

## SYRIAN POTTERY FROM MIDDLE KINGDOM EGYPT

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It may be useful at this stage, in anticipation of a more thorough and detailed study, to set down the information available to me on a small collection of vases of Syrian type recovered from Middle Kingdom deposits in Egypt. These containers, some of which have already been published, make up a third category of imported or foreign inspired pottery encountered in the Nile Valley at this time. The other two are Cretan or local imitations of Middle Minoan vessels (Kemp and Merrillees, *Minoan Pottery from Second Millennium Egypt*, forthcoming) and the el-Lisht Ware, which was originally of Palestinian derivation and became the prototype of the black punctured Tell el-Yahudiya Ware (*The Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* Vol. 1 No. 3, 1970, pp. 23f.; *Levant* VI, Merrillees, *Trade and Transcendence in the Bronze Age Levant*, forthcoming). When to these is added the occasional specimen of Cypriote pottery (*Miscellanea Wilbouriana* II, 1973), they account for all the major landfalls on the archaeologically best attested maritime route from the Aegean to Egypt round the coasts of Anatolia, Cyprus, Syria and Palestine. This does not, however, necessarily confirm the way or order in which these ceramic imports reached to the Nile Valley. Nevertheless it cannot be without its significance that the Syrian jugs concerned occurred in the same localities as the other principal concentrations of Minoan and el-Lisht pottery, even if their proportions may have been very much smaller.

The following are the specimens known to me:

### *Kahun*

1. "XIIth dynasty rubbish heaps." Shoulder sherd of jug. British Museum No. 50776 (Petrie, *Illahun, Kahun and Gurob* (1891), Pl. I. II, p. 10; Fig. 1).
2. "XIIth dynasty rubbish heaps." Jug. British Museum No. 50769 (Petrie, *Illahun, Kahun and Gurob* (1891), Pl. I. 16, p. 10; Petrie, *The Making of Egypt* (1939, p. 137, Pl. LXVIII. 12, p. 128; Fig. 2 left).
3. Town. Neck of jug. British Museum No. 50766 (Petrie, *illahun, Kahun and Gurob* (1891), Pl. I. 19, p. 10; Fig. 3).

Figure 1

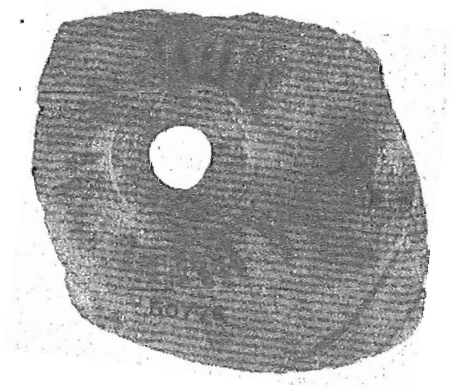


Figure 2

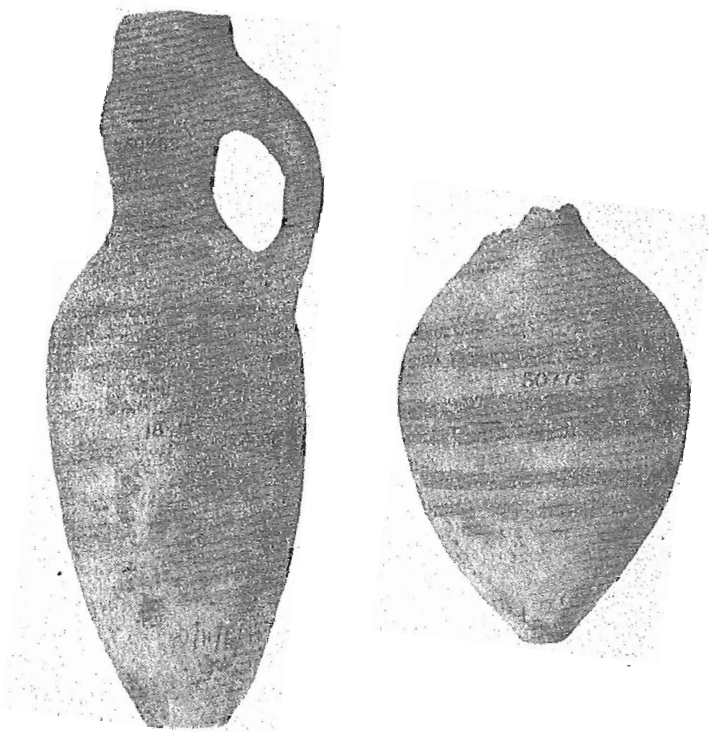
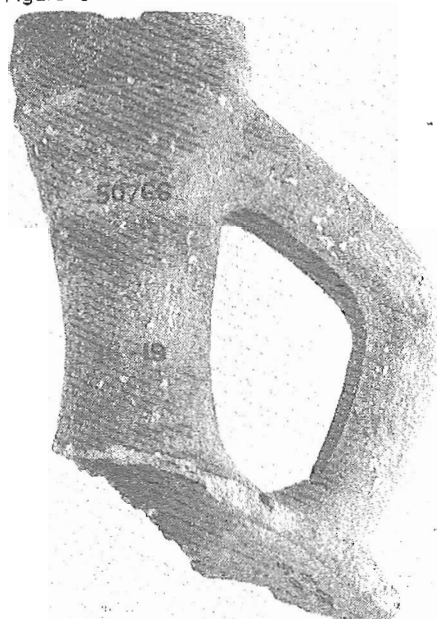


Figure 3

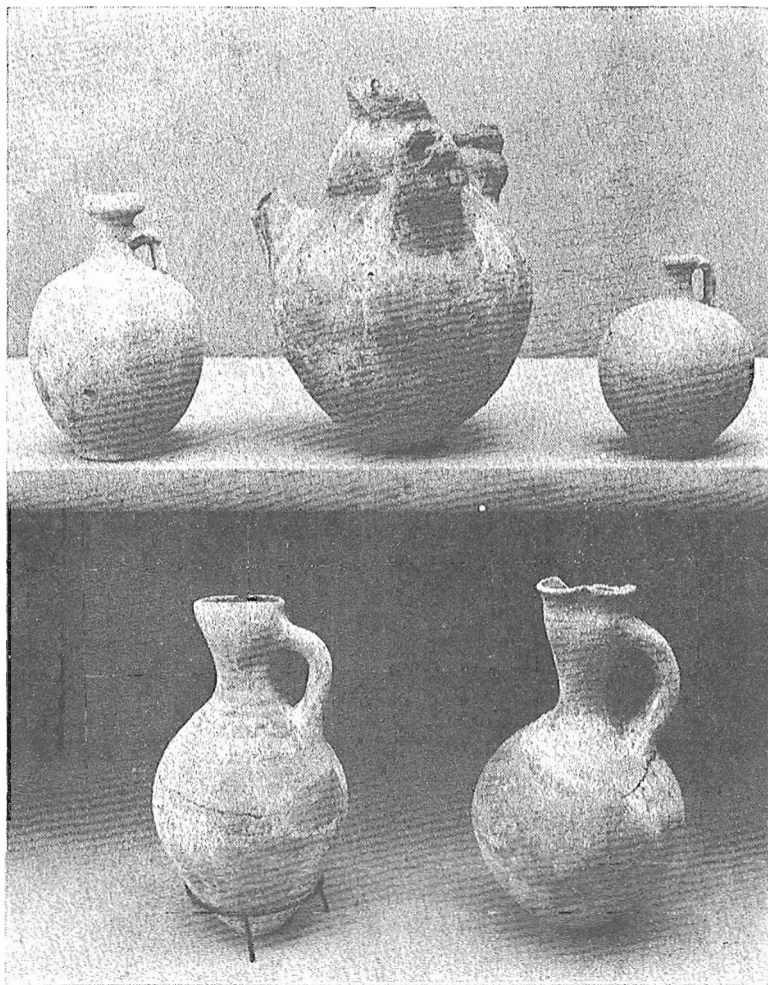


4. Town. Body of jug. British Museum No. 50733 (Petrie, *Illahun, Kahun and Gurob* (1891). Pl. I. 22; Fig. 2 right).

*El-Lisht*

5. North Pyramid. Tomb 756. Jug "Fine red ware". Height: 21.0 cm. Width: 11.8 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art No. 15.3 1580 (de-accessioned to Oriental Institute, Chicago, on 13th October, 1953). (M.M.A. Neg. No. 32323 = Fig. 4. bottom row, right; Egyptian Expedition Neg. No. L.6-7. 824 = Fig. 5. bottom row, second from left.)
6. North Pyramid. Tomb 756. Jug. Oval body with small flattened base; short concave neck with rim slightly pinched at centre to form elongated, narrow, slightly bilobate mouth; handle of approximately circular section from below rim to shoulder. Painted decoration.
- Very hard coarse clay, stuffed with large, medium and small white and grey grits, with traces of organic matter and mica, fired light orange-brown at rim. Exterior surface has been irregularly and carelessly burnished vertically to an almost matt finish, orange-buff in colour. Friable matt red painted

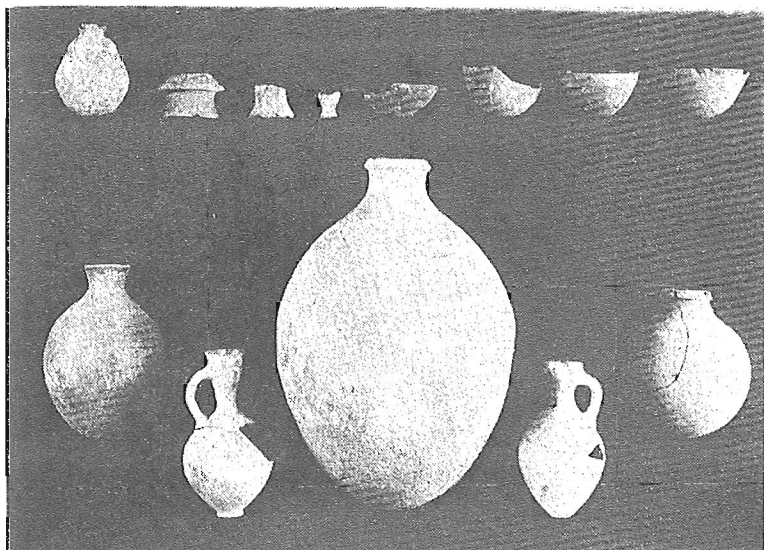
Figure 4



decoration. Wheel-made. Height: 19.3 cm. Width of body: 10.75 cm. Rim: 5.0 x 1.3 cm. (width at centre). Mended. Piece of body missing.

Metropolitan Museum of Art. No. 15.3 1581 (M.M.A. Neg. No. 32323 = Fig. 4. bottom row, left; Egyptian Expedition Neg. No. L. 6-7.824 = Fig. 5. bottom row, second from right).

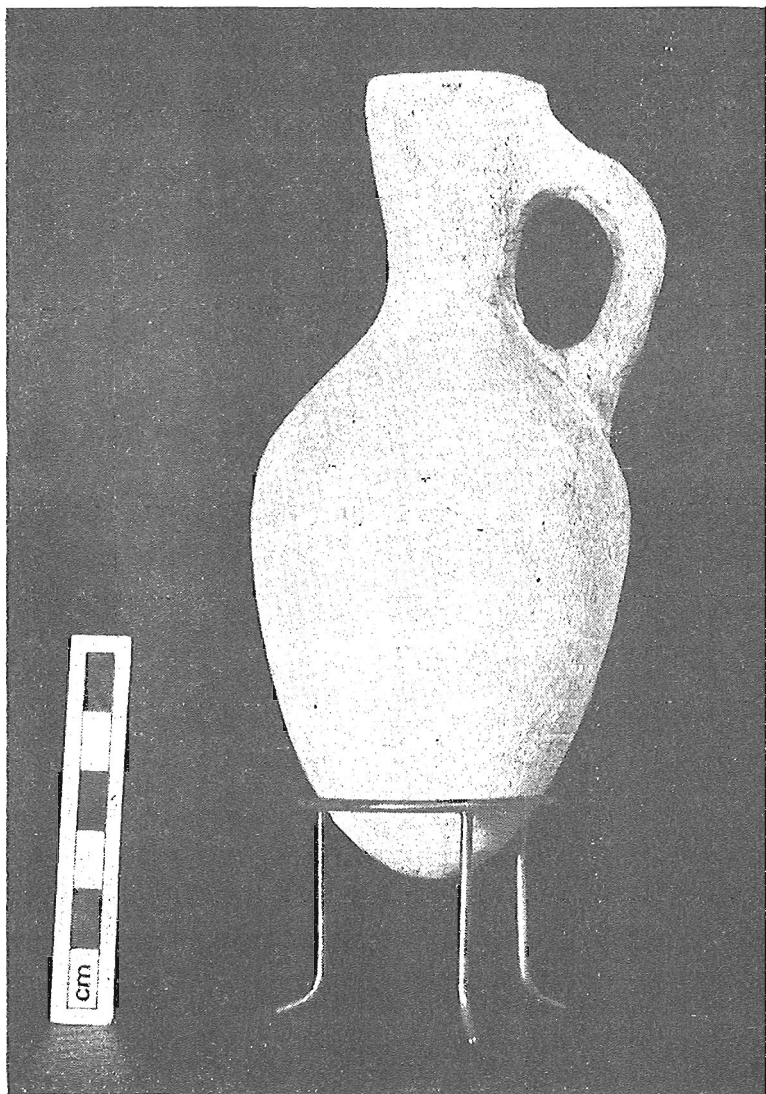
Figure 5



Nos. 5 and 6 came from the lower north chamber (B) or el-Lisht Tomb 756, which also contained the following objects:

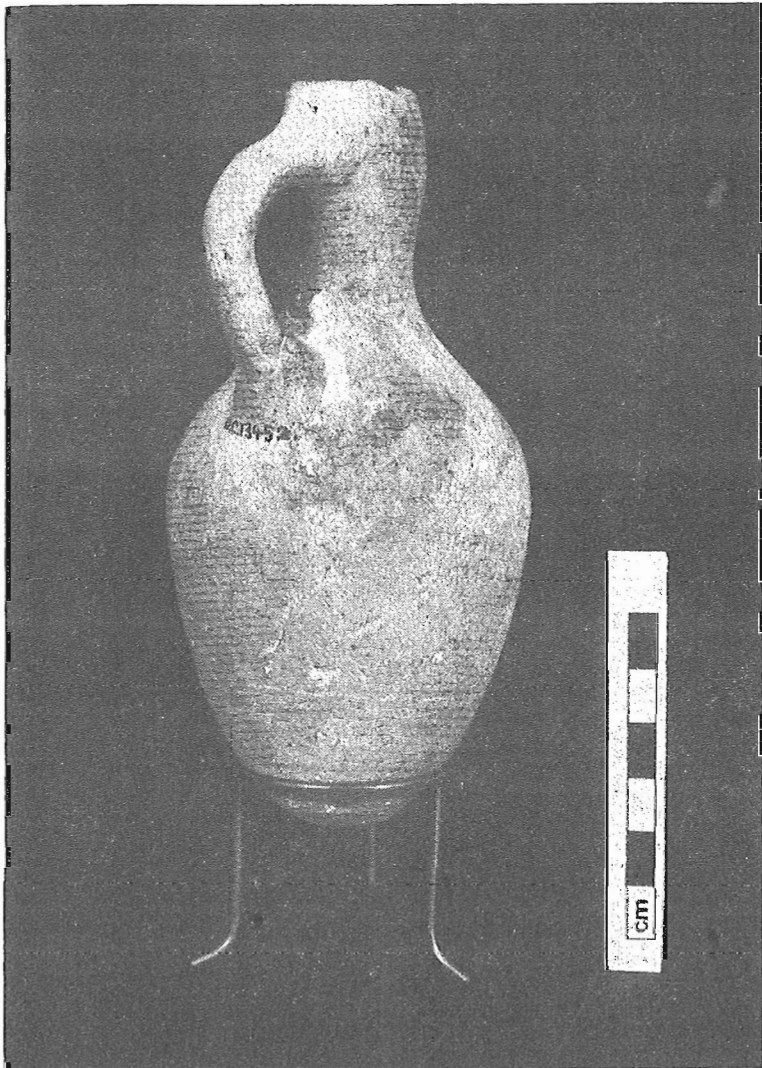
- (i) Bone point. Length: 6.3 cm.
- (ii) Part of alabaster eye.
- (iii) Gold leaf.
- (iv) Blue glazed ball bead. 1.0 cm.
- (v) Cylindrical bead. 1.0 cm.
- (vi) Pale green square for inlay.
- (vii) Lemon peel frit (?). 3.3 cm.
- (viii) Bits of bitumen.
- (ix) Limestone dome-shaped object. Height: 3.0 cm.
- (x) Pot. 10.3 x 13.5 cm. (Fig. 5. top row, left). *Harageh*, P1. XXXVIII. 49G.
- (xi) Stopper. 10.0 x 6.0 cm. (Fig. 5. top row, second from left). *Harageh*, P1. XLI. 93Q.
- (xii) Bowl 12.0 x 4.5 cm. (Fig 5. top row, fourth from right). *Harageh*, P1. P1. XXXIV. 2J.
- (xiii) Bowl. 11.5 x 7.0 cm. (Fig. 5. top row, third from right). *Harageh*, P1. XXXIV. 7K.

Figure 6



- (xiv) Bowl. 12.0 x 7.0 cm. (Fig. 5. top row, second from right).  
*Harageh*, Pl. XXXIV. 7K
- (xv) Bowl. 13.3 x 6.5 cm. (Fig. 5. top row, right).  
*Harageh*, Pl. XXXIV. 2R.

Figure 7



- (xvi) Jar. 16.6 x 23.5 cm. (Fig. 5. bottom row, left).  
*Harageh*, Pl. XXXVI. 4OR.
- (xvii) Water jar. 31.5 x 46.0 cm. (Fig. 5. bottom row, centre).  
*Harageh*, Pl. XXXVI. 41G<sub>3</sub>.
- (xviii) Fragmentary water jar. About 30.0 cm.

*No provenance*

7. Jug. Brown ware. Height: 13.7 cm. Width of body: 6.65 cm. Rim: 3.2 x 1.4 cm. Department of Egyptology, University College, London, No. 13452 (Figs. 6, 7).

The Syrian origin or inspiration of these pieces has already been recognised by Schaeffer (*Stratigraphie comparée* (1948), p. 19) and Kantor (Ehrich, *Chronologies in Old World Archaeology* (1965), p. 21). Ras Shamra supplies good parallels for Nos. 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 (Schaeffer, *Ugaritica* II (1949), p. 279, Fig. 120. 1-4, 6-12, 14, p. 299, Fig. 130, 1, 3, 5-11, 13, Pl. XLIV) and for No. 3 (*Syria* XIII, 1932, Pl. XII. 1 = Schaeffer, *Ugaritica* II (1949), Pl. XLIII. 3; Aström, *The Middle Cypriot Bronze Age* (1957), p. 212). No. 5 may be compared with a jug from Byblos (Schaeffer, *Stratigraphie comparée* (1948), Fig. 65. 929). First hand examination of the specimens from Egypt and Ras Shamra will eventually be necessary to determine the place of manufacture of those from Kahun and el-Lisht. All the Ras Shamra specimens come from the second level and are dated by Schaeffer to Ugarit Moyen 2 (1900-1750 B.C.) or the start of the following phase. Aström, however, places this period and the beginning of Ugarit Moyen 3 around 1750-1600 B.C. (*The Middle Cypriote Bronze Age* (1957), pp. 261 ff.)

The evidence from Egypt cannot help resolve the chronological problem. The contexts of the foreign pottery from Kahun, which Kemp and I have studied in detail in our forthcoming *Minoan Pottery from Second Millennium Egypt*, do not enable the span to be usefully narrowed, since material of this vintage from the site could have been deposited at any time between the middle of the 20th century B.C. and the end of the 18th century B.C. Nevertheless it seems very unlikely that the Syrian pottery would have arrived or been reproduced at Kahun later than 1700 B.C.

The evidence from el-Lisht Tomb 756 is unfortunately no less inconclusive. Apart from the fact that the deposit had evidently been thoroughly disturbed, the native Egyptian vases do not allow the chronological range of the material to be specified except in the most general terms. The parallels with the pottery corpus at el-Haraga place the assemblage from el-Lisht Tomb 756 in a Middle Kingdom horizon, whose relative chronology cannot in the state of existing knowledge be further refined or subdivided (Kemp and Merrillees, *Minoan Pottery from Second Millennium Egypt*, forthcoming). At the same time it may be doubted on the basis of these comparisons that the el-Lisht group postdated the end of the 18th century B.C.



The paucity of their numbers and disturbed state of their contexts make it difficult to attempt even the most tentative reconstruction of the circumstances in which these Syrian vases came to Egypt. Though it is tempting to use the associations of the relatively more abundant Minoan and el-Lisht pottery as analogies for reaching conclusions on the reasons for the presence of this foreign ware in the Nile Valley, there is a danger in assuming too readily that the scholarly connection of these products in written reports reflects the historical situation which prevailed in antiquity. In any case there is no lack of textual and graphic evidence to show that Asiatics were well known to the Egyptians during the Middle Kingdom (*CAH*<sup>2</sup> Fasc. 29 (1965), pp. 21ff.). Unlike the later Syrian Red lustrous Wheel-made Ware spindle bottles (Merrillees, *The Cypriote Bronze Age Pottery Found in Egypt* (1968), pp. 172f.), there is, however, no way of knowing whether the Asiatics were themselves responsible for bringing this earlier pottery to Egypt, as the only contemporaneous vessel depicted is a two-handled amphora of a type apparently distinctive of Syria (*CAH*<sup>2</sup> Fasc. 29 (1965), p. 24 n. 2).

While the failure of the Egyptian draftsmen to portray these containers could be taken to indicate that they were imported by a non-Asiatic intermediary, it should be remembered that the artists customarily chose features that were considered both characteristic and striking and at the same time served the somewhat vainglorious purpose of their graphic representation. The Cypriote Bronze Age pottery found in Egypt, for example, was not once depicted in paintings or other art forms, presumably because pictorially at least it could contribute so little to the immortality of the one who commissioned the work.

#### *Acknowledgements*

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