ANATOLICA XXXI, 2005

PERFUMES AND POLICIES – A 'Syrian Bottle' from Kinet Höyük and Anatolian Trade Patterns in the Advanced Third Millennium BC

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The 'Syrian Bottle', a small to medium-size globular or ovoid jar with a short, narrow neck and a slightly flaring rim, is one of the most diagnostic and intriguing vessel types in the late Near Eastern Early Bronze Age. Originally manufactured in Upper Mesopotamia, imports spread quickly over South-eastern Anatolia, mainly to be unearthed in EBA III-contexts (roughly from 2.500 BC onwards), with original Syrian bottles to be found as far as Kültepe in Eastern Cappadocia, the Northeasternmost fringe for real imports[2]. The production of 'Syrian' type bottles is continued in the early and advanced 2nd millennium BC, as bottles with narrow necks and protruding feet from Middle Bronze Age II-contexts in Kültepe/Karum Kaneš clearly indicate[3].

Their shape can be roughly divided into squatted globular or stretched ovoid. Detailed studies on their typology have been published by E. Rova, Ş./A. Schachner and E. Pruss[4]. It would seem that the Early Dynastic globular variant (Rova type 1/1a) precedes the ovoid-shaped bottle from Late Early Dynastic and Ur III-contexts (Rova type 2-4), at least in domestic contexts[5]. Their stratigraphical sequence in Kültepe seems to prove this assumption[6]: the globular type is characteristic for layer 15 followed by the piriform variant in layers 13-11. However a certain temporal overlapping is attested in funeral contexts thanks to undisturbed grave inventories[7].

In July 2003 an intact 'Syrian Bottle' of the ovoid-alabastron type was found in a context assigned to the locally latest EB level at Kinet Höyük, Dörtyol, Hatay province in South Eastern Anatolia. Its fabric is greyish-brown, tempered with coarse chaff and mica (Fig. 1,1). The bottle's surface has a slight pattern burnish. Although this item stems from an unburnt layer, its surface is mottled black from smoke. The stratigraphical position of the vessel coincides once more quite well with the perception that ovoid- or alabastron-shaped bottles must be date late in Early Bronze Age history (supra).

[1] Bilkent University, Ankara. I am indebted to Prof. Marie-Henriette Gates for giving me permission to publish the Kinet Höyük bottle and for fruitful and inspiring discussions, and to Ben Claasz Coockson for preparing the drawings.

[2] Özgüç 1986, 31; 34-38; Emre 1999, 39; 42-45.

[3] Emre 1999, 44-47 figs. 1-6; Pl. 1.

[4] Cf. Rova 1991; Schachner/Schachner 1995; Pruss 2001.

[5] Rova 1991, 140-143.

[6] Ibid.; Özgüç 1986, 34-37.

[7] Schachner/Schachner 1995, 87.

The multi period site Kinet Höyük, identified as ancient Issos, with an occupation history from the third millennium BC until the Medieval ages, was of both strategic and economical importance throughout the ages due to its location at the Gulf of Iskenderun[8]. It is thus not surprising that this settlement was involved in medium-range trade activities in the late third millennium BC, linking the North of Mesopotamia with the South East of modern Turkey. A large and still growing group of EBA sites in the South Eastern provinces of Anatolia yielded bottles of the 'Syrian' type[9], the recent example from Kinet Höyük testifying once more to the vivid trade and exchange activities in the second half of the third millennium.

As one expects, trafficking goods from the Mesopotamian plains into Anatolia did not stop at the Taurus foothills, but went far beyond (Fig. 3). When we survey the rest of EBA Anatolia for further evidence, we come across the phenomenon that further North and Northwest no real imports from North Syria/North Mesopotamia but locally produced copies are recorded. In South Eastern Anatolian settlements imported bottles are found together with locally made 'Syrian' pottery[10].

Further North East there is up to now only one isolated findspot. The settlement of Sos Höyük near modern Erzurum yielded a black polished Syrian bottle discovered in a pit containing material of the 'Transcaucasian' phase, hence datable to the late third millennium BC[11].

The Westernmost distribution area where 'real' imports are amongst the bottles of 'Syrian' type could be roughly described as Central or South Central Anatolia. Besides Kültepe in Eastern Cappadocia bottles of the alabastron type[12] are known from Alişar Höyük and Kestel/Göltepe[13]. A silver derivative stems from a hoard excavated in the EBA

[8] For recent reports on this site see Gates 1999; Gates 2003; Gates 2004.

[9] Syrian bottles in Anatolia, both imported and locally manufactured, are known from Arslantepe (Conti 1993, 386; 377 fig. 12,4.12); Norşuntepe (Hauptmann 1969/70, 53; fig. 12,9), Lidar Höyük (Mellink 1982, Pl. 73,7; ibid 1983, Pl. 58,8; both from burial context), Zinçirli (Andrae 1943, Pl. 26g,k), Gedikli (Alkım/Alkım 1966, Fig. 32 (right side); Alkım 1979, 140; Pl. 91,26.27), Kurban Höyük (Algaze 1990, Pl. 133 G(?).H.I; Pl. 149,D), Tilmen Höyük (Alkım 1964, 174; fig. 26), Karkemiş (Woolley 1921, Pl. 27,c1 from "Middle Hittite burial" with protruding foot), Titriş Höyük (Algaze/Mısır/Wilkinson 1992, 38; 56 Fig. 11) and Oylum Höyük (Özgen/Helwing/Tekin 1997, 60-72; Fig. 13,2.3; 73 fig. 14,5; 74 fig. 15,2.3.5.7; 75 fig. 16,6-8). Recent examples were unearthed in Tilbeshar (Kepinski-Lecomte 2000, 220-222 fig. 7; 9 from both domestic and funeral contexts) and Gre Virike (Ökse/Bucak 2002, 153-161 fig. 10).

[10] Thanks to their characteristic fabric Mesopotamian imports can be easily identified and distinguished from copied vessels (Schachner/Schachner 1995, 88).

[11] Sagona et al. 1996, 37; 44 fig. 10,9.

[12] Cf. Schachner/Schachner 1995, 91-93 (Type II); Rova 1991, 136.

[13] Schmidt 1932, 43 fig. 45; Yener 1995, 179 fig. 3-A.

layers of Eskiyapar[14]. A bottle from Konya-Karahöyük represents the southwesternmost findspot of Central Anatolia[15].

Far in the North West, at the mound Hisarlık (better known today as 'Troy'), a new and previously unseen vessel type labelled "B5" by C.W. Blegen appears in the Early Bronze Age layers of 'Troy'[16]. Although larger in size and obviously manufactured in a local tradition, its shape definitely copies flasks of 'Syrian' type. The best-documented ones are published by Blegen et al. who assigned the few sherds excavated by the American expedition to the layers of Troy III[17]. H. Schliemann also mentioned besides sherds from the "third burnt city" two more black polished bottles from the fourth settlement[18]. H. Kühne assigned one locally made 'Syrian bottle' even to Troy V[19]. The metal counterpart of this vessel type is represented by the golden flask from the both famous and hotly debated treasure 'A', better known as 'Priam's treasure', highly likely to be assigned to level Troy IIg[20]. Although the sherds published by the American mission are the most reliable ones in stratigraphical terms, the latter bottles mentioned by Schliemann and Kühne would coincide with the maximum chronological range of this vessel type extending from the mid third to the early second millennium BC[21].

Until recently it was quite problematic to link the South Eastern and Central Anatolian distribution zone of the 'Syrian bottle', that is its local derivatives with the North Westernmost fringes of Anatolia. Thanks to recent investigations in the Eskişehir plain, Western Central Anatolia, this now seems to be possible: Excavations at the settlement of Küllüoba brought a number of fragmented, locally produced bottles of 'Syrian' shape to light[22]. Size, overall shape and especially fabric resembles fairly well the 'Syrian bottles' from EBA Troy (Fig. 1,2)[23].

A bit northwest of Küllüoba, the necropolis of Demircihöyük-Sarıket and Küçükhöyük near Bozhöyük also yielded an exotic variation on the 'Syrian bottle' theme. Several burials of the Early Bronze Age contained lead flasks whose shape definitely

[14] Özgüç/Temizer 1993, 617, Pl. 116,1.

[15] Only mentioned briefly in Mellink 1967, 161; obviously from a jar burial, containing amongst other items "[...]a bottle of Syrian shape[...]".

[16] Blegen 1951, 27; Pl. 130 (Type B5).

[17] Ibid.; the few sherds excavated are descibed on 42, 52 and 58.

[18] Schliemann 1881, 441; 604; 606; figs. No. 407-410; 1122; 1124.

[19] Kühne 1976, 51.

[20] Schliemann 1881, 521; 520 fig. No. 775; Tolstikov/Treister 1996, 32 No. 4.; Treister 2003.

[21] Schachner/Schachner 1995, 87; Emre 1999, 44-45.

[22] Efe 1999, 175 figs. 5, 1-3; 180 fig. 9; Efe/Ay-Efe 2001, 52; 76 fig. 27.

[23] Cf. Ibid.1999 175 fig. 5, 1 with red engobe; cf. ibid. 2001, 76 fig. 27 right side.

copies 'Syrian' bottles[24]. Although lead vessels are quite a rare phenomenon in EBA Anatolia, they are not completely unknown, as a neck fragment of a Syrian type bottle from Tarsus attests[25]. Lead itself might have served as an alternative to imitate silver, for an object like the silver bottle from Eskiyapar (supra) was much more complicated to work[26].

We are unfortunately not informed about the ingredients of these bottles – according to their size one might assume oils or precious perfumes[27]. What we indeed can suggest is that the ceramic variants were traded because of what they contained, the value of the metal flasks from Troy treasure 'A', Demircihöyük-Sarıket, Küçükhöyük-Bozhöyük and Eskiyapar -a "blueprint" for the ceramic variants- might have come from the material of which they were made.

Concerning how these vessels were transported or stored some interesting information comes from two locally produced 'Syrian' bottles from the Early Bronze Age levels of the Karum at Kaneš: These two bottles have a shallow relief decoration showing some kind of net bag consisting of interwoven strings highly likely imitating the way these vessels were usually suspended (Fig. 2,1.2)[28]. Since most of our bottles have rounded bottoms, we have good reason to assume that at least the larger variants of these bottles were usually wrapped into a net bag to carry them or hang them up, like it is assumed for water bag/bottle equipment for the Roman foot soldier (Fig. 2,3)[29]. To stabilize these vessels with bagel-shaped ground stones as suggested by M. Artzy for similar globular- or piriform-shaped ceramics from Cyprus could be an alternative solution[30].

The distinct intensification of trade activities between the culturally and politically different entities of Northern Mesopotamia with Southern-, Central and North West Anatolia is best visible in the appearance of 'foreign' or 'exotic' small finds or vessel types in contexts originally alien to them. Together with the well-known two-handled cup called *'depas amphikypellon'*, most likely invented in Western Central Anatolia and from

[24] Baykal-Seeher/Seeher 1998, 118-121 fig. 1,1-9. The unusually elongated shape of the bottleneck might derive from the local jug forms (ibid. 119).

[25] Goldman 1956, 302; Pl. 453, 11; Baykal-Seeher/Seeher 1998, 117; 121 Il. 1, 10 with exmples from the Demircihöyük/Bozöyük necropolis plus lead beak spouted pitchers from Oymaağaç and the Sadberk Hanım museum (the latter unfortunately lacking an archaeological context (ibid.)).

[26] Ibid. 117; the complex and difficult refinement process called 'cuppelation' where silver is separated from the lead ores under highly oxidating circumstances was obviously known as early as the mid third millennium BC in the Aegean/Anatolian world (cf. Pernicka 1990; Kohlmeyer 1994; Primas 1995).

[27] Cf. Goldman 1956, 302.

[28] Cf. Özgüç 1986, 36 fig. 3:8 (from burial context); 37 fig. 3:13 (from domestic context).

[29] A reasonable reconstruction for such a water container is published at http://www.larp.com/legioxx/packs.html.

[30] Artzy 1982.

there traded as far as Mesopotamia[31], our 'Syrian bottles' are another good indicator for exchange connections between remote regions, for their original homelands are located exactly vice versa[32]. Not surprisingly, original bottles from Syria/Mesopotamia were traded northwards to neighbouring settlements and central places like Kinet. What we might witness with the local derivatives in Central and especially Western Central and Northwest Anatolia is a 'transfer of fashion', adopted by the local population. A good example to highlight the 'compromise' that was made between 'exotic' style and local traditions are the examples from Troy and Küllüoba (supra), manufactured in the traditional red polished fabric[33].

On the other hand, how far 'direct' contacts with at least South Eastern Anatolia were cast is so far best illustrated by an obviously imported alabastron-shaped flask from the settlement of Galabovo ("Assara") in South Eastern Bulgaria[34].

[31] Since a large number of depa was excavated at Troy since the late 19th century, it was traditionally believed that the two-handled slim tankard was indeed invented in Troy, imported, copied and traded as far as Northern Mesopotamia (cf. Spanos 1972, 48; Schachner/Schachner 1995, 88); a rivalling thesis was introduced by T. Efe: since the red coat technique, typical fabric for a huge bulk of pottery at least in Troy, comes from Central Anatolia, it seems plausible that the impetus for producing this vessel type -that appears roughly at the same time- derives from a region South East of Troy (Efe 1988, 97; 114-116).

[32] Spanos/Strommenger 1993; For an actual distribution map see Hüryılmaz 1995, 188.

[33] Efe 1999, 168; Efe/Ay-Efe 2001, 76 fig. 27.

[34] Leshtakov 2002, 191; 210 fig. 11,1a.

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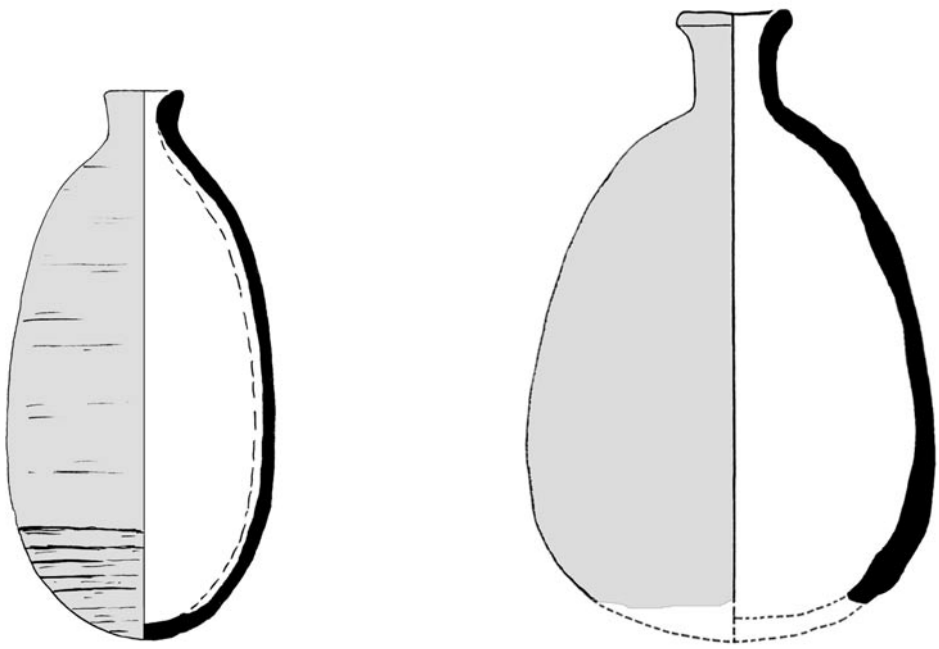

Fig. 1. 1 — "Syrian bottle" from Kinet Höyük, Hatay, Turkey;
2 — locally manufactured bottle of "Syrian" type from Küllüoba, Eskişehir, Turkey
(drawing B. C. Coockson; Efe 1999, 175 fig. 5,1 (update B. C. Coockson)) (Scale 1:2).

Fig. 2. 1.2 — Locally made "Syrian bottles" from the Early Bronze Age levels of the Karum Kaneš,
Kayseri, Turkey; with grooved 'netbag' motives; 3 — reconstruction of a water container
for a Roman foot soldier with a net bag to carry (Özgüç 1986: fig 3:8 & 3:13;
http://www.larp.com/legioxx/packs.html) (1:2; — Scale unknown).

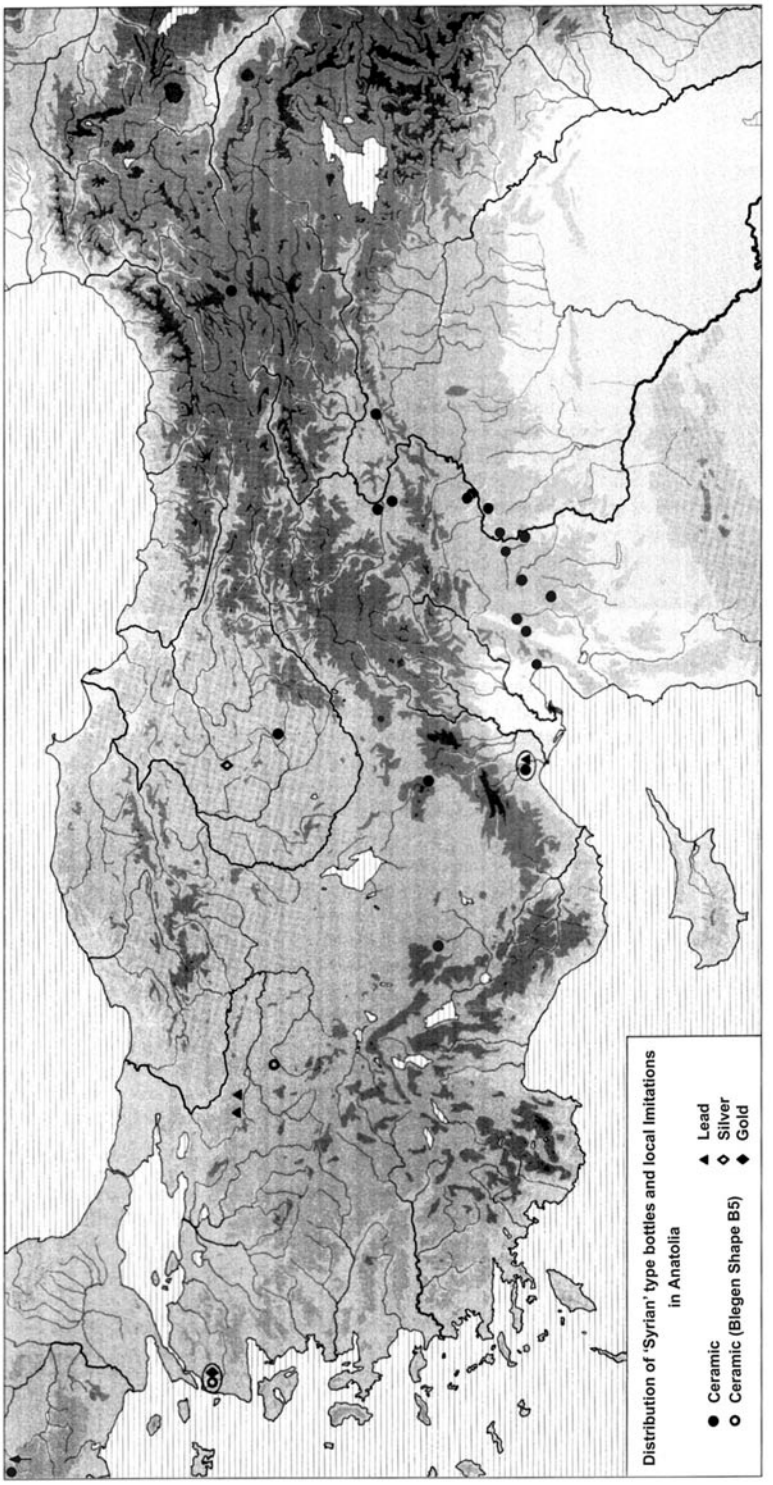

Fig. 3. — Map showing the distribution of Syrian bottles and local derivatives in Anatolia