TELL EL-YAHUDIEH WARE IN SIDON

CLAUDIE DOUMET-SERHAL

I would like to express my gratitude to Karin Kopetzky for the fruitful discussions we had in Sidon and for all her help and advice on the material as well as in making all the Tell el-Dab'a publications available to me. My thanks also go to D. A. Aston for forwarding the manuscript of his new book on Tell el-Yahudieh ware while the book was still in press. I am indebted to Ramy Yassine who worked very hard on the drawings and Tony Farraj for taking the photos used in this article.

Tell el-Yahudieh ware, first recognized in Egypt by Petrie 1 is characterized by a distinctive geometric and figurative decoration of incised lines and punctured dots filled with chalky paste. The origin of the production of this ware (Lebanon/northern Palestine, Syria or Egypt) has been the subject of numerous articles 2. The discussion on whether it was first produced in Egypt or in the Levant and then introduced by one or the other into the respective areas before spreading across the Eastern Mediterranean in the MB IIA/B but mainly in the MB IIB is also still controversial, despite the undertaking of many chemical analyses. Aston 3 compiled a list of the suggested classification of this ware, based on geography, with the so-called earlier "el Lish" ware in Egypt or Bietak's regional styles 4 and divisions accordingly, as well as with Kaplan's 5 typology relating to shapes. In his article, Aston examines older and newer publications summarizing all the discussions on the topic while advocating in favour of a combination of features including decorative styles together with techniques in order for it to be more relevant6. A more recent comprehensive study on Tell el-Yahudieh ware from Tell el-Dab'a favours the Levant as the place where this style developed first.

The Tell el-Yahudieh ware from Sidon was found at the beginning of MB II B from level 5 onwards 7 mostly in burials with the exception of wares number S/4213, S/5445, S/88833, S/1787-S/1846, S/41793, S/41102 (fig. 1, 10-13, 17, 18) found outside around the graves and S/50273 (fig. 14), a large jug found in the Middle Bronze Age temple. Handles, preserved in 7 cases (fig. 2, 4-7, 9, 15) are all double strand handles stretching from the shoulder to the neck just under the rim except for a miniature juglet (fig. 7). The body is ovoid 8, (fig. 2, 4, 5) becoming piriform later in the MB II B examples (fig. 8, 9) with shoulders more strongly marked. Jug fig. 15, S/2170-3940, has a tendency towards a more squat shape. Juglet S/4687 (fig. 2) with a stepped rim 9 is typical of the northern Levant and very popular in Sidon's level 5. Other rims are plain everted (S/4588, fig. 5) and the kettle rim is found in the later MB II B/C (S/3792, fig. 9). The button base (S/4588, fig. 5) of the earlier jugs becomes more pronounced (fig. 4) and the ring base is introduced (S/3792, fig. 9). Most of Sidon's Tell el-Yahudieh ware jugs belong to Bietak's "ovoid Palestinian group" 10 whereas only two examples from Sidon (fig. 8-9) have a piriform shape with a flattened shoulder 11, the distribution of which stretches from Byblos to Galilee and is also found at Tell el-Dab'a. Jugs such as S/4588, (fig. 5), with a bipartite handle on the shoulder first appear in the Hyksos period after 1640 BC and are found in the greatest concentration in the Delta, especially at Tell el-Dab'a and Tell el-Yahudieh, reaching as far as Cyprus. Their distribution in southern Palestine roughly reflects the political borders and/or influence of the Hyksos 12. Miniature vessels (fig. 7) are unusual because of their diminutive size 13. Only one sherd (fig. 13) is part of the body of a duck vessel and is covered with a series of incised curves which appear to imitate feathers 14. These figural jugs date to the early Hyksos Period 15. Out of the 11 jugs found at Sidon, 9 are decorated with geometric designs while two (fig. 1 & 15) display the running spiral and the garlands of lotus flowers with a bird.

The running spiral motif (fig. 1)

A vessel from Sin el Fil 16 (MB IIA/M II A-B), one from Kabri 17 and two other vessels most likely from Egypt 18 bear spiral decoration. In Ashkelon 19 in an MB IIA most deposit, a dark brown Lustrous ware, a variant of Tell el-Yahudieh ware was found decorated with crenellations and running spirals. Petrography analysis indicates a local manufacture (for Sidon, see p. 161). In Tell el-Dab'a during the Middle Bronze Age IIA a large biconical jug along with a red slipped vessel made of Levantine clay and found in str. d/1 (= G/4) around 1770-1740 BC 20 was decorated with two zones of running spirals 21. More recently Aston has classified this group as the Levantine group E1 22.

The garland of lotus flower and the standing bird (fig. 15)

Vessels with naturalistic designs bear patterns of lotus blossoms which are typical Egyptian motifs. Most of these, which are of Egyptian manufacture 23, cover a considerable chronological span in Egypt. The majority of the material was found along the Nile Valley (e. g. Tell el-Dab'a 24) and it is likely that most of the vessels manufactured in Egypt were also exported to Cyprus. The depiction of lotus flowers is not common on Tell el-Yahudieh ware from the Levant. One vessel with naturalistic designs was found (fig. 15) in Sidon. The incomplete jug with a squat profile, pronounced shoulders and bipartite handle bears a view of a garland of lotus blossoms flaring out from the top of a stem 25 and tied together with hanging garlands together with a standing bird (fig. 15) facing 6 horizontal incised lines. The bird's feathers are emphasized by small incisions. Similar examples of decorated jugs are found in the Lebanon on a cylindrical closed pot from a grave in level 13 (MB II) in Tell Arqa 26, in Tell el-Ghassil 27 and Byblos. Vessels with naturalistic designs are also found at Shechem, Ashkelon, Tell Beit Mirsim 28 in the Levant and at Tounba Tou Skourou on Cyprus 29 and were, according to Bietak, produced shortly before the Hyksos period (stratum E3/
1680-1650) 37. The lotus motif show close parallels to jugs from Byblos, Touma Tou Skourou and Tell el-Dab’a phase E/3 (first half of the 16th century shortly before the period of Hyksos rule) 38.

Geometric designs

The Sidon geometric designs are organized on two to three decoration zones except for jug S/1787/S/1846 (fig. 12) with its decoration of vertically segmented panels filled with rows of zigzag lines of punctures, a motif imported from Egypt 39 and jug S/4588 (fig. 5) which is not partitioned at all. On the latter (S/4588, fig. 5) the design is delineated by incised curvilinear and straight lines forming two standing and pendant triangles 40. S/5445, (fig.10) is filled as on fig. 2 & 7 (S/4687, S/4625) with large handmade punctured dots spaced 41 in a different manner than the tiny combed punctured dots featured on jug S/3792 (fig. 9). At Tell el-Dab’a, Tell el-Yahudieh ware jugs with handmade incisions are found only in the late MB IIA in phases G/4 through F, while those decorated with the help of a comb are not found before phase F. Thus the latter technique is considered an MB II B feature 42.

Jugs with three horizontal zones of decoration are mostly derived from north of the Litani river 43. Their decoration consists of a large upper zone of standing triangles (S/4687, S/3792) (fig. 2 & 9), or rhomboids (S/2704, fig. 4) S/3792 (fig. 9), followed by filled-in pendant triangles, (S/4687) (fig. 9), squares, rhomboids and rectangles (S/2704, S/3792, S/41793, S/41100, fig. 4, 9, 17, 18). Tell el-Yahudieh ware jugs with rectangular zones of incrustations were found at Tell el-Dab’a, Ebla and Byblos 44. The combination of designs found on jug S/2704 (fig. 4) is comparable to an example from Kefer Djara 45 in the Sidon area and the Kahlon example in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge 46. The decoration consisting of an upper zone of standing triangles and a central and lower zone of pendant triangles (S/4687) (fig. 9) is comparable to Tell el-Dab’a G-F (1760-1680 BC) 46 and Sin el Fil 47. A further comparable decoration is found at Tel Kabri and they are linked both in shape and schematic decoration to the Lebanese group 48. This type, which does not appear after MB IIA (stratum F) at Tell el-Dab’a 49, is Kaplan’s so-called “ovoid 2” 50. There are only two examples of it and both are imports. Circles 51 within geometric decoration are found in the Tell el-Yahudieh repertoire 52. The Sidon example (S/5457, fig. 3) distinguishes itself by having punctuated design circles.
S/4588/6037, burial 100
3.5 YR 5/2, weak red paste, burnished.
Height: 10.7 cm
Width: 7.1 cm
Diam.: 2 x 2.3 cm
Thick.: 0.5 cm
Curvilinear and triangular shapes filled with large handmade and punctured comb dots.

S/4649/6037, burial 102
10R 5/1, reddish grey paste, burnished.
Height: 10.7 cm
Width: 7.1 cm
Diam.: 2 x 2.3 cm
Thick.: 0.5 cm
Curvilinear and triangular shapes filled with large handmade and punctured comb dots.

S/5457/6056, burial 103
2.5 YR 5/2, weak red paste.
Vertical burnishing.
Preserved height: 4.6 cm
Diam.: 18 cm
Thick.: 0.2 cm
Handmade. At least three concentric circles preserved with handmade punctured decoration with an horizontal punctured band on top. Dots filled with white paste.

S/5457/6056, burial 103
2.5 YR 5/2, weak red paste.
Vertical burnishing.
Preserved height: 4.6 cm
Diam.: 18 cm
Thick.: 0.2 cm
Handmade. At least three concentric circles preserved with handmade punctured decoration with an horizontal punctured band on top. Dots filled with white paste.

S/2704/1888, burial 67
2.5 YR 6/2, pale red paste, burnished all over.
Height: 12.6 cm
Width: 7.5 cm
Diam.: 2.6 cm
Thick.: 0.3 cm
Irregular panels of medium punctured comb dots.
S/4625/6037, burial 102.
Miniature juglet.
2.5 YR 7/8, light red paste, red slip burned all over.
Height: 7.9 cm
Width: 4.3 cm
Diam.: 1.8 cm
Thick.: 0.2 cm
Butterfly motif in the middle surrounded above and below by two horizontal incised lines filled with comb dots.

S/5458/6037, burial 102.
2.5 YR 7/8, light red paste, red slip.
Preserved height: 7.5 cm
Diam.: 6.1 cm
Thick.: 0.3 cm
One row of incised dots around the neck with a double incised line followed by two rows of incised horizontal dots. Butterfly motifs on the body.

S/5792/2086, burial 44
5 YR 4/4, reddish brown paste, burned horizontally on the horizontal bands and vertically on the plain vertical bands.
Height: 15.8 cm
Width: 10.1 cm
Diam.: 2.8 x 3 cm
Thick.: 0.3 cm
Standing triangles and rhomboids. Horizontal incised lines around the neck. Comb punctured dots filled with white paste.

S/4625/6037, burial 102.
Miniature juglet.
2.5 YR 7/8, light red paste, red slip burned all over.
Height: 7.9 cm
Width: 4.3 cm
Diam.: 1.8 cm
Thick.: 0.2 cm
Butterfly motif in the middle surrounded above and below by two horizontal incised lines filled with comb dots.

S/5458/6037, burial 102.
2.5 YR 7/8, light red paste, red slip.
Preserved height: 7.5 cm
Diam.: 6.1 cm
Thick.: 0.3 cm
One row of incised dots around the neck with a double incised line followed by two rows of incised horizontal dots. Butterfly motifs on the body.

S/5458/6037, burial 102.
2.5 YR 0/8, light red paste, red slip, burned.
Preserved height: 4.2 cm
Thick.: 0.4 cm
Two pendent triangles with punctured handmade dots filled with white paste.
S/8883/1915
5 YR 5/4 reddish brown paste.
Preserved height: 2.2 cm
Thick.: 0.5 cm
Handmade dots filled with white paste.

S/50273/4073, MB temple.
2.5 YR 6/1, reddish grey paste, burnished on the non-punctured areas. Dots made with a comb.
Preserved height: 5.5 cm
Diam.: 11 cm
Thick.: 0.8 cm
Pendent triangles.

Level 7
10 R 5/1, reddish grey paste, burnished on the plain parts in between the dots.
Preserved height: 8.3 cm
Width: 6.2 cm
Thick.: 0.4 cm
Zigzag lines of fine punctured dots in between three vertical plain segments.

Level 8
S/4072/890, Sq. 3
5YR 4/1, dark grey paste, burnished.
Preserved height: 3.6 cm
Thick.: 0.7 cm
Handmade, zoomorphic motif.

S/5073/4073, MB temple.
2.5 YR 6/1, reddish grey paste, burnished on the non-punctured areas. Dots made with a comb.
Preserved height: 5.5 cm
Diam.: 11 cm
Thick.: 0.8 cm
Pendent triangles.
S/2170 and 3940/1379.
Burial 7/bone layer.
2.5 YR 5/1, reddish grey paste, burnished.
Preserved height: 11.4 cm
Diam.: 11.2 cm
Thick.: 0.5 cm
Garland of lotus blossom flaring out from the top of a stem and tied together with hanging garlands and a standing bird facing 6 horizontal lines.
S/2181/1379. Burial 7/bone layer. 5 YR 5/3, reddish grey paste, burnished on the plain parts in between the dots.

Preserved height: 4.5 cm
Thick.: 0.4 cm

Zigzag lines of fine punctured dots in between a plain segment.

---

S/41792/870, sq. 4
5 YR 5/3, reddish brown paste, upper part vertically burnished and lower part horizontally burnished.

Preserved height: 2.5 cm
Thick.: 0.6 cm

Three rectangular panels, one plain in the middle surrounded on either side by a panel filled with vertically aligned dots made with a comb.

---

S/41102/859, sq. 4
5 YR 5/3, reddish brown paste, burnished vertically all over.

Preserved height: 3.5 cm
Thick.: 0.3 cm

Rectangular panel with vertical rows of dots made with a comb.

---

**NOTES**

2. M. Bietak, 1996, p. 55; R. Amiran, 1969, p. 120.
12. D. A. Aston, 2011, in Tell el-Dab’a the style already appears in the early 13th Dynasty.
13. For jugs with ovoid bodies, small flattened disc bases and various types of profile rims, see U. Zevulun, 1990, p. 107.
14. D. A. Aston, 2008, p. 172; M. F. Kaplan, 1980, p. 41, the distribution of the ovoid type is in sharp contrast with that of piri-form 1. It is primarily restricted to the Levant, M. Bietak, 1996, p. 59, “certain types of Tell el-Yahudieh Ware, such as the ovoid…have a more limited distribution and occur for the most part only in central inland Palestine. This indicates that the Middle Bronze Age world was not unified…”; M. Bietak, 1997, p. 91, “the ovoid and piri-form 1a jugs were as a rule made of Levantine clays…the distribution of the earliest group of Tell el-Yahudieh ware, the so-called ovoid 1 juglet, is concentrated in the area of the Galilee and Lebanon but it is also found at Tell el-Dab’a”, p. 94.
15. R. Amiran, 1969, p. 119. “...The earlier forms have a profiled rim ridge below the rim, in the later juglets the predominating rim is inverted usually round-ed and thickened and a handle is attached to the rim or immediately below…”.
17. M. Bietak, 1997, p. 94.
18. Ibid.
21. D. A. Aston, 2011, L1.5-1, fig. 211.
22. M. Chehab, 1939, p. 806, fig. 6 a.
23. M. Kaplan, 1980, fig. 40 a.
28. D. A. Aston, 2011, fig. 70 and Group 12.1b, figs. 88 and fig. 134-135.
30. M. Bietak, 1991, abb. 79, Grab m/12, p. 125, str. E/2 and abb. 80, Grab m/12, p. 125, r. 1, 2.
32. M. Kaplan, 1980, fig. 126-127.
35. S. Ben-Ariez, 2004, p. 93, fig. 2.61, Tomb 510, MB IIb.
39. D. A. Aston, 2011, fig. 139, L1.2”, fig. 140, L1.2b. K. Kopetzky, 2008, fig. 2 (D/2-E/2) at Tell el-Dab’a, p. 197.
40. For an example from Byblos, P. Montet, 1999, pl. CXVI, 917.
43. M. Bietak, 1997, p. 94.
45. G. Contenau, 1914, pl. XI, fig. 33, p. 127.
46. M. Kaplan, 1980, fig. 28 a, fig. 99 a.
48. M. Chehab, 1939, p. 806, fig. 5 c.