

MARLIES HEINZ

**Kamed el-Loz: The Levant, Inner Syria and
Mesopotamia**

Networking patterns of the Bronze and Iron Age Levant

**KAMED EL-LOZ:
THE LEVANT, INNER SYRIA
AND MESOPOTAMIA**



Marlies Heinz

Kamed el-Loz, aerial view of the palace.

1. Material evidence and texts, that prove the scope of external relations between several sites and regions in the Ancient Near East

Archaeology disposes of varying means to reconstruct the past relationships of one region with another or several others. Material evidence, including inscribed artefacts is the archaeological source that informs the present about the external relations of a site during its history. Where we can rely on texts, as a rule political texts, inscriptions of kings, letters, reports about victories over opponents, diplomatic correspondence or reports about trade, import and export, we are often able to name not only the regions that contacted each other or that were mutually frequented but also the agents responsible for overseeing the contractual conditions of the said foreign relations.

The situation differs when we are dealing just with blank material evidence, that is to say, without additional written records. In this case we rely on material residues which, within the inventory of a site, appear to be “different” from others in order to reconstruct the “circuit of production - exchange - (and) consumption” (Wilk 1996, 31). The “things” themselves are consulted as objects with functions and meanings as well as objects that are met with appraisal.

“Imports are different” - but what is different from what? or, in other words, what characterizes “normal” inventory and what makes objects “different”? As a rule what makes them conspicuous is the form, the material and the decoration of goods, be they articles of daily use like vessels or weapons or be they designed for adornment namely so-called luxury or prestige goods. With regard to the matter of foreign connections the question as to why these differing objects should be considered as indicators of external relations and not as products of local origin does arise. As a starting point, archaeology has to concede that differing objects might certainly have been locally produced. The question then arises as to why these do not conform to the general tradition of objects found in that site. If the differing objects are already known from other regions where they conform to the standard of the particular local inventory, then we can be rather confident that we are dealing with an object that reached our site from outside -or that it was imbued with an influence, an idea, a knowledge that came from outside and was then copied locally (even the import of a copy has to be considered).

2. Modes of circulation of the differing goods

The objects, when recognized and classified as “different”, raise further questions concerning the circumstances that brought them to the site (see also Wijngaarden 2002). Did they reach the site as direct imports from their place of manufacture? Had they been purchased via *emporium*? Who brought them to the site - local traders, importing them, middleman, immigrants, exporters? How thus did the users get what they want - and why did they want what they got? In other words, why did the inhabitants of a site need, use and own goods from outside (see also Bell 2005, 363ff.)? As the anthropologist A. Appadurai stated (1986, 5) “things have no meaning apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with”.

3. The status of the differing goods as well as the social impact of owning goods “from outside”!

As a rule those goods recognized as “differing” generate only a minor part of the entire bequeathed inventory of a site. The rareness underscores once more their value as a distinctive feature and raises at the same time questions concerning firstly the character of the differing goods, secondly, questions about the owners of these “imports” and finally questions concerning those people who had access to imports or gifts from outside. Were these differing goods items of trade, goods privately owned by the immigrants, via articles destined for personal use only, gifts from one private individual to another or political - namely diplomatic presents? How did the acquired property of “imports” effect the status of the owners, if at all? Did the possession of special goods raise their status and were therefore considered symbols of luxury and prestige? Was the ownership of special goods normative or rather exceptional? What did it mean not to be in a position of owning equivalent goods? And last but not least the “imports” of “gifts” brings up the issue of “payment” - what was the exchange-value that had to be equalled and by whom in order to gain the imports? Moreover what does this say about “the relationships between human beings and the human-produced world of objects, ideas, and images.” (Wilk 1996,31-32).



1 Map of Lebanon and location of Kamid el-Loz.

1

4. Lebanon - Meeting Place of Civilizations (plate 1)

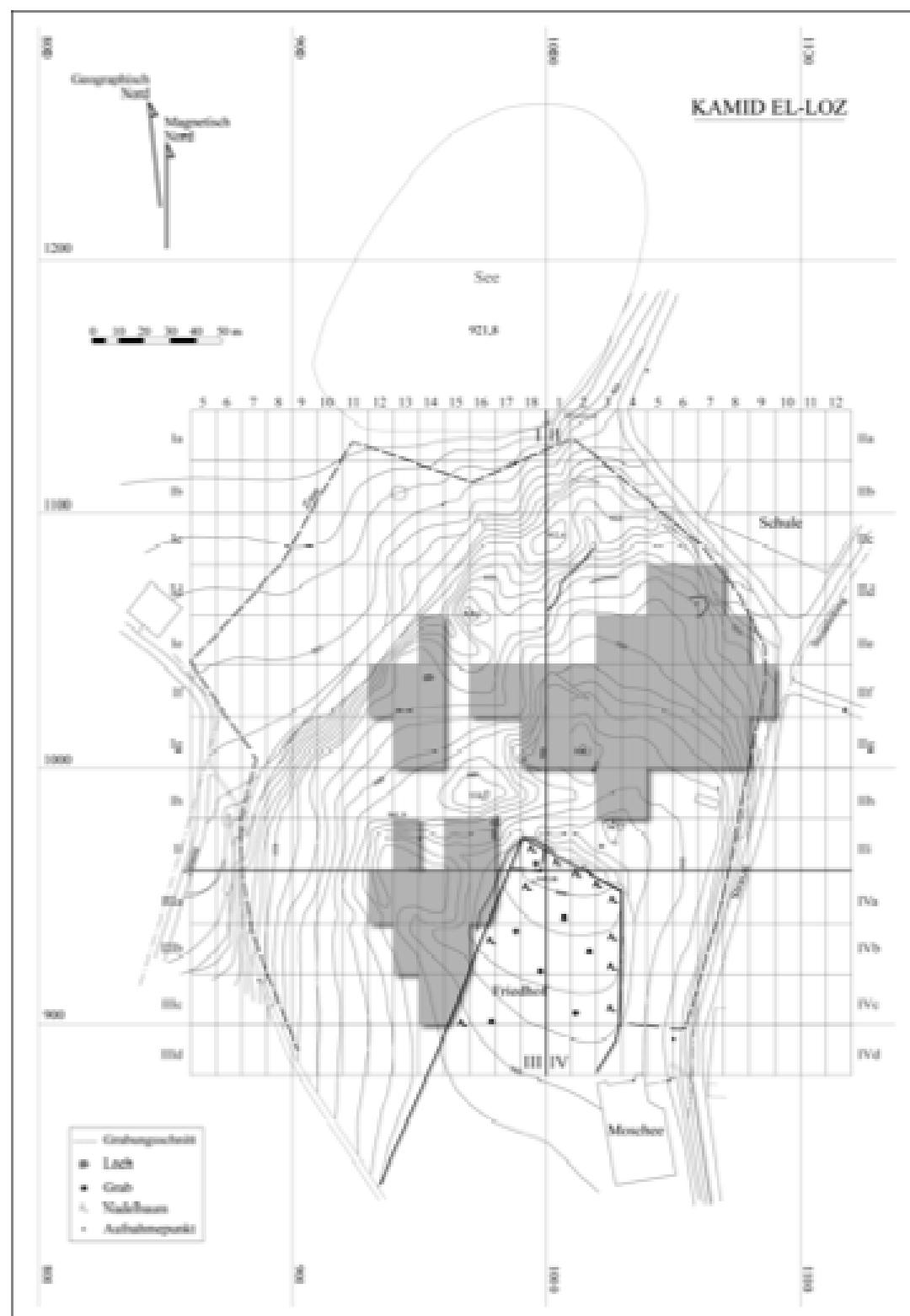
The region that is today Lebanon, a region with a long history of international contacts and global commercial relationships and well-known worldwide for one exceedingly successful trading confederacy - the Phoenicians - who put ancient Europe in touch with the skilled handicrafts of the Ancient Near Eastern societies. That the involvement of this area in “global” exchange and trade relations dates back to prehistoric times has been verified by surveys and excavations carried out throughout the country, including the excavation campaigns in Kamid el-Loz in the Beqa’a plain.

5. Kamid el-Loz - Intermediator between the different cultures

Current evidence shows that Kamid el-Loz during the Late Bronze Age period (about 1500 -1200 BC) was one of several urban centres of the area (Heinz 2004). *Kumidi*, as it was known at the time, was equipped with a palace and a temple, with a building now referred to as “Schatzhaus”, as with a living area that extended over the so-called eastern slope of the settlement’s *tell*. The “Schatzhaus” acquired its name from the comprehensive inventory found inside which in turn represented burial objects. That is, the so-called “Schatzhaus” had been used as the burial place for members of the city’s elite. *Kumidi* served as a regional administration centre in the Beqa’a plain. The plain was and still is one of the most fertile areas of the Levant, serving then as now as the “garden” of Lebanon. Its natural fertile conditions made the Beqa’a a preferred settlement area, as did the fortuitous location of through-roads, that crossed the plain and connected the Beqa’a and its settlements with its neighbours in the East, West, North and South. These through-roads were especially crucial in the accretion of those contacts that provided the inhabitants of *Kumidi* with the goods that we call “imports”, “gifts” or “diplomatic regards”.

5.1 Kumidi during the Late Bronze Age - a city that stirred a desire (plate 2)

The Late Bronze Age city obviously had been a prosperous place, not only equipped with the location-specific advantages but also with a local elite that knew how to capitalize on them. At a time when the demand for commodities was growing, a place like *Kumidi* kindled a desire for resources as well as a desire for control of trade through control of the trade-routes. As a result of this constellation of demand and supply, *Kumidi*, the local administration centre, was taken over by the commanding superpower at the time, the Egyptians (Morris 2005, Heinz 2000). Written evidence has supplied the political details of the external relations of *Kumidi*. These have been amply supported by evidence from various artefacts inscribed or not, found in the so-called “Schatzhaus”, in the palace, in the temple and in the living area of the eastern slope of the settlement.



2

2 Excavation areas 2, Kamid el-Loz / east-slope (areas II); palace (areas III) temple (areas I).

5.1.1 The so-called “Schatzhaus” of Kumidi

The most compelling context for our topic is the so-called “Schatzhaus” of *Kumidi*, a building in the neighbourhood of the palace that had been used for the burial of some members of the elite of *Kumidi* – almost only children as well as one adult person. Its fundamental layout consisted of three rooms, a hallway, and a cellar. Rooms S and T in the cellar served as burial chambers and W and R/U as anterooms (Miron 1990, Adler 1994). Although the “Schatzhaus” had been robbed in the past, some of the grave-goods were left *in situ* and exhibit the variety of goods that had been imported into *Kumidi* and from which a significant selection shall be presented here (plate 3).

In room T golden pendants (Miron 1990, Abb. 41), figurines made of silver sheet and covered with gold (Miron 1990, fig. 37 and Hachmann 1983, 109), bronze weapons (Miron 1990, fig. 112 and 113), the figurine of a lyrist (Miron 1990, fig. 24) and a gameboard (Miron 1990, fig. 53) were preserved as well as a ring with a scarab and a cartridge belonging to the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III. (Miron 1990, plate 30), probably identifying the primary owner of the ring. Room S also contained among other artefacts human heads / faces, made of ivory (Miron 1990, fig. 58), a pyxis in form of a duck made of ivory (Miron 1990, figs. 65, 66) and a stone-vessel inscribed with the personal name of the Egyptian prince “prince Ra-Woser” (Miron 1990, fig. 50).

The origin of some of the grave-goods is uncertain, but Egypt’s connection to the region that included *Kumidi* makes it a definite candidate as a source of origin. In addition to the above, there were also objects made of semi-precious stone, of bronze, silver and gold as well as ivory and all hailing from “outside” since *Kumidi* did not possess these raw materials. The painted pottery of room R/U, that was originally manufactured in Crete and Cyprus further documented the external relations of the inhabitants of *Kumidi* (Miron 1990, figs. 73, 83, 83 and 68).



3a Figurines made of silver sheet and covered with gold, Hachmann 1983, 190.

3b Figurine of a lyrist, Miron 1990, fig. 24.

3c Ring with a scarab and the cartridge of the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III; Miron 1990, plate 30.

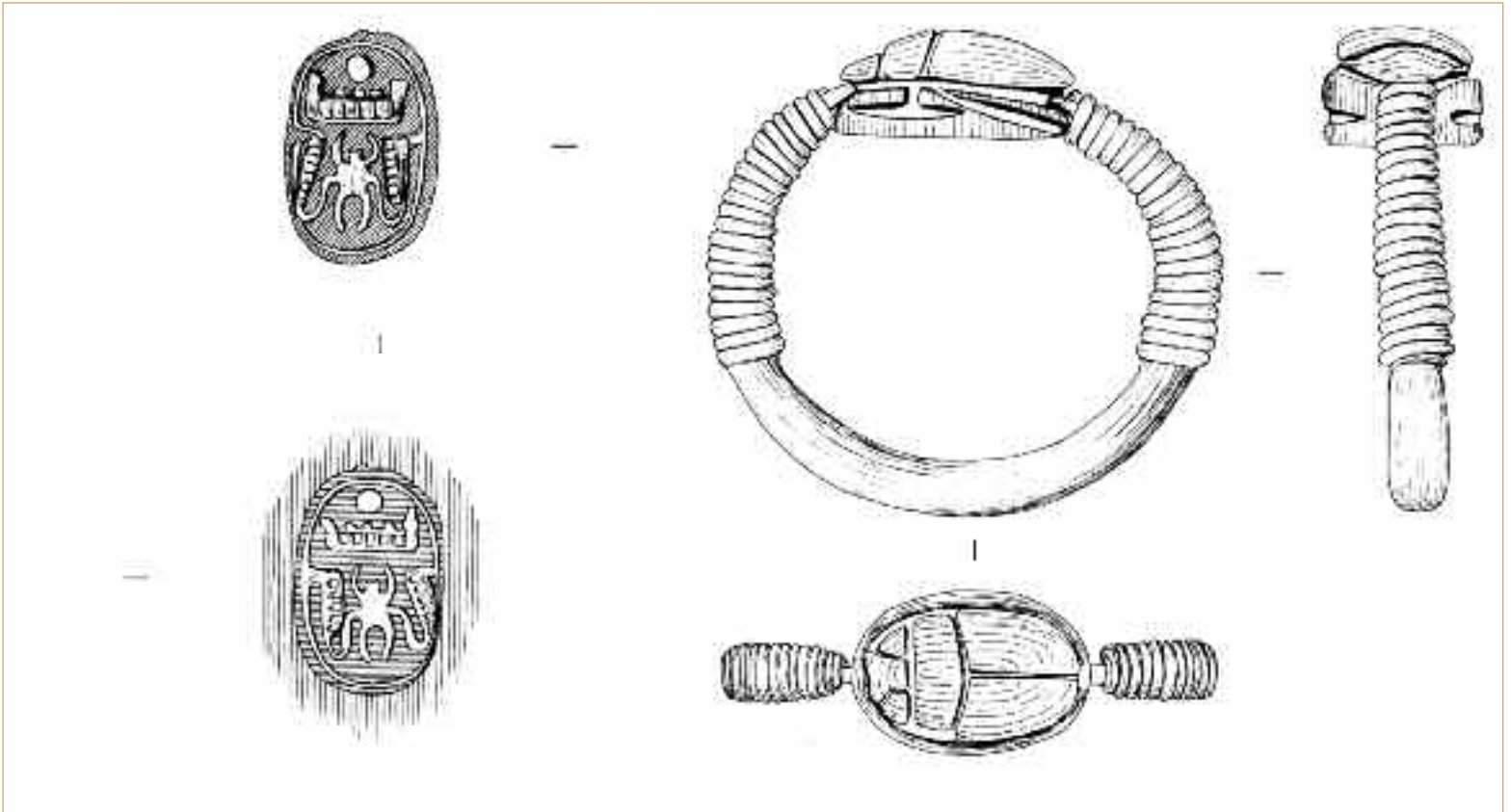
3d Stone-vessel inscribed with the personal name of the Egyptian prince "prince Ra-Woser", Miron 1990, fig. 50.



3 b



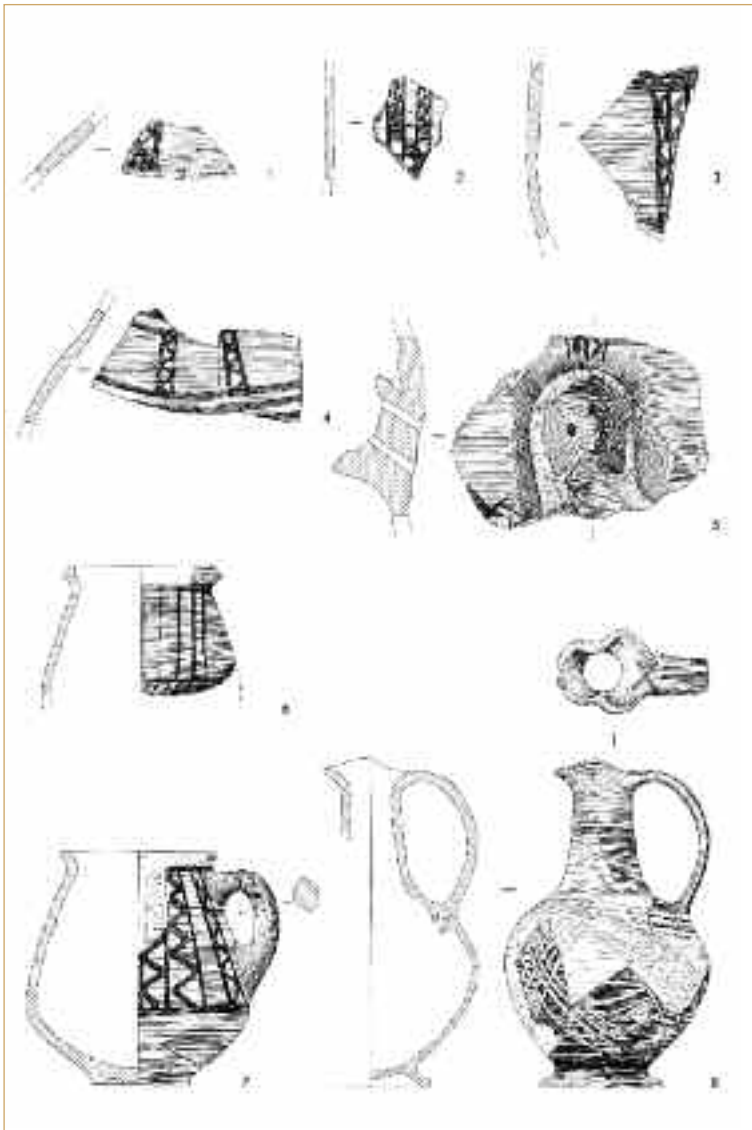
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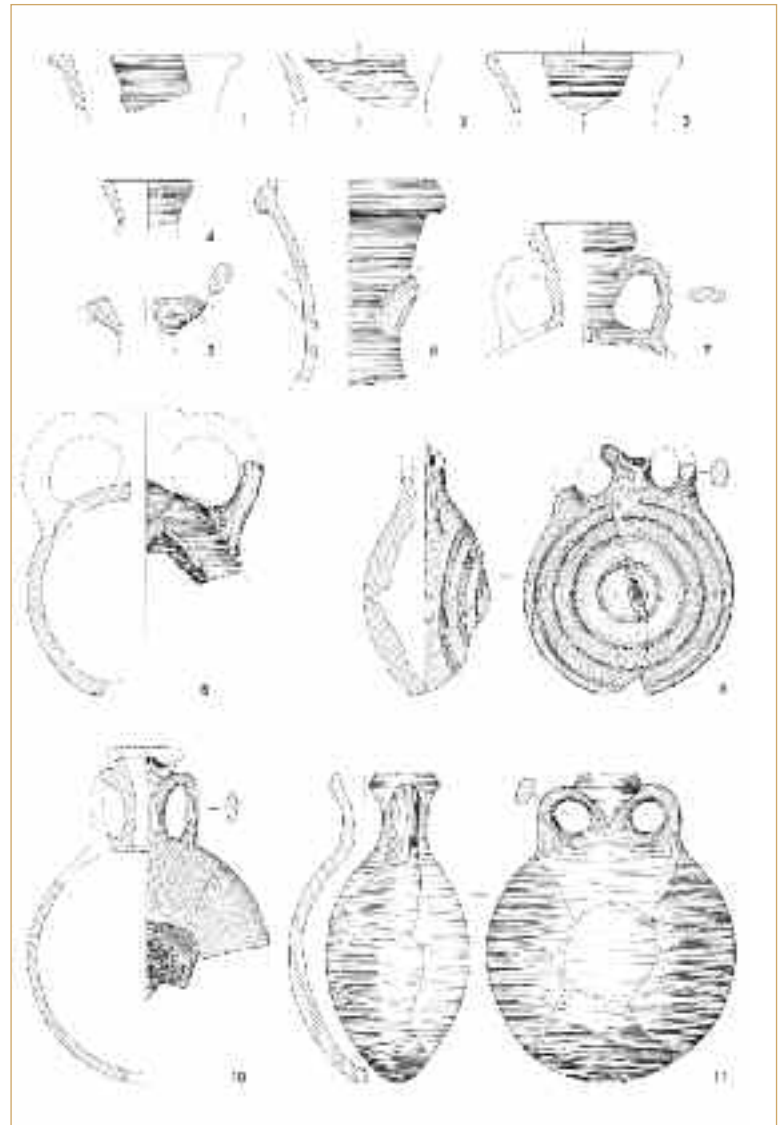
3 c

5.1.2 The Palace and its “imports” (plate 4)

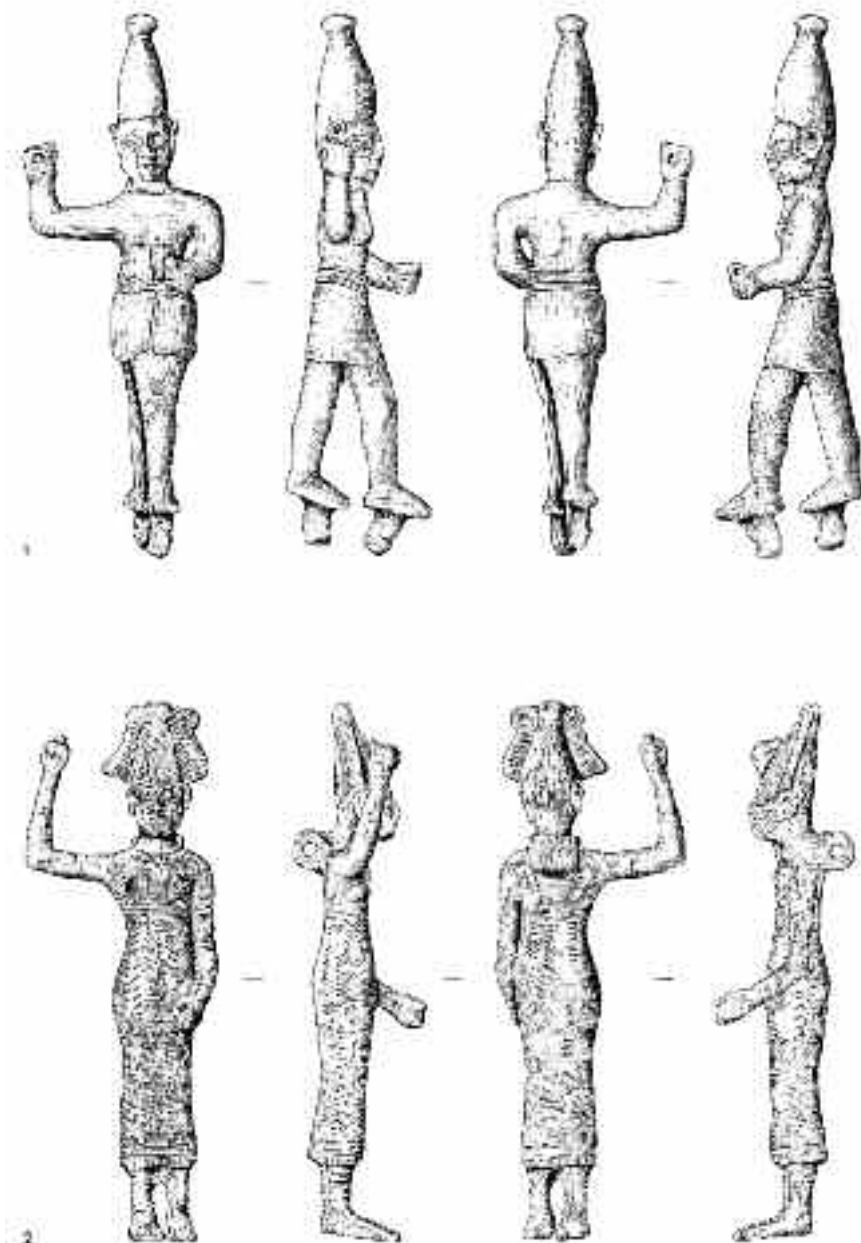
A vessel, containing fragments of silver objects like jewellery, various needles, and pieces of other broken silver-vessels was kept in room AA (Adler / Penner 2001, plates 1-7), bronze weapons and bronze needles from several other areas of the palace (Adler / Penner 2001, plates 8-10) as well as painted pottery originally manufactured in Greece, Crete and Cyprus (Adler / Penner 2001, plates 51, 53) account for the palace’s role in the external relations of the city. All in all, the functions of the palace seemingly lead to another type and spectrum of “differing” goods than the “Schatzhaus”.



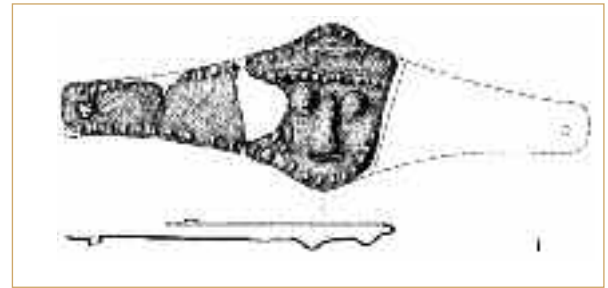
4a



4b



2
4c



4d

4a/b Painted pottery originally manufactured in Greece, Crete and Cyprus (Adler / Penner 2001, plates 51, 53).

4c Bronze figurines (Metzger 1993, plate 22).

4d Silver sheet with the depiction of the Egyptian Hathor-head ((Metzger 1993, plate 37).

5.1.3 The living-area on the east-slope

The same applies to the finds of the living area on the so-called eastern slope, where at the moment pottery of Cypriot and Greek origin points out the integration of the inhabitants of *Kumidi* (beyond the temple and palace) and presents the extent of external relations (finds to be published in Heinz *et alii*, 2008 forthcoming / *Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaises*).

5.1.4 The Temple (plate 4)

The temple inventory rendered yet another wide variety of evidence of foreign connections. Among these were a multitude of painted pottery, stemming from Greece / Mycene and Cyprus (Metzger 1993, plates 125, 131; Kulemann-Ossen in print), glass-vessels from Egypt (Metzger 1993, plate 54), an ivory figurine (Metzger 1993, plate 49) and bronze-figurines (Metzger 1993, plate 22), the latter probably originating in the area of modern Anatolia and / or Syria, a silver-sheet depicting the head of the Egyptian god Hathor (Metzger 1993, plate 37) as well as cylinder-seals (Kühne / Salje 1996) from the regions of Syria and Palestine.

6. Imports, gifts or private property? The story behind the material evidence for external relations in Late Bronze Age Kumidi

During the Late Bronze Age *Kumidi* had been a prosperous city, deeply involved in international political events, an involvement that finally resulted in the political occupation of the city by the reigning superpower, Egypt. The historical constellation, the particular contexts in which the objects were found as well as their place of origin allows the first considerations in order to define what these “differing” goods constituted in *Kumidi*.

“Schatzhaus”, palace, temple and the settlement of the east slope exhibit a variety of “differing” goods and at the same time a variety of places of origin of these goods - Egypt, Greece, Crete, Cyprus and probably Anatolia and Syria have been identified as potential countries of production. How and why did these goods arrive in the city and what purpose did they serve in *Kumidi* ?

The above cited contexts all served different functions within the settlement - care for the dead, administration, politics and representation of power, religious purposes and domesticity. Accordingly more than one solution seems possible or even likely when it comes to the bundle of questions posed about the modes in which the objects arrived in *Kumidi*, about the function the objects fulfilled, about the owners and about the equivalent exchange that had been necessary for obtaining the goods - all so far unanswered, all being topics of the current research on *Kumidi*. Nevertheless it is possible to make some educated guesses concerning the occurrence and functions of the “goods from outside”.

The “Schatzhaus”

Bearing in mind the political background, those buried in the “Schatzhaus” might either have been members of the local elite or members of that Egyptian elite that had taken over political control of *Kumidi*. That they are considered members of the elite is affirmed by the richness of the burial gifts as well as location of the burials in that specific building next to the palace. Whether the burial gifts had reached *Kumidi* as merchandise, as gifts, as diplomatic advertence or as personal belongings of the interred and whether or not they are Egyptian in origin will for the moment remain an unanswered question, as will be the question of the *quid pro quo* cost of these “imports” incurred by the deceased or the bereaved.

There is one exemption to this statement: objects that carried the name of a member of the political elite, such as prince Ra-Woser as well as the most famous pharaoh Thutmose III are, in accordance with contemporaneous customs of moral concepts and modes of trading, hardly conceivable as trading-goods and sales of this kind have not yet been accounted for.

In contrast the exchange of gifts in particular those of diplomatic advertences is well known, the latter being a means of diplomatic intercommunion and connected with paying homage to each other, rewarding loyalty, assuring public relations and tightening strategic alliances - true to the maxim that small gifts preserve friendship.

Against the background of the historical situation in *Kumidi* at that time it doesn't seem to be unlikely that the objects arrived via diplomatic exchange or that they were personal belongings of those who came from Egypt and originally had brought these objects with them when moving to *Kumidi*. As such they may even have been memorabilia, objects that already had a “biography” when committed to the dead (see thereto Kimmich 2007, 74). However, it is quite certain that the imports point to the social significance that was aligned to their use (see also Wijngaarden 2002, 71) .

The palace and the east slope

Current knowledge about the differing goods from the palace as well as from the east-slope indicates that they represent a somewhat divergent spectrum than that conveyed by the goods found in the “Schatzhaus”. Imports are mainly verified through painted pottery of Cypriot and Cretan origin, that is to say, through transport-containers, as such to be reckoned as consumer goods that might have reached *Kumidi* as an outcome of trade (although their arrival in *Kumidi* as a gift or diplomatic advertence can not be excluded).

Future excavation results from the east slope will probably reveal the answer to one of our questions concerning the access to imports - was the acquisition of imports open to more or less all members of the community of *Kumidi* or was it rather restricted to the elite circles? And was it thus rather the outcome of trade or the result of diplomatic communication?

The temple

The third “owner” of imports was the temple of *Kumidi* where like in the “Schatzhaus” a mixture of consumer goods as well as other objects like idols and figurines had been maintained. The latter might have been used rather for ceremonial activities than for daily life. As the temple inventory thus points out, goods from outside not only belong to the sphere of both the living and the dead, but it had obviously been similarly necessary to provide the gods with valuable gifts coming from outside, symbolizing a form of reciprocity where the humans served the gods and in return the gods secured the good living of the humans.

7. Fazit

The Late Bronze Age had obviously been a prosperous period for the Levant, and a prosperous time for the city of *Kumidi*. Goods from “outside” were definitely a part of the lifestyle of at least the elite of *Kumidi*. These circles had established contacts with a variety of trading areas, all of them oriented to the West and South, to Cyprus, Greece and Egypt, to the Levant / Palestine, and presumably to Anatolia and Syria. Goods from outside had been used as consumer durables if we interpret the pottery vessels as containers for foodstuff and liquids, for storage and transport of goods and as such found in all mentioned contexts.

Goods from outside had been used *inter alia* for political and social representation, if we interpret the inscribed objects found in the “Schatzhaus” as gifts exchanged in diplomatic dealings. Goods from outside had been important enough to accompany the dead. Goods from outside, especially the jewellery found in the “Schatzhaus” served as a means of personal decoration and representation of status. These objects in particular may be called luxury and prestige goods, classified as such by reason of their rare appearance in *Kumidi*, this rarity being a result of the effort in purchasing them or by virtue of the mode of exchange we ascribed to these objects - exchange of gifts on a political or diplomatic level rather than acquisition through trade. And last but not least goods from outside formed part of the funds that served the needs of the city’s divinities.

The variety of goods and the spectrum of possible producing countries was significant at that time. Awareness of the politics, the cultural development and the economic potential of neighbouring countries was existent amongst *Kumidi*’s ruling elite and immediate neighbours were also in turn knowledgeable of *Kumidi*’s situation. Which makes it all the more surprising that to all intents and purposes, Mesopotamia was not one of *Kumidi*’s trading partners during the Late Bronze Age and that finds from Syria-Anatolia had been rather an exception. The reason any material evidence from the Syrian-Anatolian axis is scarce cannot be explained by any failure of geographical or cultural cognizance. As a working hypothesis we suggest that it was due to the political situation that had established Egypt as the suzerain over the Levant and that as suzerain, Egypt controlled whether or not its territories were allowed to maintain trading connections. Economic connections meant power. Central control at this time was held by the Egyptians and this was expressed first and foremost through control over the empire’s economy.

8. The Collapse of the empire and the change of economic relations throughout the Levant (Iron Age I and Iron Age II period)

There was a major political change at the end of the second millennium. The Egyptian superpower collapsed and this collapse affected the development of the whole Levant. In *Kumidi* the palace and temple were abandoned, its function as an administrative and political centre vanished along with the city's status.

The settlement survived, but the global connections that had characterized the lifestyle in *Kumidi* during the prosperous Late Bronze Age had gone astray. The desintegration of the superpower seems to have brought about the interruption of the global network of trade and communication in which *Kumidi* had once been involved - a development, according to recent discoveries, that would keep *Kumidi* out of the global business for the next 500 - 600 years (Iron Age I, 1200 - 900 BC and Iron Age II, 900 - 600 BC). This assumption ("*Kumidi excluded*") is based upon the fact that contemporaneous imports of any kind seem to be missing in those contexts in Kamid el-Loz that are known as representing the Iron Age I and II period (Heinz 2008 forthcoming).

The exclusion of *Kumidi* from global events is all the more surprising, when, regardless of the Egyptian's loss of power in the region trade continued unabated. This of course was accomplished and controlled by a new group of protagonists, the Phoenicians, and was concentrated in a new economic centre located along the coast of what is now modern Lebanon. Phoenician trade flowed mostly westward but it was also connected to the East as far as Mesopotamia. The reasons for *Kumidi's* exclusion from this trade are not yet really known, the Phoenician economy and global trade flourished and the coastal area of the Levant experienced a heyday. Did this development not effect the *hinterland*? And if so, why? Research being undertaken in Kamid el-Loz will have to prove whether this impression is just a result of missing links in the archaeological context or the rendering of ancient circumstances in the Beqa'a plain.

9. The growth and establishment of the Persian Empire, another major change in the political organisation of the Levant and again a change with a major impact on the external relations of *Kumidi* (Iron Age III / 600 - 330 BC)

The political situation changed again when the Persians emerged as the new super power. As Markoe concluded in his research on the Phoenicians (2003), global trade came back to the Beqa'a plain when the Persian's power grew. Goods were once again exchanged between the east and what is now modern Iran as the centre of this dynamic political development and as far west as Greece. For obvious geographical reasons, the Levant once again became a mediator again and blossomed economically along with *Kumidi* which was back in the circle of those locations that took part in international encounters. To date no verification of a settlement of this period (Iron Age III) has been found for Kamid el-Loz, and up to now it is the wide-stretching cemetery, laid out during this period, that proved *Kumidi's* integration into this global trade role (Heinz *et alii*, 2008 forthcoming; Poppa 1978; Hachmann / Penner 1999). One of the graves, excavated on the east

slope in 2005, shall be presented *pars pro toto*, (to be published in Heinz *et alii* 2008 forthcoming, grave 17). The deceased female had been provided with an array of jewellery, beads made of semi-precious stones, amongst them carnelian and of silver, fibulae made of bronze, rings of bronze and silver, a cylinder for cosmetics carved out of bone and adorned with an incised decoration, a scarab made of limestone and two bronze circlets decorated with animal-heads. Three of the artefacts can be traced almost surely to their place of origin, the scarab to Egypt, the bone cylinder to Syria and the circlets to Iran.

Again we have confirmation that imports, gifts or diplomatic regards did indeed belong to the “life of the dead” and did, amongst other functions, point to the social significance of the use of those goods that had come to *Kumidi* from outside.

10. Fazit

The features so far given concerning Kamid el-Loz and the integration of that location into global events bring up some general questions concerning the organization of external relations, of global trade and in particular questions concerning the agents and those who required this global action. So far the following scenario has been established:

Global trade is highlighted and the integration of Kamid el-Loz into global events detected, as soon as a superpower has taken over the political and economical organisation of a wide ranging territory. During the Late Bronze Age, this occurred under the Egyptians, and during the Iron-Age III under the hegemony of the Persians (and following the Persians this constellation can be documented during the times of the Hellenistic and the Roman occupation of Kamid el-Loz). Without central organization, be this locally established or executed through a superpower, Kamid el-Loz, as far as current information indicates, seems not to have been involved into global action. If this scenario reflects the historical circumstances then another hypothesis could be added: In times of local independence, imports, gifts, prestige and luxury goods or diplomatic homage were not indispensable for a good living in Kamid el-Loz. If so this once again raises the question: how, when and why do which kind of “goods from outside” become necessary for whom – if we accept the *inter alia* statement by Baudrillard (1991) referring to what is the “natural” basis of human needs and what is the “natural” use of objects, and that needs are not given but socially and culturally created and that the reasons for consumption should also be thought of as “a symbolic and semiotic rather than strictly utilitarian activity” (Buchli / Lucas 2001, 22).

Further research is needed to verify or falsify these preliminary reflections.

Had Kamid el-Loz during the Middle Bronze Age been a partner in international trading? The location possessed a palace, as the excavations in 2007 have shown, as well as a temple, so it would appear to have been a central political organization, but what about imports? And will further research on the Iron-Age I and II periods show that imports reached what would now be a village, although it was, at this time, not ruled by an institutionalized local or global power?

Open questions, first assumptions, up to now few answers and a large field for future research.

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