

BRONZE AGE PAINTINGS IN THE LEVANT: CHRONOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS¹

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I. CHRONOLOGY

In a series of sites in the Near East wall paintings have come to light, some of them applied on damp lime plaster (Fig. 1).² Most of them are considered Aegean or at least carried out by artists inspired or even trained in Aegean workshops.³ In the meantime, more material of this kind has been unearthed. Therefore, it seems appropriate to reconsider the evidence, keeping a focus on chronology and the specific cultural setting.

Barbara and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, who have dealt repeatedly over the last 15 years with the overall phenomenon of those paintings, preferred to place them all into the same timeframe, into a late phase of the Middle Bronze Age II, albeit not in its final stage.⁴ The paintings of Tell el-Dab^a seemed, at the time of their discovery, to fit into this scheme.⁵ Therefore the paintings altogether were seen as the result of a kind of “Versailles effect”⁶ i.e., to have been disseminated throughout the ancient Near East in a manner similar to that of the spread of French palatial architecture and interior design throughout Europe. According to Niemeier’s theory, it was supposed to be considered a kind of prestige among kings and princes in the eastern Mediterranean to have Minoan paintings in the representation rooms of their palaces. Artists from Minoan courts or centres were supposed to have been sent to embellish palaces in the Levant and Egypt with paintings of Minoan style.⁷

Niemeier cites, as a proof for this workshop dissemination, an Ugaritic text mentioning that the goddess Anat sent for the god of handicrafts Kothar wa Khasis sitting on his throne at *Kptr* (Kaphtor) to construct the palace for Baal.⁸ This text is, however,

from the 14th century BC, and it is entirely unclear whether this association in fact reflects a mythic feature that predates the text itself by several hundred



Fig. 1 Map of the Near East with the sites with wall paintings discussed in this paper (showing the Orontes and the Litani river and the Euphrates and the sites of Alalakh, Ebla, Qatna, Kabri, Tell Sakka 20 km east of Damascus, and Tell el-Dab^a

¹ The original version of this paper was to appear among the proceedings of a conference on the Late Bronze Age. As it was reworked according to current research results, the manuscript failed to meet the deadline, and it was integrated among the proceedings of the SCIEM Euroconference in the same year, where this subject was also on the agenda. For the English editing of this paper I am indebted to Eitan Grossmann, Jerusalem, and for bibliographical assistance to Irene Kaplan, Vienna. I would also like to thank Lyvia Morgan and Peter Warren for their kindness in reading this paper and giving valuable advice.

² Surveyed mainly by NIEMEIER 1991; NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 1998; 2000; 2002a: 282–285; 2002b: 86*–131*.

³ SHAW 1995: 110.

⁴ Cf. n.2.

⁵ BIETAK 1992; JÁNOSI 1994.

⁶ This term was introduced by Malcolm Wiener (WIENER 1984:17–26).

⁷ NIEMEIER 1991.

⁸ Last: NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a: 285.

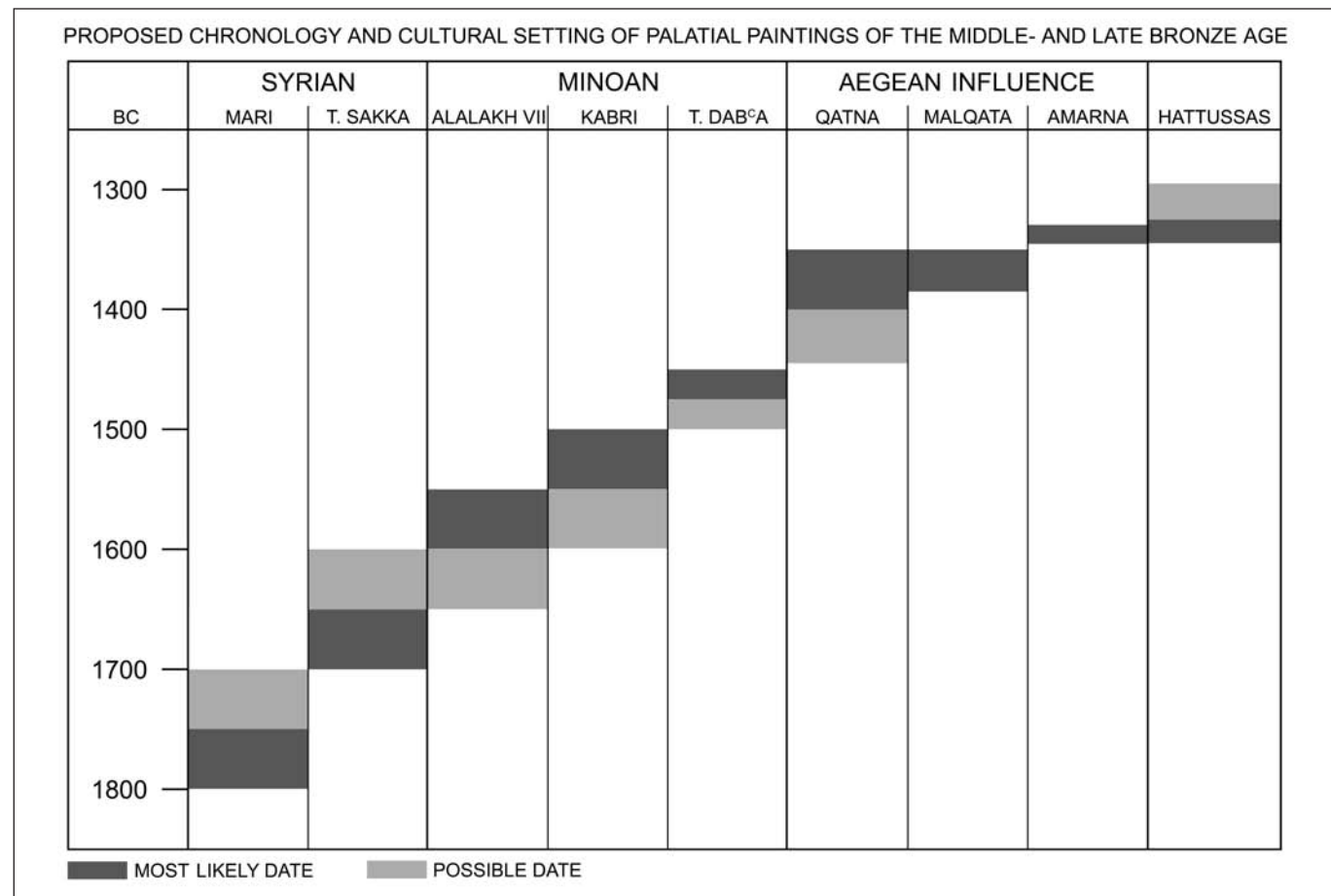


Fig. 2 Chronological table showing the date of the wall paintings of the Bronze Age in the Levant at Ebla, Mari, Tell Sakka, Alalakh, Kabri, Tell el-Dab^a and Qatna

years. Moreover, this god is Canaanite and not Minoan, and finally, *Kptr* is not mentioned as the sole abode of this god. The Egyptian Memphis is mentioned in the same passage as the land of his heritage.⁹ This text is neither chronologically nor culturally suitable to be used as a historical source for this discussion. We shall see in the following that this vision of the dissemination of mural art is highly simplified and should be reconsidered on a more correct chronological footing. Also, the specific cultural setting should be scrutinised. This should include

palatial paintings, which are of local origin but show inspirations from abroad.

As a result, the proposed chronology, which has been assessed by B. & W.-D. Niemeier around a high supposed date of the Thera eruption (around 1628 BC¹⁰), does not work out, neither in the relative chronology, nor in combination with the historical/archaeological absolute chronology of the Levant and Egypt, despite a numerically stupendous amount of publications by Sturt Manning claiming the contrary.¹¹ The paintings in question are not all

⁹ New translations in DEL OLMO 1981: 192; M. SMITH in: PARKER 1997: 119. For those references, I am grateful to my colleague Michael Jursa, Univ. Vienna. For Kothar wa Khasis in Memphis, see LEIBOVITCH 1948: 435, pl. I.; STADELMANN 1967: 123–124.

¹⁰ For a long time the high Aegean chronology was backed by the claim that an eruption such as that in Thera should be visible as a distinct climatic signal in the tree ring chronology. Indeed, in northern Europe and in North America, the only significant signal in the expected time range can be

found at 1628 BC. See last MANNING 1999: 268–281. Of course, the link between Thera and this climatic signal is not cogent. In the meantime, the eruption date has been raised by scientists to 1645±7 BC (see HAMMER *et al.* 2003; MANNING *et al.* 2001; MANNING *et al.* 2002). New radio carbon dates seem to cluster again around 1620 BC, see Bietak, Höflmayer, Introduction, this volume.

¹¹ See the long list of his literature cited by MANNING in this volume.

contemporary, nor were they produced in the same way and by the same kind of workshop (Fig. 2).

The paintings of Alalakh VII date before the fall of the town in the second year of Hattushili I, according to the Middle Chronology before c. 1628 BC, according to the Low Chronology c. 1575/1564 BC,¹² and before 1532 BC according to the even lower New Chronology of Gasche et al.¹³ This would be about 60 to 150 years before the paintings of Tell el-Dab'a/Ezbet Helmy, depending on how long before the destruction of this site they had been produced.¹⁴ There is also evidence of paintings from Alalakh IV, a level that yielded wares of the Red Lustrous Wheel Made-, White Painted VI-, White Slip I, II and Base Ring I and II Wares¹⁵ and is, according to Celia Bergoffen, most probably contemporaneous with the late Tuthmoside Period in Egypt.¹⁶

A date between the Alalakh VII and Tell el-Dab'a (phase C/3)-paintings can be assessed for the paintings of Tel Kabri in northern Galilee, c. 8 km from the seashore.¹⁷ They were found in secondary position used as filling material of the door to the main hall of the palace with floor paintings still *in situ*. The claim of a late 17th century date by W.-D. Niemeier¹⁸ would lead to a synchronisation with Alalakh VII (Middle Chronology)¹⁹ and the high date of the eruption of Thera at 1628 BC.²⁰ The relative chronology of the palace was fixed by the late A. Kempinski and W.-D. Niemeier to a phase in the late Middle Bronze Age II before the introduction of the Bichrome Ware.²¹ The destruction date of the palace was given, without further explanation, as 1600 BC. It was presented as an archaeological proof of the high date of the Thera eruption.²² How the absolute date was obtained is not explained. One may only guess that because of similarities of the Kabri paintings to those of Thera and the conviction that the

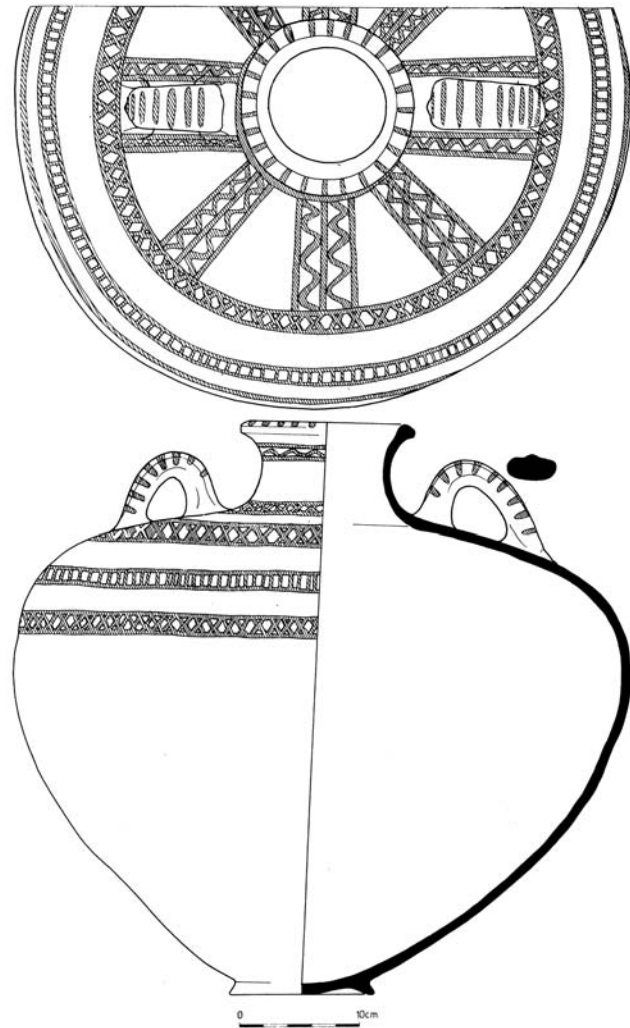


Fig. 3 The Chocolate on White Ware amphora imitation (after N. SHEFTELOWITZ in KEMPINSKI *et al.* 2002:174, fig. 5.62)

eruption of Thera could be fixed at 1628 BC, such an early date of the frescoes was transferred to Kabri. To reverse this procedure and use Kabri as an inde-

¹² GATES 1987: 75–70, and HEINZ 1992: 207 estimate 1575 BC as the end of Alalakh VII.

¹³ GASCHE 1998; GASCHE 2003; GASCHE *et al.* 1998.

¹⁴ For the chronology of the Tell el Dab'a paintings, see BIETAK, DORNER, JÁNOSI 2001: 38–45.

¹⁵ WOOLLEY 1955: 174–180, 363; BERGOFFEN 2003; BERGOFFEN 2005: 24–26.

¹⁶ BERGOFFEN 2003: 397–402; BERGOFFEN 2005: 64–65.

¹⁷ NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 1992; NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a. For the site in general, see KEMPINSKI 2002.

¹⁸ NIEMEIER 1990.

¹⁹ SMITH 1940.

²⁰ See n. 10.

²¹ Last: NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a: 270, who adopted this assumption from KEMPINSKI 1983: 223 that the beginning of the Bichrome Ware in Egypt can be dated to the reign of

Apophis and, more likely, to the beginning of his reign, if not even to the late reign of his predecessor, and that the beginning of Apophis' reign would date between 1620/10 and 1590/80. Nobody would support such a view today. There is no proof of a connection between the beginning of Apophis' reign and the introduction of Bichrome Ware in Egypt. All what we can say is that this ware appears at the end of the latest stratum of the Hyksos Period D/2, which comprises approximately a third of the time-span of 108 years before the conquest of Avaris. This would fall into the reign of Apophis, but hardly into the beginning of his long reign of 40 years or even into the time of his predecessor. The Tell el Ajjul Bichrome Wheel-made Ware (BIWM) appears, however, not before the New Kingdom (study group I. Hein).

²² NIEMEIER 1990.

pendent archaeological proof for the high date of Thera would mean using what one wants to prove as a proof – a classic circular argument.²³

There is, however, no independent chronology for the Palestinian Middle Bronze Age, and the ceramic assemblage clearly contradicts the relative dating within the Palestinian chronology. The presence of Chocolate on White Ware (CoW) in the main room of the palace (Fig. 3) shows that we are at the end of the Middle Bronze Age if not at the beginning of LB I.²⁴ A date for this magnificent and representative large amphora to a time after the destruction of the palace (Stage 3d) is neither claimed nor documented in the publication and would also not fit into this poor post-palatial phase. Besides that, Bichrome Wheelmade Ware (BIWM) which had not been recognised by the excavators was found on the floor of the same room.²⁵ A potential explanation of this piece as being post palatial does not get the support of the documentation of the palace and is equally unlikely, given the fact that it is a luxury ware. Therefore, Kabri did not end before the Bichrome phase as claimed by the excavators.

Another indicator for a transitional date to Late Bronze Age I is tomb 902 (Fig. 4a, b) with a CoW bowl, Black Lustrous Wheelmade (BLWM) jugs, red polished dipper juglets with carinated shoulders,²⁶ and two White Painted VI jugs. To separate this rich tomb from the palace period and to date it to the poor post palace phase would not make any sense.²⁷ This tomb should therefore be associated with the late phase of the Palace in its proper function. The contents of the tomb, especially the presence of the Black Lustrous Wheel Made Ware²⁸ would date already to the time of the early 18th Dynasty but still before the phase of the White Slip I/Base Ring I Ware. WP VI and BIWM Ware both appear nowhere

before the Late Hyksos Period and are still in use in the Tuthmoside Period. For example, WP VI Ware is still present in the so-called Fosse Temple at Lachish (Tell el-Duweir), where the oldest temple cannot be dated to a period before the time of Tuthmosis III,²⁹ and it is still present in Alalakh IV,³⁰ which can be dated according to the other Late Cypriot Wares such as White Slip II and Base Ring II even to the late Tuthmoside Period.³¹

All the evidence taken together would mean that the Kabri frescoes were at least still on the walls of the palace in the time of the early 18th Dynasty, which means shortly before 1500 BC according to the Egyptian historical chronology. This would be approximately 100 years later than the excavators had dated the assemblage. One may argue, of course, that the paintings were produced earlier and stayed for a long time on the walls till the palace was destroyed. According to the stratigraphic evidence, however, the paintings belonged to the third and last phase of the palace in its function as a palace (Stage 3c).³² How long this phase lasted is difficult to say, but the pottery, which can be associated with Stage 3c, belongs nevertheless to the final phase of the Middle Bronze Age. The evidence shows that the Kabri paintings seem to have been at least one or two generations longer on the walls than those at Alalakh and were also most probably produced later. Whether they can be used as evidence of a “Hyksos” koine³³ with respect to the distribution of wall paintings in the eastern Mediterranean world is therefore highly doubtful.

At other sites in the Levant such as Ebla, Qatna, Tell Sakka, and the most remote one, Mari, wall paintings in palatial contexts have also been found. They represent, however, different techniques and periods. The paintings in Qatna were, according to the excavators Mirko Novák and Peter Pfälzner, still

²³ Unfortunately, such argumentation is adopted uncritically by others, e.g. MANNING 1999: 29–30.

²⁴ For the chronology of the CoW Ware see FISCHER 1999.

²⁵ NA'AMA SCHEFTELOWITZ in: KEMPINSKI 2002: 166, 168, fig. 5.57/8. Inventory number No. 2114 from locus 611. It is a rim fragment of a crater found on the floor of the representation hall 611. It was not recognised as the surface has largely flaked away. But at an examination of the Kabri material in the magazines of the Israel Antiquity Authorities, kindly offered 2004 by Na'ama Sheftelowitz to the author and his colleague Karin Kopetzky (SCIE 2000 Research Programme), the BIWM Ware fragment was identified and the bichrome bands on the neck were still verifiable. A later petrographic analysis by Yuval Goren of Tel Aviv University verified the Cypriot origin of the

fragment. A re-publication of the fragment by Na'ama Sheftelowitz is planned for the next issue of *E&L*.

²⁶ Fig. 4a, last row. For the date of carinated dipper juglets see KOPETZKY 2002: 234–237, fig. 6.

²⁷ A. KEMPINSKI, N. SHEFTELOWITZ, L. GERSHUNY, in: A. KEMPINSKI 2002: 117–119, fig. 5.61/8–12.

²⁸ The Black Lustrous Wheel Made Ware appears nowhere in Egypt in Second Intermediate Period contexts, but only within contexts of the early 18th Dynasty, according to a current M.A. study carried out by Jürgen Hörburger, Univ. Vienna.

²⁹ TUFNELL *et al.* 1940: 84–85.

³⁰ BERGOFFEN 2005: 37.

³¹ *Ibidem*: 64–65.

³² RONIT OREN in: KEMPINSKI 2002: 63–65.

³³ NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a: 270–275.

on the walls when the palace was destroyed c. 1340 BC.³⁴ It is hardly conceivable that the paintings remained intact from the time of the Middle Bronze Age, when, according to deposits in dated pits, wall paintings were also produced.³⁵ The walls were of dried mud brick, which do not provide a stable setting for hard plaster for centuries. They are probably the latest of the known palatial wall paintings in the Levant and were perhaps contemporary with wall paintings of Temple 9 at Boghazköy, which date before the reign of Muwatalli, a time when the temple was abandoned.³⁶

At Ebla, some highly polished wall plaster fragments of lime with paint have been found from Middle Bronze Age contexts, and it would not be surprising if many more were to appear one day. In addition, in an Early Bronze IVA public building, plaster fragments with paintings have been found.³⁷ They are hitherto the oldest produced by an excavation in the Levant and may date as early as c. 2300 BC.³⁸

Paintings in palatial contexts have also been unearthed in a palace of the Middle Bronze Age II at Tell Sakka, c. 20 km east of Damascus, by an excavation of the Syrian Antiquities Authorities under Ahmad Ferzat Taraqqi.³⁹ Relying most probably on the Middle Chronology, the excavator dated the context to the 18th and the early 17th century.⁴⁰ According to parallels in the glyptic art and according to local types of Tell el-Yahudiya Ware found in the palace,⁴¹ the paintings should be dated into the 17th century in keeping with the present historical chronology devel-

oped for Egypt.⁴² They may be from the same period or slightly later than the paintings of Mari.⁴³

The date of the paintings at Tell el-Dab'a has been established by ceramic evaluation⁴⁴ beyond a shadow of a doubt to the early Tuthmoside Period (c. 1500–1450 BC) in connection with a palace precinct of phase C/3.⁴⁵ The fragments of wall paintings have been found in dumps at the foot of the rampart leading up to Palace F. Others were found fallen from the walls and dumped at a gate leading to the main Palace G.⁴⁶ There is no room for manoeuvring for this date, as not a single fragment has been found in a Hyksos layer, nor was there at that time a palatial building in the immediate vicinity of the find spots of the paintings. The original Hyksos period date has been proposed after the first season on inadequate evidence.⁴⁷ It is not understandable why till 2004 some colleagues from Aegean archaeology stick to the old date, presumably because this would fit better to their original conception. The correction of the date had been made already in 1996 and only experts in Egyptian archaeology (especially in Egyptian pottery) would be in a position to challenge this correction.⁴⁸

Within the early Tuthmoside Period the most likely date seems to be the time of Hatshepsut and young Tuthmosis III (c. 1479–1457 BC), when the first representations of Keftiu delegations and the first distinctive Minoan influence in art appear simultaneously in Theban tombs.⁴⁹ The earliest representations of Keftiu are known from the tombs of Senenmut (TT 71),⁵⁰ Useramun (TT 131)⁵¹ and most proba-

³⁴ NOVÁK & PFÄLZNER 2001: 183–185.

³⁵ Information kindly provided by Constance von Rüden, in charge of the painting workshop of the expedition of Tübingen. The paintings in Qatna, which became known to us thanks to the recent excavations, are from the Late Bronze Age, possibly as late as the 14th century BC.

³⁶ NEVE 1992: 30, fig. 75; MÜLLER-KARPE 2003: 392f.

³⁷ Kindly shown to me on a visit to Ebla by Paolo Matthiae shortly after their discovery.

³⁸ Information kindly provided by Paolo Matthiae. Preliminary publication expected in 2007 by MATTHIAE (in print).

³⁹ TARAQJI 1999: 35–41.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*: 40.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*: 41, fig. 12.

⁴² BIETAK 2002, BIETAK 2003. See also BEN-TOR 2004.

⁴³ As the transition from MB IIA to MB IIB can be dated according to research in Tell el Dab'a and Ashkelon to the decades around 1700 BC (BIETAK 2002, STAGER 2002), which was the time when larger Hazor was established, the Mari correspondence dealing with Hazor can only be dated to the 17th century BC. This is the conclusion of Amnon

Ben-Tor, the present excavator of Hazor. See BEN-TOR 2004 and the contribution of VAN KOPPEN in this volume.

⁴⁴ HEIN 1994a: 42, 1994b: 244–247, 258, 259, 261; 1998: 2001a; 2001b: 242–243; FUSCALDO 2000; FUSCALDO 2001.

⁴⁵ BIETAK 2000: 187–195; BIETAK, DORNER, JÁNOSI 2001: 38–45.

⁴⁶ BIETAK 2000: figs. 4 and 5; BIETAK, DORNER, JÁNOSI 2001: figs. 4 and 7.

⁴⁷ Originally: BIETAK, DORNER, HEIN, JÁNOSI 1994: 31f., 44; JÁNOSI 1995; see the explanation of the correction above in n. 45. See also the ceramic evaluation in n. 44.

⁴⁸ BIETAK 1996a: 67–83; BIETAK 1996b: 11–44. BIETAK 1997: 117 (still in the early 18th Dynasty) and detailed with documentation in BIETAK 2000, 187–200; BIETAK, DORNER, JÁNOSI 2001: 38–45.

⁴⁹ VERCOUTTER 1956; WACHSMANN 1987; MATTHÄUS 1995.

⁵⁰ Recently DORMAN 1991: pl. 21d.

⁵¹ DAVIES 1926: figs. 1, 6; WACHSMANN 1987: 31f, with a reconstruction of the scenes with Keftiu on pls. XXVI–XXXII after details rendered by VERCOUTTER 1956 on detailed illustrations. DZIOBEK 1994: 91f., pls. 20, 21, 23, 92, 93. On

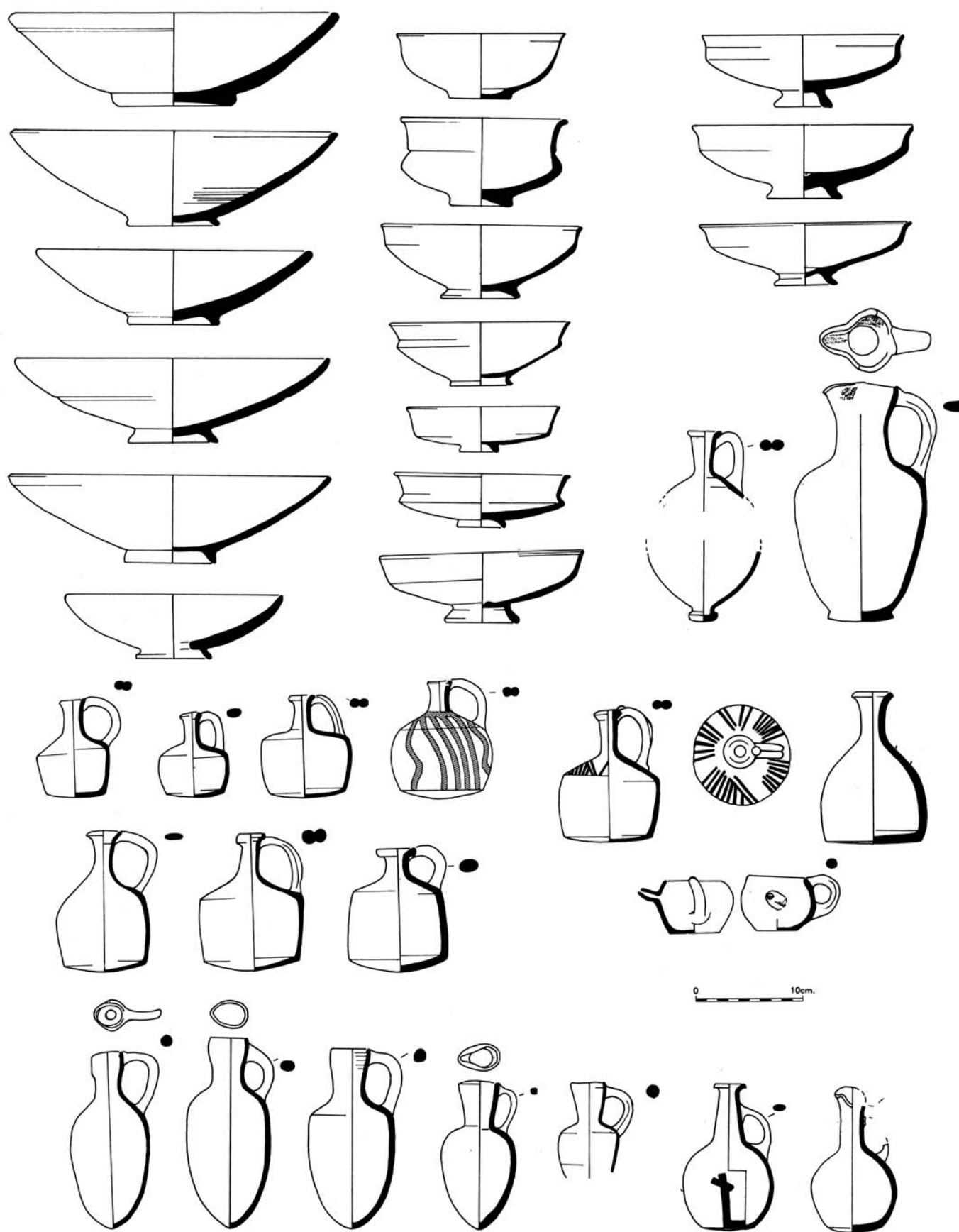


Fig. 4a Pottery from Tomb 902 from Tel Kabri, dating to the terminal Middle Bronze Age IIC showing BLWM jugs and dipper juglets with carinated shoulders (N. SHEFTELOWITZ in: KEMPINSKI 2002:172–173, figs. 5.60 and 5.61)

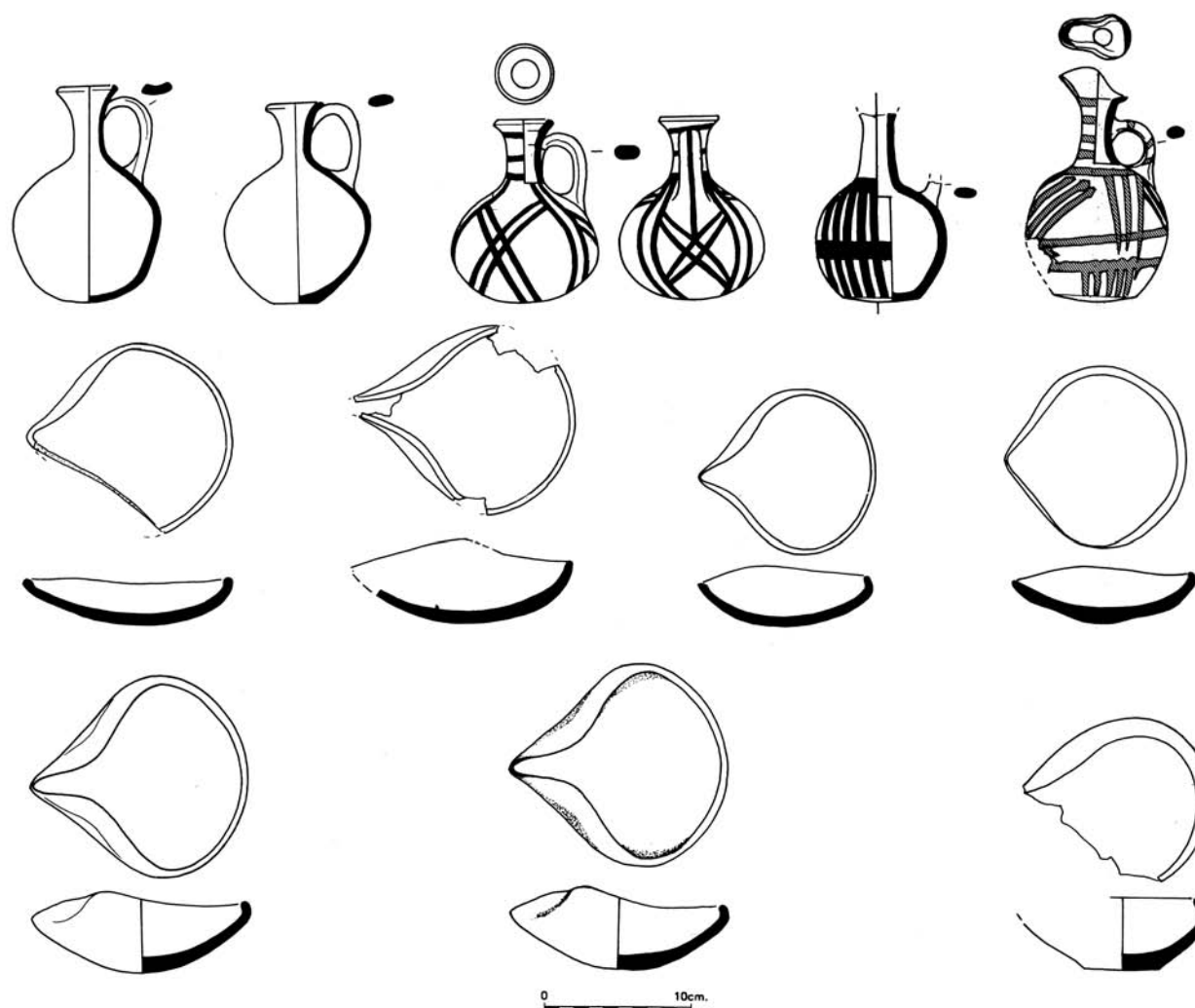


Fig. 4b Pottery from Tomb 902 from Tel Kabri, dating to the terminal Middle Bronze Age IIC showing BLWM juglets and WP V and VI jugs (N. SHEFTELOWITZ in: KEMPINSKI 2002:172–173, figs. 5.60 and 5.61)

bly of Intef (TT 155).⁵² They all date to the time of the joint reign of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III. The two tombs of Useramun were completed before the year 28 of Tuthmosis III.⁵³ It can hardly be a coincidence that at the same time we have also distinctive evidence of features of Minoan art such as the first hesitant rendering of the flying gallop with the inner legs in front and at the rear and the *en-face* killer⁵⁴ (the hunting dog) in the tomb of User

(TT 21).⁵⁵ Typical Minoan patterns can be found in the decoration of ceilings in the tomb of Senenmut.⁵⁶

Summing up, Qatna seems to provide the latest paintings, possibly from the time of the late 15th or even 14th century BC, while those from Tell el-Dab^a may be up to a century earlier; Kabri may be a generation or two earlier than Tell el-Dab^a and Alalakh VII a generation before Kabri if not more, but both would date from the 16th century if we apply the low

the chronology of the tomb of Useramun (TT131) in relationship to the tombs of Senenmut (TT71) and Rechemire^c (TT100) see recently DUHOUX 2003: 182–187, 226–228.

⁵² WACHSMANN 1987: 31, pl. XXVI/A.

⁵³ DAVIES & GARDINER 1915: 1–2, 70–72, l. 11–12; VERCOUTTER 1956: 207, n. 1; WACHSMANN 1987: 31, n. 23; DZIOBEK 1994: 100.

⁵⁴ Typical for predators in Aegean art in the moment of

killing, see on this subject MORGAN 1995b. *En face* hunting dogs continue in Egyptian art from this time onwards.

⁵⁵ DAVIES 1913: pl. XXII; MORGAN 2004: 293, fig. 15, 295; User according to *PM* I²: 35–37, served under Tuthmosis I but his tomb may have been completed as late as Tuthmosis III.

⁵⁶ DORMAN 1991: pl. 27b–c.

or the even lower New Chronology of GASCHE *et al.*⁵⁷ or the historical chronology based on Egypt.⁵⁸ This is the only way one could bring the time of the paintings as closely together as possible. Applying the Middle Chronology would result in the dates of the paintings at the different sites drifting even further apart.

At Alalakh VII and Kabri, the paintings date to a time before the first appearance of Red Lustrous Wheelmade, White Slip I and Base Ring I Wares.⁵⁹ At Tell el-Dab^a phase C/3 and Alalakh V–IV, the paintings are from a period when those wares were already disseminated.⁶⁰ This is not a speculative conclusion, as the spread of the WS I Ware in the Levant is also attested in find combinations from Cyprus, which shows even synchronisation with LM IA.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the appearance of WS I in Thera could theoretically be earlier than its advent in the Levant, although the claim of a northern Cypriot origin with an earlier production phase is an unproven hypothesis.⁶² Opinions about the relative date within the WS I series are divided and good parallels of the Thera bowl are known from southern Cyprus.⁶³ White Slip Ware as a whole does not seem to be originally a northern Cypriot product.⁶⁴

Mari and Tell Sakka – both technically and stylistically different from the other mentioned paintings – might date from the time of the 18th and the 17th century. The paintings from the Middle Bronze Age II at Ebla are not yet clear in their precise chronological position and comprise, at the present, a few solitary fragments without actual motifs. The paintings from the Early Bronze IVA, however, are as early as the late 3rd millennium, and are an indication that there existed also a local Syrian tradition of palatial paintings.

It becomes clear from this survey that the paintings are not from the same period, covering a range of possibly 600 years or more. If we take the time span

of the paintings with Minoan style (Alalakh, Kabri, Tell el-Dab^a), we still face a period of 150 years, if not more. A common origin of all the paintings seems unlikely. Therefore, we have to try to differentiate the paintings in their specific cultural setting.

II. CULTURAL SETTING

In Syria, long before Minoan influence can be found in palatial wall paintings, there appears to have been a local tradition of wall painting on lime plaster and even plaster relief for embellishing reception rooms of palaces. Little is known about those paintings and the origin of this tradition, but wall paintings have recently been found at Ebla that date to the Early Bronze Age Period IVA, the time of Sargon of Akkad (c. 2300 BC). They originate from an important room belonging to Building FF2, which is to be seen in connection with the famous Palace G of the Early Bronze IVA Period.⁶⁵ It is not yet clear if it is a secular palatial building or a kind of temple. All of the plaster fragments seem to belong to a decorated niche, which probably indicated the position of a throne.⁶⁶ The technique still has to be analysed, but the paintings were applied on lime plaster varying in thickness from a thick whitewash on mud coating to a thick lime layer. The surface was unpolished. The niche was encased with a moulded ledge decorated with lozenges. The pattern was executed according to a grid in thin red painted lines. Among the motifs were rosettes, concentric lozenges, and a maze pattern consisting of angular spiral motifs. The only two colours used were red and black. Those paintings, much older than the Middle and Late Bronze Age mural art, show that there was a local Syrian tradition in wall painting for public buildings.

Also in the Middle Bronze Age II Period, a local Syrian tradition of mural art can be found in the

⁵⁷ GASCHE 1998; GASCHE 2003; GASCHE *et al.* 1998.

⁵⁸ The beginning of the New Kingdom differs according to the current results of experts only within little more than a decade. There is, however a difference in opinion, how far the astrochronological data such as the Sothis date from the papyrus Ebers and lunar dates can be considered as reliable. For the New Kingdom, however, calculations (dead reckoning) by regnal and genealogical dates from the 26th Dynasty backwards lead within margins of error, which could be estimated at present within ± 20 years, to ± 1550 – 1540 BC, cf. HELCK 1987; HORNUNG 1964; KITCHEN 1987; KITCHEN 1996; KITCHEN 2000; KRAUSS 1985; LUFT 1992; VON BECKERATH 1994; VON BECKERATH 1997.

⁵⁹ BERGOFFEN 2005: 17–21, 41–54, table VII, 62.

⁶⁰ BIETAK & HEIN 2001. HEIN 2001b. BIETAK 2003: fig. 1.

⁶¹ VERMEULE & WOLSKY 1990: 329–239, T I/ 324,495; *ibidem*: 219–220, T I/34A, 34 B, 340, 485, 494–500.

⁶² MANNING 1999: 150–158, 170–192, 367–419. – For criticism see BIETAK 2003: 23–27; BIETAK 2004: 211–214.

⁶³ MERRILLEES 2001: 93, considers the Thera bowl as belonging to southern Cypriot production.

⁶⁴ Joanna S. Smith, Columbia University in charge of the northern Cypriot Phlamoudhi Project, personal information. See also GOMEZ *et al.* 1995.

⁶⁵ Information kindly provided by Paolo Matthiae during a visit to Ebla (4/10/2003). I also would like to thank Paolo Matthiae for all the information given to me before the publication of this important discovery and for his kind permission to report it.

⁶⁶ MATTHIAE in print.

royal palace of Mari.⁶⁷ There are paintings at several places within the palace. The most important ones can be found on the walls of the nearly square central courtyard 106 on the front wall of a throne room, with the throne looking into the courtyard. They are arranged in front of a long room sanctuary. Among the motifs are processional scenes of attendants with bulls. Of particular importance is the so-called “investiture painting of Zimrilim”, which was, at the time of excavations, still *in situ* on the western half of this front wall (see below).⁶⁸ The technique is tempera painted on wall coating of mud, which was partly whitewashed and on lime plaster.⁶⁹ Paintings were also found in the throne room,⁷⁰ in the so-called audience room no. 132⁷¹ and in the “chamber of the queen”,⁷² the “chamber of the king”,⁷³ and other so-called private apartments (Fig. 9).⁷⁴

The paintings show motifs which are originally Mesopotamian. Their style and technique can be identified, however, as local. There is a rigid register composition and a tendency for ornamental division zones and vertical separations. Besides the aspective view,⁷⁵ at home in Mesopotamian as well as in Egyptian art, the bold, even crude, outlining of figures is typical of the local style. Features such as the iconography, the dress, the mythological scenery, and the emblems are all Mesopotamian. The female colour code for male and female is not in accord with either the Minoan nor with the Egyptian Middle Kingdom codes, as no distinction of gender is shown.

There may, however, be some Minoan influence. The Niemeiers have claimed,⁷⁶ correctly I believe, that the veined rendering of imitations of floor slabs and dados⁷⁷ (Fig. 10) have their earliest examples in Crete at Phaistos⁷⁸ and Mallia,⁷⁹ dating to the early

19th century BC. This would be somewhat earlier than Mari, especially if the low Mesopotamian chronology is applied. The Niemeiers also pointed out that ashlar stone is not the building material typical of Mesopotamia.⁸⁰ It is well known, however, in Syria, although mainly volcanic stones were used there. Also of Minoan influence seem to be the borders of running spirals along the edges of the top of the podium enclosing the above-mentioned veined slab imitation.⁸¹ There is also a border of running spirals along the outer edge of the “investiture painting” in the courtyard 106.⁸² This painting, which most probably renders the investiture of a king by Ishtar in warrior outfit, is considered to be the copy of a wall carpet.⁸³ The upper and lower ends of the pannel clearly show tassels and the rendering of a fibre seam.⁸⁴ Is it possible that the element of running spirals became a typical border for wall tapestry, but was perhaps originally imported as an element of ornamented textiles from Crete? The latter seems to be the more feasible interpretation, as the multicoloured border with thin stripes of red-white-black-white-red-black or red-white-black-white-black-red framing the core of the investiture painting⁸⁵ reminds one of the borders of Minoan paintings as well.⁸⁶ The emblematic griffins at both sides of the investiture scenes are rendered, however, in Near Eastern fashion.

Contacts between Mari and Crete are known from the Mari correspondence,⁸⁷ and it was surely not the only Near Eastern town visited by Minoan merchants at that time. There was a mutual borrowing in art as well, which sometimes makes it difficult to decide which motif originated from where, e.g., the rendering of the bull leaping and grappling scenes in

⁶⁷ PARROT 1958.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 53–66, figs. 47, 48, 50, pls. VII–XIV, col. pl. A.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: 83–85. Other paintings were applied on 1mm thick gypsum(?) plaster (*ibid.*: 53). The definition “Fresko auf Gipsputz” = fresco on gypsum plaster, is wrong (e.g. KOHLMAYER & STROMENGER 1982: 112).

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*: 67–69, fig. 54.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*: pls. XVI–XX, col. pl. E

⁷² *Ibidem*: pl. I.

⁷³ *Ibidem*: pl. III.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*: pl. II.

⁷⁵ BRUNNER-TRAUT 1965: 309–330.

⁷⁶ NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a: 262–263.

⁷⁷ PARROT 1958: pls. I, XV.

⁷⁸ LEVI 1957/58: 332–333; HIRSCH 1977: 17, no. C43.

⁷⁹ DAUX 1965: 1000–1001, figs. 1–2; HIRSCH 1977: 13, nos. C22–23.

⁸⁰ NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a: 262–263.

⁸¹ PARROT 1958: pl. XV/2.

⁸² *Ibidem*: pl. XI, col. pl. A.

⁸³ MOORTGAT 1952.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*: 92.

⁸⁵ PARROT 1958: col. pl. A.

⁸⁶ Following references for multiple striped bands were kindly provided to me by Lyvia Morgan: From Knossos: CAMERON in: POPHAM 1985: pls. 46, 48; CAMERON & HOOD 1967: pl. B, fig. 1A–B, ii, iia; EVANS 1921: fig. 188 a–b; EVANS 1930: 46 ff.; EVELY 1999: 207, 209, 247; IMMERWAHR 1990: 23, fig. 6; KARETSOU & ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI 2000: 276f., 298f.; for Kea, mainly unpublished, see IMMERWAHR 1990: 34; for Thera: DOUMAS 1992: pls. 1–8, 18f., 22f., 49–56, 85 f., 90, 116, 122, 129, 131, 140 f., 151.

⁸⁷ DOSSIN 1939: 111–112.

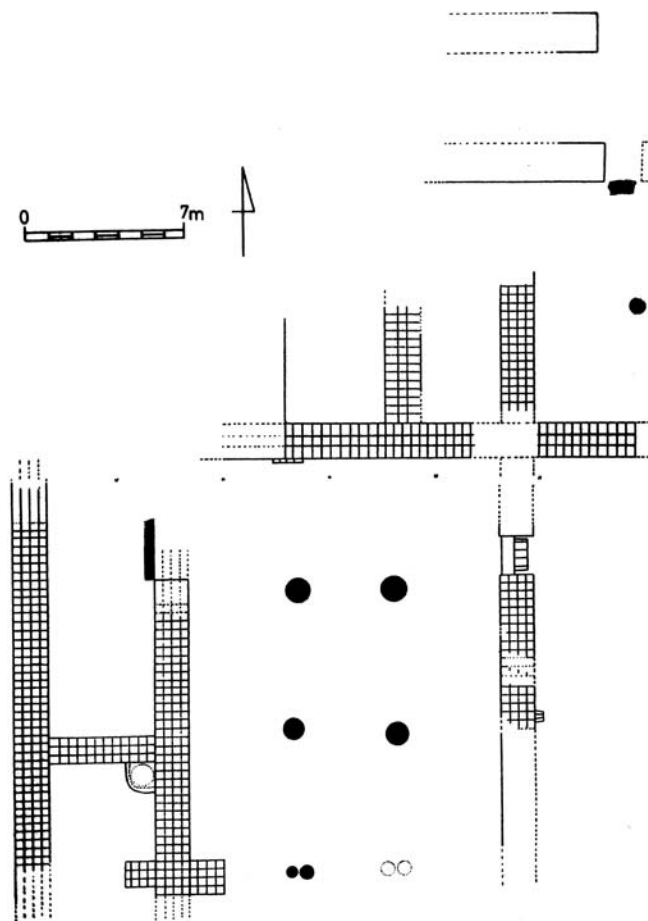


Fig. 5 Palatial building at Tell Sakka
(after TARAQJI 1999:35, fig. 7)

the Syrian glyptic art of the 18th or 17th century BC, depending on whether the middle or the low chronologies are applied.⁸⁸ Surely, the Minoans borrowed griffins as heraldic elements, but they domesticated them with a specific Minoan iconography. We may also assume that the divine marker, the multiple horns – a frequent motif in the Minoan glyptic art – came from the Near East.⁸⁹

Perhaps not much later than in Mari, in MB II, one can find Syrian mural paintings in the west of the country at Tell Sakka, c. 20 km east of Damascus.⁹⁰ They originate from a palatial structure with a major reception room of four columns (22.2 × 14.5 m) and a pair of double columns at its entrance. It is possibly a throne room (Fig. 5).

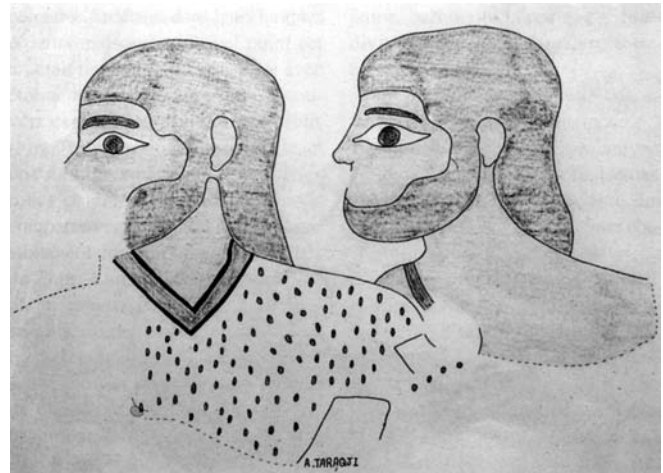


Fig. 6 Wall paintings from a palace at Tell Sakka (after TARAQJI 1999: 37, fig. 9)

The paintings on whitewashed mud coating, like those found in Mari, can only have been applied in tempera technique. They covered the walls of this columned hall, the adjacent room 5, and some other side rooms in the west. Most of the paintings were found in the rubble on the floor, tumbled from the walls. What could be recognized from larger pieces of wall coating is the following: whereas the zone along the base seems to have been covered in simple patterns of red dots – probably a dado imitation – the walls carried figural motifs. Among those published were representations of bearded Near-Easterners with long hair, and, it seems, with a headband (Fig. 6).⁹¹ They are shown, as in Egyptian art, with heads in side view with big expressive eyes, rendered in frontal aspect. Their shoulders are depicted in front view. They are dressed in white dotted robes with an ornate neck seam. Another male figure is dressed in a robe, which covered only one shoulder and also shows an ornate seam. It is not clear to which kind of scenes those figures belong. Some of the scenes undoubtedly depict warfare or hunting, as one fragment depicts a hand with a bow and an arrow poised at some unknown target.⁹² Legs of animals may belong to this scene.

Most amazing is the representation of a god with the Atef-crown and ram horns, painted within the representation of a niche (Fig. 7).⁹³ The excavator

⁸⁸ COLLON 1994 with all the references. She believes in the Syrian origin of the bull acrobatics.

⁸⁹ MARINATOS 1993: 143.

⁹⁰ TARAQJI 1999.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*: 37, fig. 9.

⁹² *Ibidem*: 40, fig. 11.

⁹³ *Ibidem*: 38, fig. 10.



Fig. 7 Image of a god on a wall painting at Tell Sakka with Egyptian Atef crown (after TARAQJI 1999: 38, fig. 10)



Fig. 8 Bone inlays at Ebla with Egyptian gods (after MATTHIAE, PINNOCK, SCANDONE-MATTHIAE 1995: 458–460, nos. 372–374)

thinks of an Egyptian influence, or even artists from Egypt. The style and the Egyptian influence can, however, be best explained together with the strong Egyptian influence on minor objects of art in this period, such as the glyptic art which frequently shows Egyptian religious emblems like the winged disk, the Ankh sign, and Egyptian gods and goddesses wearing the Atef crown, Hathor horns and other iconographic attributes (Fig. 8).⁹⁴ According to Dominique Collon, this influence should be dated to the 18th century BC in keeping with the Middle,⁹⁵ or to the 17th century in keeping with the Low Chronology.⁹⁶ According to the types of Tell el-Yahudiya

Ware found in the palace,⁹⁷ this is precisely the date of the paintings.⁹⁸

In summary, the paintings, although displaying the typical Egyptian influence and motifs of that time, can be identified as local Syrian art. They show equally Mesopotamian motifs such as a heraldic composition of goats touching a tree with their front legs.⁹⁹ Also, stylistic features such as the hand grasping the bow and arrow¹⁰⁰ remind us, with its heavy outlines, of the paintings of Mari.

The other paintings in Levantine palaces show distinctive Minoan features or are Minoan. The sites of Alalakh and Qatna are both situated in the

⁹⁴ EDER 1995; TEISSIER 1996; BIETAK 1998. See also the bone inlays found at Ebla in: MATTHIAE, P., F. PINNOCK, G. SCANDONE MATTHIAE 1995: 458–460, nos. 372–376.

⁹⁵ COLLON 1994: 81

⁹⁶ BIETAK 1998.

⁹⁷ TARAQJI 1999: 41, fig. 12. They belong to the Palestinian Tell el-Yahudiya Ware. They do not show features of late MB I (18th cent. BC). They already have the rolled rims,

but are still distant from the late types. The Piriform 3 type still has many stripes, which dates it to the early MB II Period (17th cent. BC). The Biconical jug in the foreground with oblique stripes also belongs to this time.

⁹⁸ For the typology of the Tell el-Yahudiya Ware and its chronology, see BIETAK & ASTON forthcoming.

⁹⁹ TARAQJI 1999: 39.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*: 40, Fig. 11.



Fig. 9 Representation of wall paintings at the palace of Mari with the imitation of a wall carpet, showing a zone with running spirals (after PARROT 1958: pl. XI, 1)

Orontes valley, the former at its lower reaches, the latter at its middle reaches. Both sites were powerful city-states and had palatial cultures. At both sites there is evidence of wall paintings in the palaces in the time of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. This suggests an established tradition from the 17th/16th–15th/14th century BC.

The paintings at Qatna, dating most likely from the Late Bronze Age, probably even from the 14th century BC,¹⁰¹ have technique and features which look Minoan. Among the motifs are undulating horizons and friezes with running spirals and palmettos in between (Figs. 12–13). A palm tree with bushels of dates and brown grass also look very Minoan. Arranging the spiral zones in alternative directions, is not unusual in the Minoan world. The representation of turtles, however, has no parallels there. As a part

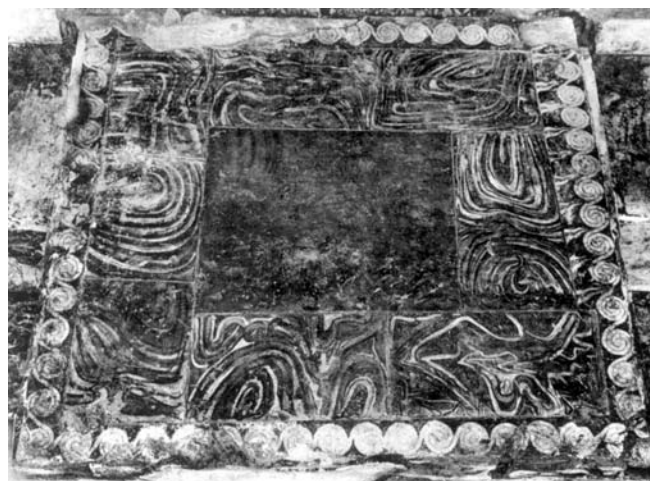


Fig. 10 Plaster imitation of veined ashlar construction (dado) and running spiral border, from Mari (after PARROT 1958: pl. XV,2)

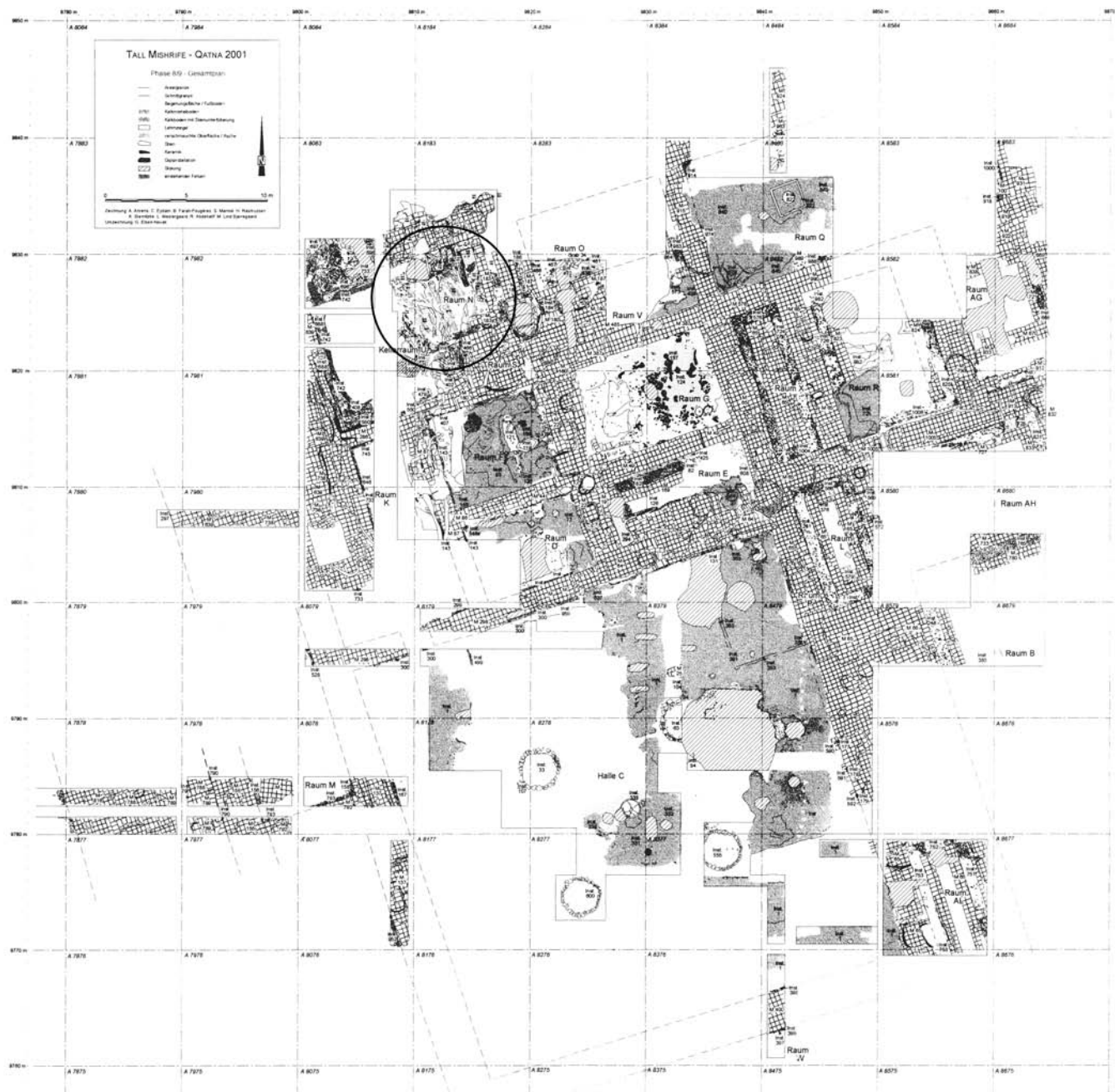
of a sea landscape, but this could be taken as an inspiration from Aegean sea landscapes. The style, however, looks different from that typically found in Minoan paintings.

The paintings are executed on lime plaster, compressed by floats. It is unclear if the colours were applied to the damp surface or if tempera technique was used. String impressions were generally not used for the planning of the decorative zones, which would be unusual in the Minoan world but usual in Mycenaean paintings. The lines of the zones were drawn with free hand in colour. This is all the more astonishing, as a single cord impression was observed.

The paintings come from a small room (N) of a huge palace (Fig. 11). We may expect, however, that the major throne room had also been embellished with paintings displaying emblems of power, such as griffins.

In general, the paintings of Qatna give the impression of being inspired by Minoan art. However, the style and technique do not follow Minoan art so strictly that the involvement of Minoan artists might be claimed cogently. There seems to be another tradition involved, which could be explained as a local one. If the paintings are indeed from the 14th century, the distance from Minoan art could also be explained by the time factor. One might think of a Mycenaean contact. A comparison could also be drawn to the paintings of the Malqata palace, which

¹⁰¹ Information on Qatna kindly provided by the excavator Peter Pfälzner and the analyst of the paintings Constance von Rüden, For the paintings see: NOVÁK & PFÄLZNER 2001: 183–85; 2002: 226–231.



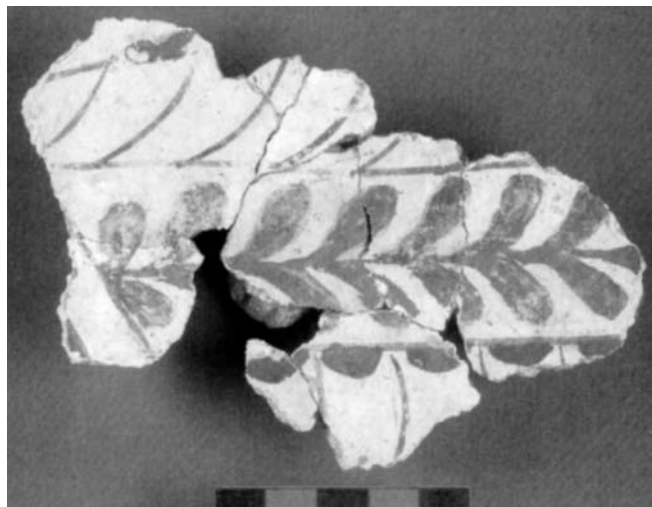


Fig. 12 Sample of wall paintings from Qatna with floral motif (after NOVÁK & PFÄLZNER 2002)

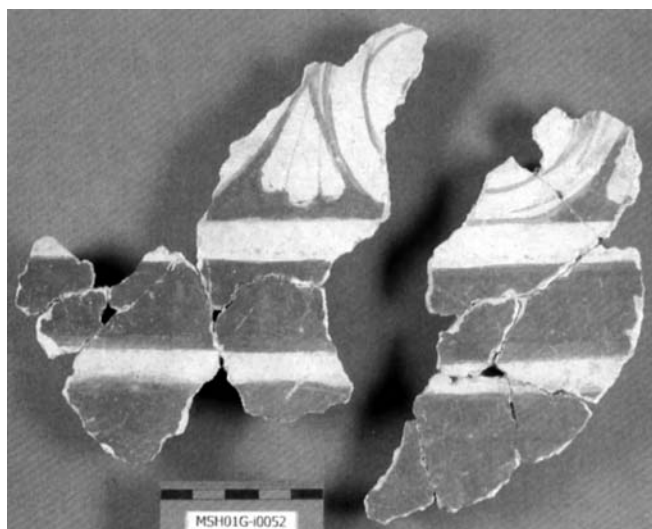


Fig. 13 Sample of wall paintings from Qatna with spiral decoration and palmettos (after NOVÁK & PFÄLZNER 2002:)

at the Orontes river), some highly polished wall plaster fragments of lime with remains of linear painting have also turned up in Middle Bronze Age II contexts from the Southern Palace.

In Alalakh, the older paintings originate from the palace of the ruler Yarim Lim (Fig. 15).¹⁰⁴ They embellished the main hall of the palace ("The chamber of audience," according to Woolley), which could

possibly be identified as the throne room. Leonard Woolley identified the technique as Minoan.¹⁰⁵

Typical features there were ashlar dado imitations in the throne room.¹⁰⁶ From the same room probably came a representation of a big emblematic griffin (Fig. 16), of which only some notched plume pattern fragments together with parts of the body, have been identified by W.-D. and B. Niemeier, as the result of a re-examination of the paintings in the Ashmolean Museum.¹⁰⁷ It seems that the fantastic animal rests on the ground, which is rendered as a schematized rocky zone in a fashion similar to the ground of the taureador frieze at Knossos. Inverted landscape has also been identified in this scene. It could be hypothesized that there was originally another griffin of the same size, and both were arranged on either side of a throne as emblems of royalty.

The Niemeiers also identified horns, possibly belonging to a frieze of bucrania with a double axe between the horns (Fig. 16). The motif may originate from Knossos.¹⁰⁸ It seems that the Alalakh paintings were inspired by the art of the palace of Knossos, although the preserved comparanda from there could date later than Alalakh. In this case, one may expect that they had predecessors in Knossos of the same kind.

The frescoes of Kabri were also found in a palatial context of the late Middle Bronze Age (MB IIC).¹⁰⁹ They were found in what had been most probably the main reception room 611 (Fig. 17). Unfortunately, the building was not completely excavated. The room was nearly square and originally measured c. 8.80 × 9.30m. It had three entrances within niches through the middle of three walls. The fourth wall probably served as the back wall for a throne. On the final floor of compressed lime plaster, the painted imitation of a marble pavement was still *in situ* (Fig. 18). The pattern of slabs seems to have been planned by cord impressions in the still-wet surface.¹¹⁰ The slabs were outlined with bold red lines, imitating the red mortar used in Aegean stone masonry and pavement. The real stone slabs of the entrance from room 607 were also covered with lime stucco and the continuation of the slab pattern. The colours were applied when the surface was still damp, which had caused the veined stone pattern to become slightly blurred. In some

¹⁰⁴ WOOLLEY 1955: 230.

¹⁰⁵ WOOLLEY 1955: 231.

¹⁰⁶ WOOLLEY 1955: 230.

¹⁰⁷ NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 1998: 84–85, pl. VI f.; NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2000: 784–789, fig. 22; NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a: 275, 282–283.

¹⁰⁸ EVANS 1930: 208, fig. 142.

¹⁰⁹ For the chronological assessment, see above 271–272.

¹¹⁰ NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a: 257, pl. VIII.

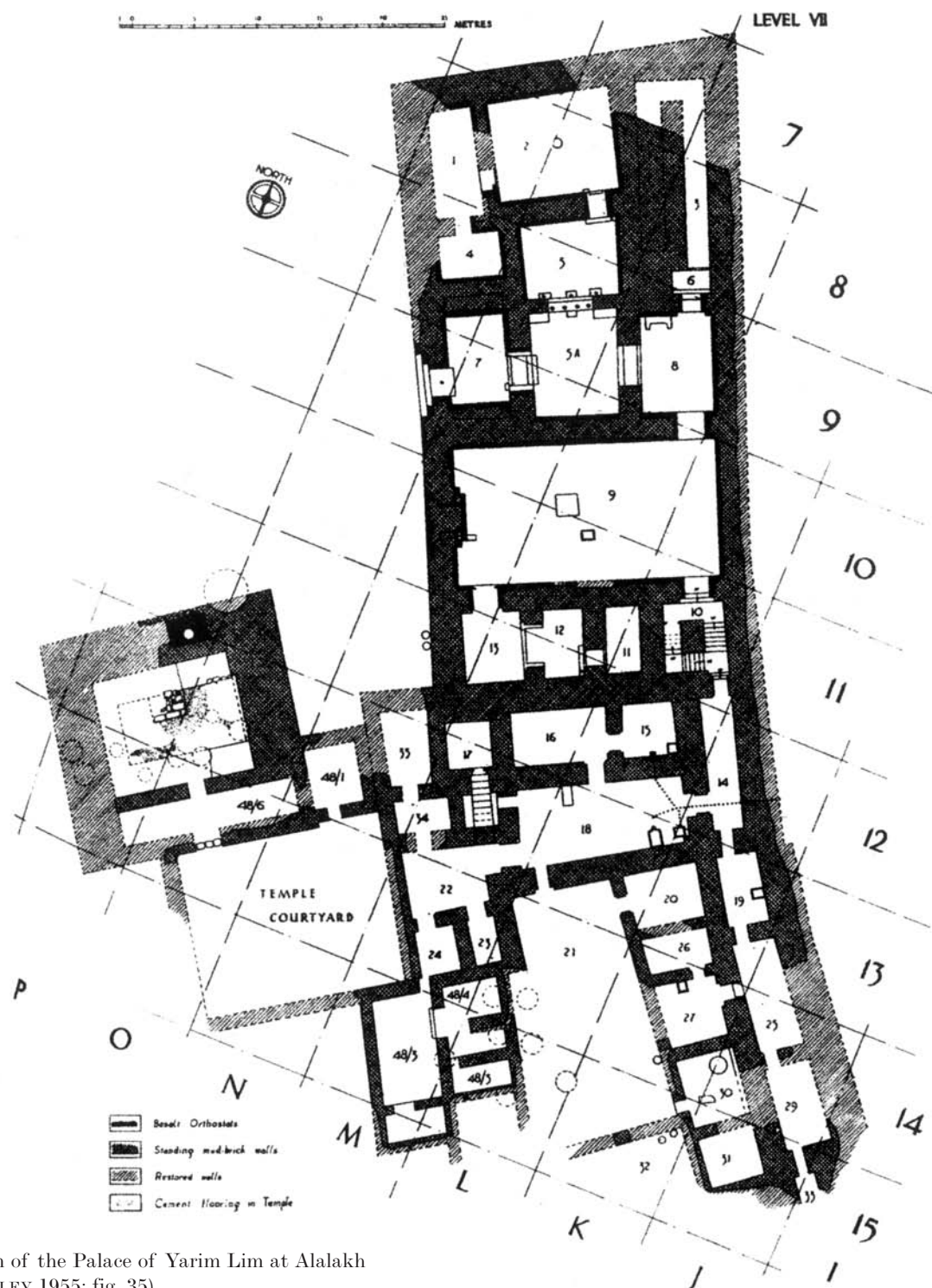


Fig. 14 Plan of the Palace of Yarim Lim at Alalakh
(after WOOLLEY 1955: fig. 35)

areas, the veined stone pattern gives way to red or blue flower decorations, which run either with the orientation of the floor pattern or in a diagonal direction to it. Sometimes, the blossoms seem to be scattered on

the floor like flowers strewn on the ground for festive occasions. The flowers were identified as iris blossoms and, in one case, there was also a representation of an object that looked like a red pomegranate.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*: pl. XVIII.

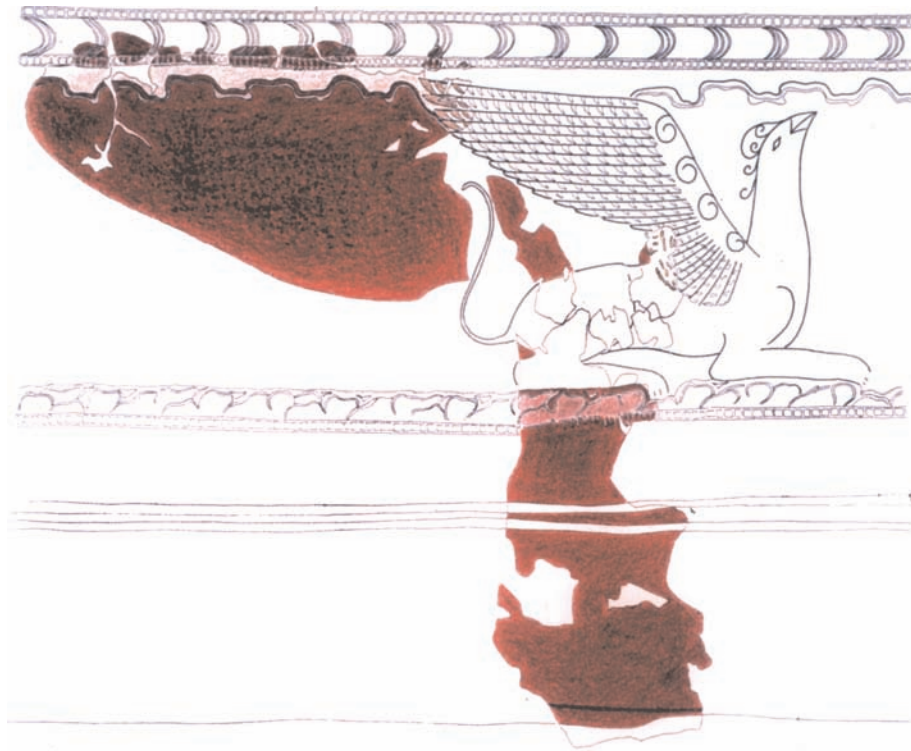


Fig. 15 Reconstruction of an emblematic griffin from the Palace of Yarim Lim at Alalakh (after NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2000: fig. 22)

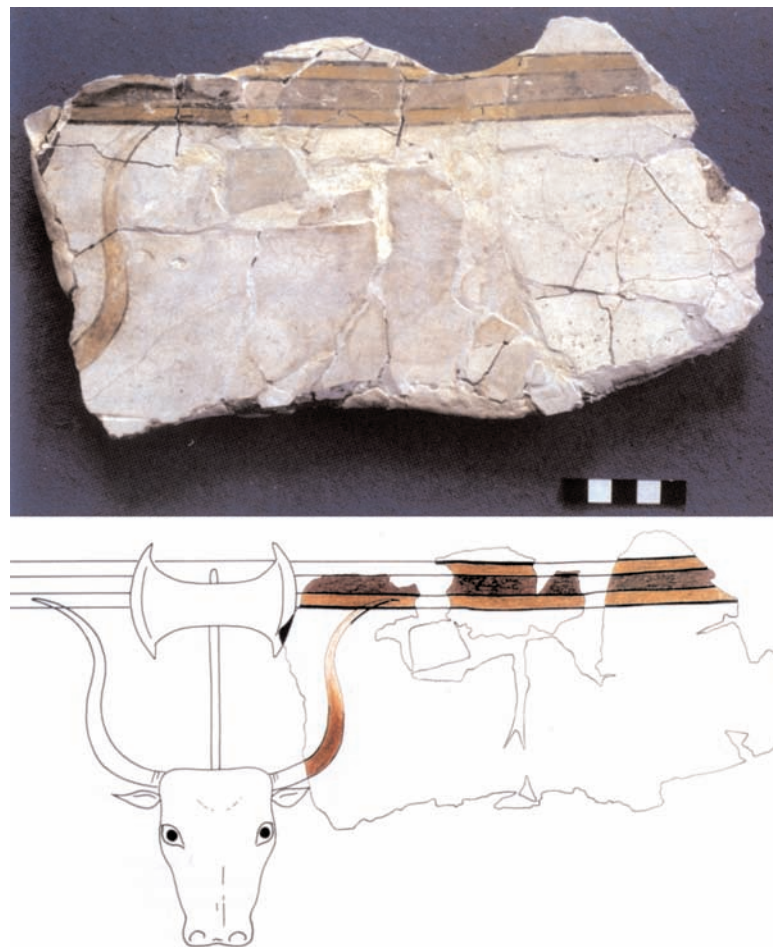


Fig. 16 Reconstruction of a bull bucrania frieze from Alalakh VII (after NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2000: fig. 14, 15)

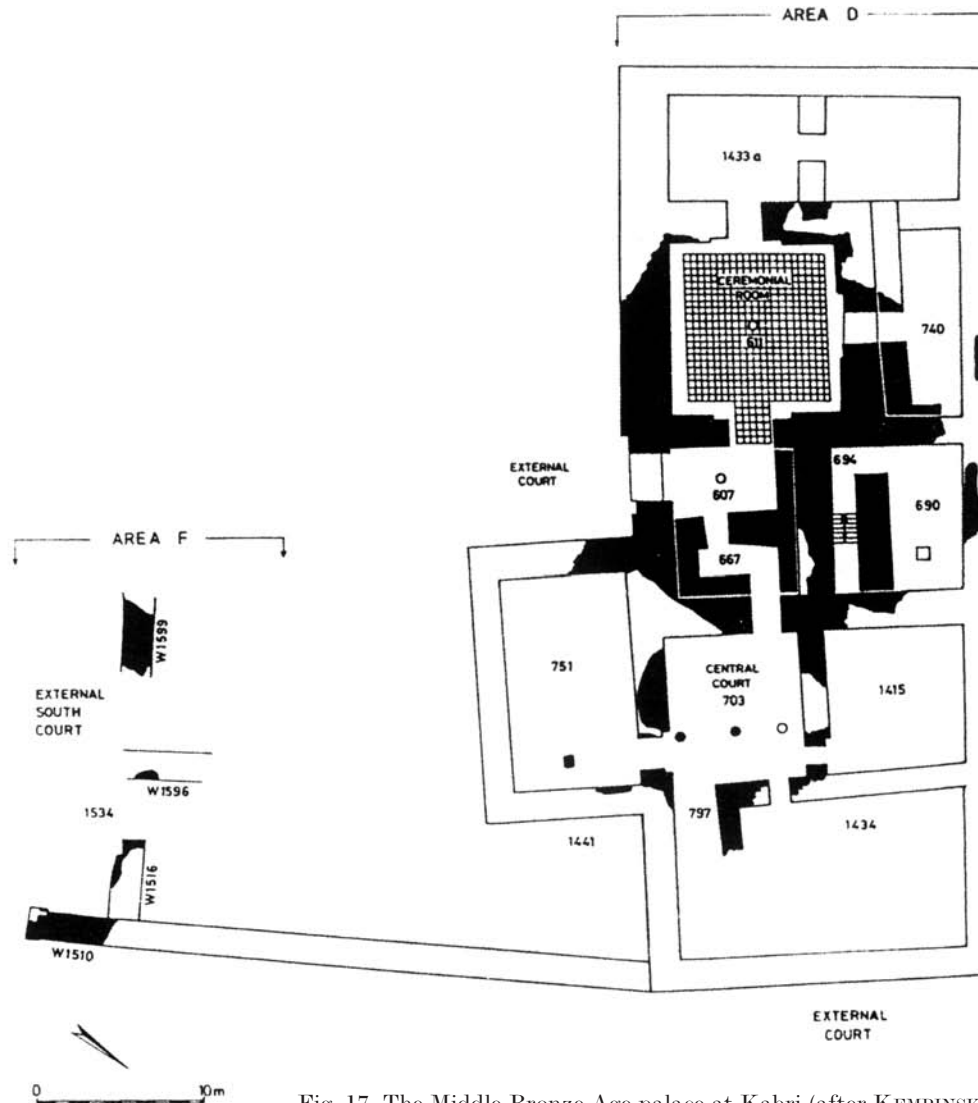


Fig. 17 The Middle Bronze Age palace at Kabri (after KEMPINSKI 2002: fig. 4.73)

There is also evidence of miniature wall paintings from this room. They were found in a secondary context on numerous tiny plaster fragments as filling of threshold 698 between the rooms 611 and 740. Some were also found in debris of wall plaster fallen from the walls. The paintings must have covered the walls above a base zone of orthostats, which had been removed by stone robbers. The lime plaster was applied against a wall with a mud coating with small notches to improve the adhesion to the wall.¹¹² The paintings were probably arranged in friezes above windows and niches, similar to arrangements typical of Minoan mural art.¹¹³

The combination of compressed and stone pol-

ished plaster, the fresco technique and the application of cord impressions for planning of patterns are purely Minoan, as the excavators pointed out. Despite the small size of the fragments, Barbara and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier were able to identify features known in the same style in Minoan mural and vase paintings, such as landscape elements consisting of rocky protuberances and outlets (Fig. 19), known from representations of seashores.¹¹⁴ The paintings from Room 5 of the West House in Thera offer especially good parallels for the abovementioned landscape features of the Kabri paintings.¹¹⁵ This frieze also shows other features we encounter in Kabri, such as representation of ashlar façades and the round

¹¹² *Ibidem*: pl. XX.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*: pl. 266 f.

¹¹⁴ NIEMEIER & NIEMEYER 2000: 777, fig. 9.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*: 266, pls. XXII, XXV, XXXIV.

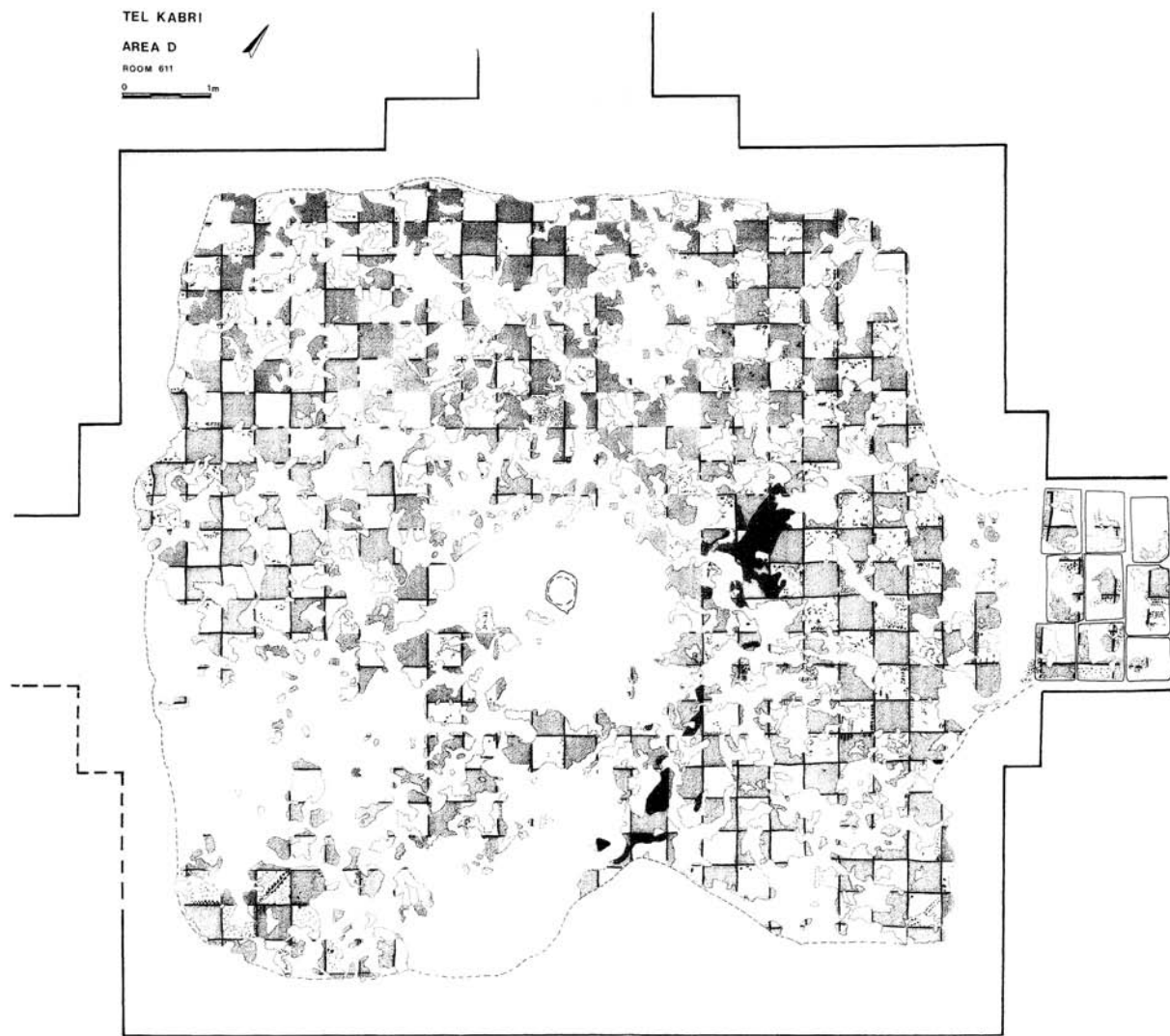


Fig. 18 The plan of the floor paintings, imitating stone slabs from room 611 at Kabri (after NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2000: fig. 2)



Fig. 19 Reconstruction of Aegean seashore rocks with outlets (after NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2000: fig. 9)

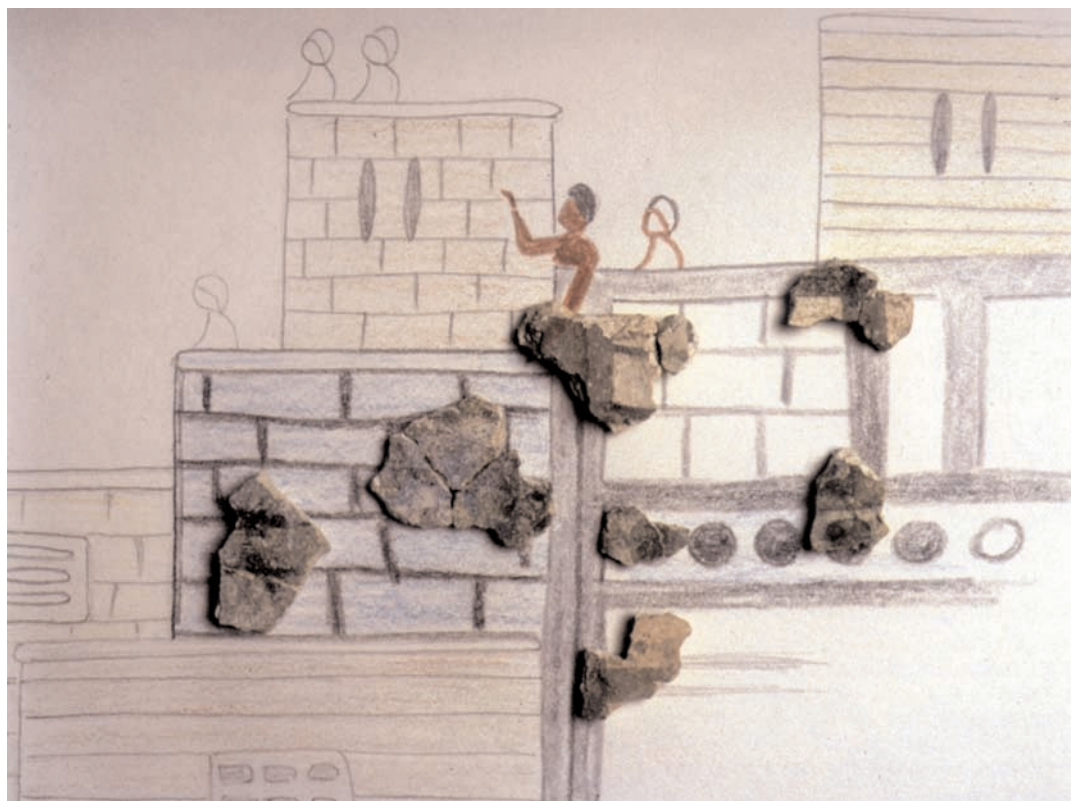


Fig. 20 Reconstruction of ashlar masonry in the wall paintings from Kabri (after NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2000: fig. 11)

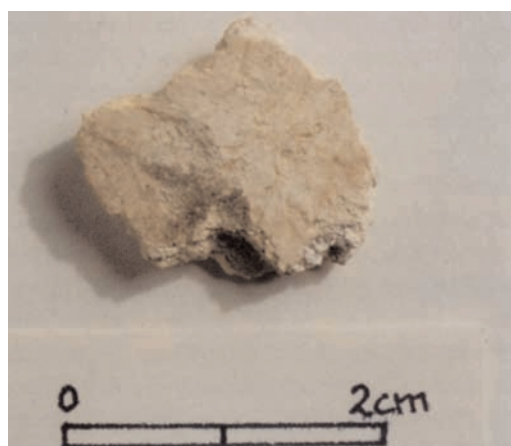


Fig. 21 Fragment of wall painting from Kabri with a representation of a swallow (after NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2000: fig. 12)



Fig. 22 Fragments of notched wings of a griffin from Kabri (after NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2000: fig. 13)

beam ends visible in the zones of ceilings (Fig. 20).¹¹⁶ Finally, very convincing features in comparison with the art of Thera are the representation of a swallow (Fig. 21)¹¹⁷ and the notches of the wings of an Aegean

griffin (Fig. 22) showing the same pattern as the chasing griffin in the West House frieze.¹¹⁸

In summary, in Kabri we have a reception room within a Near Eastern princely palace – probably the

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*: pls. XXIX, XXXI.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*: pl. XXXIII. Cf. DOUMAS 1992:146, fig. 146.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*: pl. XXXV. Cf. EVANS 1921: 548–551; MORGAN 1988: 50–54; DOUMAS 1992: 65, fig. 32.

throne room, which may, according to the ceramic finds, also have served ritual functions. It was embellished with Minoan paintings. We have a situation similar to that found in Tell el-Dab^ca/^cEzbet Helmy. We do not find, however, the typical Knossian emblems and motifs as in Tell el-Dab^ca, such as bull acrobatics, big emblematic griffins, and the half-rossette frieze.

In Tell el Dab^ca, the setting of the mural art is quite different. This site, with its complex stratigraphy, was the capital of the Hyksos, called Avaris, before the time of the New Kingdom. After its conquest by the founder of the New Kingdom, Ahmose, c. 1530 BC, the site was abandoned but immediately resettled by the Thebans along the east bank of the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. Georges Daressy¹¹⁹ and Labib Habachi¹²⁰ have suggested that Peru-nefer, the major naval and military stronghold of the 18th Dynasty should be located at the site of former Avaris. Until now, no 18th Dynasty installations were attested. This has changed now. Excavations in the last 10 years have revealed overwhelming evidence of a major military base with stockpiles of grain storage, of camps and cemeteries of Nubian archers, and of palatial quarters in royal dimensions.¹²¹ What would also speak in favour of an identification with the base of Peru-nefer is that the palace precinct dates from the time of Tuthmosis III and Amenophis II (together c. 1479–1401 BC).¹²² This would be the prime time of Peru-nefer as documented from texts.¹²³ Moreover, the function as a naval base as attested for Peru-nefer can also be found in Avaris. According to the Kamose stela it was a harbour in the Hyksos Period,¹²⁴ and served the same purpose still during the time of the 19th and 20th Dynasty, as the harbour of Piramesse the Delta residence of the Ramessides.¹²⁵ Therefore, it is feasible that it also may have been a harbour in the

18th Dynasty, the period of Peru-nefer. Such an identification could be backed by the presence of Canaanite cults as documented in the Papyrus Eremitage 1116A.¹²⁶ Such cults and the employment of Canaanite ship carpenters there¹²⁷ could be explained as survivals from Hyksos Avaris. Indeed, the temple of Sutekh in Avaris shows continual occupation beyond the time of the conquest by Ahmose.¹²⁸ Also, the ceramic production at Tell el-Dab^ca in the early New Kingdom shows a continuum from the Hyksos Period, which proves that at least a part of the Canaanite population – the former carriers of the Hyksos rule – remained at the site.¹²⁹ The identification with Peru-nefer may not yet be considered as conclusively settled, but its localisation at Avaris instead of Memphis is surely a strong option.

The setting from which the paintings came is the palatial district from the Tuthmoside Period (Fig. 23).¹³⁰ It consists of three palaces, a huge one (G), a medium-sized one (F), and a small one (J). They were all constructions elevated on platforms of c. 7 m height. Most of the fragments with paintings originated from Palace F, which can be considered as a purely ceremonial building, as it lacked the usual private section in the rear.¹³¹ Many more wall plaster fragments with paintings were found on the floor of a doorway of an enclosure wall and on a connected porch leading to the major Palace G. Some fragments were even found *in situ* on the wall.¹³²

The paintings can be identified as Minoan¹³³ because of the following properties:

1. Technique (highly polished compact lime plaster mixed with murex shells,¹³⁴ the application of fresco, impressed cords for planning, plaster relief¹³⁵).
2. Colours and colour conventions (white for women, reddish brown for men,¹³⁶ blue for grey,

¹¹⁹ DARESSY 1928–29; DARESSY 1929–31.

¹²⁰ HABACHI 2001: 106–107.

¹²¹ BIETAK, DORNER, HEIN and JÁNOSI 1994; BIETAK 1996; BIETAK 1996a; BIETAK 1997; BIETAK, DORNER, JÁNOSI 2001; BIETAK & FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2003; BIETAK 2005a, BIETAK 2005b; BIETAK 2006.

¹²² KITCHEN 2000.

¹²³ SPIEGELBERG 1927; GLANVILLE 1931; GLANVILLE 1932; DARESSY 1928–29; DARESSY 1929–31; SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH 1946: 37; BADAWY 1943: 43; BADAWY 1948: 137–139; HELCK 1939: 49–50; HELCK 1971: 446–73; DER MANUELIAN 1987: 174–175; BRYAN 1991: 49–50; HABACHI 2001: 106–107.

¹²⁴ HABACHI 1972: 36; BIETAK 1975: 192.

¹²⁵ BRUYÈRE 1930: 22; YOYOTTE 1971–72: 172; BIETAK 1975: 30, n. 38, 187, 205–206.

¹²⁶ STADELMANN 1967: 32–34.

¹²⁷ GOLENISCHIEFF 1913: 24.

¹²⁸ BIETAK 1985.

¹²⁹ BIETAK 2005; BIETAK forthcoming; GOLDWASSER forthcoming.

¹³⁰ BIETAK 2002; BIETAK, DORNER, JÁNOSI 2001; BIETAK & FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2003; BIETAK 2005; BIETAK 2006.

¹³¹ For the reconstruction see BIETAK 2005b: fig. 15.

¹³² BIETAK 2000: 196–197, fig. 5, no. 5.

¹³³ BIETAK 1994; BIETAK 2000, BIETAK, MARINATOS, PALLYVOU forthcoming; MARINATOS 1998; MORGAN 1995a; MORGAN 2000: 939–940; NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 1998: 90–93.

¹³⁴ SEEGER 2000; BRYNSBAERT 2002: 99, no. 11 and pl. 4.

¹³⁵ BIETAK 1994: 45.

¹³⁶ MORGAN 2000: 939–940.



Fig. 23 The palatial complex of Tell el-Dab'a/
ʿEzbet Helmy from the early Tuthmoside Period
with the palaces F, G, J)
(after BIETAK 2006: fig. 3)

such as the scalp¹³⁷ or hoofs, horns and grey speckles on bull hides, blue for green for rendering vegetation).

3. Motifs (bull acrobatics, floor acrobatics such as somersaulting, hunting, lions chasing ungulates,¹³⁸ rocky landscape, architectural ashlar façade, ivy, wadj = waz-lilies, maze pattern).

4. Style (Minoan style dress for men and women, coiffure,¹³⁹ jewellery, cushion shaped seal,¹⁴⁰ ornaments¹⁴¹ such as running spirals with specific attributes, loop pattern, ivy pattern, flying gallop, etc.).
5. Composition (foreground ending in an undulating horizon, frequently red background, men and ani-

¹³⁷ DOUMAS 1985: 29–34.

¹³⁸ A frequent theme in glyptic art, see MARINATOS 1998: 84–86.

¹³⁹ MARINATOS 1998: 88.

¹⁴⁰ BIETAK 2000: 200 and pl. C(c).

¹⁴¹ ASLANIDOU 2002; ASLANIDOU 2004.

mals arranged in two registers, one at the base line, one near the horizon, palmtree as divider).¹⁴²

6. Emblems such as the half rosette frieze, large griffins, the symbolic maze pattern, and the motif of bull acrobatics show a direct connection to the major Minoan palatial centre of Knossos.

Until the time of the Mycenaean palaces, paintings of bull acrobatics did not turn up in any palace other than Knossos.¹⁴³ This makes the paintings at Tell el-Dab'a/Ezbet Helmy so unique. As far as evidence goes, it is the first time that such a subject is shown outside Knossos. The maze pattern, together with the motif of bull acrobatics, have to be seen as a strong indication of their originating from the palace of Knossos.¹⁴⁴ In my opinion, this evidence shows a special relationship between Tell el-Dab'a and Knossos, which goes beyond every other site in the Levant with comparable mural art (see below).

Although most of the paintings were collected in dumps outside the ramp and landing of Palace F (Fig. 24), it is not overly daring to reconstruct the large emblematic griffin with hanging spiral decoration on the wings, most probably with an antithetical companion, on the rear wall of the four columned throne room, in an arrangement similar to that of the griffins in the throne room in Knossos (Fig. 25).¹⁴⁵

It is also highly likely that the floor painting with the maze pattern (Fig. 26)¹⁴⁶ was originally situated in the throne room. The two friezes with the bull acrobats (Fig. 27), the felines chasing ungulates (Fig. 28),¹⁴⁷ and the hunting friezes may have been applied above doors of the same hall or its vestibule. According to our knowledge from Knossos, plaster reliefs were positioned in daylight under the protection of roofed column galleries (Fig. 29).¹⁴⁸ Their place may have been in the galleries of the central court and in the porch of the entrance courtyard.

The architecture is Egyptian, but the paintings and their arrangement within the given space is Minoan. One may compare the situation with Kabri and with Alalakh, where the main rooms of palaces of Near Eastern architecture were embellished with Minoan paintings. The explanation of Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier,¹⁴⁹ viz., that the paintings resulted from a demand in the courts of the time to have the representative rooms of their palaces embellished with Minoan paintings within the trend of a network of gift exchanges with artists sent as a favour by the Minoans to their princely partners all over the Eastern Mediterranean is not, in my opinion, feasible for several reasons. First, the paintings of those three sites are not contemporary. Second, the three sites do not, as far as evidence goes, show the same pattern of rep-

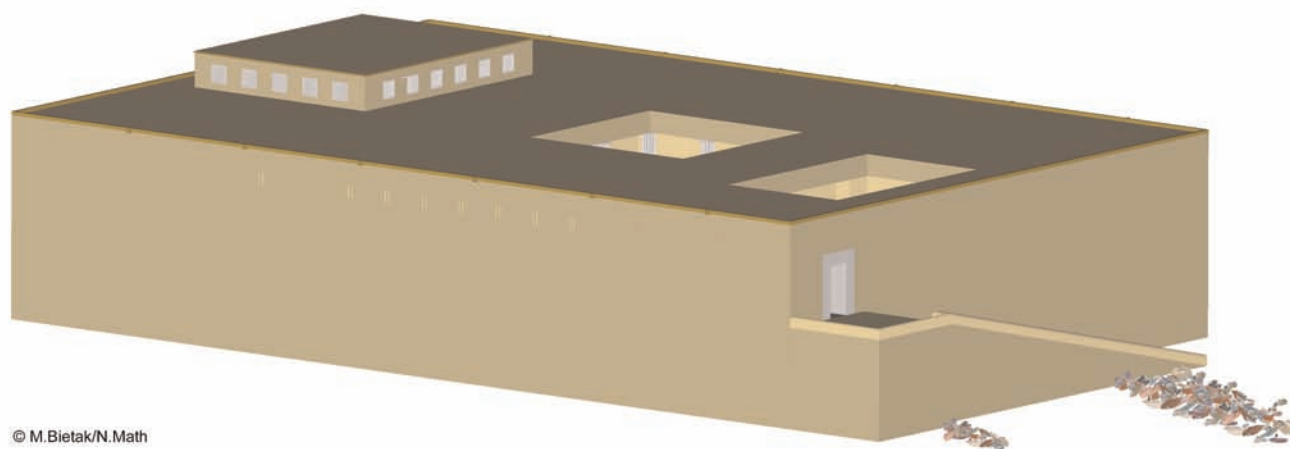


Fig. 24 Reconstructed plan of Palace F, showing also the dumps of wall plaster (reconstruction M. Bietak & N.C. Math)

¹⁴² BIETAK, MARINATOS & PALYVOU 2000.

¹⁴³ While painted representation of bull leaping was confined to Knossos, as far as evidence goes, representations of this theme on Minoan seals had a wide distribution.

¹⁴⁴ For the maze pattern in Knossos see EVANS 1921: 356–357, fig. 256.

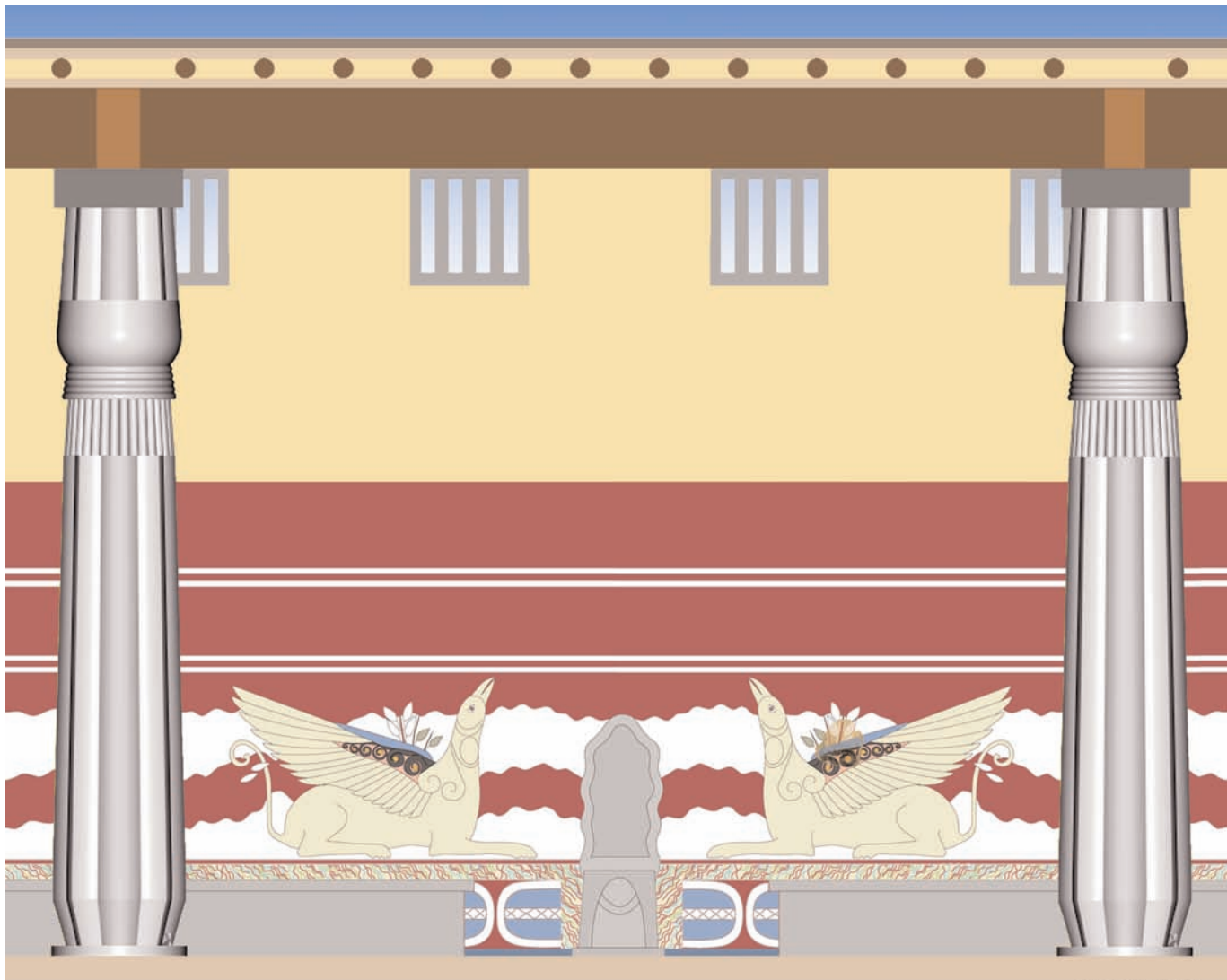
¹⁴⁵ For the reconstruction see Fig. 25.

¹⁴⁶ BIETAK 1994: 46, pl. 14B–C.

¹⁴⁷ MARINATOS 1998; MARINATOS & MORGAN forthcoming.

¹⁴⁸ KAISER 1976.

¹⁴⁹ Supra n. 2.



© M.Bietak/N.Math

Fig. 25 Reconstruction of the throne room with the heraldic griffin on the back wall (reconstruction M. Bietak & N.C. Math)

representations in the paintings, what should be expected if they are an expression of an export of Minoan ideology and style of embellishment of palaces in the Levant. The iris and crocus flowers of Kabri, the birds and the ships there did not show up among the numerous representations at Tell el-Dab^a.¹⁵⁰ On the other hand this place has numerous motives not shared by the other two sites such as bull grappling and leaping, floor acrobatics, felines chasing ungulates, hunting scenes with dogs, life-size figures, and plaster relief of human and animal representations. The representations of the lions and leopards should also not be understood as an adaptation to the Nilotic environment. Both are well incorporated into Minoan art,

including wall paintings, glyptic art and other carriers of Minoan art.¹⁵¹ Third, even if the Egyptian crown commissioned the embellishment of their palaces by Minoan artists, it is hardly believable that they would not have required them to paint Egyptian emblems of royal power or the names of the king of the time. Nothing of this kind was found. Emblems of palatial power, such as the half-rosette frieze and the griffins, are purely Minoan. The maze pattern is to be taken as a symbol of the palace of Knossos in particular. It is due to the exclusivity of painted scenes of bull acrobatics in the palace of Knossos that I proposed for Tell el-Dab^a a different scenario of takeover than at the sites of Kabri and Alalakh.

¹⁵⁰ NICOLAKAKI-KENTROU 1998.

¹⁵¹ MARINATOS & MORGAN forthcoming.



Fig. 26 Fragments of a floor painting with a maze pattern (graphic work L. Zelenková)



Fig. 27 Reconstruction of the Bull & Maze Frieze (after BIETAK, MARINATOS & PALYVOU: 2007, fig. 59)



Fig. 28 Leopard from Tell el-Dab'a (after MORGAN 2004: fig.4)



Fig. 29 Plaster relief from the Palace F at Tell el-Dab'a (after BIETAK & MARINATOS 1995: fig. 5)

The Minoan palatial symbols of power should be read as evidence of direct contact from court to court on the highest level. It should be understood as a political expression. The paintings, with all their symbolism and meaning, were made for a Minoan of the highest position. A political marriage – so important and frequent in the diplomacy of the Near East and Egypt, and so well attested during the time of Tuthmosis III¹⁵² – would be a highly feasible theory.¹⁵³ A political meeting of two leading figures of the Egyptian and the Minoan world would be another theory. In the second case, the paintings would have been applied for this event, which may have lasted, perhaps, just a few days. This would be entirely possible in the Ancient World.

The possible identification of this site with Peru-nefer and the presence of Minoan paintings create an association with entries on a papyrus in the British Museum (BM 10056), which is a document of the royal dockyards at Peru-nefer.¹⁵⁴ There, so-called Keftiu, i.e., Cretan, ships are mentioned. Till now, this specification was taken as a type of a ship or as

¹⁵² WINLOCK 1948; BIETAK 2000: 204–205; LILYQUIST 2003.

¹⁵³ It was never presented by me as anything other than a theory. Therefore, the criticism offered by CLINE 1998: 202, 209, 210, 211, 217 and NIEMEIER & NIEMEIER 2002a: 285

and others is completely unnecessary, and shows a lack of understanding of Near Eastern politics and history.

¹⁵⁴ GLANVILLE 1931; GLANVILLE 1932. See, however, WARREN 2000: 25.



Fig. 30 Keftiu delegation from the tomb of Senenmut at Thebes (after DORMAN 1991: pl. 21d)

its destination, not as a place of origin.¹⁵⁵ Given the strong evidence from the paintings, however, this may be an entirely feasible interpretation. The contact with the Keftiu in the Tuthmoside Period is reflected in the representation of Keftiu delegations (Fig. 30)¹⁵⁶ and the appearance of Minoan influence in Theban tomb paintings¹⁵⁷ from the time of coregency of young Tuthmosis III and Hatshepsut onwards (see above). This date seems to coincide precisely with the archaeological date of the Tell el-Dab^a-paintings.¹⁵⁸

III. CONCLUSIONS

The wall and floor paintings found in different palatial contexts in the Levant from the Early to the Late Bronze Age cover a considerable time span and display a differentiated cultural origin. Therefore, they should be explained in an appropriately differentiated fashion, considering the local setting and the individual cultural background. There can not be a doubt that there was a local Syrian tradition of palatial paintings, which goes back to the Early Bronze

IV A-Period in the late 3rd millennium BC as in Ebla and can be studied in individual creations of the Middle Bronze Age at Mari and Tell Sakka, the latter showing Egyptian influence. They share the technique of tempera painting (*secco*) on whitewashed mud coating and plaster coating. In the Middle Bronze Age they display influence of Egyptian iconography (Tell Sakka) and Minoan decorative art (Mari). We know nothing of figural palatial paintings in Egypt during the Old and the Middle Kingdoms. We have remains of linear patterns and hieroglyphic inscriptions from the Hyksos Period on mud coating from a palace district at ^cEzbet Helmy.¹⁵⁹ In the Southern Palace of Deir el-Ballas of the 17th Dynasty, even figural paintings have been found, which resemble provincial tomb paintings.¹⁶⁰ We may expect therefore palatial mural art in Egypt already in the time of the Middle Kingdom if not earlier.

The paintings of Alalakh VII, Kabri and Tell el-Dab^a/^cEzbet Helmy can be considered as Minoan. Those sites are nearest to the Mediterranean, while Mari and Tell Sakka, which display local Syrian art,

¹⁵⁵ SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH 1946: 49.

¹⁵⁶ VERCOUTTER 1956; WACHSMANN 1987; MATTHÄUS 1995; DUHOIX 2003.

¹⁵⁷ MORGAN 2004: 293–295.

¹⁵⁸ BIETAK, MARINATOS, PALYVOU 2007: 26–40; BIETAK, DORNER, JÁNOSI 2001: 44.

¹⁵⁹ BIETAK, DORNER, JÁNOSI 2001: 40.

¹⁶⁰ SMITH 1958:159, fig. 53.

are inland and can even be considered remote from the Mediterranean system. The paintings of Qatna show a high degree of Minoan influence and technique but also show, in my opinion, a blending with the local tradition. They may be explained perhaps as post-Minoan, given the late destruction of the palace in the 14th century. Even if we stick to the palatial paintings, which can be considered as purely Minoan (Alalakh VII, Kabri and Tell el-Dab^a), they cover altogether a time span of 150 to 200 years, depending on whether the Low or the Middle Chronology is applied.¹⁶¹ A common explanation for all of them seems to me, therefore, unfeasible. Alalakh VII and Kabri may be closer to each other in time, if the low chronology is applied, and could perhaps be explained as a result of a Versailles effect that had

not reached Egypt at that time. The chronological table on Fig. 2 may show the expansion of the sphere of influence of the Minoan Thalassocracy in geographical and chronological terms. Tell el-Dab^a, however, stands out in its setting in a ceremonial palace with its Minoan palace emblems, the maze pattern and the scenes of bull acrobatics – a combination known only from Knossos. A political *rencontre* on the highest level offers itself as an explanation.

Addition: J.-C. MAGUERON 2004 in a recent study has raised the date of the Mari paintings, particularly the “investiture” painting. For the argumentation in this article this would not change anything. The newly discovered paintings at Tell Bourak in the Lebanon have not yet been considered in this article.

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¹⁶¹ See above 270–272, 276

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