

RESSOURCENKULTUREN 36

BEYOND ATTRIBUTION?

STYLE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE VISUAL CULTURE
OF THE LATE BRONZE AND IRON AGE NEAR EAST



Editors

Virginia R. Herrmann &
Elisabeth Wagner-Durand

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Martin Bartelheim und Thomas Scholten

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Content

Preface	7
<i>Virginia R. Herrmann and Elisabeth Wagner-Durand</i>	
Beyond Attribution. Directions in the Stylistic Analysis of Visual Culture in the Ancient Near East and Elsewhere	9
 Section I: The Power of Style	
<i>Ido Koch</i>	
Canaanite in Egyptian Style	21
<i>Dirk Wicke</i>	
Between Imitation and Adaptation. Assyrianising Ivories in the Northern Levant	37
<i>Megan Cifarelli</i>	
Style, Multivocality and Resistance in Artistic Production at Hasanlu, Iran	53
<i>Claudia E. Suter</i>	
Stylistic Variation in Levantine Ivory Carvings of the Iron Age. Possible Temporal Developments	73
<i>Virginia R. Herrmann</i>	
Style Across Media. Court Style as a Rhetorical Strategy in the Iron Age Northern Levant	91
 Section II: The Embodiment of Style	
<i>Davide Nadali</i>	
Style: A Manner of Making or a Way of Being? On the Implications and Properties of Style in Creating and Shaping Visual Culture	115
<i>Elisabeth Wagner-Durand</i>	
The Style of a Smile. Style and Emotions Beyond Attribution?!	129
<i>Christoph Huth</i>	
Slow Motion. Style, Performance and Materiality in Prehistoric Temperate Europe	151
 Section III: Critiquing Concepts	
<i>Marian H. Feldman</i>	
An Alternative History of Style and the Art of the Ancient Near East	169
<i>Christoph Uehlinger</i>	
Historicising Style Group Research. A View from a Distance	181
<i>Irene J. Winter</i>	
The Bathwater and the Baby, or the Necessity of Multivariate Analysis. Another Look at Style and Attribution	197

Preface

The conference that lies behind this volume was born from the fortunate overlap of Elisabeth Wagner-Durand's visiting professorship in the Institute for Ancient Near Eastern Studies (IANES) at the University of Tübingen with the second phase of subproject A 06 of SFB 1070 RESSOURCENKULTUREN, led by Jens Kamlah from the Biblical Archaeology Institute and Virginia Herrmann from IANES. Project A 06, called 'Picturing Change: The Development of Iconographic Resources at the Transition from Bronze to Iron Age in the Eastern Mediterranean', investigated the role of the Late Bronze Age visual repertoire as a resource for the reordering of Iron Age societies in this region. The two doctoral case-studies by Giuliana Paradiso and Steve Faust, focusing on architectural sculpture in the northern Levant and cylinder seals in the southern Levant respectively, each needed a working definition of style, a method of stylistic analysis and an approach to interpreting stylistic similarity and difference. The A 06 group began to hold regular meetings with Wagner-Durand to think through this topic. At the same time, another SFB 1070 project in classical archaeology inspired us with its own conference on questions of style in that field called 'Ästhetik vs. Programmatik: Perspektiven der archäologischen Stilmforschung', organised by Martin Kovacs and Martin Dorka-Moreno. These meetings and our readings highlighted for us the great ferment taking place in ancient Near Eastern art history on the topic of style and stylistic analysis – a seeming sea-change in approach that was pushed by theoretical questioning in art history and archaeology more broadly and yet also relied on the great body of empirical and methodological insight built by past generations in our field. We had the idea, therefore, of coming together with some of the leading voices who have, like us, been down in the trenches with problems of style to capture this new state of the art.

We would like to express our thanks to both people and organisations that have supported

this project. First, we would like to thank the SFB 1070 RESSOURCENKULTUREN as well as the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for generously funding the conference on which the volume is based, which took place on Zoom April 12th–14th of 2021. We would have loved to have spent their money on plane and train tickets, as well as hotels, but the Coronavirus had other plans. We would also like to thank our respective academic homes at the time, IANES at the University of Tübingen and the Institut für Archäologische Wissenschaften of the University of Freiburg, and our technical assistant for the conference, Max Braun.

There is no conference without active participants, so we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all those who gave a talk (Dominik Bonatz, Megan Cifarelli, Steve Faust, Marian Feldman, Ann Gunter, Christoph Huth, Ido Koch, Martin Kovacs, Davide Nadali, Aslı Özyar, Giuliana Paradiso, Holly Pittman, Claudia Suter, Christoph Uehlinger, Dirk Wicke, Irene Winter and the editors) and those who kindly chaired a session (Martin Bartelheim, Alexander Heinemann, Jens Kamlah, Sarah Lange-Weber, Martin Dorka Moreno and Andrea Worm). All of them were patient, supportive and enthusiastic even when we all had to accept that meeting in person was not possible. This goodwill and good cheer should not be taken for granted in such troubling times when each of us faced unprecedented challenges.

For undergoing the arduous process of bringing their ideas from the conference to the printed page, we thank all the authors in the volume. In an era when this is difficult to find, we could not have asked for more patient and thoughtful peer reviewers. And finally, we appreciate the effort and care of the editorial staff of SFB 1070.

Virginia R. Herrmann
and Elisabeth Wagner-Durand

Virginia R. Herrmann and Elisabeth Wagner-Durand

Beyond Attribution

Directions in the Stylistic Analysis of Visual Culture in the Ancient Near East and Elsewhere

Keywords: style, art history, archaeology, historiography, attribution, connoisseurship, communication, performance, ancient Near East, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age

Summary

The concept of style has been central to art history and archaeology for most of their disciplinary history but has faced serious critique, especially since the 1960s. While some scholars argue for moving beyond style, others maintain its heuristic value. In the context of ancient Near Eastern archaeology and related disciplines, stylistic analysis has always played a vital role, while still oscillating between promise and challenge. Stylistic analysis has been crucial for questions of attribution, i. e., of origins, workshops, craftspeople, dates, contacts and more. However, recent scholarly perspectives have proposed alternative frameworks, such as understanding stylistic similarities as products of historically contingent communities of shared practices. Furthermore, the intertwined relationship between medium, style and meaning has become an increasingly vital topic. This volume aims to explore these developments and encourage discussions of style beyond (mere) attribution. The assembled papers concentrate on the highly interconnected visual cultures of the Late Bronze and Iron Age Near East, but also include a perspective from prehistoric European archaeology. Common themes of power dynamics in the production and consumption of style, rhetorical uses of style for ideological, aesthetic, or programmatic ends and the embodiment of stylistic production emerge

from these contributions. The final chapters take a historiographic view, assessing how far the connoisseurial approaches of the past have taken us and where the future of visual inquiry will lead.

Framework and Goals

Style – whether as object or method of analysis, it has long been among the most ‘vexed and contentious’ concepts for art historians and archaeologists (Root 2019, 76). After a long reign as ‘indisputable king of the discipline’ (Elsner 2003, 98), culminating in Meyer Schapiro’s confident *précis* (1953), theories of style underwent an extended period of critique, deconstruction and debate beginning in the 1960s.¹ Called into doubt were the supposed transparency or pretheoretical nature of formal classifications, a coherent distinction between form and content, assumptions regarding the causality and linear evolution of stylistic similarity and difference that underlie efforts at ‘reading from style to history’ (Davis 1990, 23) as well as the correspondence between styles and historical entities (i. e., the goal of attribution or connoisseurship). Kubler’s description of style as a ‘rainbow’, always dissolving when one tries to grasp it (1962, 129), came to sound more convincing than Ackerman’s faith in what he still called an ‘indispensable historical tool’ (1962, 227).

¹ See also Brückle et al. 2010, esp. 665. This introduction is intended only as a short orientation, not as a full history of the term style in art history or any other discipline, which can be found in various handbooks and anthologies (e.g., Elsner 2003; Preziosi 1998; Root 2019).

Yet, without a usable concept of style, what would become of disciplines like art history and archaeology that, as Feldman (this volume) notes, puts ‘close analysis of the material, physical, and formal properties and effects of created objects’ at their centre? While some may argue that advancement depends on leaving this concept behind and turning to new questions, theories and tools, this is hardly possible if – as others hold – style is ‘the explanandum for art history and archaeology’, without which ‘we have nothing to talk about’ (Davis 1990, 23) and, ‘for artist and audience, [a] protection against chaos’ (Ackerman 1962, 228). For Richard Neer, the much-maligned work of attribution or connoisseurship is the fundamental perceptual act not only of archaeology and art history, but for any ideas about the past: ‘there is, in short, nothing before or outside style’ (2005, 8).

For ancient Near Eastern² archaeology, whose emergence was deeply entangled with the questions and methods of art history, and particularly with attribution, maintaining confidence in the robustness of style and formal analysis was such an existential matter that the turmoil on this topic in the broader field at first had only a slight impact. Nowhere was stylistic analysis a more vital tool than in the study of the Late Bronze and Iron Age eastern Mediterranean and broader Near East (ca. 1600–330 BCE).

The city-states and empires of these periods, interacting through gift exchange, tribute, trade, warfare, migration and deportation, left behind a rich repertoire of visual media such as sculpture, ivories, metalwork, seals and jewellery. The prodigious mobility of images, objects, people and ideas generated by this interaction sphere that spanned thousands of kilometres has created both great promise and great challenges for the study of the visual cultures of these periods. Issues of attribution, origin, influence and hybridity have understandably dominated the field. With external evidence often lacking, stylistic analysis has been crucial for the interpretation of

the origin and date of artefacts and the contacts and relations between regions. The discovery of artefacts in non-local styles served as a quasi-independent confirmation of historical evidence for Late Bronze Age diplomatic exchanges, Egyptian and Assyrian imperial occupation, plunder and tribute as well as Iron Age Mediterranean trade and ‘colonisation’. Artefacts showing elements of multiple regional styles were used as evidence not only of contact and influence, but also of asymmetrical power relations and cultural hegemony. In particular, the large collection of what have been called Syro-Phoenician ivories found primarily at the Assyrian capital Nimrud – and therefore far from the presumed context of their original production and use – has presented an enormous historical puzzle of classification, attribution and provenance (G. Herrmann 2005; see the contributions of V. Herrmann, Suter, Uehlinger, Wicke and Winter in this volume), and so has driven a good part of the methodological and theoretical discussion of style in this field.

In a 1998 essay that took the Syro-Phoenician ivories as one of its case studies, Irene J. Winter pointed to the multivocality of style as at once a characteristic inherent to the work that is ‘apparent to the perceiver’ (Winter 1998, 56) and the product of an external analyst. With Goodman (1975), she denied that we could meaningfully set aside content from form, arguing that style ‘(1) cannot be divorced from meaning in any study of the affective properties of the work, and (2) should be considered in any historical analysis of meaning’ (Winter 1998, 57). Although Winter engaged there with the epistemological problems in stylistic analysis that were under discussion in the broader field, this work did not portend any revolution against stylistic analysis or crisis of confidence in the positivist possibility of attribution among art historians of the ancient Near East. Specialists in this material, and in particular those interested in Late Bronze Age and Iron Age portable arts (*Kleinkunst*), pragmatically chose not to throw the baby out with the bathwater (see Winter, this volume; Uehlinger, this volume). The door had been opened to more critical perspectives on stylistic analysis, however.

This included discussion of the stylistic criteria for identifying production entities of different

2 ‘West Asia’ (or ‘Southwest Asia’) is now the term that many prefer as less Eurocentric for this region of the ancient world and, as several papers in this volume note, the nomenclature used in classificatory schemes can introduce or perpetuate biases. However, since the chapters on this region use ‘Near East’, we maintain its use for consistency here.

scales (e.g., hand, workshop, school, tradition: e.g., Winter 2005), a closer attention to technological style over the usually privileged pictorial style (e.g., Caubet 2002) and the relationship between ‘major’ (monumental/non-portable) and ‘minor’ (portable) arts (e.g., Winter 1989; Thomason 2014). In addition, discussions of visual ‘hybridity’ of objects recovered on the edges of empires (e.g., Feldman 2006, 59–72; Kühne 2009) replaced an earlier judgmental discourse on ‘provincial’ ‘Assyrianising’ or ‘Egyptianising’ style³ (but see Feldman, this volume, on more fundamental Eurocentrism in the use of style in ancient Near Eastern art history).

As attribution studies of the Syro-Phoenician ivories and other *Kleinkunst* became ever more sophisticated and Morellian, however, some specialists grew increasingly critical of the robustness of the methodology of connoisseurship and attribution studies for this material in the absence of other historical evidence (di Paolo 2009; Gunter 2009; Suter 2010; Feldman 2014). Adding to the near impossibility of defining discrete stylistic boundaries, other evidence suggests that certain styles were not specific to a single place, time or ‘workshop’ (see Affanni 2009; Onnis 2009). Feldman, drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, proposed instead an understanding of stylistic similarities and differences as denoting historically contingent ‘communities of shared practices’ (Feldman 2014, 40). These dispersed, shifting and overlapping social networks came through interaction to a common way of doing and seeing (Feldman 2014, 58–61).

Furthermore, while Gombrich already in 1958 heavily critiqued the ‘physiognomic fallacy’ in art history that drew from the Hegelian notion of bounded and stable collectivities (see also Gombrich 2009), and the straightforward equation of material culture styles with social groups has long been disavowed in the archaeology of Near Eastern prehistory (Kramer 1977; Kamp/Yoffee 1980), the (often tacit) idea that certain visual styles are an ‘expression’ of local or ethnic identity or ethos has been much more durable in the study of later

periods in this region. Scholars critiquing the persistent essentialist tendencies in scholarship on the Late Bronze and Iron Age Near East propose instead to see shared stylistic practices as active means of social boundary and identity construction and negotiation (Feldman 2006; 2014, 62 f.; Tamur 2017; Cifarelli et al. 2018; Osborne 2021).⁴

Finally, just as Winter (1998) had already called into question the analytical separability of form (style) and content (meaning) (see also, e.g., Evans 2014), the intertwining of medium (material) with both style and meaning has been brought to the fore for ancient Near Eastern art (e.g., Onnis 2014; di Paolo 2015; 2018; V. Herrmann 2021).

The goal of the 2021 (virtual) Tübingen conference and resulting volume was to encourage and explore the trend in visual culture studies of the Late Bronze and Iron Age eastern Mediterranean and ancient Near East to treat stylistic analysis as a lens that looks ‘beyond attribution’ and to connect this work with that of colleagues working in affine disciplines with similar challenges but different material and intellectual histories. The title of the conference, ‘Beyond Attribution?!’, was deliberately provocative with its indecisive punctuation and left ambiguous whether we were asking contributors to think outside of the traditional questions we ask of style or to abandon the impulse to attribution altogether. The call for papers spoke of an ‘emerging paradigm shift’ sparked by the above-mentioned critiques of the basis of attribution claims for the ‘Syro-Phoenician’ ivories and of the mapping of stylistic traits onto ethno-linguistic groups, a view considered hyperbolic by Uehlinger (this volume), who stresses instead the building of our methodological and theoretical apparatus across generations.

What would it mean to move ‘beyond attribution’? We agree with Neer (2005) that archaeology in particular would be an empty shell if we could

³ See also around the same time Gunter’s critique of the discourse on the ‘Orientalising’ style in the Iron Age eastern Mediterranean (Gunter 2009).

⁴ See Shanks/Tilley (1992, 144–146), Feldman (2014, 60–64) and Tamur (2017, 10) on how style can play an active social role regardless of the intentions or conscious awareness of the producers or consumers. These authors draw from the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens to, as Tamur (2017, 10) writes, ‘transcend the separation of active and passive style by reframing the issue within practical and discursive consciousness’.

have no confidence that classification and typology can be meaningful or that the ‘constant form’ of a set of artefacts (Schapiro 1953, 287) may have an indexical relationship to their common origin. Stylistic analysis and arguments about attribution may be a ‘language game’ rather than approximations of an objective truth, but it is a language we speak intersubjectively within the great hermeneutical circle of history (Neer 2005, 22–26). Attribution is an integral part of archaeology and art history. But need it be the prime objective of the explanation and interpretation of style?

We would suggest that the (significant) work of disentangling the origins and influences of mobile artefacts has often crowded out the search to understand the means and motives of the entanglement itself. Schapiro himself famously criticised that archaeologists rather consider style ‘as a diagnostic means than for its own sake as an important constituent of culture’ (Schapiro 1953, 287). Some of our colleagues have already shown, however, that style has ‘affective properties’ (Winter 1998) and can be ‘a way into social history’ (Root 2019, 95), even in ancient contexts, through its role in (conscious or unconscious) performance and communication. Through this conference and volume, we hoped to push these themes further and found many colleagues willing and eager to journey with us beyond attribution.

Topics and Thematic Structure

The highly interconnected visual cultures of the Late Bronze and Iron Age Near East and Eastern Mediterranean, where stylistic analysis has played such an important role, were the primary focus of the conference and volume. To encourage the cross-pollination of ideas with related disciplines, however, we also invited contributions from colleagues working on similar problems in Classical Archaeology and European Prehistory (although only the latter case-study is included in the published volume). While ivory studies have long held a central place in methodological and theoretical discussions of style for the ancient Near East, and several chapters deal with this material, the volume also gathers specialists in monumental sculpture and reliefs, seals, metalwork, vase painting

and even non-representational hand axes. It covers a wide geographic range from western Europe to western Iran and spans from the 5th mill. BCE to the 5th cent. CE. The contributions have not been organised geographically or chronologically, however, but thematically, into three sections:

- I. The Power of Style;
- II. The Embodiment of Style; and
- III. Critiquing Concepts.

The Power of Style

The first five chapters share a common theme of the power dynamics at play in the production and consumption of style in the Bronze and Iron Age Near East. The case studies from Ido Koch, Dirk Wicke and Megan Cifarelli each confront the normative lens through which we view imperial or hegemonic style and trace varied responses to it outside the centres of imperial power. In Claudia Suter’s and Virginia Herrmann’s papers, meanwhile, geopolitical shifts over time offer explanations for stylistic difference within a heterogeneous corpus (Suter) and stylistic similarities across different media (Herrmann) that do not require essentialising assumptions of static identities. Style is construed in these papers as an instrument by which ancient actors could position themselves within a political landscape where local audiences matter as much or more than those of overlords.

In his study of south Levantine stamp seals and scarabs of the 2nd mill. BCE (‘Canaanite in Egyptian Style’), Koch tackles anew the mechanics and meaning of what has sometimes been termed ‘Egyptianisation’ of Canaanite (south Levantine) visual language in the colonial context of this period. Rejecting simplistic use of scarab finds as an index of Egyptian presence or ‘influence’, he traces a complex history of Canaanite-Egyptian entanglement through changes in the importation or local production of these seals, the reproduction or adaptation of Egyptian motifs or their substitution by local ones over a millennium. In some cases, it is only by the most careful investigation – or sometimes not at all – that we can attribute particular types to a place of production, complicating what the labels ‘Canaanite’ and ‘Egyptian’ mean in this context. Even against the backdrop of Egyptian

domination, Koch accords agency to local producers and consumers in the ability to accept or reject imperial manners and meanings.

In his chapter on the Iron Age Near Eastern ivories ('Between Imitation and Adaptation: Assyrianising Ivories in the Northern Levant'), Wicke takes our ability to make at least broad geographic attributions through style as a given. For him, however, the similarities and differences we identify are not merely a function of geographic or social distance, but also of political stance toward a hegemonic imperial style, i. e., in this historical setting, that of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Contrasting his approach with an earlier tendency to valorise the imperial style as normative and see 'Assyrianising' art as the product of a bumbling provincial ineptitude, Wicke outlines a distinction between two types of emulative behaviour: the imitative, which seeks identity with the imperial model, and the adaptive, which uses careful selection and rejection of elements of the model to construct something new and deliberately distinctive.

Cifarelli's contribution on one of Assyria's eastern neighbours ('Style, Multivocality and Resistance in Artistic Production at Hasanlu, Iran') further undercuts past assumptions about the power dynamics of stylistic influence. She discusses how not only our analytical bird's eye as art historians that allows for the attribution of stylistic and iconographic traits as endogenous or exogenous, but also the bias of Western scholars that privileges imperial styles like that of Iron Age Assyria as a somehow inevitable model for emulation may distort interpretations of stylistic entanglement in situations of asymmetric power. Context provides an antidote to this distortion. Looking closely at metal belts of elite men at Hasanlu, Iran, in the 10th–9th cent. BCE, Cifarelli shows how the elements we identify through attribution as showing Assyrian 'influence' derived meaning from local histories of collection, curation and display of imported objects, rather than from awe of contemporary imperial power and prestige.

The Nimrud ivories, one of the most famous test cases for theories of style in the ancient Near East, return as a topic (and not for the last time in this volume) in the chapter by Suter ('Stylistic Variation in Levantine Ivory Carvings of the Iron Age: Possible Temporal Developments'). The particular

circumstances of the deposition of ivories of non-Assyrian appearance in Assyrian palaces has tended to place the focus of study on the place of origin of these carvings, an attempt to read geography from style. A regional nomenclature – North Syrian, South Syrian and Phoenician – was applied to the three major non-Assyrian stylistic classes or 'traditions' identified in this corpus (by positing a correlation between Egyptian influence in style and iconography and proximity to Egypt, as V. Herrmann describes in her chapter). The question of chronological development seemed intractable given the ivories' secondary deposition. In the context of recent doubts raised about the idea of discrete local styles in the Iron Age Levant and the alternative proposal to understand stylistic similarity and variation as the result of broader regional networks of producers and consumers, Suter comes back to chronology as a factor for understanding the ivories' variability, however. She also proposes that an updated nomenclature – Levantine-1 to -3 – for the larger style 'traditions' allows a more objective perspective on both their distinguishing characteristics beyond iconography and stylisations and their relationship to each other. Suter's conclusion that there was a chronological, rather than geographical, shift from the Bronze Age traditions carried on in the Levantine-1 ('North Syrian') group throughout the Levant to the later adoption of more Egyptian elements in the Levantine-2 ('Phoenician') and Levantine-3 ('South Syrian') groups, in parallel to political developments in the wider region, further erodes the essentialist thesis that style is generated by the stable identity of a bounded collectivity.

Herrmann's study ('Style Across Media: Court Style as a Rhetorical Strategy in the Iron Age Northern Levant') re-examines the premise of earlier attribution studies for the Nimrud ivories that rested on stylistic comparison with contemporary, but less readily mobile stone reliefs and sculptures. These cross-media styles raise questions that get at the heart of debates about the origins of stylistic similarity, whether arising from intrinsic commonality of the producers or processes of learning and imitation between them; whether purely habitual or self-consciously rhetorical. She mobilises Davis's (2011) notion of 'stylisticality' to envision scenarios in which a

producer's own way of making may have come into conscious awareness as a particular 'style', allowing it then to be either replicated or changed in a knowing, rather than habitual, fashion. Here, too, politics are the theme, since the development of a 'court style' that is replicated across multiple state-sponsored media requires us to reconstruct an episode of stylisticality or recognition and replication of style, whether taking place in imperial Assyria or – under certain historical circumstances – among the small territorial states of the Iron Age northern Levant. In the latter case, this strategy for local distinction in the luxury crafts may be considered a counterpart to the regionally networked production proposed by Feldman (2014) and Suter (2015) and could account for certain striking cases of stylistic overlap between the ivories and other media.

The Embodiment of Style

Another set of papers hews in quite the opposite direction from the explorations of the knowing employment of style in the previous section; instead of the mind, they locate style firmly in the body, and these bodies not only do, but also see and feel in culturally distinct ways.⁵

The chapter by Davide Nadali makes the case for a concept of 'perceptual style' ('Style: A Manner of Making or Way of Being? On the Implications and Properties of Style in Creating and Shaping Visual Culture'). Nadali proposes to expand Baxandall's (1988) notion of a 'period eye' into a 'period body', a version of *habitus* that envelops style as a way of making into a way of perceiving and, more broadly, being. Beyond the artworks in which we usually seek to identify style, this period body affects or determines the broader reality in which people live, which then acts back on them in turn: 'style makes the world visible'. Nadali applies his phenomenology of style and his archaeological approach toward the intericonicity of images to case studies from the Late Bronze and Iron Age Levant. Considering the debate that swirls around

interpretation of the similarities of Late Bronze Age wall paintings from Qatna, Syria, to those in the Aegean, he follows von Rüdén's (2014) thesis that interpretation of their style and meaning depended on the 'perceptual style' of the beholder, which was shaped in turn by the beholder's origin. For Nadali, the influence of perceptual style also explains both the generic qualities and the variability of the frequently replicated image of the Storm God throughout the Iron Age northern Levant and southern Anatolia – a complex interaction of various makers and beholders resulted not only in subtle differences of appearance, but also in differences of the interpretation and identification of the divine being represented.

Next, the enigmatic smiles on Iron Age ivory faces lead Elisabeth Wagner-Durand into an exploration of not only the affective power of style in objects, but also the culturally constructed 'style' of emotions themselves and their associated bodily *habitus* ('The Style of a Smile: Style and Emotions Beyond Attribution?!'). Like layers of an onion, Wagner-Durand peels back levels of style within and behind the depiction of an emotional state in an object, such that the line between 'style' and 'culture' becomes blurred. Taking an approach akin to Feldman's search for a Mesopotamian concept of style (see Section IV), she attempts to uncover the emic associations of smiles and laughter by surveying ancient Near Eastern texts. While the hard-won insight these provide suggests that the ivory smiles communicated volumes to ancient viewers, they thereby become even more mysterious to the modern analyst who realises she can never fully inhabit the ancient Levantine emotional style.

Moving westward in 'slow motion' ('Slow Motion: Style, Performance and Materiality in Prehistoric Temperate Europe'), Christoph Huth critiques the relative lack of discussion of style (as opposed to typology) in the archaeology of prehistoric Europe as compared to the ancient Near East and Mediterranean. For him, style is not a superficial mark of the maker, but a manner of creating meaning through continuous action that is deeply embedded in the cultural *habitus* of the continent. From jade axes of the 5th–4th mill. BCE to Celtic ornaments of the 1st mill. BCE, Huth finds stylistic continuity in the value placed on change

⁵ Compare, e.g., Descola's (2021) typology of human ontologies and theory of their relationship to modes of figuration.

and transformation, whether of the material itself or of the perception of the beholder. Huth emphasises the performative and bodily aspects in the making of the objects that in turn leads to their visibly discernible style, a distinct materiality that only comes into being because of the transformative acts taking place with objects such as the jade axes. Here, the material world is shaped by actions, which in turn (re-)shape aesthetic values and modes of thinking of the world; by performing and perceiving them, these become inscribed into the body. Style thus becomes a lived bodily practice.

Critiquing Concepts

The final papers in the volume take a step back and survey the history of the style debate in ancient Near Eastern art history. These acts of historiography lead the authors toward different assessments of the connoisseurial approaches of the past and their value for the future, as, respectively, compromised (Feldman), complementary (Uehlinger) or additive (Winter).

Marian Feldman's contribution ('An Alternative History of Style and the Art of the Ancient Near East') takes a deconstructionist approach to the concept of style as used in the art history of the ancient Near East. She probes how style as a heuristic concept owes its framing and even its historiography to colonialist narratives of progression from the ancient Orient to the modern West and the project to define a Western identity opposed to that of an other. Taking a postcolonial or decolonial viewpoint, she challenges the uncritical use of 'style' as ethically compromised, giving examples such as how the study and very definition of a 'Phoenician art' valorises an Egyptian aesthetic that has been appropriated for white Europeans and degrades deviations from its normative conventions. Feldman points out that Irene Winter's seminal work over the past three decades to define Mesopotamian aesthetic concepts using indigenous concepts and vocabulary, rather than those of the modern West, has put ancient Near Eastern art history in the vanguard of the turn to a global art history that decentres Eurocentric interpretations, but that this effort hits a stumbling block

when it comes to 'style' *per se*. An explicit concept and developed vocabulary for visual properties that result from particular traditions or habits of making seems to be lacking in available ancient texts. What does this lack mean for the utility of applying contemporary stylistic analysis to the creations of these cultures? For Feldman, the answer depends on what we want this (admittedly non-universal and presentist) tool to do for us, and whether we can appropriately recognise the contingency of the lenses we use.

The essay by Christoph Uehlinger ('Historicising Style Group Research: A View from a Distance') responds to Feldman's earlier work on style (2014) and to the titular premise of this volume. He urges us to put the idea of moving 'beyond attribution' into the perspective of intellectual history and reckons that the current influence of social theory and interest in themes such as identity, memory and mobility are a product of our times, just as the authority of connoisseurship and the goal of attribution to an ethno-national group were reflections of the preoccupations of previous generations. Rather than drawing stark dichotomies or talking of paradigm shifts in the study of ancient Levantine art, Uehlinger counsels us to look for what is complementary or useful in both approaches, while always seeking to be more self-reflective about our assumptions and biases.

The volume concludes with a retrospective look on the issue of style by Irene J. Winter, a scholar whose body of work has pushed the field of ancient Near Eastern art history 'beyond attribution' and stylistic analysis more generally to probe deeper iconological and aesthetic aspects of these culturally distant works ('The Bathwater and the Baby, or the Necessity of Multivariate Analysis: Another Look at Stylistic Attributes'). Reflecting on changes in the field over the past decades, Winter identifies an ever-broadening scope of inquiry, expanded by new theoretical approaches, methodologies and ethical perspectives that call for a new type of polymath who can combine the deep knowledge of our study material with a broad interdisciplinary facility. She encourages us to save the 'baby' (a historically and analytically meaningful concept of 'style'), while cleaning up the 'bathwater' (flawed methodologies, assumptions and biases), seeing a path forward for stylistic analysis

in both critical reflection and more sophisticated, even quantitative methodologies.

Conclusion

The studies assembled here show vividly that style is far from a dead letter for archaeology and art history, especially in highly dynamic contexts like those of the Late Bronze and Iron Age Near East and eastern Mediterranean. The themes that emerged – in particular a more serious reckoning with unconscious biases in the discipline (and their reflection and perpetuation through the nomenclatures of stylistic classification) and the embedding of style in more elemental and embodied ways of being – are not necessarily those expected from the outset of the conference, though they are of our moment. Most papers emphasise the communicative aspects of style, although a divergence can still be seen between treatments of style as active, and even strategic, in shaping identities and positions or as a more unconscious and innate performance.

Importantly, these papers, each of which must draw on attribution hypotheses to some extent for its broader argument, are evidence that we cannot truly quit the primary archaeological act of attribution, even if we must interrogate it more deeply. Although we may always need attribution, together with the methodological apparatus worked out by our teachers, in order to construct a generally convincing historical foundation for the objects of study, this volume shows that this need not be the end-point of our inquiry. Rather, the study of style can bring us beyond mere etiological diagnosis and normative or unreflected expectations toward a fuller sense of the expressively and dynamically fashioned sociomaterial world of the past.

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Section I: The Power of Style

Ido Koch

Canaanite in Egyptian Style

Keywords: southern Levant, Egypt, colonial encounters, scarabs, conoids

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Summary

This contribution explores the development of a Canaanite visual language in Egyptian style as the outcome of centuries of colonial encounters between the Canaanites and the Egyptian empire and its agents during the Late Bronze Age. Using the medium of scarabs, Egyptian seal-amulets that existed in Egypt as early as the mid-3rd mill. BCE and were embraced by people living in the southern Levant since the early 2nd mill. BCE, it is argued that multifaceted encounters involving elite persons, artisans and other actors led to the transmission of knowledge that allowed local artisans in the southern Levant to manufacture artefacts from specific materials and using techniques in a sequence of actions that produced an Egyptian style. By the end of the process, artisans in both Egypt and the southern Levant shared what scholars would call Egyptian style, complicating the distinction between the two loci of production.

Introduction

Southern Levantine archaeological assemblages feature changes in appearance during significant parts of recorded history. ‘Local’ shapes in clay, stone and metal were augmented, and sometimes replaced, by ‘foreign’ shapes, known earlier in neighbouring regions. Artefacts are conventionally labelled based on their supposed geographical origins, but ethnic labels also appear in the literature, suggesting that the assumed social belonging of the maker likewise indicates that of the consumer. In the more extreme applications of such an approach, scholars have followed culture-historical models and interpreted these artefacts as indicating the presence of newcomers, reconstructing population turnovers in tandem with assumed historical events. Such scholarly perception has been vividly expressed in the study of the southern Levant during the Late Bronze Age (16th–12th cent. BCE), the days of the Egyptian Empire. A wide distribution of Egyptian-style artefacts across the southern Levant characterises the period, especially in the southwestern coastal plain and Jezreel Valley (*fig. 1*), and most scholars have quite understandably considered these artefacts to be Egyptian-made. For some scholars, these artefacts even indicate Egyptian presence.

Nonetheless, things are more complex than usually described. Several categories of artefacts that scholars (sometimes wrongly) described as Egyptian have been re-evaluated, and their production localised instead in the southern Levant. Ivory plaques are a fine example (Barnett 1982; Leibowitz 1987; Bryan 1996). Although characterised as Egyptian in style, several components in these artefacts reflect their Canaanite provenance. One set of plaques found at Tell el-Far‘ah (S) depicts a combination of marsh and banquet scenes unknown in Egypt, where these motifs have a separate tradition of depiction (Lilyquist 1998, 26, 28;



Fig. 1. Map of the southern Levant, showing locations mentioned in the text (map by author; basemap: I. Ben-Ezra).

Ziffer 2005, 150). The second set, found in the famous hoard from Megiddo Stratum VIIA, depicts a sequence of a return from battle followed by a banquet that finds its roots in Levantine banquet scenes (Ziffer 2005, 151–154).

Stamp seals form another category of objects that early scholarship has considered Egyptian.

The conventional wisdom associates the scarab (a stamp-seal shaped as a dung-beetle) as a symbol of ancient Egypt and the thousands of specimens found across the southern Levant have been considered imports from Egypt and sometimes as attesting to an Egyptian presence. Yet over the past decades, several studies (e.g., Ben-Tor 2007

on scarabs of the 19th–16th cent. BCE) have demonstrated that several groups of scarabs, some amounting to hundreds of exemplars, were produced in the southern Levant. These groups are similar in appearance to their Egyptian counterparts to the point that they differ only in the layout and syntax of the motifs engraved on their bases.

By focusing on stamp seals, this contribution chronologically reviews several cases of local craftspeople employing Egyptian style, that is the manufacture of an artefact from materials, using techniques and a sequence of actions that produce features similar to artefacts known from Egypt. It further suggests a framework for the spread of these practices among southern Levantine artisans as part of extensive colonial encounters during the 400 years of Egyptian rule over the region. In a nutshell, constant exposure to Egyptian imagery and practices and diffusion of Egyptian know-how to local workshops created an entangled Canaanite visual language that was very Egyptian in its style but with marked localism that surfaced when artisans (mis-)translated variants of Egyptian images and – sometimes – added local images. Furthermore, it is argued that this visual language continued in some parts of the southern Levant despite the collapse of the Egyptian Empire, while in other parts, it was rejected and replaced by a completely different repertoire.

The Canaanite-Egyptian Interaction During the 2nd Millennium BCE: A Short Outline

Communities located in the southern Levant and the Nile Valley have interacted since time immemorial. People and artefacts have easily crossed the sixty-hour walking distance between the eastern branch of the Nile and Wadi Gaza/Naḥal Besor.¹ This constant movement brought an ex-

change of ideas and practices that shaped societies in both regions, although the Egyptian-based side was dominant for most of recorded history. In some episodes, rulers of the Nile Valley imposed their dominance over the southern Levant. The earliest instance took place in the late 4th mill. BCE, but the Egyptian colonial initiative was abandoned after less than two centuries and the Egyptians turned their attention to the northern Levant and established direct maritime contact through Byblos (Höflmayer/Eichmann 2014; Greenberg 2019, 57–64). Following that, despite the closeness of the southern Levant to the Delta, only a meagre number of artefacts from the 3rd mill. BCE seem to have arrived from Egypt.

In the early 2nd mill. BCE, the connections between the Delta and the southern Levant strengthened with the migration of Levantines to Egypt and the intensification of maritime trade (Mourad 2015; 2021). In this context, southern Levantine groups appropriated Egyptian visual language and used it for their own needs, and Egyptian practices, such as using scarabs, which became the favourite component of local charm practices (see further below).

A better-known episode of Egyptian colonialism in the southern Levant began in the second half of the 16th cent. BCE, when rulers of the 18th Dynasty in Egypt launched campaigns to the northeast (for an overview of the period, see Morris 2005; 2018; Bunimovitz 2019). This military manoeuvre marked the commencement of a period of four centuries during which Egyptian power intensified and developed into a full-blown political hegemony that altered the local landscape and transformed the local society in the southern Levant, known at that time as Canaan. The Canaanite²-Egyptian interactions developed and intensified as years went by and the various sides became better acquainted. Means of control such as colonial hubs, garrisons and officials became increasingly complex, reaching their zenith by the mid-13th cent. BCE. Just as it had been 1500 years earlier, in a pattern that would continue

¹ This is the ca. 250km between the centres of the eastern Delta – Avaris (Tell el-Daba'), Piramesses (Qantir) and Tanis (Šān al-Ḥaḡar) – and the closest southern Levantine centres in the region of Gaza. Traffic along this route has been documented during periods of investment in infrastructure from the Egyptian side (terming it 'the Ways of Horus') and archaeological studies have explored several of these installations established by the Egyptians during the 2nd and 1st mill. BCE; some have contributed to the reconstruction of the multiple changes in the geography of the coastline of northern Sinai

over the past millennia due to sediments brought by the Nile (Hoffmeier/Moshier 2013).

² Canaanite(s) is defined here as toponym-based labelling of the inhabitants of Canaan, the southern Levant, during the Late Bronze Age (in contrast to its usage as an ethnonym).

for millennia, the Egyptian presence was primarily concentrated in the region of Gaza, with minor branches along the coast and further inland. These colonial enclaves were surrounded by a rural landscape divided into a mosaic of small socio-political units governed by an elite based in small centres, such as Lachish, Gezer, Megiddo and Tyre (an urban exception being Hazor).

During this long period, agents based in the colonial centres and the local settlements and individuals and groups that travelled between Egypt and the southern Levant interacted in intense colonial encounters (see overview in Koch 2021, 45–70). Participating in and exposed to numerous encounters, various agents gradually changed their practices. Across the southern Levant, but more profoundly in its southwest, the local elite produced their own versions of Egyptian practices in fields such as architecture, foodways and burial customs, among others. The most telling aspect is Egyptian imagery. Egyptian motifs had already been localised by southern Levantines since the Middle Bronze Age, but their number and variety grew and had a more significant presence during the Late Bronze Age (Keel/Uehlinger 1998; Schroer 2011). One prominent channel of exchange was the translation of deities into local contexts, both Levantine deities in Egypt (Tazawa 2009; Quack 2015) and Egyptian deities in the southern Levant (Koch 2021, 45–53). At the same time, local imagery persisted in other media, most visibly seen on pottery decoration (Choi 2016).

In reconstructing the agency involved in these interactions, and hence in the movement of ideas and objects from Egypt to Canaan and *vice-versa*, individuals with diverse roles should be considered (Koch 2019a, 175 f.). Think of merchants who brought materials and artefacts and artisans who learned how to produce local versions of Egyptian prototypes, as exemplified by the diffusion of Egyptian pottery-making means to local potters (Martin 2011; and see below). Above all, the local elite had an essential role. As argued elsewhere (Koch 2019b; 2021), the social order in the southern Levant was shaped by interaction with the Egyptians. Local rulers interacted with the Egyptian court for centuries, visited it and were, perhaps, among the audience of royal festivals. In addition, children of Levantines rulers

were educated in Egypt as early as the days of Thutmose III (15th cent. BCE); some served in the Egyptian army and administration before rising to power as rulers in Levantine centres. There is no doubt that these long sojourns in Egypt, or even the shortest visit, were remarkable, memorable experiences that might initiate a change in behaviour, perhaps through objects taken from Egypt that thus embodied these memories. These were later integrated into the daily practices of their owners, who fashioned themselves with attributes that could additionally have been used as status markers and might have encouraged the production of local versions of such artefacts.

On the Egyptian side, imperial agents, including officials and priests, had a significant role in these interactions, as they were based in colonial and local centres. While they are termed ‘Egyptian officials’, agents with Canaanite names were active in the colonial administration since the 14th cent. BCE. Those born in the southern Levant who advanced in the colonial administration could easily communicate with the locals. Hence, they were valuable mediators to deliver the court’s messages and their own interpretations of Egyptian ideas and practices. At the same time, they were channels through which Canaanite ideas spread to the Egyptian audience (Koch 2019a).

It should be pointed out that in such a setting, the archaeological distinction between the ethnonyms ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Canaanite’ becomes somewhat blurred. Even in the colonial centres, no single context can be defined as ‘purely’ Egyptian – if such a definition ever existed. Instead, agents from diverse backgrounds held various functions. They met at multiple points located in Egypt, in the colonial centres in Canaan, and at the neighbouring local centres – a multi-nodal colonial meshwork that produced the entangled Canaanite-Egyptian material record.

The Egyptian Empire in the southern Levant collapsed during the late 12th cent. BCE after decades of instability that led to the destruction of most local centres (see contributions in Koch et al. 2023). The regeneration of complex society in the southern Levant following the collapse was multifaceted: some ecological niches saw a complete restructuring, while resilience and reorientation characterised other regions. Not surprisingly, most

of the colonial practices that developed during the Late Bronze Age were abandoned, forgotten or rejected due to the fall of the former elite and the rise of a new one. The few Egyptian-derived innovations during the post-colonial phase are insignificant and reflect the rarity of encounters, which were limited to commercial connections.

To conclude this section, the Egyptian Empire was made of multimodal colonial meshwork that triggered the movement of peoples, ideas and practices. It led to the development of an entangled Canaanite-Egyptian society with a shared visual language. This system collapsed in the 12th cent. BCE, followed by the emergence of a tapestry of restructured social groups, some relating to the old regime, others rejecting it. Such continuity and rejection are apparent in the trajectories of stamp-seals during the second and early 1st mill. BCE, as detailed below.

Scarabs and the Canaanite-Egyptian Entanglement

First developed in Egypt during the 3rd mill. BCE, scarabs became the most popular stamp seal class in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom (ca. 21st–17th cent. BCE). Shortly afterwards, scarabs travelled beyond the Nile Valley and reached a receptive audience in the Levant.

Levantines used scarabs to stamp sealings of containers, sacks and storage facilities. Perhaps even more importantly, many scarabs were found in burials, sometimes as part of necklaces or bracelets, reflecting their function as charms. Their integration in Levantine daily life indicates the role of local agency: individuals and groups welcomed this specific innovation originating in Egypt and appropriated it to fit the local context.

Demand triggered supply, and local products are often found alongside imported scarabs in contexts dating to the 19th cent. BCE onwards (the southern Levantine Middle Bronze Age II). Scholars (e.g., Ben-Tor 2007) have differentiated the southern Levantine scarabs from their Egyptian counterparts based on the rendering of hieroglyphs, their arrangement in layouts that do not follow Egyptian prototypes, and the inclusion of northern Levantine and local icons into a

rich pictorial repertoire. Considering that all local scarabs were made of steatite imported from Egypt during the entire period, there might have been continued exposure to Egyptian ideas and practices, brought through the trade routes and then translated to the local context.

The local production of scarabs in the southern Levant declined considerably in the early phases of the Late Bronze Age. In the Late Bronze I and more visibly in the Late Bronze IIA (16th–14th cent. BCE), Egyptian imports largely replaced the locally produced scarabs in a gradual process (Koch 2019b, 16–22). Historically speaking, the distribution of imported scarabs and the intensification of their importation correspond to the growing Egyptian political impact on the southern Levant during the 18th Dynasty. The distinct character of the imagery includes a predominant component of royal and divine concepts, arguably because the court became the primary producer of such media. Nonetheless, significant themes depicted on scarabs could have been understood as representing local iconography in a new fashion, at least in the early phases of the distribution of the Egyptian scarabs. Figs. 2–4 illustrate the similarity in motifs engraved on locally produced scarabs during the Middle Bronze Age from the region of Gaza (where settlements feature the highest degree of interactions with the Delta), and the motifs engraved on imported 18th Dynasty scarabs (and other stamp seals) from the region of Gaza (the hub of Egyptian presence during the Late Bronze Age) and additional sites in southwest Canaan (the region affected the most by the Egyptian presence): an anthropomorphic figure (royal or divine) surrounded by hieroglyphs (*fig. 2*), the sphinx (*fig. 3*) and the head of a goddess adorned by cobras (*fig. 4*). In light of this, one can trace local agency in selecting which imported items to appropriate suggest that upon the acquisition of these scarabs by locals, the scenes depicted on them were translated based on the local cultural milieu.

Yet local production of scarabs did take place under Egyptian auspices. The centre of this admittedly limited production was Beth-Shean, the chief inland Egyptian colonial hub, which dominated a major junction and a fertile valley yielding agricultural products for the needs of the imperial



Fig. 2. Anthropomorphic figure surrounded by hieroglyphs on a Middle Bronze Age Levantine scarab from the region of Gaza (left), compared to imported 18th Dynasty Egyptian scarabs from the region of Gaza (centre) and from southwest Canaan (right). From left to right: Tell el-Far'ah (S), Tomb 1021, Middle Bronze Age II or III (18th or 17th–mid-16th cent. BCE; CSSL Tell el-Far'ah [S] no. 415; © SSSL); Tell el-Ajjul, Tomb 1128, Late Bronze Age I–IIA (mid-16th–14th cent. BCE; CSSL Tell el-Ajjul no. 272; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL); Gezer, Tomb 10A, Late Bronze Age I–IIA (mid-16th–14th cent. BCE; CSSL Gezer no. 634; Israel Antiquities Authority/Israel Museum Jerusalem; © SSSL).

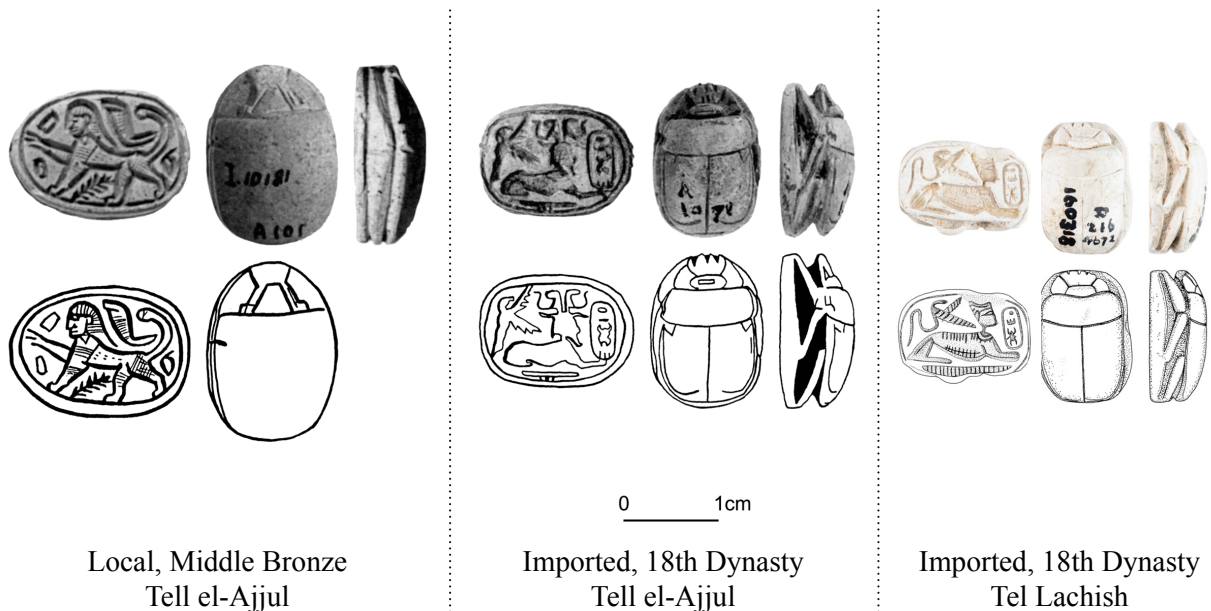


Fig. 3. Sphinx figure on a Middle Bronze Age Levantine scarab from the region of Gaza (left), compared to imported 18th Dynasty Egyptian scarabs from the region of Gaza (centre) and from southwest Canaan (right). From left to right: Tell el-Ajjul, Tomb 101, Middle Bronze Age III (17th–mid-16th cent. BCE; CSSL Tell el-Ajjul no. 78; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL); Tell el-Ajjul, Tomb 1071, Late Bronze Age IIA (14th cent. BCE; CSSL Tell el-Ajjul no. 240; © SSSL); Lachish, Tomb 216, Late Bronze Age IIA–IIB (14th–13th cent. BCE; CSSL Lachish no. 584; British Museum; © SSSL; photograph: B. Greet; drawing: I. Berney).

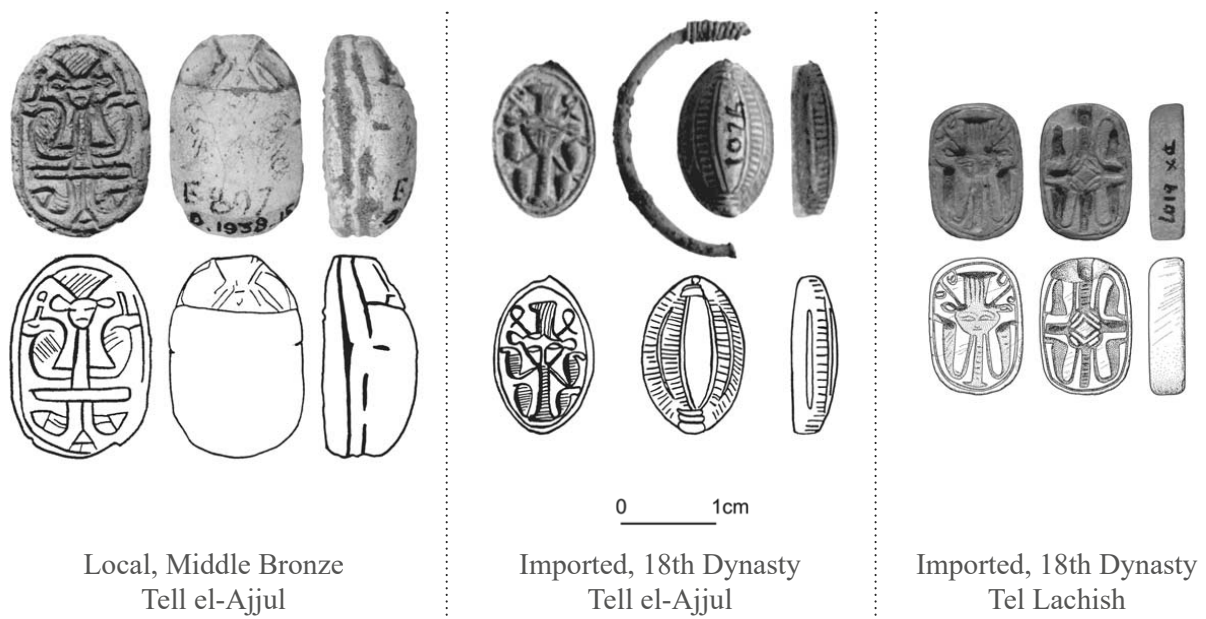


Fig. 4. Goddess's head on a Middle Bronze Age Levantine scarab from the region of Gaza (left), compared to imported 18th Dynasty Egyptian stamp seals from the region of Gaza (centre) and from southwest Canaan (right). From left to right: Tell el-Ajjul, Stratum II?, Middle Bronze Age II–III (18th–mid-16th cent. BCE; CSSL Tell el-Ajjul no. 777; © SSSL); Tell el-Ajjul, Tomb 1026, Late Bronze Age I (mid-16th–15th cent. BCE; CSSL Tell el-Ajjul no. 209; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL); Lachish, Tomb 216, Late Bronze Age IIA–IIB (14th–13th cent. BCE; CSSL Lachish no. 590; Dublin, Weingreen Museum © SSSL; drawing: I. Berney).

forces.³ Sometime in the Late Bronze Age IB or IIA (15th–14th cent. BCE), artisans at Beth-Shean used composite material to replicate Egyptian scarabs (Ben-Tor/Keel 2012). At the same time, production of local stamp seals continued, albeit in small numbers, including bifacial plaques that feature a limited interaction with contemporaneous Egyptian imagery (Brandl 2008).

The zenith of the distribution of Egyptian scarabs took place during the Late Bronze Age IIB–III (13th–12th cent. BCE), beginning in the reign of Ramesses II (Ben-Tor 2011). Royal imagery depicted on the scarabs changed to include new compositions such as a chariot scene. However, in the same period, other scarabs were engraved with motifs that conspicuously reflected Levantine Middle Bronze Age prototypes. Several scholars have suggested that these scarabs were produced in the region of Gaza (Brandl 2003; Lalkin 2008), considering their concentration in this region, the reliance on Levantine prototypes and the presence

of Middle Bronze scarabs in Late Bronze contexts that could have triggered the interest of artisans and consumers. The other opinion (Ben-Tor 2017) holds that the production of these scarabs took place at Qantir, the location of Piramesses, the capital of the 19th and 20th Dynasties, close to Avaris, the Hyksos capital, where Middle Bronze Levantine scarabs were imported during the Second Intermediate Period.

Both suggestions are intriguing. Indeed, almost nothing is known about ancient Gaza,⁴ but relying on excavated colonial centres, it probably hosted administrative and residential structures built according to Egyptian blueprints, decorated with inscriptions and staffed by officials and other agents.⁵ Moreover, local production of scarabs in

³ On the Egyptian presence at Beth-Shean see Mazar 2011.

⁴ The mound of Gaza (Tall al-Kharrubi) is in the heart of the modern city and archaeological data about it are scant. Probes conducted by Phythian-Adams (1923) revealed remains from the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age I–II. A more recent survey revealed remains from Late Antiquity onwards (Clarke et al. 2004).

⁵ On colonial buildings in southwest Canaan see Dothan/Brandl 2010; Gadot 2010; Burke et al. 2017.

or around Gaza would join other archaeologically attested crafts that utilised Egyptian techniques, such as pottery (Martin 2011), glass (Reade et al. 2017) and writing (Na'aman 2020). At the same time, finds from its satellite settlements demonstrate that Gaza and its region were the main colonial arena in the southern Levant, hosting multiple encounters that produced entangled practices observed in architecture, cult, burial and other fields (Braunstein 2011; Steel 2018). Lastly, Gaza might have hosted a temple to Amun⁶ that would have incorporated local ways of worship and paraphernalia, including amulets serving the local worshipers. In other words, although Gaza is archaeologically an enigma, a role in hosting the production of entangled Canaanite-Egyptian objects would fit the known data.

Nevertheless, even if these scarabs were produced in the Delta, this implies the integration of Levantine imagery into the repertoire of motifs engraved on Egyptian scarabs; it not only corroborates the idea of entangled Canaanite-Egyptian colonial imagery, but also adds another dimension to the meshwork, since it is difficult to assume the artisans in the Delta knew about the Levantine provenance of these Middle Bronze Age scarabs. The production of scarabs reflecting Levantine Middle Bronze Age imagery means that additional pictorial elements were shared in both the Delta and the region of Gaza.

The last phase of New Kingdom imported scarabs in the southern Levant is dated to the mid-12th cent. BCE, just before the collapse of the empire. A gap of several decades might have been created by the departure of Egyptian agents from the southern Levant. Nonetheless, scarabs did reappear. A group of scarabs and other steatite artefacts known from early Iron Age strata in the southern Levant is termed the 'post-Ramesside' or 'early Iron Age' mass-produced series (*fig. 5*). Most of the engraved motifs are Egyptian, and the

most common are related to Amun-Re – explained by scholars by the prominence of this god at the turn of the millennium (Schipper 2005, 300–308; Münger 2011; Ben-Dor Evian 2017).

In his meticulous analysis, Münger (2011) counted over 200 artefacts of this type from across the southern Levant. Over 55 objects, more than a quarter, were found in the region of Gaza alone – more than all the examples found in Egypt, thus emphasising the local status of these items. While one group of scholars considers these artefacts to be the products of a workshop based in Egypt, perhaps even at Tanis (Münger 2005a; 2011; Ben-Dor Evian 2017), another group prefers a southern Levantine provenance (Keel 2013; Ben-Tor 2016), considering that some of the motifs find no parallels in Egypt, despite their assumed 'Egyptian' style.

Following the latter line of thought, the production of scarabs and other steatite artefacts during the early Iron Age could be compared to the earlier Middle Bronze production. Both were based on imported steatite from Egypt and both shared motifs with scarabs produced in the Delta. They are dissimilar in one respect – the organisation of Egyptian motifs in the Middle Bronze Age that is unintelligible from an Egyptian perspective (e.g., Ben-Tor 2007, 126) contrasts with the proper 'Egyptian' organisation of the early Iron Age scarabs. The dissimilarity should probably be considered in light of the limited exposure to Egyptian visual language during the early 2nd mill. BCE compared to the situation at the turn of that millennium, following centuries of Egyptian colonialism and constant encounters.

Support for the Levantine provenance of the early Iron Age scarabs comes from a small group of locally produced stamp seals known from five sites in southwest Canaan (see discussion in Koch 2018; 2021, 106–124). When found in context, they are dated to the late Iron I (the late 11th or early 10th cent. BCE). Their shape is a truncated pyramid, they are made of composite material or steatite and they are all engraved on their base and all four sides (*fig. 6*). Altogether they depict ten different scenes – a few based on Levantine prototypes developed during the Late Bronze Age but the majority Egyptian-derived; the most conspicuous is the name of Amun-Re.

⁶ The temple of Amun at Gaza is ostensibly mentioned in only one source from the 20th Dynasty, Papyrus Harris I (9:1–3), which describes the acts of Ramesses III, including the establishment of a temple to Amun in Canaan. According to a number of scholars, that temple was in Gaza (Uehlinger 1988; Wimmer 1990, 1086–1088; Morris 2005, 727–729), but this suggestion has been criticised (Higginbotham 2000, 58 f.; Hasel 2009, 12 f.).



Fig. 5. Early Iron Age Egyptian-Style Stamp Seals: a. Tel Beer-sheva, Stratum VII, Early Iron Age IIA (10th cent. BCE; CSSL Beersheva no. 4; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL; drawing: U. Zurkinden); b. Tel Gerisa, Stratum 4, Late Iron (Age IIA 9th cent. BCE; CSSL Tel Gerisa no. 16; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL); c. Tel Dor, Phase D-10-D-9, Iron Age (12th-6th cent. BCE; CSSL Tel Dor no. 56; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL; photograph: M. Goldenberg; drawing: U. Zurkinden); d. Lachish, surface (CSSL Lachish no. 8; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL; photograph: M. Goldenberg; drawing: I. Berney); e. Khirbat an-Nahas, topsoil (CSSL Khirbat an-Nahas no. 1; © SSSL; drawing: I. Berney); f. Tell en-Nasbeh, Tomb 32, Iron Age (11th-6th cent. BCE; CSSL Tell en-Nasbeh no. 38; Badè Museum; © SSSL; photograph: B. Greet; drawing: U. Zurkinden).



Fig. 6. Multifaceted seal from Tel Gerisa, Stratum 6, Iron Age I (11th cent. BCE; CSSL Tel Gerisa No. 7; © SSSL).

As mentioned earlier, Amun-Re's appearance on the early Iron Age mass-produced scarabs has been explained as reflecting his prominence. However, the appearance of his name on seals locally produced in southwest Canaan during that era is noteworthy and provokes questions regarding the importance of this deity and the possible crafts related to his cult.

The shared style of the multifaceted seals and the early Iron Age scarabs brings into focus the problems in separating the Canaanite and the Egyptian spheres during the late 2nd mill. BCE after the long centuries of interaction. It is evident that most of the motifs are of Egyptian background, thus indicating the shared cultural milieu of local artisans with contemporaneous workshops that produced the early Iron Age scarabs discussed above. Therefore, these images reflect a broader phenomenon of a shared Canaanite-Egyptian visual language for glyptic during the early Iron Age that elaborated on Egyptian-inspired motifs and scenes alongside local ones – resulting from centuries of multi-directional interaction.

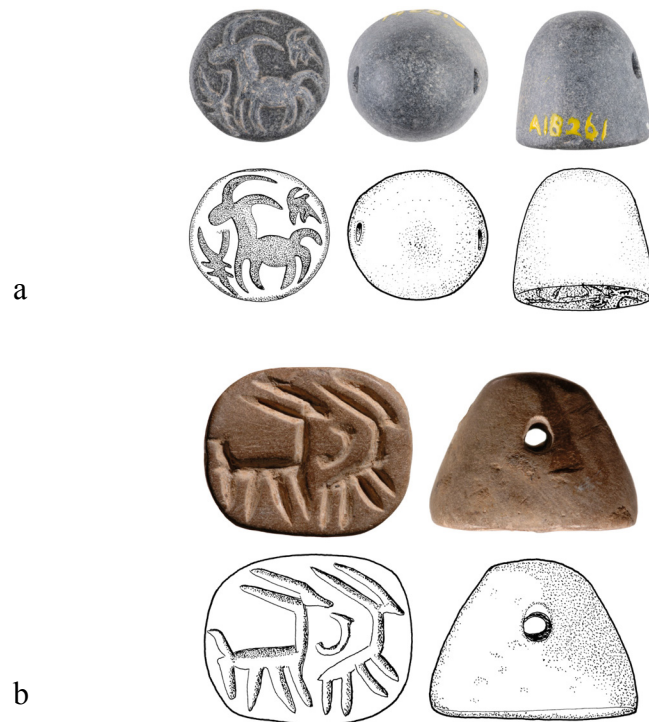
The Rise of Conoids in the Early Iron Age as a Mode of Rejection

The early Iron Age saw an increase in the production and distribution of non-scarab stamp seals across the southern Levant. Most common were limestone cone-shaped seals known as conoids. Conoids are sporadically attested since the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (Keel-Leu 1989), with limited occurrences until the very end of the Late Bronze Age (e.g., Loud 1948, Pl. 162.6,8,10–12; CSSL

Megiddo no. 605). It was only during the early Iron Age that this medium became popular (Keel 1995, 100) and examples are known from across the southern Levant.

The early Iron Age conoids and other limestone stamp seals attest to a selective preference for local imagery with a few indications of Egyptian-derived motifs. Prominent among the local motifs is the horned animal (*fig. 7*), most commonly an ibex or an oryx, a motif commonly attested in the region as early as the Chalcolithic period (Schroer/Keel 2005, 109–111, 114–125). The horned animal was popular in the Middle Bronze Age, especially on locally-produced scarabs (Keel/Uehlinger 1998; Ben-Tor 2007, 175; Schroer 2008, 48 with literature, 194–203), but became scarce in the Late Bronze Age, when it was mostly restricted to cylinder seals of North Levantine style and locally produced plaques. It became popular during the Iron I, depicted as a sole motif or with floral motifs, zoomorphic figures (mostly scorpions) and anthropomorphic figures (Koch 2017, 296 with previous literature; Schroer 2018, 69 f.).

The rise of conoids as a popular medium should perhaps be considered against the significant role scarabs have played in the southern Levant. Even if locally produced in some periods, the long centuries of colonial rule followed by the collapse of the Egyptian empire might have ultimately associated the scarab with Egypt or related it to Egyptian ways. Moreover, there is a marked dissimilarity between scarabs and limestone stamp seals on a sensorial level: in appearance, scarabs had a well-defined shape and bright colours, due to the pigment-infused glaze, compared to the earth-coloured limestone conoids.



a



b



c

0 1cm

Fig. 7. Limestone conoids from the early Iron Age southern Levant: a. Megiddo, Stratum V, Iron Age IIA (10th–9th cent. BCE; CSSL Megiddo no. 619; Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures; © SSSL; photograph: B. Greet; drawing: U. Zurkinden); b. Tel Migne-Ekron, Stratum VB, Iron Age I (11th cent. BCE; CSSL Ekron no. 72; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL); c. Tel Dor, Phase B-8, Late Iron Age IIA (9th cent. BCE; CSSL Tel Dor no. 2; Israel Antiquities Authority; © SSSL; photograph: M. Goldenberg; drawing: U. Zurkinden).

Differences in the material might have also impacted the object's feeling on the body or the sounds it made as part of a necklace or a bracelet. Last, but not least, is the probable importance of the local stone. Veneration of rock outcrops, mountains and ridges have been documented throughout the world and several studies have demonstrated that stones are recognised as indexical

surrogates for these formations, i. e., agents of their presence (e.g., Reimer 2018; Scheyhing 2018). While it is beyond the scope of this contribution to assess the agency of limestone objects in the early Iron Age, they might be related to the veneration of stones during the same era, attested in the shape of standing stones as foci of worship at temples across the southern Levant. Through their

materiality, the conoids would connect their owners to the landscape in a way that scarabs, made of artificial or manipulated materials imported from Egypt, could not.

In sum, the limestone stamp seals are local types made of local materials and engraved with local imagery. Against the historical background, it is suggested that there was a deliberate preference for artefacts made in a completely new style while rejecting scarabs, be they imported or locally produced.

Concluding Discussion

The long-lasting colonial situation in the southern Levant brought a widespread acceptance of Egyptian ways of doing among local artisans. Indeed, in the early stages, differences were apparent, resulting from the distinct background of the parties involved, but as time passed, they became entangled with a marked projection of the colonial centre's language, practices and ideology over those of the colonised. In some crafts, artisans got acquainted with the colonial ways of doing and appropriated them for their own products. Members of the local elite, who were used to fashioning themselves with Egyptian attributes, must have welcomed this development.

Scarabs are a fine example of such a process. At first look, the scarab is Egyptian in the same way that the conoid is Canaanite, but the reception and appropriation of the scarab in the southern Levant complicates scholarly attempts to catalogue objects based on stylistic criteria. No doubt, the local scarabs in the early 2nd mill. BCE were fashioned in a distinct manner compared to Egyptian imports because of the limited connections with the Nile Valley and the (mis)translation of Egyptian imagery. Hence it is relatively easy to identify local products. In contrast, the intense Canaanite-Egyptian colonial encounters during the Late Bronze Age led to a better understanding of Egyptian practices and imagery by Levantine artisans that allowed them to produce artefacts comparable to the Egyptian prototypes. By the early Iron Age, and despite the collapse of the empire,

artisans in the southern Levant and Egypt shared the same style to such a degree that it complicates the distinction by modern scholars.

In search of the agents involved in the creation of this visual language, one must consider, as detailed above, different groups, including members of the elite, imperial agents and artisans that transferred knowledge from Egypt to the southern Levant. Most of the encounters among these agents must have taken place in the colonial hubs, where Egyptian-style buildings dominated the landscape and workshops produced Egyptian-style artefacts, as indicated at Beth-Shean and several sites around Gaza.

Such a scenario would explain the centrality of Gaza in the attestations of locally produced scarabs. As detailed above, most Middle Bronze local scarabs were found in the region of Gaza, thus suggesting the existence of a production tradition. In addition, most Late Bronze scarabs reflecting Middle Bronze imagery and most early Iron Age scarabs that elaborated on the Amun iconography were also found in the region of Gaza. While missing the material remains from the city itself that would allow us to posit a 'Gazaite style' of Canaanite-Egyptian entanglement, it is suggested to keep in mind this particular case of a site located in the southwestern corner of the southern Levant and functioning as a branch of Egypt.

Once the empire eventually collapsed, scarabs might have been rejected by a portion of Canaanite society because they were so distinctly Egyptian in style, even when locally produced. Groups who opposed the continuity of entangled practices promoted the use of local shapes, formed from local material and engraved with local imagery as a deliberate decision related to the formation of a new social belonging.

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Abbreviations

CSSL: Corpus of Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant, <www.levantineseals.org> (last access: 16.09.2025).

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Dirk Wicke

Between Imitation and Adaptation

Assyrianising Ivories in the Northern Levant

Keywords: ivory carving, Assyria, elite emulation, minor arts

Summary

The paper deals with groups of ivory carvings that display certain elements of Assyrian art. This is generally considered to be evidence for Assyrian influence, connected to political and military hegemony. This influence is critically reviewed through the distinction of the concepts of ‘imitative’ vs. ‘adaptative’ emulation. In particular, cases of adaptative emulation in artistic production insinuate a wider and deliberate choice instead of forced transmission. The interpretative concept of adaptative emulation rather allows more agency to the ‘receiving’ areas under Assyrian control, which may even have become an inspiration to Assyrian craftsmen. Towards the end of the article, the author suggests Carchemish to be the place of origin of a group of carvings discovered in the Northwest Palace of Nimrud.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The influence of Assyrian art on the minor states of northern Syria and the Levant as a result of the Assyrian conquest from the 9th to 7th cent. BC has been widely discussed through various examples of large-scale art, that is, reliefs and sculpture, discovered in the major cities of northwestern Syria and the northern Levant (Winter 1982; Orthmann 2013; Gerlach 1997; 2000; for a summary Wicke 2015). More recent research has addressed and emphasised to various degrees the influence of the strong Syrian and Anatolian cultural traditions, including Hittite, Mitannian and Old Syrian artistic strands, on the development of Assyrian art, above all for the use of orthostats (e.g., Winter 1982; Aro 2009). In this paper, the focus is placed not on the ‘major’, but on the ‘minor arts’, i. e. bone and ivory carving, in Assyrian style. While ‘major art’ in the sense of monumental art, in particular in the form of orthostat reliefs and stone sculpture, has frequently been considered as the most important means to convey political and religious ideology in the Early Iron Age in its iconography and style because of its size (e.g., Bonatz 2000; Gilibert 2011, 97–112), the use and meaning of ivory carving as ‘minor art’ was rarely addressed, missing the full potential of that small scale medium.¹

¹ In its basic sense, the designations of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ address the differences in scale in the first instance. However, the meaning of ‘minor art’, German *Kleinkunst*, has tacitly also afflicted the interpretation of such objects, with ‘minor art’ being construed as less significant and meaningful and contrasting with ‘major arts’ or ‘fine or liberal arts’. It generally alludes to connotations of *Kunsthandwerk*/‘arts

Carved ivories,² in particular in the use of furniture inlays and other adornment, provide information not only about resource procurement, but also about technical craftsmanship and aesthetic appreciations. Due to the lack of ivory workshops and further information about workshop organisation, we are left with the finds from rather heterogeneous contexts, above all the findspots in the Assyrian palaces at the capitals.³

The figuratively decorated carvings are part of the same iconographic canon of ancient Near Eastern art, but they highlight different areas of use. Cabinet-making, for example, as one of the major vernacular crafts, mirrors everyday life much more intensely and conveys domestic and private tastes more readily than monumental sculpture or reliefs (Cotton 1991). Ivory-decorated furniture, such as thrones or banqueting beds constructed from precious woods and metals, certainly enters the sphere of representative ostentation, but is more likely to show a personal twist and individuality than the much more strongly normalised and regulated stone carvings adorning city gates and palace walls. Weaving, furniture-production, jewellery and maybe seals are far more

distributed in everyday life and thus more likely to be prone to individual choice and personal taste and beliefs than palace reliefs or royal sculpture, which are generally commissioned by the ruling elite, intended to convey notions of sovereignty and thus obliged to follow established artistic traditions. Therefore, it is suggested that minor art (*Kleinkunst*) can tell us more about individual interaction, conception and perception and the shaping of identity than many palace reliefs can.

This paper follows the art historical notion of style in material culture studies as a way in which something is formally made. In a holistic approach, this includes aspects of material, techniques, design, function, context, time, knowledge and ability of craftsmen, ideas and wishes of clients etc.⁴ These factors influence the appearance of crafted objects to various degrees and are often hard to separate in scientific analyses. In particular, minor arts are much more prone to stylistic change, often as a consequence of individual workshop training as the most common means of artistic transfer. Carved ivories were frequently used to embellish furniture such as chairs or beds, thus requiring larger numbers of dentically crafted inlays produced in series by a single workshop (for example Mallowan/Herrmann 1974; Fontan/Affanni 2018). Despite their general resemblance, individual carvings even in the same series differed slightly in occasional details such as the hatching of surfaces, rendering of facial features, details of floral ornamentation and the like. Although pieces were worked following certain prototypes, lack of skill, unsuitable materials or techniques or ignorance or misunderstanding of templates by the individual artisans or apprentices quite often led to stronger variations during crafting processes and copying procedures and frequently could end in severe stylistic variation and changes – even during the same period and in the same locality. The modern archaeological eye often judges quality, considering some stylistic

and crafts', 'applied art' or 'folk-art', often with a derogatory bearing, mostly deriving from European art historical scholarship (Thomason 2014 with a general discussion on this topic). For a plea to attend more to this kind of *gebundener Kunst*, see Hartmann 1980. The image itself – fulfilling different arrays of primary function such as protection, legitimisation or communication (Bonatz 2002) – can be interpreted regardless of its size in the first instance. It's 'materiality', however, can add additional aspects and enhance those primary functions. Considering that in particular large-scale works of sculptures and reliefs were commissioned and strongly controlled by king and court, pieces of 'minor art' are more prone to follow broader societal and ideological conventions as well as fashion. This paper intends to raise awareness of the potential of the study of 'arts and crafts' once more.

² The following observations pertain likewise to bone or wood carving.

³ The most obvious place for ivory working in the Levant is provided by the evidence of ivory waste and semi-finished products from Hama and Qatna, as well as possibly Tell Keisan. In the case of Hama and Qatna, the potential workshop places are located in the vicinity of monumental structures (for a summary see Wicke 2010, 36–44). It would be premature, however, to solely conclude that there was a palatial prerogative for ivory carving, since we have to reckon with a large amount of small-scale private entrepreneurship outside the documentation of official archives (also Moorey 2001, 4). We are unfortunately lacking any further information about the organisation of the craft beyond rare occasional mentions of craftsmen in cuneiform texts (Wicke 2010, 42 f.).

⁴ For a general overview of the broad spectrum of different approaches to style, see Conkey/Hastorf 1990. Stylistic change has too often been associated with a consecutive chronological development; the synchronous spread of stylistic developments through artistic transfer, however, is often neglected and plays a major role in particular in the dense cultural network of the Early Iron Age.

groups or objects to be finer or coarser in iconographic details or craftsmanship than others. The less refined objects are frequently considered to be ‘peripheral’ or ‘provincial’.⁵ Besides this, the choice or wish of a customer can also lead to variations in craft production, although this is less likely to affect the style.

On Emulation

A basic argument in this contribution is taken from the notion of emulation as a major driving force in human action.⁶ Emulation, from Latin *aemulatio*, refers to acts of copying or imitating something or someone – mostly in a competitive relationship. Coined already in ancient rhetoric, this concept was put to use in modern social theory by Thorstein Bunde Veblen (1857–1929) already in 1899 (Veblen [1899] 2000), in his book on the theory of the leisure class where he tries to describe and explain the spread of taste and fashion in society. He describes this process primarily as an effect of conspicuous consumption that leads to ‘taste and fashion’ trickling down the classes; this refers not only to material culture, but also to a large bundle of social conventions (*étiquette*), including higher education (*Bildung*), that vindicate corresponding social practices. In this respect, we mostly speak of elite emulation. Emulation can be taken as a possible driving force that incites processes of adaptation and imitation, which are particularly relevant when it comes to issues of artistic transfer as a mode of human action.⁷

Referring to material culture, emulative copying can be described as the result of unconscious as well as conscious decisions in craft production,

or rather reproduction of material culture.⁸ The training of apprentices would lead to a direct copying approach – the apprentice learns from his or her master by copying directly not only techniques and the use of tools, but also motifs, ornamental or stylistic details and even complete pictorial compositions. The indirect way of learning would be through immediate templates, objects or pattern books. A minute comparative observation can reveal the respective crafting processes (Moorey 2001). The emulation of an artistic language and the identity of the model and reproduction can be achieved to various degrees of accuracy, depending on material choices and the technical and intellectual ability of the craftsman – or customer.

Looking closely at examples of elite emulation and its motivation, it is possible to observe two different underlying motivations in the (re-)production of material culture. Pivotal is a distinction between imitation and adaptation, two emulative processes with different causes and effects. To imitate a model with the motivation of achieving identity or at least similarity means to aspire to ‘sameness’. On the one hand, sameness appears equivalent to a general acceptance of a model. On the other hand, ‘difference’ is a clear mode of rejection of a model on the opposite side of the spectrum. ‘Adaptation’ is a selective process and conscious choice, an acceptance or rejection of single (artistic) elements. Adaptation, thus, can be described as a deliberate selection by taking on specific elements or criteria of visual cultures from a model, but possibly altering them for various reasons (Wicke 2015, 564–570 with further references).

In reality, there always remain distinctions, imperfection in details, misunderstood proportions or the like in the finished artefacts. Today, with modern and scientific distance, the observer notes these ‘imperfections’ and coins such imitations as secondary. The ancient user might not have been aware of such details, since he or she would not have known the prototype, so any such ‘mistakes’ would have been irrelevant in the past. In particular, foreign styles or objects must have

⁵ For a brief overview see Gerlach 1997, 18.

⁶ For a summary of further case-studies on emulation, as well as critical comments, see Khatchadourian 2020; I am grateful to the reviewers for drawing my attention to this stimulating contribution.

⁷ Emulation leads to the construction of social identities and boundaries, core issues of the event in Tübingen in April 2021. For a useful, critical assessment of emulation by the example of Assyrianising finds from Hasanlu see Cifarelli 2018. Emulation can, of course, also foster political domination and reinforce control as a form of imperialism, but this exceeds the scope of this paper. For a balanced discussion of Assyrian imperialism see Bagg 2013.

⁸ I allude here to Sackett’s notion of isochrestism, as elaborated in his seminal paper (Sackett 1990).

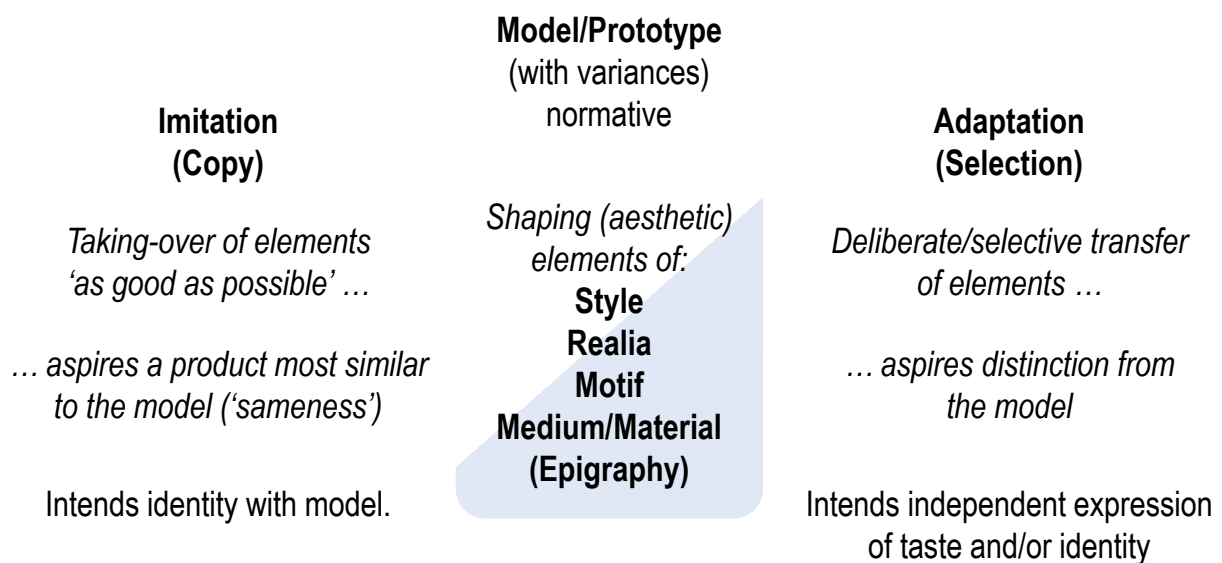


Fig. 1. Relationship of prototype, imitation and adaption (graphic by the author).

been rare and exotic and, as such, unfamiliar to the ancient and 'untaught' eye.

Imitative and adaptive processes can be extremely difficult to distinguish in material culture and the visual arts. The effects can be blurred, for example, due to incomplete archaeological preservation or through the crafting processes, which remove traces of working.⁹ This contribution intends to exemplify this through the example of carved ivories from Nimrud. Such a distinction opens unexpected vistas onto possible motivations of craft production and the use and interpretation of craft products. Apart from that, a distinction of the two emulative modes, imitation or adaptation, as visible in the archaeological record helps to explain and maybe understand ancient perceptions, motivations and intentions. Material culture, and in particular the use of fashion and art, supports the shaping of individual and group identity. Therefore, such conscious adaptations and alterations are quite meaningful, since they indicate distinct

points of individuality (e.g., Hodder 1991, 165 f.; Appadurai 1986).¹⁰

The precondition for any further consideration is the assumption of a centre, where one can find the model or prototype, developed as 'high art' and influencing works of art in all aspects of material, realia, size and style. This is the 'primary style', which receives a normative connotation.¹¹ Observable differences in (re)produced material culture can be set in relation to such hypothesized centres¹² (fig. 1). The normative primary style is surrounded by a 'secondary style', comprising the imitative and/or adaptive manifestations of emulative behaviour. Such a secondary phenomenon does not give any indication of a topographic or spatial distance, which excludes the use of

⁹ The most important factors are, of course, the availability of suitable models, the capability and training of the craftsmen and the availability of raw materials. Aro (2016, 157), e.g., describes the lion sculpture from Sheikh Sa'ad as stylistically (provincial) Assyrian. It is only its tongue hanging out that does not conform to the Assyrian iconographic convention of the primary style, a fact that passes unnoticed to an observer who is not familiar with Assyrian art.

¹⁰ A more intense and theoretical discussion of models for artistic exchange and its meanings, viewed as creating certain power relations, can be found in Gerlach 1997, 11–16 or Khatchadourian 2020, esp. 602–609. I am grateful for the peer reviewers mentioning the latter source to me.

¹¹ In the oral presentation, the terms 'court style' and 'provincial style' were used, which became a focus for further debate. In consequence, the terms 'court-style' or 'imperial monumental' (as used, for example, by Boardman [2000] or Rehm [2005] when discussing Achaemenid art with respect to Assyrian art) are avoided in the following, as they focus on a small elite circle in too narrow a sense; also Gerlach 1997, 18.

¹² Despite Feldman's general critique of a definition of 'Assyrian art' (Feldman 2014, 81–86), there are distinct criteria for apprehending Assyrian arts and crafts that consider motifs, realia, contexts, material and style.

‘provincial’, since that term denotes geographic distance and political dependence.¹³ The concept of artistic emulation thus describes a relationship of distances not in space, but in truthfulness to a model. It alludes to ‘artistic proximity or distance’ and to the spectrum between imitation and adaptation with their interpretative significance. It leads to what can be called an adaptive style, be it Egyptianising, Orientalising, Romanising or Assyrianising (see Higginbotham 2000; Gouda 2011; Noelke 2003; Ahrens 2020, chap. V, on the various ideas about *aegyptiaca* in the Levant in the 2nd mill. BC). In a similar way, different strands of meaning and significance can be ascribed to all sorts of craft production in the ‘international style’ as an artistic *koïné*, which has received attention recently, within different frames of explanation, but following a general emulative argument (see Kantor 1947; Feldman 2006; for a critical reassessment see Fischer 2007).

Emulative Phenomena in the Early Iron Age

For the archaeology of the northern Levant, three major foreign artistic trends and traditions can be distinguished that incited emulative processes. They can likewise be considered as phases of intensified identity construction in particular during the Early Iron Age in Syria and the Levant. These external traditions describe the corresponding impact of Egyptian, Hittite/Luwian or Assyrian style and iconography onto the visual culture in the Levant (north and south), Syria and southern Anatolia.¹⁴ When looking at these external phenomena presented by the major political powers, we are obviously dealing with militarily dominant forces in these regions. Yet, it would be too narrow to speak also of ‘artistic hegemony’, although this, of course, springs to mind first. Egyptian influence appears long before any military conquest

in the Levant and continues even after Egyptian political power had waned; it led to the formation of the distinctive Canaanite-Phoenician art from the 3rd into the 1st mill. BC (see Ahrens 2020 for a summary).¹⁵ Any impact of Hittite art is difficult to ascertain and less distinctive than Egyptian influence. V. Herrmann (2017, 265–268) has recently carefully traced such influence and its reception in the case of Zincirli. Hittite/Luwian merges with Syrian art from early on into what is generally described as a Late Bronze Age North Syrian style. The Assyrian influence, albeit the shortest-lived one, being confined to the early 1st mill. BC, appears to have worked in a similar way. Here, it is the concept of ‘mutual interpenetration’ that seems to describe best the relationship between Aramaean and Assyrian culture.¹⁶

The Assyrian Model

In the following, I wish to continue with the case of Assyria and Assyrianising trends in the Iron Age artistic expressions of southeastern Anatolia, northern Syria and the northern Levant.¹⁷ Following the general comments above, a general division is made between ‘secondary imitative’ and ‘secondary adaptive’ styles, since these form two distinct motivations as argued above and previously (see Gerlach 2000, 235–237).

The Assyrian court was the political centre and source of Assyrian artistic power from the 10th to the 7th cent. BC. Even if the craftsmen might have been foreign specialists, motifs, style and the overarching designs were and remained Assyrian, creating and recreating Assyrian ideology, in particular by displaying and celebrating the splendour of the king of Assyria in small- and large-scale crafts (for example Reade 1979). Within the

¹³ See Gerlach 1997, 11–18. Publications entitled ‘Imperial Peripheries’ (V. Herrmann/Tyson 2018) or ‘Provincial Archaeology’ (MacGinnis/Wicke/Greenfield 2016) of course proliferate such notions. Such general critique holds true for the emulative concept, too.

¹⁴ It would be worthwhile to look into an indigenous ‘stock’ or ‘Syrian substratum’ (see Matthiae 1962), but this is outside the reach of this contribution.

¹⁵ With critical comments as to the relevance of Egyptian imports in the Levant see Ahrens 2022, esp. 168–171).

¹⁶ For a longer discussion and further references see V. Herrmann/Tyson 2018, 18–23. Similar considerations have been expressed by others: see the contributions in Novák et al. 2004.

¹⁷ Feldman uses the term ‘Assyrianisation’ in a very different way, that is, in an ‘inwards’ direction: the making of something other into something Assyrian (Feldman 2014, 80 f., 96; for a critique of this definition see Fischer/Wicke 2016).

Assyrian Empire one can find a perpetuation of this ideology in the Assyrian territories witnessed in ‘secondary imitative’ artistic products, such as the stone sculpture and reliefs from Arslan Tash, Tell Tayinat or Til Barsip (see Orthmann 1971, 46–50, 82 f.; Gerlach 2000, 245–252).¹⁸ Imperfections in the quality and proportions of figures, or lack of iconographic accuracy have generally been ascribed to an incapability, infidelity or other inadequacies of a local craftsman. However, the Assyrian aspiration suggests a basic imitative behaviour – the recreation of an Assyrian court art at the provincial palaces. With a modern academic approach, these deviations are perceived as ‘provincialities’ and coined as secondary, often with a deprecating and disdainful connotation. It can only be assumed that such deviations would have been unnoticed by and irrelevant to the ancient observer. Only with a sourcebook on Assyrian reliefs and sculpture – the ‘primary style’ – at hand and by direct comparison does the ‘secondary style’ become evident to modern connoisseurs today.

In contrast, outside the Assyrian Empire, a ‘secondary adaptive’ style can be witnessed, conveying another intention, expressing not Assyrian ideology, but a conscious self-representation of local ruling elites. Deviations from the Assyrian model are no mistakes, but rather deliberate choices, indicating such a ‘secondary adaptive style’. Prominent examples naturally are royal monuments such as the famous representations of Kilamuwa or Barrakib (Czichon 1995; Brown 2008; V. Herrmann 2018), who relied on Assyrian military support in times of internal conflict. Thus, it is not surprising to find Assyrian traits in their representation. The Assyrianising style of the kingdom of Sam’al is not a slavish copy of the Assyrian model, but a deliberate blend of Assyrian and local traits.¹⁹ Other cases of adaptive emulation can be seen in Anatolian religious sculpture. Monuments

such as the Çineköy statue or the Gözlühöyük stela resemble local types of imagery but employ Assyrian iconography (Wicke 2015, 583–586; most recently Lovejoy 2022, stressing the creation of political identity in the named sculptures). The expression of and wish for everlasting feasting and well-being in the afterlife or an expression of sovereignty, remains the local one. Even if the Assyrians were considered as invaders and an occupying force, their material culture apparently was strived for and emulated.²⁰

Ivory Carvings in Assyrian Style

Phenomena similar to the transfer of Assyrian style observed in large scale stone sculpture can be traced in small-scale ivory carving. This has been mostly overlooked, but the artistic emulative mechanisms observable on sculptures and reliefs appear to work quite similarly.²¹ Although ivory working cannot be considered as the prime example of Assyrian craftsmanship, as Georgina Herrmann has convincingly pointed out several times (G. Herrmann 1997; G. Herrmann/Millard 2003; G. Herrmann 2017, 40–53), there are four groups of Assyrian primary style, easily recognised through their resemblance to Assyrian large-scale reliefs and sculpture (see Mallowan/Davies 1970). Following the primary publication by Mallowan and Davies, Assyrian ivory carving is divided into four technical groups: incised, low-relief to modelled, cut-out inlays and in-the-round. Realia, motifs, topics, decorative patterns and styles are comparable with the finest Assyrian stone relief-carvings on palace orthostats. Ivory carvings with Assyrian iconography and style have been discovered mostly in the Assyrian heartland, above all in the capital palaces (G. Herrmann 1992; G. Herrmann et al. 2009) and in the

¹⁸ A most spectacular recent addition is the discovery of an Assyrianized rock wall painting, which combines Assyrian-style depictions of gods with an Aramaic inscription (see Önal et al. 2022).

¹⁹ V. Herrmann (2018, 509) describes the case of Sam’al as ‘cosmopolitan subordination’ in a form of ‘double assimilation’, referring to a concept of Francine Hirsch.

²⁰ As Bagg (2013, 132) puts it, ‘The fact that it [Assyria] did not strive for acculturation of the conquered areas distinguishes Assyrian practice from that of later world empires. The absence of a mission does not mean that there was no imperial ideology.’ See also Wicke 2013, 246 f.

²¹ See here the discussion on the relationship between large-scale stone reliefs from Tell Halaf and North Syrian ivories (G. Herrmann 1989 and Winter 1989, with opposite views; also Mazzoni 2001, n. 2).



Fig. 2. Ivory panel, probably from Ziwiye (Metropolitan Museum of Art 51.131.5; CC0 1.0).

Ezida-Temple of Nimrud (Mallowan/Davies 1970, nos. 2, 3, 22–24, 198–202; Collins 2022). According to the concept of a rather homogeneous court style, the ivories can undoubtedly be considered a group of ‘Assyrian court-style ivories’ – following closely in iconography and subject the well-known, large-scale monuments. They display scenes of combat, war and tribute-offerings as well as scenes of hunting, ornamental strips and plaques of genies and courtiers. Interestingly, the small-scale art provides motifs and topics unknown from large-scale works, such as the felling of trees.²² As Georgina Herrmann stresses, the conscious use of Assyrian court-style ivories by the Assyrians can be traced in their spatial distribution (G. Herrmann 1992, 24–28; 1997; G. Herrmann/Millard 2003, 390–392; G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 101–111). Mapping Assyrian- vs. non-Assyrian-style ivories in the Northwest Palace demonstrates a clear spatial differentiation. Thus, the Assyrians apparently followed a ‘stylistic regime’, a stringent design concept that covered large- and small-scale crafts, as has already been suggested by Ellen Rehm (2005).

Outside the Assyrian heartland, ivories in ‘Assyrian secondary style’ can be found. Some of the most striking examples were discovered in northwestern Iran at sites such as Hasanlu and Ziwiye (Wilkinson 1960; Mazzoni 1977; Muscarella 1980; Cifarelli 2018). In particular, the ivories from Ziwiye have been known for a long time and new ones have been discovered in recent Iranian excavations at the site (Amelirad 2019, figs. 1 and 7). The iconographic repertoire matches the Assyrian court style, and the realia are fitting, but there are stylistic differences. On the Ziwiye fragment (fig. 2) for example, the indication of fur by slight stippling, the zigzag-decoration and, of course, the disproportionate figures and linear muscle stylisations are markedly distinct from the Assyrian primary style (Mazzoni 1977, Tav. II. VI). Yet, the overall appearance reveals a general aspiration to the Assyrian model and thus evinces ‘emulative imitation’ (Wilkinson 1975, 16 f., 40 f., 44–47).²³

Another example of Assyrian secondary-style ivories can be identified at the site of Ziyaret Tepe, probably the Assyrian provincial capital of Tušhan (Matney et al. 2017, on the ivories: 168 f.; 176 f.). Dating to the late 8th to 7th cent. BC, they

²² ND 1715a: G. Herrmann 2017, 46, fig. 42. The small scale seems to allow for much more variety and individual choices – and life –, warning against focussing too much onto the major arts. This can also be observed when studying Assyrian garment decoration (see Bartl 2014, 49).

²³ Mazzoni (1977, 161) considers an Assyrian workshop to be responsible for the ‘Assyrianising’ carvings, pointing to major differences with finds from Hasanlu. The Hasanlu ivories have to be dated earlier and are thus not useful for comparison. For a discussion on the dates see Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974, 55–57.

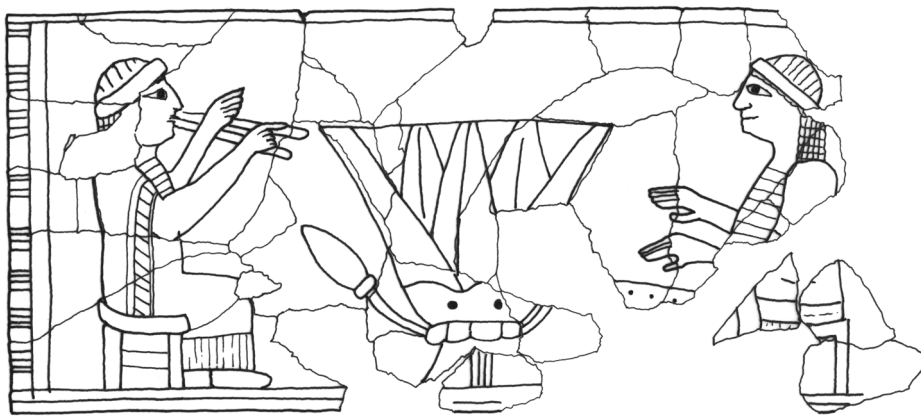


Fig. 3. Ivory panel from Ziyaret Tepe (ZT 29636; photo and drawing by the author).

were discovered in an Assyrian provincial palace on the Upper Tigris, that is, a ‘peripheral’ location. The objects comprise, among others, a pyxis with a bird-headed handle, inlay strips with rosette decoration and a plaque with seated musicians playing the flute and large drum (fig. 3). The general use of Assyrian decorative patterning, as well as realia, as in the case of the musicians (dress, hairstyle, band), indicate a basic familiarity with Assyrian court-style imagery. The specific motif of seated musicians, however, is unknown from Assyrian art so far and thus probably reflects a local custom, as does the oversized lotus flower. Thus, the ivory carving from Ziyaret Tepe appears as a form of local, adaptive elite emulation primarily based on style and form, but displaying rather non-Assyrian instruments.

A group of ivory chairbacks, discovered in Nimrud, Fort Shalmaneser, room SW 7 and thus labelled the SW 7 group by Georgina Herrmann, is even further remote from the Assyrian court-style fashion and to be regarded as ‘Assyrianising’ (Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974). In room SW 7, the excavators came across a large number of chairbacks *in situ*, still stacked in their original position. These chairbacks are assembled from a number of ivory plaques depicting winged and unwinged genies below sun-disks both male and female, sometimes seated, but mostly standing, and all grappling with plants in various shapes. The shape of the furniture itself, most of the realia, the hair and physiognomy and the symmetric composition and decorative scheme with presumably apotropaic, protective meaning are clearly North

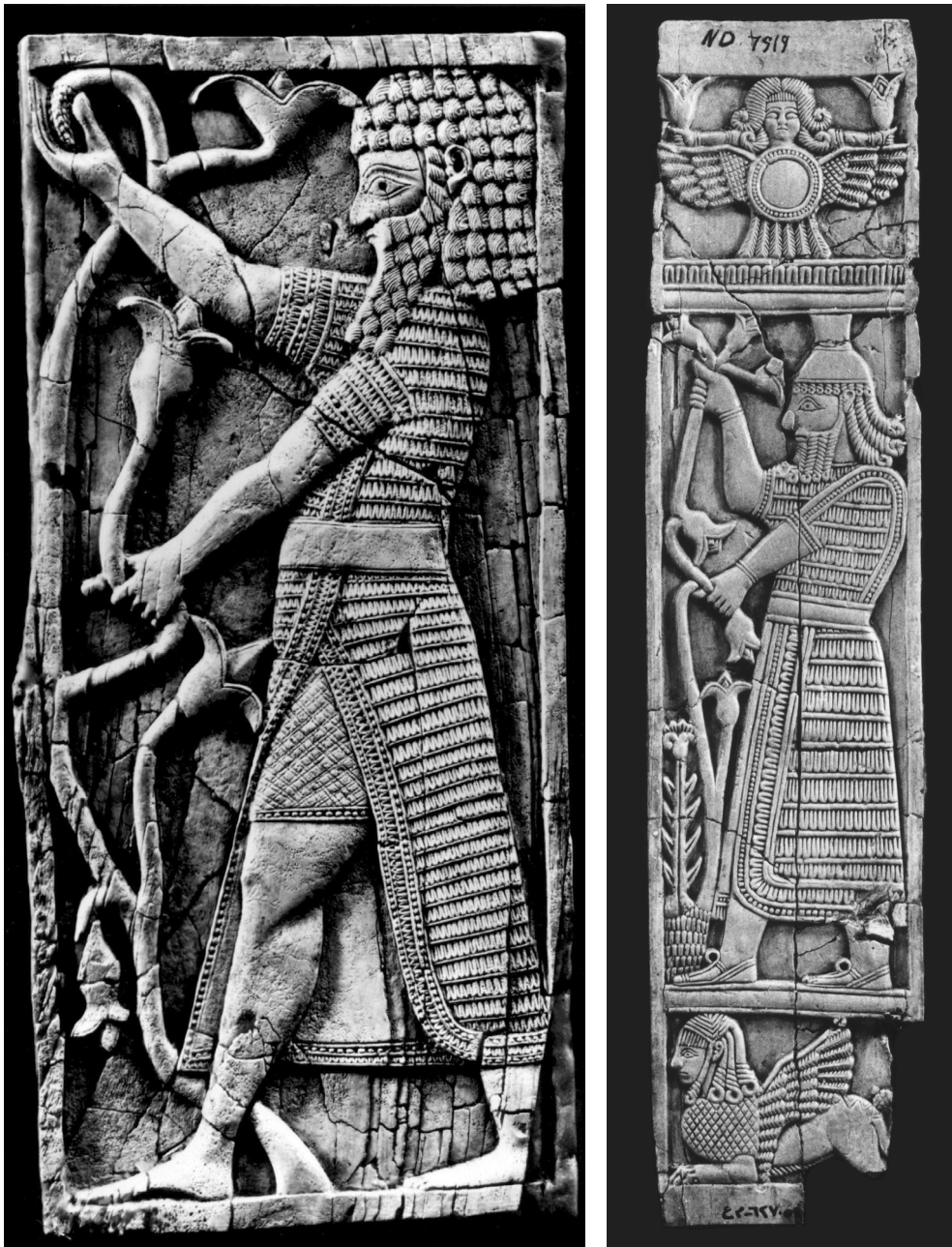


Fig. 4. Ivory panels from Fort Shalmaneser, room SW 7 at Nimrud (a: ND 6374, Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974, no. 5, Pl. 15, courtesy of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq; b: ND 7919, Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974, no. 38, Pl. 48; Iraq Museum, courtesy of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq).

Syrian or Levantine. It is the garments, which betray their Assyrian descent. The male figure to the right, one of a pair, is clearly dressed on what appears to be garments of Assyrian officials (*fig. 4a*). The Assyrianising element in these examples is the coat of mail, which resembles the Assyrian cut-away garment, but is misunderstood in its details and shows a mix of Assyrian and North Syrian style. Even more strongly Assyrianising, the vase-hat group examples (Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974,

26–28) (*fig. 4b*) still retain their ‘Aramaean locks’ but wear ‘Assyrian sandals.’ The workshop locality still remains unclear, but in particular their corkscrew locks point towards depictions on the sculptures from Sakçegözü (Orthmann 1971, Taf. 49:A4, 50:A9, 51:B1); the oddly shaped ‘vase-hats’ remain without good comparison, but are possibly an adaptation of the pointy helmets frequently worn by Assyrian soldiers on reliefs particular of the time of Tiglath-Pileser III.

For the ‘Roundcheeked & Ringletted group’ there are some strong arguments that the ivories were crafted in the purlieu of Zincirli (Wicke 2005; see V. Herrmann this volume). Yet, the Assyrian stylistic influence is very limited in this group, and the appearance rather follows local Aramaean style. This is surprising, since Sam’al in particular was very pro-Assyrian in the late 8th cent. BC, as can be observed in its inscriptions and orthostat reliefs. The most striking examples of a stark, conscious switch in artistic language are still present in the two reliefs of Barrakib facing each other in the Nördliche Hallenbau/Hilani IV at Zincirli (Orthmann 1971, 545 f.; Gilibert 2011, 85–88). The style is the same on both reliefs. The Assyrianising character of the eastern relief lies in the (possibly) Assyrian hairstyle²⁴ and, in particular, in the furniture. Barrakib displays himself as the Assyrian vassal, but on the opposite relief, he presents himself as the ruler of Sam’al, seated on a local high-backed chair (Orthmann 1971, Zincirli F1; Gilibert 2011, 86 f., Zincirli 66 and 69). This is a very self-conscious representation and a clear example of adaptive emulation.

Equally elegant is a small group of carvings from the Nimrud Northwest Palace, probably room 5 (G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 109–111, nos. 200–207; G. Herrmann 2017, 48). This group can be located in the Aramaean realm of northwest Syria (*fig. 5a–b*). While the elaborate winged disk has good comparisons at Sakçegözü, the slender proportions and finely modelled garments and body point to the famous image of Yariris and Kamanis from Carchemish (*fig. 5c*). The mace and the shawl-garment on the ivories are clearly Assyrian, as is the general treatment of facial features and musculature, specifically the forearms. Yet, the shawl-garment appears to be worn above a long tunic, which is unusual in Assyrian iconography. In particular, the vertical folds at the back underneath the shawl (*fig. 5a*) hint at the

long ‘Aramaean’ shirt also worn by Yariris and Kamanis (*fig. 5c*). The Carchemish reliefs illustrating the sovereignty and succession of the royal dynasty are unique and alien to Assyria and must be considered a specific, historic horizon in northwest Syrian art of the early 1st mill. BC. They adapt Assyrian features, and emulate traits of Assyrian art, in particular its style. The ivory panels are an interpretation of the familiar SW 7-chairback motif, as G. Herrmann has rightly pointed out, but in a different local style. These comparisons suggest another local subgroup of a northwest Syrian regional ivory workshop possibly to be located in or around Carchemish.²⁵

Artistic Emulation – Imitative or Adaptive

The Assyrian artistic language is but one of at least four, which can be singled out more precisely among the works of arts and crafts in northwestern Syria. Due to the vacuum of power left by the vanished Hittite Empire, the establishment of a large variety of little chiefdoms and polities in the region during the Early Iron Age can be witnessed (see Osborne 2021). G. Herrmann has already acknowledged the variety of different overarching traditions as emulative phenomena, in particular, ‘[...] when states were striving to establish specific artistic styles within the regional iconography, which they applied as a recognizable, artistic signature across the media’ (G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 74; see also V. Herrmann this volume). Deliberate imitation and adaptation of Assyrian elements has to be viewed against such a background of building a specific identity that is still rooted in older tradition but is now clothed in new styles. Many scholars have interpreted the spread of

²⁴ The depiction of locks in a squarish bunch resting on the shoulder comes into Assyrian fashion by the time of Sargon and is usually acknowledged as a chronological marker. The Barrakib relief, however, predates Sargon’s style and actually are the trendsetter. The mutual influence between Assyria and its ‘periphery’ has received more attention recently; for a useful overview see V. Herrmann/Tyson 2018, 20–23.

²⁵ For a full discussion of previous literature see G. Herrmann et al. 2008, 109–111. Herrmann focusses on ivory parallels allegedly found in Toprakkale and Altnötepe. Given the rapprochement between Urartu and Carchemish in the early 8th cent. BC, it seems more likely that Carchemish would have been the source for these ivories. This appears even more likely, since the Urartian style is rather distinct in its stocky appearance, and the stone carvings in Carchemish provide much closer resemblances. Winter (1983, 186) has already suggested to consider Carchemish as a likely centre for ivory carving. The Northwest-Palace group, with its marked similarity to the late 8th cent. reliefs from Carchemish, might indeed represent such local ivory workshop(s).



Fig. 5. a–b: Ivory panels from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. BM 118115 (a) and BM 118108 (b) (trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0); c: Relief of Yariris and Kamanis from Carchemish (Hogarth 1914, pls. B.4–B.8).

Assyrian artistic elements in the Levant similarly in relation to the Assyrian military conquest. This insinuates a political exploitation of art by the Assyrians and a conscious manipulation of artistic production.²⁶ In the case of the minor arts, outside of king and court, such exploitation appears much less likely. On the contrary, the instances of Assyrianising elements in Anatolia and the Levant can be considered as elaborate incidences of voluntary emulation, mirroring the establishment of specific identities by means of specific artistic styles. Gerlach (1999, 152) summarises this kind of influence as an ‘artistic offer’ of the Assyrians, without any trace of enforcement. It is a ubiquitous phenomenon that the prevalent hegemonial power sets the tone in fashion.²⁷ ‘Ruling by fashion’, in any case, appears to have been a more neutral and, above all, much more cost-efficient way to spread Assyrian hegemony through cultural influence that was voluntarily accepted and not forced (Bagg 2013 on Palestine; Wicke 2013 on southeastern Anatolia). While these comments allude to a larger picture from the Assyrian perspective, this picture has to be viewed individually, in particular when considering the heterogeneous conditions of the Early Iron Age Levant.²⁸

A distinction between imitative and adaptive behaviour helps to extricate possible intentions of emulative behaviours and the intended message behind certain artistic/stylistic choices. In particular, small-scale art is much more flexible and open to stylistic changes, as it is less controlled by political powers.²⁹ In this case, it is less ‘style’ that is the determining factor, but rather the ‘material culture’ or *antiquaria* depicted. The examples discussed in this contribution strongly advocate to overcome the artificial division of materials and genres, as well as scale, in order to fully assess the significance, meaning and importance of artistic transfers across media and their mechanisms, in particular for cultural exchange.

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²⁶ This, of course, broaches a large topic and long debate in Near Eastern archaeology far beyond the scope of this article.

²⁷ It is still undisputed that the artistic language of the kingdom of Urartu was largely shaped by adopting iconographic and stylistic traits from Assyria – its worst political enemy!

²⁸ See the detailed study of V. Herrmann (2018), discussing the case-study of Zincirli.

²⁹ The artistic development thus appears in stark contrast to the imperial ‘colonial’ regime Parker sketched for the Assyrian occupation of the Upper Tigris region, taking as his example the settlement pattern based on survey results (Parker 2003). With a different view for the Carchemish area, see Wilkinson/Wilkinson 2016. In general, the reliability of survey evidence needs to be considered more critically.

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Style, Multivocality and Resistance in Artistic Production at Hasanlu, Iran

Keywords: style, hybridisation, belts, Iranian archaeology, Iron Age

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Summary

This paper explores the phenomenon of visual culture that emerges from connections or collisions of peoples and the way stylistic and other choices express and contribute to the power dynamics of those relationships, specifically in the material culture of Hasanlu, Iran, during Period IVb (1050–800 BCE). This case study focuses on stylistic and cultural interactions embodied in sheet metal belts, a category of artifacts from Hasanlu found with the bodies of a few, likely elite, men in burials in Hasanlu's outer town, loci where we might expect to find objects related to the construction and negotiation of local identity and hierarchy. These belts conform to three types, each of which is produced through particular material and stylistic entanglements and is represented in distinct citadel contexts. Historically, scholars have amplified the local significance of identifiably Assyrian elements within these stylistic admixtures.

This paper suggests that these amplifications echo colonialist assumptions about cultural transmission in asymmetric contact situations and argues that some of the features identifiable through attribution studies as 'foreign' in the mixed artistic production of Hasanlu, including sheet metal belts, are derived from the contents of citadel buildings, and would have resonated with residents of Hasanlu as expressions of local identity and power.

Introduction

In this paper, I explore the phenomenon of visual culture that emerges from connections or collisions of peoples, and the way stylistic and other choices express and contribute to the power dynamics of those relationships, specifically in the material culture of Hasanlu, Iran, during Period IVb (1050–800 BCE). Ernst Gombrich (1968) defined style in the 1960s as a visually distinct and recognisable manner of producing works of art, and while style defined thusly is an important component in our investigation of the cultural admixtures stemming from interaction, it is not the only one, as iconography, technology, materials and craft traditions play roles as well. I am using the phrase 'mixing of styles' broadly, as encompassing a range of intercultural entanglements (or hybridisations; see Cifarelli et al. 2018) from the presence and use of imported objects or images in new contexts, the creation of local iterations of external material culture, and more generally of the creation of objects that put styles and other material aspects of different groups in dialogue with each other. Mixing of styles is a mixing of worlds and habitus, material and immaterial, and the affective and semantic potential of these mixtures is contextually dependent. This case study focuses



Fig. 1. Map of the ancient Near East showing the location of Hasanlu (base map, Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Penn Museum, with additions by the author).

on stylistic and cultural interactions embodied in sheet metal belts, a category of artefact from Hasanlu found with the bodies of a few, likely elite, men in burials in Hasanlu's outer town, loci where we might expect to find objects related to the construction and negotiation of local identity and hierarchy. These belts conform to three types, each of which is produced through particular material and stylistic entanglements and is represented in distinct citadel contexts.

Period IVb at Hasanlu: Context, Crisis and Response

For the last decade, my work has focused on the Iron Age material culture of the site of Hasanlu in northwestern Iran (*fig. 1*). This site differs significantly from the polities to the west discussed elsewhere in this volume. Writing was not used at Hasanlu, although excavators found several fragmentary objects inscribed in Elamite, Assyrian and Babylonian in temple treasuries and

residential storage. The presence of these objects demonstrates a local awareness of and interest in writing technology, as well as attesting tacitly to its failure to take hold at Hasanlu. In the absence of local written records, many have speculated about the ethno-linguistic character of the occupants of Hasanlu, as well as its ancient name, matters still largely unresolved (Dyson 1960; Reade 1979; Pecorella/Salvini 1982; Dyson/Muscarella 1989; Kroll 2005; Muscarella 2006; Curtis 2019; Hassanzadeh 2022). And unlike polities west of the Zagros Mountains in the ancient Near East, Hasanlu did not experience a socio-political collapse at the end of the Late Bronze Age (Hasanlu Period V, 1450–1250 BCE) (Danti 2013a; 2013b). Rather than an interruption and punctuated shift from the Bronze to the Iron Age, the architectural and archaeological record of Hasanlu's citadel and outer town suggests broad cultural continuity.

From the Middle Bronze Age (late 3rd mill. BCE) forward, Hasanlu's entanglements with neighbours in Mesopotamia, the South Caucasus and broader Iran ebb and flow. These interactions

have been identified through attribution studies carefully tracing non-local stylistic and material attributes to their geographical and chronological points of origin in lands near and far. Each of these points of origin – for example the Mediterranean coastal context of origin for tiny seashells (*tritina gibbusola*) found in burials and storerooms at Hasanlu (Cifarelli 2013; 2018b) or the wide swaths of land in northern Mesopotamia, southern Anatolia and northern Iran where Habur Ware pottery is found (Danti 2013a) – serves as a node in Hasanlu's broad and dynamic network of interaction across the ancient Near East.

This paper will focus on Hasanlu's Iron Age II level (Period IVb, ca. 1050–800 BCE), a chapter which closed with a massive and devastating destruction – a military attack and cataclysmic fire that left the site a smoking heap of rubble serving as a spectacle of destruction for residents and travellers in the Gadar River valley for months, if not years. This major destruction was not the first at the site: The previous period (Iron Age I, Period IVc, ca. 1250–1050 BCE) featured a significant fire on the citadel and subsequent rebuilding of monumental structures on the same footprints.

The period between these two destruction horizons was eventful, with increasing conflict in the region due to the coalescence and expansion of the kingdom of Urartu in the South Caucasus, the resumption of Assyrian territorial and colonial aggression from the west, and the rise of the Iranian Mannean kingdom to the southwest (Danti 2013b; Cifarelli 2017a; 2019; Curtis 2019; Hassanzadeh 2022). This time of intensified contact and conflict in the region coincides with detectable changes in the material culture at Hasanlu. Compared to earlier burials, those of Period IVb show striking increases in wealth disparities and differentiation of assemblages by sex. Elite identities are, for the first time at Hasanlu, distinguished by the inclusion of military and militaristic items in burials (Danti/Cifarelli 2015; Cifarelli 2016; 2017b; Cifarelli et al. 2018). The heightening of such distinctions in burials is mirrored in the material culture of the citadel, where the figural artistic production contemporary with Period IVb levels includes imagery related to social stratification and militarisation, including presentation and banquet scenes, as well as scenes of hunting and warfare, such as

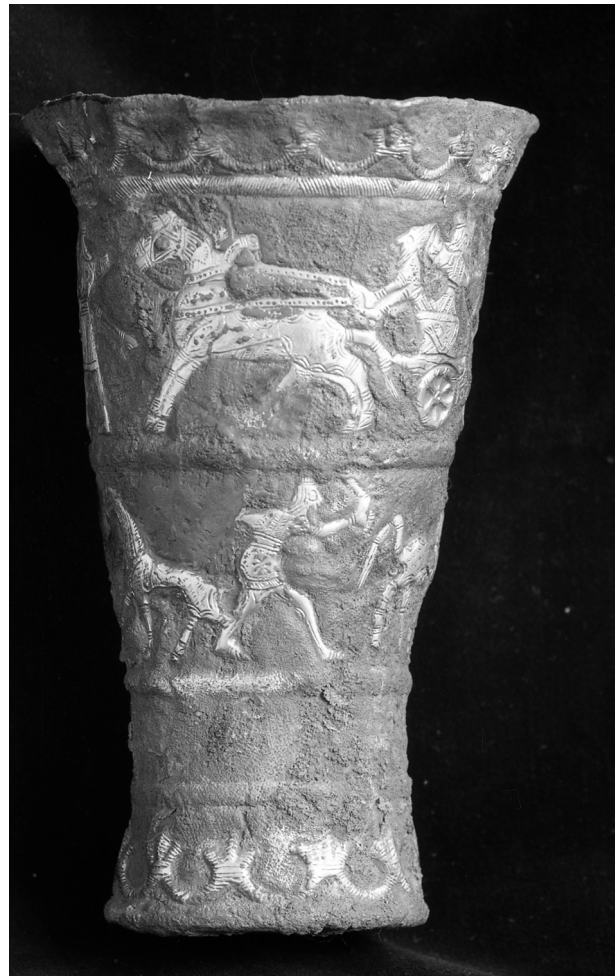


Fig. 2. Silver Beaker, HAS58-427, Tehran Museum (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

those displayed on the Silver Beaker (HAS58-427/Tehran Museum) found in Burned Building (BB) IW (fig. 2).

During Period IVb, changes to the citadel buildings increased defensibility of certain spaces by moving their entrances into courtyards, which were then closed off with fortified gateways. During the course of Period IVb, the permeability of some buildings was reduced by the narrowing and walling of openings (Dyson 1989; Danti 2013a; 2013b; Cifarelli 2017a).

In addition to changes in form, some citadel buildings evidently shifted functions during this period, perhaps closer to the end, the most notable of which is the evident use of monumental columned hall buildings, Burned Buildings (BB) IVE and V, for stabling horses. The area between these two structures – a broad, open corridor during

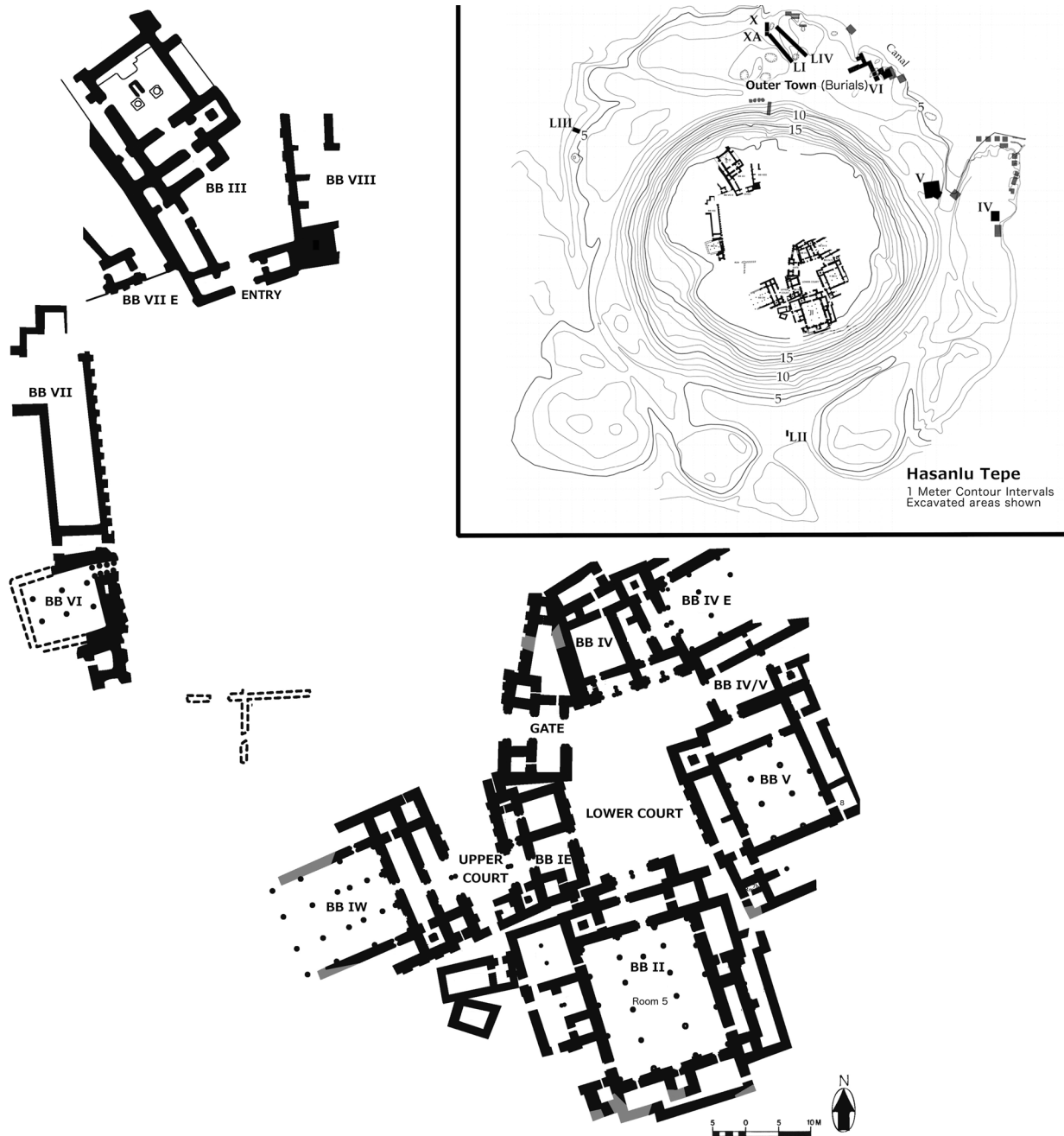


Fig. 3. Plan of Period IVb Citadel (1050–800 BCE), Hasanlu, Iran (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

Period IVc – was enclosed during Period IVb to create BBIV-V, a structure in which significant quantities of equestrian equipment were stored (*fig. 3*) (Dyson 1989, 126; de Schauensee 1989). Despite the defensive nature of these changes, evidence for circumvallation of the citadel is equivocal at best, particularly compared to the many well-fortified settlements and fortresses in the region (Danti 2013a; Biscione 2009; Danti 2014, 802 f.; Kroll 2010, 21 f.; Piller 2012, 305 f.) Many of these

architectural changes are elements of 'crisis architecture' (Driessen 1995, 65–76), manifesting the site's vulnerability to, and attempts to withstand, an outside attack during this period.

Also related to the use and control of access to spaces and objects is the introduction in Period IVb of sealing technology, used locally to secure select rooms and containers in citadel temples and elite residences (Marcus 1989; 1990; 1996). More than 100 seals and seal impressions were excavated at

Hasanlu and Michelle Marcus has shown that the seals used sphragistically at the site were those produced locally in the Hasanlu Local style, which as a group constituted less than 20% of the seals found at Hasanlu. We can read this as an indication that expressions of authority and identity at this site were deliberately rooted in indigeneity, not emulative of styles from elsewhere, as I will discuss below.

The archaeological record at Hasanlu, then, demonstrates some of the material effects of life under the threat of annihilation: Crisis architecture, tightening of administrative control of access to goods and places, widening gaps between assemblages of rich and poor, men, women and others, and the introduction of military equipment and militarising dress items to adult mortuary assemblages. From these crisis phenomena we can deduce the site's precarity during this period, an affective state that is critical for assessing the range of stylistic entanglements evident in the decorated sheet metal belts from Hasanlu, an artefact class that is both militarising and masculine (Rubinson 2012a; 2012b; Cifarelli 2016). Just as precarity led to the adoption of crisis architecture at Hasanlu, it governed both stylistic and other material choices of the local makers and consumers of the site's visual and material culture, and the ways these choices participated in the negotiation of local and regional power dynamics.

Citadel Contents and Contexts

The conflagration that ended Period IVb was so hot that the burning multi-story citadel buildings, made of mudbrick and wood on stone foundations, collapsed and sealed their contents, including the bodies of hundreds of people. Archaeologists found thousands of objects in Level IVb, many approximately where they were being used, stored or looted by enemy combatants. Tens of thousands of objects were logged by the Hasanlu Expedition on the citadel, as well as in burials in the northern and eastern areas of the outer town. These finds were split in partage between University of Pennsylvania, The Metropolitan Museum in New York and Iran, and most remain unpublished (Muscarella 2006).

In citadel buildings, patterns of deposition indicate that many objects were concentrated in the storerooms of temples and elite residences (Dyson 1989; Danti/Cifarelli 2016; de Schauensee 2011). Attribution studies (e.g., Winter 1989; Marcus 1991; Cifarelli 2018b; Porada 1965) have shown that some of these objects are older than their context of deposition, occasionally by many generations, evidently collected and safeguarded for centuries before Hasanlu's IVb destruction. That the local practice of collecting precious and interesting objects predates Period IVb is attested to by the presence of fragments of ivories under the Period IVb floor of Burned Building II in a level dating to the previous Period IVc (Iron Age I, 1250–1050 BCE) (Danti/Cifarelli 2016). Other objects appear in forms and styles that emerged locally during Period IVb, many of which have only been documented at the site of Hasanlu. As in earlier periods, attribution studies of numerous Period IVb-contextualised objects show that they are exogenous, some brought over both short and considerable distances to Hasanlu (Winter 1977; Muscarella 1980; Marcus 1996). Using a western analytical framework, some of the contents of citadel buildings have been classed as valuable 'prestige' items because of their distant or exotic origin, precious material, figural decoration or fine craftsmanship. Others (those lacking the above qualities) are ostensibly humbler, utilitarian objects, but their presence in these sealed contexts signals the high value placed on them locally. Unlike the closely clustered, frequently interacting ancient Near Eastern polities from Mesopotamia west to the Mediterranean coast, many of the geographical 'sources' of external artefacts, motifs and stylistic elements are far flung, separated from Hasanlu by great distance or geographical obstacles like mountain ranges and expanses of desert. Of the 'imported' objects, excavators and subsequent researchers attributed the greatest cachet to those connecting the site to Mesopotamia, particularly if that craftsmanship, style or iconography resembles that found in the storerooms of palaces and temples in the Assyrian heartland, for reasons that will be discussed below.

Among the objects excavated on Hasanlu's citadel are nearly 100 fragments of sheet metal belts, a class of militarising dress first appearing

at Hasanlu in Period IVb contexts in the citadel and outer town burials. These belts are present at Hasanlu in three distinct styles or types:

- (1) belts decorated with *repoussé* dots and lines, imported from or identical to belts made for centuries in the South Caucasus;
- (2) belts crafted locally in a manner that resembles the distinctive appearance of South Caucasian belts but which employs the idiosyncratic local decorative tradition of attaching metal studs or rivets in the place of embossed dots;
- (3) and more rarely belts featuring highly elaborated, skilfully crafted, Assyrian-inflected, figural decoration.

Ranging from simply wrought to elegantly embellished, each style presents a different approach to mixing indigenous and exogenous material cultures, and each is found in a distinct context of use and deposition (Cifarelli et al. 2018).

Trying to understand how these different mixtures of styles and technologies operated emically brings one face to face with the questions at the heart of ‘Beyond Attribution!’ – how do attribution studies and stylistic analysis help us understand what was going on at Hasanlu, and the choices that contributed to this mixed material culture. This is critical given that, as will be discussed below, these objects do not function as armour but seem to be intended for display on particular, male, bodies. If we have identified some of these belts as coming from elsewhere, why did the residents at Hasanlu want them? Why did they begin to make them locally? For the belts with more ornate and figural decoration, why did their makers select the particular stylistic, iconographic or technical features for these belts? In each instance of hybridisation, what new thing is being constructed and why?

There are clear pitfalls inherent to the analytical toolkit used in art history, in no small part because these tools were developed for and honed by the study of European art by Western art historians. Once one has determined that some aspect of a thing found at Point A closely resembles a thing found at Point B, both points in the distant, non-European past, how does this aid in the understanding of the choices being made in artistic production at Point B? If, for example, it appears that the artisans at Hasanlu were integrating traits

we have identified as being Assyrian (or Elamite, South Caucasian, Kassite etc.) into local artistic production, what kinds of inferences can we draw? Can we infer relationships of peoples based on our determination of relationships of visual culture? The vague but loaded terms applied to these instances of visual similarity – like ‘influence’, ‘imitation’ or ‘emulation’ – betray colonialist assumptions about relative cultural value and the unilateral transmission of culture from positions of greater to lesser power.

In the case of Hasanlu, the evidence for asymmetrical entanglements between the site and its more powerful neighbours, as observed in the visual culture of Period IVb, has been framed as a narrative about the ‘Assyrianisation’ of Hasanlu, with local artisans and their patrons deliberately collecting examples of Assyrian objects and imitating central Assyrian style and iconography in seals, ivories, other ‘prestige’ goods and architectural decoration. I have argued elsewhere that this interpretation conflates the contemporary scholars’ knowledge of, interest in and perspective on Assyria with that of the residents at Hasanlu and has emerged at a moment when the archaeological world was particularly gripped with wonderment at the discoveries emerging from important excavations in the Assyrian heartland (Danti/Cifarelli 2016; Cifarelli 2018a). At the moment the Hasanlu expedition was getting underway in the 1950s, remarkable discoveries were being made in the Assyrian capitals of northern Iraq. These discoveries were featured in newspapers in the United States and the United Kingdom and were the subject of an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1957, the year of the first field season at Hasanlu. Naturally the excavators at Hasanlu (and their funders) were delighted to recognise the Assyrian objects at the site and to detect what was at the time referred to as the ‘influence’ of Assyria in local craft production. Because of the inferred prominence of Assyrian materials at the site and Assyrian texts detailing campaigns in the general region, it was suggested that Hasanlu had diplomatic relationships with Assyrian rulers. Soon the site was referred to as the easternmost place in the Assyrian empire to have undergone Assyrianisation, a misunderstanding that continues to this day (Cifarelli 2018a).

But Hasanlu was not, as excavators later claimed (Dyson/Muscarella 1989), 'full of' imported Assyrian objects. They make up a small percentage of artefacts excavated at the site, they were not found in the loci where one might expect to see evidence of public status negotiations – namely burials – and were associated almost exclusively with the site's temple storerooms (Danti/Cifarelli 2016), where they were found along with an eclectic assortment of objects old and new, crafted locally and from distant lands, utilitarian and highly embellished. Aside from the attribution of some objects at the site to Assyrian manufacture, there is no other material evidence at Hasanlu for direct interaction with Assyria. Hasanlu itself was not integrated into an Assyrian imperial periphery, instead lying in an area that served, during the early 1st mill. BCE, as a buffer between Assyrian and Urartian interests around Lake Urmia, until it was later annexed by Urartu.

With no evidence of direct contact between Assyria and Hasanlu, one wonders what role Assyria might have played in the local imaginary of residents of a small town on the opposite side of the Zagros Mountains, where access through mountain passes is limited to a few months out of the year. If the Period IVb residents of Hasanlu had any impression of Assyria at all, it might have been from Assyria's opportunistic raids into the region during the 9th cent. BCE to extract resources, primarily horses, recorded in Assyrian inscriptions (Reade 1979). Certainly, if Lake Urmia is the 'sea of the land Nairi' in which Shalmaneser III of Assyria washed his weapons (Grayson 1996, A.O.102.1, 33b), residents of Hasanlu would have been aware of the presence of the Assyrians in their neighbourhood. Could the people of Hasanlu connect the terrifying and sensorially rich spectacle of the Assyrian army moving through the Gadar River valley with the beautiful Assyrian objects – primarily carved ivories as well as glazed and bronze vessels – that had been collected at the site and stored in temple treasures among the masses of goods? As art historians and archaeologists in the present, we connect these discrete and distant points – Hasanlu and Assyria – through stylistic analyses and attribution studies of the objects excavated at the site and there is no question that one can catch glimmers at Hasanlu of the glorious visual culture of

central Assyria (Winter 1980; Muscarella 1980; Marcus 1996; Collins 2006). Still, it does not necessarily follow that the residents of Hasanlu shared our understanding of and reverence for Assyria as a hegemonic, even superior, culture, which they would have therefore deliberately copied to augment individual status within their community. I wonder if the reason we think they could be imitating Assyrian style is because we, as practitioners of Art History who have inherited a colonialist understanding of cultural transmission in asymmetrical situations, believe they should be imitating Assyria. This paper suggests that local conditions at the site of Hasanlu, including the patterns of collecting and enclaving precious and otherwise interesting objects in citadel storerooms, as well the state of political and military precarity in which Hasanlu found itself during Period IVb, will provide a more relevant lens through which to view the stylistic choices made in the artistic production and consumption at Hasanlu.

Sheet Metal Belts at Hasanlu

Sheet metal belts were broadly distributed throughout regions in the ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean during the Iron Age, having emerged in south Caucasian contexts, almost exclusively in burials, beginning as early as the 14th cent. BCE (Castelluccia 2017). As mentioned, belts are found at Hasanlu beginning in Period IVb, centuries after their appearance in the northern highlands. At Hasanlu, excavators found more than 100 belts or belt fragments in the citadel – almost all of which were in votive collections in temples. Of the 100 outer town burials from Period IVb, only three contained sheet metal belts, each buried near the body of an adult man. On the citadel, no belts were found worn on individual bodies. Bearing in mind that the moment of their deposition coincided with an intense battle, where one might expect combatants to be armoured to the teeth, the absence of belts from combatant bodies suggests that these belts did not function as practical battle armour at the site. If these costly belts were not worn for personal protection in battle, they certainly could have been the equivalent of parade armour worn to display and construct status and affiliation.

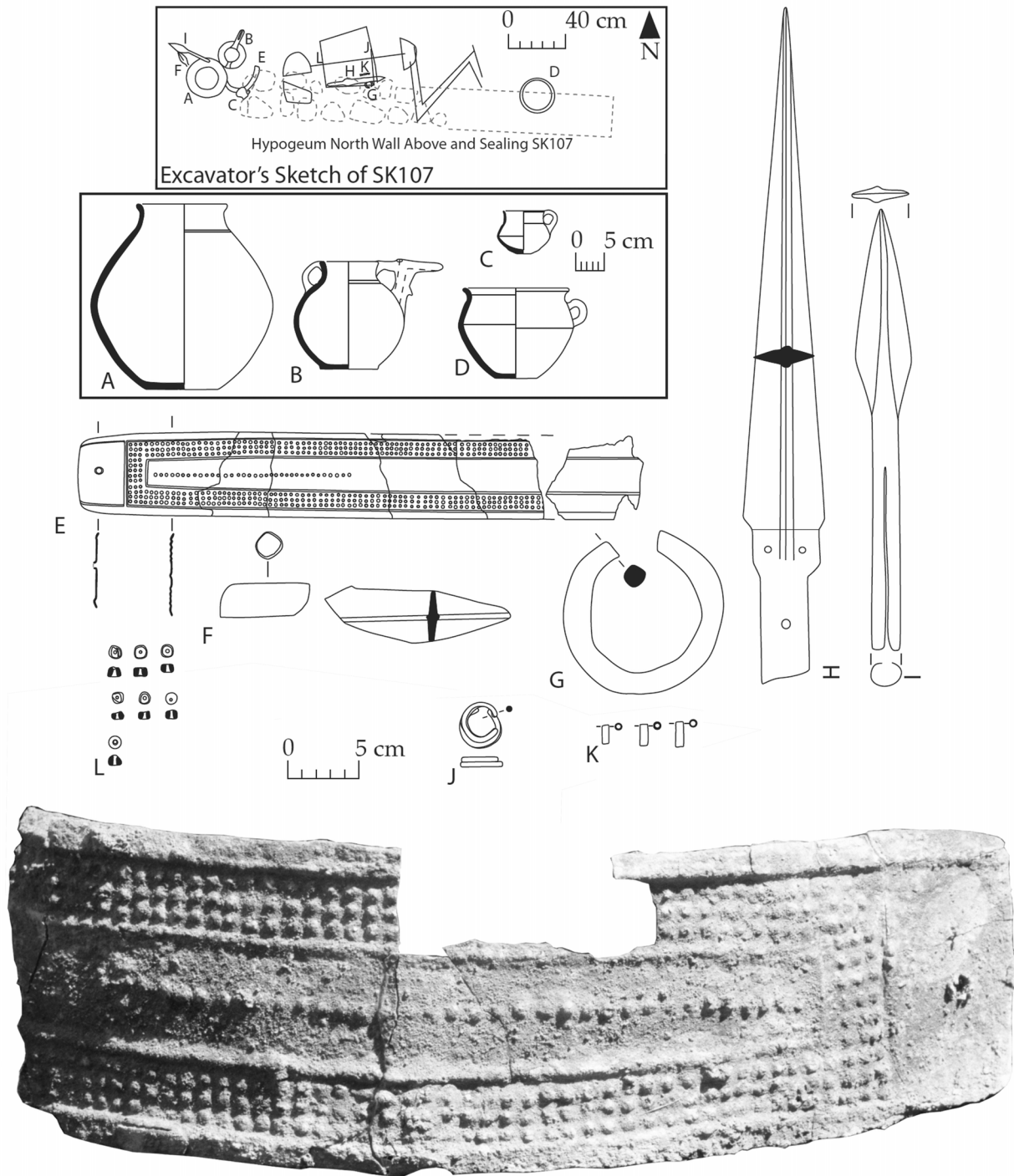


Fig. 4. Excavation drawing of Burial SK 107 and photograph of South Caucasian belt HAS59-262 (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

The visual culture of the site, exemplified by Local Style artefacts including ivory and metal furniture decorations, frequently includes male figures wearing plain, wide belts in scenes of presentation, hunting and battle. The images are difficult to interpret, and the identities of these figures (local residents, rulers, mythological beings,

deities) cannot yet be determined. It is therefore impossible to draw conclusions from these images or the three burials about daily dress at Hasanlu. Belts in burials may or may not be personal property of the deceased, or contribute to a particular identity, but we cannot consider the meaning of these belts at Hasanlu without also looking at the

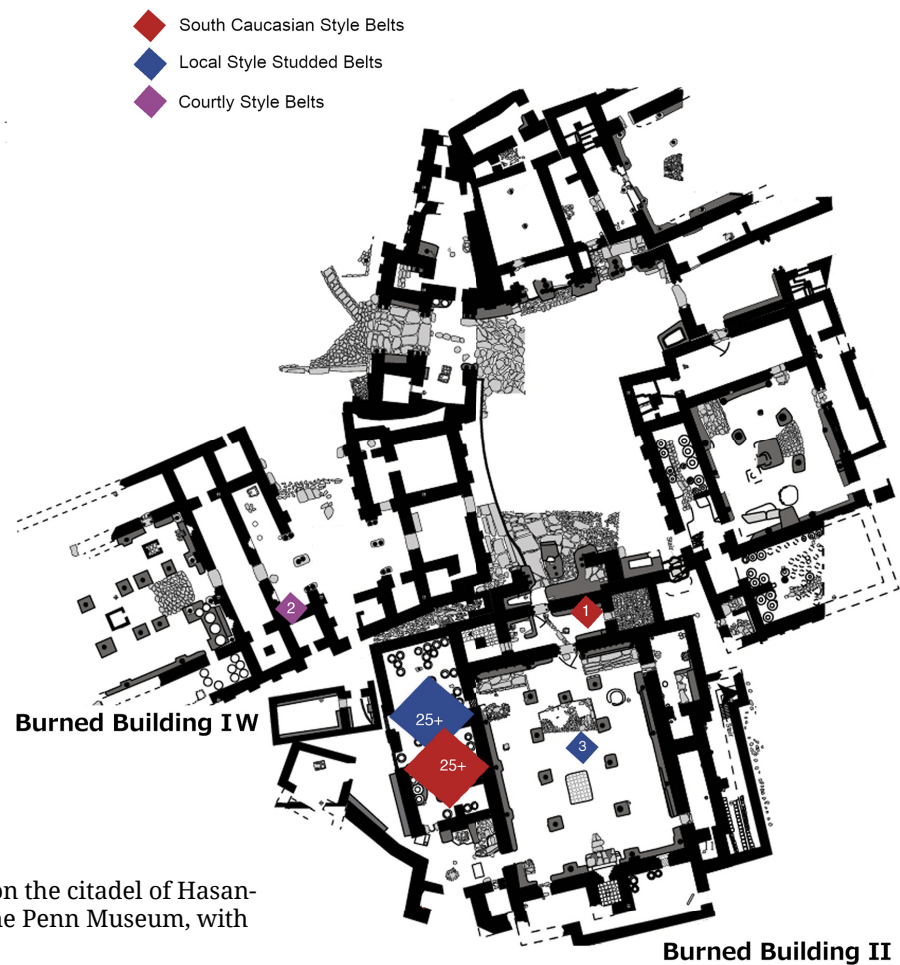


Fig. 5. Findspots of belts on the citadel of Hasanlu, Iran (plan courtesy of the Penn Museum, with additions by the author).

ways different styles of belts are contextualised on the citadel, as below.

The earliest instance of a belt (HAS59-262/UM60-20-0179; MMA 60-20-21 a-d) at Hasanlu appears in the early Period IVb burial of SK 107, a person identified bioarchaeologically as a mature adult male (Selinsky 2009) with healed cranial trauma that may indicate injuries from warfare (Monge/McCarthy 2011), and whose grave goods mark him as a person of relative wealth at the site (fig. 4). This belt, consisting of a strip of sheet bronze with decoration in the form of *repoussé* dots and lines, is in keeping with contemporary and earlier (13th–8th cent. BCE) belts found in burials in the South Caucasus (Rubinson 2012a; 2012b; Danti/Cifarelli 2015; Cifarelli et al. 2018).¹

¹ The mountainous South Caucasus region in this era was home to culturally similar but politically loosely associated, fortress-based polities. Evidence from earlier burials at Hasanlu demonstrates longstanding interconnections between Hasanlu and these northern polities (see Cifarelli

Along with the spears, swords and a heavy arm-let buried with Skeleton 107 (fig. 4), this belt is part of a constellation of South Caucasian-derived changes to local mortuary practice that appears to contribute to a particularly masculine, ‘warrior’ identity in certain male burials at Hasanlu (Danti/Cifarelli 2015a). Crafted and decorated in a style commonly excavated in Late Bronze and early Iron Age burials in the northern Highlands, it is likely that this belt was made in the South Caucasus and imported to Hasanlu along with some of the personal ornaments and weapons in the burial, perhaps indicating that the man was himself

2013; Danti 2013a; 2013b). The precise nature of the cultural interactions that resulted in artifacts of likely South Caucasian origin in burials in Iran, whether trade, military engagement or something else, cannot be determined from the evidence in the burials. In the period corresponding to Hasanlu IVb, the kingdom of Urartu began to coalesce on the shores of Lake Van and the earliest known historical (cuneiform) records of Urartian kings date shortly before the destruction of Hasanlu (see Kroll 2010).

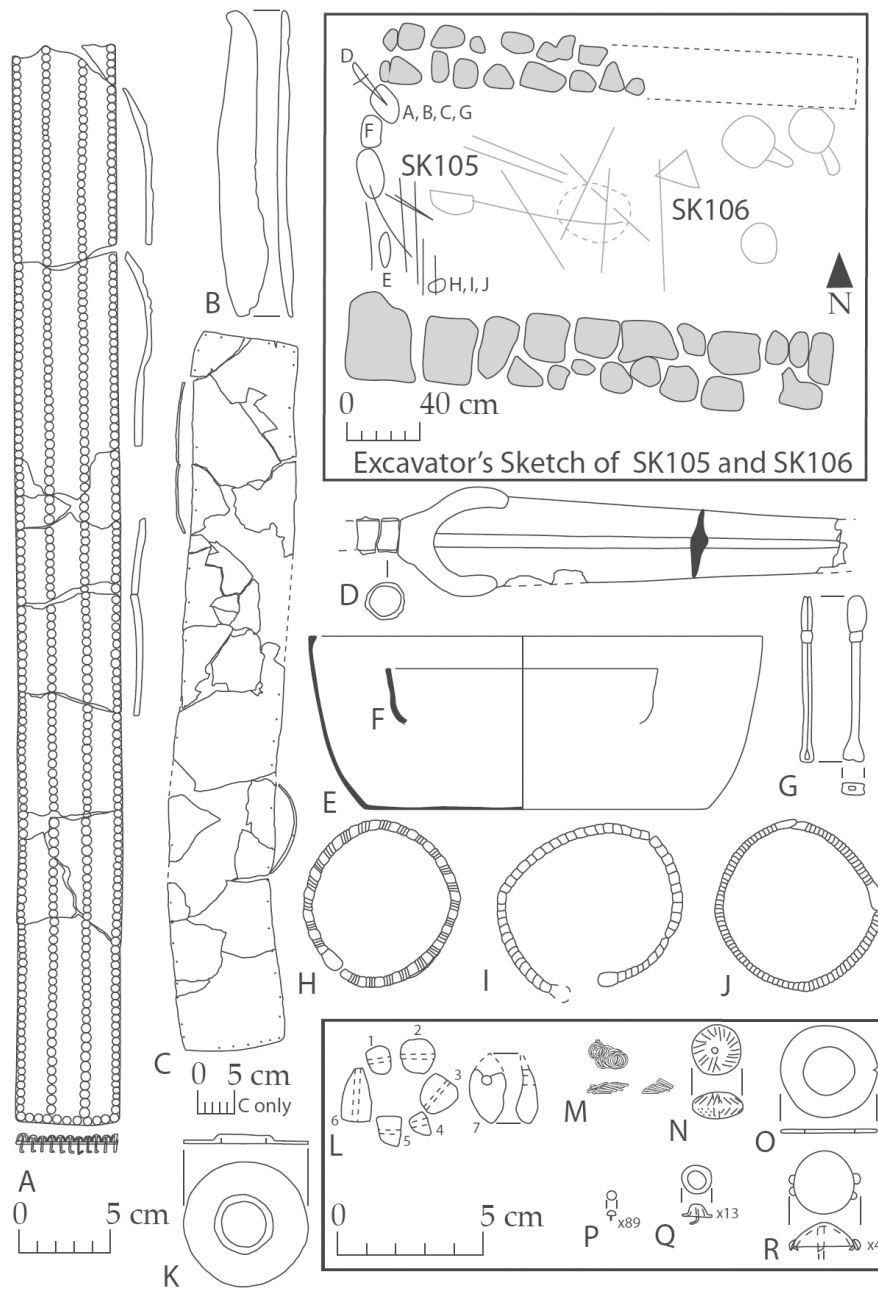


Fig. 6. Excavation drawing of Burial SK105 (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

from the north (Danti/Cifarelli 2015; Cifarelli et al. 2018).

The presence of this person at Hasanlu in a prominent, well-stratified, early IVb context reveals the intensification of interaction between Hasanlu and the South Caucasus during Period IVb, a relationship that would likely have rendered South Caucasian material culture recognisable to residents of Hasanlu. Elsewhere at Hasanlu, excavators found 25 additional examples of this South Caucasian belt type, all in citadel contexts (fig. 5).

Nearly all were discovered in a single storage/treasury context in BBII, a monumental columned

hall believed to be a temple (Dyson 1989). The fact that residents offered these objects as gifts to the temple and its deity recontextualises them across the site and imbues them with meaning specific to Hasanlu. By this act, during the era when the existence of Hasanlu was threatened not only by Assyria but also by the kingdom of Urartu and the South Caucasian warriors it employed, the recognisably South Caucasian identity of these objects is subsumed to and transformed by their local roles as votives and elite armorial dress, in a phenomenon which Philip Stockhammer terms ‘relational entanglement’ (2013).

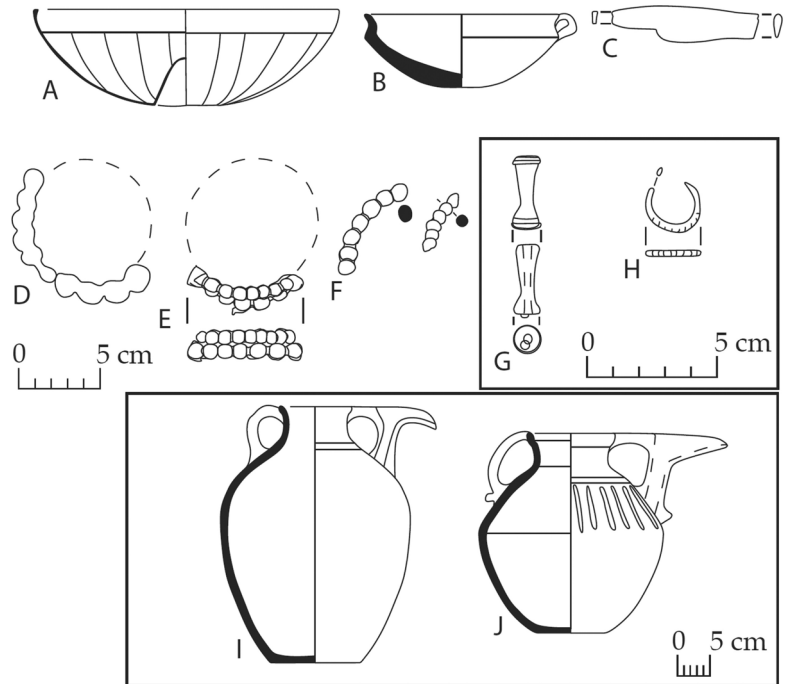


Fig. 7. Excavation drawing of Burial SK106 and photograph of Local Style studded belt HAS59-232, Tehran Museum (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

The second type of belt appears in a burial stratified directly above that of SK 107, a disturbed stone tomb holding the burials of two unsexed (due to the state of preservation) individuals, SK 105 and 106 (*fig. 6, 7*). Like that of SK 107, this burial has been described as a ‘warrior’ burial due to the inclusion of a sheet metal belt and weapons, as well as northern (South Caucasus) style dress items (Danti/Cifarelli 2015). At a glance, the decoration of this belt resembles that found with SK 107, with rows of round decorative elements resembling the embossed dots (HAS59-232, Tehran Museum). The technique used to create these dots,

however, is far more labour-intensive, employing rows of small, hemispherical tacks or studs, the shanks of which pass through perforations in the sheet metal to attach it to a substrate of textile or leather. This style and technique of decoration is largely localised to the site of Hasanlu, where it is so common that thousands of these studs were excavated across all contexts at the site, loose as well as articulating a range of surfaces from dress items, like belts and headbands, to armour, weapons, horse trappings, furniture and containers (de Schauensee 2011). These studs decorated rigid surfaces, such as metal and wood, as well as less

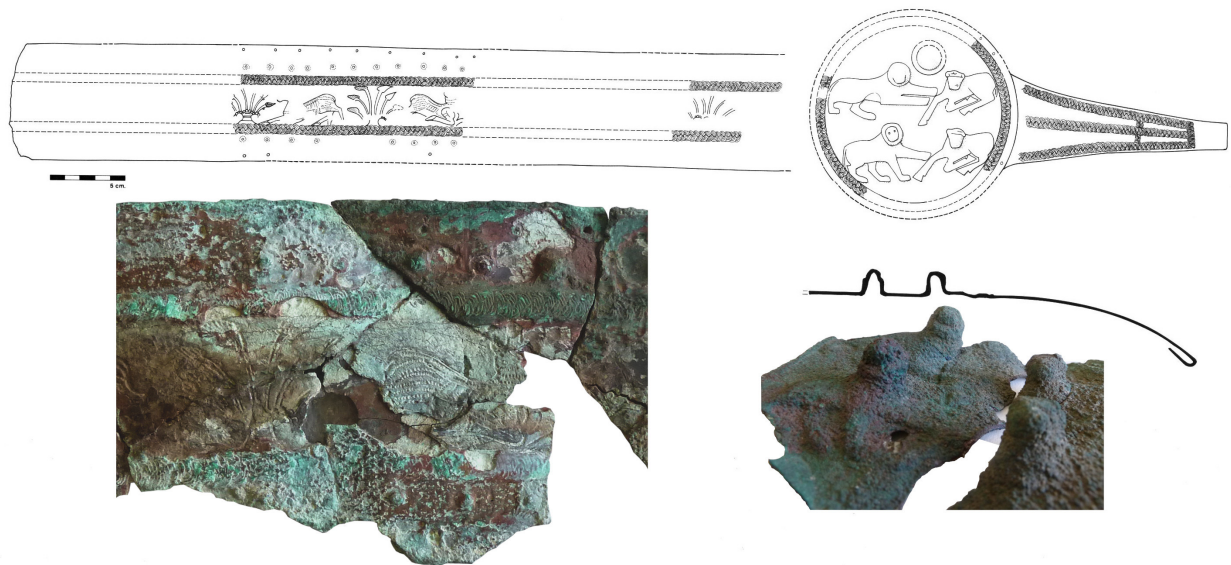


Fig. 8. Excavation photograph and drawing of Courtly Style belt HAS64-288/UM 65-31-726 (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

durable, more penetrable substrates like textile or leather, rendering them into armour.

This studded belt has an indexical relationship to the South Caucasian belts, with decoration that superficially resembles them but is crafted in the local stylistic vernacular. These belts instantiate a further degree of stylistic and technical hybridisation, which Stockhammer has termed ‘material entanglement’, or the creation of new forms from the deliberate mixing of styles of different cultures in contact situations (Stockhammer 2013, 16 f.).

They are functionally identical to the South Caucasian types, laid in a burial near a ‘warrior’ body and appearing alongside their South Caucasian counterparts in temple storage or treasuries (fig. 5). The South Caucasian ‘originals’, whose simple embossed dots were far less labour- and material-intensive to create, were available as exemplars for faithful reproduction, had that been the goal of local belt production. This costly stylistic and technical choice to use studs was deliberate. Rather than creating imitation South Caucasian belts, artisans at Hasanlu chose to make these belts using a laborious, indigenous decorative strategy that marked these objects (and perhaps their owners and wearers) as emphatically local and armoured. In this time of precarity, the constellation of makers, wearers and observers could read this embellishment as an act of status appropriation through the assertion of a local voice and

identity, engaging in an intentional dialogue with the external militaristic dress.

Like the other two belt types, the third was found in a single outer town burial, as well as in a specific citadel context. If masses of metal jewellery, weapons, armour and other objects correlates to wealth, the burial of SK 493, a young man (Selinsky 2009), is the wealthiest excavated at Hasanlu (fig. 8, 9). This belt presents a radical departure from the armorial styles examined so far, in form and decoration. It features a long, horizontal waist strip of sheet bronze with carefully incised horizontal bands of figural and abstract decoration, a large, circular medallion – presumably worn at the centre front of the body, decorated in high relief with *repoussé* animals that have protome heads and chased surface decoration, and a terminal formed by a tapering strip of incised metal sheet ending with a hook. Elsewhere (Cifarelli et al. 2018), I have referred to this style as ‘courtly’ because it is far more elaborated than the other types of belts. Further, aside from this lavishly furnished burial, all additional exemplars of the type (HAS58-450/UM59-4-113; HAS58-244/UM59-4-158) appear at Hasanlu in a single courtly context on the citadel: in the storeroom of the elite residence (palace?) BBIW. As BBIW was collapsing in flames, a group of enemy combatants spent their final moments gathering luxurious spoils of war. One of these Courtly Style belts was found,

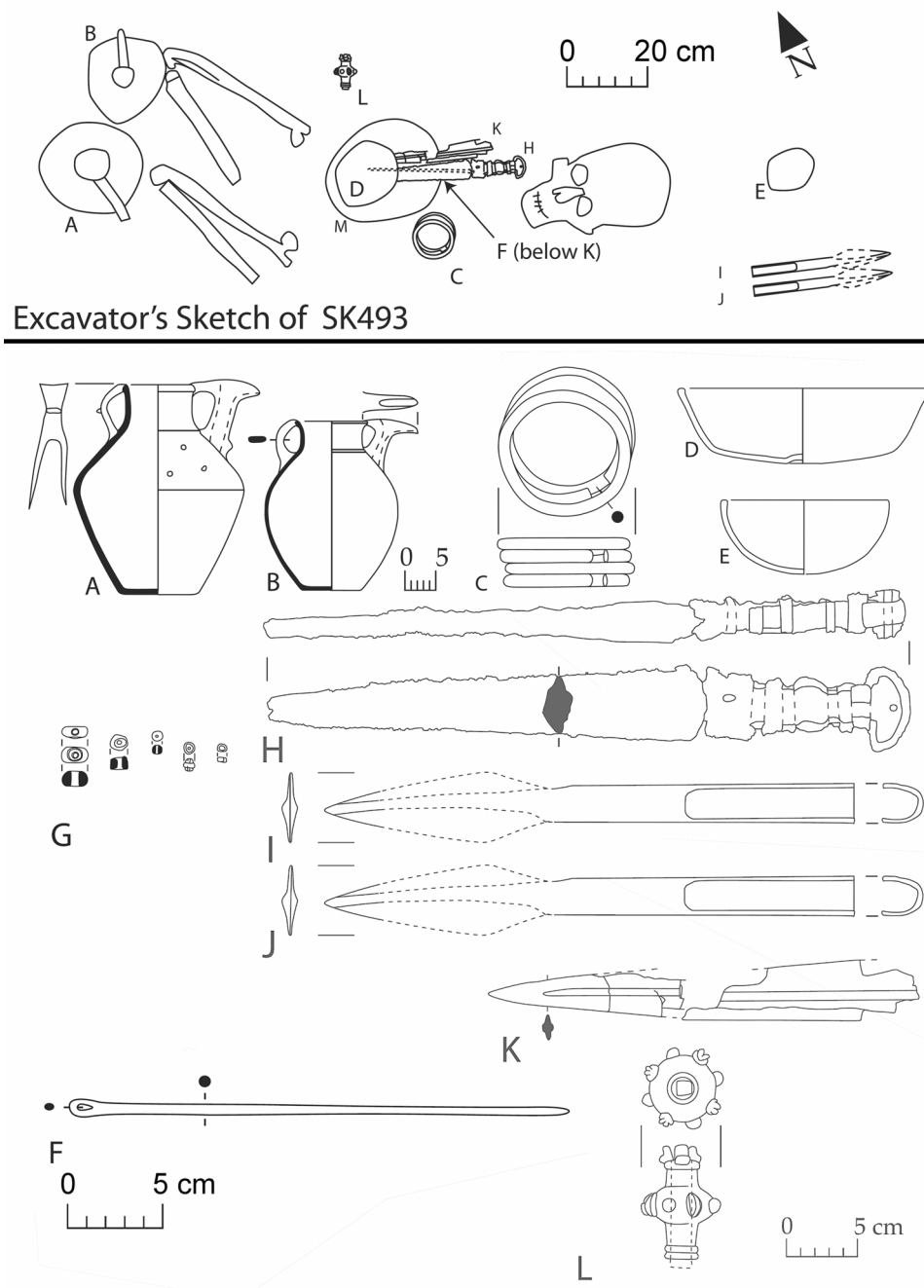


Fig. 9. Excavation drawing of Burial SK 493 (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

clutched in the arms of one of them, along with the well-known Gold Bowl (HAS58-469/Tehran Museum 10712) and other showy valuables (Danti 2014), suggesting that they were scooped up and looted as a group. This concentration of lavishly decorated objects in BBIW, in a period of increasingly visible stratification, suggests that it had been a seat of local power, a notion related recursively to the wealthy young man buried with one of these belts. The form of the belt – particularly the circular central medallion and tapering, hooked terminal – has no parallels outside of

northwestern Iran (Cifarelli et al. 2019). Like the studded belt, this type is a uniquely local but contextually distinct response to the existential crisis at the site, adapted for the palatial micro-context of the BBIW and the body of an elite young man, an expertly crafted, elegantly innovative, locally evocative variation on a decorated metal belt.

The iconographic and stylistic richness of the decoration of this belt causes our art historical synapses to fire. It is satisfying to track and attribute each visual element to a specific chronological and geographical point of origin, and like other

researchers, I have described this artefact and its decoration as ‘Assyrianising’ (Winter 1980; de Schauensee 1988; Danti/Cifarelli 2015). Indeed, the contours of the recumbent animals and palmettes on the waist strip of the belt are incised with the confident, dynamic and fluid linearity that immediately recalls the naturalism of Middle Assyrian ivories, glyptic and wall paintings (Harper et al. 1995, no. 45, fig. 20, no. 74.). The motif of animals flanking a palm or palmette is widespread, and the particular composition of the elements shown on this belt hews closely to central Assyrian examples from the 9th cent. BCE, most particularly the ‘embroidered’ borders of garments worn by the low relief sculpted figures that lined the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Kalhu (Bartl 2014). Is this belt an example of the deliberate, knowledgeable emulation of contemporary central Assyrian style, intended to elevate the status of local makers and consumers, by reference to the glory of Assyria?

Details of the belt itself belie the notion that emulation of Assyrian art predominates in its crafting. A closer look reveals that within the fluent, smooth boundaries of the kneeling animal bodies, artisans articulated internal contours and surfaces using undulating rows of tiny energetic dots and hatch marks. This surface treatment is characteristic of metalwork in a large swath of land from the South Caucasus in the north through Iranian sites like Marlik near the Caspian (Negahban 1996) and far to the south in Fars (Negahban 1984). The beautifully incised double guilloche that borders the belt is another visual element broadly distributed through the ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze and early Iron Ages. It frequently appears on belts from South Caucasian sites, both by itself and bordering figurative and geometric decoration (Castelluccia 2017, 27 f.) and at Marlik where it borders luxury metalwork from the cemetery (Negahban 1996, vol. 2, col. pl. XI–XIII).

On the round medallion of the belt where two lions are depicted in relief holding recumbent prey animals, artisans juxtaposed delicately incised surface details and low relief with high relief protome heads bursting through the surface, a combination of techniques found in Iran at sites like Marlik (Negahban 1996) and Susa (Negahban

1984, fig. 5), and echoing vessels with *repoussé*, high-relief figures found in central Iran (Hissar) and eastern Iran (Shahdad) (Moorey 1993), a cultural thread that we can pull all the way east to the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex/Oxus Civilization (BMAC) and Central Asia. The composition of lions and prey animals is not attested elsewhere in northern Iran, though; it is a staple in the Syro-Mesopotamian and Elamite worlds and appears in a similar form on a vessel at Hissar (Moorey 1993).

While each of these attributions is ostensibly straightforward, do they help us understand this complicated belt made at Hasanlu for local consumption and display? In a period of crisis when the site was under threat of annexation or destruction, local artisans and their patrons chose to make a new version of a metal belt – a South Caucasian object – as an act of hybridisation itself, using an innovative and unique combination of iconographic elements, decorative strategies and technologies that can be traced to points far from Hasanlu in the Levant and Mesopotamia, the Caucasus and Iran. Our scholarly eye identifies these elements as ‘foreign’ or exogenous to Hasanlu – and specifically Mesopotamian, Elamite etc., but we do not know whether the residents of Hasanlu would make these same identifications, and if they did, what meaning they might attach to them. It is critical to bear in mind that, as Marian Feldman (2014, 26) noted, when attempting to reconstruct social entanglements based on attributions of visual elements, ‘the social relations thus inferred are perhaps as much a product of our analytical apparatus as an [...] entity from the past’. Our present-day analytical apparatus, indeed all of human cognition, filters sensory inputs through the lens of what we already know, which may not correspond to the mental imagery, memories and knowledge of those living at Hasanlu millennia ago in the past.

We may, however, have greater access to aspects of Hasanlu’s visual imaginary than is typical for many ancient sites due to the catastrophic destruction that preserved so many examples of visual and material culture at the site. This wealth of data allows us to argue that the elements of this belt that we can identify as ‘foreign’ or ‘influenced’ by exogenous visual culture share an important,

local point of reference, in that exemplars can be found among the objects displayed in columned halls and enclaved within the treasuries and storerooms in the monumental citadel building. As discussed, excavators found thousands of objects and curiosities on the citadel, collections including objects new and old, imported and locally made, ‘elite’ and quotidian, amassed and safeguarded over generations at Hasanlu.

A few examples of locally contextualised objects that could have inspired the ‘foreign’ elements in this belt include fragments of ivory inlay executed in an incised Assyrian style (Muscarella 1980, nos. 286, 290), found in the second story collapse of the south end of a storeroom, Room 8, in Burned Building II.

These fragmentary panels display horizontal registers of fluidly drawn, naturalistic renderings of recumbent animals flanking palm trees and palmettes, in postures identical to those on the belt (*fig. 10a*; Muscarella 1980, 156 f., no. 290). The same upper-story storage context yielded hundreds of additional objects, including many more ivories in a wide range of styles, metal and ceramic vessels, dress items (many in gold), equestrian items and weapons. In addition, three clay sealings made with two different seals were found among these objects (Marcus 1996, nos. 5B, 5G, 22), indicating that at least two individuals or offices had access to the room in question and its contents. In fact, two of the sealings were made by a cylinder seal whose impressions appear in other south citadel loci, including box, jar and basket sealings in the second-story collapse of Room 7 in BBII, a door sealing from the second-story collapse of Room 6 in BBII; and one each in the second-story collapse of Rooms 3 and 8 in BBV (Marcus 1996, 86–91, nos. 5A–5J).

Similarly, a convincing parallel for the belt’s palm fronds with bulbous terminals is found on cylinder seals classified by Marcus as ‘Provincial Assyrian’ and ‘Middle Assyrian stylistic legacy’, excavated on the floor near the central column of the main hall (Room 5) in BBII (*fig. 10b*; Marcus 1996, nos. 77, 78). These seals were found with seven other seals classified by Marcus as Local Style, Central Assyrian, Provincial Assyrian, Middle Assyrian stylistic legacy and unknown (Marcus 1996, nos. 3, 57, 61, 62, 64, 75, 77, 78, 84). This locus captures a

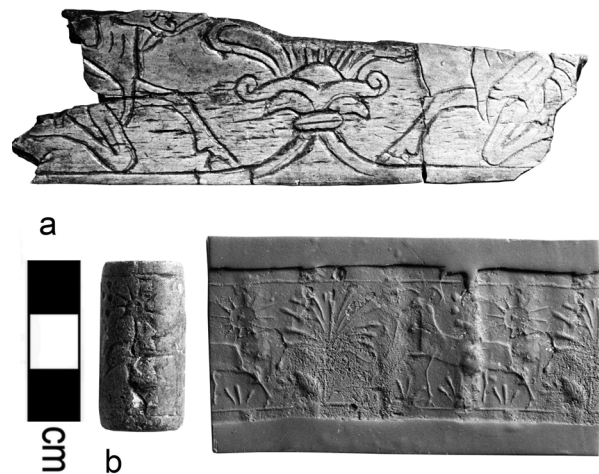


Fig. 10. a: Excavation photograph of an Assyrian style ivory fragment HAS64-722/UM 65-31-342; b: Excavation photograph of Middle Assyrian style cylinder seal HAS60-1027/UM61-5-21 (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

chaotic moment and was quite dense with artefacts and other finds. In addition to the executed bodies of several small children arranged around the central column of the hall, hundreds of objects were jumbled on the floor. Of the metal vessels, weapons and armour, decorated furniture, hundreds of pieces of jewellery (including bracelets, beads and finger rings) and more than 20 of the so-called lion pins (Cifarelli in press), it is nearly impossible to determine which objects were in a use-context on the floor of the columned hall, which may have been associated with individuals and which had been pulled from storage to be looted by enemy combatants or ‘saved’ by locals. A few items had been collected and placed in small bronze jars, either for storage or (more likely) looting.²

² The first of these ‘hoards’ is a small bronze jar (HAS60-991) that contained 28 decorated bone beads/whorls (HAS60-990, Tehran Museum), a fragment of gold foil overlay (HAS60-993), a silver ring (HAS60-994, Tehran Museum), an antimony(?) garment pin (HAS60-996, MMA61.100.44), a bronze garment pin and rock crystal beads (HAS60-997, UM61-5-99a,b). The second was also a small bronze vessel (HAS60-992, discarded) holding carnelian, composite and bronze beads (HAS60-989, UM61-5-97) as well as a metal chain (antimony or silver) and disks (HAS60-998, Tehran Museum).



Fig. 11. Excavation photo of the Hasanlu Gold Bowl (beaker) HAS58-469, Tehran Museum 10712 (courtesy of the Penn Museum).

In addition to the echoes of the Bronze and Iron Age Assyrian style imagery found in Hasanlu's collections, there are other aspects of the belt's construction and decoration that relate to Hasanlu's own visual culture, as manifest in this communal storage and display. The dotted and hatched surface treatment of animal bodies on the belt are present on certain animals on the Gold Bowl, itself an heirloom at the time of the site's destruction (Porada 1965; Winter 1980), and on the Silver Beaker (*fig. 2*); and a dense, two-stranded guilloche at the border of the belt is an echo of that on the Gold Bowl (*fig. 11*). Similarly, Irene Winter (1980) showed the local prevalence and significance of the precise combination of metalworking techniques that contributed to this belt and its decoration – hammering sheet metal, incising figural and abstract decorative elements on the surface, the pounding of *repoussé* relief elements from the back and the juxtaposition of chasing, low and very high relief in the same object – with exemplars like equestrian breastplates (HAS74-241/

Tehran Museum), fragments of relief-decorated metal vessels (HAS58-239b, UM59-4-159) and metal rhyta (HAS60-1006/MMA61.100.2). It seems likely that some of these highly embellished metal vessels and rhyta were intended for public display, as they appear to facilitate drinking rituals. Examples were found in the main columned hall of BBII and (including the Silver Beaker and Gold Bowl) upstairs in BBIW. Surely the horse's breastplate studied by Winter was intended to be seen on the body of the horse, much like the belt found with SK 493 and the two similar exemplars from BBIW were intended to be seen on the body of a man.

We cannot know the extent to which ordinary residents at Hasanlu were familiar with these local collections, but we can surmise that they would recognise the elite accoutrement worn and used by local luminaries (SK 493?) and the religious elite in monumental residences and temples across the site, including decorated body armour, ritual vessels and equestrian parade gear. We do not know enough about local cult practices

to determine whether local residents ordinarily had access to contents of temple interiors and storerooms – certainly at the moment of destruction dozens of people were huddled together in the columned halls of BBII and IV, but that was not typical day. Certainly, whoever was responsible for sealing boxes, jars, sacks and doors of temple storerooms, likely local elites, had access to the contents. Moreover, gifts to the temple came from within the community, passing through local hands and in front of local eyes and into the Hasanlu visual imaginary. Individually, objects given to the temple are physical manifestations of rituals mediating human-divine relations at Hasanlu, and collectively, as Elisa Roßberger (2016) has argued with respect to the Ištar-Kitītum Temple at Iščāli, temple collections, both votives and furnishings, function as the material correlate of collective memory and contribute to the construction of communal identity.

Within the emic context at Hasanlu, then, it seems far more likely that what residents ‘knew’ and understood about these collections is their local role in the monumental citadel structures. Despite the presence on its waist strip of Assyrian-style caprids flanking palmettes, this courtly belt was likely not crafted in cognisant emulation of Assyrian visual culture or in acknowledgement of the cultural primacy of a distant capital bent on Hasanlu’s exploitation or destruction. Attribution studies can identify the exogenous origin of certain elements, but their presence among the vast collections of artefacts in display, storage and use-contexts at Hasanlu renders them participants in a dynamic, local, visual culture. When ‘quoted’ in artistic production, these elements are brought into dialogue with other elements of Hasanlu’s collective memory and identity, with their particular contexts of use, including male bodies, and the threat associated with warriors from the South Caucasus.

In the construction of this belt, artisan and patrons left aside the abstraction of dots and studs and deliberately included elements related to

their own collections of the Bronze and early Iron Age objects. I have written about this elsewhere in terms of multivocality, but it is important to point out that in this instance, these varied voices speak of the heritage and identity of the community of Hasanlu. Together with the community, these imported and transformed belts engaged in a dynamic and flexible visual discourse about local identity, not about the distant or more powerful others. Considerations of style and attribution are a step toward understanding this discourse, but I would argue that for the residents of Hasanlu, the more proximal and more important attributions, the ones that would evoke the most memories and associations on the part of the community, are at the site itself, in its most hallowed and carefully guarded spaces. As a note of caution, when we assume that residents beyond the borders of a great empire clamoured to imitate their potential imperial overlords or sophisticated neighbours, we are imposing that imperialism onto the distant past. As others have mentioned, it is difficult to disentangle our discipline from the colonialism and imperialism from which it springs (see Feldman this volume). Archaeology in the Middle East is an instantiation of the White European colonisation of the region and the ensuing extraction of resources, including archaeological materials. That is our history, but the patterns we have inherited do not seem relevant for Hasanlu. Instead of echoes of distant greatness, these elements are recognisable features of their own heritage, perhaps even references to a heroic past to bolster and knit together the community in the present, asserting resistance to annexation or annihilation by their would-be colonisers.

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Stylistic Variation in Levantine Ivory Carvings of the Iron Age

Possible Temporal Developments

Keywords: Levant, ivory carving, Iron Age, classification, stylistic variation, temporal developments

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Summary

Elaborate Levantine ivory carvings of the Iron Age (ca. 1200–550 BCE) exhibit a large stylistic variation, which is notoriously difficult to grasp due to uncertainties regarding the modes, places and times of production. Scholars initially distinguished between two regional styles within the Levant, (North) Syrian and Phoenician, to which a third, South Syrian, was added in 1981. With the publication of much more material from Nimrud, the regional styles became referred to as 'traditions', and, in a bottom-up approach, a plethora of 'style-groups' across these 'traditions' has been introduced with the aim of eventually attributing them to palace workshops of particular cities. However, the stylistic coherence of most of these 'style-groups' is questionable and their attribution to particular cities has not materialised. The ivory carvings elude a clear-cut stylistic subdivision;

they appear to be beyond attribution. Nevertheless, there seems to be some meaning to the original tripartite classification. In fact, it has been speculated that differences between the three large groups might be more related to time than space; a thesis that has not yet been detailed or demonstrated. Introducing the more neutral labels Levantine-1–3 for them, this contribution looks at style from the perspective of social practice and explores possible developments over time.

Ivory Carving and the Art of the Levant: Continuities and Changes from the Bronze to the Iron Age

The Levant is defined here by its natural borders: the Mediterranean in the west, the Taurus Mountains in the north, the upper Euphrates and the north Arabian desert in the east and the Sinai Peninsula in the south. Located at the crossroads of the ancient world with routes in all directions – toward Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Aegean –, 'this region has witnessed unique cultural interactions, hybridity and confrontations that often fractured the population into local sub-cultures and multi-layered identities' (Steiner/Killebrew 2014, 2). In spite of variation in languages and scripts, pantheons, architectural forms, artistic expressions and ceramic assemblages, no clear-cut cultural subregions emerge. When boundaries can be determined, those of languages and scripts (Gzella 2014) ran differently from those of architectural forms (Caubet 1995, 2671–2677), which ran differently from those of pottery types (Bell 2006) etc. The distinction between a northern

and a southern Levant is as artificial as the division among the modern states that share this region today: Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and a small part of Turkey. In fact, modern political borders and overspecialisation in academia have Balkanised research of the Levant, causing recent voices to plead for a holistic approach (Porter 2016; Routledge 2017). This is also a prerequisite for exploring Levantine art from a socio-historical point of view as part of networked communities of practice (Feldman 2014, 3 f.).

Carved ivory is a main manifestation of Levantine art, in part due to the durability of this dentine material and its unsuitability for recycling (on the recycling ivory see Suter 2019). Compared to artistic styles in other Near Eastern regions, Levantine art is more eclectic and less coherent in style, which led earlier scholarship to view it as derivative, meaningless and decorative (e.g., Frankfort 1996, 243 f.). However, foreign elements were not indiscriminately copied but adapted to create a unique visual expression that is distinctly Levantine (for example Caubet 1995). Contrasting Levantine and Assyrian styles in art, Marian Feldman described the former as consisting of ‘numerous weak connections’ that convey ‘a general sense of belongingness among all these works, yet at the same time, a significant variation among them as well’ (Feldman 2018, 107 f.) as opposed to the ‘strong, consistent connections’ of the Assyrian style. Asking what causes style from the perspective of social practice, the numerous weak connections in Levantine art suggest a decentralised, mobile and fluid mode of production as opposed to a closely controlled, largely centralised mode in the case of Assyrian art (Feldman 2018, 109 f.). I agree with Feldman (2018, 100–106) that style eludes any absolute definition and that its cause is the basis for understanding its existence in particular socio-historical contexts. Thus, while departing from an essentialist culture-historical approach, we can nevertheless speak of Levantine or Assyrian art as long as we acknowledge that these cultures were not monolithic but part of socio-historical processes. Stylistic analysis remains an essential tool of art history and archaeology.

Ivory was carved in the Levant since Chalcolithic times, with real peaks in the later Late Bronze Age (LBA, ca. 1400–1200 BCE) and again

in Iron Age (IA) II (ca. 900–700 BCE). Alongside continuities in object types, imagery and stylistic features, differences between these two periods concern a shift from predominantly hippopotamus ivory to almost exclusively elephant ivory, a shift from predominantly small-scale objects to predominantly furniture plaques and fittings and considerable increases in quantity, geographic dispersion and stylistic variation (Caubet 2002; 2013; Feldman 2008; 2014, 76). The much larger quantity may be related to several factors: (a) a greater availability of elephant tusk, as the newly independent Levantine polities had direct access to and expanded long-distance trade networks along which elephant tusks presumably travelled (for example Master 2014, 89 f.; Gilboa/Namdar 2015; Bell 2016); (b) the preponderance of furniture parts, usually found disassembled, that is many isolated items that once formed part of much fewer objects; (c) perhaps also Assyrian tribute demands in a later phase. The much wider geographic dispersion was not intended by the patrons and primary consumers of these works, but largely a result of Assyrian imperial policies and their aftermath as is evident from the fact that most find contexts are secondary (for example Feldman 2014, 139–173). Furniture decorated with precious ivory and other elaborate ivory objects were certainly not made for trade.

The last comprehensive overview of elaborate Levantine ivory carvings of the IA was provided by Irene Winter in 1976. For a forthcoming book that grew out of my work on the Samaria ivories (Suter forthcoming a and b), I have updated this inventory and added to it the comparatively minute groups found associated with them but carved in styles of other Near Eastern culture regions – Assyria, Phrygia, Urartu and Mannea – as well as the few modest objects with no decoration or only minimal geometric or floral designs, such as spindle whorls or kohl tubes, which were only exceptionally made of ivory rather than bone or other cheap materials (*table 1*).¹ The quantities given in *table 1* are not necessarily representative

¹ Tables 1–3 reflect the state of research at the time of submitting the manuscript in September 2021, after which more Levantine ivories from recent excavations have been published. For updated and more detailed versions of these tables, see Suter forthcoming b: tables 2.1, 6.3 and 7.2.

Region with Subtotal	Place	Quantity	Region with Subtotal	Place	Quantity
Northern Levant: 746	Hama	609	Assyrian Heartland: 6185	Nimrud	6,074
	Zincirli	122		Khorsabad	45
	Carchemish	7		Ashur	38
	Tell Tayinat	5		Nineveh	27
	Arpad	1		Balawat	1
	Tell Afis	1	North of Assyria: 627	Hasanlu	275
	Arslantepe	1		Ziwiye/NW Iran	163
Central Coastal Area: 183	Achziv	141		Gordion	116
	Tyre	20		Altintepe	36
	Tell Keisan	16		Karmir Blur	20
	Sarepta	5		Toprakkale	17
	Byblos	1	South of Assyria: 18	Ur	9
Southern Levant: 476	Samaria	273		Susa	4
	Ekron	75		Sippar	3
	Megiddo	68		Borsippa	1
	Jerusalem	24		Kish	1
	Ashdod	14	Far West of Assyria: 195	Salamis, Cyprus	106
	Tell Qasile	6		Idaeon Cave, Crete	56
	Lachish	5		Samos	14
	Ashkelon	5		Knossos, Crete	9
	Hazor	3		Thasos	3
	Rehov	1		Ephesos	2
	Gath	1		Ialysos, Rhodes	2
	Tel Masos	1		Lindos, Rhodes	2
				Athens	1
Upper Mesopotamia: 519	Arslan Tash	301	TOTAL		8,949
	Dur-Katlimmu	88			
	Ziyaret Tepe	61			
	Tell Halaf	54			
	Tell Ahmar	12			
	Sultantepe	3			

Table 1. Quantity of finds by regions and places.

for various reasons: the chance of discovery, changing excavation practices, the fact that most IA ivory carvings are disassembled furniture parts and their fragmentary condition. The most extreme case of fragmentation concerns the assemblage from Samaria, for which I have entered the quantity published by Crowfoot and Crowfoot in

1938, rather than the over 12,000 largely minute fragments that I have found in museum storage since they would skew the picture too much.

Although the vast majority of these finds can be identified as Levantine, only a small percentage has come to light in the Levant. Instead, the lion's share was retrieved from Nimrud, the Assyrian

Type of Context	%	Places
Palace/Palatial Building	79.0	Zincirli, Hama, Samaria, Arslan Tash, Tell Halaf, Dur-Katlimmu, Nimrud, Khorsabad, Nineveh, Ur, Susa, Gordion, Hasanlu
Temple/Sanctuary	2.7	Carchemish, Tell Afis, Sarepta, Tell Qasile, Nimrud, Ashur, Khorsabad, Ur, Altintepe, Toprakkale, Idaean Cave, Ephesos, Ialysos, Samos, Thasos
Public Building	0.2	Arslantepe, Arpad, Hazor, Megiddo, Jerusalem, Sultantepe
Domestic Building	2.1	Tyre, Tell Keisan, Hazor, Rehov, Megiddo, Jerusalem, Lachish, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Tel Masos, Tell Ahmar, Nimrud, Ashur
Burial	9.7	Hama, Byblos, Achziv, Megiddo, Tell Halaf, Ziyaret Tepe, Dur-Katlimmu, Nimrud, Ashur, Gordion, Altintepe, Salamis, Knossos
Not Recorded or Identified	6.3	Tell Tayinat, Jerusalem, Ekron, Gath, Arslan Tash, Tell Halaf, Ashur, Nineveh, Balawat, Sippar, Borsippa, Gordion, Karmir Blur, Ziwiye/NW Iran, Lindos, Athens

Table 2. Percentage of finds by find contexts.

capital Kalḫu, where these luxury and prestige goods arrived as war plunder or spot tribute in the course of Assyria's expansion. The finds from Upper Mesopotamia, the first region annexed to Assyria, are, as far as identifiable, Levantine and come from contexts dating after the Assyrian annexation, except for those from Tell Halaf. By contrast, most finds from the Levant come from pre-Assyrian contexts or sites that were not annexed. The assemblages from regions to the north of Assyria (Phrygia, Urartu, Mannea) consist mainly of indigenous carvings with a few Levantine and/or Assyrian imports, while the scattered finds from regions to its south (Babylonia, Chaldea, Elam) are all Levantine and come from Assyrian or later contexts. The carvings from the far west of Assyria (Cyprus, Crete, Ionia and Athens) include only Levantine imports, which appear to have reached these places mainly in opportunistic ways (Feldman 2014, 153–170; Niemeier 2016, 241–245).

The last difference between the LBA and IA, the greater stylistic variation seen in the IA, may be due to less socio-political cohesion, that is the change from dependence on and participation in the unusually integrated and interdependent international community of royal houses in the LBA to independence in a more fractured and competitive world with the increasing threat of the Assyrian expansion and the emergence of ethno-linguistic group identities. However, despite of some fundamental changes, the two worlds may not have been dramatically polarised in every

aspect. The sharp contrasts that have been painted between a palace-administered system of exchange in the hands of a few great kings in the LBA versus an entrepreneurial world in the small-scale states of the IA Levant (for example Liverani 2003, followed by Suter 2010, 995 f., and Feldman 2014, 76) require some balancing.

The circle of consumers, for example, did not dramatically change. Ivory-decorated furniture and elaborate small-scale objects largely remained reserved to kings and their entourage. Assyrian royal inscriptions and the Bible only attest to kings as having had access to the raw material and consuming ivory(-decorated) objects in their palaces; ivory thrones and couches are repeatedly mentioned in both sources. The archaeological record largely confirms this, yet adds additional information (*table 2*): whereas elaborate objects were primarily consumed or stored in royal palaces and sometimes deposited in royal tombs, a few modest small-scale objects and very small, minimally decorated artefacts have occasionally also been found in domestic houses and non-royal burials. To give two examples, the South Arabian-inspired beaker with an ibex-shaped handle found in a burial at Hama (Riis 1948, fig. 230I) may have belonged to a rich merchant dealing with South Arabia,²

² Rather than postulating ivory carving in 9th cent. BCE South Arabia based on a single vessel found in a typically local burial at Hama (Scigliuzzo 2003), I suggest that the ibex beaker was made in the Levant for someone with links to South Arabia.

while Tomb N.1 at Achziv with very modest objects represents an elite burial at a site with little social stratification (E. Mazar 2004; Nijboer 2008).

Possible Explanations of the Stylistic Variation in Iron Age Ivory Carvings

The stylistic variation in elaborate ivory carvings is notoriously difficult to grasp. There is hardly any information available on ivory carvers and their modes, places and times of production apart from the ivory carvings themselves and they elude a rigorous stylistic subdivision. Scholars initially distinguished between two large groups conceived as regional styles: North Syrian and Phoenician, to which a South Syrian style was added in 1981 (Winter 1981). Four years earlier, Irene Winter (1976b) had distinguished a subgroup within the North Syrian style, the SW7 backrests, which she attributed to Sam'al, based on stylistic parallels with the large-scale sculpture in this kingdom. With the publication of much more material from Nimrud, the regional styles became referred to as 'traditions' and a plethora of small 'style-groups' across these 'traditions' was introduced with the aim of attributing them to palace workshops in particular cities. However, although the politically segmented Levant suggests a decentralised mode of production, the material largely eludes a subdivision into stylistically coherent subgroups; the Sam'al subgroup remains an exception.

Silvana di Paolo (2009, 141–144; 2014, 117 f.) observed that the workshop model, which is borrowed from later societies with different socio-political conditions, cannot be applied to the Levantine ivories of the Iron Age because they lack standardisation and specialisation, characteristics of the production in workshops. There are not only hardly any clear-cut stylistic subgroups, but also no coherent groups of particular objects, carving techniques, finishes or pictorial motifs. None of these aspects were standardised or in a particular form the specialty of a workshop (Suter 2015, 40). The three-sided furniture fittings (G. Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013, 30–33), for example, do not form a stylistically coherent group; nor do the various pieces carved in *cloisonné* (for example G. Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013, fig. 2a–f, h–l, p; 3i, l, o, t; 5b).

Approaching the paradoxically blurred boundaries of style from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, Marian Feldman (2014, 43–78) interpreted the entangled variation as a result of potentially fluid communities that crisscrossed the entire Levant, i. e., multiple intersecting and overlapping networks of skilled artistic production and consumption practices, which could extend or contract across time and space.

Clearly local styles were not the norm (see V. R. Herrmann this volume). The decentralised mode of production must be conceived as both fluid and networked (Feldman 2018, 110). The Levantine polities of the IA were interconnected: they competed and traded with each other but also fought together for their independence against an expanding Assyria. Their boundaries and alliances continuously fluctuated, their population was multi-ethnic and multilingual across borders and there was a high degree of mobility.³ The small circle that consumed luxurious ivory objects in the Levant obviously identified with similar types of objects, the same repertoire of images and similar, if variant, stylistic features, all of which were shared across political, linguistic and religious differences.

In an attempt to get a better understanding of the variation in this immense body of material, I went back to the initial three groups, but soon realised that the South Syrian one had become disproportionately large for a regional style. This, together with other observations, made me wonder whether the difference between these three groups might have been one of time more than geography (Suter 2015), an idea independently developed also by Marian Feldman (2014, 73–76). She proposed that the earlier North Syrian animal markings formed part of a larger scheme that aimed at creating a 'golden age' – counterbalancing the economic and political realities of the time – while the later Phoenician Egyptianising form might signal the embodiment of new social practices prompted by the increasing consolidation of the Assyrian empire, in the form of an aesthetic reaction and 'concomitant allying' with Egypt, whose role in stirring up Levantine rebellions against Assyria is well known.

³ For the demographic fluidity and cultural mobility in northern Levantine city-states see Osborne 2021.

An Attempt at Dating the General Development

Dating the production of IA ivory carvings is difficult because most of the elaborate carvings were found in secondary contexts. Such luxury and prestige goods could have several lives beyond the originally intended one, as heirlooms, gifts or plunder. Moreover, there is hardly any well-dated comparative material and we lack factual written sources such as administrative texts and letters, informing us on the production of ivory carvings or the organisation of crafts in general, at least in part owing to the spread of perishable carriers of writing. Richard Barnett (1957, 52, 129) originally envisioned a late 9th–late 8th cent. BCE date for the North Syrian production, but a continuation from the LBA to the sack of Tyre in 573 BCE for the Phoenician one. Although he later modified these dates to the late 10th–8th cent. and the 10th–8th cent. BCE, respectively (Barnett 1982, 45–48), he was not entirely convinced by Winter's (1976a, 17) suggestion of the 9th–8th and 8th–7th cent. BCE, respectively. With more recent archaeological research partly lifting the veil off the 'Dark Age' in the IA I, the beginnings of the production have been pushed further back in time. In the last volume of 'Ivories from Nimrud', Georgina Herrmann and Stuart Laidlaw (2013, 115) proposed 1150–710 BCE as a time span, based on their understanding of the political history. By contrast, Stefania Mazzoni (2013, 478–480) dated the revival of the production of luxury goods, including ivory carvings, to the 10th cent. BCE based on parallels in media other than ivory, while Wicke (2013, 565 f.) and Feldman (2014, 77 f.) did not exclude the possibility that the beginnings go back to the 11th cent. BCE. The different suggestions reveal how much we are in the dark on this issue.

At first sight, find circumstances and dates of deposition seem inadequate for dating the production, especially if viewed from the perspective of the Assyrian capital where the lion's share of elaborate ivory carvings was found. Nevertheless, taking into consideration also smaller assemblages and isolated finds as well as less elaborate finds – in short, the entire body of widely dispersed IA ivory carvings that I have compiled – and looking at time spans of archaeological contexts rather than their *ante quem* dates only may lead us further (table 3).

A careful analysis of quantities and types of finds over the different phases of the IA results in a more nuanced picture with subregional differences and developments over time as follows (table 4): a very limited production of some Bronze Age epigones and mainly very modest objects not typical of any period in the Levant during the 12th and 11th cent. BCE; the formation of a new IA repertoire of Levantine ivories on a still limited scale in the 10th cent. BCE; increasing production and diversification of this repertoire in the 9th cent. BCE, together with the beginnings of a very limited indigenous production in Phrygia (Gordion), Assyria and Mannea (Hasanlu); an unprecedented boom of production in the Levant during the 8th cent. BCE, together with continued production in Assyria and the states to its north, now also including Urartu; and finally, a very limited continuation of the Levantine production in the 7th cent. BCE, together with continued indigenous production in Assyria and the states to its north. Thus, the apogee of ivory carving in the Levant, if not of the production in general, appears to date to the 9th and 8th cent. BCE.

The proposed scenario correlates with the general development in the Levant from decline and recovery in IA I to full-fledged polities with urban centres, a hierarchically organised society and the production of elite art in IA II. In addition, the written notations inscribed on ivory carvings and Assyrian royal inscriptions regarding the acquisition of elephant tusks and ivory objects can largely be dated to the floruit period.⁴ The suggested boom in the 8th cent. BCE coincides with a hardening of ethno-linguistic group identities evidenced in the diversification of Northwest Semitic scripts, dialects and state pantheons, and an emergent individualism seen, for example, in the spread of personal names on seals. The decline and end of the Levantine manufacture must be related to the economic depletion of Assyrian vassals and the subsequent incorporation of most Levantine polities into the Assyrian empire, along with the usual resettlements (already Winter 1975, 509).

⁴ For the former see, for now, Röllig 1974 and the index of the later published inscriptions from Nimrud in G. Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013, 335–337; for the latter see Bagg 2011, 142 § 3.3.3.2.5, 146 f. § 3.3.3.4.4.

Period	Date BCE	%	Places
Iron Age I	1200–900	4.1	Hama, Byblos, Tyre, Achziv, Tell Keisan, Megiddo, Tell Qasile, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, Ashkelon, Knossos
Iron Age I–II	1000–700	4.4	Carchemish, Achziv, Tel Masos, Tell Halaf, Hasanlu, Idaean Cave
Iron Age II	900–700	14.2	Arslan Tepe, Arpad, Hama, Tyre, Achziv, Tell Keisan, Hazor, Rehov, Megiddo, Samaria, Jerusalem, Lachish, Ekron, Arslan Tash, Dur-Katlimmu, Nimrud, Gordion, Salamis, Knossos
Iron Age II–III	900–600/500	74.0	Zincirli, Tell Afis, Sarepta, Achziv, Tell Keisan, Megiddo, Ziyaret Tepe, Dur-Katlimmu, Nimrud, Ashur, Nineveh, Balawat, Kish, Gordion, Altintepe, Ziwiye/NW Iran, Knossos, Samos, Ialysos
Iron Age III	700–500	2.7	Jerusalem, Ekron, Tell Ahmar, Sultantepe, Sheikh Hamad, Nimrud, Ashur, Khorsabad, Nineveh, Ur, Gordion, Toprakkale, Karmir Blur, Ephesos, Thasos
Undated	—	0.6	Tell Tayinat, Tell Keisan, Tell Halaf, Ashur, Sippar, Borsippa, Lindos, Athens

Table 3. Percentage of finds by periods of deposition.

Date BCE	Levant	Other Regions
1200–1000	Few Bronze Age epigones and very modest objects	-
1000–900	Formation of an Iron Age repertoire	-
900–800	Increasing production and diversification	Phrygia, Assyria, Mannea
800–700	Unprecedented boom	Phrygia, Assyria, Urartu, Mannea
700–600	Very limited continuation in the few remaining polities that were not annexed to Assyria	Phrygia, Assyria, Urartu, Mannea

Table 4. Suggested general development over the Iron Age.

As Karen Radner (2018, 122 f.) observed, ‘even if the resettlement programme affected only a relatively small percentage of the overall population, the absence of specialists [...] would have massively eroded and changed local culture and local identity’. Similarly, art historians have suggested that the resettlements crushed artistic traditions along with cultural identities (for example Orthmann 2013, 543; Mazzone 2014, 697–699).

Suggestion for a New Subdivision of Elaborate Levantine Ivory Carvings Typical of the Iron Age

Coming back to style, the association of the two initial regional styles with North Syria and the Phoenician city-states, respectively, is not given, as Feldman (2014, 38) observed. The former’s affinities

with stone sculpture at sites such as Zincirli, Carchemish and Tell Halaf may disclose shared artistic practices that need not have been confined to the north – an undated and fragmentary orthostat from Karak, Jordan, exhibits North Syrian style – while the Phoenician city-states present an archaeological *lacuna*. With regard to dating, it must be recalled that the carvings cannot be precisely dated, except for the observation that some North Syrian carvings were found in contexts with an *ante quem* date in the 9th cent. BCE or at its end (Tel Masos, Tell Halaf, Gordion, Hasanlu), while this is not the case for Phoenician or South Syrian pieces. The South Syrian group is more closely related to the Phoenician group than to the North Syrian one, as demonstrated in two independent studies using a machine-learning analysis by Amy Gansell et al. (2014) and Arianna Cinquatti (2015).

Levantine-1	Levantine-2	Levantine-3
Cylindrical pyxides	<i>Cloisonné</i> anthropomorphic figures (partially) in the round	Bridle decorations: shield-shaped blinkers, sole-shaped blinkers, triangular frontlets, dendriform frontlets
‘Tall pyxides’	<i>Cloisonné</i> sphinxes and lions (partially) in the round	Other small-scale objects: fan handles, palettes, cylindrical pyxides, heads and figures in the round
Flasks	<i>Cloisonné</i> plaques and fittings with plain background	Serial plaques: single image field, single image field + border, multiple registers
Fan handles	<i>Cloisonné</i> plaques and fittings with dense floral background	Incised and stained plaques and fittings: figurative designs, floral designs, geometric patterns
Female heads in the round	<i>Cloisonné</i> openwork plaques	<i>Cloisonné</i> plaques and fittings
Animal-shaped objects	<i>Champlevé</i> plaques	Relief plaques and fittings depicting anthropomorphic figures: women at the window and empty windows, winged figures, other anthropomorphic figures
Bridle decorations	Non-inlaid female-shaped flasks	Relief plaques and fittings depicting peaceful sphinxes and griffins: full-face sphinxes, profile sphinxes, griffins
Solid relief plaques and cylindrical veneers	Non-inlaid artefacts (partially) in the round	Relief plaques and fittings depicting animals: suckling cows, striding or grazing bulls and bull calves, other grazing or browsing animals, animal combats, animals in the round
Openwork plaques	Non-inlaid bridle decorations	Relief and openwork plaques and fittings depicting floral motifs: stylised palms, other stylised trees, floral patterns, floral components in the round
Furniture parts carved in the round	Non-inlaid solid plaques	
Sam'al 1	Non-inlaid openwork plaques	
Sam'al 2		

Table 5. New subdivision of elaborate Levantine ivory carvings typical of the Iron Age.

This might correlate with the suggested boom in the 8th cent. BCE.

Because the interpretation of these three groups remains speculative, I propose to introduce the following more neutral labels for them: Levantine-1 for the carvings largely lacking Egyptian-style realia, Levantine-2 for the strongly Egyptianising works and Levantine-3 for the much-enlarged mixed group of what Winter originally identified as the South Syrian style. Despite blurry boundaries, a majority of Levantine ivory carvings can be assigned to one of these three groups. Based on objective criteria, namely object type, technique and motifs, each group can then be subdivided into smaller, interconnected subgroups (*table 5*). This subdivision aims at organising the immense body of material for easier reference and looks beyond the main corpus of the Nimrud ivories. It is, of course, only

one possibility and is open to debate. A detailed description with references to the individual ivory carvings will be provided in my forthcoming book, whereas in the frame of this contribution only a very brief description of the three groups will be given before exploring possible developments over time.

The Levantine-1 group exhibits close ties to LBA ivories not only in imagery and stylistic minutiae but also in object types. It includes a large number of small-scale objects, several of which revive LBA forms as, for example, cylindrical pyxides (Wicke 2008, 120 f.) or horn-shaped flasks (Fischer 2007, 245, pls. 65, 67). Its inlaying technique with small pegs differs from that of the Levantine-2 and 3 groups, in which the inlays were glued on a bed of frit. Typical features include the animal markings, hatched surfaces and the use of guilloche bands. Aside from the subgroups categorised by

object types, the Levantine-1 group includes two stylistically coherent subgroups, which can be confined in space and time with some probability: the already mentioned SW7 backrests and the much smaller Roundcheeked and Ringlethed subgroup, both of which have been attributed to 8th cent. Sam'al (Wicke 2013, 554–557, 563, 566). Since my configuration of these subgroups differs from the latest one provided by G. Herrmann and Laidlaw (2013, 110 f.), I call them Sam'al-1 and Sam'al-2.⁵

I am well aware that this Sam'al moniker is somewhat problematic, since the attribution to the site cannot be proven (see further V. R. Herrmann this volume). Notwithstanding, it highlights the particularity of these two subgroups, which stick out from all other Levantine ivory carvings as unusually coherent stylistic subgroups. Although they clearly belong to the Levantine-1 group based on the near absence of Egyptian-style realia, they stick out from other Levantine-1 ivory carvings with regard to the following features: the near absence of incised body marks on animals, distinct garments and hairstyles, the shape of plants, the heaviness of the figures with often awkwardly articulated limbs and, not least, the presence of fitter's marks, which they share with Levantine-2 and -3 ivories. In addition, so-called pegged dowels are unique to the Sam'al-2 subgroup, which contrasts with the Sam'al-1 subgroup regarding its predilection for faces turned out frontally toward the viewer, rounder faces, puffer cheeks, heavier and shorter proportion of figures pressing against the limits of space, less elaborate garments, slightly different hairstyles and hatched, as opposed to veined, wing feathers. Notably, and in contrast to other Levantine-1 subgroups, all members of the Sam'al subgroups were exclusively retrieved from Nimrud (see note 5 above), whereas the ivory carvings retrieved from Zincirli can be attributed to other Levantine-1 as well as Levantine-2 and Levantine-3 subgroups.⁶

A large percentage of the Levantine-2 group comprises plaques and fittings that probably decorated furniture. Many of them are heavily inlaid in both the *cloisonné* and *champlevé* techniques adopted from Egypt. Some of the Egyptianising motifs can be traced back to LBA adoptions of New Kingdom imagery, while others present new impulses from the contemporary Libyan dynasties (1070–712 BCE). Typical realia include Egyptian wigs, head-cloths, crowns and aprons.

The Levantine-3 group comprises mainly plaques that represent single figures or motifs, some furniture fittings in the round, a larger group of bridle-harness attachments and a small group of other small-scale objects. While the design of some pieces is incised and stained, the majority are carved in solid or openwork relief. Some relief plaques preserve gilding on the raised outlines of the design, others exhibit minimal inlaying of some details and a small group uses *cloisonné* technique. Although many motifs are shared with the Levantine-1 and Levantine-2 repertoires, the Levantine-3 group has its own particularities in the way single elements are combined, and also includes new motifs, such as 'women at the window' and stylised palms. Egyptian motifs are often misunderstood in their details and generally distorted in their execution. This large group exhibits a larger stylistic variation regarding realia, the figures' proportions and the design's composition.

5 My configurations are as follows: Sam'al-1 comprises IN 3, nos. 1–76, 89–94, 97–102, and 104, and IN 4, no. 335, while Sam'al-2 comprises CNI, S.184?; IN 4, nos. 888–922, and 1367?; IN 5, nos. 73, 214? and 216?; IN 6, nos. 239–240, 241? and 277–282; IN 7, nos. 703, T70?.

6 The ivories are published in the excavation report by von Luschan and Andrae (1943, 123–135); a recent descrip-

tion is provided by Feldman (2015, 99–101). I attribute them to the groups in table 5 as follows (plate numbers referring to von Luschan/Andrae 1943): the column-shaped furniture legs with so-called cushion capitals (pl. 63) to 'Levantine-1 Furniture parts carved in the round'; possible outlined *champlevé* pieces (pl. 69q–r) to the 'Levantine-2 *Champlevé* plaques'; the small plaques incised with concentric rectangles (pl. 60as–v, ay–z, ba–b) to the geometric patterns of the 'Levantine-3 Incised & stained plaques and fittings'; the cuboid fittings carved on three sides (pls. 65l–n, 66–67) and the chariot hunt fragments (pl. 71ai–k) to the other anthropomorphic figures of the 'Levantine-3 Relief plaques and fittings depicting anthropomorphic figures'; the couchant lions (pls. 64, 65a–k) to the animals in the round of the 'Levantine-3 Relief plaques and fittings depicting animals'; the less elaborate column-shaped fittings (pl. 61k–l) to the floral fittings of the 'Levantine-3 Relief plaques and fittings depicting floral motifs'.

Possible Stylistic Developments Over Time

The only one of the three groups that appears to exhibit an internal development is the Levantine-1 group. Animal markings, for example, appear to develop from large, clearly incised stylised muscles and bones, as seen, for example, on the openwork sphinx from Hama (Riis/Buhl 1990, fig. 118 no. 988), to partly misunderstood modelled ones or degenerate incised reminiscences of a presumably fading artistic practice in both the Sam'al-1 subgroup and the Levantine-3 group. Three examples illustrate these later developments. The rendering of the bull's ribs in the form of modelled flame-shaped markings on the openwork roundel IN 6, no. 238, possibly the application of a lid of a Levantine-1 cylindrical pyxis (Wicke 2008, 73, no. Nim.73), diverges in two respects from typical Levantine-1 animals' markings: they are modelled rather than incised and they render ribs, which were usually indicated by parallel strokes often in a rectangular frame, with the flame-shaped markings usually used to render the muscles on the animal's haunches. The Sam'al-1 relief sphinx IN 3, no. 21:5 exhibits unusually faint and irregularly shaped flames on the haunch, whereas the Levantine-3 openwork oryx IN 4 no. 586 exhibits rudimentary dorsal markings and unusually small and narrow flame-shaped markings on the leg rather than the haunch.

Parallel to this degeneration, one can observe a development towards more naturalistically modelled bodies, which is also apparent in nude females; this development also continues into the Levantine-3 group. To give two examples, compare the modelled, round forms of a Sam'al-2 sphinx without any incised markings of bones or muscles (IN 4, no. 904) with the typical Levantine-1 sphinx from Hama, and the naturalistically modelled face and body of a nude mistress of animals on a Levantine-3 frontlet (IN 1, 137) with the stiff and block-like body of her equivalent on the Levantine-1 frontlets from Gordion (Young 1962, pl. 46). The Levantine-1 cylindrical pyxides exhibit other variations that Dirk Wicke (2008, 70–75) interpreted in terms of a difference in time.⁷

By contrast, the Levantine-2 group does not reveal an internal development, only differences in quality. To give three examples of delicate carving with fine, intricate *cloisonné* work versus crude carving with few, large *cloisons*, compare the solid *cloisonné* plaques depicting sphinxes of IN 4, nos. 1010–1011 with IN 4, no. 1107, or the openwork *cloisonné* male figures IN 5, no. 224 with IN 4, no. 1049 and IN 5, no. 177 with IN 4, no. 1086. Differences in quality need not necessarily be due to degeneration. The apparent lack of an internal development may suggest a shorter span of time compared to the Levantine-1 group.

If the Levantine-2 group were Phoenician and dated largely to the 8th cent. BCE, this would pose a problem, since the Phoenician cities, some of which survived the international crisis following the end of the Bronze Age without destruction, appear to have flourished in the 10th–8th cent. BCE.⁸ Two attempts at filling the gap – one with the gold bowl of Yaba and a comparable silver bowl attributed to 10th cent. BCE Philistine cities (Busch et al. 2010, 126); the other with the attribution of a set of Levantine-2 statuettes from Fort Shalmaneser's Room NE-2 to a Phoenician or Phoenician-influenced workshop in the Nile Delta under the 21st Dynasty in 1070–945 BCE (Cecchini 2000) – still leave the Phoenician city-states out of the picture. The same is true of the exclusive association of Levantine-1 ivory carvings with North Syria.

Could it be that the artistic production of the Phoenician city-states in the 10th–9th cent. BCE, if ivory was carved there at that time, was not strongly Egyptianising? Musing on the emergence of Phoenician art, Glenn Markoe (1990) noted that, over the course of its history, Egyptianising trends in the Levant fluctuated in accordance with the extent of Egyptian political and commercial involvement. In the early IA,

simply reflect different hands. Based on realia that occur on 8th cent. BCE stone sculpture, some pieces of group C, such as CNI S.3 (Wicke 2008, Nim.20), may be later than, for example, CNI S.1 (Wicke 2008, Nim.35) of group A. Yet I find it hard to perceive a difference in time between the very similar pieces Hasanlu 226–230 (Wicke 2008, HSL.1–4) of group B and CNI S.13 (Wicke 2008, Nim.5) of group A; Muscarella (1980, 195) attributed these Hasanlu and Nimrud pieces to the same 'centre', perhaps even the same 'workshop'.

⁷ While I find a temporal difference between Wicke's (2008) subgroups A and C plausible, other variations may

⁸ On the Phoenician cities in this period see Aubet 2014 and now also Lehmann 2021.

he saw historical and archaeological evidence pointing to a much-reduced emphasis on Egypt in favour of a renewed Aegean/North Syrian orientation as, for example, in the Ahiram sarcophagus, while he linked ‘the strongly Egyptianizing aspect of classical IA Phoenician art’, which he saw starting to emerge in the 9th cent. BCE and reaching its apogee in ivory carvings and metal bowls of the 8th cent. BCE, to the 22nd–23rd Dynasties (945–712 BCE). If so, the new orientation in the early IA must have been related to the region’s new independence. On Levantine stamp seals of the same period, Schroer (2021) recently observed not only renewed Aegean and North Syrian influences but also a revival of an older Canaanite tradition.

Dating the Ahiram sarcophagus has been controversial over the years, but a date around 1000 BCE or in the first half of the 10th cent. BCE seems most plausible (Jenni 2015, 121; Fales 2017, 190 f.). Its inscription suggests that the sarcophagus’s patron, Ahiram’s son Ittoba’al, was a usurper who moved his non-royal father’s remains to the Bronze Age royal necropolis in order to legitimise his own rule (Jenni 2015). Both the sarcophagus and the ivory plaque found with it share affinities with Late Bronze art works from the Levant as well as Levantine-1 ivory carvings. Similar banquet scenes as depicted on the sarcophagus occur, for example, on the LBA plaque from Megiddo (Barnett 1982, pl. 19a) and some Levantine-1 pyxides (for example IN 6, no. 234). Although most scholars have attributed the ivory plaque from Byblos, which depicts an animal combat, to the LBA, some have included it among IA works (for example Winter 1976a, 12 f.; Cecchini 1995, 517). A decision is difficult, since the plaque finds parallels in both LBA objects, such as a pyxis from Lachish (Feldman 2006, 25–58) and Levantine-1 and Levantine-3 ivory plaques from Nimrud (for example IN 4, nos. 684 and IN 5 no. 308).

There are more such cases. The multi-registered fragment from a Stratum VIA domestic house at Megiddo dated to the early 10th cent. BCE (Loud 1948, pl. 204:3) finds parallels in Levantine-1 ‘tall pyxides’ (for example CNI, S.50) and cylindrical veneers (for example IN 7, no. 471). The dagger handle in the shape of a lion’s head from a mid-10th to mid-9th cent. BCE elite residence at

Tel Masos (Barnett 1982, pl. 48h) can be attributed to the Levantine-1 group but may have come from a Phoenician city in view of the abundant Phoenician pottery in this residence (Barnett 1982, 47; Crüsemann 1983, 99–102). If the enthroned statuette found near a 9th cent. BCE elite house in Tel Rehov was an early Israelite work of the 9th cent. BCE, as suggested by A. Mazar (2020), it would present a southern Levantine carving of that time that is not Egyptianising, since the figure wears a Syrian dress.

Continuities and changes from the Levantine-1 to the Levantine-2 and -3 groups appear to support the thesis that Egyptianising trends were a later phenomenon. Their re-emergence can be observed in small-scale objects that were continued on a limited scale in the Levantine-2 and -3 groups as, for example, the female-shaped flasks. Erika Fischer (2007, nos. F.25, F.52, F.55, F.56) tentatively dated the horn-shaped Levantine-1 flask carved in *cloisonné* and ending in a female head and the large spoon stopper also carved in *cloisonné* and held by a lion (IN 6, nos. 236–237) to the late 10th/early 9th cent. BCE, the Levantine-2 female-shaped flask with its spoon stopper held by a lion (IN 6, no. 286) to the 9th/8th cent. BCE, and two other female-shaped flasks of the same group (CNI, S.96 and T.6) to the 8th cent. BCE.

Egyptianising figures also appear on Levantine-3 fan-handles (for example CNI, S.293–295), which, in contrast to the Levantine-1 examples (for example Mallowan 1966, fig. 148), include not only nude females, but also dressed male figures with Egyptian wigs or head-cloths. On both frontlets and plaques, the Hittite-type winged sun-disk with pendant volutes was replaced by the Egyptian-type one with flanking *uraei* (compare for example the Gordion frontlets with IN 1, no. 137, or the SM-1 plaques in IN 3 with Fontan/Affanni 2018, no. 187 and IN 7, no. 64).

While developments can be suggested within the Levantine-1 group and from it to the Levantine-2 and -3 groups, not much development is perceivable either within the latter two groups or from one to the other. Differences in quality, as we have seen for the Levantine-2 group, may, but need not, indicate a debasement over time. Only a few Levantine-2 objects, such as the female-shaped flask IN 6, no. 236 and the statuettes from

Room NE-2 (IN 5, nos. 298–303), may be earlier works, but this cannot be proven.

The large Levantine-3 group does not reveal an internal development despite the fact that it exhibits more variation than the other two groups. It comprises Levantine-1 reminiscences, such as the above-mentioned misunderstood or degenerate animal markings, as well as different extents of Egyptianising details and accuracies of design. Inaccuracies concern, for example, wings folded along the body. On Levantine-2 works carved in *cloisonné* this feature occurs with both figures (for example IN 3, no. 88) and creatures (for example IN 4, no. 1112). Levantine-3 plaques imitate the *cloisonné* design of folded wings in incision, yet apply it in the wrong contexts: the plaque IN 5, nos. 127–128 carved in solid relief, for example, depicts a striding, human-headed sphinx with open wings comparable to this motif on Levantine-2 plaques carved in *cloisonné* (for example IN 4, no. 1010–1011), yet adds folded wings to an already winged sphinx, while another plaque (IN 4, no. 655), also carved in solid relief, adds folded wings to a sphinx with a youth lock, a type that is never winged on Levantine-2 carvings (for example Karageorghis 1973, no. 318/298).

Tentative Dating of the Stylistic Developments

Attempting to correlate the proposed stylistic developments in the Levantine-1–3 groups with the general development of ivory carving suggested above based on the time spans of the finds' deposition (*table 4*), I tentatively suggest situating the Levantine-1 group in the 10th–9th cent. BCE with overlaps into the 8th cent. BCE, and the Levantine-2 and -3 groups largely in the 8th cent. BCE with early beginnings of the former in the 9th cent. BCE and a limited continuation of both into the 7th cent. BCE. This proposal supports Markoe's and Feldman's thesis of artistic practices closely linked to the LBA in the formative period of typical IA ivory carving, followed by a re-emergence of Egyptianising features ushering in new practices across the Levant. Moreover, it factors in the mixed Levantine-3 group and suggests a boom in the 8th cent. BCE, during which all three groups overlapped.

The overlap of Levantine-1 with Levantine-2–3 is largely due to its two exceptional local subgroups. If their attribution to 8th cent. BCE Sam'al is correct, they constitute the only subgroups that can be attributed to a particular kingdom and time based on style, as well as the only ivory carvings of this period lacking Egyptianising tendencies. These anomalies may be related to the special situation of Sam'al in the 8th cent. BCE as an Assyrian ally surrounded by Levantine kingdoms fighting for their independence:⁹ the Sam'al elite apparently eschewed allying with Egypt not only on a political level but also on an ideological one. In a larger framework, such a particular path might be linked to the above-described hardening of ethno-linguistic group identities and emergent individualism of that time, which might also explain the overlap of the Levantine-2 and Levantine-3 groups and the large variation within the latter group. Conversely, the numerous lower-quality pieces of this group and some of the Levantine-2 group may have been related to increasing Assyrian demands of tribute.

While the temporal development sketched here appears plausible in view of its socio-historical context, it must remain hypothetical due to many unknowns. Yet, it is my hope that this new avenue of investigation, together with the more neutral labelling of the three main groups of elaborate Levantine ivory carvings, away from the previous essentialist conception, will eventually contribute to a better understanding of this immense body of material and major manifestation of Levantine art, which largely remains beyond attribution to particular locales or subregions of the Levant.

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⁹ On elite identity at Sam'al see V. R. Herrmann 2018 and, with regard to style, also her contribution in this volume.

Abbreviations

- CNI Catalogue of the Nimrud Ivories, see Barnett 1957.
 IN Ivories from Nimrud, see Mallowan/Herrmann 1974; G. Herrmann 1986; 1989; 1992; G. Herrmann et al. 2009; 2013.

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Style Across Media

Court Style as a Rhetorical Strategy in the Iron Age Northern Levant

Keywords: style, attribution, Iron Age, Levant, Assyria, ivory, sculpture

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Summary

In the wake of the recent re-evaluation of the relationship between visual style and social identity in the Iron Age Near East, I revisit here three pillars of the attribution of the Nimrud ivories. Art historians have called upon the strong stylistic and iconographic similarities of three groups of ivories in the ‘North Syrian tradition’ – the ‘Flame and Frond’ group, the ‘SW 7’ group and the ‘Roundcheeked and Ringleted’ group – to relief-carved stone orthostats found, respectively, in the Syro-Hittite cities Guzana (Tell Halaf, Syria) and Sam’al (Zincirli, Türkiye) as evidence for the attribution of the manufacture of these ivory groups to artisans in these cities. Underlying these attributions is a theory of local styles that crosscut different artistic media. While a general paradigm

of discrete local styles in the Iron Age Levant has been criticised and substituted by a conception of overlapping stylistic practices distributed throughout a wide network, I show how court styles, in which style is recognised as such and replicated across multiple state-sponsored media for rhetorical purposes, could also have occasionally arisen in this historical milieu. This may have occurred particularly in situations of state consolidation that took place in direct apposition to the strong court style of Assyria. Although we perceive a marked contrast between the continuity and uniformity of ‘Assyrian style’ and the variability and eclecticism of visual style in the Iron Age Levant, we should allow for the same processes of continual recursion between reflexive (habitual) and rhetorical production of style in both regions, with results influenced by the political fortunes of each.

Introduction

Given that the book title ‘Beyond Attribution’ was my suggestion, it is perhaps ironic that my contribution to this volume starts out stuck on a pillar of earlier attribution studies for the Nimrud ivories found in the Assyrian palaces of northern Iraq. A stylistic comparison between displaced portable media such as ivories and the less-portable medium of architectural sculpture is, after all, an appealingly sensible approach to identifying the former’s production locale. Scholars of this material point out strong stylistic and iconographic similarities between particular sets of ivories and relief-carved stone orthostats from certain cities in the Iron Age northern Levant. These observations

form the basis not only for specific geographic attributions for these works, however, but for a general model of distinctive local styles in this region that would potentially allow further attributions to be made. Recent commentaries on this model (e. g., Suter 2010; 2015; Feldman 2014) critique an understanding of style as an expression of autochthonous collective identity and propose that we can better account for the diffuse pattern of stylistic similarity and difference across Levantine ivories using a theory of style as a networked (rather than bounded) and embodied social practice. This discussion has so far focused on dynamics of interaction between artisans working in a particular medium, rather than across different media. In the wake of this rethinking of the relationship of visual style and social identity, I propose a new consideration of the striking and detailed correspondences between certain sets of ivories and sculptures that pays attention to the specific conditions for the sharing of style across media.

In what follows, I review approaches to the attribution of the Nimrud ivories and describe the three ivory styles – the so-called ‘Flame and Frond’, ‘SW 7’ and ‘Roundcheeked and Ringleted’ groups – that have been attributed to specific north Levantine cities (Guzana, modern Tell Halaf and Sam’al, modern Zincirli) on the basis of similarities with relief-carved stone orthostats found there. I then explore various explanations for the cross-media appearance of a common style and the relationship of these to theories of how style is related to identity. Focusing on the concept of ‘court style’ as a cross-media phenomenon, I argue that rhetorical (self-conscious) replications of style across the palace-sponsored arts could arise not only in a long-lived, imperial state like Assyria, but also – under certain historical circumstances – in the Iron Age Levant, even amid the general tendency in this region toward eclectic networked practices. Recursion between rhetorical and reflexive (habitual) production of style would have been ongoing in this fragmented peer-polity network, accounting for the pattern we observe – or, rather, the lack thereof. In this way, thinking through the unresolved phenomenon of cross-media style highlighted by earlier attribution studies illuminates vistas of cultural and historical insight beyond attribution.

Style and Attribution in the Nimrud Ivories

Questions about the relationship between style and historical entities have played an outsized role in the study of the corpus of carved ivories discovered at the Neo-Assyrian capital Nimrud. Together with other historical and archaeological evidence, their stylistic heterogeneity, with a large number of works in apparently non-Assyrian style, strongly suggests that these were brought to Nimrud as tribute or booty in the course of Assyria’s imperial expansion (e.g., Barnett 1982, 46). The resulting mass of material, undifferentiated by origin or date, practically cries out for attribution to specific workshops, production centres and periods, and the results of such attributions offer the prospect of building more detailed histories of the culture and interactions of Assyria’s neighbours.

The first step in this attribution effort is the stylistic classification of the ivories by the method of connoisseurship. After the publication of the first ivories discovered at Nimrud, observers divided the non-Assyrian ivories into two broad cultural or regional ‘traditions’: a ‘Phoenician’ tradition showing more use of Egyptian and Egyptianising motifs and a ‘North Syrian’ tradition showing less Egyptian influence (Poulsen 1912; Barnett 1935; 1939; 1957). Subsequently, a third, ‘South Syrian’ (Winter 1981) or ‘Intermediate’ (G. Herrmann 1986, 6, 52; 1992, 30–34) tradition was proposed (see Wicke 2009). The publication of more recently excavated ivories has been organised for the most part according to their findspots within the palaces of Nimrud (Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974; G. Herrmann 1986; 1992; G. Herrmann et al. 2009; G. Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013). However, over the long course of this important work of study and documentation, more specific stylistic groups, variously conceived as ‘workshops’ or ‘schools’, have been defined and subsequently refined or redefined within these three ‘traditions’ (summarised in Suter 2015, fig. 1 and table 1; see Uehlinger this volume, figs. 1–2).

Early arguments for a more specific localisation of the ivories’ production rested on historical and archaeological evidence. Barnett (1957, 45 f., 133–135; 1963) speculated that ivories of both the Phoenician and North Syrian traditions might all have been made in the once powerful kingdom

of Hamath in the southern Orontes Valley, on the basis of short inscriptions related to this kingdom on a few pieces and the discovery of finished ivories at its capital Hamath (modern Hama) – the North-Syrian-style pieces by local craftsmen and the Phoenician-style pieces by itinerant Phoenicians. Winter (1973, 482–500) proposed on economic and historical grounds that there were multiple ivory workshops operating in different north Syrian centres, however. This was indicated as well by the clear stylistic variability within the ‘traditions’, which suggested the work of multiple ‘schools’ or ‘workshops’ (see, e.g., G. Herrmann 1986, 48; Wicke 2009, 251–253 on scales of classification and their relationship to production).

The excavated ivory finds from Iron Age sites in the Levant itself do not form a very useful basis for associating either traditions or smaller style-groups with production centres, as most corpora are small and nearly all are stylistically heterogeneous (see Suter this volume). Furthermore, due to carved ivory objects’ high potential for mobility, the presence at a site of ivories in a certain recognised style does not constitute particularly meaningful evidence for the location of their production.

Various scholars have identified a work-around to this problem of the portability of the ivories in their comparison with the less portable, monumental medium of stone sculpture (Winter 1973; 1976a; 1983; 1989; 2005; Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974, 38, 47; G. Herrmann 1986, 48; 1989, 103 f.; 2000, 275; Wicke 2005; 2013, 563). Sculpture, and especially relief-carved orthostats erected in gates and palaces, flourished in the Iron Age Syro-Hittite cities of present-day north Syria and southeastern Türkiye (Orthmann 1971), but was much less common in Phoenicia and the southern Levant, meaning that this attribution strategy was most promising for ivory groups in the ‘North Syrian tradition. Winter (writing in this case about steatite objects, rather than ivories) gives the most explicit grounding of this argument:

‘It is assumed that fixed monuments such as major sculpture and architectural relief are most likely to have been carved locally, by local craftsmen, to exemplify the taste of the local population to which the monuments would be directed, unless a viable alternative explanation can be argued on

historical grounds [...] Therefore, when portable objects [...] are found at a particular site in association with a series of fixed monuments, [the portable objects] can be demonstrated to partake of virtually identical properties when compared to those monuments, and can be equally distinguished from fixed monuments of other sites within the same cultural ‘region,’ then I would suggest it is a reasonable conclusion that the portable objects were made within the same locale as the larger works’ (Winter 1983, 185; see also Winter 2005, 33 f.).

Using the comparison of the ivories with other media as a basis for attribution to a particular centre thus relies on a theory of distinct local styles that transcend medium, a model that Georgina Herrmann, the main publisher of the Nimrud ivories, has long upheld (G. Herrmann 1986, 48; 1992, 42; 2000, 268; 2017, 120; G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 74). I return below to the variants of this theory of local cross-media styles and the grounding thereof. First, however, I review the specific attributions proposed on this basis.

Cross-Media Styles in Iron Age North Syria

The ivory groups attributed to a particular production locale on the basis of cross-media comparison with sculptures are the ‘Flame and Frond’ group, the ‘SW 7’ group and the ‘Roundcheeked and Ringletted’ group.

Flame and Frond Style

The distinctive features of the Flame and Frond style group (hereafter F&F) consist mainly (but not only) of a set of stylised linear animal markings, including flame-like muscle markings on the haunches (hence the ‘flame’ part of the moniker) and certain types of plants (hence the ‘frond’ part) (*fig. 1a*) (G. Herrmann 1986, 16 f., 1989; G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 91–100). These pieces show a frequent use of gilding and inlays attached with small pegs. The iconography mainly consists of animals, sphinxes and griffins – in combat, in procession or in heraldic positions with trees and plants – as



Fig. 1. Works in Flame and Frond style. a. Ivory panel from Arslantepe, Türkiye (courtesy of the Missione Archeologica Italiana in Anatolia Orientale – Sapienza University of Rome); b. Gold plaque found at Guzana (Tell Halaf), Syria (Oppenheim 1931, Bunttafel 3.4); c. Stone orthostat from the façade of the Tempelpalast at Guzana (Tell Halaf), Syria (Wolfgang Sauber, Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 3.0).

well as frontally-posed women holding animals or plants. It also includes some narrative scenes of humans in banquet scenes or animal combat. Besides pyxides, furniture inlays, horns and spoon

stoppers, the style is also found on statuettes and fly-whisk handles of female figures with distinctive facial features, hairstyle and headdress, as well as chair legs with lion or sphinx feet.

Outside of Nimrud, a small number of F&F ivories and fragments have been found at other sites in the northern Levant and southeast Anatolia and even at Hasanlu in northwest Iran (G. Herrmann 1989, 88–103; G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 91–99; Mazzoni 2014, 46 and fig. 1; Manuelli/Pittman 2018; see map in V. R. Herrmann 2021, fig. 1). One of these is Tell Halaf, ancient Guzana, east of the Euphrates River. This was the royal seat of an Aramaean kingdom founded in the 10th cent. BCE, as evidenced by the massive fortifications and monumental buildings constructed here by king Kapara (Oppenheim 1931; Langenegger et al. 1950; see Novák 2013a; 2013b; and further below, on the 10th cent. BCE date). The façade of the ceremonial palace of Kapara (variously called the ‘Tempelpalast’ or ‘Western Palace’) was decorated by numerous stone orthostats, as well as colossal statues. The rear and side were faced by small limestone and basalt orthostats showing vignettes – in great variety but also with much repetition – of animals and *Mischwesen* alone or in combat, as well as the sacred tree, human-animal combats and other human activities (Moortgat 1955). The creatures show the same set of stylised incised markings as the F&F ivories. The entrance façade was decorated with larger basalt orthostats of similar figures, carved in a more precise and grounded, but less lively style, together with three large statues and large lion and bull bases in the round. Again here, the F&F animal stylisations are applied in the same form as in the Nimrud ivories (fig. 1c).

As already mentioned, a group of ivory fragments, including female heads and animals showing F&F characteristics, was found in one of the cremation burials on the south edge of the citadel (Hrouda 1962, 9 f., 21, Taf. 9–11). Another tomb contained seven gold plaques that are embossed, and in one case inlaid (fig. 1b), with animal scenes in F&F style (Hrouda 1962, 3 f., 19, Taf. 1). The stratigraphic evidence and stylistic comparison of the statues topping the cremation burials date the gold and ivory pieces to either just before or contemporary with the production of the orthostats (see further below). The coincidence of F&F stylisation appearing on three different media at Tell Halaf – stone sculpture, ivories and gold – has led G. Herrmann to argue consistently that F&F is the

‘artistic signature’ of this kingdom (G. Herrmann 1989, 103–105; 2000, 275 f.; 2017, 127; G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 98; G. Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013, 100). Others have suggested a different Syro-Hittite city, such as Karkemish (Winter 1989, 331 f.) or Hamath (Barnett 1982, 46; Mazzoni 2009, 107–132), as the origin of these ivories.

SW 7 Style

The second group of ivories attributed by comparison with stone sculptures takes the form of a set of inlaid chairbacks found at Nimrud in Fort Shalmaneser Room SW 7 (Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974), and so named ‘SW 7 style’ (see Wicke this volume and Suter this volume).¹ The chairbacks are faced by rectangular panels showing standing and seated male and female figures holding flowering vines, above whom winged disks hover. On one set of panels, couchant lions and sphinxes are found in a register below the standing male figures, and a frontal female head springs from the winged disk and holds out a lotus flower in each hand (Mallowan/G. Herrmann, nos. 38–45, pls. 48–51) (fig. 2a). On another set, a seated woman appears before a banquet table with a sphinx standing or crouching below her chair (Mallowan/G. Herrmann, nos. 47–50, pls. 56–59) (fig. 3a). The chairbacks sometimes had a large winged disk panel spanning the top (Mallowan/G. Herrmann, no. 1, pl. 1), and one preserved a long rectangular panel of a bull hunt from a chariot (Mallowan/G. Herrmann, no. 1, pls. 1, 3). The men – either bareheaded and wearing a long, cutaway garment covered with lappets over a short tunic, or wearing a ‘vase-hat’ and a long, full overgarment with lappets – and the women – sometimes winged and wearing a long, finely pleated dress with a trailing hem and long looped belt, as well as ankle bracelets and sometimes wrist bracelets and necklaces – appear to be divine or semi-divine creatures.

Winter (1973, 286–316; 1976a, 29–43) identified detailed similarities in the iconography, realia and style of the figures in the SW 7 chairbacks (directly dated only by the terminus ante quem of

¹ G. Herrmann uses ‘Classic SW 7’ for a more restricted set of chairbacks from this room (G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 74).

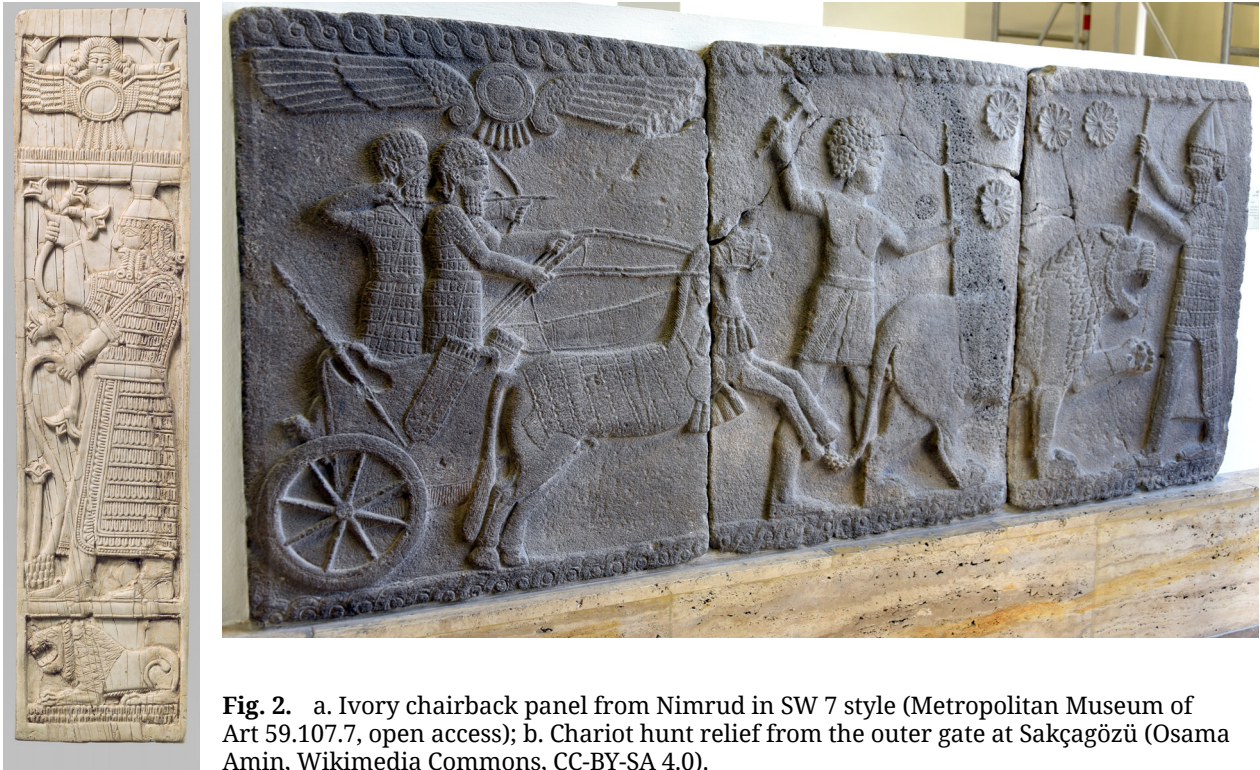


Fig. 2. a. Ivory chairback panel from Nimrud in SW 7 style (Metropolitan Museum of Art 59.107.7, open access); b. Chariot hunt relief from the outer gate at Sakçagözü (Osama Amin, Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 4.0).

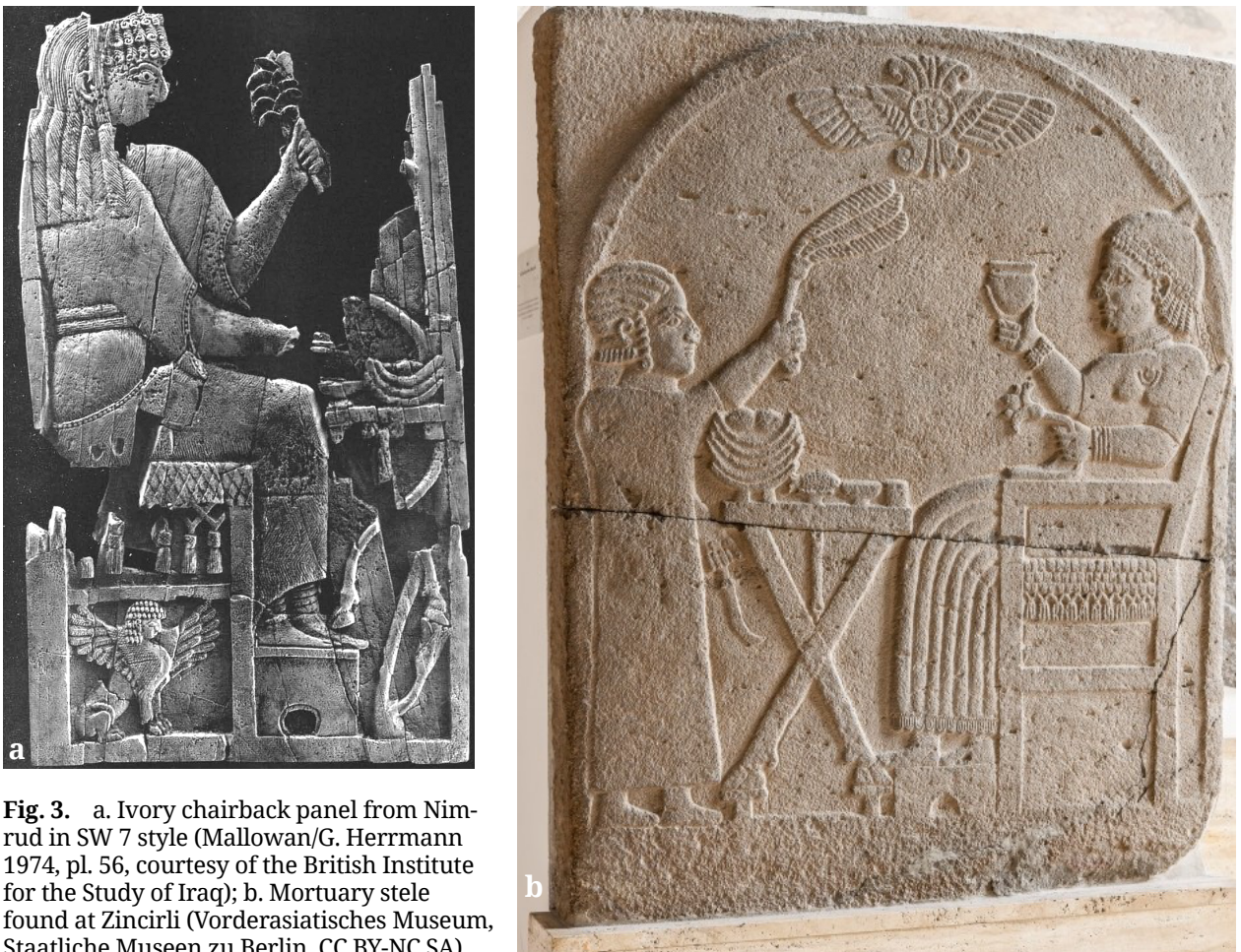


Fig. 3. a. Ivory chairback panel from Nimrud in SW 7 style (Mallowan/G. Herrmann 1974, pl. 56, courtesy of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq); b. Mortuary stele found at Zincirli (Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, CC BY-NC SA).



Fig. 4. Sphinxes. a. Ivory panel from Nimrud in Roundcheeked and Ringleted style (G. Herrmann 1992, pl. 233.905; courtesy of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq); b. Sphinx orthostat from Zincirli (von Luschan/Jacoby 1911, Taf. 55).

the destruction of Fort Shalmaneser in 612 BCE) with 8th cent. BCE sculptures found in the kingdom of Sam'al on the east side of the Amanus Mountains. Excavations at Zincirli, the capital of this kingdom, and at Sakçagözü, a small, fortified royal site nearby, produced stone reliefs and column bases decorating palaces of the second half of the 8th cent. BCE (von Luschan/Jacoby 1911; Garstang 1908). At Zincirli, many of these sculptures can be attributed by inscriptions or style to the last known king of Sam'al, Barrākib, and decorate the new palaces he constructed on the royal citadel (Hilani IV and Hilani III). The precise date and sponsor of the palace at Sakçagözü are uncertain. Winter drew particular comparisons between the details of the SW 7 chairback panels and those of a mortuary banquet stele of a royal woman found at Zincirli (von Luschan/Jacoby 1911, Taf. 54) (fig. 3b), reliefs of genies in cutaway coats flanking a volute tree under a winged disk from the palace portico at Sakçagözü (Garstang 1908, pl. 41.2; Orthmann 1971, Taf. 49a, 50c), column bases in the form of sphinxes carved in the round from Zincirli (von Luschan/Jacoby 1911, Taf. 56) and the Sakçagözü palace portico (Garstang 1908, pl. 42), and reliefs of a lion-hunt scene in the outer gate at Sakçagözü (Orthmann 1971, Taf. 51c) (fig. 2b). She concluded

(Winter 1973, 314–316; 1976a, 52 f.) that the SW 7 ivories were very likely made in the kingdom of Sam'al in the period ca. 740–725 BCE, possibly by multiple workshops operating simultaneously.

Roundcheeked and Ringleted Style

Another fairly large group of Nimrud ivories assigned to the North Syrian tradition was nicknamed the 'Roundcheeked and Ringleted' (hereafter R&R) group (G. Herrmann 1986, 19, 48 f.; see also G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 99 f.; G. Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013, 100–102; Wicke 2002; 2005; 2013, 554 f.; and this volume). Sphinxes, but also lions, winged bulls and rams, form a major part of the figures and these are characterised by heavy proportions with short limbs and no neck, particular stylisations of feathers, fur and hair and a *horror vacui* that presses the figures against the edges of their frames (fig. 4a). They are mostly depicted *en face* and the details of the heads of the sphinxes and human figures inspired the moniker 'roundcheeked and ringleted'. These latter include bearded men, usually frontally posed, with and without peaked caps with cross-hatched side flaps (fig. 5a).



Fig. 5. Courtiers. a. Ivory panel from Nimrud in Roundcheeked and Ringleted style (G. Hermann 1992, pl. 229.892; courtesy of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq); b. Orthostat from Zincirli (von Luschan/Jacoby 1911, Taf. 58).

Some figures without beards possibly represent eunuchs, while others with pleated gowns seem to be female. Uniting the human figures with the sphinxes are not only the proportions and facial features, including large, heavy-lidded eyes with incised pupils and ‘Mona Lisa’ smiles (see Wagner-Durand this volume), but also the technical feature of large circular dowel holes with a small central depression for a smaller peg. The majority of the group consists of inlay plaques, probably for furniture, but there is also a large cosmetic container carved in the round and an openwork plaque of a siren. Wicke (2005, 79) further attributed fragments of a bull and sheep carved in the round, inlaid with lapis lazuli and gold, and made compositely in both wood and ivory, to this group.

No clear examples of ivories in the R&R style have been found outside of Nimrud. As with the SW 7 group, however, this group finds its closest comparisons with the 8th cent. stone reliefs of Sam’al. At Zincirli, in addition to images of king Barrākib and his attendants on the façade of Hilani IV (von Luschan/Jacoby 1911, figs. 257, 259, pls. 60–63), a long procession of courtiers is shown heading toward the entrance of Hilani III (von Luschan/Jacoby 1911, figs. 254, pls. 58–59).

The proportions, hairstyles and clothing of these figures, including their fringed mantels wrapped over the shoulder and held in the hand and the peaked caps with side flaps, greatly resemble the male figures of the R&R ivories (fig. 5b). As Wicke points out (2005, 87), the awkward pose of the hanging right arm in both ivory and stone is remarkably similar as well. The palace entrance at Sakçagözü was likewise adorned with similar processing figures, as well as genies flanking a volute tree and a winged disk (Garstang 1908, pls. 40.1–2, 41.2; Orthmann 1971, Taf. 49a, d, 50a, c). At both Zincirli and Sakçagözü, stone sphinxes carved on column bases and orthostats have the same stocky proportions, bulging chests, chest feathers and curls as the R&R versions (von Luschan/Jacoby 1911, Taf. 55–56; Garstang 1908, pl. 40.1, 41.1, 42) (fig. 4b). The faces are also very similar. One can see small differences in the ivory and stone carvings, however – for example in the leg and belly hair of the sphinxes, the lack of frontality in the reliefs and the use of space – but the similarities are still striking.

Wicke (2005, 85–91) described in detail the correspondences between the sculptures of Zincirli and Sakçagözü with the R&R group but designated

it a ‘northwest Syrian regional style’ of the second half of the 8th cent. BCE that perhaps formed a successor to the 9th cent. (or earlier) F&F style (2005, 95 f., 100 f.). He interpreted the SW 7 style, which also has close correspondences in the 8th cent. BCE reliefs of Sam’al but is clearly distinct from the R&R group, as a slightly earlier version of this regional style, dating it to the first half of the 8th cent. BCE (2005, 91–95). Beyond the sculptures and ivories, he included in this 8th cent. BCE regional style a number of decorated bronze objects generally designated ‘North Syrian’ but found outside the region, as well as an unprovenanced soapstone cosmetic container (Wicke 2005, 100–103). Although Wicke did not at first explicitly propose that Sam’al was the production centre for the SW 7 and R&R ivories, in a later summary, he more directly makes this claim (2013, 555; see Wicke this volume). G. Herrmann was also by then convinced by Wicke’s discussion that this group was made in Sam’al (G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 100).

Interpreting Cross-Media Styles

Before re-evaluating these proposals to localise the production of ivory groups on the basis of comparison with architectural sculpture, we should first ask what it might mean for a recognisable style to appear across multiple media. Three alternative explanations present themselves.

The first is the possibility that commonalities in style arise from a common production system; that is, that the same artisans, possessing the same training and *habitus* (see below), produced works in multiple media. In an earlier contribution on the unique appearance of F&F style in a steatite object recently discovered at Zincirli, I considered the possibility that ivory, wood and soft stones like steatite were carved by the same craft specialist (see also Muscarella 1980, 203; Wicke 2016, 198 f.), possibly the occupation called ‘carpenter’ (Akk. *naggāru*) or ‘sculptor’ (Akk. *gurgurru*) (V. R. Herrmann 2021, 101). I concluded, though, that – however probable this polymaterial practice may have been – the nearly complete lack of overlap in the style of ivory and steatite objects of the same type (V. R. Herrmann 2021, 100) suggests that different aesthetic conventions were

applied to these two materials and that the ornate internal incisions in animal bodies typical of F&F style were not usually considered ‘appropriate’ for works in stone (V. R. Herrmann 2021, 103). Considering now the pairing of ivory and basalt or limestone sculpture, the aesthetic conventions for these media as well seem ordinarily to have differed. While we cannot exclude the idea that the same carvers were in some cases responsible for producing small-scale ivory and large-scale sculpture, small differences, as pointed out above, both between ivories and sculptures and even between different sets of sculptures in the same ‘style-group’ argue against this.

A second possible explanation for the transfer of style across media is an *ad hoc* situation in which artisans working in one medium emulate works in another medium. This is the scenario proposed by multiple authors for the appearance of F&F style in the reliefs from Tell Halaf (Riis 1948, 198 f.; Kantor 1956, 173; Winter 1989). The proposal is that F&F ivories served as models for the relief sculptors in a situation where there was no indigenous monumental tradition for the latter to follow, as Tell Halaf was a new city ruled by a new power – the Aramaean Kapara supplanted the weakening Middle Assyrian provincial power at nearby Tell Fekheriye (see further below). The stone reliefs, especially the small orthostats, are less refined in drawing and composition than the ivories. They have thus been interpreted as a crude imitation of ivories imported from a more ancient and sophisticated urban centre and used as a ‘pattern book’ for inexperienced stone carvers – Winter proposed Karkemish, while Riis suggested Hamath as the origin of the imported ivories.

The third explanation is that a common ‘local style’ is being expressed in multiple media, even by different craft specialists who are not directly emulating or imitating each other. For example, in the quotation above, Winter ascribes stylistic similarity between portable and less-portable objects to the ‘taste of the local population’ (Winter 1983, 185). Wicke, defining how we should use a term like ‘tradition’ in relation to the style of artworks, describes this as a ‘kulturelles Gesamtphänomen’, ‘nicht an eine Denkmälergattung gebunden’, but present across different media in a culture (Wicke 2009, 254). He distinguishes this ‘künstlerische

Tradition' from a 'handwerkliche Tradition' based in tools and techniques (Wicke 2009, 254, n. 55).

In each of these proposed explanations, common style across media has a different origin. The commonality may arise from: 1) actual identity of common makers; 2) desired perception of identity between different makers; or 3) collective identity of different makers (see Davis 2011, 75–98). These potential origins imply different theories of the relationship between style and identity that have come under scrutiny in art history generally and in Near Eastern ivory studies in particular.

Style and Identity

Autochthonous Style Versus Practice Theory

The foundation of attribution studies is the idea that there is a causal or generative relationship between the production of the formal visual characteristics that we recognise as 'style' and a particular historical entity (Davis 1990, 24), whether an individual artist or 'school', or, in the field of archaeology, much broader social groups (as 'analytic individuals', Neer 2005, 12). This premise, however fundamental for much of the basic work of archaeologists and art historians (see Hodder 1985, 9 f.; Shanks/Tilley 1992, 147; Neer 2005), has nevertheless become the subject of critique and debate. What is the origin of stylistic similarity and difference?

The notion, prevalent since Winckelmann, Herder and Hegel, that style arises from and expresses a collective *Geist* or intangible shared mentalities and values specific to particular collectivities, ethnic groups or nations has been attacked as essentialising and naively idealist (e.g., Gombrich [1968] 2009, 134–138; 1969, esp. 36–38; Gunter 2009, 91–95; Tamur 2017, 11–20). The idea of collective or autochthonous styles generated by identity has been supplanted by the theory that shared style arises from a network of interactions, in which individuals teach and learn, or observe and copy a similar manner of making. Common style is (or can be) symptomatic of a common production system (Davis 1990, 26) and technique trumps visual attributes as an indicator of authorship (Gunter 2009, 102–106).

This practice theory of style – like the theory of autochthonous style – takes the production and consumption of formally similar objects as an index of social affinity, but in this case, the affinity is not that of a bounded, collective whole, but is dispersed in an ever-shifting network with no clear edges (Gunter 2009, 94 f.). Practice theory furthermore reverses the relationship of causality: shared style is generative and constitutive of community identity, not the other way around (Feldman 2014, 62–64). The communicative aspect of style as a shared *habitus* productive of affinity can shift back and forth between nondiscursive (practical) and discursive consciousness, depending on the situation (Shanks/Tilley 1992, 144–146). That is, style is part of an active performance of social relations, whether the actors intend it or not (see also Feldman 2014, 60–64).

Communities of Practice in the Nimrud Ivories

The now century-old concept of North Syrian and Phoenician 'traditions' in the Nimrud ivory corpus, together with the more recent South Syrian/Intermediate grouping, evokes the then-prevalent theory of autochthonous style. The degree of Egyptian influence or emulation evident in the ivories was mapped onto the geography and history of interactions of the Levant, creating a continuum from the Phoenician coastal cities to more provincial inland south Syria and, finally, more Hittite-influenced north Syria (see Suter this volume for an argument to reinterpret these differences as chronological, not geographical). An understanding of style as an expression of the shared mentalities and values of a group can also be found in older statements about these ivories such as, 'these very qualities which we observed in the respective art works of Phoenicia and North Syria, a sense of balance, detachment and eclecticism as opposed to one of single-minded thrust, intensity and confrontation, clearly reflect the historical and cultural identities of the two regions' (Winter 1976b, 20).

More recently, following methodological debates about the criteria for the definition of stylistic groups in the Nimrud ivories and their origin as products of a common 'hand', 'workshop', 'school' or 'tradition', Feldman (2014, 36–41, 60) has more

fundamentally critiqued the connoisseurship approach to the attribution of this corpus and its basis in the model of discrete local styles as essentialising and lacking historical grounding (see also Suter 2010, 996 f.; 2015, 41–43). Instead, she proposes to see the complex web of stylistic similarities and differences in this corpus as a product of dispersed, shifting and overlapping social networks of artisans and consumers, or ‘communities of practice’ (Feldman 2014, 58–64; see also di Paolo 2009, 142), drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* to describe how this interaction brought members of this network to a common way of doing and seeing (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1990, 54).

Feldman (2014, 51–57) takes the F&F style group, argued by G. Herrmann to be the work of one or more workshops in the city of Guzana, as her prime example. Affanni (2009), studying differences in the depiction of sphinxes within this group, had already argued for the production of this style by multiple workshops located in different cities. Feldman goes further in suggesting that the widespread production and consumption of an ivory style like F&F, in its various manifestations, was part of a shared elite *habitus* among the north Levantine kingdoms of the early Iron Age. The widespread distribution of this style was enabled by frequent interactions among these centres and recursively helped engender a common identity among the region’s ruling elite through its reference to a shared collective memory of the courtly diplomacy of the Late Bronze Age (Feldman 2014, 64–78). In the terminology of Bourdieu, we could say that ivories (among many other aspects of material culture) helped define the ‘field’ (see Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992, 113) or arena in which these leaders cooperated and competed with each other.

Reflexive and Rhetorical Use of Style Across Media

Returning to the topic of cross-media application of styles, we can see how these theories of the relationship of style to the identity of producers and consumers fit in. The first and second explanations for cross-media style outlined above (actual identity of the makers and desired perception of

identity between different makers, respectively) are both consistent with a practice theory of style. In the first, artisans trained and experienced in the same *habitus* reflexively apply it to different materials and genres of object.

The second scenario – conscious transfer of style from one medium to another – is also allowed for in practice theory, however, by the potential to shift back and forth between practical and discursive consciousness, depending on the context. Temporarily setting aside ‘learned ignorance’ of their own practice (Feldman 2014, 62 f.), an artisan could consciously employ style in order to communicate or inculcate identity. Davis (2011, 82–86) terms this scenario ‘stylisticality’ – or, in more commonplace language, ‘rhetorical style’ (2011, 93) – in which producers themselves recognise what they do as style, as one way of doing among an array of options. When producers replicate a recognised style, whether their own or that of another, they are making it ‘to be seen as style’ (Davis 2011, 84), as ‘looking like’ another thing (Davis 2011, 85). Reflexive² production of style can shift through recognition to rhetorical production, while rhetorical style can become reflexive again through conventionalisation (Davis 2011, 86). Davis calls this process the ‘stylistic succession’ and notes that this succession is ‘continuous’ and ‘recursive’, cycling back and forth (Davis 2011, 85). The art historian will in many or most cases be unable to determine whether the style of a work, or aspects of it, is a product of reflexive or rhetorical practice.

The third explanation for cross-media style, which locates its origin in a shared local ‘taste’ or in a ‘kulturelles Gesamtphänomen’ that transcends medium and artistic practice, also sees style as a reflexive production not requiring conscious awareness, but in this case stemming from the common origin of producers. It can therefore sometimes be an example of the theory of autochthonous style critiqued by Feldman and others. But does Georgina Herrmann’s argument

2 I am adopting here and below Davis’s use of ‘reflexive’ to indicate nondiscursive, habitual or unconscious practice in his opposition between ‘reflexive’ and ‘rhetorical’ style, which gives it the opposite meaning to the use of ‘reflexive’ to mean ‘self-referential’ or ‘self-aware’ by Bourdieu (e.g., Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992, 37), among others.

that each Levantine urban centre would have had a distinctive cross-media style, such as F&F at Guzana and SW 7 and R&R at Sam'al, depend on the theory of autochthonous style? Her explanations of this model contradict such an assertion.

In her fullest statement of the idea, G. Herrmann proposes that 'each state, city or centre, while continuing to employ a common regional iconography, developed its own artistic style used across the media to act as a "visual language" or state art' (G. Herrmann 2000, 268). She goes on to term this a *Machtkunst*³ most strongly associated with empires like Assyria, but she argues that each new north Levantine kingdom of the early Iron Age also possessed a 'desire for state individuality and identification' and 'employ[ed] art as a visual language to identify it, both to its own populace and to "outsiders"' (G. Herrmann 2000, 268). The idea of local cross-media styles as deliberately constructed 'state art' – not an expression of an innate local taste – is repeated throughout her work (G. Herrmann 1989, 109; 1992, 42; G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 74). Another term for 'state art' is 'court style' and G. Herrmann's proposal of north Levantine court styles – when recast in terms of practice theory – deserves reconsideration as an explanation for stylistic similarities across diverse media.

Court Styles in Assyria and the Levant

Assyrian 'Court Style' as a Cross-Media Style

Fortunately, Marian Feldman herself has reframed court style from the perspective of practice theory, though with respect to Assyria, not the Levant, with which she specifically contrasts Assyria (Feldman 2014, 79–110; 2018). Feldman describes the stylistic features of Neo-Assyrian art as 'so consistent and pervasive across scale and media that their "Assyrianness" is rarely even questioned by modern scholars'; rather, this stylistic

unity 'has been seen as reflective of the Assyrian mindset, and in particular, that of a dominating imperial state' (Feldman 2018, 108). As part of her extended critique of the essentialism of the idea of autochthonous style and proposal to understand style as productive, rather than reflective, of identity, she reinterprets Neo-Assyrian style as 'the enactment of a consistently coherent set of stylistic practices [that] contributed to a sense of community at the level of the Assyrian court' (Feldman 2014, 80). More particularly, this was a shared identity of dominance and order: it was 'part of a strategy for maintaining a memory of conquest over the vanquished Other' (Feldman 2014, 80) that was also 'controlled and orderly [...] suggest[ing] an underlying allusion to cosmogonic myths of creation' (Feldman 2014, 81). This is a definition of 'court style' in an active sense, one that worked to create solidarity among those who ran the empire and had to continually reaffirm its dominance. Feldman thereby comes to the same conclusion as previous scholars about the 'dominating imperial' character of Neo-Assyrian art by a different route: Assyrian art did not emanate from the pre-existing imperialist character of the Assyrians; rather, through a 'dialectic of fact and symbol' (see Schloen 2001), it helped make them that way.

Feldman contrasts the 'strong, consistent connections' across Assyrian imperial art (2018, 108) with the 'numerous weak connections' within Iron Age Levantine art that create a 'general sense of belongingness' within and between different media amid a high degree of variability (Feldman 2018, 107). Anyone wanting to describe something called 'Levantine style' would have to quote the judge's definition of pornography and simply say, 'I know it when I see it' (*Jacob Ellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 197 [1964]). For Feldman, this contrast between Assyrian and Levantine art is consistent with the difference between the decentralised, yet highly interconnected Levantine peer-polity interaction sphere and the highly centralised and self-confidently universalising Assyrian state (Feldman 2018, 108–110). Assyria's 'performance of rigid stylistic homogenization was set in clear distinction from the diversity and flexibility of communities in the Levant' (Feldman 2014, 80).

³ A term apparently coined by Josef Strzygowski, vociferous anti-Semite and eventual Nazi sympathiser, in opposition to *Volkskunst* (Strzygowski 1930).

Court Styles in the Levant? Recognising Rhetorical Style

G. Herrmann, by contrast, directly likened the ambitions of Assyrian and Levantine states in her proposal to see cross-media stylistic similarities as evidence of the deliberate creation of Iron Age Levantine court styles. According to Feldman's argument, this does not seem to match the socio-political character of the Iron Age Levantine kingdoms and their interrelations, nor are the stylistic groups defined within the ivory corpus and other media as clear and bounded as a general application of this model would demand. But I would suggest that, rather than adopt a static and categorical opposition between Assyrian and Levantine political life and values (and risk relapsing into essentialism!), we should consider historical scenarios in which a cross-media court style might have temporarily developed in certain places in the Iron Age Levant.

Granted, in the absence of external (i. e., non-stylistic) evidence, we cannot take stylistic similarity between ivories found at Nimrud and sculptures from Guzana and Sam'al as proof of production in a common locale. However, we can at least acknowledge that stylistic commonality across media not believed to arise from the same production system implies a rhetorical, rather than reflexive, use of style. According to Davis (2011, 82), 'where there is observation of style, there can be replication of style. And where there is replication of style due to observation of it, there is stylisticity. Where there is stylisticity, there must be observation of style'. For example, for so many specific F&F stylisations to have been replicated in the reliefs from Guzana (or *vice versa*), we must assume a recognition of the ivory style as a style and its use in another medium as rhetorical.

Multiple scenarios that entail this 'stylistic succession' from reflexive to rhetorical style (or 'stylisticity') could produce the transfer of style from one medium to another. As already mentioned, two such explanations have been offered for the use of F&F stylisations on sculptures at Guzana (Tell Halaf). G. Herrmann understood the appearance of F&F on ivories, gold and stone sculpture at the same site as an indication of the

creation of a 'state art' or court style in the new kingdom ruled by Kapara. Other observers, however, considered the stylistic imitation of ivories presumably imported from a more established city in a large-scale medium using inexpert technique as a marker of naïve unfamiliarity with the conventions of Iron Age north Levantine arts. The latter hypothesis cannot be excluded for 10th cent. BCE Guzana (although new evidence from the site, reviewed below, makes it less plausible), but it is much more difficult to extend to the sculptures of 8th cent. BCE Sam'al, where we see sculptures stylistically overlapping the SW 7 and R&R ivory groups. By that point, the royal dynasty of Sam'al was more than a century old and to all appearances fully at home within the north Levantine art world. Below, I probe the historical context of 10th cent. BCE Guzana and 8th cent. BCE Sam'al to give further consideration to the alternative hypothesis that cross-media court styles were created there.

The Historical Genesis of Court Styles

Under what historical circumstances might artisans working in a palatial system be induced to create a court style? Habitual styles – like other aspects of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 168–170) – may come most easily to conscious awareness in confrontation with clearly contrasting alternative styles (Feldman 2014, 63). In comparison with what is 'foreign', one can see what is one's own, presenting the opportunity (but not the necessity, of course) for conscious, rhetorical revisions and replications. In the Assyrian case, this succession from reflexive to rhetorical style and the creation of a court style seems to have occurred already in the Middle Assyrian period. In this period, the process of confrontation with Mitanni may have created a new need to set Assyria rhetorically apart as not just equal, but superior to its rivals (see Feldman 2006, 132 on Assyria's unconventional participation in the international community of the Late Bronze Age 'Great Kings'). The extension of the same distinctive, 'controlled, and orderly' style across all palace-controlled media (seals, ivory, wall paintings, stone sculpture etc.) could

have quite deliberately intended to create a coherent courtly ensemble that would solidify a new Assyrian elite identity, as Feldman describes for the Neo-Assyrian period.

Should we exclude the possibility that the Iron Age courts of the northern Levant were on occasion moved to create a cross-media court style, because these were not imperial powers? How could Guzana or little Sam'al claim the type of supreme, universalising and eternalising distinction communicated by the Assyrian style? Instead, the Levantine kingdoms seem generally to have possessed an ethos of competitive emulation that recognised their position in a peer-polity system. I would suggest, however, that what unites Guzana and Sam'al in the respective periods in which the style of their reliefs innovatively echoes certain ivory styles (or *vice versa*) is an episode of state consolidation in the context of an intimate and politically transformative encounter with the power of Assyria.

Sam'al

Let us turn first to the later case of 8th cent. BCE Sam'al, as its history is somewhat better known than that of Guzana. The memorial inscription of Barrākib for his father Panamuwa II describes a period of internal upheaval in Sam'al in the time of Panamuwa's father Baršūr (Tropper 1993, text P, lines 2–7). A bloody coup against the royal house killed Baršūr and exiled his son Panamuwa. The new king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser III, is said to have then ousted the usurper and put Panamuwa II on the throne (Tropper 1993, text P, line 7), probably in the course of his campaigns in 743–740 BCE against Arpad and the coalition of other Syro-Hittite kingdoms that had allied with Urartu. In exchange for their active aid and loyalty to Assyria, Panamuwa and later his son Barrākib were rewarded by Tiglath-Pileser with additional lands and security on their throne (Tropper 1993, text P, lines 14–15, text B1, lines 5–7). The burst of building activity, inscriptions and artistic commissions of this period evidenced in the archaeology of Zincirli (and possibly also Sakçagözü) suggest that Barrākib's boast was not entirely unwarranted and that:

'The house of my father profited, more than all others. And I ran at the wheel of my lord, the king of Assyria, in the midst of powerful kings, lords of silver and lords of gold. And I took control of the house of my father. And I made it better than the house of any powerful king. And my brother kings were desirous for all that is the good of my house' (trans. Younger 2000, 161).

Sometime between 727 and 713 BCE, in unknown circumstances, Sam'al, like eventually all its neighbours, was annexed as an Assyrian province with a governor, its royal house ended. But for some years its last kings played the role of assiduous vassals, pleased with the benefits brought by this collaboration.

As I have previously described (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 503–508), the 8th cent. BCE saw an intensification in Assyrian interaction with the west that is marked in both Assyrian and local representations. I argue that, in contrast to the oppositional relationship of the 9th cent. BCE, a more integrative cosmopolitan politics emerged in the 8th cent. BCE, in which persuasive tactics such as the co-option of local vassals and their courts formed a corollary to the renewed Assyrian drive for total domination (see also Lanfranchi 1997). In the intensified interactions between Assyrian and Levantine elites, a new consciousness of diacritical cultural and status markers could emerge and contribute to the creation of an imperial *koine*. However, following the typology of Lavan et al. (2016), I propose that the Neo-Assyrian empire adopted a cultural strategy of cosmopolitan subordination, rather than assimilation, in which 'cultural difference between imperial and local elites is preserved and organised in a hierarchical manner' (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 495), even as shared elite practices and activities created identification and solidarity across this political class (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 508). The position of Levantine elites of this period in the Assyrian 'hierarchy of honor' (Olyan 1996, 206 f.) 'was thus denoted not always or not only through the emulation and adaptation of imperial styles [...] but also through the definition of a diverse array of local elite styles' (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 507 f.). We can see this in the differentiation and elaboration of the appearance (dress, hairstyle and accessories) of figures

represented on 8th cent. BCE Syro-Hittite reliefs (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 507), replacing the simpler and homogenous appearance of the figures of 10th and 9th cent. BCE sculpture (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 498–500). Indeed, Gilibert characterises the 8th cent. BCE in Syro-Hittite sculpture as ‘the age of court ceremony’ (2011, 128–131) for its marked diacritical variation among courtiers in palatial settings, as exemplified particularly at Sam’al.

The ‘blending and juxtaposition of local, Assyrian, and Assyro-Aramaean elements’ in the reliefs of Barrākib’s new palaces at Zincirli ‘signal his dual identity’ as ‘a legitimate local king and an assiduously loyal vassal’ (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 509), manifesting the logic of cosmopolitan subordination. In the distinctive appearance of royal attendants and courtiers in these palaces, as well as in the private memorial of an official called Katumuwa, we see furthermore the creation of an ‘official’ Sam’alian identity at the sub-royal level (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 510). From the imperial perspective, this move had the advantage of making Sam’alian society more legible and orderly, replacing both diverse local identities and regional solidarities with a ‘national’ identity that held a legitimate but subordinate place in the imperial hierarchy. From the perspective of the local king, the creation of a cohesive and loyal courtier class with whom he shared the spoils and honours of imperial collaboration might have been seen as a necessity, given his direct dependence on the Assyrian king for his position and the potential unpopularity of this allegiance among his subjects (V. R. Herrmann 2018, 510–512; see Fuchs 2008, 70 f.).

Such a political scenario seems a very fitting background for the creation of a court style at Sam’al that extended visual conventions across multiple figural media as part of a broader attempt to cultivate both elite solidarity at home and distinction from ‘brother kings’. More frequent or intensive encounters with the unified appearance demonstrated by Assyrian courtly equipment and settings in this period could have provided the model for such a court style and the perspective necessary to recognise the existence of style(s) in local products – the succession from reflexive to rhetorical style. We should not understand this form of influence as a simple aping of imperial

culture and practice by parochial subalterns, but as an informed and sophisticated strategy by knowing sociopolitical actors (see also Wicke this volume).

Guzana

The situation at Guzana in the 10th cent. BCE is more obscure. However, the results from recent excavations at both Tell Halaf and neighbouring Tell Fekheriye go some way toward clarifying the development and interrelationship of these two cities.

The cuneiform inscriptions on the reliefs attest that the ‘Tempelpalast’ was built by Kapara, son of Ḫadiānu, king of the land of Palê. The date of Kapara has been debated for decades (see Younger 2016, 248–255), but most recently, the convergence of new archaeological evidence (Novák 2013a, 269–272), palaeographic reassessment (Dornauer 2010, 51 f.) and stylistic comparison (e.g., V. R. Herrmann 2017, figs. 7–8) suggests the mid-10th cent. BCE. It has long been supposed that at least some of the small orthostats on the south façade of the building were reused from an earlier structure, due to inscriptions assigning them to a ‘temple of the Storm God’, the incoherence of their order and the use of corner orthostats in non-corner locations (see, e.g., Oppenheim 1931, 126–128; Moortgat 1955, 14; Özyar 2008, 406–409; V. R. Herrmann 2017, 245),⁴ while other small orthostats may have been newly made replicas of the older works and the orthostats and statues from the entrance façade were made expressly for the building. While the original excavation team supposed that the reused small orthostats could have originally belonged to a monumental structure underlying the Kapara palace, dubbed the *Altbau* (Moortgat 1955, 16 f.; Langenegger et al. 1950, 30–35), the recent excavators showed this to be only

4 Orthmann (2002, 22, 75 n. 33), pointing out that the red coating on the small limestone orthostats covers not only the ‘temple of the Storm God’ inscriptions, but also the inscriptions of Kapara, has argued that they were made for the Tempelpalast in the reign of Kapara. However, it is not clear why the orthostats could not simply have been painted or repainted after their reinscription and reinstallation and this explanation does not account for the other evidence of reuse.

a deep foundation for the building, not an earlier phase (Novák/Schmid 2019, 219).

The new excavations, together with reassessment of the old excavations, have shown that, before Kapara, the citadel mound was occupied by a fortified settlement with several disturbed buildings – some possibly of monumental character – a number of small houses and a cemetery (Sollee 2020), founded on a deliberate fill intended to even out the surface of the long-abandoned prehistoric mound (Novák 2013a, 266). The chaff-tempered pottery suggests a late Middle-Assyrian – 11th or early 10th cent. BCE – date for this settlement, and a few sherds of Groovy Ware pottery typical of the Early Iron Age of eastern Türkiye led Novák (2013a, 266) to suggest connections to this region where the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BCE) repeatedly campaigned. The area was still under Assyrian control, based locally at nearby Tell Fekheriye.

During this earliest period of resettlement at Guzana, however, the Assyrians lost control of the upper Khabur region. At Tell Fekheriye, the large Assyrian houses of administrators had perhaps already been replaced, first by a graveyard and subsequently by an open area with ovens, workshop installations and further graves, suggesting that the settlement had shrunk and probably changed status, beginning in the 12th cent. BCE, although the material culture remained Assyrian (Bartl/Bonatz 2013, 277–282; Bonatz 2015, 26). In spite of the decline of Tell Fekheriye and Assyrian regional power, the inhabitants of Guzana nevertheless assimilated to Assyrian material culture for the most part, with Assyrian-type cist graves and Assyrian ceramic shapes created in the non-Assyrian chaff-tempered ware (Novák 2013a, 266). The large cist grave found in Oppenheim's excavations and containing the gold plaques embossed in F&F style and other luxury goods belongs to this period and was cut by the construction of the Kapara Palace (Langenegger 1950, 100–104; see Sollee 2020, 178); another newly discovered cist grave belonging to a teenage girl contained textiles, a necklace with many beads, a scarab and iron rings (Novák 2013b, 297). Given the fragmentary indications for a large structure on the western citadel predating the Kapara palace (M A175/ M A176/ M B16; Sollee 2020, 177 f. and fig. 4), it seems possible that the

small orthostats were originally created for this pre-Kapara, immediately post-Middle-Assyrian settlement. Meanwhile, the chronological position of the cremation burials covered by mortuary chapels containing seated statues (Langenegger et al. 1950, 159–163; Moortgat 1955, 7–14), one of which produced the fragments of ivories in F&F style, is uncertain. They could have been built just outside the settlement gate during the immediately pre-Kapara period, or as some of the first structures in the newly fortified rectangular lower town enclosed by Kapara (Sollee 2020, 186).

In summary, this new evidence shows that F&F stylisations were being applied to more than one medium probably already in the period before Kapara that coincided with the decline or disappearance of Assyrian control in the upper Khabur. The grave goods and architecture of Guzana attest that the residents had accumulated a certain level of economic power; according to Novák, we see here 'the existence of a new local elite, now competing with the inhabitants of Aššukanni [Tell Fekheriye]' (Novák 2013b, 297). In the following period of Kapara's rule, the ambition and political independence of this new local elite is undeniable and they were apparently ethnolinguistically Aramaean (Dornauer 2010, 50 n. 99; Younger 2016, 247 n. 84, 248 n. 85). Kapara's reuse of orthostats from the previous period and the replication of their style demonstrate a continuity of representation, in spite of this king's claim to have made 'what my father and grandfather did not make' (Younger 2016, 252). Kapara used the cuneiform script and Akkadian language for his inscriptions and the repertoire of motifs shown by the reliefs derives from Late Bronze Age Mitannian and Middle Assyrian, i. e., local, repertoires (Orthmann 1971, 470 f.). The F&F style, with its historic origins lying in the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean (Kantor 1956; Feldman 2014), was quite distinct from contemporary Assyrian style, however, and the architectural plan of his palace, the practice of cladding it with relief-carved orthostats and portal figures and the tradition of monumental seated mortuary statues also originated west of the Euphrates. The monuments of Guzana thus demonstrate a complex cultural synthesis that is simultaneously innovative and traditional, external and local. Whether or not the F&F style of

ivory carving originated at Guzana,⁵ the assertion of local sovereignty by a newly emergent power would seem to be an ideal scenario in which to situate the creation of an expressly non-Assyrian cross-media court style in direct confrontation with the temporarily displaced power and courtly media of Assyria. The extension of F&F style from portable to monumental media can thus be better understood as a rhetorical strategy than as the product of an ignorance of traditional conventions, as sometimes assumed.

Conclusion

Above, I have tried to re-encompass into current thinking about style the cases of cross-media style in the Iron Age northern Levant on which certain attribution claims for the Nimrud ivories were previously supported. The study of cross-media styles in particular exposes underlying assumptions about the origins of stylistic similarity. Some accounts of the appearance of a style across multiple media rely on the theory of autochthonous style that has been rightly, in my opinion, discarded by many as essentialising and erroneous. The proposal offered by G. Herrmann, that states of the Iron Age Levant created court styles to distinguish themselves from others (and, as Feldman argues for Assyria, to inculcate a cohesive local courtly identity), does not rely on such assumptions, however. This explanation for the cases of a close stylistic and iconographic similarity between certain ivory groups and architectural sculpture from Guzana and Sam'al merits new attention.⁶ Even if

it does not work as a general model for the Levant that will allow us to make further attributions of displaced objects,⁷ the creation of local court styles should be recognised as one possible mode of stylistic production alongside regionally networked practices.

Just as Assyrian court style must also have had a historical origin point – a recognition of stylistic difference accompanied by rhetorical replication of style across state-sponsored media – probably in a period of the consolidation of recently acquired power, so too can we envision repeated episodes of the succession from reflexive to rhetorical style in the Levant under similar (if smaller-scale) circumstances, some of which resulted in short-lived court styles,⁸ but not all of which we will be able to recognise today. Likewise, it is probable that at some, or even most points in time throughout the Middle and Late Assyrian periods, the Assyrian court style reverted to a reflexive or habitual style of which the artisans using it were not always explicitly aware, just as Levantine artisans – as argued by Feldman (2014, 62 f.) – may have usually operated in 'learned ignorance' of the particularity of their way of doing things. We should expect that recursion between rhetorical and reflexive production of style would have been continuous in both regions and that these successions may be complex and impossible for analysts to fully dissect. The pattern we see of strong continuity and uniformity of Assyrian style versus great varia-

5 By suggesting to seriously consider the possibility that at Guzana F&F was a court style applied to multiple media, I do not intend to contradict the observations of variability in the F&F ivory corpus that suggest multiple production workshops or locales or Feldman's argument that F&F was in some way a regional style for ivories. The extension to large-scale media seems so far to have taken place only at Guzana, however, suggesting that it took on a different meaning there due to the specific local interactions and dynamics of the time.

6 It is worth pointing out that the creation of court styles implies that the production of ivories and other prestigious media in the early Iron Age Levant – as in Assyria – was palace-controlled, as G. Herrmann has also long maintained (e.g., G. Herrmann 2000, 269, 278; G. Herrmann et al. 2009, 69–74). Others have argued for production by independent and perhaps itinerant workshops (e.g., Barnett 1982, 55;

Winter 2005, 33 f.; Scigliuzzo 2005; Suter 2010, 995 f.), which is a better fit with a model of regionally networked practices. The former model projects forward to the early Iron Age the palace economies of the Bronze Age (see Feldman's description of the organisation of production for Late Bronze Age luxury crafts [2006, 99–101]), while the latter projects back in time the 'commercialism' of the late Iron Age. Direct evidence to decide the matter is lacking, but it should be noted that the ivories themselves give little evidence of the standardisation and specialisation that would indicate commercial mass production (G. Herrmann 2000, 278; di Paolo 2009).

7 So far, we have no ivory groups with a strong visual relationship to the sculptures from, e.g., Malatya, Karkemish, Aleppo, Maraş or Karatepe.

8 An example of a different outcome for a stylistic succession toward rhetorical production of style may be found in the orthostats of the early 9th cent. BCE Citadel Gate at Zincirli, where artisans seem to have directly copied specific motifs from reliefs at Karkemish, but blended older local stylistic features with newer elements used at Karkemish. This blend of emulation and innovation seems to manifest the rivalry of this new state with the old regional capital (V. R. Herrmann 2017).

bility on a theme seen in Levantine arts does not stem from some enduring difference of character in the inhabitants, but from their divergent political fortunes. In all their turbulence and variety, Levantine states could use practices of representation not only to meld into their network, but also occasionally to aspire – at least for a time – to distinction.

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Section II: The Embodiment of Style

Davide Nadali

Style: A Manner of Making or a Way of Being?

On the Implications and Properties of Style in Creating and Shaping Visual Culture

Keywords: period body, perception, perceptual style, phenomenology, intericonicity, frescoes, Storm God

Summary

Research on the meaning and implications of style in art-historical discourse has largely been at the centre of scholars' debate, particularly concerning the issues of definitions and the related inferences for approaches to the cultural and historical interpretation and identification of cultural movements, art tendencies and geographic and ethnic entities. While it is undoubtedly true that social and political factors influence and, to a certain extent, shape style, it is also factual that style allows for the recognition of social and political factors thanks to the form given to objects and pictures. In this respect, not only are figurative styles relevant for defining choices and motifs, but perceptual styles are vital for the investigation of how the shape of an object or picture reflects the ways in which the world has been perceived, represented and meant to be perceived across space and time. In the end, one might assume that the world is perceived, and consequently it can be categorised and classified because it is stylised. The present paper analyses definitions of style and points to a phenomenological approach in discussing two sets of data: the Late Bronze Age wall paintings from Qatna and the several Iron Age creations of pictures of the Storm God in northern Syria and south-central Anatolia.

Introduction

The question of style including its function and features, not only in the discourse of art history and iconography, but also more generally in the analysis of culture or more selectively material culture – is definitely central in art-historical discourse and analysis. At the same time, this topical centrality of style also depends on the definitions that have so far been given with the aim of identifying artistic tendencies that can eventually be used to specify historical periods, cultures, people (the question of ethnicity is always in the background: Root 2019, 76; Tamur 2017) or even named artists or – when this is in fact impossible to ascertain, as often happens for the ancient Near East with some exceptions (see Gunter 1990, 9–13; Nadali/Verderame 2019) – potential schools, traditions and workshops (Di Paolo 2013; see Lang 1987). Due to the particular situation of the (apparent) impossibility of writing a comprehensive art history of the ancient Near East,¹ the use of style seems to acquire an additional and augmented meaning in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies in the attempt to recognise the hands of artists, schools and traditions.²

This contribution does not want to pursue the trend of defining style in order to classify, recognise and then date the works; this approach is not

¹ On the problematic Western approach to the art of the ancient Near East see Nadali 2014; Gunter 2019.

² See Suter 2015 for the meaningful significance of style and stylistic analysis in the studies of ancient ivory production in the 1st mill. BC.

wrong, but it sounds more meaningful to move from the question of attribution (which mostly concerns the making of a work) to the issue of perception (which affects both the work and the beholder). In this consideration of the meaning of attribution and its implications, the ultimate role of the maker as the one who transfers, creates and invents a style, on the one hand, and the intrusive role of the analyst as the one who classifies, defines and explains the style, historically and culturally, on the other can be singled out.

In Search of a Definition of Style

Style, if looking to a generic definition, is the manner in which a work (not exclusively a visual work but including text and musical composition) is made (form) and communicates (meaning). Figurative styles are culturally and historically determined and this is the reason why analysts can classify and identify different figurative styles across space and time, adding aesthetic evaluations and clarifications concerning the shape, the treatment of space, volumes, lines and colours to anchor style and give it weight and substance. In the end, there is a plurality of figurative styles and these are used by the analyst to classify works and assign periods, enabling the suggestion that a figurative style can, in fact, be representative of a period (according to the definition of period style).

For this reason, while the making is surely crucial, taking also the properties of the materials into account (Winter 2003), the issue of the way of being has been less investigated. In this vein, Irene Winter (1998) analysed the affective property of style as a factor that is not simply added to the work (to shape the form). Nor is it characterised by external or inherent attributes that can be correctly observed in a work or group of works (for example, style has agentive properties in the process of changing the form, meaning and therefore perception of a work). In the end, style is a mediating element that gives form and expresses meaning independently from the work itself, the original intention of the artist and the contextual cultural world; if figurative styles are historically and culturally determined, it might also be argued that it is style that historically and culturally determines

the world. Therefore, the *Weltanschauung* does not influence and inspire the style, but rather style creates and explains the *Weltanschauung*. In this respect, style cannot be reduced to mimetic representations of the world, but it is through style that the world is perceived and understood. The affective property of style lies, in fact, in this specificity and perspective of creating and explaining the *Weltanschauung* rather than being explained and inspired by it.

Referring to Michael Baxandall's (1988) intuition of the period eye in the context of the art of the Renaissance the definition of 'period body' might be interestingly applied to the question of style, particularly for a holistic comprehension and evaluation of the influence of style on being and acting in the world. Moreover, eye and body change over time – that is, perception is fluid – and for this reason, the same picture can be reused and re-adapted in a different context and period with a different meaning. If it is true that cultural factors and constraints influence vision and therefore a given work and its artist perfectly function in their original political, social, religious and cultural milieu, the period body points out how the faculties of seeing, moving, touching and hearing are the reason for the understanding of the world where people live, going beyond the optic-centred concept. If the period eye gives the possibility of understanding what people see (the world where they live), the period body allows for the same understanding of the world where people live not only through the faculty of seeing but also through the totality of sensory perception (e.g., haptic experience).

In the words of Irene Winter, 'the key to 'style-as-meaning' lies [...] in cultural context and in the emotional response invoked/provoked by the work. Here I would build upon an essay by James Ackerman, in which the impact of a work is seen as the result of a combination of intellectual knowledge plus sensory perception' (Winter 1998, 72).

The relevance of emotional response is even more significant in the discourse of the period body if one takes into account that emotions are the result of the body's reactions to external stimuli (Damasio 2000). Therefore, style is not (at least not only

and not entirely) 'a fragment – a physical result – of past social actions and practices' (Feldman 2018, 106; see also 2014, 51). Past social actions and practices are translated and explained by inherent style (i. e., the artistic/visual form that has been used to express intended meaning), rather than translating or explaining style for scholars.

For this reason, beyond the figurative styles that are historically determined, it is essential to look at and analyse the perceptual styles, pointing to the consequence of seeing and perceiving not only the individual works but also, through them, the world (Pinotti 2003). In perceptual style, the notion of perception is central to both the perspective of the maker (how she/he perceived and thus represented the world) and the perspective of the beholder (how she/he, through style, is able to perceive and interact, cognitively – through experience and senses – with the world). This approach to style could be the task of a phenomenology of style, with an aesthetic evaluation that does not intend to give a value judgement (for example, the beauty of a work), but on the contrary refers to the theoretical system of the *aisthesis*, of the perceptible and sensorial experience (Pinotti 2001). Style is properly an affective element of a given work because it not only affects the work itself in the shape (lines, colours, proportions), but also acts on the beholder, who can perceive and feel the surrounding political, social, religious and cultural atmosphere (Winter 1998).

Within the phenomenology of style, the *Weltanschauung* is the configuration of the world via the sensorial perception of the body, the *Leib*, the living body with all its aesthetic properties. The style of the living body (i. e. the body of a person observing and perceiving the neighbouring reality) acts and interacts with the world and the other bodies within it that are body-objects (*Körper*) to it (Pinotti 2001, 216). These same *Körper*, however, are living bodies when they look back at other objects in the world. This mutual sensorial and perceptual relationship and reciprocity is the foundation for the comprehension of each other and the understanding of the world. In this context, style is the explanation and form (not meaning the physical form) of human social practices via the action of bodies in the world. Both the world itself and the works themselves, because of the agentive

and affective property of style, are bodies, body-objects that are perceived and, concurrently, living bodies that perceive and act (Bonatz 2002; Winter 2007; Nadali 2012). To reinforce the centrality of the human body, the meaning and implications of the anthropology of images (Belting's *Bild-anthropologie*) is central. The term 'anthropology', as explained by Belting (2001), does not precisely refer to the discipline of anthropology itself, but serves to point out the relevance and necessity of considering the human body as the living medium for the comprehension of pictures. This process and approach are also essential for the evaluation and analysis of the style of pictures: what does the adoption and use of a figurative style imply and communicate? How does it confer meaning to the perceptual style?

Figurative styles can be considered the physical translation of perceptual styles that interpret the world; the plurality of figurative styles is related to the plurality of perceptual styles (Pinotti 2003), which have the intention of forming and representing the context of each political, social, religious and cultural world. While the figurative styles point to the manner of making (and, from a very technical point of view, to skills and inventions), the perceptual styles reveal the way of being, showing both how the world is perceived and how someone wants it to be perceived.

In the field of art history, the value of style, as the marker of not only a way of production (making) but also as a way of being, is particularly clear and meaningful when iconography is taken into account (Feldman 2018, 100–105). In this respect, it is also interesting to point out that the pre-iconographic level of Panofsky's (1939) criteria in fact takes into account the analysis of style as elements of designs and forming the figures. However, the relationship between iconography and style can be better recognised and singled out in the second step of Panofsky's scheme, namely iconographic analysis, when images are studied for what and whom they are representing and stand for.

At this point, the mechanism of intericonicity adds further hints for the analysis of images: intericonicity is the process that explains and shows the existence of an implicit and explicit atlas of references that can be traced in the ways images are translated into pictures and the ways pictures

are readapted and readjusted to match a new reality (Laboury 2017; Nadali/Portuese 2020). Intericonicity discloses the repetition of a picture (the copy and replica of a similar pattern that is not properly a new picture) and the transformation into a new picture (the invention of a new icon that might still partially refer to old pictures, i. e. a quotation) (Chéroux 2009; Heydemann 2015). In addition, the semantic difference between image and picture is extremely significant in the analysis of the added value and contribution of style to the work and for art historical studies: if an image is immaterial, a picture is its material translation; a picture also renders the image through a medium (Belting 2005) and the medium is an artificial body that images need to become visible and even perceived through other senses. Going further, it can be stated that the image is a stylised picture, i. e. it is translated into a physical body with a given style. In particular, when the same image is recognised in several pictures, this means that the same iconography has been replicated, reproduced and used in a very short span of time (within the same culture and society – so a synchronic intericonicity can be detected) or centuries later (in a different culture and society – and in this case a diachronic intericonicity can be identified).

In the case of intericonicity, the question of style is useful. Following the distinction between making and matching made by Gombrich (1984), the relationship between image and picture can correspond to the following proportion: Image : Making = Picture : Matching. That is, the image is made, it is conceived; the picture reproduces, on different media, the image via the process of making (the artist physically and concretely shapes the object) and of matching (the artist corrects, modifies or readjusts the original prototype; see Freedberg 2018). It is precisely in this continuous matching that intericonicity can be recognised, showing how a picture can keep, cancel, modify, deny and even overturn the original image via a choice of an intentional style.

As a consequence of this process of a continuous system of cross-reference and reciprocity, an archaeological approach to the study of pictures is needed that considers when and where a picture has been created, used and seen and eventually how it worked in the ancient societies. The idea

of an archaeology of images intends to analyse images within an archaeological context; as a consequence, the archaeology of images is a new and crucial methodological process and approach that investigates images starting from the place and the moment an image has been made and shaped, up to the reformulation of the same picture to match a different place in another time (Juwig/Kost 2010; Samida 2010; Nadali/Portuese 2020).

The Question of Style in Syria in the Late Bronze and Iron Age: Some Examples

The correspondence and interplay of pictures can be seen specifically when the same iconographic subject is analysed or when details of iconographies are selected. If, from the iconographic point of view, the story and characters are the same, the style might change with the execution and adaptation of the story to new contexts, works and audiences. The content is the same, while the form, and consequently the meaning, can change according to intentional stylistic choices. Each society has their own habits that express their styles in how they move, live and look at the world. These are the perceptual styles that are the foundation of the figurative styles that can be typologised as variations of the same iconographic theme and, more specifically, as variations of the main theme of spatial relations and the condition of experiencing and perceiving space.

Analysis of the types of perceptual styles offers the possibility of investigating the variations on a given theme. Starting from the principle of perceptual styles, choices should accordingly be studied as a way of perceiving and being rather than a manner of making – passing from a technical to an ontological level of interpretation of the meaning and implications of style in art history and art historical analysis. This shift also avoids the need to research the origin of a marked style that is recognised and analysed in order to identify and single out a name based on a geographic or ethnic specification. Because of the nature of the information and sources at our disposal, it is impossible to ascribe a recognised style to a named person, an artist, as can be done for other contexts in antiquity (e.g., the Classical period) and modern times.

It might even be hazardous to precisely match and pinpoint a named artist and a style, the latter being the result of the personal choice of the former.³ This frequent lack of consistent and complete information about the makers and the impossibility of writing about their lives and career (sometimes only their names are known) opens the research to the identification of styles based on a cultural, ethnic and geographic basis.

In the context of the ancient Near East, the study of the historical passage from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age – particularly in the area of northern Syria with the presence and interactions of different political entities and realities – is strongly characterised by the increase of several definitions of style that have been used to identify social agents and the relationships of dependency and independence among them (which style came first, who influenced whom). The historical changes (new people, new languages, new political powers, new cultural and religious traditions) that occurred in the area surely influenced the research and the analysis of the manifestation of visual art, from the monumental reliefs and mural paintings to smaller artefacts (i. e. seals and ivories).⁴ As a consequence, the issue of the definitions of the origin and derivation of workshops and related styles is still a matter of debate and often reflects traditions and schools of studies.⁵ In this context, the common categorisations of ‘international’, ‘Syro-Hittite’ or ‘Neo-Hittite’ styles are explicitly avoided. The definition of international style, which seems to be more inclusive and less politically and culturally denotative, opens up several questions on the issues of the origin and the following developments of a style, thus paradoxically bringing the problem back (Root

2019, 78).⁶ On the one hand, it allows for moving on from geographic borders, but, because of this, it puts iconographic experiences and pictorial solutions on the same plane that are instead the result and effect of precise cultural and historical implications, bound to territory (and geography). On the other hand, the intersections of different political entities (the Hittites and the Assyrians, for example) are clear, but labels combining, for example, a geographical reference (Syro-) and a cultural and political denomination (Hittite) are not satisfactory.⁷ Solutions for a commonly shared definition and interpretation are far from being reached and scholars differently and interchangeably use one or the other. This issue is not in the scope of this study. For this reason, the evaluation of the perceptual styles could help in arriving at a possible definition of the style of the production of the cities and kingdoms in northern Syria, particularly during the Iron Age, when a mixture of elements (from the iconographic point of view) is clear, but the execution (in terms of style) is different and strictly related to the ways of perceiving and the communicative intentions. To this should be added the question of workshops and centres of production (Di Paolo 2013), the places where those products were shaped and designed as well as the final destination of the works. In this respect, the colossal sculptures of animal-shaped column bases or the bas-reliefs for the external facades of the public buildings could have been sculptured and made elsewhere, in the quarry for example, and then transported to be installed.

³ Indeed, this mostly happens in modern and contemporary art, where a style is named after the artist who invented and used it. See also the question of artistic intentionality (Feldman 2014, 47–51).

⁴ On political and cultural interconnections of the region of northern Syria and southern Anatolia and related problems in definitions see among others Mazzoni 1997; Glibert 2011; Osborne 2021.

⁵ For a re-evaluation of the definition of workshop and the idea of the workshop model related to style see the sound analysis of Di Paolo 2013.

⁶ Feldman, in her studies, addresses the problems and ambiguity of this definition (Feldman 2002; 2006). Notwithstanding her attempts to justify the use of such a definition and to correct it with new proposals, Pfälzner’s analysis (2015, 181–218, esp. 181–187) of both problematic terminology and implications of the ‘international style’ or the ‘international artistic *koiné*’ (as proposed by Feldman 2006, 41) sounds more solid. In fact, ‘international style’, while wishing to explain the complex system of creation and circulation of figurative languages and styles, oversimplifies things, flattening differences and specificities such as the regional and local features and the geographic provenance of the artefacts.

⁷ See the similar analysis by Osborne (2021, 4–7), who ultimately prefers to use the definition ‘Syro-Anatolian Culture Complex’, as does DeGrado in his recent study on clothing in Assyrian art of the 9th cent. BC (DeGrado 2021, 480–482).

The Wall Paintings from Qatna and the Storm-God in Northern Syria: Two Case Studies

To exemplify the interconnections of interpretations, definitions and considerations of style, two sets of data are taken into account: the wall paintings from the Royal Palace of Qatna in Syria in the Late Bronze Age and the multiplication of the images of the Storm God in northern Syria and south-central Anatolia during the Iron Age. Although the two examples do not entirely explain and cover the inquiries of artistic and stylistic analyses and choices, they are paradigmatic because they single out two modalities of representations (painting vs. sculpture, differing in technical approach and manner of execution) that point to two different stylistic problems of interconnections of geographic regions and cultures. In particular, these two sets are exemplary of the research methods so far applied to stylistic analysis and, in the end, although they do not solve the problem of definitions of styles (and this is proved by the several interpretations given by each scholar), they surely contribute to opening new paths of research on the modality of identification of styles related to schools, artisans, workshops and geography.

The Issue of the Identity of the Artists Who Produced the Wall Paintings of Qatna

The discovery of wall paintings in the Late Bronze Age Royal Palace of Qatna in Syria renewed the discussion and debate on the diffusion and origins of wall-painting techniques and practices, on the one hand, and iconographic motifs, on the other (fig. 1).⁸ For the iconographic theme and the style of execution (from the technical perspective of the execution *al fresco* and string impressions), a

direct Aegean origin has been suggested.⁹ Can the international style or international artistic *koiné* be invoked to explain these similarities? Both Pfälzner (2008, 108; 2013; 2015) and von Rüdén (2015, 254–256) exclude this possibility and solution; they rule out even the old idea of the presence of Aegean artists at the Royal Palace of Qatna. However, this possibility cannot be completely excluded, but in any case is insufficient to explain not only the complexity of the design and motifs, but also the process of formation and diffusion of a common scenography that shares techniques, iconography and, more precisely, style. In particular, the idea of travelling artists oversimplifies the issue and, moreover, does not take into account the contribution of local Syrian elements in composition, iconography and style.¹⁰ This is the reason why the international style cannot be called upon, but rather a hybrid regional style in this case should be preferred (Pfälzner 2015, 196). Von Rüdén (2013) rightly points out that the old interpretation of the Aegean artists in the Levant (Niemeier 1991) actually flattened or even cancelled the question of local habits, the context and therefore the audiences who were supposed to see those paintings. She expands her analysis by taking into account other examples of material culture in the Middle and Late Bronze Age that show the results of interaction and diffusion and the search for specific objects and iconographic motifs (von Rüdén 2015; 2017). Furthermore, this enlarged and more comprehensive view of the phenomenon explains not only the common points, but also the transformation and adaptation of common ideas and motifs that could ultimately convey different messages and meanings once transported and settled into a new context (Pfälzner 2013, 210 f.). Analysing the different opinions among scholars on the painting of Tel Kabri (particularly on the origin, authorship and

⁸ The wall paintings of Qatna have been extensively studied by von Rüdén (2011). Wall painting fragments have been principally found in rooms N and U of the Royal Palace. On dating, while von Rüdén (2011, 60–62) points to the first half of the 14th cent. BC (Late Bronze Age IIA), Pfälzner suggests an earlier date in the 16th cent. BC and therefore around the passage from Middle Bronze II to Late Bronze I (2008, 98 f.; 2013, 201 f.).

⁹ On the analysis of the iconographic motifs (palms, seascape, dolphins) and the comparisons with contemporary Aegean wall paintings see von Rüdén 2011. For the detail of the technique, proving an Aegean origin and influence see von Rüdén 2011, 89–94; 2013; 2015; Pfälzner 2008, 99–104; 2013, 202–204; Brysbaert 2008; 2011.

¹⁰ See for example the detailed analysis of the local Syrian elements that can be traced back to the Middle Bronze Age in the context of the diffusion of wall paintings in the 2nd mill. BC by von Rüdén (2015; 2017).



Fig. 1. Reconstructed arrangement of painted plaster decoration on west wall, Room N, Royal Palace of Qatna, Syria (courtesy of the Syro-German Archaeological Project at Tall Mišrife).

style),¹¹ which either see an exact representation of an Aegean landscape or a depiction of a typical, local, Levantine landscape (von Rüden 2013, 74), von Rüden asks whether these different opinions could also be projected onto the beholders of the 2nd mill. BC, stating that:

‘[I]t is not only the observer who is active in this object-human interaction; the same applies to the space created by the architecture and by social practice. The building and the paintings were enveloping the visitor completely, and together with practices taking place in it, would have created meaning for the visitor – a meaning that would have had an impact on the way one makes associations about (and with) images’ (von Rüden 2013, 74).

This interplay and the perception of the surrounding world are exactly what style, namely perceptual style, implies. Surely the context and cultural practices affect the comprehension of the images (the effect of the transportation and adaptation of the ideas into a new context might have changed the original meanings). Images themselves, however, because they have been formed and stylised in that way, not only affect but also create the space. This result is confirmed by the idea that style is the variation of human behaviour and experience with the world – i. e. von Rüden’s object-human interaction.

The Multiplication of the Storm-God on Stone Reliefs Across North Syria

The representations of the Storm-God in different contexts and on different works in Syria and south-central Anatolia in the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age can demonstrate intericonicity and explain the affective property of style in the perception of the deity (how it is represented and how it is then perceived). This example, as with the wall paintings of Qatna, shows the diffusion of an iconographic motif that is then subject to stylistic transformations and adaptations. The issue of representing a deity, supposedly the same deity, in fact, opens multiple possibilities of reading the picture as the specific marked representation of a Storm God from a known place, a specific culture and with clear hypostasis. The diffusion of Storm Gods in the 2nd mill. BC in Anatolia and Syria reflects the popularity of this cult on the one hand (Cornelius 1994; Bunnens 2004; 2006) and the different naming of this divine entity on the other (Schwemer 2008a; 2008b). Does a name correspond to a specific image and representation?

The affecting meaning of style is strictly bound to memory and the idea of communicating typical cultural styles that are conscious choices of the artists, but they also mirror, at an unconscious level (Kandel 2012, chapters 27–28), the inheritance of a system of references that are not only figuratively, but also perceptually marked with a political intention of expressing and conveying meaning on the beholders to shape a shared cultural memory.

¹¹ On the frescoes from Tel Kabri see Niemeier/Niemeier 2002. On the Aegean and Levantine contextualisation of the Tel Kabri wall paintings see von Rüden 2013.



Fig. 2. Relief from the Storm God Temple of Aleppo, Syria, showing the deity on the left and Taita of Palistin on the right (courtesy of the Mission archéologique d'Alep).

Albert Dietz (2020) convincingly demonstrated the impossibility of an exact and unequivocal matching between picture and name, pointing out that the iconography of the Storm God follows quite a precise and common pattern for both the portrayal and the attributes of the deity. Even when a clearer cultural identification is possible, the iconography somehow respects the canon, while details of the images and styles differ. With probably the sole exception of the Storm God of Aleppo, the others are, as concluded by Dietz, 'just an image of a specific type of god. It is possible they were even intentionally left vague, giving the prospect of a different identification' (Dietz 2020, 157).

Therefore, while the image clearly points to the Storm God, it is impossible to pinpoint which Storm God is actually depicted. Only the details and the differences in style reveal the variations of the type and, consequently, the cultural implications behind the variations, as one can identify at Emar with the contemporaneity and coincidence of Adad, Teššub and Ba'al (Dietz 2020, 154 f.). The stylistic differences or variations are the result of the perceptual styles (way of making

the god-being) rather than of the figurative styles (manner of making).

A relief in the Temple of the Storm God of Aleppo is very significant in this process. When Taita, king of Palistin, renewed the temple (Schwemer 2008a, 167), he placed his image just in front of an existing relief of the Late Bronze Age depicting the Storm God (Dietz 2019, 198). Not only the inscription, but also the style, contributes to differentiate and date the two panels (Kohlmeyer 2009, 197; 2016, 207). This means that the body of the god and the body of Taita are expressions of two perceptions, the god and the king, that coexist (*fig. 2*).

This situation can indeed be compared to the long life of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud. Although it was occupied by later Assyrian kings as well, the figurative programme of Ashurnasirpal II was not changed, nor was the style of the reliefs revised, even if in the meantime new perceptual styles had been introduced (Kertai 2013). The temple of Aleppo shows, on the contrary, the need for new pictures. The Storm God in the Late Bronze Age was portrayed in a different iconography and with a divergent style (Kohlmeyer

2009, 305). Next to him, Taita added his image in the Early Iron Age (Kohlmeyer 2009, 307 f.). It is interesting to notice that this happened in conjunction with the renovation of the temple in the 11th cent. BC (Kohlmeyer 2009, 303 f.) and actually recalls a nearly contemporary relief from Malatya of the 11th/10th cent. BC (Bunnens 2006, fig. 102).

These examples of both continuity and change in style reflect, on the one hand, the constraints of the external world (a political change, an architectural renovation etc.; Dietz 2019, 190). On the other hand, they reveal how style works in effecting meaning, particularly in communicating knowledge and reinforcing memories in a social group, in a balanced operation of mixing styles with the result of creating hybrid pictures that are difficult to categorise (a geographic- or cultural-based definition is used that does not properly take into account the differences and the impossibility of drawing sharp and clear borders).¹²

Conclusion

Iconography and style cannot be disconnected. Style is used to convey a meaning of an iconographic motif. Given similar, sometimes even identical, iconographic motifs, style is the fundamental element not only in marking differences in the form, but also in the meaning: in the end, not only in the manner of making, but also in the way of being. As a matter of fact, the very same iconography can be associated with diverse meanings and this depends on several factors, such as the political and social background. Thus, style is not only a marker of production, identifying origin and schools, but is indeed the instrument for investigating the impact of image production in different contexts. The diffusion and proliferation of iconographic motifs, as particularly can be seen during

the Late Bronze and Iron Age in the Levant, testifies to the mechanism of intericonicity (replica, quotation and adaptation of iconographies). Style operates as the distinctive marker to differentiate a series of similar images by adding, changing or subtracting features and elements not only in how pictures look (figurative style), but also in how they are perceived (perceptual style). Style makes the world visible; each style reveals and communicates its world. Stylistic analysis, or rather the analysis of the types of styles, contributes to the analysis of the history of perception. Stylistic changes are not exclusively a condition for the study of the manners of making and representing images, but also the challenge for the discovery of the ways of representing and being in general.¹³

About style, André Malraux states: ‘Le style ne nous apparaît plus seulement comme un caractère commun aux œuvres d’une école, d’une époque – conséquence ou ornement d’une vision – il nous apparaît comme l’objet de la recherche fondamentale de l’art, dont les formes vivantes ne sont que la matière première. Et à la question: – Qu’est-ce que l’art?, nous sommes portés à répondre: – Ce par quoi les formes deviennent style’ (Malraux 1952, 270).

Style is not just the possibility of looking at the world as a matter of fact, already made and provided with an established set of values that can be geographically or ethnically denoted. Style is the occasion to feel the world (in this sense, the definition of aesthetics of style can be appropriately applied) and in the end the world is perceived because it is stylised.

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¹² See Feldman 2014, 178. On a different level, the same mixtures and interactions of style among works (copy, adaptation, quotation) interestingly can be recognised in the broad diffusion of non-royal monuments, specifically of funerary steles of non-royal elites (see Bonatz 2000). Those monuments, instead of contrasting with the royal monumental art, rather enter a dialogue as part of a broad frame of representation and codification of power and social memory (see Gilibert 2011, 125–131; Bonatz 2016). This topic needs further arguments that are beyond the scope of this contribution.

¹³ This could contribute, both perceptually and cognitively, to distinguish the statue as either the representation of the god as a statue or as a living being with a body (Dietz 2019, 191 f.).

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The Style of a Smile

Style and Emotions Beyond Attribution?!

Keywords: emotion research, iconography of emotions, emotional styles, ivories, Early Iron Age

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Summary

Emotions, and expressions thereof, represent both universal and culturally constructed phenomena. Moreover, emotions and their modes of expression – bodily, visual, written or spoken – intersect with every aspect of human life. They affect the mind, the body and many different forms of materialisation. Archaeologists can utilise these materialisations to reconstruct changing ancient emotional lifeworlds, also in respect to questions of shifting appraisals, as well as various form of expression.

Within this realm, style – both as a concept and as an inherent quality – makes an impact on very different levels, ranging from the changing modes of thinking to any mode of emotional display. Therefore, it seems appropriate to engage with the style of emotions in archaeology. Despite the occurrence of emotional facial expressions in ancient Near Eastern ivories during the Early Iron Age, their existence, mode and meaning have been largely overlooked in scholarly literature. Counteracting this stance, this paper discusses the style of emotional expressions as a culturally constructed mode of being and as a means of communication. For this purpose, I propose a model connecting the various levels of style and emotions by exploring specifically the expression of the smile in Early Iron Age ivories.

Style and Smile: Why?

One of the agendas of the conference has been to push the concept of style as a heuristic tool and as a characteristic inherent in objects and people beyond the undoubtedly important issue of typological ascription. In this regard, one of the potential functional assignments of style is communication. But how does style communicate, what does it communicate and why? Since emotions and affective states form a crucial part of communicative processes overall (e.g., Izard 2010, 365), it is only logical to assume an entanglement of the cultural concepts of emotion and style on several levels.¹ Thus, this paper focuses on this relationship and especially on how style may have been involved

¹ The affective properties of style have already been discussed by Irene J. Winter (1998).



Fig. 1. Bronze statuette of a god, Late Bronze Age, Ras Shamra, RS 9.418, AO 19407 (© 2004 RMN-Grand Palais, Musée du Louvre, photo by Franck Raux).

in the communication of affective states in the ancient Near East. I therefore propose to divide style as a mode of being and doing into distinct levels, specially adapted to the requirements of discussing the style of emotional expressions.

As an example of an emotional expression identifiable in the human face, this paper focuses on the smile as potentially materialised in figural artefacts of the ancient Near East, specifically in the ivories of the Early Iron Age. The selection of this specific emotional expression is also due to its ambivalent treatment in scholarly literature on ancient Near Eastern art – at the same time acknowledged but not analysed. On the one hand, we observe a puzzling disregard of frontal depictions with undoubtedly emotional expressions, like a smile or a twisted and distorted mouth (*fig. 1*). On the other hand, scholars have acknowledged some facial expressions, naming them enigmatic (e.g., de Martino 2019, 42; Cornelius 2017, 137) or *timide* (e.g., Parrot 1967, 78) or linking them to certain locations, as with the *sourire mariote* (e.g., Parrot 1967, 59) (*fig. 2*). Yet, once mentioned, these expressions are then



Fig. 2. Statue of Ebih-Il of Mari, Early Dynastic III, AO 1755 (© 2014 Musée du Louvre, photo by Raphaël Chipault).

mostly ignored or dismissed.² However, if the minutiae of forms are meaningful (and not redundant) (Feldman 2002, 7; 2014, 44), it does not seem reasonable to ignore it when the lips are forming a smile or when the mouth is distorted in a figural depiction.

The reasons why ivories – of all things – have been chosen for exemplification are manifold and simple at the same time. First, smiles have been observed in ivories since the discovery of the famous ivory head of the so-called Mona Lisa at Nimrud in 1952 (ND 2550 see note 26, and *fig. 5*); second, the corpus of ivories has been published in major outstanding publications, providing a large basis for this study;³ third, ivories have been invoked in scholarly debates on the issue of style many times and therefore they are firmly seated

² The notion that Mesopotamian (or even ancient Near Eastern) imagery knows no facial expressions or emotions is widespread (Bonatz 2017, 58; Nunn 2009, 134 f.; Schroer 2017, 151; Berlejung 2007, 54; Zwickel 2012, 2). In contrast, Parrot argued that in later Sumerian statues the smile became more prominent (1960, 110, *fig. 140*) and according to Alvarez-Mon some Elamite funerary clay heads might also have a smiling expression (Alvarez-Mon 2005, 115; contra see Cornelius 2017).

³ See, e.g., Barnett 1957; Herrmann 1986; 1989; 1992; Herrmann et al. 2009; Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013; Mallowan/Herrmann 1974; Wicke 2008.

in the style debate;⁴ fourth, the analysis restricts itself to ivories to avoid the unnecessary and erroneous influence of specific characteristics of varied materials.

To situate the ensuing discussion on the entanglement of emotional facial expressions and style, the paper first clarifies the overall concepts of style and emotions to which it adheres. Second, it considers general issues when approaching emotional expressions, especially in the face. Third, the paper introduces the aforementioned division of style-levels and connects these with examples of smile and laughter and their often (but sometimes wrongly) connected emotional states of joy and happiness in the ancient Near East.

General Concepts of Style and Emotions

In this paper, I understand both style and emotions as cultural constructs. Style is the expression of cultural practices and a cultural practice itself (Winter 1998, 55; Sanz/Fiore 2014, 7104). Emotions are biocultural constructs (Engelen et al. 2009): they dispose of hard-wired innate elements and cognitions but are largely culturally influenced. Thus, at some point, emotions turn into cultural practices also.

In respect of style, I follow E. Gombrich's well aged statement that style is: 'any distinctive, and therefore recognisable, way in which an act is performed or an artifact made or ought to be performed and made' (Gombrich 2009, 129).

Like M. Schapiro, I adhere to the potential of style as being: 'the means of communication, a language, not only as a system of devices for conveying a precise message by representing or symbolising objects and action but also as a qualitative whole which is capable of suggesting the diffuse connotations as well and intensifying the associated or intrinsic affect' (Schapiro 1953, 304).

⁴ See, e.g., Cinquatti 2015; Feldman 2014; Naeh 2015; Suter 2011; Wicke 2005; 2009 and many more. Further reference to the bibliography of this paper might suffice to illustrate this connection.

I. J. Winter⁵ already pointed out – also to be deduced from Schapiro's and Gombrich's observations – that style⁶ not only describes a mode, but communicates the choices made to use that exact mode. Style is thus a communicative mode of being and doing that permeates mind, body and material world and that, following Winter (1998, 56), 'cannot be separated from meaning when studying the affective properties of objects'. To avoid creating a catch-all category of style, I propose the division of style-levels discussed in detail below. Before doing so, I will confront the obstacles faced when trying to identify emotional expression in ancient visual cultures.

Challenges in the Identification of Emotional Expressions, Especially in the Face

This paper will not elaborate on bodily movements *in toto* but exemplify some concerns by looking at the facial expression of the smile. Such concerns, especially with the facial display of emotions in the broader field of the Levant and its contact regions, have been promoted by many scholars. With exceedingly rare exceptions (lately Cornelius 2017), the issue of facial expressions of emotions in the whole area of the ancient Near East has mostly been dismissed (see note 2). This holistic refusal calls for a closer look.

First, one common mode of depicting humans and animals in the ancient Near East is in profile. Yet, it is the *en face* mode which has a requesting communicative appeal and in which emotions can be read best, because it displays both eyes as well as all movements of the facial muscles more unambiguously than the view in profile. It is thus the established mode for the

⁵ According to Winter, style applies to 'form, subject matter, idiosyncratic details, composition and spatial distribution, technique and material' (Winter 1977, 372).

⁶ 'A twofold term: on the one hand, it refers to a quality of past human actions which is perceptible in material culture, and, on the other hand, it is also an analytical tool that allows archaeologists to find continuities and discontinuities in the archaeological record which are relevant to answering questions about the spatial and temporal distribution and qualities of cultural practices' (Sanz/Fiore 2014, 7104).

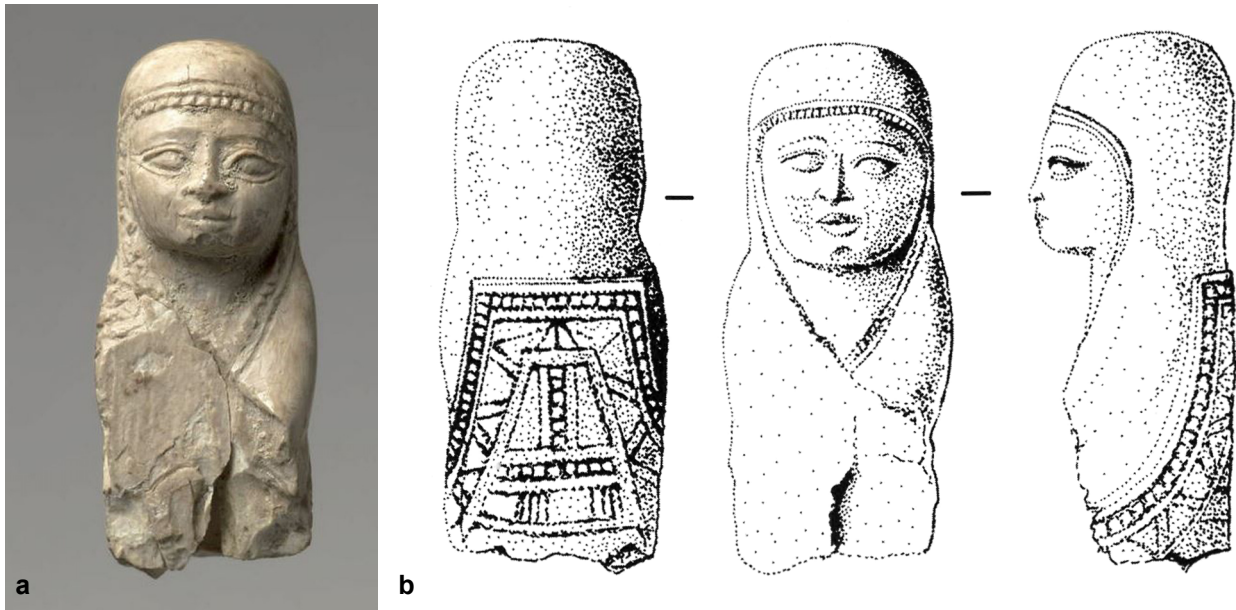


Fig. 3. Ivory statuette, 1400–1200 BCE, Ras Shamra RS 9.282, AO 19930 (a: © 2009 Musée du Louvre, photo by Raphaël Chipault; b: after Gachet-Bizollon 2007, no 40).

visualisation of emotions in the face and for their scientific analysis in psychology.⁷ Furthermore, I. Winter, G. Selz and K. Sonik, among others, have convincingly argued that the frontal gaze asks for a more intense engagement of looking and being looked at (see, e.g., Winter 2000; Selz 2018, 362–365; Sonik 2013). Consequently, the author selects the *en face* depiction when approaching facial emotives in ivories.

Two further challenges become especially valid in times in which the first-hand inspection of objects is barely possible. Archaeological drawings are interpretations, whether made in the field or in museum storerooms. That is by no means a critique; experts on technical drawing have been perennially occupied with this problem, even concerning lithics and pottery, and are still struggling to minimise subjectivities. Any interpretation deduced from a drawing must acknowledge its subjectivity (fig. 3a–b).

The same is true for photographs. Their subjectivity is especially relevant when it comes to facial expressions. The way in which the photograph is taken very much influences the interpretation

of the facial expression, depending on the angle taken or the light used.

Unfortunately, challenges do not stop here. Supposing we have identified a facial expression that resembles a smile, the assumption that this expresses joy, even happiness, should not be made too easily. The WEIRD societies (White Educated Industrial Rich Democratic) often agree that a smiling person is content, self-confident and reliable. However, studies have shown that there is no pancultural understanding of a smile. Even among the WEIRD societies, smiles can be understood as being happy, condescending or dominating (see, e.g., Rychlowska et al. 2017). In other social-cultural contexts, smiling in photographs is understood as a sign of minor intelligence or even untrustworthiness (Krys et al. 2016).

Since smiling is a cultural practice after all, it has also been argued that the face can be made to smile or to suppress a smile, which makes it difficult to address the underlying stimulus and affect. Therefore, the so-called Duchenne marker⁸ has become one of the most prominent tools to

⁷ See relevant databases, e.g., AffectNet (Mollahosseini et al. 2019); DISFA (Mavadati et al. 2013); FACES (Holland et al. 2019).

⁸ Named after Guillaume Duchenne, this is defined as an involuntary facial muscle movement which involves the contraction of both the *zygomatic major* muscle and the *orbicularis oculi* muscle. Especially the wrinkles around the eyes due to the contraction of the *orbicularis oculi* are missing with a fake smile.



Fig. 4. (Emotional) Style levels: An approach to the entanglement of emotional communication and style (graphic by author).

assess whether a smile is genuine or not (Ekman et al. 1990; contra Girard et al. 2021). Whilst the Duchenne marker might be valid for identifying ‘true’ smiles in videos, photographs and real-time, in-person situations, it does not seem immensely helpful when it comes to the visual arts of the ancient Near East. Yet, any smile is true as a means of communication and as a cultural practice.

(Emotional) Style Levels: An Approach to the Entanglement of Emotional Communication and Style

It is time for a deeper look at the entanglement of emotions (and affects in general) with style (*fig. 4*). This classification system was initially proposed to differentiate style concepts as concisely as possible and to represent and analyse the link between gestures and style (Wagner-Durand forthcoming). I have adapted this classification to the analysis of emotions and emotional expressions. This scheme allows us to concisely describe the links between emotion and style and to clarify which link is referred to when talking about figural artefacts, style and emotion.

Level 0: (Emotional) Style as a Mindset

Level 0⁹ refers to style as a mindset that results in living and breathing collective practices, i. e. in level 1. It applies to the cognitive mode in which emotions are socio-culturally embedded in the given society. This mode, or style, is based on a consensus of how emotions are understood and appraised on a sociocultural level.¹⁰ This level forms the background on which all following levels unfold. It is the style in which the mind works with respect to emotions. Level 0 will take decades to be analysed, especially since there is no uniform level 0 for all the diverse groups in

⁹ This level is an addition made to the first scheme developed (see Wagner-Durand forthcoming).

¹⁰ This is a phenomenon already described by Robert Levy, who states that some emotions can be hypercognized, i. e. exaggerated and (over-)emphasised, or that they can be hypocognized, i. e. subdued and silenced (Levy 1983; 1973). Barbara Rosenwein conceptualised the notion of the emotional community, ‘in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expressions and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions’ (Rosenwein 2006, 2). For an excellent overview and critical assessment of Rosenwein and of William Reddy (2001) see Schnell 2015.

the ancient Near East.¹¹ Thus, only eclectic comments are made focusing on the affects allegedly connected to the facial expression of the smile,¹² namely the emotion joy and the mood happiness. These do not serve to give an accurate impression of level 0 in the ancient Near East, but as very superficial illustrations of what is meant by level 0. According to M. Luukko, happiness and joy¹³ were ‘publicly encouraged in Mesopotamia’.¹⁴ Reasons for being happy are manifold, including success in building activities and war, justice, good health, appropriate weather, economic wellbeing and celebrations.¹⁵ Being joyful and happy is not generally frowned upon.

In the Hebrew Bible, the term *’ašrê*¹⁶ is used for a state of happiness referring to a fulfilling life or desirable state, wished for and envied (Janzen 1965, 225). All these emotional states and their expressions are subject to sociocultural validation. The book of Kohelet – for our purposes unfortunately late in date – states: ‘There is an appointed time to cry, and an appointed time to laugh, an appointed time to beat the breast, and an appointed time to dance’ (Ecc 3:4, translation after Gruber 1981, 337).

¹¹ The mode in which emotions and feelings were mentally treated is not completely to be reconstructed, nor is this paper the place to do so. To do this, it would be necessary to look at the written sources in general. With respect to the Levant, as well as Mesopotamia, we can surely state that emotions are subject to cultural construction concerning stimuli and appraisal as well as expression.

¹² We can surely state that there seems to be an overall emotional style in which certain emotions, such as joy, sadness and anger, were understood and through which they were valued in a society. Thus, anger was not entirely bad; it was understood much more as a driving force.

¹³ According to Luukko, the main verbs in the Neo-Assyrian Akkadian semantic domain of joy and happiness are *elēšu*, *ḥadû*, *riāšu* (*rāšu*) and *ṭiābu* (Luukko 2020, 259, notes 27, 28, 29, 30).

¹⁴ Luukko 2020, 258. Furthermore, Luukko states: ‘Therefore, as far as I am concerned, the Assyrian ideal of happiness is firmly anchored in the interaction between the elite, formed by the king, royal family and other high-ranking Assyrians, and his/their lower-ranking correspondents’ (Luukko 2020, 261).

¹⁵ Instances named in Luukko’s appendix (2020, 272–277).

¹⁶ On the term *’ašrê*, and its most likely Proto-Semitic root **sry/srw*, as well as on its development in the Hebrew Bible, see Rubin 2010, esp. 369.

Level 1: (Emotional) Style as Lived, Collective Practice

Level 1 extends level 0 from the mind to the body. Thus, it refers to style as a lived, collective practice. In respect to emotions specifically, it refers to the mode of collectively shared physical expressions based on the prevalent mindset of the group in question. In this context, emotional expressions are part of a habitual behaviour, whose communicated meaning is shared at least within one group. They represent the bodily part of the collective emotional style of an emotional community. These bodily practices are appraised, validated and expressed according to their cultural embeddedness.¹⁷ The example selected, the smile, is a polysemous emotive expression. It is neither uniform in its execution nor in its appraisal. It is a form of communication dependent on its sociocultural and actual context.

To illuminate this style level as a lived, collective practice, participant observation would be the best practice. Since this is impossible, we are confronted with several challenges connected to the two potential sources at hand. Archaeologists tend to construe bodily practices from material culture, when possible from images. Those images, which should ideally be explained on the background of the cultures they are embedded in, become the source for the reconstruction of these exact cultures. This chicken-and-egg issue cannot be solved, so we can rely on images as sources if we are critical about it. But in doing so, we reconstruct style level 3, the bodily practices condensed in images, and not level 1. Therefore, the paper first turns to the written sources, which of course could also be understood as a discrete level, namely the bodily practices condensed in texts. Yet, at some point, we need to become pragmatic and work with those sources we have at hand.

¹⁷ This is also why the author does not agree with Silvia Schroer when she makes the distinction between the ritual expression of emotions and the affect that people actually feel (Schroer 2017). First, if we enact bravery, joy or sadness, even if we do not feel these affects in the first place, their bodily mimicry can in part release the cognition of the respective emotions. Secondly, and much more importantly, we are not able to distance ourselves from our cultural conditioning, neither in the sense of hypocognition nor hypercognition. The author sides with Schroer that it is about cultural practices after all.

Because of the focus on the smile as a bodily expression, only explicit mentions of smile and laughter – terms that cannot be clearly separated in the Semitic sources – will be discussed. The paper starts with Assyria, one of the core spaces of ivory consumption. In Assyria, it is, among others, the face in which a rejoicing heart visually unfolds:

RINAP 3/1 Sennacherib 1: 30:

‘With a rejoicing heart and a radiant face (*ina ḥūd libbi u nummur pānī*), I rushed to Babylon and entered the palace of Marduk-apla-iddina (II) (Merodach-baladan) to take charge of the possessions and property therein.’

(Translation: Grayson/Novotny 2012, 34; see also RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 213: 30; Grayson/Novotny 2014, 296).

Radiance and light shine from the face, the body or the whole entity. D. Warburton rightly states that shining, being bright or having pure qualities are most likely external manifestations of one (or several) emotional states.¹⁸

Incantation from CMAWR 2, text 3., lines 33–40, incantation:

‘I am walking about shining (= ritually clean = *ebbiš*) and radiant with joy (= happily/radiant/brilliantly = *namriš*), at the command of Marduk, the king (of the gods), I am walking about shining and radiant with joy, at the command of my god and my goddess, I am walking about shining and radiant with joy, at the command of the god and goddess of my city, I am walking about shining and radiant with joy!’

May the bright (= *namru*) day make me shine (*linammiranni yâši*), may god, king, magnate, nobleman and gentleman be reconciled with me, may their faces be joyous (= be joyful = *liḥdû*) at my sight, may their mood (*kabattašunu* = lit. their liver) become bright (*limmir*), may their heart (= inner = *libbašunu*) be joyous (*liḥdunu*) (towards me).’

(Translation and transcription: Abusch/Schwemer 2016, 26).

¹⁸ *Namriš* (shining, luminous) must be an external manifestation and *ebbiš* (light, pure) ambivalent, either ‘bright’ or ‘pure’ (Warburton 2021, 230).

These outer visualisations also combine with phonetic expressions: for example, the lips may rejoice.¹⁹ Bodily performances, like dancing and singing, can also be considered as joyful.²⁰

SAA 10 226 16–20:

‘The old men dance, the young men sing, the women and girls are merry and rejoice (= celebrate happily = *ḥadia riša*); women are married and provided with earrings; boys and girls are brought forth, the births thrive.’

(Translation: Parpola 1993, 178).

Neo-Assyrian textual sources rarely mention smiles and laughter.²¹ Concerning Mesopotamia in general, A. Zgoll and K. Lämmerhirt mention various contexts and forms of smiling and laughing, which can be relieved or joyous, critically distanced, erotic or flirtatious, arrogant or condescending (Zgoll/Lämmerhirt 2009). The ANEE lexical portal of Akkadian: PMI (Sahala et al. n.d.) gives us an idea that the terms *ših̄tu* (laughter) and *šīāhu* (to laugh) are quite intricately connected with the expression *rāmu* (to love). These associations evoke the impression of love as connected to laughter, yet the sources used range from Old Babylonian to Hellenistic times, and only a few stem from the Neo-Assyrian period. Thus, we hardly know when smiling was understood as appropriate during the 1st mill. BCE Assyria.²²

¹⁹ ‘The divine words *liḥdā šapātēka*, ‘May your lips rejoice!’ addressed to Assurbanipal according to a prophecy (SAA 9 9: 22), refer to the physical, bodily effort of producing a positive speech act’ (Luukko 2020, 267).

²⁰ SAA 10 226: 9–21, r. 11–13. Singing (*zamāru*), dancing (*raqādu*), (being) happy/delighted (*ḥadiu*) and (being) joyful (*rišu*) (Luukko 2020, 271).

²¹ Most likely this should be understood as an act of hypnosis, since these texts are not generally devoid of emotional expressions. Luukko also very rightly states that one interpretive issue with smiles and laughter is their ambiguity, as they do not solely express joy (Luukko 2020, 258 f.). On the different types of smiles and laughter in the ancient Near East see also Zgoll/Lämmerhirt 2009; Schroer/Staubli 2009. Instances in Neo-Assyrian texts are, for example, *šu-uḥ-ḥu* (RINAP II/1, no. 65: 225). There are two mentions of the form *ših̄ate* from *ših̄tu* in an inscription of Ashurnasirpal (RIMA II A.0.1.101. 30: 50–51) referring to GIŠ.KIRI₆ and thus translated there as ‘delightful’ (Grayson 1991, 290), i. e. being capable of making one smile. Similarly, in SAA 3 8: 07 BARAG *ši-ḥa-a-ti*. Used condescendingly in SAA 17 130: o13–19.

²² Another reason is the inseparability of laughing and smiling in Akkadian as well as in its Semitic cognates. This is of course problematic in so far as the translation as ‘laughing’

Whilst often consumed in Assyria, the ivories were primarily produced in southern Levantine, Phoenician, Aramaic and Luwian contexts with doubtlessly different appraisals of emotions and also influenced by older – Ugaritic, Hurrian and Hittite – traditions. These are, of course, all outside of the author's expertise. Luwian inscriptions are silent when it comes to smiling and laughing; the only instance I came across is the building inscription Karkamish A2 for the temple of the Storm God using the term *suhanati*.

Karkamish A2, §§ 6–9:

‘And he (the Storm God) regarded me (Katuwa) with a smiling (?) (*suhanati*) face and in my days brought forth the Grain God and the Wine God in the country.’

(Translation Payne 2012, 75; Hawkins 2000, 109; insertion in parentheses by the author).

If the translation of the smiling face is correct in this context, this instance connects the smile with a joyous occasion and good fortune. Yet, the extant Luwian text genres make it impossible to judge whether the lack of the term really reveals anything robust. The same applies to Phoenician sources, in which I am not aware of any instance connected to smiles or laughter despite the well-known Phoenician-Punic masks, of which the grinning type is a late development (Orsingher 2018; 2019; 2020).

Early Aramaic texts are not devoid of emotions like fear (e.g., KAI 202), contentment (e.g., KAI 215), grief and sadness (e.g., KAI 215), but the issue of the smile as an emotive expression does not surface.²³

In the context of the Hebrew Bible, S. Schroer and T. Staubli consider a range of spontaneous, as well as provoked, types of laughter and smiling (Schroer/Staubli 2009, 498–508). Mostly, these derive from *šəḥōq* שֶׁחֹק or *śəḥōq* שֶׁחֹק. The ‘Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament’ considers the term to mean the nonverbal, yet audible expression of a relaxed and loosened mood

(Botterweck et al. 1993, 733). Schroer and Staubli (2009, 498–508) observe that laughing is often taunting and condescending but also appears in contexts of erotic encounters or the cultic realm. In comparison to Neo-Assyrian sources, the term appears much more often. In the book of Psalms (e.g., Ps. 2:4; 35:15; 52:8; 70:4), laughing is mostly taunting. In Chapters 17–18 of Genesis, Abraham and Sarah laugh and smile condescendingly at the prospect of a child.²⁴ Dated much later, and thus out of consideration, the Book of Sirach (21:20) gives a stunning insight into how laughter and smiling were valued, as the text states that only the fool laughs with a loud voice, whilst the wise smile silently.

One last look takes us further back into the Late Bronze Age texts of Ugarit. The terms in question *š-h-q* (v.) and *šhq* (n. m.) clearly relate to those sound-related expressions we have already encountered. Ugaritic instances show a connection to the liver or innards (KTU 1.3. II 25) or the heart (KTU 1.12 I 12), which are typical places for emotions in Mesopotamia.

KTU 1.3 II:

‘(24) it struggled and watched Anat.

(25) It swelled her insides with laughter,

(26) her heart filled with joy, Anat's inner

(27) with triumph. Yes, her knees she dipped in the blood

(28) of the warriors, her thighs in the coagulated blood of the warriors.’

(Translation: adapted from the German translation by Niehr 2015, 205).

Facial expressions also find acknowledgement in the mythical texts of Ugarit. In KTU 1.4 IV, Anat stands before her father El. He reacts to her appearance by unknitting his brows and beginning to laugh (KTU 1.4 IV 28; Smith/Pitard 2009, 493; Olmo del Lete 2015, 771).

Summing up level 1, smiles and laughter were acknowledged as expressions of emotional states,

or ‘smiling’ depends on the translator and their interpretation of the context.

²³ In the ‘Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament’, it is stated that there is no instance of *šhq/šhq* in the Aramaic part of the Bible (Botterweck et al. 1993, 731).

²⁴ While these smiles and laughter are more out of disbelief (not necessarily disrespect of YHWH; cf. Botterweck et al. 1993, 736 f.), Sara's laughter in Gen 21:6 is much more genuine and relates to her joy at becoming a mother and how that joy spreads to all that share the knowledge of the divine wonder (Botterweck et al. 1993, 735, 738).

often connected with sounds made. These expressions of joy, but also condescension and superiority, were made in private as well as in situations affecting larger audiences. Unfortunately, there is only little information on smiles and smiling itself. Positively and negatively connotated affects like desire, joy, mockery and pride led to laughter and smiling and that they were seen as appropriate at certain times in certain places.

Level 2: (Emotional) Style as a Means of Material (Non-Pictorial) Expression

Moving on to level 2, we turn to the material world itself. Habitus is not only about the body, but also transcends to the material world. Before condensing into images, multimodal habitual styles express emotive states in accordance with their sociocultural context, like wearing black at a funeral or the special treatment of the hair and the body. All these elements create the specific atmosphere in which actions are interpreted.

Selecting one example of how this level can be traced in the ancient Near East, the paper turns to the issue of colour, based on Shianthi Thavapalan's work (Thavapalan 2020). The overall impression is that Mesopotamians linked dazzling light to a favourable state of being that also appears in the face and the eyes.²⁵ Thus, Thavapalan connects *namru* (bright) also with joy and a positive change of mood (Thavapalan 2020, 104) and *helû* (translucent and shining) with the fact that to 'glow from within was concomitant with joy' (Thavapalan 2020, 118). The term *helû* is also associated with brightness and therefore being used as 'to be happy' and 'to be in/to make love' (Thavapalan 2020, 119). Thavapalan further refers to the Hebrew verb *p-š-h*, 'to be cheerful, happy' whose root *f/pšh* has the secondary meaning of brightness and whiteness (Thavapalan 2020, 133). Thus, light colours, but also saturated ones, can be connected with joyful moods.

²⁵ 'The face (*pānu*), heart (*libbu*), mind (*kabattu*), eyes (*inān*) and appearance (*zīmu*) of gods and human beings are described in this way. In this Old Assyrian letter [TCL 19 13: rev. 1–4], the writer uses the turn of phrase 'your heart shall dazzle' to express the idea of pleasure' (Thavapalan 2020, 104 f.).

Level 3: (Emotional) Style as the Mode in which Bodily Practices Pictorially Crystallise

Leaving level 2, we finally approach level 3, and thus the images themselves. Level 3 covers the conventional pictorial crystallisation of bodily practices. It thus turns from bodily performances to practices materialised in images. It refers to a certain collective style visualised in pictures and therefore assigned to a corresponding group of people. It is not necessarily about the actual emotional bodily habitus of those depicted; it is about the visual assignment of such practices by those making the images. Lived and visualised habitus need not be identical. Especially regarding visually stereotyped groups of 'foreigners' (e.g., the subjugated, prisoners or deportees), a common consensus of both parties (conquerors and subjugated) on representation seems unlikely. Moreover, not every physical expression finds a pictorial counterpart. In accordance with level 0, some practices become hypocognised in images, which in turn does not imply that they were hypocognised in all emotional groups and all forms of expressions.

Level 4: (Emotional) Style as a Cultural Manifestation

The closely related level 4 refers to what is commonly understood as style. It is about design, about the rules of the *de facto* realisation of an image beyond its visual content. It turns to the material-technical, but at the same time also to culturally manifest rules. Amongst other things, this concerns aesthetic guidelines and ideal concepts. Whilst level 3 is more about how a certain smile is depicted as a bodily and emotional practice, level 4 is more about how the smile is actually carved according to the prevalent rules of design.

Level 5: Personal/Individual (Emotional Style) in Images

These levels 3 and 4, especially level 4, closely tie in with level 5, the personal/individual style, which refers to the respective elements of the design that are executed within the free framework



Fig. 5. The so-called Mona Lisa head (IM), ND 2550, Well NN, NW Palace, Nimrud (after Mallowan 1966, cover illustration).

of individual craftsmanship. It includes the quality of craftsmanship as well as individual characteristics and forms of expression. Concerning the ivories, there is evidence for both the use of several craftsmen for one panel (Herrmann 1986, 47; 1989, 92; Mallowan/Herrmann 1974, 35 f.), mostly under the supervision of a master craftsman (Herrmann et al. 2009, 67), and the making of several ivories by one craftsman, as proven, for example, by makers' marks (Herrmann et al. 2009, 57, 65 f.) and by the execution itself (Herrmann et al. 2009, nos. 99–100). I will not further consider this level in this contribution. This is mostly due to the fact that individual craftsmanship and the attribution to one specific individual, instead of what we call a workshop or a school, is still very difficult to assess.

Exemplification of Levels 3–4 by the Emotive 'Smile' in Ivories of the Early Iron Age

Before moving on to the next levels 6 and 7, we will turn to a lengthier exemplification of levels 3–4 with the help of the ivories. With those levels 3 and 4, we finally reach exactly those levels that we

aim to retrace in respect to the smile as an emotive in the ivories of the Early Iron Age. Generally, only frontal depictions have been selected for the reasons explained above. However, this does not preclude that in a later state of the analysis of the emotive smile in ivories, the study could be extended to all ivories showing the face from the side. Nevertheless, this state has not been reached yet, and the analysis of the frontal depiction needs more study.

Some attributions made, and especially some awkward naming of the smile families proposed, will be subject to change. Furthermore, the issue of miniature art is one of minute forms, some of which might be due to mere chance, some due to mistakes or rough and careless carving and others due to the material density of the ivory itself. Yet, we have attributed forms much smaller, less significant and probably less meaningful to more or less important *minutiae* of forms and thus interpreted them as the outcome of either conscious or unconscious stylistic decisions. Therefore, there is no reason why the facial features should not be treated in the same way.

Generally, all smiles observed show no teeth and the mouth is for the most part closed.

The V-Shaped Smile

The first smile type to be singled out is the V-shaped smile (*fig. 5*).²⁶ In this style of smile, the lips form a clear V-shape. In some cases, the geometrical and thus unnatural form is very obvious, while in others the sharp angle is slightly weakened.

Yet, as already stated, photographs can be misleading. Thus, in the case of an ivory statuette

26 E.g., face, ND 763/IM 55748, Room HH, NW Palace, Nimrud, 5.5 x 4.5cm, Phoenician/Levantine (Herrmann et al. 2009, no. 315); the so-called Mona Lisa head, ND 2550, Well NN, NW Palace, Nimrud, 16.0 x 13.2 x 5.5cm, Phoenician/Levantine (Herrmann et al. 2008, no. 348); bulgier lips: sphinx? head, ND 13530, IM, Room SW 37, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 3 x 2.2cm, Wig and Wing? (Herrmann 1986, no. 537); head (half of face preserved), ND 13339, IM, Room SW 37, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 2.8 x 1.1cm (Herrmann 1986, no. 491) (photo difficult to evaluate, not frontal); see also female figure with two young children, Antalya Museum 2.21.87, Bayındır Tumuli, Elmalı plain, 17cm (Helft 2020, pl. 4.2, no. 2.21.87).



Fig. 6. Example of an Assyrian ivory of a beardless official (IM 79520), Well AJ, Nimrud, NW Palace (© Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg), CC BY-SA 4.0).



Fig. 7. Female head, BM 118228 (after Barnett 1957, no. U.6).

(Herrmann et al. 2008, no. 230) clearly of Assyrian making, recent photos hint at a V-smile at first glance (*fig. 6*). Other photos clearly contradict this impression and G. Herrmann also describes quite the opposite of a smile when she writes of ‘a small mouth, slightly downward-curving’ (Herrmann et al. 2008, 183). The increased fractures erroneously enhance the impression of a V-shape. When zooming in, the corners of the mouth are clearly drawn downwards, contradicting a smile. Furthermore, the Assyrian design provides another counterargument to the interpretation of a V-smile, since emotionally expressive faces are not a characteristic trait of Assyrian art.²⁷ This is a vivid example of how challenging the approach is, especially when no close first-hand inspection is possible.

Crescent-Shaped Smile

The next sub-style of the smile is quite varied and its definition heavily relies on the clearly executed curve of the smile in the form of a crescent

(*fig. 7*).²⁸ It can be irregularly subdivided by other markers like the form of the lips, ranging from almost non-executed to tube-like, yet thin, lips with a specific roundness in the corners of the mouth. This vague mode explains its appearance in different style groups like Flame and Frond or Ornate and probably calls for a stricter subdivision. Not only that it appears in different style groups, but also that otherwise stylistically very similar faces do not show the same smile is especially striking or confusing,²⁹ an issue to which we will return later on.

²⁷ This is not to say that there are no facial expressions of emotion, but that we might lack the tools for identifying them.

²⁸ E.g., female head, BM 118228/1855,1205.208, Sherif Khan?, ca. 3.2cm, Flame and Frond (Barnett 1957, no. U.6; Herrmann et al. 2008, no. 41); head, IM 65216, ND 94000, Room NE 2, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, ca. 5.6 x 3.9 x 1.9cm, North Syrian/Flame and Frond? (Herrmann 1992, no. 304); head, broken, BM, Nimrud, Burnt Palace (Barnett 1957, S.100g); face, broken (woman at the window panel), IM, ND 13096, Room SW37, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, ca. 3.2 x 2.5 x 1.6cm (Herrmann 1986, no. 411); face of an open-work sphinx, IM 79522, Well AJ, NW Palace, Nimrud, ca. 16.5 x 11.5cm, Ornate (Herrmann et al. 2008, no. 259); head, broken, IM, ND 7677, Room SE 10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, ca. 3.4 x 2.8cm, Wig and Wing? (Herrmann 1992, no. 245).

²⁹ E.g., Barnett 1957, U.7 (see below), S.175.176 (broken lips).



Fig. 8. Detail of a woman at the window panel, ca. 8th cent. BCE, Room S10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, MMA 59.107.18 (© Metropolitan Museum of Art, open access).

Mildly Curved Smile with Bulging Lips

Another type of smile is the mildly curved smile with bulging lips (*fig. 8*).³⁰ The focal point of this smile style is the relation between the mildly curved, bulging lips and the broadly executed nose. As we will see later, potential connections with level 6 (see below), i. e. the style as a rulebook of *topoi*, become likely, as all instances belong to what has been called a Phoenician tradition and are considered to be examples of series E of the women at the window according to C. Suter (1992).

Smiles Framed by Nasolabial Grooves

Considering the smile alone, it is difficult to differentiate the mildly curved smile with bulging lips

³⁰ E.g., woman at the window panel, MMA 59.107.18, Room S10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 7.19 x 6.91 x 0.79cm, Phoenician (Herrmann 1992, no. 103); same set: woman at the window panel, IM 62676, ND 7967, Room S10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, ca. 7.5 x 3.9 x 1.3cm, Phoenician (Herrmann 1992, no. 105); same set: woman at the window panel, fragment, IM, ND 7803, Room S10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, ca. 3.6 x 3.3cm, Phoenician (Herrmann 1992, no. 107); same set, woman at the window fragment, IM, ND 8147, Room S10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 3.2 x 2.9cm, Phoenician (Herrmann 1992, no. 108).



Fig. 9. Sphinx panel, ca. 8th cent. BCE, probably Arslan Tash, MMA 57.80.4a,b (© Metropolitan Museum of Art, open access).

from smiles framed by nasolabial grooves highlighting the cheeks, mainly in the Wig and Wing group (*fig. 9*).³¹ This smile subgroup is narrowed down to only those smiles in which the nasolabial grooves are heavily emphasised and the slight curve of the bulging lips is undeniable.³²

The Flame and Frond Smile

Much easier to distinguish is a smile that also neatly matches to the style group in which it often occurs: the Flame and Frond group (*fig. 10*).³³ Typically, the lips are marked by a deeply carved

³¹ E.g., woman at the window panel IM 60500, ND 6316, Room NW 15, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, ca. 8.2 x 6.9 x 8.0 x 0.9cm, Wig and Wing (Herrmann 1992, no. 467) as well as all other examples of this set (Herrmann 1992, nos. 468–470); sphinx panel, MMA 57.80.4a,b, Arslan Tash?, 5.8 x 11.3 x 1.1cm, Wig and Wing (Fontan 2014, fig. 3.51); from the same hand, also AO 11478, sphinx panel, Arslan Tash, 5.8 x 8 x 1cm, Wig and Wing (Thureau-Dangin et al. 1931, pl. XXXI, no. 34); probably also fitting, head, BM 132987, Room SW 11/12, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 4.5 x 0.26 x 3.8cm, Wig and Wing (Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013, no. 54); head of sphinx (?), ND 13529, Room SW 37, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 4.6 x 2.1 x 1.1cm (Herrmann 1986, no. 536).

³² That excludes, for example, BM 118159, woman at the window panel, V/W doorway, NW Palace, Nimrud, ca. 10.9 x 8.8 x 1.1cm, Wig and Wing (Herrmann et al. 2009, no. 111), in which the lower lip shows a slight downwards curve and the outer corners are deeply cut, thus contradicting the smiling curve of the upper lip (note that this piece can be found under either BM 118156 or 118159).

³³ E.g., female head, BM 118229, Sherif Khan? 5.6 x 5.2 x 2.8 x 3.2cm: Barnett 1957, U.7; Herrmann et al. 2009, no. 42; female head, BM 118233, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 5.2 x 3.4cm:



Fig. 10. Female head in the 'Flame and Frond' style, ca. 9th–8th cent. BCE, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, BM 118233 (trustees of the British Museum, open access).

line and the area of the mouth emerges gently from the background of the face without actually forming distinct lips. The distance between mouth opening and nose is much more marked than in those smile groups in which bulging lips are a defining feature. The smile is markedly flat and thus not very clearly distinguished from 'neutral', non-smiling faces.

The Naturalistic Smile

The last group is defined by its naturalistic execution (*fig. 11*).³⁴ The lips are carved in an unprecedentedly naturalistic way with chin and philtrum



Fig. 11. Female head, 9th–8th cent. BCE, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, BM 118199B (trustees of the British Museum, open access).

Barnett 1957, S.173; female head, BM 118237, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 5,08cm: Barnett 1957, S.193.

³⁴ E.g., Egyptian head, BM 118199B, Burnt Palace, Nimrud (Barnett 1957, S.340); head, IM 69997, Room SW 37, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, S, 9.6, x 9.2 x 2.3cm (Herrmann 1986, no. 1284); MMA 59. 107.13, Room SW 37, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 8.3 x 4.3 x 3.8cm, Ornate (Herrmann 1986, no. 1281).



Fig. 12. Detail of an ivory plaque of a wiggled woman, ca. 730–720 BCE, Room SE10, Fort Shalmaneser, ND 7786, NM59.12, Nicholson Collection (courtesy of the Chau Chak Wing Museum, the University of Sydney).

often neatly executed. The smile is only accentuated by a slight curve. Egyptian aesthetics are undeniable.

Machine Learning and Facial Markers

A range of smiles detectable in the ivories of the Iron Age seem not to fit in any of the categories described and thus call for more categories or for more refined ones. This will be the work of further research. Yet this diversity not only hints at the complex system in which the style levels are interwoven but also at the effect of local traditions as well as individual styles, preferences and skills. I am convinced that more detailed analyses, a closer inspection autopsy, a precise collection of data and a machine-learning approach³⁵ – proposed, for example, by Amy Gansell (2008) – in combination with the analysis of facial markers developed in psychology to detect emotional expressions will

help to define new styles of the smile and revise the preliminarily proposed ones. The implications of these results must then be discussed to understand the relation between ‘natural’ and codified facial expressions in those ivories.

It Is Not All Sunshine and Roses: Expressions of a ‘Bad Mood’

The facial expression of the smile in ivories is not a matter of chance. Whilst some of these smiles might be up for discussion, as they are interpretations of the materialised facial expression, the existence of other meaningful facial expressions clearly prove that the face is not a neutral zone of ivory carving but a means of communication. Two very telling examples are the ivory plaques NM 59.12³⁶ (fig. 12) and ND 14531 (Iraq Museum),³⁷ both quite similar, found in different rooms of Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud. Whilst one could be defined as looking angry, the other displays a sad expression. In both cases, the execution of the eyes in combination with the mouth plays a vivid role in the interpretation of the facial expression. This in turn leads to two implications. First, a collection of data linking several facial traits (see below) will be of help in defining and delineating emotional expressions in the face when it comes to ivories and beyond. Second, facial expressions are mostly not devoid of emotions. Either we are unable to read their materialisation in ivories most of the time or there is a deliberate neglect of these expressions and the meaning they carry.

The Style of the Smile

Is it *l’art pour l’art* in dividing the smiles into groups – from V-shaped to flat (Flame and Frond), from naturalistic to crescent shaped – or is there any meaning hidden in the execution of the smile? Leaving aside that certain smile types might be connected with certain subjects (see

³⁵ Machine-learning is far from flawless and it requires a standard set of photos and drawings that reduce the missing subjectivity of any visual documentation. By doing so, a set of data is created that allows data processing with a maximal objective outcome.

³⁶ ND 7768, Room SE 10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, ca. 8 x 4cm: Herrmann 1992, no. 242.

³⁷ ND 14531, Room T10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud: Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013, T.36.



Fig. 13. Four-winged goddess on a pyxis (Flame and Frond), ca. 9th–8th cent. BCE, Well AJ, NW palace, Nimrud, IM 79514, photo by Herrmann et al. 2008, no. 234; b: Women holding animals, ca. 9th–8th cent. BCE, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, N.970 (acc. to Barnett: BM 126521) (trustees of the British Museum, open access).

level 6 below), it seems that certain smile executions are clearly linked with the overall style in which the ivory in question was executed, as one can observe with the Flame and Frond smile style and probably with the naturalistic execution of the Egyptianising ivories, as well as with the Wig and Wing group. Indeed, the uneasiness with the smile type as crescent-shaped, defined above, could be connected to the absence of a link to a

certain style group. If there is a connection between the style of the smile and the overall style group, then we can deduce that the stylistic form of the smile does not carry any further meaning besides those inherent in the style group as such. That does not imply that the style does not carry meaning in itself (e.g., a difference between condescending, seductive, happy etc.), yet its stylistic execution is entirely or at least mostly up to the

mode in which an ivory is carved *in toto*. Other meanings connected to the smile need to be deduced from the overall thematic subject the smile might be connected with (see level 6).

Level 6: (Emotional) Style as a Rulebook on How to Link *Topoi* and Emotional Expression in Images

Level 6 connects style and subject. It is the rulebook for how images are (to be) created with respect to the topics shown. While level 3 refers to the habitual style depicted, to the visualised bodily practice, level 6 refers to the style by which these are visually connected with other *topoi*. This level of style concerns the overall habitus of image-making in a society. The corresponding set of rules determines, among other things, in what pictorial contexts which groups can be endowed with what bodily practices of emotional display.

In respect to the example of the smile, several connections are striking. Often discussed and wildly puzzling is the *topos* of the ‘woman at the window’. Within the groups or the series defined by Suter (according to headdresses, hairstyles, balustrades and so forth see Suter 1992), we can observe that ‘smiling women’³⁸ are, at least at first glance, eclectically distributed. Therefore, I am tempted to connect a narrative meaning to the smiling and non-smiling woman, probably due to a temporal or causal link. That is to say that some ivories depict selected segments of still unknown stories and that the facial expressions chosen might be due to this selection and due to the narrative emotional situation depicted. Nonetheless, personal style choices cannot be excluded yet.

A narrative explanation, i. e. the selection of different moments in the depicted story, might

also apply to the ‘Hathoresque’ heroine holding branches or animals in her hands who is not confined to one mood expression (*fig. 13*).³⁹ In this case, the smile could be read as a narrative marker referring to a certain point during the narrative depicted via a single image. The narrative itself, in the case of the gilded pyxis from the Iraq Museum, could also be sequential, considering that there were other, partly destroyed frames of this particular pyxis as well as other mood expressions in frames of different, yet cognate pyxides.⁴⁰

Another pyxis (BM 118179)⁴¹ reveals a procession or entertainment in front of a goddess during a feast. The small container shows two of the musicians *en face*, playing the *chalcophones*, the left one most likely smiling. Here, smile and *topos* accord nicely and are also a neat fit with what we learn from texts about singing and rejoicing as well as joy released by and during festivities.

The *topos* of the woman holding her breasts, known from very different object types, is also not confined to a smiling type.⁴² It is still a challenge to explain the different facial expressions, which could also be due to an individual style choice less than a certain *topos*.

The choice could also be related to the object type. Looking at the naked women mostly decorating handles in pairs or trios, there is the slight possibility that one is smiling more than the other. It remains hard to judge from the photographs also due to the fragmentation of the objects.

It is the Flame and Frond style that handsomely shows that smiling in itself is not necessarily

³⁸ E.g., head fragment, woman at the window, ND 13096 (IM), Room SW 37, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 3.2 x 2.5 x 1.6cm, Wig and Wing (Herrmann 1986, no. 411); woman at the window panel, IM 60500, ND 6316, Room NW 15, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, 8.2 x 5.8 x 0.9cm, Wig and Wing (Herrmann 1992, no. 467); non-smiling examples: e.g., fragment of a woman at the window panel, MMA 57.80.12, Arslan Tash?, 6.4 x 4.5 x 1.2cm, <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/324695>> (last access: 10th of February 2022); woman at the window panel, BM 118158, Room 5, NW Palace, Nimrud, 9.8 x 9.7 x 1.4cm, Wig and Wing (Herrmann et al. 2009, no. 111).

³⁹ Smiling example: four-winged goddess on a pyxis, IM 79513, Well AJ, NW Palace, 6.4 (9.5 with lid) x 14.4cm, Flame and Frond (Herrmann et al. 2009, no. 234; Wicke 2008, Nim. 19; non-smiling: women holding animals (lions?), cup, N.970 (acc. to Barnett: BM 126521), Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 5.56cm, Flame and Frond (Barnett 1957, S.20).

⁴⁰ E.g., fragment BM 118247, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 6.05cm, Flame and Frond (Barnett 1957, S.26) and cup fragment N.970 (see note 39 above).

⁴¹ Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 6.7 x 9.5cm (Barnett 1957, S.3; Wicke 2008, Nim.20).

⁴² E.g., smiling IM 79504, statuette of a woman with traces of paint: black on the eyebrows and rims of the eyes, white in the pupils, Well AJ, NW Palace, Nimrud, 34cm, Syrian or Phoenician (Herrmann et al. 2009, no. 287); non-smiling, e.g., the ‘woman flask’, IM 79505, Well AJ, NW Palace, Nimrud, 28–31cm, Phoenician (Herrmann et al. 2009, no. 286b).

linked to certain already defined style groups.⁴³ Female heads with inlaid headdresses, a distinct hairstyle and multi-row beaded necklaces were implemented in different objects and, unfortunately, it is not yet clear whether the smile depends on the object's function. It can be excluded that some creatures, like the sphinx, always call for a smile in the Flame and Frond school. Examples like the human-headed sphinxes of the lion-bowl in the Iraq Museum (IM 79501)⁴⁴ show that such sphinx heads need not have been connected with a smile. The human-headed sphinx is not confined to one mode, smiling or non-smiling.⁴⁵ This can easily be connected with their purpose and narrative origin, as some might be frightening, others condescending and others supportive and protective, while some were royal representatives and some divine.

Level 7: (Emotional) Style Beyond the Depiction of Bodily Practices in Images

Level 7 concerns the style in which images distil emotions beyond the depiction of bodily emotional practices. This is due to the affective power of images that is embedded in their overall style, colours, movements, textures and materiality. This also relates back to level 2, i. e. style as a means of material (non-pictorial) expression which also concerns, for example, the specific use of colour, lustre and texture, which in turn also add to the affective impact of the image in question. All these elements create the specific atmosphere in which actions are interpreted. This level of style is difficult to reconstruct because we perceive the objects

now in museum settings and not in the multimodal contexts in which they were handled in the past; this, for example, necessarily prevents us from touching the otherwise haptic objects. Furthermore, and on a very practical level, many aspects remain undisclosed due to fragmentation, abrasion and loss. Craftsmen might have used gilding, inlays, clothing, hairstyles and overall compositions to communicate emotional and affective states beyond facial or bodily memes. Looking at the lips and the smile specifically, craftsmen might have used colouring to enhance the overall affective expression, like in the case of the Nimrud Mona Lisa (see above), whose lips still show 'a light reddish tint' (Herrmann et al. 2009, 216).

Gender and Smile

One issue that has not found its way into the analysis yet is a debatable connection between gender and the emotional expression of the smile. There are several reasons why such a link can be neither confirmed nor dismissed yet. One is the lack of a comprehensive database on the emotional facial expression in ivories; another is a yet to be established rigorous scheme for identifying emotional expressions in the face. Also, the identification of gender in ivories is not beyond doubt and some ascriptions are purely speculative. There might also be instances in which gender plays no role at all, for example among the sphinxes.

Smile and Style: (Dis-)Entanglements

The entanglement of style as a conceptualisation of things and of the smile as a culturally codified mode of emotional expression opens several questions. These are easy to ask but far from easy to answer: Is the smile an issue of style in terms of certain regional styles or even workshops, or is it a style in the sense of an individual style that relates to the preferences of the single artisans? Or is it connected to an immediate meaning, and is it thus an emotional style of expression that cannot be boiled down to decisions beneath subject matter? Despite a certain subjectivity in the interpretation of the faces as smiling or not, the existence of the

⁴³ Non-smiling, e.g., handle in the shape of a woman, BM 118204, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 17.8 x 4.5cm (Barnett 1957, S.211); female head, BM 118234, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 4.5 x 3.5 x 3.5cm (Barnett 1957, S.172); BM 118202, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 3.8cm (Barnett 1957, S.194); female head, BM 118238, Burnt Palace, Nimrud, 4.3cm (Barnett 1957, S.174).

⁴⁴ Ivory tusk vessel from Well AJ, NW palace, Nimrud, Roundcheeked and Ringleted (Herrmann et al. 2009, no. 239).

⁴⁵ Smiling example: open-work plaque MMA 57.80.4a, b (see note 31 above); non-smiling example: sphinx fragment, OIM A22172A, DS1017.23, Nabû temple, Khorsabad, ca. 11cm, Wig and Wing: <<https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/id/39a60ca8-ba65-4e6a-8321-c04b12c810ca>>.

exact opposite mode of facial expressions, with lips drawn downwards, makes it impossible to detach smile from meaning.

Several issues arose during the preparation of both the talk and this paper. One of the most pressing matters that came up repeatedly is that communication creates a common theme connecting all three analytic concepts that represent cultural practices at the same time: their socio-cultural shaping, their perception, their appraisal and, in turn, their reshaping. All of these processes need to be transmitted. This transmission happens via the most varied communicative channels, by transmitting values, by ontologies underlying narratives of being in the world, by the daily use and consumption of objects, by apprenticeship and by experience and learning.

The existence of emotional styles communicated and enacted by the ivories of the Levant is striking. It is not about hypocognition, about being devoid of emotions and affects – far from it. There are reasons to smile and reasons for the styles of smile. These do not yet unfold their meaning *in toto* or their stimuli and the emotional states they communicate. That is yet to come. But if style is a way of being and doing, then there is no way to dismiss this concept in any study of visual communication.

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Abbreviations

- CMAwR 2*: T. Abusch/D. Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals. Ancient Magic and Divination 8/2* (Leiden 2016).
- KAI*: H. Donner/W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften. Band I–III* (Wiesbaden 1962–2002).
- KTU*: M. Dietrich/O. Loretz/J. Sanmartín, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani und anderen Orten. Dritte, erweiterte Auflage. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 360/1* (Münster 2013).
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Christoph Huth

Slow Motion

Style, Performance and Materiality in Prehistoric Temperate Europe

Keywords: jade axes, Copper Age, Celtic art, performance, materiality

Summary

In prehistoric archaeology, style is difficult to come to terms with. This is due to the complexity of style as a form of material expression. Contrary to what is generally assumed, style is not the consequence of specific intention. It rather seems to be an epiphenomenon of activities that are firmly grounded in the way people perceive the world. Performance is therefore the driving force behind stylistic expression, leading in many cases to never-ending change. This goes for the objects themselves, like Neolithic jade axes (and bracelets) from 5th and 4th mill. BC Europe, as well as for visual perception as a way of experiencing and understanding a continuously transforming world in the Celtic Iron Age of the 1st mill. BC.

Introduction

Style as a heuristic category is basically unknown in prehistoric research. Hardly any handbook or introductory work on prehistoric archaeology features an entry on style. At least the first edition of Colin Renfrew's and Paul Bahn's introductory book had a special section on style in archaeology (Renfrew/Bahn 1991, 369). They concluded that an analysis of this kind 'is still in its infancy' and 'there is much to learn' from 'art historians and Classical archaeologists' (Renfrew/Bahn 1991, 369). This optimism seems to have been lost somewhere

in the meantime, as in later editions explanations on style have been reduced to a few lines (Renfrew/Bahn 2016, 423: 'the word "style" is a difficult one').

This may come as a surprise, as prehistorians have been obsessed with typology for such a long time. Yet style does not exist in a prehistorian's vocabulary, very few exceptions notwithstanding. One exception of this kind would be local decoration styles among early Neolithic linear pottery (Bickle/Whittle 2013) or among Bell Beaker pottery (Fokkens/Nicolis 2012). There, style is a subcategory of an overarching pottery typology. Very often, although not always, these stylistic groups are readily equated with peoples, with groups sharing a common identity, for example, or with archaeological cultures, whatever those may be.

The only noteworthy exception is Latène or Celtic art of the Iron Age, for which Paul Jacobsthal (1944) identified several styles. It is definitely no coincidence that Jacobsthal was a classical archaeologist, and it is no coincidence that only with regard to Latène material culture do scholars of European prehistory use the term 'art' at all. They never speak about art otherwise, except perhaps in the case of Palaeolithic art (Groenen 2016) and sometimes of megalithic art and rock art (Jones/Cochrane 2018, 137–172 with further references) in later periods. Yet there is commonly no Neolithic art, no Bronze Age art, no Hallstatt art and so on. Jacobsthal's contribution to Iron Age archaeology has been immensely stimulating, and therefore Celtic art will be considered later again.

Recently the concept of style in prehistoric archaeology has been reevaluated by Andrew Jones and Andrew Cochrane (2018). Again, the starting point is art, although the book is very critical of

traditional ideas about art. The authors dismiss a definition of art as something representational and exclusively visual and they suggest a multifaceted approach instead. Jones and Cochrane rightly stress the importance of materiality, making, marking, affect, assemblage and, above all, change as elements and processes necessary for codifying art. Undeniably, these aspects need to be considered whenever style is in question.

In general, style is a very vague category. This goes for the definition and the criteria of what may be called style and even more so for the meaning of style in society. The conception of style strongly influences the way of identifying material in the archaeological record. Depending on what has been ascribed to style and its heuristic qualities, researchers will inevitably find the corresponding features in the archaeological record and take them as an essential attribute of the past society under consideration. Therefore, the conceptual vagueness of style is something to be dealt with cautiously. There is always an imminent danger of circular reasoning, which can be prevalent among archaeologists.

As a consequence, it seems advisable to start from a very broad definition of style. According to Gombrich, 'style is any distinctive and therefore recognizable way in which an act is performed or an artifact made' (Gombrich 2009, 129). Following Renfrew and Bahn (1991, 369) there is a difference between function (i. e. what you are doing) and style (i. e. how you are doing it). While this is quite a common understanding of style, the underlying idea needs to be thoroughly revised. Two case studies will demonstrate how performance relates to style and how change is an integral element of style. The first example will focus on objects that were never fully finished, that is Neolithic axes and possibly also bracelets made of jade. The second example will focus on ever-changing images and their modes of perception in Latène or 'Celtic' art of the Iron Age. Jade artefacts embody transformation in a material way, while Latène objects do so in an iconographic way. The common denominator is transformation by performance, slowly and gradually, either by altering objects physically or mentally by perceiving them in a specific way. Both case studies seem to be quite different from those of Syro-Phoenician ivories and the like, in



Fig. 1. Highly polished jade axe from Canterbury, Kent, United Kingdom (Pétrequin 2012, vol. 2, 1064 fig. 18; used with permission).

geographical, chronological and, above all, in conceptual and perceptual terms. These differences are exactly why they deserve a closer look in this volume on style in the ancient Near East of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age.

Jade Axes

Jade axes, i. e. axes made of jadeite and sometimes omphacite or eclogite are a typical feature of the western European Neolithic, especially from the period 4700 to 3500 BC (*fig. 1*). For a long time, these axes received little attention from archaeologists, although they are very conspicuous artefacts. The fact that jade was given no significance, while archaeologists concentrated much more on objects made of copper and gold, reflects an eminently Western view of material value. Most of

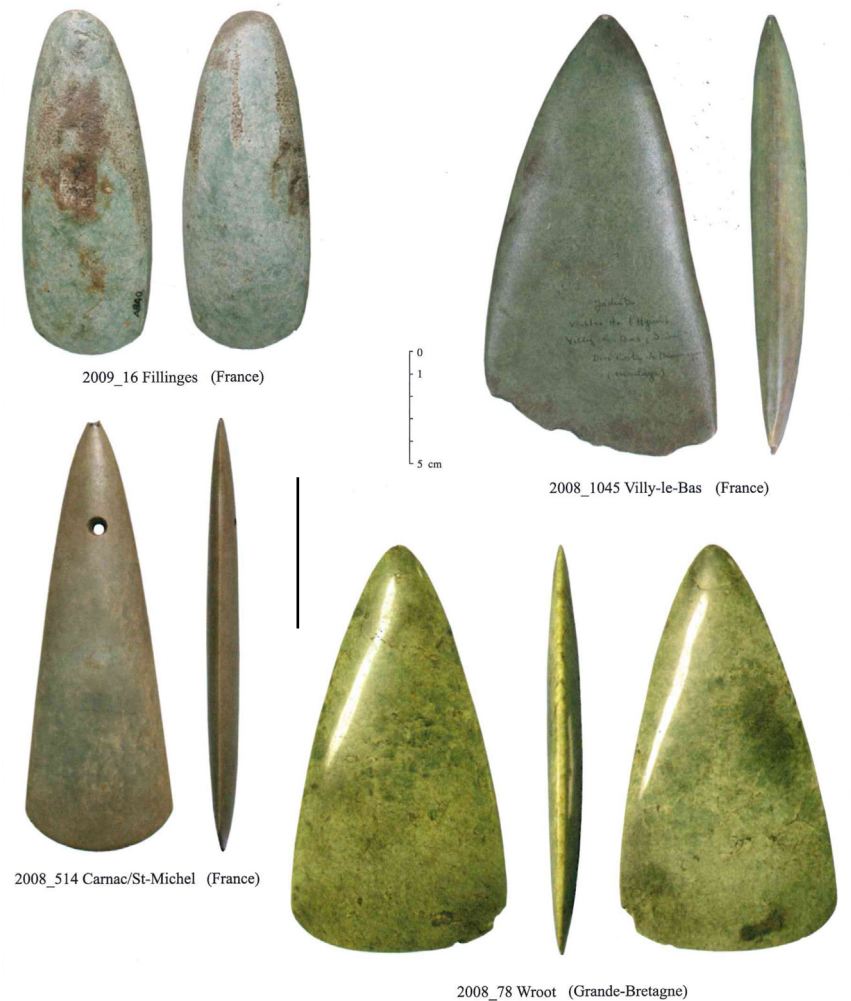


Fig. 2. Jade axes with increasing degrees of polishing (Pétrequin 2012, vol. 1, 285 fig. 39; used with permission).

what is known about jade axes goes back to the work of Pierre and Anne-Marie Pétrequin, who finally managed to locate the place of origin of the raw material in the Italian Alps (Pétrequin 2012; Pétrequin et al. 2017a).

Axes made of jade played a major role in Neolithic societies of western Europe, where they were exchanged over distances of up to 2000km (Pétrequin et al. 2012a; 2012b). At the same time they were treated in a very particular way. Thus, at the end of their journey and after quite a long period of time they underwent significant changes of form and appearance.

Jade is the hardest type of stone used in manufacturing artefacts in prehistory. It is extremely difficult to work (Pétrequin et al. 2012c). At the same time polished jade has an exceedingly smooth and shiny surface. Some varieties of jade are almost translucent. Working jade requires a lot of experience and particularly a lot of time. It takes one hour to remove one to three grams of

material by polishing jade. In general, the axes have undergone about 80 hours of polishing, while the most elaborate specimens have been polished for up to several hundred hours (*fig. 2*). Their material, optic and haptic qualities clearly make jade axes very stylish products. From their size, form, smoothness and colour, people could instantly assess the quality and value of an axe – something not to be underestimated given the scarcity and physical properties of the material.

Jade comes from two deposits in the Italian Alps, one in the higher ranges of Monte Viso beyond 1700m a.s.l., the other from the Monte Beigua area (Pétrequin et al. 2012d). Jade was recovered by collecting, fire-setting and, in the case of extra-long axes, by sawing pieces from larger outcrops. Particularly the sawing technique required special skills and an enormous amount of time. Quarrying started already in the 6th mill. BC, when jade was used to produce standard axes of rather reduced size, something that continued for



Fig. 3. Jade axes from the Saint-Michel tumulus in Carnac, Morbihan, France (Pétrequin 2012, vol. 1, 606 fig. 30; used with permission).

several thousands of years. Only in the 5th mill. did people start to produce oversized axes with an overall length exceeding 13.5cm, while the largest specimens are up to 40cm long.

Axes found in closer proximity to the raw deposits tend to be only slightly worked and polished. Those found further away were treated in an increasingly careful manner. Obviously, the axes were exchanged in several steps, not just down the line, but preferentially in certain regions (Pétrequin et al. 2012a; 2012b). One region exhibiting the local working of the jade axes is the area around modern-day Paris. There, the axes

underwent further reworking that changed their form and smoothness. These new types of axes were then traded to the British Isles and northern Germany. Again, they underwent further polishing until some of them were so thin that they appeared to be translucent. Some of the axes went to Brittany and were reworked yet another time (Cassen et al. 2012). The resulting axes of the Tumiatic type and the Saint Michel type are characteristic artefacts of the Morbihan.

Finally, they were deposited in the huge megalithic burial monuments of the area around Locmariaquer (*fig. 3*). Yet some of these axes did

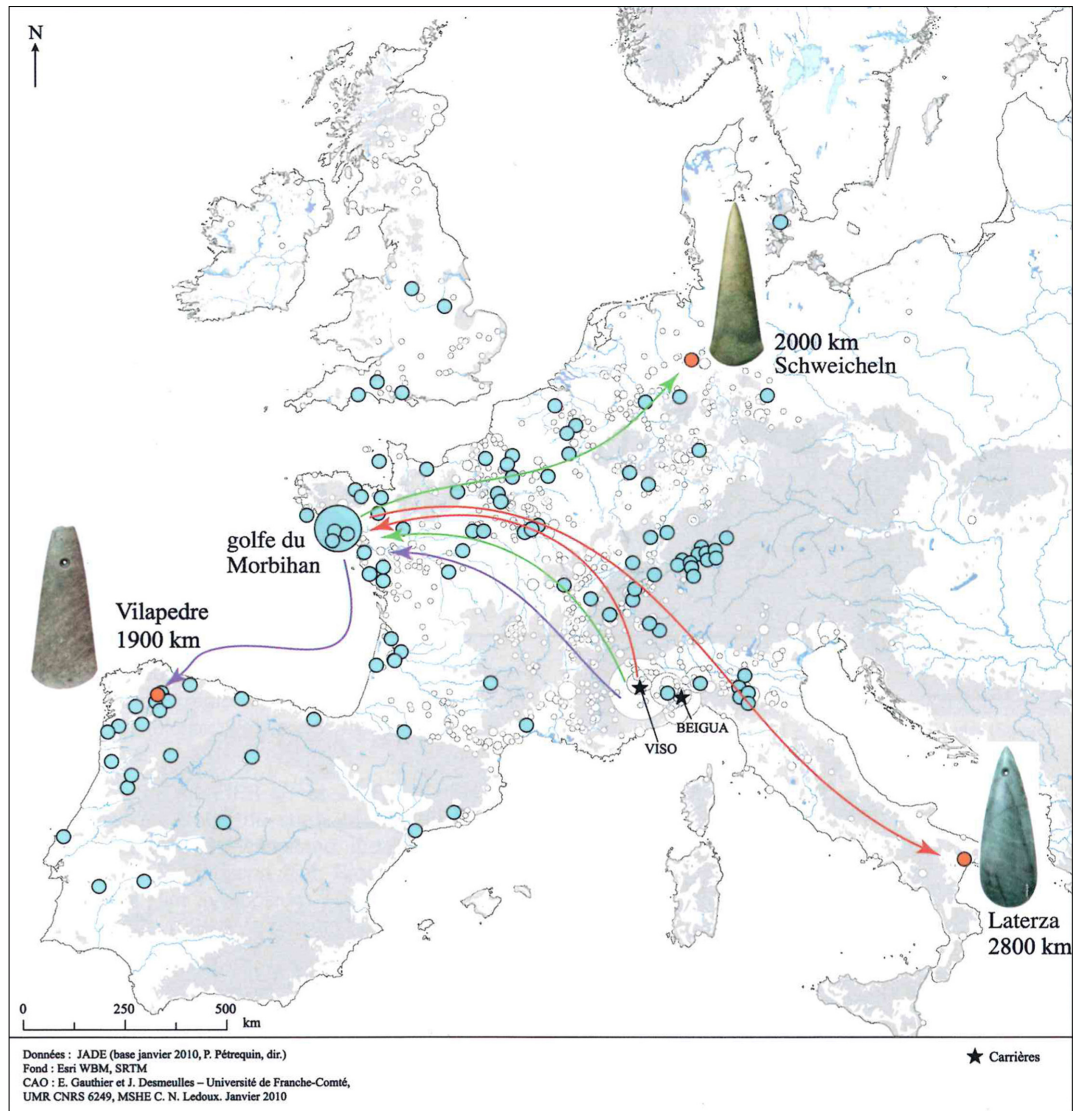


Fig. 4. Jade axes from the Monte Viso (Piemonte, Italy) exchanged to Brittany and from there all over Europe (Pétrequin 2012, vol. 2, 1033 fig. 17; used with permission).

not stay in Brittany, but were exchanged again over long distances eastwards to northern Germany and southwards to Italy. In the end, the axe from Laterza in Apulia had been travelling over more than 2000km and for an unknown period of time, which may have amounted to several centuries (*fig. 4*).

There can be no doubt that jade axes must have had a highly symbolic value for the communities involved in the axe trade (Pétrequin et al. 2012a; 2012e; 2017a). In several regions, axes imitating jade specimens were made from other materials like flint or serpentinite. In Spain and Switzerland large numbers of local copies of regionally available materials can be found. In both cases it seems that people were involved in activities in

which the symbolic value of certain axes and materials like jade played a decisive role in society. The Spanish communities traded ornaments made of variscite in exchange for jade axes from Brittany. In Brittany these variscite objects were deposited in the same burials as the jade axes.

It would be futile to ponder over the specific meaning of jade axes. Axes are the index fossil of the Neolithic in temperate Europe, where they were used in clearing woods for agriculture and in building houses, whereas their role as weapons seems to be secondary. The religious connotation of axes emerges from the megalithic burials in the Morbihan, where these axes are carved on the orthostats of the graves (Cassen 2012; see *fig. 5*).



Fig. 5. Rock carvings from the Gavrinis tumulus, Morbihan, France (Pétrequin 2012, vol. 2, 1319 fig. 5; used with permission).

There are also depictions of axes on menhirs in the Paris basin and in Burgundy (Cassen et al. 2017a; 2017b).

Traces of grinding axes can be found at the entrance of the West Kennet Long Barrow near Avebury in Wiltshire (fig. 6). In most cases, however, jade axes were deposited as single objects or

in pairs with the cutting edge pointing upwards. Locations are generally remote and frequently close to streams of water (Pétrequin et al. 2012e).

It seems that grinding and polishing was a central element in treating these axes, taking into account how much work and the utmost diligence was invested in shaping them. Yet this means that



Fig. 6. Traces of axe polishing at entrance to West Kennet Long Barrow, Wiltshire, United Kingdom (photo by author).



Fig. 7. Carved stone ball from Towie X.AS 10, Aberdeenshire, United Kingdom (Evans 1872, 376, fig. 352).



Fig. 8. Jade bracelets from Bréhan-Loudéac, Morbihan, France (Pétrequin et al. 2017a, vol. 3, 620 fig. 8).

continuous transformation is an essential part of these artefacts. In other words, the specific jade axe style in itself – smooth and green and translucent – was a temporal and constantly changing quality up to the very moment when the axes were deposited. This is a characteristic jade axes share with other Neolithic artefacts like the enigmatic carved stone balls of Scotland (Jones/Díaz-Guardamino 2019, 103–121) (*fig. 7*). These were worked over and over for a long time until they were transformed into highly artistic masterpieces of three-dimensional object design. This is also true for their ornamentation, which has parallels in megalithic art (Robin 2009; Scarre 2011). Similar artefacts, although not as excessively

artistic like the carved stone balls, can be found in the Neolithic in western Europe, such as flint mace heads, cylindrical idols with anthropomorphic features and finally stone stelae (Jones/Cochrane 2018, 137–172; Jones/Díaz-Guardamino 2019; Belley et al. 1998). The ubiquitous sound of the time must have been some sort of grinding and scratching, as an acoustic resonance of the slow and never-ending performance of transforming artefacts.

One should not forget to mention that there seems to be an equivalent to the jade axes. These are highly polished bracelets made of jade or other precious stones (Pétrequin et al. 2017c; see *fig. 8*). As so often in archaeology the male sphere

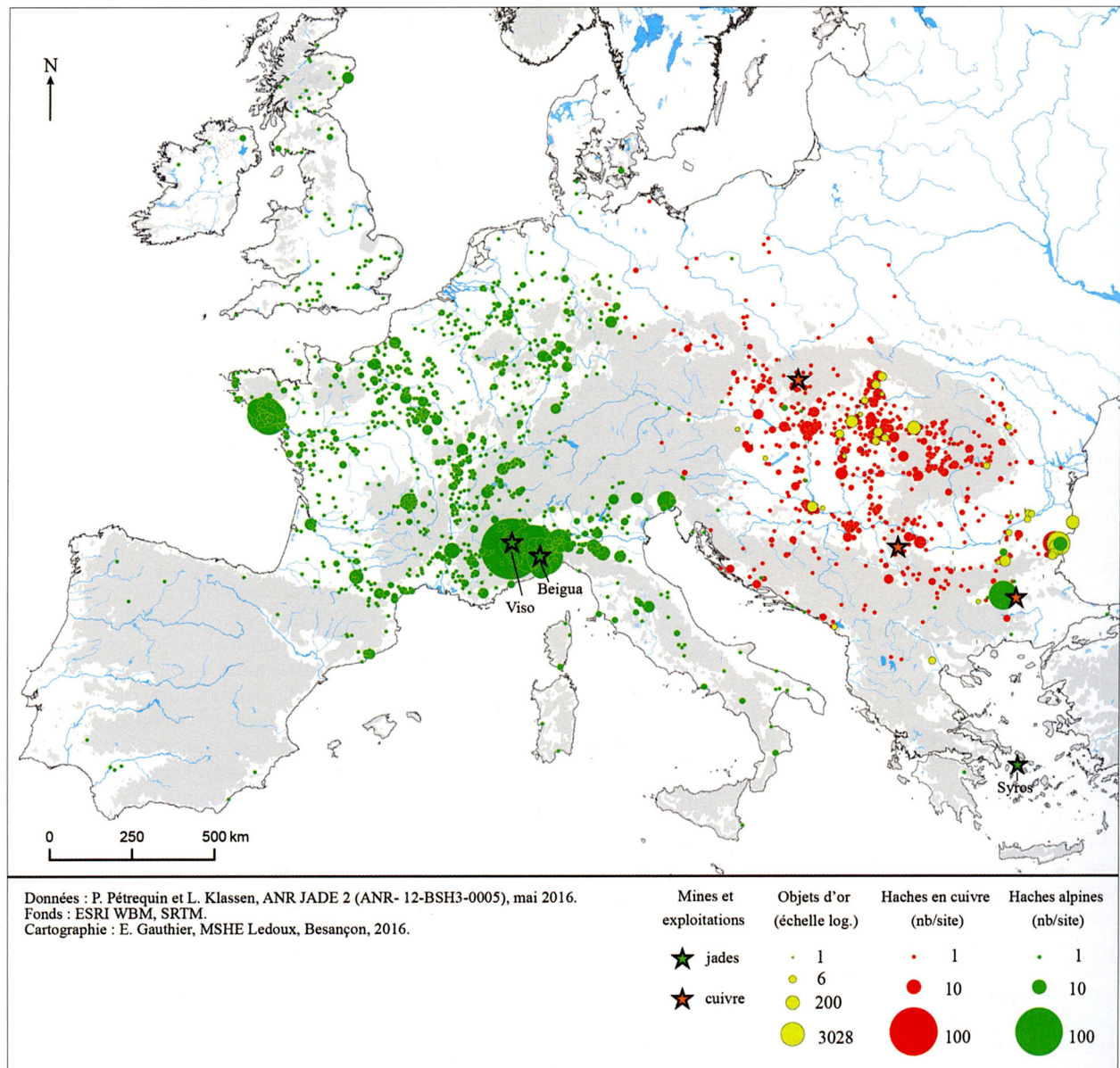


Fig. 9. Distribution of jade and copper axes and gold objects of the 5th and 4th mill. BC (Pétrequin et al. 2017a, vol. 4, 945 fig. 11).

has attracted so much attention that the female sphere risks being overlooked. Yet the bracelets share many features with the axes. They may indeed reflect the same realm of beliefs and practices as the axes.

In general, the western European occupation with jade axes is mirrored by the production of oversized copper axes in southeastern Europe (Klassen et al. 2012). These, naturally, have attracted much more attention than the jade axes. Nevertheless they seem to demonstrate the same esteem as axes in the west (*fig. 9*). Quite obviously these copper axes, which weigh up to a kilogram

or more, were highly symbolic artefacts that were exchanged over large distances. When jade axes and copper axes appear together, they do so in extremely sumptuous burials like in Varna on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast (Pétrequin et al. 2012f). Varna is also famous for rich ornaments of gold, possibly an equivalent to the stone bracelets of the west. Colour seems to have been an important feature too – red and gold in the east, green in the west. In western Europe light green jade was preferred over dark green varieties, at least in the north and with increasing distance from the mines in the Alps.

Jade axes and bracelets, for that matter, fulfil all the criteria of artefacts with style. They have a distinctive and easily recognisable appearance in many respects (shape, colour, smoothness etc.) and they result from a particular way of making. While it is not exactly clear what the axes were used for, a difference between function (i. e. what you are doing) and style (i. e. how you are doing it) is far from obvious. Polishing and grinding for days, weeks and months over a very long period of time seems to be an integral part of the experience, value and possibly agency of these ever-changing objects. All this happened over vast areas and a long span of time, in communities which all were Neolithic and agricultural, but otherwise quite different. Evidently jade axes do not represent specific groups of people such as elites and the like. They rather seem to be a materialisation of a specific conception of life or, following Philippe Descola (2010), a specific ontology. Making jade axes might be a form of rendering this particular world view, whatever it may have been.

Celtic Art

Finally, a short look should be taken at something entirely different, that is Celtic art of the 1st mill. BC (Jacobsthal 1944; Megaw/Megaw 1989; Müller 2009; Garrow/Gosden 2012; Farley/Hunter 2015; Nimura et al. 2020). This is where style comes in as a category, even by prehistoric standards. However, as already mentioned, Celtic art was to a large extent defined and described by Paul Jacobsthal, a classical archaeologist, and this may explain some of its characteristics as presented in scholarship. Jacobsthal's styles of Latène art in fact resemble an evolutionary art historical scheme of development. There is an early style, a continuous vegetal style and a plastic style, and this equates very much with an elaboration over time, beginning with a formative phase, followed by a classical stage and finally leading to a baroque style of art.

As a matter of fact, Celtic art or Latène style in all its temporal and regional varieties is the defining criterion for Latène material culture or Latène culture, as prehistorians tend to say. Together with onomastic and written sources it makes up what is known about pre-Roman Celtic life (Cunliffe 2018,



Fig. 10. Gold torque from Erstfeld, Uri, Switzerland (Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum Inv. Nr. A-52046; courtesy of the Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum).

29–51). Needless to say, these three strands of information do not really fit together in either time, space or content. Latène style is mostly found on personal objects like ornaments, particularly necklaces and bracelets, but also brooches and belt buckles, on weapons of all sorts, on metal vessels and ceramics and on equestrian gear and wagon fittings. On the other hand, sculpture and architectural features are extremely rare (Baitinger/Pinsker 2002).

The overall impression of Celtic art is kind of ornamental. There are three basic elements which are almost always present. Typically, they are depicted in combination, that is, human beings, animals and plants appear together. Generally, it is impossible to make clear-cut distinctions between these. Humans, animals and plants are merged together in order to represent hybrid creatures, monsters and the like (*fig. 10*). Very often, although not always, they make a rather wild and aggressive impression. The hybridity of humans, animals and plants and the combinations of parts thereof in endless varieties reflects a world of continuous and never-ending change. There is no standstill. Everything is in motion. Transformation is what everything is all about. Quite congenially, Paul Jacobsthal baptised a



Fig. 11. Bronze phalera from Somme-Bionne, Somme, France (Lenerz-de Wilde 1977, Taf. 21; British Museum Image ID : 01612939180).

specific style of Celtic art ‘Cheshire style’ after the cat in ‘Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’ by Lewis Carroll (Jacobsthal 1944, 19).

Celtic art is definitely not naturalistic (Ginoux 2020). It reflects what has been called ‘intellectual realism’ in child psychology or ‘aspective’ in Egyptology (Luquet 1913; Schäfer 1918; see also Willats 1997, 150–154). Visuality is not determined by optical illusion, but by what is deemed to be characteristic of the being or object depicted. Celtic art adopted many elements of Greek, Etruscan, Near Eastern and Scythian art. However, it strictly rejected all conventions with regard to visual representation (Ginoux 2020; Olivier 2020a; 2020b). Therefore, it is no surprise that Celtic art has commonly been regarded as something inferior, as something ornamental and decorative at best.

This way of looking at Celtic art has led to a profound misunderstanding of what it is really all about (Ginoux 2020). Actually, ‘the very act of using a picture to recount a story’, as in Greek vase painting, for example, would have been entirely ‘foreign to them’ (Olivier 2020b, 25). Likewise, the clear-cut differentiation between single persons and single scenes, and the spatial and temporal rolling out of these in a specific manner like in a comic strip would have never come to their minds.

Accordingly, Celtic art has been described as elusive. Some regard it as a way of deconstructing

the world into basic and recurrent forms. As a matter of fact, it is just the other way around. The underlying intention of Celtic art is to construct the world, to render things visible which are otherwise invisible. Once again, the traditional Western art-historical perspective on Celtic art has been highly misleading, while for the longest time this form of misunderstanding remained unnoticed. ‘The point is to see that Celtic representations derive from a distinctive view of reality, one which is neither inferior nor superior to that of Mediterranean civilisations, but simply, and above all, different from it’ (Olivier 2020a, 107).

While the idea of Celtic art reducing complex representations to simple recurrent forms can be dismissed by now, there is no doubt that Celtic art makes use of selected basic elements to produce complex images. This is easily understandable in those works which make use of a compass, like the bronze phalerae from Champagne (Bacault/Flouest 2003). The Somme Bionne phalera is made of hundreds of circles and segments (*fig. 11*).

Yet, the result is not only geometric forms, but also vegetal motifs. This way of composing images from circles, triangles and pentagons can also be observed among objects that look much less geometrical than the bronze phalerae do (Lenerz-de Wilde 1977). For instance, a very complex wagon fitting from Roissy near Paris is built on circles,



Fig. 12. Domed bronze plate from Roissy, Val-d'Oise, France (Musée d'Archéologie Nationale 89206.022; courtesy of the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale. © MAN / Valorie Gô).

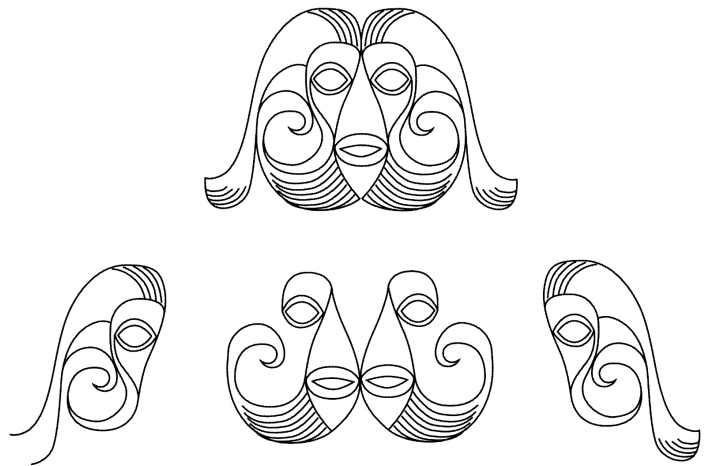


Fig. 13. Face and its compositional elements (lower register) on linch pin from Orval 'Les Plaines', Manche, France (Ginoux 2020, 143 fig. 8.6).

triangles and pentagons, although the overall impression is of a swarm of monsters and dragons (fig. 12). Yet even the dragons and monsters are recurring arrangements of eyes, brows, muzzles and manes in a specific way so as to produce ever-changing and emerging creatures (Olivier 2012; 2020a, 104 f., fig. 6.8–10).

This way of composing images from very few basic elements can also be seen on linchpins of Orval 'Les Plaines' in northern France (fig. 13). The basic picture is a monster made of S-shaped and almond-shaped elements. This type of monster (aka 'dragon') is extremely popular in Celtic art. By turning the elements and merging them together, something very complex like a monster emerges (Ginoux 2020, 143–145). In a later phase, in the so-called plastic style, the transforming effect through recombining basic elements on several dimensions is exaggerated to the extreme (fig. 14).

Yet what looks elusive in the first place may be something profoundly constructive in reality. As the images are made by combining basic elements in order to build up a complex arrangement in the end, the person looking at it will equally construct a constantly transforming image, a simultaneously merging and disintegrating picture. This is the maximal contrast possible to the visual world of the Mediterranean.



Fig. 14. Bronze yoke mount from Attichy, Oise, France (Moscati 1991, 31; © Musée Antoine Vivenel, Compiègne).

Conclusion

Neolithic jade axes and Iron Age Latène art are separated by three millennia. They belong to societies that are quite different from each other. So, do they have anything in common and what do they convey about style? The most striking feature common to jade axes and Latène art is constant change and continuous transformation. In the Neolithic it is the objects themselves that undergo transformation; in Celtic art it is the way images are constructed that produces never-ending transformations.

It is obvious that jade axes and Latène artefacts are not purely aesthetic creations. They undoubtedly carry some sort of meaning, which is rendered through their material and visual qualities. The technological aspect of shaping and finishing stone axes is conspicuous and certainly an important feature of the axes in general. Yet, this does not seem to be a question of simple procedural know-how. The act of transforming may be in itself an essential quality of making axes and other jadeite objects, a matter of ongoing performance in slow motion. There is a material side to creating Latène artefacts, too, particularly with regard to specific materials like gold, bronze, red and white coral and sometimes even ivory. Precious materials are definitely very important in the Iron Age, and there is a striking obsession with good quality (in terms of material, craftsmanship and artistry) in general (which is also true for Hallstatt and Villanova communities as well as Etruscans and related people). The connection between material and artefact is not as clearly evident as with the jade axes. Still, there is no question that style is to some (and certainly not the least) extent the outcome of processes of making.

Making objects as an essential feature of style moves the focus away from the objects and puts the attention on people making or handling artefacts, on performance to be precise (and change, for that matter, too). Jones and Cochrane (2018, 42 f., 115–136) have comprehensively dealt with intra-action as an aspect of the relationship between person and artefact. Intra-action between material and maker may be a decisive element in attributing meaning to an artefact, all the more when the engagement with material is repetitive, something that is definitely the case with grinding and polishing jade axes. It could also be important in metallurgy, which is *per se* a way of transforming materials.

A multi-dimensional approach that takes into consideration material, technology, intra-action and, above all, change and transformation significantly adds to style as a heuristic tool of understanding in archaeology. It is equally important

that people and action are considered in a much more comprehensive way as an element of style. Although next to nothing is known about the specific meaning of the jade axes or the Celtic images, it seems reasonable that transforming material and its visual appearance may have been a technique of apprehending the world through recreating. It would also be in line with agency attributed to objects in general and to visual artefacts in particular. This is not so much a question of Alfred Gell's (1992) technologies of enchantment but rather of the way activity creates meaning (Pfaffenberger 2001).

Jones and Cochrane (2018, 101 f.) have rightly criticised hylomorphic concepts of style. There, style is somehow predetermined in shaping artefacts, a way of imposing mental concepts on matter which is intended to communicate specific ideas. Hylomorphism is just a manner of circular reasoning that takes style as a pre-existing phenomenon leading to certain forms of materiality, which can be then traced back to their pre-existing roots.

Correspondingly, style does not seem to be an end in itself, to be something intrinsic. It rather appears to be an epiphenomenon, something drawn from and rooted in collective action, in ways of understanding the world and the forces in it. And this is why style is so omnipresent.

With such a multi-dimensional approach, style no longer needs to be a 'difficult word' in prehistoric archaeology. It could transform into a powerful heuristic tool through which 'there is much to learn', and it will hopefully return to Renfrew's and Bahn's introductory book on archaeology.

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Section III: Critiquing Concepts

Marian H. Feldman

An Alternative History of Style and the Art of the Ancient Near East

Keywords: style, historiography, postcolonialism, decolonising, ivories, Phoenician, Ancient Near East

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Summary

Acknowledging the disciplinary sources of the art-historical concept of style within the colonialist and imperialist ambitions of Europe and North America, this contribution asks whether, and – if so – how, we can ethically employ stylistic analysis as a tool for studying Ancient Near Eastern art. Traditional uses and histories of style are argued to belong to a constructed narrative that bolstered a conception of Western Civilisation as a linear trajectory from Classical antiquity through early modern and modern European history. Instead, this paper looks to postcolonial and decolonial critical theory to explore alternative histories and applications of style, including indigenous

interpretative strategies and the challenges of working within Mesopotamian ancient languages. It concludes with a brief sketch of the ethical stakes at the heart of this fundamental art historical concept, calling for art historians to acknowledge and assume responsibility for the outcomes of its use.

Introduction

The history of the art-historical concept of style has been reviewed in several publications of the last thirty to forty years, particularly during the historiographic turn at the end of the 20th cent. CE. A specific narrative of the concept's development, including a genealogy of 19th and 20th cent. scholarship, has emerged and is now generally accepted. The narrative focuses on a search for an 'objective' definition of style, usually by means of tracing the concept through the writing of earlier scholars, and ranges across materialist, instrumentalist, idealist and philosophical thinking. This paper explores an alternative history of the concept of style within the discipline of art history – one that takes a postcolonial/decolonial perspective and considers the social and economic implications of art-historical style. Such a perspective is especially valuable when thinking about the art-historical analysis of ancient objects from the Middle East, a region that has experienced, and continues to experience, a heavy toll from European and North American imperialism. Acknowledging the colonialist origins of artistic style, the paper asks whether the concept should continue to be used, even in a revised form attentive to postcolonial and decolonial critical theory. It argues for a greater awareness and sense of ethical responsibility on the part of art historians in the ongoing use of style as a disciplinary tool.

Traditional Histories of Style

The discipline of art history has been negotiating an identity crisis for some time – at least since the late 1980s when the field began to engage intensely with postmodernism and self-reflexivity. Across the discipline, scholars have asked themselves profound questions about their practices and what makes art history a valid, feasible field of inquiry. What does it mean to conduct art-historical research? What should constitute the objects of study? And how are art historians different – distinct – from their colleagues in history, literary studies or other humanistic disciplines? One result of this self-questioning has been to expand the boundaries of what qualifies as art, and therefore as worthy subjects of art-historical inquiry. Yet, as the corpus of potential objects of study has expanded and the distinctiveness of a discrete body of ‘art’ (what used to be referred to as ‘fine art’) has taken on blurrier contours, the question of what art historians do that is particular to the discipline has gained even more urgency. For many art historians, the answer to this existential question lies in the particular way of looking at, viewing and seeing the material products of study. Thus, central to the disciplinary identity is a close analysis of the material, physical and formal properties and effects of created objects: what is usually referred to as artistic style. In this way, style has been cast as a – if not **the** – defining characteristic of the discipline of art history: without style, there can be no art history.

With the turn at the end of the 20th cent. CE to a more reflexive contemplation of the discipline’s very being, art historians embarked on historiographic investigations of its conceptual foundations, including, albeit with perhaps less frequency, that of style.¹ With respect to defining style, there has been a general acknowledgement – either tacit or explicit – of the problems in articulating a universal concept (Tamur 2017, 3 f.). Nonetheless, numerous proposals have been espoused – briefly reviewed below – and these have since

come to serve as the basis for the subsequent historiographic engagements with the term.

The line between scholarly definitions of artistic style and historiographic interventions into the discipline’s definition and use of the concept is always fungible and intellectual interest in the notion of style has never waned for long in the discipline. At the same time, very generally speaking, one can see a drop-off of interest in defining style during the turn to contextualism in the 1980s and early 1990s, while an increase in interest in historiographic study of the term began from the later 1990s onward, alongside continued (re-)formulations of the concept. For example, art historians such as Jaś Elsner (2003), Richard Neer (2005) and Whitney Davis (2011) have provided rich, recent interventions on the topic that engage with, critique and build upon seminal publications on style from the 20th cent. CE and earlier. From studies such as these, a normative narrative of the historiographic development of style as an art historical concept has emerged and become entrenched within the discipline. This is the ‘traditional’ narrative of style referenced in the above section heading, of which I will provide only a very brief survey here, since it has already been the subject of much scholarly discussion.

Traditional histories of style are neither entirely linear nor consistent, but they do share several core elements and they have come to coalesce around a more or less agreed-upon canon of scholars and literature.² Variation in the narratives is most evident in the choice of where to begin chronologically. Some seek a line of inheritance that stretches back to the ostensible origins of ‘Western Civilisation’ in Greece and Rome.³ Some start with the presumed wellspring of art history as a discipline, namely the 16th cent. CE painter

¹ In fact, the first edition of ‘Critical Terms for Art History’ (Nelson/Shiff 1996) did not include an entry on either style or formalism, as Jaś Elsner (2003, 98) points out in his entry on style for the second edition.

² There are many different overviews that present variations on these traditional histories (e.g., Fernie 1995; Preziosi 1998; Wood 2019).

³ Scholars writing about style often trace the term etymologically back to its linguistic origins in Latin to refer to an implement for writing and its Roman associations with oratory rhetoric (see, e.g., Gombrich 1968; Sauerländer 1983). Sauerländer (1983, 255) refers to ‘the anamnesis of the modern art historical usage’ of the term style, implying a deep-seated (and singular) memory of usage extending from today back to ancient Rome, a viewpoint that is problematic in its teleology but adopted by many scholars writing on the topic both before and after Sauerländer.

and writer Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574). Others consider the concept of style in its art-historical sense to emerge from the watershed moment of aesthetic philosophies in the 18th and 19th cent. CE with scholars such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1719–1768), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Almost all commenters will include the work of Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) and Alois Riegl (1858–1905), who are seen as foundational for the group of mid-20th cent. CE scholars who continue to be influential in discussions of style, most prominently Meyer Schapiro (1953), Ernst Gombrich (1968), Svetlana Alpers (1979), Richard Wollheim (1979; 1995) and Willibald Sauerländer (1983).⁴ These mid-century art historians merge seamlessly into the later 20th cent. historiographic project and many of the scholars who have written on the concept of style have themselves become enshrined in the canon.

Throughout the intellectual debates surrounding the concept of style and despite differing definitions or even larger oppositions between idealist versus materialist understandings (see, e.g., Feldman 2018), the art-historical discourse has mostly stayed within a certain set of parameters that tend to neglect or downplay the political, social and economic contexts of the development of the concept, focusing instead on an intellectual history of ideas. That those ideas flow primarily from white, male, European and North American scholars, and that the history they construct follows a mostly linear path from Classical antiquity (Greece and Rome) through European history (primarily that of Germany, Italy and France) has been much less considered (Carrier 2008, 35; Michaud 2019). Indeed, the creation of an intellectual history of style is itself both a result of the project to construct an identity unified around the very notion of Europe – a notion that is conceived as ‘Western’ in its white masculinity – and (as one aspect of historical development) a contributor to that very

project. One can trace a mutually reinforcing relay between the construction of the notion of Western Civilisation *tout court* and the teleological narrative of style’s centrality to the development of art history stretching back to the Greco-Roman world.

Style in an Expanded Field of Art History

Stylistic analysis has often been taken as objective and empirical, although several scholars have noted that its practice is inherently subjective, resting on those features that the analyst chooses (consciously or, more often, unconsciously) to be relevant and there is a growing recognition of the complexity of the concept as made apparent in this volume (Elsner 2003; Elkins/Fiorentini 2021, 356 f.). The subjective selections for stylistic analysis, in turn, are situated within, and in fact often support, larger interpretative narratives, traditionally by means of value judgements that permit developmental schemas of either progress or decline (Elsner 2003). Such an acknowledgement challenges the neutrality of style and raises questions surrounding its uses, abuses and legacy. Post-colonial/decolonial critiques offer a particularly potent avenue for addressing these challenges.

Looking at the question of style through a post-colonial/decolonial lens encounters many of the debates that have surrounded the disciplinary development of an expanded, less Eurocentric art history, referred to in North America as world art history, world art studies or global art history (e.g., Onians 1996; Elkins 2004; 2007; Carrier 2008; Zijlmans/Van Damme 2008; Casid/D’Souza 2014; Kaufmann et al. 2015).⁵ While the mandate to practice such a newly defined art history has been clear for at least thirty years, its precise execution remains fraught. One of the fundamental questions that roils discussions of global and world art history is whether the frameworks and tools of art history, as developed over the 18th through 20th cent. CE, can be applied universally to all cultures and times. Aruna D’Souza (2014, viii), in the introduction to the proceedings of a

⁴ Wölfflin’s 1915 *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* (Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art) is often seen as one of the most influential treatises on artistic style in the discipline (for discussion of both Wölfflin and Riegl see Podro 1982; Fernie 1995; Preziosi 1998; Wood 2019).

⁵ See also D’Souza (2014, vii), who notes that global art history emerged from postcolonial theory’s impact on the study of art history.

conference on art history in the wake of the global turn, characterises this issue as a search for ‘tools of analysis adequate to this new global turn, tools that can be deployed to eventually create a more or less complete picture of art production, whatever its site or moment of origin’. Given that art history as a discipline developed over the 18th and 19th cent. CE alongside colonial expansion and slavery, we are forced to ask if its core methodological terms such as style are irredeemably weighted toward these Eurocentric conceptions and thus not useful – or worse – actively damaging for the study of so-called non-Western arts such as the Ancient Near East. Dave-Mukherji (2014, 101–104) responds in both the affirmative and the negative, calling for active assessment on the part of scholars of specific individual instances. She opines that it seems ‘futile to jettison authoritative histories and concepts from mainstream art histories’ (Dave-Mukherji 2020, 41), but that nevertheless they must be deployed in ‘non-essentialist terms’. Are we able to nuance the concept of style – de-essentialise it – in order to be able to retain its foundational role in the discipline?

A Mesopotamian Concept of Style?

One approach taken to address the concern regarding the Eurocentric legacy of art-historical terminology is to work within indigenous or non-Western interpretative strategies (e.g., Elkins 2004, 377 f.; Elsner 2020, 25). For Mesopotamian art, Irene Winter has made the case for over thirty years now for using indigenous vocabularies and concepts in order to reconstruct ancient systems of valuation and appreciation. Winter’s (1995; 2002) work enumerating a Mesopotamian system of aesthetics is the fullest and most influential of these interventions, along with her explorations of vocabulary related to mastery in crafting (Winter 2003; 2008). The specific notion of style, however, has not yet been addressed within an ancient Mesopotamian conceptualisation. Indeed, reconstructing an ancient notion of style is particularly difficult because there is less semantic evidence for a conception of something similar to what we call artistic style than there is for reconstructing a broad aesthetic awareness. The endeavour is

further complicated by our own inherently ambiguous definition of style.

While there are ancient words that are sometimes translated with the English word ‘style’, these translations can be problematic or quite loose, often projecting our own concepts onto the past.⁶ For example, Grayson and Novotny translate a text from the reign of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) that refers to structures belonging to a larger palace complex (a kind of armoury) at Nineveh: ‘a palatial wing of limestone and cedar in the style of Hatti and a magnificent palatial wing of Assyrian workmanship’ (*ēkal pīli u erēni nēpešti Hatti u ēkallu širtu epšet māt Aššur*) (Grayson/Novotny 2012, Sennacherib 22, col. vi, ll. 53–55). Here, they loosely translate the term *nēpeštu* as ‘in the style of’ for the Hatti palace and the term *epištu* as ‘Assyrian workmanship’ for the other structure, but the text itself

6 A brief search for Akkadian terms translated using the English word ‘style’ in the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD), which admittedly has numerous limitations related to comprehensiveness and our evolving understanding of the language, highlights the complications of first identifying and then enumerating an ancient concept of style. The Akkadian words *epištu* and *nēpeštu*, derived from the verb *epēšu* (‘to act’, ‘make’ or ‘build’), in their description of workmanship have sometimes been translated as conveying a notion similar to our use of cultural or regional style, as discussed in the main text. In addition to the Sennacherib text cited see also *udē erī...epišti mātīšunu*: ‘copper objects... the work of their own land’; and *kappi kaspi dannūti qallūti nēpešti māt Aššur māt Urarṭi u Ḥabḥi*: ‘silver *kappu*-bowls – (both) heavy (ones and) light (ones) – of Assyrian, Urartian and Habbian workmanship’ (Frame 2021, Sargon 65, ll. 364 and 383). According to CAD, however, the number of attestations for this usage are quite few: Three are cited for *epištu* and three for *nēpeštu*, and all date to the late Assyrian empire (Sargon II [721–705 BCE] and Sennacherib for both words; CAD E, s.v. *epištu* 1b; CAD N, s.v. *nēpeštu* 3). An inventory from the Syrian city of Qatna includes two references to necklaces that are designated as *ša qāti māt Tukriš* (Bottéro 1949, 142, l. 56; 150, l. 124). Literally, ‘of the hand of the land of Tukrish,’ the use of the phrase *ša qāti* (‘of the hand’) may appear similar to our notion of an artistic hand, but is attested in CAD and AHw only in this one instance in which it is paired with a geographical location rather than an individual or group (CAD Q, s.v. *qātu*, 10a; AHw s.v. *qātu* (m), B.7). The question remains open as to whether to understand objects said to be ‘... of GN’ or similarly modified by a geographical designation, as denoting a concept of regional/cultural style. To detail these instances would require more space than is available here; however, that none of the texts provide any explicit discussion of visual qualities significantly complicates interpreting them as written evidence for an ancient Mesopotamian concept of style. This is, of course, not to say that no such concept existed, but in the absence of textual evidence, it is nearly impossible to determine.

does not articulate a relationship between place of manufacture and coherent artistic style.⁷ The terms *nēpeštu* and *epištu*, derived from the verb *epēšu* ('to act', 'make' or 'build'), refer specifically to practices of making and only implicitly – because of our assumption that practices of making generate circumscribed visual appearances that we classify as cultural style – to artistic style. How we translate these two words derived from a verbal stem related to making and doing, especially when the attestations are few and their semantic contexts limited, can be highly influenced by our pre-existing conceptions regarding the relationship between making and artistic style – conceptions rooted in a European-based art history.⁸

Although ancient textual evidence can offer critical glimpses into Mesopotamian ways of thinking,⁹ the task of trying to find a one-to-one correlation between ancient and modern terms is always complex and may not be possible in the case of style. There is little indication in the textual records of an awareness of, or interest in, the visual properties of these items that we would call style, nor how they might be similar to, or different from products from elsewhere. While this is not to say that Ancient Near Easterners did not perceive visual similarities and differences, we have little written record of this, especially with respect to how such visual associations were classified or interpreted. Moreover, it is not clear how the retrieval of a purportedly authentic Mesopotamian conception of style helps us in our own stylistic analysis of the art. It is not enough to claim a term's legitimacy because a related concept can be recovered from the past. Nor in the case of style do the ancient Mesopotamian texts, in their extremely restricted and laconic nature, offer a robust methodological framework for our usage. It seems instead that we need to accept style as a contemporary analytic tool with heuristic value for our scholarship apart from any ancient conceptualisations.

When we acknowledge that style is a contemporary analytical tool, then we can ask more freighted questions: What work do we want style to do for us?¹⁰ Can we use it to retrieve ancient classifications and categories, ancient aesthetic appreciations or ancient responses to art? Or do we want style to help us answer questions about social and political organisation, artistic production and practices or trade and exchange – questions that might not have been of central concern for the ancient scribes and thus that lie outside the sphere of textual discourse? Ultimately, I suggest it is what we use the concept of style to do that constitutes the stakes of stylistic analysis and of which we need to be aware. Having a sense of ancient conceptions as inferred from the ancient texts can help counter assumptions that underlie normative notions of the term. That is, what can seem natural or self-evident might be challenged or undermined by alternate viewpoints. Nonetheless, any investigation into indigenous interpretative strategies should clearly make the distinction between an analytical tool that we call style and that is used in the practical operation of art history regardless of any ancient analogue, versus looking for and enumerating an equivalent concept in the past.

Style in a Postcolonial Middle East

It is then the use of style as a contemporary, analytical tool deployed for the study of Ancient Near Eastern art that requires further dissection and scrutiny, and I propose that approaching this process through the lens of postcolonial/decolonial critical theory offers a particularly insightful means of placing the term under the microscope.¹¹ I am using the terms postcolonial and decolonial

7 The text continues by describing these structures as surpassing in size and expertise, built by well-trained, skilled builders (Grayson/Novotny 2012, Sennacherib 22, col. vi, ll. 55–57; see Winter 2008).

8 For a similar argument with respect to other art-related terms see Winter 2008, 337.

9 It is, however, important to remember that there was no single, monolithic entity – Mesopotamia – and concepts almost certainly varied over time, space and social group.

10 Similarly, Winter (1998, 56) notes that 'what one can do with style depends on how one *defines* style' (italics in the original).

11 Geographic terminology equally requires close consideration, as both the designations 'Ancient Near East' and 'Middle East' carry much the same legacy of colonialism and imperialism. While I continue to use the generally accepted academic designation 'Ancient Near East' here (capitalising 'Ancient' to indicate the constructed nature of the term), I occasionally use 'Middle East' to remind ourselves of the ongoing ramifications for this region of the world today. Ancient Western Asia and ancient Iraq are also increasingly used to designate the region.

somewhat interchangeably and drawing upon scholars who identify themselves with either, although I recognize that not everyone will agree with this move. I do so because both terms encompass theoretical terrain that is important for the discussion; while a significant part of those terrains overlaps one another, I acknowledge that they are not mutually coterminous.¹² Just as the term postcolonialism has come to represent a body of theory explaining cultural contact and interactions, the term decolonisation is similarly entering the academic lexicon to denote a body of theory that radically challenges Eurocentrism (see especially the two issues from 2020 of the journals 'Art History' and 'October'; Copeland et al. 2020; Grant/Price 2020). This is despite the forceful and much-cited 2012 article by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor', in which the authors argue that the term decolonisation should be applied only to situations relating to the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Tuck and Yang (2012, 1) rightly note that making the term decolonisation into a metaphor permits what they refer to as 'sets of evasion', or 'settler moves to innocence'. Nonetheless, a decade beyond the publication of their article and despite its robust citation, the term decolonisation is in the process of assuming its own body of critical theory, although what the contours of this theory are remain in flux. Even more so than in the case of the traditional histories discussed above, there is little consensus or homogeneity in the thinking that comes out of postcolonial and decolonial theorising, and many issues remain fiercely debated within each. Yet, as was also the case with the traditional histories, there are broader conceptual parameters that unite the different strands. These include an underlying scepticism and questioning of those concepts deemed self-evident or natural and a commitment to weighing issues of agency and autonomy among subjects, whether those be human or object-based subjects.

However we define the difference between postcolonial and decolonial theory, both highlight the need to question whether and how to use terms with European genealogies in the study of non-European and pre-modern arts. More than simply reflecting on the legacy of art historical terms, these critical theories insist on an assessment of the lingering effects and ramifications of this lineage that is intimately bound up with notions of white supremacy, colonisation and imperialism (see, e.g., Michaud 2019). Part of the narrative of traditional histories of style is the assumption/presumption of a 'disembodied modern white self' (Adusei-Poku 2020, 4–6). Style is used to order taxonomies that create hierarchies in support of white, masculine superiority (Michaud 2019; Adusei-Poku 2020; Corey 2020, 19 f). Thus, it is not enough to expose or reveal past histories, one must also grapple with how an uncritical, ongoing use of the term, even for the study of ancient arts, might continue to reinforce inequities in the contemporary world. Indeed, we must include the study of ancient arts in this reformulation because the past also has been colonised by Europe and North America through the very study and writing of ancient (art) history (D'Emilio 2020).

The art-historical study of Phoenician art offers an especially trenchant example of the way in which traditional concepts of style have contributed to a colonisation of the past. In fact, I would argue that Phoenician art, as it is commonly defined, is ultimately a fabrication born from this scholarly colonisation (Feldman 2019). But before we can disentangle the situation of Phoenician art, it is necessary to consider the construction of ancient Egyptian art as an art-historical entity. Scholars have identified over the course of its three millennia several periods of ancient Egyptian art whose aesthetic features (tall, slender proportions within balanced compositions and appropriately European-looking physiognomic features) appealed to Western tastes and were therefore elevated as high points of artistic production. The Black feminist Classicist, Shelley Haley, points out that the attractive aesthetics of ancient Egyptian artistic production led to the bleaching of its African identity in order to appropriate its cultural artefacts for a white, European tradition (Haley 1993). The occurrence of similarly aesthetically

¹² For some scholars, a decolonising project in art history would be significantly more 'invasive' than a postcolonial one (Jumabhoy 2020, 31; see also Jain 2020, 29), although the parameters for these two designations remain nebulous, and I would argue that in fact for both terms much of their power comes from the flexibility of their constitution.



Fig. 1. Male figure spearing a griffin in the 'Phoenician' style. Ivory, Fort Shalmaneser, SW 37. Baghdad, Iraq Museum (IM 65360). Courtesy of The British Institute for the Study of Iraq (Gertrude Bell Memorial).



Fig. 2. Male figure spearing a griffin in the 'North Syrian' style. Ivory, Fort Shalmaneser, SW 37. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 61.197.11). Courtesy of The British Institute for the Study of Iraq (Gertrude Bell Memorial).

appealing, ancient-Egyptian-looking features in several Levantine ivories was seen to tie those objects together as a cultural group and, because of known historical ties between several Phoenician cities and Egypt, in particular Byblos, the culture with which the group was identified was labelled Phoenician.¹³ Following the logic of this stylistic classification, those ivories that do not exhibit features in the manner of high ancient Egyptian style were classified as 'other' – a category that continues to plague the study of these ivories to

¹³ This cultural association happened early in the history of the discovery of these ivories, after the first large group of them was excavated at Nimrud in the mid-19th cent. CE (Herrmann et al. 2009, 53). On 19th cent. CE reception of ancient Egyptian style see also Michaud 2019, esp. 185–198. The situation is more complicated than outlined here, but to detail it further would require greater space than is possible.

this day (at first identified as Hittite, then as North Syrian, with the later addition of South Syrian/Intermediate and remaining a topic of ongoing discussion; Suter 2015 and this volume). In the classic comparison of Phoenician versus North Syrian styles, the Western 19th cent. CE project to literally whitewash ancient Egyptian culture finds its echo in the stylistic characterisation of proportionally tall, slender figures in placid, upright poses of the identified Phoenician ivories in contrast to the 'squat' and 'crude' figures of North Syria (fig. 1–2). In this way, a hierarchy is established with Egyptian art at the top, followed by Phoenician and then bringing up the rear is the 'other', which assumes a subaltern position in the narrative. As this brief discussion illustrates, the process of stylistic analysis constructs hierarchies of value that encompass both objects and people.

The question, then, is not just whether it is valid to transfer Western-originated concepts to other parts of the world or to pre-modern periods, but whether methods developed during the disciplinary formation of the field, which itself developed alongside histories of colonialism, imperialism and slavery, can ethically be used universally. As Dave-Mukherji (2014) asserts, it is the uses to which methods and approaches are put that provide an ethical lens. One of the fundamental tenets of postcolonial/decolonial theory is to recognise the contingency of scholarship, its ability to do real work in the world and thus its potential for both positive and negative consequences. This is not to embrace the extreme relativism that characterised some early postcolonial scholarship and that has been vilified by more conservative strains of scholarship, but rather to be aware of and responsible for the consequences of our scholarship. Most critical is the awareness that there can never be entirely neutral scholarly approaches, although this is not to say that as scholars we should not pursue precision and accuracy in our research. The supposedly objective and empirical scholarship of traditional art history can often be revealed to be biased in ways that significantly affect its conclusions. A postcolonial/decolonial lens reveals how methods such as stylistic analysis have been central to creating classification systems that structured genealogies and hierarchies promoting white European male supremacy (Michaud 2019).

When we ask what work style has done – and continues to do – for us, what comes into focus first and foremost is the central role of style as an indicator of a specific time and place of production: a cultural origin or wellspring. Style appears to exist as a benign by-product (a by-product of what is somewhat controversial; see Feldman 2018). This ostensibly self-evident, non-evaluative residue that we call style connects a manufactured item to a locale in time and space. It is this aspect of style that has allowed us to literally map both horizontally across space and vertically through time all of human production. Style has also traditionally been connected with individuals and groups whose identity and very being is contained within and conveyed through what we call style (Michaud 2019). This understanding of style is more obviously evaluative and judgmental, with some styles being assigned to disembodied masters, others to

students; some styles to ‘dominant’ cultures, others to purportedly ‘weak’ cultures.

An old but still influential example is the organisation of Henri Frankfort’s *‘Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient’*, first published in 1954, in which a Mesopotamian culture characterised by a singular trajectory of stylistic development is placed at the centre – and literally occupies the first half of the volume – while the artistic production of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures is arrayed around it and designated as peripheral. Style in this conception is bound up with nationalist enterprises of 18th and 19th cent. CE Europe, for which the delineation of national styles was integral (Michaud 2019). As both a cultural and individual marker, style is a tool deployed to order and regulate the unruliness of human production and as such, it serves specific interests and agendas of those who wield it. Style thus becomes a prime tool in the construction of historical narratives in which objects are valued because of their position in a larger matrix of relations through time and space (Preziosi 1998, 111). Dave-Mukherji (2014, 91) neatly summarises this situation as ‘the politics of exclusion and inclusion built into the foundation of art history as a Western discipline’.

Concluding Thoughts

Can concepts like style be divorced from their European, colonialist and imperialist birthing and repositioned to new ends? Or must we concede that, as the Black lesbian feminist writer Audre Lorde asserted back in 1979, ‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’ (Lorde 2007)? When we use concepts central to the European imperialist endeavour, can we ever escape that legacy? What are our ethical obligations as world citizens in the performance of our academic scholarship?

The impossibility of returning to, or even discovering, ‘authentic’ or ‘original’ sources means that trying to recover indigenous concepts does not fully solve the problem. We cannot return to an uncontaminated or untainted pre-existing time (Dave-Mukherji 2014). Nor does this need to be a primary goal. As many postcolonial scholars have asked, why shouldn’t all conceptual tools, regardless of genealogy, be available for use, reuse

and even reinterpretation?¹⁴ We might pursue an approach that acknowledges the legacy and baggage of the past as ongoing accretions that cannot be disentangled or extracted from the constantly forming and growing matrix of the present. Through such a postcolonial perspective, in which it is not possible to undo the interactions and exchanges that have happened in the past and where the coloniser is as changed and affected by their interactions with the colonised as the reverse, an optimistic hope is that the discipline will evolve and change in response to its newly expanded members and materials being studied. Yet, at the same time, to wait passively and hope for change generally leads only to stasis, or worse, continued marginalisation.

Instead, I suggest that we actively acknowledge that the methods we use to analyse the objects of our study, including style, are never natural, neutral or self-evident. They are not universal, nor do ancient populations need to have seen them similarly. Rather, they are heuristic devices that we use to help us grapple with, come to terms with and better understand an ancient past that is foreign and often only fragmentarily accessible. As heuristic concepts, they are not unchanging, immutable entities that are either right or wrong; rather, they are elastic, fluid and adaptable to new situations and needs. It is, therefore, our duty to develop and use these methods in ethically responsible ways because they are indeed of our own making and we are wholly responsible for the outcomes to which they lead us.

But how do we determine ethical approaches to studying Ancient Near Eastern art? This question returns us to an earlier critical question that has threaded through this paper: What do we use style for? What are the stakes of stylistic analysis? A more starkly put question would be: Who are the winners and the losers in any application of stylistic analysis? The fundamental assumption that each time and place has its own way of doing things such that its products share certain visual

and formal properties has allowed art historians to construct periods and whole cultures, in addition to the oeuvres of individual artists. It also permits the authentication of an object, in effect turning it into an artwork, which in turn ascribes a value – aesthetic but also monetary – to that object. We can see clearly here how stylistic analysis contributes to narratives that construct collective identities and sets these identities in relation to one another, usually positing asymmetries of power and status as in the case of Phoenician and North Syrian ivories. Stylistic analysis also works hand in hand with capitalist valuations of the ‘original’ and ‘authentic’ artwork, permitting some ‘players’ to acquire wealth at the expense of others.

These factors – constructing narratives of historical power relations and ascribing value to material things – are the stakes underlying the concept of style and they must be acknowledged as points for ethical debate. My call then is that we take responsibility for rethinking how we want to use the concept of style and to question whether there can be a universal definition of the term. To have a single definition of style would imply that style exists as an unchanging entity that can be corralled into a singular container, neatly defined and deployed. Yet, in surveying the numerous competing discussions of style, this does not appear to be the case. We might be able to trace a history – or better, multiple histories – of style-like concepts, and these certainly bear a weighty legacy on the term today.¹⁵ In doing so, we are able to both problematise and historicise the term.¹⁶

¹⁵ These legacies practically never include non-Greco-Roman ancient texts, which are seen as existing outside of (and thus unable to influence) the stream of art-historical development. In contrast, art historians have engaged productively with pre-modern Greek and Latin sources that have inspired the development of new art theories in the discipline (Dave-Mukherji [2014, 92], who notes that ancient South Asian concepts are approached as ‘dead’ and unchanging concepts from the past, only available for recovery but not for use in altering current art theory nor as ‘resources for critical thought for the present’).

¹⁶ Compare Jain 2020, 29: ‘In other words [my postcolonial approach] tries to reckon with *both* the undeniable inadequacy *and* the ongoing force of the categories we have received from colonialism to understand objects-images-events-practices. Even as these concepts cannot be jettisoned entirely, they can and must be historicized and provincialized’ (italics in the original). Critically, in provincialising the European-based concepts, Jain decentres Europe and opens a space for alternative concepts.

¹⁴ Gupta/Ray 2007 citing Dipesh Chakrabarty’s project to decentre Europe from narratives of historical development. A central tenet of postcolonial theory is the recognition that the very foundations of ‘Western Civilisation’, such as artistic style, were developed in colonial or slavery contexts and thus are themselves rooted outside of, just as much as within, Europe. My thanks to Rebecca Brown for this insight.

But we should also be wary of ascribing too much weight to a single narrative of inexorable development from 18th and 19th cent. CE Europe to today. Even the construction of this historiographic narrative has colonialist implications in its single-minded teleological focus; we might instead embrace ‘the perspective of the collective practices of reflection and writing on art, images, cultural objects and aesthetic practices that have accompanied their production across the world’ (Vellodi 2020).¹⁷ This leaves us free to reshape the concept of style for our analytical needs. Critical in any path forward, I suggest, is our need to probe more

deeply into what style does and what outcomes result from the different applications of our stylistic analyses. This is certainly a complex affair, involving many competing agendas at both the national and disciplinary levels. I am not sure where exactly it will lead us, but I am convinced that we need to follow the path and investigate.

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¹⁷ The reliance on texts, whether ancient or otherwise, noted in this citation can be challenged; nonetheless, the expansion of the ‘perspective of the collective practices’ offers an important means for decentring the traditional art historical narrative outlined above.

Abbreviations

AHw: Akkadisches Handwörterbuch. 3 volumes (Wiesbaden 1965, 1972, 1981).

CAD: Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (Chicago 1956–2010).

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Historicising Style Group Research

A View from a Distance

Keywords: style, attribution, connoisseurship, social theory, practice, *habitus*

new to be alternatives, or rather complements, to previous scholarly endeavours?

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Summary

Recent studies on ancient Near Eastern visual and material culture have drawn extensively on socio-cultural theory and concepts borrowed from the social sciences. Focusing on debates in the study of 1st mill. BCE ivory carvings, this chapter reflects on the stakes and benefits of this trend and asks how much farther it has led our understanding of the production, diffusion, appreciation and consumption of luxury and miniature artefacts in ancient Levantine societies. Should moving 'beyond' attribution studies mean that the latter's more 'conventional' questions have been answered, or that they were ill-posed, so that scholars should abandon them and entirely re-orientate their inquiries? Are the purportedly new approaches really as different as they seem on first sight? Could it be that some aspects of the new approaches might even lead us astray? And should we consider the

Preliminaries

It has been almost fifteen years since I last took an active part in discussions on style, style groups and group attribution in ivory studies, one of the major scholarly foci for Near Eastern art history of the 2nd and 1st mill. BCE and the topic of several papers in this volume. When preparing the talk on which this chapter is based, I thus felt like an outsider of sorts, observing a game played by a particular 'community of practice' and viewing it as if from the other side of an imaginary fence. Several authors in this volume have contributed to recent debates not only on how to best classify ancient ivory carvings, particularly of the earlier 1st mill. BCE, but also how to make sense – historically, sociologically and anthropologically – of data that reflect both a high degree of stylistic diversity and a relative cultural (or iconographic) homogeneity and that we still struggle to properly contextualise in history. When viewed from such a distance, I recognise a series of conferences and workshops – among them, those in Fribourg (Suter/Uehlinger 2005), Pisa (Cecchini et al. 2009) and Bern (Suter 2015a) – as having brought significant fuel to this conversation during the past two decades. I see the Tübingen conference on which this volume is based as yet another step in this line of continuous conversations. At the same time, the two decades have witnessed tremendous and significant individual achievements: first of all, the completion by Georgina Herrmann of the final publication of the Nimrud ivories (Herrmann

From...	A	to...	B
	connoisseurship		social theory
	workshop		community of practice
	bounded and localised		mobile and networked
	distinctive 'cultural markers'		shared, fluid, blurred (or blurring) 'identities'
	'images as media' (social communication)		'objects generating social relationships' and 'collective (cultural) memory'

Tab. 1. Shifts from A to B, or 'beyond attribution', in the study of style in ancient Near Eastern (or Levantine) art history.

1986; 1992; Herrmann et al. 2009; Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013); second, the re-publication by Elisabeth Fontan and Giorgio Affanni of the ivories from Arslan Tash (Fontan/Affanni 2018); and third, Marian Feldman's two monographs 'Diplomacy by Design' (2006) and 'Communities of Style' (2014). I consider Feldman's books landmarks in the deconstruction of long-held basic assumptions in the field and a challenging attempt to develop an alternative approach to our long-known materials within a sophisticated theoretical framework. I might add as another individual project Claudia Suter's ongoing commitment to painstakingly re-examine the ivories from Samaria in view of their first full publication (see Suter this volume, and her forthcoming catalogue and monograph). By singling out these collective and individual undertakings I do not want to belittle all other contributions to the debate, especially by our Italian and German colleagues. I want instead to draw attention to what may sound like a truism: when observed from beyond the fence, the game being played is as much one of a 'community of practice' as it is the work of individual scholars. These may all be intensely connected, but each and every one performs their craft in their very specific academic, disciplinary, institutional, social and even personal context (Feldman 2014, xv–xvii, 175).

In what follows I would like to first point out what seem to me (a bystander) important shifts of attention and emphasis that have occurred in this field over the last twenty years. I then contrast some salient features of what we might call two competing explanatory models, an older and a more recent one, which I shall be careful not to call 'past' and 'present' but rather 'A' and 'B'.

Finally, I seek to make us critically consider how much the explanatory shifts from A to B do not simply reflect a methodological crisis of the earlier model(s) and/or linear progress towards views that may appear more plausible to us, let alone the definitive replacement of one paradigm by another, more appropriate one. The shifts I want to address reflect more than just linear developments in ancient Near Eastern art history. I shall argue they reflect changes on a higher level, namely, of academia, of the societies we live in and indeed of the globalising world we all belong to. The basic hypothesis underlying my contribution is that to move from model A to B, or 'beyond (mere) attribution', is not simply a matter of scholarly progress, and it does not perhaps represent the only possible option we have. My commentary is an invitation to step back and pause before possibly moving beyond.

Style in Recent Scholarship on Luxury Art: Shifts of Emphasis

Examining A alongside B or comparing A to B points to changes in the way of framing the data, of looking at objects and of dealing with them through description, analysis and interpretation (*tab. 1*). The crucial question for a historian is whether that change (of *our* way of framing the data, objects and inquiry) might allow us to make better sense of them in terms of critical social history. Let me state explicitly that what I consider my ultimate object of study is ancient Levantine societies, not the artefacts in themselves. Setting such priorities will inevitably have an effect on

what we expect historical scholarship to do and on how we evaluate the work of others. The best we can and should do is to make our priorities and expectations explicit.

If I understand the main proponents of the ‘beyond attribution’ approach rightly, model B is meant to replace model A, which in their view has been proven to be not only impractical, but ultimately wrong.¹ Thus an important question is whether model B is apt to replace model A or, in other words, whether the two should better be considered as mutually exclusive or as potentially complementary. Should we accept the presentation of the two models as strictly alternative or could another option be to try and combine the two – which would probably imply that both would need some modification in order to better speak to each other?

In other words, are we really dealing with a paradigm change, where a past paradigm now considered obsolete gives way to the promises of a new one? Or is the challenge we face more a matter of adopting critical awareness regarding hitherto neglected issues and probably some dead ends in former studies, aiming at more precision and sophistication in our inquiries – not least concerning their theoretical framework? If so, can we move into that direction without giving away too many of the observations and insights produced by previous scholarship on classification and attribution?

Put more simply: are we to change the game or to adapt its rules? Are models A and B so different that they represent two different games? Or do both models contribute to the same goal, namely a historical project to explain who produced, distributed, appreciated and consumed decorative objects made of ivory² and other luxury materials in the Late Bronze and Iron Age Levant, where, when and to what end? By dichotomising the issue, are we keeping our ‘community of practice’

together or splitting it up into different sects that can no longer critically and meaningfully talk to each other?

Let us consider some shifts of emphasis in recent scholarship on early 1st mill. BCE Levantine luxury art. The first, and arguably most unsettling, shift might be labelled ‘from connoisseurship to theory’. Anyone having read chapter 1 of ‘Communities of Style’ (Feldman 2014, 11–42) will recognise that this shift comes with an ambition to redefine the rules of the game. The most immediate effect of this shift relates to the authority of the researcher. In previous scholarship, first-hand physical acquaintance with the ivories (most notably, the various collections from Nimrud) and the sheer (embodied) experience acquired by physically handling and examining thousands of objects over decades would almost automatically lend special credentials to a scholar having devoted a lifetime to this endeavour. One may designate this the connoisseurship type of scholarly authority.³ Allow me to mention Georgina Herrmann as the paragon among such scholars today.⁴ In the new approach, though, authority of discourse and argument rests on recourse to social theory, that is, is borrowed from social theorists: Pierre Bourdieu foremost among them, as well as Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Connerton, Alfred Gell, Etienne Wenger and Bruno Latour, to name but the most often cited. Those authors’ theories on practice (Bourdieu 1977; 1990), collective memory (Halbwachs 1992; Connerton 1989), the agency of art (Gell 1998), communities of practice (Wenger 1998) and actor-network entanglements (Latour 2005) were developed in the field of sociology on the basis of empirical research entirely unrelated to the materials discussed in this volume. Theory (paradoxically including theory on embodied practice) seems to have taken the lead

1 Suter (2022) provides a very succinct summary to that effect.

2 Ivory and ivory studies will be the focus of my argument, since it is in this domain that the clash of approaches has been the most vivid over the last two decades. One of the main aims of the Fribourg exploratory workshop (Suter/Uehlinger 2005) was to bring together some major protagonists of that debate.

3 On the connection between connoisseurship and classification in the analysis of style, see Pappalardo 2019, who discusses important shifts in how recent scholarship on ivory carving, glyptics and sculpture construes and evaluates style.

4 The importance of her achievements has been celebrated in a recent *Festschrift* (Curtis/Wicke 2022), which includes several chapters (by Eric Gubel, Stefania Mazzoni, Alan Millard, Claudia Suter and Dirk Wicke, among others) that directly inform and reflect the debates discussed here. Another paragon is Claudia Suter (as her forthcoming publication of the Samaria ivories will demonstrate).

and relegated first-hand inspection and the physical experience of material data to a secondary, subservient position.

The rejection of connoisseurship comes along with a strong critique of the concept of ‘workshop’ on the basis that (it is argued) it developed in the study of European Renaissance art and thus must be considered Eurocentrically biased (Feldman 2014, 18–21; see also Di Paolo 2009; 2014; Suter 2015b; 2019). While this critique fixates on a particular strand of European art history, I would prefer that, before rejecting the notion of workshop altogether, we consider research on workshops, master-apprentice relations, knowledge transmission practices and the concomitant crafting of ‘styles’ and ‘traditions’ within the framework of a comparative anthropology of craftsmanship (Flad/Hruby 2007; Wendrich 2012). The alternative framework focuses on the concept of a ‘community of practice’, a notion developed by Etienne Wenger (1998) and derived from Bourdieu’s practice theory, as far as the second element is concerned. Allow me to point out that Bourdieu would perhaps not have embraced the way ‘community’ is used in our discussions. Reading Bourdieu, I find the inclusion of ivory craftsmen and elite consumers within a single ‘community of practice’, thought to have shared a common commitment to a loosely delineated ‘collective memory’, highly counterintuitive.

Another shift concerns the question of the social and geographical location of ancient craftsmen. While previous research (model A) operated on the assumption of localised, that is spatially bounded, workshops operating in one or another ancient city(-state) and crafting their products in a more or less consistent stylistic idiom (e.g., Winter 1973, 482–500; 2005; Herrmann 1986, 48; 1992, 42; 2000, 268), the new model (B) sees craftsmen not only as highly mobile in geographical terms but also as stylistically polyglot (e.g., Suter 2008; 2022, 542; Feldman 2014, 31–38). Somewhat paradoxically (in my view), the notion of *habitus* is mobilised to support model B (Feldman 2014, 57), while it seems to me that *habitus* as an embodied and internalized practice might equally or even better work in model A (see below).

Yet another shift has occurred in that the stylistic characteristics of the material products

we study, but also the iconographic choices they display, are no longer considered to reflect pre-existing cultural knowledge as would have been acquired by craftsmen in a particular context of space, time and society. The craftsmen’s products are thought to have themselves actively participated in the construction of identities that ancient Levantine communities, or at least the social elites, shared with each other by consuming identical goods on comparable ceremonial and ritual occasions (Feldman 2014, 62–64). The idea of a widely shared repertoire of meaningful objects, iconographies and practices of consumption has much to commend itself, as does the notion that material and visual culture not only articulate and reflect but also contribute to the social construction of symbolic repertoires. However, do scholars need to oppose the two perspectives against each other, rather than understanding them as two faces of the same coin?

I hesitate to insist too heavily on the shared and blurred (or even blurring) aspects of ancient identities and repertoires as advocated in model B. More specifically with regard to style and stylistic analysis, I wonder whether commonalities and the blurring of distinctions have not been emphasised too strongly in recent studies at the expense of stylistic difference, variation and distinction (another notion for which Bourdieu had a special concern [1984]), that is, what once generated model A in the first place. Allow me to point out in passing that the very insistence on notions of ‘identity’ is itself a relatively recent development in the field, which obviously cannot be explained by the parochial demands of the field as such, but reflects the high tide of ‘identity’ discourse over the past three decades in the societies at large we belong to.

I hope these brief observations on shifts of emphasis in recent scholarship do not sound polemic even to firm proponents of model B. Let me stress that I find the new approach extremely valuable and challenging and that I welcome and appreciate the strong concern for a more theoretically reflective framing of our research on ancient material and visual culture. That being said, I admit that, to my personal taste or perception, the emphatic recourse to social theory has, at times, the ring of a repetitive mantra, or an incantatory language game, if you will. When rhetoric takes over and

becomes redundant instead of better explaining the data, I develop a certain scepticism (perhaps the *déformation professionnelle* of a scholar of religion).

Historicising Data and Theory

At this point I would like to reframe what may on first sight appear to be a scholarly controversy within a quite restricted and highly specialised field, the historical (or art historical) study of ancient Levantine luxury crafts of the early 1st mill. BCE. When observed from beyond the fence, the shifts of emphasis I have described are not peculiar to our (after all quite small) community of practitioners. Rather, they represent a particular (one might say localised or community-adapted) instantiation of discursive and epistemological shifts one can observe in many other academic fields and disciplines. Bourdieu is no longer a recent classic for sociologists only, but a standard reference in virtually all the disciplines we used to count among the ‘humanities’. To a lesser degree, the same could be said of Maurice Halbwachs’ work on collective memory, or of the more recent actor-network theory developed by Bruno Latour. What has been designated as a ‘practice turn’ in the humanities (Schatzki et al. 2001) is only one among several so-called ‘cultural turns’ (Bachmann-Medick 2016). Taken together, these have generated a kind of metamorphosis of the humanities into cultural studies (in German, from *Geisteswissenschaften* to *Kulturwissenschaften*) (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 4).

As it happens, Marian Feldman has been prompt to disclose how much her own approach to style and communities of practice has been enriched by interdisciplinary conversations with colleagues from the social sciences (e.g., 2006; 2014; 2018). Such interdisciplinarity is itself a major characteristic of late 20th and early 21st cent. CE scholarship in the humanities, and this is no doubt very stimulating whenever disciplines manage to cross-fertilise each other and to maintain an equilibrium of mutual, bi-directional dialogue.

As mentioned above, one salient outcome of the recent flourishing of interdisciplinary conversations has been the ready adoption, by historians

working on various sets of data, of terminology, concepts and conventions that had originally been developed within the social sciences. My own use of the term ‘data’ (instead of ‘works of art’ or ‘artefacts’) to describe the objects of our study is a case in point, as is the appearance of other theory-derived concepts such as ‘media’, ‘networks’ or ‘identity’/‘identities’ in this literature. One of my own first steps into that direction occurred in the early 1990s when Othmar Keel and I chose to address ancient Near Eastern seals and amulets held in the collections of the then ‘Biblical Institute’ at Fribourg (Switzerland) as ‘altorientalische Massenkommunikationsmittel’ (Keel/Uehlinger 1990), at the time more an intuitive move than the result of serious engagement with theory. The latter became inevitable when I was asked in 2003 to contribute to a colloquium held in Cologne to evaluate whether the concept of ‘media’ might be of conceptual and theoretical use when applied to ancient Levantine everyday culture (Uehlinger 2005). My personal interest in matters of theory has increased ever since without erasing an earlier layer of rather mundanely historicist research interests. More specifically, moving out from biblical studies to the wider academic study of religion brought with it a qualitative leap regarding my engagement with theory. Not least among the many new skills I learned was to become critical of the often pre-reflexive assumptions and frames with which we as scholars approach the objects of our study.

These reminiscences aside, what I want to stress here is that these shifts did not occur ‘out of the blue’, nor did they result gradually from the progress of any specific discipline. New theories and their terminological apparatus were adopted by historians as they struggled to make themselves understood in a scholarly community increasingly shaped and dominated by the social sciences and in a general framework of research funding and organisation increasingly driven by notions of social relevance and benefit. Adopting the new language games was more than a tactical or strategic move, however; it helped historians to better conceptualise their objects of study. That being said, as (art) historians we should be aware that these theories and concepts are of a rather recent breed and that they were developed by sociologists

(themselves a product of the 20th cent. CE) whose aim was to better understand and engineer their own (that is, our) contemporary societies.

The hype of media and practice theory and associated terminology cannot properly be understood unless we consider the incredible developments in media and information technology as well as the erosion and fragmentation of traditional knowledge corpora during the last few decades. The second career of social memory studies in the 1980s was to a large extent due to the gradual disappearance of the generations who had experienced World War II, to public debates on the duty to remember and to the challenges of aging societies confronted with dramatic individual and collective memory loss – alongside stunning technological advances (from observation and analysis to imaging) in neurosciences (see, e.g., Kansteiner 2002; Wertsch/Roediger 2008; Assmann/Conrad 2010; Gudehus et al. 2010). In order to fully understand Bourdieu's theory of practice, too, we must historicise it in the anti-colonialist anthropology and neo-Marxist critique of bourgeois French society current in the 1960s (Lane 2000; Medvetz/Sallaz 2018). As for the emergence of actor-network theory, it is best understood against the background of science-and-technology studies in the 1980s (Muniesa 2015).

Where should all this lead us today, as we consider new theoretical approaches and associated methodologies in the study of early 1st mill. BCE luxury arts of the ancient Near East? My point is that responsible historians must be aware that theories have their history, and that the history of social theory is a rather recent one. To further complicate matters, we as scholars are obviously part of that history ourselves. Historicising contemporary theory can remind us how recent so many of our theories and terminologies are, but also to how large a degree the models we adopt from the social sciences are inextricably linked to very contemporary concerns. It can draw our attention to the more critical point that much of contemporary social theory may sound plausible and evocative to us, first of all because it promises to get a better grasp on major challenges our own societies are struggling with. More often than not, the questions we ask and the answers (or, more modestly, the terminological apparatus)

we co-opt do not emerge from our 'data' or objects of study themselves. They have a special ring to our ears (and the agencies and institutions funding our research) because they speak a language that reflects, addresses and shapes the contemporary societies we are part of. For what other reason should we have come to speak of culture contact, mobility, identity, hybridity, media, networks, practice and *habitus*, etc. in the study of the ancient Near East?

To be sure, I certainly do not think abstinence from critical theory is a way out of the dilemma. But I suggest that we should, on the one hand, historicise theory as much as we do our primary data, acknowledging the contingency of its analytical apparatus and the possible limits of its performative and explanatory reach when applied to ancient data. I should add to this that we also ought to historicise ourselves as scholars – not only the predecessors we want to place at some comfortable distance. That being said, we must also acknowledge that good theory is generalist by definition, which means that it usually hides from our view the very contingent circumstances from which it originally emerged. There is a paradox in this double bind, or a dialectic, which we should keep in mind whenever we adapt contemporary theory to ancient data. Needless to add, to historicise one's own scholarship is a notoriously difficult exercise – an exercise which may become easier with age as one experiences social change along one's own lifespan, becoming increasingly aware of how much contingency and context are paramount for historically understanding any given trajectory.

Another recommendation born of these reflections might be that we should be modest with claims about paradigm change. Whether or not a new approach is really new to the extent of changing the game is perhaps not for the practitioners themselves to evaluate. That said, I am inclined to see less of a caesura between more conventional attribution studies (model A) and the new approach based on practice theory (model B). Where I do see a notable difference, however, is that it seems far easier to submit attribution proposals to critical examination and even occasional falsification than it does for scholarship operating with fluid concepts and fuzzy boundaries. One may or

may not sympathise with Popper's critical rationalism (1963), but I do prefer a historically realist research agenda open to potential falsification to any kind of postmodern approach, especially if the latter does not consider as the ultimate object of inquiry some ancient social reality, whether material, skilled, communicative or otherwise.

Where Some of Us May Have Been Wrong – or Misunderstood

In the second part of this essay, I want to acknowledge that earlier attempts to classify style groups and to attribute them to specific locations have been fraught with many difficulties and occasionally led into dead ends. These have been charted and rightly criticised by Claudia Suter in her contribution to the workshop held at the 2015 Rencontre Assyriologique in Bern (Suter 2015b). Suter illustrated her argument with two charts meant to be deconstructed (2015b, *fig. 1, tab. 1*), the first being a handout I had prepared for the Fribourg 'Crafts and Images' workshop fourteen years earlier, in which I attempted to associate the so-called style groups, as distinguished by then, with particular locations of production (*fig. 1*). When viewed from some distance, one salient feature of that chart is the abundance of question marks in the last column. Another aspect, which received little emphasis in Suter's criticism, is my attempt to decentre and widen the debate by giving equal attention to the southern Levant as an important region of production, circulation and consumption of luxury crafts, at a time when ivory scholarship was mainly concerned with the northern Levant.

My goal in this was not to recover yet another province for the essentialist attribution of ivories to a particular ethnicity or culture. I hoped rather to break the spell of exceptionalism that still widely affects all matters 'Israelite', due to the (weakened, yet unbroken) cultural and religious influence of biblical historiography and its normative template on Western humanities (Uehlinger 2015). From this perspective, in addition to their sheer quantitative significance, the Samaria ivories deserve a prime place among the important collections of ancient Levantine ivories. The archaeological and material data make the assumption of

a significant amount of local production by local craftsmen operating in Samaria infinitely more plausible than any hypothesis to the contrary (a conclusion also adopted by Suter 2011 and 2022 and cautiously supported via observations of fitters' marks by Millard 2016). But precisely because this collection of ivories presents such a wide spectrum of stylistic variation, I would maintain that distinguishing style groups, or discrete groups of production, remains an important and meaningful goal in the study of these ivories even today.⁵

One major difficulty in our work is, of course, that we still know so little, archaeologically speaking, about several central Levantine coastal sites, such as Sidon and Tyre; but we should also not forget Gaza and Ashkelon in the south as cities likely to have had their own local production of luxury crafts in the 9th and 8th cent. BCE, alongside other southern centres like Samaria and Megiddo. It seems impossible at this time to attribute particular styles to Gaza, and the inclusion of Gaza and Palestine in historical arguments about the production and consumption of luxury arts may seem to be largely a matter of speculation. However, I would argue that any historical scenario that ignores the central role of Gaza and Ashkelon, but also of the Egyptian Delta, in Iron Age II Levantine cultural history must be considered biased and blinkered. That being said, I do not want to defend my 2001 chart in the face of better knowledge. What strikes me most when reconsidering it after more than twenty years is the complete absence of a chronological variable in this way of presenting what I then thought reflected the state of the art at the time. Since the production of Iron Age II luxury crafts in ivory and metal spanned a period of at least two and a half centuries (but probably more), this omission needs correction (see Suter, this volume, whose distinction of 'Levantine-1 to -3' groups in ivory is basically chronological). That said, as much as this correction complicates our task, it does not require fundamentally changing the rules of the game.

Another chart presented by Suter in order to be deconstructed offers a synopsis of style groups

⁵ Such an attempt at distinguishing groups of production does not necessarily contradict, but might rather substantiate the 'communities of practice' approach.

Provisional division of ivory style-groups

(thanks to G. Herrmann, I.J. Winter, E. Gubel, D. Wicke et al.; *exploratory suggestions)

Traditions	Schools	Style-groups	Sub-groups	Suggested locations
... Assyrian Urartean 'Cilician'				
	↑	'NW-Syrian'	'round-cheeked and ringletted'	Sam'al
			'drilled eye'	?
			'vase hat'	?
'Northern'/ 'North-Syrian'			'classic SW 7'	?
			'flame-and-frond'	Guzana or Charchemish?
	↑	<?<	'Lu'ash school'	Lu'ash
			'marked haunch'	?
			'George and dragon', 'collar and crown'	?
			'wig and wing', 'crown and scale'	?
'South Syrian'/ 'Intermediate'/ 'Syro-Phoenician'	↑		'scaley wing'	
		'aproned sphinx and griffin'	'triple flower' { more ornate more plain	Damascus?
			'pointed ear'	
			'beaky nose'	*Samaria?
			'excised eye'	?
	↓		'triple beard'	?
			'Eric's favourite'	Sidon?
			'grooved cheek'	?
'Southern'/ 'Phoenician'		'ornate'	'ornate' <i>cloisonné</i> *several?	Tyre?
			NE 2 group	?
		'Egyptianizing'	'alternate inlay' *several?	
			<i>champlevé</i> , 'silhouette-inlay'	Palestine? Philistia?
Egyptian?				*Tanis *Bubastis, *Memphis?

Fig. 1. Handout originally prepared by the author for the Fribourg Exploratory Workshop in 2001.

<i>IN 4 (1986)</i>	<i>IN 5 (1992)</i>	<i>IN 6 (2009)</i>	<i>IN 7 (2013)</i>
Northern Tradition	North Syrian	North Syrian	North Syrian
Flame&Fronde	Flame&Fronde	Flame&Fronde	Flame&Fronde
Drilled-Eye	Drilled-Eye		Animal-Contest Scenes
SW7-Chairbacks			SW7-Chairbacks
Roundcheeked&Ringletted	Roundcheeked&Ringletted	Roundcheeked&Ringletted	Roundcheeked&Ringletted
Burnt-Palace			
Intermediate	Intermediate	Syrian	Syrian-Intermediate
Beaky-Nose		Beaky-Nose	Beaky-Nose
Lu'ash	Wig&Wing	Wig&Wing	Wig&Wing
George&Dragon	Crown&Scale (+Scaly-Wing)	Crown&Scale	Crown&Scale
	Collar&Crown (+Sharply-Curved-Collar)		Tall-Crown
NW-Palace			
Haunch-Markings	Finely-Carved		
	Large&Thin-Panels		
	NW21-cows&stags		
	S10-cows&stags (+Excised-Eye)		
Southern Tradition	Phoenician	Classic Phoenician	Phoenician I
Egyptianizing	Egyptianizing	Egyptianizing	Egyptianizing
Ornate Champlevé Gowned-Ladies Long-Sphinx-Panels Openwork-Cloisonné-Panels Unusually-Shaped-Panels	Ornate (+Triple-Flower) Samaria School of Champlevé	Ornate	Ornate Ornate-Modelled-Panels (Triple-Flower) Champlevé-Plaques&Panels 3-sided-Furniture-Fittings Pharaoh-Statuettes (+NE2+NW-Palace) Unusually-Shaped-Ivories Finely-Carved
Aproned-Sphinx&Griffin Excised-Eye Pointed-Ear Scaly-Wing Sharply-Curved-Collar Triple-Flower Plaques	NE2	Group2-Bridle-Harness	Group2-Bridle-Harness
		Other Phoenician	Phoenician II
		Group1-Bridle-Harness	People (+Crinkly-Hair)
		3-sided-Furniture-Fittings	Sphinxes-Griffins&Stylized-Trees
			Bovids&Cervids
			Small-Objects (+Group1-Bridle-Harness+Plaques)

Fig. 2. Style groups and attributions as proposed over the course of 'Ivories from Nimrud', vols. 4–7 (Suter 2015b, table 1).

as defined and attributed to different regional ‘traditions’ by Georgina Herrmann between 1986 and 2013, that is, in ‘Ivories from Nimrud’ volumes 4 through 7 (Herrmann 1986; 1992; Herrmann et al. 2009; Herrmann/Laidlaw 2013) (fig. 2). Again, when viewed from a distance, this table shows nicely something that should not really come as a surprise: namely, that attribution is a tentative exercise and that the more data a system includes, the more complex it becomes, being subject both to *ad hoc* revisions and at times to a certain constraint of dogmatism. To be aware of these limitations is of crucial importance, and yet I still do not think the approach championed by Herrmann needs to be rejected entirely. If anything, it may need to become even more sophisticated, which probably implies that we develop some common understanding of how to calibrate and grade observations of stylistic peculiarities and variation in terms of tradition, school, production centre, workshop or hand (see Winter 2005). Again, we need to integrate a diachronic perspective into the endeavour. I am also in full agreement with Feldman and others that a network perspective might lead us further, as it allows to integrate cross-school interaction that may either have occurred in one place when teams from different schools cooperated or when the products themselves travelled from one place to another, inviting craftsmen to adopt new features into their local production. In this regard, some more refined (and, in the first place, explicated) theory will be helpful alongside refined, science-and-technology based methods of inquiry.

One problem highlighted by the second chart concerns analytical and taxonomic methodology, or, in other words, the path leading from the observation of *minutiae* to the hypothetical definition of a ‘style group’ (see Winter 2005). The very nicknames by which style groups have been labelled betray what one might call a conceptual inconsistency, since they sometimes refer to features of style and then again to technical peculiarities or even to iconographic details. To mention one example where this system has shown its limits, there seems to be a growing consensus that the entire ‘Flame and Frond’ production cannot adequately be understood as a single style group (Affanni 2009; Feldman 2014, 52–57; Suter 2015b, 39 f.). To recognise this is to call for additional nuance

and methodological sophistication – in my view a better alternative than to simply abandon the historical-realist search for production centres and ignore the geographical variable (see also V. Herrmann and Winter, this volume).

Are we to make a sectarian choice between model A and model B, or is it possible to chart some middle way and keep the two in conversation with each other? The answer to this question cannot come from beyond the fence but must be given within the community of practitioners themselves. What the distant observer might possibly contribute is to analyse how the rules of the game are interpreted by different key players and teams and to offer a few suggestions for how to make the game more legible for others.

Does *Habitus* Communicate?

As mentioned earlier, one major shift in recent debates in this field has been to emphatically embrace social theory, particularly drawing from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts have been adopted rather selectively, which is striking when observed from the viewpoint of another discipline (namely, the history of religion/s) where concomitant aspects of Bourdieu’s theory such as the notion of social fields, various forms of capital and the rules of ‘taste’, distinction and competition (Bourdieu 1984; 1986) are intensely debated (e.g., Urban 2003; Rey 2018; Walthert 2020). I wonder why the latter aspects of Bourdieu’s theory have found lesser resonance in our recent debates on early 1st mill. BCE luxury crafts.

Two concepts particularly highlighted by Marian Feldman are practice (or practice theory) and *habitus*, closely related concepts, both of which I hold to be extremely useful and appropriate for our debate. As far as I understand Bourdieu, *habitus* designates the way people act or behave according to rules that seem entirely natural to them and are largely implicit, in contrast to manners and taste that are accompanied by explicit rationalisations (Bourdieu 1990). One could say that what distinguishes manner from *habitus* is the different degree of intentionality and agency, or the different ways that agency and

intentionality operate in *habitus* versus manner: in *habitus*, agency is implicit, whereas in manner, it is generally explicit, if not altogether self-reflective and self-affirmative. How can we relate this distinction to the notion of style in craftsmanship? Allow me to submit to your consideration and critique the following model (or, more modestly, an example), based so far on a largely intuitive understanding of master-apprentice relationships formed through an earlier study of mine on 'learning-by-doing' (Uehlinger 2016) that might – and certainly should – be further substantiated by anthropological theory.

In that study, I think to have demonstrated that both drawings and inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud (a site in the northern Sinai dated to ca. 800 BCE) allow us to observe master-apprentice transmission and learning practices in visual and epigraphic media *in situ*.⁶ I argued that these drawings and inscriptions point to a joint venture engaging 'Israelite' and (so-called) 'Phoenician' craftsmen and scribes. It is precisely because we are able to distinguish writing styles down to the level of individual hands, experienced alongside inexperienced, as well as iconographic repertoires and stylistic variations, that we can positively analyse processes of cooperation and transmission, but also clear instances of distinction, within what we might in this instance call a micro-community of practice of people coming from different artistic and linguistic backgrounds.⁷

That case study exemplifies my understanding of the progression of apprenticeship: in the process of acquiring skills and abilities, an apprentice will generally move from relatively easy to more sophisticated tasks; they will first learn the basics and work on tasks where failure will have little consequence before being introduced to more demanding tasks. The more they progress on the ladder of skilful craftsmanship, the more operations

that once were acquired with explicit commentary from a master will turn into habitual skill. That is to say, the acquisition of new skills requires explicit communication about technique, material characteristics, the handling of tools and its effects on the material and so forth. The more an apprentice gets used to the process, the more the handling of the *chaîne opératoire* turns into routine and explicitly acquired knowledge turns into habitual knowledge. The more a learner's knowledge progresses and turns into habitual craftsmanship, the more they will develop a particular style, that is, features of execution resting on pre-reflexive, largely habitual operations, based on more-or-less expert knowledge of the properties of materials and tools and of tasks to be accomplished. Such particularities may at times be observed as consistent idiosyncrasies. They may perhaps be conceptualised in terms of a craftsman's or school's 'identity' (Naeh 2015), but the latter should not be essentialised too quickly in ethno-linguistic or culturalist terms (note Stark 1998; Brysbaert/Vetters 2010).

If I understood Bourdieu correctly, *habitus* does not communicate, at least not explicitly or intentionally (1990). Yet the product of habitual action or artistic performance may be received in terms of a message or communication by a beholder or consumer of an artefact, who will not necessarily be interested in the technical *minutiae* of a process that transformed raw materials into a work of art, but who will appreciate the product for itself and, as a potentially functional item, with a purpose related to use in context. It stands to reason that on this level of consumption, intentionality and communication have a greater role to play, not least in terms of manner and taste, although the consumption of even exquisite crafts can itself turn into a habitual practice.

To Sum Up: Paradigm Change or Ongoing Conversation?

Looking back at more than twenty years of concern with ancient Levantine miniature art, from 'Images as Media' (Uehlinger 2000) through 'Crafts and Images in Contact' (Suter/Uehlinger 2005) and 'Syrian and Phoenician Ivories of the Early First

⁶ See bibliography on Kuntillet Ajrud in Uehlinger 2016 and subsequent studies of this site and its materials.

⁷ I would argue that cooperation has significantly more to tell the historian once she or he acknowledges that it is observable (although anything but obvious) than if cooperation and boundary-crossing are predicted *a priori* by a theory operating on largely unproven assumptions. I suspect that our recent inclinations to identify fuzziness rather than distinctiveness in style reflect mainly the limits of our analytic capacities rather than an ancient historical reality.

Millennium BCE' (Cecchini et al. 2009) to 'Communities of Style' (Feldman 2014), 'Levantine Ivories of the Iron Age' (Suter 2015a) and this volume's call to venture 'Beyond Attribution?!', I first of all recognise tremendous progress in the theorisation of our research. I also recognise that my own thinking about the objects of our study has moved from more or less 'lacking theory' (that is, based on implicit and under-reflected assumptions) to a growing concern for and with theory. Reflecting on the process of interdisciplinary appropriation of social theory and the latter's seductive properties, I suggest that we step back and pause before committing to a putative paradigm change, that is before leaving the project of attribution behind. One crucial bifurcation apparent in recent studies seems to be whether attempts to classify and structure the bewildering variety of styles, which is obvious and recognised by all participants in the debate, should be refined (chronologically and spatially) and further differentiated, not least with the help of less subjective methodologies (Gansell et al. 2014; Cinquatti 2015). Or should such attempts be more or less abandoned in favour of a paradigm stressing fluidity and fuzziness, in which disentanglement is considered an impossible goal?

I hope to have made it sufficiently clear that my hesitation to fully embrace a new paradigm is not due to intellectual laziness or methodological conservatism. It is grounded in an epistemological commitment to the historical, that is, contextual and contingent explanation of ancient material

and visual culture and ultimately to the elucidation of both habitual and communicative practices of ancient Levantine societies. The networks invoked by protagonists of the new paradigm were, after all, networks of real people; and if it is certainly true that style cannot simply be conflated with locale, the communities of practice making up our hypothetical network(s) must have operated at particular locations in space and time. Network analysis gives us new tools to analyse social complexity, and it would no doubt be worthwhile to adopt some of these tools (rather than simply an abstract jargon) for the study of ancient ivory carvings. Social theory helps frame our study by providing conceptual tools to better articulate data, analysis and explanation. But it does not provide historical explanations *per se*, which is why I maintain that we cannot properly historicise our objects of study without recourse to attribution hypotheses – nor, I should add – without historicising ourselves in time and place.

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Irene J. Winter

The Bathwater and the Baby, or the Necessity of Multivariate Analysis

Another Look at Style and Attribution

Keywords: style, attribute, attribution, classification, affect, interdisciplinarity, chronology, multivariate analysis

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Summary

The present paper argues for keeping stylistic analysis and the concept of 'style' as an important component of the art-historical enterprise; that is, a necessary but not sufficient phase of making order from disparate elements and limited archaeological samples. From resultant clusters there emerges the possibility of establishing groupings based upon discernible sets of elements that can give rise to discussions of social and economic

issues, along with data on both production and inferred affect. Crucial in this regard is the rigorous and explicit articulation of criteria for group membership, along with an awareness that works falling outside of established clusters may eventually be understood once the limitations of available samples are recognised, whether projected into the future or through the introduction of further argument. Furthermore, an exploration of the continuous building and broadening of the contextual and intellectual framework of stylistic analysis suggests that the 'baby's' 'bathwater' is becoming ever clearer, and we need not abandon the enterprise of exploring the meaning of visual properties.

The 'Bathwater' and the 'Baby'

Speakers of colloquial English will have noticed that the present title reverses the standard order in the anglophone idiom of the 'baby' and the 'bathwater'. The rationale for this, I hope, will become apparent below. I began preparation for the conference by putting images and texts together in relation to discussions by various scholars toward a validation of (some) stylistic groups and (some) nomenclature as gathered from prior studies. The point of this exercise was to argue in favour of a suggestion not to throw the 'baby' (that is, identifiable 'style', based upon observations and analyses of visual properties) out with 'the bathwater' (a polluted medium unnecessary to classification).

In this, I thought to lay out what I perceived to be misuses of nomenclature and classification;

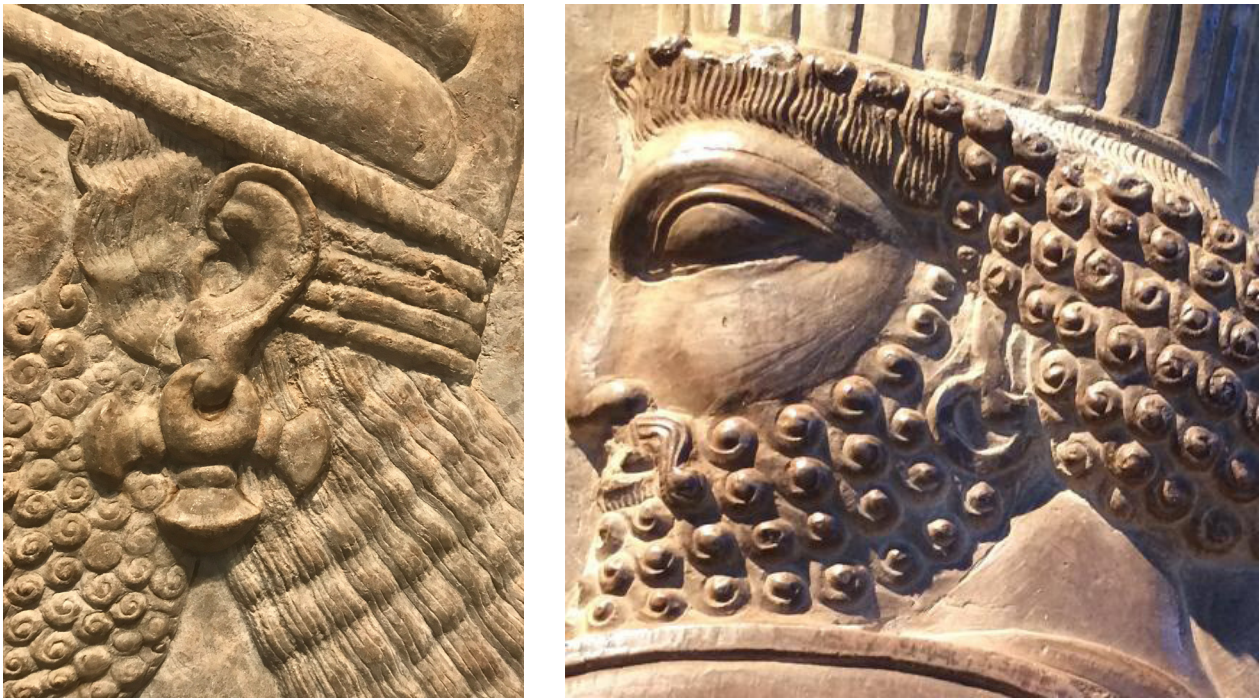


Fig. 1. Details from Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid reliefs: a) Detail of a winged genius, Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Iraq; Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum 1940.13 (open access); b) Fragment of a relief from Persepolis, Iran; National Museum of Iran (photograph: Lindsay Allen, used with permission).

however, along the way I both changed the title and, in part, shifted my argument toward a need for both ‘stylistic analysis’ and a broader context of cultural and historical surrounds.

It is apparent to many at present that ‘style’ as a monologic topic of analysis of archaeological or art-historical materials (along with other media such as literature, music, dance and fashion) may have had its day (Elsner 1996; Kubler 1962; Brückle et al. 2010; Brevern/Imorde 2014). In addition, it has become clear that ‘attribution’ as a primary consequence of description and classification – while a legitimate enterprise when seeking to establish ‘sets’ – cannot stand as a goal in itself. Instead, while I would argue not to throw out the baby (that is ‘style’) as a significant diagnostic tool, we have moved on toward new syntheses – hopefully more nuanced and inclusive when set in broader social and intellectual frameworks. That is to say, in present scholarship it becomes necessary to recognise that with ‘style’ as a single class of inquiry, much important information is left out of contemporary discourse. I therefore begin with a reflection on how the frame of reference for stylistic analysis has continually broadened over the past several decades.

Biases, Challenges and Progress

Dealing with the visual attributes of artefacts and their techniques of making has long been second nature to art historians and archaeologists. Moves toward classification tended to follow, creating groups made up of clusters of singularities based upon selected and oftentimes ranked attributes. The exercise of a trained eye can help to argue for dating, ethno-historical association and craftsmanship. One may see this clearly when observing details of two male heads rendered in relief, both dated to the first half of the 1st mill. BCE (see *fig. 1a* and *1b*). Without any further context, one is readily identified as a Neo-Assyrian genius, with tight but continuous beard curls and an oversized earring (*fig. 1a*), and the other can be recognised as an Achaemenid Persian ruler, showing a smaller earring and more three-dimensional beard curls (*fig. 1b*). In this case, chronology plays a significant role once tied to known (and occasionally inscribed) monuments.

And yet, it has long been recognised that the very selection of attributes on which to base such classifications can be charged with biases. For example, attributes of scale are frequently culturally



Fig. 2. Ivory furniture-fitting 'Lioness mauling a (Nubian?) youth' (BM 127412, trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

determined, as demonstrated by recent challenges to Western culture's privileging of 'big over small'. For ancient Mesopotamia, as but one example, the small size of cylinder seals does not *a priori* determine their status as 'minor arts' (although that is where images of seals and sealings were housed in the drawers of slide libraries where I have learned and taught). If indeed 'bigger is better' in some cases, then one would have to address what values were being propounded – gendered or otherwise – when the quality of seal-carving in miniature can not only mirror but even rival major sculptural relief programs. Meanwhile, thematic and semiotic connections between reliefs and seals can be overlooked due to differences in style (Winter 2000), or widely distributed portable forms in conventional styles may be dismissed as craft, rather than art, in defining an ancient Near Eastern 'canon' (Thomason 2014).

The Nimrud ivory corpus of the early 1st mill. BCE may serve as an additional case study for the concerns faced by the historian of art. The corpus, consisting of works both complete and fragmentary, is relatively large and permits both classification and subdivision. Yet, an outstanding example of a unique piece is a carving from Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud, often referred to as a 'Lioness mauling a (Nubian?) youth' (fig. 2) in the

British Museum. Due to its excavated context, the work's uniqueness does not call into question its authenticity. It rather foregrounds its mastery, hence 'quality', which by modern standards quite literally takes one's breath away. The natural inner curvature of the hollow portion of the tusk was used to embed the two figures in both a landscape and a sexualised embrace well before Classical takes on such themes (see, e.g., mythological motifs showing Leda and the swan, echoed much later by Bernini in the ecstasy of Saint Theresa). Certain artisans will always slip through our classificatory nets with their talent and invention.

These are just some of the variables that scholars of ancient art were traditionally expected to factor into their analyses, together with archaeological context, iconography, composition, material, technique, cross-media parallels, relevant texts and the application of available scientific analyses.¹

The first wave of more socially and materially grounded approaches in the 1960s and 1970s, along with new standards for publication, followed the movement then known as the 'New Archaeology' in Europe and the United States (see, e.g., Trigger 1989; Bernbeck 1997). Made explicit was the need to move beyond a 'myth and religion' focus in ancient studies based upon 19th cent. paradigms toward more modern constructs that included aspects of materiality, production and exchange within a particular socio-historical context. Insistence upon the social history of works has also led to considerable progress in understanding the carriers of 'style' as important components of social history (Appadurai 1986).

A subsequent wave of scholarship since the 1990s, while continuing many traditional practices and incorporating new data, questioned the purely 'processual' aspects of the 'New Archaeology'

¹ To probe these issues, one must also control relevant discussions in past and current literature – not merely in books and articles within a designated field, but also in scholarly reviews of volumes where a good deal of the debates in any given field was once understood to take place (see e.g., Winter 1992; 1998a; 2014 with respect to ivory carving). This is particularly true with respect to cylinder seals, along with works that come from the art market and have no known cultural or stratigraphical findspot. In this arena, lexicon is important: 'provenance' has come to signify a history of collecting as distinct from 'provenience' – a history of excavation and known depositional context.

and looked to the possibilities of reconstructing both ancient and modern identity and experience through a lens of material culture and textual data.

In addition to challenging new theoretical perspectives, this later phase comprised taking into consideration new field data, along with new concepts of land and environment, new technologies for analysis, plus more reading by analogy across cultures and territories, along with more responsible publication strategies.

At the same time as we have become more sophisticated in our own analyses over the past several decades, we have become better attuned to the degree to which a given historical era, the taste and sensibilities of subsequent scholarly investigators, recent theoretical paradigms and later audience demands will have privileged some questions over others and coloured our approaches to ancient materials.

Here, one has profited from the development of historical ‘reception theory’ that initially sprang from literary studies to see how archaeological materials had an impact on later eras and interpretive theories. That is, one can now see glimpses of synthesis in the pursuit of cultural meaning and historical agency. This has come together with studies on the historiography of our field and the preoccupations and methods of its founding figures (see, e.g., Moorey 1991; Bohrer 2003; Cancik-Kirschbaum/Gertzen 2021; Cholidis/Martin 2010; Baghdo et al. 2012). The materials coming from excavations in the Near and Middle East were received with excitement in the 19th cent. From antiquarian display rooms and recreations of actual finds for the modern market in the form of gold and silver personal ornaments, it is clear that Neo-Assyrian materials took Europe by storm – in sculpture and jewellery, along with painting, theatre and architecture (see, e.g., Bohrer 1998; 2003; Holloway 2004).

Aspects of all of the above have been echoed in the papers collected in this conference and volume. But no one has yet taken on the issue of what a given (stylistic) practice of filling all available space with intense action, versus a more serene composition of elements in un-charged space, might have meant to an audience in antiquity. That is, a developed argument of how ‘style’ itself

communicates via (visual) affect and therefore contributes to meaning is still needed.²

The broader historical continuities of some ancient Near Eastern motifs have only now begun to be addressed – for example, how ancient Near Eastern griffin slayers represent a continuity extending to early Christian warrior saints Michael and George. At the same time, contemporary artists have drawn on ancient materials, as seen in the work of Chicago-based artist Michael Rakowitz. His own family origins in Northern Iraq are signalled most explicitly in his preference for using Neo-Assyrian palace sculpture as sources – evident, for example, in the Assyrian *lamassu* set up in Trafalgar Square, London (the figure constructed entirely from discarded date-syrup containers). Entitled ‘The Invisible Enemy Does Not Exist (Lamassu of Nineveh, 2018)’, use of the Assyrian motif thus represents not only his contemporary artistic practice, but also his personal identity in a direct, if displaced, genetic lineage (Rakowitz 2018; see also Tugendhaft 2020, 63).

Now let us look at a few specifics of debates in stylistic analysis of the Nimrud ivories to illustrate where we have been in recent scholarly discussion, where we are at present and where we might be heading.

Nomenclature, Classification and Multivariate Interpretative Schemata for the Nimrud Ivories

With respect to attribution categories for 1st mill. BCE ivory carving and metal work, there has been much debate over governing (largely regional) stylistic categories designated ‘North Syrian’, ‘Phoenician’ and ‘South Syrian’. These loci have on occasion been replaced by the less geographically specific ‘Northern’, ‘Southern’ and ‘Intermediate’.

This issue has been the subject of much discussion, from my own reviews of Georgina Herrmann’s publications (Winter 1992; 1998a; 2000) to Marian Feldman’s book ‘Communities of Style’ (2014) and the work of several contributors to the present volume, including Claudia Suter, Dirk

² An attempt to signal this issue was included in Winter 2005.

Wicke and Christoph Uehlinger. It seems to me that more discussion is still needed as to whether geographical designations based upon arguments of findspot, posited centres of production and parallel presence in other media (such as fixed architectural reliefs) at known sites (see V. Herrmann, this volume) are more or less subjective decisions on the part of the analyst than a mixed terminology including unspecified geographical locators (e.g., ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’) that imply a combination of geography and a style-designated position suggested by the term ‘Intermediate’. Then, does the more recent use of the term ‘Levantine’ as a broad regional label yield a better descriptor for the creation and distribution of definable groups (see Suter 2015 and this volume)?

Just how further subdivisions of a particularly broad sub-group might ultimately be divided, inevitably leading to even smaller subdivisions, remains to be articulated. In this latter case, I would only stress that findspot does not necessarily distinguish areas of production from the phenomenon of distribution due to trade, conquest or gifting across zones in ancient times.

Equally needing more definition and discussion are the requisite criteria for the classifying and naming of stylistic sub-groups. An example of this problem may be seen in some scholars’ adherence to the shorthand of a ‘Flame and Frond Group’ distinguished by Georgina Herrmann (e.g., Herrmann 1989), while others dispute its relevance (e.g., Affanni 2009; Feldman 2014). As a gloss on this issue, I would cite Heinrich Wölfflin, Swiss art historian and one of the founding fathers of ‘style’ studies. In his ‘Principles of Art History’ (Wölfflin [1932] 1950), for example, Wölfflin put forward a series of paired variables to distinguish sets of European paintings. However, his more complete argument for clusters of attributes that constitute a particular ‘style’ has gone largely ignored. Practice in the field quickly singled out as the most meaningful of the dyadic sets that of ‘linear vs. painterly’, behaving as if that pair were both necessary and sufficient to description and classification. What I would stress here is that the isolation of single descriptive and constitutive elements such as ‘flame’ and ‘frond’ – while the aliteration scans well – quickly becomes reductive. Larger ‘clusters’ of attributes are needed and

should be applied in order to make possible more discrete sub-groupings, followed by an analysis of chronology with respect to the meanings thereof.

I am persuaded that we need more attention paid to what is necessary and sufficient for an argument in our field as we move forward. And in analysis, the use of multiple variables leading to significant clusters – applied to additional visual aspects such as posture, attendant iconographic attributes and distribution across functional classes of ‘object types’ – really should be addressed in order to define a given class. In short, I would argue that in order to determine production area, workshop attribution and/or groupings that are neither too large nor too small, such clusters are in the long run far better predictors than the presence or absence of individual elements (see Winter 2005, 415).

Arguments for the validity of discrete ivory ‘groups’ provides an ideal opportunity to probe what we do relevant to ‘classification’ for our contemporary scholarly purposes, as distinct from what ‘they’ were doing (or trying to signify) in antiquity. And the application of new approaches can help us to better probe ancient affect and thought.

What Are We Missing? Style, Affect and Meaning

As the field of enquiry shifts to new technologies, approaches and goals, a number of unresolved questions remain that continue to vex us: for example, how to assess ‘affect’ and potential emotional responses to stylistic groups in antiquity (see Wagner-Durand this volume), such as the more crowded and physically active aspects associated with the ‘North Syrian’ style as distinct from the more balanced and spacious dispositions of figures in the ‘Phoenician’ style mentioned above (see Feldman this volume; also Winter 2005). And where might the boundaries lie between groupings when individual works do not fall neatly into one set or another? Finally, a clear statement evaluating the quality of evidence might be required to validate proposed clusters.

In brief, the all-important question asking what data and analyses we are missing offers an articulation of some very contemporary issues on

the horizon. It also engages a further methodological problem: how our humanistic field deals with uncertainty – that is, missing categories, opaque texts, inadequate samples and partial data.

Anthropologists of an empirical bent may have done better in the old days under the rubric of ‘annihilating competing hypotheses’ before arriving at a conclusion or even opting for a favoured hypothesis. But even that empirical approach has now been challenged. In the above-mentioned case, one may – even should – explore the possibility that the flame markings on animal bodies cannot be understood as merely stylistic elements related to the unconscious expression of individual hand or place of manufacture. As a thought experiment in that challenge, what (if anything) might the markings signify? And then, what might their absence signify, since these markings are not consistently attested?

The flame-like markings on the haunches of animals were recognised early by Helene Kantor (Kantor 1956) as occurring in the Late Bronze Age and into the Early Iron Age in the Levant. Using the site of Tell Halaf as her test case, Kantor observed that such markings appeared on both ivory carvings and on sculpture. The same markings appear to be used as well for bulls, sphinxes, griffins and caprids (Cholidis/Martin 2010, 169–172). The question then should arise: could this be an example of ‘naturalism’, with the better craftsmen applying such markings to represent actual hair-whorls of the animal’s pelt? Or were the markings tied to recognised hands or workshops? Or could they have been artefacts of meaning, as a possible sign of the divine association of the animal? In brief, the question eventually arises whether one wastes one’s time attempting to determine if the hair-whorl is a topic relevant to ‘attribution’ – to individual hand, local workshop or regional production area – or instead, if it serves as an ‘attribute’ related to meaning (not unlike St. Catherine’s wheel) and should therefore be recognised as part of the iconography. Finally, could it on occasion be multivalent?

In the long run, as was made clear from the title of the present volume, there are times when one has to get ‘beyond attribution’ for its own sake and shift to more appropriate and multi-variate interpretative schemata. I would argue,

however, that, with respect to ‘style’ in particular, one equally must resist discarding former conceptual frames completely, when and if the concept remains relevant. What I am suggesting is an operative principle: test multiple explanatory hypotheses in the course of a publication and only then rank the robustness or the validity of each, discarding weaker competing hypotheses and arguing for some being more viable than others.

Contemporary Demands on the Field

Today the professional demands upon the archaeologist, art historian or historian working on materials from the ancient Near East are manifestly greater than envisioned even twenty to thirty years ago. In the era of my own formation, we were expected to deal with the then-current literature, gain familiarity with field techniques and interpretive validity through field experience, process new data and then undertake intense visual analysis and classification, all the while factoring in historical context. Today, we are further asked to add an awareness of historiography, culture, social organisation, materiality, possible ritual use of works and the mobility of objects. We are expected to be able to evaluate and incorporate the most recent textual studies and absorb new topics of inquiry and new techniques and technologies as they become necessary to the material under study.

We are then asked (and indeed, wish) to take into consideration the interests of host countries in new and challenging ways. This is long overdue, not only with respect to cultural heritage and cultural property issues, such as taking an active stance against illicit trafficking, but also in field training and much-needed protective efforts within those same countries. It no longer needs to be argued that providing opportunities for experience and study that might not be available in the home country is the right thing to do, but it may be necessary to work harder at making such opportunities operational. And finally, expeditions can support their host countries by budgeting and fund-raising for the building of facilities or public spaces (such as labs and local museums) within those same host countries.

At the same time, we must be aware of the crises that currently exist in the humanities, at least in the United States and parts of Europe, while cognisant of the global politics that determine our opportunities and funding. We need to be able to explore possibilities offered by digital humanities, while avoiding the fashionable but untested bandwagons of the moment. We need to resist the often 'presentist' intellectual fabric of many of our current universities.

As each of the attending Directors General of Antiquities noted in their respective contributions to the 12th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE) held remotely from Bologna (April 9–14, 2021), we all need to be working together to address endangered cultural history. This includes not losing sight of our responsibilities to the host countries of the Near and Middle East.

The same goes for an understanding of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, not only upon our fieldwork, but also upon our collective psyches, at home and abroad. We have a hunger to be back in the field, contributing to the cumulation of that knowledge to which we all aspire, along with travel to collections, libraries and sites relevant to current research.

What, Then, Can One Hope for The Future?

My own hopes for the future of our field are predicated upon continued learning as scholars in the context of host countries' needs and desires and an expanded field of inquiry for ourselves, students and colleagues. In that regard, a PhD research position listed recently on AWOL, the Ancient World Online website,³ laid out the current preparation and expertise desired for academic positions in the field. The job description specifically asked for control over the 'history, archaeology and languages of the Ancient Near East'. To this an ability to move into the interdisciplinary consumption and production of knowledge currently being espoused would be added (e.g., Fuller 2002; Winter 1998b). And to achieve this, one would need expertise with

respect to the opportunities offered by digital humanities, sophisticated data processing and related scholarly disciplines, no less than good chronological control of the materials.

We furthermore need to be acutely aware of the inevitable limitations of our data, our sampling procedures and what issues cannot responsibly be addressed at present. In anticipation of the 12th ICAANE meetings hosted from Bologna, the call for papers included a segment on 'Cognitive Archaeology'. Unfortunately, the topic attracted relatively few contributors. Yet, in direct opposition to the empirical goals of the 1970s New Archaeology that insisted that we were ill-equipped to become paleo-psychologists, the field has since opened to include patterns of thought and behaviour and is now at work to develop criteria for pursuing that goal.

One is further asked to be cognisant of historiography – both activities out in the field and as characteristic of one's intellectual era – and to be drawing upon quite sophisticated scientific techniques and technologies in the processing of our data.

In brief, serious interdisciplinary work is now called for, in which few of us have been trained and which few of us are capable of putting into practice. That is, we should apply these approaches with rigor, not just echo a current buzz as amateurs, whether with respect to multiculturalism, identity, phenomenology, landscape archaeology or new applications of computer programming and digital data processing. In brief, we need to be informed consumers, not tourists; and we need to take the time for mastery.

No single individual is likely to master all of the above-mentioned methodologies and theoretical constructs, however. Therefore, what we also face in the future is working in collaborative research teams. To this must be added addressing the needs of host countries for training in field experience and technology through local programs along with public exhibition spaces and equipment.

This global picture then is the inverse of the idiomatic 'baby and the bathwater' problem: not just avoiding throwing away what is valuable, but rather finding a way to put into practice inquiry across long-existing and formerly exclusionary

³ <<http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/>> (last access: 14.10.2025).

academic boundaries to mark the changing nature of our enterprise. What is more, we now realise that if one wants a more complete historical picture, knowing what the ‘baby’ was eating, or what health problems were being faced at a given moment in time, we have to preserve samples of the bathwater (see Anthes 2021; Vogel 2022)!

The Implications Are Clear: Keep Both the Bathwater and the Baby!

All this I turn over to the next generation. Many necessary steps are already understood and being taken. In the context of a broader enquiry into material classification, attribution and experience

– all of which are the among the consequences of rigorous stylistic analysis – the application of interdisciplinary methodologies and theories have already become essential. I would therefore close with an acknowledgment of how much we all learn from each other, and more than ever, must learn from each other, toward an expanding knowledge of the past and of ourselves.

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BEYOND ATTRIBUTION?

The concept of style has been central to art history and archaeology for most of their disciplinary history but has faced serious critique, especially since the 1960s. While some scholars argue for moving beyond style, others maintain its heuristic value. In the context of ancient Near Eastern archaeology and related disciplines, stylistic analysis has always played a vital role, while still oscillating between promise and challenge. Stylistic analysis has been crucial for questions of attribution, i. e. of origins, workshops, craftspeople, dates, contacts, and more. Recent scholarly perspectives have proposed alternative frameworks, such as understanding stylistic similarities as products of historically contingent communities of shared practices. The intertwined relationship between medium, style and meaning has also become an increasingly vital topic. This volume and the 2021 virtual conference on which it is based aimed to explore these developments and encourage discussion of style beyond (mere) attribution. The assembled papers concentrate on the highly interconnected visual cultures of the Late Bronze and Iron Age Near East, but also include a perspective from prehistoric European archaeology. Common themes of power dynamics in the production and consumption of style, rhetorical uses of style for ideological, aesthetic, or programmatic ends, and the embodiment of stylistic production emerge from these contributions. The final chapters take a historiographic view, assessing how far the connoisseurial approaches of the past have taken us and where the future of visual inquiry will lead.



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