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TRADE, PIRACY AND THE PROTECTION OF SEA-LANES IN THE MYCENAEAN WORLD AND EGYPT

JORRIT M. KELDER*

Abstract

References to Tnj in Egyptian texts, as well as numerous Mycenaean vases found throughout Egypt, indicate that the Mycenaean world was known to the Egyptians. Because the Mycenaean world is not attested in the Amarna letters, however, archaeologists traditionally sought to explain Mycenaica in Egypt as the result of – mostly indirect – trading relations. Various recent studies have now shown that this position is untenable, and that direct relations must have existed and – at least occasionally – involved diplomatic missions. In this paper, I would like to focus on a small bronze lamella, stamped with the cartouche of Rameses II, that was found at the site of Kanakia on the island of Salamis. It once belonged to a suit of armour worn by charioteers. The precise mechanisms by which it reached its eventual destination elude us, and it may well have reached Salamis in the context of trade, or as plunder. This paper argues, however, that it likely reached Salamis via Mycenae, and that the presence of this remarkable piece may inform us about the role of Kanakia in the wider Mycenaean world – and that world's connections to Egypt.

EGYPT AND THE MYCENAEAN WORLD

In the last decades, it has become increasingly clear that Mycenae served as some sort of nexus for Egyptian interest in the Aegean. Though the region is only sporadically attested (as *Tnj*) in Egyptian sources, those texts that do mention it (most notably the so-called Kom el Hetan inscription) suggest a good knowledge of the Aegean and mention several important sites on Crete and the Greek mainland.¹ Although *Aegyptiaca* have been found at several other Aegean sites, the quantity and quality of the objects found at Mycenae, a site which is also attested in the Kom el Hetan text, are unsurpassed. Most notable amongst these finds are fragments of faience plaques, with the throne names of Amenhotep III inscribed on either side. Recent studies suggest that these fragments belonged to at least 11 complete plaques, and though only one of these fragments was found in a secure (but later) context, it is likely that these reached

Mycenae during the reign of Amenhotep III.² The plaques are unique, not just in the Aegean but also in Egypt: although plaques with royal cartouches are known, e.g., from several Egyptian foundation deposits, none of those plaques was inscribed on *both* sites. Because of their peculiar nature, it has been suggested that the plaques were made in Mycenae, but the good palaeography argues against such a notion.³ Other objects from Amenhotep's reign, moreover, have also been found at Mycenae, and in the nearby site of Tiryns – which likely served as the main harbour of Mycenae. Such imports include faience monkeys and scarabs, but not, as far as the archaeological evidence is concerned, anything that may qualify as 'ordinary'.⁴

That relations between the Aegean and New Kingdom Egypt involved more than the exchange of elite trinkets, however, can be safely assumed. Louis Dautais, for example, has suggested that Crete was originally a major exporter of timber,

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¹ EDEL 1966; see now also CLINE, STANNISH 2011.

² CLINE 1987; PHILLIPS 2007, 490; HELCK 1979, 97.

³ PHILLIPS 2007, 482.

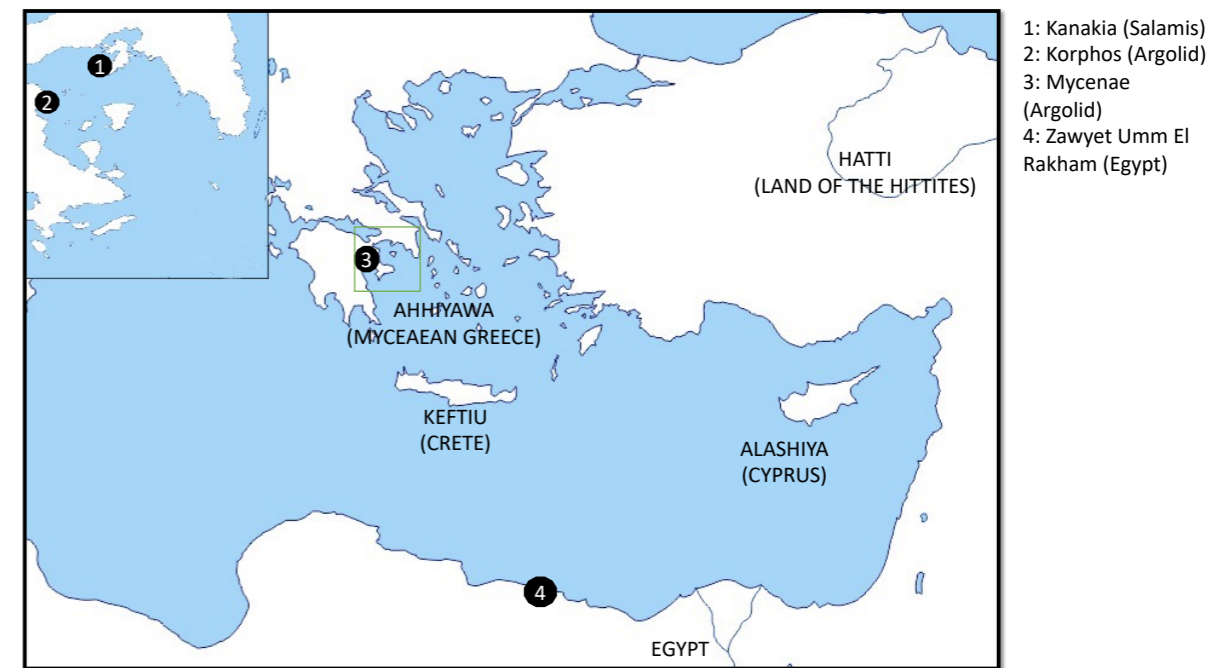
⁴ CLINE 1991; see for an overview of Orientalia in the Aegean: CLINE 2009.

and that Egyptian ‘Keftiu ships’ derived their name primarily from their (Cretan inspired) decorations and the material (imported conifer wood) they were built with.⁵ In addition, I myself have argued that contacts between the Aegean and Egypt must have involved the exchange of precious metals, with gold coming from Egypt and silver from the Aegean.⁶ That the Aegean may indeed have held a special attraction to the Egyptians because of its silver supplies, may perhaps be inferred from two remarkable ship-models from the tomb of Queen Ahotep.⁷ One of these represents a typical Egyptian vessel and is made of gold, whereas the other, which seems to represent a typical Minoan watercraft, is made of silver. One may be forgiven to think that the choice of metals here is deliberate, and that the silver used for the Minoan watercraft is a reference to the ship-type’s origin.

It is entirely likely that such metal-trade continued and indeed intensified in Mycenaean times. The peculiar tendency amongst some scholars to dismiss the evidence for direct, formal, contacts between the Mycenaean world and Egypt, and instead suggest that most of this trade must have been indirect, via Cyprus and the Levant, seems to stem from a desire to view the Mycenaean world as somehow small-scale, politically fragmented, and peripheral to the larger states of the Near East.⁸ Yet there is no evidence whatsoever to support this notion. Instead, the array of objects from the reign of Amenhotep III in the Aegean, and the remarkable presence of a large shipment of Mycenaean containers (virtually all of which, as far as we can tell, stem from the north-western Peloponnese; the region around Mycenae), strongly suggest that formal relations between Egypt and Mycenae continued well into the Amarna period. These relations may well have involved more than the exchange of metals: I have previously proposed that

the introduction of the olive in Egypt may have been the result of royal gift exchange during the Amarna period.⁹ Moreover, there are some indications that Mycenaean soldiers (perhaps specialists in hand-to-hand combat) now also found employment in Egypt, though it is unclear whether these arrived as the result of diplomatic contacts or on their own accord. A remarkable papyrus that was found at Amarna seems to show Mycenaean warriors, wearing boars’ tusks helmets.¹⁰ A fragment of just such a tusk, with the perforation to attach it to a leather core still visible, was found at Qantir (the site of Pi-Ramesse) and may indicate that such warriors still found employment at the Pharaonic court a century after Amarna.¹¹

This should not at all surprise us: employing foreigners as specialist troops was nothing new: the Egyptians had been doing so since the earliest days of the Pharaonic state (think of Nubian archers, or the Medjay), and both texts and archaeology suggest similar practices throughout the Near East, the Mycenaean world, and even northern Europe.¹² We also know that the Egyptians (and indeed all of their contemporaries) adopted foreign weaponry and knowhow, as is evidenced by, for example, the discovery of moulds for Hittite-style shields at Qantir, and specific developments (such as the adoption of the brailed sail and the crow’s nest) in Egyptian shipbuilding.¹³ Indeed, the very symbol of pharaonic military might – the war chariot – derived from Levantine prototypes. Mercenaries (regardless of whether they came on their own accord, were incorporated after a defeat, or served as part of a diplomatic understanding with a foreign power) must have been the principal agents in such technology transfer.¹⁴ And whilst many may have chosen, or were forced, to live out their lives in the country where they served, many may well have returned home, where they doubt-



Maps:

lessly were hailed as ‘heroes’ – a situation that is also known from, e.g., the later Viking Age.

It thus is entirely plausible, and even likely, that people from the Mycenaean world served in Pharaoh’s armies. This was no one-way stream. Though there are no indications for Egyptians in the Mycenaean army (which would have been surprising, for historically, ‘mercenaries’ tend to be recruited from the periphery), we do have two Linear B texts from Knossos that refer to one *ai-ku-pi-ti-jo* (Aiguptios: an Egyptian, or ‘man from Memphis’), who apparently worked as a shepherd, and a certain *mi-sa-ra-jo* (from the Akkadian Misr, or Egypt, which remains the Hebrew and the Arabic designation to this day) who is the recipient of olives and figs.¹⁵ Though some have argued that these personal names do not necessarily signify the actual origin of their bearers, one has to wonder what would normally prompt cause someone to be known by such names, had there not been a rather direct link with Egypt.¹⁶ The evidence, in sum, rather seems to suggest that there were close connections between Egypt and

the Mycenaean world, and that these connections involved diplomatic missions, exchange, and the movement of people.

THREATS AND COUNTERMEASURES

These connections, of course, depended on ships and the safety of sea-lanes. As a consequence, keeping the sea-lanes safe would have been of key importance to the states that participated in (and to an extent relied on the goods that were acquired via) overseas trade and diplomacy. Though it is likely that piracy is as old as seafaring itself, there are few indications that such activities ever seriously threatened the relative safety of overseas contacts prior to the Amarna Era / 14th century BCE.¹⁷ From that period onwards, however, references to raids, enquiries after the movement of small fleets, and increasingly exasperated correspondence between the rulers of the various states along the eastern Mediterranean coast, suggest that things were spiralling out of control. One famous letter from the Amarna Archive, sent by the king of Alashiya (Cyprus), explains that he was

⁵ DAUTAIS 2021, esp. 89; DAUTAIS 2024. Import of Minoan timber can only be securely attested during the relatively short period of LM II, though there is no reason to assume that it ceased after that time.

⁶ KELDER 2019, 2016.

⁷ For in-depth studies of the inventory of Ahhotep’s tomb see now MINIACI, LACOVARA 2022; for the ship models, see esp. WACHSMANN 2022.

⁸ Most recently SHERRATT 2023.

⁹ KELDER 2009.

¹⁰ SCHOFIELD, PARKINSON 1994, 157-70; PARKINSON, SCHOFIELD 1995, 125.

¹¹ PUSCH 1999, 29.

¹² For the Medjay, see LITZKA 2011; for the Near East, see HEIMPEL 2003, 29; TRIMM 2017, 121. Recent and remarkable evidence for what must have been mercenaries in temperate Europe comes from the excavations of the so-called battlefield at Tollense, Mecklenburg, in northern Germany. See LIDKE *et al.* 2017.

¹³ EMANUEL 2017.

¹⁴ KELDER 2022; EMANUEL 2014a.

¹⁵ KELDER, COLE, CLINE 2018, 14; PALAIMA 1991, 280.

¹⁶ Pace BENNET 2011, 157-8.

¹⁷ Though there is a reference from the reign of Amenhotep III (on a statue [E] of Amenhotep son of Hapu) to the fortification of the Nile delta, apparently with an eye on preventing raids on that area. Cf. EMANUEL 2021, 170, 185, 273; SIMMANCE 2014, 90 [non vidi].

not responsible for a raid on Egypt (even though some Cypriots were said to be amongst the raiders) and that instead some of his own villages were pillaged, apparently on a yearly basis, by ‘men from Lukka’ (almost certainly a reference to Lycia).

Scholars have proposed various explanations for the emergence of piracy during the Amarna Age, ranging from social reorientation and the formation of new identities, to the emergence of new naval technologies (such as the brailed sail and crow’s nest mentioned above).¹⁸ There is probably truth in all of these explanations, though the often-heard claim that piracy was largely the preserve of the disenfranchised fringe communities of the Late Bronze Age world seems off the mark. There is, in fact, some good evidence to suggest that some, and perhaps most, of the sea-raiding involved nobility. One example is the so-called *Indictment of Madduwatta*; a Hittite text that relates to events in c. 1400 BCE. In it, the Hittite king complains about raids by one ‘Attarissiya’ on the Anatolian west-coast and Cyprus. Interestingly, whilst Attarissiya initially seems to have targeted lands (in western Anatolia) that were held by the Hittite vassal Madduwatta (after whom the text is named), this same Madduwatta later appears to have joined his erstwhile enemy in his raids on Cyprus. Much like the Amarna Letter referred to above, the *Indictment of Madduwatta* shows the fluidity of raiding: perpetrators may come from the same community as victims of raiding (in other words: everyone did it!). The *Indictment of Madduwatta* also suggests that some of these raids, at least, were led by a noble – for Attarissiya is designated as a ‘LÚ’ (man, king) of Ahhiya, and he is reported to have had some 100 chariots at his disposal. The name Attarissiya has given rise to a lot of speculation, and may well be the Hittite rendering of the Greek patronymic ‘Atreid’. Ahhiya, at the same time, is widely believed to be an early version of later Ahhiyawa; the Hittite designation for the Mycenaean world. Given the fact that Attarissiya is active at precisely the time when the first Mycenaean palaces emerge, it seems reasonable to assume that there is a correlation. Perhaps these

raids were conducted by (the ruler of) an aggressively expanding Mycenaean polity, or they were led by displaced nobles who were trying to secure loyalty amongst their retainers through plunder. Parallels with the early Viking Age, and the rise of the so-called ‘Sea Kings’, spring to mind.¹⁹

Despite the Cypriot king’s apparent inability to shield his people from naval raids and prevent them from joining raids on Egypt, it is quite clear that, elsewhere at least, some steps were taken to curb such activities. A string of fortresses along the western coast of Egypt was constructed in the early 13th century BCE, and though these are often thought to have been built to check land-based incursions from Libya, such strongpoints must have also been important in monitoring maritime activity. That these fortresses did indeed serve as checkpoints for maritime activity may be deduced from the development of the site of Marsa Matruh. The site’s floruit appears to have been the 14th century BCE, but it seems to have declined rapidly following the construction of the nearby fortress of Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham in the early 13th century BCE – despite the fact that it represents the only natural anchorage along this part of the coast. Whilst Marsa Matruh was previously considered to have been a trading station (and a stopover between Crete and Egypt), Manfred Bietak has suggested that it was instead a pirate’s nest – whose operations came to an end due to Egyptian surveillance.²⁰

It is unlikely that the Egyptians were the only ones that invested in the safety of sea-lanes and ports. Indeed, Emanuel has suggested that the important Levantine city of Ugarit may have kept a contingent of military vessels at the ready for patrol and escort duties, whereas Hittite texts similarly suggest some precautions against naval raids.²¹ In Mycenaean Greece, the evidence for maritime surveillance is even stronger. A famous text (*An 657*) from the palace of Pylos, for example, refers to *e-pi-ko-wo* guarding the coast. It suggests a fear for seaborne threats and probably for good reason, given that the palace of Pylos was burnt and abandoned not long after this text was written. The ex-

act political status of Pylos in its wider Mycenaean setting remains a matter of debate. Though it is traditionally thought to have been the ‘capital’ of a Mycenaean state that covered most of the modern province of Messenia, I have argued that it was likely a vassal to the king of Mycenae.²² This suggestion may now find some further support in the recent identification of the *e-pi-ko-wo* at Pylos. The term is traditionally considered a compound of Greek *ἐπί* (on, at) and *κοῦω* (remark, learn, hear), and is often thought to mean something like ‘watcher’ or ‘lookout’. But Mahoney has recently suggested that the Mycenaean spelling is more plausibly equated with later Greek ‘epikouroi’ (allies or auxiliaries);²³ a reading that fits my scenario of a Mycenaean overlord, sending reinforcements to a beleaguered vassal in Messenia, rather well.²⁴

SECURING THE SARONIC

That the Lords of Mycenae had a stake in securing sea lanes is quite evident: I have noted earlier that Mycenae was a hub for long-distance contacts, especially with Egypt (but there are also sizable amounts of Levantine and Cypriot and even some Anatolian imports). Moreover, if Mycenae was indeed the centre of a larger territorial state, the sea would have often provided the fastest way of communicating with distant parts of the realm – such as Millawanda (the Hittite rendering of Miletus). There is archaeological evidence that suggests that Mycenae was, indeed, investing in access to and control over important sea-lanes. This is especially evident in the Saronic Gulf, which was an area of pivotal importance for a number of reasons. In the first place because of defensive considerations: one could easily land on the west-coast of the Sa-

ronic and reach Mycenae within a few hours, thus bypassing the heavily fortified coastal centres in the Argolid (such as Asine, Tiryns, and almost certainly Nauplion).²⁵ But the Saronic also offered the fastest route to the silver mines of southern Attica. Two clusters of sites are of particular interest here: Korphos Kalamianos and Stiri (the latter essentially a satellite of the former) on the west-coast of the Saronic (just to the east of Mycenae), and the site of Kanakia (and the nearby site of Pyrgiakoni) on the island of Salamis. Both appear to be built in the early 13th century BCE – at around the same time as the construction of the string of Egyptian fortresses along the Libyan coast.²⁶

These sites clearly were in an excellent position to monitor movements at sea. Stiri, in particular, had “a sweeping viewshed extending from Athens and Salamis in the northeast to Aegina and Methana in the east and southeast (which) allowed the inhabitants to monitor seaborne traffic on the Saronic”.²⁷ It is thought to have supplied agricultural products to Kalamianos,²⁸ and probably doubled as that harbour town’s lookout post. Given their proximity to Mycenae (the journey would have been approximately 50 km on foot), there can be no doubt that Stiri and Kalamianos fell under the authority of that centre. I would argue that the sites must have primarily served a military purpose, and as a statement of power: Kalamianos was not a mere harbour town, but may best be considered as a major naval base that controlled the Saronic Gulf. “The imposing architecture at Kalamianos and Stiri was meant to be seen from the sea”.²⁹

I suggest that Kanakia on Salamis served a very similar purpose. Like Kalamianos, Kanakia is part of a larger constellation of sites. One of these

¹⁸ Amongst the burgeoning literature on the topic, I should especially highlight the important work by EMANUEL (e.g., 2020, 2021) and HITCHCOCK, MAEIR (e.g., 2018).

¹⁹ All Hittite texts pertaining to Ahhiyawa have now been published by BECKMAN, BRYCE, CLINE (2011); an excellent overview of the Viking age and the emergence of ‘hydrarchies’ (essentially plundering, ‘migratory communities’, that were essentially polities in themselves) is PRICE 2020 (esp. 360 ff.).

²⁰ BIETAK 2015; EMANUEL 2021, 177-8.

²¹ EMANUEL 2018, 248.

²² E.g., KELDER 2008.

²³ MAHONEY 2017.

²⁴ Note that some texts from Pylos similarly suggest supra-regional coordination of naval forces, such as the dispatch of a ship to Pleuron – a place well beyond the administrative purview of the palace of Pylos. Cf. KELDER 2008.

²⁵ There are various indications that Mycenae was investing in its security over the course of the 13th century BCE. Apart from the extension of its citadel walls halfway the century, it seems that there was also an attempt to limit access to the Argolid from the northeast, by fortifying the Isthmus. Though it is unclear whether this wall was ever finished, and if so, what its precise course may have been, it does suggest an increasing need to control land (and, as I hope to demonstrate, sea) routes in the area. Recent analysis of drill-cores, moreover, suggest that the harbour of Lechaion – the main harbour of later (Iron Age) Corinth – may have been used already at this time, too, suggesting a remarkable degree of activity in the Corinthia. For the wall along the isthmus, see BRONEER 1966; 1968. For the recent discoveries at Lechaion, see CHABROL *et al.* 2023.

²⁶ Though there appears to have been a minor settlement at Kalamianos in the 14th century BCE, it was massively expanded early in the 13th century BCE. Korphos was constructed, ex novo, around the same time, using virtually identical building techniques. See TARTARON 2013, 258-62; 2015, 32. For Kanakia, see LOLOS 2009.

²⁷ TARTARON 2013, 259.

²⁸ KVAPIL (2021, 111) suggests that the terracing required for agriculture may have been built by workgroups sent there by a palace.

²⁹ TARTARON 2013, 265; see also TARTARON 2015, 38.

sites, Pyrgiakoni, lies about 750 metres south of the main site of Kanakia and is thought to have been a sanctuary of sorts, as well as a checkpoint for a nearby bay / harbour.³⁰ Kanakia itself sits on what may best be described as a ‘finger’ stretching out towards the sea. It commands two small plains on its north and south (though I suspect these may have aggregated over the ages as a result of alluvial deposition; the acropolis may well have extended into the sea in Mycenaean times), but its strategic value doubtlessly lies in its commanding views over the western part of the Saronic Gulf, stretching from the Gerania Mountain range in the northwest to the region around Epidaurus in the southwest.³¹ The place was inhabited since the neolithic, but around the end of LH IIIA2 and the beginning of LH IIIB (a transition usually dated to c.1300 BCE), all previous architecture on the acropolis was razed and replaced with several large building complexes.³²

The most monumental of these consist of building Gamma (which included a double megaron, a bath, and what has been identified as a shrine)³³ and the so-called Eastern Complex. Building Gamma is thought to have been the ideological heart of the settlement. It could be entered three entrances, though access to this upper part of the settlement was likely restricted: the remains of a peribolos wall have been found lower down the slope. The Eastern Complex was even less accessible, and could only be entered, it seems, through a fortified gate with a triangular inner courtyard. The complex, which includes 41 rooms, is thought to have served as the locus for the reception of people and the storage and distribution of goods.³⁴ Amongst these goods were copious amounts of pottery, but remarkably, none of these vessels appear to have been locally made. Indeed, even fairly mundane kitchenware appears to have been imported from nearby Aigina, whereas petrographic analysis of

other pots from the site points to production centres in Attica (apparently the sole supplier of fine ware), the Argolid, and Crete.³⁵ Many facets of everyday life – cooking, storage, dining – apparently depended on supplies from elsewhere. And whilst Marabea, in her impressive studies on the material from Kanakia, noted that “pottery offers no evidence in favour of a Salaminian attachment to or special relationship with any of the [...] realms” of nearby palaces, the situation at Kanakia would in fact fit perfectly within the framework of a single, supra-regional polity, that could direct the production of various centres in order to supply specific strongholds.

I argue that the construction of the buildings on the acropolis of Kanakia in the early 13th century BCE, in particular Building Gamma and the Eastern Complex, were built under the aegis of such a single state. The clear architectural break with previous occupation, the fact that the buildings show palatial traits (the sheer quality of the architecture and features such as the double megaron, columned entrances, and the remarkable fortified gate), and the apparent reliance on imported stuff for daily needs, suggests that this was not the culmination of a local architectural (and social) development (and thus not the seat of a local ruler), but something that was ‘planted’. To put it in legendary / Homeric perspective: if Kanakia were indeed the palace of Ajax, as its excavator has called it, then Ajax would have clearly been a subordinate of Agamemnon, and he was likely tasked to monitor shipping in the northern Saronic.³⁶

What I propose, in sum, is that at roughly the same time, at either (northern and southern) end of the Mediterranean, a need was felt to secure sea routes through the erection of coastal checkpoints. In Egypt, the evidence indicates that these checkpoints were created at the expressed order of the King (Ramesses II). Though the evidence

³⁰ MARABEA 2019: 453.

³¹ LOLOS (2009: 37) argues that, due to its strategic position, Kanakia probably controlled the sea-routes of the western Saronic.

³² MARABEA 2019, 450.

³³ LOLOS 2016.

³⁴ MARABEA 2019, 452.

³⁵ MARABEA 2010, 215-24; TARTARON 2013, 239.

³⁶ Pace LOLOS 2009, 37. Lolos’ argument that “the identification of the coastal palace complex of Salamis provides us with a number of new parameters for assessing the manifestation, exercise and gradation of royal power in Greece in the 13th and early 12th century B.C. (and that) Palatial power in Mycenaean Greece should not be viewed as solid and uniform, or indeed expressed in a single way, but rather as highly diversified and plausibly asymmetrical” only holds true if one adheres, a priori, to the view that Mycenaean Greece was not politically unified. If one does not adhere to that view (for which, I cannot repeat this often enough, there is no single shred of evidence), the finds at Kanakia are, in fact, perfectly in line with the model of a larger, single state, with various palaces and minor centres, including ‘checkpoints’ such as Kanakia.



Fig. 1 - The lamella in the Salamis museum.

in Greece is far less clear, I propose a similar scenario, and that Kanakia and Kalamianos were part of the same building project under the aegis of the King of Mycenae. It is perhaps no coincidence that the great extension of the citadel of Mycenae itself was built not much later (around the middle of the 13th century BCE). Whether these two kings knew of each other’s construction spree or independently acted against similar threats is a moot point, but that there were relations between Egypt and Mycenae at this point in time is all but certain.

A CARTOUCHE AT KANAKIA

It is in this light that we may perhaps consider a bronze lamella, with the praenomen of Ramesses II stamped onto it, that was found at Kanakia. The mechanisms by which this object arrived at Kanakia are unclear, but given the sporadic occurrence of such lamellas in the archaeological record and the presence of a royal cartouche, it seems

unlikely that this was a mere trinket that was acquired via ‘regular’ trade. It was found under the floor of an anteroom in building IΔ of the Eastern Complex, amongst a group of other metal objects, which included a fragment of a vessel, a sickle and two chisels; all of Mycenaean type.³⁷ The lamella itself was wrapped with a piece of bronze sheet. It was once part of a larger suit of armour, of a type that was worn by Near Eastern charioteers: multiple metal strips of this sort would have been sown onto a leather or textile cuirass, providing its wearer with protection as well as flexibility to move. The cartouche indicates that it was originally issued for Ramesses’ military.

From contemporary inscriptions, it is known that Ramesses II employed a number of foreigners in his army, including groups that are thought to have come from the north. The Sherden, whose origins are variously thought to lie in Urnfield Europe, the Mycenaean world, or Sardinia, are

³⁷ LOLOS 2009, 31-9; JUNG 2022, 257.

amongst the most conspicuous of such groups.³⁸ At the famous battle of Kadesh, they served as the Pharaoh's bodyguard, and were equipped with characteristic swords (unlike the traditional Egyptian scimitar), round shields, and horned helmets. In a previous paper, I have suggested that some of such foreign 'mercenaries' may have returned home, and brought part of their military kit, as well as stories about their service abroad, with them.³⁹ Some of these stories, perhaps picked up around foreign campfires or based on personal experience, made it into songs that are still known today. Odysseus' 'Trojan Horse', as well as his capacity to shoot an arrow with his (composite?) bow through a row of bronze axes, for example, are remarkably similar to the Egyptian story of the 'Taking of Joppa' or the depictions of Amenhotep II shooting arrows through bronze ingots. Homer's description of Odysseus' "intrinsically worked corslet" (θώρηκος πολυδαίδαλου; *Iliad* XI 436), moreover, could well be taken to describe a coat of scale armour consisting of lamella like the one found at Kanakia. Indeed, the hero himself tells a tale (or rather, a lie) of him being forced into Egyptian service after a failed raid on the delta; it may well have originally been part of another story that was later incorporated in the *Odyssey*.

That 'mercenaries' (I use this term in the loosest possible way; we may be talking about independent 'swords for hire', press-ganged captives, or groups that served abroad for diplomatic reasons – for example in support of an ally) adopted foreign equipment and fighting techniques would make total sense, and it is thus possible that a foreign warrior in Egyptian service may have acquired a suit of scale-armour and brought home to Salamis. At the same time, however, it is unlikely that such suits of armour were distributed to just any warrior: these were rare and expensive pieces, and would have normally only been distributed amongst the fighting elite – such as royal charioteers. Indeed, I know of only 10 other metal scales that have been found within Egypt itself (in the palace of Amenhotep III at Malqata), whereas a suit with leather scales was included in Tut-

ankhamun's tomb inventory. Moreover, two suits of – seemingly bronze – scale armour are shown on the wall of the tomb of Qenamun; a high official from the reign of Amenhotep III. Elsewhere in the Near East, a complete suit of bronze scale armour was found on Cyprus (and is apparently dated to the 14th century BCE), and various single lamellas from a scatter of sites in the Near East, including Nuzi in Syria, Pyla-Kokkinokremos on Cyprus, and the the Uluburun wreck.⁴⁰ Within Greece, only two other lamellas have previously been found: one at Mycenae (but late; in a LH IIIC context), and one at Tiryns – though none of these were inscribed. Suits of scale armour were thus a rarity, even in wealthy Egypt, and unlikely to simply be gifted to foreign warriors upon their retirement. Other explanations for the lamella's presence at Kanakia must thus be considered.

A GIFT REGIFTED

One of these is that the lamella had not come to Salamis as part of a complete suit, but as a solitary piece. The lamella, like the other bronze objects with which it was found, may in such a scenario be interpreted as the result of trade; perhaps as scrap metal that was to be reused in the manufacture of new tools or weapons. For some reason, it was subsequently buried in the Eastern Complex, perhaps when the building and, indeed, the entire site, was abandoned around 1200 BCE. What speaks against such a scenario, however, is that there is no sign that Kanakia was abandoned in a hurry, and as the result of an imminent threat. Quite the contrary, for access to the site's 'ideological heart' – Building Gamma – was blocked by three walls prior to its abandonment, suggesting a degree of planning. There thus would be little reason to leave a valuable quantity of metal sitting in the floor of an abandoned building.

What strikes me as a far more likely scenario is that the lamella, and the assemblage in which it was found, was part of a foundation deposit. This would necessarily mean that the Eastern Complex at Kanakia cannot have been built prior the earliest regnal year of Ramesses II, which is now com-

monly thought to be c. 1295 BCE.⁴¹ One strong argument in favour of such an interpretation is that the lamella appears to have been 'wrapped' in a piece of bronze sheet, suggesting that those who deposited the assemblage, took care to protect the hieroglyphs on the object. Foundation deposits are known from virtually all parts of the ancient world, from temperate Europe to the Near East. In Egypt, numerous examples are known, and these normally included vessels containing food, (model) tools, and faience plaques bearing the cartouche of the Pharaoh who ordered the construction of the relevant building.⁴² It is quite likely that the Mycenaeans were aware of this Egyptian practice. I already mentioned the remarkable fragments of inscribed faience plaques from the reign of Amenhotep III that have been found at Mycenae. Though their unique features (being inscribed on both sides) makes it difficult to assess how they were meant to be used, some of these plaques ended up in a religious context. One such fragment was found in a crumpled lead vessel in the so-called 'room with the fresco' at the cult centre. Seeing that this room went out of use towards end of the 13th century BCE, this suggests that these plaques were used in some ritual, well over a century after they had arrived at the Mycenae – though clearly not, one should add, as a building deposit.

The suggestion that the faience plaques, perhaps because of the presence of Egyptian hieroglyphs, were held in special esteem, may similarly have applied to the lamella from Salamis. It, too, was clearly Egyptian and bore that society's singular script: this may well have imbued the small object with a special significance (that is now largely lost to us), and made it suitable as a donation to a deity when the new centre at Kanakia was constructed. Given that this centre was, in my view, almost certainly built on the orders of the king of Mycenae, it seems likely that the objects included in the foundation deposit were supplied by that centre, too. This makes sense, for whilst the two chisels, the sickle and (part of) the bronze vessel may have come from anywhere in the Mycenaean world, access to exotic objects from Egypt was clearly restricted.

The lamella may have originally come to Mycenae as part of diplomatic gift exchange, perhaps

even as part of a complete suit. I noted earlier that the presence of a (single) piece of boars' tusk at Qantir may suggest that Mycenaeans served in the army of the Pharaoh, or at least were present at his residence of Pi-Ramesse. Given the likelihood that the Mycenaean world participated, like all the other states in the eastern Mediterranean, in international diplomacy (which involved the exchange of letters, gifts, and occasionally even specialist craftsmen), it is possible that some of these warriors may have been sent there in the context of such a diplomatic mission. Eric Cline once even argued that there may have been an anti-Hittite alliance between the Mycenaeans and Egypt.⁴³ Perhaps one of the high-ranking Mycenaeans at Pi-Ramesse – let's call him an ambassador – was gifted a costly suit of armour on the occasion of Ramesses' accession to the throne; a gift that would fit the general custom of elite gift exchange rather well. In this way, the suit may have reached Mycenae, where most of its metal may well have been reused (again; a practice that is well attested with other objects that were exchanged and reused, despite the fact that we now would qualify them as 'works of art').⁴⁴ The lamella, with its hieroglyphs, was spared from such profane reuse and selected for an offering to the deity guarding over newly built Kanakia. If I am right in suggesting that the site was primarily built as a (primarily) military checkpoint, then the selection of an inscribed piece of bronze that once was part of a larger piece of armour – perhaps as *pars pro toto* – would have been truly appropriate. I hope that this paper is a similarly appropriate gift to Professor Betrò on the occasion of her retirement.

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³⁸ WACHSMANN 2013, 167-76 for Urnfield origins; EMANUEL 2014b, 43 for arguments against and in favour of an Aegean origin.

³⁹ KELDER 2022.

⁴⁰ LOLOS 2009, 39; for Mycenae and Tiryns, see CATLING 1970 and MARAN 2004, 21. MÖDLINGER (2012, 1) mentions a possible third specimen from Pylos. MOLLOY 2012, 286 notes that Linear B references to 'tunic fittings' (*e-pi-ki-to-ni-ja*) with the ideogram for bronze in some Linear B texts may refer to scale armour.

⁴¹ VAN DIJK 2008; but see KRAUSS, WARBURTON 2009, 134.

⁴² MÜLLER 2018, 182.

⁴³ CLINE 1998, 250.

⁴⁴ MORRIS 2015.

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