



ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE PRESENCE OF EGYPTIANS IN THE SOUTHERN LEVANT DURING THE LATE BRONZE AGE—A REAPPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

The nature of Egyptian control in the southern Levant during the Late Bronze Age has been the subject of vivid debate. Historical reconstructions either see a substantial presence of Egyptian personnel into the southern Levant (Weinstein) or local Canaanites emulating the Egyptian mode of rulership (Higginbotham). This paper offers a re-evaluation of the archaeological data by focusing on evidence that might indicate the presence of Egyptian individuals. This data is re-analyzed in light of indicators for “embodied knowledge,” which can be used to differentiate the presence of individuals acculturated in Egypt from the “emulation” of Egyptian practices by local, Canaanite individuals. It is argued that limited evidence can be found for local Canaanites adopting an Egyptian style of architecture and material culture during the Late Bronze Age I. In the Late Bronze Age II, however, archaeological evidence supports the notion of Egyptian individuals being present in the southern Levant. Egyptians appear to have occupied both lower administrative functions as well as higher positions in this hierarchy. It can therefore be concluded that Egyptian control of the Levant initially relied on loyal local Canaanites, but later came to include a limited influx of Egyptian personnel.

INTRODUCTION

After the expulsion of the Hyksos and the reunification of Egypt at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty under Ahmose, Egypt regained its power in the eastern Mediterranean. After this reconsolidation of Egypt, its political, military, and economic interests in the southern Levant slowly began to increase, following a number of military campaigns in the second half of the 18th (mainly Thutmose III, Amenhotep II) and the 19th Dynasties (mainly Seti I, Ramesses II). By the middle of the Late Bronze Age, Egypt had become an omnipresent power in the southern Levant. It remains unclear, however, whether control of the region entailed a substantial movement of individuals from Egypt (military personnel, administrators, etc.) or was the result of local elites emulating Egyptian forms and

(broadly) being loyal to the Egyptian king. The answer to this question is paramount to understanding developments and dynamics in the southern Levant and to the interpretation of material culture.

Written sources of the 18th and 19th Dynasties provide some insights into Egyptian involvement in the southern Levant during the New Kingdom. While their detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, the general nature of a number of inscriptions from the first half of the 18th Dynasty should be kept in mind: such as two from Masara mentioning (and dated to the reign of) Ahmose, inscriptions found on blocks from Karnak (dated into the reign of Amenhotep I), the inscribed fragment of a stone vessel from the so-called Tomb of Amenhotep I in western Thebes, the autobio-

ographies of Ahmose son of Ibana and Ahmose pa-Nekhbit found at el-Kab (dating to the reign of Thutmose I), the Tombos stele of Thutmose I in the Hatshepsut temple in Deir el-Bahri, the tomb of Amenemhet the astronomer in western Thebes (who served under Ahmose, Amenemhet I, and Thutmose I), and a Thutmose II inscription from Aswan.¹ In a recent analysis, following a study by James Hoffmeier from the 1980s,² Felix Höflmayer stressed that none of these sources can clearly be linked to the southern Levant, as the interpretation of the toponyms and ethnonyms included within them is circumstantial and not secure.³ Consequently, no firm textual evidence can be found for Egyptian involvement in the early 18th Dynasty (cf. William G. Dever and James Weinstein for differing conclusions.⁴) This changed notably with the campaigns of Thutmose III and continued through the latter part of the 18th and most of the 19th Dynasty.⁵

Two opposing models have dominated the last three decades of discourse on the nature of Egyptian presence in the southern Levant during the Late Bronze Age.⁶ While the “direct rule” model proposed by James M. Weinstein reconstructed the substantial presence of Egyptian personnel in the region,⁷ the “elite emulation” model, offered by Carolyn R. Higginbotham,⁸ challenged this perception and argued that most “Egyptian” material culture in the southern Levant could be the result of local Canaanites emulating Egyptian elites. This difference of interpretation is understandable, because tracing the ethnic background of populations based on material culture is difficult. As I have outlined elsewhere,⁹ concepts of fluid ethnicities such as acquired ethnicities, multiple and situational ethnicities, and segmental ethnicities are frequently mentioned in ethnographic studies.

In recent years, the theoretical concept of “embodied knowledge” has become increasingly popular, echoing Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*.¹⁰ A detailed study on embodied knowledge was recently published by Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and Katharina Rebay-Salisbury,¹¹ focusing mainly on the interaction of technology and belief. The connection between embodied knowledge and social and ethnic environments was briefly mentioned by Siân Jones¹² but not explored in detail. I have recently argued that two distinct pathways of human-material culture interaction can be distinguished: “embodied cultural automatism” and “conscious cultural choice.”¹³ While the former is defined as the full

range of unconsciously acquired technical skills, work processes, and aesthetic preferences (all shaped by one’s ethnic surrounding), the latter involves active decision making, which might also reflect the cultural identity of another ethnic group and can serve a specific purpose.

Since the analyses by Weinstein and Higginbotham,¹⁴ new studies on selected aspects of material culture and historical narrative have been published.¹⁵ While it is generally accepted that Egypt exerted some degree of political control over the southern Levant from at least the second part of the 18th Dynasty, whether this required the physical presence of Egyptian (or Egyptian-trained) individuals in the region remains unresolved. Evidence of Canaanites acculturated and trained in Egypt can be found, for example, in EA 296.25–26, where *Yabitiri* claimed to have been taken to Egypt where he served the royal court, before he returned to Canaan as ruler of an (unidentified) city.

This paper therefore aims to re-evaluate old and new archaeological evidence, and attempts to identify the presence (or absence) of Egyptians in the southern Levant. I focus on allegedly Egyptian or “Egyptianizing” material culture that was shaped by “embodied cultural automatism,” rather than “conscious cultural choice.” Two categories of evidence will be excluded from the dataset. First, Egyptian and Egyptianizing items that are likely to have arrived via trade networks are omitted. This applies mainly to prestige goods such as jewelry, scarabs, stone and faience vessels, and statuary. They are excluded because they are unlikely to have been found in their primary cultural context and are thus liable to distort the picture. Second, items that could be regarded as propaganda, such as royal inscriptions and statuary, speak to the Egyptian control of key strategic points, yet say little regarding the presence of Egyptians after they had been erected. Instead, evidence that unwittingly contains information about the individuals involved in its creation will be analyzed. For example, distinct architectural types such as the so-called governor houses, fortresses, and temples are discussed, with particular attention paid to building materials and methods, while burial in anthropomorphic clay coffins will be examined in light of new discoveries.¹⁶ Hieratic inscriptions that relate to administrative activities are considered, as is the ceramic assemblage that has traditionally been referred to as “Egyptianizing.”

ARCHITECTURE

“GOVERNOR HOUSES” AND RELATED STRUCTURES

So-called governor houses have long been considered the hallmark of Egyptian presence in the southern Levant during the Late Bronze Age.¹⁷ The term appears to have been coined by Sir Flinders Petrie, who identified the first building of this type at Tell el-Far‘a South.¹⁸ This building type has been compared with Egyptian houses, particularly the smaller houses in el-Amarna, and is markedly different from other buildings at the sites where they were discovered.¹⁹ Buildings that have been interpreted as such “governor houses” were identified at seven sites, west and east of the Jordan (see Table 1; Figs. 1, 2): Beth Shean (Building 1500, Stratum VI);²⁰ Tel Aphek (Building 1104);²¹ Tell el-Hesi (City IV);²² Tell Sera‘ (Building 906, Stratum IX);²³ Tell Jemmeh (level J: JC–JN);²⁴ Tell el-Far‘a South;²⁵ and Tel Masos (Building 480, Stratum IIIA).²⁶ Additionally, the identification of “governor houses” (or related buildings) has been suggested for Pella,²⁷ Tell es-Sa‘idiye,²⁸ Gezer,²⁹ and Qubur al-Walaydah.³⁰

The structures so defined had a nearly square plan ranging from ca. 15 × 15 m to 25 × 25 m, and thick (ca. 1.5–2.0 m) walls. Such structures usually had a central space with a set of surrounding rooms, as well as an asymmetrically located entrance. Some of the central rooms had pillars, which must have supported a roof, but those without pillars may have been open. The ground plan of “governor houses” does vary considerably, particularly the examples from Jordan, yet the general concept remains clearly discernible. All “governor houses” were dated by their excavators independently to the 13th and 12th centuries, with the exception of the structure in Pella (see Table 1 and references therein; Fig. 2:9).

Beside the characteristic ground plan of these structures, the building method is indicative of a different construction tradition: in contrast to a stone foundation and mud-brick superstructure, which is the most common method in the Levant,³¹ these buildings have mud-brick foundations. Such mud-brick foundations have been reported for the governor houses found at Tell el-Hesi, Tell Sera‘, Tell Jemmeh, Tell el-Far‘a South, Tell Masos, Tell es-Saidye, and Qubur al-Walaydah, and have therefore been interpreted as examples of Egyptian influence.³² Further, ceramics from assemblages inside the “governor houses” were statistically evaluated at three of the sites, with Egyptianizing ceramic shapes making up 72.5% of the assemblage

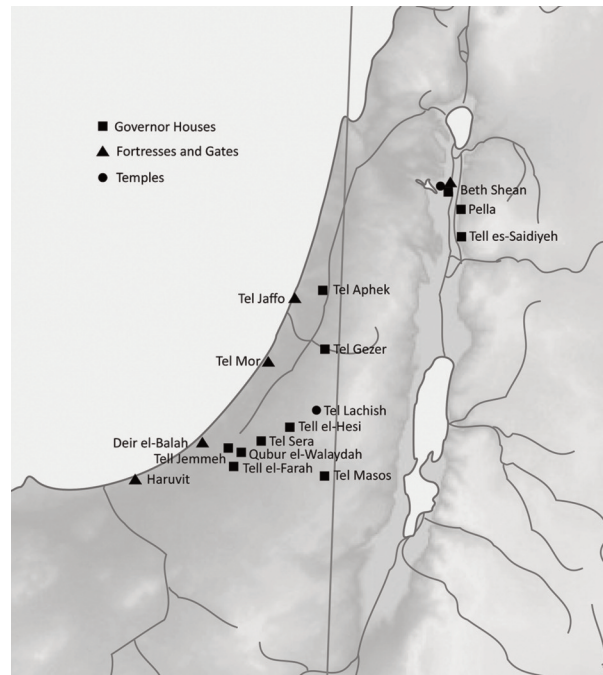


FIGURE 1: Map of architectural evidence: “governor houses,” Egyptian-style fortresses, Egyptianizing temples, other architecture

at Beth Shean,³³ 49% in Stratum X and 43% in Stratum IX at Tell Sera‘,³⁴ and 34% at Tel Aphek.³⁵

This evidence was initially interpreted as demonstrating the presence of ethnically Egyptian governors in Canaan,³⁶ but Eliezer Oren noted that “no particular Egyptian model was copied, or any uniform, modular plan, but rather an Egyptian architectural concept was adopted to the local building tradition at the centre of which was the traditional oriental house.”³⁷ While the characteristic ground plan may indeed have been a stylistic choice to emulate Egyptian taste,³⁸ the building method with mud-brick foundations should be considered a strong ethnic indicator: this feature is not even visible after completion, so it is unlikely to be the result of emulation. It is difficult to determine who built or commissioned these structures, and probably impossible to reconstruct who lived in them, but the variety observed in these buildings at least suggests a lack of standardization. And their very existence means that at least a few individuals familiar with this building method must have been involved in the construction of “governor houses.”

Two rather unspectacular yet important finds should be mentioned in addition to the “governor

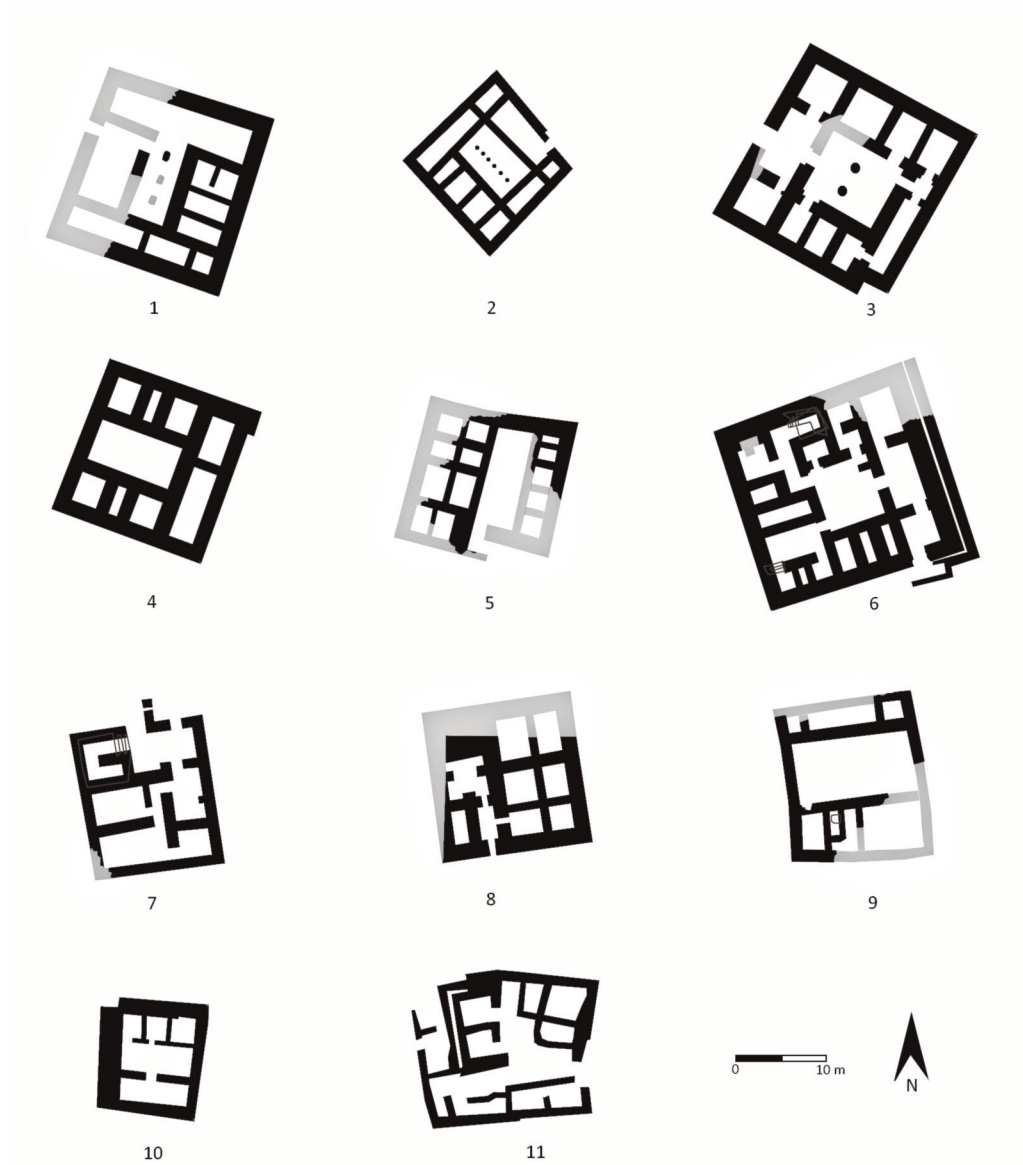


FIGURE 2: "Governor houses" and related structures. 1: Tel Sera ; 2: Tel Masos; 3: Beth Shean; 4: Tel Hesi; 5: Tell Jemmeh; 6: Tell el-Far'a South; 7: Tel Aphek; 8: Tel Gezer; 9: Pella; 10: Qubur el-Walaydah; 11: Tell es-Saidiyeh.

houses." Silos have been observed at Beth Shan³⁹ and at Lachish.⁴⁰ These silos are aboveground and mud-brick built, and measure 4.6 m and 4.2 m in diameter, respectively. The example from Lachish was distinctly dome-shaped, but the silo at Beth Shean was cylindrical to the height of preservation. This type of silo is well known in Egypt,⁴¹ with its closest

parallel at Bir el-Abd.⁴² As silos are typically not representative structures, and their construction should be linked to embodied knowledge and cultural traditions, these two examples can be considered strong evidence of Egyptian constructors.

TABLE 1: "Governor houses."

SITE	STRATIGRAPHIC UNIT	STRUCTURE	CONSTRUCTION METHOD	SIZE (M)	EGYPTIANIZING POTTERY	DATE (CENTURY BCE)	FIG.
Tell Sera ^a	Building 906, Stratum X-IX	"Governor house"	Mud-brick foundation	22 × 22	Stratum IX: 43% Stratum X: 49%	Late 13th/ early 12th)	2:1
Tell Masos ^b	House 480, Stratum II	"Governor house"	Partly stone foundation, partly mud brick	15 × 15	n/a	12th	2:2
Tel Beth Shean ^c	Building 1500, Stratum VI	"Governor house"	Stone foundation	22 × 23	72.5% ^d	13th	2:3
Tell el-Hesi ^e	City IV	"Governor house"	Mud-brick foundation	18 × 18	n/a	12th	2:4
Tell Jemmeh ^f	Level J: JC-JN	"Governor house"	Mud-brick foundation	15 × 15	n/a	12th	2:5
Tell el-Far'a South ^g	Building 906, Stratum IX	"Governor house"	Mud-brick foundation	22 × 25	n/a	Late 13th/ early 12th	2:6
Tel Aphek ^h	Building 1104, Stratum X12	"Governor house"	Stone foundation	14 × 16	35% 1% import	13th	2:7
Tel Gezer ⁱ	IIIa 27-28	"Governor house"	Unknown foundation	15 × 15	n/a	13th to 12th	2:8
Pella ^j	Area IIN/S, Phase VA-B	Building	Stone foundation	15 × 15	n/a	ca. late 15th to mid-14th	2:9
Qubur el-Walaydah ^k	Str. VIII	Building	Mud-brick foundation	10.5 × 11.5	n/a	Late 13th and 12th	2:10
Tell es-Saidiyeh ^l	Area AA, Stratum XII	"Governor house"	Mud-brick foundation	15-20 × 15-20	n/a	Late 12th	2:11
Tel Lachish ^m	Stratum VI	Silo	Dome-shaped, mud-brick built	4.2 Ø	n/a	12th	—
Beth Shean ⁿ	Level VII	Silo	Circular; mud brick; possibly dome shaped	4.6 Ø	n/a	13th	—

^a Oren 1984, 39-41.^b Conrad and Crüsemann 1983, 61-67.^c James 1966, 8-11; Mazar 2006, 61-93.^d Mazar and Martin 2006.^e Bliss 1894, 72.^f Petrie 1928, 5-6, pl. VI.^g Oren 1984, 39-41.^h Gadot 2009; Gadot 2010.ⁱ Bunimovitz 1988-1989; R. A. Stewart Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer: 1902-1905 and 1907-1909* (London: John Murray, 1912), Vol. III, pl. VII, fig. 1-b.^j Bourke, Sparks, Sowada and Mairs 1994/1995, 104-107; Bourke et al. 1998, 196-201.^k Lehmann et al. 2010.^l Tubb 1988, 40-41, fig. 15.^m Ussishkin 2004a, 297-300.ⁿ James and McGovern 1993, 60-61, pl 5c.

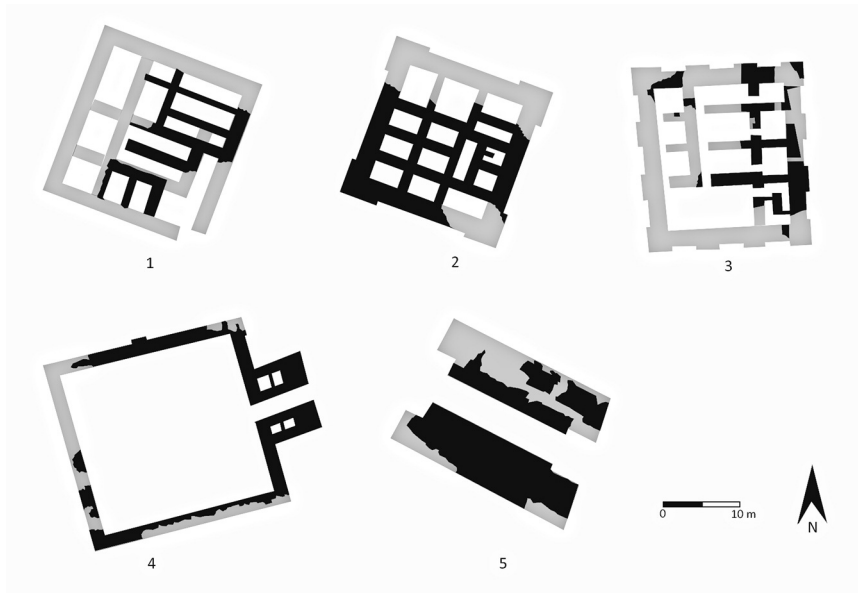


FIGURE 3: Egyptian-style fortresses and gates. 1: Beth Shean; 2: Deir el-Balah; 3: Tel Mor; 4: Haruvit (A-289); 5: Jaffa.

EGYPTIAN-STYLE FORTRESSES AND GATES

Four additional structures have been observed that do not entirely fit into the “governor house” category, but seem to be related. These buildings are also square and built of mud bricks without stone foundations, but lack the characteristic central area. The walls are particularly thick (up to 4 m) and have external buttresses, and a second story can be

reconstructed in some cases. Examples have been found at Deir el-Balah (Stratum VII),⁴³ Haruvit,⁴⁴ Tel Mor (Building B, Stratum VIII–VII),⁴⁵ and Beth Shean (Q-2/VII).⁴⁶ Notably, the “governor house”-type structure identified at Gezer seems to be closer in form to these buildings than to other “governor houses.”⁴⁷ The buildings at all four of these sites were dated by their respective excavators to the 13th

TABLE 2: Egyptian-style fortresses.

SITE	STRATIGRAPHIC UNIT	STRUCTURE	CONSTRUCTION METHOD	SIZE (M)	EGYPTIANIZING POTTERY	DATE (CENTURY BCE)
Beth Shean ^a	Q-2/VII	Fortress	Mud brick	22 × 22 (?)	74% ^b	13th
Deir el-Balah ^c	Stratum VII	Fortress	Mud brick	20 × 20	>50%	13th
Tel Mor ^d	Building B, Stratum VIII–VII	Fortress	Mud brick	23 × 23	7%	13th
Haruvit (A-289) ^e	—	Fortress	Mud brick	50 × 50	n/a	Late 13th/12th
Jaffa ^f	V, IV	Gate	Rameses portal façade	16.5 × 24	Yes, not quantified	14th to 13th

^a Mazar 2006, 83–97.

^b Mazar and Martin 2006.

^c Brandl 2010b, 77–85; Brandl 2010a, 254–258.

^d Barako 2007, 20–24.

^e Oren 1980, 27–32.

^f Kaplan and Ritter-Kaplan 1993; Herzog 2008; Burke et al. 2017.

century BCE (Table 2; Figs. 1, 3).

These buildings have been interpreted as defensive structures, or Egyptian fortresses,⁴⁸ based on the thickness of their walls and on iconographic parallels. The characteristic buttresses seem to be depicted, for example, on a relief from the reign of Seti I at Karnak.⁴⁹ And it is notable that the frequent depiction of ponds adjacent to fortresses in art has a parallel, because a feature interpreted as pond was uncovered at Deir el-Balah.⁵⁰

The cultural affiliation of the ceramic assemblage could be evaluated statistically at three of the four sites. The highest frequency of Egyptianizing ceramics was recorded at Beth Shean (74%),⁵¹ followed by Deir el-Balah (>50%),⁵² and Tel Mor (7%).⁵³ The high proportion of Egyptianizing pottery, together with the building method and layout of the structures, make it probable that their builders, and potentially occupants, were of Egyptian origin, and most likely military personnel. Tristan J. Barako even reconstructed a group of fifty Egyptian soldiers stationed in the fortress at Tel Mor.⁵⁴

Further, a monumental gate was excavated by Jacob Kaplan between 1955–1962 at Jaffa,⁵⁵ with additional projects by Tel Aviv University in the late 1990s,⁵⁶ and the Jaffa Cultural Heritage Project from 2011 to 2014.⁵⁷ Based on ceramics and glyptic finds as well as radiocarbon dating, the first phase of the gate was constructed to the 14th century BCE, with subsequent renovations and the addition of a carved stone façade of Ramses II in the 13th and 12th centuries.⁵⁸

EGYPTIANIZING TEMPLES

Several temple structures have also been identified as being influenced by Egypt. Two sites, Tel Lachish and Tel Beth Shean, stand out in this regard (Table 3; Figs. 1, 4).

Two temples have attracted attention at Tel Lachish. The “Fosse Temple” was uncovered by the Starkey expedition at the foot of the tell, nesting in the Middle Bronze Age fosse.⁵⁹ Its three distinct architectural phases and the rich assemblage of imported ceramics and scarabs bearing the names of kings provided the basis for a more nuanced chronology of the Late Bronze Age. The first phase of the structure consists of a long room with three pillars arranged along its central axis, and two side rooms to the north and west (Fig. 4:3). The second and third phases are marked by a square central hall with four pillars, benches along the western, northern, and eastern walls, and a raised platform on the southern wall. One additional side room was found to the north, and two to the south of the central hall.

The architectural origin and possible function of the Fosse Temple have been intensely debated. Its function has variously been interpreted as ranging from pottery workshop,⁶⁰ a temple serving lower classes who lacked access to a main sanctuary on top of the mound,⁶¹ or serving pastoral nomads,⁶² or a function as a Beit Marzeah where (funerary) ritual feasts were conducted.⁶³ Manfred Bietak stressed Egyptian influences in the ground plan and its similarity with New Kingdom Egyptian houses.⁶⁴

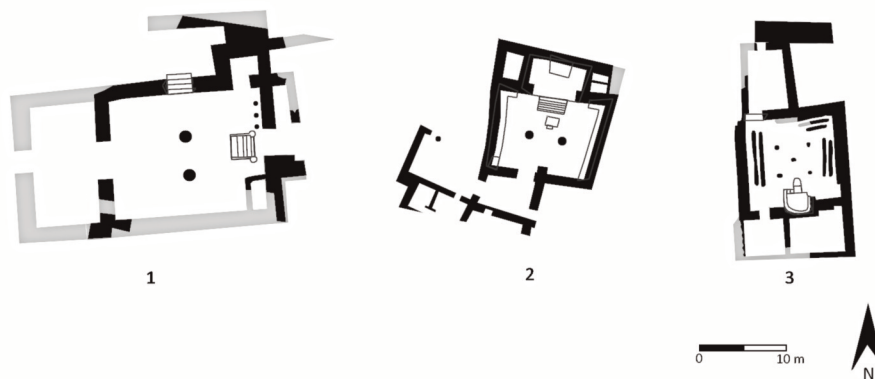


FIGURE 4: Temples. 1: Tel Lachish acropolis temple; 2: Beth Shean; 3: Tel Lachish “Fosse Temple” III.

TABLE 3: Temples.

SITE	STRATIGRAPHIC UNIT	STRUCTURE	CONSTRUCTION METHOD	SIZE (M)	EGYPTIANIZING POTTERY	DATE (CENTURY BCE)
Tel Lachish ^a	Stratum VI	Acropolis Temple	Octagonal columns, flowered capital, general layout (?)	23 × 32	n/a	12th
Beth Shean ^b	Level VII–VI	Temple	Blue color in sanctum, Egyptian cornices, papyriform capitals	14 × 19	n/a	14th or 13th to 12th
Tel Lachish ^c	“Temple I–III”	“Fosse Temple”	Square cult room with four columns, benches	Max. 13 × 25	n/a	Later 15th to 13th

^a Ussishkin 2004b.
^b James 1966, 14–15, fig. 77; James and McGovern 1993, 6–12.
^c Tufnell, Inge, and Harding 1940.

Ido Koch has recently argued that the remodeling of the temple after its first phase, and the increased presence of Hathor in the iconography of the sanctuary, was connected to cultic reforms under Amenhotep III and reflects “Egypt’s integration within the local cultural world.”⁶⁵ It should be noted, however, that this interpretation is solely based on a handful of mobile iconographic prestige objects, which cannot unambiguously be connected to the nature of the cult itself, particularly as they have been found alongside Canaanite cult figurines.⁶⁶

Two examples of temples have been uncovered that have a “raised Holy of Holies,”⁶⁷ at Beth Shean and at Lachish (Fig. 4:1–2). The former was excavated by the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania expedition in the 1920s and early ’30s.⁶⁸ This temple continued through two strata (VII and VI) and was dated to the late 14th to 12th centuries by the excavator, Frances W. James. The Lachish acropolis temple of Stratum VI (12th century) was excavated by the Tel Aviv University project at Lachish in the 1970s and ’80s.⁶⁹ Both temples are characterized by a main hall (of slightly different proportions) with two pillars, an elevated holy of holies accessible by a staircase, additional side rooms, and the incorporation of distinctly Egyptian architectural elements: at Lachish there are octagonal columns and a flowered capital; at Beth

Shean there was blue color in the sanctum, Egyptian cornices, and papyrus-shaped capitals.

Egyptian finds in the vicinity of the St. Étienne monastery, such as the fragment of a stele, two offering tables, two Egyptian stone vessels, an Egyptian serpentine statuette and Egyptian-style capital have led Gabriel Barkay to postulate the existence of an Egyptian temple in Jerusalem.⁷⁰ While no architectural remains of such a structure have been found, the density of these finds, and particularly the offering table found in situ, embedded, or rather beneath, the floor of the church render this interpretation very likely.

Although Egyptian influences are apparent in temple layouts, architectural features, and finds, no evidence was found for an Egyptian cult in these sanctuaries, as was noted by Weinstein.⁷¹ Rather, the iconography uncovered in the Lachish acropolis temple points to a local Canaanite deity.⁷² The closest evidence for Egyptian cult and the worship of an Egyptian deity yet found is from the Hathor temples at Serabit el-Khadem,⁷³ and at Timna,⁷⁴ far to the southwest in the Sinai Peninsula. It should be therefore concluded that while a strong preference for Egyptian artistic features is evident, sanctuaries do not by themselves imply the presence of a substantial Egyptian population in the southern Levant.

TABLE 4: Anthropoid coffins.

SITE	NO. OF COFFINS	TYPE	CONTEXT	DATE (CENTURY BCE)
Deir el-Balah ^a	ca. 75	Grotesque; naturalistic	Pit burials	Late 14th to 12th
Tell el-Far'a ^b	3	Grotesque	Rock-cut tomb	?
Tel Lachish ^c	2	Grotesque	Rock-cut tomb	12th
Beth Shean ^d	ca. 50	Mainly naturalistic; a few examples of grotesque	Rock-cut tomb	13th to 11th
Tel Midrash ^e	1	?	Surface find	n/a
Tel Shaddud ^f	1	Naturalistic	Pit burial	Late 13th to early 12th
Pella ^g	2 (+ 2 without anthropomorphic depiction)	Naturalistic	Rock-cut tomb	?

^a Dothan 1972; Dothan 1973; Dotha, 1979.
^b Petrie 1930, 6–9, pls. XIX, XXIV.
^c Hannequin 1939; Tufnell, 1958, 36, 66, 131–132, 248–249, pls. 45–46.
^d Oren 1973, 129–150.
^e Zori 1962, 170.
^f van den Brink et al. 2017.
^g Yassin 1975, 58–62, n. 11.

BURIALS (ANTHROPOID COFFINS)

Anthropoid coffins were first observed in the southern Levant at Tel Beth Shean.⁷⁵ It became evident that these finds were not isolated, but rather part of a wider practice that has attracted considerable attention.⁷⁶ Also called “slipper coffins” (as the body without the lid is reminiscent of the shape of a slipper),⁷⁷ they have been observed at a total of seven sites (Table 4; Fig. 5): Tell el-Far'a South,⁷⁸ Deir el-Balah,⁷⁹ Tel Lachish,⁸⁰ Beth Shean,⁸¹ Tel Midras,⁸² Tell Shadud,⁸³ and Pella.⁸⁴

Two different styles of facial depiction have been distinguished on anthropoid coffins.⁸⁵ The “naturalistic style” features facial details that include the eyes, nose, and mouth with some degree of anatomical accuracy, while the “grotesque style” distorts these features. The appearance of anthropoid coffins initially was linked to the Philistine invasion, mainly because of the visual resemblance between the hairstyle represented on

the coffin with depictions of Sea Peoples “feathered” crown at Medinet Habu,⁸⁶ but it soon became evident that the origin of the anthropoid clay coffins is to be found in Egypt and clearly predates the appearance of Philistine material culture in the southern Levant.⁸⁷ The initial interpretation was then revised to suggest that anthropoid coffins of the “naturalistic style” would date to the 13th and early 12th centuries BCE and were associated with the burial of Egyptian officials stationed in the southern Levant. Coffins of the “grotesque style” were dated to the later 12th and 11th centuries BCE, when Philistines or other Sea People groups adopted and adapted this burial tradition.⁸⁸ However, as coffins of the “grotesque style” have also been uncovered in Egypt,⁸⁹ it is more likely that they were simply stylistic variations without any ethnic connotations.

The recent discovery of another anthropoid coffin at Tel Shadud provides valuable clues regarding who was buried in them. Petrographic analysis of

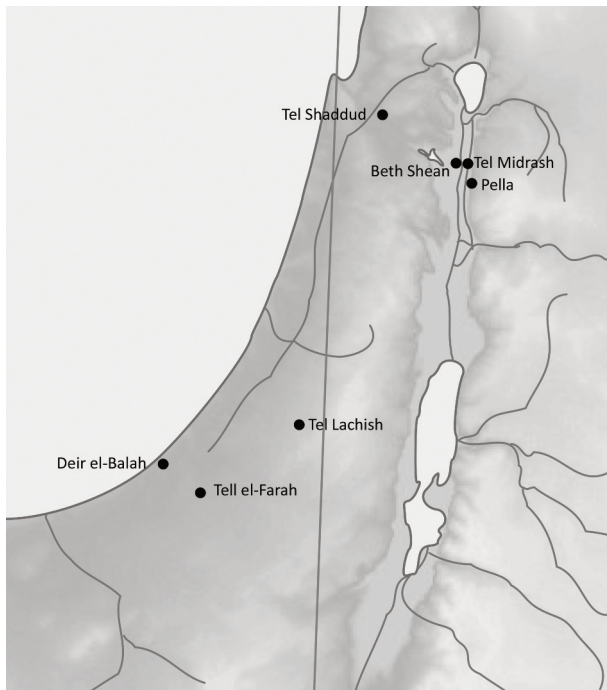


FIGURE 5: Map of burials in anthropoid coffins: naturalistic/grotesque styles.

the clay indicates that it had been produced in the Beth Shean area, which implies that it was transported to Tel Shaddud, 43 km away.⁹⁰ Human remains were found inside the well-preserved coffin, which belonged to someone aged ca. 50–60 years old at death.⁹¹ A sample of the petrous bone was submitted for DNA analysis, and the results suggested a local Canaanite individual with no evidence of any sub-Saharan African genetic component.⁹²

These results match earlier interpretations of the coffin found at Tel Lachish that bore pseudo-hieroglyphic inscriptions, which had most likely been produced by a Canaanite scribe⁹³ and which has been viewed as evidence for local Canaanites emulating Egyptian burial practice.⁹⁴ This was further corroborated by Mary-Ann Pouls Wegner, who pointed out that the main difference between this interment and normal Egyptian burial practice is the lack of mummification. Embalmers regularly accompanied Egyptian expeditions, so it is not unlikely that they could also have been part of the garrison staff in the southern Levant. Mummification would have allowed the bodies of Egyptians to

be returned to their homeland.⁹⁵ While this interpretation remains speculative, on current evidence anthropoid coffins seem to point towards Canaanites emulating Egyptian burial practice.

HIERATIC INSCRIPTIONS

Hieratic inscriptions have been found at nine sites in the southern Levant (Table 5; Fig. 6). The largest assemblages were uncovered at Lachish, with eleven inscriptions,⁹⁶ followed by Tel Sera' with seven,⁹⁷ Beth Shean with three,⁹⁸ Tell el-Far'a South,⁹⁹ Tell es-Safi,¹⁰⁰ and Qubur el-Walaydah each with two,¹⁰¹ and Tel Haror,¹⁰² Deir el-Balah,¹⁰³ and Ashkelon with one.¹⁰⁴

Almost all these hieratic inscriptions were written in dark ink on ceramics, mostly bowls, and in cases where the vessel could be reconstructed they were categorized as Egyptian shaped.¹⁰⁵ Three of the hieratic inscriptions were ostraca: from Tel Sera',¹⁰⁶ Qubur el-Walaydah,¹⁰⁷ and Ashkelon.¹⁰⁸ One example from Tell es-Safi was incised into the clay before the vessel was fired.¹⁰⁹ A survey of those inscriptions that were found in datable contexts indicates that the vast majority date to the 13th and 12th centuries. One inscription from Beth Shean (Stratum R-1a) has been dated to the 14th century,¹¹⁰ as was one from Tel Lachish, Area S (Level S-3).¹¹¹ However, the renewed excavations at Area S and the extensive radiocarbon dating project suggest a date in the second half of the 15th century BCE.¹¹² The precise archaeological context for the finds from Tel Sera',¹¹³ Tel Haror,¹¹⁴ and Tell el-Far'a South¹¹⁵ have not yet been reported. Seven of the inscriptions from Tel Lachish were uncovered in the construction fills of Stratum IV, the Iron Age palace-fortress.¹¹⁶ It is likely that the sediment used for these fills contained material from a Late Bronze Age administrative center in the vicinity.

The vast majority of the hieratic inscriptions relate to administrative activities such as the collection of harvest taxes (e.g., Lachish,¹¹⁷ Tell el-Far'a South,¹¹⁸ Deir el-Balah,¹¹⁹ and Tell Sera').¹²⁰ In some cases the preserved fragment does not state this explicitly, but the inscriptions seem to fall into a pattern (e.g., Lachish,¹²¹ Tell es-Safi,¹²² Tel Haror).¹²³ One example of a letter was uncovered at Tel Sera'.¹²⁴ Additionally, examples of ritual or religious texts have been found at Beth Shean¹²⁵ and at Ashkelon.¹²⁶

It is not clear who wrote these administrative notes, letters, and dedication texts. Little scholarly attention has been paid to the possible identity of the

scribes, mainly because identifying handwriting with an individual is virtually impossible, but Orly Goldwasser has discussed one of the scribes, the author of shard No. V from Tel Lachish.¹²⁷ The translation reads “(The) scribe ‘Is. . .,” suggesting an acknowledgment of authorship for the (now lost) inscription. While the reconstruction of the name remains unresolved,¹²⁸ Goldwasser states that the scribe “had a trained hand, and was well acquainted with the rules of the Late Egyptian language.” She therefore suggested that this scribe must have been either Egyptian or Egyptian trained.¹²⁹

The scribes who produced the corpus of hieratic

inscriptions uncovered in the southern Levant may be unknown, but they adhered the Egyptian hieratic tradition. Hieroglyphic writing that deviates from the Egyptian tradition has been noted on other objects,¹³⁰ but it seems probable that those who wrote in hieratic, for largely administrative purposes, were either trained in Egypt or by those intimately familiar with the Egyptian writing system. Whether these were Canaanites trained in Egypt or ethnic Egyptians is impossible to determine, but an influx of individuals with a specific profession seems probable. It has even been hypothesized, by Goldwasser,¹³¹ that these scribes were employed as

TABLE 5, PART 1: Hieratic inscriptions (continued on next page).

SITE	NO. OF INSCRIPTIONS	TYPE	CONTEXT	DATE (CENTURY BCE)
Tel Lachish	3 ^a	Administrative	Construction fill of Stratum IV	?
	1 ^b	Administrative	Area Pal. L.3002. Construction fill of Stratum IV or III	?
	1 ^c	Administrative	Area D, level VI or later, L.7000	12th
	1 ^d	Administrative	Area S, level S-3, L.3974	ca. 1450–1400 ^e
	1 ^f	Administrative	Area Pal. L.5181. Construction fill of IV	?
	1 ^g	Administrative	Area D, L.7065. Construction fills of IV or III	?
	1 ^h	Administrative?	Area D, Level VI, L.7059	12th
	1 ⁱ	Administrative	Area Pal. L.7041, fills of Level IV or in Level IV	?
	1 ^j	Administrative	Tomb str. VIIA?	13th
Tel Sera ^k	7	Administrative	n/a	?
Tel Haror ^l	1	Administrative?	?	?
Deir el-Balah	1 ^m	Administrative	Pit 1068; Sq. H/9, Str. VI–IV?	13th

^a Tufnell 1958, 132–133, pls. 44, 47; Sweeny 2004, Hieratic Inscriptions I–III.
^b Gilula 1976; Sweeny 2004, Hieratic Inscriptions IV.
^c Goldwasser 1991b; Sweeny 2004, Hieratic Inscriptions V.
^d Goldwasser 1991b; Sweeny 2004, Hieratic Inscriptions VI.
^e Date based on radiocarbon data from the renewed Austro-Israeli Excavation project at Area S (Katharina Streit, Lyndelle C. Webster, Vanessa Becker, Ann-Katharin Jeske, Hadas Misgav and Felix Höflmayer, “Between Destruction and Diplomacy in Canaan: The Austro-Israeli Expedition to Tel Lachish,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 81[4]: 259–268).
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^k Please note the discrepancy of the total number compared to the assessment by Wimmer 2008, 69; Goldwasser 1984.
^l Illegible toponym; Goldwasser 1991a.
^m Wimmer 2010.

TABLE 5, PART 2: Hieratic inscriptions (continued from previous page).

SITE	NO. OF INSCRIPTIONS	TYPE	CONTEXT	DATE (CENTURY BCE)
Beth Shean	1 ⁿ	Religious	Foor of Building SN; Area S, in debris L.78714 on floor L.78724; Stratums S-3a	12th
	1 ^o	Religious	VII	13th
	1 ^p	Administrative	Fill on floor; Area R; L.98218; R-1a	14th
Tell el-Far'a South ^q	2	Administrative	n/a (Petrie excavation)	?
Tel Ashkalon ^r	1	Religious	Fills in courtyard; Grid 38, Sq. 74	12th
Qubur el-Walaydah ^s	2	Administrative	Inside building complex 1-5 ("Egyptian Residency")	12th
Tell es-Safi	1 ^t	Administrative	Stratified fill; Field E, Temporary Stratum 9	ca. 1200
	1 ^u	Administrative?	Field F; not stratified	?

ⁿ "Bow of Anat"; Wimmer 2009.
^o Execration ritual?; Wimmer 1993.
^p "Tick" mark; Wimmer 2007.
^q Possibly part of the same bowl; Goldwasser and Wimmer 1999.
^r "There is/was no seer/prophet"; Wimmer 2008.
^s Wimmer and Lehmann 2014.
^t Incised; Maeir, Martin, and Wimmer 2004; Wimmer 2012.
^u "Prince of Safi"; Wimmer and Maeir 2007; Wimmer 2012.

specialists experienced in administration and record keeping by the Philistine and Israelite rulers after Egyptian domination ended.

POTTERY

The Egyptian-type pottery of the southern Levant in the Late Bronze Age has been analyzed by Mario Martin in a comprehensive study.¹³² He argues that while Egyptian-type prestige goods such as scarabs, stone vessels, and jewelry could be dispersed as part of elite emulation, low social prestige (i.e., domestic) goods such as mass-produced ceramics cannot be explained in the same way. He therefore states that "as an item of low prestige, Egyptian-style pottery is a highly important ethnic marker, specifically at sites where it appears mass-produced and in a considerable range of forms."¹³³ He therefore postulates that this pottery was produced by Egyptians or potters trained by Egyptians.

Distinctly Egyptian shapes include variations of straight-walled, or sometimes slightly rounded, rather shallow bowls on flat bases (BL 1-5),¹³⁴ carinated bowls (BL 6), spinning bowls (BL 7), which are clearly connected to Egyptian-style textile

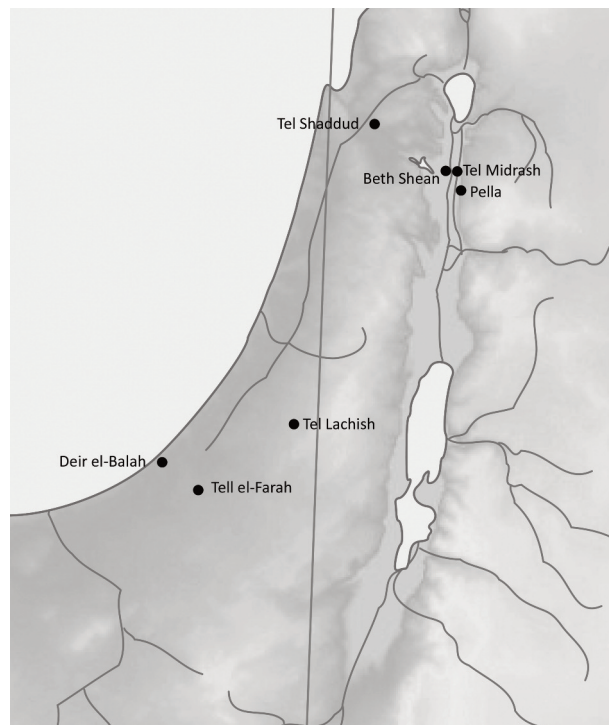


FIGURE 6: Map of hieratic inscriptions: administrative/ritual.

production, strainer bowls (BL 8), “flowerpots” (FL) whose function is still unclear, beer jars (BB), ovoid, funnel-necked, globular, and carinated jars (JR 1–7), bottles (JR 8), small conical jars (JR 9), the so-called Zir (JR 10), amphorae (AM 1–4), handled cups (CU), pilgrim flasks (PF), tazzas (TZ), double vessels (DV), “fire dogs” (FD), conical lids with knobbed handles (LD), small cones, and lids with open tops. All of these shapes are widespread in Egypt and were also produced in, and imported into, the southern Levant.

Statistical values for Egyptian-style ceramics in relation to local Canaanite shapes are available from five sites (Table 6; Fig. 7). At sites with diachronic information, such as Tel Sera’,¹³⁵ Tel Mor,¹³⁶ and Beth Shean,¹³⁷ significant frequencies of Egyptian-style ceramics appear at the earliest in the LB IIA (15th century BCE) and at all statistically analyzed sites reach their peak in the early 12th century. Based on a ceramic analysis, Martin has discussed the possible presence of Egyptians at sites such as Beth Shean, Jaffa, Gaza, and Deir el-Balah, and probably at Aphek, Tel Mor, Ashkelon (late LB IIB), Tel Sera’, Tell el-Far’a South, and Tell es-Sa’idiyeh.¹³⁸ Comparing the frequency of typological shapes with Egyptian origins at these sites with the ceramic assemblages found at others, such as Dan, Hazor, Megiddo and Ashdod, he concluded that foreign influences need not be ascribed to the physical presence of Egyptians. Rather, these assemblages could be the

result of elite emulation, stylistic influence, or the *cultural koine* shaped by the Egyptian influence.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The foregoing survey has examined evidence for the possible presence of Egyptians in the southern Levant. It has focused on evidence for “embodied cultural automatism” rather than “conscious cultural choice,” because the former can be considered a strong indicator for the presence of individual Egyptians or individuals acculturated in Egypt leaving unwitting traces of their cultural imprints. Figure 8 summarizes the chronological range and schematic intensity of material culture groups have arguably been shaped by “embodied cultural automatisms.”

So-called governor houses and related structures began to appear at a range of sites in the 13th and 12th centuries BCE. Their mud-brick foundations and ground plans are unequivocally connected to Egyptian traditions. It cannot be stated with confidence that these Egyptian traditions reflect the identity of those who were resident in the buildings, but it is evident that Egyptian or Egyptian-trained personnel were involved in their construction. This also applies to fortresses and gates erected in an Egyptian style (both building materials and layout). The exception to the 13th and 12th century construction is the Jaffa gate complex, which was installed in the 14th century. This might suggest that Egyptians sought to establish their presence at a

TABLE 6: Frequency of Egyptian-style pottery.

SITE	LB I (15TH CENTURY BCE)	LB IIA (14TH CENTURY BCE)	LB IIB (13TH TO EARLY 12TH CENTURY BCE)	TBI (EARLY 12TH TO RAMESSES VI)
Tel Sera’ ^a		Stratum XI: 13%	Stratum X: 30%	Stratum IX: 38%
Tel Ashkelon ^b			Phase 21: 30%	
Tel Mor ^c		IX: 3%	VIII–VII: 7%	VI–V: 13%
Tel Aphek ^d			X12: 34%, 1% imported	
Beth Shean ^e	R-1: 1–4%	Q-3: 8%	Q-2: 64% S-4: 55% S-5: 46%	S-3: 58%
^a Martin 2004, fig. 6. ^b Martin 2011, fig. 107. ^c Martin 2004, fig. 6. ^d Martin 2011, fig. 101. ^e Martin 2011, fig. 85.				

coastal site before they aspired to control and administer the hinterland. Temple structures with a ground plan inspired by Egyptian traditions are rare, and neither the building method nor the cult performed inside them were Egyptian, but instead were of local, Canaanite nature. Their sporadic appearance from the 15th century onwards should therefore be interpreted as a general international style, rather than as evidence of Egyptian personnel performing Egyptian ritual activities. A frequently overlooked, but very informative, find category are architectural features that are not considered culturally representative, such as silos. The construction of silos of an Egyptian tradition at Beth Shean and Lachish should be considered strong evidence for the presence of at least some Egyptian individuals at these sites during the 13th and 12th centuries.

Burial practice should be also taken into account. With the exception of Deir el-Balah, where the earliest anthropomorphic coffin burials seem to appear in the 14th century, the vast majority of anthropoid coffins date to the 13th and 12th centuries BCE. No chronological phasing of the two styles (“naturalistic” and “grotesque”) can be observed, and the only example of successful aDNA analysis, at Tel Shadud, supports the notion of local, Canaanite people being interred in these sarcophagi.

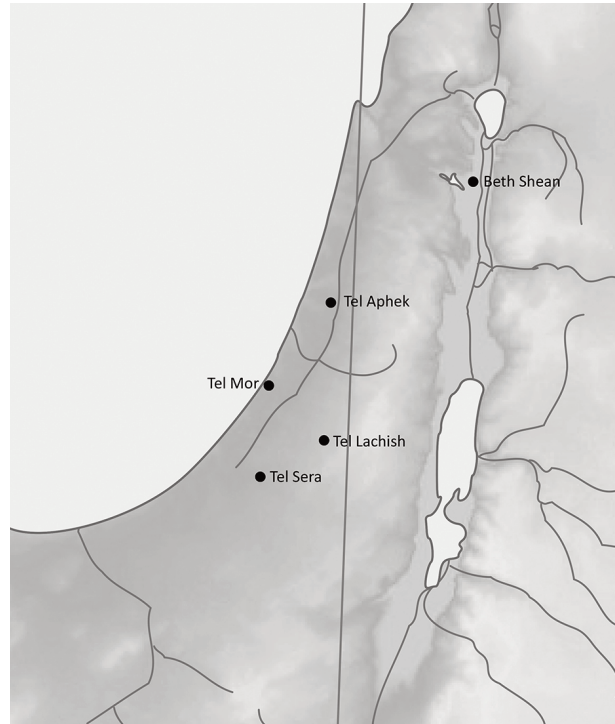


FIGURE 7: Map of Egyptianizing ware quantities.

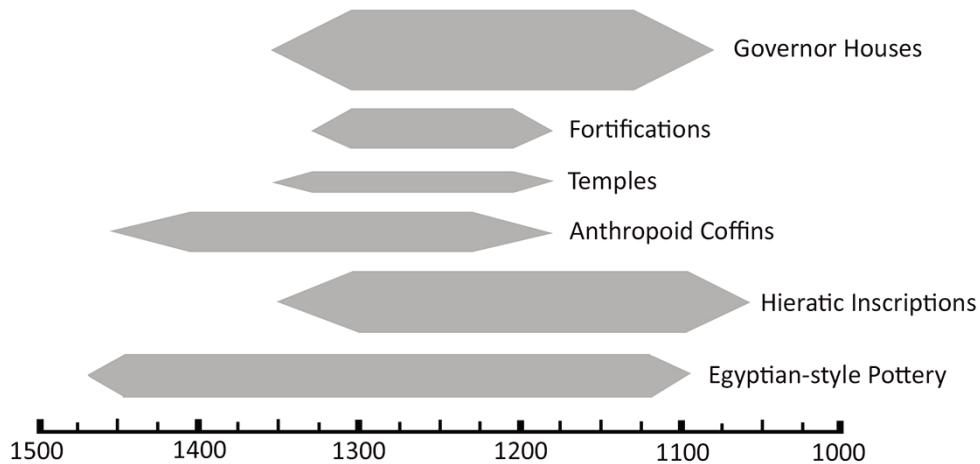


FIGURE 8: Appearance of Egyptianizing and Egyptian material culture .

Evidence derived from hieratic inscriptions stands in stark contrast. Nine sites have yielded hieratic inscriptions that date (based on new radiocarbon data) from the 15th to the 12th centuries BCE. The vast majority of these inscriptions appear to be connected to administrative activities, such as tax collection. The handwriting appears to indicate well-trained scribes, suggesting an Egyptian or Egyptian-trained background. This in turn would support the notion of Egyptian specialists being present in the southern Levant from the 15th century onward. This is further supported by ceramic evidence, which shows a substantial peak of Egyptian-style pottery in the 13th and mainly 12th centuries, with its first appearance in the 15th century at key sites such as Beth Shean.

The available archaeological data matches the literary evidence. While limited involvement of Egyptian or Egyptian-trained individuals can be traced back to the 15th century BCE, the heyday of Egyptian involvement in the southern Levant seems to have been in the 13th and 12th centuries. Archaeological data for the earlier phase is concentrated in known Egyptian “strongholds” such as Jaffa and Beth Shean, but is more dispersed in the later part of the Late Bronze Age. While the Egyptian-style material culture in the Late Bronze Age I is best explained as deriving from the presence of relatively few Egyptian individuals and the emulation of non-local practices by Canaanites, the later part of the Late Bronze Age shows sufficient evidence to envisage more substantial numbers of Egyptians. Precise numbers remain elusive, and will probably remain so, as the available material culture evidence could be ascribed merely to a few dozen individuals: none of the evidence examined here would require more than a few hundred non-Levantine individuals at most. It should be therefore concluded that while no evidence of a large-scale migrations can be found at any stage during the Late Bronze Age, the influx of small numbers of individuals from or acculturated in Egypt cannot be denied.

NOTES

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