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# The Foreign Trade of Tell el-Dab'a during the Second Intermediate Period: Another Glance at Imported Ceramics under Hyksos Rule

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# A Stranger

## in the House – the Crossroads III.

Proceedings of an International Conference  
on Foreigners in Ancient Egyptian and Near  
Eastern Societies of the Bronze Age held  
in Prague, September 10–13, 2018

edited by

Jana Mynářová  
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Prague  
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## THE FOREIGN TRADE OF TELL EL-DAB‘A DURING THE SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD: ANOTHER GLANCE AT IMPORTED CERAMICS UNDER HYKSOS RULE

Sarah Vilain (The ERC Advanced Grant Project  
“The Enigma of the Hyksos”, Austrian Academy of Sciences)\*

### Introduction

The archaeological site of Tell el-Dab‘a is strategically located on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, at the intersection of crucial communication roads. Thanks to the Nile route, it benefited from direct access to the Mediterranean Sea to the north and to Upper Egypt to the south. The Way of Horus, which linked Egypt with the Levantine area (Bietak 1997: 87), was easily reachable eastwards. As a result, excavations established that the city sheltered Near Eastern populations from the late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty until the end of the Second Intermediate Period. However, even if these populations were mostly integrated among the city’s inhabitants, the takeover of a dynasty of Asiatics is a unique phenomenon that had a lasting influence on Egyptian’s culture. These kings called themselves *Heqau Khasut* – “rulers of the foreign lands” – which was transmitted by Greek sources as *Hyksos*. At Tell el-Dab‘a, the beginning of the Hyksos period was identified in Phase E/2 thanks to modifications in the settlement and in the material culture (Bietak – Forstner-Müller – Mlinar 2001).

The takeover of the Hyksos had an important impact at a local scale, but not exclusively. The presence of foreign imports from Phase G/1–3 onwards suggests that Tell el-Dab‘a was already implied in international trading connections when the Hyksos came to power. However, the establishment of long-distance exchanges necessitates a certain degree of political stability, especially in Egypt, where they occur under royal control. Thus, if one of the partner changes due to political circumstances, as it happened with the takeover of the Hyksos, what becomes of the already established trading connections? Several logical scenarios could be considered: the contacts could be terminated, altered, continue unchanged or be re-oriented, with the introduction of new partners. With this question, this paper proposes an overview of the evolution of connections during the Second Intermediate Period between Tell el-Dab‘a and four different areas: the Levant, Cyprus, Middle Egypt and Nubia. Due to its limited scope, it focusses on the examination of imported ceramics, as the study of their development through-

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out the stratigraphy of the site should reveal the nature of contacts and whether changes occurred as the political situation was altered.

## The Levant

The Second Stela of Kamose, discovered in 1954 in Karnak, relates a campaign of the Theban king against the northern territories controlled by the Hyksos. Even if the veracity of the narration is questionable, it is noteworthy that Avaris is depicted as an important trading centre. According to Habachi's translation (Habachi 1972; Redford 1997: 14, no. 69), the stela's inscription evokes "all the fine products from Retjenu", suggesting that the Levant was one of the trading partners of the Hyksos. More important, raw materials as well as perishable goods are mentioned among the products which originate from this area. Consequently, we have to keep in mind that an unassessed part of the commodities did not leave any traces in the archaeological records.

Relationships between Tell el-Dabʿa and the Levant were investigated by K. Kopetzky, who studied the evolution of Levantine imports in domestic contexts (Kopetzky 2010: fig. 52). She showed that they were reaching a culminating point in Phase F, before declining until the end of the Second Intermediate Period. According to her study, Levantine imports constitute 28.7% of domestic ceramics at their climax, in Phase F, against 13.9% in Phase E/3 and only 5.6% in Phase D/2. The ongoing examination by the author of the evolution of imports in funerary contexts confirms the pattern that was previously observed. Thus, in Area A/II, Levantine imports constitute 24.7% of the vessels of funerary assemblages in Phase F, against 14% in Phase E/3 and 6.7% in Phase D/2 (Bietak 1991; Förstner-Müller 2008).<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that, in Area A/II, the lowest quantity of Levantine imports is reached in Phase E/1, shortly after the takeover of the Hyksos. They are then less than 2% of the funerary offerings.

Another specificity of the ceramic assemblage of Tell el-Dabʿa is the presence of locally made vases imitating Middle Bronze shapes already from the late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Most of them are made from a fine Nile clay with limestone inclusions (Nile I-d). According to Kopetzky (2010: fig. 52), both imports and local Middle Bronze shapes increased until Phase F in domestic contexts. Middle Bronze shapes then constitute 39.2% of the assemblage, before dropping to around 22% in Phase E/3 and 16.4% in Phase D/2. However, they still supplant imports until the end of the Second Intermediate Period. It is notable that from Phase E/2, imitations of Middle Bronze shapes are occasionally produced in Nile clay I-b-2, a clay usually used for indigenous shapes, recognisable by its sand and chaff inclusions.

In funerary contexts of Area A/II, locally made Middle Bronze shapes reach their climax at the beginning of the Hyksos period, in Phase E/1, where the lowest rate of imports is observed. Local Middle Bronze shapes then constitute almost

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<sup>1</sup> These percentages as well as those in the following paragraphs rely on published material. Only vases from graves securely attributed to one of the site's Phases were taken into consideration. These results could evolve in regards to future discoveries.

70% of the ceramics of funerary assemblages. The number of local imitations decreases to about 24% in Phase D/2, but these productions are still more numerous than genuine imported pottery. This diminution at the end of the Second Intermediate Period could be due to the fact that the funerary assemblage of these two phases gives a more important place to the indigenous pottery tradition of the Delta. This specific production develops by its own under Hyksos rule and borrows from both Egyptian and Middle Bronze Age characteristics (Aston 2004: 185).

The decrease of Levantine imports is also accompanied by a progressive change in the repertoire of shapes during the Hyksos period. Indeed, according to our current data, Phases D/3 and D/2 witness a diminution of the part of imported tableware in favour of transport jars, a shift which could be observed both in domestic and funerary contexts. As a result, at the end of the Second Intermediate Period, Levantine imports are almost exclusively limited to Canaanite Jars.

Therefore, the consistency of the presence of Canaanite Jars in all phases of the site make them a good candidate to investigate issues related to the identification of trading partners of the Hyksos. This was addressed by both Neutron Activation Analysis (McGovern – Harbottle 1997; McGovern 2000) and petrography (Cohen-Weinberger – Goren 2004: 69–100) studies that delivered contradictory results. The discrepancies have been explained by methodological issues related to the Neutron Activation Analysis sampling and the database referencing (Goren 2003). The petrographic analyses of forty–six Canaanite Jars from Phases E/2 to D/2 by Cohen-Weinberger and Goren (2004) suggested that most of them belong to Group B2, which coincides with the general northern Levant, and to Group B3, attributed to the north of Israel and the Lebanese coast (Cohen-Weinberger – Goren 2004: fig. 3). These two groups are also best represented among the analysed Canaanite Jars from Phases G/1-3 and F-E/3, showing a remarkable continuity in contacts.

It is noteworthy that group D, which originates from the region between Beirut and Byblos, constitutes 21% of Canaanite Jars during the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasties and only 6% during the Hyksos period (Cohen-Weinberger – Goren 2004: tab. 1). In our view, it reflects the increase in importance of other Northern Levantine centres during the Middle Bronze IIB, like Sidon or the Akkar Plain. Complementary petrographic analyses conducted on Canaanite Jars from Memphis and Kom el-Khilgan showed that the northern Levant was the most probable place of origin of a large part of them (Ownby – Bourriau 2009; Ownby 2012: 36–37). Therefore, it seems likely that the content of the jars produced in the area was particularly valued in the Delta.

As the Nile Delta constituted the main gate of entrance of Levantine commodities to Egypt, the study of the distribution of Canaanite Jars would give us an insight on the evolution of contacts between Tell el-Dabʿa and other Egyptian sites during the Second Intermediate Period. As shown in Fig. 1, these productions are concentrated in the Delta and the Memphite area. In the vicinity of Tell el-Dabʿa, at Tell el-Maskhuta, they were identified in domestic and funerary contexts of all levels of the site (Redmount 1995: 186). A newborn was buried in an imported Canaanite Jar in Phase 3 of the site, outside House B in Area R7/R8, a custom also observed at Tell el-Dabʿa (Redmount 1989: tab. 39, fig. 178). Another





**Fig. 1.**  
The distribution of Canaanite jars in Egypt (S. Vilain, map background: H. David-Cuny).



newborn burial in a jar, possibly of Levantine fabric, was encountered in Phase 5 (Redmount 1989: tab. 39, fig. 178). Further north, excavations at Tell el-Hebwa, delivered one Canaanite Jar which finds close parallels in Phases E/1-D/3 of Tell el-Dabʿa (Abd el-Maksoud 1998: pl. XXVIII d, 243, fig. 37). Eight other examples are dating from the end of the Second Intermediate Period or the beginning of the New Kingdom (Abd el-Maksoud 1998: pls. XXVIII a, e, f, i, j, k, l, r, 243–245, figs. 36–37).

The presence of Canaanite Jars at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, a harbour site on the Red Sea, is noteworthy. In the beach area above the site (WG 47) fragments of these jars were discovered associated with a large cooking pot of Nile E fabric, the type of which is well attested at Tell el-Dabʿa (Bard – Fattovich 2010: pls. 11–12). This association suggests that some contacts occurred between the two harbours.

Just south of the Delta, at Memphis, Canaanite Jars constitute the bulk of imported ceramics. According to Bader (2009: Abb. 366), they reach their *floruit* in Phase VII, where they constitute 1% of the whole ceramic assemblage. Interestingly, they almost disappear after Phase VI d, correlated to Tell el-Dabʿa's Phases E/2–1 (Bader 2009: Abb 96). At Lisht, the occurrence of Middle Bronze jars can be explained by the presence of Levantines in the royal residence of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, as reported in the Illahun papyri (Arnold *et al.* 1995: 20–29). Two fragments of bases and a rim fragment of Middle Bronze IIA Canaanite Jars were found in the pyramid complex of Amenemhat III at Dahshur. The cemetery has been attributed to the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty but was still in use during the 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Arnold 1982: 41–42). A possible intrusive example was uncovered at Riqqeh in a plundered tomb attributed to the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Engelbach 1915: 10, 21, pls. XXXVII, XLIV).

Occasional fragments of these productions were discovered as far as Buhen and Askut. The examples from Buhen are dated from the late Middle Kingdom (Randall-MacIver – Woolley 1911: 185–186, 195–196, pl. 94). These fragments as well as the ones from Askut may have arrived due to royal acquisition of imported goods which were then sent to the forts near the Second Cataract (Smith 2002: 51). In the current state of research, the most southern sites seem to have received Canaanite Jars before Hyksos rule.

This overview of the evolution of Levantine imports at Tell el-Dabʿa showed that their decline is a phenomenon that precedes the takeover of the Hyksos, as it began already in Phase E/3. One of the factors could be the dislocation of the Middle Kingdom as the power of the Levantine groups in the Eastern Delta rose (Kopetzky 2009: 154). This collapse of the central Egyptian administration and the division of Egypt into different entities had consequences on the organisation of trade. The situation of both political instability and economic weakness more likely facilitated the takeover of the 15<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Surprisingly, the Hyksos rulers did not seem to get the possibility or the will to reinforce this ceramic trade with the Levant. Indeed, the gap between the proportion of imitations and imports continues to widen under Hyksos rule, the latest being mostly reduced to Canaanite Jars at the end of the Second Intermediate Period. Despite the decrease of imports, the results of petrographic analyses on these jars suggest a continuity of contacts between the Delta and the Northern Levantine area. However, the limited distribution of these

containers in the rest of Egypt after the takeover of the Hyksos is noteworthy. Their drastic decrease at Memphis after Phase VII supports the hypothesis of a rupture of contacts between the two areas. Therefore, it is plausible that the growing isolation of the Delta and the ability of local potters to imitate Middle Bronze shapes made unnecessary the importation of Levantine ceramics at a larger scale. This process could explain why, at the end of the Hyksos period, Levantine imports are mostly limited to Canaanite Jars, still looked for their content.

## Cyprus

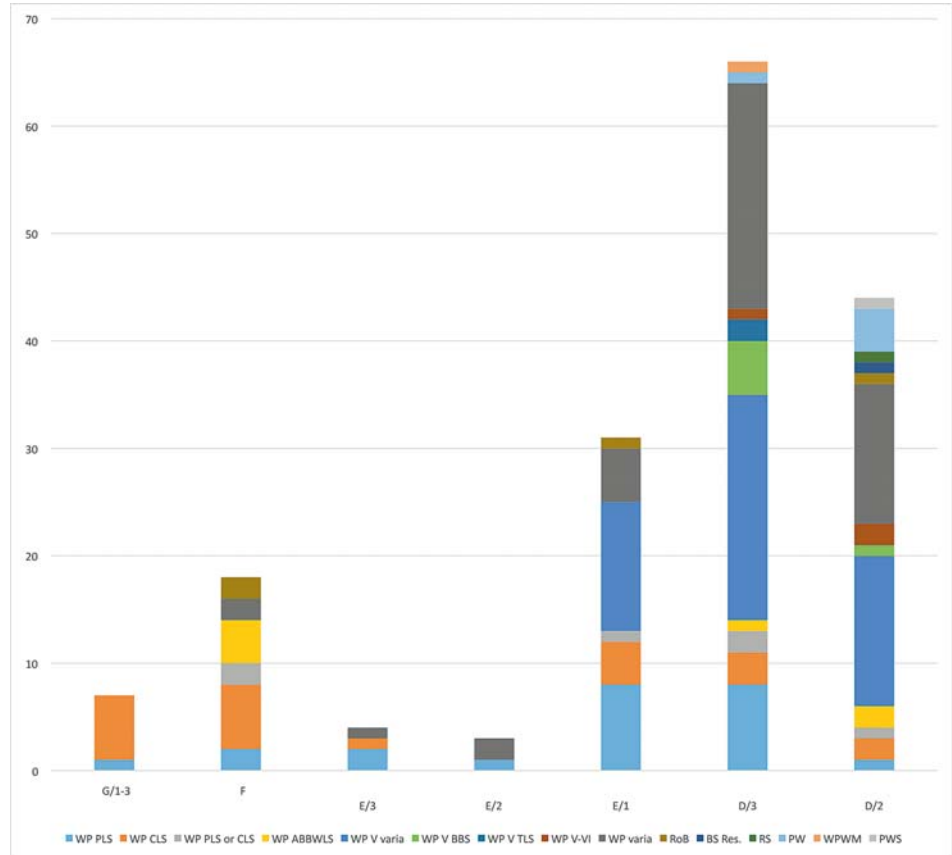
The island of Cyprus occupies a central position in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its southern coast lies at a distance of about 120 km from the northern Levant and 420 km from Egypt. A direct crossing from Cyprus to Egypt was possible at least during the Late Bronze Age and maybe even earlier (Karageorghis 1995: 73). However, during the Middle Bronze Age the easiest way for Cypriot merchants to reach Egypt was to sail first to a northern Levantine port, such as Ugarit, and then to follow the coast southwards.

The earliest clues of interactions between Cyprus and Tell el-Dabʿa were uncovered from the end of Phase G/1–3. At this time, imports are quite scarce and limited to White Painted Pendent Line Style and Cross Line Style jugs and juglets characteristic of Eastern Cyprus. However, even if Cypriot imports are rare in the early phases of the site, interactions with the island are suggested by the discovery of Tell el-Yahudiya juglets of Nile clay (Nile I-d) made according to the Cypriot tradition (Maguire 2009: 21–24, fig. 3; Aston – Bietak 2012: 302). These juglets testify to the presence at Tell el-Dabʿa of potters who were either Cypriots or at least familiar with Cypriot technics (Vilain 2018).

As shown in Fig. 2, the presence of Cypriot imports increased in Phase F, which also delivered the largest corpus of Levantine imports. However, these vessels are almost absent from Phases E/3 and E/2. We noticed above a concomitant decline of Levantine imports from Phase E/3, which precedes Hyksos rule. Thus, complementary information about this period at Tell el-Dabʿa are brought by discoveries from Area F/II. Excavations of this area yielded the remains of a large complex dated to the end of Phase E/3 or the beginning of Phase E/2 according to the local sequence. This complex was intended for storage as evident by its dimensions, the organisation of space and the materials that were discovered, such as lumps of quartz, obsidian, ochre, or Egyptian blue (Math 2012–2013: 32). On the preserved part of the floor of Locus 1421 was a group of vessels. Their shape and decoration are characteristic of Cypriot White Painted Pendent Line Style juglets. However, all of them are wheel-made, the fabric is Egyptian (Nile I-d) and the handles are not inserted through the walls of the vessels, contrary to the Cypriot tradition. The presence of imitations in this context, where one would have expected genuine imports, could indicate disturbances in supply (Vilain 2018). A large burnt layer was also identified, suggesting destruction by a major conflagration. This discovery raises the possibility of internal troubles, which would have had a further impact on trade. One may speculate whether this conflagration was caused by the establishment of Hyksos rule.

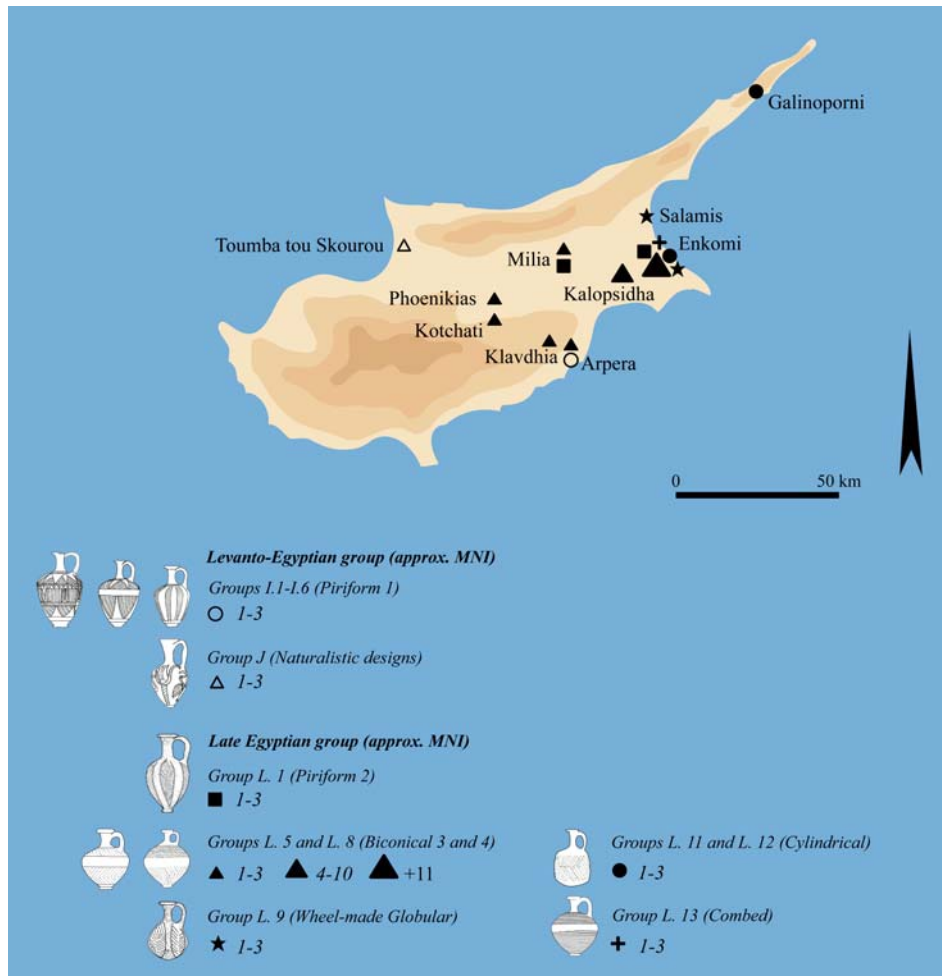
**Fig. 2.**

The Cypriot pottery at Tell el-Dabʿa, minimum number of individuals from Phases G/1-3-D/2, Areas A/I, A/II, A/III, A/IV, A/V and F/I (Graphic: S. Vilain).



From Phase E/1, Cypriot imports show a different pattern: their frequency is increasing, with a growing presence of the White Painted V. This new increase of Cypriot pottery, while Levantine ceramics are still declining, is not only the result of different trading patterns but also of different consumption modes, as Cypriot vases were likely of different purpose. Indeed, the corpus of Cypriot vessels discovered at Tell el-Dabʿa is mainly composed of jugs or juglets valued for their contents. Open shapes are uncommon but, when attested, consist of painted vessels of high quality. They were mostly considered as luxury items, at least in the earliest phases, and were not imported to such a large extent as Levantine pottery.

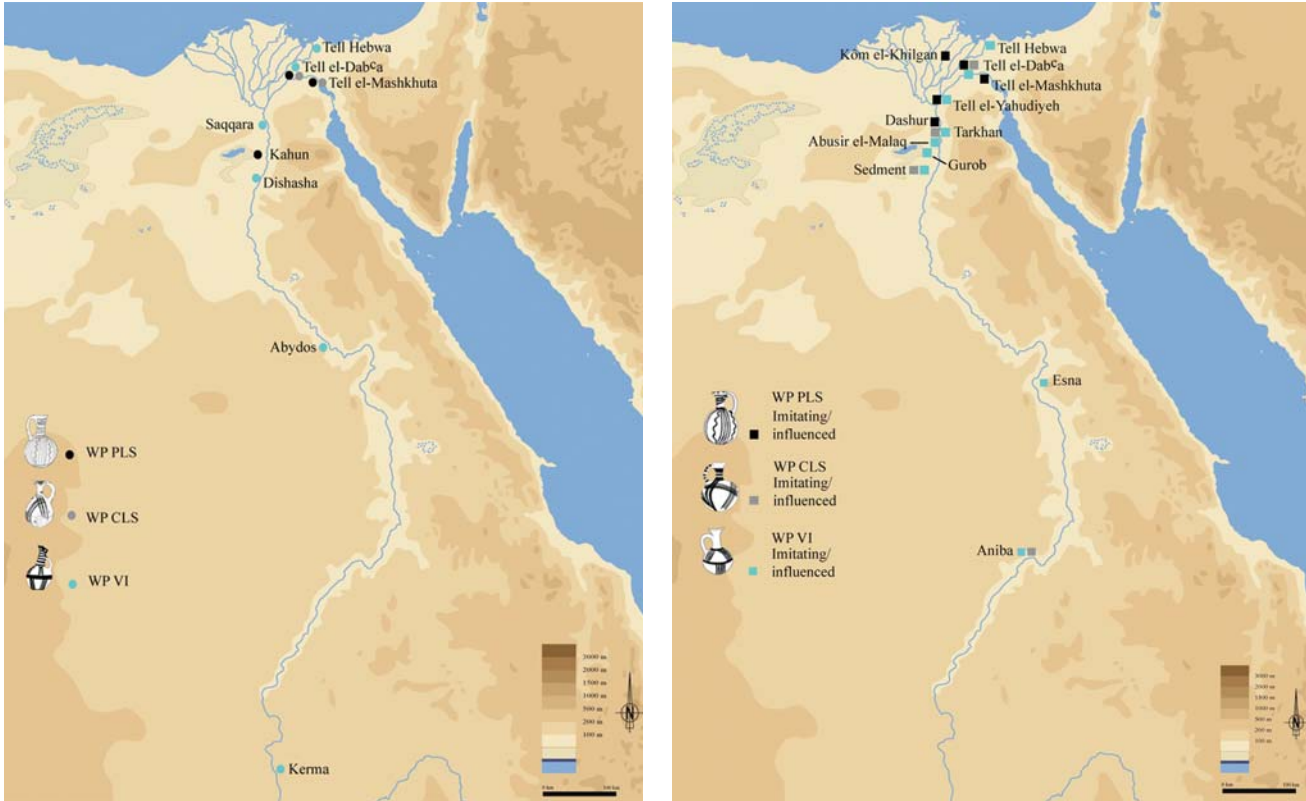
Interestingly, the rise of Cypriot pottery from Phase E/1 at Tell el-Dabʿa is mirrored by the presence of Tell el-Yahudiya juglets characteristic of the Hyksos period in Cyprus (Fig. 3). Two poles can be distinguished: 1) the area of Kalopsidha and Enkomi, from where the White Painted Pendent Line Style and Cross Line Style discovered at Tell el-Dabʿa mostly originate; and 2) Central Cyprus at sites located close to the Troodos mining areas. The presence of Tell el-Yahudiya at Klavdhia-Tremithos is noteworthy. The material culture of this site shows connections with Central Cyprus (Malmgren 2003: 113). It belongs to a series of new settlements which were established at the end of the Middle Cypriot period, like Hala Sultan Tekke or Maroni. One hypothesis for its creation is that individuals



**Fig. 3.**  
 The distribution of Tell el-Yahudiya juglets in Cyprus (S. Vilain/P. Aprent, map background: H. David-Cuny).

from the central parts of the island, who were already familiar with the production of copper, were moving down to the coastal area to come closer to the Eastern Mediterranean with its increasing demand for this metal. It is likely that, at least at first, Cypriot ceramics could have been added as complementary cargo to other valuable commodities, such as raw materials. They were progressively valued for themselves, explaining their growing popularity. Therefore, the intensification of contacts, either direct or indirect, is witnessed both by the presence of foreign wares, such as the Tell el-Yahudia vessels in Cyprus, and by the increase of Cypriot ceramics both along the Levantine coast and in the Nile Delta.

Thus, the Cypriot pottery is rarely encountered outside Tell el-Dabʿa. The scarcity of White Painted Pendant Line Style and Cross Line Style productions, which reach their climax at the beginning of the Hyksos period, is remarkable (Fig. 4). Best represented outside the Delta is the White Painted VI, present at Tell el-Dabʿa from Phase D/2 to Phase C/2 i.e. from the end of the Second Intermediate Period to the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The vases from Deshasha and Abydos mostly belong to the second half of the Second Intermediate Period according to Merrillees



**Fig. 4.**  
The distribution of WP PLS, CLS and WP VI in Egypt (S. Vilain, map background: H. David-Cuny).

**Fig. 5.**  
The distribution of imitations and vases influenced by WP PLS, CLS and WP VI in Egypt (S. Vilain, map background: H. David-Cuny).

(1968: 146). The contexts of other attestations of this ware are more questionable and could be dated to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. A large part of a White Painted juglet with a pinched mouth was identified as far as Kerma in Nubia. It was published as a White Painted IV (Lecovara 1997: fig. 3.7) but its shape and decoration are typical of White Painted VI (Åström 1972: pl. XLI: 2–3). It was discovered in a Classic Kerma context, correlated with both the Second Intermediate Period and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. It is noteworthy that no White Painted V, the best represented Cypriot Ware at Tell el-Dabʿa under Hyksos rule (Phases E/1–D/2) has been identified yet outside this site.

Imitations were also occasionally encountered, as shown by Fig. 5. But, once again, they are concentrated around the Delta and are mostly related to the White Painted VI. A superior part of an imitation of White Painted VI juglet was discovered at Abydos, in a context dated from the end of Ahmose's reign by the excavator.<sup>2</sup> The findings from Aniba (Cemetery S, Tomb S69, S71) could come from the end of the Second Intermediate Period or the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Merrillees 1968: 146). The vases from Gurob (Point Q, Tomb 26) and Tell el-Yahudiya, Tomb 47, 52, 59 (Merrillees 1968) are later and more likely date to the beginning

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished material. I am indebted to S. Harvey, director of the Oriental Institute Ahmose and Tetisheri Project, Abydos, for this information.



of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. One could speculate if these imitations were intended in order to compensate a restricted access to genuine imports.

Thus, this brief overview of the development of Cypriot imports throughout the stratigraphy of the site showed that connections with Cyprus were likely reinforced under the 15<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The creation of imitations of White Painted Pendant Line Style jugs from Phase E/3 could have been stimulated by the lack of imports which was observed in this phase and Phase E/2 as well (Vilain 2018). However, Cypriot imports increase again from Phase E/1, suggesting a new development of this trade under Hyksos rule. This development manifests in both a diversification of Cypriot wares and an increase of their quantity between Phases E/1 to D/2. This phenomenon is however limited Tell el-Dab'a and its area. Outside the Delta, the scarcity of Cypriot imports, especially of White Painted V, could suggest that the rest of Egypt had a difficult access to these specific productions. We are interpreting this phenomenon as another element in favour of the hypothesis of a growing isolation of the Delta under Hyksos rule.

## Middle Egypt

Because of its political implications, the takeover of the Hyksos had a strong impact on connections between the Delta and other entities in Egyptian territory. Even if the extent of this impact is difficult to assess, the Marl C pottery is a helpful tool to investigate this situation.

Marl C clays probably originate from the Memphis-Fayum area (Arnold 1981) even if the presence of at least another source in the south cannot be discounted (Bader 2002: 39). This production was studied in detail by Bader (2001). The author highlighted that Marl C vessels, which were attested at Tell el-Dab'a from Phase H, were suddenly becoming scarce in the assemblage of this site in the late Hyksos period (Bader 2001: 231). The repertoire of shapes also changed: jars with a corrugated neck are not attested at Tell el-Dab'a after Phase E/1. Still, this type occurs until the late Second Intermediate Period at Memphis (Bader 2002: 41; 2009).

According to Bader (2002: 41), the discrepancy between the Marl C assemblages of Tell el-Dab'a and Memphis could suggest that contacts between the Eastern Delta and the Memphis-Fayum area could have been restricted after Phase E/1. This perspective is also supported by the scarcity of Canaanite Jars at Memphis after the takeover of the Hyksos. Moreover, by Phase D/2, most of the open shapes of the Marl C repertoire are no longer present in Tell el-Dab'a's repertoire, except for specific types of bowls (Bader 2002: 50, types 17, 20 and 23). This reduction of the part of imported open shapes at the end of the Hyksos period is a phenomenon that has also been observed with Levantine imports.

In addition, the study by Kopetzky (2010) of Marl clay ceramics discovered at Tell el-Dab'a in domestic contexts revealed that from Phase D/3, Marl II-c-2/3 vessels<sup>3</sup> were supplanted by Marl II-f productions, a fabric group that likely orig-

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<sup>3</sup> The Marl II-c-2 and II-c-3 groups of Tell el-Dab'a's pottery classification are respectively correlated with Marl C1 and Marl C2 groups of the Viennese System (Kopetzky 2010: 44).

inates near the Eastern Delta (Kopetzky 2010: fig. 44). We are interpreting this shift as another sign of disturbances in contacts with the area from where these vases originate. The loss of access to the southern Memphis-Fayum area at this time and the lack of communication between politically separated territories in Egypt could be an explanation for this phenomenon.

## **Nubia**

The existence of interactions between Egypt and Nubia is already documented in the Old Kingdom. Semi-precious stones, incense, electrum, yellow ochre, oils, spices, wood, ebony, bows and arrows are some of the commodities from Nubia mentioned in the Annals of Amenemhat II (Gratien 2004: 80). At the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, the Egyptians built a series of frontier fortresses to act as a rear guard against the Nubian populations, but they were also stations for trading caravans. The forts served as installations for washing and processing of gold as well as posting expeditions to mine it (Lacovara 1997: 72). The Nubian Kingdom of Kush, with its capital at Kerma, was the main rival of Egypt for the control of the gold deposits of the Eastern Desert (Dirminti 2004). According to Ryholt (1997: 252–253), relations between the two polities culminated in the dynastic marriage between a Nubian queen and a 14<sup>th</sup> Dynasty pharaoh, parents of the future king Nehesy. Then, long-going diplomatic relations between Egypt and Nubia were already established before the fall of the Middle Kingdom and the takeover of the Hyksos.

Excavations at Tell el-Dabʿa yielded a peculiar corpus of Nubian pottery, essentially composed of open shapes discovered in domestic contexts. Some of these vessels could have been produced locally in the Delta, speaking in favour of a presence of Nubians (Forstner-Müller – Rose 2012: 200; Aston – Bietak 2017: 507). At this stage of the excavation, Nubian pottery has been identified in three main areas, at ‘Ezbet Helmi (H/I–H/V), in Area F/II, and in Area R/III (Hein 2001; Fuscaldo 2002; 2004; 2008; Forstner-Müller – Rose 2012; Aston – Bietak 2017). Among the earliest fragments of Nubian pottery identified on the site are two beakers belonging to the Kerma culture, attributed to Phase E/3 (Aston – Bietak 2017: 496). They were discovered in one of the burnt magazines of the Palace of Area F/II, the same area which also delivered the imitations of Cypriot pottery mentioned above.

During the Hyksos period, the Nubian ceramic material is ambiguous. Rose – Forstner-Müller (2012: 7) already highlighted how delicate was the attribution of the findings to a specific Nubian culture, except for the well-known Kerma beakers. However, none of these beakers have been retrieved from the Hyksos period. According to a recent study by Aston – Bietak (2017: 506), even if a few sherds were identified as deriving from the Kerma Culture, they may also relate to another Nubian group. Some fragments of Nubian vessels from L81, in Area F/II, which were previously considered as “Kerman” (Aston – Bader 2009: 63) were lately re-evaluated as “Pan-Grave related” (Aston 2012: 164, n. 41). Thus, at the possible exception of one sherd (Fuscaldo 2008: 110, no. 1), no secure example of Kerma pottery have been recognised at Tell el-Dabʿa under Hyksos rule



(Aston – Bietak 2017: 501). Even if, following the well-known adage, “the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”, this lack of typical Kerma vessels challenges our expectations about Nubian cultures with which Tell el-Dab'a was in contact.

A well commented section of the Second Stela of Kamose relates how the Theban king captured a messenger with a letter from the Hyksos ruler Apophis in the Oasis of Djesdjes, nowadays known as Baharia (Redford 1997: 14; Colin 2005: 36–38). In this letter, Apophis urges the King of Kush to attack the Thebans from the south, suggesting that the Kingdom of Kush was an ally of Avaris, at least at the end of the Hyksos period. However, this situation is not reflected in the archaeological record, as contacts with the Kerma culture are poorly attested at Tell el-Dab'a under Hyksos rule.

One hypothesis raised by Aston – Bietak (2017: 508) is that in Upper Egypt the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty acted as a barrier between the two major political and military powers at that time, the Hyksos and the Kingdom of Kush. It seems reasonable to assume that the kings of the 15<sup>th</sup> Dynasty were intending to benefit from the Nubian resources of gold and ivory. This situation would have been a disadvantage for the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, both politically and economically (Forstner-Müller – Rose 2010: 181; Colin 2005: 62). Indeed, the abundant Egyptian pottery discovered in Nubia during the Hyksos period comes from Upper Egypt, suggesting that trade was occurring mainly through Thebes at this time (Bourriau 1993: 130; O'Connor 1997: 62).

The hypothesis of the isolationist politics of the Theban Kingdom against the Hyksos is coherent with the scarcity of Levantine and Cypriot imports outside the Delta under Hyksos rule, the decrease of Marl C pottery and the lack of attestations of Kerma pottery during the same period at Tell el-Dab'a. However, the examination of the distribution of other commodities, such as Tell el-Yahudiya juglets, suggests that connections were much more complex and multi-faceted. At the stage of our research, it is still difficult to assess if all contacts ceased between the separated political entities or if some indirect connections could have still occurred, at least during certain periods. More elements of reflection can be brought by the study of the distribution of Tell el-Yahudiya juglets of Late Egyptian Group (Fig. 6) belonging to categories Piriform 2, Biconical 3 and 4, Wheel-made globular and Combed Ware (Bietak – Aston 2012: groups L.1, L.5, L.8–9, L.11–12, L.13).

Type Piriform 2 developed shortly before Hyksos rule, it is attested between Phases E/3 and D/2 at Tell el-Dab'a (Aston – Bietak 2012: fig. 253). This type is the most widely spread and was discovered as far south as Kerma in Nubia (Aston – Bietak 2012: fig. 141). Juglets of Biconical 3 and 4 types are encountered at Tell el-Dab'a from Phases E/2 to D/2 (Aston – Bietak 2012: fig. 253). They are attested in minute quantities on sites along the Nile, in the areas of Memphis, Abydos, Rifa, and in the south at Buhen and Aniba (Aston – Bietak 2012: figs. 167, 182). Sites which yielded Biconical 3 and 4 juglets often delivered Piriform 2 juglets as well. Wheel-made globular juglets and Cylindrical types are only attested under Hyksos rule. They are present at Tell el-Dab'a from Phases E/1 to D/2 (Aston – Bietak 2012: fig. 253). Their distribution is more limited than the previous types outside the Delta. However, they are still occasionally encountered in the

**Fig. 6.**

The distribution of Tell el-Yahudiya juglets of Late Egyptian Group in Egypt (S. Vilain/P. Aprent, map background: H. David-Cuny).



south at Aniba and Buhen (Aston – Bietak 2012: figs. 189, 201). It is noteworthy that the latest category of Tell el-Yahudiya juglets of the Late Egyptian Group, the Combed Ware, which is a characteristic of the end of the Hyksos period (Phase D/2), is not attested more southwards than Sedment (Aston – Bietak 2012: fig. 206). A detailed study of the distribution and discovery contexts of Tell el-Yahudiya juglets in Egypt is currently in preparation.<sup>4</sup> This first overview suggests that not all communication routes were disrupted, or at least not during the whole Hyksos rule. However, the restrictions in the distribution of the latest types of Tell el-Yahudiya could suggest a more pronounced rupture in contacts towards the end of the Hyksos period.

Of great interest is the discovery of a Tell el-Yahudiya juglet of type Piriform 2 at Qaret el-Toub, located in the oasis of Baharia. This juglet testifies to contacts

<sup>4</sup> This study is a part of the research track “Trade and Crisis Analysis” investigated in the framework of the ERC Advanced Grand Project “The Enigma of the Hyksos” directed by M. Bietak, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria.

between Baharia and the Delta as suggested by the episode of the messenger depicted in the Second Stela of Kamose (Redford 1997: 14; Colin 2005: 36–38). The role of the Western Desert Oases during the Second Intermediate Period is still difficult to assess. Excavations at Dakhleh showed an expansion of the oasis back then, while the Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom layers only delivered poor archaeological remains (Gratien 2006: 128). Thus, we are interpreting the presence of Tell el-Yahudiya at Baharia as well as the development of Dakhleh during the Second Intermediate Period as signs of a new interest for the oases route under Hyksos rule. At some point, a part of trading connections could have been conducted by nomads, who had free movement through the desert and could interact with both Nubia and the Delta (Aston – Bietak 2017: 508). A better picture of the situation would request further investigations in the Oases area.

## Conclusion

The diachronic study of imported ceramics discovered at Tell el-Dabʿa is a useful tool to investigate the nature of the foreign relations of the Hyksos. This overview showed that their takeover had a different impact on already established connections. Trade with the Levant was already weakened by the fall of the Middle Kingdom and the separation of Egypt into different entities when the Hyksos came to power. However, the ongoing decline of Levantine imports continued and even amplified under Hyksos rule. As a result, at the end of the Second Intermediate Period, imitations of Middle Bronze shapes were favoured and imports were mainly limited to specific commodities, such as Canaanite Jars. Further investigations will be necessary to determine if these shifts reflect a voluntary choice instigated by a reduced need for imports, or if they constituted a necessary response to external constraints.

Compared to these shifts in Levantine imports, the examination of the evolution of Cypriot wares at Tell el-Dabʿa revealed a different pattern. Their presence increased under Hyksos rule and, even if imitations occurred, their number never supplanted the quantity of genuine imports. Cypriot vessels were mostly luxury commodities and were responding to specific needs. Consequently, we have to keep in mind that Cypriot imports, even at their climax, constitute only a minor part of the overall assemblage of the ceramics of each phase at Tell el-Dabʿa. Still, their increase under Hyksos rule could be interpreted as a sign of the will to develop connections with the Eastern Mediterranean, as the political situation surely affected the way that the Hyksos could interact with other parts of Egypt.

In regards to these interactions, the decrease of Marl C pottery at Tell el-Dabʿa as well as the decrease of Canaanite Jars at Memphis after Phase VI<sub>d</sub> could reflect disturbances in contacts between the Hyksos and the Memphite-Fayum area. The progressive isolation of the Delta, which seems stronger at the end of the Hyksos period, would have affected not only connections with the rest of Egypt but also with Nubia. One of the consequences would have been a reinforcement of the role of the Oases and nomads in the Western Desert.

Such observations highlight the varying interactions of the Hyksos with different powers across the region. The takeover of the Delta by the Hyksos dynasty

was an unprecedented event in Egypt. Therefore, their reign, as well as their fall, is closely linked to the way they interacted not only politically but also economically with both the rest of Egypt as well as the Eastern Mediterranean.

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