frequently including bowls) which roughly correspond in quantity to the gifts in the “Annals” entry, see Guichard 1999, 172–4; Guichard 2005, 207–9; Højen Sørensen 2009, 14–6, 27, 28–30.

64 Ventris & Chadwick 1973, 336.

65 Feldman 2006, 108.

66 What we define as Mycenaean style in this period is actually an amalgam of indigenous Helladic tradition and Minoan influence; see the classic study of Vermeule 1975, esp. 27–51: “Without Crete, there would have been no Mycenaean art as we know it”.

gift to the Pharaoh or a locally manufactured product made by indigenous artists in a Minoan style. To exploit all possible interpretations, a third option must not be excluded, i.e. a vase which was produced in a mainland centre by residing or itinerant Minoan artists in Minoan style.

There is a further interesting issue that emerges out of the fact that one of the vases was described as being of Cretan workmanship. This designation was a sort of label, a mark of quality, accompanying the valuable gifts which were sent to a land in which Minoan artwork was highly appreciated.<sup>67</sup> The reference to Crete or to Cretan style would certainly have increased its material and symbolic value in the land of their destination. This “label” presupposes palatial manufacture. As J. Bennet has convincingly suggested, specific products from (Mycenaean) palatial workshops could have been recognized as unique and highly valuable items by virtue of their material and process of manufacture, in other words as goods of a “trademark” palatial production.<sup>68</sup> Palatial products which were exported abroad as trade items or diplomatic gifts served as the main indicators of a local artistic tradition. What was perceived abroad as Minoan (*Keftiu*) or Mycenaean style or workmanship was mainly – if not exclusively – the produce of palatial workshops.

## Historical context

The “Annals” entry mentioning the land of *Tanaja* can be related to one of the first appearances of a thriving Mycenaean political centre in the international scene of the Near East in a period in which Minoan Crete was still an active member of the same supranational diplomatic and economic networks. In terms of relative chronology, the reign of Thutmose III can be linked either to LM IB/LH IIA – LM II/LH IIB (low chronology)<sup>69</sup> or LM/LH II–IIIA:1 period (high chronology).<sup>70</sup> One should refrain here from an extensive discussion about the precise chronological correlation between Thutmose III to a specific period of Minoan/Mycenaean chronology, since this is not decisive for a historical evaluation of the recorded event. Much more important is to acknowledge that a Mycenaean centre sent emissaries to the Egyptian Pharaoh at a time, when the latter had close diplomatic contacts to the Minoans. This could have happened any time from LM/LH I to LM/LH IIIA:1, a period in which the Mycenaean centres contested the dominant role of Minoan Crete in the Aegean and gradually consolidated their political and economic power. Therefore, the “Annals” entry offers a precious historical testimony that this rivalry was also taking place in distant theatres of diplomatic action. The question whether *Tanaja* was Mycenae or another Mycenaean centre must remain open, even if – in my view – the first option is actually more convincing. Since the name of *Tanaja* appears only rarely in Egyptian sources, the impact of this diplomatic gesture can be better traced by means of the archaeological evidence which is at both ends of this interaction very telling. The Mycenaean ceramic imports in Egypt from the period of Thutmose’s reign onwards, culminating in the Amarna period,<sup>71</sup> and the wealth of Egyptian imports in Mycenae and other Peloponnesian centres<sup>72</sup> provide unequivocal evidence

67 See also Guichard 2005, 163: “Ce n’était pas seulement une indication géographique mais c’était surtout une marque de qualité.”

68 See Bennet 2008.

69 Warren & Hankey 1989, 137–46; Matthäus 1995.

70 Manning 1999, 209–20.

71 See recently Kelder 2009; Kelder 2010; further Hankey & Leonard 1992.

72 Cline 1994, 31–47.

for the close ties which Egypt and Mycenaean Greece developed in the following periods. The modest entry in the “Annals” might thus commemorate an event which marked the beginning of a successful diplomatic and commercial relationship.

## Epilogue

On the basis of the previous analysis, one can suggest the following scenario for the chain of events behind the Mycenaean entry of year 42: At a time, when Minoan Crete already enjoyed long and close diplomatic relations with the pharaonic court, an ambitious Mycenaean ruler (most probably the ruler of Mycenae) joined an elite club of international brotherhood, offering precious gifts to – which actually means nothing else than exchanging gifts with – the Egyptian king. His gifts (five vessels, one of which was manufactured in Minoan style) were presented to the Pharaoh during the course of an official ceremony – probably together with the diplomatic or compulsory gifts of other foreign regions – and were accurately registered by Egyptian officials. The registration of the gifts obviously took place during the ceremony as the precious items “changed hands”, thus entering the orbit of the palace administration. The vessels were despatched to one of Thebes’ royal treasures where they were kept among other Egyptian and foreign luxuries as part of the Pharaoh’s symbolic capital, before they were offered as gifts to other foreign rulers or Egyptian officials.<sup>73</sup> Their later “biography” must remain a mystery.

## Abbreviations

<i>EA</i>	J. A. Knudtzon, <i>Die El-Amarna-Tafeln</i> (1915). Leipzig: Hinrichs.
<i>TT</i>	Theban Tomb
<i>Urk.</i>	<i>Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums</i>

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73 For a rare glimpse of the affluence of the royal treasuries at Thebes, in which masses of Egyptian and foreign valuables were kept, see the magnificent wall painting in the tomb of Kenamun (*TT* 93) who served during the reign of Amenophis II, see Davies 1930, 22–32, Pls. XXIII–XXIV.

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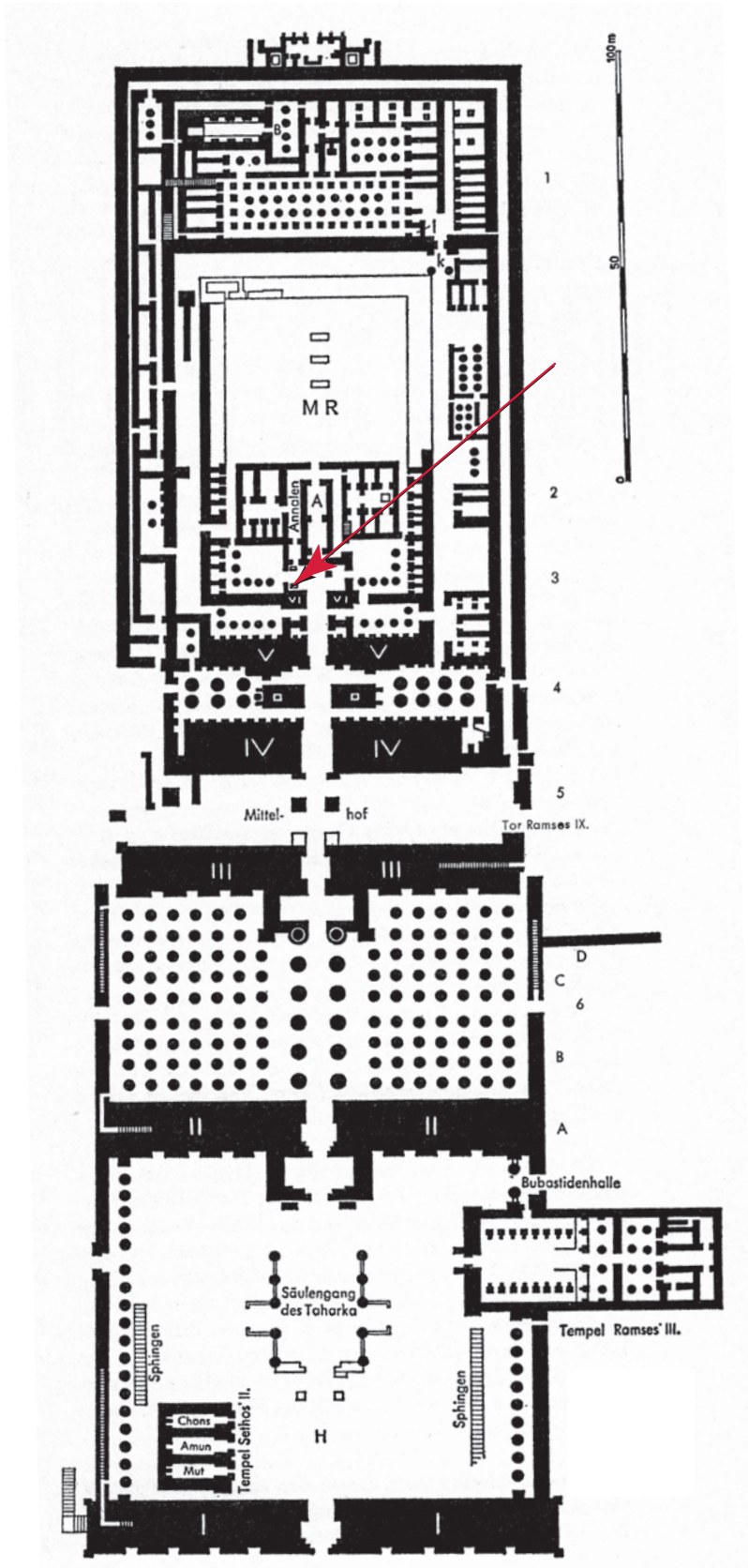


Fig. 1: Plan of the temple of Amun at Karnak (after Lange & Hirmer 1967, Fig. 58)

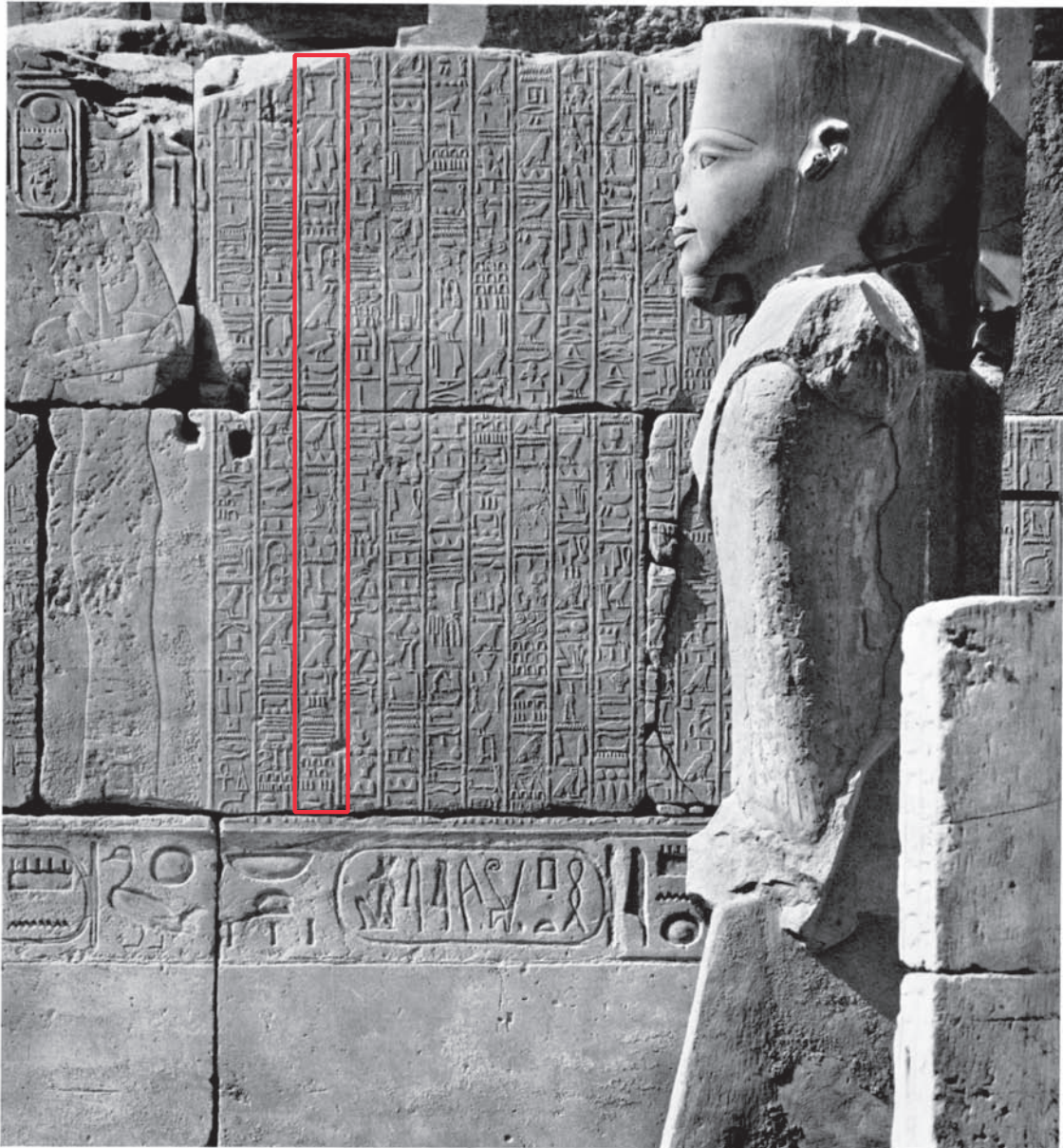


Fig. 2: West wall of the “Western Annal Hall” with part of the inscription. The Aegean entry is highlighted in red frame (after Otto & Hirmer 1966, Pl. 23)

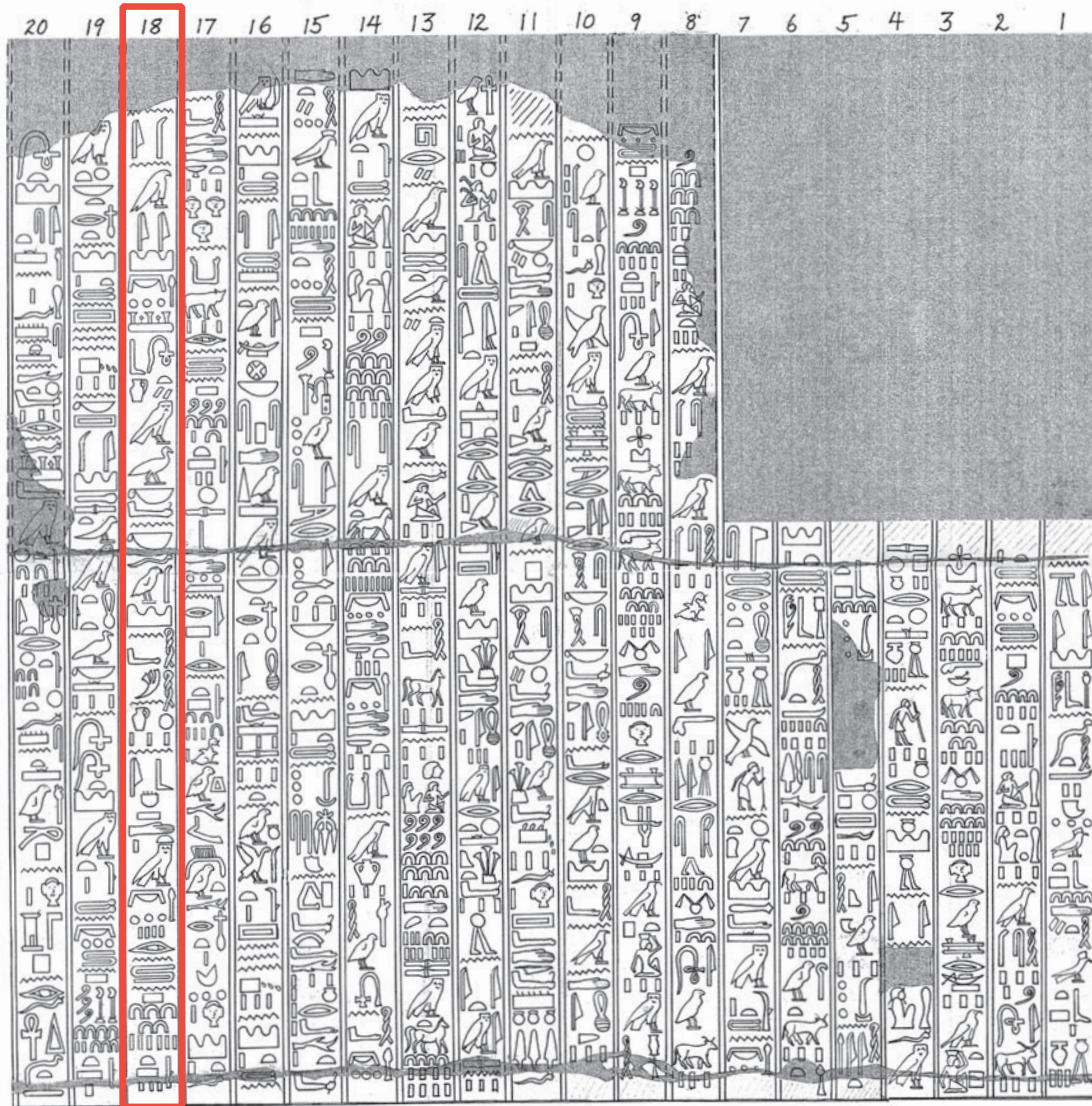


Fig. 3: Hand-copy of the inscription on the west wall of the “Western Annal Hall” with the Aegean entry highlighted in red frame (after Redford 2003, Fig. 10)



Fig. 4: Wall painting with foreign emissaries bearing gifts from the Theban tomb of Rehmire, *TT* 100 (after Graff 2008, Fig. 85, detail)





Fig. 5: Wall painting from the Theban tomb of Useramun (TT 131) with Aegean emissaries bearing vases as diplomatic gifts for the Pharaoh (after Dziobek 1994, Taf. 23 c)

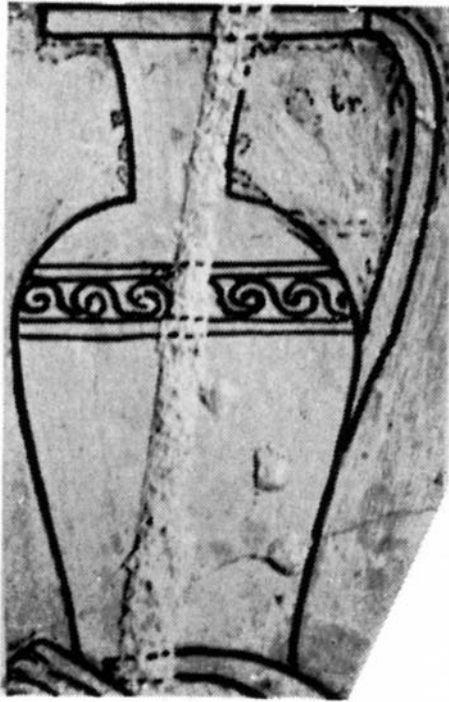


Fig. 6: Depiction of a silver ewer from the Syrian procession in the Theban tomb of Menkheperreseneb, *TT* 86 (after Vercoutter 1956, Pl. XLV, no. 334)

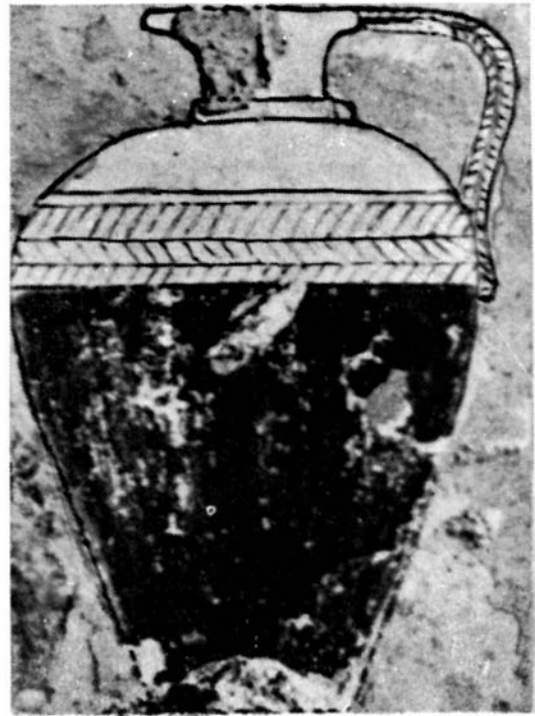


Fig. 7: Depiction of a bimetallic ewer from the procession of Aegean emissaries in the Theban tomb of Senenmut, *TT* 71 (after Vercoutter 1956, Pl. XLVI, no. 342)



Fig. 8: Silver ewer from Shaft Grave V at Mycenae (after Karo 1930, Pl. CXXXIV, left)



Fig. 9: Silver cup with gold overlay on rim and handle from the tholos tomb at Vaphio (after Demakopoulou 1988, 102)