



REVIEW

HANDEL IN KRISENZEITEN. ÄGYPTISCH-MYKENISCHE HANDELSBEZIEHUNGEN IN DER RAMESSIDENZEIT

by Birgit Schiller

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This book by Birgit Schiller is a new and very welcome study of Mycenaean and Mycenaeanized imported pottery and their imitations in Egypt and Nubia during the Ramesside period of the New Kingdom. As stated in the preface, the book is the result of a masters thesis defended at Humboldt University in Berlin in 2012.

In the introductory chapter (pp. 1–5) Schiller asks if imitations of Mycenaean and Mycenaeanized pottery appeared at the same time as the originals were imported or only after their importation ceased. Her study encompasses not only Mycenaean pottery from mainland Greece but also the so-called Simple Style pottery, produced on Cyprus and in Palestine, and Philistine pottery, found both in Egypt and in Nubia. She is interested in the functioning of exchange in the so-called crisis period of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE, usually related to the activities of the “Sea Peoples,” various small pirate-like groups of the eastern Mediterranean.¹ Schiller first presents a research history of Mycenaean Greece, relations with Egypt, and Mycenaean pottery in Egypt and its chronology. She summarizes previous opinions on the location



of Keftiu and concludes that the identification of Keftiu with Crete is nowadays generally accepted, though it should be noted that there are still authors who disagree.² Schiller does not venture into discussion of possible Mycenaean toponyms in Egyptian texts or references to Egypt and Egyptians in Linear B texts.³ She stresses that the main problem with the pottery she studied is that it often comes from insecure contexts or contexts that cannot be narrowly dated, as Egyptian tombs of this period were often reused.

Sometimes pottery fragments are found in settlement contexts without clear stratigraphic relations to structures. This is because most of the finds come from old excavations when recording methods did not meet modern documentation standards. Schiller summarizes the arguments of other authors on the duration of the Late Helladic IIIA2 and Late Helladic IIIB periods. She claims that there is no Late Helladic IIIA1 material in Egypt but does not attempt to explain why.

The second chapter (pp. 6–11) is a very short overview of the evidence for exchange during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE. Schiller

insists on marking a difference between an object as exchange or trade good and an object as a gift (p. 6). It is difficult to argue if imports came directly from their places of production or indirectly. Schiller discusses evidence for indirect trade via Cyprus, Crete, and Syria-Palestine. She claims that there is no evidence for direct trade between Egypt and Cyprus after the 18th Dynasty. However, we know from the later *Story of Wenamun* (Papyrus Moscow 120, recto, lines 2,75 and 2,79), from the eleventh century BCE, that the wind took him to Cyprus.⁴ Although of course this literary story has to be approached cautiously, and Wenamun found himself accidentally rather than purposefully on Cyprus, it nevertheless reflects the possibility of direct contact. Further, she argues that the attestations of the toponym *Keftiu* after Thutmose III can be explained as tradition and not as evidence for actual contacts (p. 6). This is problematic for few reasons. Several authors have argued that the statue bases from Kom el-Hetan dated to the reign of Amenhotep III contain an itinerary.⁵ Whether this is true or not, the many identified Aegean toponyms from Kom el-Hetan indicate a good knowledge of Aegean places, both on Crete and on mainland Greece, and therefore perhaps direct contact. Schiller argues that the supposed lack of direct contact is also indicated by the “verschmelzen” (merging) of Cretans and Syrians in Egyptian iconography in the time after Thutmose III. This iconographic hybridism is actually attested even earlier and we find it in the tomb of Puimre (TT 39) from the reign of Hatshepsut and in the tomb of Menkheperreseneb (TT 86) from the reign of Thutmose III. Furthermore, hybridism is observed also for objects brought by Aegeans and Syrians, and, being that both regions are in the north, they were considered to be culturally close in the Egyptian cultural geography of the New Kingdom.⁶ Schiller also argues that at this time Crete was dominated by Mycenaeans and asks if they used the old trading structures or not. Where Syria-Palestine is concerned, Schiller places emphasis on the role of Ugarit in the trade network.

The chapter also discusses different models of exchange (pp. 6–7), for example, the reciprocal exchange of gifts, which excludes the existence of a free market and considers all exchange to be controlled by the palaces. She does not quote the seminal work of Marcel Mauss on gift exchange.⁷ Also, the seminal work on exchange models written by Collin Renfrew is not referred to.⁸ These studies

could have been useful in developing more nuanced methods for the analysis of distribution of imports. The discussion continues with textual evidence for different types of ships and ship owners in Egypt. She mentions Byblos- and *Keftiu*-ships and that they were built in Perunefer, as attested in Papyrus British Museum 10056 (p. 8). The problem of the localization of Perunefer is briefly mentioned in footnote 33 of the book. To this discussion may be added the most recent results from excavations in area R/IV, the main harbor area of Tell el-Dabʿa, ancient Avaris, which point towards a hiatus during the 18th Dynasty in the main harbor area of the site,⁹ evidence that argues against the identification of Perunefer with Tell el-Dabʿa, which is still argued for by some Egyptologists.¹⁰ Schiller further mentions *Menesh*-, *Qerer*- and *Mek*-ships. Schiller also considers Egyptian evidence for private ownership of the ships and gives good claims that this cannot be supported, at least not based on Papyrus Cairo 58056 (Ramesses II) and Papyrus Anastasi IV, 3. 10.

The third chapter (pp. 12–31) lists sites with finds of Mycenaean and Myceneanized pottery in Egypt (a total of 36 sites). It starts by defining “Simple Style,” Philistine, and Late Hellenic III C1b pottery and then continues with the list of sites in Egypt and closer discussion of contexts. Some sites are missing from the list, as, for example, Tell el-Retaba in the eastern Delta. There, not only Mycenaean pottery of Late Hellenic IIIB, dated to the reign of Ramesses II, was found (three handle fragments, two knobs and three body fragments of stirrup jars)¹¹ but also a Mycenaean figurine. The figurine was found in mud brick debris 1536 originating from the destruction of features belonging to a structure of phase E4 in area 9 of the site and dating to the 19th Dynasty.¹² Her entry on Sedment can now be updated with the Mycenaean pottery and imitations from the site recently published by Henning Franzmeier.¹³ Schiller lists 7 entries in her catalogue (p. 134), whereas Franzmeier lists 13 fragments of Mycenaean pottery (all LH III) and one secure and two insecure cases of imitations.¹⁴ Schiller’s entry on Gurob and the accompanying finds listed in the catalogue do not mention an almost complete stirrup jar in the collection of the Prehistoric Seminar in Marburg (Vorgeschichtliches Seminar Marburg), which was donated by Kurt Bittel in 1933. Tobias Mühlenbruch, who published this vessel, argues that it dates to LH IIIB 2.¹⁵

The fourth chapter (pp. 32–42) lists sites with finds

of Mycenaean and Myceneanized pottery in Nubia (12 sites). In the case of Sai, Schiller refers to fragments of a Mycenaean stirrup jar N/C 616 (pp. 37). However, this fragment is from a non-stratified context.¹⁶

The fifth chapter (pp. 43–47) summarizes the evidence for Mycenaean pottery in Egypt and Nubia. Schiller argues that during the 18th Dynasty most of the material comes from Tell el-Amarna. This is to be expected if one bears in mind that the contacts were of diplomatic nature and that the center of Akhenaten's state was in the new capital. She concludes that during the 20th Dynasty exchange with mainland Greece did not occur but re-oriented itself to Cyprus and Syria-Palestine (pp. 46–47), but she does not state why. One possible explanation is the slow demise of Mycenaean palaces.

The sixth chapter (pp. 48–62) deals with imitations of Mycenaean pottery in Egypt and Nubia. These come in different materials, such as faïence, clay, and stone. Particularly problematic is the identification of modern imitations (p. 48). Schiller provides a very useful table of decoration patterns found on imitation vessels (pp. 54–55) and some of these, such as papyrus and lotus, could be Egyptian elements, although such motifs are known from the Aegean, too. These imitations have already been extensively discussed by Natasha D. Ayers.¹⁷

The seventh chapter (pp. 63–66) deals with the so-called “crisis period” which according to Schiller started in the Late Hellenic IIIB period and ended with the destruction of palaces around 1200 BC (pp. 63–66). Schiller summarizes the evidence and arguments for the causes of this crisis, seen in natural catastrophes such as earthquakes or epidemics, drought, lack of grain, or inner political reasons such as instability and immigration, or military reasons such as invasion. Some of these arguments, such as military invasion based on the distribution of bow-fibulae, Naue II swords, and so-called Barbarian ware, are based on very problematic methodology (the pots=people premise). No doubt many factors together contributed to the “crisis period”.

The eighth chapter (pp. 67–73) deals with trade in olive oil in New Kingdom Egypt. The chapter opens with discussion on olive oil in Mycenaean Greece, focusing on possible words from Linear B texts and the attested finds of oil remains in stirrup jars. Schiller points out that until now there have been no chemical analyses of the oil remains from stirrup jars from mainland Greece and argues that the idea that

stirrup jars in the Aegean and Egypt contained olive oil rests on a chain of inferences (pp. 67). She continues with research on the capacity of stirrup jars. Further, she discusses Egyptian lexicographic and other evidence for olive oil in Egypt. In discussing the date of appearance of olive oil in Egypt, Schiller must rely primarily on Egyptian textual attestations. The Egyptian word for olive oil, *nhh*, is not attested before Amenhotep III (p. 72), however, there is evidence for olives in Egypt already during the Old Kingdom.¹⁸

In the ninth chapter (pp. 74–75) Schiller summarizes evidence for exchange during the 12th century BCE. Supposedly the exchange between Egypt and Crete went through Marsa Matruh as a station (p. 74). It still remains unclear if the site was controlled by Egyptian state at all, and the excavated area is rather small. Schiller mentions the toponym Menenus, which is according to some authors (Wolfgang Helck, Jean Vercoutter, Peter Haider) to be identified with Minos and therefore Crete. The authors who are against locating Menenus on Crete plead instead for Cilicia, which is indeed more in accordance with Egyptian sources.

In the tenth and concluding chapter (pp. 76–77) Schiller points that the pottery imported to Tell el-Amarna comes from Argolis, or Mycenae itself, and that the picture changes in the Ramesside period. The first occurrence of imitations also dates to the Amarna period or shortly thereafter. During the 19th and 20th Dynasty imports come also from Cyprus and Syria-Palestine. Sometime during the 20th Dynasty the production of imitation vessels stopped, possibly at the same time when imports from Greece and Cyprus ceased. Schiller asks why Cyprus and Syria-Palestine started the local production, and if this could be the result of the incapability of Argolis to satisfy growing Egyptian needs. She even considers that this could have affected the olive oil market and that it is plausible, but not possible to prove, that Cyprus and Syria-Palestine produced aromatic oils that were more attractive to Egyptians (p. 76). She does not refer to Papyrus Anastasi IV (Papyrus British Museum EA 10249), recto, 13.8–17.9, which mentions *Djefet-* and *Yneb-*oil from Cyprus, the best *Qedjur-*oil from Hatti, *Nekefeter-*oil from Babylon, *Qeneni-*oil from Amurru, *get-*oil from Tachsi, and *moringa-*oil from Mittani. The many oils from the harbors are referred to in order to satisfy the needs of king's army and his chariot troops.¹⁹ She argues for a state-controlled traffic of goods and

points to the fact that Mycenaean and Mycenaeanized imports are found on military sites, temple-towns in Nubia, and tombs of high officials (p. 77). The overall impression is that the conclusion is the summary of results, but it remains unclear why the picture changed in the Ramesside period.

The bibliography (pp. 78–97) is rich, but some important references are missing. The study of Natasha D. Ayers on Egyptian imitations of Mycenaean pottery is not quoted, although it represents the first attempt at a synthetic study of the phenomenon. The article of Manfred Bietak on Marsa Matruh is important for the interpretation of the nature of the site.²⁰ The seminal work of Bleiberg on *jn.w* as “gift” in ancient Egypt is also missing and is crucial for the question of the economic model of pharaonic Egypt, namely for the substantivist vs. modernist debate.²¹ The paper of Cline and Stannish on the Kom el-Hetan Aegean list is also missing.²² Schiller also does not mention the famous Amarna papyrus with depictions of soldiers wearing Mycenaean boar-tusk helmets.²³

Schiller provides several useful registers such as the register of vessel types (pp. 98–99), the register of museums with Mycenaean pottery from Egypt and Nubia (pp. 100–101), the register of imitations from Egypt and Nubia (p. 102), and the list of illustrations (p. 103). In an appendix she provides the documentation of Mycenaean pottery from Sesebi (pp. 104–106). The catalogue (pp. 107–179) provides the reader with information about every sherd, organized according to the sites at which they were found. The book has several maps. Readers should be careful not to confuse the indication of origin of imports with the ways by which they came to Egypt (pp. 180–181). There are 75 photos, both in black and white and in color. Some of them are clearly old archive photos and some were taken by the author during her visit to museum collections or were provided to her by the museum collections. Many of these are missing a scale. Some of them are rather blurred (Abb. 14). The book ends with a summary in English (pp. 206–208).

Schiller’s study is a most valuable contribution to the area of Aegean-Egyptian interconnections, a step closer in understanding the complex exchange network of the Late Bronze Age. The book will be definitely useful to both scholars and students and is the most comprehensive one on the topic yet. The lack of reference to some texts or finds from Egypt does not significantly change the main arguments of

the author. Studying interconnections is particularly challenging endeavor because it requires knowledge of several cultural spheres. Schiller is to be congratulated on mastering both the perspectives of an Aegeanist and an Egyptologist. In conclusion this book is highly recommended.

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NOTES

- ¹ For the most recent related publications see Fischer and Bürge 2017.
- ² Vandersleyen 2003.
- ³ Bennet 2011.
- ⁴ Gardiner 1932, 74–75.
- ⁵ Cline and Stannish 2011.
- ⁶ Matić 2012, 2014.
- ⁷ Mauss 1923–1924.
- ⁸ Renfrew 1975.
- ⁹ Forstner-Mueller et al. 2015.
- ¹⁰ The latest discussion about the identification of Perunefer is found in Gundacker 2017. Epigraphic arguments for identification of Tell el-Dabʿa with Perunefer are still lacking.
- ¹¹ Rzepka 2015, 141 fig. 71, 143 fig. 74, 144.
- ¹² Rzepka et al. 2015, 97–166; the excavators argue that this is according to their knowledge the first find of a Mycenaean figurine in Egypt. They also argue that this figurine raises the question of presence of "representatives of the Mycenaean culture" at the site. According to information kindly provided to me by Henning Franzmeier, no Mycenaean figurines are known so far from Qantir (personal communication, 18 October 2018).
- ¹³ Franzmeier 2017, 129–132.
- ¹⁴ Franzmeier 2017, 130–131.
- ¹⁵ Mühlenbruch 2010.
- ¹⁶ Budka 2017, 126.
- ¹⁷ Ayers 2015.

¹⁸ Alba Gómez 2010.

¹⁹ Gardiner 1937, 49–54.

²⁰ Bietak 2015.

²¹ Bleiberg 1996.

²² Cline and Stannish 2011.

²³ Schofield and Parkinson 1994.