

THE USE AND APPRECIATION OF MYCENAEAN POTTERY IN NEW KINGDOM EGYPT

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In this article the different patterns of distribution of Mycenaean pottery in Egypt will be demonstrated¹. I will pay attention to the chronological, geographical and typological distribution of the Mycenaean imports in the greater Egyptian Empire of the 18th and 19th dynasty.

The rise of the New Kingdom

After the expulsion of the Hyksos around 1550 BC by Theban armies led by King Ahmose, the two kingdoms² were once again united. Fairly soon after the unification, Ahmose and his successors conquered large areas in the Levant, mainly in an attempt to create a buffer between Egypt and the dangerous East, and to gain control of an area traditionally crossed by trading routes. In doing so these kings inevitably came in contact with peoples from distant lands, or at least got acquainted with foreign objects. In the second half of the 16th century BC certain places in the Aegean, mainly in Crete, were so familiar to the Egyptians that these names were transcribed in hieroglyphic (Redford 1992, 241). I have to stress however that despite the apparent Egyptian knowledge of Cretan topography, at this stage there is little evidence for close contacts between Egypt and the Greek mainland; Mycenaean pottery hardly appears in Egypt at this time.

Things may have changed with the sole-accession of Thutmose III on the throne of Egypt. During his reign Egyptian borders were pushed to the east, eventually reaching the Euphrates river. Not only did the expansion of Egypt almost totally destroy another superpower of those days – namely the Mittani empire – but it also made the very rich and cosmopolitan cities of the northern Levantine coast part of the empire. An increase in trade – and I will not go into the exact definition of that word now – must have taken

¹ It is my pleasure to thank Prof. J.H. Crouwel for his help during my research. Also, the assistance offered by R. Leenheer, W. van Haarlem, H. van der Zee and M. Weesie was invaluable. I wish to thank Dr. D. Aston for his kindness showing me the recent finds from Tell el-Dab'a.

² That is, the south (Upper Egypt) and the north (Lower Egypt).

place. Shortly after, one of the first pieces of Mycenaean pottery reached Egypt, ending up at the palace at Malqata, Thebes (Hankey 1993, 114). Due to very poor publication I do not know what type of pottery was found here; looking at the corpus of Mycenaean pottery in Egypt, I suppose it must have been a stirrup jar or the like. Although minor local uprisings in the Levant did occur after the death of Thutmose III, trade apparently flourished. Pharaoh's court became a place of splendor, the treasury overflowing with Nubian gold and Levantine exotica. During the reign of Amenhotep III (c. 1390-1352 BC), trade with the Aegean was sufficiently common that a "periplus" was made, with names of cities in Crete, the Greek mainland and possibly even Turkey (Dickinson 1994, 249). It needs to be said, however, that I have not been able to ascribe specific pieces of Mycenaean ware to Amenhotep's reign. Still, it is very interesting that apparently contacts with the Aegean were getting closer during this time, when changes in Egyptian religion that would eventually lead to the Aten-cult, became apparent (Hayes 1953, 279). Even more curious it seems that at the "flourish" of the Aten, say 1345 BC, the largest amount of Mycenaean pottery ever in Egypt was imported to the short-lived capital of Akhetaten (Helck 1995, 73).

Amarna and onwards

Over 99% of the material found in this city is of closed shape, *i.e.* stirrup jars or pilgrim flasks (Helck 1995, 73). It is very likely, then, that this material was primarily imported because of its contents; otherwise I would expect more open shapes to occur as well. The fact that the Akhetaten-pottery, consisting of roughly 1500 fragments (Hankey, unpublished), is painted only with very simple bands, makes it – in my opinion – only more likely that the Aegean ware was imported mainly for its contents, not for its beauty. Perfumed oil was most likely the material inside these jars, and we could well expect these rather precious "perfumes" – and their containers – to end up in the palace area and the great Aten-temple. Actually, the first happened; the second did not. As always in Egyptian history, palace and temple were closely connected, mainly due to the Pharaoh's semi-divine role as son of the Sun God. Why then, do we find a lot of pottery in the palace-area, and absolutely nothing in the temple? I think an explanation may be a shift in status and activities of the king. Whereas the predecessors of Akhenaten and his father were primarily warriors, expanding the Egyptian empire and inspecting the country at an almost yearly rate, Amenhotep III and his son Akhenaten resided mainly at their respective palaces at Malqata, Thebes, and Akhetaten (Reeves 2001, 113). Military matters were left to others; the king stayed at home, where he was increasingly venerated as a living god. It is in this setting the use of (Aegean) perfumes can be assumed – in impressive amounts. This may explain the amount of Mycenaean pottery found in the palace-area. As for its complete absence in the temple, perhaps other products to offer the Aten were con-

sidered more appropriate. Perhaps more Egyptian goods: products created by the life giving breath of the Aten, in the chosen lands of the Aten, Egypt. At any rate it seems clear that the Amarna Kings were mainly interested in Egypt itself and not in the rapidly declining Levantine empire. Akhenaten died around 1334 BC. His successors were some petty kings of whom we know very little. By the time Thutankhamen died however, the Aten-religion was abolished and the Egyptian Levantine empire was partly occupied by the growing empire of the Kings of Hatti. With the accession of Horemheb, circa 1321 BC, things changed for the better and Egyptian armies were soon to conquer parts of the lost territories (Hayes 1953, 327).

A new era

Again, Egypt controlled vast areas crossed by trade routes from Anatolia, the Aegean and Cyprus, and Mesopotamia. It is hardly surprising, then, that after a late “Amarna dip” Mycenaean pottery found its way to Egypt again. In the necropolis of the royal capital Memphis – nowadays called Sâqqarah –, several tombs belonging to members of the Egyptian elite contained Mycenaean pottery (Van Wijngaarden 2000, site no. 245). Although the necropolis was plundered even in antiquity, several examples of Late Helladic (=LH) IIIA2 and LH IIIB pottery, mostly stirrup jars, were found *in situ* (Warren/Hankey 1989, 151; Kemp/Merillees 1989, 253). This material at the Sâqqarah necropolis has exclusively been found in tombs of high officials, such as Maya and his wife Merit, and Tia and his wife Tia, all closely linked to Pharaoh’s court. Apparently the material was at this time only available for the very wealthy. Again, closed shapes are by far the majority; only one fragment of a kylix has been found (Warren/Hankey 1989, 152). At Sâqqarah, too, the contents of the Mycenaean pottery were clearly considered more important than the pottery itself, for the decoration of the ware is very simple. Bands and stripes are the only decoration; no pictorial decoration on Mycenaean vases has ever been found in Egypt (personal communications J.H. Crouwel and D. Aston), whereas several sites in the Levant did yield some pictorial decorated pieces.

The Ramessides

Thus, after the restoration of part of the Levantine empire, Mycenaean pottery reappears in Egypt, though not in the impressive quantities of Amarna. With the rise of the 19th dynasty and further involvement in the Levant, Egypt was soon to find itself in war with Hatti, fighting mainly for the Qadesh-region. Despite the troubles that this must have caused for Levantine trade, Mycenaean pottery still appears in Egyptian tombs, at Thebes and Sâqqarah, in the same – modest – quantities as during the late 18th dynasty. With the accession of Ramesses II to the throne around 1279 BC peace was to be restored after the famous battle at Qadesh (1275 BC), where the Hittite army confronted the Egyptian forces. The treaty between

Egypt and Hatti started almost half of a century of peace and prosperity for the entire Middle East, mainly due to international trade. The Levantine trading-cities flourished, as did the empire of Hatti and Egypt (Hayes 1953, 345). Trade with the Aegean probably continued, though domestic troubles in Ahhijawa may have been getting serious now. During the long reign of Ramesses II, several Mycenaean pots reached Egyptian soil. Again, the Memphite region brought us some LH IIIA2 and LH IIIB pottery, again many fragments of stirrup jars (Warren/Hankey 1989, 151; Kemp/Merillees 1989, 253). Especially the tomb of Horemheb is interesting, since a Ramesside princess (probably Ramesses' eldest daughter) was buried here. At least 7 vases were found in her grave, buried with the princess a hundred years after their manufacture (Warren/Hankey 1989, 151).

The Delta residence

Apart from Memphis, one other site deserves special mention here: Piramesse. Though this settlement was already important during the Hyksos occupation, its significance dwindled during the 18th dynasty. The Ramessides however, made it the royal residence *par excellence* and adorned the city with splendid temples and palaces. In the end, Ramesses II would turn the city into a metropolis and the capital of Egypt. Situated near the Sinai and the Levantine empire, and having direct access to the Mediterranean Sea, Piramesse was bound to become an incredibly wealthy city and a center of trade. At present Qantir, the old center of Piramesse, approximately 100 fragments of Mycenaean pottery have been found³. Considering the amounts found in the center of Amarna, this is rather modest. One needs to bear in mind, however, that unlike Amarna, the city of Piramesse has been inhabited ever since its *floruit* during the 19th dynasty, and so a lot of material must have been destroyed during later activities. Also, the city was used as a quarry for the later Tanite kings, which caused a lot of damage to the archaeological record as well. Thus, originally, far more Mycenaean pottery may have been present in the city-center. Outside the center, in a place called Tell el Dab'a, less than 50 fragments of Mycenaean pottery have been found, to my knowledge exclusively of closed shape⁴. This brings the total amount of Mycenaean pottery found at Piramesse around 150 fragments; a modest result indeed. Still, it is the second largest concentration of Mycenaean ware in Egypt, again present at a palatial site, and again almost exclusively consisting of closed shapes. Does this mean that Mycenaean pottery was something exclusively imported for the court, and that it was used mainly as a container for (perfumed) olive oil? As for the second question, I think it is safe to say: yes, although some

³ Personal communication D. Aston. Unfortunately, good publication is still lacking.

⁴ As yet there is no good publication of the imported pottery. Hence, this remains uncer-

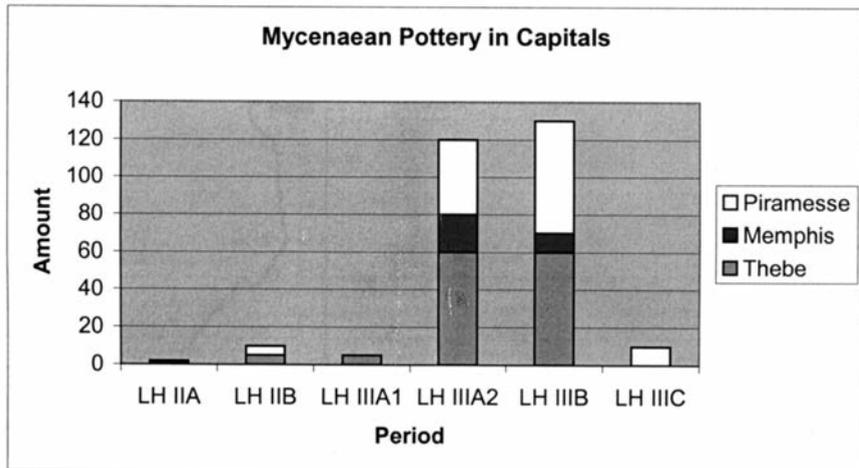


Fig.1. Mycenaean pottery in capitals.

faience copies of stirrup jars found at the fortress of Buhen point to some esthetic appreciation as well. The first question however must be answered with “no”. Mycenaean pottery has been found at several non-palatial sites in Egypt, such as Gurob, Deir el Medina, and Abydos and even has been found in substantial quantities in fortified cities in Nubia, such as Sesebi. It was however an elite thing at all times – almost nowhere to be found at common people’s houses or tombs. An exception in this perspective is Akhetaten, where substantial amounts of Mycenaean pottery have been found in the houses of the “middle class”. And if it does it is always in very small quantities, probably as a display of wealth. Mycenaean pottery was never considered something sacred or religious, since its appearance in temples is rare. Rather, it was associated with Pharaoh’s court and as such, probably imported mainly by “state trade” – trade strictly controlled by the palace. In principle, it was available for others as well, however on a very small scale and probably at a price.

Mycenaean pottery was imported mainly during LH IIIA2 and early LH IIIB. The bulk of the material from this period derives from Sâqqarah and Akhetaten, although material from Piramesse may partly be of an early LH IIIB date as well. During LH IIIB there was probably a slight decrease in import of Mycenaean pottery, although it still reached Egypt in substantial quantities. The end of the 13th century BC saw a marked decline of trade, as is visible in Fig. 1 (note that Amarna has not been included), and only very few LH IIIC pottery has been found in Egypt, mainly in Piramesse (personal communication D. Aston). Throughout all periods, mainly closed

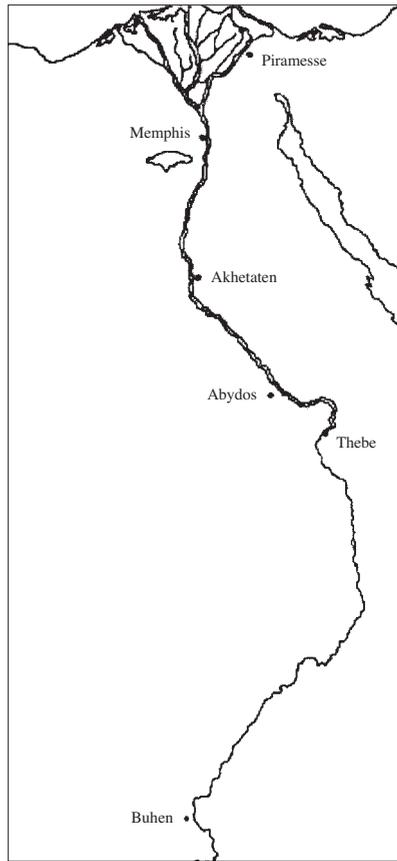


Fig. 2. Map of Egypt.

vessels were imported, especially stirrup jars and pilgrim flasks. These vessels probably contained perfumed olive oil, which was the prime reason for import. The pottery itself thus was of lesser concern, although a certain value was probably attached to it. The very simple decoration of the vessels – lines and bands – points to this low appreciation as well, although the quality of the pottery was good. As stated above, the Mycenaean pottery was probably associated with the elite. It is rarely found at common people's houses or tombs. The pottery has been found in funeral, domestic, and official contexts (*i.e.* in tombs, houses, and buildings related to the court, such as palaces or archives), but never within a temple. Apparently, the pottery had no religious meaning whatsoever, as was the case in some Levantine cities.

Conclusion

Looking at the distribution of the pottery as it is known now, I would say the material arrived in Egypt at the northern ports from where it was shipped to Memphis and Piramesse. During the Amarna-period it was probably shipped directly to Akhetaten, but during the earlier and later periods I doubt the arrival of seagoing vessels any further south than Memphis itself. From these northern centers, it was distributed to provincial centers, like Sedment, but also to the more southern cities of Abydos and Thebes. The smaller amounts of Aegean pottery at these sites are best explained by their geographical position, rather than the importance of these centers compared to the northern cities. From these “provincial” centers the Mycenaean pottery diffused over the *nomes* (= Egyptian provinces) at a very modest rate, or sometimes was shipped to the southern cities in Nubia. In general, Mycenaean pottery in Egypt has been found in and around the great centers Memphis, Piramesse, Akhetaten and Thebes. Diffusion of the pottery in the northern *nomes* seems to have been on a greater scale than in the southern *nomes*, probably because of the proximity of the ports where the ware arrived first. Ships with Mycenaean pottery, coming probably from Cyprus and the Levant, arrived at these ports until around 1200 BC. With the fall of Hatti and Ahhijawa itself around this time, trade with the Aegean virtually came to an end.

Appendix 1. The Amarna corpus.

No.	Date	Object	function	Context	literature
Mycenaean ware in the North Suburb of Akhetaten					
Central - Western Quarter					
1	LH IIIa	pilgrim flask	storage	residential (house of the mycenaean greek)	Pendlebury, City II, 46
2	LH IIIa	stem of a goblet	eating / drinking	residential (house of the mycenaean greek)	Pendlebury, City II, 46
3	LH IIIa	fragments		residential, 26: 30/207:225	Pendlebury, City II, 48
4	LH IIIa	fragments		residential, 61: 30/257	Pendlebury, City II, 48
South - Western Quarter					
1	LH IIIa	fragments, 4		residential, T.36.64: 30/279	Pendlebury, City II, 53
2	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, T.36.69: 30/296	Pendlebury, City II, 53
3	LH IIIa	fragment of a stirrup jar	storage	residential, T.36.78: 30/379	Pendlebury, City II, 53
4	LH IIIa	fragment of a pilgrim flask of Rhodian fabric	storage	residential, T.36.58: 30/196	Pendlebury, City II, 55
5	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, T.36.84: 30/420	Pendlebury, City II, 56
6	LH IIIa	handle of a stirrup jar	storage	residential, T.36.44: 30/46	Pendlebury, City II, 57
7	LH IIIa	fragment of a pilgrim flask	storage	residential, T.36.54: 30/152	Pendlebury, City II, 57
8	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, T.36.62: 30/345	Pendlebury, City II, 57
9	LH IIIa	fragments		residential, T.36.76: 30/371, 372	Pendlebury, City II, 58
10	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, T.36.79: 30/391	Pendlebury, City II, 58
11	LH IIIa	fragments, 2		residential, T.36.57: 30/232	Pendlebury, City II, 59
12	LH IIIa	bead-spacer of white paste		residential, T.36.74: 30/330 (public well)	Pendlebury, City II, 61
13	LH IIIa	fragments, 2		residential, T.36.75: 30/364	Pendlebury, City II, 62
14	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, T.34.3: 30/480	Pendlebury, City II, 67

15	LH IIIa	base of an amphora	storage	residential, S.33.1: 30/464	Pendlebury, City II, 68
Northern Quarter					
0		no fragments			
North - Western Quarter					
1	LH IIIa	fragment		(top of a shaft) burial?, T.35.6: 29/353	Pendlebury, City II, 43
2		pair of small pottery birds, Aegean?		residential, T.35.6: 29/352	Pendlebury, City II, 43
South - Eastern Quarter					
1	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, V.37.8: 26/216	Pendlebury, City II, 8
South - Central Quarter					
1	LH IIIa	fragment of a globular vase, 11 cm	storage	residential, U.36.29: 29/36 (slums)	Pendlebury, City II, 18
2	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, T.36.2 (larger estates)	Pendlebury, City II, 24
Eastern Quarter					
0		no fragments			
Mycenaean ware in the South Suburb of Akhetaten					
1	LH IIIa	fragment of a stirrup jar	storage	residential, N.49.18: 21/284	Peet, City I, 15,XXIX/1010b
2	LH IIIa	neck of a stirrup jar	storage	residential, N.49.10: 21/33	Peet, City I, 20,XIII, fig.5, t.1
3	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, N.49.12: 21/163	Peet, City I, 21
4	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, N.49.35: 21/496	Peet, City I, 26
5	LH IIIa	fragments, 2		residential, O.47.16: 22/517, 532	Peet, City I, 28
6	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, P.46.7: 22/544	Peet, City I, 30
7	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, P.46.8: 22/542	Peet, City I, 31
8	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, P.46.10: 22/547	Peet, City I, 32
9	LH IIIa	fragments		residential, P.46.15: 22/565	Peet, City I, 33
10	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, P.47.30: 22/531	Peet, City I, 35
11	LH IIIa	mouth of a vase	storage	residential, P.47.31: no number	Peet, City I, 35
12	LH IIIa	fragments, 3		residential, Petrie's House 11	Petrie, Tell el Amarna, 17
Mycenaean ware in the Central City of Akhetaten					
Mycenaean ware found by Carter, precise context within the central city unknown, now in the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam					
1	LH IIIa2, Late	sherds, small piriform jar	storage	APM 3226/D en /4	
2	LH IIIa2, Late	sherds, vertical flask	storage	APM 3226/B, F, H, 1,3,5,6,7	
3	LH IIIa2, Late	sherd	storage	APM 3226/8	
4	LH IIIa2, Late	sherd, alabastron	storage	APM 3226/G	
5	LH IIIa2, Late	sherd, stirrup jar?	storage	APM 3226/A	
6	LH IIIa2, Late	sherds	storage	APM 3226/2,9	
The Great Temple					
0		no fragments			
The dependencies of the great temple					
0		no fragments			
The Great Palace: magazines					
1	LH IIIa	fragment and a handle of a pilgrim flask	storage	official, 34/41	Pendlebury, City III, 38
2	LH IIIa	fragments of a stirrup jar, 2	storage	official, 34/45	Pendlebury, City III, 38
3	LH IIIa	fragment of a vase, 8.5 cm	storage	official, 35/137	Pendlebury, City III, 49
4	LH IIIa	fragment of a pilgrim flask, 5.8 cm	storage	official, 35/150	Pendlebury, City III, 49
5	LH IIIa	fragments of a pilgrim	storage	official, 35/190	Pendlebury, City III, 49

		flask, 4			
6	LH IIIa	base and part of the side of a pilgrim flask	storage	official, 35/180	Pendlebury, City III, 49
7	LH IIIa	fragment of a vase, 5.5 cm	storage	official, 35/196	Pendlebury, City III, 49
8	LH IIIa	fragment of a pilgrim flask, 4 cm	storage	official, 35/221	Pendlebury, City III, 49
9	LH IIIa	fragment (rough ware)		official, 35/222	Pendlebury, City III, 49
10	LH IIIa	fragments of vases, 4	storage	official, 35/239	Pendlebury, City III, 50
11	LH IIIa	fragments, 4		official, 35/273	Pendlebury, City III, 50
The Great Palace: state apartments					
1	LH IIIa	fragment of a pilgrim flask	storage	official, 34/182	Pendlebury, City III, 65
2	LH IIIa	fragment		official, 35/382	Pendlebury, City III, 68,CIX.3
3	LH IIIa	fragments of 2 small amphoras	storage	official, 35/373	Pendlebury, City III, 69,CIX.5
4	LH IIIa	fragment, 7.6 cm		official, 35/492	Pendlebury, City III, 70,CIX.3
5	LH IIIa	fragment		official, 35/415	Pendlebury, City III, 72,CIX.3
6	LH IIIa	fragments of stirrup jars, 2	storage	official, 35/289	Pendlebury, City III, 73
7	LH IIIa	fragments, 7		official, 35/305	Pendlebury, City III, 73
8	LH IIIa	fragments, 2		official, 35/315	Pendlebury, City III, 73
9	LH IIIa	fragments, 6 (3 from pilgrim flasks)	storage	official, 35/310	Pendlebury, City III, 73
10	LH IIIa	fragments, 6		official, 35/324	Pendlebury, City III, 73
11	LH IIIa	fragments, 3		official, 35/349	Pendlebury, City III, 74
12	LH IIIa	fragments, 2		official, 35/359	Pendlebury, City III, 74
13	LH IIIa	fragments, 9		official, no specification	Petrie, Tell el Amarna, 17
The Royal Estate					
1	LH IIIa	fragment of an amphora, 5.6 cm	storage	official, 31/622	Pendlebury, City III, 88
2	LH IIIa	fragment, 4.8 cm		official, 31/532	Pendlebury, City III, 91,CIX.2
3	LH IIIa	fragments, 2		official, 31/547	Pendlebury, City III, 91,CIX.2
4	LH IIIa	fragments of a pilgrim flask, 3	storage	official, 31/553	Pendlebury, City III, 91,CIX.2
5	LH IIIa	fragment of a bowl	eating / drinking	official, 31/560	Pendlebury, City III, 91,CIX.2
6	LH IIIa	fragment		official, 31/564	Pendlebury, City III, 91,CIX.2
The Magazines between the Royal Estate and the Temple					
1	LH IIIa	fragment		official, P.41.1&3: 31/609	Pendlebury, City III, 107,CIX.2
2	LH IIIa	top of a stirrup jar	storage	official, Q.41.7: 31/605	Pendlebury, City III, 107,CIX.2
3	LH IIIa	fragments of a stirrup jar, 2	storage	official, Q.41.7: 31/606	Pendlebury, City III, 107,CIX.2
4	LH IIIa	base of a stirrup jar	storage	official, Q.41.7: 31/607	Pendlebury, City III, 107,CIX.2
5	LH IIIa	fragments, 2		official, Q.41.2: 32/260	Pendlebury, City III, 108
6	LH IIIa	fragment of an amphora	storage	official, Q.41.4: 32/248	Pendlebury, City III, 109
7	LH IIIa	fragment		official, Q.41.10: 32/283	Pendlebury, City III, 109,CIX.1
8	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, R.41.1: 32.263	Pendlebury, City III, 210,CIX.1
The Record Office and its Surroundings					
1	LH IIIa	fragment		official, Q.42.1: 33/39	Pendlebury, City III, 118
2	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, Q.42.15: 33/96	Pendlebury, City III, 119
3	LH IIIa	fragment		official, Q.42.21: 33/142	Pendlebury, City III, 120
4	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, Q.42.28: 33/200	Pendlebury, City III, 121
5	LH IIIa	fragments, 5		official, Q.42.30: 33/211	Pendlebury, City III, 121
6	LH IIIa	fragment		official, Q.42.31: 33/215	Pendlebury, City III, 121
7	LH IIIa	fragments, 2		residential, no.1:33/223	Pendlebury, City III, 123
8	LH IIIa	top of a stirrup jar	storage	residential, no.2&3:33/199	Pendlebury, City III, 123
9	LH IIIa	top of a stirrup jar	storage	residential, no.2&3:33/190	Pendlebury, City III, 123

10	LH IIIa	fragments of pilgrim flasks, 4	storage	residential, no.15&16:33/243	Pendlebury, City III, 123,CIX.7
11	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, no.36:33/255	Pendlebury, City III, 124,CIX.7
12	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, no.43:33/252	Pendlebury, City III, 124,CIX.7
13	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, no.58:33/263	Pendlebury, City III, 125,CIX.7
14	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, no.69:33/284	Pendlebury, City III, 125,CIX.7
15	LH IIIa	fragments, 1329		official, waste heaps	Petrie, Tell el Amarna, 17
16	LH IIIa	fragment		official, waste heaps	Kemp, Amarna Reports IV, 119
The Military and Police Quarters					
1	LH IIIa	base of a pilgrim flask, 7.3 cm	storage	official, R.42.9.B: 36/112	Pendlebury, City III, 135,CIX.6
2	LH IIIa	fragments		official, R.42.9.C: 36/121,127	Pendlebury, City III, 135,CIX.6
3	LH IIIa	fragment		official, R.42.9.D: 36/134	Pendlebury, City III, 136,CIX.6
The South - East Quarter					
1	LH IIIa	fragment		residential, R.43.1.A: 36/181	Pendlebury, City III, 140,CIX.6
2	LH IIIa	fragments of an amphora, 2	storage	residential, R.43.1.B: 36/151	Pendlebury, City III, 140,CIX.6
3	LH IIIa	stirrup jar, 12 cm	storage	residential, R.43.2: 36/164	Pendlebury, City III, 141,LXXVIII.9

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