

Conference: 'The Crossroads II, or There and Back Again'. Faculty of Arts, Charles University of Prague, 15-18th September 2014

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After the success of the conference 'Egypt and the Near East - the Crossroads' in 2010, the proceedings of which focused on the study of Egyptian interconnections with Syria-Palestine,¹ 'Crossroads II' took place in the Faculty of Arts, Charles University of Prague on 15-18 September 2014.²

'Crossroads II' was organised by the Czech Institute of Archaeology and the Institute for Classical Archaeology (Faculty of Arts, Charles University of Prague) in co-operation with the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures. It was dedicated to the study of relations between Egypt, the Aegean, the Levant and the Sudan in the second and first millennia BC. In this report I summarize some of the highlights of 'Crossroads II'.

Aims of the conference

The conference invited experts (archaeologists, ancient historians, linguists, etc.) to get together and follow current research in the field of Egyptian interconnections. It also aimed at giving academics from various disciplines - including early career researchers - the opportunity to present and discuss their work. A wide number of topics were presented, ranging from issues of chronological synchronisms to the exchange of technological knowledge, products and ideas between Egypt and its neighbouring regions.

First day of lectures

Among the lectures on the first day, I will mention two papers that deal with technological and stylistic transfers in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Romain Prévàlet and Elise Morero talked about foreign technological influences in goldwork and stone vessel production on Crete. As an example, they argued that items such as the frog pendant from Koumasa (which is decorated with the granulation technique)³ demonstrate that Cretan craftsmen were influenced by foreign technology from the Orient in a selective and integrative manner. The speakers added that while technological transference requires direct contact

¹ Mynářová 2011.

² The conference programme is available on http://egyptologie.ff.cuni.cz/pdf/crossroads2_programme_final.pdf (last accessed 14/10/2014). The organising committee consisted of Jana Mynářová (Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague), Pavel Onderka (National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures) and Peter Pavúk (Institute of Classical Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague).

³ For the pendant see Karetsou et al. 2000: 178 (catalogue number 175) with a coloured picture.

with foreign craftsmen, the Cretans were perfectly capable of introducing their own technological innovations, or, even, developing imported technological knowledge according to local needs and fashion. In my opinion, the notion of the selectivity of imported technology and style furthers the discussion over Minoan aesthetics.

In her paper, Vanessa Boschloos referred to the unfinished Egyptian and Egyptianising scarab(oid)s from Byblos⁴ and compared them to the so-called Green Jasper Group of Canaanite scarabs.⁵ Her comparison prompts debate with regard to the date and provenance of these pieces, although Boschloos discusses the possibility that the unfinished scarabs would be finished in another phase/region and that at least at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, a seal-cutter operated at Byblos.

Second day of lectures

Nozomu Kawai presented a paper tracing on-going research in Northwest Saqqara by the Waseda University Egyptian expedition. An intact and undisturbed multiple burial of 12 persons was unearthed in 2003 and was dated to sometime between the very end of the Second Intermediate Period and the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty. This burial presents mixed ethnic traits of both Syro-Palestinian and Egyptian cultures, e.g. an Egyptian coffin burial, both Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian grave goods, etc.⁶ The ethnic identity of the deceased is not yet known, and I am certain that many conference attendees eagerly await news about this project.

In her paper, Sara Caramello considered the exchange of physicians in Late Bronze Age international relations, providing examples from the Amarna Letters.⁷ She differentiated between permanent gift-exchange (i.e. exchange of raw materials and luxury goods) and the temporary 'gift-exchange' of physicians,⁸ as these specialists were expected to return home after offering their services to foreign courts. Yet, she highlighted that whereas the presence of physicians in foreign courts was temporary, the exchange of medical knowledge was enduring.

Third day of lectures

The third day of the conference was dedicated to iconography and language issues.

With her paper at Crossroads II, Judith Weingarten, who has an interest in Egyptian and Minoan demonology, updated her research on the image of Beset on Crete.⁹ Beset was the female version of Egyptian god Bes,¹⁰ and Weingarten explained how a Beset-like image appears on a

⁴ Boschloos 2011-2012

⁵ Keel 1989

⁶ See e.g. Yoshimura and Kawai 2008

⁷ For example, EA 49 (Moran 1992: 120), where Ugarit king Niqm-Adda II corresponds with Amenhotep III or IV to request a palace physician.

⁸ An explanation about physicians as 'exchanged gifts': Caramello noted that the physicians were considered and used as an exchange good, although a very pricey one, as they were treated as high status individuals while in foreign courts and were seen as equal in value to hundreds of ingots of gold.

⁹ See also Weingarten 2013.

¹⁰ Romano 1989

hard-stone seal from House Tomb 2 at Petras,¹¹ and considered what the Minoan craftsman maintained from the Egyptian image, what was altered, and which traits were not depicted at all. To my mind, Weingarten also managed to raise attention to gender issues in the process of transference of cultic images from Egypt to Crete - a topic that still lacks a major comparative study in the field.

Uroš Matić delivered a paper on the topic of the depictions of foreign children brought by adult bearers, as seen in the New Kingdom procession scenes in tombs (e.g. TT 86 - tomb of Menkheperreseneb) and temples (e.g. Armant).¹² He grouped the depicted children according to different traits (seated, dressed, brought in baskets, etc.) and examined the way they are labelled in inscriptions.¹³ Additionally, he debated the extent to which New Kingdom procession scenes with children correspond to diplomatic reality: were these children brought to Egypt as political hostages and if not, then for what reason?

Zsolt Simon delivered a paper on a very controversial topic: the origin of the Danuna mentioned in Amarna tablet EA 151. The terms Danuna, Dnny and Denyen have been previously connected to various geographical regions (e.g. Cilicia, Northern Levant or the Aegean).¹⁴ In the opinion of Simon, Danuna and Dnny should be separated, and Danuna should be placed in Northern Levant.¹⁵ In my opinion, the terms will continue to divide researchers with their problematic origin associations, most likely for years to come. Further, any literary notions should be confirmed by archaeological finds.

Fourth day of lectures

The fourth day of the conference focused on the first millennium BC. For instance, Luisa Bonadies discussed stone jars in the Mediterranean in the first millennium BC. She argued that Egyptians and Phoenicians exchanged technological knowledge regarding stone jar production, and she also examined the possibility that Egyptian-looking stone jars, frequently considered Egyptian in origin, were made by foreign craftsmen, possibly living in the Nile Valley. The speaker referred to examples of soft stone vessels from the Department of Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre Museum.¹⁶

Special lectures

In the opening lecture of the conference, A. Bernard Knapp traced the development of maritime transport containers, such as the Minoan transport stirrup jar.¹⁷ The study of such containers

¹¹ The engraved gem was discovered in House Tomb 2, Room 3, at Petras, Crete. An image is provided in Weingarten 2013: 376 (figure 4).

¹² See, for example, a Syrian man (the 'prince of Tunip') accompanying a child in the procession in the tomb of Menkheperreseneb, 1st register, facsimile (Davies 1936: pl. XXI).

¹³ For instance, Matić concluded that Syrian children in almost all cases are labelled as 'jnw'; an exception is the procession in TT 100, the Tomb of Rekhmire. For the various interpretations of jnw see Warburton 1997: 221-236.

¹⁴ See, for example, Laroche 1958: 263-275; Goetze 1962: 50; Astour 1965: 248; Cline and Stannish 2011: 7; Singer 2013: 323.

¹⁵ An opinion first suggested by Goetze 1962: 50 ff.

¹⁶ Unpublished material: for example, a jar from white veined stone ('alabaster') (Louvre Museum catalogue number E22576).

¹⁷ For transport stirrup jars in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean see Haskell et al. 2011.

promotes an understanding of the mechanisms of trade and exchange, as well as aspects of mobility and connectivity in the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean. It also highlights the modus operandi of economies which are dependent on seaborne trade. Besides, as Knapp demonstrated, these exchanged items are markers of relations of power among Eastern Mediterranean elites.

Diane H. Cline and Eric H. Cline gave a joint evening lecture on the second day of the conference. In my opinion, their paper was pioneering as it went beyond the traditional view of Amarna interrelations,¹⁸ since the speakers used Social Network Analysis for the examination of the Amarna Letters. They did this experimentally, with the help of an analytical tool called NodeXL.¹⁹ The results ('sociograms') of NodeXL manifested the degree of connectivity between Eastern Mediterranean rulers in the Amarna correspondence; i.e. how rulers were connected to each other via intermediate leaders. After following this paper I am convinced that Social Network Analysis, as an alternative way of data analysis, has great potential in the study of Eastern Mediterranean interconnections in the Bronze and Iron Age.

Museum visits

Two complimentary museum visits and guided tours were arranged as part of the conference schedule.

On the second day, conference participants visited the exhibition 'Land of the Black Pharaohs', in the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures. There, we had the chance to follow the history of Ancient Nubia and see unique artefacts from the permanent collections at the Náprstek Museum. In addition, we admired items that were on loan from the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum, the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection in Berlin and the Egyptian Museum of the University of Leipzig. Among them was the pair statue of the god Amun and the goddess Mut from the Island of Meroe and a barkstand with bilingual inscriptions of the names of King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore.²⁰

On the last day of the conference we visited the permanent exhibition 'The Art of Asia/The Art of the Ancient World' in the National Gallery (Kinský Palace). We looked at artefacts from Egypt and Nubia, Anatolia, Assyria, Mesopotamia and Iran, as well as Cyprus, the Prehistoric Aegean, and Classical Greek and Roman art.

Closing remarks

The presented papers were all noteworthy, generating stimulating discussions. The aims of Crossroads II were generously met, with the 'Crossroads conference series' being a channel for academic networking and the exchange of knowledge between researchers of various disciplines.

¹⁸ Moran 1992; Mynářová 2007.

¹⁹ NodeXL is a free open source Microsoft XL template that explores network graphs. It is available on <http://nodexl.codeplex.com/> (last accessed 14/10/2014). A sociogram is a graph representing social links and interpersonal relations.

²⁰ Pair statue: Meroitic Period, first century AD, Wad Ben Naga. On loan from the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum (CNM 36100); Barkstand: Meroitic Period, first century AD, Wad Ben Naga, Isis Temple. On loan from the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection in Berlin (ÄM 7261).

The organisers are planning to publish the conference proceedings in the following year, and 'Crossroads III' is scheduled to take place in 2018.

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