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## **Aegypto-Aegean relations up to the 2nd millennium B.C.**

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There is considerable evidence for Late Bronze Age relations with Egypt, through Egyptian written and pictorial records, and cross-cultural artefacts and influences. Indeed, this evidence has been the material basis for Aegean relative and absolute chronology for over a century. Virtually no Early and Middle Bronze Age evidence exists, however, with the notable exception of the island of Crete and its Minoan civilization. Some recent studies of the general subject of Aegypto-Aegean cross-cultural influences include Lambrou-Phillipson (1990), Cline (1991) and Phillips (1991), each with different emphases. Chronological aspects are discussed at length by Warren and Hankey (1989), on which the accompanying relative chronological chart (Fig. 1) is based. All have extensive bibliographies.

Middle Minoan (MM) evidence is less substantial than later, but it remains clear and reasonably strong. Evidence prior to the 2nd millennium B.C. is far more sparse and less precisely dated, yet it indicates Early Minoan (EM) Crete and Egypt were aware of one another and in at least limited contact before the construction of the first Minoan palaces roughly around 1900 B.C. On Crete, this change (and other indicators) distinguish the transition between the MM IA and IB periods; in Egyptian terms, it is around the mid-Twelfth Dynasty. This paper reviews aspects of Aegypto-Aegean contact during the 'pre-palatial' period (EM-MM IA), the evidence for which has been strengthened through recent research and excavation work.

The earliest direct evidence for Aegypto-Minoan cross-cultural contact are two imported objects. The first is an obsidian bowl or beaker rim fragment of Egyptian origin and Early Dynastic date (Warren 1981: 633-635, Fig. 5, Pl. 205b, left), and the other a worked hippopotamus canine (Krzyszkowska 1984: 123-125, Pl. XIII a), both recently excavated in Early Minoan IIA domestic levels at Knossos (generally equivalent to the Third-Fourth Dynasties in Egypt). Obsidian sources can be traced through signature analysis, and the stone itself was most commonly imported from elsewhere onto Crete, especially from the island of

Crete		Egypt	
		Dynasties	
		III	
	EM IIA	IV	Old Kingdom
		V	
		VI	
Pre-Palatial	EM IIB	VII - X	FIP
	EM III		
		IX	
	MM IA	XII	Middle Kingdom
	MM 1B		

Fig. 1. Relative chronological chart for Pre-palatial Crete and Egypt.

Melos (Renfrew et al. 1965: 237-239; Warren 1981: 630). The vessel material is entirely unlike any other found on Crete, and best relates to that employed in Egypt. The canine almost certainly came from Egypt, where hippopotamus ivory was commonly worked and not from the Near East where it was rarely exploited until much later (Krzyszowska 1988: 229; Hughes-Brock 1992: 25).

A number of Minoan objects (chiefly seals and pendants) also have recently been re-identified as hippopotamus ivory imported as raw material, presumably also from Egypt. Elephant ivory, whether the African or West Asian varieties, apparently was unknown as a material in the Aegean until the late Middle Bronze Age, and was quite rare in the Levant before ca. 2000 B.C. Elephants themselves cannot be documented in the Levant before that time (Winter 1985: 339ff.; Krzyszowska 1988: 227-229; Hughes-Brock 1992: 25, Fig. 5, a Minoan product, is carved from hippopotamus ivory).

Additionally, a number of EM II objects on Crete have certain 'egyptianizing' features. One of the most obvious is the design on a Minoan seal from a tomb on Mochlos in north-eastern Crete (Fig. 2). Two crouching baboon-like apes are

depicted back-to-back (Platon 1969: #473).

No apes of any description are native to Crete (or the Aegean), but were well-known in Egypt where they were depicted in just such a crouching pose, as amulets and figurines of the god Thoth in zoomorphic form, from the beginning of the Dynastic period (Adams 1974: 24-29, #128-144, Pl. 18-23; Brunton 1928: 19, Pl. XCIV.14). The crouching monkey also is known as a filler ornament on Old Syrian and Old Babylonian seals, and appears as an Anatolian image as well, but these are later in date and probably also developed from the Egyptian image (Mellink 1987: 65-68.). The back-to-back arrangement, however, is unknown in Egypt and must be of Minoan innovation. It is the earliest of many such depictions of this animal found on Crete.

Also possibly as early as EM II is the apparent Minoan imitation of two Egyptian stone vessel forms. The Minoan 'miniature amphora' shape, which first appeared in EM II, has been cited as an imitation of the Egyptian Early Dynastic 'shoulder jar.' Although no Egyptian import has been found on the island, a considerable number of 'imitations' have been recovered from EM II Mochlos tombs and tombs of later date elsewhere, especially the Mesara Plain area of south-central Crete (Warren 1969: 72-73, Type 28; a few others of similar form have since been recovered). To my mind, however, its derivative origin is questionable. The other form, the cylindrical jar with everted rim and base, might also have appeared as early as EM II, although the contexts of both imports and imitations are too wide-ranging to be sure. Egyptian imports have been found at Knossos (Warren 1969: 111, Type 43 F; 1981: 633-634, Fig. 4, Pl. 206 a-b), and imitations at Mochlos and in various Mesara tombs, none demonstrably earlier than EM II (Fig. 3) in context (Warren 1969: 75-76, Type 30 D). Both Minoan forms are found only in miniature scale, unlike the oversize to miniature vessels recovered in Egypt itself. Other Egyptian stone vessel forms, not locally imitated, recently have been recovered or identified from Knossos in EM III-MM IA contexts (Warren 1969: 109-110, Type 43.A5, A10, C1.; 1981: 633, Fig. 3, Pl. 205.b). There is also a pyxis from Hagia Triadha (Warren 1969: 111-112, Type 43. G4).

In EM III, the Mesara Plain area seems to become extremely important for eastern communication. Unfortunately, almost all EM-MM I Mesara sites are communal tombs in use for centuries, and close dating parameters are rare. However, their contents included a not insignificant number of imported and imitative objects, indicating Minoan contact with Egypt expanded in EM III / MM IA.

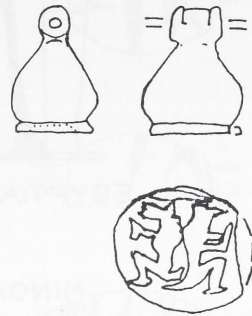


Fig. 2. EM II seal from Mochlos.

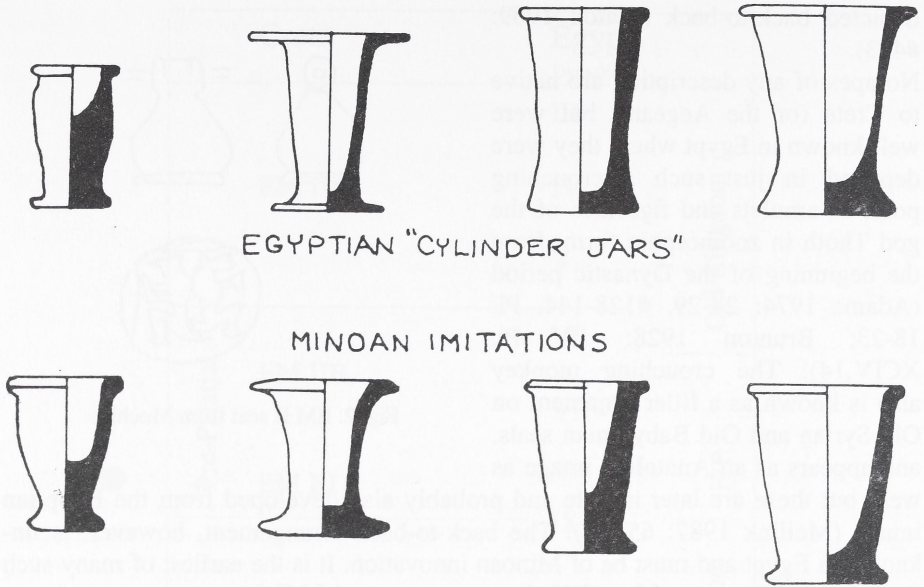


Fig. 3. Egyptian 'cylinder jars' from Egypt and Minoan imitations from Crete.

Amongst the most common are scarab seals, both imported and local imitations. While not always clearly distinguished, their ultimately Egyptian origin is without doubt. Scarab beetles are found on Crete, but the native variety has a prominent 'horn' that is never depicted on Minoan scarab seals, nor on Egyptian seals; the imitations clearly copy the Egyptian type, but can usually be identified by their face designs and some technical differences (Fig. 4). Furthermore, the earliest appearance of the scarab seal is demonstrably later than in Egypt, for the earliest imports are not the earliest Egyptian scarab form. None are datable to Ward's 'Period 1' (late Dynasty VI-early Dynasty IX/X; Ward 1978: 16, Fig. 3). The earliest stylistic date of Egyptian scarabs found on Crete are not earlier than sometime in the First Intermediate Period. However, stamp seals were already in use by the late EM I on Crete (and elsewhere) - earlier than their use in Egypt - and theriomorphic seals are typical of EM III / MM IA (Weingarten 1986: 279-280). While evidence for sphragistic use is not extensive, it does exist. The seals themselves do have both a carved form and separate face design, a combination not found in Egypt until the late Old Kingdom; until that time, the cylinder seal was employed in Egypt. On the popularity of theriomorphic seal shapes in EM III / MM IA, see Yule (1981: 91-100, 104). The scarab form was merely adopted into an already existing Minoan figural repertoire.

Five imported Egyptian scarab seals were found in closely datable MM IA tomb contexts at Lebena in the Mesara and Gournes and Archanes near Knossos

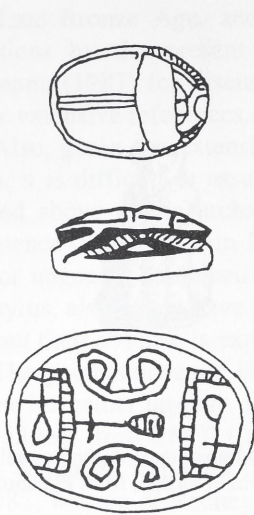


Fig. 4a. Imported Egyptian scarabseal, from Lebena.

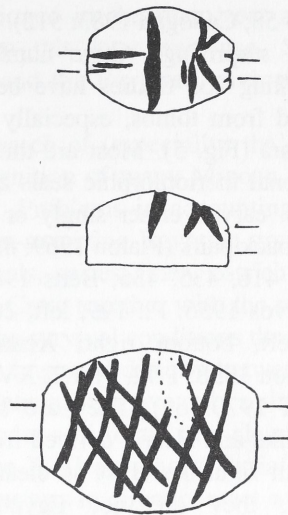


Fig. 4b. Imitative Minoan carnelian scarab seal, from Pezoules kephales.

(Platon 1969: #180, 201, 204, 395, 405). Others with more wide-ranging contexts probably were interred earlier (Platon 1969: #267, 434). Imitative Minoan scarab seals of EM III and later date also are found in similar contexts (Platon 1969: #154, 332, 402; Davaras 1986: 14 #5, Fig. 3, Pl. 20στ-ι). Others are more wide-ranging in date, and might be later interments. Before the end of MM IA, however, some were wholly non-Egyptian in character, the Minoan artisans having developed their own peculiarities of style (Platon 1967: 194, Pl. 172; 1969: #154). Several are made of carnelian and amethyst, stones not indigenous to Crete and imported as raw material, possibly from Egypt like the hippopotamus ivory of which some other imitations are carved.

Other imported goods include ostrich eggshells, large fragments of which have been recovered from religious contexts at EM III Palaikastro on the eastern coast and MM IA Knossos (Sakellarakis 1990: 289-290, Figs. 22-23). Ostriches were unknown in the Levant but hunted wild in the Egyptian desert; the eggs were considered a luxury. Some beads found in an EM III / MM IA tomb at Pezoules Kephales on the eastern coast must also have been imported from Egypt, if their identification as blue frit ('Egyptian blue') is correct (Pomerance 1973: 22 n. 6). The use (and possibly production) of faience was introduced to Crete by EM IIA, either from the Levant or Egypt. Faience beads have been found in several EM III Mesara tombs, and in EM IIA Mochlos also a bowl, unfortunately not preserved. The beads might be either imported or locally made, but have been found in 3rd millennium B.C. contexts only at Mochlos and in the Mesara. It has long been assumed that the bowl was imported either from Egypt, Syria or elsewhere in the Near East (Foster

1979: 56-58; Cadogan 1983: 512).

A surprisingly large number of crouching ape figures have been recovered from tombs, especially in the Mesara (Fig. 5). Most are three-dimensional theriomorphic seals and pendants, carved either singly or as back-to-back pairs (Platon 1969: #20, 21, 249, 416, 435, 436; Betts 1980: #31; Zervos 1956: Pl. 199, left, 203, centre left, bottom right; Xenaki-Sakellariou 1958: 1 #2, Pl. I.2, XV.2; Branigan 1970: 69). They are still baboon-like and clearly derived from the Thoth figurines. Just as clearly, however, they are not Egyptian products. The ape, like the scarab beetle, was consciously adopted into an already existing Minoan figural repertoire. Also like the scarab beetle, the derived imitation acquired local variations, including a more pointed face and large pointed ears.

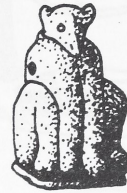


Fig. 5. Minoan theriomorphic seal in the form of an ape, from Platanos.

So far, only material found on Crete has been mentioned. Presuming that some form of reciprocal traffic in goods must have occurred, let us also consider the Minoan material found in 3rd millennium B.C. Egypt. Surprisingly, there isn't any. Datable Minoan objects found in Egypt are no earlier than MM IB in style (beyond the scope of this paper). In keeping with the conference theme of 'prehistory,' there is also a complete dearth of Egyptian textual evidence for contact between Egypt and the Aegean before the 2nd millennium B.C. Despite the lack of finds, something must have been conveyed from Crete to Egypt. We can only assume such goods have not survived in the archaeological record, or have not been recognised as Minoan. Such commodities as olive and other oils, unguents and perfumes, medicines, aromatic herbs and spices, wine, honey, 'exotic' food-stuffs, resins, hides, multicoloured woven cloths like wool, dyestuffs and other raw materials, and possibly oak and cyprus wood are potential non-surviving goods exported from Crete. Some are illustrated in later tomb paintings of the early- to mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, being brought to the tomb owner by 'tribute-bearers' identified as from 'Keftiu' and the 'islands in the midst of the Great Green.' Contemporary texts also mention 'Keftiu magic,' 'Keftiu paste' and 'Keftiu beans,' 'Keftiu' being identified as the ancient Egyptian name for Crete. There is, however, no trace of any such goods in 3rd millennium B.C. Egypt, where conditions for the archaeological survival of many normally perishable goods are virtually ideal. For an extensive discussion of non-surviving goods possibly imported and exported in the Bronze Age, see Knapp (1991: 21-68) and, for textiles, Barber (1991: 311-357). Evidence for trade in such items is virtually limited

to the Late Bronze Age, and all items mentioned in the main text are mere speculations by the present author based on this later evidence. See also Wachsmann (1987) for discussion of 'Keftiu' and the Egyptian tomb paintings. All have extensive references.

Also, given the extensive scientific research of (especially) the past two decades, it is difficult to assume the non-recognition of many Minoan products suggested above in the archaeological record. Problems in accounting for the total absence of evidence in Egypt persist. Non-surviving Egyptian goods, such as oils or unguents contained in the stone vessels, spices, linen, ostrich feathers and papyrus, also might have been imported to Crete together with the recovered goods, but their absence is explicable through the survival conditions there.

The goods conveyed likely were not all imported directly between Egypt and Crete but rather through one or more middlemen. We have only a single Near Eastern object from EM II Crete, a silver cylinder seal found in a clearly EM II tomb at Mochlos, imported from Early Bronze II-III provincial Syria/Palestine (Pini 1982; Warren & Hankey 1989: 127). Egypt was in direct contact with Syro-Palestine by the beginning of the Dynastic period, especially with Byblos which is well-known for its imported Egyptian finds (Saghieh 1983: 104-106; Ward 1971: 49-69). The silver seal suggests the Minoans also were in contact with the Levantine coast by EM II, and therefore presumably also Cyprus.

Evidence for EM III / MM IA contact with Cyprus and the Levant is far more substantial. Traditional pointers include an EM III / MM IA bridge-spouted jar found in an Early Cypriote IIIB / Middle Cypriote I tomb at Lapithos in north-western Cyprus (Catling & Karageorghis 1960: 108-110; Warren & Hankey 1989: 115) and an Early Cypriote IIIB amphora recently identified from an MM IA context at Knossos (Catling & MacGillivray 1983). These two cross-cultural imports ensure the contemporaneity of MM IA and ECyp IIIB / MCyp I.

Recent specialized research also has identified cross-cultural imported finds and imitative features of certain Early Bronze III-Middle Bronze I daggers and tools from Cyprus, Crete and Syria. Specific imports include a Syrian dagger found in a tomb at Koumassa (in the Mesara) not in use after MM IA and a Cretan scraper of EM III-MM IA date from an MB I Byblite context (Catling & Karageorghis 1960: 110-111; Branigan 1966: 125-126; 1967: 119-121; 1970: 186-187). Crete lacks virtually all metal resources; raw metal, including gold, silver, and the copper and tin for bronze, had to be imported even for the earliest metal objects made. Recent lead isotope analysis has confirmed the presence of specifically Cypriote copper in EM bronze tools and weapons (Stos-Gale & MacDonald 1991: 249-287 *passim*). This was but one of many copper sources identified in these tools and weapons.

Nevertheless, it must also be pointed out that no Egyptian and virtually no Syro-Palestinian goods have been identified from contexts on Cyprus until the late Middle Bronze Age. Earlier Cypriote relative chronology is based almost entirely on Cypriote finds in the Levant and Egypt. Presumably, again, the Cypriotes must

have received goods from these areas in exchange for objects they exported. The imported goods too have either not survived or not been recognised in the archaeological record, a situation similar to the the lack of Minoan goods in Egypt at this time and just as problematic.

Nonetheless, Egypt and Crete were in at least indirect contact with each other and with the Levant, especially Byblos, in the 3rd millennium B.C. The exact nature of that contact, however, has always been speculative. Active trading has long been presumed, if only because the most likely alternative (diplomatic exchange) is inconsistent with the types of Egyptian objects recovered on Crete. Yet these objects generally would be considered 'luxury' or 'exotic' imports, i.e. small and easily portable yet intriguing and expensive commodities of clearly non-local character that would be favoured for long-distance trade. A sea route between Crete and Egypt via Cyprus and the Levant has long been accepted on the basis of known finds, and supported by the distribution of the earliest contexts. The north-east coast of Crete is the island's logical port for any ships travelling to and from that direction. Presumably Cypriote and Byblite ships also plied this route, among others, although Egyptian ships were unlikely ever to have ventured far from sight of land. Materials and objects from these cultures would also have been conveyed in both directions.

Vercoutter and Schachermeyr both pointed out long ago that wind and current also favour a counter-clockwise sea route directly from southern Crete to the Libyan coast of Cyrenaica and then east to Egypt, returning to Crete via Syria and Cyprus (Schachermeyr 1952-1953: 81-83; Vercoutter 1954; 1956: 417-422; Kemp & Merrillees 1980: 268-286; they also publish a wind and current map, Fig. 78). Their theory is supported by the predominance of cross-cultural material in EM III-MM IA tombs of the Mesara, this route's natural point of departure from Crete. Its basic objection has long been the complete dearth of Minoan goods in Cyrenaica, despite over three decades of systematic excavation there (Vickers & Reynolds 1971-1972: 28-29). There is a similar dearth of evidence for Marmarica, situated between Cyrenaica and Egypt. The earliest evidence is from Marsa Matruh, where a few sherds of Late Minoan date have been recovered from disturbed contexts (White 1987: 12). However, since Minoan goods have not been found in Egypt either, it is highly unlikely we would recover similar goods left en route in Cyrenaica. Recently, a possible seasonal direct reverse route from Egypt to Crete also has been postulated.

The distribution of finds indicates north-eastern Crete was in contact with Egypt from early EM II, and the Mesara area from EM III / MM IA (see Figs. 6-7), probably following the discovery of the anti-clockwise route. The other route, via Cyprus and the Levant, was known by EM II and continued in use by north-east Crete. The division almost certainly was not so absolute and the routes so limited as these statements suggest. Much overlap must have existed. The Minoans almost certainly were active participants in this early contact, if only due to the quantity of



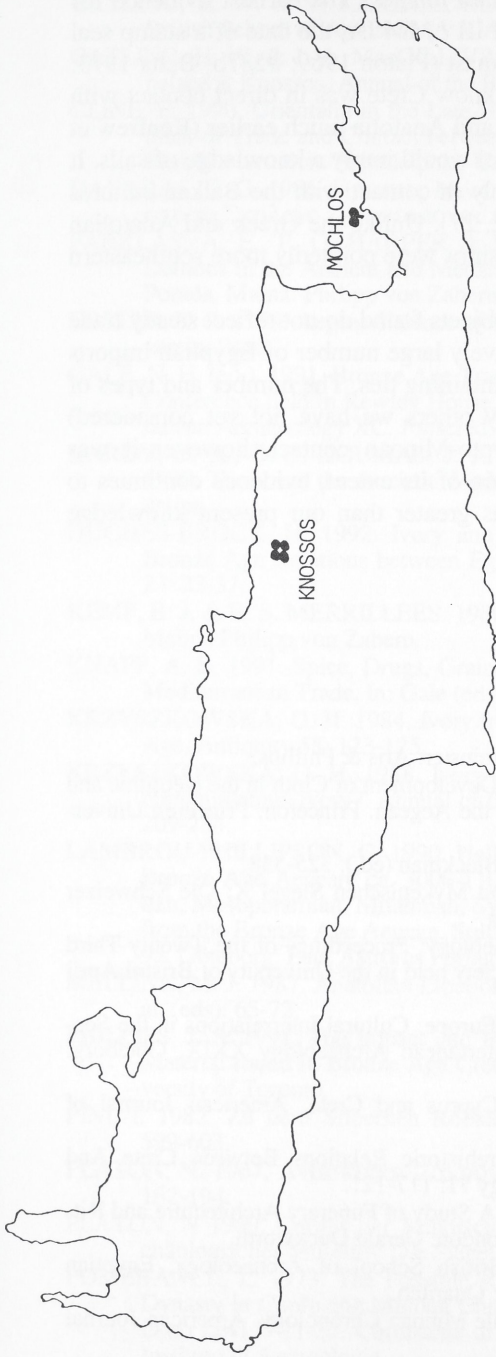


Fig. 6. Map showing Egyptian imports and influences on sites of EM II Crete.

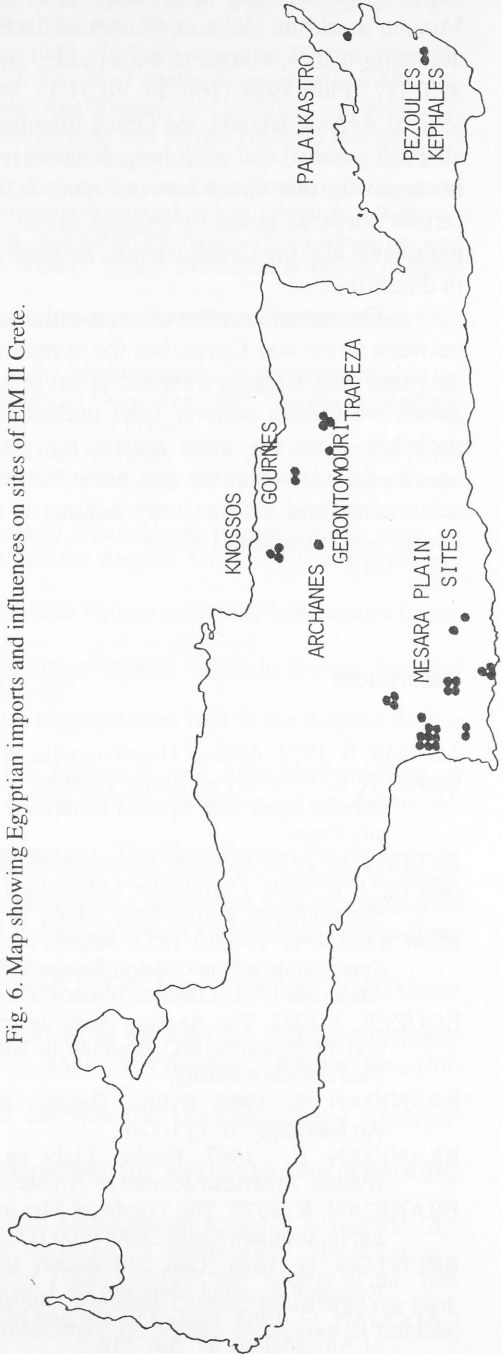


Fig. 7. Map showing Egyptian imports and influences on sites of EM III/MM IA Crete.

imported objects and their adoption of certain images. The earliest evidence for Minoan maritime technology appears in EM III / MM IA, the date of a stamp seal depicting a ship, complete with rudder and mast (Platon 1969: #287b; Betts 1973: 325-327; Yule 1981: 166, Pl. 28.51.1). We know Crete was in direct contact with several Aegean islands, the Greek mainland and Anatolia much earlier (Renfrew et al. 1965 *passim*) and such long distance travel would imply a knowledge of sails. It is surprising that Crete was not more actively in contact with the Balkan cultures farther north, as noted by Bouzek (1985: 22, 27). Unlike the Greek and Anatolian mainlands and the Greek islands, its relationships were pointedly more southeastern in direction.

The actual number of cross-cultural objects found do not reflect steady trade between Crete and Egypt, but the comparatively large number of Egyptian imports on Crete does suggest a certain effort at maintaining ties. The number and types of goods we cannot recover (and undoubtedly others we have not yet considered) probably were the main reason for Aegypto-Minoan contact, however it was accomplished. While we can never be certain of its extent, evidence continues to accumulate and we can only assume it was greater than our present knowledge allows us to represent it.

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