

The Distribution of Mycenaean Ceramics in the Kingdom of Ugarit

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Late Bronze Age II and the kingdom of Ugarit

The urban settlement at Tell Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) formed the centre of a small polity (c. 2000 sq km) during the second part of the Late Bronze Age (c. 1350-1200 BC) (Fig. 3). Based on the relative amount of pottery from the excavations at Tell Ras Shamra, the island of Cyprus was probably the most favoured trading partner at this point in time, given its importance in the metal trade. By the end of the 14th c. BC the island had also become a port of transhipment for products from the Aegean world, including Late Helladic ceramics.



Figure 1. (left) Aerial view of Tell Tweini.

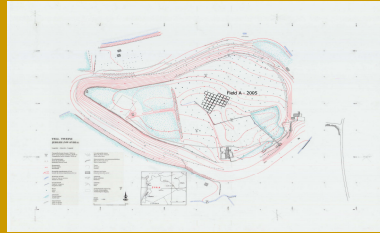


Figure 2. (right) Topographic map of Tell Tweini indicating the position of Field A.

Figure 5. (below) Layer 7C-B in Field A is dated to Late Bronze Age II. Three major contexts in which LH sherds were found are indicated in light grey. The circles in darker grey represent pits dug during the same period.



Figure 3. Map of the Ugaritic kingdom, some of its identified settlements and its most important neighbors.

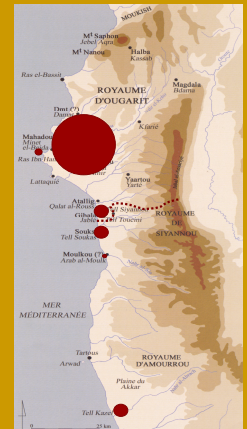


Figure 4. The relative distribution of LH sherds within the Ugaritic kingdom, indicating the probable course of its southern border (dotted line).



Late Bronze Age II at Tell Tweini (Gibala)

A fair amount of historical information is available on the borders of the Ugaritic kingdom and the sites belonging to it (e.g. van Soldt 2005). Only a small number of those sites, however, has been the subject of intensive archaeological research (e.g. Minet el-Beidha [ancient Mahadou] and Ras Ibn Hani [ancient Biruti?]). Surface finds or rescue excavations have collected material from smaller sites within this region (e.g. Qalat Er-Rouss [ancient Attalig?]). Since 1999, the site of Tell Tweini (Jebbleh) (Figs 1,2) is being excavated by a Syro-Belgian team led by Prof. Dr. M. Al-Maqdissi (DGAM) and Prof. Dr. K. Van Lerberghe (KULeuven). The site, which was inhabited at least since the end of the 3rd mill. BC until the Persian period, was a flourishing harbour town during LB II (Bretschneider *et al.* 2005). It is very likely that the site may be identified as ancient Gibala which formed the southernmost border of the Ugaritic kingdom (Fig. 4). Several finds attest to the close relationship with Ugarit, such as a weight of a bovine with an identical parallel at Ugarit. Late Bronze Age layers have been found in Field A at the centre of Tell Tweini (Figs 2,5). Remains of at least three separate structures were excavated. In each of those some of the archaeological contexts contained Late Helladic sherds, in combination with local and Cypriot ceramics. Context 2 comprises a number of loci in which, among other, fragments from one amphoroid crater (LH IIIA:2) (Figs 10,11) were found scattered over a relatively large area (see connecting dots in Figure 5). Context 3 is a burnt layer in which a semi-complete kylix with shell motives (LH IIIB) (Fig. 7) was discovered.



Figure 6. Figurine TWE-A-01818-M-002, LH IIIB.

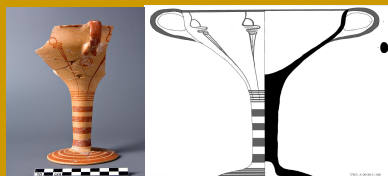


Figure 7. Kylix TWE-A-00185-C-020, LH IIIB.

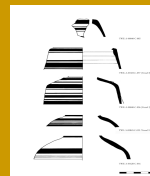


Figure 8. Several pyxides.



Figure 9. Stirrup from jar TWE-A-00157-C-012.

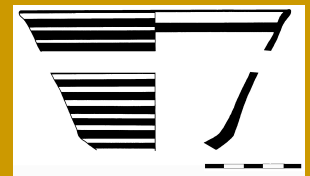


Figure 10. Chalice TWE-A-00838-C-045.

Late Helladic ceramics in the kingdom of Ugarit

At present c. 900 Late Helladic vessels are known and published from the tell of Ras Shamra, making up more than one third of the total sherds from the Levant (Leonard 1994; Yon *et al.* 2000). LH ceramics have been reported from only one other Ugaritic site: Ras Ibn Hani (min. 18 LH vessels: LH IIIB-C, Bounni *et al.* 1998: Figs 152,155-6). Sites just outside the Ugaritic territory with finds of LH sherds include: Tell Daruk (Oldenburg and Rohweder 1981: 52), Tell Sukas (Riis *et al.* 1996) and Tell Kazel (Badre *et al.* 1999-2000: 148, Fig. 25 o).



Figure 11. Fragments and reconstruction of amphoroid crater TWE-A-01805-C-001, probably FS 54.

The difference between the large amount from Ugarit, the paucity of LH sherds within its kingdom and the limited presence of the material in the surrounding settlements may lead to the impression that LH ceramics were only consumed at Ugarit itself or that the site served as a port-of-trade for the entire region. Such idea is in fact the result of the lack of excavated settlements in the Ugaritic kingdom as the excavations at Tell Tweini now demonstrate. LH IIIA:2 and IIIB sherds have been found in three contexts at Tell Tweini (Fig. 5). This collection is thereby the first assemblage from stratigraphically controlled excavations outside the immediate region of Ugarit. The sherds represent a minimum of 36 vessels. There are at least two open forms: two kylikes and two chalices (but also a possible bowl or cup). There are 31 closed vessels: ten closed vessels of unidentified form, six stirrup jars, five amphoroid kraters, five pyxides, four piriform jars and one possible flask. There are also two figurine fragments. Interestingly enough, the entire collection can be dated before the second half of the 13th c. BC. No younger material has been found. This suggests that the import to Tell Tweini was halted at some point in the 13th c. BC for an unknown reason. It may also indicate that the site was partially destroyed (see destruction of House 3 with a LH IIIB kylix in situ, Fig. 5) or abandoned before the sack of Ugarit at the beginning of the 12th c. BC.

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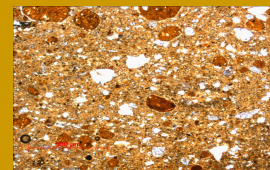
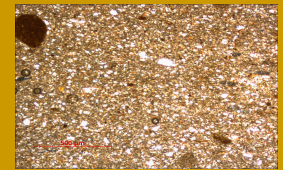


Figure 12. Pictures of Fabric 19 (LH) (above right) and Fabric 4 (local ceramics) (above left).



Chemical analysis

It is must be stressed that the 'foreign' nature of those LH ceramics is not established beyond doubt. Their apparent appreciation by Levantine Bronze Age communities may have led to local copies. The LH ceramics from Tell Tweini are therefore analysed in three different ways.

1. *Stylistic analysis* suggests a very close relationship with the material from Ugarit as exemplified by the Pictorial Repertoire (Fig. 10,11), the figurines and the kylikes (Figs 6,7,10). An interesting contrast with the settlement at Ugarit is the lack of 'cultic vases' as defined by Yon *et al.* (2000) in this repertoire.
2. *Petrographic analysis* confirmed the unique composition of the fabric of this vessel in comparison with the local repertoire (Fig. 12). The fabric has a homogenous grey-brown matrix with occasional red spot: a mineral content of 5% small (up to 50µm) and evenly distributed quartz grains; secondary calcite deposition in the pores. The local fabrics consist of a yellow-brown matrix which contains many fossil fragments (between 25 and 50%) such as shell fragments, gastropods, bivalves, corals, algae, ostracodes, foraminifers, radiolaria, calcispheres. The bioclastic content is from 100 µm to up to 2 mm in size. Dark red to brown grog has been added, in which no mineral content is obvious (about 5 to 10%, between 500 µm and 2 mm in size); few mineral grains (around 5%).
3. *Chemical analysis* will also be conducted on the sherds in order to add the information to a growing comparative database. This research is currently underway.

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