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# At the dawn of the Late Bronze Age ‘globalization’: the (re)-circulation of Egyptian artefacts in Nubia and the Northern Levant in the MB II–mid MB III (c. 1710–1550 BC)

*Gianluca Miniaci\**

## Abstract

The article analyses the circulation of late Middle Kingdom (mid MB I–MB I/II) Egyptian artefacts in the Northern Levant and Upper Nubia in the MB II–mid MB III (c. 1710–1550 BC). Three case studies have been selected: the royal tombs of Byblos, the tomb of the Goats at Ebla, and the Egyptian Cemetery at Kerma. Although the two regions were politically disconnected, their populations appropriated, reused, and occasionally reinterpreted Egyptian artefacts in a similar manner. These artifacts, although found in Second Intermediate Period contexts, generally dated to the mid MB I–MB I/II (late Middle Kingdom). It is suggested that the collapse of Egyptian central power at the end of the Middle Kingdom could have led to the recirculation of older Egyptian objects. The recirculation suggests that the ‘globalisation’, noted in archaeology and text during the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BC) in fact started in the first half of the Second millennium BC.

**Key-words:** Byblos; Ebla; Kerma; Globalisation; Circulation of artefact; Second Intermediate Period.

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**En los albores de la "globalización" de la Edad del Bronce Final: la (re) -circulación de los artefactos egipcios en Nubia y el Levante Norte en la MB II / III (c. 1710–1550 a.C.)**

**Resumen**

El artículo analiza la circulación de artefactos egipcios tardíos del Imperio Medio (mediados de MB I a MB I / II) en el norte de Levante y la Alta Nubia en MB II a mediados de MB III (c. 1710-1550 a. Se han seleccionado tres estudios de caso: las tumbas reales de Byblos, la tumba de las cabras en Ebla y el cementerio egipcio en Kerma. Aunque las dos regiones estaban políticamente desconectadas, sus poblaciones se apropiaron, reutilizaron y ocasionalmente reinterpretaron los artefactos egipcios de manera similar. Estos artefactos, aunque se encuentran en contextos del Segundo Período Intermedio, generalmente datan de mediados de MB I-MB I / II (finales del Reino Medio). Se sugiere que el colapso del poder central egipcio al final del Reino Medio podría haber llevado a la recirculación de objetos egipcios más antiguos. La recirculación sugiere que la "globalización", observada en la arqueología y el texto durante la Edad del Bronce Final (1500-1200 a. C.), de hecho comenzó en la primera mitad del segundo milenio a. C.

**Palabras clave:** Byblos; Ebla; Kerma; Globalización; Circulación de artefactos; Segundo Período Intermedio.

During the MB II/III (1710–1550 BC)<sup>1</sup>, roughly corresponding to the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt, two apparently ‘disconnected’ areas, the Northern Levant<sup>2</sup> and Upper Nubia, exhibited a similar phenomenon: the appropriation, reuse, and occasional reinterpretation of Egyptian artefacts. In both regions, the reused artefacts were attested in funerary contexts belonging to one of the highest/wealthiest layers of the society (leaders, chiefs, rulers, or kings). Although such a phenomenon frequently

<sup>1</sup>I adopted the ‘Low Chronology’ concerning the Levant in this paper: MB I = ±1900–±1710 BC, MB I/II = ±1710–±1680 BC; MB II = ±1680–±1580 BC; MB III = ±1580–±1500 BC, based on Bietak 2002. For the high chronology, see Höflmayer et alii 2016 (response in Ben-Tor 2018, 43-54). See also the volume edited by Bietak, Czerny 2008. For Egyptian synchronization, late Middle Kingdom approximately corresponds to the mid-MB I (1850/1800 BC) and MBI/II (1680 BC); Second Intermediate Period starts more or less around the MB II, in 1650 BC, and ends with the mid-MB III, in 1550 BC.

<sup>2</sup>For the Northern Levant is intended the region of Lebanon and southern Syria; instead for Southern Levant the region of Israel/Palestine and western Jordan.

occurs in ancient (and modern) societies (cf. Ogbechie 2014), these Egyptian objects do not seem to be contemporary with their archaeological contexts of provenance. They were older, in some cases by centuries<sup>3</sup>. Due to their homogeneity and robust presence at important sites like Byblos in the Northern Levant and Kerma in Upper Nubia, they do not seem to simply represent heirlooms or exotica from a distant land, but they form a coherent set of material that had been produced in the Middle Kingdom, and especially in its latter part (MB I and MB I/II). Just when and how these objects arrived in the Northern Levant and Upper Nubia is an open question (Ben-Tor forthcoming a and b).

## Byblos

In 1922, the excavations conducted by Charles Virroleaud, first, and Pierre Montet, later, at Byblos unearthed nine tombs carved into the rock on the western side of the site. Intended for local rulers, the tombs were numbered by Montet from I to IX (Virolleaud 1922; Montet 1928: 143-238). Unfortunately, only the tombs I–III had been found intact, while the structures V–IX had all already been plundered in antiquity. At the time of its discovery, only tomb IV seemed to have been looted in more modern times. Inside the intact funerary structures, wooden or stone sarcophagi were found surrounded or equipped with a conspicuous funerary equipment. Tombs I (identified with Prince Abishemu) and II (Abishemu's son Ibshemuabi) were connected to each other through an underground passage, which probably had the purpose of putting the two deceased in eternal contact (Kopetkzy 2016: 151-5).

These structures represent the oldest funerary structures of the whole necropolis and contained many Egyptian or Egyptian-style objects (Kopetkzy 2015 and 2018). For instance, Tomb I contained an obsidian and gold vase inscribed with the name of Amenemhat III. Tomb II included even richer equipment with more elements typical of Egyptian art: an obsidian vase bearing the name of Amenemhat IV, a gold pectoral, an obsidian box

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<sup>3</sup>The complex geo-political histories of the two regions necessitate caution in connecting the two phenomena (see Morris 2005: 11-4; also Ben-Tor forthcoming a), although there is a clear evidence that the diffusion of Egyptian artefacts across the Mediterranean notably increased during the first half of the second millennium. The large number of Predynastic–Old Kingdom vessels excavated from unstratified, or much later, second millennium Aegean deposits, especially at Knossos, might constitute a fitting parallel; Renfrew 1972: 214; Bevan 2004: 115, esp. n. 4.

with the name of the pharaoh Amenemhat IV, a gold ring with a scarab in amethyst, a gold bracelet with a scarab, a silver mirror with a wooden handle covered with gold leaf in the shape of a papyrus and a spoon with a wooden duck head handle covered with gold leaf (a summary can be found in Jidejian 1968: 56–74 and Mourad 2015: 167–169). The appearance in 1925 at an antiquarian in Jerusalem of sixty-seven objects of great value from Lebanon, including a gold pectoral inscribed with the name of Amenemhat III, may indicate that many of these objects could have come from tomb IV (Chéhab 1937). Found empty by Montet, this tomb likely had been sacked in conjunction with the discovery of the necropolis in modern times.

All the precious materials and objects of prestige<sup>4</sup>, clearly belong to the late Middle Kingdom (mid-MB I–MB I/II) according to their type and manufacture. Some of these objects had clearly been adapted to the new cultural horizons: for instance, the inscriptions and decorations on the bases of three amethyst scarabs found in the tombs I–III had been erased (Kopetzky 2018: 310-2, figs 1-2). Therefore, it seems they had been manufactured for a different owner and purpose. Indeed, recent analyses of local pottery found inside the tombs I–III of Byblos – and the comparison with more recent finds at various sites in the Levant and at Tell el-Dab‘a – has shifted the dating of the burial depositions towards the middle of MB II and the beginning of MB III, corresponding to the Second Intermediate Period and the Hyksos period in Egypt (Kopetzky 2018: 353; questioned in Ben-Tor forthcoming a)<sup>5</sup>.

## Ebla

In the ancient Syrian city of Ebla, the so-called Western Palace<sup>6</sup> concealed below its floor three royal hypogea: the tomb of the Princess, the tomb of the Lord of the Goats, and the tomb of the Cisterns (Matthiae 1995:

<sup>4</sup>Prestige objects are goods with high quality workmanship and/or costly materials (such as ivory, calcite, gold, silver and other metals, semiprecious stones or also faience material, see Miniaci 2018b).

<sup>5</sup>The archaeological context of the royal tombs at Byblos is far from being intact and the presence of pottery and other material of later date may suggest a reuse of these tombs and not necessarily a dating of the entire burial assemblage.

<sup>6</sup>The palace is located in the Area Q in the Lower Town West, close to Reshef’s temple (Temple B1), see Matthiae 1995: 152-3, fig. 33, and Sanctuary B2, a cult installation probably devoted to the cult of divinized ancestors and heroes (*rapi’uma*), Matthiae 1995: 155-7, 185-6, fig. 34. See also discussions in Pinnock 2012: 97-8.

175-86; see also Nigro 2008: 159, with bibliographic reference in nos. 2-3). The palace was built between the end of the EB IV and the middle of MB I (i.e. c. 1900–1800 BC) and its last phase of use corresponds to a large phase of destruction that occurred around c. 1600 BC (Matthiae 1982: 1-14; Matthiae 1984: 19-22; Matthiae 1995: 162-4). Only the tomb of the Princess was found intact, while the other two tombs had been violated; a first looting phase probably occurred already during 1600 BC, followed by more severe looting during Persian and late Roman-Byzantine times. The tomb of the Cisterns had been almost completely spoiled of its contents, as only a few vessels, some precious materials, a skull, and a group of bones were found inside the structure (Matthiae 1995: 184). Nonetheless, some marks on the walls of the chamber and the ceramic assessment revealed two phases of use, one in c. 1820 BC, contemporary with the tomb of the Princess, and another later, in c. 1620–1600 BC, just before the abandonment of the site (Nigro 2008: 164; Nigro 2009: § 1.4). Despite being plundered, the tomb of the Lord of the Goats, preserved more precious burial goods, including a gold and silver scepter, inlaid with the name of a King Ḥtp-ib-R<sup>c</sup> (Matthiae, Pinnock, Scandone Matthiae 1995: 478, no. 384). The owner of the scepter is sometimes identified as Hotepibre Qemaw, son of Harnedjheritef, one of earliest kings of the early Thirteenth Dynasty (Ryholt 1998: 2; Matthiae 1997: 398; Scandone Matthiae 1979; for the position of the king see Grajetzki 2006: 67; Ryholt 1997: 338, File 13/6; Allen 2010: 7, table 1, 7.08). Given the absence of a cartouche, the upsidedown Ḥtp-sign, and the clumsy alignment of the signs, the absence of certain expected signs (like the phonetic *p* of the Ḥtp-sign), the identification is perhaps doubtful. Ryholt suggested that the name on the mace could refer to the name throne name of Amenemhat I, Sḥtp-ib-R<sup>c</sup>, supposing the loss of some letters in the assembling the names (at least an initial *s* and the *p*) (Ryholt 1998: 3-4). If so, the presence of the artefact may not represent a clear chronological anchor for the date of the tomb. Indeed, the scepter shows clear traces of reworking in antiquity in the course of which different elements had been combined: the manufacture and the type of object, for example, point to a Syrian production (Lilyquist 1993: 45-6), while the hieroglyphs demonstrate Egyptian influence (Ryholt 1997: 84, n. 265). Even if the scepter may refer to an early Thirteenth Dynasty king Hotepibre, its inclusion inside the tomb simply represents a *terminus post quem* for the burial equipment. Its refurbishment in antiquity implies that the artefact could have been placed in the Eblaitic tomb long after its manufacture or it could have been an heirloom, indicating secondary or tertiary deposition.

A silver bowl, decorated with two applied hands and a *ḥnḥ*-sign-sign, also deposited in the tomb, serves as a further indication that Egyptian inscriptions and material culture were imbued with connotations of power and prestige. The bowl is, however, also inscribed in cuneiform with the name ‘Immeya’, who could have been one of the owners of the tomb. The other metals and jewelry coming from this tomb are datable to the Eighteenth century BC or so and are comparable to the burial equipment of the royal tombs II and III at Byblos (Nigro 2008: 166-7; Nigro 2003: 345-6; Nigro 2002: 109, with bibliography in the footnotes 155-6). For instance, the fenestrated axes found in the tomb belong to types that can be dated around the beginning–mid of the eighteenth century BC or even earlier (Gernez 2011: fig. 1.9; Gernez 2007: 91-2, type H 4.A)<sup>7</sup>.

Nonetheless, not all the material is contemporaneous. In some instances, the technique used in the manufacture of the jewelry found in the tomb of the Lord of the Goats may belong to the beginning of seventeenth century BC or later (Lilyquist 1993: 45, following Gates 1987: 67, n. 3). Also, the pottery corpus from the tomb is comparable with the material found in the waste pit F.5861 (layer 2d), which may be dated to the late MB II/III phases. In fact, a Hyksos scarab with several ‘late Thirteenth Dynasty’ parallels (contemporary with the Second Intermediate Period and MB II/mid-MB III) was found among the corpus of pottery from layer 2d in F.5861 (Nigro 2002: 109, n. 157). Thus, in the Lord of the Goats tomb, as with the royal tombs of Byblos, there is a chronological disjuncture between the age of the tomb and the Egyptian-style burial goods. Needless to say, also this context had not been found intact and later reuses of the structure are always to be taken into consideration.

## Kerma

In the so-called ‘Egyptian Cemetery’ of the Upper Egyptian polity of Kerma (Reisner 1923: Part I-III, 61, pl. 3), were some large tumuli (especially K III, IV, X, XVI) that may be connected with the local ruling classes. These tumuli date to the Classic Kerma phase, contemporary with the Second Intermediate Period–early Eighteenth Dynasty (MB II–MB III). Tumulus K

<sup>7</sup>See Pinnock 2012 for the analysis of comparable axes found in the *Dépot d’offrandes* A from the forecourt of the Obelisk Temple of Byblos cf. Dunand 1952-58: 852-60, pl. CXXXI, see esp. nos. 16708, 16709-16712. I am grateful to Camilla Saler for the reference and discussions about Levantine material.

XVI may be one of the earliest large tumuli (KC I, 1750–1650 BC), Tumulus K X may belong to an intermediate phase (KC II, 1650–1580 BC), while Tumuli K IV, II, and III fit into the latest Classic Kerma phase (KC III, 1600–1550 BC) (Gratien 1978; Lacovara 1987: 53-6; Minor 2012: 8). Each tumulus comprises a central corridor leading to the burial chamber made for the owner of the structure. The corridors contained a high number, sometimes hundreds, of burials of males and females (young and adult, but rarely old) who had likely been ritually killed at the time of the tumulus owner's death. These tumuli contained Egyptian or Egyptian-style artefacts (such as stelae, statues, and scarabs) that mainly dated to the Middle Kingdom, especially the latter part of the Middle Kingdom, i.e. 1850–1750 BC (for scarabs see O'Connor 1984: table 3; for pottery see Bourriau 1981; for statues see Minor 2012: 50-65; see also discussion in Markowitz 1997 and Ben-Tor 2007b: 62-3). For instance, Tumulus K III, one of the latest burials in the cemetery (dated around 1550 BC), contained several fragments of inscribed private statues, attributed to the late Middle Kingdom (late Twelfth–Thirteenth Dynasties) (Minor 2012: 62-74). Stylistically, the statue of Senaa-ib closely resembles one of Amenemhet, son of Sattjenj from the Heqaib complex, belonging to the time of Amenemhat IV (Habachi 1985: pl. 93, no. 31). The granite stela of Intef – found by Reisner in the eastern corner of K III façade – also dates to the time of Amenemhat III, since its inscription refers to the Wall construction carried out by Intef in the year 33 of the king (MFA 13.3967, Reisner 1923: 127-8; Leprohon 1982). Many of the objects found in Kerma burials have the potential to be Egyptian imports (cf. Reisner 1923: 178-80; Lilyquist 1982: 184; Walsh 2020), or alternately, to be made in Nubia but closely patterned on Egyptian Middle Kingdom models (cf. Minor 2012: 134; see also Bourriau 2001 and Miniaci 2019). A number of Egyptian objects were utilized in a manner alien to Egyptian tradition (e.g., headrests placed at the feet of the deceased or ivory wands originally made for the ritual protection of women and infants reworked into dagger handles). The 'reinvention' of these items demonstrate that the Nubians had not adopted these items through direct contact with Egyptians and that the objects may not even have been contemporary with the tumuli (Minor 2012: 155; Miniaci 2019).

At first glance, the presence of Egyptian material had been mistaken for a chronological synchronism. In the case of Byblos, the tombs had long been dated to the time of Amenemhat III and IV (Virolleaud 1922: 290; Montet 1928: 147, followed by Albright 1964: 39; Kitchen 1967: 40). Similarly, Egyptian material in the Kerma cemetery had been interpreted as diplomatic

gifts to the rulers of Kush or the Egyptian dominion over Nubia in the Twelfth Dynasty (K III was considered by Reisner, in fact, to have been the tomb of the Twelfth Dynasty mayor of Assiut, Hapidjefa) (Reisner 1923: 135-89; for Hapidjefa see Grajetzki 2006: 103-7).

## **‘Out-of-time’ artefacts: chronological asynchronism**

The Egyptian materials in Byblos, Ebla, and Kerma seem to predate their chronological context (caution in Ben Tor forthcoming a and b). For instance, in royal tombs at Byblos, the diagnostic prestige goods of Egyptian manufacture or inspiration stylistically and typologically date back to the mid-MB I (late Middle Kingdom) (Kopetzky 2018), particularly to the reigns of Amenemhat III and IV. The pottery corpus, on the other hand, dates to the MB II–mid MB III, suggesting that two chronological distinct groups of objects can be envisaged in a single assemblage.

Similarly, a high percentage of Egyptian artefacts found at Kerma – mostly status goods such as statues, faience, ivory, bronze cosmetic implements, and games – date mainly to the late Middle Kingdom, but were found together with other categories of Egyptian or Egyptian-style objects belonging to the Second Intermediate Period/Hyksos phase (pottery, especially Tell el-Yahudieh ware: Minor 2012: 135-42, see table 5.7; O’Connor 1984 and Bourriau 2004; and one part of the sealing and scarab corpus: Minor 2012: 138-9; Ben-Tor 2010: 92-3). Both ceramics and seals are connected with daily activity, rather than being symbols of prestige. In addition, the archaeological contexts for the deposition of these objects date to the Second Intermediate Period (Minor 2012: 134)<sup>8</sup>. The case of Ebla is more complicated to assess, although some internal chronological inconsistency could be witnessed, namely earlier Egyptian or Egyptianizing materials being included in MB II–mid MB III pottery.

More recently, scholars have explained such a significant presence of ‘out-of-time’ material as the result of looting activity carried out by Hyksos and Nubians at the end of the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt, when the Egyptian dynasties had difficulties in maintaining territorial control (Pomerance 1973; Helck 1976; Lacovara 1989: 304-7; Phillips 1992: 170,

<sup>8</sup>The high status Egyptian goods concentrated in the most prestigious graves of the cemetery.

175-6; Minor 2012: 69-76; Ahrens 2011; Ahrens 2015a and 2015b; Ahrens 2016; Kopetzky 2018, 353-4)<sup>9</sup>. By the mid Thirteenth Dynasty, the finances and sphere of effective power of the central administration and royal court steadily declined (Morris 2018: 89; Siesse 2019), creating the conditions for foreign interference, intrusion, and perhaps plundering. This explanation is rooted in textual sources, such as the inscriptions left by the kings of the Seventeenth Dynasty and by later sources (e.g., the inscription of Hatshepsut in the Speos Artemidos; Gardiner 1946) that describe the Hyksos sacking and pillaging Egypt (Redford 1997). In addition, the second stela of Kamose refers to a possible alliance between the Hyksos and Kush rulers (Habachi 1972; Bonnet, Valbelle 2010: 363), implying that the *modus operandi* from north to south could have been similar. Especially after the publication of an inscription from the tomb no. 10 at Elkab, scholars started to imagine a country (Egypt) torn apart and ransacked both from north to south by foreign populations. At Elkab, the governor Sobeknakht (Grajetzki 2009: 120-1) recorded a military victory against Nubian raiders in his tomb (Davies 2010 and 2003).

[Vile?] Kush came, aroused along his length, he having stirred up the tribes of Wawat (Lower Nubia), the island-[dwellers?] of Khenthennefer (Upper Nubia), Punt and the Medjaw [...] [entering even] into the neighbourhood of the Asiatics [...] unprecedented since the time of the god [...] the enclosure wall of Nekheb being destroyed [...] [the Egyptian king praises Sobeknakht] on account of the coming of his Person [...] to repel the looters [whose] bodies become swollen [...] love of [the goddess] coursed through his (the king's) body (Davies 2003: 52-3).

The custom of sacking earlier tombs in order to retrieve expensive equipment is a practice well known in ancient Egypt, attested by archaeological and written sources since the end of the New Kingdom (Miniaci 2008; Strudwick 2013). In fact, Middle Kingdom material have been recovered in the city and necropolis of Tanis, reused by the pharaohs of the Third Intermediate Period (Hill 2015).

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<sup>9</sup>Recently, Dietrich Raue suggested that the presence of Egyptian royal and private sculptures in Kerma tumuli could have been part of an execration ritual, since there a systematic damaging of Egyptian statues may have taken place on the occasion of the king's burial (Raue 2019: 323).

However, notwithstanding the fall of Itjtawy, the collapse of the Thirteenth Dynasty, and the decrease of central control in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period, it is difficult to understand the reasons behind so-well defined chronological correspondences. In approximately the same epoch (MB II–mid MB III), why should people from the Levant and Nubia have robbed tombs dated to the late Middle Kingdom<sup>10</sup>, almost systematically excluding tombs dated earlier in time?<sup>11</sup>

## An alternative historical view: signs of an already pre-‘globalised’ world

Courts in the Late Bronze Age engaged in a continuous exchange of resources, people and artefacts (for a summary see Liverani 2008: 161-8; Redford 1992, 121-213; see also Cohen, Westbrook 2000). Indeed, the intensity of this exchange could be termed pre-‘globalisation’<sup>12</sup>. At the beginning of the Second millennium BC, different areas of the eastern Mediterranean (including Aegean, Egypt, northern Levant, Near East, and Nubia) similarly engaged in trade, immigrations, mixed marriages, diplomacy, war, and the exchange of skilled specialists (Aruz 2008: 6).

At the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty the northern Levant represented one of the most valued trading partners (Ben-Tor forthcoming a), involving several sites, such as Sidon, Qatna, Ugarit, and Tell Hizzin (Ben-Tor forthcoming a; Forstner Müller and Kopetzky 2009; Ahrens 2010, 2011, 2013). Byblos represented Egypt’s primary trading port (Breyer 2010: 101-14; cf. the Montet Jar with hundreds of Egyptian scarabs and anulets, Tufnell, Ward 1966; Ben-Tor 1998), as glimpsed in the famous tale of

<sup>10</sup>Kopetzky 2018: 313-4: ‘It is the author’s opinion that most of the Egyptian objects found inside Tombs I–III were robbed from burials of the 12th and 13th Dynasties in the Memphite region around the time of the collapse of the Middle Kingdom and shortly afterwards’. See also Ahrens 2016; Ahrens 2015a and 2015b.

<sup>11</sup>The presence of Old Kingdom at Kerma material is limited to K I (and an isolated example from K II) and stone vessels. Minor suggests they arrived in Kerma after a raid carried out in the Second Intermediate Period against a Sixth Dynasty royal ka-chapel in Upper Egypt, Minor 2012: 66-7; see also Lacovara 1991; Reisner 1923: 30-1. Nonetheless, a circulation of Old Kingdom stone vessels is widely attested in Egypt of the late Twelfth Dynasty and Second Intermediate Period.

<sup>12</sup>Beaujard 2005 and 2009. See also, Miniaci 2020 and the whole volume, *Egyptology and Global History* (Moreno García, Miniaci and Morris 2020). Cf. Aruz 2008: 6: ‘The terms “global” and “multicultural” are often applied to our contemporary society, which has just stepped out of the second millennium A.D.’.

Sinuhe (Wastlhuber 2013) and the annals of Amenemhat II (Mit-Rahina) (Altenmüller and Moussa 1991; Marcus 2007; Altenmüller 2015). However, it was only during the second half of the Twelfth Dynasty that commercial and diplomatic contact between Egypt and Byblos intensified (Broodbank 2013: 362-4; Forstner-Müller and Kopetzky 2009). Not only did Byblos's rulers emulate royal Egyptian titulary and administrative titles (Kopetzky 2016), adopt the hieroglyphic writing system, embrace certain religious traditions, allowed Egypt to interfere in local political affairs (Allen 2008), but they also conspicuously consume Egyptian luxury goods (Teissier 1995: 2-3). The rulers of Byblos notably increased their emulation of Egyptian customs and practices (Flammini 2010).

During the Middle Kingdom, Egypt started to extend control over and colonize Lower Nubia, reaching Semna cataract by the time of Senwosret III (Knoblauch 2019: 367). The massive fortification building program throughout the Second Cataract region during the Twelfth Dynasty consolidated Egypt's political power over the region (Smith 1991: 126; Trigger 1982; contra Adams 1977: 183) and facilitated a permanent migration of Egyptians into Nubian lands. As a result, Egypt and Upper Nubia entered into much closer contact: during the time of Senwosret I, conflicts with the northern Kerma settlement at Sai Island are attested in an inscription (Vercoutter 1956; Morris 2005: 100).

During the late Middle Bronze Age, as Kerma power increasingly expanded into Lower Nubia, it is possible to witness a direct and long-term engagement between the Mediterranean World and the local populations (Knoblauch 2019: 368). The relation did not involve only military troops and merchants but so too powerful political figures, such as the prince of Kush Weteterereses (Posener 1940: 34, 48, no. A1) and Awa'wa, born of his mother Kouna, whose names appear in Egyptian execration texts (Gratien 1978: 295; Kendall 1997: 28-9). The constant contacts between Egyptian and Nubia cultures tackled the shaping of a new elite social identity in Kerma, achieved also through the transfer of Egyptian goods (e.g. the role played by the cosmetic equipment for the eyes, Walsh 2020). Certainly interaction with Egyptians should have triggered for the Nubians, as it did for the northern Levant, emulation of Egyptian customs by the local population and the need of Egyptian artefacts to sustain the ideology of their power.

Since the rise of complex societies, new rulers or “forms of powers” have been inspired by the examples of even more powerful counterparts in foreign lands (Wengrow 2006: 127-50; cf. Wengrow 2010). So too, in the late

Middle Kingdom, precious and prestigious artifacts circulated widely – in this case throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and the north-eastern part of Africa –, leading to a process of ‘globalisation’. The expansion of Egypt towards north and south enhanced the movement of people, ideas, culture, knowledge, and especially objects during the whole first half of the Second millennium BC (Larsen 2008: 13-7).

When the central power of Egypt collapsed and could no longer afford to engage in international commerce, a vacuum in the circulation of prestige goods created a political, ideological, and economic vacuum that had to be replaced somehow. The demand for Egyptian objects, already rooted in the Levant and Nubia after centuries of contact, may have encouraged two separate practices at the during the MB II–mid MB III, when the decrease of royal power in Egypt may have slowed down the exchange of prestige objects: 1) the local production of objects expertly imitating Egyptian models; 2) a re-circulation of older Egyptian objects, locally accumulated over the last decades and centuries (which could have – at least conceptually – predated action 1, because it is easier and quicker to recycle existing material than producing new one). The reuse of late Middle Kingdom objects found at Byblos, Kerma or in Syria in elite cemeteries could have constituted an effort on the part of the local elite to continue to support their ideological power in the absence of continuing diplomatic interchange. The objects reused could have been those already circulating in the time before the interruption of fluent commercial exchanges with Egypt, therefore this could explain the abundant presence of objects dated to the last kings of the Twelfth Dynasty (namely Amenemhat III and IV) and late Middle Kingdom. Interestingly, Daphna Ben-Tor noticed how the connections between Egypt and the Levant shifted from its north part (Lebanon/southern Syria) to the south (Israel/Palestine) during the early seventeenth century BC (beginning of Second Intermediate Period) in relation with the new politic strategies given by the collapse of the Egyptian royal power (implying a change in Egypt’s commercial and cultural trades). The shift of relations also involved a shift in the type of Egyptian products: the archaeological records from the MB I in the North Levant are mainly featured by ‘imports’ from Egypt (cf. Miniaci 2018a; Ben-Tor 2007a), while the range of Egyptian artefacts documented in the South Levant after the ‘MBIIA’ (end of MB I and MB I/II: attested at Tell el-Ifshar in Israel) include a large number of local production imitating Egyptian models (Ben-Tor forthcoming a; cf. Ben-Tor 2007b, 117-121, 155-156). A simplified process can be imagined: import - circulation - interruption of import - recycle - imitation.

The funerary context only provides us with an arrested view of a practice which may have been far more widespread in the early second millennium BC than actually supposed. In archaeology some phenomena become more visible when they are interrupted. When artifacts stop their restless movement and are interred in a tomb, they pause long enough to attest to their presence. The process of ‘globalisation’, already begun in the first half of the second millennium BC, became more clearly visible to archaeologists in the funerary sphere.

The act of resurrecting objects from the immediate past in order to support the present should perhaps be considered one of the first steps of the ‘globalisation’ process. In the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean, with the rise of the Egyptian, Mitanni and Hittite empires, the ‘globalisation’ process would only accelerate. The emulation of Minoan frescoes at Tell el-Dab‘a (Bietak, Marinatos and Palivou 2007), the heterogeneous compositions of Ahhotep’s treasure as well as the Shaft Circle Cemeteries at Mycenae, and the contents of the Amarna letters (Moran 1992) all provide a fitting parallel. The creation of an ‘international koine’ (Feldman 2006) reflected diplomatic exchanges among numerous royal courts in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC, but its origins were rooted in the cultural dynamics of the first half of the Second millennium BC.

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