

THE MYCENAEAN POTTERY FROM TEL APHEK: CHRONOLOGY AND PATTERNS OF TRADE

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The manorial structure in Area X at Tel Aphek, sometimes referred to as the “Egyptian Residence”, yielded one of the most important contexts for the understanding of the relative and absolute dates connected to the close of the Late Bronze Age in Canaan. Its contents, a rich array of local and imported pottery, as well as several inscribed clay tablets, provide excellent synchronisms between the cultures of Egypt, Palestine, Ugarit, Cyprus, and the Aegean.

The Mycenaean pottery from the residence is now for the first time fully studied and put into context. The vessels gathered by the inhabitants of the residency, dating from as early as LHIIIA2, to LHIIIB2, if not later, provide intriguing details on patterns of trade, imported pottery consumption, and new data on the possible date for the destruction of the residence and the absolute chronology of the local pottery within it.

1. INTRODUCTION

The excavations at the site of Aphek took place through most of the 1970s and were conducted by Tel Aviv University under the direction of Moshe Kochavi and the late Pirhiya Beck. Although a preliminary report has been published following the works (BECK and KOCHAVI 1985), and some of the Mycenaean pottery has been discussed by WARREN and HANKEY (1989: 156) and LEONARD (1994), the entire Mycenaean pottery assemblage of Area X is only now being prepared for final publication by the present writers.¹

The aim of our paper is to present the preliminary results of the analysis of the Mycenaean pottery in Aphek with a special emphasis put on the interpretation of its find context and spatial distribution.² We shall try to establish whether the evidence of Mycenaean pottery supports or refutes the chronology

given by the excavators of the destruction of the Egyptian Governor’s residence, a date with bearing on the question of the end of Egyptian domination in Palestine.

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE MYCENAEAN POTTERY

A. Area G, Locus 1200, the Tomb

The Late Bronze Age tomb found in Aphek was also the only context which did not raise severe questions of interpretation. Tomb 1200, located in Area G, at the edge of the summit, was a well built tomb, in which eight burials were found, belonging to some of the richer residents of Aphek (KOCHAVI 1989: 76–78; BECK and KOCHAVI 1993: 68; finds from tomb KOCHAVI 1990: 32–33).

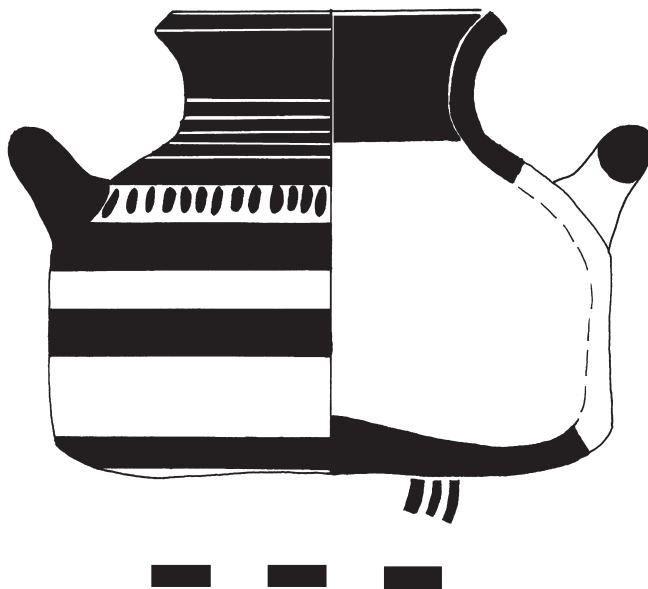


Fig. 1 A straight-sided alabastron from Tomb 1200

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² So far, studies concerning the spatial distribution of Mycenaean pottery in Levantine sites have been relatively few, including STEEL (1998; 2002), LEONARD and CLINE (1998), and VAN WIJNGAARDEN (2002).

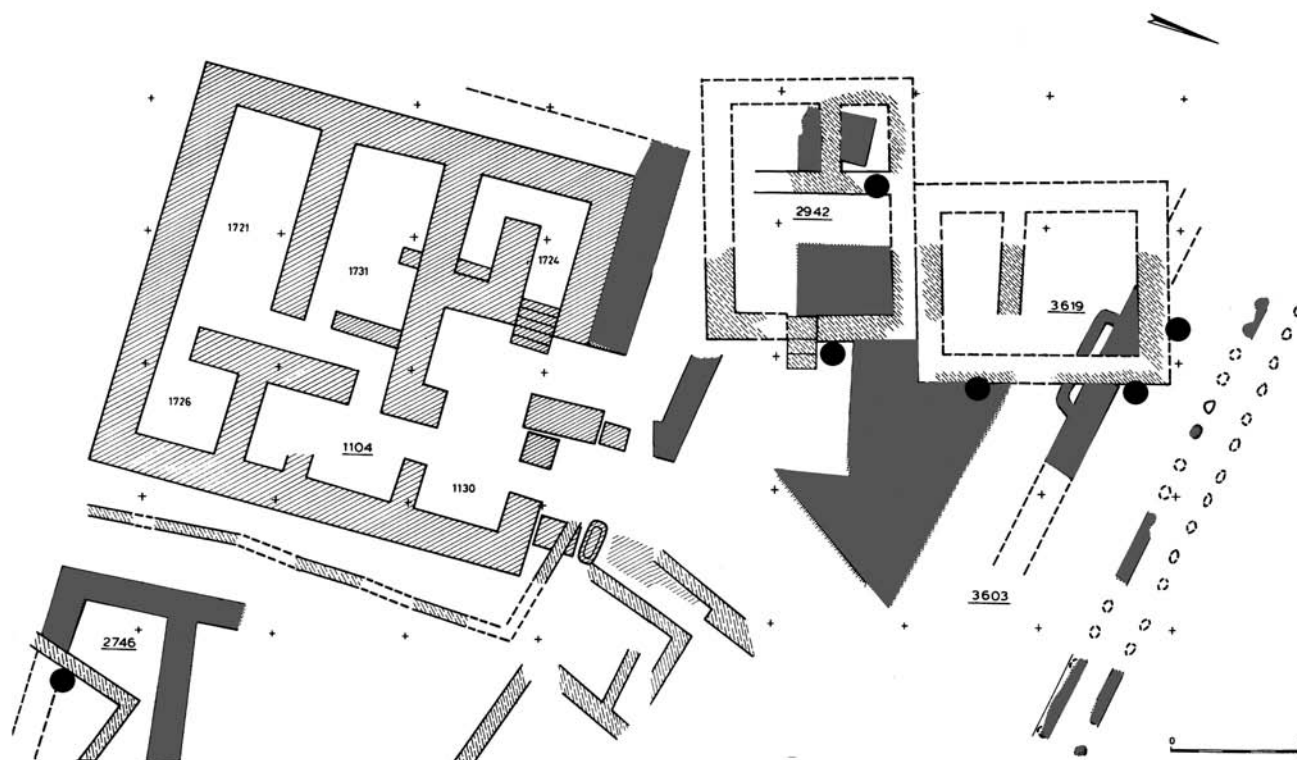


Fig. 2 Distribution of Mycenaean sherds in the stratum X13

In addition to local pottery and some Cypriot imports, it contained four almost complete Mycenaean vessels: two straight-sided alabastra (Fig. 1) and two stirrup jars as well as a fragment of a flask (GUZOWSKA and YASUR-LANDAU forthcoming: cat. nos. 56–59). Unfortunately, we could not examine two of the complete vessels (a stirrup jar and an alabastron), lost in the years following the excavations, leaving behind only photographic and drawing documentation. Based on the documentation of the preserved vessels the assemblage can be dated no more precisely than to LHIIIA2–B1. Imitations of Mycenaean shapes in local clay were also deposited as burial gifts. Chronologically, this tomb may be assigned to the late 14th century into the 13th century.

B. Area X, stratum X13, “palace V” (Fig. 2)

The Mycenaean pottery in habitation strata at Aphek presented more complex questions of context and chronology. The earliest occurrence of Mycenaean pottery in habitation strata is associated with a large residential complex that was situated on the summit of the tell in the 14th century – the “Canaanite palace” or “palace V” (KOCHAVI 1989: 61–62; BECK and KOCHAVI 1993: 68). Only small parts of the structure have been uncovered and no overall plan can be recognized. It is thus hardly surprising that

only few Mycenaean sherds have been found in this stratum. All of them are very small and probably moved from their primary context.

The most distinctive among them is a fragment of a LHIIIA2 jug (FS 133 or 136) decorated with an octopus (FM 21) (Fig. 3) (GUZOWSKA and YASUR-LANDAU forthcoming: cat no. 24).

C. Area X, stratum X12, “palace VI” (Fig. 4)

The majority of Mycenaean sherds at Aphek have been found in stratum X12, connected with the activity of Egyptian administration (BECK and KOCHAVI 1985: 35–36; KOCHAVI 1990). In the 13th century, “palace VI”, the residence of an Egyptian governor was built on the summit of the hill, on the very place of the earlier Canaanite palace. Mycenaean sherds ascribed to this stratum were found concentrated



Fig. 3 A fragment of an octopus-decorated jug in stratum X13

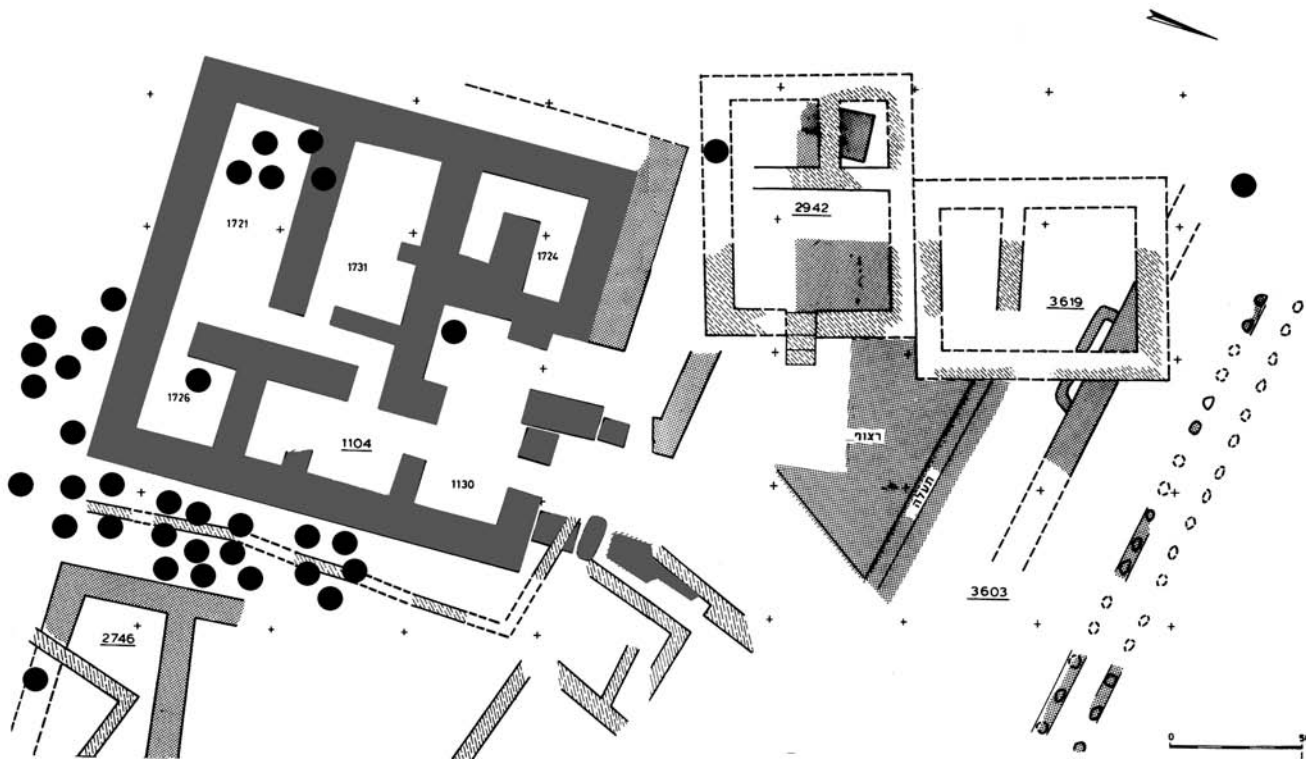


Fig. 4 Distribution of Mycenaean sherds in the stratum X12

outside the building, close to its walls, especially in the narrow alley by wall E of the residence. Other groups of sherds come from the inside of the residence. Only few sherds were found scattered around in some distance from the building.

Almost all Mycenaean material in this stratum is in the form of small, single sherds. It is possible that many fragments assigned to stratum X12 could in fact have been in circulation during the earlier stratum X13, the period of the Canaanite palace. A large part of the sherd material in question dates to LHIIIA2–B1. Since we do not have the precise date of construction of the Governor's Residence – we only know that it took place some time during the long reign of Ramesses II, in the 13th century – it is equally likely that the Mycenaean material appeared at

the site in this period or in the earlier period of the Canaanite palace. We assume that many of the small fragments could have been mixed with clay and mud used to form mudbricks and incorporated in the walls of the Governor's Residence, either during its original construction or during subsequent repairs.

Two small sherds from a LHIIIA2 "Chariot Krater" (Fig. 5) (GUZOWSKA and YASUR-LANDAU forthcoming: cat. no. 2) may confirm this hypothesis, as they were found on and practically inside the ruined wall of the residence.

Only two restorable vessels from the stratum X12, associated with the existence of the Governor's Residence, have been recovered: a stirrup jar (Fig. 6) (GUZOWSKA and YASUR-LANDAU forthcoming: cat. no. 19), and a vertical flask (Fig. 7) (GUZOWSKA and YASUR-LANDAU forthcoming: cat. no. 25). The vessels have different dates: The flask has been dated to LHIIIA2–B1, whereas the stirrup jar comes from the later stratum of the LHIIIB. This case seems to prove that the Governor's "collection" of Mycenaean vases contained "grandmother's china" alongside with pottery acquired in the later period. This is not an isolated case in the Levant: The Amman Airport Temple (HANKEY 1974) was built during the time when LHIIIB ware was in use, yet contained a very impressive array of Mycenaean imports from LHIIA to LHIIIB, meaning that some vessels were two hun-



Fig. 5 A fragment of a "Chariot Krater" in stratum X12

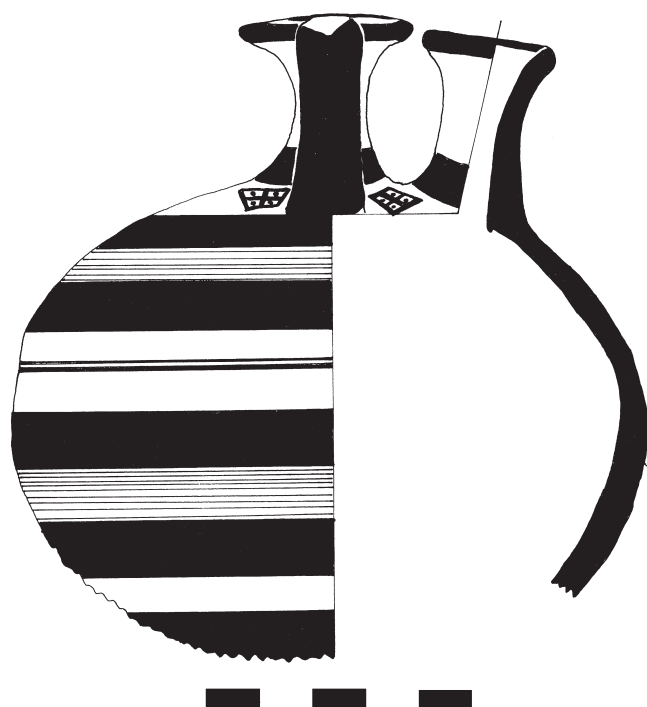


Fig. 6 A fragmentary stirrup jar in stratum X12



Fig. 7 A fragmentary flask in stratum X12



Fig. 8 A rim sherd from a krater in stratum X12

dred years old “antiques”. In Tel Deir ‘Alla two of the vessels, a flask (FS 192; HANKEY 1967: 131, fig. 5:b) and a stirrup jar (FS 180; HANKEY 1967: 131, fig. 5:a) were described as first by HANKEY (1967: 132) as LHIIIA2, then by WARREN and HANKEY (1989: 161) as LHIIIB1, meaning that they were already in use for several decades, possibly more than half a century, before the destruction of the temple.

An almost complete cup from the residence published by BECK and KOCHAVI (1985: 56, fig. 2.7) was quoted by WARREN and HANKEY (1989: 156) as a Mycenaean cup FS 220. After close examination it has, however, turned out to be an imitation of Mycenaean shape and decoration in local clay and therefore it has been excluded from the discussion.

Other single sherds dating from LHIIIB, found below the destruction deposit, may have belonged to the vessels broken during the period of existence of the Governor’s Residence and swept away before the final destruction of the building.

The possible latest sherd in stratum X12, so far unpublished, was found sealed by the destruction deposits outside the residence (GUZOWSKA and YASUR-LANDAU forthcoming: cat. no. 4). It is a rim fragment of a krater (FS 282), decorated with a paneled decoration separated by a triglyph (FM 75), filled with horizontal zigzag (FM 61: 5). The main panel motif is FM 43, isolated semicircles or some form of a large lozenge (Fig. 8). The vessel can be most likely dated to LHIIIB2. Analogies to identical decoration come from Thorikos and have been assigned by Mountjoy to transitional LHIIIB2–IIIC Early (MOUNTJOY 1999: 561, fig. 205: 291). Similarly as in case of vessels quoted above, only a single sherd was found from the whole vessel. The krater was then very likely broken and discarded some time before the destruction of the Governor’s Residence, whereas the earlier flask and stirrup jar survived, and broke only during the destruction.

D. Stratum X11 (Fig. 9)

After the destruction of Governor’s Residence, the settlement in stratum X11 had small rectangular houses, built on the summit of the tell during the 12th century B.C. The finds are very meager, indicating the existence of a fishermen village on the Yarkon River (KOCHAVI 1989: 79–80; BECK and KOCHAVI 1993: 68). Very few Mycenaean sherds have been excavated in this stratum, most of them also preserved only in the form of single sherds. Taking into consideration the generally humble nature of the settlement, we assume that also in stratum X11 the Mycenaean material is in a secondary context,

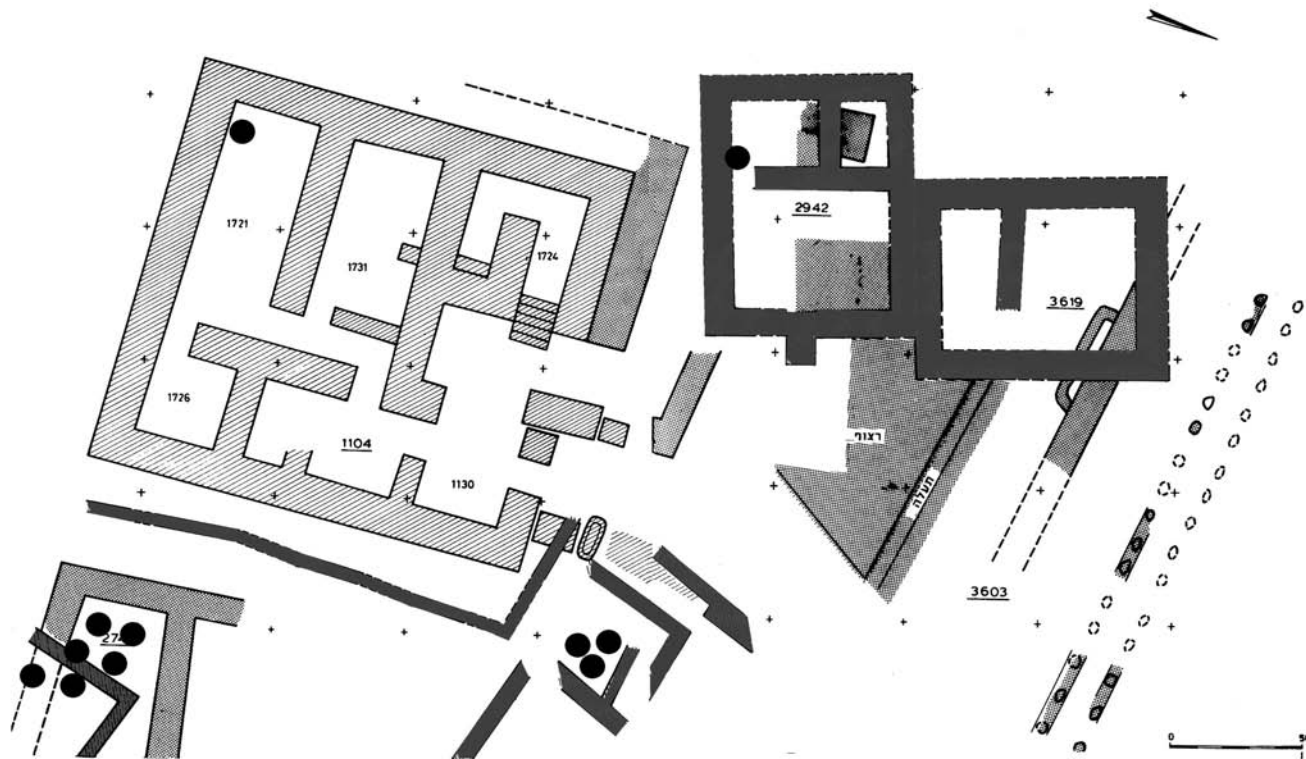


Fig. 9 Distribution of Mycenaean sherds in stratum X11

originating from the period of the Governor's Residence and maybe also transported with the mud-brick into the walls of the houses.

From this stratum came few sherds from a krater with pictorial decoration, most probably LHIIB (GUZOWSKA and YASUR-LANDAU forthcoming; cat no. 3). We assume that, like other late Mycenaean imports of the above mentioned LHIIB stirrup jar, and the LHIIB or early LHIIC krater with triglyph decoration the LHIIB krater was in use in Aphek during the existence of the Governor's Residence.

3. ASPECTS OF CONSUMPTION OF MYCENAEAN POTTERY

It is possible to gain several insights on questions of consumption of Mycenaean pottery in Aphek from the entire assemblage originating in residential deposits of strata X13, X12, and X11.³ The total of the Mycenaean pottery from the settlement strata discussed here consists of 43 closed vessels and 12 open vessels (Fig. 10), representing a ratio of ca. 8 closed vessels, i.e. containers, to ca. 2 open vessels, kraters, and small drinking ware. This conforms to ratios pub-

lished from other sites in the Levant (STEEL 2002: 31; KILLEBREW 1998: 160). According to SHERRATT (in a discussion following Killebrew's paper [1998: 169]) ca. 30 % of the Mycenaean imports to the Levant were non-containers, yet most published deposits point to lower figures. In Beth Shean, an Egyptian stronghold (HANEY 1993: 103), only 15 % of the imported Mycenaean vessels of strata VIII and VII were open vessels. In Tel el-^cAjjul (STEEL 2002: 33, fig. 3), less than 10 % of the imported Mycenaean pottery were open vessels. The ratios in the "Mycenaean" tomb from Dan (BEN-DOV 2002: 98–118), belonging to the upper elite of the site in the 14th and 13th centuries B.C. include 18 open vessels to 82 closed vessels, the closest to the Aphek ratio. The small and medium-sized closed vessels, forming the majority of imports to the Levant, were argued by Leonard (LEONARD 1981: 91–100) to be containers for oils and unguents. Recent work in the Aegean on residue analysis (TZEDAKIS and MARTLEW 1999: 152, 173, 196) has demonstrated that wine was also a commodity stored inside medium-sized and large stirrup jars, and there-

³ Because it is impossible to differentiate between Mycenaean pottery used during the existence of stratum X12 and residual pottery found within this stratum, but originating

in the earlier stratum X13, it would be unsafe to draw conclusions on differences in patterns of Mycenaean imports between the 14th and 13th centuries B.C.

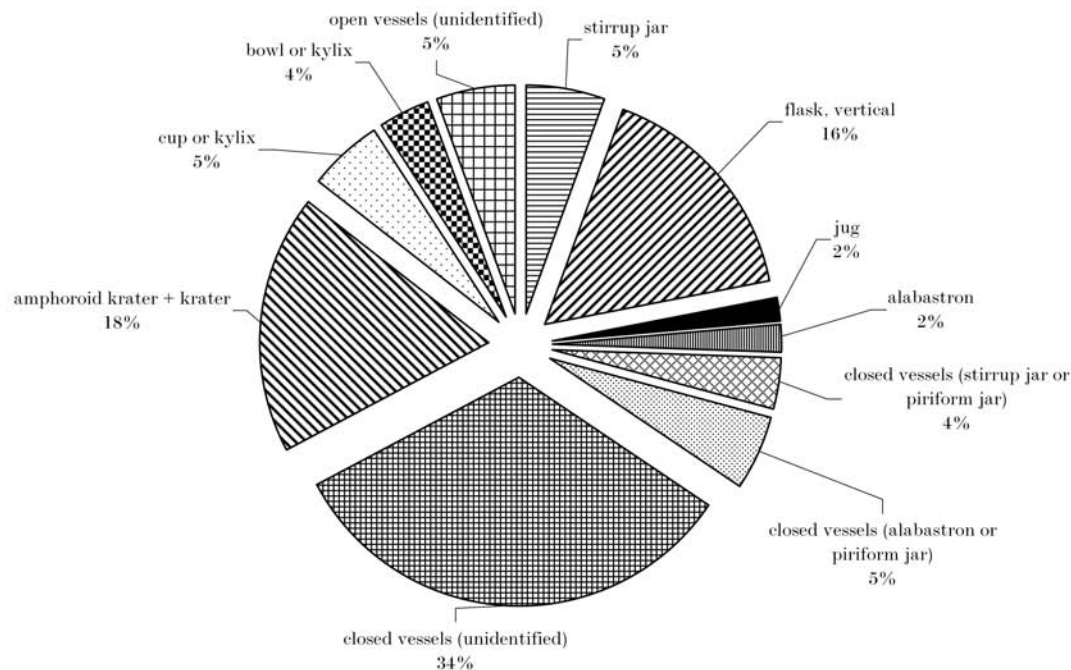


Fig. 10 Ratios of shapes of Mycenaean pottery at Aphek

fore could potentially also be shipped to the Levant.

The small number of imported tableware in the Aphek assemblage opens the question of use of Mycenaean tableware by Levantine elites. Specialized forms of Mycenaean tableware, most notable of which were the “Chariot Kraters” (LEONARD 1994: 22–33; SOUTH and TODD 1997: 75; ÅKERSTRÖM 1987: 117; MOUNTJOY 1993: 73; HALSTEAD 1994: 208; VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS 1982: 8–9), were manufactured in mainland production centers as Berbati in order to be exported to Cyprus and the Levant (GUNNEWEG *et al.* 1994). The scenes on these kraters depicting chariots with Mycenaean elite deliver a complex message combining elite status with consumption of wine in Aegean tableware. The message is most explicit in the case of a krater fragment from Enkomi (FURUMARK 1941: fig. 75; VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS 1982: III.21; WRIGHT 1996: 304), in which a Mycenaean dignitary with his servant appear behind a chariot, surrounded by a complete Mycenaean drinking kit, including a rhyton, ladle or cup, goblet or krater, a jug, and a chalice. The message may be something like: “This is how a true Aegean nobleman drinks; buy the complete Mycenaean drinking kit!”

The imported kraters and smaller drinking vessels in Aphek may reflect a phenomenon similar to that in LCHC Kalavassos/Ayios Dhimitrios in Cyprus (SOUTH and RUSSEL 1993: 306–308), where imports of Aegean fine tableware pottery were relat-

ed to high-status dwelling, while a large number of closed vessels were found in more varied contexts. This case indicates a more restricted access to high-status imported tableware than to closed vessels. STEEL (1998: 296) made a similar generalization for the patterns of use of Mycenaean pottery in Cyprus: “...on the one hand, the dinner services and pictorial style were appropriated by the elite as status symbols to define their own exclusivity. On the other hand, the small, more widely available unguent containers were adopted by those members of Cypriot society who chose to emulate the elite but did not have access to the more highly valued Red Lustrous perfume bottles”. Judging from the elite residential area in which the Aphek open vessels were found, and the find of sherds of “Chariot Kraters” in what appears to be an elite area in Tel el-^cAjjul (STEEL 2002: 36–38), it is likely that the situation in the southern Levant was very much the same.

4. CHRONOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The destruction of “palace VI” has been given a *terminus post quem* by a letter from Ugarit, which was written between the fifth and the sixth decade of Ramses II, i.e. between 1229–1219 B.C. (OWEN 1981; SINGER 1983). A scarab of Ramses II found in the trough at the entrance to the building (KOCHAVI 1989: 67) as well as a faience plaque, possibly a foundation plate, found in a later pit with the name of Ramses II (GIVEON 1978: 188–190) give further confirmation for

at least a construction date of the building and possibly its main period of use to the days of Ramses II.⁴ In addition, no scarabs containing royal names of the 20th dynasty have been found in the Late Bronze Age strata of Aphek. However, a scarab in Locus 4018, stratum X-10 was read by Kitchen to include the name of Ramses IV “*Rʿ-mss m3 ʿtj*” (KEEL 1997: 84 no. 17). This reading was questioned by UEHLINGER (1988: 21, n. 63), yet confirmed in renewed readings by Baruch Brandl and Nir Lalkin (personal communication). Theoretically, this scarab could also have originated from the Egyptian residence, thus lowering significantly its destruction date, yet there is no supporting evidence for such a hypothesis.

As for chronological evidence obtainable from the Mycenaean pottery, the only two above mentioned restorable vessels from the stratum X12 associated with the existence of the Governor’s Residence were a stirrup jar and a vertical flask. They were found outside the residence, by its wall, sealed by debris from the destruction. We can assume that only those two vessels were complete at the moment of destruction of the residence. They had fallen to the street together with the remains of the upper floor and were sealed from above with debris from the remains of the roof. WARREN and HANKEY (1989: 156) chronologically linked the stirrup jar, identified by them to

be “mature LHIIIB”, to the letter from Ugarit, and thus assigned a destruction date late within the rule of Ramses II to an advanced stage of LHIIIB. However, is the deposition date of the stirrup jar necessarily close to its date of manufacture?

Two phenomena hinder any chronological conclusion obtainable from the Aphek assemblage: The first is the common practice in the Levant to “hoard” Mycenaean pottery through an extended period of time discussed above, the second is the abrupt end of the arrival of Mycenaean imports during the 13th century.

There are no Mycenaean pottery imports later than LHIIIB2 south of the Jazreel valley (YASURLANDAU 2003). Thus, for example, no LHIIIC pottery was found in Lachish, although stratum VI of the site was destroyed in the days of Ramses IV, if not later (KRAUSS 1994).⁵ It is thus impossible to use Mycenaean vessels to date levels deposited later than the 13th century. Thus, from the point of view of Mycenaean pottery as well as Egyptian finds, it is theoretically possible that Aphek was destroyed either at the end of the 13th century or at the beginning and even middle of the 12th century, together with the end of Egyptian administration in Beth Shean and Lachish.

⁴ An additional scarab from Locus 4805, stratum X5 containing the throne name of Ramses II (KEEL 1997: 89, no. 30), probably also originated in stratum X12.

⁵ See, however, that LHIIIC pottery, probably originating in Cyprus was found in Beth Shean (YASURLANDAU 2003) also

destroyed during the days of Ramses IV, giving further indication that lack of a certain imported pottery type in a deposit may reflect also patterns of trade, rather than being necessarily a chronological indicator.

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