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The Wall Paintings of Tell el-Dab'a: Potential Aegean Connections

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In 1991 Manfred Bietak discovered wall paintings produced in the Aegean style with Aegean techniques at the Egyptian Delta site of Tell el-Dab'a, or ancient Avaris. These paintings date to Egypt's 18th Dynasty (c.1550-1069 B.C.) and were found in a palatial context. A close examination of the paintings regarding materials and techniques, iconography, style and context sheds new light on the relationship between Egypt and the Aegean world during the 2nd millennium B.C. Additionally, it provides increased support for a system of an elite shared cultural koiné in the eastern Mediterranean during this time, which the elites of each culture appropriated for their own use.

Introduction

In the 1990's Bronze Age paintings of potential Aegean origin were discovered outside of the Aegean, in Egypt. Manfred Bietak of the University of Vienna, and Director of the Austrian Institute in Cairo, discovered wall paintings in 1991 at Tell el-Dab'a that were painted using Aegean techniques and which contained the theme of bull-leaping (considered by many to be of Minoan origin), as well as other traditionally Aegean iconographic images. The discovery of these paintings has drastically altered the perception of Aegean influence in Egypt during the second millennium BCE. These wall paintings pose the possibility of strong Aegean influences in ancient Egyptian wall decoration during early 18th Dynasty Egypt. It remains a source of debate whether Aegean artists were indeed brought to locations such as Tel el-Dab'a to execute their work, and if so, why. Other possibilities include Egyptian artists traveling to the Aegean and bringing Aegean traditions to the eastern Mediterranean, or that the paintings are not in fact of Aegean origin. This paper will examine the Tell el-Dab'a paintings in the context of the Bronze Age wall painting traditions of the Aegean and Egypt and seek to determine to which tradition the paintings most closely belong. The analysis will show that the paintings are primarily Aegean in materials and techniques, iconography and style, rather than Egyptian. Additionally, it will be shown

that the artists themselves were likely Aegeans commissioned from the Knossian court to work for the elite of Egypt. An examination of the causes and methods behind the spread of artistic traditions across the eastern Mediterranean can potentially provide a new understanding of the nature and degree of contact between the Aegean and Egypt in the Bronze Age. Clarity regarding the source of the wall paintings at Tell el-Dab'a will bring a fuller understanding to New Kingdom Egypt's relations with the Aegean. An examination of what these similarities mean in terms of Egyptian contact with the Aegean will illuminate the larger implications for such contact in social, art historical, and archaeological contexts.

Tell el-Dab'a

The Site

Tell el-Dab'a is located in the Nile Delta near the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. The site of Tell el-Dab'a was the ancient Hyksos capital Avaris. The Hyksos ruled Egypt during the 16th and 17th Dynasties. The Hyksos-period town was about 250 ha. in size. The Hyksos-period and Tuthmoside buildings are located on the western edge of the site.

It had previously been thought that the site was abandoned after the expulsion of the Hyksos by King Ahmose until about 200 years later during the reigns of Seti I and Ramesses II founded the town Piramesse, which was centered about 2 km north of Tell el-Dab'a. The excavations that have been carried out at the site since 1991 by Manfred Bietak have indicated continued occupation during this time.[1] There are at least two early 18th Dynasty strata between the Hyksos-period citadel and the Tuthmoside palace district that contained the wall paintings. After the early 18th Dynasty Tuthmoside palatial compound, there are later occupation levels nearby that date to the Amarna period and the 19th Dynasty establishment of Piramesse.

The Tuthmoside period palatial district is about 5.5 ha. in size and covers the same area as the former Hyksos citadel. The compound contained two prominent palatial structures, the smaller Palace F and the larger Palace G. The two palatial structures were constructed parallel to one another and enclosed a courtyard. Both buildings had ramps on their north-eastern side which led to an upper story. The buildings are surrounded by enclosure Wall H. Wall H has a monumental doorway with pylons on its north-eastern side which leads to the court. A small structure, Palace J, is attached to the south of palace G. Palace J is constructed on a platform, like the other structures, and also contains an access ramp.

There were two stages of use for the Tuthmoside palatial compound. The early stage consisted of Palaces F, G, and J with enclosure wall H. The wall paintings associated with Palaces F and G are from this earlier stage.[2] Palaces F and G, as well as enclosure Wall H, were used in the second phase. This phase also included two workshops, an inner enclosure wall for Palace G, and other new building projects. Palace J was dismantled at this time. By this second stage of occupation, the wall paintings of the earlier stage had fallen down from the walls of Palaces F and G.

Palace F is located in area H/I and measures 70.5 x 47 m.[3] Palace G is located in areas H/II, H/III, and H/IV and measures 160.5 x 79.7 m.[4] The buildings were constructed of mud brick. The two palaces were constructed at about the same time. Reconstructions of Palace G indicate that it was used for both administrative and residential purposes.[5]

Context of the Paintings

The majority of the wall painting fragments are associated with Palace F, including the bull leaping and hunting scenes.[6] The fragments were found in a dump on the north-east of the

building and they may have been thrown from the ramp. The upper story of Palace F, which was accessible by the ramp, was probably the original site of the paintings.[7] In area H/III of Palace G a patch of painted plaster was found *in situ* on the wall of a doorway with a portico.[8] Fragments of painted plaster were also found in area H/III. On the north-western wall of Palace G in area H/VI several plaster fragments had fallen off the wall.[9] The paintings did not last long on the walls of the palaces – they fell from the walls because lime plaster is not suitable for use on mud brick walls.

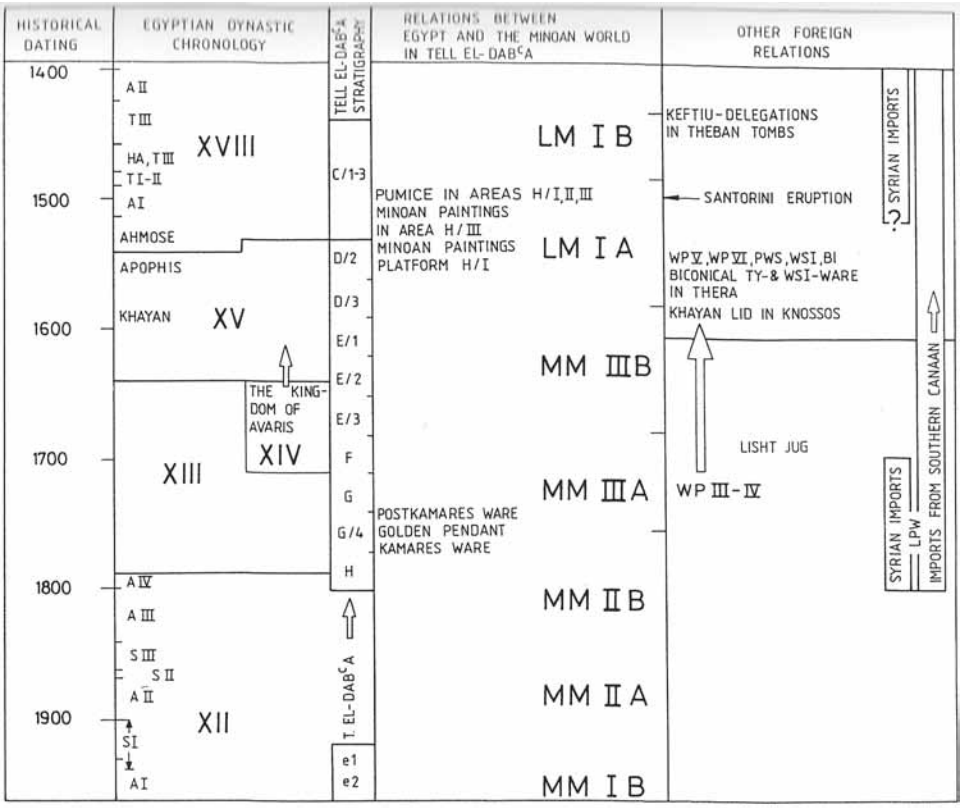
The palatial complex appears royal in nature due to its monumental scale.[10] It bears resemblances to the palace district at Deir el-Ballas, which was used by king Ahmose during his struggles with the Hyksos.[11] It seems, therefore, that the paintings were executed and used in a palatial context for elite consumption. Brysbaert concludes that the "painters must have been controlled at a royal or at least at an elite level."[12] The use of bull leaping scenes may also represent a royal context, as all bull leaping scenes from Knossos are associated with the palace, and are not found in any domestic contexts.

Chronology

The question of the chronological placement of the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes raises many problems. Various schools of thought regarding chronology exist for both the Aegean and Egypt, which present independent difficulties in themselves, and it is particularly challenging to determine which periods correspond as there is no consensus on a correct chronological construct for either region. The placement of Aegean relative periods into absolute chronological terms is a daunting task given the chronological disagreement among authorities. Bietak's theories regarding the chronology of the palatial complex have changed greatly over time. Bietak currently places the 18th Dynasty Palace district during the reign of Thutmosis III (c.1479 – 1425 BC), which in Minoan terms (according to Bietak's chronology) is contemporary with LM IB (Table 1). Bietak's dates for the site have become increasingly more recent throughout the course of his excavations. Originally, Bietak believed that some of the paintings may have come from as early as the Hyksos-period installation; he no longer believes this is possible. Later, in 2005, Bietak believed that the wall paintings may have been produced sometime during the reigns of Tuthmosis I and II, or maybe as late as the reigns of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III, during which time there was intensive contact between Minoan Crete and Egypt.[13] He now believes (2007) that the wall paintings were most likely executed during the reign of Tuthmosis III (c.1479 – 1425 BC), which he places as contemporary with LM IB.

Bietak favors a low chronology, which is not agreed upon by all authorities. The chronology of the paintings raises several questions, as each expert's opinion differs regarding both Aegean and Egyptian relative and absolute chronology. A rift exists between those who favor a High Absolute Chronology and those who prefer the Low Chronology for dating in Egypt, and a similar debate exists between high, revised high, and low (traditional) chronology in the Aegean which further complicates the process of attempting to determine which Aegean period is contemporary with the paintings of Tell el-Dab'a. As previously stated, Bietak favors a low chronology, placing the paintings as contemporary with LM IB. It is challenging to attempt an association with the paintings of Tell el-Dab'a and those of LM IA and LM IB Knossos, as the corpus of material from this time period in Knossos is fragmentary and has not been securely dated.[14] Manning believes, based on stylistic comparisons between the frescoes of Tell el-Dab'a and Crete, that a late LM IB date is likely.[15] According to Manning, placing the paintings of Tell el-Dab'a as contemporary with the Aegean LM IB actually challenges Bietak's use of a low chronology (which would favor an LM IA placement, in Manning's chronology), as an LM IB placement seems to

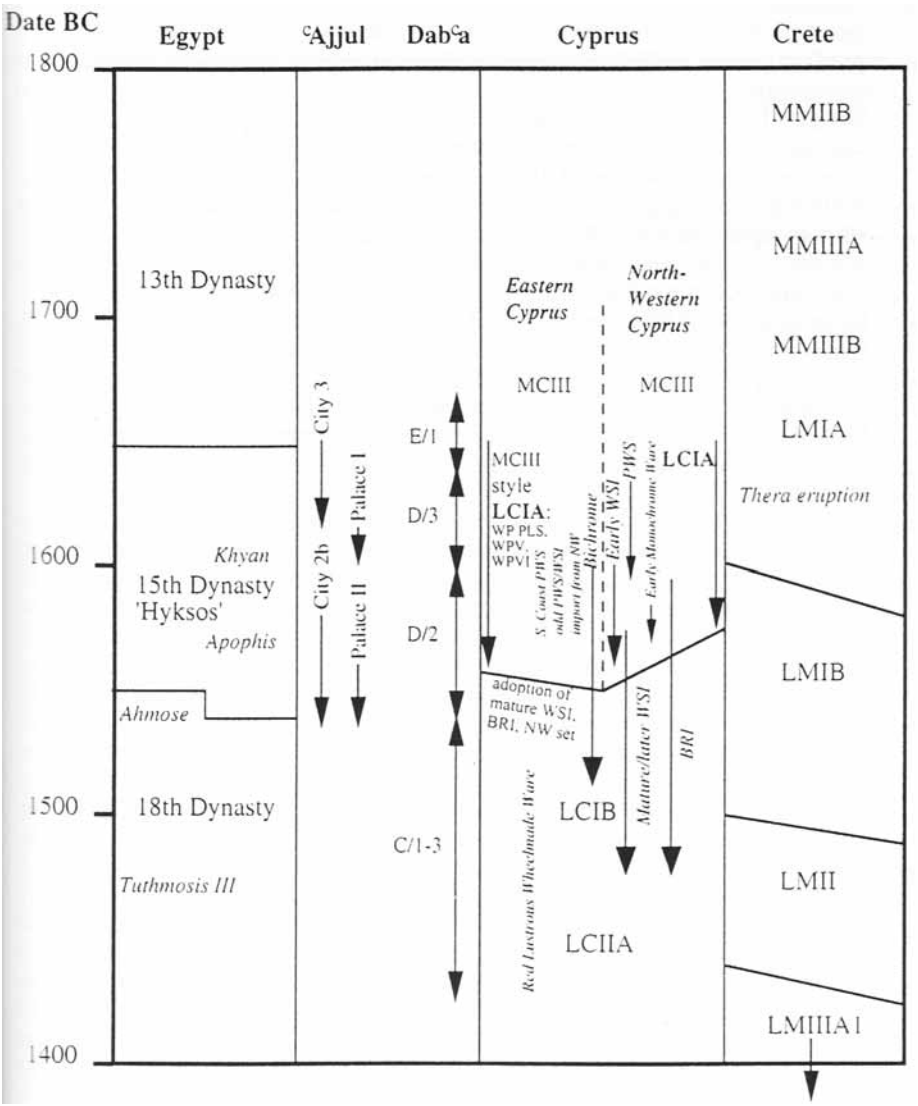
Table 1. Chronology of Egypt and the Minoan World (Bietak 1995)



favor a revised high Aegean chronology.[16] Manning believes that LM IB ended before the reign of Tuthomosis III, rather than being contemporary with it (Table 2). Therefore, "careful consideration of Aegean stylistic date may…undermine the conventional low Aegean chronology which he [Bietak] takes for granted."[17]

Brysbaert presents a chronology, based primarily on Manning's dendrochronology, which similarly places LM IB as contemporary with the Egyptian 17th Dynasty, making LM IB too early to be contemporary with the reign of Tuthmosis III (Table 3).[18] If in fact the paintings are from the reign of Tuthmosis III, they would be contemporary with LM II in Manning's and Brysbaert's terms.[19] Brysbaert states that the paintings probably belong to the period of Tuthmosis I – Tuthmosis III (1500 – 1450 BC), a 150-year period ranging from late LM IB to early LM II.[20] Morgan states that the palatial complex may have been built during the early Tuthmoside period or during the reigns of Tuthmosis III and Hatshepsut.[21] This could place the paintings at either LM IA (which corresponds to the reign of Tuthmosis I) or LM IB (which corresponds to Tuthmosis II or Tuthmosis III and Hatshepsut) based on Morgan's chronology. According to Morgan, the latest possible date for the paintings is the beginning of the reign of Tuthmosis III/Hatshepsut (1479 – 1427 BC), in LM IB. This disagreement over the absolute dates of the LM IB period (and all Aegean relative chronology) demonstrates the chronological dispute that clouds the discussion of the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes.

Table 2. Eastern Mediterranean chronology. (Manning 1999)



The ceramic material from the site indicates that Palace F dates to the period of Tuthmosis III (c.1479 – 1425 BC), with the reign of Amenhotep II (c. 1427 – 1401 BC) as its latest possible date.[22] There is a collection of Cypriot ceramic ware at Tell el-Dab'a, including WSI ware, which can aid in the determination of chronology.[23] The various types and frequency of occurrence of Cypriot ware at Tell el-Dab'a are detailed in Table 4. No wall painting fragments were found in earlier contexts and no fragments were found in the foundation ditches of the palace, so the paintings were not from an earlier context. In Structure K west of Palace F in area H/V, which included magazines, pottery was found that dates from Tuthmosis III to Amenhotep II and possibly later. Some fragments of wall paintings were found underneath the floors of the magazines. Bietak concludes that the

Table 3. Aegean and Egyptian Chronology. (Brysbaert 2008)

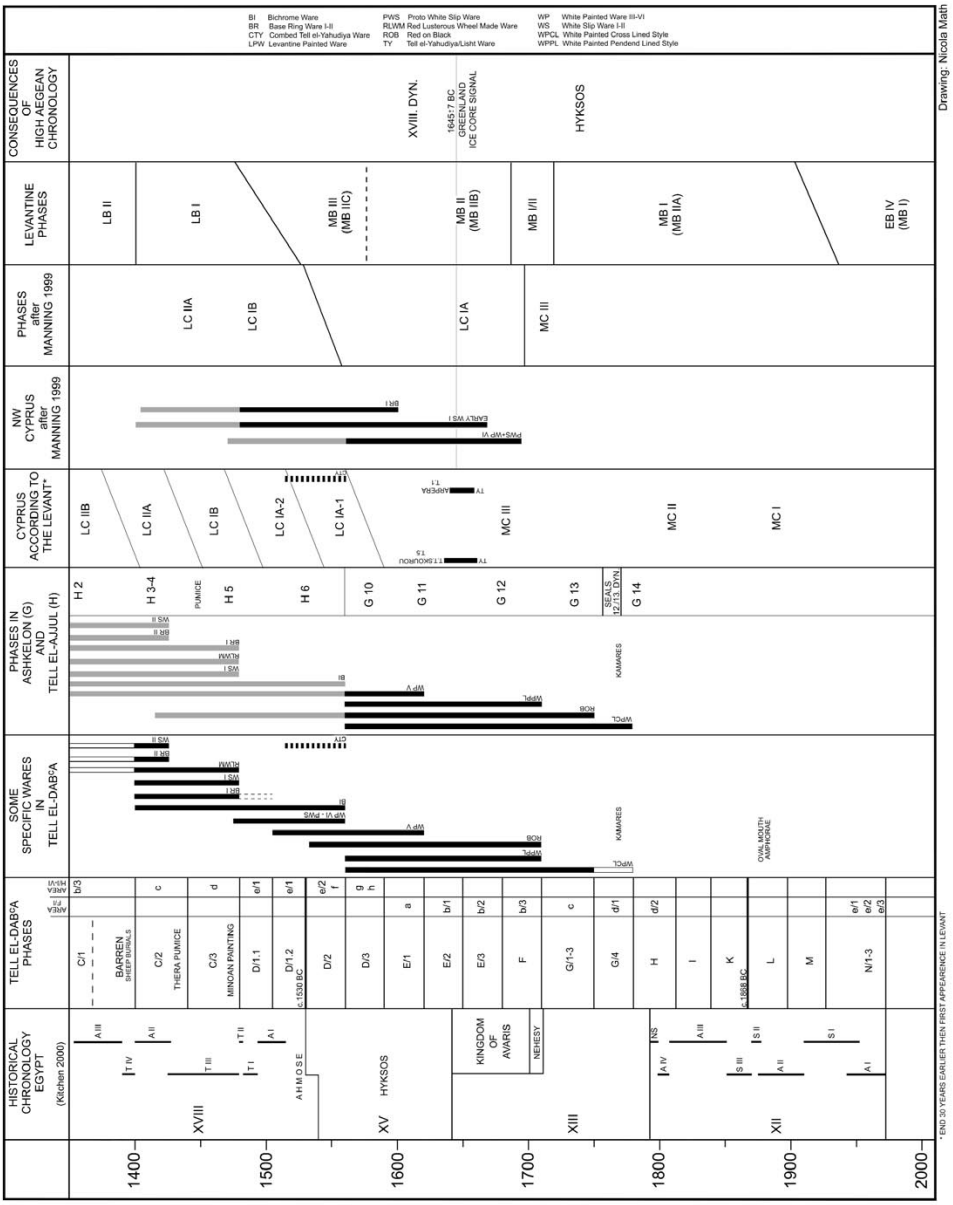
Absolute dates	*Crete*	*Mainland*	*Period*	*Egypt*
3100-2700/2650 BC	EM I		Prepalatial period	
2700/2650-2450 BC	EM IIA			
2450-2200 BC	EM IIB			
2200-2050 BC	EM III			
2050-±1900 BC	MM IA			
±1900-1820/1810 BC	MM IB		1st Palace Period/	
1820/1810-±1780 BC	MM IIA		Old Palace Period/	
±1780-±1740 BC	MM IIB		Protopalatial Period	
±1740-±1720 BC	MM IIIA			
±1720-1700 BC	MM IIIB		2nd Palace Period/	
1700/1675-1600 BC	LM IA	LH I	New Palace Period/	13th Dynasty (1759-1606 BC)
1665-1595 BC: Thera	LM IA*		Neopalatial Period	15th Dynasty (1637-1529 BC)
1600/1590-1525/1479 BC	LM IB	LH IIA		17th Dynasty (1606-1539 BC)
1479-1440/1425 BC	LM II	LH IIB	3rd Palace Period	18th Dynasty (1539-1296 BC)
1440/1425-1390/1370 BC	LM IIIA1	LH IIIA1		
1390/1370-1325/1300 BC	LM IIIA2	LH IIIA2		
1325/1300-1200/1180 BC	LM IIIB	LH IIIB1		19th Dynasty (1295-1186 BC)
		LH IIIB2		20th Dynasty (1186-1069 BC)
1200/1180-1070 BC	LM IIIC	LH IIIC	Postpalatial Period	
	Subminoan	Submycenaean		

*LM 1A advanced

wall paintings decorated Palace F and some parts of Palace G in the early palace phase, the Tuthmoside period.[24] The earliest possible builder of the palaces is Tuthmosis I; the palaces were probably built during the reign of Tuthmosis III, which he considers contemporary with LM IB.[25]

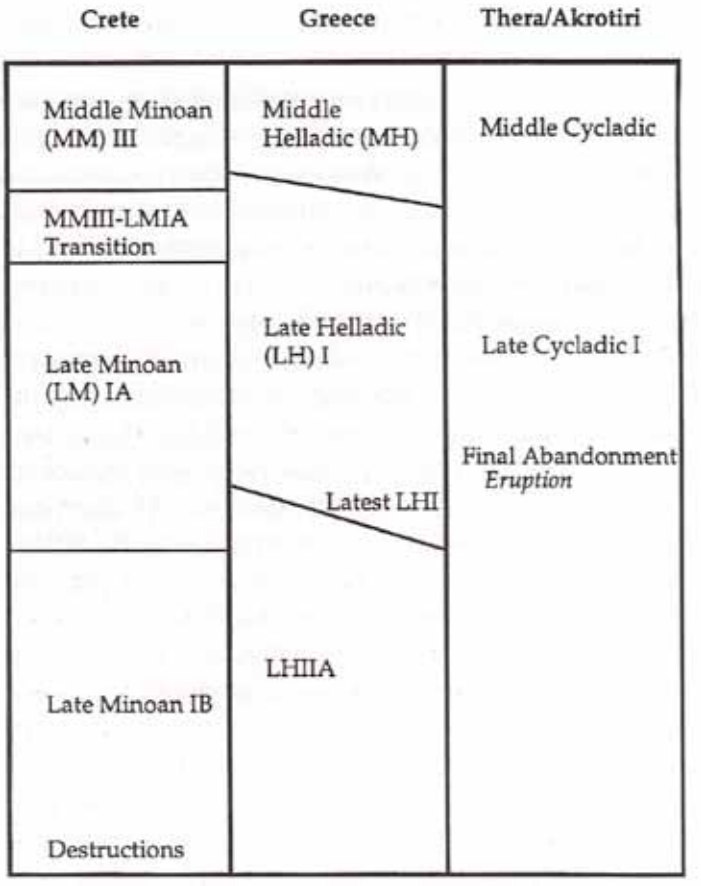
The dating of the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes, and the Aegean wall paintings that are contemporary with the site, has enormous implications for Aegean contact with Egypt and the Near East during this period. Naturally, one's opinion regarding second millennium BC chronology for both the Aegean and Egypt influences where the Tell el-Dab'a paintings fall in relation to the Aegean. The Thera volcanic eruption is the mostly likely candidate for producing an absolute date for this period, but its date has been estimated at anywhere from 1628 – 1520 BCE.[26] It is generally agreed that the eruption occurred during the LM IA period (Table 5), but the primary debate is whether it occurred in late LM IA or a bit earlier during the mature LM IA period.[27] The time span from the MM III/LM IA transition to the time of the Thera volcanic eruption is uncertain. It has been estimated from c.47 to c.80 years. Gates estimates that the Akrotiri wall paintings were done over a span of about fifty years.[28] Manning places the eruption at the earliest estimated date of c.1628 BCE.[29] He bases this placement on such evidence as "the first appearance of WSI pottery, the Aegeanising frescoes at Tell el-Dab'a in Egypt, the finds of Theran pumice at Tell el-Dab'a (and elsewhere)."[30] Based on his placement of the Thera volcanic eruption, Manning

Table 4. Eastern Mediterranean pottery phases. (Bietak 2003)



has developed a proposed high Aegean chronology (Table 2) that is not compatible with Bietak's placement of the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes as contemporary with LM IB, because it places the reign of Tuthomosis III as contemporary with LM II rather than LM IB.[31] Both Bietak and Manning place the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes as contemporary with LM IB, but they disagree on the time period that LM IB covers. This further complicates the issue. The determination of more precise dates will ultimately be very useful. For the purposes of this paper, the wall paintings at Tell el-Dab'a will be compared with Aegean frescoes that are

Table 5. Chronology of the Thera eruption. (Manning 1999)



generally considered to be of the LM IA and LM IB periods, and a few from later periods. The Egyptian wall paintings that will be focused on are those of the New Kingdom, and the 18th Dynasty in particular.

The Tell el-Dab'a Paintings

Materials and Techniques

A study conducted by Brysbaert has provided the majority of the information collected regarding the materials and techniques used in the Tell el-Dab'a wall paintings.[32] Brysbaert analyzed 27 samples of wall painting fragments, most of which were collected from areas H/I and H/IV because those areas had the highest concentration of fragments.

The lime plaster used contained calcite as the main mineral, and some amount of quartz was usually found in the plaster. A small amount of dolomite was found in some samples. This type of pure, high quality lime plaster is necessary for *al fresco* painting. Most samples contained a single layer of plaster and paint, but some had multiple layers of both. Crushed shell bits were sometimes used in the plaster as filler; shells are essentially

calcium carbonate. These shell bits would have been added to the plaster after it had been calcined, before applying the plaster layer to the backing support. The wet plaster surface was floated and polished in order to flatten the surface, enrich the surface with calcium hydroxide (this helped pigments become locked into the plaster after being applied), and create a fine texture on which to be painted.[33] Floating and flattening also help keep the plaster wet longer allowing more time to paint.

In several instances a clay plaster backing layer mixed with straw was applied to the wall first. It was applied to the surface and pressed in with fingers. This layer was allowed to dry, and the lime plaster was then applied on top of it. The thickness of this clay layer was about 1-2 cm. Finger and thumb impressions in the clay were filled in with lime plaster, and these impressions can still be seen.[34]

The pigments used included red and yellow ochres, black, white, greens, and blues. Red, yellow and orange ochres were either hematite, goethite, or limonite.[35] Some pigments were made of mixed ochres. Light reds and pink were a mixture of hematite and calcite white. Orange was made either with two goethite phases or by mixing hematite and goethite. Black was carbon. White was probably lime white; no gypsum of kaolinite was found. Two different materials were used to make green: Egyptian Blue (cuprorivaite) and yellow grains. Limonite was found in a yellow sample, indicating that the yellow grains were ochre-based.[36] All blues used at Tell el-Dab'a were cuprorivaite (Egyptian Blue). In order to create a dark blue, blue was sometimes painted over black. More often, though, black was painted over blue. Tin was found in the Egyptian Blue used at Tell el-Dab'a, as was arsenic. As for the use of any organic binders, it has not been attested, but it would be very difficult to do so as such binders age and disintegrate when they are buried for long periods of time in aerated agricultural soil.

The thickness of the paint layers at Tell el-Dab'a varies. This could be caused by the pigment used because hue intensity often depended on grain size. Additionally, the top paint layers could have been damaged by surface erosion, in which case the original thickness would have been affected. Brysbaert examined pigment penetration levels in the samples. There is evidence of red and yellow pigments penetrating the plaster surface. Particularly significant is the penetration of Egyptian Blue pigments, which can be used to identify *al fresco* painting. Egyptian Blue has a large grain size and these grains are not easily absorbed into dry plaster because of osmotic pressure. If Egyptian Blue pigments were absorbed into the plaster, it indicates that *al fresco* was used because the plaster would have been wet at the time the pigment was applied.[37] Most, and possibly all, of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings were done al fresco, "even at the level of detailed additions that were traditionally considered to be *al secco*."[38] In addition to the penetration of Egyptian Blue grains, *al fresco* is indicated by evidence of the plaster being dragged by the paintbrush as it went over the wet surface; in these instances the plaster was not allowed to dry sufficiently before painting began.[39]

Red or yellow paint was found beneath the flaking or eroded top paint layers on some fragments from Tell el-Dab'a. These were underdrawings, or *sinopie*, that were used to guide the artist but which were not visible in the final painting. The *sinopie* cannot be associated with the use of *giornata*, a technique in which the composition was divided into segments and each segment consisted of the amount of painting that could be completed in one day.[40] The sinopie were not visible as they were covered by paint or by an *intonaco*, a very fine thin layer of plaster that was applied last. Most of the paintings at Tell el-Dab'a do not have an *intonaco*, but according to Brysbaert, "The apparent lack of *intonaci* is no longer a criteria to claim *al secco* painting."[41]

An examination of the carboniation of the top layer of plaster can provide additional evidence for the *al fresco* technique. When paint is applied to wet plaster the pigments become locked in by the transformation of calcium hydroxide into calcium carbonate.[42] This occurs on the outside first because the top layer of plaster is the first to dry. If *al fresco* painting is used, then, lime will be present in the paint layer because it is what locks the pigment into the plaster.[43] This was observed in the fresco samples from Tell el-Dab'a.

Analysis of Materials and Techniques

The 27 plaster fragments from Tell el-Dab'a analyzed by Brysbaert are indicative of strong Aegean connections in the materials and techniques used by the artists.[44] The use of lime plaster is typically Aegean. Egyptian wall painting was done on gypsum plaster and was not executed in *al fresco*, and Tell el-Dab'a is the only site in Egypt to paint on lime plaster. The high quality lime plaster used at Tell el-Dab'a is consistent in composition with the plaster found at Knossos, Mycenae, and Akrotiri.[45] As discussed earlier, some plaster samples contained dolomite. Dolomite was found in the plaster at Palaikastro, Thebes, Monastiraki, and Phylakopi in the Aegean. The paintings of Tell el-Dab'a were executed in the *al fresco* technique, which could not be done on gypsum plaster. Lime plaster is required for *al fresco* painting. As previously discussed, the use of the *al fresco* technique is indicated at Tell el-Dab'a by several factors, including the penetration of Egyptian Blue grains, the smearing of plaster with paint brushes, the carbonization of the top layer of plaster, the lack of organic binders, and string impressions in the plaster used as guide lines. Planning borders by using string on the wet plaster is a Minoan technique.[46] Other plaster techniques used at Tell el-Dab'a that were common in the Aegean are the use of floaters to flatten the plaster surface, and the use of a clay backing layer which is attested on the Greek mainland sites of Orchomenos, Gla, and Tiryns.[47] There is no evidence that an Egyptian grid was used to paint the figures of Tell el-Dab'a, nor was the Egyptian scale for human figures followed.[48]

The pigments used at Tell el-Dab'a are comparable to those used in the Bronze Age Aegean.[49] Several of the pigments used at Tell el-Dab'a have been found at Crete, Akrotiri, and the Mycenaean mainland. The yellow, red and blue pigment grain sizes from Tell el-Dab'a are a close match for those used on the Greek mainland, Akrotiri, and Miletus.[50] The use of Egyptian Blue and yellow grains to make green was used at both Tell el-Dab'a and Knossos. At Tell el-Dab'a black was often created by painting black over blue; this technique has been attested at the Aegean site of Miletus. The grain size of the Egyptian Blue at Tell el-Dab'a is quite close to the grain size of the Egyptian Blue examined on mainland Greece.[51] Tin was found in the Egyptian Blue used at Tell el-Dab'a. Tin was used in Egyptian Blue at Knossos, Akrotiri, Mycenae, Thebes, Orchomenos, and Phylakopi. Arsenic was also detected in the Egyptian Blue at Tell el-Dab'a; this is also true of the Egyptian Blue at Mycenae and Gla. Brysbaert explains the use of a copper-tin alloy in the Egyptian Blue of Tell el-Dab'a by stating that it was almost certainly brought to Egypt from another site where such materials were already being used.[52] A copper-tin alloy was used in Egyptian Blue at Akrotiri before the beginning of 18th Dynasty Egypt, and it was used at Knossos as early as MM II. Brysbaert believes that the presence of such specific Egyptian Blue at Tell el-Dab'a indicates that it was brought from the Aegean and probably "came together with the people who eventually applied it, the painters."[53]

The paintings at Tell el-Dab'a display a clear transferal of materials and techniques from Aegean painting to Egypt. According to Brysbaert the use of traditionally Aegean materials and techniques at Tell el-Dab'a is strong indication that Aegean painters were in

Egypt and that the artists would have been controlled by a royal, or at least elite, administration.[54] The quality and workmanship of the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes is uneven. Because the work varies in quality, it seems to have been done by masters and pupils, some of whom would have been more skilled and experienced than others.[55]

Iconography

The iconographic images contained in the plaster fragments from Tell el-Dab'a generally fall into the categories of bull leaping and bull grappling, hunting, landscape, animal representations, and human representations. Fragmentary scenes of each category will be discussed. As the finds are so fragmentary, it can be difficult to determine which images were interconnected and used within the same scene or within the same painting program. Some distinctions and associations are possible to make based upon reconstructions; these will be significant for later comparisons with the iconography of Aegean and Egyptian wall painting. Images of bull leaping were often associated with acrobats and acrobatic activity. Landscape elements generally appear in scenes of hunting and animal representation, rather than by themselves as strictly landscape scenes. Animals are generally shown in the act of hunting; hunting scenes also often include human hunters and their dogs.

Scenes of bull leaping were found in a fragmentary state at Tell el-Dab'a. Bull leaping is a theme that was not previously found outside the paintings at the palace at Knossos.[56] One set of plaster fragments show a bull's heel, and possibly a hoof and tail. Fragments of a tableau, the Bull Frieze, were found depicting at least four bulls, two speckled blue and two speckled reddish yellow against a maze patterned background. Three of the bulls run to the left, the one in the upper-middle of the composition runs to the right. This is the first known instance of bulls appearing with a maze pattern. Bietak believes that this scene is of acrobatic activities that were associated with bulls.[57]

The maze tableau of the Bull Frieze presents a unique challenge. In the Bull Frieze, it is difficult to determine what the maze represents. What is fairly clear is that the bull leaping is taking place on official grounds (grounds that were regulated in some form) that were paved, rather than in unregulated nature. Perhaps the maze is an indication of palatial grounds. Bietak also believes that the maze pattern "can be seen as an ornament rendering of the pavement of a court on which bull games were performed."[58] At the base of the tableau is a half-rosette and triglyph frieze. Bietak believes is an emblem of the palace itself, indicating that the action in taking place in a palatial context.[59]

The section of the Bull Frieze containing the maze and bull leapers is divided into vertical zones. The upper part of the maze pattern outlines an undulating hill silhouette with palms against a red void background, as though the scene bordered open country. The middle zone contains the maze pattern background and bulls with bull leapers, and the lower border is of a half-rosette motif. The maze pattern was made up of double and triple grid lines. The lines were made by impressing strings that had been dipped in black and red paint into the wet plaster.

In the middle zone there are at least two bulls against the maze pattern. One or two of the bulls is shown partly against the red background and hill silhouette. One bull has yellow mottling, one has blue. Two of the bulls against the maze are leaping in the air. One bull against the maze is fixed to the ground line of the upper border of the half rosette frieze. The best- preserved bull is shown *en face* and is in a flying gallop. A yellow acrobat hangs onto the bull's neck by clasping the skin-folds. The man's head is partially shaved, indicating youth. He is wearing a bracelet and a Minoan-style seal on his wrist. A fragment of a leg wearing white leggings and blue shoes was probably his. A preserved yellow head

of another acrobat may also be from this frieze. Fragments of another acrobat show a head against the maze. His yellow arm wears a blue ornament on his wrist. He has a shaved sideburn. This acrobat was probably falling, which would explain why his head is against the maze.

There are no maze or half-rosette patterns on the far left segment of the Bull Frieze, which would have joined the bull and maze tableau. This segment of the frieze contains two male figures along with a bull against an olive yellow background. The bull is collapsing on his forelegs, looking up with his tongue hanging out of his mouth. One man stands behind the bull, while a second is on a higher level above the bull. The latter male has his arms bent and fists clenched. The male standing behind the bull grabs the bull's head and rests his chin against it. Only the man's head has survived but it seems that he forced the bull down. The men are wearing boots and Minoan-style kilts. The man grabbing the bull's head is rendered on a different scale from the acrobats against the maze; perhaps a different artist painted this part of the scene. He is smaller and his head is large in proportion to torso and arms. This scene on the left is probably related to bull catching and grappling, which appear to have had a connection to bull leaping.

The palm tree on the left of the tableau probably connects the painting with another bull scene by a different artist. This scene shows evidence of at least four bulls accompanied by toreadors. Two of the bulls have reddish yellow speckled skin, as in the first fresco, and two have whitish skin with black speckles. One well-preserved fragment shows an acrobat in a side leap.

There are also fragments of floor acrobats, near palm trees or papyrus plants, wearing plumed headdresses. They also wear long white Minoan kilts and boots. These acrobats are rendered in similar size and style to the bull leapers and they may have been connected in the same painting program. Along with this scene, fragments were found of at least two bulls, a man's brown forearm, and the white fragments of a leg, thigh and arm. A fresco fragment from Tell el-Dab'a shows a tumbler doing a handstand with a palm tree to his right. He wears a loincloth, booties, and a special type of headdress. This headdress is made up of two featherlike objects that extend from a blue *waz* surmounting a white lily.[60] He is painted in yellow, probably indicating his youth. These individuals may be associated with bull rituals.

There are two depictions of griffins known from Tell el-Dab'a. One fragment shows the remains of a small-scale griffin's wing and head. The upper border of the wings is framed in blue and the feather texture of the wings is painted in black. The wing pattern of the griffin is very similar to that of the griffin behind the goddess in the wall paintings of Xeste 3 at Akrotiri, perhaps indicating a chronological proximity. The griffin may have been hunting in the scene. In a fragment of a larger griffin, the wings remain. This griffin's wing is against a background of blue bud-like aquatic flowers. Bietak, Marinatos, and Palivou present a reconstruction of the griffins as they may have appeared in the throne room of Palace F, indicating a great deal of similarity with the griffins of the throne room at Knossos.[61]

Hunting scenes are common at Tell el-Dab'a. These scenes include hunters, dogs, feline predators, and prey. In depictions of human hunters they have long strides and are accompanied by dogs, which they hold on leashes. The prey is usually ungulates, antelopes, or goats. What Morgan refers to as 'The Hunt Frieze' was found in hundreds of fragments.[62] The fragments of the Hunt Frieze were found in the same dump with those of the Bull Frieze, leading Morgan to suggest that, "Clearly they belonged to the same iconographic programme."[63] There are enough surviving fragments for Morgan to estimate that

the scene covered two or three walls.[64] At least ten lions and six leopards have been identified as belonging to the frieze. In addition there are human hunters, dogs, goats, antelope, deer and bull. These animals, except for the hunter's dogs who wear red collars, are prey.

The frieze contains several hunters, each with a dog. They move in both directions pursuing prey. Two large animals, which could be either wild goats or antelopes, are being pursued. These are probably goats, given that scenes of goat pursuit are generally more common than antelope pursuit.[65] A fragment of horn is preserved from one of the animals; it is curved and blue. The animal's head did not survive but it is probable that both animals' heads were turned backward facing the pursuing dog. This posture is known in Aegean art. The animal on the left of the painting is in a kneeling position, as though wounded, perhaps having been struck by a missile, as there is no dog next to the animal.[66] The animal on the right is overlapping the first animal. He is in a flying gallop position, with his body rising upwards. The animal is bitten by a large grey dog – of the dog, the silhouette, forepaws, and red collar are preserved. Red blood trickles from the animal's wound. The dogs spring in a flying gallop to bite the underbelly of the hunted animal. Morgan suggests that this composition belonged to a program that also involved scenes of bull sports.[67]

The Hunt Frieze's background is red above and yellow below, with a wavy line that indicates a river. In some areas of the composition, the ground is divided by rocky terrain and small pebbles. Large areas of mainly blue rock decorate the base of the scene. The scene contains one griffin on a yellow ochre ground.

Almost all lions in the frieze are in a flying gallop. These animals are associated with a rocky landscape as well as an aquatic environment with reeds. All leopards are painted against a red background. They have white spots with irregular black outlines. Some are pouncing from the upper area of the painting, while some are prowling along the lower ground line. In the Hunt Frieze it is difficult to say whether the lions and leopards occupied different parts of the painting or whether they were shown hunting together.

Scenes of lions and leopards outside of the Hunt Frieze appear at Tell el-Dab'a. As at Knossos, beige and red backgrounds are used together in the fragments. One fragment is of a lion in a flying gallop among reeds. Only his hind legs have been preserved. The claws are finely detailed in blue. Several other fragments show lions against a beige ochre background. Preserved among this group of fragments are a head, part of a torso, and a snout of one lion. One fragment contains a mane, two body sections, and underbellies with a red stripe and fur markings. Two fragments show paws. The underbelly can be identified as that of a lion because of a white stripe crossed by small lines, indicating fur. Lions' claws are always blue in the fragments. Other parts of lions that are shown include underbellies and forepaws. The fifth "finger" (the equivalent of the human thumb) is shown as a blue circle. From these lion fragments at least two lion settings are discernable: an aquatic scene with reeds and a rocky scene probably of mountainous terrain.

There are also fragments of at least three leopards against a red background. One leopard's hindquarters are preserved, showing that the leopard is in a flying gallop. The leopard is very well executed and has fine black outlines on the thighs, with white used to highlight the underside of the thighs. The animal's fur is in yellow ochre with white blotches. The claws on the paws are blue. The background is of blue bulbous plants. Also remaining are the body of a second leopard and the paws of a third. All of the leopards have black and white spots with a white underbelly and white inside the thighs. In the fragment containing most of the body of a leopard, the animal is descending, probably stalking prey.

Landscape fragments are generally associated with hunting and animal scenes. A fragment of the collection of lion depictions showing an underbelly contains a blue mass

below the lion, which is probably rock landscape. In the Hunt Frieze there is a rocky landscape below the animals. The rocks are oval in shape and painted blue highlighted with green. Plants growing on this undulating ground were blue/green with red stalks.

Aquatic plants are common, including palms, reeds, grass, ivy, and possibly myrtle. Unidentified bud-like plants are also depicted. A fragment shows a white, blue, and yellow *waz* papyrus plant against a red background. This may have been part of one of the hunting or acrobatic scenes. Plants were also used as decorative motifs, like the border of ivy that probably decorated the portal of area H/III. A set of fragments shows blue reeds against a red background. The reeds are growing on an undulating ground line.

Several Tell el-Dab'a frescoes have oval rocks that look like eggs used in landscape. According to Marinatos, "They are realistic depictions of pebbles smoothened by the water of aquatic settings."[68] Some of these egg-like rocks are blue with white stripes against a red or pink background. Some are light blue against an ochre background.

A variety of rocks and hills are depicted. One kind of rock is trapezoidal with angular edges alternating in blue and red. One fragment contains the underbelly of a lion that is galloping above a blue trapezoidal rock with white and yellow stripes. There were also oval rocks without stripes, as seen in a fragment of blue oval rocks on a red background.

Terrain is shown as ovoid patches of different colors. The colors used to represent terrain are blue, pink, and red. The ground is sometimes dotted with white to indicate small stones (gravel). Sometimes hills are shown against a red background, but this is not nearly as prevalent as aquatic landscapes. The painted hills are pointed in shape and appear like dunes of sand. A convention used to depict terrain at Tell el-Dab'a is the use of "clusters of multi-colored surfaces divided by undulations."[69] Small white dots on a fragment indicate sandy soil. The fragment of terrain seems to have been part of a scene of hunters and dogs. Undulating surfaces in different colors represent the terrain.

Fragments of human representations from unidentified compositions have been found at Tell el-Dab'a. A fragment depicts a life-size white-skinned human of uncertain gender against a red background with vegetation. A relief fresco fragment contains the white limb of a human, again of uncertain gender, which ends in a patterned design. This design may indicate a boot or an armlet. Fragments have been found of an arm, possible torso, and feet of a male. The details of the nails are very detailed and careful. Most of the fragments of are of males. One set of fragments may depict a female. Patterns on these fragments seem to suggest large-scale women's clothing.[70] Fragments showing the lower part of a flounced skirt and a white foot with double anklets, which appears to have been a female figure in full scale, were found north of palace G around a portico.

So far, of the paintings of human heads that have been found at Tell el-Dab'a, all are male. These males have a variety of hair styles. These various hair styles probably indicate age groups.[71] For example, a shaved head seems to indicate youth. In the Bull Frieze the young bull leaper has a partially shaved head with long hair. Long hair is also seen on the brown leaper doing a somersault over a bull's back. This leaper is painted a reddish-brown; his skin color and hair indicate that he is older than the yellow leaper. Another hair style is a bun on top of the head, which is worn by one of the boys in the Bull Frieze. He is painted yellow, indicating that he is still young. One last hair style is hair tied with a band at the nape of the neck. There is a fragment of a male with this hair style who may be an acrobat or bull leaper. He has red skin and shaved sideburn.

One male from Tell el-Dab'a has curly hair. The figure is fragmentary so it is hard to tell the hair's length, but it was probably short. According to Marinatos, the short-haired

men from Dab'a represent different status groups.[72] One seems to be a priest – he wears a long white robe with a red border. He is gesturing in a way that appears official or ceremonial. Two men have short straight hair with a fringe and a bearded face. One of these men is slightly less than life-size and was painted in excellent execution. He probably belonged to a processional scene or some other formal composition. The other man is from a miniature painting. He belongs to an unidentified composition, but it is likely that he too was part of a processional scene.

The scruffy hair style is seen on a man who appears to be running. He is probably connected with some architectural pieces in the scene and he may have been part of a festival scene.[73] He has unkempt hair, indicating that he is not a noble.

Only a few large-scale human figures have been identified, like the almost life-size human head of a male who has a beard and curls on his forehead. A large griffin fragment may have been associated with him because they are both on the same scale. A group of about 15 fragments found in the area of palatial complex F are from a scene of large seated male figures. A fragment shows part of a male head, and other fragments show body parts. This man would have been over-life size at about 2.8 meters tall. He has black hair, which is middle length and in a wavy contour with shapely locks on the forehead. His body is outlined in black. A fragment contains part of his leg and ankle. He is against a yellow ochre background. There are two parallel string lines that indicate that he was next to an architectural façade.[74] He raises his arm over his head; maybe he was carrying an object. A possible pottery vessel is indicated by fragments with a red tone and preliminary sketching. Two fragments show parts of a white garment decorated with black stripes and wavy bands. This was likely a kilt that reached knee level.

The second male figure is seen in a fragment showing a male head. He is seen from profile view with the same hairstyle as the first man. His total height was probably about 2.35 meters. He was shorter than the first man, but is still over life-size. A small scale and the same vertical impressed string lines are used in the fragments of both men – they belonged to the same composition.

Two men on a small scale have been found in fragments. They are not quite small enough to be considered miniature. They belonged to the same composition and are painted against a yellow façade. The first man is wearing a long white gown with a red border. He was probably holding his gown with his left hand, but this part of the painting is not preserved. He is extending his right arm forward in some sort of formal gesture. He has short hair and large eyes. This man is depicted against the yellow façade of a building with a red-framed window above him. He may have been part of a procession. The second man, also painted against a yellow façade, has a naked torso. He probably wore a kilt or codpiece. His left arm is bent and he holds his fist close to his chest. His right arm is extended forward.

There are a number of non-figural representations of note from Tell el-Dab'a. These include the maze pattern, the half-rosette motif, ivy patterns, and painted imitations of ashlar stone masonry. The maze of the Bull Frieze seems to "echo" earlier paintings found at the Phaistian and Knossian palaces.[75] The two mazes are similar in layout and design, and seem to signify some sort of connection to the palace. There is no sign of any Egyptian royal emblems in the paintings, but the half-rosette frieze and maze pattern are Knossian emblems.[76] Loop and ivy patterns were found on the portico north of Palace G.

At both the portico north of Palace G and the dump at Palace F, fragments were found showing a painted imitation of an ashlar stone façade. Fragments show painted patterns of ashlar masonry, painted with "thick reddish brown horizontal and vertical zones"

– it seems the artist was attempting to imitate wooden beams.[77] Bietak concludes that either the north façade with the ramp, or the internal walls were given a painted Aegean ashlar façade.[78]

Style

The size of the paintings at Tell el-Dab'a varied from miniature to larger than life-size. Paintings of all scales and sizes are found. There does not seem to have been a standardization of scale. In reconstruction, fragments can often be grouped together based upon their scale because of the frequency of variation. The paintings lack perspective and depth, which is true of both Aegean and Egyptian art. A couple of fragments (a bull and human limb) were executed in relief, providing at least some semblance of depth.

Outlining was used occasionally for heightened effect. The line quality was usually quite fine and careful. Lines were used both as outlines of entire figures and within figures to highlight human muscles or animal fur and facial features. The black outline of one individual was approximately 4mm thick. The paintings rely solely on images and do not incorporate writing or labels.

The paintings do not appear stiff or static, but rather fluid and graceful with a flowing sense of line. Animals in particular are often shown in action, either in a flying gallop or descending on their prey. Bulls are shown in the act of leaping into the air with bull leapers doing acrobatic tricks. There is a sense of naturalistic movement to these figures. The figures are not always firmly fixed to a ground line, as is seen in bull and acrobats in mid-air and animals in the act of galloping.

The animals of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings are ones that fit the Delta environment. The artists' probably desired to include species of animals and plants that would have been readily recognizable to the audience and that would have made sense in the setting.[79]

Animals generally move to the left in compositions. Highlighting and outlining was often used for animal representations. A lion in a flying gallop has been reconstructed from many fragments; he moves to the left. His snout and chin are outlined in red, and his mouth is highlighted in white. It is a very precise rendering. His mane is made with fine red brushstrokes against a pinkish beige base color. The eye is outlined in red, and the eye interior is green-blue. Lions' claws in general are outlined - sometimes in black, sometimes in red. One well-executed leopard has fine black outlines on the thighs. The hind legs of the leopards and lions are very similar in style, conventions, and proportions. This creates a sense of standardization in the representation of feline hunters.

In human representations, generally the large-scale figures are painted on very thick plaster and the smaller scale figures are painted on thin plaster. In the fragment of the over life-size male, his body is outlined in black and the thickness of the line is about 4mm. His head and lower body part are in profile and his torso is seen from the front.

In the fragments of two over life-size men, there is no evidence that a grid was used to paint the figures. The kilt fragments were not decorated using impressed grid lines. Both men are carefully outlined in black. There is a concern for naturalistic representation and realism in the rendering of anatomy. Men are represented in standard skin colors (yellow and red) that appear to indicate age.

The overall quality and workmanship across the fragments is uneven. This indicates that the ability level of the artists varied, and paintings were probably done by schools of masters and apprentices. There is, however, a high attention to detail and the plaster surface on which the paintings were made is highly polished. The representations of animals, humans, and landscape elements are fairly standardized with certain skin colors, hair styles, and clothing representing age and status. Painting size, however, does not appear to have

been standardized as figures vary widely in scale. Because the paintings are so fragmentary, it is difficult to comment on overall style – we have no complete or nearly complete compositions from which to work. The style of the individual fragments seems fairly consistent, however, and is suggestive of high quality craftsmanship.

Analysis of Iconography and Style

The iconography and style of the wall painting fragments at Tell el-Dab'a will be examined in the order in which they were presented in the previous Iconography section. They will be examined based upon their similarities and differences regarding the contemporary Egyptian and Aegean wall painting traditions. Marinatos believes that the conventions of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings are not those of Egyptian or Near Eastern art, but are rather strongly Minoan.[80] These conventions include landscapes, the postures, features and hairstyles of human figures, and the posture of animals. Marinatos defines conventions as "culturally determined visual rules and should not be confused with style."[81] He believes that the conventions of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings are characteristically Minoan. In addition to conventions, Marinatos sees parallels in the formulas of the paintings of Tell el-Dab'a and the Aegean. Aegean art uses several formulas which appear on Crete as early as the Old Palace period. Some of these formulas are seen at Tell el-Dab'a. They include lions + reeds, palms + bulls = bull hunting, and ungulates + craggy rocks = mountainous terrain.[82]

The Bull Frieze of Tell el-Dab'a is quite similar to the bull leaping scenes of Knossos, but on a smaller scale. This frieze is the first known instance of bulls appearing with a maze pattern. Bietak believes that the pattern "can be seen as an ornament rendering of the pavement of a court on which bull games were performed."[83] The half-rosette and triglyph frieze along the base of the Bull Frieze is a motif that is found in the West Court of the palace at Knossos and which Bietak believes is an emblem of the palace itself.[84] The major entrances to the Knossian palace were decorated with bull images, so the bull also seems to have had close connections to the palace. The maze pattern of the Bull Frieze may also be an indication that the action is taking place on palatial grounds.[85] According to Bietak and Marinatos: "Since the half-rosette is associated with palace architecture in all Aegean iconography we suggest that it signifies palatial architecture on the Tell el-Dab'a mural as well."[86] This is assuming, of course, that the half-rosette frieze used at Tell el-Dab'a has the same connotations in its Egyptian setting as similar scenes had in the Aegean.

Bull leaping scenes were not previously found outside of the paintings at the palace at Knossos.[87] The Bull Frieze does raise some chronological issues, as the bull leaping scenes of Knossos date to LM IIIA, while the scenes at Tel Dab'a are from LM IA or B according to most experts. On the other hand, there are not many surviving paintings from the Knossos palace prior to the LM I period so it is possible that bull leaping scenes did exist at Knossos earlier than LM IIIA, during the MM IIIB-LM IA transition.[88] The compositional scheme of the Bull Frieze is attested in Aegean art (particularly seal rings), though there are no contemporary bull leaping frescoes in the Aegean.[89] Additionally, Manning suggests that Evan's placement of the Knossos bull leaping scene as LM IB should be reconsidered.[90]

The best preserved bull of the Bull Frieze is shown *en face*, a technique that was used occasionally in Minoan art.[91] This bull leaping scene can be compared to a similar one on the Vapheio Cup, which like this fresco, shows a bull *en face* and includes palm trees.[92] The patches on the bulls match Minoan bull representations, not Egyptian ones.[93] The use of blue in the horns and hooves of bulls is typical of Aegean representations.[94]

The human figures of the Bull Frieze contain Minoan elements: "The human figures, the details of the dress, leggings, partially shaved heads, jewelry etc. are elements

that only an artist thoroughly versed in Minoan tradition would be able to reproduce."[95] The young bull leaper with a partially shaved head, who is painted yellow, may be related to the youngest boy from the paintings of Xeste 3 at Akrotiri, who is also painted yellow. The kilts worn by the men of the Bull Frieze are Minoan.[96] The young yellow man with a partially shaved head, who clings to a bull's neck, is wearing a bracelet and a Minoan-style seal on his wrist.[97] Based on the high quality of artistic techniques in the Tell el-Dab'a Bull Frieze, Bietak conludes that "only artists living in the Minoan world could be familiar with such minute details."[98]

Egyptian hunting scenes have different conventions and formulas than the Tell el-Dab'a animal scenes. There are two kinds of hunting scenes in ancient Egypt: hunting of herbivores for food, and ritual hunting of wild bulls and lions.[99] The Tell el-Dab'a scenes seem instead to be of the same tradition as Aegean scenes of hunting and animal pursuit.[100] The lion fragments from Tell el-Dab'a display at least two lion settings: an aquatic scene with reeds, and a rocky scene probably of mountainous terrain. These same two formulas are found in the Aegean. The Tell el-Dab'a lions are executed in the Minoan tradition based on conventions identified by Marinatos.[101] Aegean lions are shown just as the Tell el-Dab'a ones: a specific position for the paws, an open mouth, light underbelly with fur, and the "thumb" or "fifth finger" as a blue circle. The flying gallop posture of the Tell el-Dab'a lions is the same as that found in Aegean art. The hind legs of the leopards and lions are very similar in style, conventions, and proportions. Leopards were commonly used in Minoan iconography, as is seen in the spotted leopard head from the palace at Knossos.[102]

The Hunting Frieze is in part made up of a fragment containing either large antelopes or goats being pursued by a dog. The red background seen in the Hunting Frieze is typical of Minoan wall painting.[103] Red was a common LM IA background color in the Aegean. The body and legs of the prey are grey with black outlining, just like the fresco of antelopes from Akrotiri. The posture of the prey, with their heads turned back looking at their pursuer, is found on Aegean seals, including a fragmentary seal impression from the Temple Repositories at Knossos, as well as on a gold plaque from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae that shows a lion chasing a goat.[104] The animal on the right is in a flying gallop position, which is characteristically Aegean. The leopard of this scene is also in a flying gallop posture. Similar images are found on a MM II seal from Crete that shows a goat in flying gallop being bitten by a dog, a seal from Koukkounara near Pylos that has the same pattern, a seal from Mycenae that shows a dog attacking a goat. On the Mycenaean seal the goat turns to face the dog and the dog bites its victim in approximately the same spot as the dog and victim in the Tell el-Dab'a painting.[105] There are many Minoan seal representations of men with collared dogs and of goats being pursued by dogs. A sealing impression from Palaikastro shows two dogs attacking a large goat, with a man or god standing in the background. On a seal impression from Chania, a hunter tries to control his dog.

The depiction of hunters directly involved with the hunt is not seen in Aegean paintings. Egyptian paintings do show humans actively involved in hunting. Scenes of hunters without dogs are found in Minoan iconography, including a scene of a hunter stepping on the belly of a goat, and ring and seal impressions from the Temple Repository at Knossos with similar scenes. The pairing of human males with lions may be deliberately symbolic. Scenes paired together in the Aegean, on the Shaft Grave stele at Mycenae, include themes of man versus man and lion versus prey. The Lion Hunt dagger from Mycenae contains themes of man versus lion and lion versus prey. Such scenes may be symbolic of male prowess and domination.[106] It is possible, though, that the use of a lion as a metaphor for male strength and conquest could have developed independently in the Aegean and the

East and does not necessarily indicate artistic influence in either direction.[107] Marinatos and Morgan come to the conclusion that hunter and dogs were important iconographic images in the Aegean and that several of the glyptic scenes mentioned originated in Crete.[108] However, the theme of dogs and the hunt was common to both the Aegean and Egypt.

The Hunting Frieze of Tell el-Dab'a bears strong resemblances to a dog pursuit scene from the site of Ayia Irini on Kea in the Cyclades. The Hunting Frieze has been analyzed in comparison to this scene by Marinatos and Morgan.[109] The Kea fresco is a miniature wall painting of white dogs in pursuit of a fallow deer. Both the painting from Kea and the one from Tell el-Dab'a are on a slightly larger scale than typical miniature paintings. In both scenes the dogs are the predators, the prey are ungulates, and the presence of dogs in both scenes implies the presence of a human hunter.[110] Fallow deer existed in Greece and were the chief prey in Aegean hunt scenes, while in Egypt deer were rare and are only seen in a few representations.[111] The difference in the animals represented as prey can be explained by the artists' desire to include species of animals and plants that would have been readily recognizable to the audience and that would have made sense in the Delta setting. The dogs from both scenes are long and slender, of the greyhound type. These dogs, tesem and saluki variety, were used in hunting in Egypt.[112] The Egyptian dogs are distinct for the collar, and their black on white markings. These characteristics are absent in the Kea painting. It may be that the Tell el-Dab'a artist wanted the dogs to be identifiable to both Egyptian and Aegean observers.[113]

The only Aegean painting showing dogs in the miniature, as at Tell el-Dab'a, is the Hunt Frieze from Kea. The dogs in both scenes are in the characteristically Aegean flying gallop position. The dogs jump to bite the underbelly of the prey – the underbelly bite is also characteristically Aegean. In Egyptian Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom paintings dogs attack the neck or throat while standing on the ground, or they climb onto their prey, but they do not attack the underbelly. In the early 18th Dynasty dogs in Egyptian paintings usually attack the throat or legs.[114] The remains of the painting from Kea do not contain landscape details, while the fragments from Tell el-Dab'a do, but this does not mean that it did not originally contain a landscape – the fragmentary nature of the painting makes any conclusion regarding landscape difficult.

While scenes of hunting in Aegean art are uncommon before the Mycenaean period, there are scenes of feline hunting found at Akrotiri. These scenes contain no humans, but the same three predators seen at Tell el-Dab'a are used in the Theran hunting scenes: lions, leopards, and griffins.[115] Lions and leopards together are only seen in the Aegean at the Shaft Graves of Mycenae (LH I) in a gold pommel and gold inlays.[116] The use of dogs, lions and leopards together in a hunting scene is not attested in Aegean art, nor did Aegean art show humans in association with these predators.[117] Leopards were rare, but not absent, in Aegean art. A fresco fragment from Knossos contains a leopard, and a leopard may have been present in a Theran frieze.[118] The formula of man + dog, lion, leopard, and ungulates in a hunt is an Egyptian formula.[119] The way in which the animals are portrayed, however, is Aegean. Additionally, the use of lions in association with rocky landscape, reeds, and palms is a motif of the Aegean.[120] It is possible that Aegean artists at Tell el-Dab'a used the hunt, a theme found in both Aegean and Egyptian art, and used the lion (which was a common figure throughout the ancient world) and the leopard (which was more local to Egypt and the Near East). In this way, the artists used Aegean representations of animals that were familiar to viewers of Egyptian and Near Eastern art.[121]

In Middle Kingdom Egyptian painting (through about the 12th Dynasty) hunting is often shown juxtaposed with bull catching and combat sports.[122] Similarly, it seems that

the Hunt Frieze belonged to a program that involved scenes of bull sports. So the use of hunting and bull sports is not necessarily strictly Aegean, because the nature of the composition was being used long before the Tell el-Dab'a paintings. The flying gallop position only begins appearing in Egyptian art at the beginning of the New Kingdom. Although the concept of the juxtaposition of scenes is earlier, the subject matter is current with the New Kingdom. Scenes of feline hunting were used in Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom tomb paintings, but not in the New Kingdom.[123] The use of such scenes had been discontinued by the time of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings, suggesting that the motif was introduced from elsewhere. Marinatos believes that the hunting scenes at Dab'a indicate that hunting was a theme of Minoan, not Mycenaean, origin.[124] In the Dab'a paintings, "The quality of their execution and the nature of the scenes (emblematic, hunting, feline pursuits) suggests aristocratic themes and highly competent artists."[125]

The full-scale griffin of Tell el-Dab'a, of which the wings remain, is similar in size to the griffin of the Knossian throne room.[126] Some believe that the Knossian throne room was used by a female (perhaps a queen or a priestess), acting as a "mistress of the animals." If this is the case, Bietak hypothesizes, perhaps the presence of similar griffins at Tell el-Dab'a indicates that Palace F included a female throne room.[127] The smaller griffin, which has wings framed in blue and decorated with a black feather texture, is very similar to the griffin from Xeste 3 at Akrotiri.[128] Its wing pattern and colored spots are also similar to that of the griffin behind the goddess in one of the wall paintings of Xeste 3 at Akrotiri; this could indicate chronological proximity as well as cultural transmission.[129] This griffin, which was probably part of the Hunting Frieze, has a typical Aegean crest, running spirals, and wings. Griffins were commonly represented as predators in Aegean wall painting.[130]

All of the species of plants and animals represented in the Tell el-Dab'a wall paintings could be found both in the Aegean and Egypt. The flora and fauna of the paintings contain "nothing that belongs exclusively to the iconography of one or the other."[131] The landscape elements of Tell el-Dab'a often show influence that appears to be strongly Aegean. Several Tell el-Dab'a landscape fragments show oval rocks that look like eggs; this type of rock is typical of Aegean landscapes. They are meant to represent pebbles that have been smoothened by water in aquatic settings.[132] The conventions of depicting terrain as groupings of multi-colored surfaces divided by undulations is used at Tell el-Dab'a and is also seen at Thera. The use of small white dots to indicate sandy soil is attested in Aegean art. Sand shown as dots is also seen in Egyptian art, but there is a formula at work here which is Aegean: dots + pebbles + multi-colored stripes of terrain.[133] There are no craggy rocks in the Tell el-Dab'a paintings, as is typical of Minoan landscapes: "This could indicate that landscape and vegetation are, to some extent, adapted to a Delta environment as perceived by Minoan artists."[134] This suggests that, as with the Hunt Frieze, the artists of Tell el-Dab'a used Aegean conventions and formulas but adapted them to the environment that contained the paintings in order to make them relevant to an Egyptian audience.

The acrobats represented at Tell el-Dab'a bear strong resemblances to their Aegean counterparts. The fresco fragment of a tumbler doing a handstand while wearing a loincloth, booties, and a special headdress may have Aegean parallels as well. His headdress is made up of two featherlike objects that extend from a blue *waz* surmounting a white lily. He is painted in yellow. Shaw believes that this headdress is related to the headdress worn by the male figure in the Priest King fresco from Knossos.[135] Similar headdresses are worn by tumblers in Minoan and Mycenaean seals, as well as a wall painting from Thera.[136] According to Shaw, there is a relationship between head dresses containing *waz* lilies and athletic activity.[137] Shaw suggests that the *waz* lilies were a sacred insignia allowed to

certain people, and that perhaps they conferred a status on their wearers that was both sacred and secular.[138]

Reminiscent of the Priest King fresco from Knossos is a fragment showing a life-size white-skinned human against a red background with vegetation. The fragments of floor acrobats, near palm trees, wearing plumed headdresses are similar to scenes found on Minoan seals and seal impressions; these acrobats may be associated with bull leaping ceremonies.[139]

In the fragments of males that have been identified, shaved heads seems to indicate youth, as at Akrotiri. The use of blue shaved heads to indicate youth appears at Akrotiri, although not on Crete. The bun on top of the head hair style is seen at Tell el-Dab'a as well as on the seated male of Xeste 3 at Akrotiri. A red-skinned male who may be an acrobat or bull leaper has a shaved sideburn, which is seen in some Aegean frescoes. The fragmentary head of a man that seems to have had short curly hair may be Minoan – short hair is not unusual in Minoan frescoes. A miniature male figure with the same hairstyle may have been part of a processional scene or some other formal composition. The use of miniature frescoes and processional scenes is common on Crete and at Akrotiri. The running man with a scruffy hairstyle appears similar to figures in the Theran miniature, whom Marinatos has suggested are lower class individuals.[140]

The over life-size male figure (2.8 meters high) resembles several examples from Aegean art.[141] He raises his arm over his head – maybe he was carrying an object. The fragments indicate that a pottery vessel may have been present. Men carrying pottery is common in Aegean art, but it is also seen in Egyptian scenes like the tribute scenes of the 18th Dynasty Theban tombs.

The fragments of white garment decorated with black stripes and wavy bands that likely represented a kilt is similar in design to the Theran textiles; it is much less elaborate than the decorated kilts worn by the male figures in the processional scenes of Knossos.[142] The use of impressed grids as guidelines was used for the geometric textile patterns on the processional young men at Knossos. They were also used on the decorations of dresses for some large-scale Aegean female figures, like the Ladies in Blue, as well as the Goddess and kneeling woman scene from Agia Triada. Similar impressed grid lines have also been found at Thera.[143] Interestingly, though, these impressed lines were not used on the male figures from Tell el-Dab'a.

Two male figures are outlined in black. In the Aegean, after MM IIIB, black outlines were used on colored figures. Egyptian outlines were done in red or dark red.[144] These men appear similar to the Boxing Boys of Akrotiri. The figures, therefore, contain some Aegean aspects of human figural representation and not others. The careful outlining of body parts and the use of fine inner lines for muscles is seen in the males of Tell el-Dab'a and of Thera.[145] The males of both sites display a concern for naturalistic representation and realism in the rendering of anatomy. The use of occasional outlining for heightened effect is a feature of Minoan painting.[146] According to Aslanidou, the male figures of Tell el-Dab'a show a relationship to the Knossian tradition, but are most closely related to the Theran school of wall painting.[147]

As far as non-figural representations, there is no sign of any Egyptian royal emblems in the paintings, but there do appear Knossian-style emblems such as the half-rosette frieze and the maze pattern of the Bull Fresco. The border of ivy that probably decorated the portal of area H/III is more typical of the Aegean than of Egypt. It is similar to an ivy pattern found on a LM IB pottery sherd from Kastri on Kythera and a LH IIA pottery sherd from Ayia Irini on Keos. Ivy is used as a decorative motif in the Aegean. Ivy is not common in

Egypt.[148] It appears that emblems associated with the palace at Knossos were being transferred to a palatial context in Egypt, suggesting that the artists of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings were aware of the connotations of such emblems.

Analysis of Context

The context of the wall paintings of Tell el-Dab'a may have some significance regarding the site's Aegean connections. The paintings were found in a palatial context, and many, including Morgan and Brysbaert, have suggested that wall paintings in the Aegean served an elite, and more specifically palatial, purpose.[149] The Aegean paintings at Tell el-Dab'a may be serving a distinct and special role within their palatial context.[150] The fragments that were found in a plaster dump near Palace F may have been used in a monumental watch tower that had a view over the river. If this is the case, it presents yet another parallel to Aegean wall painting contexts. The miniature paintings from the North-East Bastion on the Cycladic island of Kea overlooked the harbor and coast.[151] It may be that Aegean artists who were familiar with the usual context of such images were executing the paintings.

Conclusion

The elements present in the wall paintings of Tell el-Dab'a, including materials and techniques, iconography and style, and to some extent context, are all indicative of strong Aegean influence. They portray Aegean traditions far more strongly than those of Egypt or the Near East. The use of lime plaster, the application of a clay backing layer, the *al fresco* technique, and pigments are characteristically Aegean. None of these materials and techniques was used in Egyptian wall painting, with the exception of the pigments, many of which were used in both the Aegean and Egypt. The particular composition of the pigments at Tell el-Dab'a, however, is attested in many Aegean locations.[152] The use of the Egyptian grid system and scale are absent and have been replaced by the more flexible scale of Aegean figures.

As has been demonstrated, the iconography and style of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings are strongly Aegean. Uniquely Aegean formulas and conventions, by the definition of Marinatos, are used.[153] The portrayal of bull leaping, along with a maze pattern and half-rosette frieze much like the ones seen at Knossos, indicates a connection to the Knossian palace. Such bull leaping scenes, containing a maze pattern, are only found in two locations in the Eastern Mediterranean: the Aegean and Tell el-Dab'a. While bull leaping scenes have not been found in the Aegean from the LM IA or LM IB periods, which would be contemporary with Bietak's chronological placement of the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes, such images do appear on seal rings, and a bull *en face* is shown on the Vapheio Cup. These images appear later in wall painting form at Knossos in LM IIIA and bear a striking resemblance to the LM IB bull images at Tell el-Dab'a.

The conventions of the hunting scenes at Tell el-Dab'a are Aegean, rather than Egyptian. The Egyptian hunting formulas of hunting of herbivores for food, as well as ritual hunting of wild bulls and lions are not used. Rather, Aegean formulas of lions in aquatic scenes with reeds, and lions in mountainous terrain, are employed. The presentation of the lions themselves, based on their posture, coloring, and proportions, are Aegean. The use of a flying gallop posture originated in Aegean art and is seen in the animals of the Tell el-Dab'a scenes. The posture of the prey in the Hunting Frieze, with the animal looking back over its shoulder at its pursuer, is Aegean. The use of a red background is typical of Aegean scenes. The similarities between the Hunting Frieze and a scene of white dogs

in pursuit of a fallow deer from Ayia Irini on Kea in the Cyclades have been examined. The two scenes are remarkably similar, with the exception of the breed of dog. The dogs in the Tell el-Dab'a Hunting Frieze are Egyptian breeds, which likely indicates the artist's desire to show animals that would be familiar to an Egyptian audience. Additionally, the prey in the Kea fresco is a deer, while in the Tell el-Dab'a fresco the prey are either goats or antelopes. Again, this may be an attempt by the artist to show familiar animals to the inhabitants of the Egyptian Nile Delta. The style, scale, and composition of the two paintings demonstrate a great deal of similarity.

The Tell el-Dab'a Hunting Frieze contains humans, which is not typical of Aegean painting. Scenes of feline hunting at Akrotiri do not include humans. The formula seen in the Hunting Frieze, of man + dog, lion, leopard, and ungulates in a hunt is an Egyptian formula, but the formula is presented in an Aegean style. The use of lions in association with rocky landscape, reed, and palms is an Aegean formula. This may be a combination of Egyptian and Aegean traditions, taking an Egyptian formula and presenting it in an Aegean way.

The griffins represented at Tell el-Dab'a are similar to those found in the Aegean. The full-scale griffin, whose wings remain, is similar to the griffins of the Knossian throne room. The smaller griffin's wing pattern and colored spots resemble those of the griffin in Xeste 3 at Akrotiri. This second griffin may have been a predator in the Hunting Frieze. Griffins represented as predators are common in Aegean art.

While the plants and animals represented in the wall paintings of Tell el-Dab'a were used in both Aegean and Egyptian art, their representation is typically Aegean. The use of ovoid rocks, white dots indicating sandy soil, and multi-colored surfaces divided by undulations are Aegean. Also Aegean is the formula of dots + pebbles + multi-colored stripes of terrain. Here again there seems to be the use of images that would be recognizable to Egyptians, represented in an Aegean fashion.

The human figures of the wall paintings wear Minoan clothing and Minoan-style ornaments and headdresses, such as the young acrobat wearing a head dress that represents Aegean *waz* lilies. Shaved heads seem to indicate youth, as at Akrotiri. Several of the male figures are similar to males from the wall paintings of Akrotiri in particular. The fragment from Tell el-Dab'a showing a garment represents Theran textiles. Figures are outlined in black, which is typical of the Aegean, rather than red or dark red as in Egyptian paintings. The human figures of Tell el-Dab'a have a naturalistic feel that is far more characteristic of Aegean painting than that of Egypt, where human figures are stiff and stylized.

The context of the paintings may indicate a connection between the palaces of Egypt and Knossos. Bull leaping scenes of the Minoan world only appear at the palace of Knossos. They do not appear in other Aegean palaces, or domestic contexts. The palace district of Tell el-Dab'a is the only other context in which such bull leaping frescoes appear in the Eastern Mediterranean. This indicates that the artists of Tell el-Dab'a understood that bull leaping was associated with an elite/palatial context in the Aegean, and that both the iconography and its context were transferred from the Aegean (and the Knossos palace in particular) to Tell el-Dab'a. The use of a maze pattern in association with bull leaping is used at both Knossos and Tell el-Dab'a; because bull leaping is associated with a palatial context, it appears that the maze pattern somehow indicates official (controlled by the palace) grounds.

The general consensus among experts is that the paintings of Tell el-Dab'a are primarily, if not entirely Aegean in materials and techniques, iconography, style, and context. Based on the information presented here, Aegean origin is the most logical conclusion. The paintings are noticeably lacking in Egyptian influence. The only potentially Egyptian

aspect of the paintings is the presence of flora and fauna that would have been present in the Delta, as well as a formula present in the Hunting Frieze. This has been explained, however, by the desire of the artists to make the scenes recognizable, relevant, and meaningful to an Egyptian audience. It is important to note that the paintings would have been comprehensible to both Egyptian and Aegean audiences.

It remains unclear whether the artists themselves were Aegeans sent by the Knossian palace to work in Egypt, Aegeans working outside of palatial/elite control, Egyptians who were artistically trained by Aegeans, or Aegean and Egyptian artists working together. As has been seen, many believe that the quality of the paintings, as well as the level of familiarity with Aegean conventions and formulas, is sufficient evidence that the artists were Aegean. It is uncertain from where in the Aegean these painters may have come, as they show connections with Minoan Crete and Akrotiri on Thera, which are slightly different artistic families, although they clearly belong to the same tradition. According to Bietak, the technique, composition, themes, style, and iconography of the paintings serve as evidence that there were Minoan artists working in Egypt.[154] The Tell el-Dab'a paintings, if they are indeed Minoan, would be some of the earliest known Minoan paintings. Morgan believes that Knossos is the most likely candidate for the origin of the artists at Tell el-Dab'a.[155] Bietak agrees and believes, based on the quality of the plaster and the themes employed by the artists, that the artistic influence seen in the Tell el-Dab'a paintings came from Minoan palatial centers, and Knossos in particular.[156] The use of bull leaping in association with a maze, which is seen only at Knossos and Tell el-Dab'a, further strengthens the argument that the primary connection that resulted in the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes was between the palaces of Egypt and Knossos.

Bietak believes the presence of Minoan-style wall paintings at Tell el-Dab'a is evidence of direct contact between the Egyptian pharaonic court of the early Tuthmoside period and the court of Knossos.[157] The high level of contact indicated may have led to a political marriage, which was ultimately responsible for the transmission of artistic ideas. Bietak posits the theory that a marriage took place between an Egyptian king and a Minoan princess – this could explain the architectural layout of the palace district.[158] Palace F would have been a residence for the Minoan consort and Palace J would have been a residence for another queen or prince. In this case, Palace G would likely contain an Egyptian-style wall painting program. Only the building's substructure remains, and any paintings would probably have been removed during the building activity of the Amarna and post-Amarna periods. However, Minoan-style paintings like the loop and ivy patterns were found north of Palace G around the door with a portico. Also found in this area was the fragment showing the lower part of a flounced skirt and a white foot with double anklets, which may have been a female in full scale. Therefore, it is difficult to determine exactly what nature of painting program decorated the interior of Palace G.

There would have been benefits for the Minoans in a relationship with Egypt. After Pharaoh Ahmose retook Nubia from the kingdom of Kush, Egypt had access to gold. Egypt also served as a middle-man in the trade networks of luxury goods from the Sudan. Egypt, however, did not have strong motives for developing a relationship with the Minoans. Bietak suggests that Egypt was interested in protecting itself by sea; the Hyksos had just been evicted from Egypt and perhaps still posed a threat.[159] This remains entirely hypothetical, but diplomatic marriages were common in Egypt and would explain the presence of Aegean wall paintings in an Egyptian palatial context.

According to Marinatos and Morgan these paintings are evidence of a shared artistic tradition and the use of a common language of themes and idioms.[160] This common

language is adaptable but also distinctly Aegean; it was used "in scenes which are not restricted by specific religious iconography to a particular time and place but which, like the hunt pertain to life experiences."[161] This is evidence of "the care taken by the artists to apply themes and motifs relevant to the context. It is also a significant indication of the iconographic interrelations established between the Aegean, Egypt and the Levant at this time."[162] According to Morgan, at the very least these paintings demonstrate that the links between mid-second millennium BCE Egypt and the Aegean were much closer than has previously been believed.[163]

In her examination of an ancient Near Eastern cultural koiné shared among elites, Feldman presents the idea of an "ideal" context, which is "a context in which an object was expected to exist and for which it was created," and within such a context the object must retain "physical traces associable with the context."[164] While Feldman's work deals primarily with Egypt and the Near East in the Late Bronze Age, we can apply her theories to the paintings of Tell el-Dab'a to gain fresh perspective. The paintings themselves could be considered to have been found in a semi-ideal context; they were not found in the exact original context in which they were placed and intended to be viewed due to the lime plaster having crumbled from the walls. They were, however, found in close enough proximity to their original location that we can fairly accurately deduce their intended context and perhaps determine associations between the paintings and their original context. Feldman argues that relations between elite courts, manifested in reciprocal gift exchange, can provide an ideal context within which to interpret the features of an elite cultural koiné, which are "visual hybridity, iconography of generalized kingship, high-value materiality, and wide geographic distribution associated by archaeological findspots within elite spheres."[165] These criteria are applicable to the wall paintings of Tell el-Dab'a.

While such a cultural koiné is readily visible among the Near Eastern cultures of the Late Bronze Age studied by Feldman, the wall paintings of Tell el-Dab'a demonstrate an earlier eastern Mediterranean koiné shared between Egypt and the Aegean for at least a short time, and to some extent shared in Near Eastern locations like Tel Kabri, Mari, and Alalakh. The sharing of iconography through wall painting between the elite of the Aegean and Egypt fits Feldman's aforementioned description of an elite cultural koiné, strengthening Bietak's theory of a connection between the palaces of these two cultural spheres and demonstrating an understood elite iconography. The elite iconography of the Aegean could be shared with other elite courts who used it to demonstrate their elite status, which would be understood among other elites and would establish their status in the eyes of the common population by creating a selective group to whom such iconography was available for use and manipulation. Aegean iconography would have been foreign and exotic to an Egyptian audience, and could be used by Egyptian elites to demonstrate their international connections with other elite courts, thereby strengthening their legitimacy and power in the eyes of all Egyptians.

Shaw agrees that there are undeniable Aegean affinities between the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes and those of the Aegean, particularly the bull leaping scenes.[166] She contends, however, that the artists appear to have been somewhat distanced from the original Aegean model; perhaps they were Aegean artists who had lived in other areas where fresco painting was practiced, like the Near East and the Levant, before going to Egypt. She believes that exposure to the fresco traditions of other cultures would have allowed the Aegean artists "to adopt new habits and to modify the more specifically Minoan codes of representation, especially if their work at Tell el Dab'a was aided by artists of other nationalities."[167] It is possible that a combination of Aegean artists and Egyptian artists trained by Aegeans were

at work on the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes; this would explain the knowledge of Egyptian flora and fauna demonstrated in the paintings. Even if the artists were entirely Aegean, they seem to have had some degree of education in Egyptian hunting formulas, as well as the typical flora and fauna represented in Egyptian paintings, such as the Egyptian hunting dogs present in the Hunting Frieze. This does not necessarily mean, though, that the artists were not sent by an Aegean court. The apparent distance from the Aegean model could be due to an artistic desire to present visually relevant material to an Egyptian elite audience, but in a technique and style that represented its elite Aegean roots.

Elizabeth Barber, in her examination of Bronze Age textiles, suggests that relations between the courts of the Aegean world and Egypt were fairly strong during the reigns of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III, which lines up nicely with Bietak's chronological placement of the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes.[168] She suggests that the Aegean motifs found on the ceilings of Theban tombs were transmitted via textiles and notes the Minoan-style clothing worn by Aegean men represented in several Theban tomb paintings.[169] Barber points out that contact between the Minoans and Egypt was high during the reign of Hatshepsut, who received Minoan embassies at court.[170] Aegean contact continued into the reign of Tuthmosis III before experiencing a temporary decline and then a revivification during the reigns of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten.[171] This Aegean contact is evident in five Theban tombs of court officials. The officials Senmut and Antef served under Hatshepsut, while Useramon/Amenuser, Rekhmire, and Menkheperraseneb served under Tuthmosis III. Each of their tombs contains wall paintings depicting Aegean men wearing Minoan-style clothing. The men seem to be arriving as embassies, sometimes carrying gifts (the tombs of Senmut and Menkheperraseneb), and sometimes prostrate (the tomb of Antef). This suggests that the men were sent by the palaces of the Aegean (most likely Knossos) to visit the court of Egypt bearing gifts. In the tomb of Rekhmire the men are labeled as princes of Keftiu (Crete) and the "Islands in the Midst of the Great Green Sea."[172]

Given that Aegean, and more specifically Minoan, officials were traveling between the courts of the Aegean and Egypt during the reigns of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III, it is plausible that they brought with them Aegean artistic traditions and possibly even Aegean artists to share with the Egyptian court in a system of elite exchange, such as the reciprocal system posited by Feldman.[173] Such a system also allows for the consideration of Bietak's theory of an official marriage between the courts of Knossos and Egypt.[174] In any case, the ideas presented by Bietak, Feldman, and Barber dispute Shaw's idea that the artists at Tell el-Dab'a were somehow disassociated with the palaces of the Aegean, as it seems that there was a direct connection between the courts that allowed for the transmission of artistic traditions.[175]

Having established that communication between the courts of Egypt and the Aegean was strong during the period of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings and that such communication could have resulted in Egyptian adaptation of Aegean elite artistic traditions, the relationship between artist and court becomes significant. Brysbaert argues for a system in the Eastern Mediterranean in which artists were often tied to elites.[176] Elites, recognizing the talent of particularly skilled artists, brought them into their service and virtually controlled them by providing necessities like access to agricultural produce or land. Elites used these artists to decorate their monumental architecture with large-scale paintings in order to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive struggle for elite status.[177] The court of Tell el-Dab'a may have incorporated a foreign elite artistic tradition in order to make an innovative and impressive distinction between itself and elites using traditional Egyptian forms, intensifying its elite status through use of a developing Eastern Mediterranean elite

iconographic koiné. According to Brysbaert: "The material evidence is strong enough to suggest that painters and plasterers from Crete…went, upon demand, to other places to execute the paintings they were known for."[178] Artists in the Aegean worked only for the elite, so the transmission of an Aegean artistic tradition to Egypt was most likely achieved by means of elite communication.[179] The most reasonable conclusion, based on the evidence of contact between the Aegean and Egypt and the relationship between court and artist, is that a connection between the court of Knossos (where figural representation originated) and that of Egypt resulted in Aegean artists being commissioned to work for the Egyptian elite.

It is possible, as Morgan suggests, that the Tell el-Dab'a paintings brought about changes in New Kingdom Egyptian art that have not been fully recognized: "Such changes were presumably to be seen in (now lost) early New Kingdom palatial murals."[180] A hunt scene of a lion, and maybe also a leopard, decorated the Throne Room of Amenhotep III's palace at Malkata.[181] Morgan posits that there are steps of influence in between the paintings at Tell el-Dab'a and those at Malkata which we are missing and which might explain the seemingly sudden appearance of Aegean influence. Morgan believes that the impact of Aegean art in Egypt is seen in the hunt scenes that decorate objects in the tomb of Tutankhamen, palace murals at Malkata and Amarna, and the Tomb of User (an official of Tuthmosis I).[182] If this is indeed the case, then Aegean influence in New Kingdom Egyptian wall painting was not exclusive to Tell el-Dab'a, but developed and spread in an elite context. The gradual spread of Aegean artistic influence in Egypt is more likely than a sudden and isolated surge of influence that was limited to the site of Tell el-Dab'a. Morgan's ideas are certainly worth further examination, as they would clarify the degree of Aegean influence in Egyptian elite art of the 18th Dynasty, as well as the ways in which it developed and eventually declined.

It seems, therefore, that Aegean influence in New Kingdom Egyptian art, and wall painting in particular, was more far reaching than has yet been recognized, even with the discovery of the Tell el-Dab'a paintings. Such a level of artistic influence indicates a connection between the Aegean and Egyptian courts and a transmission of ideas that had a period of development, a climax (demonstrated at Tell el-Dab'a), and a decline. It is unlikely that the strong Aegean influence seen at Tell el-Dab'a was a sudden and isolated incident, but rather that it represents the high point of a cultural transmission between the palaces of Knossos and Egypt that was born out of a period of development which has not been entirely preserved in the archaeological record.

Endnotes

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