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Egyptian words in the Late Bronze Age Levant: a linguistic investigation of New Kingdom Egyptian-Levantine interactions

Palavras egípcias no Levante ao final da Idade do Bronze: uma investigação linguística das interações egípcio-levantinas do Reino Novo

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Abstract

Cultural encounters often result in the borrowing of words between the communities involved. This words, in turn, preserve precious clues about the nature and characteristics of the interactions underlying their transfer, and can thus be a precious (but often overlooked) source of socio-historical information. The present paper aims at showing how Egyptian borrowings in Levantine languages can be used as an additional source of evidence to explore the sociocultural interactions between Egyptians and local Levantine societies during the New Kingdom.

Keywords: Loanwords; Egyptian; Biblical Hebrew; New Kingdom; Late Bronze Age; Cultural contacts; Linguistic contacts.

Resumo

Os encontros culturais muitas vezes resultam no empréstimo de palavras entre as comunidades envolvidas. Essas palavras, por sua vez, preservam pistas preciosas sobre a natureza e as características das interações subjacentes à sua transferência, e podem, portanto, ser uma fonte preciosa (mas muitas vezes esquecida) de informações sócio-históricas. O presente artigo tem como objetivo mostrar como empréstimos egípcios em línguas levantinas podem ser usados como evidência adicional para explorar as interações socioculturais entre egípcios e sociedades locais no Levante durante o Reino Novo.

Palavras-chave: Estrangeirismos; Língua Egípcia; Hebraico Bíblico; Reino Novo; Fim da Idade do Bronze; Contatos culturais; Contatos linguísticos.

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Introduction

Except for neologisms and a few other marginal types of words, most of the lexicon of any language can be divided into two main components: a) words inherited from earlier phases of the language, i.e. from its ancestors, and b) words borrowed from other languages. The two categories of words preserve information about the history and relations of the language and of its speakers. Inherited words attest the philogenetic[2] history of the language and can thus reveal languages that stemmed from a common ancestor and which are thus members of a language family. For instance, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French belong to a single language family as they all stem from a same ancestor, Latin. This philogenetic relation is easily recognizable from their inherited words, which can be traced back to Latin: Italian *lingua,* Portuguese *língua*, Spanish *lengua*, French *langue*, Rumanian *limbă* all derive from Latin *lingua* = "tongue", while Italian *mano*, Protuguese *mão*, Spanish *mano*, French *main* and Rumanian *mână* derive form Latin *manus* = "hand".

Borrowed words, instead, are words that a language picked up at some point in its history from other distinct languages. Borrowed words also preserve historical information, but of a different kind. While inherited words tell us about the linguistic ancestors of an idiom, borrowed words keep trace of the contacts and interactions that the community of speakers of one language had with communities speaking other languages.

The present article focuses on borrowed words, using them to explore the historical reality of the Egyptian domination of the Levant during the New Kingdom.

Borrowed words: some theoretical considerations

Borrowed words have been the subject of several studies. Scholars have observed that all languages borrow words and that in principle any type of word can be borrowed. At the same time, however, not all borrowed words are the same, and not all languages borrow words in the same way. To begin with, borrowed words can be divided into "cultural borrowings" and "core borrowings". Cultural borrowings are words referring to specific goods, items, concepts, or practices, and they usually travel from one culture to the other together with the things they refer to. Words like English *tomato* ultimately from Nahuatl *tomatl* or English *avocado* ultimately from Nahuatl *āhuacatl* are good examples of cultural borrowings that were adopted by various societies together with the corresponding American vegetables.

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[2] I.e. the evolutionary history of related languages.

By contrast core borrowings differ from cultural borrowings in that they do not refer to new items, ideas, or practices, but rather refer to items and concepts that already exist in the receiving culture. For instance, several examples of core borrowings can be found in Modern English: Modern Eng. *river* < Old French *riviere* (displacing Old English *ēa* = "river"); Mod. Eng. *mountain* < O. Fr. *montaigne* (displacing O. Eng. *beorg* = "mountain"), Mod. Eng. *participate* < Latin *participat-* (displacing O. Eng. *dǽlniman* = "take part", "participate"). At first sight, the reasons for such borrowings are less obvious and intuitive than for cultural borrowing. While we can easily imagine (also from our own personal experiences) how the introduction of new items and ideas can lead to the adoption of new words referring to them, why did English speakers feel the need to borrow words from Old French and Latin for concepts like "river", "mountain" and "to participate", for which they already had suitable inherited Anglo-Saxon words? Various studies have shown that the answer is primarily socio-cultural, and involves political and cultural prestige. In particular, it has been observed that cultural borrowings do not circulate freely between languages, but rather a) they are transferred mostly where clear political and/or cultural hierarchies of prestige are present, and b) they tend to flow primarily from the more prestigious languages to the less prestigious ones (CARLING et al., 2019 with refs; see also HASPELMATH; TADMOR, 2009). Often such linguistic prestige reflects political dominance. This explains a large part of the French borrowings in English: many of these words entered English after the Normand conquest of England, that is in a period in which England was politically dominated by an elite of Normand/French origins speaking a Normand/French dialect. Similarly, Latin also enjoyed a high prestige in pre-modern Europe as language of the Church and of culture.

In fact, prestige does not stem only from political dominance. Languages can be perceived as culturally prestigious even when their speakers enjoy no political prominence. The relation between Greek and Latin in Imperial Rome is a very good example of that: even though Greece had been conquered and was dominated by Rome, Latin still borrowed numerous words from Greek, as Greek enjoyed a high cultural prestige within the Roman society. A similar situation can be observed with Arabic in the Ottoman Empire: Ottoman Turkish borrowed hundreds of words from Arabic because Arabic enjoyed an enormous cultural prestige, being the language of Islam, even though the Ottoman Empire was ruled by a Turkish-speaking elite and the Arab Middle East had been conquered and was politically dominated by the Ottoman Empire.

At the same time, while political domination can result in linguistic prestige and can thus lead to linguistic borrowings, it does not always do so. The interactions between Italian and various Germanic languages during the Middle Ages provide a quite interesting and illustrative example. Three main phases are relevant for us here. To begin with, after the fall of the Roman Empire, after a brief period of Gothic dominance, large parts of Italy were conquered by the Langobards (568-774 CE). Both Goths and Langobards spoke Germanic languages, and both set up kingdoms centred in Italy. Their languages were certainly politically dominant and probably somehow prestigious.

While the Gothic rule was rather short and ephemeral, and its linguistic evidence are rather scanty and often difficult to identify (MIGLIORINI, 2001 [1st ed 1960], p. 49–50, 78–79; MORLICCHIO, 2011, p. 23–24), the Langobardic domination and its sociolinguistic reality left long lasting traces. The settlement of the Langobards within Italy probably resulted in a relatively widespread bilingualism. As a result, dozen of Langobardic words were borrowed (including core borrowings) into several pre-Italian neo-Latin vernaculars and they can still be found in their modern descendants as well as modern Italian. Some of these words may have also entered the language through Langobardic speakers that switched to Latin, but retained some words from their previous Langobardic language (MIGLIORINI, 2001 [1st ed 1960], p. 50–56, 79–80; MORLICCHIO, 2011, p. 222 et passim).

A similar pattern can be seen also in French: after the collapse of the Roman Empire the north of France became politically dominated by the Franks, who spoke Frankish, another Germanic language. Frankish was certainly politically dominant and prestigious in France. As a result, several Frankish words (including core borrowings) were borrowed in the local pre-French Latin vernaculars. Modern French, which descends from those vernaculars, still preserves many of those Frankish words.

Things, however, become interesting when Charlemagne conquered northern Italy. Considering what happened in the previous centuries with the Langobardic language in northern Italy and with Frankish in France, and considering the obvious political dominance of the Frankish elite (and we can assume, of their language) within the Carolingian empire, one could intuitively expect Frankish borrowings to enter Italian as the Langobardic ones did in the previous centuries. This, however, is not what happened. Or more precisely: Frankish borrowings did enter the Italian vernaculars in this period, but in contrast with the Langobardic ones they are less significant and usually mediated by Latin (MORLICCHIO, 2002, p. 56, 60; - CASTELLANI, 2000, p. 92 goes as far as suggesting that there is no clear evidence for any

direct borrowing). Moreover, they can be understood mostly (although not exclusively) as cultural borrowings pertaining to domains related with the new Frankish imperial administration and its feudal reality, with the military realm, or with items, practices, and specific trading or artisanal activities introduced by the Franks (MIGLIORINI, 2001 [1st ed 1960], p. 80–81; MORLICCHIO, 2011, p. 222–23; JONES, 2013, esp. 302). Why this difference? First of all, in contrast with the Langobards, the Frankish conquest did not lead to significant movements of populations into Italy (MORLICCHIO, 2011, p. 222 with refs). Moreover, although when Charlemagne conquered Italy, Frankish was still the language of his elite, by that time the Franks were already heavily Romanised and Latin, rather than Frankish, was the language used in the imperial chancelleries and in the imperial administration (see also MIGLIORINI, 2001 [1st ed 1960], p. 53, 80; MORLICCHIO, 2011, p. 222). Frankish still enjoyed some prestige at the court and clearly influenced the Latin used in the administration there, but then it was this administrative Latin, rather than Frankish itself, that was the "face" of the empire (e.g. the language enjoying political prestige) in the distant provinces of Italy, acting as a lingua franca and, thus, as vector for the indirect borrowing of Frankish words in Italy (MIGLIORINI, 2001 [1st ed 1960], p. 80; MORLICCHIO, 2011, p. 222).

Things changed again during the last centuries of the Middle Ages, in the first half of the 2nd millennium CE, when Northern Italy was formally dominated by the Holy Roman Empire. During this period the core of the Empire was located in German-speaking territories, and it was ruled by primarily German-speaking monarchs elected by mostly German-speaking elites (as implied also by the official name of the empire after the Diet of Cologne of 1512, namely: *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation* = "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation"). The clear association of Middle High German with the political elites of the Empire made the languages prestigious, at least in its core territories north of the Alps – in this respect, for instance, the hundreds of borrowings from Middle High German into Czech dating to this period reflect this sociolinguistic reality (see e.g. NEWERKLA, 2013; BERGER, 2014). However, while Middle High German speakers and bilingual speakers were certainly widespread in the Czech territories during the late Middle Ages, this was likely not the case in Italy (MIGLIORINI, 2001 [1st ed 1960], p. 164; see also MORLICCHIO, 2002, p. 53–54). Moreover, while Middle High German was certainly politically dominant, there was probably never any particular pressure or interest in using (or imposing) it in Italy, both because the imperial administration still used Latin as lingua franca, and because Italian itself was also

recognized as a major language of the empire.[3] As a result, only very few Middle High German borrowings entered Italian in this period, and they were cultural borrowings mostly limited to specialized military terms, new specialized skills (e.g. terms related with mining techniques introduced from northern Europe), or referred to specific administrative and political realities of the Empire (MIGLIORINI, 2001 [1st ed 1960], p. 164).

The differences observed in the Italian case show that prestige is a crucial precondition for borrowing, but it is not enough. Rather, scholars have observed that borrowings are more likely to take place where at least some parts of the communities involved are consistently bilingual. Bilingualism itself, in turn, is often a direct reflection of how different communities perceive and interact with each other at the political and socio-cultural level. This aspect becomes particularly interesting in colonial realities, as it is the case with Amerindian languages. In his study about loanwords in Amerindian languages, Brown (1999, p. 81–83) notices an interesting pattern: indigenous languages within the Spanish and Portuguese (and secondarily Russian, in Alaska) colonial spheres borrowed several European words,[4] while most languages in North America borrowed far less European words and rather resort to neologisms to refer to European items and concepts. He explains this difference as a consequence of the different ways in which Indigenous and colonial communities interacted in the two areas: he argues that while both were oppressive and exploitative, the Spanish and Portuguese colonial authorities deployed several strategies (mostly through the colonial administration, and through the missionary activity and conversion to Christianity) to actively integrate the existing Indigenous communities into the fabric of their colonial societies. By doing so, they consciously or unconsciously created social spaces within the colonial societies where Indigenous languages (and at least some aspects of Indigenous cultures) were tolerated or even promoted.[5] This resulted in realities with relatively widespread and stable bilingualism that favoured the transfer from the colonial languages to the Indigenous ones of both core and cultural borrowings.

By contrast, Brown (1999, p. 81–83) argues that the North American reality was different, in the sense that European colonial societies there had no space for Indigenous

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[3] The Golden Bull of 1356 established that sons and heirs of the electors were to be taught German, Latin, Italian and Czech, thus the facto recognizing the official status of these languages within the Empire.

[4] At least those that were in contact with the Europeans during the core periods of the colonization, like Nahuatl, most Mayan dialects, Quechua, Ayimara, Guaranì, Mapuche, and several other indigenous languages. The case of languages in the Caribbean in the very early years of the European invasion, and the case of those that were colonized only in the 19th or 20th century (like the south of Brazil or Argentina) was significantly different.

[5] The best example is the promotion by Jesuit missionaries of Guaranì as a regional lingua franca.

communities and their languages. Rather, the model of interaction enforced there was often, even usually, one that envisioned only two options: either the extermination, forced displacement, removal, and segregation (into confined "reservations") of the Indigenous communities, or their (often forced) complete assimilation into the settler societies in ways that expected the full renunciation and aimed at the complete erasure of their indigenous cultures, languages, and identities (see e.g. the system of boarding schools). Even where and when these practices were not implemented explicitly, they still existed due to social pressure: in North America, if Indigenous people wanted to have access to colonial society they usually had to relinquish any element of their identity and fully embrace the colonial culture to hope to have any success in them. As a result, according to Brown, while bilingual individuals did exist also in North America, the nature of the European-Indigenous interactions there prevented the emergence of any social space characterized by widespread bilingualism[6] and thus prevented any significant transfer of European words to Indigenous languages.

As it appears from this introduction and short selection of examples, it is clear that borrowings do not just "happen" and they are not a completely random, unpredictable phenomenon. Rather, the distribution and nature of borrowed words is directly shaped by specific sociolinguistic factors and constraints, and can thus be understood as reflecting the socio-cultural realities in which such words were transferred (or not).

Borrowed words can thus be seen as a trace, a fingerprint, of specific sociolinguistic realities shaped by small sets of factors and constraints. This means that, while each of these realities is unique, it is reasonable to assume that similar sociolinguistic realities will result in similar sets of borrowed words (in fact, this is what current cross-linguistic research shows – see e.g. HASPELMATH; TADMOR, 2009; CARLING et al., 2019). As a consequence, we can also assume that if we study the nature and distribution of borrowed words attested in a given language, then we might be able to infer information about the sociolinguistic reality underlying their borrowing. This hints at an intriguing possibility, and leads us to the idea at the core of the present article.

The Levantine evidence

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[6] In my opinion we should also consider that the aggressively anti-Indigenous policies in North America may have also resulted in a conscious rejection (a "negative prestige") of European words among indigenous communities – this aspect, however, would deserve further study.

Written sources and archaeological evidence show that Egypt dominated over the Levant during the New Kingdom (see MORRIS, 2018 with refs). Such Egyptian presence led to sociocultural and linguistic interactions that might have resulted also in Egyptian words being borrowed into local languages. Therefore, if the nature and distribution of borrowed words are shaped by (and thus reflect) the sociocultural reality in which they are borrowed, then what do the Egyptian words in Levantine languages tell us about the sociocultural reality of the Egyptian domination in the region during the New Kingdom?

Let us start with the sources. Unfortunately, we have no consistent Late Bronze Age corpus of texts from the core territories of the Egyptian Levantine domains in the Southern Levant and Lebanon. We have the Ugaritic material, but Ugarit was located beyond the northern border of the Egyptian sphere, and the extent of its integration in the Egyptian empire at any point in time is open to debate, but was likely not particularly significant (if any at all). Ugarit is therefore interesting on its own, but it cannot be considered as representative of the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic realities in the Levantine territories that were under direct Egyptian control. The lack of direct contemporary sources is certainly an issue that limits the potential of our investigation. Yet, in principle, this is not necessarily an insurmountable obstacle. After all, we have no consistent direct attestation of the Latin vernaculars spoken in Italy or France in the early centuries of the Langobardic and Frankish domination. Nevertheless, we can study the words borrowed in those periods because several of them survive in later, better known phases of these languages, or are indirectly attested in contemporary Latin documents (MORLICCHIO, 2002, p. 56–58). The case of the Levant is similar: although we do not have consistent direct contemporary attestations of the "vernaculars" spoken in the Egyptian-controlled territories, we do have some indirect sources that can be useful for our investigation. These are the Amarna letters, Biblical Hebrew, and the Phoenician inscriptions. Finally, as mentioned, we also have the Ugaritic material.

The Amarna letters

The Amarna letters are a collection of over 300 letters of mostly diplomatic nature found in Amarna and sent by various Near Eastern rulers in the period covering the last years of Amenhotep III, the reign of Akhenaton and probably the first years of Tutankhamun (MORAN, 1992, p. xxxiv–xxxix). A few (copies of?) letters sent from Egypt are also present – Egyptian words do appear in the latter, but they are excluded from the present study because these words reflect the Egyptian native language of the scribes of these texts. As for the other, more

numerous letters, while some were sent by kings like those of Babylon, Mitanni, or Assyria, most of them were written by the Levantine rulers of the territories under Egyptian control. Unfortunately, these letters are not written in the Canaanite vernaculars that were spoken in the region – that would have provided a wonderful source for the present study. Rather, they are written in Akkadian, which was the lingua franca used in the official epistolary communications between the Egyptian court and the Levantine rulers (somehow like Latin in the Carolingian case described above). Yet, several scholars have pointed out that the Akkadian of these letters is often noticeably influenced by the (mostly non-attested) Canaanite vernaculars spoken by the Levantine scribes who wrote them. In particular, besides a few typically Canaanite grammatical and syntactic features, the most obvious influence is the presence of non-Akkadian words. Some of these words are clearly Canaanite, likely coming from the vernaculars they spoke in their daily life.[7] Others, instead, come from other languages, including Egyptian. The fact that they were using these Egyptian words in Akkadian suggests that a) they did not know any Akkadian equivalent and/or b) that these Egyptian term were their default words to refer to these concepts and realities, likely also in their Canaanite vernaculars. Therefore, we can thus suppose that these Egyptian borrowings in the Akkadian of the Levantine scribes existed also as Egyptian borrowings in their Canaanite vernaculars.

Now, what are these words? The Egyptian words in the Amarna letters sent from the Levant (i.e. excluding those appearing in the letters form Egypt) are not numerous – they are listed in the following table (for the edition of the letters, see: MORAN, 1992; RAINEY, 1976; for the Egyptian words COCHAVI-RAINEY, 1997 with refs):

ID	Egy.	Egyptian meaning	Form in the Amarna letters	Meaning of the form in the Amarna letters
	Levantine Ruler – City: Attestations			
I.1	*jkn*	'a type of jar'	DUG*a-ku-ni*	'a type of jar'
	Abi-Milki – Tyre: EA 148:12			
I.2	*jr^y-pʿt*	"nobleman"	*ir-pi$_2$(-šu)*	"(his) nobleman"
	Abdi-Heba – Jerusalem: EA 289:38			
I.3	*wʿw*	"*wʿw*-soldier"	LU$_2$*we-a*	"*wʿw*-soldier"
	Rib-Hadda – Byblos: EA 108:16; 109:22, 39; 129:12			
	Abi-Milki – Tyre: EA 150:6; 150:8; 152:9, 47, 50			
	Šamu-Haddi – Šamʿôna: EA 227:20			
	Yama (or perhaps Maya? see Moran 1992, EA 230 n1) - unknown city: EA 230:11			

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[7] In the same way as we often find Italian, or French or Spanish words in Latin texts written in Medieval Latin.

	Abdi-Heba – Jerusalem: EA 285:6; 287:47, 69; 288:10			

I.4	*pꜣ-tꜣty*	"the vizir"	*pa-si₂-t[e]*	"the vizir"
	Rib-Hadda – Byblos: EA 71:1			

I.5	*pḏty*	"*pḏty*-troops"	LU₂.MEŠ *pi-ṭa-ti*	"*pḏty*-troops"
	Niqm-Adda - Ugarit: EA 49:6			
	Akizzi - Qatna: EA 53:47, 53, 67, 68			
	'Abdi-Ashtarti - Gath?: EA 65:12			
	Rib-Haddi - Byblos: EA 70:23, 26, 28; 71:14, 27; 72:30; 73:10, 13, 22; 76:32; 77:23, 27; 79:17, 18, 32; 81:30, 43, 46; 82:19, 42, 50; 86:7; 90:60, 62; 91:28, 41, 44; 93:17, 26; 94:11, 13, 16, 17; 95:16, 18, 37; 102:34; 103:29, 52, 55; 108:27, 32; 111:19; 112:38; 114:45; 116:73; 117:57, 60; 118:43; 119:20; 121:48; 123:42; 124:52; 127:13, 39; 129:30, 34, 38, 40, 49, 78; 95; 131:33, 40, 43, 57; 132:59; 136:38; 137:40; 137:45, 49			
	Ammunira - Beirut: EA 141:30; 142:14, 30			
	Zimredda - Sidon: EA 144:20, 28			
	Aziri - Amurru: EA 166:4			
	Bieri - Hašabu: EA 174:21			
	Abdi-Riša - Enišasi: EA 176:16			
	Tiwati - Labana: EA 193:14			
	Biryawaza - Damascus: EA 195:30; 196:37; 197:43			
	Artamanya - Ṣiri-Bašani: EA 201:13, 21			
	Amayaše - unknown city: EA 202:11, 19			
	Abdi-Milki - Sashimi: EA 203:12			
	Unnamed ruler - Qanu: EA 204:14			
	Unnamed ruler - Ṭubu: EA 205:12			
	Unnamed ruler - Naziba : EA 206:12, 17			
	Bayawa - unknown city: EA 216:9, 16			
	Biridiya - Megiddo: EA 244:10, 20			
	Milkilu - Gezer: EA 269:12			
	Šuwardata - Qiltu: EA 279:15; 281:12, 28; 282:11; 283:16, 26			
	Abdi-Heba – Jerusalem: EA 285:16; 286:53, 54, 57, 59; 287:17, 18, 21, 23; 288:50, 51, 57; 290:20, 22			
	Adda-danu - Gezer: EA 292:32, 40			
	Yahtiru - Gaza: EA 296:34			
	Yapahu - Gezer: EA 300:16			
	Hiziri - unknown city: EA 337:11			

I.6	*mšꜥ*	"*mšꜥ*-troops"	LU₂.MEŠ *mi-ši*	"*mšꜥ*-troops"
	Rib-Hadda – Byblos: EA 101:4; 101:33; 105:27; 108:38; 110:52; 111:21; 126:63			

I.7	*rḫ*	"one who knows"	LU₂*ru-ʾi₃* (*šar₃-ri*)	"one who knows (the ruler)"
	Abdi-Heba – Jerusalem: EA 288:11			

I.8	*hrw*	"he is happy" (stat.)	*a-ru-u₂ hrw(w)*	"he is content", "satisfied"

			Abi-Milki – Tyre: EA 147:28	

I.9	*ḥry-pḏt*	"chief of the troops"	LU₂*iḫ-ri-pi₂-ˈta*ˈ	"chief of the troops"
	Rib-Hadda – Byblos: EA 107:14			

I.10	*ḫpš*	"arm"	ZAG *ha-ap-ši*	"arm (of the king)"
	Abi-Milki – Tyre: EA 147:12			

I.11	*sẖ-šʿt*	"scribe of letters"	LU₂*ša-aḫ-ši-ḫa-ši-ˈḫa*ˈ	"scribe of letters"
	Pu-Baʕlu – Yurṣa: EA 316:16			

I.12	*šnwtʸ*	"granary"	E₂-*ti \šu-nu-ti*	"storehouse"
	Zimredda – Lakish: EA 294:22			

These words can clearly be divided into two main categories: on the one hand we have terms that appear only in the correspondence of single rulers/scribes, often only once in the whole corpus. On the other we have words that are attested several times in several letters by various scribes. As for the first ones, most of them appear either in the letters sent by the King of Jerusalem, in the letters from Byblos, or in those written by one specific scribe at Tyre. Given their very specific distribution, these words are likely to reflect a specific familiarity with Egypt or Egyptian of these three individuals, rather reflecting real, commonly used borrowings. In particular, it is likely that the king of Jerusalem spent part of his youth in Egypt, before ascending to the throne in Jerusalem (NA'AMAN, 2011, esp. 35-36). It is thus likely that he learnt Egyptian back there, and that these words are a reflex of this personal experience. The city of Byblos had a strong, ancient historical connection with Egypt, it is likely that Egyptians were present in the city, and the ruler of Byblos clearly believed to have some special connection with the Pharaoh (KILANI, 2019, p. 146–75, 234). It is thus not surprising to find Egyptian words in the letters from there, as Egyptian must have been spoken in the city and the ruler himself had certainly been exposed to (and possibly was familiar with) it. Interestingly, the words attested in the letters from Byblos pertain to only two semantic domains: they are either titles for Egyptian officers, or terms referring to different types of Egyptian troops. As for the scribe of Tyre, scholars have noticed that his letters presents other features pointing to an Egyptian influence, such as expressions and phrasing reminiscent of Egyptian texts, and even spelling mistakes common in the letters sent from Egypt and written by Egyptian scribes. It has thus been suggested that also this scribe had a strong link with Egypt, perhaps was trained there or was himself Egyptian (ALBRIGHT, 1937, p. 196–203; contra: GEVIRTZ, 1973, p. 74;

NA'AMAN, 2021, p. 394–95 with refs). Alternatively, it may have been the king of Tyre that had a particularly strong connection with Egypt, possibly having resided there in his youth like the king of Jerusalem (for a recent discussion of this possibility see NA'AMAN, 2021).

By contrast, there is little we can say about the terms LU₂*ša-aḫ-ši-ḫa-ši-ˁḫaˀ* in the letter of Pu-Baʕlu of Yurṣa and *šu-nu-ti* in that of Zimredda of Lakish: these words are attested only here, they are the only Egyptian words in the correspondence of these rules, and we do not know of any special connection between them (or their scribes) and Egypt. In the case of *šu-nu-ti*, however, it might be significant that Zimredda is talking about a structure located in Jaffa, a city that was an Egyptian base. The use of the Egyptian word here, therefore, might be due to the specifically Egyptian nature of this structure.

The two remaining Egyptian words, LU₂*we-a* and LU₂.MEŠ *pi-ṭa-ti*, are attested in several letters of different rulers, which set them apart from the previous ones. Both these words pertain to only one semantic domain: they are both terms referring to different types of Egyptian troops. This is a remarkably specific, and a remarkably restricted type of borrowing: essentially they are only cultural borrowings referring exclusively to explicitly Egyptian realities. No core borrowing, and no cultural borrowing outside the Egyptian military realm is attested.

However, we have to be cautious in assessing these data: what we see here (both the letter-specific borrowings and the more generalized terms) are likely to be *only* the borrowings used by Canaanite speaking scribes when writing in Akkadian. As said above, they cannot be assumed a priori to fully represent the reality of loanwords in Canaanite. In fact, the obvious association of these words with Egyptian realities might explain their use in the Amarna letters: perhaps the scribes did not know (or did not want to use) any corresponding Akkadian word. It is certainly possible that other Egyptian words were borrowed into Canaanite, but they do not appear in the Amarna letters simply because the scribes knew how to (and preferred to) express the same concepts using proper Akkadian words.

Biblical Hebrew

As said, we have no consistent direct attestation of the language(s) spoken in the Southern Levant during the Late Bronze Age. The closest we get is Biblical Hebrew, namely the language spoken in the region a few centuries later, during the Iron Age. Biblical Hebrew is usually considered as a descendant of (one of the dialects of) Late Bronze Age Canaanite. Therefore, in the same way as Langobardic borrowings can still be found in modern Italian, we can reasonably expect that if Egyptian words were borrowed into Canaanite during the New

Kingdom, at least some of them may have been retained until the Iron Age and may thus still be found in Biblical Hebrew.

However, there are a few problems to consider. First of all, while the recorded lexicon of Biblical Hebrew is quite extensive (as it is attested in the Bible and a few Iron Age inscriptions), it does not cover in detail all semantic domains – for instance, the sea-related and sailing-related lexicon is poorly attested in Biblical Hebrew. It is thus possible that other unattested Egyptian words may have existed in the spoken language. At the same time, we have to consider that words borrowed during the New Kingdom may have fell out of use before Biblical Hebrew was recorded in writing in the Iron Age.

Another obvious issue is the dating of any potential borrowing identified in Biblical Hebrew: such borrowings were in use when the passages recording them were composed, and must have thus entered the language in earlier times. This however is a rather vague *terminus ante quem*: Egypt has been in constant contact with the Levantine coast at least since the Old Kingdom, and in principle Egyptian words may have been borrowed also before or after the New Kingdom.

The main way to establish when a word was borrowed is to look for indicators in its phonological shape that could be used as chronological anchors. More concretely: both Egyptian and Canaanite changed over time, and some of their phonetic and morphological features existed in some periods but not in others. Therefore, presence or absence of such features can give us some clues about when the words were borrowed. For instance, we know that the Egyptian feminine ending –*t* stopped being pronounced at some point before the New Kingdom (LOPRIENO, 1995, p. 38; ALLEN, 2013, p. 28, 49, 51). Therefore, if an Egyptian word is attested in Biblical Hebrew with its final –*t*, then we can assume that it was borrowed some time before the New Kingdom. If instead the final –*t* is absent, then we can assume it was borrowed just before the New Kingdom, during the New Kingdom, or afterwards. Similar considerations can be made also on the basis of the Egyptian vocalization as reconstructed on the basis of Coptic, Greek, and cuneiform transcriptions. Contextual information (e.g. about the chronology of the attestations of a word within Egyptian) can also help in this endeavour. Unfortunately, as we will see, many words present no chronologically distinctive feature and their transfer cannot be precisely dated. Still, something can indeed be said, which is better than nothing.

Various scholars have listed and studied potential Egyptian borrowings in Biblical Hebrew, with various degrees of accuracy and strictness in their work (see e.g. LAMBDIN,

1952; 1953; BREYER, 2019 and several works by Manfred Görg, discussed by Breyer). The most recent comprehensive study was published by Noonan in 2019. His work provides a balanced and accurate assessment of previous suggestions enriched by valuable observations on various aspects of these words and of their contexts of use. Noonan collected 52 potential Egyptian borrowings, and this list will serve as starting point for the analysis I present here. His corpus, however, needs some adjustments. First of all, there are a few matches that are somewhat weak and which will be excluded from the present study. Moreover, Noonan does not discuss in depth the phonological dimension of these words, as this was not the focus of his research. As a result, he offers only occasional comments on the possible dates of the borrowings. A detailed linguistic reassessment of these words would indeed be needed and valuable, as it might provide precious insights on the history of these words and on the underlying interactions. Such study, however, is obviously beyond the scope of the present paper. Here all we need is to distinguish the loanwords that could date to the New Kingdom from those that are earlier or later.[8]

So this considered, Noonan's 52 potential Egyptian borrowings can be divided in various groups. First, we can exclude 21 of them for the following reasons:

• 1 of them can be excluded because it is an Egyptian word uttered by an Egyptian Biblical character, it is not a borrowed word (i.e. *ʾaḇreḵ* = 'an exclamatory word')

• 10 of them can be excluded either because of problems in the phonological or semantic correspondences (i.e. *bad* = "pole"; *bad* = "linen"; *boḥan* = "greywacke"; *gāḇîaʿ* = "cup", "cup-shaped candleholder"; *mešî* = 'a garment'; *pᵉʾer* = "headwrap", "turban"; *piṭdâ* = 'a gemstone', perhaps "peridot"; *qop̄, qôp̄* = 'an African monkey'; *taḥaš* = "stretched leather"; *tukî* = 'a female African ape')

• 5 of them can be excluded because they were likely borrowed before the New Kingdom[9] (i.e. *zęp̄ęṯ* = 'a type of pitch'; *zęręt* = "span (as measure)"; *ṭabaʿaṯ* = "seal", "signet ring"; *qallaḥat* = "pot", "cooking pot"; *taḥrāʾ* = "leathervest")

• 5 of them can also be excluded because they were likely borrowed after the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period (i.e. *ʾaḥ* = "brazier"; *ʾeṭûn* = "fine linen"; *baḥaṭ* = 'a costly stone'; *šô/ûšan* = "water lily", "Egyptian lotus"; *teḇâ* = "ark", "basket")

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[8] My linguistic analyses underlying the classification applied in this paper will be the object of another paper, currently in preparation.

[9] As mentioned above, the criteria to date these and the following words to these periods are strictly linguistic and will be discussed in detail in a distinct paper currently in preparation.

The remaining 31 are or could have been borrowed during the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, and are thus relevant for us. They can be divided as follow:

• 4 have been likely borrowed during the New Kingdom or Third Intermediate Period, either because of their vocalization or because comparable Egyptian forms are attested only in this period. They are:

ID	Egy. Attestations	Egy. meaning	Biblical Hebrew	Meaning Biblical Hebrew
II.1	*bḫn*	"castle"; "country mansion"	*baḥan*	'a watch tower'
	Isa 23:13, 32:14			
II.2	*hbn(y)* = *hubnV*	= "ebony"	*hŏḇnîm < *hubn-*	"ebony", "African blackwood"
	Ezek 27:15			
II.3	*ḥr(y).t*	'a kind of baked goods'	*ḥorî*	'a type of cake'
	Gen 40:16			
II.4	*qmꜣ = *q'umꜣV*	"reeds"	*gomęꜣ < *gumꜣ-*	"reed", "rush"
	Exod 2:3; Job 8:11; Isa 18:2; 35:7			

• 1 could have been borrowed in the early New Kingdom or in a previous period:

ID	Egy. Attestations	Egy. meaning	Biblical Hebrew	Meaning Biblical Hebrew
II.5	*ḫtm, ḫtm.t*	"seal"; "sealing"; "sealing cylinder"	*ḥôtām, ḥôtęmęṯ*	"seal", "signet ring"
	Gen 38:18; Exod 28:11, 21, 36; 39:6, 14, 30; 1 Kgs 21:8; Job 38:14; 41:7; Song 8:6 [2x]; Jer 22:23; Hag 2:23; RES 928:3; Avigad-Sass 721:1; 805:1; 847:1; KAI 51 Vs. 9-10 [2x]			

Note that if *ḥôtęmęṯ* is not a secondary form, then it was likely borrowed before the New Kingdom because of the final -*t*. The fact that another word for seal (*ṭabaˁaṯ*) is clearly a pre-New Kingdom borrowing (because of the final –*t*) might support a pre-New Kingdom date of borrowing.

• 2 are likely to have been borrowed during the New Kingdom or before, but a later transfer cannot be totally excluded:

II.6	*jp.t*	"oipe (a dry measure)"	*ʾêpâ*	'a certain measure'
	Exod 16:36; [LXX;SEP] Lev 5:11; 6:13; 19:36; Num 5:15; 28:5; Deut 25:14 (2x), 15; Judg 6:19; 1 Sam 1:24; 17:17; Isa 5.10; Ezek 45:10, 11 (2x), 13 (2x), 24 (3x); 46:5 (2x), 7 (3x), 11 (3x), 14; Amos 8:5; Mic 6:10; Zech 5:6-10; Prov 20:10 (2x); Ruth 2:17.			

II.7	*šnḏ.t* < **šanḏvt*	"acacia"	*šiṭṭâ* < *šanṭa(t)*	"acacia", "acacia wood"
	Exod 25:5, 10, 13, 23, 38; 26:15, 26, 32, 37; 27:1, 6; 30:1, 5; 35:7, 24; 36:20, 31, 36; 37:1, 4, 10, 15, 25, 28; 38:1, 6; Deut 10:3; Isa 41:19			

• 4 could have been borrowed during the New Kingdom or in a later period, but not before the New Kingdom:

II.8	*ꜣbw*	"tusk"; "ivory"	*šẹnhabîm*	"ivory"
	1 Kgs 10:22; 2 Chron 9:21			

II.9	*ḥrʸ-tp*	"chief (of priests)"	**ḥarṭom*[10]	'a learned magician of the Egyptian court'
	Gen 41:8, 24; Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:3, 14, 15; 9:11			

II.10	*dnj.t*	'a bowl'; "cubic cubit (as a measure of volume)"	*ṭẹnẹʾ*	'a basket'
	Deut 26:2, 4; 28:5, 17			

II.11	*ḏꜣj.w* (pl.?)	'a large riverboat'	*ṣî*	"riverboad"
	Num 24:24; Isa 33:21; Ezek 30:9; Dan 11:30			

• Finally, the remaining 20 words cannot be dated to any specific period. They could have indeed been borrowed during the New Kingdom, but they could have been transferred also before or after that. They are the following:

II.12	*ꜣḫ(y)*	'some plants'	*ʾāḥû*	"sedge", "reed"; "marsh", "meadow"
	Gen 41:2, 18; Job 8:11			

II.13	*ꜥr(.t)*	"(lotus) stalk"; "stem"	*ʿārâ*	"reed"
	Isa 19:7			

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[10] This word is attested only as plural *ḥarṭummîm* in Biblical Hebrew.

II.14	*bnd*	"clothing"; "garment (belt?)"	*ʾaḇneṯ*	"sash", "wrap"
	Exod 28:4, 39-40; 29:9; 39:29; Lev 8:7, 13; 16:4; Isa 22:21			

II.15	*pẖ(ꜣ)*	"(wooden) bird trap"	*paḥ*	"trap", "birdtrap"
	Josh 23:13; Job 18:9; 22:10; Ps 69:23; 91:3; 119:110; 124:7 (2x); 140:6; 141:9; 142:4; Prov 7:23; 22:5; Eccl 9:12; Isa 8:14; 24:17-18; Jer 18:22; 48:43-44; Hos 5:1; 9:8; Amos 3:5 (2x)			

II.16	*pẖꜣ*	"plank"	*paḥ*	"metal plating", "metal foil"
	Exod 39:3; Num 17:3			

II.17	*mfk(ꜣ).t*	"turquoise"	*nōp̄ęḵ < *nupk-*	"turquoise"
	Exod 28:18; 39:11; Ezek 27:16; 28:13			

II.18	*nẖt(j/w)*	"strength"; "might"; "victory"	*naḥaṯ*	"power", "strength"
	Isa 30:30			

II.19	*nšm.t*	"green feldspar"	*lęšęm*	"feldspar", "amazonite"
	Exod 28:19; 39:12			

II.20	*nṯri*	"natron"	*nęṯęr*	"natron"
	Prov 25:20; Jer 2:22 Prov 25:30			

II.21	*ry.t*	"ink"	*dᵉyô*	"ink"
	Jer 36:18			

II.22	*hnw*	"hin (unit of measure, ca. 1/2 liter)"	*hîn*	'a liquid measure'
	Exod 29:40 [2x]; 30:24; Lev 19:36; 23:13; Num 15:4-10; 28:5, 7, 14 [3x]; Ezek 4:11; 45:24; 46:5, 7, 11, 14.			

II.23	*ḥnm.t*	"jasper"	*ʾaḥlāmâ*	"red jasper"
	Exod 28:19; 39:12			

II.24	*sktʸ*	'a boat'	*śᵉḵîṯ*	'a ship'
	Isa 2:16			

II.25	*šs*	"alabaster"; "alabaster vessels"	*šeš, šayiš*	"Egyptian alabaster", "travertine"
	Song 5:15; Esth 1:6 [2X]; 1 Chr 29:2			

II.26	*šs*	"linen"	*šeš*	"Egyptian linen"
	Gen 41:42; Exod 25:4; 26:1, passim; Prov 31:22; Ezek 16:10, 13 [2x]; 27:7			

II.27	*qwr* (et sim)	"barge"; "cargo boat"	*kᵉlî*	"ship"
	Isa 18:2			

II.28	*qb(y)*	"jar (for water, for beer)"	*qaḇ*	'a volume measure'
	2 Kgs 6:25			

II.29	*kꜣkꜣ, kyky*	'a plant (med.)'	*qîqāyôn*	"castor-oil plant"
	Jon 4:6-7, 9-10			

II.30	*gstj = *gastV*	"scribe's palette"	*qęsęṭ*	"scribal palette"
	Ezek 9:2,11			

II.31	*ṯwfy / sw*	'a plant'	*sûp̄*	"papyrus", "reed"
	Exod 10:19; 15:4, 22; 23:31; Num 14:25; 21:4; 31:10-11; Deut 1:40; 2:11; 11:4; Josh 2:10; 4:23; 24:6; Judg 11:16; 1 Kgs 9:26; Neh 9:9; Ps 106:7, 9, 22; 136:13, 15; Jer 49:21			

These words can be approached from a conservative perspective, looking only at those that are likely to have been borrowed during the New Kingdom, or with a more tolerant frame, including also the words that cannot be dated with any certainty. Interestingly, the resulting picture does not change much.

First of all, these words appear to belong to a reduced number of semantic domains. In total, we have:

• 9 words referring to precious traded goods, among which we can distinguish 2 items traded from Africa through Egypt (*hŏḇnîm* = "ebony", "African blackwood"; *šęnhabîm* = "ivory"), 5 minerals and precious stones (*ʾaḥlāmâ* = "red jasper"; *lęšęm* = "feldspar", "amazonite"; *nop̄ęḵ* = "turquoise"; *nęṭęr* = "natron"; *šeš, šayiš* = "Egyptian alabaster", "travertine") and 2 words referring to textiles (*ʾaḇnęṭ* = "sash", "wrap"; *šeš* = "Egyptian linen")

• 4 words for containers, all of which could be used in Egypt as measures (*ṭęnęʾ* = "basket", also as a volume measure in Egypt; *ʾêpâ* = 'a certain measure'; *hîn* = 'a liquid measure'; *qaḇ* = 'a volume measure')

• 3 words related with the scribal and administrative domain (*ḥôtām, ḥôtęmęṯ* = "seal", "signet ring"; *dᵉyô* = "ink"; *qęsęṭ* = "scribal palette")

• 3 words referring to types of ships (*ṣî* = "riverboad"; *kᵉlî* = "ship"; *śᵉḵîṯ* = 'a ship')

• 6 words referring to Egyptian plants, 4 of which are types of reeds or herbs (*gomęʾ* = "reed", "rush"; *šiṭṭâ* = "acacia", "acacia wood"; *ʾāḫû* = "sedge", "reed", "marsh", "meadow"; *sûp̄* = "papyrus", "reed"; *ʿārâ* = "reed"; *qîqāyôn* = "castor-oil plant")

• 1 term referring to the military or administrative infrastructure (*baḥan*, which refers to a watch tower in Hebrew, but which in Egyptian seems to have referred to some kind of administrative headquarters, compounds, or estates – see MORRIS, 2005, p. 821–23, 826)

• 1 religious title (**ḥarṭom* = 'a learned magician of the Egyptian court')

• 1 deriving from the power-related ideology (*naḥaṯ* = "power", "strength")

• 3 miscellanea terms (*ḥorî* = a type of cake; *paḥ* = "trap", "birdtrap"; *paḥ* = "metal plating", "metal foil")

As observed by Noonan, a few of these words appear only in two Biblical Narratives set in Egypt (the cycle of Joseph and the Exodus) and in the book of Isaiah. As for Isaiah, the Egyptian words used there often appear in oracles and passages concerned with Egypt, and are probably instances of "addressee-switching", that is the practice of embedding foreign words in prophetic passages concerned with foreign nations (RABIN, 1967, p. 304–5; NOONAN, 2019, p. 77, 169) – this is likely the case for *kᵉlî*, which refers to a kind of ship, *ʿārâ* = "reed", and *naḥaṯ* = "power", "strength" all used in passages concerned with Egypt or Kush. Note that the case of *śᵉḵîṯ*, which refers to a kind of ship and *baḥan*, which refers to some kind of fortified structure, are different: while they are also attested only in Isaiah, they appear in contexts that are not connected with Egypt – in fact, *baḥan* is used to describe a structure build by the Assyrians (see NOONAN, 2019, p. 75 for discussion). Moreover, a form related to *śᵉḵîṯ* might be attested also in Ugaritic (see below), which points to a regional, Late Bronze Age circulation of the term. These two words, therefore, are better understood as real loanwords, rather than as stylistic devises connected with the nature of the biblical passages in which they appear. The book of Isaiah was clearly composed after the New Kingdom and therefore we can assume that the addressee-switching words contained there also reflect a post-New Kingdom familiarity with Egypt, which would exclude them from the scope of the present study.

In the case of Exodus and of Joseph's cycle, at least some of the Egyptian words reflect stylistic factors and were likely used to give the to the narrative a nuance of exoticism and authenticity – this is likely the case for the word *ḥorî*, used only in Joseph's cycle to refer to a type of bread or pastry eaten in Egypt, for the term **ḥarṭom*, used only in Joseph's cycle and in the Exodus narrative to refer specifically to the magicians at the Egyptian court, and for several of the reeds and plants words, which often appear mostly or exclusively in descriptions of the

Egyptian landscape. This suggests that these words retained an Egyptian "flavour" in the mind (and at the time) of the authors of those texts, which in turn suggests some contemporary knowledge of these Egyptian realities. The question, however, is what "that time" is. This is a tricky question, first of all because the original composition and redactional history of the two texts is complex and certainly went through several re-elaborations in various periods. In the case of Exodus, however, there are quite a few linguistic elements pointing to rather late post-New Kingdom/Third Intermediate Period timeframe. First of all the word *teḇâ* = "ark", "basket" must have been borrowed after Egyptian *i > e* development, which points to a late borrowing (hence, this word is not discussed in the present article). Moreover, there are strong hints pointing to a late (likely post-New-Kingdom) origin for at least some of the attested words and toponyms (not considered in this article) in the text. In particular, the name *piṯom* = corresponding to the Egyptian city of *pꜣ-jtm*, *jeʾôr* = "Nile" < Egyptian *jtr* = "river" and *parʿoh* = "Pharaoh" < Egyptian *pr-ꜥꜣ* = "Great House", "Palace", all with a vowel *o* in Hebrew, must have been borrowed after the *a/ā > o/ō* développent of the Egyptian vowels, therefore in the Third Intermediate Period or later.[11] At the same time, the Biblical city of *raʿamses* (and variants) is clearly the Egyptian city of *pr-rꜥmssw* (Piramses). However, the usual New Kingdom form of the name does include the element *pr-*, while the shortened form *rꜥmssw*, without *pr-*, which seems to be reflected in the Hebrew form (also without *pr-*) is attested later, in the 1st millennium BC (VAN SETERS, 2001, p. 264–67). Similarly, while the title *ẖry-tp* (an abbreviation of *ẖry-ḥb ẖry-tp*) is indeed attested in the New Kingdom (QUAEGEBEUR, 1985, p. 167–68), this shortened form becomes common only later, in Late Period and Demotic sources (QUAEGEBEUR, 1985; see also BREYER, 2019, p. 117–18 with refs; NOONAN, 2019, p. 102–3 with refs).

All this suggests that the text must have been reworked at least in its Egyptian literary elements (or composed altogether?) after the New Kingdom, and puts at least some (and potentially most or even all) of the Egyptian words in the Exodus narrative outside the scope of the present article. The case of Joseph's cycle is more ambiguous (see REDFORD, 1970; KITCHEN, 1973; SHUPAK, 2020 for discussion), as there are less obvious post-New Kingdom/Third Intermediate Period borrowings in it. However, the fact that the title **ḫarṯom*

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[11] The development of the vocalization of these words in Egyptian can be reconstructed as: **pvr-jvtˈāmv > *pv-jvtˈōm* (cf. Cpt. B ⲁⲑⲱⲙ), **jˈatrv > *jˈoʔrv* (cf. Cpt. S ⲉⲓⲟⲟⲣ), **pvr-ˈꜥaʔ > *pvr-ˈꜥoʔ* (cf. Cpt. S ⲣⲡⲟ, ⲉⲣⲟ).

= *ẖry-tp* appears there as well might point to a late composition or reworking of the text similar
(and possibly contemporaneous?) to that just suggested for the Exodus.

Now, if we exclude the words attested in Joseph's cycle, Exodus and Isaiah, which are
clearly motivated by the Egyptian connections of those passages, what remains are almost
exclusively words related with trade and economic activities (luxury goods, vessels and
measures, transport ships), and bureaucratic administration (scribal tools, seals, and a word for
what might have been an Egyptian administrative structure). The word *paḥ* = "trap", "birdtrap"
can also be considered as pertaining to the luxury domain and as reflecting a cultural influence
on the Levantine elite culture. This interpretation would correlate well with the archaeological
evidence: as argued by Ido Koch (2014), the evidence for geese keeping and consumption in
Late Bronze Age Lakish is likely attesting Egyptianised feasting (and implicitly hunting?)
practices .

By contrast, we have no word related with military technology, with strictly agricultural
activities, with religious or wider cultural practices, with political administration, and obviously
absolutely no core borrowing. These observations are significant especially in light of the other
evidence discussed in this paper and they will be explored more in detail below, in the general
conclusions.

The word *hîn* = 'a liquid measure' is attested also in an Amarna letter sent from Egypt
to Burna-Buriyaš, king of Babylon (EA 14:III 62). Clearly, the name of this vessel was used by
the Egyptians in their diplomatic and commercial interactions with the Near East during the
Late Bronze Age, and might suggest a context for its transfer in the Canaanite and thus Hebrew.
This word, however, is an exception: beside it, none of the Egyptian borrowings attested in the
Amarna letters appears in Hebrew. There are two distinct problems here: on the one hand, there
are the Egyptian words attested in Hebrew but not attested in the Amarna letters, and on the
other there are the Egyptian words attested in the Amarna letters but not in Hebrew.

As for the first group, different factors and different explanations can be put forward.
To begin with, it is not surprising to see no Egyptian word for Egyptian plants or the like in the
Amarna letters, as the Amarna letters do not contain any literary description of the Egyptian
landscape in the first place. Similarly, while economic and administrative matters are mentioned
in the Amarna letters, they are rarely discussed in strictly administrative terms. The letters
usually bear communications of local rulers, not of their traders or administrators, and their
primary function was diplomatic, not economic. In this perspective, the fact that for instance
the Egyptian vessels and measures attested in Hebrew do not appear in the Amarna corpus

would not be too surprising: simply these were usually not diplomatic matters, and vessels and measures of any type and in any language are overall rare in the letters of the Levantine rulers. At the same time, some of the Egyptian administration-related loanwords attested in Hebrew must have been borrowed before the New Kingdom, but none appears in the Amarna letters: this implies that these words must have existed in the language of the time, but they were clearly not used in the Amarna letters. At the same time, it is also possible that some of the Egyptian words attested in Hebrew were borrowed in the New Kingdom, but *after* the Amarna period – it has often been suggested that the Egyptian administration in the region became more consistent (or even invasive) during and after the 19th dynasty (MORRIS, 2018, p. 187–221), and this might have resulted in a new wave of borrowings. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that one of the features of this 19th dynasty administration appearing from the archaeological record of the Southern Levant is the presence of ostraca written in Egyptian hieratic penned with ink and stylus – these Egyptian scribal practices might provide a suggestive sociocultural context for the transfer of the words *d^eyô* = "ink" and *qẹsẹṭ* = "scribal palette" (see e.g. MORRIS, 2018, p. 202, 212, 220–21, and passim with refs).

Moreover, we have to remember that the Amarna letters were written in Akkadian, a language that did have a rich lexicon covering trade and administrative practices. At the same time, as mentioned, the Egyptian words attested in the Amarna corpus refer primarily to Egyptian-specific realities (such as Egyptian military and administrative titles). Therefore it is also possible that the Egyptian loanwords attested in Hebrew existed already in the Canaanite of the Amarna age, but they do not appear in the Amarna letters simply because the scribes writing them were using Akkadian equivalents whenever possible, and were resorting to Egyptian terms only for uniquely Egyptian terms and/or words that they perceived as somehow "untranslatable".

In this respect, it is interesting to observe that none of the Egyptian words for luxury goods attested in Hebrew is attested in the Amarna corpus. However: *hbn* = "ebony" is attested in Ugaritic (see below), which confirms that the Egyptian word was indeed circulating in the region during the Late Bronze Age. At the same time, most of the goods attested by these Egyptian loanwords in Hebrew do appear in the Amarna corpus, primarily in EA 14 (sent from Egypt) or in EA 22 (sent from king Tušratta of Mitanni), but they are either mentioned using Akkadian words or more often they are written with sumerograms. The latter are very interesting yet very frustrating: sumerograms are signs used as logograms employed to transcribe both Akkadian and Canaanite words. In principle, therefore, we cannot exclude that

sumerograms could also represent the Egyptian borrowings attested in Hebrew, but we cannot demonstrate it either, as there is no clue in the texts about how these signs were actually read – this has to remain an undemonstrated (and currently indemonstrable) speculation.

At any rate, the very fact that the same goods attested as Egyptian loanwords in Biblical Hebrew appear among the goods exchanged between Egypt and the Levant during the Amarna period supports the idea that these words might have been borrowed during the New Kingdom, and even suggests how they could have been transferred: through the trading network that characterized the region at the time. This possibility is further strengthened by the fact that these goods are usually attested together in the Amarna letters, as batches of goods that were being exchanged together. Since these products form coherent, matching "packages" both as items being exchanged in the Amarna period *and* as Egyptian loanwords in Biblical Hebrew, it is reasonable to assume that the two realities are correlated.

Then we have the Egyptian loanwords in the Amarna letters, which did not survive in Biblical Hebrew. There are two questions here: why do they appear in the Amarna letters, while other loanwords do not, and why are they not attested in later periods? These two questions might have a same answer: as we saw above, most of the Egyptian words attested in the Amarna letters (both the widespread ones and those specific to single individuals) are strictly related with specifically Egyptian realities connected with the political-administrative, military, or ideological dimensions of the Egyptian domination. So on the one hand, this "Egyptianness" might explain why they were used in the letters in the first place: the scribes might have felt that Akkadian lacked exact equivalents, or might have simply found it easier to use Egyptian terms to talk about Egyptian realities with their Egyptian overlords. On the other hand, the fact that these terms were clearly associated exclusively with Egypt might easily be the reason why we do not find them in later periods: since these words seem to have been used to refer only to realities connected with the New Kingdom political, military, and administrative infrastructure in the Levant, without being assimilated into the local culture(s), it is reasonable to assume that they simply became obsolete and fell out of use when such infrastructure collapsed and disappeared at the end of the Late Bronze Age.[12]

Finally, while the present paper focuses on the New Kingdom, it is interesting to observe that also the words that were likely borrowed before the New Kingdom seems to pertain to

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[12] Potential parallels to this development can be found easily in other periods and cultures. For instance, Chinese texts from the time of the Mongol domination attest several political, administrative, and military titles, but most of them simply fell out of use and disappeared after the collapse of the Mongol domination at the end of the Yuan dynasty (see e.g. HASPELMATH; TADMOR, 2009, p. 580; HO, 2016; ZU, 2019).

either the domain of trade and commerce, or to that of the (Egyptian) bureaucracy. This suggests that these two areas were a main space of interaction even before the New Kingdom.

Phoenician

The situation for Phoenician-Punic is similar to Hebrew, but somehow worse. As in the case of the Southern Levant, we have no consistent attestation of the Late Bronze Age languages spoken on the Lebanese coast. However, we have quite a few Phoenician inscriptions dating to the Iron Age, and we also have various later Punic texts. Unfortunately, the scope of these texts is rather limited: while we have numerous funerary inscriptions and a few celebratory and diplomatic texts (treaties, dedicatory and celebrative steles and the like), no extensive literary composition or administrative archive is known from the Phoenician world. Our understanding of the Phoenician and Punic lexicon is clearly shaped by this issue: while we have words for several concepts related with these inscriptions, we have no attestation for words related with other domains of the Phoenician-Punic society (including daily realities), where Egyptian borrowings could have existed and could have been more common.

It is thus not too surprising that only two Egyptian borrowings can be identified in Phoenician, namely *ṭbʿt* = "seal" < Eg. *ḏbʿt* (ID III.1), "signet ring" (NOONAN, 2012, p. 180–81) and *ḥtm* < Eg. *ḫtm* = "seal", "sealing", "sealing cylinder" (ID III.2). The first can be excluded because the final *-t* shows it was borrowed before the New Kingdom. The same might be true also for *ḥtm* (see above). However, it is worth noticing that both these words refers to Egyptian administrative practices (i.e. seals) and both are attested also in Hebrew, which suggests that they might reflect of a pre-New Kingdom regional phenomenon (or network?) that resulted in the spread through the Levantine coast of specific Egyptian administrative practices – or at least Egyptian seals. This would actually match well with the archaeological evidence: Egyptian seals, in the form of scarabs, are attested in Lebanon since the Old Kingdom (BOSCHLOOS, 2011–2012) and they become widespread along the Levantine coast (to the point of being also abundantly produced locally) during the Middle Bronze Age, thus before the New Kingdom.

At the same time, the absence of other Egyptian borrowings should be taken with caution, as it might not be the whole picture. In fact, if we compare the Phoenician evidence with the Hebrew one, we notice that most of the Egyptian words attested in Hebrew occur in semantic fields that, simply, are not attested or only poorly in the surviving Phoenician documents. It is thus very possible that these two words were not the only Egyptian borrowings

that Phoenician shared with Hebrew: other words may have existed but are simply not attested due to the specific nature of the surviving Phoenician sources.

Ugaritic[13]

As mentioned above, Ugaritic lied outside the Egyptian sphere of influence during most if not all of the New Kingdom. However, Ugarit is also the only costal city in the region that was in contact with Egypt and which yielded significant textual archives. A look at the Egyptian loanwords attested there, therefore, can be useful to put the fragmentary evidence from Lebanon and the Southern Levant into perspective. First of all, however, a methodological note: Ugaritic sources date to the New Kingdom, so in contrast with Hebrew and Phoenician, we can be sure that any Egyptian word attested there was not borrowed after the New Kingdom. However, like Phoenician, Ugaritic was mostly written only consonantally, and without precise information about the vowel it is often impossible to say if a word was borrowed during the New Kingdom or before it. This said, there are 5 words of possible Egyptian origin in Ugaritic.[14] They are the following:

Likely borrowings:

ID	Egy.	Egy. meaning	Ugaritic	Ugaritic meaning	Attestations DUL
IV.1	*hbn(y)*	"ebony"	*hbn*	"ebony"	DUL 333
IV.2	*ḥtp(t)*	"offering"	*ḥtp*	"a type of sacrifice"	DUL 376

Possible borrowings:

ID	Egy.	Egy. meaning	Ugaritic	Ugaritic meaning	Attestations DUL
IV.3	*jrb*	wine	*irp*	a vessel or container (?)	DUL 105
IV.4	*sktj*	a boat	*ṯkt*	a type of boat	DUL 904-5

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[13] Forms are cited according to the DUL = "A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition" (OLMO LETE, 2003).

[14] There are 4 other words that have been suggested to be Egyptian, namely *aḫ* = "shore" (DUL 36), *ap* = "forecourt" (DUL 87-8), *ary* = "companion" (DUL 111-2), *mk* = "behold!" (DUL 542-3). However they are excluded here because their etymology is contested, because their meaning is unclear or significantly different from the suggested Egyptian sources. Moreover, the actual form and meaning of the word *hn* mentioned by Muchiki (MUCHIKI, 1999, p. 282) is also not clear and the word itself might be a ghost – therefore it is also excluded here.

Pre-New Kingdom borrowings:

IV.5	*qrḫt*	"vessel"	*qlḫt*	pot, cooking pot	DUL 701

Of the 2 likely borrowings, 1 is shared with Hebrew (*hbn*), and it likely reflects the same trading network involving luxury goods discussed for the Hebrew forms. As for the two other words, the term *ḥtp* = "offering" is curious, as it is the only term related with religious/ritual practices attested in the corpus discussed here. Perhaps the archaeological evidence of Egyptian offerings in the temple of Ba'al in the city (see the Egyptian steles dedicated there) could be correlated with this word, and might have provided the socio-cultural context for its transfer. Among the 2 possible words, if the reading *ṯkt* is correct and if it truly refers to ships, then if would be another borrowing shared with Hebrew (see above). No Hebrew parallel, instead, has been identified for *irp*. From the context, it seems to refer to a vessel. Therefore, if the word is truly related with Egyptian *jrp* = "wine" (possibly as "vessel used to drink/transport wine"?), then it would be another trade-related term.

The limited number and primarily trade-related nature of the loanwords in Ugaritic is not surprising and reflects well the reality of the city, which was probably only marginally involved in the Egyptian domination in the Levant, but was a major costal trading hub. At the same time, the fact that most of these (few) words are shared also by Hebrew suggests that these borrowings were not the result of specific Egyptian-Ugaritic interactions, but rather reflect a widespread regional network. One may thus even wonder if these words were really transferred directly from Egyptian to Ugaritic, or if rather they were circulating in the region and Ugaritic was just one step in a chain of borrowings among various languages and dialects of the region.

Finally, the word *qlḫt*, which was likely borrowed before the New Kingdom and shared by Hebrew[15], points once again to the existence of a network of (linguistic) exchanges that predates the New Kingdom itself.

General discussion and conclusions

To sum up: what can we say about borrowings and the linguistic landscape of the New Kingdom Levant? As said at the beginning, the evidence is frustratingly scanty, scattered, and fragmentary, and therefore we cannot expect to reconstruct any complete, detailed picture. Yet,

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[15] Although Ugaritic -ḥ- for Egyptian -ḫ- is unexpected – perhaps the Ugaritic form was not borrowed directly from Egyptian, but might have been transferred through some intermediary.

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what we have does allow us to sketch out at least some of the main elements of that reality. First of all, we can say that some Egyptian words were indeed transferred to local languages during this period. These words can be divided into two main categories. The first were a couple of Egyptian troop-related terms. They were used in the frame of the Levantine-Egyptian diplomatic interactions to refer specifically to realities connected with the Egyptian presence and military-political infrastructure in the region. They do not seem to survive in Biblical Hebrew, possibly because they became obsolete and fell out of use once the Egyptian domination over the Levant came to its end. A few semantically diverse Egyptian words can also be found in letters of the king of Jerusalem and Byblos, and in those written by a scribe of Tyre. Probably these words do not reflect any global phenomenon and probably they were not loanwords commonly used in the region. Rather, they seem to reflect the specific experiences of single individuals that lived in the Levant but had special connections with Egypt and possibly spoke Egyptian. In the case of the king of Jerusalem, it is likely that he spent part of his youth in Egypt, before being installed on the throne of his city. He might have picked up the words and expressions attested in his letters there. The king of Byblos ruled over a city with strong, ancient contacts with Egypt and where the Egyptian language is well attested throughout the centuries (see MONTET, 1928a; 1928b; 1954; 1962; 1964; on the interactions during the New Kingdom see KILANI, 2019). As for the scribe of Tyre, we know nothing about his biography. As mentioned above, perhaps he also spent some time in Egypt (e.g. as an envoy of the kind of Tyre?) or was trained there, or perhaps he was himself of Egyptian origins. Alternatively, it is the king of Tyre that might have been familiar with Egyptian and might have spent some time in Egypt. These words attest of the presence of local, bilingual individuals in the region among the highest classes of the society. However, the fact that only a few such individuals can be spotted in the whole Amarna corpus might suggest that they might have been relatively rare.

The second category is composed of Egyptian words in Levantine languages that describe items, goods, and practices originating in Egypt and/or brought to the Levant by the Egyptians. These terms mostly pertain to the domains of trade, luxury items, and economic and administrative practices and infrastructure (including boats and possibly administrative compounds). They survive in later periods and in Biblical Hebrew they were or could be used to refer to purely local, Levantine realities without any connection with Egypt anymore. This indicates that even though the Egyptians might have originally introduced them, at some point they became fully integrated and assimilated in the Canaanite reality and lexicon. Several of

these terms refer to luxury traded goods, like gemstones, ivory, ebony, and textiles. None of these words are attested in the Amarna correspondence, but the products do appear in a few letters both from Egypt and from Levantine rulers. This attests that these items were indeed traded across the region in the Amarna period. Moreover, the fact that several of the products that are indicated in Hebrew through Egyptian loanwords were exchanged together in the Amarna letters, as part of coherent "batches" or "packages", points to a correlation between the two phenomena. This correlation supports a New Kingdom dating for the borrowings of these words. At least one of these terms is attested also in Ugaritic, which on the one hand confirms that they were known outside Egypt during the Late Bronze Age, and on the other points to the existence of a network that extended across the Levant and touched even a kingdom like Ugarit, that bordered Egyptian-controlled territories but probably had been outside the sphere of direct, strong Egyptian control for most if not all of the New Kingdom.

Moreover, the presence in Phoenician of a couple of Egyptian words for seals shared with Hebrew but likely borrowed before the New Kingdom shows that Egyptian administrative practices (and related terms) spread also before the New Kingdom, pointing to the existence of some network (the same, or a distinct one) already in earlier times.[16]

The "missing words" are also interesting. As said, most of the potentially New Kingdom loanwords in Biblical Hebrew pertain to the domains of trade, economic activities, and bureaucratic administration. By contrast no Egyptian loanword related with military technology, with strictly agricultural activities, with religion, governance or other cultural dimensions, and above all no core borrowings are attested in Hebrew. Obviously we cannot completely exclude that such words did exist and simply are not attested. However, this possibility seems to me rather unlikely: on the one hand these semantic domains are overall well attested in the Bible (and loanwords from other languages do appear in relation with some of these domains – see NOONAN, 2019, p. 235–72), on the other the facts that the Egyptian loanwords discussed in this article appear in Hebrew, and do so in several different contexts, suggests that if a consistent number of Egyptian loanwords existed in the New Kingdom also in these other semantic fields, which are way better represented in the Bible, then at least a few of them should have re-surfaced in Hebrew. This is not the case. This absence might thus be significant and might indeed indicate that few or no Egyptian word related with these domains was borrowed in the Levant in the first place.

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[16] Something that in fact agrees with the archaeological and historical evidence – see e.g. the diffusion of scarabs in pre-New Kingdom Levant (BOSCHLOOS, 2011–2012).

So essentially, the Levantine evidence points to some punctual and stable but likely limited and circumscribed Egyptian presence that did not projected any significant widespread cultural prestige on the local population (none that resulted in widespread borrowings, at least), and which seems to have had an impact on the local languages (and local societies) mostly in the domains of trade and trade-related activities, and administrative bureaucracy. The resulting linguistic influence seems to have been rather loose, but quite widespread, hinting at a network that extended as far as Ugarit.

Finally, what does all this tell us about the contemporary historical and socio-cultural dimensions? We saw in the introduction of this paper that the nature and distribution of loanwords is shaped and thus bears traces of the sociocultural settings in which the linguistic interaction(s) took place. So what do these words tell us about the reality of the time? Can we find any close parallel among the selection of cases discussed at the beginning, and if so which insights do we get about the Egyptian presence and domination in the Levant during the New Kingdom? Obviously, it is important to stress that cross-cultural parallels should not be read as absolute models that can be cast onto the Levantine reality in order to mechanically interpret it – each cultural encounter is unique and it is shaped by unique socio-historical circumstances that lead to unique features and dynamics. However, cross-cultural parallels can be understood as useful starting points for a comparative analysis that looks for common patterns and specific differences, and which aims at identifying the significant features and elements characterizing the situation under study.

So when we look at our evidence the first obvious observation is that Egyptian loanwords indeed entered Levantine languages, which suggests that some linguistic interaction did occur, and that some form of sustained bilingualism was socially possible (as suggested also by the letters of the king of Jerusalem and Byblos, and the scribe of Tyre). This is enough to exclude a scenario like that of North America: the Egyptians were likely not implementing an aggressive segregation-or-full-assimilation policy in the Levant as was often the case of European colonial societies in North America.

At the same time, however, the Egyptian domination was likely significantly different also from the Spanish and Portuguese colonial realities in the Americas. As seen above, the Spanish and Portuguese imperial administrations actively tried to integrate local Indigenous communities within their imperial realities by actively spreading and imposing specific European cultural, economical, and political frames onto them (starting from the Christian religion, and the European political administration, management, and ownership of land), at the

same time creating also social spaces within the colonial societies within which at least some indigenous languages, and some elements of the local indigenous cultures were tolerated and even found some legitimacy. These policies seem to have resulted in relatively widespread stable bilingualism that allowed for consistent linguistic interactions and resulted in the transfer of a substantial number of loanwords, including in the core vocabulary. This does not match well with the picture emerging from the Levant: in particular, the lack in the Levant of core borrowings from Egyptian, and the lack of Egyptian terms in the domains of religion, local political administration, and agriculture and land ownership/administration indicates that the Egyptian presence in the Levant was way less invasive and overreaching than the Spanish and Portuguese ones, and likely did not involve any consistent attempt to integrate the local populations into the Egyptian societies, nor the conscious and organized imposition of Egyptian religious and cultural practices, nor the systematic appropriation and exploitation of the land according to specifically Egyptian methods.

Similarly, the lack of core borrowings and of borrowings related with elite practices (except for traded goods and possibly fowling) set the Levantine case apart also from the Langobardic scenario. While Egyptian individuals certainly lived in the Levant, the linguistic evidence here does not support any major migration or settlement of Egyptian-speaking people there during the Late Bronze Age.[17]

The Frankish example is also different: while in that case Frankish words entered Italian mostly mediated by Latin, the "lingua franca" of the imperial administration, there is no evidence that Akkadian (the diplomatic lingua franca of the time) played a substantial role as intermediary between Egyptian and the local Levantine languages – in fact, it might be significant in this sense that only one among the Egyptian words attested in Canaanite appears in the Amarna letters. The issue of sumerograms does not change the picture significantly either: although it is true that some of them might conceal Egyptian terms, this would at most

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[17] This applies to hypothetical Egyptian settlers, but in fact it applies also to hypothetical originally Levantine people fleeing from Egypt after residing there for a long time. In that case, we would expect such population to have picked up Egyptian words (including core borrowings!) while in Egypt, and then if they moved in great numbers into the Levant and became a politically or numerically dominant component there, we would expect at least some of such Egyptian words to appear in Biblical Hebrew. But this is not the case, which goes against both the idea of a mass migration from the Hyksos territories after the reunification of the country, and against the narrative of the biblical Exodus. This of course does not preclude the possibility of single individuals, or even small groups of people, moving back and forth between the Levant and Egypt for various reasons – in fact as seen above, the Amarna letters do explicitly attested of that. However, the numbers and sociocultural impact of such movements must have been remarkably limited, because no clear distinctive trace of any such phenomenon seems discernable in the linguistic evidence available and discussed here.

concern a few traded goods, but do not match with the array of terms that we see being transferred to Italian through Latin in the Frankish case.

By contrast, the case of Middle High German words in Italian transferred at the time of the Holy Roman Empire provides a rather intriguing parallel. While words were indeed borrowed back then, they were remarkably few and tended either to reflect specific political and administrative realities of the empire, or to belong to a few specific semantic fields. This picture reflects the actual geopolitical reality of the time: while Italy was indeed part of the Empire, no consistent German immigration took place, and while the German-speaking elites of the empire exerted a political dominance over the Italian territories, their direct interference in the local geopolitical reality was rather limited, and so was their overall cultural prestige and influence at the local level, except for a few specific domains. The Egyptian borrowings in the Levant might point toward a similar situation, with a loose Egyptian control that was incarnated mostly by an administrative infrastructure aimed at ensuring the Egyptian grip on specific strategic domains, but which had no will and no interest in actively engaging with and reshaping the local cultural and geopolitical realities. Naturally, the Holy Roman Empire case is a tempting parallel, but it should not be read as an exact twin: notable differences are also present. In particular, while Middle High German words borrowed in Italian pertain to the domain of war, no military-related Egyptian term could be identified in Hebrew. At the same time, and by contrast, Middle High German was not a source of words for precious goods and luxury items for Italian, as instead Egyptian seems to have been for Canaanite.

This might suggest that while overall the Holy Roman Empire and Egyptian dominations might have shared a similar "distant-overlord" framework, their actual manifestations "on the ground" were likely significantly different, with the domination of the Holy Roman Empire having a more militaristic connotation, while the Egyptian one being more bureaucratic and economic/trade-oriented.

This last observation is interesting, and provides both the conclusion of this paper and a starting point for future research. On the one hand, the linguistic evidence presented here and its cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contextualization point to a rather loose Egyptian domination over the Levant, a depiction that seems to agree with the written sources and general archaeological evidence. On the other hand, the question of the actual Egyptian interests in the Levant has been an open question that has proved particularly difficult to answer on the basis of the sole archaeological and written evidence (see MORRIS, 2018 for a recent overview). The linguistic data discussed in this paper add a new dimension, and a new, virtually unexplored

source of information that seems to point to a primarily economic and commercial engagement with the local realities. These data would deserve to be discussed further within a wider perspective that integrates them with other written and archaeological evidence. This, however, is obviously beyond the scopes of the present paper, and has to be left to future research.

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