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REFERENCES

Alexander AHRENS, *Aegyptiaca in der nördlichen Levante. Eine Studie zur Kontextualisierung und Rezeption ägyptischer und ägyptisierender Objekte in der Bronzezeit* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis Series Archaeologica 41), Leuven-Paris-Bristol, Peeters, 2020, 24 × 32, XX + 451 p., ISBN : 978-9-0429-4369-8.

- 1 Objects which are associated with Egypt (Aegyptiaca) have been, and continue to be, frequently found in Levantine contexts. While often discussed in science, be it for their chronological implications or their historical-political significance, they had to date never been assembled in one comprehensive study. This study achieves exactly that, with the geographic qualifier of dealing only with the northern Levant, which is defined as north of what is in modern terms the southern Lebanese border. The closest parallels for such a study are the two volumes of *Aegyptiaca on the Island of Crete in Their Chronological Context: A Critical Review* by Jacqueline Phillips, published as *Contributions to the Chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean* 18 in 2008. While that work was, in a sense, an update of Pendlebury's study *Aegyptiaca: A Catalogue of Egyptian Objects in the Aegean Area* from 1930, Ahrens' book is a first. The study is primarily a collection of older known material and some recent discoveries. Into the latter category fall predominantly the recent finds from Qatna, some of which have been and continue to be studied and

published by the author. The former group assembles well-known material and less well-known material, often previously having appeared in, from an Egyptological perspective, somewhat inaccessible publications. Such comprehensive “catalogue-studies” are bound to be hefty in size, in this case 451 pages, including 52 plates at the end. The book, based on the author’s PhD at the Univ. of Bern (Switzerland) completed in 2013, includes references which were published up to 2016. Publications from the years 2016-2020 and not included are cited in footnote 1. The author is a specialist on the cultural interactions and material culture of the Egyptian-Levantine regions, with a particular expertise on Egyptian stone vessels. He has published extensively on these topics, as is in evidence in the bibliography, which includes a long list of publications by the author.

- 2 The chapters are organized in the following way. Chapter I is the introduction, chapter II defines the geographic and temporal frame of the study, chapter III presents the history of research, and in chapter IV the Egypto-Levantine relations are discussed from a historical perspective. In chapter V theoretical thoughts on “material culture” are outlined. The bulk of the book is formed by chapter VI (p. 68-276), the catalogue, presenting *Aegyptiaca* from the northern Levant by sites, subdivided into nine geographic regions (A-I), and an additional section on the Uluburun and Cape Gelidonya shipwrecks (J). The regions are presented in a geographical order which starts in the southeast, moves north and then shifts back to the southwest and moves back north again, along the coast: A. the Damascene basin; B. the Beqa‘a plain; C. the Orontes valley and the Ghab-plain; D. the northern plateau, east and north of the Orontes and west of the Euphrates; E. the Amuq plain; F. the southern coastal area, i.e. the Lebanese coast south of the Akkar plain; G. the central coastal area, that is, the Akkar (Eleutheros) plain, from northern Lebanon to the southern Syrian coastal site of Arwad/Amrit; H. the northern coastal area, that is, the Syrian plains of Geble and Latakiah; and I. Cilicia in south-eastern Turkey. Chapter VII provides a summary and historical synthesis, discussing, in two sub-chapters the reception of *Aegyptiaca* in the Levant. Five lists are added as appendices: the first enumerates Egyptian imports with hieroglyphic inscriptions mentioning kings and queens, from the early Dynastic Period to the New Kingdom; the second list shows the three Middle Kingdom princesses named on Egyptian statues found in the Levant; the third list records officials and private persons named on objects dating from the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom; the fourth list consists of inscribed objects of unclear origin, contexts and dates, or outside of the northern Levant, such as Babylon, Cyprus and Hattusha; and the fifth list details the hieroglyphic inscriptions on Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom objects. This is followed by eight distribution maps with pie charts, visualizing the lists cited above. The book provides a summary in English and French, and a very extensive bibliography of 68 pages. Three separate indexes are provided: one for keywords, one for names of people and one for geographic terms. The volume concludes with 52 plates at the end, combining black and white, color photographs, and line drawings.
- 3 The introduction (chapter I) outlines the criteria for inclusion of material. While comprehensiveness was a goal, it was, due to the vast amounts of material, not feasible to include everything (p. 2). The stated reasons for exclusion are primarily contextual, that is, objects with unclear or unknown contexts are only included in exceptional cases. However, at some sites, such as Byblos, from the same contexts, such as the ‘royal tombs’, some material is presented and some is excluded, and it is not entirely

clear why something is discussed or is not. What emerges is a focus on stone material, i. e. statues and vessels, and on inscribed objects. Other object categories, such as jewelry, mirrors and different metal objects, faience figurines and scarabs, are generally less well or not represented. Indisputably, the volume of material is prohibitive, and lines must be drawn, but some stated criteria for inclusion/exclusion would have been helpful.

- 4 The geographic and chronological scope is defined in chapter II. The restriction to the northern Levant is mainly due to the volume of data. An additional germane argument to distinguish the northern Levant historically from the southern Levant is also put forward, namely that the northern part was never under exhaustive and continuous direct Egyptian occupation during the Middle and Late Bronze ages. Therefore, it is argued, the Egyptian objects in this region are particularly well-suited for scrutinizing their relevance for the local elites, which is the stated goal of this study. The Bronze Age in the title is further clarified: the book covers the Middle and Late Bronze ages, i. e. mainly the 2nd millennium BCE, with exceptional inclusions of some late Early Bronze Age material, namely from the sites of Byblos and Ebla.
- 5 Chapter III deals with the history of research of the Levant. What is described under section 3.3. as a ‘new beginning’, i.e. the period after the establishment of independent statehoods after the 2nd World War, seems, scientifically, more like a continuity. Notable is the lack of local archaeologists conducting fieldwork. One wonders whether local researchers might have looked at some of the issues at hand differently, for example, whether different narratives might have been developed, which consider the regions less as determined primarily by external imperial powers but more as small creative centers. Particularly relevant is section 3.4, entitled ‘Aegyptiaca in the Levant: a blessing or a curse?’ (my translation). The importance bestowed upon Egyptian finds in Levantine contexts was often linked to the hope for a ‘good’ date, provided by the more stable Egyptian absolute chronology. This ‘blessing’ led to ignoring contextual issues and problems. Remarkable is the tenacity of the idea that Aegyptiaca were sent from Egypt to represent Egyptian authority, be it reflecting Egyptian political presence in the Levant or an Egyptian attempt at bolstering Egyptian prestige in the region. Helck’s seminal studies from the 1970s, in particular his article ‘Ägyptische Statuen im Ausland—ein chronologisches Problem’ (in *Ugarit Forschungen* 8, p. 101-116), argued that the production of the objects in Egypt and their movement to the Levant are to be temporally separated. His suggested Hyksos-era ‘art-trade’ in Middle Kingdom artifacts was inspired by the older discussions of this phenomenon for the realm of Kerma, in the Sudan. Ahrens’ perspective gives the Levantine elite agency in the process of acquiring this material, more in line with the Kerma cases, where we have evidence for raids in which the Nubians came to Egypt and most likely chose what to take with them.
- 6 Chapter IV discusses the relationship of Egypt and the Levant from a historical perspective, that is, mostly based on textual sources, which in this period are predominantly Egyptian.
- 7 Chapter V, ‘The World of things’, discusses a series of pertinent theories relating to objects in archaeology and the ‘material turn’. Ahrens sees the use of the Aegyptiaca as means for self-representation of the elite of the Northern Levant. The value and importance of the Aegyptiaca lie, according to him, in their perception as exotic and foreign, which conferred prestige to their owners. The large amount of such objects

and the very long time periods they were in use in the Levant, as well as their frequent local production, does raise the question just how ‘exotic’ these objects were. Were some of them not rather understood as representations of local Levantine elite cultures and are only perceived as Egyptian by us, but not necessarily so in antiquity? Different categories of objects most likely had different trajectories, and these questions remain to be studied in the future. For example, Egyptian stone vessels and scarabs seem to have sparked local productions, and their perceived ‘Egyptianess’ may have declined. Egyptian statues, however, did not trigger a wave of local productions, and these most likely remained ‘unusual’. Ahrens cites J.-M. Durand’s suggestion (‘La façade orientale du Proche-Orient d’après les textes de Mari’, in A. CAUBET [ed.], *L’acrobate au taureau. Les découvertes de Tell el-Dab’a (Égypte) et l’archéologie de la Méditerranée orientale (1800-1400 av.J.-C.)*. Actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre par le Service culturel le 3 décembre 1994, Paris, p. 149-164) that the term *gublayu*, ‘Byblite’ or ‘from Byblos’, of the Mari-letters may also have been used for objects of Egyptian origin. Ahrens points out that the thus-designated gift of a golden bowl from the Byblite ruler Yantin-‘Ammu to Zimri-Lim of Mari may have been Egyptian in origin. One could also, however, see it, more generally, as an argument against the importance of the Egyptianess of objects and as an argument for the perception of such items as Byblite or local.

- 8 The massive catalogue (chapter VI) makes a few striking points upon first glance: the sheer quantity of material and its wide distribution. While, among sites, the ‘big four’—Tell el-Mishrife/Qatna (p. 111-146), Tell Mardikh/Ebla (p. 156-173), Byblos/Gubla (p. 211-232), and Ras Shamra/Ugarit (p. 249-265)—stand out with the lengthiest entries, owning and or producing Egyptian/izing material is clearly not just limited to a few central sites or coastal regions. It is found in the hinterland and in numerous less prominent sites as well. An indication of how much larger the numbers of Egyptian/izing material in the Levant had been is provided by the hundreds of such stone vessels found in Assur, which had been brought there from the Levant in antiquity (H.-U. ONASCH, *Ägyptische und assyrische Alabastergefäße aus Assur*. [Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 128], Wiesbaden 2010). The individual sites are discussed in the following order: the location and natural setting of the site, the research history, the identification of the archaeological site with a historic place name, a historic summary, a discussion of Egyptian and Egyptianizing finds, and separately, a discussion on the date and the circumstances of their move to the site (*Verbringung*). The regional entries close with a summary. In some cases, an additional chapter discusses the archaeological contexts prior to the discussion of the individual objects.
- 9 The detailed discussion of the archaeological contexts of the objects are to be commended, yet they tend to confirm that many questions remain, even in recent and excellently documented excavations, as the case of Qatna illustrates. The long uses and re-uses of tombs make the reconstruction of when specific objects were deposited often impossible. For the high number of Aegyptiaca at inland sites such as Qatna and Ebla, the crucial role of Byblos as a distribution center is emphasized. When discussing where the Egyptian statuary found in the Levant had been originally set up in Egypt, Ahrens often uses the term ‘kultisch-funerärer Kontext’, which then is elaborated as being either a tomb, a shrine, or a temple (e. g. p. 272). This point is, somewhat, a given, as Egyptian statuary was essentially made for tombs or temples. There are, in some instances, however, possibilities to clarify on typological grounds which of the two

categories the statue was initially intended for: The kneeling royal statue from Qatna (C.5; p. 120) must have originally stood in a temple and not a tomb. For the sphinx of Ita (C3-4; p. 119) an original *sepulchral-funerary* context is suggested, but a temple seems also a possibility, where the majority of royal sphinxes have been found.

- 10 At Tell Mardikh/Ebla (p. 156-173), the Egyptian origin of all Middle Bronze Age objects –stone vessels, silver bowl, ceremonial scepters and scarabs and seals is doubted (p. 173). A production in the Levant, in some cases re-using older Egyptian parts, is suggested as more likely. A central role in the trade, consumption and production of Aegyptiaca is assigned to Byblos. The relevant material from this site is varied and vast, and reflects a local Egyptianizing culture, which also used Egyptian hieroglyphs. Some well-known Aegyptiaca from Byblos are not discussed, such as jewelry from the royal tombs: the Hathor pendants (MONTET 1928-1929¹, no. 707), the gold foil falcon collars (MONTET 1928-1929, nos. 619 and 620) and a pendant from tomb II (MONTET 1928-1929, no. 617), and the mirrors (e.g. MONTET 1928-1929, no. 616). The faience figurines from the obelisk temple (Deposit f) are discussed only in passing, but are particularly notable as they constitute the largest assembly of Egyptian Middle Kingdom faience votive temple figurines found anywhere, including Egypt; however, they remain but hardly known in Egyptology (see now G. MINIACI, 'Deposit f (nos. 15121-15567) in the obelisk temple at Byblos: Artefact Mobility in the Middle Bronze Age I-II (1850-1650 BC) between Egypt and the Levant', *Egypt and the Levant* 28, 2018, p. 379-408). Most of the objects from this category can only be paralleled in Egypt with finds from tombs. For data on Egyptian temple votives from the Middle Kingdom see the recent publication of the Satet temple in Elephantine (P. KOPP, *Elephantine IX: Der Tempel der Satet. Die Funde des späten Alten bis Neuen Reichs* [Archäologische Veröffentlichungen, DAI, Abteilung Kairo 41], Wiesbaden, 2020).
- 11 The Egyptian material from Ras Shamra (p. 249-266) can be separated into two groups: those that date to the Middle Kingdom, but were moved to Ras Shamra at a later date, and those from the New Kingdom which were brought to Ugarit and deposited there in the Late Bronze Age, that is, most likely very soon after their production. Textual evidence, referred to on p. 50 (fn. 265), adds further layers to the issue of Aegyptiaca at Ugarit, and possibly the wider Levant in general: a letter (RS 88.2158) sent by the court of the Egyptian king Merenptah to the Ugaritic king Ammurapi responds to the Ugaritic request for Egyptian artists to create a sculpture of the Egyptian king at Ugarit in order for it to be set up in the temple of Baal. While no such statue can be identified, it begs the question: how useful the categories of imports and local productions are? Material culture alone has its limitations, which becomes all the more apparent when we are able to compare it to information gained from other sources. As Ahrens points out (p. 90), the archaeological finds at the sites of Kamid el-Loz and Sumur (Tell Kazel) would not have suggested their historic roles as Egyptian administrative centers, which are well established thanks to textual evidence. The shipwreck of Uluburun, which sank in the late 14th c., contained among its goods scarabs that were 100-200 years old. Some antiquities were clearly traded, yet it is unclear to what extent and to how many categories of objects this applied.
- 12 The final summary and historical synthesis, chapter VII, reiterates crucial points. The majority of finds are from elite, palatial contexts and are to be understood as a program of elite self-presentation via Aegyptiaca. Ahrens suggests this played a particular role in the Late Bronze Age *northern* Levant, as it was a contested area between Egypt and

Near Eastern powers, in which local rulers needed to constantly balance out their power bases. It is indeed an intriguing question whether material associated with different powers was strategically employed in this context. As this book deals only with *Aegyptiaca*, it is for another study to investigate what roles the material culture of other superpowers may have played in these power negotiations. The pivotal role of Byblos for the distribution of Egyptian goods in the Levant is pointed out. Another center of redistribution of Egyptian finds, originating from plundered Egyptian tombs, is assigned to Avaris/Tell el-Dab'a. Middle Kingdom objects, deriving most likely from tombs of the Memphite and other elite necropoleis, and from temples, were funneled to the Levant via Avaris. While Ahrens discusses the group of Egyptian private statues from the northern Levant separately, he doubts whether royal and private statues were differentiated in the Bronze Age Levant. Finally, the question of the precise modalities of the movement of material from Egypt to the Levant is raised again, under the heading of 'Exchange of gifts between rulers or plundering of tombs', for which the short answer is: both.

- 13 What future avenues for clarifying some questions emerge? The author emphasizes the importance of establishing a natural scientific methodology for provenance studies of calcite-alabaster vessels. First studies in this direction have only very recently been undertaken for vessels found in the Levant, under the direction of T. Köster and in collaboration with the author. Using neutron activation analysis and strontium isotope analysis, a preliminary grouping of vessels has been accomplished, but so far no local sources have been identified. This has only recently been accomplished for the southern Levant with the identification and dating of the quarries in the Te'omim and 'Abdu caves of Israel and Palestine: see A. FRUMKIN, M. BAR-MATTHEWS, U. DAVIDOVICH, B. LANGFORD, R. PORAT, M. ULLMAN and B. ZISSU, 'In situ dating of ancient quarries and the source of flowstone ("calcite-alabaster") artifacts in the southern Levant', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 41, 2014, p. 749-758. Strontium isotope analysis had previously already been applied to stone vessels found on Crete, addressing the same question of local or Egyptian provenance: see M. BARBIERI, C. LILYQUIST and G. TESTA, 'Provenancing Egyptian and Minoan calcite-alabaster artifacts through $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ isotopic ratios and petrography', in L. LAZZARINI (ed.), *Interdisciplinary Studies on Ancient Stone. Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference, Venice, June 15-18 2000 (ASMOSIA VI)*, Padova, 2002, p. 403-414; G. TESTA and C. LILYQUIST, 'Strontium isotopes as a promising tool to determine calcite-alabaster provenance', in M. ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI and E. PAPADOPOULOU (ed.), *Proceedings of the 10th International Cretological Congress, Khania, 1-8 October 2006, Vol. A3*, Khania, 2011, p. 323-326. Egyptian and Egyptianizing pottery is increasingly being recognized at Levantine sites. While it forms only a small part of the material presented here, e. g. from the sites of Kamid el-Loz, Qatna, Tell el-Burak, Sidon, Byblos and Tell 'Arqa, it may in the future provide the most valuable chronological links, as it tends not to raise many of the issues associated with stone objects, such as long term uses and re-uses.
- 14 This publication is very welcome and highly useful, for Near Eastern archaeologists, Egyptologists and ancient historians of these regions and should find its way into the libraries of those fields.
- 15 Some minor corrections: on p. 444, fig. H13 and H14 were switched, some titles in bibliography are missing, such as Arnold 2006 and Jaritz 2004.

NOTES

1. P. MONTET, *Byblos et l'Égypte. Quatre campagnes de fouilles 1921-1924 (BAH 11)*, Paris, 1928-1929.

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