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## **South Levantine Influences on Egyptian Stone and Pottery Production: Some Rare Examples**

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### *Memories of Lech by Edwin van den Brink*

My first memories of Lech are while my colleagues and I conducted the AUSE survey when in the mid-eighties we visited the expedition working at Minshat Abu Omar. Lech, year after year and always full of good humor and good will, enthusiastically and energetically would explain to our team what was uncovered at that particular point of the excavation on the gezira. Afterwards he would accompany us to the excavation house where Karla would usually show us the most recent finds uncovered in the graves. This viewing was then followed by lengthy discussions and exchanges of opinion, symposium-style in the true meaning of the word, that is accompanied by lots of food and liquid refreshments. Our team always left MAO feeling uplifted in intellect, spirit and body, and yes ever so slightly sad to abandon that small oasis of friendship and shared interests. We could then appreciate Lech's profuse knowledge, enthusiasm and dedication to his colleagues and students. He will not be forgotten by those who had the pleasure and privilege to know him and preserve his memory.

### **Introduction**

Recent excavations at Tell el-Farkha in the eastern Nile Delta have revealed a group of eight calcite stone vessels from a single cache. The vessels were found upside down, probably where they had been placed in a single container of some organic material (possibly a reed basket) now decayed. The cache, derived from a settlement context on the eastern Kom, is dated to Nagada IIIB (Cialowicz & Chlodnicki, pers. comm.) by its 'sandwiched' archaeological context. It lies beneath graves of the Early Dynastic period and is superimposed on Naqada III building levels. While most of the stone vessels are of well known Egyptian morphological types (Fig. 1), one smallish jar (inv. Nr. E/05/12N3, reg.

no. 435) stands out as a rare, diminutive ‘copy’ of an idealized, south Levantine EB I storage jar, complete with two well-defined ledge handles (Figs. 2, 3). As noted below, the Tell el-Farkha specimen is an addition to a small, select collection of stone vessels of clear south Levantine morphological inspiration, produced in contemporary (royal?) workshops in Egypt.

### **Egyptian Stone Vessels of South Levantine appearance**

The earliest Egyptian stone vessel industry began in Naqada I and seems to have reached a first floruit in Naqada III when it was producing a large variety of shapes and forms (e.g. el-Khouli 1978; Aston 1994), many copies of Egyptian ceramic prototypes. Some of these were obviously copied from ceramic types already influenced in details and additions by south Levantine pottery morphology that introduced such appurtenances as lug-handles, tubular-handles and ledge-handles, which initially appeared on vessels imported from the Southern Levant during the second half of the Naqada II. Such additions were apparently appealing to Egyptian potters who imitated them and transmogrified them into highly stylized renditions, quite different from their prototypes.

Today such examples of pottery are amongst specialized groups, identified first by Petrie who labeled them “D-, F- and W-wares”. In their turn, these foreign handle templates also found their way into the repertoire of Egyptian stone vessels (e.g. el-Khouli’s [1978] Class II jars, A: cylinder jars with serpentine handles). Such stone vessels exemplify Egyptian adaptation and co-option of foreign ideas, i.e. hybrid types, translated into stone, similar to those found in pottery vessels.

There is, however, another extremely rare class of stone vessels that appears to represent an effort by Egyptian workmen to directly copy south Levantine morphological types rather than to reproduce south Levantine influenced types. One such example is the Tell el-Farkha stone jar. In the opinion of the writers of these lines it is a true copy of a south Levantine ceramic prototype translated into stone, rather than a copy of an Egyptian type ceramic vessel that had previously borrowed some south Levantine morphological aspects. Two aspects of this vessel that allow for such a precise characterization are, its overall morphology which is definitively non-Egyptian, and its broad ledge handles that were not perforated. Ledge handles on the majority of Egyptian stone vessels of this period are vestigial (i.e. narrow, decorative elements) and often pierced (cf. el-Khouli 1978).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Piercing of ledge handles is only very rarely applied to contemporary Southern Levantine pottery vessels. The few known examples are always single piercing (see, for example, van den Brink 2002: 295, Fig. 19.5), and contrast with the always double piercing noted on relevant Egyptian stone specimens.

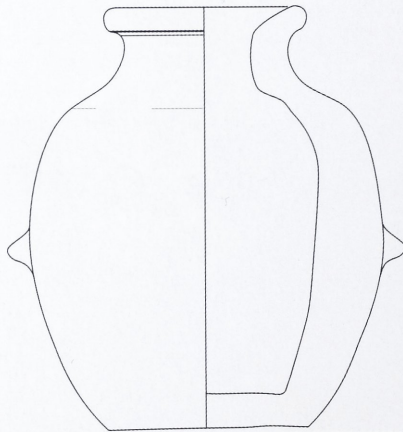




Fig. 1. Finds from Tell el-Farkha. Photo by Anna Biel.



Fig. 2. Tell el-Farkha wavy-handled pot of stone. Inv. Nr. E/05/12N3.reg. no. 435. Photo by Anna Biel.



0 5cm

Fig. 3. Tell el-Farkha wavy-handled pot of stone. Inv. Nr. E/05/12N3.reg. no. 435. Drawing by Anna Longa.





Fig. 4. Knobbed bowl. Munich ÄS 5985.

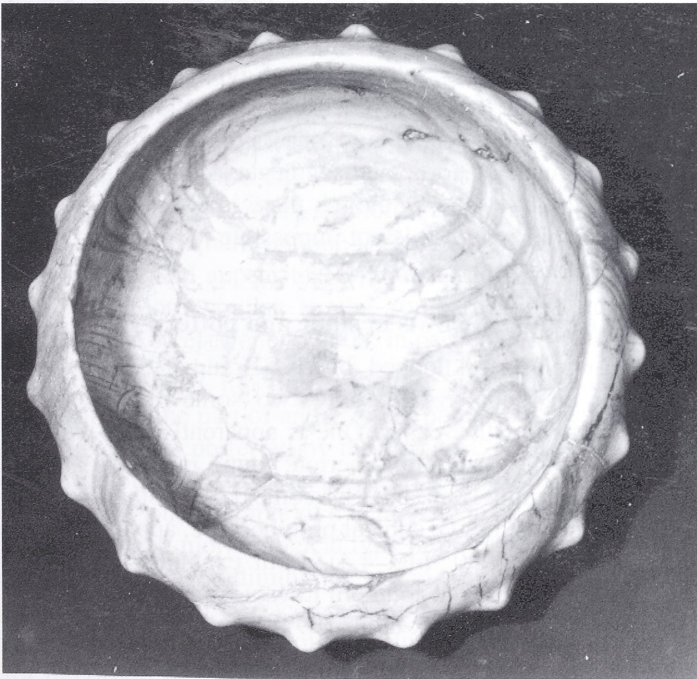


Fig. 5. Knobbed bowl. Munich ÄS 5985.

Two additional vessels in the rarified assemblage of south Levantine copies by Egyptians are a small bowl from Tell el Dab'a (Daqahlia Province, eastern Nile delta; Abd el-Moneim 2000: 152-153, Figs. 2b, 3) and another one acquired on the antiquities market. The former, well provenienced from an excavation, and dated by its (grave) context to the beginning of the First Dynasty (Abd el-Noneim 2000: 151), is a hemispherical bowl of basalt adorned with a single, continuous, horizontal row of evenly spaced conical protuberances below its rim. That bowl shares the highly distinctive morphology of numerous ceramic vessels from more or less contemporary contexts in the southern Levant as well as a few examples from Egypt. The purchased vessel is of similar appearance, and purportedly derived from a Delta site. It was fashioned of hard yellow limestone and now resides in the Egyptian collection of the Ägyptisches Museum München (Figs. 4-5).

Yet another example of Egyptian stone vessel production of a south-Levantine shape may be a partially preserved calcite holemouth jar from the south Levantine site of et-Tell/Ai (Amiran 1970: Fig. 1; Pl. 39). Although this obvious Egyptian import was found in a temple dated to the EB III period (late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE), this vessel, and few Egyptian stone bowls found in the same temple, were almost certainly heirlooms that as Amiran (1970: 172-173) has demonstrated, should be dated more or less to the period of the First Dynasty. The jar from Ai is made of horizontal segments, as are at least two stone vessels from the Tell el-Farkha cache. Although there is no more information as to the ultimate source of this export, it is not impossible it originated in a similar workshop as the specimens from Tell el-Farkha.

### **South Levantine knobbed bowls in stone and pottery**

Stone examples of knobbed bowls (Braun 1990: Type IV) from the southern Levant are equally rare; only two somewhat similar examples are known to the authors of this paper. One is apparently a re-worked, fenestrated, pedestaled bowl of the Chalcolithic period, found in a cave at Megiddo (Braun 1990: Fig. 4.3A), seemingly in an EB I context. The other is a minuscule fragment, a rim with the distinctive conical protuberance, apparently from EB I levels at Beth Yerah (Braun 1990: Fig. 4.4). Both examples are made of basalt, a material commonly used in the southern Levant from Neolithic times for the production of bowls (van den Brink et al. 1999), so there is no reason to suspect an Egyptian origin for either object.

These knobbed bowls appear to be based on ceramic proto-types, mostly from advanced EB I phases in the northern region (Braun 1985). Pottery proto-types have similar conical protuberances just below their rims. The pottery types may be of different colors and show considerable variation in overall form. In the



north examples tend to have simple, incurving walls with rounded rims and flat bases (e.g. Braun 1990: Fig. 4: 5). Others, known only from fragments (e.g. Braun 1985; Zuckerman 2003: Fig. 23.15-20) probably were shallow, almost hemispherical in form with incurving, tapered rims. Their colors vary from gray to almost black or red and are sometimes associated with specialized production such as Gray Burnished Ware or 'Crackled Ware' that is often mottled with red and black patches, or painted red (Braun 1989). Examples may be burnished or un-burnished.

Additional examples of EB I bowls with similar conical knobs are known from mortuary contexts in the southern region. They are rare and show considerable variation in form. One published example from Tell en Nasbeh (Wampler 1947: Pl. 52.1124) is a flat-based, deep bowl with slightly inverted, tapered rim. Somewhat unusually, the conical protrusions are at the very top of the rim. One of them is pierced vertically. Another specimen, from Ai/Et Tell (Marquet Krause 1949: Pl. LXXIV.1055), is also flat-based and deep, but has a broad, everted rim. Its protrusions, placed midway down the wall of the vessel give it the impression of carination and make it more similar in morphology to northern examples of Gray Burnished Ware with flattened protuberances. A third, unpublished bowl, on public display in the Israel Museum, is from a tomb context at Azor, a cemetery that is noted for yielding a considerable quantity of Egyptian imports. It is somewhat unusual because it has one, flat, pierced protuberance in place of a conical knob. Such handles are not uncommon on other bowls of the Late EB I horizon in the southern region. These southern examples are made of buff or light brown clay and appear to be produced locally. Additional ceramic examples, of fabrics more similar to the southern types, are known from Egyptian contexts (see Abd el-Moneim 2000: in particular Fig. 4f-g).

Another unusual object, this time of pottery, adds a little emphasis to what appears to be a desire on the part of an Egyptian potter to directly reproduce vessels of morphological types preferred by their south Levantine neighbors. While there are many examples of Egyptian pottery vessels influenced by south Levantine decoration, only one example of a deliberate copy (albeit somewhat idealized) of a south Levantine morphological type in pottery is known to the writers of these lines. It is a somewhat diminutive vessel (Fig. 6-7) recovered in a clear Late EB I context at Tel Halif Terrace (see also Levy et al. 1997: 34). Of unusually light colored clay with a finely polished surface, this jar was checked petrographically for the origin of its fabric. It turned out to be demonstrably Egyptian and obviously an ancient export to the homeland of this style of vessel (sic!).

In conclusion it can be said that the Tell el-Farkha and Tell el-Dab'a stone jars presented above, in conjunction with the pottery jar found at Tel Halif Terrace, form part of a highly rarified collection of artifacts produced in Egypt

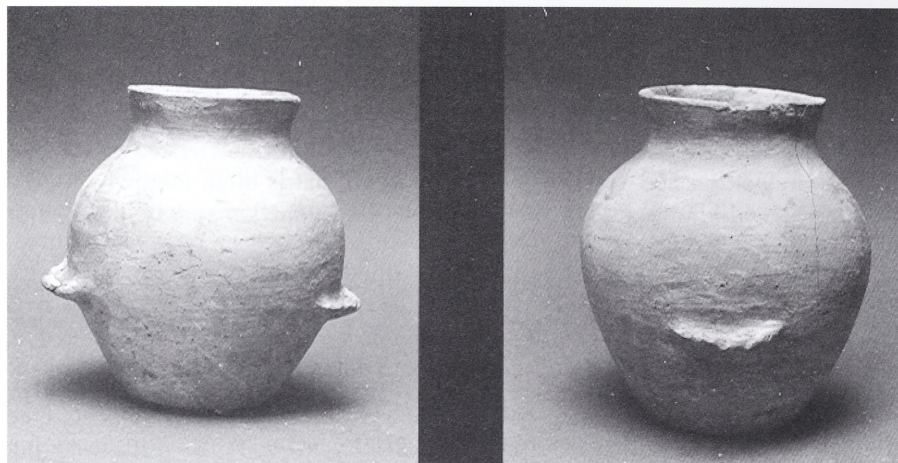


Fig. 6 and 7. Vessel from Tel Halif Terrace.

during Naqada III, according to south Levantine morphological templates. They represent extraordinarily rare and unusual examples of the intrusion of foreign influences into the very traditional spheres of Egyptian stone and ceramic vessel production. They can be considered additional examples to support the view developed by Wilkinson in his paper „Reality versus Ideology“ (Wilkinson 2002).

### Acknowledgements

The writers are thankful to Krzysztof Cialowicz and Marek Chlodnicki for their kind permission to present the Tell el-Farkha stone vessel and to Sylvia Schoske (Ägyptisches Museum München) for her kind permission to reproduce bowl ÄS 5985. Thanks are also due Tom E. Levy and E. Kansa for their kind permission to reproduce the Tel Halif Terrace pottery jar.

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