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There and Back Again – the Crossroads II

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Cover: Glass flask of Maiherperri from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Photo by Andreas F. Voeglin, Photographer Antikenmuseum Basel, Switzerland; the entire Social Network of the Amarna letters with four clusters (© D. H. Cline – E. H. Cline).

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STONE JARS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN OF THE 1ST MILLENNIUM BCE

Luisa Bonadies

Introduction

According to a common practice in many pre-industrialized societies, the exchange of gifts between Near Eastern, Mediterranean and Egyptian dynasties often had a social meaning (e.g. diplomacy, marriage, kinship ties, etc.) mainly when luxury goods were involved.1

Stone vessels play an important role in this exchange network because of their economic, political and symbolic values (Bevan 2007: 186–194), and that is why they were widely distributed in the ancient world. These artefacts have been crafted for different purposes: everyday use, ritual functions as foundation deposits and temple votives, and especially inclusion as part of tomb equipment containing solid substances or cosmetic and scented oils.2

They have been the subject of various studies,3 mostly lacking adequate identification of raw materials. In fact, solely on the basis of their physical appearance, most vases found outside Egypt have been usually interpreted as Egyptian alabaster, often termed also calcite, travertine or onyx. This generic terminology is used to refer to “a translucent stone, whitish to pale yellow in colour, and often with bands of darker and lighter shades” (Ben-Dor 1945: 95)4.

Actually, distinctive banded or mottled calcite which is very similar in appearance to the Egyptian alabaster occurs at various localities in Palestine, e.g. in the Negev Desert, within the Shagur formation (Lilyquist 1996: 140), and in western Anatolia, where there is evidence of exploitation during the Roman period (Bevan 2007: ch. 6, n. 3).

Archaeologists commonly tend to assign production of stone vessels to the Egyptian world also because of the existence of a long tradition of stone cutting

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1 Gifts exchange between ancient societies has been the subject of numerous studies; we mention here only Zaccagnini 1973 and Garraty – Stark 2010, because in our view they seem to offer a more complete discussion of the problem.
2 Cf. Pliny, Natural History, Book XIII, § 3; “Unguents keep best in boxes of alabaster.” There are many examples of stone vessels used as tomb equipment, but we mention here the most famous, Egyptian canopic jars used as containers for the inner organs of mummies.
3 Given the long list of scientific publications on this topic, it has proved necessary to quote only those that are interesting for our study: von Bissing 1940; Caubet 1991; Lilyquist 1996; Bevan 2007; Sparks 2007.
4 Concerning question of terminology of stone, see Köster 2012: 221–223.
that stretches back to the Predynastic Period (B. Aston 1994). This prolific industry excels especially during the New Kingdom: according to J. Bourriau, “in the 18th–19th Dynasties there is an enormous proliferation of shapes and materials to match the increase in products from outside Egypt now available” (Bourriau 1984: 365). Indeed, from the 11th–10th centuries BCE this industry seems in decline: with the exception of Lahun, burial assemblages from the 21st to the 25th Dynasties show a scarcity of stone vessels in the tomb equipment (D. Aston 2009: 386).

Actually, stone vases cutting was practised in many other areas of the ancient world. As is well known, Cyprus and Anatolia have long traditions of this production that stretches back to the 8th millennium BCE (Bevan 2007: 79–80); in the Aegean area (in the Cyclades and in Crete) manufacture of these artefacts emerges during the Early Bronze Age (Bevan 2007: 80–99).

Moreover, in her study on archaeological material found in Ugarit, A. Caubet has suggested that stone objects for domestic use could be assigned to a local production (Caubet 1991: 219). More recently, Chr. Lilyquist has stated that stone vases discovered in the “Schatzhaus” at Kamid el-Loz (Lebanon) should be considered as locally made, even if there is also evidence of several possible Egyptian imports (Lilyquist 1996: 155).

The Department of Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre Museum5 has a vast collection of stone vessels unfortunately without a clear context of provenance. Given the lack of petrographic analysis, it has not been possible to identify the kind of raw material employed in the manufacture of these artefacts. Therefore, for the moment, the general term soft stone vessels has been used.

The morphological analysis of some items in this collection has provided an opportunity for a general overview on some soft stone jars found at several sites of the Mediterranean of the 1st millennium BCE.

Materials

The unpublished stone collection of the Louvre Museum includes three miniature jars characterised by a conical body tapering towards a pointed base and angular shoulders (CBAS jars).

1. Jar N1080
Jar largely complete, but the upper part is missing.
H 18.0 cm; maximum D 10 cm.

5 I was able to study this collection thanks to the permission of Madame Géneviève Pierrat-Bonnefois, Chief Curator of the Department of Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre Museum in Paris. I would like to extend many thanks to her for the discussion about the stone vessels in the Louvre Museum and especially for the prolific exchange of ideas about Levantine presence in Egypt.
White veined soft stone.
Unknown provenance. It was part of the collection of objects found and traded in the Nile Valley by Bernardino Drovetti, an Italian diplomat, lawyer and antiquarian appointed by Napoleon as French consul to Egypt.
Conical body with straight sides tapering towards a pointed base; missing shoulders.
Perforated handles have a triangular form and an oval section; their point of attachment corresponds to the carination.
Unpublished.
2. Jar E23331
Jar largely complete, but part of the rim is missing.
H 11.0 cm; maximum D 6.8 cm; rim D 2.4 cm.
White veined soft stone.
Unknown provenance (probably Egypt).
Conical body with straight sides tapering towards a pointed base; short slightly rounded shoulders.
Short neck and slightly everted lip with a rounded edge.
Perforated handles have a triangular form and an oval section; their point of attachment corresponds to the carination.

Unpublished.

3. Jar N119
Jar largely complete, but part of the rim is missing.
H 4.8 cm; maximum D 3.2 cm.
White soft stone.
Unknown provenance (probably Egypt).
Conical body with straight sides tapering towards a pointed base; short straight shoulders.
Unpierced handles with an oval section, which extend to flanges below.
Unpublished.

**Parallels and Geographical Distribution**

The Louvre’s vessels display a body profile similar to other stone jars found at different sites of the Near East and the Mediterranean (Oggiano 2010: 183–186), generally dated to 8th–7th centuries BCE.

In the early 20th century, W. Andrae discovered in the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Aššur (Andrae 1938: fig. 73, c) a CBAS jar bearing two inscriptions. The older one, in Egyptian hieroglyphs, is an encircling band with two feather-topped cartouches. According to F. von Bissing (1940: 157), it can be dated to the time of Pharaoh Takelot III (23rd Dynasty, second half of the 8th century BCE) and it must have been engraved at the time of the manufacture of the vessel. The second inscription, in cuneiform characters, is on the flat shoulder and was probably added at a later time, maybe when the amphora arrived in Aššur. This one, indeed, reports that the vessel was taken from the palace of king Abdi-milkuti of Sidon during the looting of royal storerooms in the course of Esharaddon’s campaign of 677 BCE.6

Some years later, M. Mallowan uncovered other stone vessels in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud: one of these (Mallowan 1966: fig. 104) has the same morphology as the Louvre items and, according to the British archaeologist’s analysis, is datable to Esarhaddon’s reign (681–669 BCE).

Three stone jars came from Samaria: two were recovered in a remblai from Period I or II (Crowfoot – Crowfoot – Kenyon 1957: 466), the third one, found on the floor of Ahab’s Palace (Reisner – Fischer – Lyon 1924: 334, fig. 205), bears a hieroglyphic inscription of Pharaoh Osorkon II (23rd Dynasty, second quarter of 8th century BCE).

I. Oggiano has recently published a paper on a stone amphora from the Roger Saidah’s reserve at the Beirut National Museum (Oggiano 2010: 181–205). The jar, whose exact provenance is uncertain, bears an engraved inscription with a Phoenician anthroponym (ŠM’) below the shoulder, which can be dated between the 8th and the 7th centuries BCE.

Moving to Egypt, CBAS are attested especially in the Delta area: beyond one item recovered by W. M. F. Petrie in Lahun (Petrie – Brunton – Murray 1920: pl.

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6 For a recent and exhaustive discussion concerning this vessel, see Wasmuth – Brein 2013: 343–367. I thank Dr. phil. Melanie Wasmuth for drawing my attention to her paper.
LXVII, 40) and one from Mit Rahina (von Bissing 1907: Nr. 18432), we can mention a jar found by P. Montet in the tomb of Takelot II at Tanis (Montet 1947: pl. XLVI), called “the jar of Osorkon I” because of the presence of the cartouche of this Pharaoh (22nd Dynasty, from the last quarter of the 10th until the first quarter of the 9th century BCE).

The Spanish mission (López Grande – Quesada Sanz – Molinero Polo 1995: 239, 250–251, pl. LXXXI, a, b, c) unearthed several stone vessels in Herakleopolis Magna, the capital of the 20th Nome during the Third Intermediate Period; three examples could be assigned to the CBAS class based on the profile of their body and their shoulders.

Turning to the West, except for a vessel from the National Museum of Carthage (Redissi 1997: 118–119, figs. 3–4), whose exact provenance is uncertain, examples of this type of vessel were found only in Spain. One CBAS jar was part of the equipment of the tomb 1A of Lagos (Malaga Museum, A/DJ06751; Aubet-Semmler 1995: 28, figs. 6–7); another one came from Cadiz and was reused as a cinerary urn during the Roman period (García y Bellido – Schubart – Niemeyer 1971: 146).

A further vessel, which was part of the collection of Marqués de Fontalba D. Luis Arcos Carvajal, was found in Puerto de Santa María7 and bears an inscription of a Theban priest Dd-Hr-wjf–nḫt (Perez Die 1983: 237–244).

In the 1950s a stone CBAS jar was discovered in the region of Barbate, between Cape Trafalgar and Cadiz: a hieroglyphic inscription runs around the upper body, but it does not allow any reading (Gómez Moreno 1958: 153, fig. 162; García y Bellido – Schubart – Niemeyer 1971: 146–147, pl. XXXVI, 1).

The most famous corpus of stone vases from the Iberian Peninsula was unearthed in the 1960s in the Cerro de San Cristóbal necropolis, located to the northwest of the town of Almuñécar, where several pit tombs were discovered (Padró 1985). Vessels of different shapes were used as cinerary urns and were placed in a side niche, closed with stone slabs.

Among the eighteen stone jars found in the Iberian necropolis, two items from Tomb 3 (Museo Arqueológico y Etnográfico de Granada, n. 8322) and Tomb 12 (Museo Arqueológico y Etnográfico de Granada, n. 8326) seem to belong to the CBAS class. On the upper part of the Tomb 3 vessel an inscription in Phoenician characters painted in black states that the vessel contains the remains of Magon, Arish’s son and Hilles’ grandson. According to a recent analysis of J. Zamora López (Zamora López 2013: 347–370), a person well skilled in the art of writing should have written the text not long before the vessel was put in the tomb.

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7 See www.christies.com, Bonham’s, London, 15 October 2008, lot 17. Unfortunately the context of the find is unknown, see lot notes: “passed down through his family since at least the early 19th century. Thought to have been found on the family’s property, “El Retiro,” near Churriana in Southern Spain. Rediscovered in the family’s collection in 1910”.
It is noteworthy that two other CBAS jars without handles were found at el-Kurru (Sudan), in the tomb of Piankhy’s daughter Tabiry (Dunham 1950: n. 19-3-1223 and n. 19-3-1363, 87, fig. 29c, pl. XXXIXA, 2–3).

**Discussion**

The type of stone jars described above has been commonly considered to be of Egyptian production (Gamer-Wallert 1976: 223–228; id. 1978; Padró i Parcerisa 1980–1985).

Actually, the present analysis indicates that the CBAS display morphological features which cast doubt on a connection with the Nile Valley. The sharper profile of these artefacts, in fact, does not seem to correspond with the Egyptian ceramic (D. Aston 1996) and stone repertories (B. Aston 1994); rather, it was common in the Levantine production of the Iron Age.

According to W. Culican’s assumption (Culican 1970: 31, fn. 24), it resembles the morphological features of some ceramic transport jars known under various names: *Torpedo jars*, *Carinated-shoulder amphora* and, more generally, *Canaanite jars* (Sagona 1982: 73).

Produced with different variations from the Middle Bronze Age in the Levant through to the Punic Western Mediterranean, they can be generally assigned to Type 7c of A. Sagona’s typological classification (Sagona 1982: 83–85). More precisely, CBAS class is similar to the Type 5–2 of Pedrazzi’s typology, which identify a group of storage jars widely distributed along the Lebanese and Palestinian coasts during the Iron Age I, II, as shown by numerous items found in Strata III–II of Tyre, dated to the second half of the 8th century BCE (Bikai 1978: 67).

These jars, which could be generally assigned to Levantine production, should be considered an evolution of the Canaanite amphora that is present in large amounts in Egypt especially in the late Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period.

Pottery *carinated-shoulder amphorae* are widespread in the Nile Valley in the Third Intermediate Period (Padró – Ramón 2004: 77–102), too, and became so popular that from the Saite period (6th–5th centuries BCE), local copies are documented (Defernez – Marchand 2006: 68–71).

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9 Actually, there are jars of this shape that cannot be assigned to the same group due to different morphological elements, such as the maximum diameter location and shoulder inflection (Ramon Torres 1995: 272; Pedrazzi 2005: 464).

10 We adopt here the chronology proposed by Pedrazzi 2007: 39, that means second and third quarter of the 12th – first quarter of the 6th centuries BCE. On the problem of Iron Age chronology, see Pedrazzi 2007: 17–39.

11 The list of scientific publications on this topic is too long to be detailed here; therefore it has proved necessary to quote just Bourriau 1990: 18–26.
The geographical distribution analysis of stone CBAS jars in the Mediterranean of the 1st millennium BCE shows that most of the samples were found outside Egypt, with a high concentration in Assyria (Neo-Assyrian palaces of Aššur, Niniveh and Nimrud) and in the Iberian Peninsula (Fig. 4).

Their diffusion outside the Nile Valley has prompted different explanations: I. Gamer-Wallert, according to J. Maluquer’s assumption (Maluquer 1963: 59), indicates that the samples found in Spain are the result of the looting of the Egyptian royal tombs at Tanis and that they may have been part of Takelot II’s tomb equipment (Gamer-Wallert 1973: 408; id. 1978: 224–225).

On the basis of the cuneiform inscription on the jar found at Aššur in the palace of Ashurnasirpal II, W. Culican suggested that even the “Almuñe car alabastra” could be considered part of Abdi-milkutí’s palace treasure, looted by Esarhaddon during his campaign of 677 BCE and then traded by the Phoenicians (Culican 1970: 30–31).

Another hypothesis suggests that the Assyrians acquired soft stone jars in the third quarter of the 7th century BCE, after the second invasion of Egypt, and that they gave them to the Phoenician merchants for trading (Pernigotti 1988: 275–276).

Actually, the last two interpretations encounter some problems considering chronology (López Castro 2006: 79): the study of the tomb equipment has, in fact, shown that some of the graves of Almuñe car can be dated to the 8th century BCE (Aubet et al. 1991: 21; Negueruela 1991: 199–207; Mederos Martín – Ruiz Cabrero 2002: 41–47), therefore they precede the looting of Abdi-milkutí’s palace at Sidon and the second Assyrian invasion of Egypt. Moreover, as noted by J. López Castro, the number of soft stone vessels found in the Iberian Peninsula is too large to classify all these items as stolen.
The most commonly accepted hypothesis explains the spread of soft stone vessels in the palaces of Near Eastern sites (Assyria, Sidon and Samaria) as luxury gifts within a network of long-distance inter-dynastic contacts. Instead, the Iberian artefacts could be considered as the result of Phoenician trade with rich artisans and merchants of the Western Mediterranean during the 7th century BCE (López Castro 2006: 82).

It is noteworthy that stone CBAS jars are widespread in areas where contacts with the Phoenicians are generally attested, even if with different characteristics.

Commercial and political relations between Assyria and the Levantine area are well known (Botto 1990) and for Carthage and the Iberian Peninsula, archaeological excavations have witnessed a Phoenician presence at least from the first quarter of the 8th century BCE.

The major difficulty concerns the Phoenician presence in Egypt and Sudan: the Greek historian Herodotus (The Histories II, 112) reports that the Tyrians had a district of their own in Memphis, the στρατόπεδον Τυρίων, with a sanctuary for the Foreign Aphrodite.

According to a papyrus from Zenon’s archive, the priests of this temple were called Φοινικαῖοι, a definition that seems to suggest the existence of a community who had moved there a long time ago (De Simone 2006: 77–92). Despite the total lack of archaeological evidence suggesting the existence of a Tyrian district in Memphis, the possibility of a Phoenician presence in Egypt can be supported by the increasing number of various materials, mainly ceramic and epigraphic, that can be surely assigned to Levantine production.12

Contacts between Nubia and the Levant, instead, may have started at the time of Pharaoh Sheshonk I (22nd Dynasty, 945–924 BCE), who renewed relations with Byblos and Sudan (Kitchen 1973: § 250–251). Even if for the moment evidence of them is more difficult to identify, archaeological excavations in el-Kurru have uncovered some objects that seem at least to suggest an influence of the Phoenician art. In addition to several beads, it is important to mention here two stone jugs that display a shape which is clearly of a Phoenician origin, the trefoil-mouth profile.

The jug (Fig. 5) found in the grave of queen Khenisa, wife of Piankhy (25th Dynasty, 747–716 BCE), has an incised band of red hieroglyphs around the shoulder, including two cartouches of the queen. It has a moulded palmette below the join of the handle and body, usually considered an element of a Phoenician origin, which was very widespread all over the Mediterranean area and which soon became subject to various reinterpretations.

12 The analysis of this archaeological evidence is the subject of the Ph.D. thesis ("The Phoenician presence in Egypt and Sudan") that I am currently preparing under the direction of Prof. Eric Gubel at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.
The presence of hieroglyphs and cartouches of Egyptian pharaohs on stone vessels found outside Egypt has been always considered a proof that the vase was made in the Nile Valley.

Actually, this element does not necessarily define the cultural identity of the craftsmen, same as an incorrect or pseudo-hieroglyphic inscription cannot be considered clear evidence of the artefact being of Phoenician production.

In this regard, several ivory plates assigned to Levantine manufacture which were discovered at the Palaces at Nimrud are of some interest. Even if most of the time the interpretation of the inscriptions is problematic, these ivories testify to the use of hieroglyphs by Phoenician artisans (Gubel 2009: 325–326).

The two stone trefoil-mouth jugs from el-Kurru mentioned above are a clear example of an association between a shape of a foreign origin and an Egyptian inscription. A similar jug was part of the “Treasure of Aliseda” discovered in Spain at the beginning of the 20th century AD (Fig. 6). This glass vessel has a band of
hieroglyphs around the shoulder and two cartouches on each side of the neck, but the understanding of them is problematic.

According to these examples, it may be possible to imagine different scenarios that could explain the presence of hieroglyphic inscriptions on vessels. Concerning el-Kurru jugs, it seems suitable that the person who commissioned the vase might also have provided a copy of the inscriptions to be engraved on it. However, if Gamer-Wallert’s assumption that the Egyptian characters on the jug from La

Fig. 6
Glass trefoil-mouth jug from the La Aliseda Treasure (after Gamer-Wallert 1978: Taf. 31).
Aliseda seems to be a copy of a fragmented text (Gamert-Wallert 1976b: 127–131) is right, we wonder if any examples of hieroglyphic inscriptions with classical formulas could be found in the workshops where the stone vessels were crafted. Of course, the quality of the result was not necessarily linked to the knowledge of the language; rather, it depended on the skills of the craftsmen who engraved the characters.13

**Conclusions**

The remarks above suggest that a connection of the manufacture of stone CBAS jars to an Egyptian workshop is not certain. I. Oggiano (Oggiano 2010: 190–193) has recently proposed a different hypothesis for the localisation of the workshops where these artefacts were made:

a. manufactured in the Near East, then traded in the Mediterranean;

b. manufactured in Egypt by Egyptian craftsmen, inspired by Levantine ceramic production;

c. manufactured in Egypt by Phoenician craftsmen who combined elements of different origins.

A petrographic analysis (Oggiano 2010: 193) surely could help to identify the place where an artefact was crafted, combining data from vessels and potential quarry sources. Unfortunately, at the moment reference data on raw materials of stone vessels is not always available (as in the case of the Louvre collection) and not all quarry sources have been exactly located. The scarcity of archaeological findings for the moment does not even allow us to detect possible workshops of these artifacts.

Pending progress in research on raw materials and quarry sources, we would like to focus on the hypothesis that the Phoenicians had not only the role of traders of stone CBAS jars, but that they may have also contributed to their production, at least in terms of influence.

Actually, Phoenician art seems to have inspired foreign production more than once, e.g. the production of some Sardinian pottery storage jars (“anfore di tipo Sant’Imbenia,” Oggiano 2000: 235–258) and some metal bowls found in Etruria during the Orientalizing Period (Naso 2012: 437).

Concerning Egypt, Levantine influence on art becomes visible from the end of the 12th Dynasty mainly because of the presence of foreign artisans in the Nile Valley (Posener 1957: 161). During the New Kingdom, due to military campaigns against Syria and Palestine, many objects of Levantine production became rapidly widespread in Egypt and subject to local imitations.

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13 The Nimrud ivory plates seem to suggest that Phoenician artists at times used original Egyptian inscriptions as models for hieroglyphs (Gubel 2009: 327).
In this regard, the study of G. A. D. Tait on Egyptian relief chalices (Tait 1963) is of some interest: most of these artefacts were crafted in Tuna el-Gebel (Hermopolis) during the 22nd Dynasty and they display Levantine influence in the decoration and iconography (Boschoos 2009) inspired by Phoenician ivories.

All this evidence begs the question whether during the Third Intermediate Period the Levantine artisans living in Egypt could have become specialized in the manufacture of luxury goods as stone vases and in faience production.

Of some interest is the fact that the jugs from el-Kurru and La Aliseda mentioned above seem to suggest the existence of a connection between these two
manufactures. This idea does not sound really unusual in the case of a faience amphora (Fig. 7) discovered by Delattre in a tomb at the hill of Juno (Redissi 1992–1993: 325–341). The vessel, usually considered as Egyptian in origin because of its decoration, seems not to have any parallels in the Nile Valley; it displays a body profile resembling the conical shaped jars mentioned earlier, except for the bottom, which is more inspired by Canaanite ceramic production.14

Unfortunately, given the paucity of typological classification on Phoenician glass vessels, for the moment we cannot go any further on the issue of a connection between ceramic, faience and stone production in the 1st millennium BCE, but maybe it is a suggestion that could be worth exploring.

In any case, it seems clear that artistic productions of this period display a mixture of elements of different origins that result in cultural syncretism.

Objects here presented mainly suggest that relations between Egypt and the Phoenicians are not only the result of simple commercial activities, but also of an important mutual exchange of ideas and technical knowledge.

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