

1. INTRODUCTION

A special study dedicated to Levantine Painted Ware may seem superfluous, as this type of pottery is actually relatively scarce. It is nevertheless one of the most distinctive types of pottery from the Middle Bronze Age and a hallmark of the beginning of this period as it appears almost exclusively in early Middle Bronze Age contexts at sites in the Levant. Since it has turned up in Egypt as well it is not only a ‘secure link’ between sites in the Levant but also a welcome link between Egypt and the Levant and consequently of the chronologies of the two areas. In order to be able to fully appreciate and utilise this ‘link’ it is obviously of great importance to investigate the distribution patterns of Levantine Painted Ware with the tools provided by a typology. The present study offers a typology and a collection of all known and published examples of Levantine Painted Ware as well as examples of other contemporary and related painted wares together with an evaluation of this material and the chronological significance.

LEVANTINE PAINTED WARE DISTRIBUTION AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE CHRONOLOGY

As the name says the origin of Levantine Painted Ware is unquestionably the Levant, where it was most likely produced at several locations alongside unpainted vessels. Examples are found from northern Syria along the eastern Mediterranean coast and somewhat inland down to Tell el-Dab^{ca} in the eastern Nile Delta and even as far south as Elephantine on the southern border of Egypt. With this geographical distribution pattern and as a hallmark of the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, Levantine Painted Ware was an obvious choice for a study within the frames of SCIEM2000 Project no. 3: “Datum Lines by First Appearances”. Dating the Bronze Age of the Levant in terms of Egyptian chronology, relative as well as absolute, is a long-standing practice rooted in the absence in the Levant itself of historical sources of that time which can be used for dating. The two areas were naturally closely linked as neighbours

through trade, immigration, warfare and the various levels of communication between the two at different points in time.

Most importantly Levantine Painted Ware appears as imports at the site of Tell el-Dab^{ca} in secure stratigraphical contexts and through the dating of the Tell el-Dab^{ca} strata it may be tied to the beginning of the 2nd Millennium and thus be a tool for dating of the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age in the Levant. The earliest reliably dateable examples of Levantine Painted Ware from Egypt are from below the Middle Kingdom temple at ‘Ezbet Rushdi (Tell el-Dab^{ca} area), where these imports can be dated to some time before the reign of Senwosret III according to the dating of the temple and the stratigraphical position of the pottery in relation to the building. Thus far the earliest occurrence of Levantine Painted Ware can be pushed back to the time of Amenemhet II or possibly the end of Senwosret I’s reign. More examples of LPW, of which some are of a type different from the ‘Ezbet Rushdi material, are from the excavation areas F/I and A/II of Tell el-Dab^{ca} and for the most part have been dated to the very end of Dynasty XII and some even to the beginning of Dynasty XIII. The Tell el-Dab^{ca} material is thus the basis for an investigation of the entire corpus of Levantine Painted Ware from all other sites in Egypt and the extensive material from the Levant.

The question of absolute chronology has naturally been an integral part of SCIEM2000. Important ‘anchor’ dates for the present study is the beginning of Dynasty XII and XIII as well as the reign of Senwosret III for the date of the ‘Ezbet Rushdi material. Fig. 4 with the Tell el-Dab^{ca} Stratigraphy (2008 version) is largely following Kenneth A. Kitchen’s proposal from 2000¹ dating Dynasty XII to 1973–1795 BC and year 5 of Senwosret III to 1868 BC. Adjustments may be required and the calculated date for the beginning of Dynasty XII as suggested by Thomas Schneider places the beginning of Dynasty XII at 1995 or 2002 BC.²

¹ KITCHEN 2000; cf. also MÜLLER 2006.

² SCHNEIDER 2008, revised for the SCIEM2000 Closing conference January 2011.

MAIN TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

In dealing with the corpus of Levantine Painted Ware from Tell el-Dab^{ca} some questions arose that will be answered here as far as possible. Some key issues will also be handled in order to reveal as much as possible about the core material itself as well as about the ware per se. In short the main topics are:

- **Types**

The existing types of LPW in general are defined and it is established how these compare to the Tell el-Dab^{ca} material.

- **Distribution**

The geographical distribution patterns of the various types of LPW are mapped and evaluated. The contexts and how the different types occur together and with other material as well are also investigated. In addition this is important for the question of chronology.

- **Chronology**

The chronological range of the various types of LPW at different sites is assessed and the conclusions are shown to have a bearing on our understanding of the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. This is true for the northern as well as the southern Levant. The relationship between Middle Kingdom Egypt and the Middle Bronze Age in the Levant at the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C. will be one of the main points.

- **Origin**

After the investigations of typology, distribution and chronology the question of the origin of LPW in general and of the examples found at Tell el-Dab^{ca} will be examined. This question is of course linked to the three first-mentioned main topics; to some degree scientific analyses such as neutron activation and petrographic analyses have shed further light on this topic.

To sum up: the main question is of relative chronology versus typology. Questions of a more detailed character include why the early examples from ‘Ezbet Rushdi do not include bichrome and more luxurious LPW and whether this fact is actually connected to chronology or is simply fortuitously consistent with what was found or even whether we are possibly dealing with material from two different main sources. Another is whether there is a specific difference between the types occurring in the northern Levant compared to the southern Levant. And again, whether any possibly detected differences are due to

geographical or chronological differences. In addition, the probable relationship between LPW and Syro/Cilician Ware from north-western Syria and south-eastern Anatolia as well as to Khabur Ware from inner Syria and north-western Mesopotamia will be investigated as this has bearings on the chronological conclusions as well.

OBJECTIVES AND WORKING PROCEDURE

Tell el-Dab^{ca} and the examples of Levantine Painted Ware from there are the starting point. The initial step, however, must be to define LPW in general and the range of possible variations. In order to do so a thorough typology is presented largely by way of using the more complete examples from the Levant as the Tell el-Dab^{ca} LPW is predominantly fragmentary.

The Tell el-Dab^{ca} material will subsequently be presented in detail and preliminarily compared to the complete corpus before the additional Egyptian and Levantine examples are dealt with. All known examples of LPW are brought together here and presented with figures and descriptions to the extent that it is possible; published examples as well as some that were hitherto unpublished. Every site with LPW is presented with information relevant for understanding the LPW context. Selected important sites in the Levant are described in more detail than others in order to investigate better the context of LPW and related painted pottery. A briefer assessment of Khabur Ware and Syro/Cilician Ware is presented at the end in order to distinguish between these and LPW. This should also be helpful for defining future finds of painted wares from the Middle Bronze Age.

The following statements are the basis for the investigation:

- LPW occurs from the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age and is a good indicator for the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age.
- LPW supposedly arrived in Egypt at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age as well and was deposited shortly after.
- ‘Ezbet Rushdi provides the earliest reliable dateable examples of LPW.
- Finds of LPW in Egypt in secure stratigraphical contexts can thus help us date the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age in the Levant, at least relatively according to the reigns of Egyptian kings.
- Egyptian pottery is by now a reliable source for relative dating of Second Millennium Egypt (the above statement depends on this statement).

The conclusions will outline the results relating to types, contexts, and chronology.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY

In the present context the Levant is understood as a neutral term for the area of ancient Palestine and the Syrian coast, including today's Israel, Lebanon, the Syrian coastal region and part of Jordan. It has been preferred to 'Syria-Palestine', common in many publications, to stress the fact that inland Syria is not directly included and that the Levant through this period is seen as one entity distinct from inland Syria. Obviously, however, differences existed between north and south and in dealing with Levantine Painted Ware from the various sites this difference will be investigated.

The standard short forms EB–MB–LB are used throughout for the Early Bronze, Middle Bronze and Late Bronze Age in the Levant. Debate on Early Bronze/Middle Bronze definitions and terminology has been going on since W.F. Albright published his Tell Beit Mirsim excavations in the early 1930s and defined the periods according to his stratigraphy: EB III for stratum J, MB I for str. I–H and MB II for G–F together with E–D.³ After other excavations had yielded pottery comparable to Tell Beit Mirsim, especially Gezer and Ras el 'Ain (Aphek), Albright divided his MB II into MB IIA for str. G–F, MB IIB for str. E and MB IIC for str. D ("for convenience").⁴ For a long time, strata G–F of Tell Beit Mirsim remained the standard indication of MB IIA.

Albright's Bronze Age division was subsequently revised by others. The first effective attempt at an actual renewal of EB–MB terminology was initiated

by K. Kenyon⁵ who wanted to reserve the Middle Bronze Age terms for the period starting with Albright's MB IIA and termed the preceding period Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze. She proposed that MB IIA should become MB I, and MB IIB(–C) simply MB II. This made more sense since the real change in the archaeological material occurs between Albright's MB I and MB IIA as has also been shown by more recent excavations and studies. 'EB–MB' never really eclipsed 'EB IV', which became the new term for Albright's MB I, whereas substituting MB I for MB IIA, MB II for MB IIB and, by some, MB III for MB IIC was followed and emphasised by P. Gerstenblith, W. Dever, E. Oren, D. Ilan and others.⁶ Many publications, however, still prefer MB IIA and B and in some cases C in order not to confuse terms with Albright's MB I and II, and often both terminologies are used with one of them in brackets. The standard MB IIA–C will also be applied here.⁷

The pottery will be divided into 'MB pottery' for pottery of the Middle Bronze Age culture, which is mainly produced in the Levant, but at some point also in Avaris, and 'Egyptian pottery' for pottery belonging to the Egyptian cultural sphere. 'MB pottery' is preferred here to 'Canaanite pottery', which has been employed in other publications,⁸ although 'Canaanite' would of course, on one hand, be more in accordance with 'Egyptian'. On the other hand, it seems more appropriate to adhere to a name that does not carry ethnic but rather chronological implications.

³ ALBRIGHT 1933, 68. In ALBRIGHT 1932, xxi, str. G–F had been included in his MB I, but this was modified in 1933.

⁴ ALBRIGHT 1938, 24–25.

⁵ KENYON 1973, 77–116.

⁶ GERSTENBLITH 1983, 2–3 has a summary of the arguments with a list of scholars/terminologies. See also ILAN 1995, 298.

⁷ In my original Ph.D. thesis from 2000, MB I was preferred to MB IIA, but since then more publications have still employed the original MB IIA, which is now followed here.

⁸ For example, ARNOLD, ARNOLD and ALLEN 1995.

