

# Cultures in Contact

From Mesopotamia to  
the Mediterranean in the  
Second Millennium B.C.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART  
Symposia







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From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean  
in the Second Millennium B.C.

Edited by

Joan Aruz, Sarah B. Graff, and Yelena Rakic



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

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# CHRONOLOGY

	Southern Mesopotamia/Elam	Northern Mesopotamia	Syria and the Levant
2000 B.C. Middle Bronze	ISIN-LARSA PERIOD, 2004-1763  OLD BABYLONIAN PERIOD, 1894-1595  <i>Hammurabi of Babylon (1792-1750)</i> <i>Dadusha of Eshnunna (ca. 1780)</i>  <i>Samsu-iluna of Babylon (1749-1712)</i>	Amorite dynasties  OLD ASSYRIAN PERIOD, 1920-1740  <i>Shamshi-Adad I (1808-1776?)</i>  <i>Ishme-Dagan I (1775-?)</i>	MIDDLE BRONZE AGE, 2000-1600 OLD SYRIAN PERIOD, 2000-1600   <i>Yahdun-Lim of Mari (1810-1794)</i> Alalakh VII <i>Yarim-Lim of Alalakh (1780-1765?)</i> <i>Zimri-Lim of Mari (1775-1760)</i> Destruction of Mari, ca. 1760 <i>Immeya of Ebla (1750-1700)</i>
1600 B.C. Late Bronze	Destruction of Babylon, 1595 MIDDLE BABYLONIAN/ KASSITE PERIOD, 1595-1155   <i>Kara-indash (ca. 1415)</i> <i>Kurigalzu I (ca. 1390)</i>  <i>Kadashman-Enlil I (ca. 1370)</i> <i>Burnaburiash II (1359-1333)</i>  <i>Untash-Napirisha of Elam (1340-1300)</i> <i>Kurigalzu II (1332-1308)</i>   <i>Nazi-Maruttash (1307-1282)</i>   <i>Shagarakti-Shuriash (1245-1233)</i> <i>Kashtiliashu IV (1232-1225)</i>	MITANNI, 1500-1330 <i>Parattarna (ca. 1500)</i> <i>Saushtatar (?)</i>  <i>Artatama I (?)</i>  MIDDLE ASSYRIAN PERIOD, 1400-1000 <i>Eriba-Adad I (1390-1364)</i>   <i>Tushratta (1365-1330?)</i> <i>Ashur-uballit I (1363-1328)</i>   <i>Adad-nirari I (1305-1274)</i>  <i>Shalmaneser I (1273-1244)</i>  <i>Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207)</i>	LATE BRONZE AGE, 1600-1200/1150 MIDDLE SYRIAN PERIOD, 1600-1200/1150   Alalakh IV <i>Idrimi of Alalakh (ca. 1500)</i>    <i>Niqmaddu of Ugarit (1353-1318)</i> Destruction of Qatna, ca. 1340   Battle of Qadesh, ca. 1275 Treaty of Qadesh, ca. 1258 <i>Ammistamru II of Ugarit (1250-1210)</i>
ca. 1200/ 1150 B.C. Late Bronze/ Early Iron	  <i>Meli-Shipak (1186-1172)</i> <i>Shutruk-Nahunte of Elam (1185-1155)</i>  <i>Marduk-apla-iddina I (1171-1159)</i> End of Kassite dynasty, ca. 1155	  <i>Ashur-dan I (1178-1133)</i>   <i>Ashur-resha-ishi (1132-1115)</i> <i>Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076)</i>	BEGINNING OF IRON AGE, CA. 1200/1150  Destruction of Ugarit, ca. 1180

Anatolia	Egypt	Greek mainland	Crete/Cyclades
<p>OLD ASSYRIAN TRADING/ MERCHANT COLONY PERIOD <i>karum</i> Kanesh, 1950–1700</p> <p>Kültepe <i>karum</i> II (1950–1836)</p> <p>Kültepe <i>karum</i> Ib (1800–1700)</p> <p>HITTITE OLD KINGDOM (1650–1500) <i>Hattusili I</i> (1650–1620)</p> <p><i>Mursili I</i> (1620–1590)</p>	<p>MIDDLE KINGDOM Dynasty 12, 1981–1802 <i>Amenemhat I</i> (1981–1952) <i>Senusret I</i> (1961–1917)</p> <p><i>Amenemhat II</i> (1919–1885)</p> <p>Töd Treasure <i>Senusret II</i> (1887–1878) <i>Senusret III</i> (1878–1840) <i>Amenemhat III</i> (1859–1813) <i>Amenemhat IV</i> (1813–1805)</p> <p>Dynasty 13, 1802–1640</p> <p><i>Neferhotep I</i> (1722–1711)</p> <p>SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD (HYKSOS), 1640–1550</p>	<p>MIDDLE HELLADIC, 2090–1625</p> <p>LATE HELLADIC (LH) I/EARLY MYCENAEAN PERIOD, 1625–1525</p>	<p>MIDDLE MINOAN (MM) IB–IIA–B/ PROTOPALATIAL PERIOD, 1950–1750</p> <p>MM IIIA–B/NEOPALATIAL PERIOD, 1750–1625</p> <p>MMIIB–LATE MINOAN (LM) IA/ LATE CYCLADIC (LC) I, 1625–1525</p>
<p><i>Telipinu</i> (1525–1500)</p> <p>HITTITE MIDDLE KINGDOM (1500–1344)</p> <p><i>Tudhaliya I/II</i> (1430–1390)</p> <p><i>Tudhaliya III</i> (1360–1344)</p> <p>HITTITE NEW KINGDOM/ HITTITE EMPIRE (1344–1200) <i>Suppiluliuma I</i> (1344–1322)</p> <p><i>Mursili II</i> (1321–1295)</p> <p>Uluburun shipwreck, ca. 1300 <i>Muwattalli II</i> (1295–1272)</p> <p><i>Hattusili III</i> (1267–1237)</p> <p><i>Tudhaliya IV</i> (1237–1209)</p>	<p><i>Kamose</i> (1552–1550)</p> <p>NEW KINGDOM Dynasty 18, 1550–1295 <i>Ahmose</i> (1550–1525)</p> <p><i>Thutmose I</i> (1504–1492) <i>Thutmose III</i> (1479–1425) <i>Hatshepsut</i> (1473–1458)</p> <p><i>Amenhotep II</i> (1427–1400)</p> <p><i>Thutmose IV</i> (1400–1390) <i>Amenhotep III</i> (1390–1352)</p> <p><i>Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten</i> (1353–1336)</p> <p><i>Tutankhamun</i> (1336–1327)</p> <p><i>Haremhab</i> (1323–1295)</p> <p>Dynasty 19, 1295–1186 <i>Seti I</i> (1294–1279) <i>Ramesses II</i> (1279–1213)</p> <p><i>Merneptah</i> (1213–1203)</p>	<p>Shaft Graves at Mycenae</p> <p>LH IIA, 1525–1450</p> <p>LH IIB, 1450–1425</p> <p>LH IIIA:1, 1425–1375</p> <p>LH IIIA:2 (EARLY), 1375–1325</p> <p>LH IIIA:2 (LATE)–IIB/LATE MYCENAEAN PERIOD, 1325–1200</p> <p>Theban Hoard</p>	<p>Thera eruption, ca. 1525? LM IB, 1525–1450/LC II, 1525–1425</p> <p>LM II/FINAL PALATIAL PERIOD, 1450–1425</p> <p>LM IIIA:1/LC III (EARLY), 1425–1375</p> <p>LM IIIA:2 (EARLY), 1375–1325/ LC III (MIDDLE), 1375–1200</p> <p>LM IIIA:2 (LATE)–LM IIB/ POSTPALATIAL PERIOD, 1325–1200 Destruction of palace at Knossos</p>
<p>Destruction of Hattusa, ca. 1200</p> <p>Neo-Hittite and Aramean states</p>	<p>Dynasty 20, 1186–1070 <i>Ramesses III</i> (1184–1153)</p> <p><i>Ramesses IV</i> (1153–1147)</p>		<p>LM IIIC/LC III (LATE), 1200–1125</p>



# Introduction

The exhibition “Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.,” held in 2008–9 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, demonstrated the cultural enrichment that emerged from the intensive interaction of civilizations from western Asia to Egypt and the Aegean in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. During this critical period in human history, powerful kingdoms and large territorial states were formed. Rising social elites created a demand for copper and tin, as well as for precious gold and silver and exotic materials such as lapis lazuli and ivory to create elite objects fashioned in styles that reflected contacts with foreign lands. This quest for metals—along with the desire for foreign textiles—was the driving force that led to the establishment of merchant colonies and a vast trading network throughout central Anatolia during the early second millennium B.C. Texts from palaces at sites from Hattusa (modern Boğazköy) in Hittite Anatolia to Amarna in Egypt attest to the volume and variety of interactions that took place some centuries later, creating the impetus for the circulation of precious goods, stimulating the exchange of ideas, and inspiring artistic creativity. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence for these far-flung connections emerges out of tragedy—the wreckage of the oldest known seagoing ship, discovered in a treacherous stretch off the southern coast of Turkey near the promontory known as Uluburun. Among its extraordinary cargo of copper, glass, and exotic raw materials and luxury goods is a gilded bronze statuette of a goddess—perhaps the patron deity on board, who failed in her mission to protect the ship.

To explore the themes of the exhibition—art, trade, and diplomacy, viewed from an international perspective—a two-day symposium and related scholarly events

allowed colleagues to explore many facets of the multicultural societies that developed in the second millennium B.C. Their insights, which dramatically illustrate the incipient phases of our intensely interactive world, are presented largely in symposium order, beginning with broad regional overviews and examinations of particular archaeological contexts and then drawing attention to specific artistic and literary evidence for interconnections. In this introduction, however, their contributions are viewed from a somewhat more synthetic perspective, one that focuses attention on the ways in which ideas in this volume intersect to enrich the ongoing discourse on the themes elucidated in the exhibition.

## MESOPOTAMIA, SYRIA, AND ANATOLIA: OVERLAND AVENUES OF EXCHANGE

In one of the more theoretical papers in the volume, Giorgio Buccellati addresses the “forces that shaped the world—beyond Babylon.” He focuses on the Hurrian identity of the northeast Syrian site of Urkesh, and approaches questions regarding the boundaries that define cultural groups and the foreign stimuli that transform them. Glenn Schwartz discusses the changing relationship of Mesopotamia and Syria between the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, when the Amorite domination of the two areas yielded to the formation of territorial states—Kassite and Mitanni—and Syria’s movement into the eastern Mediterranean cultural sphere. This reinforces the picture presented by Michel Al-Maqdissi, whose intimate knowledge of the geography, settlements, and finds from the northern Levant, as well as of the textual evidence, permits him to reconstruct trade routes from Tell Sianu to Qatna. Al-Maqdissi focuses attention on the strategic roles of inland Syria and the Levantine coastal cities in exchange networks that extended across the Mediterranean.

Within western Syria, the rich artistic culture of palatial society in Old Syrian Ebla is illuminated by Paolo Matthiae, who emphasizes the architectural and stylistic

continuity in the region, which extends into the Iron Age, placing special emphasis on the iconography of divinities such as Ishtar *Eblaitu* and Haddad. At the same time, he notes that Egyptian artistic styles—so prevalent in Late Bronze Age Syria—are already manifest in the locally produced hippopotamus ivory furnishings found in Middle Bronze Age Ebla, a time when a similar impetus is evident in the ivories attributed to the trading town of Achemhöyük in central Anatolia.

The period of the Old Assyrian Trading Colonies in Anatolia is the focus of an essay by Karen Rubinson. Her convincing discussion of the parallels between the glyptic depictions from the central Anatolian *karum* of Kültepe and the imagery on three silver vessels from kurgans in Georgia and Armenia highlights the relevance of the south Caucasus in discussions of the emerging trading networks of the early second millennium B.C. Rubinson also addresses the role of imports, such as the Trialeti bucket, in providing visual models for scenes on the goblets that glorify local rulers through conquest, the hunt, and ritual feasting. A few decades later, in the Middle Bronze Age palace of Alalakh, we also have much evidence for artistic and cultural diversity. Aslihan Yener describes the site as “straddling the trade route between Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean Sea,” nurturing “a fusion of influences on the indigenous traditions.” Among the finds discussed are fragments of stone relief sculpture that appear to have formed the support of an elaborate royal throne or enthroned statue, with winged sphinxes or griffins that would have flanked the seated ruler (or deity)—an arrangement that can be traced back to the Neolithic period in Anatolia and persists in the Near East, Egypt, and the Aegean world.

Exotic materials such as ivory were used to create elaborate furnishings during the Bronze Age, among them the sphinx- and lion-shaped furniture legs from central Anatolia. They are made of hippopotamus canines and incisors—the predominant

source of ivory during the Bronze Age—with a large number transported on the Uluburun ship. Yet, startling new evidence of elephant skeletal remains from the Royal Palace of Qatna has changed our picture regarding the local availability of elephant ivory. Peter Pfälzner discusses these remarkable discoveries in his essay on elephant hunting in Syria and Mesopotamia, reconstructing possible elephant habitats and interpreting the ritual and practical implications of elephant bones.

#### MARITIME ROUTES AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Maritime routes and contacts alluded to in the ancient texts have also been revealed by tracing goods that traveled across the Mediterranean, as well as works of art that demonstrate a fusion of styles and stimuli. The earliest periods of interaction between Crete and the eastern Mediterranean world are surveyed by Malcolm Wiener, who reviews an array of imported objects and, perhaps even more significantly, imported concepts such as the monumentality and literacy that emerge with the inception of the palatial period on the island. Recognizing overwhelming influences from Egypt rather than the Levant, he proposes that contacts between Crete and the Nile Valley during the twenty-first–twentieth century B.C. were direct, avoiding the Mediterranean coastal route. He cites textual evidence for Egyptian control of early sea transport and draws attention to an early Minoan depiction of a sailing vessel.

Eric Cline, in his overview of Aegean, Near Eastern, and Egyptian relations, refers to an Ugaritic text mentioning a merchant ship arriving from Caphtor, which has been associated with Crete, and also discusses the famous list of Aegean sites on the Kom el-Hetan statue base. The role of Egypt as a seafaring power has been reassessed by Cheryl Ward, based on archaeological discoveries on its Red Sea coast. The finds indicate the Egyptians’ access to Mediterranean cedar and their mastery of crafting



the seagoing ships necessary to acquire exotic goods from the land of Punt during the Middle Kingdom. In order to learn more about Egyptian seafaring, Ward and her team built *Min of the Desert*, based on representations of Egyptian ships on the Punt reliefs at Deir el-Bahri. The seaworthy *Min* then voyaged along the ancient Red Sea route.

Another significant maritime excavation was conducted by the father of underwater archaeology, George F. Bass, who returned to Cape Gelidonya five decades after he initiated explorations at that site and farther west along the Anatolian coast at Uluburun. Bass shares some recent conclusions based on previous and new finds, reinforced by analyses of the extraordinary wealth of material from the Uluburun ship.

In *Beyond Babylon*, the exhibition's catalogue, Cemal Pulak's chapter on the Uluburun ship carefully addressed questions regarding the nature of the objects on board—whether diplomatic gifts, items of trade, or the crew's personal effects—drawing conclusions about the origin of the ship in the southern Levant, where it was loaded, and the westward route of its voyage. Yuval Goren's essay outlines his own primary research on the sources of materials found in the wreck, which identify the ship as Canaanite, with a port of origin along the Carmel coast of Israel. Goren's analysis of Canaanite jars and anchors places their origins largely in the area from the vicinity of Mount Carmel to Tyre and Sidon. Reinforcing Sidon's role in international exchange, Claude Doumet-Serhal traces its Mediterranean routes on the basis of the rich and varied finds at the site. She emphasizes the geological formations along its coastline, which created Sidon's naturally protected rock-cut harbor and an offshore anchorage for transient foreign crafts.

Doumet-Serhal's work forms an interesting juxtaposition to that of Goren, who concludes that the Canaanite states of the southern Levant—the home port of the Uluburun ship—played a limited role in international exchange. His assessment of Egyptian, Hittite,

and Aegean relations leads to a new interpretation of the role of Egypt in its transfer of a wealth of raw materials and prestige objects toward the Greek mainland.

#### TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FOR INTERCONNECTIONS

Goren's reconstruction of the events that might have involved Egypt and the Aegean in such an exchange is based on cuneiform documents that provide evidence for the ongoing rivalry between Egypt and Hatti and the rising power of the Aegean kingdom of Ahhiyawa. This is a subject examined by Cline, who in his overview of eastern Mediterranean interconnections interprets the Akkadian-inscribed Mycenaean sword found at Hattusa as booty captured by the Hittite king after suppressing the so-called Assuwa Rebellion near Troy.

Texts are invaluable for the historical interpretation of material culture, but as Cline and other authors in this volume elucidate, evidence for interconnections is also embedded in language itself, and literary and religious writings allude to common intellectual traditions and related belief systems. While Mycenaean Greek documents offer little evidence for historical events, the use of loan words for foreign goods in Linear B provides clues to their original sources, as elaborated in Cline's essay. By contrast, a variety of documents allows for the reconstruction of the Near Eastern world system from multiple points of view during the Bronze Age, as Marc Van De Mieroop makes clear. In his essay he delves into an area that has not often been approached from an international perspective: the study of ancient Near Eastern literature. Van De Mieroop questions the conventional view of Babylonian dominance by illustrating the diversity of the active literary culture of the wealthy and important emporium of Ugarit. Using the manuscripts of the Epic of Gilgamesh found at Ugarit, Emar, and Hattusa, he recognizes their creative engagement with the epic, which must be considered an early work of world literature.

Gary Beckman's in-depth study of Hittite religious beliefs opens another window onto interrelations between Mesopotamia and Anatolia during the Late Bronze Age, at a time when cuneiform writing was adopted in the Hittite court. Providing us first with a comprehensive picture of the Hittite divine world, he points out similarities with Mesopotamian ideas regarding the role of the ruler and the creation of mankind. Turning his attention to the distinctive solar deities in the Hittite and Mesopotamian pantheons, he recognizes a significant infiltration of Mesopotamian concepts into Hittite religious practice. The solar dimension of the Hittite pantheon and kingship is also the subject of the essay by Beate Pongratz-Leisten, who explores the adoption of both pictorial and pictographic depictions of the sun as a symbol of universal control. Tracing the history of this form of expression of ultimate power, she observes similarities in Anatolian, Mitannian, and Assyrian traditions in the context of the "Club of the Great Powers" of the Amarna period, while shared imagery such as the winged disk is differentiated in its details, in order to convey very distinctive messages in each culture.

#### THE IMAGERY OF INTERACTION

The imagery of interaction is expressed in various ways in the visual arts: on Egyptian wall paintings depicting foreigners, on Minoan-style frescoes from palaces around the Mediterranean littoral, on luxurious ivory furniture with intercultural motifs and styles, and on drinking vessels that exhibit shared social and ritual practices. Centuries before scenes of foreign envoys from the Aegean and the Near East become quite common in the entry chambers of the tombs of Theban nobles, a procession of "Asiatic" traders or metalworkers appears in paintings from the tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan. Janice Kamrin gives a nuanced interpretation of these figures, with their distinctive garments and foreign weapons, suggesting that they symbolize the transition between the chaotic world of their

foreign desert homeland and the ordered realm of pharaonic Egypt.

About the same time, according to Robert Koehl, Minoan painters (and perhaps acrobats) appear to have traveled as far as inland Syria and participated in the embellishment of the famous palaces at Mari and, later, at Alalakh, absorbing artistic stimuli that become manifest in the art of succeeding eras on Crete. Koehl also notes that the Cycladic affinities of the Tel Kabri miniature paintings suggest traveling painters from these islands at a time when figural imagery covered the surfaces of large pottery vessels at Akrotiri. This occurs in the phase preceding the artistic explosion on Thera, when superb figural frescoes set the stage for a brilliant era of Minoan wall painting and the transmission of Cretan artistry to Egypt and Syria. Christos Doumas offers an economic perspective on the introduction of "orientalia" into the Theran repertoire, connecting it with the location of the island on the copper route between Cyprus and Crete and citing the discovery of paraphernalia of metal production at Akrotiri as intimating Cycladic involvement in the trade and production of metals.

The revelation of Minoan-style frescoes in the palaces of Tell el-Dab'a with apparent ties to Knossos and frescoes with Theran affinities at Qatna has revolutionized our view of the impact of Aegean civilization on the societies of the Near East and Egypt, although authors differ in the interpretation of the timeline of their execution. Manfred Bietak details the extraordinary discovery of a great range of Minoan-style frescoes and what appears to be a Minoan-style throne room in the royal residence at a site he identifies with the renowned pharaonic naval base of Peru-nefer. He interprets the Minoan presence in the Nile Delta as perhaps the result of a treaty that brought Cretan ships to this important port at about the time that envoys from Keftiu were illustrated in the tombs of Egyptian nobles at Thebes.

Peter Pfälzner offers a different explanation for the Aegean-style paintings that

embellished the Royal Palace at the inland site of Qatna. Dating the paintings to the early rather than the latest phase of the palace, based on parallels with the Thera frescoes, he interprets the introduction into Qatna of the fresco technique and Minoan pigments, as well as the creation of an “Aegeo-Syrian” style, to be the consequence of continuous, intimate interaction between Minoan and Syrian craftsmen in a workshop environment. The result is imagery bearing a specific resonance related to cultic practices at Qatna.

Portable objects that traveled, although divorced from their original settings, offer a rich avenue for understanding interactions across the Mediterranean world. Some are obvious imports, while others exhibit a fusion of artistic styles that transcends regional traditions. As Christine Lilyquist points out, prestige items with “international style” imagery, often made of precious materials such as gold, silver, and ivory, are indicative of the multicultural world of the Late Bronze Age in which royal courts conducted exchanges, but were not all necessarily created to intentionally project a specific message or even to circulate in the diplomatic sphere. Works in ivory are the subject of the essay by Marian Feldman, who highlights the universal esteem in which this exotic material was held throughout the ancient world. She notes its association with palatial power, trade, and diplomacy, and draws attention to its international repertoire of motifs. At the same time, as discussed by this author, images that project a sense of conquest and control—either in the form of human hunters confronting lions or felines attacking prey—occur on the intercultural style glyptic of the Mediterranean region, which appears to have functioned as more than simply an administrative tool of international exchange.

Goldworking is treated by Kim Benzel, who focuses on a very different expression of powerful forces in the form of so-called Astarte pendants. Exploring the concept

of sexual allure, she sheds light on their emphasis on explicit female nudity. “Women with liquid eyes,” mentioned in the Amarna Letters along with horses and chariots, are cited by Annie Caubet in her discussion of the social dimension of interaction. These subjects embellish drinking vessels discovered at Ugarit, providing evidence for banquet and libation rituals that were partially informed by foreign practices and enacted using exotic wares. Among the predominant drinking vessel forms are those that are zoomorphic. Providing a comprehensive picture of their various forms and functions in the Hittite and Aegean worlds, Robert Koehl clarifies the terms “*bibru*” and “*rhyton*.” Experimenting with the shapes of these vessels and their pouring holes, he suggests which types of liquids were imbibed, as well as how they were flavored.

In the “Beyond Babylon” show, we enjoyed a singular opportunity to view an impressive, indeed, unique array of raw materials and precious goods that had once made their way to royal courts and merchant towns along trade routes that extended from the Mesopotamian heartland to the Mediterranean, inspiring transformations that are manifest in the rich intellectual, religious, and artistic record of the Bronze Age, stimulating the research reflected in this volume. At the symposium, the last word went to Jack Sasson, whose reflections on past scholarship and thoughts regarding future methods offered hope for advances that will capture even more fully the social dimensions of interaction. Published here, his essay reminds us that the legacy of the interconnected world of the second millennium B.C. continues to resonate with us today, as demonstrated through the remarkable objects brought together in “Beyond Babylon,” and through the vital intellectual contributions in the pages that follow.

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Joan Aruz, Sarah B. Graff, and Yelena Rakic





# The First International Age



# An Amorite Global Village: Syrian–Mesopotamian Relations in the Second Millennium B.C.

When considering Syria and Mesopotamia in antiquity, scholars have often conceptualized the relationship between the two regions in terms of asymmetry, of center and periphery. Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, is celebrated as the birthplace and heartland of cities and civilization. Syria, in contrast, seems to be in the shadow of its formidable neighbor to the southeast politically, culturally, and economically. An asymmetric relationship between the two regions can be seen as far back as the Ubaid period in the fifth millennium B.C., when Mesopotamian pottery and other material culture were adopted all over Syria, eastern Anatolia, and western Iran. While the participants in a recent symposium on the Ubaid culture emphasized the autonomy of the non-Mesopotamians in determining which (if any) Ubaid material-culture styles to adopt, it still must be acknowledged that the process was unidirectional, from southern Mesopotamia to the north.<sup>1</sup> In the Uruk expansion of the fourth millennium B.C., Mesopotamian material culture proliferated over the same considerable area but with a greater diversity of types and with evidence of urban colonization.<sup>2</sup> The late

third millennium B.C. brought yet another Mesopotamian incursion, this time of a military character, in which Sargon of Akkad and his successors ransacked and apparently subjugated a good part of Syria, particularly in the Jezireh.<sup>3</sup> These episodes of expansion are usually understood to have been economically motivated, with Mesopotamia extracting natural resources such as metals, timber, and stone from its neighbors. Certainly, a diversity of raw materials was available from the regions encircling Mesopotamia, while Mesopotamia itself was bereft of most of the natural resources necessary for luxury goods and even some essentials.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, other factors are also likely to have been significant, with ideology not the least of these.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, this pattern of a Mesopotamian core acting upon its passive Syrian periphery has come under increasing critical scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> Research has shown that the relationships between Mesopotamia and its neighbors were neither as one-sided nor as asymmetric as was first thought. We are more attentive now to the agency exercised by people in the so-called peripheries, who made their own decisions about which Mesopotamian styles and technologies to adopt and which to reject.

The first four centuries of the second millennium B.C., the Middle Bronze Age, supply a particularly compelling illustration of the complexities of the Syrian–Mesopotamian relationship. In one sense, this period offers an example to contradict the core-and-periphery model, as Jean-Marie Durand has elucidated.<sup>7</sup> Syria and Mesopotamia were linked culturally, economically, politically, and ethnically, without an obvious advantage of one side over the other. The Syro–Mesopotamian world had become a “global village,” an *oikoumene*, in which relatively equivalent political forces alternately struggled and cooperated with one another. And yet a closer look at the evidence reveals that Mesopotamia’s traditional cultural preeminence had not been totally eclipsed. In this brief essay, I

will explore some of the ways in which this world order manifested itself and some of the issues involved in understanding it.

#### THE AMORITE TAKEOVER

Central to the developments of the Middle Bronze Age in Syria and Mesopotamia was the group known as the Amorites. **Martu** in Sumerian, *amurru* in Akkadian, the term “Amorite” refers to people who originated in Syria but were also living in large numbers in southern Mesopotamia by the late third millennium B.C.<sup>8</sup> Given their kinship ties and common West Semitic language, it is reasonable to understand Amorite as an ethnic term, although other interpretations have been advanced.<sup>9</sup>

While a significant number of Amorites were pastoral nomads tending herds of sheep and goats, others were sedentists practicing agriculture or other economic pursuits, or some combination of the above. Whether pastoralist or sedentist, the Amorites were organized according to kin affiliations, in groups that have been termed “tribes,” “sub-tribes,” and “tribal confederacies,” social structures that were foreign to Mesopotamia up to this point but may have been more common in Syria.<sup>10</sup> Tribal organization is typical of pastoralist groups worldwide, and so its prevalence among the Amorites might be linked to the frequency of pastoralist lifestyles amongst them. Since tribal organization was integrated into the states of the period, Lauren Ristvet characterizes these polities as “tribal states,” with their own peculiar characteristics and trajectories.<sup>11</sup>

In a reversal of the usual movement of ideas, technologies, and people from Mesopotamia to Syria, Amorites from Syria migrated in large numbers into southern Mesopotamia in the late third millennium B.C. The kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur (2112–2004 B.C.) were troubled by the influx of Amorites into their domain, considering them dangerous and labeling them uncivilized barbarians.<sup>12</sup> As is the case with present-day illegal immigrants in the United States, the Amorites were seen as an external threat, yet at the

same time they occupied diverse roles within Mesopotamian society. Also as in the case of present-day “illegals,” the authorities built a long wall in an attempt to keep them out. The construction was designated an “Amorite wall” and entitled *Muriq-tidnim*, “it keeps Tidnum at a distance,” Tidnum being one of the most important Amorite groups.<sup>13</sup> The wall, apparently, was ineffectual.

By about 2000 B.C. (Middle Chronology), the Third Dynasty of Ur had collapsed under the weight of external pressures and internal weaknesses. In its wake, a number of individual city-states appeared. Remarkably, almost all of them had Amorites at their head: the “illegals” had come out on top. It is clear that the new rulers’ Amorite identity was important to them. In addition to adopting traditional Mesopotamian titles, many called themselves *rabiān amurrim*, “prince of the Amorites.” Others assumed titles referring to their membership in Amorite subgroups: the ruler of Kisurra was styled *rabiānum* of the Rabbaeans, and Sin-kashid of Uruk was designated ruler of the Amnanum.<sup>14</sup> The most famous Amorite monarch, Hammurabi, sometimes referred to himself as “king of all the Amorite land” (**lugal da-ga-an<sup>kur</sup>mar-dú**), while Kudur-mabuk of Larsa was designated “father of the Amorites.”<sup>15</sup> According to Piotr Michalowski, these rulers’ legitimacy was partly based on their claims of high-born lineage within the Amorite kinship units.<sup>16</sup> In Syria, the Amorite homeland, Amorites presided over new political entities; foremost among these were Mari, Yamhad, and Qatna.

We do not yet fully understand why Amorites moved in large numbers into southern Mesopotamia. Scholars hypothesize that environmental or sociopolitical crises in Syrian urban societies impelled local peasants and pastoralists to seek out economic opportunities or better pastureland in Mesopotamia, but data supporting such hypotheses are not as substantial as one would hope.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, we are largely ignorant as to why Amorites were able to take charge of the majority of cities and states in early second

millennium B.C. Syria and Mesopotamia. One might cite the military advantage that pastoralist groups, given their mobility, can have over sedentists, or it is possible that Amorite mercenaries took advantage of systemic weaknesses and assumed power over the cities they had been hired to defend.<sup>18</sup> Norman Yoffee has proposed that the kinship ties between groups of Amorites operating in diverse locations allowed them to cooperate and mobilize effectively.<sup>19</sup> All of these factors may well have been significant. In any case, it should be noted that the Amorites were neither the first nor the last outsider group to acquire political hegemony in Mesopotamia; in the later third millennium B.C. the Gutian dynasty assumed power, as did the Kassites and Aramaeans in later periods. The reasons for the success of these groups likewise remain to be fully elucidated.

Third millennium B.C. Syrian textual sources from Ebla, Tell Beydar, and Mari say very little about Martu or the Amorites, despite their presumed origins in Syria. It is not clear whether they were localized in a relatively small region of western Syria or occupied a broader expanse.<sup>20</sup> Encouraging new results from archaeological survey and excavation in the steppe east of Raqqa and in the Jebel Bishri region, the supposed homeland of the Amorites, allow for the identification of architectural and mortuary features possibly associated with pastoralists and tribally organized groups, but the identification of the groups as Amorites is as yet conjectural.<sup>21</sup>

#### A SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN *OIKOUMENE*

The acquisition of political power over both Syria and Mesopotamia by members of the same ethnic group had significant ramifications. For the first time, rulers throughout Syria and Mesopotamia shared ties of kinship. As is well known, the ancestors claimed by the Amorite kings of Babylon, extending back to kings “who lived in tents,” were the same as those cited by the Upper Mesopotamian Amorite conqueror Shamshi-Adad.<sup>22</sup> In this world dominated

by Amorites, neither Mesopotamia nor Syria appears to have been privileged as a political superior. In the words of the well-known letter written by Itur-Asdu to his master, king Zimri-Lim of Mari: “There is no king who is strong on his own: ten to fifteen kings follow Hammurabi of Babylon, Rim-Sin of Larsa the same, Ibal-pi-El of Eshnunna the same, Amut-pi-El of Qatna the same, and 20 kings follow Yarim-Lim of Yamhad.”<sup>23</sup> If any of these rulers was accorded an advantage, it was Yarim-Lim, based in northern Syria, who had the largest following of kings.

As the documents from Mari reveal, the Amorite kings of Syria and Mesopotamia were in continual contact, sending emissaries from court to court to ascertain the intentions and actions of each ruler and to make deals.<sup>24</sup> The kings themselves not infrequently traveled long distances to visit one another.<sup>25</sup> Alliances were concluded between such polities as Yamhad and Babylon, and Mari and Eshnunna, only to be revoked shortly thereafter. Dynastic marriages also took place, as between Zimri-Lim and Shiptu, daughter of the king of Yamhad, and between Shamshi-Adad’s son Yasmah-Addu and the daughter of the king of Qatna.<sup>26</sup>

Trade flowed freely throughout the Amorite *oikoumene* and beyond, usually without a distinct advantage to either Syria or Mesopotamia. The Old Assyrian merchants’ routes to central Anatolia traversed the Syrian Jezireh without impediment. Evidence of a Babylonian trading network crossing Syria and reaching into southeastern Anatolia has also materialized. In 2007, the Italian-Turkish joint excavations at Tilmen Höyük, north of Aleppo in the Islahiye Plain of southeastern Turkey, found a door sealing with the inscription of the scribe Lagamal-gamil, servant of Sumu-la-el, king of Babylon, a predecessor of Hammurabi. The sealing indicates that a Babylonian performed administrative tasks at this site far from his homeland. The excavator, Nicolò Marchetti, posits that the sealing provides evidence of a commercial





Fig. 1a, b. Diorite fragment of a victory stele showing (a) the king smiting his enemy and (b) a bound (royal?) captive. Mesopotamia. Old Assyrian period, reign of Shamshi-Adad I (?), ca. 1808–1776 B.C. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 2776

network, operating from Babylon and Sippar through Syria and into Anatolia, with the aim of acquiring Anatolian raw materials.<sup>27</sup> That it was the Mesopotamians and not the Syrians who initiated such trading systems is not surprising, given the scarcity or absence of metals, wood, and precious stone in Mesopotamia and its significant distance from sources of such materials.

The mobility of Amorite pastoral nomadic groups crossing territories in both Syria and Mesopotamia also contributed to the interrelated world of the two regions. As Durand, Dominique Charpin, and their team of Mari specialists have observed, there is a curious phenomenon of “mirror toponymy,” in which the same geographical name



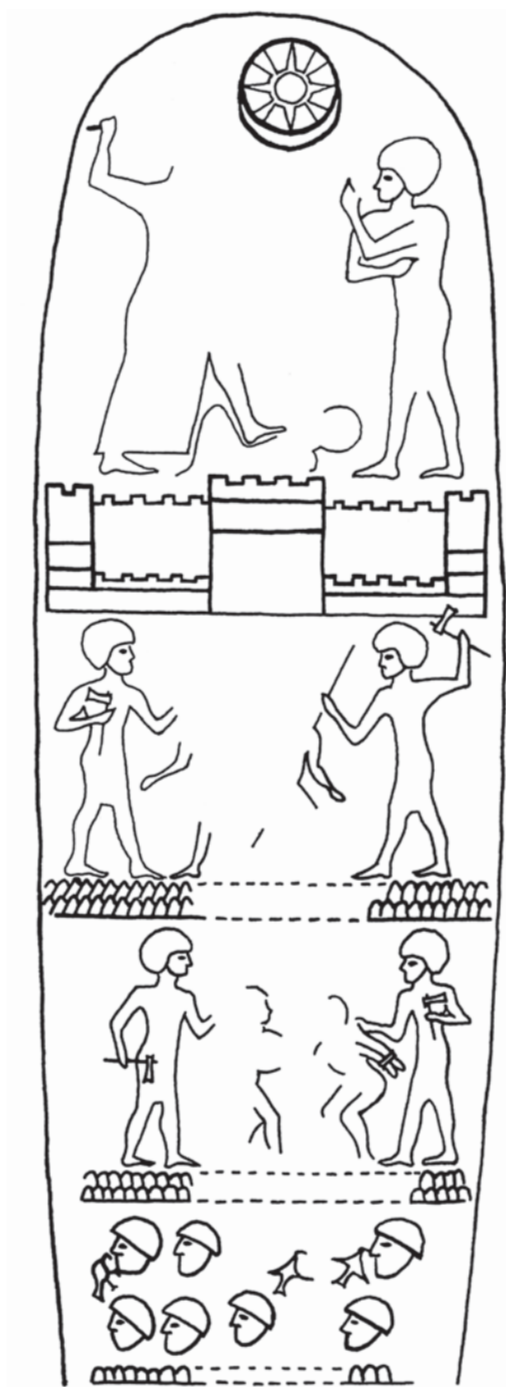


Fig. 2. Drawing of victory stele found in a field near Tell Asmar. Old Babylonian period, reign of Dadusha, ca. 1780 B.C. Iraq Museum, Baghdad IM 95200

was often applied to disparate localities, perhaps indicating the end points of pastoralist migratory routes or other nodes of mobility.<sup>28</sup> For example, Yamutbal was simultaneously the name of a group located near the Jebel Sinjar in northern Mesopotamia, and a region (rendered “Emutbal”) near Larsa, in southern Mesopotamia.

#### WAR AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS

Although political cooperation and economic exchange were typical of Syro-Mesopotamian relations in the Amorite period, persistent and ubiquitous warfare was an equally important aspect of inter-regional contact. The rulers of the region may have shared kinship and ethnic identities, but this did not prevent them from engaging in constant hostilities. The excellent syntheses presented by Charpin and Nele Ziegler provide a numbingly monotonous tale of military activities undertaken by the rulers of the Syrian and Mesopotamian kingdoms against one another.<sup>29</sup> Reviewing the career of Shamshi-Adad in the late nineteenth–early eighteenth century B.C., for example, we find that after forming his Upper Mesopotamian kingdom through numerous military adventures, he conducted hostilities against Eshnunna, assisted Qatna in western Syria against rebellions, joined Eshnunna and Babylon against cities in southern Mesopotamia, and dealt with numerous rebellions against his own authority. A stele usually attributed to Shamshi-Adad and commemorating a campaign against the town of Qabra, near Erbil, in northern Mesopotamia, provides a rare artistic representation of such military activity (fig. 1a, b).<sup>30</sup> Another stele memorializing the same event was set up by Shamshi-Adad’s ally Dadusha of Eshnunna and was found by archaeologists near Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna) (fig. 2).<sup>31</sup>

After Shamshi-Adad’s death around 1776 B.C., his empire quickly disintegrated. His enemy Zimri-Lim took over Mari and much of Upper Mesopotamia, and Zimri-Lim’s reign, too, was marked by numerous

military campaigns, including another confrontation with Eshnunna, an invasion by the Elamites, and an expedition to western Syria to help Yamhad put down a rebellion. One of Zimri-Lim's main allies was Hammurabi of Babylon; in one document, Hammurabi affirms that "the city of Mari and Babylon have always been one house and one finger that does not lend itself to be split."<sup>32</sup> Only a few years later, however, Hammurabi's armies destroyed Mari, ending its status as an urban center and regional power. The other major central Mesopotamian power, Eshnunna, likewise met its fate at the hands of Hammurabi's forces.<sup>33</sup>

Why the constant warfare? Obviously the various hegemonies of the Amorite sphere sought both to increase their power and wealth and to protect themselves against similarly predatory peers and superiors. But ideological factors were probably of great importance as well, including the high value attached to the military lifestyle and the need for elites to demonstrate their military prowess in order to legitimize their authority. The victory stele of Dadusha of Eshnunna, for example, avers that the king's motivation in mounting military campaigns was to acquire prestige with other rulers: "In the land of Subartu, I defeated the territory between the lands of Burunda and Eluhtum and the lands/mountains of Diluba and Lullum with my mighty weapons. So that the kings in all the land and forever will sing my praises, I did this."<sup>34</sup>

A state of persistent warfare was not unique to early second millennium B.C. Syro-Mesopotamia. During the Third Dynasty of Ur, for example, Steven J. Garfinkle reports, a similarly continuous military activity obtained, though it was usually conducted on the peripheries of Mesopotamia or beyond.<sup>35</sup> Garfinkle's theory that these campaigns supported a prestige economy by furnishing the elite with a constant supply of precious goods does not explain the conduct of Middle Bronze Age belligerents, who primarily fought in the lowlands of Mesopotamia

rather than in the resource-rich highlands. In the twenty-fourth century B.C., the Ebla texts were already depicting an environment of persistent conflicts between the rulers of Syria and northern Mesopotamia, with wars, shifting alliances, and tenuous diplomacy that recall the situation in the Amorite period.<sup>36</sup>

When sources report on the incessant warfare that the early second millennium B.C. rulers engaged in, they pay little attention to the individuals who conducted most of this activity and suffered accordingly: the soldiers. One may well sympathize with the prisoners of war depicted on royal monuments like the stele of Dadusha (fig. 2). Victorious kings made a point of abusing and killing captives as enemies and rebels against proper authority, or at best enslaved them, but it was the rulers who made the decisions that precipitated the doom of the common soldiers, who could only obey and hope for the best. How the rulers managed to raise the troops needed to conduct the nonstop warfare, and why the troops agreed to participate, are interesting but difficult questions.<sup>37</sup> An *ilkum* system was sometimes employed, in which soldiers were allotted land in return for joining the army.<sup>38</sup> Amorite pastoralists were a major source of soldiers, and mercenaries were sometimes used. Presumably a glorification of the warrior's lifestyle also played an important role, as would the prospect of booty. Finally, and not least, rulers used coercion. A Mari official wrote to Zimri-Lim about his strategy for raising troops: "If they still do not assemble three days from now, with my lord's permission, I will kill a criminal who is in prison, cut his head off and parade it from village to village . . . , so that the people become afraid and assemble soon."<sup>39</sup>

It would be useful to inquire as to the effect such continual warfare had on the political, economic, and environmental conditions of the Syro-Mesopotamian region. It is evident, in fact, that after a period of intensive warfare in the era of Shamshi-Adad, Zimri-Lim, and



Hammurabi, the landscape of the Syrian Jezireh and Upper Mesopotamia had changed. The major urban centers of Tuttul (Tell Bi'a) and Mari were both largely defunct by the end of Hammurabi's reign and were not replaced by similar prosperous urban centers. Terqa (Tell 'Ashara), the capital of Mari's successor state, Hana, was nowhere near the great metropolis that Mari had been, and no urban center is evident in the Upper Khabur, the site of formerly great cities such as Shubat-Enlil (Tell Leilan) and Nagar (Tell Brak). It is likely that the constant internecine warfare ultimately led to dire economic, demographic, and environmental consequences. The effect of frequent warfare could include the loss of manpower, mass deportations,<sup>40</sup> the devastation of agriculture, and even plagues of locusts, as Karen Radner has recently discussed, since human labor was required to keep the Moroccan locust population in this region in check.<sup>41</sup> Walther Sallaberger has suggested that the unprecedented scale of warfare in the late third millennium B.C. Syrian Jezireh led to urban disintegration and decentralization,<sup>42</sup> and I would suggest that similar factors applied in the later Amorite period. Given Robert McC. Adams's survey results in the Diyala and

other parts of southern Mesopotamia, the same conclusion might be drawn for the Eshnunna region and parts of Sumer as well. Excavation in the Diyala demonstrates that the primary cities of Eshnunna and Tutub (Khafaje), as well as smaller sites like Tell Harmal and Tell Agrab, were abandoned in the Old Babylonian period,<sup>43</sup> while survey data indicate that most larger sites in the region and numerous smaller ones were deserted at that time.<sup>44</sup> Adams estimates a decline of one-third to one-half of the total sedentary population. A similar pattern of deurbanization and diminution of the sedentary population is observable in Sumer.<sup>45</sup> While failed agricultural policies, shifting watercourse patterns, and climate changes can also be invoked to account for such changes, the effects of continual warfare should be factored into the situation.

#### MESOPOTAMIA AS MODEL

Although the Amorite period provides a rare instance in which there was no obvious political or economic dominance by southern Mesopotamia, a review of our evidence shows that southern Mesopotamian culture still served as a prestigious model and referent for Syrian polities. The Amorites spoke their own West Semitic language, evinced



Fig. 3. Stone cylinder seal with modern impression. Umm el-Marra. Middle Bronze Age. National Museum, Aleppo UMM08 G1

in their personal names, but the cuneiform records of the Amorite rulers were always written in Akkadian, the Semitic language traditionally used for writing in Mesopotamia. Not only was Akkadian the preferred written language, but the scribes at Mari abruptly switched to writing in the Old Babylonian dialect during the reign of Yahdun-Lim in the late nineteenth century B.C., directly imitating the most up-to-date scribal conventions of the south.<sup>46</sup>

Slightly later, in the early eighteenth century B.C., Shamshi-Adad established an unusually extensive kingdom in northern Mesopotamia and the Syrian Jezireh. One of the salient characteristics of this kingdom was the emulation of southern Mesopotamian cultural attributes. When Shamshi-Adad established his capital at the city of Shekhna, modern Tell Leilan in the Upper Khabur plains, he renamed it Shubat-Enlil, honoring the Mesopotamian god Enlil, who legitimizes kingship. At Shubat-Enlil, Shamshi-Adad built a temple whose elaborate, semiengaged spiral columns are directly comparable to examples from Larsa in southern Mesopotamia.<sup>47</sup> He also employed titles ordinarily associated with southern Mesopotamian rulers, such as “king of Akkad,” and *šar kiššatim*, “king of the world.”<sup>48</sup> While Durand has suggested that the Mesopotamian orientation of Shamshi-Adad might be linked to that ruler’s origins in Akkad itself, I would suggest that we consider instead Shamshi-Adad’s ambitions to be seen as the founder of a multiregional state or empire.<sup>49</sup> The most obvious model available was that of the Sargonic dynasty of third millennium B.C. Mesopotamia, which had established the first Near Eastern state with a universalist ideology and multi-regional dominion. Shamshi-Adad presented himself as the heir to the well-known Sargonic imperial tradition.

A Mesopotamianization of elite material culture in Syria can also be seen in the glyptic realm. Syrian cylinder seals, used for documenting property and transactions, had long emulated Mesopotamian artistic

models.<sup>50</sup> But the glyptic from Shamshi-Adad’s capital and other Syrian power centers displayed an even more pronounced debt to Babylonian glyptic art.<sup>51</sup> For example, the representation of the king holding a mace and facing a suppliant goddess, a common motif in the court styles of the major Syrian polities, originated in Babylonia.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, local motifs and styles were integrated with the Babylonian iconography. In the case of a Classic Syrian style<sup>53</sup> cylinder seal excavated in 2008 by the joint Johns Hopkins University–University of Amsterdam expedition to Umm el-Marra in western Syria (fig. 3), the seated god has Mesopotamian attributes—a horned crown, a vase of flowing water, and a flounced robe—but the style in which these elements are depicted differs from Mesopotamian examples.<sup>54</sup> The individual horns of the crown are not as clearly separated as they are in Mesopotamia, and the flounces of the robe are enclosed within the outlines of the garment as opposed to the separate rows of flounces forming a jagged outline to the garment on Mesopotamian seals. Further, the standing man and the animals are purely Syrian motifs.<sup>55</sup>

One can observe the influence of southern Mesopotamian material culture in the nonelite realm as well. Two common pottery types of the Middle Bronze II period in Syria (ca. 1800–1600 B.C.) appear first in southern Mesopotamia and thus seem to have been copied by the Syrian potters from Mesopotamian models.<sup>56</sup> The first of these is the cylindrical beaker with low carination, which Max Mallowan referred to as a “grain measure,” like those seen in Isin-Larsa levels at Tell Asmar and Khafaje.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, the so-called shoulder cup, a carinated small jar with a tall neck and small button or pedestal base, appears to have originated in southern Mesopotamia.<sup>58</sup>

It appears to be much easier to discern Syrian emulation of Mesopotamian material culture than the reverse—Syrian artistic motifs, writing styles, and other cultural elements are only rarely evident in southern

Mesopotamia.<sup>59</sup> We may conclude, therefore, that the traditional view of Mesopotamia as a cultural forebear and source of prestigious styles was still potent even in this period of shared ethnicity throughout Syria and Mesopotamia. But this situation changed gradually as the Middle Bronze Age continued, and Mesopotamian cultural influence in Syria began to dissipate after the fall of Mari and the diminution of Babylon's power. The art of Yamhad in the later Middle Bronze Age, for example, has fewer Mesopotamian elements and shows more borrowings from Egypt and the Aegean.<sup>60</sup>

#### CONCLUSIONS

The Amorite domination in Syria and Mesopotamia drew to a close by 1600 B.C., when the Hittite kings Hattusili I and Mursili I destroyed Yamhad in Syria and the Babylonian kingdom governed by Hammurabi's heirs. In the Late Bronze period that followed, the ethnic and political makeup of the region changed dramatically. A dynasty of Kassites, probably from western Iran, assumed control in Babylonia. In Syria and northern Mesopotamia, the kingdom of Mitanni ruled over a population whose personal names and, apparently, spoken language were Hurrian, from the eastern Anatolian highlands. The shared ethnicity of the Amorite period was over, as was the era of numerous competing polities bickering and coexisting with one another. Instead, there were only two major political entities: Kassite Babylonia in the south and Hurrian Mitanni in the north. While Mesopotamian cultural influence might still be seen in the glyptic art of Mitanni, the intense interrelations characteristic of the Amorite period no longer applied. Syria became more and more connected economically, politically, and culturally to the Aegean, Egypt, and Anatolia. Mesopotamia, the ancient core and dominant cultural model, had become just one of many points of contact and sources of inspiration.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Joan Aruz for inviting me to participate in the "Beyond Babylon" symposium, to the members of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art for their assistance and collegiality, and to Paul Delnero and Jacob Lauinger for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this essay.

1. R. A. Carter and Philip 2010. Note, however, that several essays in this volume question the Mesopotamian origins of Ubaid material culture styles.
2. Algaze 1993; G. Stein 1999.
3. Sallaberger 2007.
4. Potts 1997.
5. Schwartz 2001, pp. 256–61; Van De Mierop 2007b, pp. 38–39.
6. G. Stein 2002.
7. Durand 1992.
8. Streck 2000.
9. Kamp and Yoffee 1980; Sallaberger 2007; Porter 2012.
10. Fleming 2004, pp. 24–33; Porter 2012.
11. Ristvet 2012.
12. Jahn 2007.
13. Frayne 1997, p. 290; Marchesi 2006.
14. Charpin 2004, pp. 74, 96–97, 108; Jahn 2007.
15. Frayne 1990, pp. 206, 343–46.
16. P. Michalowski 1983, pp. 240–41.
17. Weiss et al. 1993; Sallaberger 2007.
18. Whiting 1995.
19. Yoffee 1995, p. 297.
20. Archi 1985; Fleming 2004, p. 40. On the problems of recognizing Amorites in the Syrian archaeological record, see L. Cooper 2006, pp. 248–50; Nichols and Weber 2006. In Syria, the inception of Middle Bronze Age urban society can be studied with reference to the regeneration of societal complexity after a period of decentralization and collapse (Schwartz 2006).
21. Fujii and Adachi 2010; Lönnqvist 2010; Meyer 2010; Nishiaki 2010; Numoto and Kume 2010.
22. Finkelstein 1966.
23. Dossin 1938, pp. 117–18.
24. Durand 1997–2000; Heimpele 2003.
25. Villard 1986.
26. No obvious cases of dynastic marriages between ruling families in the north (Syria, the Jezireh) and southern Mesopotamia are evident, however. It is notable that the Amorite rulers' diplomatic



- contacts were largely restricted to the region dominated by the Amorites in Syria and Mesopotamia. Podany 2010, p. 14.
27. Marchetti 2009; Marchetti 2010. On the Sippar-Anatolia network, see Marchetti 2003, p. 166, n. 20.
  28. Durand 1992.
  29. Charpin and Ziegler 2003; Charpin 2004. See also the recently published archives from Tell Leilan, offering a similar chronicle of unrelenting military activity (Eidem 2011).
  30. André-Salvini in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 25–26, no. 5.
  31. Ismail and Cavigneaux 2003.
  32. Heimpel 2003, pp. 372–73.
  33. On the collapse of Mari and Eshnunna, see Fazal 2007, which discusses the tendency for states caught between two powerful rivals (in this case, Babylon and Yamhad) to perish.
  34. Bahrani 2008, pp. 140–41.
  35. Garfinkle forthcoming.
  36. Archi and Biga 2003; Biga 2008.
  37. For complaints about a soldier's lot, see, e.g., Veenhof and Eidem 2008, p. 332, where north Mesopotamian troops lament a lack of food and clothing. On desertion, see Heimpel 2003, p. 486. Hamblin (2006, pp. 192–93, 208–9) discusses these issues as well.
  38. Charpin 2004, pp. 279–80.
  39. Van De Mieroop 2005b, p. 22.
  40. Durand 1992, pp. 102–5.
  41. Radner 2004; see also Heimpel 2003, pp. 420–21.
  42. Sallaberger 2007.
  43. Ishchali is an exception to this pattern (Hill, Jacobsen, and Delougaz 1990).
  44. Adams 1965, pp. 50–53. The trend of decline in sedentary occupation from the Isin-Larsa period to Old Babylonian times may also apply to the Hamrin region (Gibson 1981, p. 22), although some later Old Babylonian occupation has been discerned at the archaeological sites of Tell Yelkhi and Tell edh-Dhiba'i (Gasche et al. 1998, pp. 18–20). I am grateful to McGuire Gibson and James Armstrong for their comments on the Old Babylonian period in the Hamrin.
  45. Adams 1981, pp. 138–53.
  46. Durand 1992, pp. 121–23. For discussion of the “Akkadianization” of writing and of the material culture at Mari in the Amorite period, see also Charpin and Ziegler 2003, p. 40, nn. 99, 100; Butterlin 2007, pp. 242–43.
  47. Weiss 1985. One might also point out occasional commonalities in palace architecture in Syria and Mesopotamia in this period, such as the sequence of throne room, adjacent “banqueting room,” and sometimes an additional adjacent court, observable at Qatna, Tuttul (Tell Bi'a), Mari, Eshnunna, and Larsa (Blocher 2009, p. 259).
  48. Grayson 1987, pp. 47–66.
  49. Durand 1997–2000, vol. 2, pp. 108–9.
  50. Porada 1985.
  51. Parayre 1990; Otto 2000.
  52. Otto 1992.
  53. Otto 2000, Group 2a. This seal, UMMo8 G1, derives from room debris in the third of five Middle Bronze Age phases (from earliest to latest) in trench 1006/4012 in Northwest Area A. The seal is currently housed in the Aleppo Museum.
  54. Since the water-god motif originates in southern Mesopotamia in the Akkadian period but is absent from early second millennium B.C. Babylonia, Otto (2000, pp. 220–21) proposes that its continued or revived use in Middle Bronze Age Syria was part of an “Akkadian renaissance.”
  55. I am extremely indebted to Sally Dunham for her comments and assistance on this seal.
  56. D. L. Stein 1984, p. 12.
  57. Mallowan 1946, p. 148. For an illustration, see Akkermans and Schwartz 2003, p. 332, fig. 10.3O.
  58. For illustrations, see Akkermans and Schwartz 2003, p. 293, fig. 9.3C, G.
  59. Marchetti 2003.
  60. Collon 1975.

# Actual Imports or Just Ideas? Investigations in Anatolia and the Caucasus

The South Caucasus lies far beyond the principal geographic foci of the “Beyond Babylon” exhibition, at what is sometimes conceived as the boundary between Europe and Asia. Although conceptually distant, partly because it was a region without writing until relatively late, the area today comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia has had archaeologically well-documented (if sometimes explanatorily thorny) connections with the ancient Near East since at least the Neolithic period.<sup>1</sup> It is the ancient Near Eastern connections in the Trialeti/Vanadzor culture of the Middle Bronze Age, beginning near the end of the third millennium B.C. according to most chronologies, and extending to about the second quarter of the second millennium B.C., that concern us here.<sup>2</sup>

A brief outline of regional cultural developments during the third millennium B.C. highlights some of the distinctive characteristics of the Trialeti culture.<sup>3</sup> The Early Bronze Age Kura-Araxes, or Early Transcaucasian, culture was characterized by a settled, nonhierarchical, agropastoral society located in small villages. Arsenical copper/bronze metallurgy was widespread, and distinctive black handmade ceramics, often with red interiors, were characteristic. Toward the end of the third millennium B.C., a highly stratified, apparently transhumant pastoral

economy emerged. Burials under large mounds appeared, containing rich inventories including tin bronzes together with arsenical ones, and large wooden wagons. As Philip L. Kohl has noted, some of these burial mounds covered almost 3 hectares, an area larger than most Kura-Araxes villages.<sup>4</sup> The impetus for these changes has yet to be fully explained, and the chronological relationships among the various cultural strands—Kura-Araxes, Early Kurgan, and even the Trialeti culture—remain contested.<sup>5</sup>

The so-called flourishing stage of Trialeti culture began near the end of the third millennium B.C. The strong social differentiation; rich mound burials; and fugitive settlements, indicating a mobile population, recall the Early Kurgan group.<sup>6</sup> New practices included cremation burial, the creation of ritual roads to the mounds, and the appearance of painted pottery; arsenical bronzes disappeared.<sup>7</sup> What these practices indicate—the introduction of new populations from outside, the transformation of local customs, the shifting and/or intensifying of external relations for political or social reasons, or something else—remains to be fully understood. Based on materials recovered from excavations, in this phase there was an increase in imported objects among the grave goods. Likewise, more goods display what we might call “interconnectedness,” sharing, to a greater or lesser degree, features of archaeological materials found beyond the South Caucasus, especially in the ancient Near East.<sup>8</sup> Scholars, myself included, have employed these “interconnected” grave goods to try to date the Trialeti burials more precisely than the broad ranges generally accepted; this endeavor remains a work in progress.<sup>9</sup>

Precisely why and how ancient Near Eastern and other exotic objects and ideas reached the Trialeti culture area are open questions. And which objects are exotic, rather than just local and rare, is often impossible to determine, as in the case of a cauldron from Trialeti that is identical to one from Shaft Grave 4 at Mycenae.<sup>10</sup>

Where they were made and whether they are local in either place are not known. The two vessels clearly demonstrate interconnectedness of some sort, but clarifying the interrelationships requires larger data sets. And even with these data, the sociocultural factors that drive the interactions on both macro- and local levels must be explained.

Within the framework of this overview, what follows is a close examination of three silver objects: two goblets, one excavated from the Great Kurgan at Karashamb, in modern Armenia, the other from Kurgan 5 at Trialeti, in modern Georgia, and a silver bucket from Kurgan 17 at Trialeti (figs. 1–3).<sup>11</sup> These objects all display imagery associated with the ancient Near East that was new at this time in the South Caucasus. Where were the objects made? What are the relationships among them? What might the objects tell us about the cultural contexts in which they were found, and what might these cultural contexts tell us about the objects?

The two goblets are similar in shape and share angular rosette ornaments at the base. The Karashamb goblet (fig. 1a, b) is more complex in composition and iconography, with five registers of figural imagery, compared with the two on the Trialeti example (fig. 2a, b). Both designs contain human figures wearing similar garments and shoes. However, details of the treatment of the figures differ. For example, the Karashamb figures are hairless, while the Trialeti figures have hair on their heads and beards. The puffy figures of the Karashamb goblet contrast with the flatter, more patterned Trialeti ones. There are technical differences as well (see Appendix, p. 22). But despite these differences, the two goblets share the same principal scene: a large individual holding a goblet sits before a table with legs ending in animal hooves. The figure is flanked by animals, and approached by walking figures also holding goblets.

When he first published the Trialeti excavations, Boris A. Kuftin suggested that the walking figures on the Trialeti goblet resembled the much later figures on rock reliefs

from the sites of Carchemish and Zincirli, in present-day southeastern Turkey. Although these were the only comparisons the author illustrated, Kuftin mentioned others from Anatolia, including Cappadocian cylinder seals.<sup>12</sup> Investigating Kuftin's suggestions, my research has demonstrated that the local Anatolian style seals from Kültepe (Kanesh) share highly specific iconographic elements with the Trialeti culture silver goblets. I have argued elsewhere that such clusters of iconographic details tell the histories of non-literate cultures. Despite broader similarities with images from Mesopotamia, Syria, and elsewhere in the ancient Near East, the multiplicity of detailed parallels to Anatolian style seals points to an Anatolian source for the imagery on the goblets.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly the images originated outside the South Caucasus, but the goblets themselves were probably manufactured within the Trialeti cultural sphere.<sup>14</sup> While the iconography itself was new to the area, it was presented within local traditions of composition and subject matter. As the Kura-Araxes artistic tradition included both two- and three-dimensional representations of humans and animals, their appearance was not new in the South Caucasus in the Trialeti culture.<sup>15</sup> Animals were sometimes depicted in rows on ceramic vessels,<sup>16</sup> they could also be presented as discrete elements on ceramics and metalwork.<sup>17</sup> Like the earlier occurrences, most of the animals on the Trialeti and Karashamb goblets are in rows. The appearance of the cast gold lion from Tsnori suggests that three-dimensional representations of animals continued into the time of the Early Kurgan culture.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the lion is decorated with rows of raised dots bounded by raised lines, a decorative pattern echoed on a gold pin from Bedeni,<sup>19</sup> where rows of small circles are bounded by raised hatched lines. A pin with similar decoration was excavated in Trialeti Kurgan 22.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, on these two goblets of the Trialeti culture, new kinds of figural imagery were incorporated into existing artistic traditions. For example, in the application of these new

Fig. 1a, b. Silver goblet. Karashamb, Great Kurgan. Middle Bronze Age. History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan 2867-1







Fig. 2a, b. Silver goblet. Trialeti, Kurgan 5. Middle Bronze Age. Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi 89-63:348









Fig. 3. Watercolor of silver bucket. Trialeti, Kurgan 17. Middle Bronze Age. Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi 9-63:974

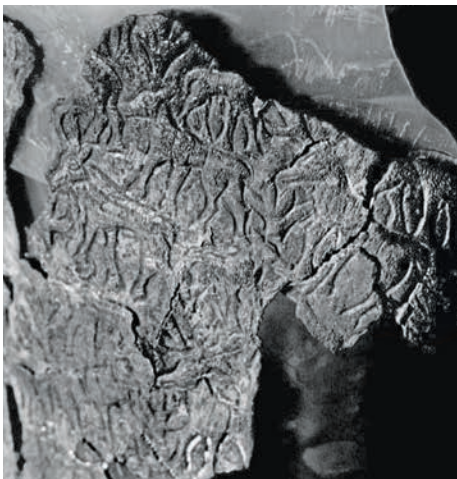


Fig. 4. Detail of bucket (fig. 3)



Fig. 5. Cylinder seal impression on a clay tablet. Kültepe. *Karum* Kanesh II, ca. 1950–1836 B.C. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara Kt. 10



Fig. 6. Detail of bucket (fig. 3)

images to the goblets, the maker may have retained the already familiar composition of rows of animals. In addition, the boundary lines for the scenes may be inspired by the preexisting practice of bounding ornamental patterns, although, as N. O. Dzhaparidze has noted, the figures on the goblets stand on ground lines for the first time in Georgian art, a practice often seen in ancient Near Eastern art of this period and earlier.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it may be that the bands dividing the rows on the goblets are part of that new representational practice. Also new in the art of the Trialeti culture at this time is imagery presented as a narrative, with the introduction of the elements of time and trajectory, features already well established in the art of the ancient Near East.

The close interconnectedness of the goblet imagery and that of Anatolian style seals is reinforced by the research of Dominique Collon, who showed that two objects excavated at Trialeti—a copper/bronze cauldron and the silver bucket (fig. 3)—had distinctive handles of a type known at Kültepe and other sites west of Trialeti.<sup>22</sup> With more materials from the Kültepe excavations now published, we can see that many examples of this kind of intricate handle—a basket handle inserted into a looped piece of metal that is attached by a third metal piece, either



Fig. 7. Cylinder seal impression on a clay tablet. Kültepe. *Karum* Kanesh II, ca. 1950–1836 B.C. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara d/k 33

butterfly- or barrel-shaped, to the vessel itself—were found at the site.<sup>23</sup> Other similar objects occur in both contexts and require further investigation.<sup>24</sup> These findings lead me to ask: Could it be that the bucket and cauldron were imported from Kültepe or another Anatolian site, along with whatever carried the borrowed imagery that appears on the goblets?

While the interpretation of the cauldron remains challenging and calls for scientific investigation, it seems possible to demonstrate that the bucket (fig. 3), because of its figural imagery, is an exotic work in the Trialeti culture assemblage. First, there are stylistic similarities between the bucket and local Anatolian style seals.<sup>25</sup> A striking element is the overall distribution of the animals on the surface of the bucket, generally without a groundline, sometimes with one animal appearing to stand on the back of another (fig. 4). Such features also appear on Kültepe glyptic (fig. 5). In addition, on both the bucket (fig. 6) and local Anatolian style glyptic (fig. 7), animal hair is represented by an overall pattern of bands or groups of hatched lines.<sup>26</sup> When this convention is used on the goblets, it is limited to partial areas of the bodies.

Although no single object identical to the bucket can be found in the assemblage so far

Fig. 8. Detail of bucket (fig. 3)



Fig. 9. Detail of silver goblet, Trialeti (fig. 2b)



published from the excavations at Kültepe or other contemporary sites in Anatolia, the similarities to the arrangement of the visual field and the treatment of the animals on local Anatolian style seals point to an Anatolian origin.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the bucket handle and its attachment appear to have been a common type at Kültepe but rare among Trialeti materials. It would seem, then, that the bucket was made in Anatolian Local Style somewhere in Anatolia.<sup>28</sup> This view is reinforced by the fact that, while the goblets incorporated borrowed imagery into preexisting visual patterns, the bucket does not exhibit such a transformation. The possible exotic origin of the bucket is also suggested by the differences between the figural surfaces on the bucket and on the goblets. The relief on the bucket is lower and flatter than that on either of the goblets; it would be useful to conduct a technical study of the precise mechanical production of the relief surfaces of the vessels to see if the manufacturing techniques are significantly different, as they appear to be.

If we can assume that the bucket is imported, then Kuftin's observation that

two animals in the lower area of the vessel (fig. 8) are virtually identical to two on the Trialeti goblet (fig. 9) raises some interesting questions about the interrelationship between the two objects. Kuftin suggested that the animals on the goblet were copied from the bucket, where the animals appear livelier.<sup>29</sup> Another image on the goblet that might also have been copied is the tree behind the central figure (fig. 10), which is virtually identical to one on the bucket (fig. 11). The vessels come from two different burials dating to roughly the same century or two (E. M. Gogadze's Middle Bronze Age II group), but the chronology cannot be more precisely ascertained.<sup>30</sup> I would suggest that the craftsman who created the Trialeti goblet saw the bucket, which was imported into the South Caucasus from Anatolia, and then borrowed visual elements to incorporate into a local product. As one might say in anthropological terms, the bucket mediates between Anatolian artistic tradition and emerging approaches to representation.<sup>31</sup> It remains to be explained why these particular visual elements were selected, copied, and replicated, and what the source objects, their imagery, and the local visual program meant within the Trialeti culture.

This leaves the questions of the temporal and visual relationships between the two goblets, as well as why we see this new imagery in the art of the South Caucasus at this time. These questions appear to be related. In an analysis of the Karashamb goblet, Adam T. Smith noted that

the most compelling aspect . . . is its representation of a rather limited set of practices central to the reproduction of political order: war and conquest, feasting and celebration, punishment and ritual, hunting and the technology of violence. The central theme of the piece is clearly the conquest of enemies and the glorification of the ruler and the apparatus of political authority.



Smith suggested that these images were useful to the ruling elite in their effort to consolidate power in an unstable time of social transformation from settled, nonhierarchical village life to a more mobile life in a larger landscape, with power aggregating to a few privileged hands.<sup>32</sup>

Accepting that suggestion as an explanation of the imagery on the Karashamb goblet, how do we interpret the iconography of the Trialeti example? I propose that the Trialeti goblet was made later in the socio-historical process of culture change, when contention and competition had been reduced or become more routine, thus lessening the need to assert violence on the accoutrements of power. What is left, then, is the seated figure drinking from a goblet, with other, smaller figures joining him (fig. 2a). Although the close similarities of the details of these scenes raise questions about whether the maker of the Trialeti goblet had seen the Karashamb vessel, I find another explanation more compelling. Perhaps the scene recorded on both goblets is a living ritual, with details of the performance and practice initially inspired by borrowed imagery. Alternatively, perhaps such a social performance or practice developed locally with the emergence of the new elites, and the ancient Near Eastern iconography, however it reached the South Caucasus, provided an apt visual model.

There has been much recent scholarly discussion about the role of food, drink, and commensality in early society (see Caubet essay, pp. 226–37). In an essay on Mesopotamia, Susan Pollock states:

It is not just food or drink themselves that are important but especially their consumption as a social event . . . and there are typically strong rules that govern . . . the sharing of beverages and food. . . . The ways that food and drink are prepared, presented, and consumed contribute to the construction and communication of social relations.<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 10. Detail of silver goblet, Trialeti (fig. 2a)



Fig. 11. Detail of bucket (fig. 3)

I would posit that in the Trialeti culture, the ritual of communal drinking with an elite person had an ongoing role in the apparatus of political authority after early struggles for power abated or had become routine. Most of the images on the Karashamb goblet express and glorify violence, whether human or animal. The Trialeti goblet, by contrast, features the calm repetition of figures in both registers. Thus, I suggest that the goblet from Trialeti dates later than the one excavated at Karashamb. Perhaps the maker of the Trialeti goblet had

Fig. 12. Detail of silver goblet, Karashamb (fig. 1)



Fig. 13. Detail of silver goblet, Trialeti (fig. 2)



seen the Karashamb one and edited the imagery to keep only what remained necessary as a public expression of authority; alternatively, he may have based the main scene of the Trialeti vessel on living ritual, oral tradition, or now local (if rare or rarely preserved) visual tradition. He clearly augmented the pictorial scheme with images based on those found on the bucket, which must have been visible to the maker of the Trialeti goblet, either in use as part of ritual practice or as part of an accumulation of riches by the powerful. The important social and political role of drinking in this society may be further indicated by the many drinking vessels of gold and silver found in the Trialeti culture burials.<sup>34</sup>

I have not addressed here why the “foreign” objects and images were valued within the Trialeti culture. These exotica and the demonstrated connections between the Trialeti culture and Kültepe are part of a great

web of exchange of the sort recently discussed by Kohl. What he calls “weblike interconnections” should bring the South Caucasus into discussions of the expansive trading systems of the early second millennium B.C.<sup>35</sup> Trade may have been written about in the context of the Old Assyrian Trading Colonies, but South Caucasian obsidian at Tal-i Malyan, in Iran, and local Anatolian style imagery in the South Caucasus are “documents” as well, and demonstrate that the region was not beyond the world of the ancient Near East in this period.

#### APPENDIX: TECHNICAL NOTE

Technical differences between the two goblets were observed in the examinations conducted by Jean-François de Lapérouse of the Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Mark Wypyski of the Museum’s Department of Scientific Research, with the permission of the History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, and the Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi, when the goblets were on loan to the Metropolitan for the “Beyond Babylon” exhibition. Variations in the raised decoration on the vessels are visible to the naked eye, and close-up photographs reveal differences in the execution of the repoussé (figs. 12, 13). In addition, although surface scans by X-ray fluorescence spectrometry indicate the use of relatively pure silver in both cases, with only minor amounts of gold and lead, there are variations in how the two goblets were fashioned. As radiographs show, the bottom of the Karashamb goblet (fig. 14) was added as a separate piece and the lip reinforced with an interior metal ring (fig. 15). Conversely, the foot of the Trialeti vessel, although made as one piece with the rest of the vessel (fig. 16), was reinforced at its outer circumference by an interior ring, most likely made of metal given its radiopacity, while the lip appears to have been simply folded over (fig. 17).<sup>36</sup> The rings are probably silver, given the lack of corrosion-related porosity that one might expect to see if they were made of copper alloy in contact with silver for many centuries.<sup>37</sup>

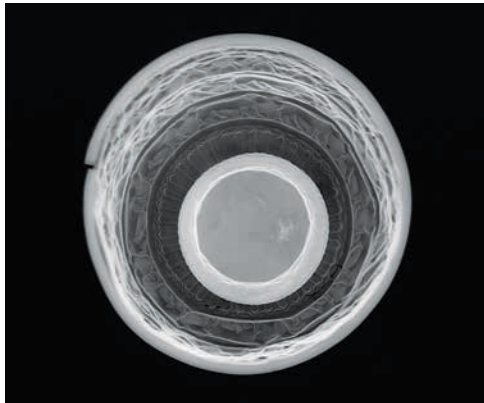


Fig. 14. Radiograph of the Karashamb goblet (fig. 1), top view



Fig. 15. Radiograph of the Karashamb goblet (fig. 1), side view

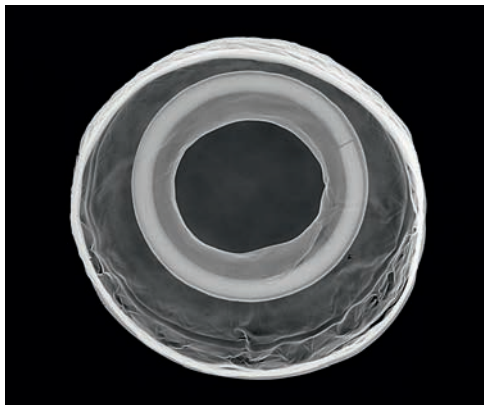


Fig. 16. Radiograph of the Trialeti goblet (fig. 2), top view



Fig. 17. Radiograph of the Trialeti goblet (fig. 2), side view

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1. Lyonnet 2007; Marro 2008; Palumbi 2008; Bakhchaliyev, Ashurov, and Marro 2009, p. 57; Helwing 2009; Lyonnet 2009; Museibli 2009; Bobokhyan 2010.
2. Kushnareva and Rysin 2001; Badalyan, Avetisyan, and A. T. Smith 2009, pp. 38–39, 55–65.
3. See Kushnareva 1997 for a summary in English and a more recent overview in Badalyan, Avetisyan, and A. T. Smith 2009.
4. Kohl 2007, p. 114.
5. Badalyan et al. 2008, pp. 89–90; Badalyan, Avetisyan, and A. T. Smith 2009, pp. 35–38, 42–55. For a general discussion of some of the chronological problems, see Kavtaradze 2004.
6. Bertram 2005, pp. 71–73.
7. Narimanishvili 2004.
8. For some commentary and bibliography, see Rubinson 2003; Benzel in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 93.



- no. 57, pp. 101–3; Rubinson in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 91–92, nos. 55, 56. See also Apakidze 1999, pp. 517–20; Puturidze 2005; Abramishvili 2010.
9. See Abramishvili 2010 for one chronology. Abramishvili's chronology differs in details from a recent suggested chronology based on the ceramic evidence (Badalyan, Avetisyan, and A. T. Smith 2009, p. 56, esp. n. 37).
  10. Rubinson 1991. See Puturidze 2005 for additional cauldrons found in Trialeti culture burials and comparanda to them.
  11. For the goblets, see Rubinson in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 91–92, nos. 55, 56; for the bucket, see Kuftin 1941, pl. LXXXVIII, p. 411, and details, pls. LXXXIX, XC, pp. 413–14.
  12. Kuftin 1941, pp. 89–90.
  13. For a detailed description of the goblets and specific parallels to the Anatolian style seals, see Rubinson 2003; Rubinson 2006. Rubinson 2006 discusses an approach to interpreting visual parallels in contexts where texts are absent. For a different approach to and interpretation of this evidence, see Abramishvili 2010, pp. 171–72; see also Boehmer and Kossack 2000.
  14. Although the goblets were made in the South Caucasus, it is unclear whether the artisans were local individuals. The maker of the Trialeti goblet was probably copying or inspired by embossed silver objects already in the South Caucasus; the case of the Karashamb example is less certain. It may have been made to local taste and requirements by a foreign craftsman for a local Trialeti-culture elite. Further examination of the techniques of manufacture may help clarify this question.
  15. For example, Kushnareva and Markovin 1994, p. 53, pl. 14; Kushnareva 1997, p. 58, fig. 21, nos. 13, 21–25; Makharadze 2008, fig. 16, no. 1, fig. 29, nos. 1–3.
  16. Kushnareva and Markovin 1994, p. 21, pl. 3, no. 37; Kushnareva 1997, p. 58, fig. 21, no. 12.
  17. Kushnareva 1997, p. 56, fig. 20, no. 14; Glonti, Ketskhoveli, and Palumbi 2008, fig. 5, no. 1. For further discussion in a larger regional context, see Rubinson 2006, p. 259. It should be noted that within the preserved evidence, two-dimensional animal representations are rare in this period.
  18. Dschaparidze 2001, ill. p. 103.
  19. Miron and Orthmann 1995, p. 29, fig. 8.
  20. Zhorzhikashvili and Gogadze 1974, pl. 45, no. 328. See also the pendant from Ananauri for raised herringbone lines bounded by flat surfaces (Dschaparidze 2001, p. 104). Discussed in Rubinson 2006, pp. 259–60.
  21. Dzhaparidze 1988, p. 16.
  22. Collon 1982. Collon (1982, p. 101) also noted that this handle type, usually found on small vessels, might be associated with vessels that had ritual, ceremonial, or other nonquotidian purposes.
  23. Rubinson 2001; Puturidze 2005, pp. 11–13.
  24. See Rubinson 2003, p. 141, for some further elements to consider. See also Abramishvili 2010, p. 174; Puturidze 2005.
  25. Rubinson 2003; Rubinson 2006.
  26. There are identical guilloche borders on the bucket and seals from Kültepe; however, this is a less complex and thus less determinative element of visual similarity, and such guilloche motifs occur elsewhere in the ancient Near East as well.
  27. N. Özgüç 1965. See also N. Özgüç and Tunca 2001, p. 125. Seals and their impressions often form the most extensive preserved corpus of visual images from the ancient Near East, providing a database of style and iconography through time and space.
  28. It is possible that the silver used to make the goblets was also imported into the South Caucasus from Anatolia. Moorey (1994, pp. 234–35) notes the importance of Anatolia as the source for silver in greater Mesopotamia and mentions a thirteenth-century A.D. source identifying eastern Anatolia as a rich silver source. See Bobokhyan 2008, p. 75, where he notes that silver objects are virtually absent in the South Caucasus in the Kura-Araxes period, appear in the Early Kurgan phase, and become widespread in the Trialeti culture. The author reviews the sources of silver in Anatolia and the metal's appearance in greater Mesopotamia (Bobokhyan 2008, pp. 75–76, and table 6, pp. 308ff.). Dschaparidze (2001, p. 104) states that silver does not occur naturally in Georgia and was imported beginning in Early Kurgan time. Twaltschrelidze (2001, pp. 79–80, 82–84) notes the presence of silver-containing ores in Georgia, and mentions silver mining in modern times near the modern Turkish border. The question of whether the virtually pure silver of the Trialeti and Karashamb goblets could have been derived from these sources requires further study. Abramishvili (2010, p. 175) suggests that silver found within Georgia was exploited in the Bronze Age. I have argued elsewhere that the South Caucasus was part of the same trading network as the well-documented Assyrian trading colonies (Rubinson 2003, p. 142; Rubinson in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 92), and of course silver was the principal export to Ashur and beyond from Anatolia. New research is being undertaken in Armenia by Idaho State University (Pocatello) and the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography and Institute of Geological Sciences, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (NAS RA, Yerevan). These excavations in the Kotayk region, where Karashamb is located, will

- yield information about the silver resources there (David Peterson, personal communication).
29. Kufin 1941, p. 88, fig. 93.
  30. Badalyan, Avetisyan, and A. T. Smith 2009, p. 56, n. 37, suggests that both of these kurgans are earlier, but keeps them within a more or less internally contemporary group.
  31. My thanks to Adam T. Smith for this observation. See also Mazarella 2004, p. 348.
  32. A. T. Smith 2001, pp. 166–67. See also A. T. Smith 2009, pp. 27–28.
  33. Pollock 2003, p. 19.
  34. McGovern (1999) notes silver-covered grapevines as well from the Trialeti culture. He posits that viniculture likely began in the South Caucasus millennia earlier than in the Trialeti culture (p. 58); the significant sociopolitical role of drinking wine within the Trialeti culture should be viewed in that context.
  35. Kohl 2008, p. 495.
  36. For a drawing of the Trialeti vessel profile, see Tavadze and Barkaja 1954, fig. 3.
  37. Jean-François de Lapérouse, personal communication.

# Aegean—Near East Relations in the Second Millennium B.C.

It was only a little more than twenty years ago that scholars were still debating whether there was any contact during the second millennium B.C. between Mycenaean and Minoans on the one hand and Egyptians, Canaanites, Cypriots, Hittites, Assyrians, and Babylonians on the other. Since 1990, however, a (relative) plethora of books and articles has appeared that has completely changed our understanding of the contacts between Greece, the Near East, and Egypt during the Late Bronze Age. These range from preliminary publications of the discoveries from the Uluburun shipwreck, which sank with its cargo intact off the coast of Turkey ca. 1300 B.C.,<sup>1</sup> to a number of catalogues that document Egyptian and Near Eastern finds in Bronze Age contexts in mainland Greece, Crete, and the Cycladic Islands;<sup>2</sup> articles and catalogues documenting Minoan and Mycenaean artifacts and influence in the Near East and Egypt;<sup>3</sup> and more recent books and articles taking all of the above discussions even further.<sup>4</sup>

We are now at the point where the debate is no longer whether trade and contacts between these regions took place, for it is clear that they did. The questions focus more on what kinds of perishable goods were being shipped in containers like Canaanite jars and Mycenaean stirrup jars and whether ideas and innovations—including names for specific items—came along with the goods being traded. New types of scientific

analyses are being done, including petrography and residue analysis, in order to answer questions like those regarding perishable goods and the origins of the ceramic containers in which they were transported (see Goren essay, pp. 54–61).

Nevertheless, the five basic types of material evidence for Aegean relations with the Near East and Egypt during the Bronze Age are those I first documented some years ago.<sup>5</sup> I will discuss each of these briefly, with excursions to explore briefly some of the more interesting or unique objects and connections, before summing up the current state of the field.

## EGYPTIAN AND NEAR EASTERN OBJECTS FOUND IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE AEGEAN

Approximately one thousand imported Egyptian and Near Eastern objects have been found in Late Bronze Age contexts in the Aegean area, that is, in either mainland Greece, Crete, or the Cycladic Islands. These include Canaanite jars (fig. 1) and figurines, Cypriot milk bowls and wall brackets (fig. 2), Egyptian scarabs and ostrich eggs, and Mesopotamian cylinder seals and glass objects.<sup>6</sup> However, they are only the tip of the proverbial iceberg, probably only about 10 percent of what once existed; the rest has long since perished or was converted into other objects (raw copper and tin into bronze items; elephant and hippopotamus tusks, canines, and incisors into ivory objects). The Uluburun ship alone, which was wrecked en route to the Aegean with a full load of cargo from Egypt, Canaan, and Cyprus, had approximately 140 Canaanite jars on board. This amount is more than all of those found in the Aegean put together, indicating that the extent of trade was much greater than previously thought.

Among the most interesting imports found in the Aegean are objects with inscriptions, especially Egyptian artifacts. These include the inscribed statuette of User at Knossos on Crete; an alabaster lid inscribed with the





Fig. 1. Ceramic Canaanite jar. Mycenae.  
Late Bronze Age. Nafplion Archaeological  
Museum 11454



Fig. 2. Ceramic  
fragments of a Cypriot  
wall bracket. Tiryns.  
Late Bronze Age

Fig. 3. Blue frit monkey figurine with the cartouche of Amenhotep II. Mycenae. Reign of Amenhotep II, ca. 1427–1400 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens NMA 4573



Fig. 4. Blue frit monkey figurine with the cartouche of Amenhotep II. Tiryns. Reign of Amenhotep II, ca. 1427–1400 B.C.



name of the Hyksos king Khayan, also at Knossos; a large calcite vase inscribed with the cartouche of Thutmose III at Katsamba on Crete; small blue frit monkey figurines with the cartouche of Amenhotep II at Mycenae and Tiryns (figs. 3, 4); and scarabs, some with Ramesses II cartouches, at Perati in mainland Greece.<sup>7</sup>

Among these inscribed Egyptian objects is an unusual group of fragments found at

Mycenae. They come from at least nine separate faience plaques, all inscribed with the name and title(s) of Amenhotep III (r. ca. 1390–1352 B.C.; fig. 5). How, why, and when these plaques made it to Mycenae are still questions that remain to be resolved, despite much discussion during the past few years. It is clear that the group must be considered in conjunction with both other objects of Amenhotep III and his wife queen Tiye that have been found elsewhere in the Aegean area and with the so-called Aegean List of Amenhotep III, which was discovered inscribed on the base of a statue within his mortuary temple back in Egypt (on which more below).<sup>8</sup>

Not every inscribed foreign object was imported from Egypt; there is also a group of thirty-eight cylinder seals, some inscribed, that was discovered at Thebes in Greece in a context dating to ca. 1220 B.C. (see Aruz essay, pp. 216–25). To judge from their various origins, these were presumably imported from various places in the ancient Near East, including Cyprus, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. It is not clear why they were together; hypotheses have ranged from a jeweler’s hoard to raw material for a workshop to a royal gift sent from an Assyrian king to the Mycenaean king of Thebes.<sup>9</sup> Of the cylinder seals, among the most interesting is one of deep blue, very pure lapis lazuli, which features an engraved scene of a god, perhaps Marduk, who rises between two mountains, grasping a stream in either hand. The Akkadian inscription on the seal refers to Burnaburiash II, a Kassite Babylonian king known to have been involved in international trade and contact: “Kidin-Marduk, /son of Ša-ilimma-damqā, /the ša rēši official of Burra-Buriaš, king of the world.”<sup>10</sup>

#### AEGEAN FINDS IN BRONZE AGE CONTEXTS IN EGYPT, CYPRUS, AND THE NEAR EAST

Mycenaean and Minoan pottery, distinctive as it is, has long been recognized in Egypt and the Near East, including Cyprus and

Turkey. It has frequently been used to help date stratigraphic levels and contexts at eastern Mediterranean sites, including Troy, Megiddo, Lachish, and Amarna,<sup>11</sup> although this can sometimes be a circular argument, since Mycenaean levels at sites back in Greece were frequently dated by the presence of Egyptian scarabs and other inscribed objects, especially in earlier days of archaeology.

Such Aegean vessels, mostly in closed shapes such as stirrup jars and pilgrim flasks, were presumably shipped to eastern Mediterranean areas primarily for their contents, such as wine, olive oil, and perfume; even when emptied, the vessels seem to have been valued for their own sake and are frequently found as grave goods at Egyptian and Near Eastern sites. Numbering in the hundreds, they are found throughout the Levant, from Syria in the north to Sinai in the south, as well as in Egypt proper, Turkey, and Cyprus.

In fact, it is now the places and periods where they do *not* appear that are almost more interesting—including northern Syria after the invasion of the Hittites under

Suppiluliuma I and almost all of central Anatolia—leading the present author to speculate on the possibility of a deliberate trade embargo established by the Hittites against the Mycenaeans during the Late Bronze Age.<sup>12</sup> Such embargoes were not unknown; the famous Shaushgamuwa Treaty Tablet, signed by Tudhaliya IV and Shaushgamuwa of Amurru (in northern Syria) ca. 1225 B.C., reads in part:

A merchant from you (Amurru) is not allowed to go to the land of the Assyrians! A merchant from him (Assyria) you must not allow in your land! Through or across your land he may not go! If, however, he comes to you in your land, then take him into custody and send him away to 'my Sun' [i.e., to me, in Hattušas]! . . . let no ship of the Ahhiyawa go to him (Assyria).<sup>13</sup>

However, since the exception always proves the rule, it is worth noting that by far the most interesting of the possible



Fig. 5. Faience plaque inscribed with the name and title(s) of Amenhotep III. Mycenae. Reign of Amenhotep III, ca. 1390–1352 B.C.



Mycenaean artifacts found outside the Aegean area is a sword from Hattusa, the capital city of the Hittites. Discovered by a bulldozer operator engaged in road maintenance in 1991, the bronze weapon looks very much like a Mycenaean Type B sword, primarily used in the fifteenth century B.C., and has an inscription written in Akkadian carved into its blade, reading: “As Tudhaliya the Great King shattered the Assuwa-Country, he dedicated these swords to the Storm-God, his Lord.”<sup>14</sup> The sword is clearly part of booty captured by the Hittite king Tudhaliya (either I or II; the debate continues) after he triumphantly suppressed the so-called Assuwa Rebellion, centered around the region of Troy, ca. 1420 B.C. Why a Mycenaean sword was being used in the rebellion is a matter for much discussion, but the tale of the Trojan War might conceivably have its origin in Mycenaean warriors fighting in the area of Troy long before the end of the Bronze Age.

#### BRONZE AGE DOCUMENTS FROM EGYPT AND THE NEAR EAST THAT REFERENCE THE AEGEAN

We also possess a number of Bronze Age documents from Egypt and the Near East (including Mari in Mesopotamia, various sites in Egypt, Hattusa in Anatolia, and Ugarit in Syro-Palestine) that mention Aegean regions, people, and/or goods. Others refer to merchants and possibly diplomats from Egypt and the Near East sailing to the Bronze Age Aegean.

Among these are the well-known Mari Letters, dating to the reign of king Zimri-Lim, who ruled during the eighteenth century B.C. Included in these is an inventory concerned with tin coming from the east, which Mari was redistributing to merchants from the west. Mentioned in this inventory are men from Caphtor (Crete): “1+x/3 minae of tin to the Caphtorian, 1/3 minae of tin to the interpreter (of the) chief merchant of the Caphtorians in Ugarit.”<sup>15</sup> Other texts refer to objects of Caphtorian (Minoan) manufacture, ranging from vases

and leather sandals to weapons covered with gold and encrusted with lapis lazuli. One such text reads: “One Caphtorian weapon, the top and the base are covered with gold, its top is incusted with lapis lazuli,” while another states: “One pair of leather shoes in the Caphtorian (Minoan) style, which to the palace of Hammurabi, king of Babylon, Bahdi-Lim (an official) carried, but which were returned.”<sup>16</sup> While it is intriguing that the famous king Hammurabi is mentioned, we are not informed as to why the shoes were returned.

Approximately twenty-five texts from the Hittite archives at Hattusa in central Anatolia are concerned with an area known as Ahhiyawa, probably to be interpreted as mainland Greece (though this is still a matter of scholarly debate). Most of the texts document activities of Ahhiyawans on the west coast of Turkey—in an area where we know the Mycenaeans to have been present—including some episodes that were apparently quite troubling to the Hittites.<sup>17</sup>

We also possess a text from Ugarit, a major port in northern Syria, known as the Sinaranu Text. Dating to the mid-thirteenth century B.C., it was found in the archives at Ugarit and declares that the ship of the merchant Sinaranu is to be exempted from taxes when it arrives from Caphtor. It reads in part: “From the present day Ammištamru, son of Niqmepa, King of Ugarit, exempts Sinaranu, son of Siginu. As [the sun] is clear/pure, he is clear/pure. His [grain], his beer, his (olive)-oil to the palace he shall not deliver. His ship is exempt when from Caphtor his ship it arrives.”<sup>18</sup> Apart from providing documentation for at least one trip to Crete undertaken by, or at the instigation of, Sinaranu during the Late Bronze Age, this text itemizes goods possibly imported from Crete, as well as the fact that import taxes were usually paid on such items.

In terms of voyages, however, perhaps the most unique may have been a journey to the Aegean possibly undertaken at the behest of pharaoh Amenhotep III. The voyage may have resulted in the arrival at



Fig. 6. Stone statue base inscribed with the “Aegean List” of Amenhotep III. Kom el-Hetan. Reign of Amenhotep III, ca. 1390–1352 B.C.

Mycenae of the faience plaques with his name on them and other objects inscribed with either his name or his wife’s at sites such as Knossos and Khania on Crete. The occurrence of such a journey is hinted at—or perhaps simply documented—on Amenhotep III’s Aegean List at Kom el-Hetan, his mortuary temple near the Valley of the Kings, across the Nile River from Luxor.

Here, amidst other statue bases inscribed with lists of cities and other places in the Near Eastern world, is a base with a list of sites in the Aegean world (fig. 6). The first two names are apparently the headings for the rest of the list: Keftiu (the Egyptian name for Crete) and Tanaja (the Egyptian name for mainland Greece); the other names follow in order: 1) Amnisos; 2) Phaistos; 3) Kydonia; 4) Mycenae; 5) Dikte (Boiotian Thebes or Kato Zakro?); 6) Methana (Argolid) or Mes-sana (Pylos/Messenia area); 7) Nauplion; 8) Kythera; 9) Ilios (Troy?); 10) Knossos;

11) Amnisos (again); and 12) Lyktos. Numbers 13 to 16 are lost.<sup>19</sup>

Scholarly discussion of this list, after a period of initial skepticism as to whether the names on the list were authentic (they are), has centered on whether it records the itinerary of a journey from Egypt, around the Aegean, and then back to Egypt, or something else entirely. One of the alternate suggestions is that it represents simply wishful thinking on the part of the Egyptians, specifically regarding Egyptian dominance of the areas listed on the combined statue bases, of which there were probably originally ten in total, which covered most of the world known to the Egyptians at that time. Debate concerning the Aegean List, and its possible implications, has remained lively ever since it was first discovered and published in the 1960s, but it clearly documents—at the very least—Egyptian knowledge of areas and specific sites in the Bronze Age Aegean.<sup>20</sup>

LINEAR B TABLETS FOUND IN THE  
AEGEAN AREA WITH EVIDENCE OF  
FOREIGN CONTACTS AND CONTAINING  
TEXTUAL REFERENCES POSSIBLY  
RESULTING FROM CONTACT WITH  
EGYPT AND THE NEAR EAST

Clay tablets inscribed with Linear B signs were used by the Mycenaeans primarily to document their economic activities in the major palatial centers, from Mycenae, Pylos, and Thebes on the Greek mainland to Knossos, Khania, and other centers on Crete. While these tablets never refer to trade or other contact with the outside world—leading some scholars to speculate that the “foreign” archives may have been kept elsewhere in the palaces—they do contain words with foreign derivations, usually linked with specific foreign goods.

Thus, the Linear B word *mi-sa-ra-jo*, translated as “Egyptian,” comes from the Semitic word for Egypt, *Misraim*. An alternate word, Linear B *a<sub>3</sub>-ku-pi-ti-jo*, translated as “Memphite” or “Egyptian,” comes from the Ugaritic name for both Egypt and the city of Memphis (= *Hikupta*, corresponding to the *Hikuptah* of the Amarna Letters and to *Ht-k’-pth* in Egyptian). Likewise, the Linear B word *ku-ru-so*, meaning “gold,” comes from the Akkadian *hurasu*, Ugaritic *hrs*, and Hebrew *harus*, while the Linear B words *e-re-pa* and *e-re-pa-te-jo/-ja*, translated as “ivory,” come from the Hebrew *’elef*, Akkadian *alpu*, and Hittite *la-ah-pa-aš*.<sup>21</sup> It seems clear, in virtually every such case, that the foreign word was imported along with the foreign object, arriving together in the Bronze Age Aegean.

WALL PAINTINGS WITH AEGEAN  
FEATURES IN EGYPT AND THE  
NEAR EAST

Among the most interesting artifacts suggesting contact between the Aegean area, Egypt, and the Near East are the paintings found in Egyptian tombs on the one hand and in palaces in Egypt and Canaan (modern Israel and Syria) on the other.

Among the former are the tombs of Rekhmire, Menkheperreseneb, and other Egyptian nobles, which document the apparent arrival in Egypt of Minoans and/or Minoan goods (and, later, Mycenaean and Mycenaean goods), from the days of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III in the fifteenth century B.C. through the heady days of the Amarna period in the fourteenth century B.C. and into the final days of the New Kingdom in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries B.C.<sup>22</sup>

Among the latter are a painted ceiling with bucrania (bulls’ heads) at Amenhotep III’s palace at Malkata in Egypt, which appears to show Aegean influence. More intriguing, and more recently discovered, is a palace at the site of Avaris (today Tell el-Dab’a) in the Nile Delta region, which originally served as the Hyksos capital city. Avaris was later captured by the Egyptians and resettled, with numerous palaces built by pharaohs such as Thutmose III. In one such palace, Manfred Bietak found a tremendous wall painting executed either by Minoans or by artisans trained in Minoan painting techniques (see Bietak essay, pp. 188–99). Though the painting was found torn down and discarded, it can be seen to depict numerous bulls and bull-leapers, a motif that is more at home at Knossos than in the Nile Delta and that begs for an explanation to account for its presence here in Egypt (see Koehl essay, pp. 170–79).<sup>23</sup>

The painting at Avaris is not unique, however, for three other sites in the Near East have yielded similar types of Aegean-style floor and wall decorations, ranging from Alalakh in Turkey and Qatna in Syria to Tel Kabri in Israel. These, described at length elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> all seem to reflect Minoan, or perhaps Cycladic, influences and, again, to have been painted either by Aegean artisans or by those trained in Aegean painting techniques. Those at Alalakh were found by Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1930s and 1940s, but those at Qatna and Tel Kabri are still being recovered by modern expeditions.<sup>25</sup> It is, as yet, unclear why Egyptian and Canaanite



rulers would have wanted Aegean-style paintings to decorate their palaces, but at the very least it is clear that such decorations reflect contact between the Aegean, Egypt, and the Near East during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The dramatic shift in our understanding of trade and other contacts between the Aegean, Egypt, and the Near East from as recently as the 1980s is manifest in a sign that now hangs in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens. It reads as follows:

*The Mycenaean World Between the East and the West*

The Egyptians took an interest in the Tanaja, as they called the Mycenaeanans . . . and their rise to power beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is indicative that faience plaques, vessels, and figurines with the cartouche of the Pharaohs Amenophis [Amenhotep] II and Amenophis [Amenhotep] III were brought to Mycenae, possibly even by official Egyptian delegations. . . . The biblical land Canaan, the ports of Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon), Syria and Cyprus all had trading relations with the Mycenaean world. Ships crossed the Aegean sea laden with copper and glass ingots, elephant and hippopotamus tusks, semi-precious stones and faience to be worked in the palatial workshops of Mycenae and at other centres. Also considered as exotic items were Egyptian faience scarabs, bronze statuettes of the Syro-Palestinian god Reshef, cylinder seals depicting Mesopotamian gods and heroes, ostrich eggs and possibly even cloths. Canaanite pointed-base amphorae were used to transport a number of goods to Greece. . . .<sup>26</sup>

Such a sign, and such confident statements, would not have been made thirty years ago, let alone hang in the main Prehistoric gallery of the National Archaeological Museum, Athens. That is how far we have come. Happily, Mycenae and the Mycenaean world, as well as Crete and the Minoans, are no longer “beyond Babylon.”

1. Pulak 1988a; Pulak 1993; Bass 1997a; Pulak 1997; Bass 1998; Pulak 1998; Pulak 1999; Pulak 2001; Pulak 2005; Bachhuber 2006.
2. Lambrou-Phillipson 1990; Cline 1994; Phillips 2008.
3. Kemp and Merrillees 1980; Leonard 1981; Leonard 1985; Leonard and Cline 1998; van Wijngaarden 2002.
4. For example, Cline 1995; Cline 1999a; Cline 1999b; Cline 2005; Cline 2010. See now Burns 2010; W. A. Parkinson 2010.
5. Cline 1994; Cline 2010.
6. Cline 1994.
7. Ibid.
8. Cline 1987; Cline 1990; Cline 1998a; Phillips and Cline 2005.
9. Cline 1994 (with bibliography).
10. Ibid., p. 157, no. 203 (with bibliography).
11. Kemp and Merrillees 1980; Leonard 1981; Leonard 1985; Leonard and Cline 1998; van Wijngaarden 2002.
12. Cline 1994; see also Cline 1991a; Cline 1991b.
13. Cline 1994, p. 72; see also further discussion. Note that “Ahhiyawa” is most likely a reference to mainland Greece, at least in the present author’s opinion. See now Beckman, Bryce, and Cline 2011.
14. Cline 1996; Cline 1997.
15. ARMT 23: 556 (Bardet et al. 1984). See Cline 1994, p. 126 (D2).
16. ARMT 25: 420 (Limet 1986) and ARMT 21: 342 (Durand 1983), respectively. See Cline 1994, pp. 126–27 (D5, D7) (with bibliography).
17. See, for example, Bryce 1989; Cline 1994.
18. RS 16.238. See Cline 1994, p. 120 (B3) (with bibliography).
19. Cline 1987; Cline 1990; Cline 1998a.
20. See now Cline and Stannish 2011.
21. See Cline 1994, pp. 128–31 (E1–24) (with bibliography).
22. Vercoutter 1954; Vercoutter 1956; Wachsmann 1987; Cline 1994.
23. Bietak 1995; Cline 1998b; Bietak 2000b.
24. W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998; Bietak 2007a; Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007; Brysbaert 2008; Pfälzner 2008a.
25. See Pfälzner 2008a; Cline, Yasur-Landau, and Goshen 2011; von Räden 2011.
26. Seen and recorded by the author in August 2010.

# Contacts: Crete, Egypt, and the Near East circa 2000 B.C.

This essay examines the interaction between Minoan Crete, Egypt, the Levant, and Anatolia in the twenty-first and twentieth centuries B.C. and briefly thereafter.<sup>1</sup>

Of course contacts began much earlier. The appearance en masse of pottery of Anatolian derivation in Crete at the beginning of Early Minoan (EM) I, around 3000 B.C.,<sup>2</sup> together with some evidence of destructions and the occupation of refuge sites at the time, suggests the arrival of settlers from Anatolia. The “International Age” of the mid-third millennium B.C. saw the arrival in Crete of imports of gold, faience, ivory, Egyptian stone vases, and a silver cylinder seal from Syria.<sup>3</sup> A foot amulet-seal from a tomb in the Mesara clearly depends on Egyptian prototypes.<sup>4</sup> A piece of hippopotamus tusk, probably from Egypt, was found in an EM IIA fill above the West Court House at Knossos.<sup>5</sup>

In EM III the picture changed, with international trade apparently sharply diminished in some areas. The change may have resulted in large measure from a major desiccation event ca. 2250–2050 B.C. and its consequences in the form of movements and invasions.<sup>6</sup> In Anatolia the arc of destruction included Troy, where the great walls of Troy II–III fell into ruin and Troy IV suffered six destruction levels; sites in Cilicia proper and across the Taurus Mountains at the metallurgical site at Göltepe; and Kültepe to the east. In the Khabur Valley in northeastern Syria, the

major Akkadian site at Tell Leilan and many of its neighboring sites were abandoned ca. 2200 B.C.<sup>7</sup> Many other Syrian sites were abandoned early in Early Bronze (EB) IVB, with the final wave of destruction and abandonment coming at the end of EB IVB, about the end of the third millennium B.C.<sup>8</sup> In Canaan there was a precipitous decline in the number of inhabited sites in EB III–IVB,<sup>9</sup> including a hiatus posited at Ugarit. In Cyprus, the Philia phase of the Early Bronze Age, “characterised by a uniformity of material culture indicating close connections between different parts of the island”<sup>10</sup> and linked to a broader eastern Mediterranean interaction sphere, broke down, perhaps because of a general collapse of overseas systems and a reduced demand for Cypriot copper.<sup>11</sup> With respect to Egypt, Donald Redford states that “[t]he incidence of famine increases in the late 6th Dynasty and early First Intermediate Period, and a reduction in rainfall and the annual flooding of the Nile seems to have afflicted northeast Africa with progressive desiccation as the third millennium draws to a close.”<sup>12</sup>

Contact between regions clearly suffered. At Byblos there are no Egyptian pharaonic inscriptions between those of Pepi II at the end of Dynasty 6 in EB II and Dynasty 12 in the Middle Bronze Age. Evidence of Egyptian contact with Sinai and Nubia in this period is practically nonexistent.

Crete also experienced a period of drier climate in EM III,<sup>13</sup> perhaps beginning in EM IIB. Around the end of EM IIB, a number of settlements and cemeteries were destroyed or abandoned and not reoccupied, while refuge sites appeared on hilltops where access was extremely difficult.<sup>14</sup> Crete seems to have recovered relatively quickly, however, with late EM III–Middle Minoan (MM) I witnessing site nucleation and the beginning of monumental architecture at the major centers of Knossos, Phaistos, and Mallia.

In the Aegean, the International Age of EB II was followed by a wave of destructions, associated on the islands and at sites along the mainland coast with the arrival of

new groups from Anatolia,<sup>15</sup> perhaps set in motion by the climatic factors mentioned above. Some settlements were abandoned and others were established in more remote and defensible positions with fortifications, for example at Kastri on Syros, built when the great Early Cycladic (EC) I–II cemetery went out of use, perhaps suggesting the arrival of new inhabitants. The manufacture of marble objects ceased or declined sharply, and cist tomb burial went out of fashion. Beginning in Early Helladic (EH) II in the northern Cyclades and central Greece, and continuing into EB III as far as Aigina and the southern Cyclades, metal forms and burnished pottery of western Anatolian shape, known as the Kastri group or EC IIIA intrusive ware, appeared.<sup>16</sup>

How did these developments affect Crete? A cemetery at Hagia Photia on the north-east coast of Crete contained one teapot and a few sherds of Kastri ware, dated around the end of EM II/beginning of EM III,<sup>17</sup> and a single sherd was found in the fill of an MM IA foundation deposit at Knossos,<sup>18</sup> but no other Kastri material has been reported from Crete. Sixty kilometers to the north, at Christiana, the nearest Cycladic island to Crete, the situation is far different. On the saddle of a hill from which Crete is sometimes visible there is a rich scatter of EC IIIA intrusive ware, *depas* handles included.<sup>19</sup> The boundary between the Cyclades and Crete thus marks the abrupt limit of the expansion of the Kastri group. Pottery of the subsequent Phylakopi I type is also known from Christiana but absent from Crete, again indicating a line of demarcation. Some contact with Cycladic or Attic copper sources in this period may have continued, however. A hilltop on the north coast of Crete at Chrysokamino, with traces of occupation from Final Neolithic through EM III, provides the earliest evidence for copper smelting on Crete. The lead isotope composition of the Chrysokamino fragments from the slag heaps bears some resemblance to that of the ores of the Cycladic island of Kythnos and the mines at Lavrion

in Attica. Accordingly, the Chrysokamino evidence neither establishes nor precludes Cretan contact with Cycladic ore sources in EM III.<sup>20</sup>

While there is some evidence of internal disruption in areas of Crete at the end of the EM II period, ca. 2300–2250 B.C., on the whole Crete escaped the great waves of destruction in mainland Greece and the Cyclades. In the following EM III–MM I period, ca. 2100–1900 B.C., Crete began a millennium of intense contact with the cultures of Egypt and the Near East. In sum, the first appearance of monumentality and literacy in the Aegean, in EM III–MM I, with its concentration at the preexisting centers of ritual and production at Knossos, Phaistos, and Mallia,<sup>21</sup> may be seen as the consequence of the happy position of Crete, just far enough apart and with sufficient population relative to size to resist destructive incursions, but within range of a wide variety of stimuli from the civilizations of Egypt and the Near East around the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

Egypt may have recovered from the disarray caused by the low Nile floods of the First Intermediate Period a short time before recovery took hold in the Levant and Anatolia. By the last quarter of the twentieth century B.C., Egyptian expeditions to the Near East, some military in nature, were bringing back enormous amounts of booty, if the Mit Rahina inscription from the court records of Amenemhat II are to be believed.<sup>22</sup> While there is evidence of Cretan contact with the Near East as well in the period just prior to and at the beginning of the Minoan First Palace period, ca. 2150–1925 B.C., the contacts with Egypt seem to have been both earlier and more significant with respect to the emergence of palatial society on Crete.<sup>23</sup> Stimulus diffusion via models of behavior and of technical knowledge, including knowledge of the possible, may have had far greater importance than the specific goods exchanged.<sup>24</sup>

In EM III–MM IA (but perhaps mostly in MM IA, if in the central Phaistos–Knossos



zone that period began before 2000 B.C.) Egyptian stone vases, scarabs, and faience were both imported and imitated locally in Crete.<sup>25</sup> The use of the hand drill in the manufacture of stone vases and seals may have followed Egyptian practice. Minoan seal production appears to have followed the Egyptian example in the use of ivory and faience and in the adoption of cylinder and scarab shapes, and perhaps the button shape as well.<sup>26</sup> Scarabs were first manufactured in Egypt in the First Intermediate Period, ca. 2150–2025 B.C., and arrived on Crete by at least the latter part of the period, around or just before the beginning of MM I.<sup>27</sup> Their findspots both in Egypt and Crete suggest an amuletic function with strong funerary associations. The Cretan versions depict not the indigenous horned variety of beetle, but instead reproduce the Egyptian models.<sup>28</sup> A local technique was used to produce the designs on the seal faces, however, one of many instances in which Minoan craftspeople adapted foreign models to their own purposes.<sup>29</sup> The rapidity with which Minoans learned to imitate the technique of Egyptian blue glaze, even if the results were fugitive, shows a knowledge of Egypt beyond that indicated by the copying of imported vases and scarabs. Daphna Ben-Tor observes that

the ability of Cretan artisans to manufacture scarabs using the same material and manufacturing techniques as the Egyptians suggests close familiarity with Egyptian manufacturing of scarabs, which could have been attained only by working alongside Egyptian artisans. This could not take place at Byblos, where no scarab manufacturing is attested during the Middle Bronze Age.<sup>30</sup>

While the glazing technique is known in Syria-Palestine as well, the shape of the Cretan seals is entirely Egyptian, as is the inspiration for many of the images. Kostas Sbonias in his discussion of seal shapes and images previously unknown in Crete notes

in particular the Parading Lions/Spiral Complex (fig. 1), of which fifty-six of the eighty examples on Crete—probably made from Egyptian hippopotamus tusk—were found in the Mesara Plain in south-central Crete at the site of Platanos. Seals of the “White Piece” group, with more than one hundred examples, some of scarab shape, are a Minoan innovation with no precedent in Egypt.<sup>31</sup> They are made, however, from what appears to be heated talc (steatite), used for imports from Egypt and for Minoan imitations, some with scarab form and Egyptian-type designs, hence indicative of an early case of technological and artistic transfer in, and limited to, the late Prepalatial period in Crete.<sup>32</sup> Several partial impressions of a Parading Lions seal were found in an EM III context at Knossos.<sup>33</sup> Lions are not native to Crete, nor are they likely to have been imported by sea for zoos. The great majority of those viewing the seals or seal impressions depicting highly stylized lions surely had not observed them firsthand. Rather, the portrayal and intended perception were likely that of a mythical beast signifying power.<sup>34</sup>

Excavations of cave deposits at Hagios Charalambos and Trapeza in the mountain chain surrounding the Lasithi Plain in east-central Crete have produced EM III–MM IA objects made from hippopotamus tusks, including seals, human figurines, miniature knife handles, a pommel, pendants, beads, an abstracted double-headed animal, apes, and an ivory foot amulet, a type that originated in Egypt.<sup>35</sup> The cave at Hagios Charalambos served as a site of secondary burial; the place of primary burial and the location and nature of the settlement(s) of those buried are still unknown. The recovery of so many objects of foreign origin in so remote an area in the Prepalatial period came as a surprise, and should serve as a warning about how the accidents of discovery may affect our distribution maps. One of the hippopotamus-ivory seals from Hagios Charalambos is ape-shaped, as are some of the seals from south-central Crete; they

have designs on their bases that are similar to the designs on the bases of ape-shaped seals found in Egypt.<sup>36</sup> Such seals belong to a special tradition in Egypt, with what are likely religious connotations.<sup>37</sup> Monkey/ape seals and pendants have been found in late Prepalatial levels at Hagia Triada, Marathokephalo, Platanos, Mallia, and Archanes Phourni, as well as at the Hagios Charalambos and Trapeza caves.<sup>38</sup> Joan Aruz suggests that the seals may have come via the Levant, where such seals have also been found,<sup>39</sup> and Keith Branigan proposed in 1973 that Minoan trade in Egyptian goods in general was conducted via Syria,<sup>40</sup> but the Levant in the twenty-first and early twentieth centuries B.C. was still struggling. Moreover, direct voyages between Egypt and Crete appear more feasible both nautically and logistically, as will be discussed further below.

Egyptian forms and motifs clearly influenced Minoan crafts, but in all cases they were subject to Minoan selection and transformation, whether of vase shapes or images of animals.<sup>41</sup> In MM IA, burial practices in elite Minoan tholos tombs in the Mesara Plain included the adoption or adaptation of some Egyptian funerary practices and equipment, such as the use of clay coffins, stone cosmetic palettes, stone vases of types used in Egypt for funerary purposes, and clay models of bread loaves.<sup>42</sup> In this period the Phourni cemetery at Archanes, on the slopes of Mount Jouktas, not far from Knossos, also shows strong Egyptian connections, including a stone vase, two scarabs, and a clay sistrum. Five clay sistra and fragments of another, believed by the excavator to be MM IA in date, were deposited in the MM II secondary burial deposit in the Hagios Charalambos Cave.<sup>43</sup> The clay appears to be Cretan, but not local to the region. It is the idea of the sistrum that is imported.<sup>44</sup> While sistra have been found in the Near East, the ultimate source was in all likelihood Egyptian.<sup>45</sup> The image of a sistrum became a sign in the Linear A script.<sup>46</sup> Phourni gives every indication of pronounced social stratification, with



Fig. 1. Modern impression of a Parading Lions seal. Crete, Platanos, Tholos A. Middle Minoan I period. Heraklion Archaeological Museum

four monumental tombs containing many imported elite objects alongside very simple burials with few grave goods.<sup>47</sup> This distribution suggests that high social status and access to foreign prestige goods and knowledge were intimately connected.<sup>48</sup> The Phourni cemetery in this period (MM IA) has also produced what may be the earliest version of a Cretan Hieroglyphic script.<sup>49</sup> The stimulus for this form of writing in all likelihood was Egyptian, and a few of the signs, such as the respective wine ideograms, are quite similar.<sup>50</sup>

The question of possible foreign influence on the architecture of the Minoan palaces has long been debated.<sup>51</sup> Construction techniques, architectural designs, and the possible spur to aspiration resulting from awareness of buildings in Egypt and/or the Near East require consideration. About 2030 B.C. on the Middle Chronology, Mentuhotep Nebhepetra built his great funerary temple at Deir el-Bahri, perhaps about the time of the imposing structure at Chrysolakkos at Mallia, where evidence of a monumental orthostat predates, by about a century, the construction of the impressive western facades of the palaces at Phaistos and Knossos. Chrysolakkos was also “bounded by a rubble and mudbrick wall topped by a series of rounded capping stones

that are unparalleled outside of Egypt” and contained pointed-bottomed cups of a shape quite common in Egypt but otherwise without parallel in Crete.<sup>52</sup> With respect to the architecture of the first palace at Knossos, Alexander MacGillivray has noted that the wall of the northwest platform, perhaps the earliest surviving part of the palace and on a different alignment from the rest, was made of small cut limestone blocks laid in regular courses, suggesting that the builder may have been familiar with mudbrick construction.<sup>53</sup> Small cut stones were also used in the wall flanking Royal Road West at Knossos. Egypt, where building with small cut stones had been practiced since Dynasty 3, may have provided a stimulus in the form of buildings such as the Amenemhat I pyramid at Lisht (ca. 1990–1970 B.C.). During the reign of Amenemhat large structures of cut stone were also erected in the Nile Delta, a likely point of initial contact between Minoans and Egyptians. Whether any foreign inspiration occurred is open to question, however, since the Mesara tholoi show that in EM I Minoan stonemasons could already work and face building stone and lay it in courses.<sup>54</sup>

This method of construction was quickly superseded by the erection of palace facades at Knossos and Phaistos, built first on large ashlar vertical orthostats, then on long rectangular courses. The origin of ashlar orthostat construction is problematic. Though rare in Egypt, such construction does exist, for example, in the pyramid temple of Sahure.<sup>55</sup> At Ebla in Syria, orthostat construction may be seen in the southwest city gate,<sup>56</sup> but this may be later than the Cretan examples. At most, however, it is the idea of monumentality, plus perhaps the technique of quarrying and transporting large stones and the employment of control marks (see the Minoan “masons’ marks”),<sup>57</sup> that Crete adopted. In the Minoan Prepalatial period there is no evidence of imitation of foreign architectural plans in general.

The use of the potter’s wheel may also derive from Egyptian example. The low,

block-like slow wheel appears in wall paintings of Dynasty 5 (ca. 2475–2300 B.C.). During Dynasty 6 and the First Intermediate Period, the presence of a central spiral on cups indicates that they were placed on a wheel at some point during the process of manufacture.<sup>58</sup> By at least late in the reign of Senwosret I, around 1925 B.C. (and hence overlapping the beginning of the Cretan Old Palace period), a somewhat higher and more slender wheel stem was introduced. Dorothea Arnold has noted that the depiction of this wheel in the tomb of the nomarch Amenemhat at Beni Hasan closely resembles that of an MM IB wheel found in the excavation at Mallia in Crete.<sup>59</sup> One detail is of particular interest—the oblique parallel lines observable on the wheel-top in the painting, which find their analogue in the incised lines on the Minoan wheel (figs. 2, 3). The appearance in vast numbers in cultic and other contexts in Crete of the archetypal Minoan vessel, the conical cup, may also be of Egyptian inspiration. Farther away, in Mesopotamia, the conical cup replaced the beveled-rim bowl as the standard mass-produced vessel,<sup>60</sup> but the Mesopotamian cups are generally larger, and their method of manufacture is different.

What might Egypt have received from Crete in MM I, about the time of the construction of the first palaces? Silver found in Egypt in Dynasty 10 to 12 contexts contains traces of lead consistent with sources in the Cyclades and the Lavrion field on the coast of Attica.<sup>61</sup> Timber, spices, medicinal herbs, and decorated fabrics are obvious possibilities for Minoan exports to Egypt. The design of the ceiling from the tomb of Hapzefa in the reign of Senwosret I was linked by Helene Kantor and subsequently by Maria Shaw to the influence of Minoan textiles, in this case perhaps tapestries.<sup>62</sup> Egypt has limited grazing land for sheep, and linen does not easily accept dyes; accordingly Minoan fabrics may have been particularly prized. Elizabeth Barber has suggested that the Early Minoan spinning bowls found at Myrtos–Fournou Korifi, on the south coast of Crete, might



indicate a Cretan origin for the flax-spinning method employed later in Egypt.<sup>63</sup> The spiral decoration on some Egyptian seals, together with the use in Egypt of stamp seals in the First Intermediate Period, may reflect links with Crete as well.<sup>64</sup> A stele of Senwosret II refers to the Horus Keftiu.<sup>65</sup>

Were contacts between Egypt and Crete in the twenty-first and early twentieth centuries B.C. direct, or did ships travel from Egypt to Crete by making a counterclockwise circuit via the Near East, Cyprus, and the Dodecanese? None doubt the relative ease of direct voyages from Crete to Egypt given the prevailing winds and currents, but some have questioned the nautical feasibility of direct Egypt-to-Crete sea travel.<sup>66</sup> Such voyages appear practicable at certain times of the year, however, particularly by following the African shoreline from the Nile Delta to Cyrenaica and then turning toward Crete. Sailing vessels traveling at normal speeds would have been out of sight of land for only one day before coming within sight of the White Mountains of Crete, with Egyptian knowledge of the night sky surely serving as an aid to navigation. Direct voyages would have avoided the practical and political problems of arranging for safe anchorage and provisioning for ships voyaging up the Levantine coast and then to Cyprus and/or the Dodecanese before reaching Crete and making their way along its south coast.<sup>67</sup>

Available evidence suggests that the first voyages between Egypt and Crete were under Egyptian control, even if the crews and shipwrights may have been Levantines familiar with working cedarwood and sea voyaging.<sup>68</sup> Expeditions to Byblos are recorded in Egypt by the mid-third millennium B.C. The “ship kit” buried in the Khufu pyramid has been reassembled into a ship 43 meters in length.<sup>69</sup> A ship of Dynasty 12 whose remains were excavated at an Egyptian Red Sea port has an estimated length of 30 meters or more (see Ward essay, pp. 46–53).<sup>70</sup>

A Minoan seal found in an MM IA context (ca. 2000 B.C.), at the close of the



Fig. 2. Depiction of an Egyptian potter's wheel. Beni Hasan, Tomb of Amenemhat. Middle Kingdom

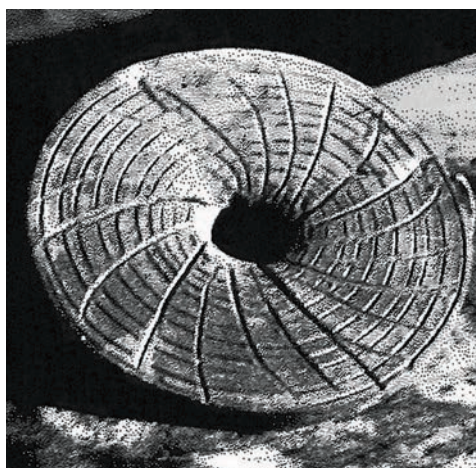


Fig. 3. Potter's wheel. Crete, Mallia. Middle Minoan IB

Prepalatial period, depicts a sailing vessel.<sup>71</sup> Of course we cannot be certain that the vessel is Minoan, nor that such vessels did not exist earlier. In any event the seal owner clearly wished to signal a role in seafaring. The creation of a sailing vessel was a complex and costly undertaking, requiring the accumulation of extensive knowledge regarding construction, equipping, and seamanship, plus the capability of organizing the labors of various crafts. It seems highly likely that those who directed the shipbuilding and the voyages belonged to the ruling elite in Crete. Mary Helms has provided the classic anthropological discussion of how travel to and knowledge of distant places may have been perceived as conferring special

powers, and how foreign goods may have been seen as supernatural and powerful.<sup>72</sup>

The late Prepalatial period in Crete saw the nucleation of settlement, with Knossos reaching an estimated 33 hectares and Phaistos 27 hectares.<sup>73</sup> With respect to Knossos, Todd Whitelaw concluded “that this relatively short phase was a period of very rapid and significant expansion of the community.”<sup>74</sup> Regarding Phaistos, Simona Todaro observes that in EM III “a major building project took place which filled in all structures belonging to the previous phase and substantially changed the appearance of the Palace hill.”<sup>75</sup> Monumental mortuary structures appeared at Archanes Phourni and in south-central Crete. A locus of authority sufficient to command the leveling of the summit of the Kephala hill at Knossos, including a large number of houses; the creation of the Royal Road, 5 meters wide and almost 1 kilometer long;<sup>76</sup> and the monumental construction of the Old Palace is clearly present. Cretan contact with Egypt appears to have played a prominent role in the marked intensification of complexity in Minoan society at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

Notwithstanding the importance of Cretan contact with Egypt and its chronological precedence to major contact with the Near East, by the twentieth century B.C. the significance of contact with western Asia, in particular with regard to metallurgy and the search for metal sources, seems clear. Crete has no significant metal resources and was thus dependent on foreign sources for copper and tin, the essential constituents for a Bronze Age society. An interruption of regular access to sources in the Cyclades may have provided an added spur to a search for metals in the east. We may note in this connection the Cilician-Syrian inspiration of Minoan daggers,<sup>77</sup> the appearance of Minoan daggers and an MM IA bridge-spouted jar in tombs at Lapithos and Vounous on the north coast of Cyprus, a Cypriot sherd in an MM I context at the south-coast port of Kommos in Crete, the

presence of EM III–MM I sherds at Karpathos and Kos, the MM I pottery reported from Rhodes and Knidos,<sup>78</sup> and the appearance at Knossos of a Cypriot amphora.<sup>79</sup> Anatolian models may have provided the inspiration for Minoan relief-decorated pottery in EM III–MM IA,<sup>80</sup> and by MM IB–IIA Anatolian influence can be seen in fluted kantharoi and animal-headed rhyta.<sup>81</sup>

The Tôd Treasure, found in Egypt in copper chests with the cartouche of Amenemhat II and thus dated around 1900 B.C., consists of 153 silver vessels and many silver chains and bars. Peter Warren and Vronwy Hankey thought the treasure Minoan, citing a closely parallel clay cup from the Stratigraphic Museum excavations at Knossos with repoussé circles in the bottom painted white in possible imitation of silver and other Minoan pottery comparanda, whereas Ellen Davis and Vance Watrous have contended that the treasure is typically Anatolian.<sup>82</sup> “[T]he Tôd bee seal-amulet suggests at least an awareness of Minoan work.”<sup>83</sup> Conversely, the adoption of bee imagery may have derived from Egypt, where the bee was a pharaonic symbol.<sup>84</sup> The same reign witnessed the arrival in the Nile Delta, at the site of ‘Ezbet Rushdi, of MM IB–IIA ceramics of fine quality and bearing some resemblances to some of the silver vessels of the Tôd Treasure.<sup>85</sup> Lead isotope analysis was not able to distinguish between Aegean and Anatolian sources for the silver vessels tested, but the metal of the chains, which differed in composition from the rest of the silver, was consistent with a source on the island of Thasos or in the mines of Chalcidice in northern Greece.<sup>86</sup> Texts found at Mari on the Euphrates River about a century later speak of the arrival of silver vessels from Kaptara, almost certainly Crete.<sup>87</sup> The uncertainty as to whether the silver vessels in the Tôd Treasure are Minoan or Anatolian (or made locally in imitation of foreign prototypes) reminds us of the close similarity of western Asian and Minoan metallurgy in this period, and of the Minoan dependence on eastern sources of tin and copper

in particular. One of a group of tablets of ca. 1800–1750 B.C.—MM II on Crete—found at Mari refers to the dispatch of one third of a mina of tin to Ugarit, on the Mediterranean, for “the translator [and] the overseer of the merchants from Crete in Ugarit.”<sup>88</sup> Whether the text refers to a permanent colony of Cretan merchants or a group that came in the sailing season, it implies a significant trade in tin. Of the references to Kaptara in the Mari tablets translated to date, ten mention weapons. The armorers of Egypt and the Near East produced nothing that could compare with the magnificent Minoan swords of this period found at the Mallia Palace in Crete.<sup>89</sup> While these swords, with their gold pommels, were parade pieces, surely their creation reflected the production of swords for combat as well. Taken together, the evidence suggests that Minoan contact with the Near East involved (inter alia) the importation of tin and the export of bronze weapons.<sup>90</sup>

Cretan contact with the Assyrian colony period metal-trading network in Anatolia and with other Anatolian metal sources also seems likely. A critical question with respect to the significance of the contact is raised by the large cache of sealings discovered in one room of the palace at Phaistos, preserved in the MM IIB destruction level of the late eighteenth century B.C.<sup>91</sup> Of course the chronological level in which sealings are recovered may be considerably later than the time when the sealing system represented first came into use. Sealings, which can be difficult to recognize in any event, are only preserved in Crete if a fire accidentally bakes them and they are protected by a roof collapsing before rain comes. Aruz, noting parallels between the system already employed at Lerna in the Peloponnese in EH II and that of Arslantepe in Anatolia, has suggested an arrival of administrative, rather than merely decorative, seal use on Crete significantly earlier than the MM IIB destruction deposit at Phaistos.<sup>92</sup> Enigmatic evidence of some kind of seal use is present in EM II at the small village of Myrtilos–Fournou Korifi

on the south coast of Crete and in EM III–MM IA at the Phourni cemetery.<sup>93</sup> It is of course difficult on such fragmentary evidence to determine the nature of this use. Were the seals initially simply attractive objects whose possession conferred prestige? Were they used only to decorate cloth, pottery, or bodies? Perhaps the next stage was the use of sealings to identify personal, family, or clan property. Administrative use is another matter. Sealings may have been used to indicate the sources of goods coming from farmers, pastoralists, or craftspeople; to seal chests or storerooms; or to do both and supplement writing in the creation of a major system of administration.

Judith Weingarten has argued that by the end of the eighteenth century B.C. the Phais-tian sealing system was the same in every detail as the system employed at the site of Karahöyük, near Konya in central Turkey.<sup>94</sup> This is so important an assertion—the proposed complete adoption of a particular foreign administrative system by a major Minoan palace—that it deserves close attention. Stamp seals survived as the form of choice in Crete and in Anatolia, whereas other areas of the Near East employed cylinder seals.<sup>95</sup> Minoan seals of gable shape may derive from gable seals found in this period in Syria/Cilicia and at Kültepe, a key node in the Assyrian trading colony metallurgical network.<sup>96</sup> A number of Aegean seal shapes and motifs have Anatolian parallels at Acemhöyük, Boğazköy, and Alishar Höyük, as well as at Kültepe and Karahöyük.<sup>97</sup> A small percentage of the sealings at both Karahöyük and Phaistos exhibit some simple designs that are extremely similar if not identical.

It would of course have been possible to adopt a foreign sealing system while retaining native iconography. Conversely, it would have been possible to adopt only the idea of affixing seal impressions to objects, doors, or pegs closing chests—the principal elements of the common sealing system Weingarten discerns—without intensive contact between Crete and the Assyrian colony metal-trading network. A prominent



feature of the Anatolian system, the clay crescent stamped by seals, thought to act as a receipt, does not appear in Crete. The Minoan roundel is not a convincing analogue, in view of its different use of seal impressions and its scarcity relative to the crescents. Moreover, in western Asia sealing and writing were often employed jointly, whereas in Crete almost no seals are inscribed, and tablets are not sealed. Significant differences exist between the systems of Karahöyük and Phaistos, and evidence for intense direct contact between administrators at the two sites is lacking.

In any event, the evidence for some type of contact, even if not profound, between Phaistos and the Anatolian trading center at Karahöyük, a site whose principal activity was trade in metal, reminds us again of the dependence of palatial Crete on metal from foreign sources. Forty-two percent of the copper found in the metallurgical workshop of Quartier Mu at Mallia came from Anatolian sources (as did much of the obsidian used in the manufacture of the obsidian blades found in the same deposit).<sup>98</sup> Quartier Mu was destroyed at or close to the time of the MM IIB destruction at Phaistos, which preserved the sealings discussed above. The amount of metal surviving in the archaeological record is of course only a very small fraction of what once existed—as the quantity of metal recovered from the Uluburun shipwreck reminds us—for metal is universally remelted and reused. It appears likely that the cause of the shift in the major focus of Minoan trade from Egypt to the Near East over the course of the First Palace period, culminating in the marked decline of contacts in the Egyptian Second Intermediate Period, lay in the ceaseless Minoan search for the metals that have given the Bronze Age its name. Contact with Egyptian civilization in the period ca. 2100–1950 B.C., however, provided the main source of the new ideas and technologies that led to the creation of the palatial culture of Minoan Crete.

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1. Of recent works addressing the subject across a broad range, those of Joan Aruz (2008), dealing with seals and sealings, and Vance Watrous (Watrous 1987; Watrous 1994; Watrous 2004), encompassing a wide array of data and interpretation, deserve special mention.
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26. Palmer 1994, p. 40; Aruz 2008, pp. 53, 55–56, 83.
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32. Watrous 2004, p. 257; Krzyszkowska 2005.
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34. Weingarten 2005, pp. 764–65 and n. 34.
35. H. W. Pendlebury, J. D. S. Pendlebury, and Money-Coutts 1935–36, pp. 19, 21; J. D. S. Pendlebury, Money-Coutts, and H. W. Pendlebury 1937–38, p. 2; Aruz 2000; Betancourt 2005; Ferrence 2007; Betancourt 2011; Betancourt 2012, pp. 187–89.
36. Aruz 2005, p. 756.
37. Aruz 2000, pp. 2–3; Ferrence 2007, p. 171.
38. Ferrence 2007, p. 171.
39. Aruz 2000, p. 4.
40. Branigan 1973, pp. 23, 26, cited in Ferrence 2007, p. 171.
41. Phillips 2008, pp. 156–217.
42. Watrous 1998, p. 24; Watrous 2004, pp. 259–60.
43. Betancourt 2011, p. 2.
44. The putative process is discussed in detail in Warren 2005, pp. 223–25.
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47. Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997; Colburn 2008.
48. Cf. Helms 1988; Helms 1993.
49. For a recent discussion of Cretan Hieroglyphic, see Olivier 2010.
50. Palmer 1996, fig. 17.1.
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55. Arnold (Dieter) 1991, p. 164.
56. Watrous 1987, p. 69.
57. F. Arnold 1990.
58. Arnold (Dorothea) 1993, pp. 46–49, 51–52; Dorothea Arnold, personal communication.
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60. Beale 1978, pp. 307–8.
61. Gale and Stos-Gale 1981, p. 191.
62. Kantor 1947; M. C. Shaw 1970.
63. Discussed in B. Burke 1999, p. 79, n. 24.
64. Kantor 1947; Quirke and Fitton 1997. Cf. Aruz 2008, pp. 53–61.
65. Cline 1994, p. 108, no. A.7.
66. Lambrou-Phillipson 1991.
67. Watrous 1992, pp. 177–78; Warren 1995, pp. 10–11.
68. Bietak 2010a; Bietak 2010b; Bietak 2011. I am grateful to Professor Manfred Bietak for calling my attention to this question and for his advice.
69. C. A. Ward 2010b, p. 154.
70. C. A. Ward, Zazzaro, and Abd el-Maguid 2010, p. 389. See generally Bard and Fattovich 2007; Bard and Fattovich 2008; Bard and Fattovich 2010.
71. Broodbank 2000, fig. 115. Other seals depicting ships with masts have been described as EM III–MM I, although contexts are frequently uncertain (Wedde 2000, pp. 331–33).
72. Helms 1988; Helms 1993.
73. Watrous 2004, pp. 256, 268; Whitelaw 2012, p. 144.
74. Whitelaw 2012, p. 141.
75. Todaro 2012, p. 212.
76. MacGillivray 1994, p. 52.
77. The origin of Minoan dagger design may lie in Syria (Branigan 1968, p. 186).
78. Watrous 1994, pp. 735–36, 747–49.
79. Lambrou-Phillipson 1990, p. 85.
80. Coldstream 1972, pp. 84–85. Cf. K. P. Foster 1982, pp. 142, 145–46; Betancourt 1985, pp. 84–85.
81. Watrous 1987, p. 67.
82. Warren and Hankey 1989, pp. 131–34 and pls. 5–11; Davis 1977, pp. 69–79; Watrous 1994, p. 749.
83. Aruz 2008, p. 87.
84. *Ibid.*
85. Lilyquist 1993; Marcus 2007.
86. Menu 1994.
87. Guichard 2005.
88. *Assyrian Dictionary* 2006, p. 135a, *tamkāru*, and p. 229b, *targamannu*. See also Malamat 1998, pp. 413–14.
89. Sandars 1963, p. 119.
90. Other Cretan imports mentioned in the Mari tablets include sandals, spices, and a ship inlaid with lapis lazuli, perhaps a ship model akin to the one carried by one of the figures on the Hagia Triada sarcophagus centuries later (Malamat 1998, p. 418). See also Guichard 1999; Guichard 2005; Sørensen 2009.
91. Walberg 1990.
92. Aruz 2008, pp. 48–49. At least one of the seal impressions was made by a seal created centuries earlier (Betancourt 2010, pp. 87–89).
93. Warren 1972, pp. 226–27; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997.
94. Weingarten 1990a, esp. p. 76; Weingarten 1994. See also Alp 1968; Poursat 1994.
95. Aruz 2008, p. 101.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
97. Aruz 2006, p. 49.
98. Poursat and Loubet 2005, p. 120, n. 19.







# Maritime Trade

# Seafaring in Ancient Egypt: Cedar Ships, Incense, and Long-Distance Voyaging

Recent archaeological finds at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis on Egypt's Red Sea coast and reconsideration of earlier finds establish a new paradigm for identifying ancient Egypt as a seafaring power. Extensive deposits of maritime materials show that by Dynasty 12, the Egyptians had achieved regular success in launching expeditions that acquired lumber from Mediterranean and local sources, built ships of several types, disassembled them for transport, sailed to Punt (likely on the modern Eritrean coast), and returned safely, laden with products vital to the daily life of the religious institutions of the country.

At Gawasis, a 10-meter-deep lagoon, hardened foreshore, and long galleries carved into uplifted fossil coral reefs functioned as an intermittent base of operations for state expeditions staged from Koptos, on the Nile. Their purpose was to facilitate the acquisition of exotic materials and animals from Punt, or *Pwenet* or "God's Land," primarily during Dynasty 12 of the Middle Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Ships were built of imported cedar of Lebanon at yards on the Nile, then disassembled, transported about 140 kilometers across the Eastern Desert to Gawasis by men and animals, and reassembled for a round-trip voyage of at least 2,430 kilometers to the southern Red Sea. Abundant remains of shipworm damage to exterior

planking surfaces, along with a range of recycled ship timbers and other maritime artifacts, attest to shipbreaking activities at the end of voyages as well.

Recognizing the unique methods of hull construction developed in Egypt is straightforward because the most ancient assemblage of complex watercraft belongs to the Nile Valley. Both ceremonial and working vessels are represented in the twenty-six finds that date from about five thousand to twenty-five hundred years ago.<sup>2</sup> Thick, irregularly shaped cedar planks were fastened about every cubit (ca. 45 cm) along their edges by long, trapezoidal tenons of native acacia (*Acacia nilotica*). Beams passed through the planking shell at deck level and supported deck planking, but hulls almost entirely lacked interior framing. To provide some perspective on these adjectives, "thick" means planks 12 to 22.5 centimeters thick, more than twice as thick as the thickest plank on the Late Bronze Age Uluburun ship (ca. 1300 B.C.). Although planks on these two examples are fastened by tenons of approximately the same length (22–26 cm), Egyptian tenons are twice the thickness (1.4–1.8 cm), usually paired, and spaced much farther apart than the Mediterranean example.

The discovery of fragments and entire timbers that once belonged to seagoing vessels has transformed our understanding of ancient Egyptian shipbuilding technologies. Until 2005, little direct evidence of seagoing ships existed in Egypt, and the scraps of cedar planks documented by Abdel Monem el Sayed at Gawasis in the late 1970s were never fully studied or integrated into a comprehensive approach to ship construction in Egypt. Since then, excavations at Gawasis and at Ayn Sokhna, near Suez, have provided substantial physical proof of Egypt's successful indigenous and idiosyncratic approach to building wooden watercraft.

From the mid-fourth millennium B.C., woodworking technologies evolved rapidly, as illustrated by finds of tools and wood planks, coffins, furniture, and, by early Dynasty 1, planked wooden boats. The

evolution of complex boatbuilding technology is documented in the consistency of fastening types and measurements, with the overall conception of the boat as a shallow hull built of thick, edge-joined planks that could be disassembled relatively easily.<sup>3</sup>

Despite a range of Nile craft that include both simple functional boats like that found at Matariya, near Heliopolis, and the ceremonial 43-meter-long Khufu ships at Giza, the most frequently cited evidence for sea-going came from the Punt reliefs at Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri (ca. 1480 B.C.).<sup>4</sup> Publication of the narrative scenes depicting a round-trip journey to God's Land engaged scholars interested in questions of how, when, and where the ancient Egyptians went to sea. Until excavations at Gawasis by the Boston University–Università degli studi di Napoli l'Orientale team uncovered a vast complex for staging round-trip voyages to Punt, primarily during the Middle Kingdom,<sup>5</sup> the Punt reliefs were virtually the only evidence brought in to elaborate discussions of how Egyptian ships were designed and built. Most reconstructions relied on archaic technology from the time of Khufu, one thousand years earlier, if indeed they attempted to use an Egyptian method, but even more scholars insisted that the only successful approach to shipbuilding was the typical Mediterranean technique of locked (pegged) mortise-and-tenon joints.

But at Gawasis and in recent excavations by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO) at Ayn Sokhna, both administrative frontier camps with recycled and stored ship timbers, a dramatically different perspective is demonstrated. This essay reviews archaeological evidence for Egyptian seafaring before 1450 B.C. and briefly describes the reconstruction of a Red Sea Punt ship at full scale.

#### INDIRECT EVIDENCE

Until recently, the only evidence for seafaring by the Egyptians was indirect: no pharaonic-period shipwrecks have been found.<sup>6</sup> A variety of textual sources indicates

regular contact with the Levant, especially Byblos, from the early third millennium B.C.,<sup>7</sup> as do finds such as Naqada II (ca. 3500–3200 B.C.) pottery off the coast of Israel, a stone vase fragment bearing the name of the Dynasty 2 ruler Khasekhemwy, and a Dynasty 4 gold Egyptian axehead found in Lebanon inscribed with the epithet “the boat crew Pacified-is-the-Two-Falcons-of-Gold port gang.” The Palermo Stone cites forty ships loaded with ‘s wood, probably cedar, brought to Egypt during the Dynasty 4 reign of Snefru (ca. 2600 B.C.).<sup>8</sup>

Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) was a raw material imported to Egypt, as it grows only at altitudes above 1,700 meters and historically is known from Lebanon, Cyprus, and Turkey's Cilician shore.<sup>9</sup> Archaeologists at several Predynastic Nile Valley sites have reported small quantities of cedar, and statues, coffins, furniture, and cedar planks more than 2 meters long were not uncommon by the Early Dynastic period. By Dynasty 4, physical evidence for a high volume of and high-value trade in cedar is most apparent in the 43-meter-long cedar ship reassembled beside Khufu's pyramid and a second “ship kit” of the same size, still disassembled and unexcavated in an adjacent boat grave.<sup>10</sup>

By the Middle Kingdom, Egyptian connections across the seas are better documented. A reexamination of the Mit Rahina inscription of Amenemhat II (r. ca. 1919–1885 B.C.) by Ezra S. Marcus suggests that it incorporates the official record of an expedition to Sinai in Amenemhat II's third regnal year, but more significantly offers an early cargo manifest.<sup>11</sup> Amenemhat launched a Mediterranean engagement that resulted in the transport of slaves, cedar, and booty from the Levant back to Egypt, in quantities that Marcus convincingly defines.

Egyptian voyages along established routes on the Mediterranean are implied by the Dynasty 5 depictions on the causeway of the pyramid complex of Sahure. Twelve sea-going ships—portrayed with fine details of rigging, hull construction, cargo, and passengers—represent a Mediterranean



Fig. 1. Detail of stone relief with expedition to Punt. Deir el-Bahri, mortuary temple of Hatshepsut. Dynasty 18, reign of Hatshepsut, ca. 1473–1458 B.C.



voyage, but Sahure also documented a Red Sea journey. Excavations in the mortuary temple of Sahure at Abusir by Miroslav Verner and the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt<sup>12</sup> produced decorated relief fragments featuring an incense tree; inscriptions referencing primates, dogs, and people; and portraits of individual men, women, and children of Punt. The Red Sea expedition, which, according to the Palermo Stone, dates to Sahure's thirteenth regnal year (ca. 2445 B.C.), returned from Punt laden with incense trees and eighty thousand measures of incense, among other goods.

Such voyages imply the use of relatively large ships operated by crews with the knowledge and experience required to navigate the reef-lined shores of the Red Sea. Hatshepsut's Punt reliefs (fig. 1) are a better-preserved and better-known example of the genre. Although speculative scholarly discussions have addressed the construction of her Punt ships,<sup>13</sup> none of the projections could be tested, as direct evidence was lacking.

#### SHIP TIMBERS FROM GAWASIS

The first direct evidence of pharaonic seafaring in Egyptian ships was uncovered in archaeological explorations at Gawasis, now positively identified as *S'wsw*, a pharaonic harbor and staging area for sea voyages.<sup>14</sup> The multicomponent site was briefly examined by Abdel Monem el Sayed of the University of Alexandria, who found a few fragments of mortised cedar planks and commemorative inscriptions on limestone anchors arranged as shrines above the bay.<sup>15</sup> A 1994 underwater survey by the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA)—Egypt in Gawasis documented only a single nineteenth-century iron anchor,<sup>16</sup> but the site continued to intrigue archaeologists.

In 2001, an Italian-American expedition directed by Kathryn Bard of Boston University and Rodolfo Fattovich of the Università degli studi di Napoli l'Orientale started work at this primarily Middle Kingdom harbor. A number of inscriptions honoring the officials and kings who organized

the trips to Punt emphasize its special function. Geophysical mapping has outlined a lagoon system deep enough to accommodate large ships. Excavations at Gawasis since 2004 have identified eight rooms and galleries carved about 20 meters deep into the fossil coral terrace, alongside work, habitation, and ritual areas (fig. 2). Some of the first artifacts recorded were two wood rudder blades for a steering oar, Egyptian-type stone anchors, and cedar ship timbers riddled with shells and paths of shipworms, the larval form of a warm-water mollusk.<sup>17</sup>

The cedar probably originated as trimmed and roughly squared logs from an expedition such as the one described in the annals of Amenemhat II.<sup>18</sup> Cedar growing at elevations above 1,700 meters was acquired, then transported to Egypt and up the Nile to a royal shipyard such as Thinis, at Koptos (modern Quft).<sup>19</sup> The process of building ships on the Nile and transporting them across the desert to the Red Sea is referred to in one of the Gawasis inscriptions.<sup>20</sup> Shipwrights probably created individual “kits,”<sup>21</sup> consisting of all the planks, beams, and other timbers needed to build an entire vessel. Quft is the closest point on the Nile to the Red Sea, about 140 kilometers across the Eastern Desert from Gawasis.

At Gawasis, men reassembled the ship kits and outfitted each vessel with the necessary equipment, including a square sail, almost certainly of linen, and oars to use for maneuvering in and out of port each night. Others acquired a local white limestone for weight anchors.<sup>22</sup> Because texts refer only to “ships” rather than to a precise numbers of vessels, the number of ships required to make the journey is unclear, although Hatshepsut illustrated five. Once the fleet departed, much of the staging team probably went elsewhere, but when the ships returned, cargo was unloaded and rapid disassembly of the hulls began.

Thousands of pieces of wood debris, cordage, linen fragments, and ship parts testify to shipbreaking, the predominant activity documented in areas directly outside the carved rooms at Gawasis. Toolmarks from

heavy copper-alloy axes, adzes, chisels, and saws, and from stone tools, wood wedges, and improvised devices cover the chips of wood, splintered bits of planks, and remains of ship fittings in and near the galleries.

Shipworm infestation penetrated up to 5 centimeters into planks 14.5 to 22 centimeters thick, so planks could not be reused in their original configuration. Red paint on wood debitage and damaged areas on reused ship timbers provide clues to other activities. The trimming and reshaping of cedar timbers indicates that their value justified the time involved in removing the damaged wood, even after months in salt water.<sup>23</sup> As recorded at Lisht, workers pried plank seams open with wedges made of other planks, and then sawed or chiseled through tenons from the outside of the hull before pulling timbers off it.<sup>24</sup> Individual planks were sometimes burned as fuel, but also might be cleaned of shipworm damage for reuse on site as walkways, ramps, or reinforcements for doorways or work areas, and perhaps also for Nile workshops and shipyards.

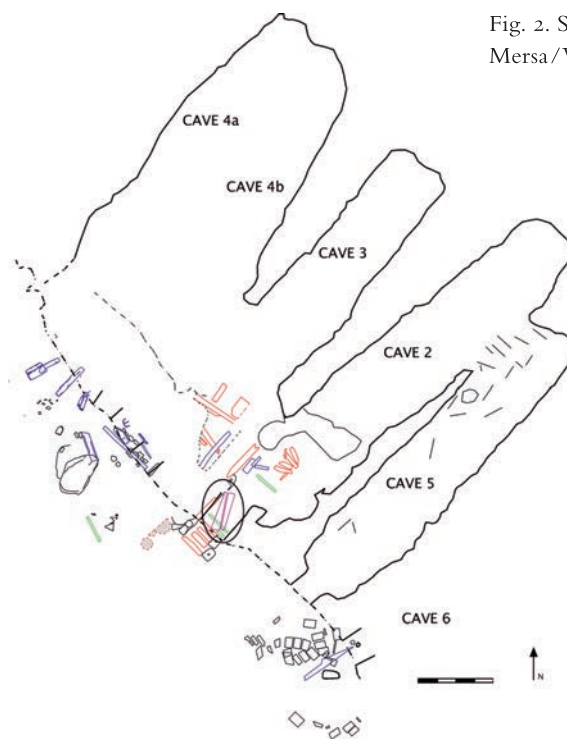


Fig. 2. Site plan of Mersa/Wadi Gawasis

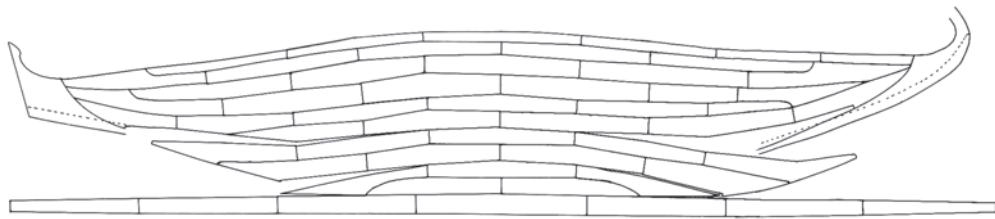


Fig. 3. Construction pattern and plan for *Min of the Desert* based on archaeological data from ancient Egyptian rivercraft and from the remains of seagoing ships found at Gawasis

Timber cleaning is not attested at Ayn Sokhna, where archaeologists discovered the charred remains of ship timbers tied in bundles and stored in galleries similar to those at Gawasis. These disassembled ship timbers show little or no evidence of shipworm infestation but instead were stored for reuse. Cedar planks 10 centimeters thick and up to 23 centimeters wide, with both mortise-and-tenon fastenings and lashing channels like those on Nile ships, provide additional proof of Egyptian seafaring capabilities.<sup>25</sup> Inscriptions at Ayn Sokhna indicate its establishment in the Old Kingdom and use through the early Middle Kingdom, most likely for short voyages across the Gulf of Suez to mines on the Sinai Peninsula.

#### INTERPRETATION

The maritime artifacts at Gawasis and Ayn Sokhna reveal third millennium B.C. technology and shipbuilding expertise. The unique methods of hull construction developed in ancient Egypt are manifest in thick planks, edge-fastened by unpegged and deep mortise-and-tenon joints and reinforced by beams at deck level, with little or no interior framing. These independently invented construction techniques for riverboats differ so greatly from those of later Mediterranean seagoing craft that most authors mistakenly expected Egyptian ships to mirror Mediterranean-type construction.<sup>26</sup> Discoveries of nearly one hundred identifiable ship components at Gawasis demonstrate the successful application of Egyptian techniques both on the Nile and at sea.<sup>27</sup>

Egypt's shipwrights followed practices that allowed watercraft to be more easily disassembled and reassembled, transported, and recycled. These are first documented in planked boats of the late fourth millennium at Abydos.<sup>28</sup> For example, Egyptian construction techniques used fastenings of standard dimensions, planks of similar shape, and predictable patterns in the millennium represented by the Abydos planks of 3050 B.C., the Khufu ships of about 2650 B.C., and the Middle Kingdom finds from Dahshur and Gawasis.<sup>29</sup>

One of the most characteristic features of Egyptian planking is the rejection of locked (pegged) mortise-and-tenon joints. Using fastenings that require holes to be drilled for pegs to lock each tenon in place on each side of the plank seam would have hampered the reassembly of a planking shell or the recycling of planks in different watercraft. Some joints at Gawasis have pegs, but they are rare and seem to reflect stress points in the hull or placement of fastenings within plank edges. Transportation of disassembled vessels across the desert from the Nile River to the Red Sea is likely one of the most important reasons the Egyptians designed hulls with their reassembly in mind.

#### RECONSTRUCTING A PHARAONIC SHIP

Despite finding ship timbers, we lack basic data about the performance of ancient Egyptian seagoing ships. Experimental archaeology addressed elementary questions such as how the ships might have handled, whether they were watertight and seaworthy,



and how they responded to waves. From 2006 to 2008, I led a team that designed, built, and sailed a full-scale reconstruction of an ancient Egyptian ship.

The theoretical reconstruction is a floating hypothesis. Its design draws heavily on archaeological data, but none of the cedar hull planks at Gawasis were found joined. In other words, projections about where a timber might be found in the hull (for example, as a sheer plank, at the waterline, fastened to the keel) are based on its features, but its precise location or the relationship of one plank to other timbers preserved at the site cannot be determined, nor can the number of different vessels represented by our finds be established.

For example, ship component dimensions illustrated in the Hatshepsut Punt reliefs (fig. 1) show consistency in proportions for steering oar blades, beam ends, oar looms, beam spacing, and crutch height with many Gawasis examples. That consistency, and similarities between the profiles of Hatshepsut's ships and those of the Middle Kingdom Dahshur boats, provided the foundation for a vessel design created by naval architect Patrick Couser.<sup>39</sup> Dimensions were based on Gawasis timbers wherever possible, and fastening patterns and timber shapes also were replicated. Plank thickness varies from 22 centimeters for the bottom planks to 14 centimeters at the sheer. The ship is held together entirely by unpegged mortise-and-tenon joints in double lines along plank edges. In the lower hull, the large gaps between planks caused by exposure and poor seasoning were filled with linen fibers and beeswax. No similar stopping materials are known from any ancient Egyptian hulls, but there is abundant linen at Gawasis, and ancient craftsmen knew and exploited the properties of beeswax.

The ship was built with the same construction technology as ships launched four thousand years ago from Gawasis on voyages to Punt (fig. 3). The ship, named *Min of the Desert* for the ancient god of Koptos, measures 20 × 4.89 × 1.7 m deep under its beams.

It displaces 30 tons with a cargo capacity of about 17 tons. Cedar of Lebanon is unavailable in the wood markets today, so Douglas fir was used, as its physical characteristics, especially density, bending strength, and ring size, are closely comparable. The ship-builders practiced ancient techniques, assisted in some cases by modern technologies such as electric band saws for roughing out planks. The crew of four men and two teenagers relied on hand tools made to ancient specifications, but of iron rather than copper.

*Min of the Desert* crossed the Eastern Desert on a flatbed truck, rather than in pieces in a caravan of men and donkeys. Captain David Vann supervised a crew of twenty-four international volunteers, including a core crew of five Egyptian sailors, for a week of sea trials on a ship rigged according to a plan lifted straight from the Hatshepsut Punt reliefs. The voyage of 135 kilometers south from Safaga followed the ancient route (fig. 4), stopping each night at a protected anchorage, some still lined with mangroves, as the lagoon at Gawasis was in the early second millennium B.C.

Like the ancient Egyptians, we used oars to maneuver the ship into position for raising and lowering the sail, and once to save ourselves from being blown onto a reef.

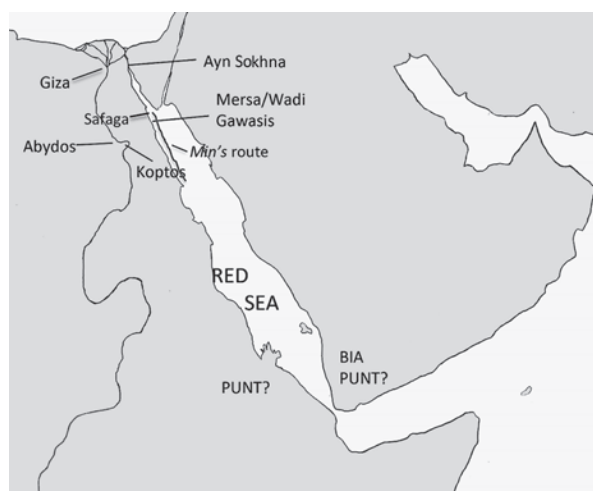


Fig. 4. Map showing the route of *Min of the Desert*

Although the rowing crew of fourteen, fewer than half the number illustrated on the Punt reliefs, reached 2.5 knots against the wind, rowing was not a primary propulsion strategy. A heavy cotton square sail, modeled on the remains of model boat sails and linen fragments from Gawasis, measured approximately  $14.25 \times 5.6$  meters (ca.  $80 \text{ m}^2$ ), and we used a 21-square-meter storm sail when the winds were steadily higher than 20 knots. The first raising of sail required two teams of eight and, without the advantage of pulleys, brute strength, and it took about three minutes. By the final day of sailing, a six-man crew raised sail in less than thirty seconds. *Min* sails across the wind up to an angle of about one hundred degrees off the wind, and as few as two rowers can turn the ship 180 degrees in less than one minute.<sup>31</sup>

*Min of the Desert* outperformed all expectations, logging an average speed over six days just above 6 knots, with speeds of up to 9 knots (fig. 5). During the voyage, wind speed reached 25 knots and the swells climbed to 2.5–3.0 meters, but the ship easily kept to its course and suffered no adverse effects. Throughout the journey, it took on less than two to three liters of water per hour, an amount easily managed by the hand-operated bilge pump we set up each night. The ship itself now belongs to

Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities and is displayed outside the new Suez National Museum of Antiquities.

The ancient Egyptians sailed much farther south on the Red Sea than our trials allowed, probably arriving at Punt by late fall. It is likely that they returned along the Arabian coast with northbound currents and a south wind from the end of the Indian Ocean monsoon season before spring. This sailing regime was familiar from the Nile: sail south with the north wind, and use the current to travel north, crossing near the modern port of Safaga, still a destination for voyages across the Red Sea because of favorable wind and current conditions.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Scholars long underestimated the seafaring capabilities of the ancient Egyptians, but recent excavations beside the Red Sea demand respect for the mastery of shipbuilding technology of about four thousand years ago. The unique ability to acquire Mediterranean cedar for use in building Red Sea ships provided the Egyptians access to what they called the marvels of Punt. While the frontier staging ground at Gawasis expands our knowledge of how and when they sailed south to return with incense and other cargoes, many details remain obscure.

Fig. 5. *Min of the Desert* at sea



Nonetheless, ship timbers and maritime artifacts at Gawasis illustrate the technological, administrative, and bureaucratic nature of ancient Egyptian engagement with the world beyond the Nile. Studying these abandoned ship planks and equipment—the products of shipyards operating under an approach that recalls assembly-line construction—informs us about ship technology and shipbuilders, as well as the use of watercraft at sea in ancient Egypt.

*Min of the Desert* relied on archaeological data for its design and internal structure. Thick planks interlocked along their edges and fastened by deep, unpegged mortise-and-tenon joints created its structurally sound hull. *Min's* sailing performance proved that a rig copied directly from the Hatshepsut Punt reliefs was efficient and effective and conclusively demonstrates the feasibility of extended sea voyages in indigenous Egyptian craft.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kathryn Bard and Rodolfo Fattovich, the directors of the Italian-American Mersa/Wadi Gawasis excavation project, permitted me to discover, document, and replicate finds from the site, and I am in their debt. The ship reconstruction was almost entirely funded and otherwise made possible by the hard work of Sombrero & Co. during the creation of the documentary film *Quand les Égyptiens naviguaient sur la Mer Rouge*, directed by Stéphane Bégoïn and produced by Valérie Abita (Sombrero & Co.) with the participation of Arte France, the Musée du Louvre, Nova WGBH, NHK Japan, and the BBC. Dr. Mohamed Abd el-Maguid of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities was an indispensable liaison and recorder in the shipyard. I am grateful to Patrick Couser of Formation Design Systems for the supply of Maxsurf software for design and analysis of the vessel and to consulting shipwright Tom Vosmer.

Sincere appreciation goes to Mahrous Lahma and the shipwrights of Chantier

Ebad El-Rahman, Rashid, Egypt, and our core crew of sailors from Lake Borolos, Egypt, and I especially thank our captain, David Vann, and the international all-volunteer crew for joining us in an untried experimental vessel.

1. Bard and Fattovich 2010.
2. Fourteen boats at Abydos, two at Khufu's pyramid, disassembled planks at Lisht, four boats at Dahshur, and disassembled timbers at Ayn Sokhna and Gawasis from at least four vessels, and a small boat at Matariya (C. A. Ward 2000; El-Raziq, Castel, and Tallet 2006; C. A. Ward and Zazzaro 2010).
3. C. A. Ward 2006.
4. Landström 1970; Wachsmann 1998.
5. Bard and Fattovich 2007.
6. Haldane 1996.
7. W. A. Ward 1963.
8. Breasted 1906–7, vol. 1, pp. 146–48; T. A. H. Wilkinson 2000, pp. 141–45.
9. The Atlas cedar from Morocco is not documented in Egypt.
10. Lipke 1984; C. A. Ward 2000; C. A. Ward 2004; Mark 2009.
11. Marcus 2007.
12. El Awady 2009.
13. For example, Edgerton 1923; Landström 1970; Wachsmann 1998; Fabre 2005.
14. Bard and Fattovich 2007.
15. Sayed 1977; Sayed 1978; Sayed 1980; Sayed 1983.
16. Haldane 1996.
17. C. A. Ward 2007; C. A. Ward 2009; Zazzaro 2009; Borojevic et al. 2010; C. A. Ward and Zazzaro 2010.
18. Marcus 2007, pp. 152–55.
19. Glanville 1932.
20. Sayed 1977, p. 173.
21. The Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen coined this phrase.
22. Zazzaro 2007.
23. C. A. Ward 2010a; C. A. Ward and Zazzaro 2010.
24. Haldane 1992; C. A. Ward 2000.
25. El-Raziq, Castel, and Tallet 2006; Pomey 2012.
26. For example, Wachsmann 1998.
27. C. A. Ward 2009; C. A. Ward and Zazzaro 2010; C. A. Ward, Zazzaro, and Abd el-Maguid 2010.
28. C. A. Ward 2006.
29. C. A. Ward 2004.
30. C. A. Ward, Couser, and Vosmer 2008; Couser, C. A. Ward, and Vosmer 2009.
31. C. A. Ward et al. 2012.



# International Exchange during the Late Second Millennium B.C.: Microarchaeological Study of Finds from the Uluburun Ship

The beginning of the eastern Mediterranean Late Bronze Age “epoch of internationalism” can best be marked by the establishment of the Egyptian empire of the New Kingdom era, which held sway for almost three hundred years between the fourth cataract of the Nile and the Orontes River.<sup>1</sup> Concurrently, cities and states crystallized into the great kingdoms of Hatti, Mitanni, Babylonia, and Assyria during the first half of the second millennium B.C., and these became the main political and economic powers of the time (fig. 1). After centuries of military conflicts, these superpowers set up peaceful relations through a series of treaties and a network of trade relations. Hence, by the fourteenth–thirteenth century B.C., international commerce grew to unprecedented levels, extending from the Anatolian plateau to the Nile Valley and from the Argolid to the Euphrates River.<sup>2</sup> Through lively maritime transportation copper from Cyprus was traded over long distances, together with Nubian and Anatolian gold; Assyrian silver; and Levantine oil, resin, and wine. At the same time, Mycenaean and

Cypriot ceramics were distributed in large quantities along the length of the Levantine coast.<sup>3</sup> Tin, an essential component of bronze, arrived by caravan at Ugarit for shipment to other Levantine harbors and to the foundries of cities such as Enkomi on Cyprus.<sup>4</sup> This wealth of commodities resulted in flourishing port cities along the Levantine littoral, especially Ugarit, which played a pivotal role in the organization of long-distance maritime trade in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup>

We may assume that state authorities controlled the mass transportation of goods intended specifically for royal needs. The modern term “trade” is thus not relevant in this case and should be replaced by “state exchange,” which stemmed from palace economies.<sup>6</sup> Such an exchange system is best reflected in the Amarna Letters, where gift lists specify the vast amount of commodities that were exchanged between the Great Kings of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup> However, this system is not completely understood. It has long been recognized that provenance identification of the main articles of this exchange by scientific methods could clarify its specific characteristics. Of special interest are the Canaanite jars that were used in the eastern Mediterranean during the second millennium B.C. to hold a range of products such as oil, wine, resin, meat, and honey.<sup>8</sup> Their abundance at sites along the coast and in the Uluburun shipwreck indicates clearly that they were used primarily for maritime transport.<sup>9</sup>

Two sunken ships excavated over the last four decades supply an important body of data about the extent of maritime trade during this period. The first shipwreck, which we shall not discuss here, lies offshore from Cape Gelidonya in the Gulf of Finike, on the southern coast of Turkey, and it is broadly dated to about 1250 to 1150 B.C.<sup>10</sup> The second and by far more important ship was found off Uluburun near Kaş, also in southern Turkey, and is currently dated to about 1330 B.C.<sup>11</sup> The main cargo comprised approximately ten tons of copper in the form



Fig. 1. Map of the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia showing the main political entities of the 14th and 13th centuries B.C.

of “oxhide” and discoid ingots; one ton of tin ingots in bun and oxhide shapes; vessels, including nearly 150 Canaanite jars that carried approximately one ton of terebinth resin, and some 175 intact ingots of glass. The ship also carried logs of Egyptian ebony; ostrich eggshells; an elephant tusk; hippopotamus teeth; rings made of seashells; Cypriot ceramics; beads; faience drinking cups; small Egyptian objects of gold and silver, including a unique scarab bearing the cartouche of queen Nefertiti; Canaanite jewelry; bronze tools and weapons; stone mace heads; and two wooden writing boards or diptychs. Another important find was an assemblage of twenty-four stone anchors.

Ever since its discovery, many attempts have been made to identify the owner, course, and destination of the ship. Various lines of evidence suggest that most of the cargo was loaded as one episode, namely in one location.<sup>12</sup> In the last decade, it has often been proposed that the port of origin was Ugarit and that the ship must have sailed westward toward the Aegean, perhaps in order to carry its cargo to the Mycenaeans.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the origin and itinerary of the crew may be revealed by the provenance of the galley wares—the simple daily vessels that were found aboard the ship and had been used by the crew. On a sailing ship, such vessels are likely to break easily and be replaced by vessels purchased in the next port. The provenance of the galley wares, as indicated by the material analyses, may therefore reveal the ships’ courses. Petrographic analysis of the stone anchors from the ships may also supply solid information about their origins and sailing routes. On the other hand, it is not always easy to distinguish between galley wares and the main cargo. In order to remain on the safe side, we will consider as cargo only those Canaanite jars that were loaded with resin, and the used oil lamps, with deposits of soot on their rims, as galley wares.

Judging by their distribution and composition, it is evident that Canaanite jars were produced mostly in coastal sites and of coastal sediments.<sup>14</sup> In the eastern Mediterranean, currents flow from west to east along North Africa, then northward along the Levantine coast. The main source of

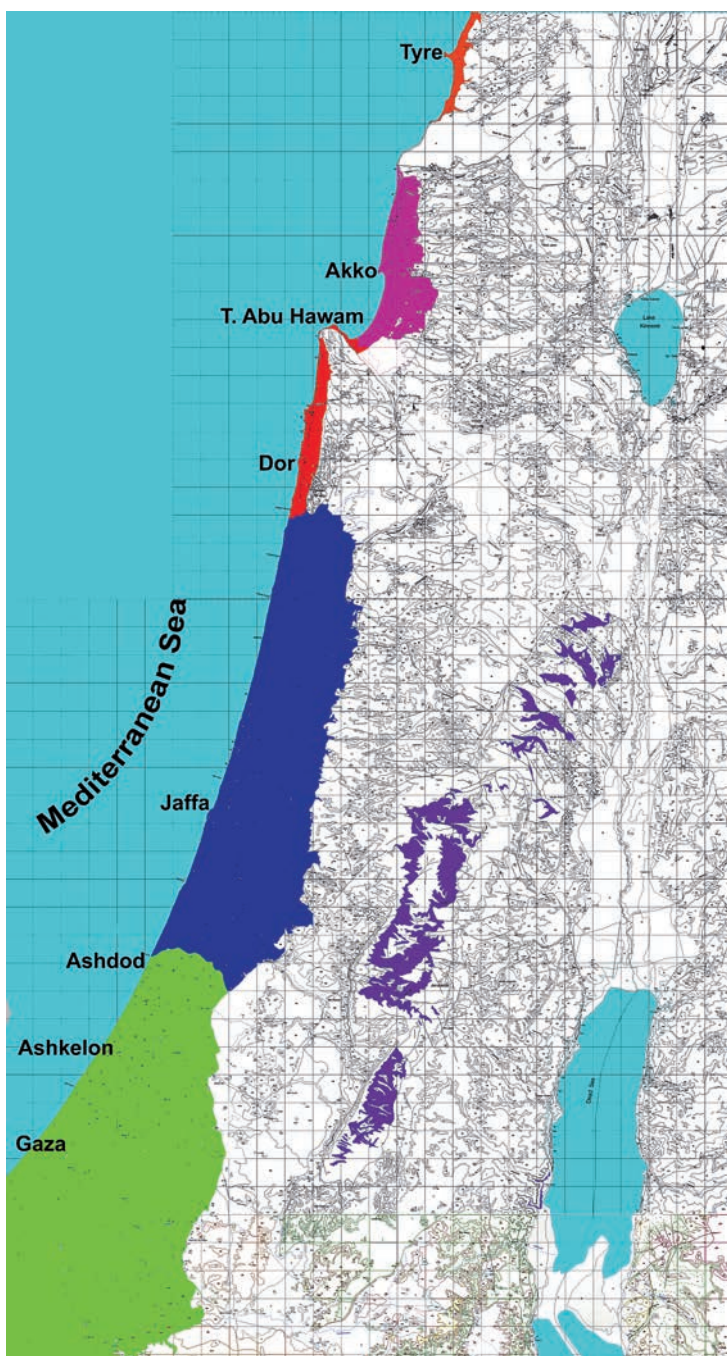


Fig. 2. Map showing the distribution of the main combinations of clay and temper used by the potters of Canaanite jars along the southern Levantine coast. From north to south: the Tyre–Sidon area (orange), the Akko coast north of Mount Carmel (pink), the Mount Carmel coast (red), the central Israeli coastal plain south and north of Tel Aviv (blue), and the Gaza–Ashkelon area (green)

sediments to this area is the Nile River, which drains the plutonic rock plateaus of East Africa. The most stable mineral of these rocks is quartz, which therefore constitutes the primary component of the Nile sand. This sand is swept along the Sinai and northward along the southern Levantine coast.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the inland limestone hills of the Levantine coast contribute calcareous sand to the sediments. Since Mount Carmel acts as a natural barrier to the Nile sand, north of it the sand contains less quartz, and the sediment becomes increasingly calcareous. Another contributing factor is the sea. Along the Levantine coast, shell fragments and parts of the coralline algae *Amphiroa* occur as a significant component of Quaternary beach deposits.

A closer look at the Levantine sand that the local potters usually employed as temper can tell us about the provenance of Canaanite jars. When examined microscopically, the coastal sands between Gaza in the south and the coast of Ugarit in the north exhibit significantly different compositions (fig. 2). For example, the sand near the Bronze Age cities of Gaza and Ashkelon, about 10 kilometers apart, is made almost entirely of large, rounded quartz grains of Nilotic origin, with very little limestone or other calcareous components. Secondary silicate minerals appear in significant quantities, originating from the weathering of the igneous rocks common in the Nile headwaters. Moving 50 kilometers north, to the beach of Tel Aviv, the grain size of the quartz becomes significantly smaller and the grains are well sorted because of the natural sorting of the sand by the currents. The secondary minerals, whose specific gravity is greater and which are therefore heavier, appear only as very fine grains. Advancing another 50 kilometers north, to the beach of Tel Dor on the coast near Mount Carmel, we can see that alongside the quartz there are more than 30 percent of calcareous grains, representing the increasing contribution of the indigenous lithology to the sand. About 50 more kilometers north again, on the coast



near Akko, north of the Mount Carmel barrier, a sharp change occurs in the composition of the sand. The quartz decreases to about 30 percent of the sand, which is made up almost exclusively of limestone grains and skeletons of marine fauna, where *Amphiroa* fragments are very common.<sup>16</sup>

Needless to say, the identification of the provenance of pottery is not determined entirely by the sand temper, but also by the clay. In most parts of the Levantine coast, pottery was manufactured from the local soils. Different soil types predominate in the various regions along the southern Levantine coast. Thus, by combining the data retrieved from the composition of the sand and the soil types, the southern Levantine coast may be organized into segments. The same method can be applied to the Mediterranean coasts of Lebanon and Syria, where the geology is far more complex and the differences consequently rather extreme (fig. 3).<sup>17</sup>

In all, 260 vessels—nearly the entire ceramic content of the Uluburun ship—were studied by means of optical mineralogy (OM) in thin sections under a polarizing microscope.<sup>18</sup> The most common fabric, accounting for 82 percent of the Canaanite jars, is grumosol (a clay-rich alluvial soil), as clay with Levantine beach sand, made of about 70 percent quartz and 30 percent limestone (fig. 4). As we have mentioned, this is typical of the Carmel coast. Especially notable is the fact that the galley wares—the flasks and Levantine oil lamps—are all made of this fabric. The second fabric is again of coastal origin, as attested by the abundant fragments of *Amphiroa* in the temper, but it is entirely calcareous with the addition of some chert. This fabric is typically Lebanese and it is compatible with the area between Tyre and Sidon;<sup>19</sup> only 14 percent of the Canaanite jars are made of this fabric, indicating that a minority of these vessels originated in this area. Five jar fragments are made of a third fabric, composed of Miocene marl with radiolarite and ophiolitic minerals, which



Fig. 3. Map showing the distribution of the main combinations of clay and temper used along the northern Levantine coast. From north to south: the Ras Shamra–Ugarit area (green), Tripoli and the Akkar area (pink), the Beirut area (red), and the Tyre–Sidon area (blue)

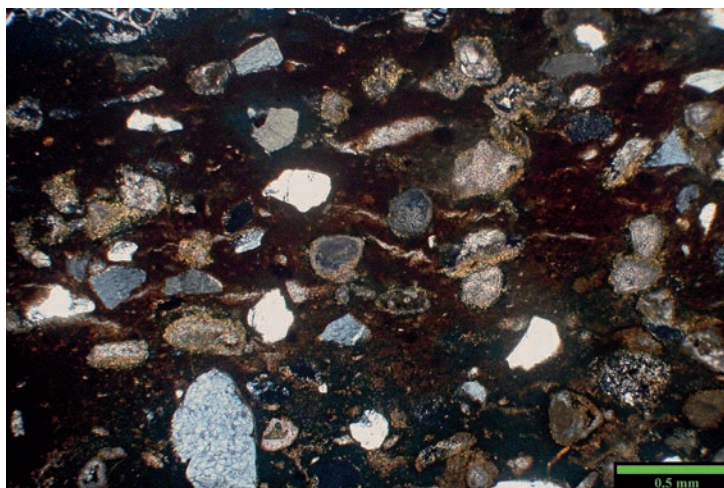
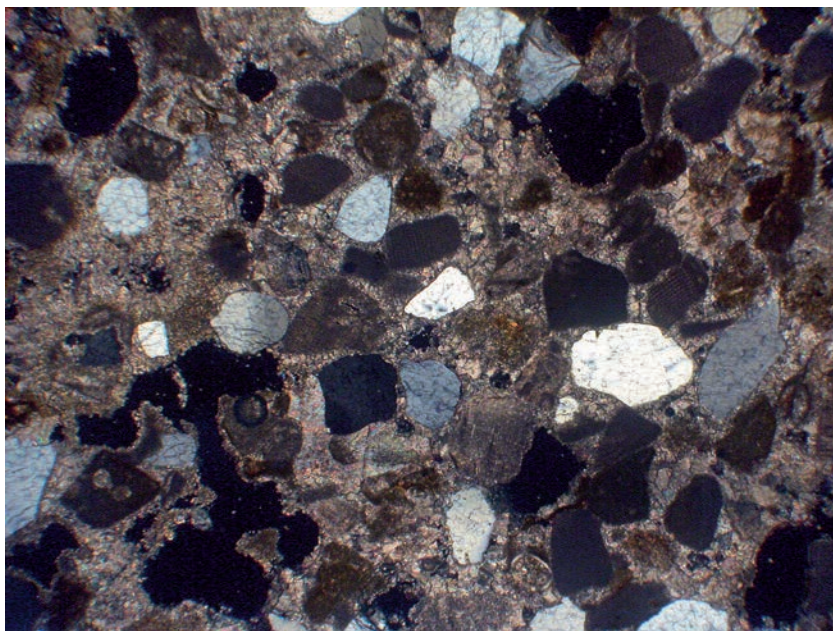


Fig. 4. View under a petrographic microscope between crossed polarizers of a thin section of a typical ceramic Canaanite jar from the Uluburun shipwreck. The clay matrix appears as brown to dark tan. The temper is seen as grains of quartz (clear white or gray bodies) and limestone (brownish-matte bodies).

Fig. 5. Thin section of an anchor from the Uluburun shipwreck showing beachrock from the Carmel coast



is typical of the pottery and the cuneiform tablets from Ugarit. The composition of the typical Ugaritic fabric is affected by the nearby coastal sediments, but also by the presence of the ophiolitic complex of Baër-Bassit with its radiolarian chert and eroded mafic minerals such as pyroxenes and olivines.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that these five Canaanite jars are in fact base sherds, most likely used as lids to other jars. To sum up, the galley wares of the ship and more than 80 percent of the Canaanite jars originated along the Carmel coast of Israel. A small group of jars originated in the area between Tyre and Sidon. The few remaining jars, or rather jar fragments, are either lids or outliers that may represent vessels that were incidentally recycled.

As mentioned above, the ship was loaded with twenty-four stone anchors. In a fully loaded ship, these anchors cannot be considered ballast, and it is highly unlikely that they were part of the cargo. The question arises: Why would the ship carry so many anchors? First and foremost, in antiquity a ship without an anchor was a lost ship. This makes the presence of more than one anchor

very logical. Still, a load of twenty-four anchors seems excessive. It may indicate that the loss of anchors was rather frequent along the route and thus that this ship was intending to make a very long journey. The lost anchors would be continuously replaced by others, either made by the crew—usually of an available beachrock—or acquired in ports along the way. The provenance of the anchors can therefore tell us much about the ship's itinerary.

It should not come as a surprise that according to the petrographic analysis of all twenty-four anchors, twenty-two were made of beachrock. The most common structure of these rocks incorporates typical Levantine coastal sand, where the ratio of quartz to limestone is similar to that of the most common temper of the Canaanite jars and the galley wares. Moreover, in some of these anchors the sand includes grains of volcanic tuff fragments from Cretaceous exposures occurring on the higher slopes of Mount Carmel and carried to the coast by the principal rivers that drain the ridge (fig. 5). The distribution of anchors, according to the provenance of their rock, indicates

that the majority are made of beachrock from the Carmel coast, a few of Lebanese beachrock, and one or possibly two of beachrock containing radiolarian chert and ophiolitic minerals from the Ugarit area.

The combined evidence of the galley wares and the anchors identifies the ship as Canaanite, and suggests that its port of origin on its final trip was one of the few along the Carmel coast (such as Tell Abu Hawam, Tel Dor, or Tel Shikmona). The cargo of Canaanite jars was most likely loaded there, with a few jars from other locations that could be recycled. Does this mean that a Canaanite king initiated the journey? During the Late Bronze Age, this would have been impossible. Canaan was not a political entity but a geographical term used by the Egyptians for their territories in Asia. The Amarna Letters and the archaeological record tell us that, by that time, the Canaanite city-states were completely exhausted by taxes and the costs of supporting the Egyptian troops.<sup>21</sup> No Canaanite ruler could afford or would have been allowed to accumulate such a wealth of commodities and send them on a risky trip to a remote destination in the west. A Canaanite ship would only have taken on such a mission by command of an Egyptian king. The approximate date that we have for the shipwreck permits us to place it tentatively at the end of Dynasty 18 or the beginning of Dynasty 19 in Egypt. I suggest that the Uluburun ship was a Canaanite vessel sent by a pharaoh with a royal shipment to another ruler in the Aegean. Egyptian seagoing ships were inferior to those used by other peoples and were not used in the Mediterranean, so it is very likely that our Canaanite ship was ordered by a pharaoh to load a palatial shipment in Egypt and sail to the Aegean under his assignment. To test this hypothesis, let us explore the nature of the cargo and Egypt's interests in the Aegean at this time.

Let us begin with the main cargo. The principal commodity aboard the ship is copper. The textual evidence from the Amarna and Ugarit letters indicates that it was the

copper-producing kingdom of Alashiya that maintained economic and political contacts with Egypt and Syria and traded copper with its mainland neighbors.<sup>22</sup> Alashiya is securely identified now with the island of Cyprus,<sup>23</sup> and, indeed, archaeometallurgical analyses indicate that the copper on the Uluburun ship originated in Cyprus. The ratio of ten parts copper to one part tin is the normal proportion for making bronze. Therefore, returning to the ship's cargo, the coexistence of the two metals in these proportions is not accidental and points to their preplanned loading as a single episode. If so, we may logically relate them to the third commodity. Resin was used as incense, but when mixed with beeswax it forms a pliable putty that was used universally as an essential product in casting metal using the lost-wax technique.<sup>24</sup> This lends additional support to the argument that at least the main inventory of finds on the ship should be regarded a single assemblage reflecting palatial exchange, as Cemal Pulak has suggested. Eric Cline further proposed that a single center may have received the bulk of the cargo, as in the case of the Amarna gift inventories.<sup>25</sup> The same process could have happened at the beginning of the journey, if we assume that a palatial exchange was performed between royal courts and was not organized by a ship's crew. In fact, it is very easy to see how the entire cargo of the Uluburun ship could have been gathered in the Egyptian treasury before shipment. The ship's cargo would amount to about 320 talents' worth of copper, which, according to the Amarna Letters, was about average for one shipment of copper from Alashiya to the Egyptian treasury. The transport of resin and gold plaques from Canaan to Egypt as tax also agrees with this evidence. Indeed, there are many Egyptian products in the cargo of the ship. For example, although the origin of the 175 glass ingots from the ship is unclear, the OM examination of a fragment of a ceramic crucible used to make glass, which was attached to one of the ingots, indicated an Egyptian



provenance. Such crucibles are known from Amarna and Qantir in Egypt, where glass was manufactured under royal control.<sup>26</sup> The crucible fragment was made of Egyptian Nile clay, suggesting that at least part of the glass is Egyptian. The ongoing accumulation of goods in a royal Egyptian treasury, comparable to the entire ship's cargo, is evident also in the wall paintings of the tomb of the Egyptian noble Rekhmire, where we see treasures from foreign lands within the stores of the Great Temple of Amun.<sup>27</sup> This scene depicts, in a nutshell, the entire inventory of the ship's cargo.

Based on this interpretation, what could be the interests of Egypt in the Aegean during late Dynasty 18 or early Dynasty 19? Contemporary documents supply a clear answer to this question. Just before the Amarna period, Amenhotep III sent a letter to a certain Tarhundurandu of Arzawa, a kingdom west of Cilicia. In his letter, the Egyptian king asked the Arzawan ruler to send him a princess to marry, an act that resulted in an international alliance. The letter indicates that, as a wedding gift, the Egyptian king sent his ally a sack of high-quality gold and other gifts. The reason for this affair was most likely related to the rise of the Hittite Empire under Suppiluliuma I and the threat that Hatti posed to the Egyptian territories in the north. Hence, beating Suppiluliuma to an alliance with the most powerful ruler of Arzawa assured Egypt of his loyalty and thus helped slow the recovery of the Hittites.<sup>28</sup> Yet this reality would soon change: during Suppiluliuma's reign, Arzawa was defeated and split into three vassal kingdoms.

At about the date estimated for the ship, a political entity named Ahhiyawa became Hatti's rival for control of western Anatolia, a situation best known from the so-called Tawagalawa letter (CTH 181) found in Hattusa (modern Boğazköy). This document is thought to have been written by a Hittite king, most likely Hattusili III, to a king of

Ahhiyawa about 1250 B.C. The letter, of which only the third tablet has survived, concerns the activities of a certain Piyamaradu against the Hittites, requesting his exile to Hatti with safe escort. The Tawagalawa letter further mentions "Millawanda" (better known as Miletus) and its dependent city Atriya, as does the Milawata letter (CTH 182). The Tawagalawa letter also mentions Millawanda's governor Atpa, as does the Manapa-Tarhunta letter (CTH 191).<sup>29</sup>

We recently analyzed the Tawagalawa letter by several elemental methods and by OM.<sup>30</sup> The results indicate that the letter was written on clay from the eastern Aegean coastal area south of Ephesus, most likely from around Miletus or the Samian Peraia. The events discussed in the letter should therefore be related to Hittite incursions into the Aegean area. Indeed, the Ahhiyawans are often equated with the Homeric Achaeans and consequently with the Mycenaean warriors, who formed an alliance with the Ahhiyawans, invaded the Hittite border districts, inciting more revolts. Thus, at a time when armed clashes between Hittites and Egyptians were becoming more frequent, Egypt had the utmost interest in restoring its alliance with Hatti's enemy kingdoms in the Aegean. In ca. 1275 B.C. these conflicts culminated in the Battle of Qadesh. The ongoing conflicts in the borderlands were finally concluded by an official peace treaty (the "Silver Treaty"), signed in 1258 B.C. between Ramesses II and Hattusili III.

Taking this background into account, we may suggest that the Uluburun ship was a Canaanite vessel that was loaded in Egypt with palatial gifts in the form of precious raw materials and sent to the Aegean at the time of the Egyptian-Hittite conflicts, in order to form an alliance with a rival kingdom of Hatti. Yet the ship met its sad destiny just before it completed its journey and before war and peace took place between the two countries.

1. Redford 1992, pp. 125–91.
2. Knapp 1991; Manning and Hulin 2005.
3. Van Wijngaarden 2002.
4. J. D. Muhly 1973; J. D. Muhly 1993.
5. Cline 1994, pp. 1–107; van Wijngaarden 2002.
6. Knapp, J. D. Muhly, and P. M. Muhly 1988; A. G. Sherratt and S. Sherratt 1991; Bachhuber 2006.
7. Zaccagnini 1987; Moran 1992; Bachhuber 2006.
8. Grace 1956; Mills and White 1989; Leonard 1997; Serpico et al. 2003.
9. Cohen-Weinberger and Goren 2004; L. Smith et al. 2004.
10. Bass 1967; Bass 1973.
11. Bass 1987; Pulak 1988a; Bass and Pulak 1989; Pulak 1993; Pulak 1997. The Uluburun shipwreck was excavated under the auspices of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA) of Texas A&M University. I would like to thank Cemal Pulak and George Bass at the INA and Yaşar Yıldız, Director of the Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, for their permission to study the Uluburun finds. This study is part of a research project entitled “Marine and Overland Interactions in the Eastern Mediterranean Area during the 2nd Millennium BCE.” I gratefully acknowledge funding for this project by the Israel Science Foundation on behalf of the Israel Academy of Sciences (grant no. 253/07).
12. Cline 1994, pp. 85–90.
13. See Bachhuber 2006 (with references).
14. Serpico et al. 2003; Cohen-Weinberger and Goren 2004; L. Smith et al. 2004; Ownby and Bourriau 2009.
15. Röhrlich and Goldsmith 1984, p. 99; Nir 1989, p. 12.
16. Goren, Finkelstein, and Na’aman 2004, pp. 109–10, 112–13.
17. Detailed discussion and maps indicating the clay and temper combinations along the length of the Levantine coast will be published in Goren and Golding forthcoming.
18. The exceptions were a few Mycenaean vessels that had already been sampled by Peter Day. Cemal Pulak, personal communication.
19. Cohen-Weinberger and Goren 2004.
20. Goren, Finkelstein, and Na’aman 2004, pp. 88–89.
21. Bunimovitz 1994.
22. Moran 1992, pp. 104–13.
23. Goren et al. 2003; Goren, Finkelstein, and Na’aman 2004.
24. Goren 2008 (with references).
25. Cline 1994.
26. Rehren and Pusch 2005.
27. Davies (Norman de Garis) 1943.
28. Moran 1992, pp. 101–3.
29. The CTH numbers refer to Laroche 1971.
30. Goren, Mommsen, and Klinger 2011.

# Cape Gelidonya Redux

Archaeological excavations are never completed. This truism was amply demonstrated at the 2011 annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in a session devoted to what has been learned about shipwrecks excavated in Turkey at Cape Gelidonya, Yassıada, and Serçe Limanı since the publication of their so-called final excavation reports.<sup>1</sup>

Acquisition of additional knowledge of excavated sites is made possible by new tools for fieldwork, greater expertise based on experience, recently published comparanda, and innovative techniques of laboratory analysis. All four developments have led to new information about the Late Bronze Age shipwreck I excavated at Cape Gelidonya in 1960 and published in 1967. In some cases subsequent discoveries strengthened my published conclusions and in other cases proved them wrong.

Let us first consider fieldwork conducted by more experienced excavators with better equipment than was available to my team when we originally excavated the site. In 1987 a dozen of us sailed to Cape Gelidonya from the nearby excavation we were conducting on another Bronze Age shipwreck, at Uluburun.<sup>2</sup> We intended our trip only as a one-day voyage of nostalgia to take Claude Duthuit and me back to where we had begun true nautical archaeology decades earlier (fig. 1). Because we were on the Institute of Nautical Archaeology's (INA) research vessel, *Virazon*, which was fully outfitted for diving, with even a double-lock recompression chamber, and had Yaşar Yıldız, representative of the Turkish Ministry of Culture, on board, we decided we

could all dive to the site, although there was only time for one dive apiece. Among the divers were two Texas A&M University graduate students, who continue to play major roles in the ongoing study of the site: Cemal Pulak, to whom I had just officially turned over the directorship of the Uluburun excavation, and Nicolle Hirschfeld.

Our twenty-minute dives quickly proved to be more than nostalgic. Duthuit and I descended together and with our hands began sweeping sand away from the base of the multi-ton boulder that delineated the northeast extremity of the site. We were surprised to find in Area M I of the original, published site plans<sup>3</sup> another pan-balance weight from the sets we had uncovered there twenty-seven years earlier. In the same area we picked up several bits of metal: one of them the site's first zoomorphic find, a small bull's-head protome (fig. 2), the other a lump of what at first appeared to be metallic tin, but which laboratory analysis by Robert H. Brill of the Corning Museum of Glass, New York, later showed to be a mysterious, solder-like alloy of lead and tin. On the next dive, Pulak and three comrades discovered several beautifully preserved double-edged bronze knives in Area M IV. A third dive located copper and bronze fragments.

These unexpected discoveries were made without air lifts on a site where we had dived twice daily in 1960, showing that we had not excavated the site as thoroughly as we had believed in our pioneering days. Indeed, we may have spent too much time in 1960 wrestling the now outmoded heavy metal air lifts against the powerful current. Experienced excavators can accomplish a great deal by simply fanning sand away by hand, sometimes using light air lifts made of locally available PVC irrigation pipe (fig. 3). It was clear that Cape Gelidonya needed further exploration. This initial foray led to return visits in 1988, 1989, 1990, and 1994.

The first of these visits, with Bahadır Berkaya from the Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, representing the





Fig. 1. Claude Duthuit and George Bass aboard the Institute of Nautical Archaeology's research vessel, *Virazon*, at Cape Gelidonya, 1987



Fig. 2. Metal bull's-head protome. Cape Gelidonya shipwreck. Late Bronze Age. Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology

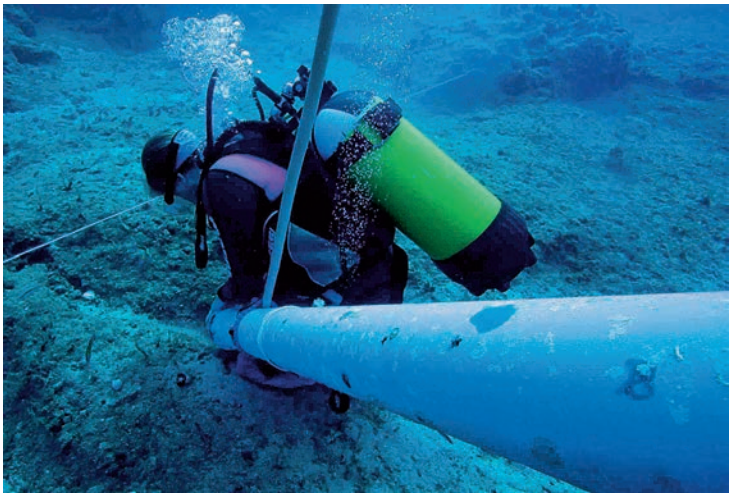


Fig. 3. Light air lift in use at Cape Gelidonya



Fig. 4. Underwater scooters used during the 1988 reexamination of the Cape Gelidonya shipwreck

Turkish Ministry of Culture,<sup>4</sup> was so productive that we extended our planned one-week visit to two weeks. Donald Frey and Murat Tilev, on battery-powered underwater scooters (fig. 4), could for the first time search a large area around the 1960 excavation site, looking mainly for the ship's anchor(s). About 70 meters to the southeast Frey found an intact Mycenaean IIIB stirrup jar, which he and Tilev marked the

next day with a buoy; during the night, high waves lifted the lead weight that anchored the buoy to the seabed and moved it a few meters, where it came to rest near a second, larger stirrup jar at a depth of 39 meters.<sup>5</sup> The first jar had a ballast stone concreted to it, but we still assumed that both had been carried to their destination by the extremely strong current that often flows toward their findspot from the main wreck site.

Later, Pulak and Tufan Turanlı found a bronze spit on the sand only 2 or 3 meters from where one of the stirrup jars was discovered. Because the spit was too dense to have been carried there by the current, we guessed that it had been removed from the wreck and dropped by either a sponge diver or one of the divers who had explored the site with Peter Throckmorton in 1959.<sup>6</sup> The jars, however, lay near the base of a pinnacle of rock that rises from the seabed to within 1.5 meters of the surface. The discovery of the spit between the jars and the 1960 excavation site made us wonder if the ship had been holed by the pinnacle, allowing it to spill out parts of its cargo as it drifted down to its final destination. This hypothesis needed further investigation.

At the time of their discovery, the stirrup jars (fig. 5) provided the strongest evidence for dating the wreck to my preferred thirteenth century B.C. date, which had been controversial.<sup>7</sup> This was important because I held that a Mycenaean colonization of Cyprus after 1200 B.C. ended the production of copper ingots, which I had seen as of Near Eastern origin, whereas others believed that the ingots were introduced onto Cyprus by colonizing Mycenaeans.<sup>8</sup> Regardless, the continuing excavation of the fourteenth century B.C. Uluburun wreck, of nearly certain Near Eastern origin, left little doubt of the Near Eastern source of four-handled copper ingots. In the meantime, Turanlı, using a much better metal detector than had been available to us in 1960, found throughout the main excavation area additional fragments of copper ingots and bronze implements similar



to the scrap metal of the ship's cargo we had uncovered in 1960.

Pulak did not require modern equipment, however, for another major discovery. We had always wondered if the large, multi-ton boulder on the site had fallen before or after the wreck took place. If afterward, there should have been shipwrecked remains beneath it. Returning to the area where we original excavators had dived twice daily for three months in 1960, Pulak spotted in seaweed on top of the boulder a bronze sword (fig. 6)—the first true weapon from the site—as well as additional metal fragments and ballast stones. These finds showed that the ship had partly settled onto the boulder until its disintegrating wooden hull toppled into the gully between the boulder and the base of the island (Devecitaşı Adası) against which we had assumed, in 1960, that the Bronze Age ship had been dashed.

Our third visit to Cape Gelidonya, for twelve days in 1989, was part of the INA's annual surveys of the Turkish coast; Berkaya again represented the Ministry of Culture.<sup>9</sup> We especially wanted to explore the area between the 1960 excavation site and the pinnacle of rock near where the stirrup jars had been found a year earlier, to test the hypothesis that artifacts had dropped through a holed hull. Frey and Tilev examined the nearly flat seabed between the two areas, both from their scooters and by swimming with Turanlı's modern metal detector. They discovered a trail of mostly metallic finds (and additionally the largest stone pan-balance weight found so far) that led from the rocky pinnacle to the large boulder. This was strong evidence that the ship ripped open its bottom on the pinnacle and created the artifact trail as it drifted



Fig. 5. Cemal Pulak holding stirrup jar found during the 1988 reexamination of the Cape Gelidonya shipwreck



Fig. 6. Bronze sword. Cape Gelidonya shipwreck. Late Bronze Age. Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology





Fig. 7. Pithos base embedded in concretion found during a 1989 dive to the Cape Gelidonya shipwreck. The diver is Marilyn Cassedy.

down to the seabed, its stern held high by the boulder before its eventual collapse, list to port, and tumble into the gully. This scenario fits our published belief that the concentration of personal possessions found in the gully in 1960 represents the remains of stern living quarters.<sup>10</sup>

Surprisingly, Turanlı's metal detector determined the presence of pottery as well

as metal under thick seabed concretion. The discovery of a large pithos base in the gully (fig. 7) extended the site several meters farther aft (to the southeast) than on the plans I had published in 1967.<sup>11</sup> The base was so heavily embedded in concretion, however, that our efforts to chisel it free proved futile. A ten-day trip to Cape Gelidonya in 1990 was devoted mostly to trying once more to chisel free the pithos base, again without success.

During the next visit to Cape Gelidonya, for five days in 1994, a team under Pulak's direction continued the search for the ship's anchor(s) using underwater scooters. About 100 meters from the main site, in the same basic direction as the stirrup jars' findspot, Tilev located a Byzantine anchor and set his scooter aside on a rock in order to examine it. He then realized that the "rock" was a sandstone anchor obscured by a thick covering of seaweed (fig. 8).<sup>12</sup> The position of the hawser hole indicated that the anchor was being dragged toward the island and the rocky pinnacle when it was lost. Of a type not common to the Aegean,<sup>13</sup> but frequently found along the Syro-Palestinian coast and on and around Cyprus,<sup>14</sup> it was similar to but larger than any of the two dozen anchors from the Uluburun wreck.<sup>15</sup> Had it been found in 1960 it would have strengthened my then-controversial belief that the Cape Gelidonya ship was of Near Eastern origin.

Attempts to chisel the large pithos base free from the thick concretion surrounding it in the gully continued to frustrate the divers. Enough of it was revealed, however, for Pulak to conclude that it was similar to the pithoi, of probable Cypriot origin, on the Uluburun wreck.<sup>16</sup>

Discoveries made during these five exploratory visits to Cape Gelidonya led Pulak to decide that the site deserved a full reexcavation, which we accomplished in 2010 as part of the fiftieth-anniversary celebration of the original excavation.<sup>17</sup> Although Duthuit, Pulak, and I were all present, the campaign was conducted under a salvage permit given to the Antalya and Bodrum

museums. The fieldwork was directed by Harun Özdaş, of Dokuz Eylül University in Izmir, and Nicolle Hirschfeld, now on the faculty of Trinity University in San Antonio. Although the 2010 finds are still being cleaned and conserved in the INA's laboratory in Bodrum, we can already say that since 1960 we have vastly increased the number of pan-balance weights, copper-ingot fragments, broken bronze implements, and ceramic finds from the site. And on the last day of diving, the large pithos fragment finally came free and was brought to the surface. Substantial sherds of other large vessels found under and around it extend the length

of the site, making it likely that the ship lost at Cape Gelidonya was closer to the length of the Uluburun ship, perhaps 16 meters, than to our original estimate of 10 meters.<sup>18</sup>

Even without these later explorations of the Cape Gelidonya wreck, newly discovered or newly published comparanda provide much evidence for an enhanced understanding of it. Derived primarily from the Uluburun wreck of a century earlier, this material attests to the immense maritime traffic in Near Eastern raw materials, which before the advent of modern shipwreck archaeology in 1960 was almost invisible in the archaeological record.<sup>19</sup> The Uluburun wreck alone



Fig. 8. Cemal Pulak with sandstone anchor found during the 1994 excavations at the Cape Gelidonya shipwreck



produced twenty tons of artifacts, largely raw materials seldom if ever found at terrestrial excavations, including a ton of tin ingots, nearly two hundred glass ingots, logs of African blackwood (called ebony by the Egyptians), both hippopotamus and elephant ivory, ostrich eggshells, murex shell opercula, orpiment, terebinth resin, various spices and fruits, and ten tons of copper ingots.<sup>20</sup> Among the copper ingots at Uluburun were examples with only two rather than the normal four protrusions, further evidence that such ingots were not cast to imitate dried oxhides (unless there were two-legged oxen).<sup>21</sup> The discovery of tin ingots at Uluburun strengthened my belief that they were carried with copper ingots in

the Cape Gelidonya cargo, an assumption that had been challenged.<sup>22</sup>

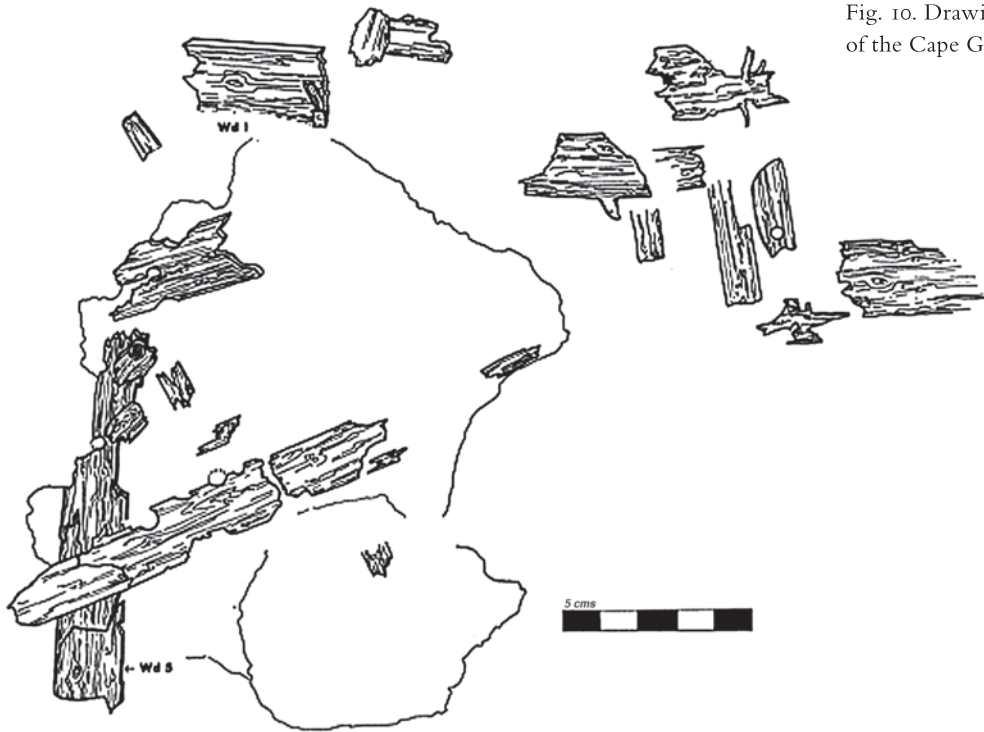
Pulak's detailed knowledge of the better-preserved Uluburun hull now allows us to understand for the first time exactly how the Cape Gelidonya ship was built. When Ann Bass and I were cleaning, attempting to conserve, and cataloguing small fragments of wood in our primitive camp an hour's sail from the Cape Gelidonya wreck (fig. 9), I was not yet familiar with the details of ancient hull construction that had been brought to light earlier, especially in the 1950s. Even after I read and reviewed a book about many earlier studies of hulls,<sup>23</sup> I still failed to recognize that we had been handling fragments of



Fig. 9. George and Ann Bass cleaning and preserving wood fragments from the Cape Gelidonya shipwreck, 1960



Fig. 10. Drawing of wood from the hull of the Cape Gelidonya shipwreck



mortise-and-tenon-joined planking like that found in Roman hulls. Nevertheless, in my 1967 publication I correctly identified the timber labeled Wd 1 (fig. 10) as part of a heavy strake and the twigs lying over most of the fragments as dunnage, thereby explaining for the first time the  $\delta\lambda\eta$  Homer mentions being thrown by Odysseus into the hull of the boat he builds to leave Calypso's island (*Odyssey* 5:256–57).<sup>24</sup> With nothing more than my published drawing to go on, however, Shelley Wachsmann much later recognized that Wd 2 was part of a pegged tenon.<sup>25</sup> Quite independently, Pulak identified the same piece from a hitherto-unpublished photograph. Looking through papers willed to the INA by Peter Throckmorton, discoverer of the Cape Gelidonya wreck in 1959 and co-field director with me of its 1960 excavation, Pulak noted a photograph of the same broken tenon. Comparing it and images of

other wood fragments from Cape Gelidonya to elements of the Uluburun hull, he found them similar. Pulak then found a drawing of a plank comparable in thickness to those at Uluburun, and determined that the spacing between the mortises cut into its edge were about the same distance apart as those at Uluburun.<sup>26</sup> Further, while studying the Uluburun pan-balance weights for his doctoral dissertation, Pulak used statistical analysis to reinterpret the Cape Gelidonya weights. His conclusions are surely more correct than mine, with which I was never satisfied.<sup>27</sup>

Like new comparanda, laboratory analyses have provided new information about hypotheses I published in 1967 regarding the Cape Gelidonya wreck and the Mediterranean Bronze Age more generally. I then believed, for example, that the four-handled copper ingots found at Cape Gelidonya were cast from ore mined on Cyprus, a major

source of copper throughout antiquity. Lead-isotope analyses of the ingots by the Isotrace Laboratory at Oxford point not only to the Cypriot origin of the ingots, but more specifically to the Solea region of the island.<sup>28</sup> The bun ingots in the cargo were also of Cypriot copper, but what I dubbed “slab ingots” were made of copper from Lavrion, in Greece.<sup>29</sup>

Laboratory analyses made since 1967, however, have not always been kind to my various published conclusions. Because copper ore exists on Sardinia, I strongly believed that four-handled copper ingots found there were cast from Sardinian ore.<sup>30</sup> However, lead-isotope analyses of the Sardinian ingots show them to be made of Cypriot copper instead.<sup>31</sup> They were presumably carried to Sardinia on ships like those lost at Cape Gelidonya and Uluburun. The discovery of the figure of a Bronze Age Canaanite god off the south coast of Sicily may point to the remains of such a ship in the central Mediterranean.<sup>32</sup>

For years I argued that there was no firm evidence that the land of Alashiya was Cyprus, or even a place on Cyprus.<sup>33</sup> All of the arguments for that identification could be explained away. Shipments of copper from Alashiya mentioned in the Amarna tablets meant no more than the depictions in Egyptian art of ingot-bearing Syrians carrying copper from Retenu. Now I am convinced that once more I was wrong. Petrographic and chemical analyses of cuneiform tablets sent from Alashiya to Egypt show that they are not made of Syrian clay, but of clay from Cyprus.<sup>34</sup>

I based my case for the Syrian origin of the ship lost at Cape Gelidonya largely on the ship’s lamp, which I identified as Canaanite, and other such personal finds; they were items that almost certainly came aboard with members of the crew rather than as part of a cargo that could have been

taken on at any port.<sup>35</sup> Again I was wrong, although in this case I never denied the possibility of the ship being Cypriot.<sup>36</sup> Pulak had the stone of the ship’s anchor, ceramic samples from the lamp, and a pithos analyzed by Yuval Goren. Both the stone and clay are Cypriot. The fact that the Cape Gelidonya ship was more likely Cypriot than Syrian does not, however, compromise my assertion that there was a Near Eastern element in maritime trade in the eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age, and that Mycenaean Greeks did not hold a monopoly on it as once believed.<sup>37</sup> Cyprus in the thirteenth century B.C. was still culturally closer to the Near East than to the Aegean.

In closing, I might point out that without our somewhat flawed pioneering efforts at Cape Gelidonya in 1960, the excavation of the Uluburun shipwreck might never have occurred. At the end of that first summer, at Peter Throckmorton’s suggestion, I sought and received permission from the Turkish Ministry of Education to start a museum of underwater archaeology in the Castle of the Knights of Saint John in Bodrum, now the Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, the most visited archaeological museum in Turkey. Throughout the 1960s, the main display featured the finds from Cape Gelidonya, especially the four-handled copper ingots. Although he had not been a member of the excavation team, Donald Frey was familiar with the ingots’ unique existence in the Bronze Age. Thus, when he began conducting almost annual surveys along the Turkish coast, he often sketched pictures of such ingots to show the sponge divers he interviewed. Without this information, the captain of the boat from which new sponger Mehmet Çakır dived would not have recognized the “strange metal biscuits with ears” Çakır reported seeing off Uluburun in 1982.<sup>38</sup> The rest is history.<sup>39</sup>

1. For the shipwreck at Cape Gelidonya, see Bass 1967; for Yassiada, see Bass and van Doorninck 1982; for Serçe Limanı, see Bass et al. 2004; Bass et al. 2009.
2. Bass 1988.
3. Bass 1967, pp. 44–47.
4. Pulak 1988b, p. 13.
5. “New Shipwreck Finds” 1989.
6. Throckmorton 1960, p. 702; Throckmorton 1964, pp. 118–25.
7. Bass 1973, p. 35.
8. Catling 1964.
9. Bass 1989.
10. Bass 1967, pp. 45, 47, 135, 143, 148, 163.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–47.
12. Pulak and Rogers 1994, pp. 20–21; Wachsmann 1998, pp. 283, 285; Bass 1999, p. 23.
13. Wachsmann 1998, pp. 275, 279–81.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 262–86; Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 307.
15. Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 306–7.
16. Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 296.
17. Bass 2010; Hirschfeld 2010; Lee 2010.
18. Bass 1999, p. 23.
19. Bass 1967, pp. 165–66; Bass 1997a.
20. Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 293–96, and pp. 307–10, 313–14, 324–25.
21. For the copper ingots found at Uluburun, see Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 307–8; for the copper ingots at Cape Gelidonya, see Bass 1961, pp. 272–73.
22. Bass 1986, p. 272, n. 9.
23. *Atti* 1961, pp. 155, 195, 349; see also Taylor 1965, pp. 50, 89.
24. Bass 1967, pp. 45, 48–51.
25. Wachsmann 1998, p. 217.
26. Bass 1999, pp. 21–22.
27. Bass 1967, pp. 135–42; Pulak 1996, pp. 154–285, 502–80.
28. Stos 2009, pp. 170, 172.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
30. Bass 1967, p. 77.
31. Gale 1991, pp. 212–24; Stos-Gale and Gale 1992, p. 322.
32. Purpura 1986, pp. 153, 155.
33. Bass 1967, pp. 77–78; Bass 1991, pp. 75–76.
34. Goren et al. 2003.
35. Bass 1967, p. 164.
36. Bass 1973, pp. 36–37.
37. Bass 1997b; Bass 1998.
38. Bass 1986, pp. 269–70; Bass 1987, p. 708.
39. All of the new findings briefly mentioned here will be fully published in a new and expanded volume on Cape Gelidonya by Hirschfeld, with contributions by Pulak, Özdaş, and me.





# Interpreting the Archaeological Evidence

# From Tell Sianu to Qatna: Some Common Features of Inland Syrian and Levantine Cities in the Second Millennium B.C.

*Material for the Study of the City in Syria (Part Three)\**

*Matériel pour l'étude de la ville en Syrie (troisième partie)*

## INTRODUCTION

The northern half of the Levantine coast possesses very specific geographical characteristics. Three plains constitute the main features of this part of the Near East: to the north, the plain of Latakia (where the site of Ras Shamra, ancient Ugarit, is located); in the central part of the coastal strip, the plain of Jableh (with Tell Sianu in its center); and, in the south, the Akkar Plain (where Tell Kazel, ancient Sumur, and Tell Arqa are located) (fig. 1).

This coastal strip is separated from inland Syria by a mountain barrier that, in antiquity, played a major role in cultural differentiation and development.<sup>1</sup> A closer look at



Fig. 1. Map of the Syrian coastal region in the 2nd millennium B.C.



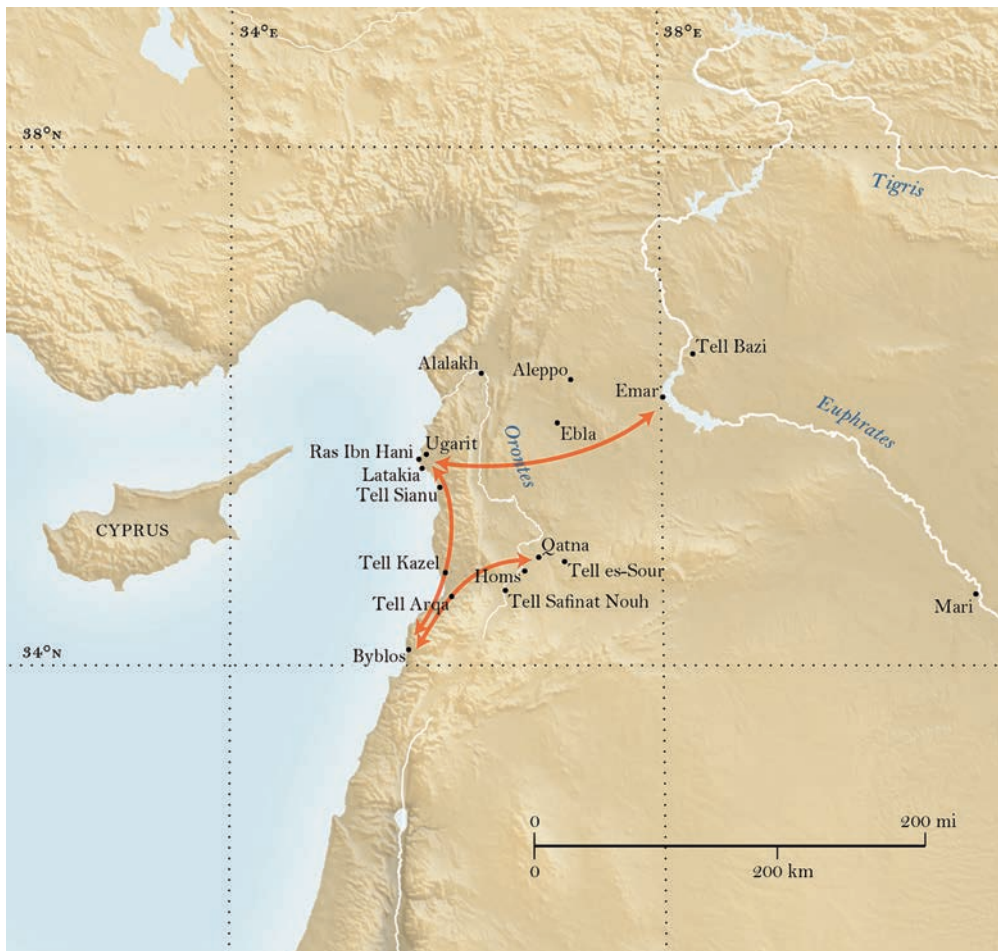


Fig. 2. Map of the ancient Near East showing axes of communication between Mediterranean harbors, inland Syria, and the Middle Euphrates Valley in the 2nd millennium B.C.

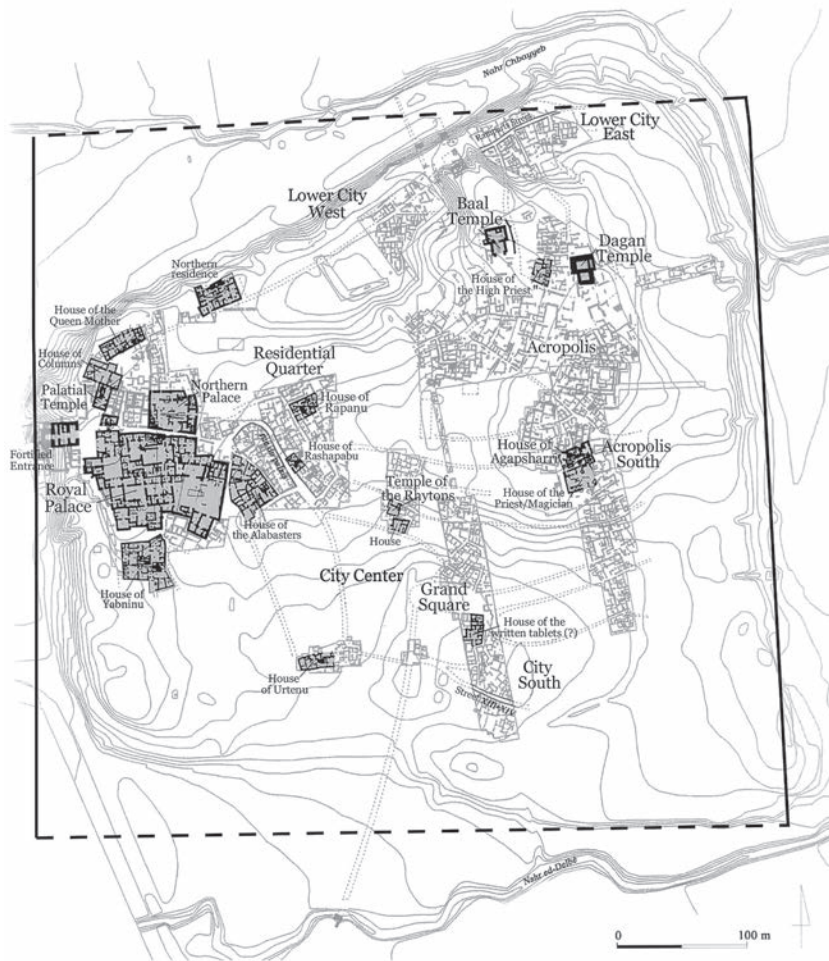
this 1,580-meter-high range, the Bargylos of Classical times, shows two corridors linking the coast with the Middle Orontes Valley.<sup>2</sup> The valley of the Nahr al-Kebir Shemali, to the north, enabled communication between the areas of Latakia and Aleppo and with the Middle Euphrates Valley and the river port of Emar there. The second passage is the Akkar Plain and Homs corridor, which linked Bronze Age ports like Byblos to major Syrian urban centers such as Qatna (Tell Mishrifeh). This topography must be accounted for in any preliminary interpretation of the region's geopolitics, as it reveals the axes of communication between Mediterranean harbors, inland Syria, and the Middle Euphrates Valley in

the second millennium B.C. (fig. 2). A study of the region's geography also reveals the presence of outposts, founded at regular intervals, where merchants made stopovers in their journeys eastward. This essay specifically focuses on some of the major sites located on these routes in order to discover new salient aspects of the region's Bronze Age archaeology. Ugarit, the sites of the Jableh Plain, settlements on the Akkar Plain, and lastly the metropolis of Qatna will be briefly considered in this short text.

#### UGARIT

Fieldwork carried out during the last decade at Ugarit, in the northern coastal plain, by a joint French-Syrian expedition has yielded

Fig. 3. Map of Ugarit showing the city's new, rectilinear foundation in the early 2nd millennium B.C.



essential data on urban planning in the Late Bronze Age. Moreover, detailed analyses of the site's topography, the stratigraphy since Claude Schaeffer's early soundings, and epigraphic remains from Mari have shown the extent and importance of Ugarit in the Middle Bronze Age.<sup>3</sup> The topographical plan of the mound, as it appears today, shows the city as a 28-hectare trapezoid. However, the two rivers—the Nahr Chbayyeb and the Nahr ad-Delbe—bordering the site to the north and south respectively have eroded large parts of the settlement. This observation, combined with perfectly preserved

stretches of the city's western wall, suggests that the real shape of this Levantine center was originally a square with sides 600 meters long (fig. 3).<sup>4</sup> A more accurate measurement of the total area of the site in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages is, therefore, 36 hectares. Thus, Ugarit is a perfect example of an early second millennium B.C. rectilinear foundation and a site comparable in importance to Ras Ibn Hani, Qatna, Tell Safinat Nouh, and Tell es-Sour.<sup>5</sup> Circular and rectilinear urban plans demarcate the two major phases of urban development in pre-Classical Syria, that is, the third millennium B.C. (Early



Bronze Age [EB] III–IV) and the early second millennium B.C. (Middle Bronze Age [MB] I).<sup>6</sup> The appearance of rectilinear cities marks a new second stage of the Second Urban Revolution, a process that originated in Syria around 2700–2600 B.C.<sup>7</sup>

#### TELL SIANU AND THE PLAIN OF JABLEH

The plain of Jableh lies in the middle part of the Syrian coastal strip and is rectangular in shape, extending 20 kilometers in a north–south direction, and is 7 kilometers from east to west, from the sea to the mountains (fig. 4). It is located on a route running north–south and constitutes a transition between the northern coastal plain and the Akkar Plain. Archaeological fieldwork carried out since the pioneering excavations of the Danish expedition in the area of Tell Sukas has filled in the gaps relating to the area’s various stages of cultural development.<sup>8</sup> The first phase of complex, stratified social organization in the plain can be linked to the Second Urban Revolution, as is unquestionably demonstrated by recent excavation results at Tell Sianu (fig. 5). A sounding made in Area B on the tell’s summit identified a succession of levels that include mudbrick monumental architecture (fig. 6).<sup>9</sup>

The extent and plan of early second millennium B.C. Tell Sianu and of nearby sites are unfortunately poorly known. However, the little information available has provided new data on funerary architecture in the Middle Bronze Age. Graves dug into bedrock have been uncovered at both Tell Iris and Tell Tweini;<sup>10</sup> these consist of a shaft leading to a single funerary chamber (fig. 7). The grave goods, which go back to MB II, and include both local and imported (in particular, Cypriot) ceramic wares, bronze tools, and bone implements, reflect a certain degree of wealth and social differentiation. This funerary tradition is widespread throughout the Levant and is attested at many Syrian and Palestinian sites.<sup>11</sup> The assemblage of ceramic wares discovered during fieldwork reflects circulation and

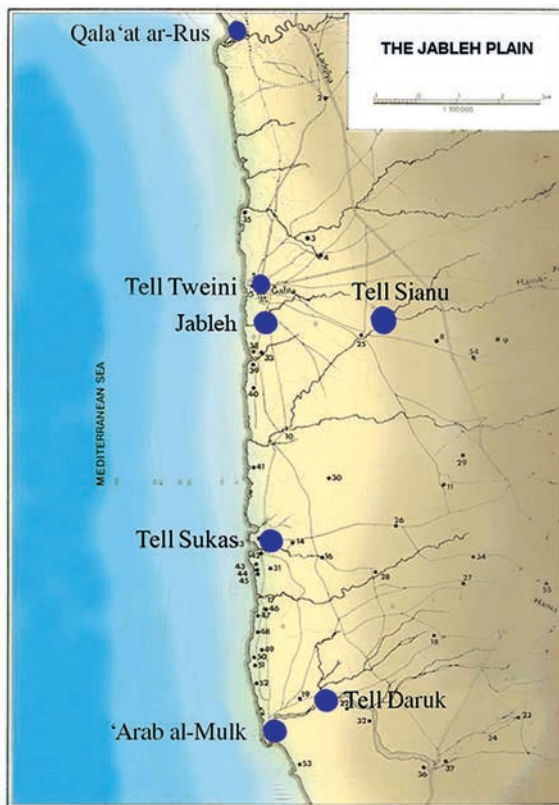


Fig. 4. Map of the Jableh Plain, 2nd millennium B.C.



Fig. 5. Aerial view of Tell Sianu



trade patterns linking the Jableh Plain to Cyprus and the Aegean (fig. 8). The material is quite rich and varied, in terms of both shapes and decoration.

A single tablet discovered on site, in proper stratigraphic context, supports our reconstructed trade network (fig. 9). This Akkadian cuneiform tablet can be attributed

to the eighteenth century B.C. (MB II) and shows paleographic features comparable to those of the Mari archive.<sup>12</sup> This economic text lists trade goods circulating through three ancient Near Eastern lands: Egypt (Misru), Cyprus (Alashiya), and Subartu (probably the Hurrian lands of northeastern Syria, i.e., the Jezireh). A closer study of this document elucidates the strategic position of cities of the middle and northern Syrian coast and their crucial role in international trade. It confirms that ports founded during the Second Urban Revolution (EB III) were in full development in the Middle Bronze Age and played a decisive part in exchanges in the eastern Mediterranean. The prosperity of second millennium B.C. ports lasted until the arrival of the Sea Peoples from the Aegean and the destruction of Ugarit ca. 1185 B.C. The importance of trade in this period has also, of course, been evidenced by spectacular imports and tablets from Ugarit and by a single epigraphic find from the excavations of Sidon carried out by the British Museum team (see Doumet-Serhal essay, pp. 132–41).<sup>13</sup>

The Jableh Plain was, therefore, an important intermediary between inland Syria and the Mediterranean.<sup>14</sup> The sites of Qala'at ar-Rus in the north; Tell Tweini, Jableh, and Tell Sukas in the center; and 'Arab al-Mulk and Tell Daruk in the south must have all been under the political domination of Tell Sianu, a city whose extent and prominent, high-elevation location enabled it to control the entire coastal strip as well as the towns located below the site.<sup>15</sup> Ugaritic texts reveal the existence of a city called Sianu<sup>16</sup> and a small buffer state with the same name caught between two Late Bronze Age (LB) II regional powers, Amurru and Ugarit, themselves allies of the major empires of the day, Hatti and Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

#### THE AKKAR PLAIN

The Akkar Plain to the south, adjacent to the Syrian-Lebanese border and located on both sides of the Nahr al-Kebir Janoubi (Eleutheros River), is unusual in shape, a



Fig. 6. Mudbrick monumental building. Tell Sianu. Early Bronze Age IVA



Fig. 7. Grave with shaft and single funerary chamber. Tell Iris. Middle Bronze Age II

perfect equilateral triangle with its sides measuring 30 kilometers (fig. 10). Surveyed sites on the plain belonging to pre-Classical periods show that the settlement pattern was already established during the Second Urban Revolution. This settlement pattern is structured around three major sites: Tell Kazel in the north, Tell Arqa in the south, and Tell Jammous in the east.<sup>18</sup> Each of these settlements forms the apex of a triangle. Moreover, they are located approximately 20 kilometers from each other, a distance corresponding to a day's journey on foot. A study recently published by Jean-Claude Margueron on donkey caravan circulation in the Bronze Age has concluded that 20 kilometers constituted the average distance between two way stations/stages.<sup>19</sup> One can thus evaluate the number of stops between the port of Byblos and Qatna, and pinpoint the thoroughfare linking the two. I would like to propose the following sites as stepping stones or stages in the caravan route from Byblos to the Orontes: Batroun (Butruna of the Amarna tablets); Tell Arda (Irdata of the Amarna tablets); Tell Arqa (Irqata of the Amarna tablets); Tell Jammous; another site in the Buqei'a Plain, which remains to be found; Tell Nebi Mend (Qadesh); the ancient tell in the city of Homs; and finally Qatna. Thus eight stages (approximately 160 kilometers) stood between this Bronze Age Syrian capital and the principal Mediterranean harbor (fig. 11). This communication network remained unchanged until the beginning of hostilities between Egyptians and Hittites in LB II and the foundation by Abdi-Ashirta of the powerful kingdom of Amurru ca. 1350 B.C. Following the Battle of Qadesh, the region was a frontier buffer zone between empires and of little commercial interest. Indeed, the name Amurru is rarely attested in written documents of the thirteenth century B.C., although the land is mentioned later as the property of Zakar-baal, king of Byblos, in the Wenamon Papyrus of 1080 B.C.

Before this discussion of the Akkar Plain concludes, there remains the question of the



Fig. 8. Cyproit milk bowl. Tell Sianu. Late Bronze Age II-III. National Museum, Damascus 8720



Fig. 9. Cuneiform tablet with economic text. Tell Sianu. Middle Bronze Age II. National Museum, Damascus 8719

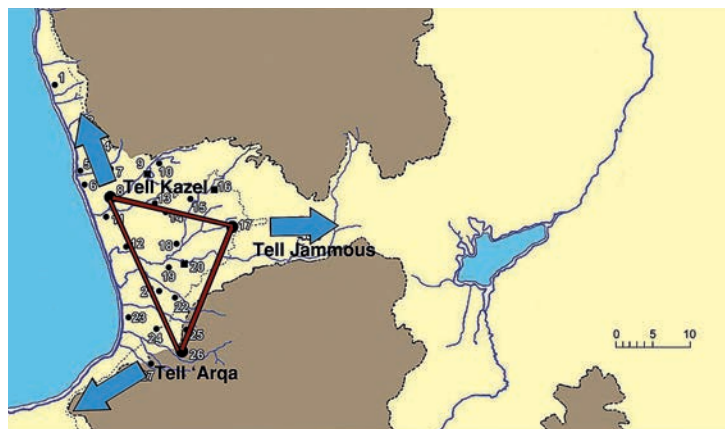


Fig. 10. Map of the Akkar Plain



Fig. 11. Map showing stages in the caravan route from Byblos to Qatna in the Middle Bronze Age



settlement pattern in the area between Tell Arqa, Tell Kazel, and Tell Jammous.<sup>20</sup> Small sites were founded in the immediate vicinity of all three of these localities, suggesting that they must have played essentially agricultural roles, serving as centers for the

collection of the produce that fed the inhabitants of the three cities and their palaces. Worthy of note are, for instance, the Bronze Age sites (probably villages) of Tell al-Laha and Tell Bseiseh in the immediate periphery of Tell Kazel.<sup>21</sup>

#### QATNA

Excavations carried out since 1994 by the Syrian expedition provide a completely new outlook on this huge urban center in inland Syria.<sup>22</sup> Several deep soundings have shown that the first phase of the site's occupation was coeval with the inception of the Second Urban Revolution. Qatna was perfectly circular in the third millennium B.C.: its outline can be compared with many EB sites located on the Syrian steppe's western border, including Tell Sha'irat, Tell Rawda, and Tell es-Sour, among many others.<sup>23</sup> The beginning of the second millennium B.C., however, marked a radical change in the city's plan, from a circular to a rectilinear shape. Moreover, Qatna's surface grew from a mere 25 hectares to more than one hundred. In the Middle Bronze Age, Qatna formed a perfect square, consisting of an upper city surrounded by a lower town (fig. 12). The entire settlement was fortified in the early stages of its refoundation in

Fig. 12. Aerial view of Qatna





MB I, when Amorite kingdoms were being established throughout Syria. Four monumental gates were built into the ramparts at the four cardinal points. The ditches surrounding the outer face of the impressive 30-meter-high glacis made this defensive system almost impregnable.

The city's detailed interior layout is still poorly known. The information on urban planning at Qatna comes largely from excavations of the upper city's Royal Palace and several smaller palatial buildings from the Late Bronze Age—the Southern, Northern, and Eastern palaces (fig. 13).<sup>24</sup> Each of these royal residences adopts a perfectly Syrian layout, including private and public sections on both sides of the throne room. This characteristic feature is most clearly evidenced in the Southern Palace, excavated by the Syrian team, and, of course, in the Royal Palace.<sup>25</sup> The latter is also noteworthy for another detail: below it lie the royal tombs, accessible directly from the throne room via a very long dromos.<sup>26</sup>

A stratigraphic study of this palace has shown that it was built in the final phases of the Middle Bronze Age, above another large Middle Bronze Age royal residence, itself probably the residence of the Amorite kings Amut-pi-El and Ishkhi-Addu mentioned in the documents of Yasmah-Addu from the Old Assyrian archives of Mari.<sup>27</sup>

The most salient feature of urban planning at Qatna is the transformation of the circular city into a square one. This radical change in layout was implemented all over inland Syria in the Amorite period (fig. 14). At the beginning of the Second Urban Revolution, urban foundations were all circular in plan. Tell Rawda,<sup>28</sup> Tell Sha'irat, and Tell es-Sour have already been mentioned, but the same is true of the huge cities of the Jezireh, such as Tell Chuera in the north and Tell Beydar and Tell Mabtouh in the east.<sup>29</sup> In the early second millennium B.C. cities became rectilinear in plan, either square, as at Qatna and Tell Safinat Nouh, or rectangular, as at Tell es-Sour.<sup>30</sup> These

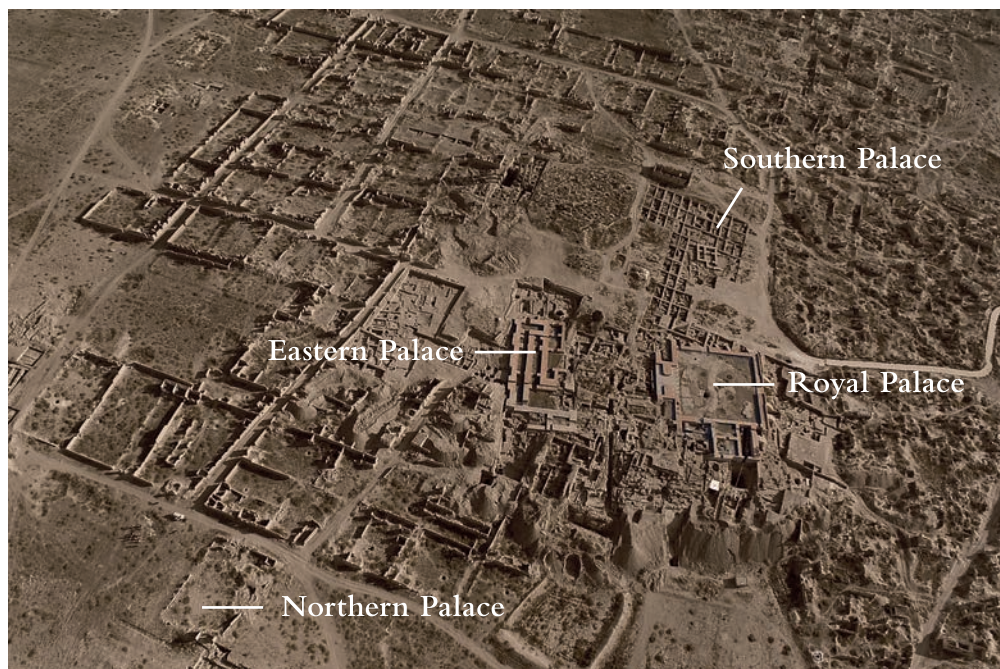


Fig. 13. Palatial buildings on the acropolis of Qatna



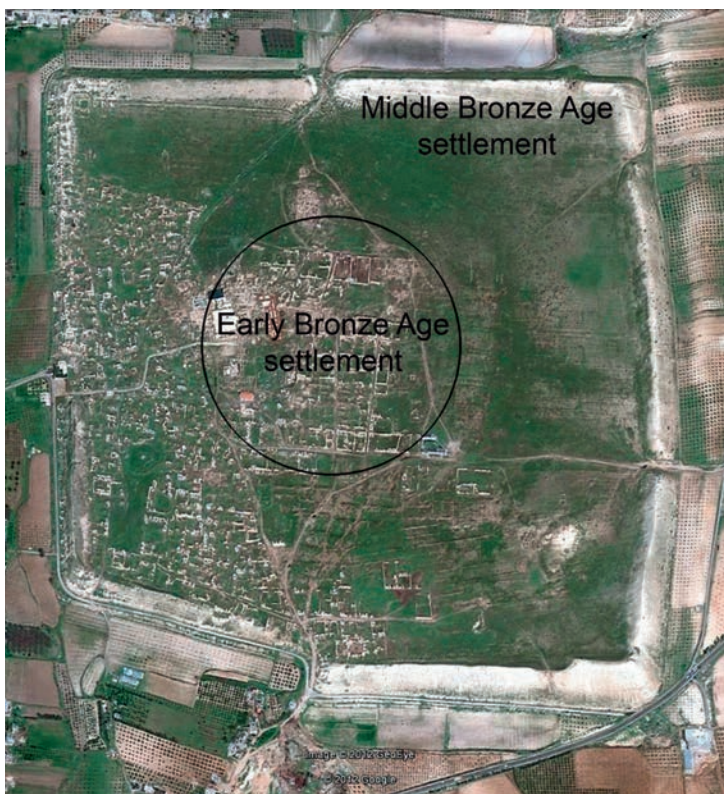


Fig. 14. Aerial view of Qatna. Image © 2012 GeoEye; © 2012 Google

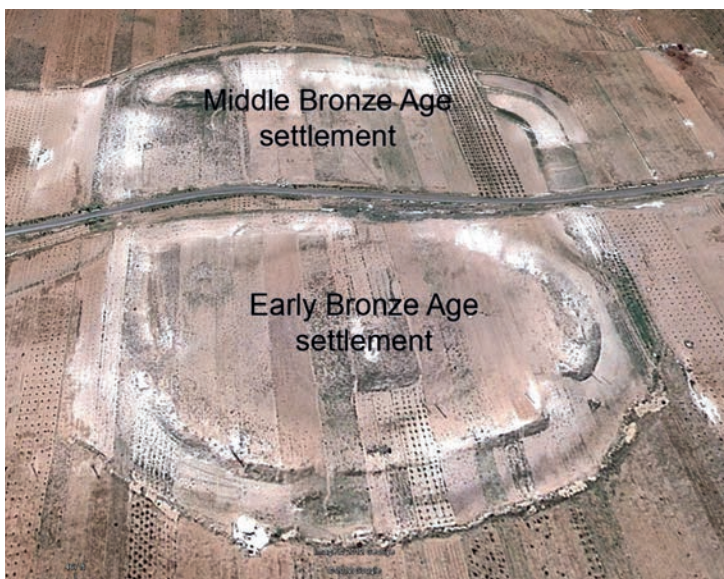


Fig. 15. Aerial view of Tell es-Sour. Image © 2012 GeoEye; © 2012 Google

rectilinear shapes became common in the Late Bronze Age and characterized coastal Syrian or middle Euphrates River Valley sites like Ugarit, Emar, and Tell Bazi,<sup>31</sup> among others.

Worthy of note are sites refounded in the Middle Bronze Age on Early Bronze Age circular settlements. Circular towns belonging to this category were enclosed within cities rectilinear in plan and used as citadels, as at Qatna. They were often placed in the center of the larger settlement, as at Qatna, or some were located adjacent to the city walls, as at Tell es-Sour (fig. 15).

#### CONCLUSION

The set of data referred to in this essay illustrates changes in settlement and organization in the northern Levant during the Bronze Age. One can be certain that the foundation of cities on the coast dates to and was the result of the Second Urban Revolution in EB III. This new settlement pattern, which therefore appeared before the mid-third millennium B.C., was related to economic growth and prosperity, itself a direct result of the use of ports along the Syro-Palestinian coast and of routes to the interior and thence to Mesopotamia. The subsequent EB IVB (ca. 2250–2200 B.C.) was a period of decline due to several factors, namely the First Intermediate Period in Egypt, the fall of the Akkadian empire, and upheaval in Syria caused by changes in ethnicity (that is, the Amorite, and to a lesser extent Hurrian, settlement of the inland and coastal areas). As a result, many urban centers survived during this phase, but some shrank in size and importance.

In the early second millennium B.C., a new use of long-distance trade routes resulted in a second phase of urban and political organization in the region. The Amorite kingdoms and states created during this period played a major part in the geopolitical reconfiguration of the entire Near East. The areas of northern and western Syria were at the zenith of their urban prosperity, a prosperity visible not only in

its architecture but also in major artistic achievements. This phase of development and wealth was then somewhat disrupted by the clash of the Mitannian, Hittite, and Egyptian empires. The period, which started with the invasion of Thutmose III (r. ca. 1479–1425 B.C.) and the Syrian wars of Suppiluliuma (ca. 1350 B.C.) and ended with the Battle of Qadesh (ca. 1275 B.C.), weakened Syria's paramount economic role. Nevertheless, great Syrian ports such as Ugarit survived and played a major role in the eastern Mediterranean as production and redistribution centers.<sup>32</sup>

Ugarit, the most famous emporium of the northern Levant, is the best example of a Late Bronze Age commercial city-state and an overarching palatial economy.<sup>33</sup> The state's structure and organization can, to some extent, serve as a blueprint for those of Phoenician trading cities of the early first millennium B.C.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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\* This essay constitutes part three of "Material for the Study of the City in Syria." For parts one and two, see Al-Maqdissi 2008b and 2010b, respectively.

1. Weulersse 1940b.
2. Weulersse 1940a.
3. Al-Maqdissi 2008g.
4. Al-Maqdissi 2008e.
5. For Ras Ibn Hani, see Bounni 1982, fig. 1; for Qatna, see Al-Maqdissi 2010c; for Tell Safinat Nouh, see Moussli 1985, Moussli 1986–87,

- Moussli 1989–90; and for Tell es-Sour, see Al-Maqdissi 2009, figs. 7, 10.
6. Al-Maqdissi 2008g.
7. For the First Urban Revolution, see G. Stein 1999; Butterlin 2003; Margueron 2003b, pp. 47–54, 216–20; Forest and Gallois 2006, pp. 13–39.
8. Oldenburg 1991.
9. Al-Maqdissi 2006; Al-Maqdissi 2008d.
10. For Tell Iris, see Al-Maqdissi and Souleiman 2004; for Tell Tweini, see Bretschneider and van Lerberghe 2008, pp. 75–86.
11. Guigues 1937; Thrane 1978; Ilan 1995; Riis and Buhl 2007.
12. Charpin in Galliano and Calvet 2004, p. 111, no. 85.
13. Finkel 2006.
14. Riis et al. 2004.
15. For Qala'at ar-Rus, see Al-Maqdissi 2008c; for Jableh, see Bretschneider and van Lerberghe 2008; for Tell Sukas, see Thrane 1978; Riis et al. 2004; and for 'Arab al-Mulk and Tell Daruk, see Oldenburg and Rohweder 1981.
16. Astour 1979; Malbran Labat 2003.
17. Freu 2004; Freu 2006.
18. Thalmann 2000.
19. Margueron 1989.
20. For Tell Arqa, see Thalmann 2006; for Tell Kazel, see, for example, Badre et al. 1994; and for Tell Jammous, see an unpublished survey by Michel Al-Maqdissi and J. Mouamar.
21. Thalmann 2000.
22. Al-Maqdissi et al. 2002; Al-Maqdissi and Morandi Bonacossi 2005.
23. Al-Maqdissi 2010b.
24. For the Southern Palace, see Al-Maqdissi 2003, pp. 1500–1505 and figs. 11–12; for the Northern Palace, see Morandi Bonacossi 2009; and for the Eastern Palace, see Iamoni and Kanhouh 2009.
25. Al-Maqdissi 2008a.
26. Bordreuil and Al-Maqdissi 2007; Al-Maqdissi 2010a.
27. Klengel 2000.
28. Castel and Peltenburg 2007.
29. For Tell Chuera, see Meyer 2007; for Tell Beydar, see Lebeau 2008; Lebeau and Suleiman 2005.
30. For the square city plan, see Al-Maqdissi 2010c; for the rectangular plan, see Al-Maqdissi 2008f.
31. For Ugarit, see Al-Maqdissi 2008g, fig. 3d; for Emar, see Margueron 1982; for Tell Bazi, see Otto 2006.
32. Freu 2004; Freu 2009.
33. Freu 2006.



# When Were the Hurrians Hurrian? The Persistence of Ethnicity in Urkesh

An important result of our excavations at Tell Mozan (ancient Urkesh) has been a radically new understanding of the earliest history of the Hurrians: they can now be recognized as having established a major urban entity for certain by the early third millennium B.C. and most likely already by the middle of the fourth. The ethnic identity of the city remained in the foreground until it was abandoned with the arrival of the Assyrians in the late fourteenth century B.C. This essay will present the evidence for both a definition of this identity and its remarkable continuity over time.

## ETHNICITY AS A SEMIOTIC SYSTEM AND THE URKESH CLUSTER

The concept of ethnicity has, we might say, a bad reputation, but the fault would seem to lie, not with the concept but with the way it is used. On the one hand, it is freely invoked, in an oblique way and without using the ethnic qualifier, for example, when referring to “Sumerians” or “Babylonians” as coherent entities so identified apart from a political configuration, or when applying adjectives that transcend territorial boundaries and provide a unifying attribute (as when speaking of “Amorite kingdoms”). On the other hand, one is wary of using explicitly

the concept and the term of “ethnicity” when referring to these groups.

The first important task in this regard is to identify clearly the concept. I developed my thoughts in this regard in a recent article in which I emphasized the semiotic aspect of the phenomenon: ethnic identity relies on the interrelationship of a complex set of signs, and thus a study of the valence of these signs is the determining element that helps us to recognize the presence and indeed the nature of the ethnic bond.<sup>1</sup> It is in this light that I will look here at the data pertaining to Urkesh, that is, following the semiotic principles described in the earlier article, and considering the signs in terms of their progressive degrees of transparency, from language and religion (more opaque) to art and customs (more transparent).

The second major task is to face directly the problem inherent in a treatment of broken traditions, those where self-perception is absent given the lack of responsive live informants. How can we predicate value to signs when we do not have interpreters who can vouch for the interpretation? This is of course the case for ancient Urkesh. The answer lies in the identification of distributional classes that—by virtue of their very complexity—exclude an accidental clustering as the reason for their existence.

I will, therefore, propose the existence of an Urkesh cluster of cultural traits that can best be explained in terms of a group self-awareness not linked to organizational factors, and yet sufficient to maintain a profound bond of solidarity over a long period of time. Such a cluster, in other words, would be specifically ethnic. It is necessary, in this respect, to place the data of second millennium B.C. Urkesh against those of their third (and even fourth) millennium B.C. backdrop, as the foundational moments of a deeply rooted amalgam that fostered cohesiveness across time.

## LANGUAGE: THE SIGN AS CIPHER

Being a native speaker of a given language is, in most cases, the primary hallmark of

ethnic identity. The reason for the distinctiveness of native fluency is that it is the least transparent of signs: it is a true cipher, one that can be de-ciphered by those who share the code. It is especially the native dimension of language acquisition that defines the relationship between competence and ethnic identity. Subsequent learning through schooling is of course possible, and this may in some ways come to serve as a form of “legal” ascription in the ethnic group, but it is the exception. Instinctively sharing the “code” is, in fact, what it means to be a native speaker. There emerges almost a sense of complicity, which emphasizes the barrier between “us” and “the others,” especially in a multiethnic (and multilingual) setting. It should be noted, in this regard, that signs are meaningful not only in themselves, but also, and often especially, because of their oppositional value to other signs, whereby a certain type of mutual exclusivity emerges.

In the case of Urkesh, we have very significant evidence of the central role played, in the Akkadian period (ca. 2300–2159 B.C.), by a Hurrian linguistic identity. In our case, we have the inscriptions connected with the two lions of Tish-atal<sup>2</sup> and the recurrence of the Hurrian term *endan* used for the king.<sup>3</sup> It is the political dimension of both occurrences that is especially important. The linguistic specificity that is proclaimed by both the texts and the title affirms a sense of identity that is all the stronger as it is set against the dominant political dimension of Akkadian supremacy. In other words, the trend would have been—opportunistically perhaps—to write in Akkadian and to avoid the title *endan*, loaded, by virtue of its very distinctiveness, with non-Akkadian (if not outright anti-Akkadian) overtones. That this did not happen lends an even greater significance to the insistence on the use of Hurrian in contradistinction to Akkadian.

New evidence introduces an element of great importance into the discussion of the Hurrian linguistic dimension of Urkesh. Massimo Maiocchi’s analysis of tablet

A7.341 shows that this small administrative tablet, written in a beautiful Akkadian script,<sup>4</sup> was in fact understood (that is, written and read) as a Hurrian text, on account of Hurrian morphemic elements embedded in the text. The reason this is so significant is because it points to Hurrian being the language used in the administration of the Palace, a fact not immediately apparent, because the few other administrative texts we have are written exclusively with Sumerograms and Akkadograms.

Hurrian personal names are common at Urkesh, but what is especially telling is their distribution. Thus, in the court of Tupkish, it is not only the name of the king that can be explained as Hurrian. Even more suggestive is the fact that two servants of the queen (who has an Akkadian name, Uqnitum) also have Hurrian names: Zamena, “the nurse of the queen,” and Tuli, “the chief cook of the queen.” The distribution suggests that naming practices do indeed correspond, in this case, to an underlying ethnic reality. On the model of Tar’am-Agade (who followed Uqnitum),<sup>5</sup> it is plausible to assume that Uqnitum also belonged to the royal house of Akkad, or at least that she came from outside Urkesh. The two courtiers who are in her service and who bear the Hurrian names Zamena and Tuli are associated with functions that are especially significant. The nurse “of the queen” is the nurse of her children; the chief cook “of the queen” is in charge of preparing banquets that are important for ceremonial purposes, both political and religious. That they have Hurrian names implies that they did not come with the queen from her country of origin, but were assigned to her after her arrival in the city. Given the importance of the two tasks for which Zamena and Tuli were responsible—rearing the royal children and projecting the proper public image at state banquets—the Hurrian dimension emerges all the more starkly. Were the royal children raised speaking Hurrian? Were the banquets in keeping with Hurrian lore and traditions?

All this evidence belongs to the third millennium B.C. We have no comparable, specifically Hurrian linguistic evidence from the second millennium B.C. But this need not be interpreted as an indication that the language was no longer in use at Urkesh. A suggestion to the contrary is provided by the letters sent by the “man of Urkesh” (first Terru and then Haziran) to the overlord, Zimri-Lim of Mari.<sup>6</sup> Written, appropriately, in Akkadian, the letters speak quite openly of a constant antagonism on the part of the “men of Urkesh” toward the Mari-appointed governors. It seems plausible that such antagonism was due as much to a persistent sense of ethnic diversity as to other factors, whether political<sup>7</sup> or religious (see next section). If so, the linguistic “cipher” might have continued to serve as a bond for the social group, which seems, indeed, to have founded its solidarity on nonorganizational traits. The terms used to support this interpretation are as follows:

- “the city of Urkesh” *a-lum Ur-ké-eš<sup>KI</sup>*<sub>15</sub> (44bis:21)
- “the sons of my city” DUMU.MEŠ *a-li-ia* (44bis:8)
- “the men of Urkesh” LÚ.MEŠ *Ur-ké-ša-yu<sup>KI</sup>* (69:9, a letter from Ashlakka; 105:7’; 107:4, from Ashnakkum)
- “the elders of Urkesh” LÚ.ŠU.GI.MEŠ *Ur-ké-eš<sup>KI</sup>* (45:12’)
- “the *hābiru*” are assembled in Urkesh (100:22–23, from Ashnakkum)
- “assembly” *puhrum* and related verb (69:9, from Ashlakka; 99:12’–13’, from Ashnakkum, used as a collective, with the verb *īpulū* in the plural; 100:23, from Ashnakkum; 113:10–11, from Shuduhum)
- “Urkesh” alone, referring to the population of the city as a whole, is found in 48:ii, from Ashlakka; 98:17, from Ashnakkum, used as a collective, with the verb *īlqū* in the plural in line 20; 105:4’, 30’, from Ashnakkum; possibly 140:17, from Qa’a and Ishqa, though here the name of Urkesh may refer simply to the place, not the inhabitants.

While the letters found in Mari are so far the only texts known to have originated in Urkesh in the second millennium B.C., it is not unlikely that we will find second millennium B.C. tablets in the area above the Palace, where we hope to resume excavations. We are currently in the Mitanni levels that, in our understanding, correspond to the service wing of the Great Temple. Like the area east of the Temple in the third and early second millennia B.C., this area shows no sign of destruction, and this may lessen our chances of discovering complete archives. But if our interpretation of the structures as buildings used for the administration of Temple affairs is correct, there may be at least isolated epigraphic finds in both areas. These may in turn be relevant to the question of a possible use of Hurrian as the main local language down through the second millennium B.C.

#### RELIGION: THE SHARED INTANGIBLE

Religion proposes, to the attention of a social group, intangible phenomena that act as powerful bonding mechanisms in two ways. First, the very fact that the phenomena are intangible means that sharing in the perception of them as real heightens the feeling of solidarity in the members of the group. Like language, religion is a cipher, albeit a more transparent one. The individual phenomena are given concrete embodiment in the form of buildings, objects, and actions, all of which are tangible in their external appearance, and as such understandable by outsiders, even if their deeper semiotic valence may remain obscured.

Second, the individual phenomena are all the more effective as bonding mechanisms because of the way in which they are structured within a complex system, where each individual part depends on the other, thereby strengthening their reciprocal import. A functioning system means accepting as real the close and structured interrelationship of a number of discrete elements: a temple, the objects within it (statues, altars, cultic paraphernalia), the actions that link all of this



into a single whole (the rituals). One accepts the reference of the entire system of tangible phenomena to a higher, intangible plane, and this creates a stronger bond of solidarity, almost a sense of complicity, especially to the extent that some of the semiotic references remain less transparent (“mysterious”).

At Urkesh we have clear indications of a very distinctive sacral system, of which three particular elements may be singled out.

The one that is most directly relevant to our present discussion is the subterranean shaft, known in Hurrian as *ābi* (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup> The archaeological finds match perfectly the information from the later Hurrian texts, in particular the shallow pits (identifiable in the centuries-long accumulations within the monumental frame of the *ābi*) where the rituals took place; the prevalence of piglet and puppy bones; a small jar in the shape of a naked woman with distorted lips (possibly representing a spirit of the Netherworld whose speech is “like the chirping of birds”; the miniature jar would have been used for pouring small quantities of perfumed oil, as mentioned in the texts); silver or lead rings; the spout of a theriomorphic jar in the shape of a pig’s snout. The Urkesh structure serves as a monumental frame for the performance of the rituals described in the texts for evoking the spirits of the Netherworld, and it is thus one of the most definable religious structures of Syro-Mesopotamia, just as a baptistry is reserved for a single type of ritual in the Catholic tradition. Not only are the texts written in Hurrian, they describe rituals that are wholly at odds with the Mesopotamian traditions. Now, although the core of the Urkesh *ābi* belongs to the third millennium B.C., it continued in use throughout the second, albeit in a less monumental fashion. The area adjacent to the *ābi* appears to have retained a specific functional coherence, with a platform to the immediate northwest remaining in continuous use alongside the *ābi* (although this requires further excavation in unit A14).

The great Temple complex, which includes the Terrace on which the Temple stood and the Plaza facing its southern edge, is also very distinctive, although a definition of its Hurrian character is more inferential than in the case of the *ābi*. The structural distinctiveness, described in several publications,<sup>9</sup> applies to all aspects of the complex, in particular the high stone revetment wall with its peculiar triangular pattern; the asymmetric organization of the sacred space, enclosed by a stone temenos wall; the monumental staircase, also placed asymmetrically and obliquely; an “apron” flanking the staircase that may have served for seating; and a triple escarpment—one in stone and two in clay—against floodwaters at the base of the wall. This is the classical formulation as we know it for the Early Dynastic III period. It was preceded by a very similar structure dating back to Late Chalcolithic 3,<sup>10</sup> and it remained in use

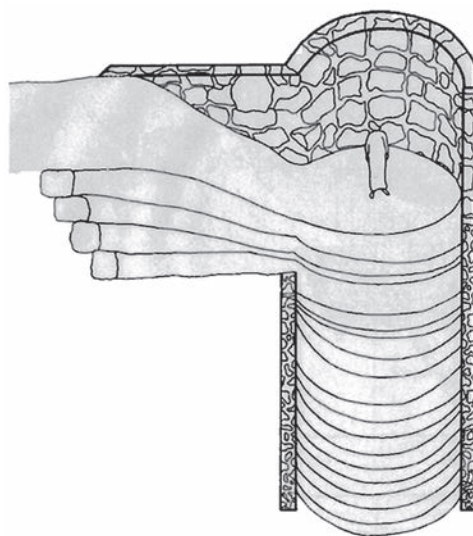


Fig. 1. Drawing of section through the subterranean shaft (Hurrian *ābi*), showing accumulations rising to a height at which the roof became an impediment. It was removed to allow the accumulations to continue, until they covered both the circular shaft and the antechamber.



Fig. 2. The eastern staircase and the “apron” flanking it. Urkesh, Temple Terrace complex



Fig. 3. The western, five-step staircase that replaced the eastern, thirty-step staircase at the end of the Mitanni period. Urkesh, Temple Terrace complex

unchanged for more than a thousand years (fig. 2), until the last century of Mitanni rule. At that point, there was a considerable retrenchment of the entire settlement, and a new staircase was built to the west, replacing the more monumental one of the third millennium B.C. (fig. 3). What is significant is the extraordinary continuity in the definition of the sacral space, which remained topologically the same for more than two millennia.<sup>11</sup> For our current argument, two points are particularly relevant. There are reasons for suggesting that the Tish-atal lions belonged to the foundation deposit of one of the temples at the top of the Terrace and that the god mentioned in the text may be Kumarbi (referred to with the Sumerogram <sup>DINGIR</sup>KIŠ.GAL), the main god of the Hurrian pantheon.<sup>12</sup> If so, the entire Temple

complex would be not only structurally at variance with the patterns of Mesopotamian religious architecture, but specifically linked to the Hurrian tradition of Kumarbi, a recurrent protagonist in the Hurrian mythological texts found at Hattusa.

A third element of the religious practice of Urkesh that is of interest for the question of Hurrian ethnicity pertains to the domestic sphere.<sup>13</sup> While andirons are common household items that at most indicate a northern sphere of influence,<sup>14</sup> two elements stand out in the Urkesh evidence. First, the location of one of these andirons is very significant. It is in the courtyard of a grave that was built as a miniature house (fig. 4), which links the andiron to both a domestic and a religious setting. Second, the incised decorations on the front of several andirons

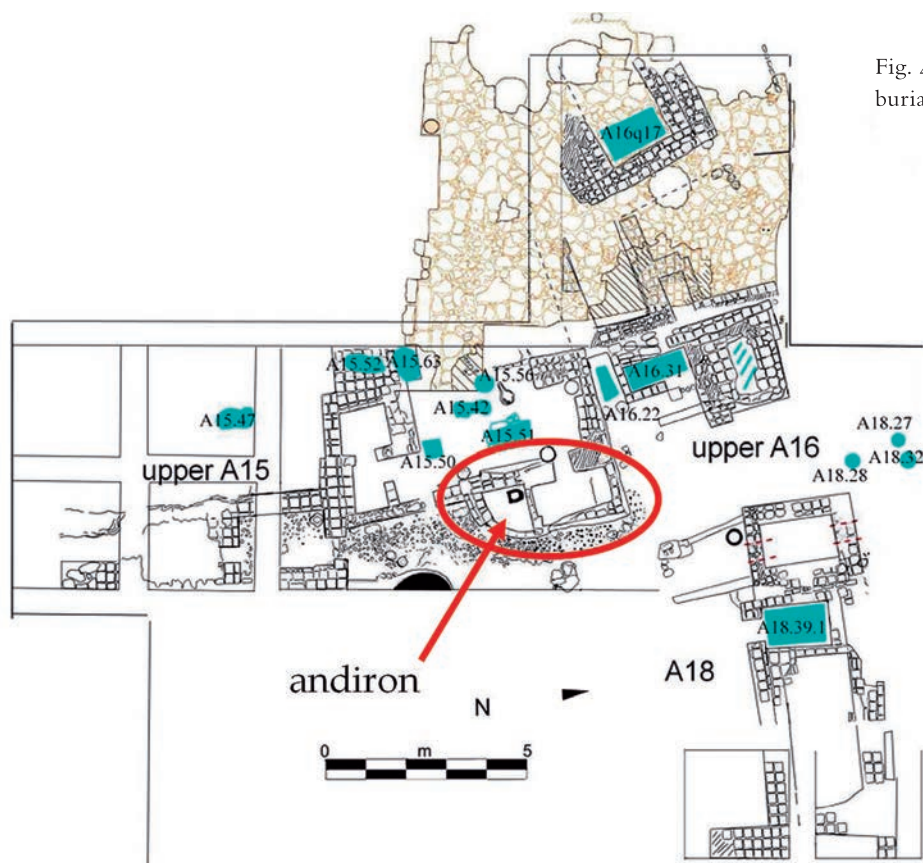


Fig. 4. Plan of Khabur-period burials at Urkesh





Fig. 5. Clay andiron with decorations on the front. Urkesh. Khabur period

(fig. 5) appear to be schematic renderings of religious symbols. The andirons found in situ date to the Khabur period (1800–1600 B.C.), while others are scattered surface finds.

What is particularly impressive about the two architectural elements, the *ābi* and the Temple Terrace, is the remarkable continuity over time—one millennium in the case of the *ābi* (but certainly future excavations will show that its use extended much earlier in time) and more than two millennia for the Temple and its Terrace. Also significant is the fact that this continuity was brought to a sudden halt with the end of the Hurrian

presence in the area. By about 1300 B.C. the site was completely abandoned, with, as of yet, little indication of Middle Assyrian presence. Such abandonment, in a region that has otherwise yielded evidence of a pervasive Middle Assyrian presence, may be due to the unambiguous identification of Urkesh as a Hurrian religious sanctuary, one that could not easily be absorbed within Assyrian ideology and might best be left untouched.

#### ART: THE SHARED VISION

Progressing in the direction of ever more transparent signs, we should consider the sharing of distinctive stylistic traits as a factor in establishing a bond of solidarity within a human group. These signs are transparent because any outsider can not only immediately identify them as signs but can also discern the meaning that lies behind them. This meaning, or signified, is not semiotically hidden. Rather, it proclaims itself by virtue of the simple coherence of those traits and their distinctiveness vis-à-vis other stylistic choices. The strong asymmetry of the Temple Terrace is already indicative of such distinctiveness, and by inference we associate it with the ethnic background of its makers. One did not need to be Hurrian to notice it and appreciate its aesthetic import. It is by virtue of its association with other factors—specifically the presumed dedication of the Temple to Kumarbi—that I attribute an ethnic valence to this factor. Beyond architecture, we notice characteristic features in the other avenues of artistic expression, and these, by implication, may also be assumed to have value as ethnic factors. I will mention two such features: realism and expressionism.

It is especially in third millennium B.C. sculpture and glyptic that the realism of Urkesh art emerges. Of the lions of Tishatal it is especially the one in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection that is remarkable in this respect: besides the fine quality with which the details of the lion's body are rendered, we notice in particular

the twist of the neck and face relative to the torso and paws, which gives the statue a strongly dynamic sense of movement. The same dynamic sense is to be seen in the plaque found in the vicinity of the Temple,<sup>15</sup> where on one side is an image of a man pushing a plow deeply into the furrows in front of him, and on the other there is a herd of quadrupeds shown in a circular movement. The latter theme is echoed in a seal impression from the Palace; the glyptic is also unusual because of the unique attention it pays to scenes from daily life in ways that are unparalleled in Mesopotamia. We may call to mind a second millennium B.C. figurine representing a man with a turban, where paint is used to highlight the physiognomy of the individual, suggesting an attempt at a real portrait (fig. 6).<sup>16</sup>

Alongside this realism, there are stylistic traits that we may call expressionistic in the exaggerated emphasis on gestures and physiognomic traits of the individual figures. The glyptic from the Palace of Tupkish embodies some of these traits, for instance the long arms extended to emphasize the posture of a servant reaching out in an offering gesture. From the second millennium B.C., a small stone sculpture represents a human head, presumably male (fig. 7).<sup>17</sup> The flatness of the cheeks, the very straight nose placed immediately above a barely identifiable mouth, the absence of ears, the wide holes for eyes, the broadly incised forehead, and the large conical top (a hat?) so placed as to emphasize the broad base that seems to preclude a neck—all these features combine to project a very stark geometric volume that is not unlike the impression we get from the contemporary statue of Idrimi (see p. 149, fig. 11) or those from the Mitanni palace at Tell Brak.

#### CUSTOMS: THE SHARED ICONS

The final set of traits to be considered includes customs that, in and of themselves, are very simple and unassuming but may be thought of as tags marking a differential status because of their distinctiveness vis-à-vis



Fig. 6. Baked clay head of a man. Urkesh. Khabur period A15.226



Fig. 7. Stone head of a man. Urkesh. Probably Mitanni period A9.149

other customs, however simple in typology. In this regard, then, customs become like icons that are shared because of what they signify beneath their appearance. A flag is the most provocative of such icons, being a simple piece of cloth, which, however, symbolizes the entire community. We have no indication of flags for Urkesh, but other icons stand out as potentially significant in this respect.

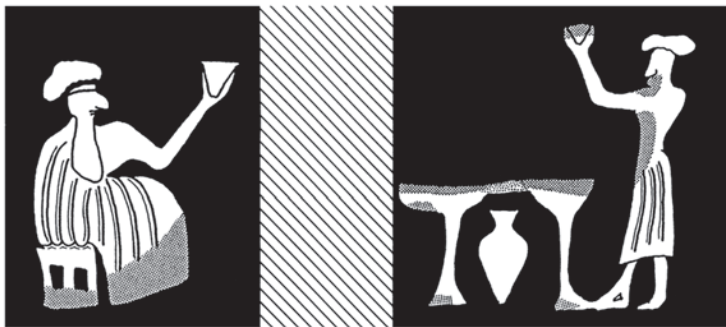


Fig. 8. Drawing of cylinder seal impression. Urkesh, Palace of Tupkish. Akkadian period



Fig. 9. Drawing of cylinder seal impression; the figure on the right brings tribute (a skein of wool?) to the king. Urkesh, Palace of Tupkish. Akkadian period



Fig. 11. Drawing of cylinder seal impression from the first seal of Tuli, the female chef of queen Uqnitum. Urkesh. Akkadian period



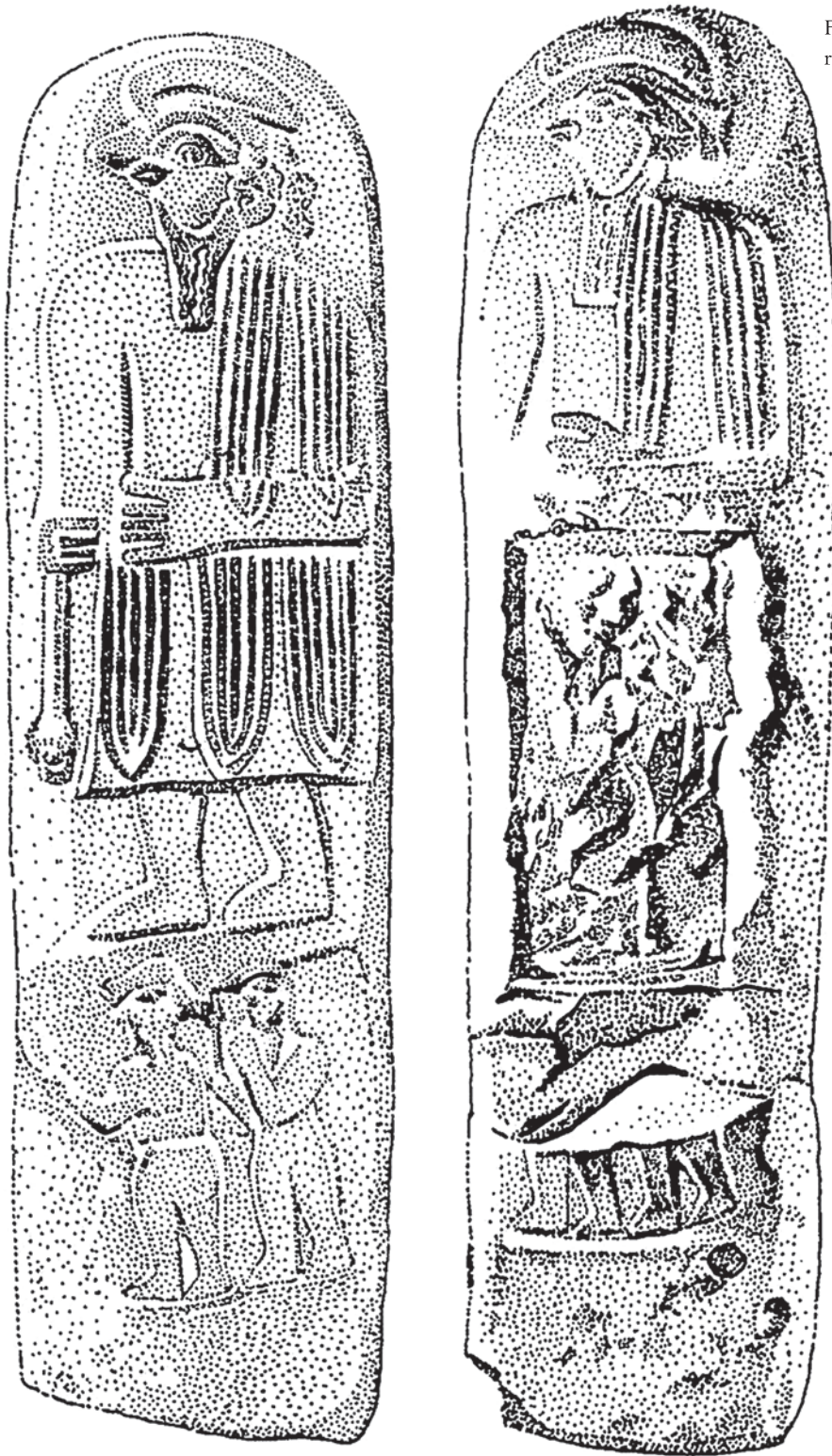
Fig. 12. Drawing of cylinder seal impression from the second seal of Tuli. Urkesh. Akkadian period

The first set of traits pertains to fashion in dress, with particular regard to head coverings. The Khabur-period figurine wears a headdress (fig. 6), the shape of which is shown in considerable detail on the side and in the back of the head. It resembles a modern kaffiyeh in the way it is draped in several overlapping strands, and even the painted stripes suggest a similar ornamental pattern. Another peculiar headdress is a hat resembling a Basque beret, found on seal impressions from the Palace of Tupkish (figs. 8, 9) and on four figures on the Jebelet el-Beidah stele, possibly dated to the second half of the third millennium B.C. (fig. 10).

A suggestion for another distinctive element that may have an iconic value belongs to the culinary sphere. The two seals of the cook Tuli (figs. 11, 12) share a similar iconography, with one showing a butcher leading a sheep to the block and a woman making butter in a churn, and the other a butcher with a kid and a woman making bread. The cook is certainly not a low-level servant, but the administrator of the kitchen, and especially in charge of important ceremonial



Fig. 10. Drawings of obverse and reverse of stele. Jebelet el-Beidah



banquets. It is therefore likely that the similar themes of the two seals reflect one of these important occasions, in which the meat of a lamb or a kid was prepared with cream and served with butter. The use of butter in itself, rather than oil, may be a northern peculiarity, and the combination of the two (meat possibly stewed in cream) may represent a distinctive northern recipe.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE URKESH CLUSTER

My title, “When Were the Hurrians Hurrian?,” was intended to highlight the dichotomy in the discipline whereby ethnic terms are on the one hand used easily when understood in a generic fashion, while on the other there is a widespread resistance to using such terms to imply a truly ethnic categorization. In other words, it is acceptable to speak about “Hurrians” in a generic way, as long as we do not really think of them as “Hurrian.”

The thrust of my argument has been to develop a framework within which it seems proper to think, instead, of the “Hurrians” as properly “Hurrian,” at least in the case of Urkesh. The theoretical aspect of this framework is the definition of specific criteria—the adherence to certain signs as the center around which a nonorganizational solidarity pivots. The historical aspect has been the articulation of a cluster of such signs, which, taken together, allow us to identify a concrete Urkesh reality as properly ethnic. At Urkesh, then, it is legitimate to think of the “Hurrians” as “Hurrian.”

The Urkesh cluster, as I have outlined it, is unique in its totality. A site like Tell Chuera in the third millennium B.C. has striking similarities to the Temple Terrace, but none of the other distinctive traits apply. The peculiar beret-like cap of Urkesh glyptic is also found on the Jebel el-Beidah stele. The flat representational style on the Urkesh stone head may be compared to the statue of Idrimi, thus widening the comparable regional range. The important aspect of a cluster that aims to establish ethnic identity is the distribution of the elements

under discussion. What marks the Urkesh cluster as Hurrian, rather than just northern, is the bracketing of the traits I have analyzed into a semiotic complex, a bracketing that includes explicit factors, namely the linguistic evidence and the specificity of the religious traditions embodied in the *ābi* and in the Temple Terrace.

The title “Beyond Babylon” refers to both a geographical location and an intellectual construct. It encourages us to look beyond the narrow limits of local history and to seek to understand a globalization process that was fully underway in the Near East of the second millennium B.C. Within this perspective, I have sought to point out how ethnic realities, clearly defined and properly understood, were part of this process. They were real historical forces in that they provided a bond of solidarity for a given human group that, while it paralleled the cohesive power of political institutions, also differed from it in many respects. While this bond lacked organizational mechanisms, it broadly overarched time and space, retaining its efficacy longer and more widely than any territorially based state institution. There are plausible reasons, I believe, to trace back the Hurrian identity of Urkesh over a period of two millennia, and certainly for a period of some thirteen centuries, from 2600 B.C. to its final demise around 1300 B.C. Thus, ethnic identity gives us an important historiographic handle, an interpretive key, for a better understanding of the forces that shaped the world—beyond Babylon.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This essay follows closely the presentation at the “Beyond Babylon” symposium, except that I include the results of two seasons of excavation (2009 and 2010) that have taken place since then and have added important new evidence for our theme. Work in these two seasons has been made possible in part through the generous support of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is here gratefully acknowledged. Major funding was provided by GulfSands Petroleum Plc.

1. G. Buccellati 2010a. On Hurrians at Urkesh, see recently G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2007; G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2009, esp. pp. 66–69. For a full bibliography and an online publication of most of the titles, see the website [www.urkesh.org](http://www.urkesh.org).
2. See the edition by Wilhelm 1998.
3. Besides Tish-atal, the rulers who used the term were Tupkish (for whom the term LUGAL is also attested), Ishar-kinum, and, possibly, the husband of Tar'am-Agade. For Tupkish, see G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1995–96; G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1996. For Tar'am-Agade, see G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2002b, esp. p. 17. For Ishar-kinum, see G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2005, pp. 39–40.
4. Maiocchi 2011. The tablet comes from an Ur III context immediately above the Palace of Tupkish, but the paleographical considerations place it squarely in the period of Naram-Sin.
5. See Kelly-Buccellati 2010b.
6. Kupper 1998, letters 44–46 and 98:24ff. (Terra); 69 (Haziran); see also letters 100, 105, 107, 113, 140.
7. See Fleming 2004.
8. Kelly-Buccellati 2002; G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2004; Collins 2004.
9. G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2005; G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2009; F. Buccellati 2010; G. Buccellati 2010b; G. Buccellati forthcoming.
10. Kelly-Buccellati 2010a.
11. On this, see G. Buccellati forthcoming, sec. 1.6.
12. G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2009, pp. 58–66.
13. Kelly-Buccellati 2004; Kelly-Buccellati 2005.
14. For arguments in support of a religious aspect to the andirons, see Takaoglu 2000; Trufelli 2000. On the other hand, Anna Smogorzewska (2009) does not consider the andirons sufficiently specific to have either Hurrian or religious associations.
15. Kelly-Buccellati 1989.
16. G. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2002a, pp. 123–25.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 126–29.
18. I thank Dr. Alexis Martin for this suggestion.



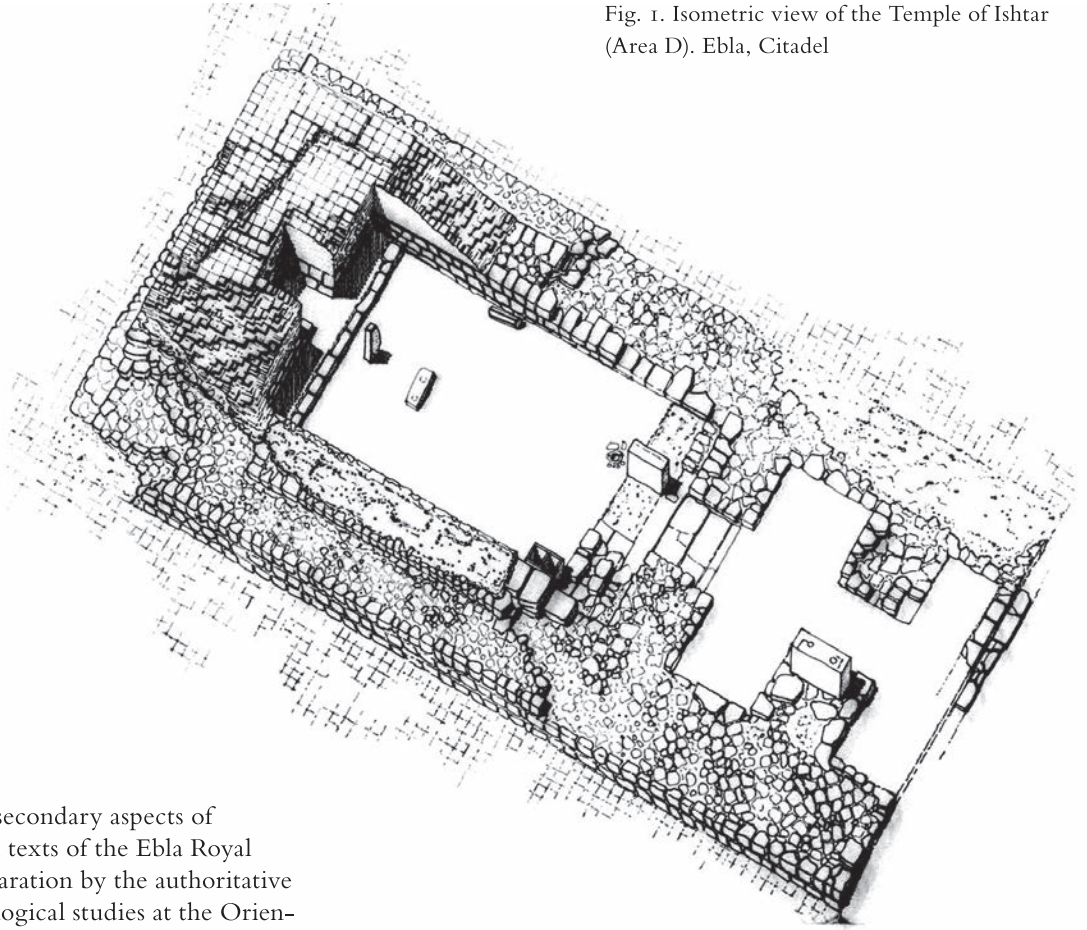
# Ebla: Recent Excavation Results and the Continuity of Syrian Art

The archaeological exploration at Tell Mardikh, nearly 60 kilometers south of Aleppo in inner Syria, was undertaken in 1964 by the Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza” with three main aims. First, there was the wish to prove in another urban center of western Syria that the culture discovered by Sir Leonard Woolley some years earlier at Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh) in the Antioch Valley was an original and autonomous culture of Upper Syria for the Middle Bronze (MB) I–II period (ca. 2000–1600 B.C.).<sup>1</sup> This had already been maintained—on the basis of scanty evidence, mainly architectural and glyptic—by some scholars: Henri Frankfort, Edith Porada, Ursula Moortgat-Correns, and Eva Strommenger.<sup>2</sup> The second aim was to collect evidence to test the hypothesis, advanced in an essay by this author,<sup>3</sup> that there was a strong continuity between the artistic culture of MB I–II and that of Late Bronze I–II (1600–1200 B.C.), which in turn formed the foundation of the artistic flourishing of the Iron Age (IA) I–III (ca. 1200–535 B.C.) world, generally called Syro-Hittite.<sup>4</sup> Third, we wished to identify the roots of the MB I–II culture of inner Syria in those centuries of the third millennium B.C. that until recently had remained quite obscure, particularly the middle and late phases of the millennium. They can now

be defined, although still with some uncertainty, as a consequence of the excavations by Robert Braidwood and Linda Braidwood at three sites in the Antioch Valley, dating to the Early Bronze (EB) III (ca. 2700–2400 B.C.), EB IVA (ca. 2400–2300 B.C.), and EB IVB (ca. 2300–2000 B.C.) periods, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

From the beginning of the excavations, the monumental architecture of the Damascus Gate (Area A), Ishtar’s Temple on the Citadel (Area D), and Reshef’s Temple (Area B); the imposing earthenwork ramparts surrounding the approximately 56 hectares of the site; and artistic works of astounding typological, iconographic, and stylistic homogeneity immediately persuaded great scholars from various disciplines, such as William Foxwell Albright, Roland de Vaux, Anton Moortgat, Porada, and Claude Schaeffer, that Tell Mardikh was the best place to obtain convincing evidence to test the soundness of the first and second aims of the research project.<sup>6</sup> This was true even before the discovery in 1968 of the inscribed votive torso of Ibbit-Lim, king of Ebla, allowed us to identify the site with ancient Ebla.<sup>7</sup> It was only during the tenth campaign, in 1973, that we were able to realize, beyond our most optimistic expectations, the third aim of the program. At that time, an extraordinarily well-preserved sector was found in the area later identified as the Administrative Quarter of Royal Palace G.<sup>8</sup> In 1974 forty-two cuneiform tablets dating to EB IVA were found, and in 1975 the largest part of the more than 17,050 inventoried texts of the Royal Archives of the second half of the twenty-fourth century B.C. was brought to light.<sup>9</sup> These led us to understand Ebla’s role not only in the history of Syria, but also in that of the entire ancient Near East, shortly before the foundation of the Akkadian empire, around 2340 B.C. The texts also clearly revealed Ebla’s fundamental role in the creation of the cultural tradition—material, architectural, artistic, religious, and ideological—of inner Syria. While nonsensical polemics fueled by deplorable political speculations were raging in

Fig. 1. Isometric view of the Temple of Ishtar (Area D). Ebla, Citadel



the press about secondary aspects of the Early Syrian texts of the Ebla Royal Archives, a declaration by the authoritative dean of Assyriological studies at the Oriental Institute of Chicago, Ignace J. Gelb, firmly and clearly expressed the opinion largely prevailing in the scientific community: “The Italians at Ebla discovered a new language, a new culture, a new history.”<sup>10</sup>

After completing the excavation of the remains of the EB IVA Royal Palace G, the intensive exploration of several monuments of the third phase of Old Syrian Ebla, which flourished in MB I–II, addressed, first, a large part of the Lower Town West and South, then the earthenwork ramparts, the sites of the four city gates, and later the large sectors of residences and private houses in several other areas of the Lower Town.<sup>11</sup> It was therefore possible to understand several aspects of the originality and continuity of the Old Syrian architectural culture, since the experience of architectural space throughout Syrian history, until the age of Persian rule,

appears to have been formed in the first half of the second millennium B.C.

In regard to religious architecture, the constant and canonical plan consists of antae, vestibule, and longitudinal cella (*Langraum*); a bench or niche at the back wall for the cult statue; and a longitudinally tripartite construction, with cella, antecella, and vestibule in the case of dynastic temples or temples related to kingship. These elements are at the origin of a tradition that would end with the town sanctuaries of IA I–II.<sup>12</sup> This is demonstrated by the *Langraum* tradition in the temples of Ishtar (Area P), Reshef (Area B), and Shamash/Shapash (Area N), in the Lower Town West and North, while Ishtar’s Temple on the Citadel (Area D; fig. 1) and the temple possibly dedicated to Haddad in the Lower Town



Fig. 2. Temple of the Rock (Area HH) viewed from the east. Ebla, Lower Town

South-East (Area HH) demonstrate the tripartite model.<sup>13</sup> This tradition underlies the form of later temples of Tell 'Ain Dara; the Aleppo Citadel, whose foundation is very ancient; Tell Ta'yinat; and Tell Afis.<sup>14</sup> Such North Syrian sanctuaries as Tell 'Ain Dara and Tell Afis might have been the direct models for the plan of the Jerusalem Temple, built by Solomon in the tenth century B.C., with some meaningful alterations to the proportions of inner spaces and the addition of the storerooms on three sides.<sup>15</sup> The recent excavations at Tell Mardikh have uncovered the Temple of the Rock (Area HH; fig. 2) in the Lower Town South-East and the Red Temple (Area D) in the Acropolis West, both dating from EB IVA–B. The plans of these temples revealed the development of the *Breitraum*-type temples (with antae) of the second half of the third millennium B.C. into the

*Langraum* temples typical of the first half of the second millennium B.C.<sup>16</sup>

In the great palaces of Old Syrian Ebla, the reception suite was always located in the center of the building, with the throne room sometimes divided into two spaces by a columned porch and extended by two wings, one for an entrance of the bent-axis type and one for stores. This is characteristic of the very large Western Palace (fig. 3), the residence of the crown prince; the Northern Palace, a ceremonial royal structure; the Southern Palace, the palace prefect's residence; and, with different spatial elaborations, the contemporary palaces of Alalakh VII and Tilmen Höyük.<sup>17</sup> This plan is certainly the source of the multiple columned structures of the Ugarit Royal Palace, the proto-*hilani* of Alalakh IV and possibly that of Emar, and the widespread Syro-Hittite monumental *hilani*, or pillared portico, of



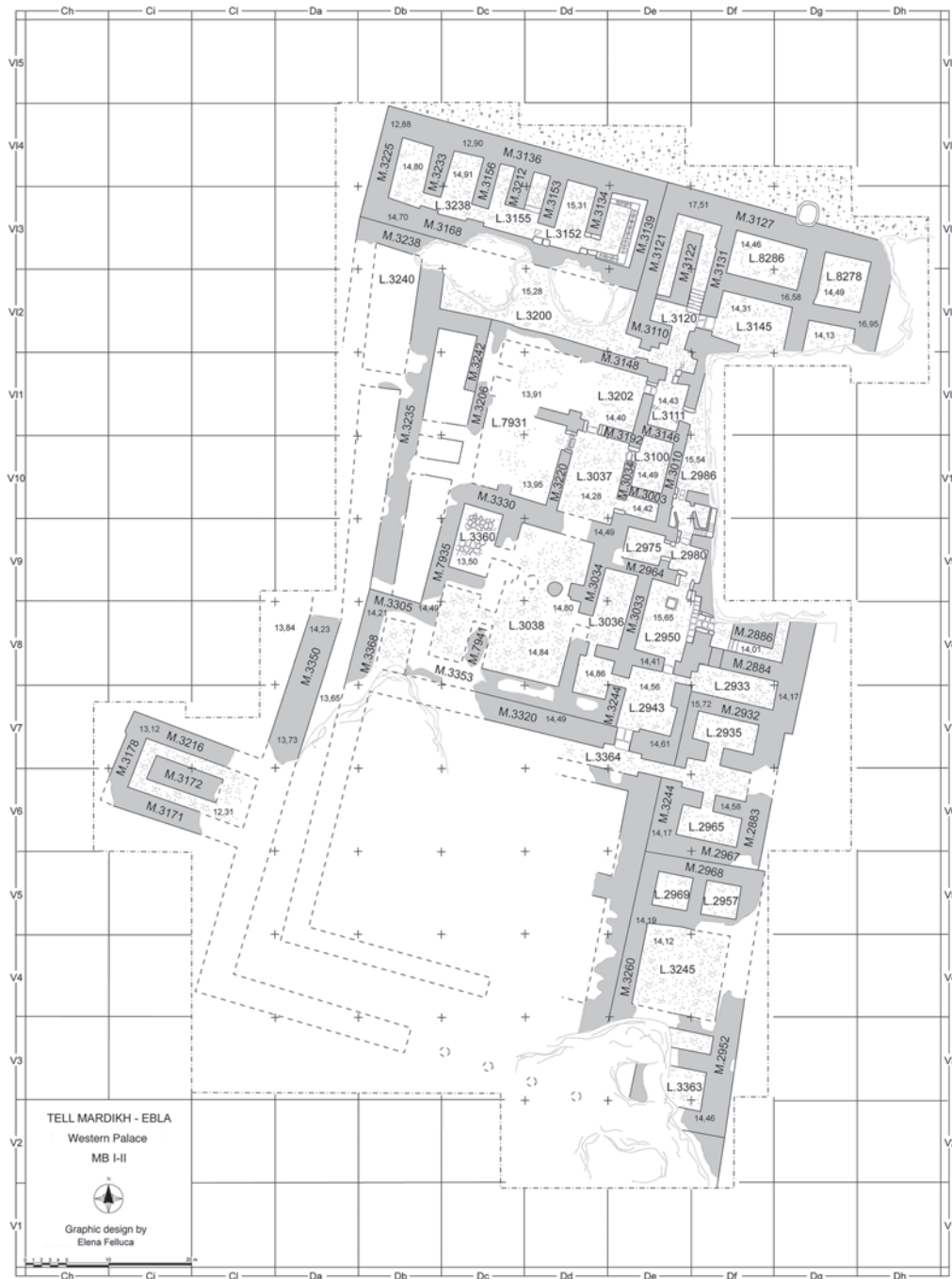
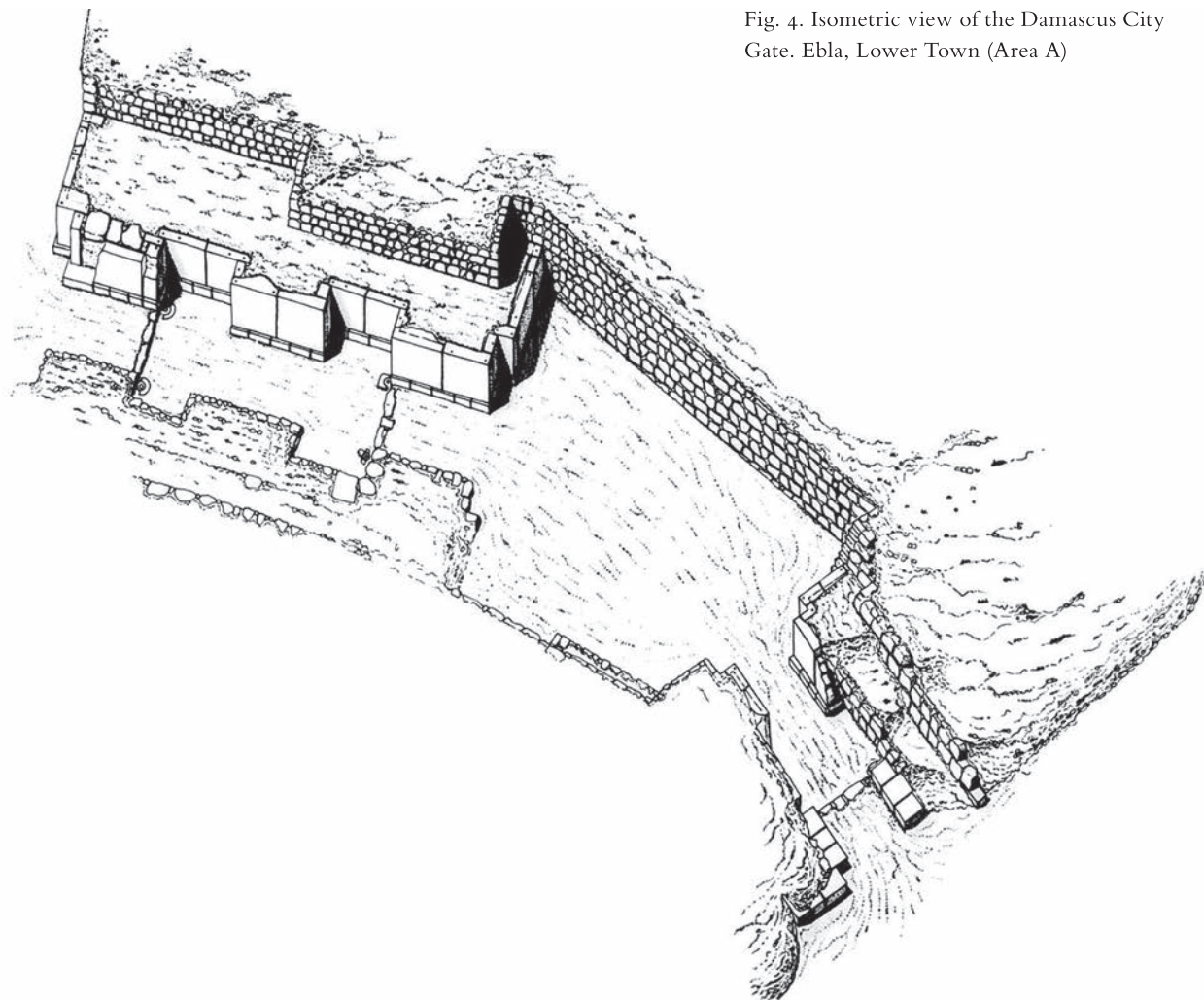


Fig. 3. Plan of the Western Palace (Area Q), Ebla, Lower Town

IA I–II (ca. 1200–720 B.C.), particularly at Tell Halaf, Zincirli, and Tell Ta’ayinat.<sup>18</sup> The frequent and diversified use of columns as independent static supports—allowing for

dramatic interruptions of wall surfaces and as basic elements for articulating outdoor spaces and facades—was already associated at Ebla with a scenographic concept

Fig. 4. Isometric view of the Damascus City Gate. Ebla, Lower Town (Area A)



of the power of public spaces in EB IVA, the period of the Royal Archives. We see its mature expression in Royal Palace G, particularly in the monumental Court of Audience, and in the Throne Room in the Administrative Quarter.<sup>19</sup> In much the same way, the monumental Old Syrian city gates of Ebla (fig. 4), like contemporary ones at Qatna, Alalakh, Tell Tuqan, and Carchemish (to mention only the main ones) with their three pairs of piers and two rooms, became a model that would be elaborated upon in the following centuries.<sup>20</sup> Evidence

strongly suggests some examples remained in use in urban centers such as Carchemish, retained for their functionality and spatial magnificence.<sup>21</sup>

The rich artistic culture of Old Syrian Ebla, whose major masterpieces were certainly all made for the court and whose production was entrusted to royal workshops, is mainly votive in nature. These objects were dedicated in the town's main temples, or placed in the spaces in front of temples or, more seldom, inside public buildings of a royal character: the king's



Fig. 5. Main face of limestone cult basin. Ebla, Citadel, Temple of Ishtar (Area D). Middle Bronze Age IIA. National Museum, Aleppo

residence, ceremonial palaces, and the seats of high officials.

The most common temple fitting is the cult double basin, usually with three or all faces carved with ritual or mythical reliefs.<sup>22</sup> At least one example has been found, in a more or less good state of preservation, in nearly every Old Syrian temple thus far brought to light. The imagery on the main front face of this kind of cult fitting usually represents what is quite likely a ritual banquet. On the intact limestone basin from the temple on the Citadel dedicated to Ishtar—goddess of fertility, love, and war—the protagonists are the king, depicted wearing a peculiar peaked tiara, and the queen or high priestess, with long hair; the pair is shown seated and drinking on either side of an offering table covered with unleavened bread (fig. 5). In this instance it

is possible that the scene hints at the symposium celebrated at the end of the sacred marriage ceremony.<sup>23</sup> In other cases, as on the two basalt basins (one almost intact and the other preserved only in two fragments) dedicated in the Temple of Reshef, god of the Netherworld, the king, raising a bowl to drink, is again seated in front of a table with unleavened bread.<sup>24</sup> He faces a standing male figure, who is also drinking, among a line of armed men. Here, the king was perhaps taking part in a funerary ceremony, and the other male personage was the crown prince. Another limestone basin was placed near large offering slabs in front of the back bench of the Shamash/Shapash Temple, where the cult statue may have stood. The partially preserved basin bears on the sides a series of unusual facing figures of suppliant goddesses, while on the back there are





Fig. 6. Rear face of limestone cult basin. Ebla, Lower Town, Temple of Shamash/Shapash (Area N). Middle Bronze Age IIA. National Museum, Aleppo

several pairs of male characters embracing (fig. 6), possibly in celebration of a treaty or an alliance, which would usually be placed under the guarantee of the sun god.

The most original cult basin from Old Syrian Ebla, but unfortunately also the most fragmentary, probably stood in the Temple of Ishtar in the Lower Town North-West, which was heavily pillaged because it was used for a long time as a stone quarry. Only two pieces survive, which are nonetheless quite meaningful (fig. 7). The central figure on the front face of the largest fragment is partially preserved as the outline of a front-facing winged goddess, quite certainly naked, and featuring a Hathoric coiffure.<sup>25</sup> This figure, which also appears carved on a fragmentary offering table dedicated in the goddess' dynastic sanctuary, certainly maintained the image of the "lustful" iconography of the great goddess, called Ishtar *Eblaitu*.

She also had another, "austere" iconography, probably used only in votive monuments for the dynastic temple—the king's private place of worship—on the Citadel.<sup>26</sup> On the sides of the basin from Ishtar's Temple in the Lower Town, priestesses devoted to divine services in that sanctuary—possibly hierodules, that is, sacred prostitutes—were probably depicted. The only extant figure, located in the lower portion of one side, is a front-facing naked female, holding her hands to her breasts (fig. 8), bearing a very close resemblance to the clay female figurines that were a very common popular production of classical Old Syrian Ebla.<sup>27</sup>

Ishtar *Eblaitu*, as the goddess is called in a Middle Assyrian ritual text from the great Temple of Ashur in Ashur,<sup>28</sup> quite likely was the patron goddess of Ebla and the protector of the Amorite dynasty, certainly since the beginning of the twentieth century B.C. At



Fig. 7. Fragment of basalt cult basin. Ebla, Lower Town, Temple of Ishtar (Area P). Middle Bronze Age IIA. Idlib Museum

that time, Ibbit-Lim, son of Igrish-Kheb(at), king of Ebla, dedicated a basalt votive statue in the goddess' dynastic sanctuary on the Citadel, recalling that it had been dedicated eight years after the goddess' "apparition."<sup>29</sup> This peculiar statement, providing specific evidence for an event in the town's cultic history, in which the goddess had certainly been the protagonist, does not mark the introduction of Ishtar's cult in Old Syrian Ebla. In fact, texts from the Royal Archives dating three centuries earlier make it quite clear that Ishtar was already adored, bearing the meaningful epithet "Lioness" in the official pantheon of the high Early Syrian town.<sup>30</sup> The cultic event recalled and commemorated by Ibbit-Lim, who was probably, if not the founder, one of the first kings of the refounded Old Syrian town of MB IA, must rather reflect his promotion of the goddess to the role of the town's main deity and patron goddess of the new ruling dynasty.

In Ishtar *Eblaitu's* temple on the Citadel, Ibbit-Lim dedicated his votive statue, exalting the goddess' new role, and allowed for the identification in 1968 of Tell Mardikh with Ebla. A stele with four carved faces (fig. 9) and an obelisk (fig. 10) of the same typology, both featuring the image of the goddess inside a winged shrine above a bull, were later placed there.<sup>31</sup> These masterpieces, broken into pieces by the Hittites and Hurrians who conquered the town

around 1600 B.C., were recovered and restored almost entirely from a number of fragments scattered over the Acropolis.<sup>32</sup> On an upper register of the front face of the stele, as well as on the obelisk, Ishtar *Eblaitu's* "austere" iconography appears: the great goddess wears a heavy cloak of wool tufts, the so-called *kaunakès*, and stands inside a winged chapel placed on the back of a striding bull. Two bull men, apparently supporting the wings of the naos, flank the chapel. On the stele, in a lower register of the same face, under a bipartite register with



Fig. 8. Fragment of basalt cult basin. Ebla, Lower Town, Temple of Ishtar (Area P). Middle Bronze Age IIA. Idlib Museum



Fig. 9. Drawing of faces of basalt stele. Ebla, Citadel, Temple of Ishtar (Area D). Middle Bronze Age IIA. Idlib Museum 3003





musicians evidently playing cultic music, a winged dragon with a lion's body and claws, an eagle's wings, and a snake's tail vomits the waters of the abyss, which through springs bring fertility to the fields.<sup>33</sup>

These representations on the stele and on the obelisk reveal a remarkable ideological complexity, sometimes difficult to interpret. The representation of the composite sphinx with human head, lion's body, eagle's wings, and lion's, bull's, and human legs, clearly announces, in an astonishing way, the four monsters of Ezekiel's biblical vision (Ezekiel 1:4–10), which became the manifestations of the Evangelists of the Christian world. Undoubtedly such representations of Ishtar on these two royal monuments from the Citadel of Old Syrian Ebla are intended to stress the essence, at the same time heavenly and chthonic, of the great goddess. This iconography certainly derives from the syncretism of the older Ishtar and Ishkhara, both worshipped in the Ebla of the time of the Royal Archives.<sup>34</sup> Thus both the stele and the obelisk highlighted the goddess' extraordinary divine nature: she was, simultaneously, the lady of love and war, irresistible seductress and violent warrior, evening and morning star, appearing in the sky as the planet Venus. Ishtar, the undisputed great goddess of universal fertility and probably also mistress of the fates and destinies of humans at Ebla (as in Mesopotamia), appears in several Sumerian literary texts composed in the same decades as the two figurative monuments from Ebla.<sup>35</sup> The Ishtar sanctuaries of Old Syrian Ebla were centers of a cult of wide popularity even outside Ebla, attested as well throughout Syria and Palestine in the first half of the second millennium B.C.<sup>36</sup>

It is most likely that these sanctuaries marked the origin of the great popularity of the goddess in the Middle Syrian period—when her “lustful” persona became quite widespread—even into the age of the Roman Empire, when the heir of this very ancient fertility goddess was known everywhere simply as “the Syrian goddess.”<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 10. Face of basalt obelisk. Ebla, Citadel, Temple of Ishtar (Area D). Middle Bronze Age IIA. Idlib Museum



Fig. 11. Fragment of basalt stele. Ebla, Lower Town, perhaps from Temple of Haddad (Area HH). Middle Bronze Age IIA–B. Idlib Museum

Her power was probably strengthened by the hegemonic role of Ebla during the entire MB I period until the years around 1800 B.C., when Aleppo assumed political supremacy over the entire Syrian region.<sup>38</sup> Nearly universally in the region, from the Taurus Mountains to the Nile Delta, and from the Mediterranean to Upper Mesopotamia, Aleppo's ascendance probably promoted the fortunes of Haddad, who galloped through the skies in his chariot, drawn by a bull, his symbolic animal, and struck the clouds to let the rain pour down.<sup>39</sup> This is also the very ancient weather god of the Syrian world, already attested as an eminent deity in the Royal Archive texts from Ebla, and as protagonist of the mythical cycle of Baal of Ugarit, from whom are probably derived the great gods of the Roman world Jupiter Damascenus and Jupiter Heliopolitanus, of Damascus and Baalbek, respectively.<sup>40</sup>

The most ancient attestation of Haddad's classical iconography may be found on a fragment of a basalt stele from Ebla (fig. 11).<sup>41</sup> The god stands in an attitude that may be

reconstructed as that of the so-called smiting god, holding a mace in one up-raised hand and a curved weapon (and sometimes the bull's bridle in the other), which is stretched in front of him. The stele probably originally stood in the temple, possibly to Haddad (Area HH), in the Lower Town South-East, near the Steppe Gate. The last sovereigns of the Old Syrian town, undoubtedly the main allies of the lords of the powerful kingdom of Yamhad, whose capital was Aleppo, must have assumed the royal ideology of that city, possibly side by side with their traditional local ideology, where Ishtar *Eblaitu* was the king's patron deity.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the wonderful dynastic seal of crown prince Maratewari (fig. 12), son of Indilimma, the last king of MB IIB Ebla, depicts the prince receiving life, in the shape of the Egyptian hieroglyphic sign ankh, from the god Haddad. This is typical of Aleppo iconography, as is the presence of Haddad's companion goddess, Khebat, who usually appeared in Yamhad royal seals in front of the image of the king of Aleppo.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, Maratewari wears the large fringed royal cloak typical of Old Syrian





Fig. 12. Impression of cylinder seal of crown prince Maratewari on shoulder of clay jar. Ebla, Western Palace (Area Q). Middle Bronze Age IIB. Idlib Museum

kingship, but he is bare-headed; absent is the high oval tiara of the kings of inner Syria in this period, which was evidently worn only after ascending the throne. The seal of king Indilimma's son is preserved in several impressions on the shoulders of large jars.<sup>44</sup> It is exceptional for its size—7.5 centimeters high—and it is one of the greatest masterpieces of ancient glyptic. The figures of the two great Aleppo deities appearing on it are executed in the finest classical style used for the best royal glyptic of Aleppo.

Between MB IB and MB IIA, in the decades between the archaic and the classical Old Syrian periods, Ebla was the seat of important royal workshops, which produced a series of basalt votive statues of kings and queens. The royal statues were always in pairs, the king depicted sitting on a throne and the queen shown standing.<sup>45</sup> They were usually dedicated in temples somehow related to kingship: Ishtar's Temple on the Citadel, the goddess' temple in the Lower

Town North-West, and the probable Temple of Haddad in the Lower Town South-East. The frequently very fragmentary remains of the oldest of these figures date from between 1850 and 1750 B.C. They feature a severe and rigid style, although two later statues of a king and queen (fig. 13),<sup>46</sup> dating from between 1700 and 1600 B.C., display a very refined plastic naturalism. These two sculptures show that royal workshops at Ebla, certainly like those of Aleppo, Carchemish, and Qatna, took part in the profound stylistic renewal that probably characterized the final phase of the classical Old Syrian period in all the great centers of inner Syria.<sup>47</sup>

Yet, the royal workshops at Ebla in the same years produced other types of basalt statues as well, one of which provides particularly meaningful evidence for the continuity of the tradition of stone carving between the Old Syrian and the Late Syrian periods. These are the large sculptures of standing



Fig. 13. Basalt royal statue.  
Ebla, Lower Town,  
Temple of Ishtar (Area P).  
Middle Bronze Age IIB.  
Idlib Museum



kings, of which only very small fragments have been preserved, unfortunately. These figures are clearly different from all the other productions because they were placed on very unusual bases,<sup>48</sup> each with quite a deep hole for attaching the statue. The bases are characterized by the presence of two lion protomes, on both the front and rear faces (fig. 14). Between the protruding heads of the roaring lions is the figure of a king sitting on a throne, sometimes having at his feet a net with a slain enemy inside. The statues of standing kings, set into bases

decorated with lions, were located in the open spaces in front of the temples, or, in at least one instance, in a palace, for example in the Western Palace.<sup>49</sup>

There are reasons to believe that these were statues of royal, possibly deified ancestors, and that they were not dedicated as votive images in temples, but rather were placed in public spaces or in the crown prince's residence. They represented, on the one hand, the most worshipped protectors of the town, and, on the other, the sovereigns buried in the royal tombs located beneath the floors of the Western Palace.<sup>50</sup> Based on their standing position and their lion-type bases, these statues of deified dead sovereigns may be identified as the clear antecedents of a typology of monumental statues of the Late Syrian period, well known from the large-scale specimens erected, for example, at Carchemish and Sam'al, and that were probably also placed in open-air public spaces.<sup>51</sup> Thus, if the cult of deified royal ancestors was already a well-attested practice with a special ideological meaning in the texts of the Ebla Royal Archives of the twenty-fourth century B.C., which record sacrifices and offerings presented to the statues of dead kings, there is no doubt that Old Syrian Ebla preserved the most significant archaeological evidence of this cult, in terms of the religious ideology of the first half of the second millennium B.C. This practice is also attested in a number of great contemporary urban centers of the Amorite world of Mesopotamia, from Mari to Babylon.<sup>52</sup> However, only at Ebla do we have a close topographic connection between the Western Palace—the residence of the crown prince, traditionally responsible for the success of the deceased king's funeral rites, assuring his assumption among the *rapi'uma*, the deified royal ancestors<sup>53</sup>—and both the Temple of Reshef, god of the Netherworld, and the sanctuary for the cult of the Deified Royal Ancestors (Sanctuary B2). This sanctuary featured altars to accommodate the well-known small bronze figures of deified dead kings, places for sacrifices,



Fig. 14. Basalt base of royal statue. Ebla, Lower Town, Temple of Ishtar (Area P). Middle Bronze Age II. Idlib Museum

and a central hall for the funerary banquets that accompanied royal funerary rites.<sup>54</sup> To this impressive Old Syrian evidence for the *rapi'uma* cult at Ebla, we must add the deceased king's statues on lion bases, directly connecting these cults of the first half of the second millennium B.C. with the Ugarit rituals of the second half of the second millennium B.C., and even with the persistent cults of Late Syrian towns until shortly before the

Assyrian conquest, mostly dating from the second half of the eighth century B.C.<sup>55</sup>

Other evidence for continuity with the later Late Syrian artistic milieu is possibly to be found in the discovery in the Northern Palace of Ebla of a group of very important hippopotamus-ivory inlays dating from around 1700 B.C. Almost certainly belonging to the decoration of a throne or of a bed, they take the form of Egyptian divine



figures such as Horus, Sobek, and Hathor, as well as of wonderful heads wearing Osiris's crown.<sup>56</sup> These heads may also belong to deified royal ancestor figures, but represented in the Nile Valley iconography and style. There is no doubt that these ivories are the production of local workshops that were very familiar with the Egyptian style, perhaps from the presence at the Ebla court of jewels and minor artifacts of Pharaonic production, probably sent as gifts to the royal court of this important Old Syrian town.<sup>57</sup> Thus, we must believe that Ebla's royal ateliers of the seventeenth century B.C.—like those of the ninth–eighth century B.C. in the main centers of the Aramaic period, Damascus in particular<sup>58</sup>—were extraordinarily skilled in completely assimilating and re-creating in an original way the highest level of genres and forms typical of the great foreign artistic civilizations. Ebla displayed this mastery with regard to the art of Middle Kingdom Egypt during the Old Syrian period, as had already happened in an equally brilliant way in connection with the late Early Dynastic art of southern Mesopotamia during the Early Syrian period of the Royal Archives age, that is, the twenty-fourth century B.C.<sup>59</sup> At Ebla and possibly other urban centers of Upper Syria, the special talent of the Old Syrian court workshops seems to have taken the form of expressive qualities strongly anchored in a local artistic vision of marked originality, which allowed an in-depth understanding and re-creation of completely different but not lesser artistic forms, without falling into misunderstandings and confusion. On the other hand, a characteristic of these royal workshops seems to have been the ability to master techniques in such a refined way that they never fell into mechanical repetition or summary popularization.<sup>60</sup>

All the evidence that excavations have brought to light about the artistic culture of classical Old Syrian Ebla indicates that the

royal workshops of Ebla played a meaningful role in the transition from archaic to classical forms in the artistic development of inner Syria, and that they remained faithful to that classical style without indulging in the baroque preciousities that appear to be typical of the palace workshops of Aleppo.<sup>61</sup> At the end of the seventeenth century B.C., Hattusili I launched his resolute attacks against Yamhad and its allies, conquering and sacking a number of towns allied with Aleppo. A few years later, Mursili I launched his own mortal attack against Aleppo itself. It is certain that during this time Ebla was a center of vigorous and inventive artistic elaboration, no doubt with its own distinctive characteristics, like other great contemporary centers such as Aleppo, Carchemish, and Qatna.<sup>62</sup> According to the bilingual Hurrian–Hittite “Poem of the Release,” and with historical likelihood, all artistic expression was brutally interrupted at Ebla by Pizikarra of Nineveh's military intervention.<sup>63</sup> Inspired by the god Teshshub of Kummē, Pizikarra besieged, conquered, sacked, and finally destroyed Ebla. It is quite likely that Mursili I of Hattusa found in Pizikarra of Nineveh a valuable ally in his defeat not only of Aleppo, but also of several other Upper Syrian towns allied with Aleppo. Certainly with the support of the eastern Hurrians and the Kassites, Mursili I achieved the extraordinary siege and conquest of Babylon, where Hammurabi's last successor ruled. In fact, it is likely that in years of severe demographic and economic crisis, several archaeological hints of which exist at Ebla itself,<sup>64</sup> Hittites, Hurrians, and Kassites, coordinated by Mursili I—whose name became legendary for these deeds—succeeded in overturning the whole order of the rich and prosperous Amorite kingdoms of Upper Syria and Lower Mesopotamia, leaving no possibility of rebirth.



1. Woolley 1955.
2. Frankfort 1952; Porada 1957; Moortgat-Correns 1955; Nagel and Strommenger 1958.
3. Matthiae 1962, pp. 133–38.
4. Against this usual definition, see Matthiae 1975.
5. R. J. Braidwood and L. S. Braidwood 1960.
6. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 11–32.
7. Matthiae and Pettinato 1972; Lambert 1981; Gelb 1984.
8. Matthiae 2008, pp. 41–77; Matthiae 2010b, pp. 64–93, 118–51.
9. Archi 1986; Matthiae 1986a; Matthiae 2008 (with bibliography).
10. La Fay 1978. For a short summary of the polemics, see Matthiae 2008, pp. 223–27.
11. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 25–30.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 264–78.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 419–35.
14. Haines 1971, pp. 53–55; Abu Assaf 1990; Khayyata and Kohlmeyer 1998; Kohlmeyer 2005; Mazzoni 2010. A useful general evaluation of the development of the sacred architecture of preclassical Syria is Werner 1994, but see also Margueron 2003a.
15. Matthiae 2002b; Zimansky 2002.
16. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 387–96.
17. Matthiae (1990b) has defined the specific characters of the Old Syrian reception suite; for the Southern Palace of Ebla, see Matthiae 2004 and for the recent researches at Tilmen Höyük, Marchetti 2006.
18. On the origin of the *hilani* architectural type, after the basic study by Frankfort 1952 and Frankfort 1954, pp. 145–48, 167–75, different interpretations have been proposed by Margueron 1977a (Anatolian origin) and Matthiae 2002c (Syrian origin). A picture of the historical development of the palatial planimetric schemes from the Old Syrian to the Neo-Syrian period is presented by Matthiae 1997, pp. 114–19, 182–91; Matthiae 2000b, pp. 175–87.
19. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 64–93, 377–87. For the spatial relations between the Early Syrian palaces of Ebla, Tuttul, and Tell Chuera, see Matthiae 2010a. For the problem of the continuity between Early Syrian and Old Syrian architectural traditions, important aspects are treated by Matthiae 2002a.
20. Herzog 1985; Herzog 1997, pp. 115–62 (for Palestinian comparisons).
21. A. Burke 2008, pp. 47–84.
22. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 293–302.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
24. Matthiae 2006b.
25. Matthiae 1996.
26. Matthiae 2011.
27. Badre 1980; Marchetti 2001.
28. Frankena 1953, pp. 8, 12.
29. Gelb 1984.
30. Pomponio and Xella 1997, pp. 63–77.
31. Matthiae 1986b.
32. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 312–17, 325–26.
33. *Ibid.*, fig. 166, pl. XXIII.
34. Pomponio and Xella 1997, pp. 66–67, 214–17.
35. Jacobsen 1987, pp. 112–24; Black et al. 2004, pp. 63–99, 252–53, 262–69.
36. Cornelius 2004.
37. Hörig 1979; Lightfoot 2003.
38. Klengel 1992, pp. 49–64.
39. Schwemer 2001; Green 2003.
40. Caquot, Szynter, and Herdner 1974; Teixidor 1977; Pomponio and Xella 1997, pp. 31–54.
41. Matthiae 1993.
42. Matthiae 2003. For the dominant political role of Aleppo/Yamhad, see the historical picture by Klengel 1992, pp. 44–83.
43. Collon 1975, pp. 5–13; Collon 1987, pp. 123–30.
44. Matthiae 1969; Matthiae 2010b, pp. 316–19.
45. Matthiae 1992.
46. Matthiae 2006b.
47. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 325–26.
48. Matthiae 1998, pp. 568–71.
49. Matthiae 2000a.
50. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 452–57 (with bibliography).
51. Orthmann 1971, pp. 287–94.
52. Jacquet 2002; Durand 2008 (with bibliography).
53. Del Olmo Lete 2008.
54. Matthiae 1990a.
55. Caquot, de Tarragon, and Cunchillos 1989, pp. 127–238; Bonatz 2000; del Olmo Lete 2008.
56. Scandone Matthiae 1991a; Scandone Matthiae 2002; Scandone Matthiae 2006. In particular for the head with the Osiris's crown, see Scandone Matthiae 1991b.
57. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 507–12.
58. Herrmann 1992.
59. Matthiae 2009b.
60. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 320–26.
61. Collon 1981; Porada 1985; Otto 2000, pp. 24–35.
62. Matthiae 2010b, pp. 320–22.
63. Otten 1988b; Neu 1996. For a historical reconstruction of the scenario of the destruction, see Matthiae 2007; Matthiae 2009a.
64. Matthiae 2006a.

# The Elephant Hunters of Bronze Age Syria

The excavations in the Royal Palace of Qatna in western Syria have been continuously carried out by the Syrian-German Mission since 1999.<sup>1</sup> The northwest wing of the Palace has been intensively explored since the season of 2008.<sup>2</sup> This unit, arranged in three rows of four rooms each, is distinguished from the main part of the Palace in several ways. Structurally, it is built independently, with its walls set against the foundations of the latter. Architecturally, it is characterized by a very regular rectangular grid of small chambers. Functionally, the small size of the chambers—unlike the rooms in the body of the Palace, which are for the most part much larger—and the specific fill encountered in most of them suggest that the northwest wing served a special purpose (fig. 1).

The northwest wing was added to the Palace's main unit probably shortly after its construction during the Middle Bronze Age (MB) IIA period.<sup>3</sup> The fill of its rooms contains pottery datable to the Late Bronze Age (LB) I and IIA periods, that is, the late sixteenth to fourteenth century B.C., before the final destruction of the Royal Palace at around 1340 B.C. Based on its homogenous nature, the fill is not typical of the destruction debris of the Palace. Instead, it seems to have been intentionally deposited there during the LB I or IIA period, possibly as the result of an earthquake, which would have required the deliberate blocking of the rooms to prevent further destabilization of the entire building. The state of preservation of the northwest wing is exceptionally good. It was a terraced building, with the

upper of the two preserved stories forming a lower ground-floor level of the side wing, and the one below representing a basement level. The third, uppermost (reconstructed) story, which can be regarded as the upper ground floor level, corresponds to the main (and only preserved) floor of the other parts of the Royal Palace.

Two rooms of the northwest wing, DD and DF, contained elephant bones.<sup>4</sup> Room DD is square, with a size of only 3 by 3 meters. Without an intermediate ceiling and associated floor between the two preserved stories of the wing, the room is 5 meters deep. Its walls are coated with lime plaster, and it is equipped with a simple mud floor. It lacks doorways to the surrounding rooms and would have been inaccessible, except from above, with the help of a ladder. The room was filled from bottom to top with the homogenous earth typical of the northwest wing and contained only a few LB and some earlier pottery sherds, along with five large elephant bones embedded in the lower part of the fill, close to the floor level. They must have been deliberately placed there at the onset of the filling process.

It is striking that the bones are only slightly damaged and thus could not have been thrown into the room from above, from a height of (minimally) 5 meters. They would have been broken as a result of this fall—unless they still had the meat on the bones, which is improbable as several vertebrae were disarticulated, and so already defleshed, with the connecting tendons and muscles removed. Rather, they must have been carefully lowered into the room, probably by means of cords. While one large bone (a scapula, or shoulder blade; see below) was in an isolated position in front of the north wall of the room (fig. 2), the other bones were concentrated in front of a niche in the wall in the southeast corner. The niche, originally supported by a wooden lintel, was carelessly blocked by a number of single mudbricks. Perhaps the deposition of the elephant bones was somehow related to this blocked niche.

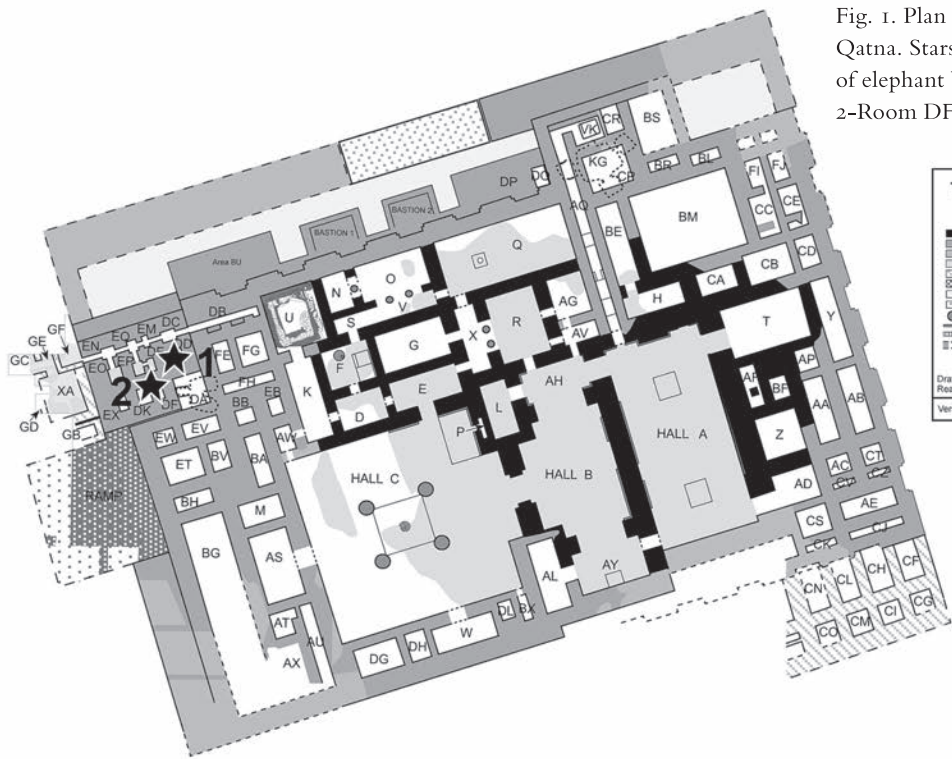


Fig. 1. Plan of the Royal Palace of Qatna. Stars indicate the findspots of elephant bones (1-Room DD; 2-Room DF).



Fig. 2. Elephant scapula leaning north against the wall of Room DD



The second room, DF, is much smaller but was equipped with a ceiling covered by a sherd-paved floor between the lower ground level and the basement level. The elephant bones were embedded in the fallen debris of the floor and must have been deposited on top of the floor sometime during LB I or IIA, before the earthquake occurred. Room DF was not accessible from any of its four sides, so that, as in Room DD, bones such as the large tibia (shinbone) might have been lowered from above with the help of a rope or might have been brought down a ladder. Again, there were no other objects within the debris and only a few pottery sherds, besides the large number of pottery fragments embedded in the floor material. Thus, from a functional point of view, both rooms have no apparent use apart from being repositories of the elephant bones.

#### THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE ELEPHANT BONES

According to our mission's archaeozoologist, Emmanuelle Vila-Meyer,<sup>5</sup> the largest single elephant bone in Room DD was a scapula, hardly damaged. In the southeast corner of the room, the long, massive, undamaged humerus (upper arm bone) of an elephant was laid down in a position parallel to the room's south wall. Close to it, toward the center of the room, there was a large fragment of a pelvis, which was cut in the middle, with only one half still present. The other half was lost as a consequence of the 1927 excavations of Robert Du Mesnil du Buisson, who cut directly into this bone at a depth of 5.65 meters in his deep sounding (*Sondage 1*); Du Mesnil du Buisson remarked on the bone's "extraordinary size."<sup>6</sup> The bone was sent to France for scientific examination, but unfortunately the sample was lost.<sup>7</sup> In view of these circumstances, it can be argued that the pelvis bone, like all the other elephant bones from Rooms DD and DF, was originally deposited in an intact condition. There were also two single vertebrae found near the humerus and pelvis.

Room DF contained a tibia, also complete. It was found in the north part of the room, in a vertical position within the collapsed floor material. At a slightly lower level, and also associated with the debris of the fallen floor, were two more vertebrae.

Vila-Meyer discovered that all seven bones possibly belonged to a mature animal of between twenty-five and thirty years of age, as suggested by comparable growth-indications of the bones.<sup>8</sup> The reconstructed size of the animal, when compared to modern specimens of the Asiatic elephant (*Elephas maximus*) and the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), is approximately that of a large modern male African elephant.<sup>9</sup> This provides some evidence for the dimensions of the now-extinct "Syrian" elephant, believed to be a subspecies of the Asiatic elephant and denominated *Elephas maximus asurus*.<sup>10</sup> Hitherto, clear morphological data on this subspecies had not yet been available. However, we should not generalize the size indicators from one single animal, as at Qatna.

#### THE POSSIBLE FUNCTION OF THE ELEPHANT BONE REPOSITORY AT QATNA

According to Vila-Meyer, the elephant bones from Qatna do not show cutting marks or fractures caused by human activity.<sup>11</sup> This indicates that they were not defleshed for their meat and, thus, they cannot be interpreted as refuse from food production or consumption.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in the absence of smaller bone fragments, they are to be regarded neither as discard stemming from craft production, nor as indicating a place of such production. As they appear to have been deposited intentionally and in a careful manner inside the Palace rooms, the extraordinarily large bones seem to have possessed particular symbolic value. One possible hypothesis is that the animal had been hunted by the king or members of the royal court of Qatna and had been brought back to the Palace as a trophy and a sign of prestige. The killing of a huge and possibly fierce elephant must have been a

prestigious act indeed, as illustrated in the accounts by Thutmose III of his elephant hunt in Syria. Such a hunting event could have been memorialized over time by retaining the bones from it, or a representative sample of them.

This hypothesis would explain why the elephant bones were brought to the Royal Palace of Qatna but it does not explain why the bones were deposited in rooms inaccessible to the public or even a smaller audience. Perhaps the bones were transferred to this remote place after a period of public display—carefully deposited while still retaining their supposed symbolic value. One may further speculate about a possible association of the bone deposits with the nearby Tomb VII.<sup>13</sup> This MB IIB–LB I chamber tomb belonged to the Royal Palace and is situated below Room DA, in close proximity to the elephant bones, that is, immediately south of Room DD and directly east of Room DF. The bones could have had a symbolic connection to the deceased members of the royal court, regarded as the royal ancestors, and were perhaps buried in the two rooms close to Tomb VII. Whether associated with the burial chamber or not, the deposition of the elephant bones in Rooms DD and DF can be understood as a ritual act.

#### ELEPHANT BONE DEPOSITIONS IN THE BRONZE AGE

The picture presented above highlights the peculiar situation at Qatna and leads to a specific functional hypothesis that should be evaluated through a comparison with elephant bone depositions at other Bronze Age sites in the Near East. In addition, general assumptions regarding the occurrence of elephants in the Near East,<sup>14</sup> the importance of elephant hunts, and the value of elephants and their by-products, such as ivory, need to be considered. In this way, by combining archaeological data and theoretical approaches, a general picture of the role of elephants in the Bronze Age cultures can be retrieved.

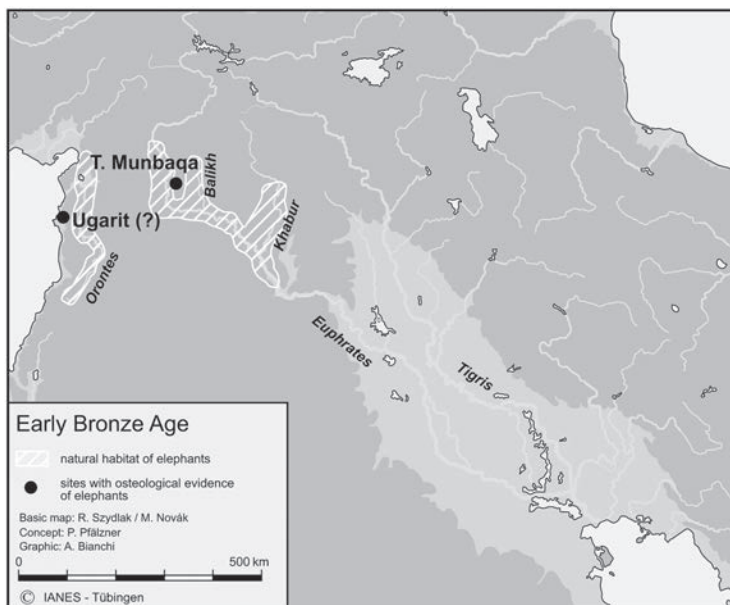


Fig. 3. Distribution map of elephant bone finds in the Early Bronze Age

#### *The Early Bronze Age*

Few archaeologically deposited elephant bones have been found in Early Bronze Age contexts in the ancient Near East (fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> One example from Ugarit comprises foot bones and vertebrae of an elephant (or hippopotamus).<sup>16</sup> To this we can now add a second find, from Tell Munbaqa on the Middle Euphrates, which has been neglected as evidence for this period in previous discussions.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, this elephant bone was burnt, which could mean that its meat was roasted, or that it was thrown into the fire after a meal.<sup>18</sup> The limited evidence does not support the assumption of intensive elephant hunting during this period,<sup>19</sup> although the find from Tell Munbaqa indicates that elephant hunting took place in the gallery forests of the Middle Euphrates Valley as early as the Early Bronze Age IV period (ca. 2400–2000 B.C.).

### *The Middle Bronze Age*

The first widespread evidence of elephants being hunted and their parts being carried into human settlements is observable starting with the Middle Bronze Age (fig. 4). At Alalakh a fragment of a bone with saw marks was retrieved in Level VIII.<sup>20</sup> Many ivory inlays and a text reporting the purchase of ivory were found in the Level VII palace,<sup>21</sup> indicating that ivory was a traded commodity. Five well-preserved tusks from Room 11 in the Level VII palace could have been stored for use by the local ivory industry or kept for trade or gift exchange (fig. 5).<sup>22</sup> They may have been either acquired by the palace or obtained by hunting, as is suggested by the presence of the elephant bone and molar found at the site.<sup>23</sup>

At Middle Bronze Age Emar a complete phalanx (digital bone) of an elephant was found.<sup>24</sup> Although from a functionally undetermined context,<sup>25</sup> the find presents clear testimony of elephants being hunted during the Middle Bronze Age in the riverine region of the Middle Euphrates. According to textual evidence, the city of Emar lacked centralized political institutions,<sup>26</sup> so that the hunting of elephants in this area cannot be understood as a palatial or royal activity.

The hunting of elephants during the early second millennium B.C. is further attested in the Beqa' Valley in Lebanon, based on a fragment of an elephant femur discovered in a drainage channel in a domestic area at Kamid el-Loz.<sup>27</sup> The context dates to MB IIB (late seventeenth to early sixteenth century B.C.).<sup>28</sup> Sándor Bökönyi notes that the bone is interesting because of its cutting marks;<sup>29</sup> according to him, this hints at the local consumption of elephant meat.<sup>30</sup> Geographically, the Upper Orontes and Upper Litani valleys can be regarded as the most probable habitat of the animal from Kamid el-Loz,<sup>31</sup> while the evidence of elephant bones at Alalakh points to the Lower Orontes Valley. Thus, both parts of the Orontes Valley can be seen as core regions of elephant hunting during the Middle Bronze Age.

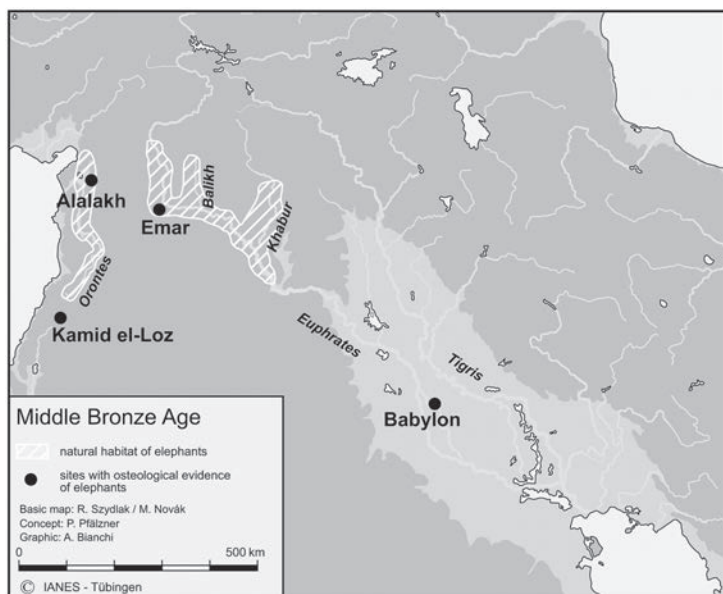


Fig. 4. Distribution map of elephant bone finds in the Middle Bronze Age



Fig. 5. Elephant tusks in situ at Alalakh, Level VII Palace, Room 11. Middle Bronze Age. From Woolley 1955, pl. XVIIb



Only a few sites outside Syria provided evidence of elephants during the Middle Bronze Age. A single, but nearly intact elephant tibia, 1.15 meters long, was found in a Middle Bronze Age domestic context, the so-called Hammurabi stratum in the central inner city area (*Merkes*) of Babylon (fig. 6).<sup>32</sup> The bone may have been brought to Babylon by long-distance trade. Deposited singly and in an undamaged state, it must have had a special meaning or function, which, however, remains obscure. Elephant tusk segments were discovered in a Middle Bronze Age context at Acmehöyük in central Anatolia in a building near the palace.<sup>33</sup> Probably brought to this city, which was in close commercial contact with Ashur, from regions in northern and western Syria, they could have been intended for use in the local production of ivory objects.

#### *The Late Bronze Age*

Attestations of elephants are most abundant in the Late Bronze Age, based on bones discovered at settlement sites (fig. 7). After Qatna, Alalakh is one of the sites with the clearest evidence. Sir Leonard Woolley found the lower jaw of an elephant in the destruction debris of the east wing of the Level IV palace, obviously a valuable object that fell from the upper floor when the building was destroyed.<sup>34</sup> Another elephant bone, from Level II, was retrieved in the area of a private residence (House 39 B) close to the city wall.<sup>35</sup> The latter indicates that the hunting of elephants and/or the economic use of elephant bones were not exclusively a palatial affair at Alalakh.

The site of Ugarit is famous for its palatial ivories.<sup>36</sup> However, several elephant molars were found in nonpalatial residential areas throughout the city, including one discovered—together with hippopotamus tusks—in the harbor town of Minet el-Beidha.<sup>37</sup> The latter were probably stored with trade goods, including Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery, in a house built above tombs. This distribution signals that there was no palatial monopolization of elephant

products at Ugarit, with regard to either consumption or production activities.

The nearest possible source for the elephant bones at Ugarit was the Orontes Valley, probably its central area, the Ghab Basin, situated some 50 kilometers east of Ugarit, across the steep Al-Ansariyeh coastal mountains. This rather long distance would explain why mainly small parts of the animals, generally molars, were present at Ugarit, with only one fragment of a long bone attested. As Can Yümeni Gündem and Hans-Peter Uerpmann suggest, the flat enamel lamellae of elephant molars could probably have been used for the production of jewelry as part of the handicraft



Fig. 6. Elephant tibia. Babylon, central city area (*Merkes*). Old Babylonian period. From Reuther 1926, fig. 4

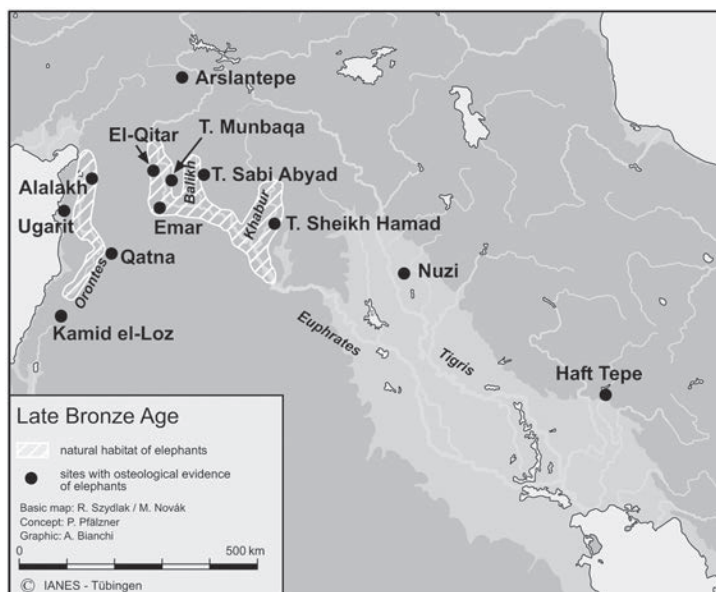


Fig. 7. Distribution map of elephant bone finds in the Late Bronze Age

activities of the city—a by-product of the wider “elephant economy.”<sup>38</sup>

Further south, Kamid el-Loz provided an elephant rib fragment,<sup>39</sup> found in an open area in front of the temple<sup>40</sup> and dated to the very beginning of LB I.<sup>41</sup> It is probably refuse from a temple workshop, or a leftover from consumption during a temple feast.<sup>42</sup>

As in the Middle Bronze Age, in the Late Bronze Age elephant bones were also concentrated in the Middle Euphrates region, now under the suzerainty of the empire of Mitanni. There are, however, no indications of state or palatial control of the elephant products mentioned below. At Emar, the lower jawbones of two elephants were found on the floor of a Late Bronze Age private dwelling dating to the fifteenth–fourteenth century B.C.<sup>43</sup> The jaws had evidently been cracked open—leaving traces of cutting and axe strikes on the bones<sup>44</sup>—in order to remove the molars, probably for the production of jewelry. The molars themselves were missing. Clipped antlers and horns<sup>45</sup> and a manufactured bone inlay piece in the house<sup>46</sup> indicate a wider set of handicraft activities using bone material. It can be concluded that elephant bones were easily accessible in this area, suggesting the presence of elephants among the local fauna along the Euphrates River.

Similarly, at nearby Tell Munbaqa (ancient Ekalte), a fragment of a burnt long bone, probably food refuse, was found in a workroom of a private house,<sup>47</sup> where stone tools and cooking pots have also been found.<sup>48</sup> Five more elephant bones from the site,<sup>49</sup> obviously from Late Bronze Age contexts, are reported to have been cracked, thus used for either consumption or handicraft activities. An elephant femur comes from the fortified settlement of el-Qitar, north of Tell Munbaqa.<sup>50</sup> It was found in a modest house in the lower town, destroyed in the fourteenth century B.C.<sup>51</sup>

Farther east, at Middle Assyrian Tell Sabi Abyad, on the Balikh River, a fragment of an elephant femur was discovered in a twelfth century B.C. context of the

administrative center or “fortress,” from which the agricultural exploitation of the area was presumably organized and controlled.<sup>52</sup> The bone shows saw marks, an indication of handicraft use,<sup>53</sup> and is an example of a state-controlled utilization of elephant products in a Middle Assyrian provincial center. The Balikh River probably offered environmental conditions for elephants similar to those in the Euphrates Valley, and could also have served as one of their natural habitats.

At the Middle Assyrian provincial capital of Dur-Katlimmu (Tell Sheikh Hamad), on the Khabur River, three fragments of elephant bones were found in Building P on the citadel mound.<sup>54</sup> Erected in the thirteenth century B.C. and used until ca. 1130 B.C., this was the seat of the Middle Assyrian governor.<sup>55</sup> One of the bones, found in a storage context along with bones and skulls of sheep, equids, and pigs, appears to have been associated with the food supply.<sup>56</sup> Two fragments of a femur, dated to the last phase of the building, in the mid-twelfth century B.C.,<sup>57</sup> were found with administrative devices: pottery jars and bowls, jar covers, and clay sealings. Thus, as at Tell Sabi Abyad, the elephant bones from Dur-Katlimmu throw light on the importance of the elephant hunt in the centrally administered areas of the Balikh and Khabur valleys during this late phase of the Middle Assyrian empire and clearly attest to state-controlled elephant hunts.

Farther east, an elephant ulna or radius (the bone on either the inside or outside of the forelimb) was discovered at Nuzi (fig. 8).<sup>58</sup> It is one of very few intact elephant bones from the Bronze Age in the ancient Near East. As the eastern Tigris region can for geographical reasons be excluded as an area where elephants lived naturally, the bone must have been imported, probably from the Khabur or Euphrates Valley. The bone was not found in the Palace, but in a building complex in the northeast, domestic quarter of the upper city, dated to the fourteenth century B.C.<sup>59</sup> Purposefully imported,

it may have served either an economic or ritual function.

At Haft Tepe, in the lowland of Khuzestan (Iran), an “elephant skeleton” was found, comprising a large number of bones, including a mandibula (lower jaw) and probably ribs.<sup>60</sup> The bones were discovered in a large hall, along with ivory and bone objects, bowls with dried paint, a mass of bronze arrowheads, bronze tools, and shells, all hinting at handicraft production.<sup>61</sup> The hall is on the east side of the huge mudbrick platform of the high-status Terrace Complex I, dated to the fourteenth century B.C.<sup>62</sup> The elephant bones carry saw marks,<sup>63</sup> indicating their use for handicraft production as well.

Whether the animal was part of a natural population of elephants in the humid region of Khuzestan, or an individual animal brought alive to Elam from Syria or India—the more likely scenario—has to remain a matter of speculation. What seems certain, however, is that the elephant bones at Haft Tepe are too numerous to have been traded individually over long distances. The elephant might have arrived alive, probably as a royal gift to the newly founded capital or residence of king Tepti-Ahar and his dynasty in Elam during the late fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C., which was in contact with the contemporary kingdoms of Babylonia, Assyria, and Mitanni.<sup>64</sup>

A molar and four small pelvis fragments with traces of cutting were found in a Hittite imperial context (fourteenth to twelfth century B.C.) at Arslantepe on the Upper Euphrates.<sup>65</sup> Bökönyi believes that the meat of the animal was eaten and assumes that the animal came from the colony of wild elephants living in the Middle Euphrates, some 250 to 300 kilometers to the south.<sup>66</sup>

#### FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE “ELEPHANT ECONOMY”

From a functional point of view, there are significant differences visible in the contexts where elephant bones occur. For the sites in the Middle Euphrates region and



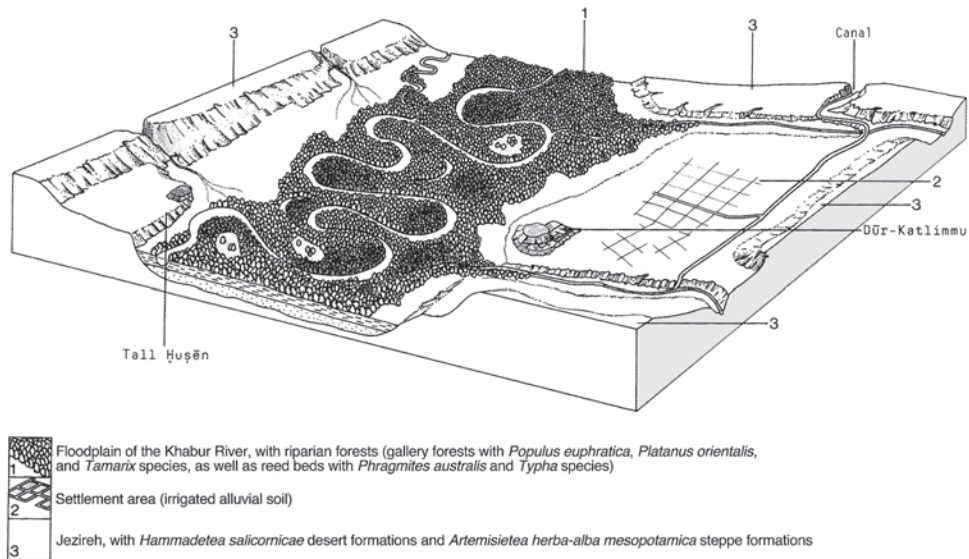
Fig. 8. Elephant bone in situ at Nuzi, northeast quarter of the upper city, Room C35. Late Bronze Age. From Starr 1937, pl. 28 C

Ugarit, activities in connection with elephant bones are located in private households, while at Alalakh, Qatna, and the Middle Assyrian provincial centers of Tell Sabi Abyad and Dur-Katlimmu, the elephant bones are related to palatial contexts. The Trans-Tigridian region, Elam, and the Upper Euphrates in Anatolia, with probably no indigenous populations of elephants, participated in the Late Bronze Age “elephant economy,” an exchange network of elephants and elephant bones, with evidence of handicraft activities and the consumption of elephants as food.

Furthermore, other elephant bones were found in Late Bronze Age religious contexts, such as at Kamid el-Loz and at Tell Munbaqa, and these ought perhaps to be



Fig. 9.  
Reconstruction of the  
natural environment  
of the Khabur Valley  
during the Late  
Bronze Age



seen as the remains of ritual consumption or of handicraft productions carried out in the framework of religious institutions. The building complex at Haft Tepe, in which a large quantity of elephant bones was found, may have had combined religious and palatial functions. The evidence from Qatna, where a ritual deposition of intact elephant bones is attested, stands apart from all other documented sites.

#### SYRIAN ELEPHANT HABITATS AND HUNTING GROUNDS

On the basis of the geographical distribution of elephant bones, two core regions stand out with regard to elephant hunting for the Middle and Late Bronze Ages: the Orontes Valley and the Middle Euphrates Valley, together with the latter river's tributaries, the Balikh and the Khabur rivers. These regions offered good living conditions for elephants, with a lot of water for drinking and bathing, and an adequate vegetal food supply.<sup>67</sup> The reconstruction of the ancient environment in the Lower Khabur Valley proves the existence of particularly suitable ecological conditions for elephants during the Bronze Age. The settlement system and the associated agricultural areas around sites

on the Lower Khabur River up until the early Iron Age were not so extensive as to threaten these natural habitats.<sup>68</sup> The valleys' broad and dense riverine gallery forests, along both sides of the river, included trees, bushes, and reeds (fig. 9).<sup>69</sup> In addition, the adjoining steppes on both sides of the valley still contained a lot of grasslands, interspersed with trees,<sup>70</sup> offering an easily accessible additional food supply. Elephants, as Robert Miller points out, prefer to “live on the boundary between forest and grassland” and “they need an optimum mix of grasses, bark, and tender branches in their diet.”<sup>71</sup> These were ideally provided by the Euphrates, Balikh, and Khabur river valleys and the adjacent former savannas.

The Balikh and Khabur valleys also emerge as regions with textual attestations of elephants. Six Assyrian kings left accounts of elephant hunts, presumably in these regions.<sup>72</sup> The most detailed comes from the time of Tiglath-Pileser I (r. ca. 1114–1076 B.C.).<sup>73</sup> He claims to have hunted and “killed ten strong bull elephants in the Land Harran”—the Upper Balikh region—“and in the region of the River Khabur,” bringing four elephants home alive to Ashur.<sup>74</sup> He also brought hides and tusks back to Ashur as

booty. Chronologically, this episode dates to the final stage of the Middle Assyrian period. The account of Tiglath-Pileser I, thus, corresponds chronologically with the archaeological evidence of elephants in Middle Assyrian contexts in the Balikh and Khabur valleys, such as at Tell Sabi Abyad and Dur-Katlimmu.<sup>75</sup>

The Orontes River system was the setting for well-known accounts by Egyptian rulers of hunting expeditions in Syria. It is often claimed that Thutmose I (r. ca. 1504–1492 B.C.) was the first ruler to hunt elephants in Syria, based on an inscription in the Punt Hall of the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri mentioning the city of “Niya” as well as “elephants.”<sup>76</sup> Thutmose III (r. ca. 1479–1425 B.C.) gave a very detailed account of the famous elephant hunt during his Syrian wars,<sup>77</sup> which relies on four different texts: the annals of Karnak, which refer to “Niya,” but not to elephant hunts;<sup>78</sup> a stele from Gebel Barkal, which tells of a herd of 120 elephants hunted at the “lake” or “sea” of Niya by the king;<sup>79</sup> another stele from the Temple of Montu at Armant, also reporting 120 elephants killed by Thutmose in the “steppe of Niya” or the “land of Niya,”<sup>80</sup> and the most detailed version of this episode, in an inscription of Amun-em-hab in his tomb at Thebes.<sup>81</sup> He reports that his king hunted a herd of 120 elephants at Niya for their tusks. The largest of the animals threatened the king, whereon Amun-em-hab fought back the animal by cutting his trunk. Amun-em-hab explains that he was standing in the water between two stones during this episode, suggesting that the hunt actually took place on the banks of the lake of Niya.

While the location of Niya is debated, it is generally accepted that it was located in the Ghab Plain—covered in ancient times by extensive swamps and lakes—at the site of Qala’at al-Mudiq, which corresponds to the Hellenistic and Roman city of Apameia.<sup>82</sup> Limited excavations at the southern flank of the site prove that it was inhabited from the Ubaid to the Middle Bronze Age, and in the late Iron Age,<sup>83</sup> but no intervening levels of

the Late Bronze Age have yet been identified.<sup>84</sup> Alternatively, the Late Bronze Age site of Niya may also be buried in one of the larger settlement mounds close by, such as Tell Squalbiye, 5 kilometers south of Qala’at al-Mudiq, with a prominent Middle to Late Bronze Age occupation.<sup>85</sup>

It is highly plausible that those hunting elephants in the Ghab Valley, close to the lake of Niya, included not only the king of Egypt but also the rulers and inhabitants of Syrian kingdoms, particularly Qatna, which was only 50 kilometers from Sheizar, at the southeast edge of the Ghab depression, and 77 kilometers from Qala’at al-Mudiq. As the routes from Qatna to the Ghab lead through flat terrain and are not hampered by

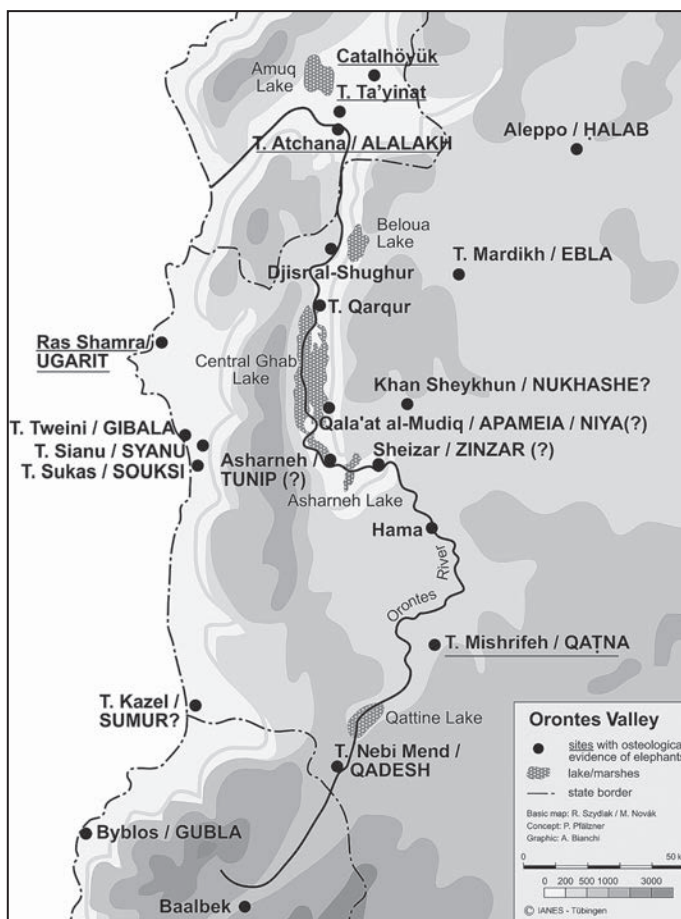


Fig. 10. The Orontes system of basins and lakes

Fig. 11. Remains of small ponds and swamps in the Ghab depression, between Al-Hattan and Mardash



any natural barriers, the transport of killed animals, or parts of them, back to Qatna would have been easy to accomplish.

The Ghab Basin, a plain approximately 70 kilometers long (fig. 10), with an average width of 11 kilometers, offered particularly favorable natural conditions for elephants. The occupation of the Ghab Basin during the Bronze Age does not seem to have been fundamentally different from the modern situation in the early twentieth century A.D. As Jean-Claude Courtois observed in an archaeological survey of the Ghab and Roudj regions, the Bronze and Iron Age settlements were mainly aligned along the eastern fringe of the Ghab Basin.<sup>86</sup> The larger part of the area, once covered by extensive swamps and lakes, fed during springtime by the Orontes and its tributaries, was sparsely populated in all historical periods. Shallow but vast lakes were generated in the month of November, which then receded from April until June, while the central area remained swampy year-round because the ground retained the humidity

like a sponge (figs. 11, 12).<sup>87</sup> This seasonal diversity of the environment probably explains why the area was called both the “lake of Niya” and the “steppe of Niya,” depending on the season. The vegetation of the Ghab was originally dominated by reeds—the meaning of the Arabic word *ghab*—surrounded by grass pastures.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, the Ghab Basin offered water year-round, easily accessible in shallow ponds, in addition to an abundance of plant nutrition in the form of reeds and grass; the single missing component for elephants was the presence of trees.<sup>89</sup> However, during the second millennium B.C. there might still have been pine and evergreen oak, especially at the foot of the eastern slopes of the Al-Ansariyeh Mountains along the western edge of the Ghab.<sup>90</sup>

#### THE ORONTES VALLEY: NATURAL HABITAT OR ELEPHANT RESERVE?

While a number of scholars prefer to interpret Niya as a reserve or zoological park,<sup>91</sup> there are many arguments that militate against the idea of an artificially created



“elephant reserve” in the region, whether in the Orontes Valley or along the Euphrates River. Most importantly, elephants are not well suited either to life in reserves or parks or to captive breeding, for various reasons. In view of their high demand for food,<sup>92</sup> they would have quickly depleted the natural vegetation within a confined reserve, so that a constant external supply of additional food would have been necessary. Elephants are highly mobile: in their search for food and water they circulate over long distances, up to 50 kilometers per day and in total up to 130 kilometers across their home range.<sup>93</sup> This makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to keep the animals in a restricted compound and to control their movements. They are, furthermore, strong enough to break through any fences. Elephants have a very long maturation period with a long reproduction cycle, but very low reproduction rates, which makes breeding them extremely difficult. When living under human control they are normally very reluctant to reproduce.<sup>94</sup> If the elephants had been imported from India or another foreign region, transport to Syria over thousands of kilometers would have been extremely difficult to organize during the Bronze Age, a period of political fragmentation throughout the Near East.<sup>95</sup> This would have effectively hampered the regular supply of new animals needed to maintain an elephant reserve over a period of time. Finally, the political situation in the Orontes Valley, with changing overlords between the Middle and the Late Bronze Ages, would



Fig. 12. Lake in the Ghab Basin during wintertime. Early 20th century A.D.

not have been conducive to sustaining such a reserve. It is more likely that the Orontes Valley—especially the Ghab depression, with the lake of Niya, but also the Lower Orontes Valley, with the Amuq Plain and the lake in its center—and the valleys of the Euphrates, Balikh, and Khabur rivers constituted ideal natural habitats, where elephants lived wild and could be hunted, until their final extinction during the ninth century B.C. (fig. 10). Their natural occurrence in these regions explains why these animals were not monopolized by a single power, but, instead, various cities and kingdoms, such as Qatna, Ugarit, Alalakh, and Kumidi, and the urban centers of the Middle Euphrates River participated in elephant hunts. It furthermore explains why palatial as well as private households utilized hunted elephant products.



Fig. 13. Hippopotamus ivory scepter. Qatna, Royal Hypogeum. Late Bronze Age I–II. MSHo2G-10770. National Museum, Damascus

THE SOCIOPOLITICAL AND  
IDEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF  
ELEPHANT HUNTING

The procurement of ivory, a material esteemed in royal and elite contexts of the Bronze and Iron Ages, can be seen as the major reason for hunting elephants.<sup>96</sup> A large number of ivories discovered in the Royal Palace at Qatna, mostly in the Royal Hypogeum,<sup>97</sup> date to the LB I–IIA period.<sup>98</sup> Approximately 175 pieces are fabricated



Fig. 14. Elephant ivory comb. Qatna, Royal Hypogeum. Late Bronze Age I–II. MSHo2G-io787. National Museum, Damascus



Fig. 15. Elephant ivory pyxis lid. Qatna, Corridor AQ. Late Bronze Age I–II. MSHo2G-io015. National Museum, Damascus

from hippopotamus ivory, including a scepter (fig. 13) and inlays in the form of *djed* pillars.<sup>99</sup> Elephant ivory, on the other hand, is attested for only three objects from the Qatna Royal Tomb: a comb (fig. 14), a plaque, and a knob.<sup>100</sup> Another, a decorated lid of a pyxis (fig. 15), comes from the debris of the upper story, which fell into the corridor of the tomb.<sup>101</sup> Thus, even in a royal context such as Qatna, precious elephant ivory was rare.<sup>102</sup>

It is noteworthy that the most superbly crafted ivory object found at Qatna to date, the Hathor mask plaque (fig. 16), is made of elephant ivory, indicating that the material was only used for prestige items.<sup>103</sup> It was discovered, along with 340 fragments, mostly of elephant ivory, in the Syrian–Italian excavations of a large official building called the Lower City Palace and dated to the Late Bronze Age.<sup>104</sup> It probably once decorated a piece of furniture.<sup>105</sup> As the plaque and fragments were concentrated in two rooms (R and Y), they probably indicate a workshop for the secondary activities—joining and fitting—involved in the production of ivory marquetry.<sup>106</sup>

The finds from Qatna support our belief that elephants were mainly hunted to procure ivory. The latter was an important natural and cultural resource over which political control was sought. While Qatna no longer had direct control over the Orontes Basin during the Late Bronze Age,<sup>107</sup> its kings nevertheless appear to have had access to elephants, probably negotiated through the attested close political relations between Qatna and Niya.<sup>108</sup> Annie Caubet has raised the question of whether the “elephants of the land of Niya” belonged to the king of Qatna.<sup>109</sup> While this might have held true for the Middle Bronze Age, it can be rejected for the Late Bronze Age, the time of the elephant bone deposition in the Royal Palace of Qatna.

It is astonishing to notice that elephants also served as exchange items in international relations. The most ostentatious example is presented by the paintings in the



Fig. 16. Elephant ivory Hathor mask plaque. Qatna, Lower City Palace. Late Bronze Age I-II. MSHo2-3266.707. National Museum, Damascus



Fig. 17. Facsimile of wall painting showing Syrian tribute of elephant, bear, tusks, and copper ingot. Egypt, Thebes, Tomb of Rekhmire. Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose III. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1931 31.6.43



Tomb of Rekhmire in Egyptian Thebes, dating to the time of Thutmose III,<sup>110</sup> ca. 1450 B.C., and depicting tribute brought from foreign lands. The tribute carried from *Retnu*—the Syrian territories—includes metal vases; copper ingots; jars with wine; a chariot and a pair of horses; weapons such as bows, quivers, and daggers; ivory ointment holders; tusks; a bear; and an elephant (fig. 17).<sup>111</sup> This arrangement conveys a clear message: elephants and their products (tusks as raw material and ivory artifacts) were among the most valuable items associated with Syria, at least in the eyes of the Egyptians, beheld on the same level as metalwork, military equipment, and exotica such as bears.

The distinctive rendering of the elephant in this tribute scene, especially its small size, has been the source of much discussion. Did it symbolize a tamed animal, or one that was kept in a reserve near a city or close to a palace of a Syrian ruler? Most probably, it represents a trapped animal from one of the natural habitats of elephants in Syria, and—like the bear—is a symbol of Syria’s natural wealth. Elephants, together with other exotic animals, remained objects of gift exchange in the Iron Age, as is demonstrated by the presence of an elephant in the tribute scenes on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (r. ca. 858–824 B.C.).<sup>112</sup>

The hunting of elephants was surely a matter of prestige in the Bronze Age, as attested by the attention given this pursuit by the official Egyptian inscriptions of Thutmose III (and, to a lesser extent, Thutmose I). The fact that this hunt takes place in Syria, in the territories of defeated enemies or, at least, dependent neighbors, ostentatiously signals the supremacy of the Egyptian ruler over these territories. This might also be the reason why the number of killed elephants, stated to be 120, is probably greatly exaggerated. Marc Gabolde, taking the presented numbers as credible, has argued that the hunt of Thutmose III at the “sea of Niya” was intended to ruin the economy of Egypt’s

rival Mitanni by destroying one of its most profitable resources.<sup>113</sup> However, the status of victorious fighter and successful hunter bestowed by this hunt might have far outweighed its economic importance.

The same intention is still evident between the twelfth and ninth centuries B.C. in the inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian rulers Tiglath-Pileser I,<sup>114</sup> Ashur-bel-kala,<sup>115</sup> Ashur-dan II,<sup>116</sup> Adad-nirari II,<sup>117</sup> Ashurnasirpal II,<sup>118</sup> and Shalmaneser III<sup>119</sup> mentioning elephant hunts in the conquered Syrian territories. The Assyrian kings wanted to symbolize their political and military predominance by presenting themselves as fearless, superior hunters. Their elephant hunts were aspects of Assyrian royal ideology, not a strategy to weaken the economy of the conquered regions, which would have only diminished the value of newly acquired territories. Although Ashurnasirpal II (r. ca. 883–859 B.C.) claimed to have killed thirty elephants and Ashur-dan II (r. ca. 934–912 B.C.) said he felled fifty-six, the actual numbers may have been exaggerated for propagandistic purposes—as in the records of the Egyptian pharaoh centuries earlier.

We may infer that elephants had a similar ideological importance for the Syrian kingdoms of the second millennium B.C., especially Qatna. This could have been bolstered by the close proximity of Qatna to the elephant habitats in the Middle Orontes region. The ideology of the king as elephant hunter could theoretically have already been developed during the Middle Bronze Age, when Qatna had direct political and military control over the Middle Orontes region, making the king of Qatna the master of the elephants of the Orontes region. This general framework might well explain the large, undamaged elephant bones found in a Late Bronze Age context in the Royal Palace of Qatna. They could have been brought back by the king as trophies of a successful elephant hunt to demonstrate his vigor, strength, and bravery and to symbolize royal supremacy and power. An ostentatious display of the

extraordinarily large elephant bones in the Royal Palace would have conveyed this message to a larger audience, a means of storytelling and of memorializing a remarkable hunting event. Of course, this would assume that the elephant bones were presented in a public area within the palace. The fact that they were found in the northwest wing could mean that they had lost their symbolic meaning at some point in time.

It is argued here that the kings of Qatna held a royal monopoly on the hunting of elephants in the vicinity of their realm, especially in the Ghab Basin. This privilege was established during the Middle Bronze Age and was still partially maintained in the Late Bronze Age. At the time, however, other kingdoms also participated in elephant hunting in the same region or, as in the case of Alalakh, further north, in the Amuq Plain.

The find context of the elephant bones at Qatna presents a special situation, as the deposition indicates that they were neither dumped as refuse from consumption or production, nor displayed as hunting trophies. Instead, they were deposited in a remote part of the palace, in two rooms without doors and filled with earth. The bones were lowered very carefully into these rooms, and no other finds were associated with them, suggesting a ritual burial, perhaps after the death of the ruler, when these trophies would have lost part of their ideological value and would no longer have been needed to be publicly displayed. They were placed near a large chamber tomb, Tomb VII, the secondary burial of many individuals from a palatial context.<sup>120</sup> Perhaps the place of “burial” of the elephant bones was chosen for its proximity to this tomb, located below Room DA in the northwest wing. The two rooms where the elephant bones were deposited were immediately north (Room DD) and west (Room DF) of Room DA. Furthermore, the basement floor of Room DF, which was below the deposit of the elephant bones, had direct access to the antechamber of Tomb VII.

The conspicuous spatial relation between the elephant bones and the burials in Tomb VII suggests a relationship between the elephant remains and Qatna’s funerary cult. Was the ruler—who had once hunted the elephant—buried in Tomb VII, and were his elephant trophies buried close to him? Whatever the explanation may be, the deposition of the elephant bones at Qatna may be understood as a ritual action. We may observe a possible relationship to the funerary cult, but the ritual function of the deposition remains very speculative.

#### CONCLUSIONS

What, in the end, is the relevance of the new discovery of elephant bones at Qatna in the framework of these discussions? Four major points can be emphasized.

a) The bones from Qatna are the best-preserved elephant remains discovered so far in Syria. They make a strong argument in favor of the existence of elephants in ancient western Syria, especially in the Middle Orontes region. Due to their size they could not have been imported from faraway places and most probably derive from elephants of the Ghab Basin, west of Qatna.

b) The elephant bones from Qatna had not been discarded, but were carefully deposited in a side wing of the Royal Palace. This proves that they were particularly esteemed, and that there was a direct royal association with this elephant, which must have been hunted by the royal elite, if not by the king himself.

c) There was definitely a certain prestige associated with hunting elephants. Not only would the tusks of the killed elephant have been removed from the cadaver, but in this case a number of bones, including vertebrae, were brought back to the palace in Qatna. This implies that elephant bones might have been publicly displayed in the Royal Palace as a symbol of prestige, in order to glorify the bravery and strength of the king. This function of the elephant was probably embedded in the royal ideology of Qatna, and added value to the elephant’s unquestionable economic importance.

d) Based on zoological and historical evidence there is no reason to assume an elephant reserve in the area of the “lake of Niya,” to be identified with the extended lakes and swamps that still existed in the central Ghab Basin until recently. The elephants were probably naturally at home in this area of the Middle Orontes, as they also were in the Amuq Basin, the Middle Euphrates Valley, and the Balikh and Khabur valleys.

In summary, Qatna offers one of the rare finds of intact elephant bones in the ancient Near East; it throws light on the broad range of meanings of elephant hunting in the Bronze Age, from the economic to the political, ideological, and even ritual functions of the hunt and its associated trophies. The royal elephant hunters of Bronze Age Syria pursued this activity not only in order to monopolize one of the most valuable raw materials of their time, ivory, but also to acquire prestige and symbolize their bravery and power. The extinction of the Syrian elephant during the Iron Age is the result of this unfortunate combination of commercial and ideological interests.

1. Under joint responsibility of Michel Al-Maqdissi (Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic, Damascus) and Peter Pfälzner (Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Studies [IANES] at the University of Tübingen, Germany). See the annual and biannual reports in *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*, nos. 132 (2000)–143 (2011). For a summary report, see Pfälzner 2007.
2. See Dohmann-Pfälzner and Pfälzner 2008, pp. 20–45; Dohmann-Pfälzner and Pfälzner 2011, pp. 10–28.
3. Pfälzner 2007, pp. 36–42.
4. For short preliminary reports, see Pfälzner 2008b; Pfälzner 2009a; more details were published in Dohmann-Pfälzner and Pfälzner 2008, pp. 35–42.
5. For a first, preliminary publication, see Pfälzner and Vila 2009; see also an unpublished manuscript by Emmanuelle Vila, “Tell Mishrife: La faune des fouilles du Secteur G—le palais. Rapport de mission d’étude (été 2008).” Details on the elephant bone finds contributed by Vila-Meyer were also published in Dohmann-Pfälzner and Pfälzner 2008, pp. 38–39, 41.

6. Du Mesnil du Buisson 1928, pp. 81–82, pl. II.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 81, n. 1.
8. Pfälzner and Vila 2009, p. 27.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
10. For the definition of the “Syrian” elephant and its affiliation to the Asiatic elephant, see Hofmann 1974; Hooijer 1978; Bökönyi 1986, p. 187; C. Becker 1994, p. 175; von den Driesch 1996, pp. 34–35.
11. Pfälzner and Vila 2009, p. 27.
12. It should be added that this conclusion is not completely compelling, because detaching meat from such large bones does not necessarily leave cutting traces (Cornelia Becker, personal communication).
13. Pfälzner and Dohmann-Pfälzner 2011.
14. For previous compilations of elephant bone finds, see C. Becker 1994, pp. 173–78, table 1, fig. 5; Fischer 2007a, pp. 75–78, table 5a, 5b; C. Becker 2008, p. 107, fig. 06:65.
15. Caubet and Poplin 2010, pp. 1–2.
16. Schaeffer 1962, p. 233; Collon 1977, p. 222, n. 15; Caubet and Poplin 2010. Schaeffer’s account leaves open whether the bones are from elephants or hippopotamuses.
17. See, for example, Caubet and Poplin 2010, p. 2, where it is reckoned to the Middle Bronze Age. Fischer (2007a, p. 76, table 5a) dates it to 2200–1900 B.C., leaving open whether it is Early or Middle Bronze Age in date. See also Boessneck and Peters 1988, pp. 51–53.
18. Boessneck and Peters 1988, p. 53.
19. Cf. Caubet and Poplin 1987, and Caubet and Poplin 1992, p. 100, for an assessment of the chronological beginnings of ivory production in the ancient Near East, demonstrating that, apart from small quantities of hippopotamus ivory artifacts, there are no elephant ivory products before the second millennium B.C.
20. Woolley 1955, p. 288, n. 3; Fischer 2007a, p. 75.
21. For the inlays, see Woolley 1955, p. 61, n. 1, p. 98; for the text (AIT 366:16), see Wiseman 1953, pp. 100–101. It cannot be deduced from the Akkadian word *šinnu* used in the text whether the transaction refers to an elephant tusk or to an ivory artifact.
22. Woolley 1955, p. 102, pl. XVIa, b.
23. Caubet and Poplin 1987, p. 297.
24. Gündem and Uerpmann 2003, p. 120.
25. Ferhan Sakal, personal communication.
26. Fleming 1992; Adamthwaite 2001, pp. XX–XXI.
27. Echt 1984, p. 112, fig. 14a, pl. 15; Bökönyi 1986, pp. 187–88; Bökönyi 1990, p. 71, pl. 12.
28. Level 14 is assigned to Building Period 6 and dated to the end of the MB IIB period (Echt 1984, pp. 55–57, fig. 3).
29. Bökönyi 1986.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 188; Bökönyi 1990, p. 72.
31. In contrast, Bökönyi (1986, p. 188) thinks that this elephant might have been imported from Egypt,



- probably in the form of a royal gift. He based this assumption on the close relations of Kumidi with Egypt. However, these close relations are historically not attested before the Late Bronze Age, i.e., before the New Kingdom.
32. Reuther 1926, pp. 7, 10, fig. 4; Fischer 2007a, p. 77, table 5a. The identification of the bone as a tibia is proposed by Emmanuelle Vila-Meyer on the basis of the photograph in Reuther 1926, fig. 4 (in the present essay, fig. 6); other authors (for example, Fischer 2007a, p. 77, table 5a) have suggested a femur.
  33. Fischer 2007a, p. 78, table 5b.
  34. The question of whether the bone was found in Room 21 or 22 has been discussed by Fischer (2007a, p. 75, table 5a, n. 185), who concluded that it should have come from Room 21. I do not share this conclusion, as the situation is far more confusing. First, as Fischer correctly states, the plans in Woolley 1955, figs. 44, 45, bear the wrong room numbers: Rooms 21 and 22 have been transposed. Room 21 is, in fact, the larger, southern area, identified as the courtyard of the so-called Ilim-Ilimma wing (Woolley 1955, pp. 112–13, 123), and the smaller, northern one is Room 22 (Woolley 1955, p. 123). The lot of sixteen tablets, which in Woolley's text (1955, p. 123) is said to have been found together with the elephant bone in Room 22, is divided among two rooms in the publication of the texts (Wiseman 1953, p. 119). The majority of them (nine texts) are given in Wiseman's list as being from Room 22, while only three are from Room 21. This situation corresponds to the notion of the word "tablets" in the (corrected) Room 22 of the Palace plan (Woolley 1955, fig. 44). In conclusion, the elephant bone could also have come from either Room 21 or Room 22. As the association of the bones with the texts is stressed in Woolley's text, it seems more probable to me that the elephant bone was actually found in the (northern) Tablet Room 22 and not in the (southern) Courtyard 21.
 

The attribution of the bone find to the upper floor of the palace is not affected by the open question of the exact localization of the room where the bone was found, but unquestioned on the basis of Woolley's report that he found the bone embedded "in the brickwork fallen from above" (Woolley 1955, pp. 123, 288).
  35. The bone is not mentioned in Woolley 1955; the area is described in Woolley 1955, pp. 179–80, fig. 63. See also Fischer 2007a, p. 75, table 5a. It is, in this case, not clear whether it is a jawbone or a femur (see Fischer 2007a, p. 75, table 5a, n. 187).
  36. Gachet 1987; Yon 1997, pp. 146–49; Gachet-Bizollon 2007.
  37. Caubet and Poplin 1987, p. 297, table 2.
  38. Gündem and Uerpmann 2003, p. 122.
  39. Bökönyi 1986, p. 187; Bökönyi 1990, p. 71.
  40. Metzger 1991, pp. 73–75, 115–28, fig. 10, pl. 39; Metzger 1993, p. 142, no. 44. The object was found a short distance south of Wall 7, the south wall of Temple Room B.
  41. Echt 1984, p. 60, fig. 3.
  42. Bökönyi (1990, p. 71) thinks that the rib fragment from the T<sub>3</sub> Temple and the femur fragment from the MB IIB building Phase 14 (see above) once belonged to a single animal living at the turn of the Middle to the Late Bronze Age, because of the close temporal proximity of the two levels (compare Echt 1984, fig. 3). However, this seems unlikely, given that the two fragments were found 30 meters apart, in totally different functional areas and at different levels (see localizations presented in the present essay).
  43. Finkbeiner 2001, p. 58, n. 6; Finkbeiner 2002, p. 118; Gündem and Uerpmann 2003, pp. 120–22, fig. 1; Gündem 2010, p. 136.
  44. Gündem and Uerpmann 2003, p. 122.
  45. Finkbeiner 2002, p. 120; Gündem and Uerpmann 2003, p. 122.
  46. Finkbeiner and Sakal 2003, p. 24.
  47. Boessneck and von den Driesch 1986, pp. 148, 150.
  48. Machule et al. 1986, pp. 111–12.
  49. Machule et al. 1987, pp. 110, 132. Another elephant bone was recently discovered in the area of *Steinbau 4*, a temple in antis located in the northern inner city. Dittmar Machule, quoting Emmanuelle Vila-Meyer, personal communication.
  50. McClellan 1986, pp. 435–36; identification quoted after C. Becker 1994, p. 173, table 1; Fischer 2007a, p. 76, table 5a.
  51. Culican and McClellan 1983–84, pp. 41–42, fig. 2; McClellan 1984–85, pp. 40–43, fig. 2.
  52. Akkermans and Rossmesl 1990, p. 20; Akkermans 2006, p. 205, fig. 3; Fischer 2007a, fig. 5a. The context dates to the time between 1225 and 1120 B.C., as indicated by the cuneiform texts found at the site, from the time of the Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I and his successors; Akkermans 2006, p. 209; Akkermans and Smits 2008, p. 251. As the bone was found on a later, postdestruction floor of Stratum II in the tower, a date in the twelfth century B.C. can be assumed for its deposition.
  53. Instead, Akkermans and Rossmesl (1990, p. 20) interpret it as slaughter refuse.
  54. C. Becker 1994, p. 172, fig. 2 (erroneously classified as Neo-Assyrian and coming from the Lower City); C. Becker 2005–6, p. 449; C. Becker 2008, p. 67, table 06:1–3, p. 107; Pfälzner forthcoming. A reassessment of the find contexts of the elephant bones was made in September 2011 by Jens Rohde, Cornelia Becker, Hartmut Kühne, and myself.
  55. Pfälzner 1995, pp. 106–14, 233–38, figs. 81a–83; Kühne 1998; Kühne 2000; Pfälzner forthcoming.
  56. Pfälzner forthcoming.
  57. Pfälzner 1995, p. 114, fig. 81c, pp. 236–37, fig. 137; Pfälzner forthcoming. I want to thank Jens Rohde

- (Tell Šēh Hamad, project of the Free University of Berlin) and Cornelia Becker for their support in locating the exact findspot of the elephant bone.
58. Identification proposed by Emmanuelle Vila-Meyer on the basis of the photograph in Starr 1937, pl. 28 C (in the present essay, fig. 8). The same identification (ulna) had been proposed by Vogler (1997, p. 172, quoted in Fischer 2007a, p. 77, n. 191); in contrast, Cornelia Becker (1994, p. 173, table 1) stated that they are fragments of a femur; Fischer (2007a, p. 77, table 5a, n. 191) mentions both possibilities.
  59. Starr 1937, pl. 28 C; Starr 1939, pp. 189–90, Plan 11, pp. 199, 493, pl. 28 C; C. Becker 1994, p. 173, table 1; Novák 1994, p. 400, fig. 35; Fischer 2007a, p. 77, table 5a. Novák (1994, p. 442) added the idea that the building might have been a “pub.”
  60. Negahban described the find as both an “elephant skeleton” (Negahban 1979, p. 25; Negahban 1991, p. 10) and “elephant bones” (Negahban 1991, p. 18, and caption of pl. 14 B). On the published photograph (Negahban 1991, pl. 14 B) it can be recognized that the bones are disarticulated and not lying in their original anatomical position. On the specific bones, see C. Becker 1994, p. 173, table 1; Fischer 2007a, p. 77, table 5a. It is not clear whether there were also tusks in this context (see Collon 1977, p. 225, n. 25; Fischer 2007a, p. 78, table 5b).
  61. Negahban 1979, pp. 21–29; Negahban 1991, pp. 9–10, 15–18.
  62. Negahban 1979, pp. 24–25; Negahban 1991, pp. 10, 18, pl. 14 B.
  63. Negahban 1991, pp. 10, 18.
  64. Potts 1999, pp. 192, 204.
  65. Bökönyi 1986, p. 187, pl. 29:1, 3. Bökönyi (1986, p. 187) does not specify the find context of these bones, but this might be due to a printing error, as footnote 1 is missing in his article.
  66. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
  67. Hofmann 1974; C. Becker 1994, p. 175; C. Becker 2005–6, p. 453.
  68. Ergenzinger and Kühne 1991; Morandi Bonacossi 2008.
  69. Frey and Kürschner 1991; Kühne 1991; Kürschner 2008.
  70. Frey and Kürschner 1991, pp. 92–96, 99–102.
  71. Miller 1986, p. 29.
  72. Fischer 2007a, p. 72, table 4.
  73. For more references on elephant hunts by later Neo-Assyrian rulers, see notes 114–19 below.
  74. Grayson 1991, p. 26 (col. vi: ll. 70–75).
  75. The elephant bones at Dur-Katlimmu come from a context dated to the Middle Assyrian III period, which extends into the time of Tiglath-Pileser I (r. ca. 1114–1076 B.C.) (Pfälzner 1995, p. 235).
  76. Redford 1979, p. 276; Gabolde 2000, pp. 129–30; for a critical assessment of the textual evidence, see Busch 2006, pp. 87–88; Fischer 2007a, p. 71.
  77. Redford 2003.
  78. Blumenthal, Müller, and Reineke 1984, p. 207; Gabolde 2000, p. 133.
  79. G. A. Reisner and M. B. Reisner 1933; Helck 1961, p. 8; Gabolde 2000, p. 132.
  80. Helck 1961, p. 13; Gabolde 2000, p. 132.
  81. Blumenthal, Müller, and Reineke 1984, p. 312; Gabolde 2000, p. 131.
  82. For the identification of the city of Niya with Qala’at al-Mudiq, see Klengel 1969, pp. 58–59; Klengel 1970, p. 54; Courtois 1973, pp. 68–70, fig. 7; Röllig 1999, p. 314a; Gabolde 2000, p. 133; Otto 2006–8; Pfälzner 2012, pp. 777–78. Alternative proposals with regard to localizing the lake of Niya have suggested the lake of Homs (most recently, Caubet and Poplin 2010, p. 3) or the lake of Jabbul, east of Aleppo (Miller 1986, p. 31; Lamprichs 1995, pp. 360, 364).
  83. Collon et al. 1975.
  84. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
  85. Courtois 1973, p. 58, n. 1, pp. 65–68, figs. 5, 6.
  86. The occupation of the Ghab Basin during the Bronze Age does not seem to have fundamentally differed from the premodern situation. As Courtois observed in an archaeological survey of the Ghab and Roudj regions, the Bronze and Iron Age settlements were mainly aligned along the eastern fringe of the Ghab Basin: Tell Sqalbiye (EB, MB, LB), Qala’at al-Mudiq (EB, MB, LB, IA, Classic), Tell Ibrahim (EB), Tell Aamqiye (EB, MB, LB), Tell Qleidine (EB, MB), Tell Qastoun (EB, Classic), and Tell Qarqur are the visible tell sites located east of the eastern bank of the Ghab lake; Courtois 1973, pp. 65–70, 81–88; cf. Fortin 2007, pp. 254–55, table 1.
  87. Thoumin 1936, pp. 468–85; Weulersse 1940a, pp. 73–75; Weulersse 1940b, p. 353.
  88. Thoumin 1936, pp. 479, 483, 485, 517.
  89. Elephants need 70 to 90 liters of water a day (C. Becker 1994, p. 179). The major food sources of elephants are leaves, twigs, grass, fruit, tree bark, tubers, and roots (C. Becker 1994, p. 179). For the need for trees in an elephant habitat, see Miller 1986, pp. 32–33.
  90. For potential forest vegetation in earlier periods, see Fortin 2007, p. 260; Yasuda, Kitagawa, and Nakagawa 2000. It must be pointed out that elephants are highly mobile, even climbing steep slopes in their search for food (C. Becker 1994, p. 179).
  91. S. Smith 1949; I. J. Winter 1973; Collon 1977; Gabolde 2000; Luciani 2006b; Caubet in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 406–7; Caubet and Poplin 2010.
  92. Elephants consume 100–200 kilograms of plant food per day (C. Becker 1994, p. 179).
  93. Miller 1986, p. 30; C. Becker 1994, p. 179.
  94. Clutton-Brock 1987, p. 115; Cornelia Becker, personal communication.
  95. Klengel 1969; Klengel 1970; Klengel 1992; Pfälzner 2012. The situation was different during

- the Seleucid era, when the importation of elephants was actually practiced, but within a largely politically unified world region; C. Becker 1994, p. 173.
96. Caubet and Poplin 1987; Gachet 1987; Caubet and Poplin 1992; Gachet-Bizollon 2007.
97. Bertsch 2011.
98. For the dating, see Pfälzner 2011a, pp. 58–59, 65–66, table 1.
99. I am very grateful to François Poplin for identifying the ivory types of the objects found in the Syrian–German excavations at Qatna. For the scepter, see Pfälzner 2009b, ill. on p. 136; Pfälzner 2011b, p. 174, figs. 38, 39b; for the inlays, see Bertsch 2011, p. 249, figs. 1, 2.
100. For the comb, see Pfälzner 2011b, p. 176, fig. 40; for the plaque, see Bertsch 2011, p. 253, figs. 8a, b. The knob, Field inv. no. MSH02G-11977+1985, is hitherto unpublished.
101. Richter and Lange 2012.
102. More ivory objects were discovered in 2009 and 2010 in Tomb VII below the Royal Palace of Qatna (Pfälzner and Dohmann-Pfälzner 2011, pp. 96–98, 118–22, 126–27), dating to the Middle Bronze IIB period, but it has not yet been determined whether they were made of elephant or hippopotamus ivory.
103. Luciani 2006a; Morandi Bonacossi in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 234, no. 144; Turri 2009, p. 191.
104. Morandi Bonacossi 2009, pp. 157–59, plan ill. on p. 156.
105. Luciani 2006b, pp. 407–11; Morandi Bonacossi in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 233, 234; Morandi Bonacossi 2009, p. 159, ill. p. 157; Turri 2009, p. 191.
106. Luciani 2006b, pp. 406, 410–11; subsequently: Morandi Bonacossi 2009, p. 159; Turri 2009, p. 191.
107. Klengel 1992; Klengel 2000.
108. Richter and Lange 2012.
109. Caubet in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 406.
110. Grave TT 100; Davies (Norman de Garis) 1943/1973, pp. 17–30.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–29.
112. Börker-Klähn 1982, pp. 190ff., pl. 152.
113. Gabolde 2000, p. 134.
114. Grayson 1991, p. 26 (col. vi: ll. 70–75).
115. *Ibid.*, p. 103 (col. iv: ll. 5–10).
116. *Ibid.*, p. 135 (col. iv: l. 72).
117. *Ibid.*, p. 154 (ll. 125–26).
118. *Ibid.*, p. 226 (l. 41).
119. Grayson 1996, p. 41 (l. 44).
120. Pfälzner and Dohmann-Pfälzner 2011.



# Tracing Sidon's Mediterranean Networks in the Second Millennium B.C.: Receiving, Transmitting, and Assimilating. Twelve Years of British Museum Excavations

In ancient times Sidon enjoyed a privileged position as an important port city on the Levantine coast. Its naturally protected rock-cut harbor, situated beside a long coastal reef, provided a natural shelter along this exposed coastline.<sup>1</sup> This reef, which is geologically part of the same offshore reef as Zire, the island of Sidon, is a unique feature of the Sidonian coastline, reaching approximately 540 meters in length and lying parallel to and 1 kilometer from the coast. It was used as Sidon's offshore anchorage or "island harbor" for visiting foreign craft en route to other Mediterranean harbors. The first probable reference to it as part of the city, the phrase "Sidon in the midst of the sea,"<sup>2</sup> was in 675 B.C., when the Assyrian ruler Esarhaddon

punished Abdimilkuti, the rebellious king of Sidon, by destroying the town.

Crucial to any port city's life, in terms of the movement of goods, people, and ideas, is its harbor, and Sidonians are blessed with theirs. The city's inhabitants came to realize its importance toward the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third millennium B.C. Leaving their original settlement at Dakerman, south of Sidon, they moved a kilometer north to what was to become their permanent location. This was confirmed by the eighteen core samples taken in collaboration with the University of Aix-en-Provence,<sup>3</sup> first along the seashore and then in Sidon's old suq. The new location, known today as College Site, which is being excavated by the British Museum in collaboration with Lebanon's Department of Antiquities, was much closer to the harbor and so began the city's commercial activity, with the port driving its economy. Evidence of early ventures from their shore by the Sidonians is provided by the abundance at College Site of fish bones from large deep-sea specimens such as hammer-head and porbeagle sharks measuring between 1.5 and 3 meters long. Found at third millennium B.C. levels, these point incontrovertibly to a well-established offshore deep-sea-fishing activity.

Thus, the rare natural shelter of Sidon's reef served the city from very early times: the movement of people and goods, attested to, albeit sporadically, as early as the third millennium B.C., would increase throughout the city's history. The Mit Rahina inscription specifically mentions voyages to and from the Lebanese coast (*Hunty-š*) during the reign of Amenemhat II (r. ca. 1919–1885 B.C.), documenting journeys from the eastern Nile Delta to Lebanon, with calls at ports along the way and mixed cargoes on board.<sup>4</sup> The emerging archaeological evidence from Sidon offers unequivocal proof of such early contacts.

As early as Dynasty 12, the formation of trading contacts presented local elites with the opportunity to organize the supply of

desirable exotica, provided raw materials such as bronze and silver for local manufacturing processes,<sup>5</sup> and allowed for participation in more complex exchanges. The supply of organic commodities in the form of cereals, wine, and oil was also an important element of trade. Although pottery was rarely an important commodity of trade in its own right, its archaeological visibility makes it a useful surrogate for more valuable but less easily traceable items of commerce.

#### MINOAN IMPORTS

The Minoan imports, which represent the tangible evidence of Sidonian contact with the Aegean, first come from the Mesara, the largest and most important plain in Crete, in Middle Minoan (MM) IIA. This period is contemporary with the reigns of Amenemhat II and III (1919–1813 B.C.), when Phaistos was already trading with Egypt and the Levant. Carbon 14 analysis undertaken at the Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, Oxford University, on the animal bone fragments from one subadult goat and two young sheep on which the Minoan cup was found gives the highest probability for an absolute date between 1984 and 1859 B.C.<sup>6</sup> This is consistent with the first half of MM IIA, beginning around the end of the reign of Senwosret I. It also suggests a provisional terminus ante quem of 1880/1870 B.C. for Sidon's phase 2.<sup>7</sup> A recently found Minoan import belonging to MM IIB consists of the shoulder of a rounded bridge-spouted jar of either type 4 or type 6 at Knossos. This type of vessel was often made as part of a set that included fine cups.<sup>8</sup>

The first standardized pottery forms with a clear primary purpose as transport containers for a distinctive Aegean organic product, probably perfumed oil,<sup>9</sup> are the stirrup jars, one of which reached Sidon in the fourteenth–thirteenth century B.C. from Khania, in western Crete.<sup>10</sup> This Late Minoan (LM) III stirrup jar has painted signs of Linear B script on the shoulder.

A jar (fig. 1) manufactured in Sidon,<sup>11</sup> with a sequence of leaping dolphins placed above a wave pattern rendered in Minoan fashion, epitomizes the transmission and assimilation of a Minoan idea into the repertoire of the Levant. Contacts between

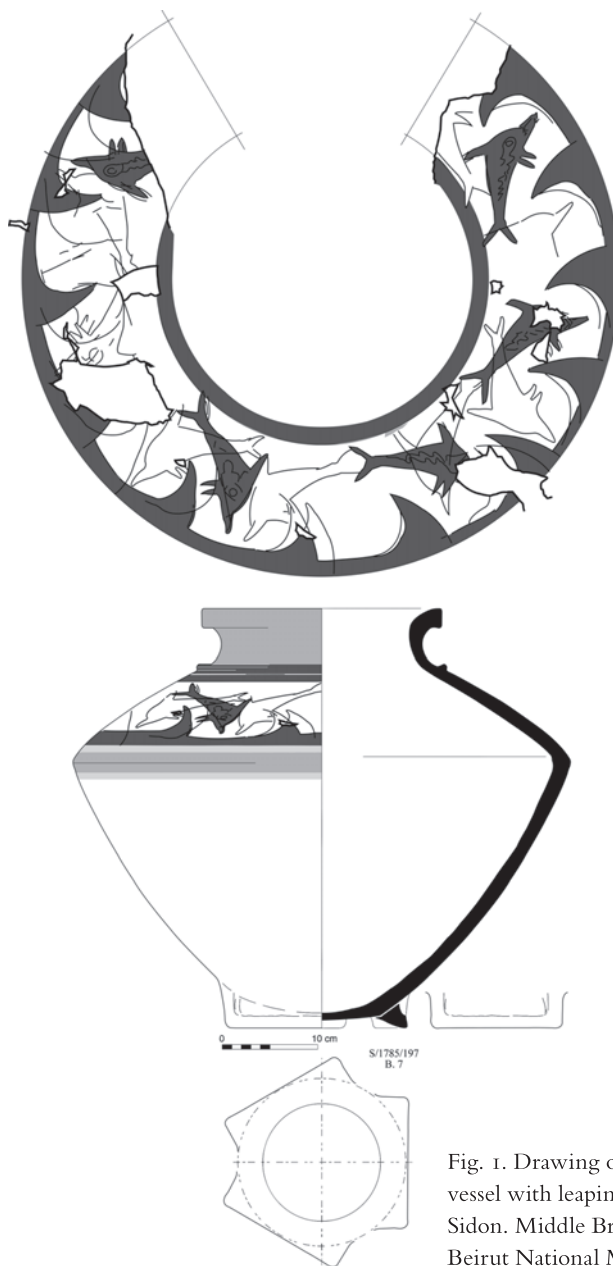


Fig. 1. Drawing of ceramic vessel with leaping dolphins. Sidon. Middle Bronze Age. Beirut National Museum 1785/197

Crete and the Levant during MM IIB/IIIA even led to the appearance of this motif—similar to the Pachyammos dolphins on comparable vessels—on a locally made jar.<sup>12</sup>

#### EGYPTIAN IMPORTS

Small quantities of valuable materials, which motivated the exchange of goods and started with the arrival of personal gifts from Crete, took a different course in the context of Sidon's relations with Egypt about 1800 B.C. The scale of exchanges between the latter two was noticeably larger than in the former case. The large amphorae known as Canaanite jars, which probably contained olive oil, were found in great quantities at Tell el-Dab'a.<sup>13</sup> Egyptian vessels imported

into Sidon are known as early as Dynasty 12 from a small Marl C jar from Sidon Burial 13<sup>14</sup> and the large *zhr* from Sidon Burial 24 dated to the period of Amenemhat III and the beginning of Dynasty 13.<sup>15</sup> Another Upper Egyptian vessel fits within the narrow time frame covered by the reigns of Senwosret I (r. ca. 1961–1917 B.C.) and Senwosret III (r. ca. 1878–1840 B.C.).<sup>16</sup> These imports, as well as those found in Middle Bronze Age (MB) IIA/B and IIB contexts, mostly comprise closed vessels, including storage jars, jugs, and juglets. That coastal traffic with Egypt continued throughout the Middle Bronze Age was confirmed with the discovery of a Hyksos-type Nile B-2 clay jar.<sup>17</sup> An interesting fact, however, is that a few Egyptian imports to Sidon consisted of special jugs and bottles that were manufactured for the Sidon market in a larger size than the original Egyptian models, presumably to satisfy the increased demands of Sidonian consumption.

Egyptian luxury items have also been found among the burials in Sidon, where cosmetic containers were either imported from Egypt or manufactured in Sidon in the Egyptian style. Alabaster and steatite vessels (fig. 2) from MB I/IIB contexts, with narrow, flat bases and eggshell-thin walls,<sup>18</sup> were probably unguent containers.

Two other miniatures, probably used as containers for kohl and made respectively of faience and hematite (fig. 3) were most likely manufactured in Sidon. The faience vessel finds many stone parallels in Egypt and was probably moulded using brown and white silica and glazed green.<sup>19</sup> One particular Egyptian faience vessel, decorated in black with a frieze of lotus petals and imported to Sidon as a prestigious gift, had only a short lifespan. Painted cartouches bear the throne and birth names of queen Tawosret, whose reign seemingly lasted less than two years. As a consequence, the vessel can be dated with great precision to about 1190 B.C., with a margin of error of ten years at the most. The Tawosret container, like most Egyptian faience vessels, was not an item of trade but a precious gift for ritual use.<sup>20</sup>

Fig. 2. Drawing of (left) alabaster and (right) steatite vessels. Sidon. Middle Bronze Age I/IIB. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon

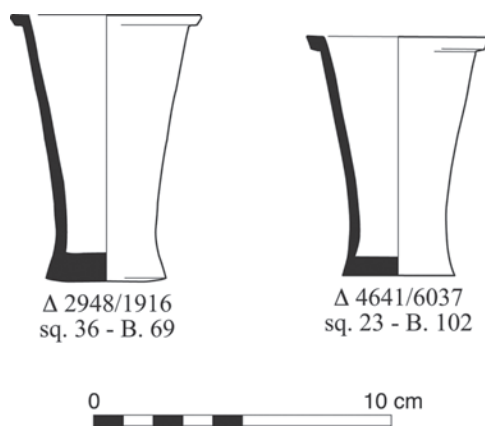
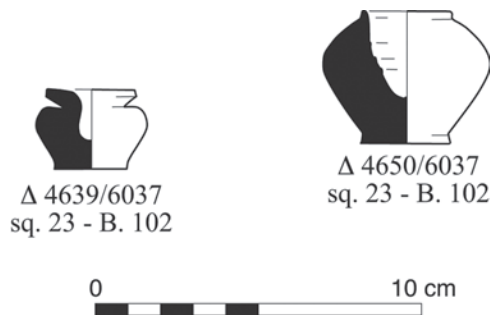


Fig. 3. Drawing of (left) faience and (right) hematite and kohl containers. Sidon. Middle Bronze Age. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon





Numerous scarabs found in Sidon are either Egyptian imports or imitations by local artisans with motifs not found in Egypt and with their own meaning within the Canaanite cultural sphere. One scarab bears the West Semitic name of the owner, Sid-Kâr (fig. 4),<sup>21</sup> a recently identified notable or “prince” of the city of Iay, located to the north of Sidon. Entirely Egyptian in style, with hieroglyphs showing an unusually high degree of “Egyptianness,”<sup>22</sup> it is still being discussed. The scarab was found in a funerary context on the floor of an area where burials and *tannours*, or ovens, dating to MB IIB were found side by side.<sup>23</sup> The beloved traditional formula of Seth/Baal and the customary identification of Seth with Baal have recently been challenged by an Osiris/Baal association instead.<sup>24</sup> Other local deities also appear on scarabs, for example the Canaanite god Horan (fig. 5), who, in his protective role as a half-hawk, half-man holding a large *was* scepter, presents an image equidistant between the Egyptian and Semitic worlds.<sup>25</sup> It is the semihuman representation of this god that makes this scaraboid so special, attesting for the first time to the two forms of the deity, namely the hawk-man on the base of the object and the human with a Semitic face on top, which would reinforce the action of the sympathetic magic attached to it.

A faience cylinder seal recently found in a MB II/IIB Sidon burial<sup>26</sup> depicts two half-human, half-animal creatures dancing, with an “arched harp” depicted as a secondary motif. The creatures have one leg raised, with the foot upright, in a position very similar to that of the young girls depicted on Egyptian wall paintings. Another typical Egyptian posture is the “crossed arms,” stretched forward in a horizontal V shape with the palm raised to the front.<sup>27</sup> This is found on Egyptianizing Syrian cylinder seals of the Middle Bronze Age and denotes adoration or, as at Sidon, the veneration of a deity, depicted along with Syro-Anatolian iconographic elements. Other Egyptian-style motifs found on seals, such as the *djed*, the *ankh*, and the Horus hawk, were integrated into the local imagery and developed a life of their own, continuing to be used side by side with the new images of the Canaanite period.

#### CYPRIOT IMPORTS

A wide variety of Cypriot exports reached Sidon. The recently unearthed White-Painted examples, once published, will constitute the largest corpus of this fabric found in Lebanon to date. Two complete jugs were found in burials: a White-Painted III–IV Pendent Line style jug with an ovoid shape decorated with straight and wavy



Fig. 4. Base of black steatite scarab with inscription naming Sid-Kâr. Sidon. Middle Bronze Age IIB. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon 3487/583



Fig. 5. White faience scaraboid showing Horan on base and male face on top. Sidon. Middle Bronze Age IIB/C. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon 3889/287

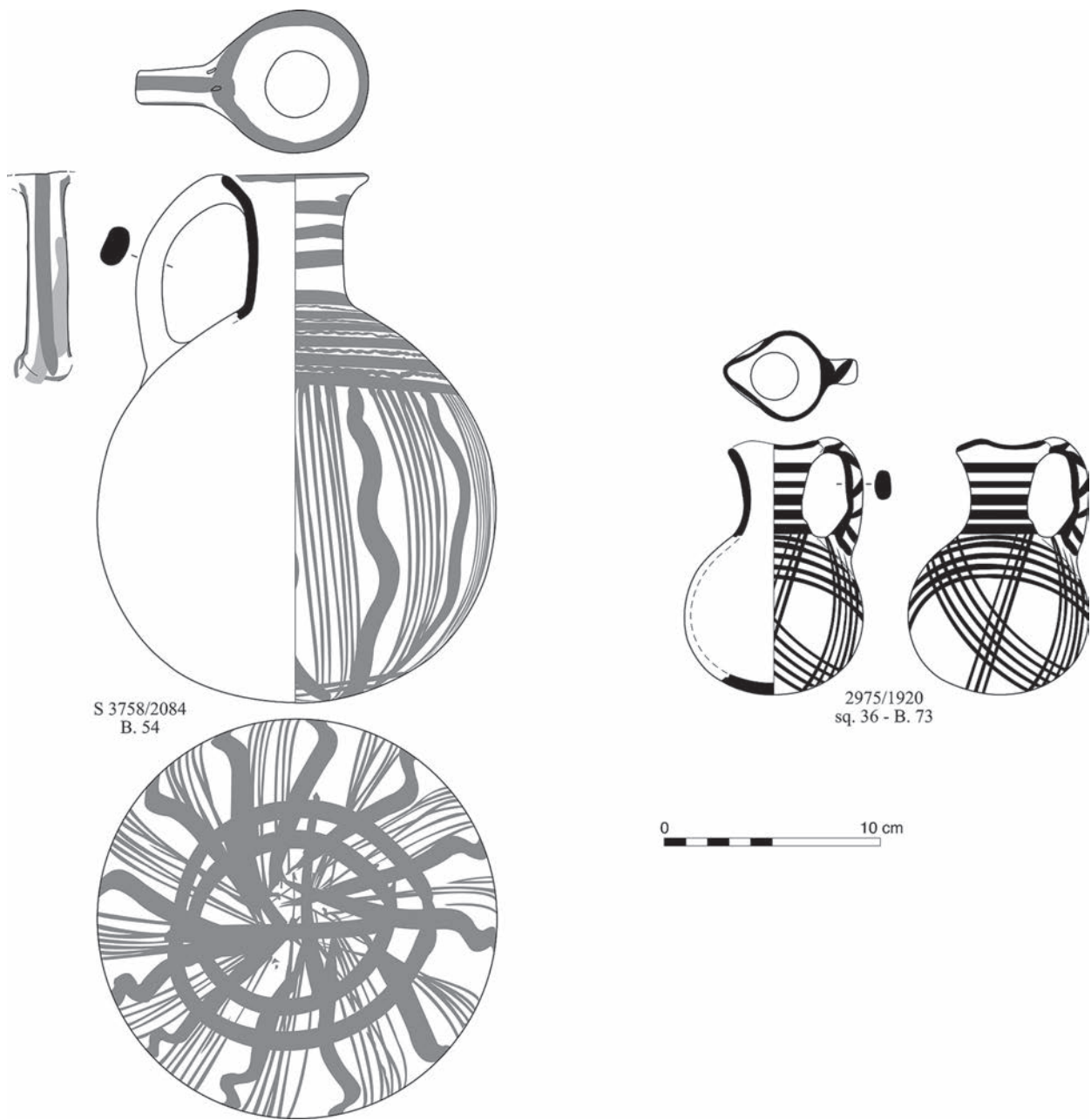


Fig. 6. Drawing of White-Painted ceramic jugs: (left) White-Painted III–IV Pendent Line style ovoid jug; (right) Cross Line style juglet. Sidon. Middle Bronze Age. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon

vertical lines and a juglet from a burial in Level 6 in the Cross Line style, with groups of intersecting lines (fig. 6). The White-Painted III–IV style appears in Sidon for the first time in Level 5 (MB II/IIB), later than Egyptian and Cretan imports. The White-Painted Broad and Wavy style and the White-Painted V Framed Broad Band style are both present at Sidon. Bichrome wheel-made ware, some of it figural, and monochrome ware also appear in Sidon, at the end of the Middle and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (MB IIB/C–LB I).

#### MYCENAEAN WARE

The current excavations at College Site have uncovered large amounts of Mycenaean pottery. The Aegean Late Bronze Age pottery from Sidon, which is to be published by Vassos Karageorghis, will undoubtedly change current perceptions of the ware and will prove at least as important as that of Ras Shamra. The large amount of pictorial-style ware found at Sidon demonstrates that the local elite had a pronounced taste for luxury pottery.

Mycenaean conical rhyta of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. were very common in the Levant. They were used for the preparation of drink for ritual feasts, and their frequency in the Levant suggests that by the fourteenth–thirteenth century B.C., such customs had been introduced from the Aegean to the main centers of the Syro-Palestinian littoral and Cyprus and were practiced by the local elite. In his essay on the subject in this volume (pp. 238–47), Robert Koehl provides an up-to-date account of the occurrence and use of conical rhyta in western Asia.<sup>28</sup> Recent excavations at Sidon have yielded by far the largest number of these vessels ever found at one single site, many of them decorated in the pictorial style with human figures, fish, and other motifs.

The 2010 excavation season yielded a fragment from the upper part of a conical Mycenaean IIB rhyton. Its painted decoration represents a standing human figure facing



Fig. 7. Sherd of ceramic rhyton with standing human figure. Sidon. Mycenaean IIB. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon 6097/7119

to his left (fig. 7), in silhouette except for the head, which is drawn in outline with an eye in the center; the eye is rendered with a small circle in white paint, with a dot of red paint in the middle. The use of white paint for the eye is a rare novelty in the technique of Mycenaean IIB pictorial vase painting. Behind the human figure is a group of bivalve-shell motifs, which are quite common as filling ornaments in the Mycenaean pictorial style. The drawing of the figure follows the fashion of Mycenaean vase painters, who represented the human figure in a very stylized manner, with very thick, long legs; a short torso; and a long neck. No attempt is made to depict the facial characteristics in a naturalistic manner. The hair is shown by just a lock at the back of the head. The standing male figures painted on vases appear to be nude, but in fact may not have been intended to be so. They were probably meant to wear the Aegean short kilt, which the vase painter was unable to render; nudity, however, appears in other major arts, such as sculpture. Standing human figures, not uncommon in the Mycenaean IIB pictorial style for the decoration of large



amphoroid kraters, are also seen on conical rhyta. In fact, they were very suitable motifs to fill the main decorated zone of these rhyta. The figures appear either in a procession, often brandishing spears, or in pairs, as boxers. The figure in our fragment has both arms bent upward in a gesture that may indicate dancing. Two other rhyta from Sidon feature the thin legs of a nude human figure rendered in silhouette (fig. 8), as well as the upper half of a human figure turned to his left, with a long arm bent upward, which may identify him as a boxer (fig. 9).

#### SYRIAN IMPORTS

Other finds showing Syrian influence were also found deposited in graves. A necked bowl (fig. 10) was found in a warrior burial. With its rounded body and medium-size neck, the bowl is of a type not usually found on coastal sites in Lebanon.<sup>29</sup> Three trefoil-mouth jugs of so-called metallic ware<sup>30</sup> are distinguished by their highly polished red surface as well as by their shapes, with a high ring foot and moulding in one case at the intersection of the necks and shoulders imitating metal prototypes (fig. 11). These jugs, found in Sidon in MB I/IIA, are barely attested in this early stage of the Middle Bronze Age in Palestine but are found at Ebla, where they are clearly imitations of bronze and silver jugs. The long-necked jug from Sidon's warrior burial 27 (fig. 12) has affinities to Levantine Painted Ware as well as to North Syrian/

Fig. 8. Drawing of ceramic rhyton fragment with legs of nude human figure. Sidon. Mycenaean IIIB. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon

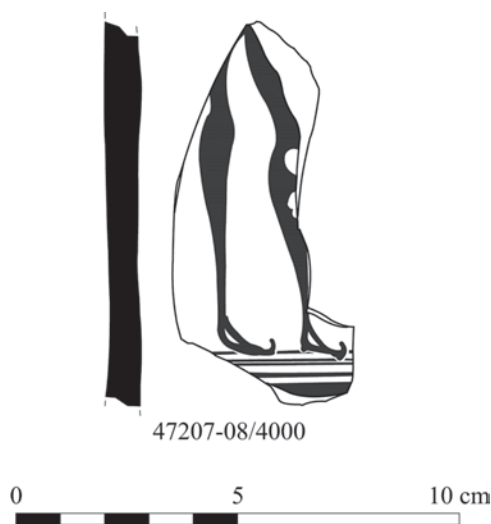


Fig. 9. Drawing of ceramic rhyton fragment with upper half of human figure. Sidon. Mycenaean IIIB. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon

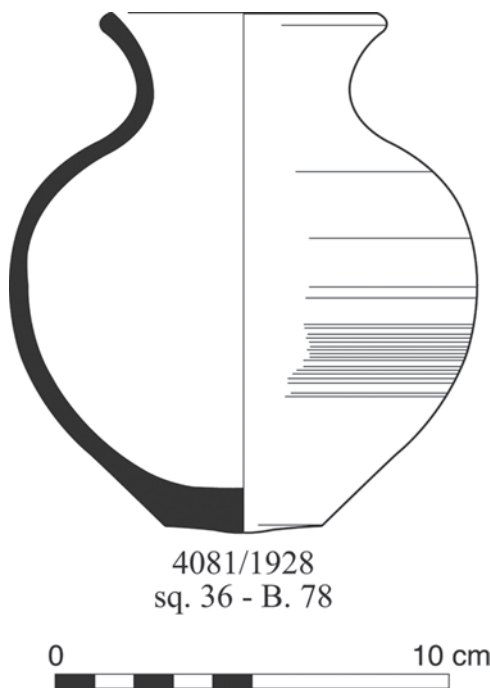
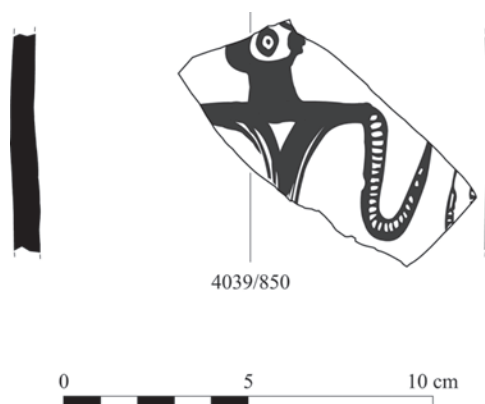


Fig. 10. Drawing of necked ceramic bowl. MB IIA, phase 1 in the sand. Sidon. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon

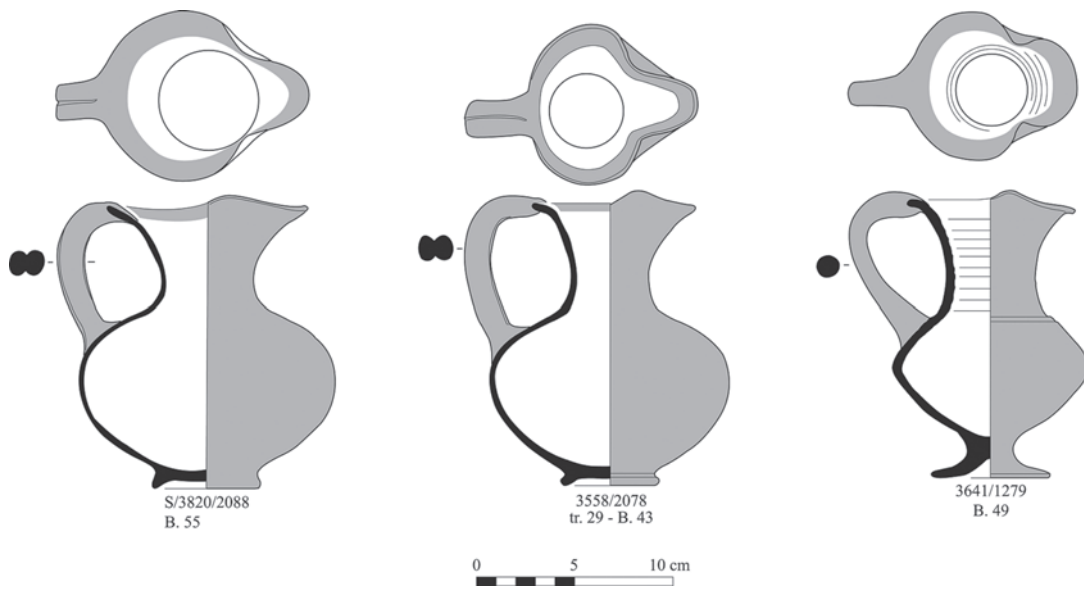


Fig. 11. Drawing of three “metallic ware” red-slip trefoil-mouth ceramic jugs. Sidon. Middle Bronze Age I/IIA. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon

Syro-Cilician pottery originating in the Ebla-Aleppo region.<sup>31</sup> Its bichrome decoration is similar to that on a jug from Tell Tweini (Gibala), which shows a stylized quadruped. The particular bichrome “butterfly” decoration on the body is found on jugs of the Syro-Cilician family.<sup>32</sup> This “butterfly” motif was also found recently on another jug in Sidon (fig. 12b). The discovery of Syro-Cilician ware in a warrior burial in Sidon’s phase I means that Levantine Painted Ware and Syro-Cilician ware are in fact contemporary,<sup>33</sup> as they were found in different burials from this same period. Some of these warrior burials demonstrate Syrian influence, while others show closer affinities to Palestine. Another recently discovered jug is distinguished by its greenish cream fabric and its decoration of groups of vertical lines on the shoulder, bordered by horizontal lines above and below. This type of decoration, which is also characteristic of Syro-Cilician ware, is comparable to an example from Hama (fig. 13).<sup>34</sup>

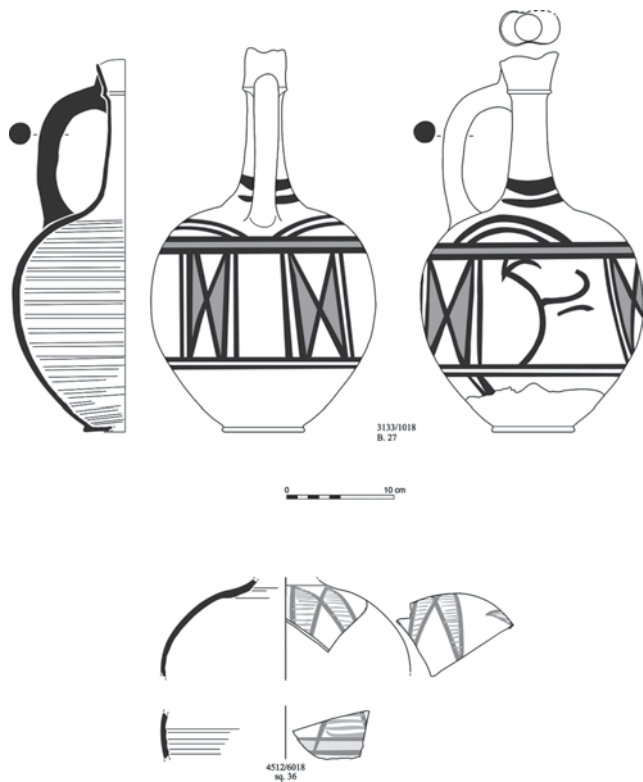


Fig. 12a, b. Drawing of two Syro-Cilician ware long-necked ceramic jugs. Sidon. Middle Bronze Age. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon

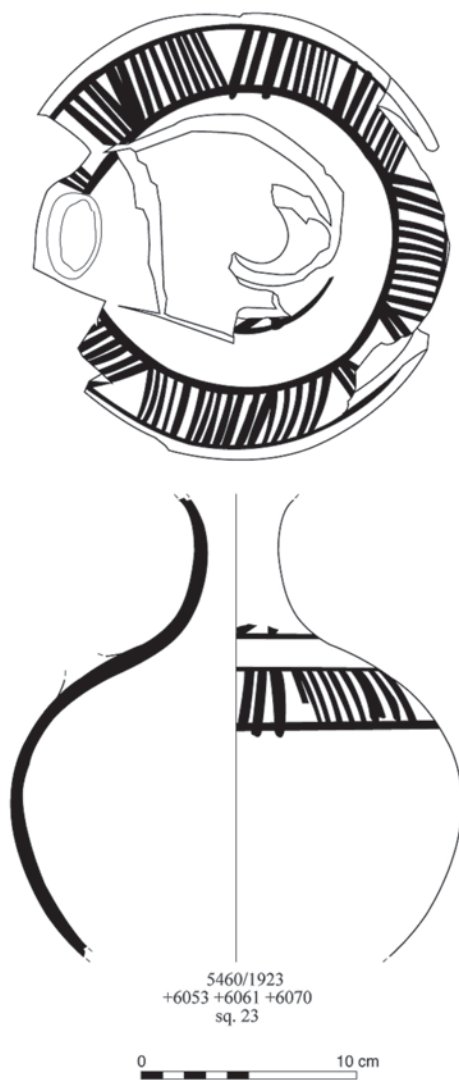


Fig. 13. (Left and below left) Drawing of Syro-Cilician ware ceramic jug. Sidon. MB IIIB. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon

Fig. 14. (Below) Drawing of metal torque. Sidon. MB IIA, phase 3 in the sand. Directorate General of Antiquities, Sidon



Syrian influence was not found only on pottery. A torque from burial 42 (fig. 14), made from a piece of bent metal with flattened, curled ends, resembles those found at Byblos and Ugarit. More than forty torques were found in the Montet Jar,<sup>35</sup> and others come from the warrior graves at Ugarit that Claude Schaeffer described as the burials of “the torque wearers.”<sup>36</sup> While many examples of figurines wearing torques were discovered in Palestine,<sup>37</sup> it would be more accurate to assign this type of ornament to the Syrian, rather than the Palestinian, sphere.

#### PALESTINE

Two sherds painted in the so-called Red, White, and Blue (RWB) polychrome decoration, known mainly from Ashkelon, have been found in Sidon to date.<sup>38</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

From the amount of imported material emerging from ongoing excavations at Sidon, it is clear that the city was a prominent maritime center throughout its history. Exotic and utilitarian goods were traded alongside raw materials. Most of the corpus



of Egyptian ceramics from early Dynasty 12 onward relates mainly to vessels that were highly suitable for the transport of commodities. This means that trade with Egypt was necessary to supply a demand for comestible goods on the part of the local population. The shortage of basic agricultural products was a recurrent factor in the Levant. It existed in the second millennium B.C. and continued in the first, according to the biblical account of Hiram of Tyre, who, in return for his services to Solomon, received annually “twenty thousand measures of wheat and twenty measures of pure oil.”<sup>39</sup> Public trade and private initiative were complementary: a seal engraved with hieroglyphs was used by a powerful, high-ranking Canaanite, Sid-Kâr. This confirms the existence in the Levant outside Byblos of a scribal tradition using Egyptian hieroglyphs. Sid-Kâr, similarly to the prince of Qedem, who “was familiar with the Egyptian language,”<sup>40</sup> may well have had a seal engraved with hieroglyphs in order to facilitate business and to simplify his dealings with the Egyptians.

As well as trade with clear economic significance, the rare and selective exchange of imported gifts was also an important factor in reinforcing the high status of the local elite. Images found mainly on seals and scarabs, but also on pottery, show the degree of their transmission and assimilation. In the case of the Sidon dolphin jar, we have the adoption of a Cretan motif on a vessel faithfully copied from the Pachyammos model. It is, however, from seals and scarabs carved in Sidon’s workshops that the scale of the circulation of images within the Levantine melting pot is truly revealed. It is there that local artists integrated Cretan, Egyptian, Syrian, and Syro-Anatolian iconographic elements and reinterpreted them, creating their uniquely distinctive style.

1. Frost 1973, pp. 78–86.
2. Pritchard 1955, pp. 290–91.
3. Marriner, Morhange, and Doumet-Serhal 2006, pp. 1514–15.
4. Marcus 2007, pp. 145–46.
5. For the trade in bronze, see Leroux et al. 2003. For silver, see Doumet-Serhal 2004, p. 28; Véron and Leroux 2004.
6. “Sidon’s Minoan Cup” 2004.
7. MacGillivray 2009, pp. 188–90, suggests 1860 B.C.
8. MacGillivray 2011–12.
9. A. G. Sherratt and S. Sherratt 1991, p. 363.
10. Karageorghis 2008.
11. Mommsen 2006; Doumet-Serhal 2008, pp. 14–15.
12. Bietak and Kopetzky 2009, p. 24.
13. Bietak 1996, p. 20.
14. Bader 2003, p. 32.
15. Bader et al. 2009.
16. Forstner-Müller and Kopetzky 2006, pp. 60–61.
17. Forstner-Müller and Kopetzky 2009, pp. 151, 153.
18. These vessels find close parallels in Tell el-Dab’a Stratum F (1710–1680 B.C.; Forstner-Müller 2008, p. 144, fig. 84a, 9 [5426]) and Stratum E/1 or D/3 (1620–1590 B.C.; Forstner-Müller 2008, p. 295, fig. 216a, 5 [2273]).
19. Many parallels in stone to the faience container are found at Tell el-Dab’a as early as Dynasty 12: Stratum G (Bietak 1991, pp. 34–38, fig. 9 [MB I]; Forstner-Müller 2008, p. 140, fig. 78), Stratum F (Forstner-Müller 2008, p. 154, fig. 91, 3 [2511], p. 167, fig. 96a, 2 [2589] [MB I/II]), Stratum E/1 or D/3 (Forstner-Müller 2008, p. 295, fig. 216a, 6 [2272] [MB II]), and Typ 1 Stratum D/1 (Schiestl 2009, pp. 121–23, and p. 380, fig. 336, 6 [7176]).
20. Marée 2006; Doumet-Serhal 2008, pp. 39, 57.
21. S/3487 (Directorate-General of Antiquities, Sidon); Loffet 2006; most recently, Gubel and Loffet 2011–12, pp. 79, 84.
22. Goldwasser 2006, pp. 122–23.
23. Doumet-Serhal 2009, pp. 239–42.
24. Goldwasser 2006, pp. 122–23.
25. Loffet 2009.
26. Doumet-Serhal 2011–12, pp. 95–99.
27. A. Ben-Tor 2009, pp. 23, 29.
28. See also Koehl 2006, pp. 345–48 and tables 23, 24.
29. Charaf 2004, p. 239.
30. Nigro 2003, pp. 345–49.
31. Nigro 2002, p. 312.
32. Bagh 2004, pp. 46, 48.
33. Bagh 2003, p. 225.
34. Fugmann 1958, pl. X, 5B 901; see also Bagh 2003, pp. 222–26, on this style belonging to a simpler version of Syro-Cilician ware.
35. Tufnell and W. A. Ward 1966, p. 208.
36. Schaeffer 1949, p. 88, fig. 22, p. 110, fig. 47.
37. Ziffer 1990, p. 107, for an example from Gezer.
38. Doumet-Serhal 2006, p. 43.
39. 1 Kings 5:11.
40. Gubel and Loffet 2011–12, p. 84.

# Recent Excavations at Alalakh: Throne Embellishments in Middle Bronze Age Level VII

## INTRODUCTION

This essay centers on select finds from the renewed series of field research at Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh), especially on the sculptural embellishments and artifacts found in Square 33.32, Courtyard 9, Level VII Palace (fig. 1). The recent excavations of Alalakh represent the first phase of long-range, broadly based archaeological investigations in the Turkish state of Hatay, Plain of Antioch, today called the Amuq Valley. Tell Atchana is located at the south center of the valley, close to the bend of the Orontes River, and represents the capital of the small regional state called Mukish. The cultural dynamics of the second millennium B.C. are encapsulated in the sequences for the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, dating from about 2200 to 1300 B.C. Finds such as the multilingual tablet archives in Hurrian, Akkadian, Hittite, and now Sumerian, as well as a sequence of palaces and the sixteen temples excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley, elevated Alalakh to a very special place.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the excavation of exotic materials at the site testifies to the capital city's lively international discourse, if not shared artistic styles, with far-flung areas, many represented in the "Beyond Babylon"

exhibition—the Mediterranean, the Aegean, Syro-Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt.<sup>2</sup> The field projects at Alalakh now present an opportunity to examine various dimensions of these traditions in this culturally rich and historically significant region of the north-eastern Mediterranean.

The research at Alalakh was designed as three tiers of investigation. The first tier is the ongoing exploration of regional and inter-regional transformations. To that end, in 1995 we returned to the Amuq Valley sites originally surveyed by Robert Braidwood in the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Our aim has been to illuminate the organization of the Mukish kingdom in the Amuq Valley by focusing on the relationships between second millennium B.C. sites and the capital, Alalakh. Alalakh was originally excavated by Woolley from 1936 to 1939 and again after World War II, from 1946 to 1949, for the British Museum and Oxford University. The new round of exploration at Alalakh began in 2000, and seven seasons of excavations were completed between 2003 and 2010.<sup>4</sup> The last five seasons were conducted under the auspices of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Mustafa Kemal University in Antakya, and Koç University in Istanbul.<sup>5</sup>

The second aspect of the new plan of research is to continue refining the chronologies of early second millennium B.C. levels represented at Alalakh.<sup>6</sup> By so doing, we hope a more nuanced understanding of the site will emerge with the defining of household economies and the management practices of the palace as a complement to textual information.

The third aim of our research is to spark dialogue about the nature of evidence, interpretive modes, and practices within disciplines such as archaeology, art history, instrumental analysis, and history. The comparisons at the heart of this conversation concern the varying roles of artifacts and cuneiform texts at Alalakh. The notion emphasized here is that the study of objects and of their methods of manufacture magnifies relationships deeply embedded in the

social order. More specifically, I argue that the diversity of artistic traditions seen in the luxury goods from Alalakh played a prominent role in the establishment of status and identity at a variety of levels. Fine artifacts such as sculpture, metallurgy, glass, faience, and ivory carving were produced under palace patronage. Trade, diplomacy, warfare, and interregional networks facilitated their transport, along with raw materials, across great distances in the ancient Near East. Several analytical techniques have aided in the reconstruction of these trans-regional activities. In particular, the use of lead isotope ratios, scanning electron microscopy, and polarizing light microscopy has elucidated the artistic expression of Alalakh and the production of sophisticated objects of power and prestige.<sup>7</sup>

In the early second millennium B.C., the Near East was the locus of a remarkable economic and political tableau.<sup>8</sup> Alalakh was a prosperous city straddling the trade route between Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean Sea. During these centuries of emerging expansionist states in this region, Alalakh was vassal to the Amorite kingdom of Yamhad (Aleppo, in modern Syria). This period in Alalakh's history was marked by the construction of a new temple, palace, and city gate.<sup>9</sup> These structures, appearing in Level VII, were monumental in scale and contained a host of rich, exotic artifacts and archives that yielded 175 tablets. Regionally, there was an ongoing pattern of cultural and ethnic diversity in antiquity, and Alalakh's desirable location became the backdrop for a kaleidoscope of changing political affiliations—local, Aegean, Egyptian, Hittite, and Hurro-Mitannian. The fluid, permeable borders of these ancient regions and the quixotic interregional relationships between them nurtured a fusion of influences on Alalakh's indigenous traditions of architecture and material culture.

At Alalakh, major building activity in the Late Bronze Age Level IV Palace was carried out by the short-lived dynasty of Idrimi, his son Niqmepa, and grandson Ilim-Ilimma.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 1. Plan of Level VII Palace at Alalakh. Courtyard 9, Square 33.32 indicated in red



Fig. 2. Partially melted basalt basin in situ at the center of Courtyard 9, Alalakh, Level VII Palace. Middle Bronze Age



The Level IV Palace and its archives date to the time when Alalakh became vassal to the Hurro-Mitannians, a relationship outlined under the terms of a treaty between Amenhotep II of Egypt—the other superpower—and Saushtatar of Mitanni. With the ascendancy of the Hittite Empire, Alalakh came under the dominion of the Hittite great king Suppiluliuma I and his successor, Mursili II, in their campaigns in north Syria. This period of Hittite overlordship is less well known, however; at Alalakh it is represented by the construction of massive fortified mudbrick fortresses that transformed the political landscape. Woolley maintained that the final period of habitation at Alalakh was curtailed by the incursions of the mythical Sea Peoples, but this is now known to be incorrect. Recent reassessments of Alalakh's chronology place its destruction at roughly 1300 B.C. or shortly thereafter.<sup>11</sup>

#### SCULPTURAL EMBELLISHMENTS

According to Hittite texts, the Middle Bronze Age Level VII Palace was destroyed by the Hittite king Hattusili I. The decorative

molded fragments of a possible stone throne come from Square 33.32, a sounding that was placed in the courtyard (Room 9) of the previously excavated Level VII Palace. After clearing the vegetation and erosion accumulated over the course of sixty years, Phase 1 consisted of a badly burned floor full of ash and charcoal, the last phase excavated by Woolley in the palace. The intense heat of a massive fire, possibly generated by the extensive use of wood, melted the surface of some basalt wall orthostats, as well as a basalt basin situated in the center of the courtyard (fig. 2).<sup>12</sup> The palace architecture revealed horizontal and vertical wooden beams. In addition, the earlier excavations had uncovered wooden planking on floors and thresholds, which would have augmented the fuel during the catastrophic burning.

Vitrified materials resembling the rounded contours of turtle backs were documented throughout the square and may be resolidified bubbling floor material. This mass of clay bubbles indicates a very high burning temperature, which also vitrified the mudbrick walls, leaving a variegated green-yellow



Fig. 3. (Far left) Obverse and (left) reverse of cuneiform tablet AT. Alalakh, Level VII Palace, Courtyard 9. Middle Bronze Age

glassy coating. The extreme heat of the fire rendered the Phase I pottery warped and unrecognizable. One tablet was found in situ on the surface of the courtyard with its burnt clay envelope facing up (fig. 3). According to the Alalakh philologist Jacob Lauinger, the legal tablet contains the names of seventeen witnesses, some of whom were recognized from previously excavated documents.<sup>13</sup> Given the unusually high number of witnesses, he notes that this tablet must have recorded an important judicial event, but unfortunately the reverse, which described the legal dispute, was fused to its envelope and vitrified beyond recognition. Other tablet-like fragments (or tablet blanks) set within a vitrified clay mass were found, but none with legible inscriptions (fig. 4).

The architectural features of this Level VII phase consisted of a fragmented rectangular basalt basin at the east end of the courtyard and a square mudbrick platform measuring  $1.75 \times 1.83$  meters in situ in the center of the courtyard (figs. 5, 6), both previously excavated by Woolley.<sup>14</sup> North of the platform, a posthole, also noted by Woolley, was found



Fig. 4. Tablet blank. Alalakh, Level VII Palace, Courtyard 9. Middle Bronze Age



Fig. 5. Square mudbrick platform at the center of Courtyard 9. Alalakh, Level VII Palace. Middle Bronze Age



measuring 45–50 centimeters in diameter, which may have served for a canopy over the platform. Fragments of the well-polished, prepared “cement” floor could be observed throughout the square, overlaying a stratum of small pebbles mixed with mortar above a concrete subfloor made of larger cobblestones set in lime. After clearing away the ashy top layer, several large fragments of the floor, most notably from the area below the mudbrick platform, were salvaged and collected for analysis by conservator Polly Westlake.<sup>15</sup>

Chalky white tuff or limestone and alabaster fragments with fluted decorations were discovered in the immediate vicinity of the mudbrick platform (fig. 7). Woolley mentions finding fragments of a large alabaster “basin” with shell-like scalloping near the platform as well, although no illustrations of this were published.<sup>16</sup> This interpretation of the alabaster fragments as part of a basin may be discarded for several reasons. Firstly, the fragments found in 2006 have a definitely curved surface and taper slightly at one end, which would not be an appropriate shape for a basin. Secondly, some of the recently found fluted limestone fragments

contained peg holes and dowel marks on the reverse, which suggests that they may have originally been attached to or embellished a sculpture. A third argument against Woolley’s basin interpretation is the three-dimensionality of the fragments. The perforations would have facilitated the attachment of composite parts by reinforcement with ties on pegs, as indicated by smaller pairs of joining holes visible on some of the fragments.

While most of the fragments are white or sandy yellow, the fluted pieces have a different appearance. Traces of a thick, black material on the surface may be deposits from the burning of Level VII. Alternatively, the black may be a coating, pigment binder, mordant, or inorganic pigment that has altered due to heat and/or fire damage. As Westlake put it, “The idea of a mordant is intriguing, since the possibility of a highly worked, high quality sculpture having once been gilded is not implausible.”<sup>17</sup> In some places, the black layer underlies what appears to be a layer of yellow pigment, possibly yellow ocher (fig. 8). The survival of this layer is unexpected, given the fire, but it is possible that these areas were protected by an additional coating or layer,





Fig. 6. Rectangular basalt basin and square mudbrick platform. Alalakh, Level VII Palace, Courtyard 9. Middle Bronze Age



Fig. 7. Limestone or alabaster fluted wing-like fragment. Alalakh, Level VII Palace, Courtyard 9. Middle Bronze Age



Fig. 8. Detail of fig. 7. Note distinct black layer, in some places underlying yellow, granular material (possibly pigment).

since destroyed. In addition to the yellow layer, traces of a thick, light blue material are also visible on several of the fragments (fig. 9). As with the black and yellow layers, the blue layer is distinct from the underlying stone and appears to have been intentionally applied.

Upon microscopic examination, another fluted alabaster fragment exhibited a mottled, light-and-dark, feather-like appearance (fig. 10). It may have represented the wings of a sphinx or another of the winged creatures (*Mischwesen*) abundantly depicted on Alalakh seals and sealings dating from Level VII and continuing through the extent of Alalakh's lifespan.<sup>18</sup> Without a definitive technical analysis, it is not possible to say whether this feathering was painted or the product of a particular polishing technique. However, it may be that the artisan exploited the feathered effect of the worked stone to enhance the impression of wings. Tool marks are visible running along the grooves between several of the flutes. The surface was smoothed in long strokes, which interrupted the natural pattern of the stone and produced small ridges. According to the conservator, this effect could have been achieved with a smooth stone or metal tool.<sup>19</sup>

Based on the proximity of these wing-like sculptural fragments, I would argue that they were part of a composite sphinx throne or sculpture that incorporated a winged representation. It is well known that sculptures and figurines of this period were composite constructions: inlaid ostrich-shell eyes, bitumen inlaid eyebrows, magnetite iron eyeballs, and steatite wigs and beards have been found both as appendages on sculptures and separately, at Alalakh and at other sites.<sup>20</sup> This interpretation of the alabaster fragments accords well with a suggestion made earlier by Dominique Collon that a winged sphinx may have decorated the limestone throne of the statue of the Late Bronze Age king Idrimi (fig. 11), now in the British Museum, which dates to the subsequent period of Mitannian overlordship (fifteenth–fourteenth century B.C.).<sup>21</sup> The seated sculpture of Idrimi was found

discarded in a pit in the eastern courtyard of the Level IB Temple annex: Idrimi sits on a throne with his long autobiography written in cuneiform on his body.<sup>22</sup> The use of dowels and drills evident on the lower side of the sculpture suggests an attachment to the throne.<sup>23</sup> According to Woolley a limestone base was also found, decorated with the claws of a lion (or a composite creature) in relief on the side panel.<sup>24</sup> This base was excavated in the courtyard of Temple Level IB and is thought to have been part of Idrimi's throne.

Elaborate thrones depicting the animal attributes of seated deities have a very long history in ancient Near Eastern art. In Anatolia, the association of an anthropomorphized throne in the shape of felines and a seated female figure dates back to Neolithic Çatalhöyük, while thrones decorated with lions' claws and winged dragons appear throughout the glyptic of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Syria in the second millennium B.C.<sup>25</sup> Middle Bronze Age sealings from Level II of the central Anatolian capital city, Kanesh, yield highly complex scenes illustrating a female deity seated on thrones in the shape of lions, bull-men, and horned animals and often surrounded by a plethora of winged creatures—birds and both male and female sphinxes.<sup>26</sup> Compelling three-dimensional examples of sphinxes and lion's legs as furniture decorations are attributed to the Middle Bronze Age central Anatolian site of Acemhöyük.<sup>27</sup> Plated with polychrome silver and copper and colored with pigments, these hippopotamus-ivory fragments support the notion that elite furniture fixtures in the shape of supernatural creatures were in high demand during this period. Following this tradition of thrones embellished with supernatural animals is a sealing depicting a figure seated on a wingless sphinx, found in Level IV at Alalakh.<sup>28</sup>

The attribution of elaborate royal thrones decorated with winged sphinxes rests on two important examples. The first documented sphinx throne appears on a Megiddo ivory fragment dated to the thirteenth or

Fig. 9. Limestone or alabaster fragment and detail, showing blue layer (possibly pigment). Alalakh, Level VII Palace, Courtyard 9. Middle Bronze Age

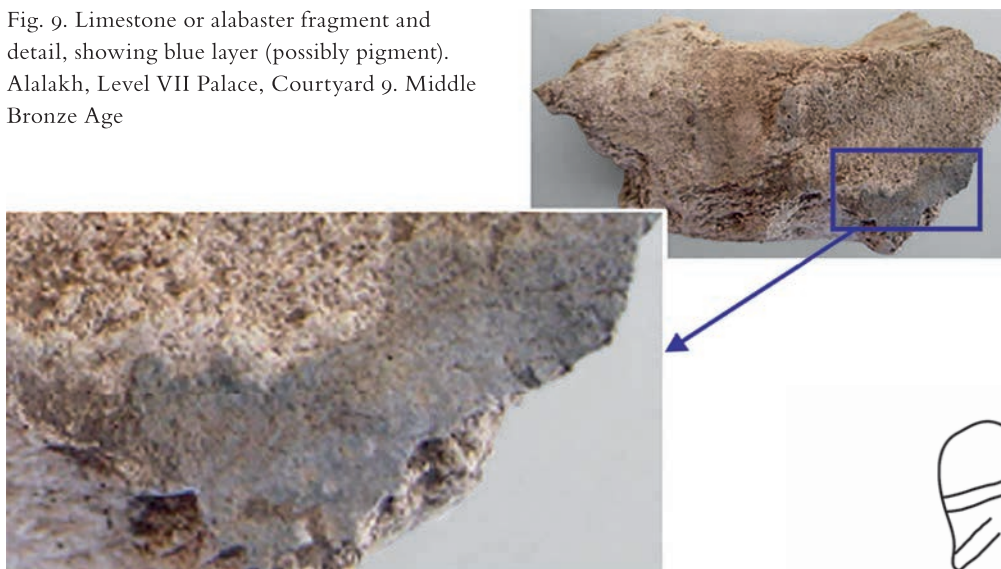


Fig. 10. Limestone or alabaster fluted fragment showing mottled, feather-like effect and tool marks. Alalakh, Level VII Palace, Courtyard 9. Middle Bronze Age



Fig. 11. Reconstruction of the stone statue of Idrimi on a winged throne. Alalakh, Level IB Temple annex. Late Bronze Age. The Trustees of the British Museum, London ME 130738A





Fig. 12. Drawing of modern impression of faience or glass cylinder seal. Alalakh, Northern Fortress. Late Bronze Age. Antakya Archaeological Museum A03-R1326

twelfth century B.C.<sup>29</sup> The second is on the sarcophagus inscribed with the name of king Ahiiram, found in Tomb V at Byblos and now in the Beirut National Museum. Reliefs on the sarcophagus are variously dated to the Late Bronze Age, or to the Iron Age, if contemporary with the Phoenician inscription giving the king's name.<sup>30</sup> Here, king Ahiiram is shown on a high-backed throne decorated with a standing sphinx whose vertical tail loops downward at its tip, echoing the downward loop of the seat back. The unfurled wing sweeps upward and the feathers are shown as two tiered layers. The hooked, erect tails and the stance of these two sphinxes accord well with details of Hittite sculptural styles, as exemplified by sphinx sculptures from the inner doorway of the Sphinx Gate above Yerkapı, at Hattusa (Boğazköy).<sup>31</sup> Tall, unfurled wings depicted in two tiers are especially notable in the sphinx now in the Boğazköy Museum, while the sphinx in the collection of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums displays the vertical tail. The molded fragments from the 2006 excavation and the ones collected by Woolley are broken and thus do not reveal the edge of the wings, nor is it possible to

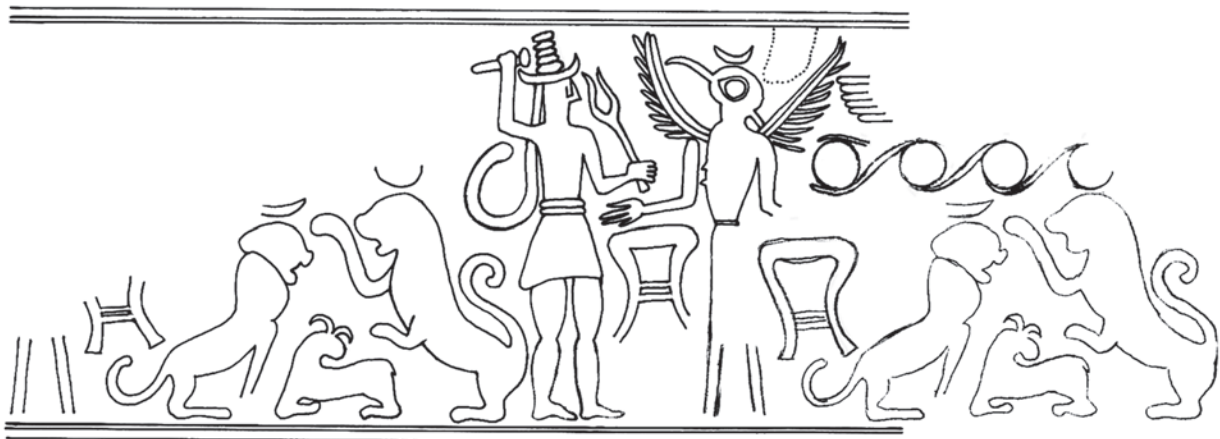


Fig. 13. Drawing of seal impression reconstructed from multiple ancient impressions. Alalakh, Level V, Square 32.57. Late Bronze Age

determine their stance; nevertheless, the artisan's attention to the feathering hints at the possibility of painted sculptural embellishment.

Images of winged creatures abound in the Level VII Palace in other media as well, most notably in the Aegean-related painted frescoes. Adjacent to Courtyard 9, Woolley's excavations unearthed fresco fragments in the rubble of Rooms 11–13, which had collapsed from the second story. According to Barbara Niemeier and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, these fragments depicted a recumbent griffin with raised, unfurled polychrome wings.<sup>32</sup> They reconstructed the griffin in an Aegean style based on the similarities of the background landscape to examples at Thera and Knossos.<sup>33</sup> If their hypothesis is correct, the wings depart from the usual North Syrian–Anatolian type in their single-tier, horizontal stylization.<sup>34</sup> A more local depiction of a winged sphinx and winged griffin appears on an ivory or bone panel found in the soil at Alalakh and dated to Level I or II of the Northern Fortress.<sup>35</sup> The panel is divided into four triangular sections by a groove, and a faience-like material (now lost) was inlaid into this separator space. In the middle triangle, a griffin with a second head protruding from its chest devours a horned animal. The griffin's wings, held high but bent forward at the tip, are partitioned into three segments. Each tier of feathers is represented by parallel striations. If this interpretation of a second head on the deteriorated plaque is correct, it would echo the multiple-headed sphinxes so prevalent in Neo-Hittite reliefs from Carchemish and Tell Halaf and also represented on a Late Bronze Age ivory from Megiddo with very strong Hittite iconographic features (see Feldman essay, pp. 248–57, and p. 303, fig. 5).<sup>36</sup> The sphinx appears in the top triangular panel, bearing conical horned headgear akin to that on the newly discovered sphinx sculptures from Hattusa<sup>37</sup> and also paralleled on the Megiddo ivory. As in the case of the griffin, the wings of the sphinx

are partitioned into three and its feathers delineated as parallel lines.

There is substantial evidence for images of winged supernatural creatures at Alalakh; a recent find dating to the Late Bronze Age is a faience or glass cylinder seal possibly belonging to the ruling dynasty (fig. 12). The seal, found in the debris of the Northern Fortress in 2003, illustrates a winged and horned human-headed bull.<sup>38</sup> The supernatural creature in this instance resembles later human-headed bulls, or *lamassu*, in that it has the body of a bearded, winged bull and multiple-horned headgear.<sup>39</sup> Among the numerous depictions of winged demons at Alalakh is an example, found in Square 32.57 (fig. 13), postdating the Level VII Palace and dating to phases equivalent to Level V. According to Collon this is a “visiting card” fragment, which provides a first indication of individuals who lived before king Idrimi. Pieced together, it depicts an elaborate scene of a weather god in a smiting position confronting a bird-headed, winged demon. The use of the same seal on a much later, Level IV tablet suggests that this seal was inherited by at least three generations of the family of a man called Irihalpa—as named in the tablet.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion, the excavations at Alalakh provide a unique laboratory for the integration of three levels of research: region, site, and artifact. The iconography of winged supernatural creatures and animal thrones and their relationships to deities and rulers are both complex. The salient features of these palatial luxury items from Alalakh and their interpretation can be linked to iconography from all over the Near East, demonstrating the city's central location on far-reaching routes. Thus, the artifacts that have been presented here do not just reflect culture, they are embedded in culture and enact cultural transmission. In terms of relational associations, they are intriguing signs of a fluid but unspecified form of exchange—maybe of ideas, perhaps of religious practices—that existed between various regions and Alalakh. It is within

this context that the winged embellishments of thrones from this corner of the northeastern Mediterranean begin to make sense. Beginning in the early second millennium B.C., Alalakh appears to have been a regional kingdom that witnessed increasingly complex social relationships with the Aegean, Anatolia, and Syria while maintaining its impressive local idioms during the Late Bronze Age.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1. Woolley 1953; Woolley 1955.
2. *Beyond Babylon*.
3. R. J. Braidwood 1937.
4. Yener 2005; Yener 2010 (with bibliography). Yearly updates can be found at [www.alalakh.org](http://www.alalakh.org).
5. As of 2006, Murat Akar has been senior field supervisor. I would like to give heartfelt thanks to the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP) and to Anthony and Lawrie Dean of the Fund for Amuq Valley Archaeological Excavations (FAVAE) for their most generous support of this project. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, Koç University, and countless private donors.
6. Yener 2010.
7. Yener 2007a.
8. Klengel 1992; Bryce 1998.
9. D. L. Stein 1997.
10. Von Dassow 2008.
11. Yener 2012; Yener in preparation.
12. Basalt melts at between 984 and 1100 degrees Celsius depending on the composition.
13. Several attempts to read the reverse of the tablet by means of X-ray analysis and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) were unfortunately unsuccessful. The names legible on the Level VII witness list thus far are: Hali-kiba (l. 3), Atri-Addu (ll. 4 & 9), Bani-Addu (l. 5), Bendi-ili (l. 6), Abdi-Ishhara (l. 7), Lim-Addu (l. 8), Iri-Ammu (l. 13), and Shinu-rapi (l. 17). Jacob Lauinger, personal communication.
14. Woolley 1955, fig. 35.
15. Westlake 2007.
16. Woolley 1955, p. 101. It is possible that the alabaster “basin” fragments were part of the throne’s base.
17. Westlake (2007) notes that some of the areas of black appear to belong to a distinct layer, rather than surface staining. Future analysis of these fragments using X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) and gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC-MS) will determine the nature of the colorants.



18. Collon 1975, pls. 44, 45.
19. Westlake 2007.
20. See Woolley 1955, pl. XCIII, and Morandi Bonacossi in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 234, no. 144, for an ivory face plaque from Late Bronze Age Qatna.
21. British Museum, ME 130738A. Dominique Collon, personal communication.
22. Woolley 1955, pl. XLVI.
23. *Ibid.*, pl. XLVIIa.
24. S. Smith 1949; Woolley 1955, pl. XLVIIb.
25. For an Old Syrian style sealing from Kanesh Ib depicting the deity Ea seated on a lion-shaped throne, see N. Özgüç 1968, pl. 11:C. For an Old Babylonian seal depicting the weather god, Adad, seated on a winged dragon throne, see Frankfort 1939, pl. 27:i.
26. N. Özgüç 1965, pl. 24, nos. 71, 74.
27. Aruz and de Lapérouse in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 82–86.
28. Collon 1975, p. 111, no. 204.
29. Loud 1939, pl. 4:2b.
30. Porada 1973; Markoe 1990. See also Hakimian in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 49–50.
31. See Seeher 2002, figs. 62, 63.
32. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 801–2.
33. The Mari Investiture scene also depicts several winged sphinxes painted with polychrome feathers. See *Beyond Babylon*, p. 28, fig. 13.
34. For the diversity of Syrian, Levantine, and Anatolian wing styles on various supernatural creatures, see *Beyond Babylon*.
35. Woolley 1955, pl. LXXXVII (AT/8/204); Barnett 1982, pls. 27e, f.
36. For the Iron Age Carchemish Herald's Wall relief of a two-headed sphinx, see Bittel 1976b, fig. 284; for a Late Bronze Age Megiddo example, see Loud 1939, pls. 10, 11; Alexander 1991, p. 163, fig. 2, where a better interpretation of the two-headed sphinx is drawn.
37. Neve 1992, p. 45, figs. 118, 119.
38. Collon 2010, p. 97, figs. 5a–e.
39. Seal no. A03-R1326 (Antakya Archaeological Museum). Lauinger 2010, p. 87: “a-a-a[l-š]i-d[DN], *Ayalši*-[DN].”
40. AT.06.0876 (Collon 2006); sealing no. 216 on tablet AT419 (Collon 1975).
41. For the Mycenaean bull-leaping krater, see Yener 2009; the ivory inlays, Yener 2007a; the plastered tomb, Yener forthcoming; the spiked axe, Yener 2011.







# Art and Interaction: Wall Paintings



# The Procession of “Asiatics” at Beni Hasan

The Middle Kingdom (ca. 1880 B.C.) tomb chapel of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan is best known for the procession of foreigners in brightly patterned garments depicted on its north wall (fig. 1). This scene has appeared numerous times in both scholarly and popular contexts, and remains a topic of lively debate and discussion. This article explores the identity of this group of men, women, and children and discusses how they might have functioned in both the real world and the microcosm of the tomb chapel in which they were painted.

## THE FAMILY AND CAREER OF KHNUMHOTEP II

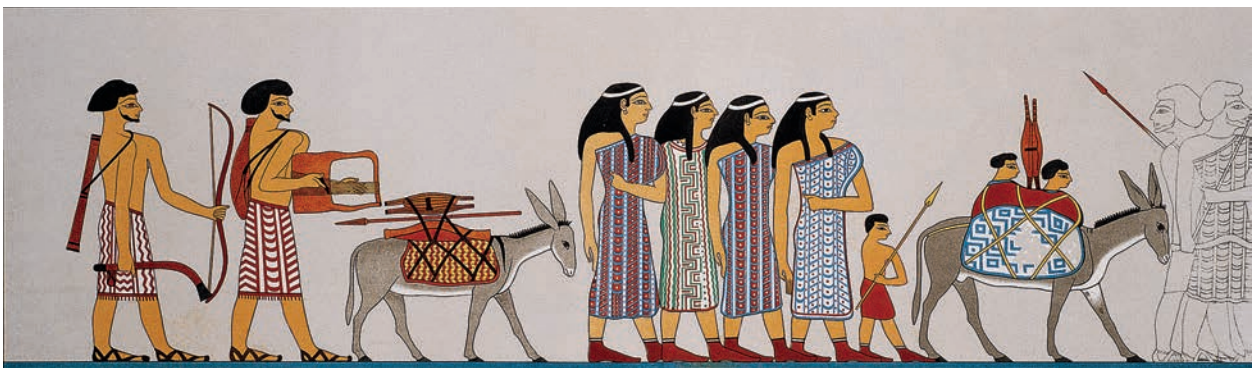
The rock-cut sepulcher of Khnumhotep II (Tomb 3; fig. 2) is one of thirty-nine Middle Kingdom tombs for the high officials of the Oryx (16th Upper Egyptian)

nome carved into the eastern cliffs at the Middle Egyptian site of Beni Hasan.<sup>1</sup> The earliest tombs most likely date to later Dynasty 11;<sup>2</sup> Khnumhotep II's monument, completed during the reign of the fourth king of Dynasty 12, Senwosret II (r. ca. 1887–1878 B.C.), is the last in the series.

In his tomb autobiography,<sup>3</sup> Khnumhotep II states that he inherited his principal titles, Administrator of the Eastern Desert (*jmj-rA HAswt iAbtt*) and Mayor (*HATy-a*) in the town of Menat Khufu,<sup>4</sup> from his maternal grandfather, Khnumhotep I (Tomb 14). Khnumhotep II's father, Nehri, was a Hereditary Prince (*jrj-pat*), Mayor, Ruler of the New Towns (*HqA njwwt mAt*), and Overseer of the City (*jmj-rA njwt*); his mother's name was Bakt. Khnumhotep II appears to have been raised at court, no doubt due to his family's status. His principal wife, Khety, was the daughter of a nomarch of the adjacent Jackal (17th Upper Egyptian) nome.<sup>5</sup>

The title of Administrator of the Eastern Desert<sup>6</sup>—a post that he was granted in Year 19 of Amenemhat II and held until at least Year 6 of Senwosret II—has been interpreted by some scholars to indicate that Khnumhotep II was in charge of the entire Eastern Desert (the area between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea), although others believe that his purview was more

Fig. 1. Reconstruction of wall painting of the procession of Aamu. Beni Hasan, Tomb of Khnumhotep II, north wall. Dynasty 12, reign of Senwosret II, ca. 1887–1878 B.C.



geographically limited.<sup>7</sup> Rock inscriptions and archaeological deposits show clearly that the Eastern Desert was crucial for hunting, mining, and trade; in addition, it was a key point of contact between Egypt and its neighbors to the northeast.<sup>8</sup> As Administrator of the Eastern Desert, therefore, Khnumhotep II was, at a minimum, directly responsible for prospecting and mining activities in the stretch of desert between the Oryx nome and the Red Sea, and may well have played a role in securing Egypt's northeastern border.

**THE FOREIGNERS IN TOMB 3:  
CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION**

The main chamber of Khnumhotep II's tomb chapel is square, with a triple-vaulted ceiling supported by four pillars of living rock. Due to its location on the east bank of the Nile, the entrance is to the west and the cult niche, which contained a rock-cut statue of the deceased,<sup>9</sup> is in the center of the east wall. The two burial shafts cut into the floor of the chamber were robbed in antiquity.<sup>10</sup>

The walls of the chapel are covered with brightly colored scenes and texts in paint on plaster. On the entrance wall are images of manufacture and food production, as well as of a pilgrimage to Abydos. Figures of the tomb owner and his wife Khetu seated at offering tables dominate the south



Fig. 2. Facade of the Tomb of Khnumhotep II

wall. On the east wall, Khnumhotep II is shown, on one side, fishing with a harpoon and, on the other, bringing down waterfowl with a throw stick. The north wall (figs. 7, 8) is dominated by two large-scale figures of the tomb owner: on the upper left, he hunts wild animals in the desert; on the lower right, he receives processions of officials, petitioners, and scribes. The foreigners (fig. 1), who are painted on the third register of this wall, are part of the scene on the lower right.<sup>11</sup>





The procession comprises eight men, four women, and three children; their clothing, sandals, and hairstyles, as well as the objects they carry with them, distinguish them clearly as non-Egyptians. The unusual nature of this scene, described below; the care taken in the rendering of its details; and the regnal date provided by an inscription within the scene suggest strongly that it represents, or at least alludes to, a real event.

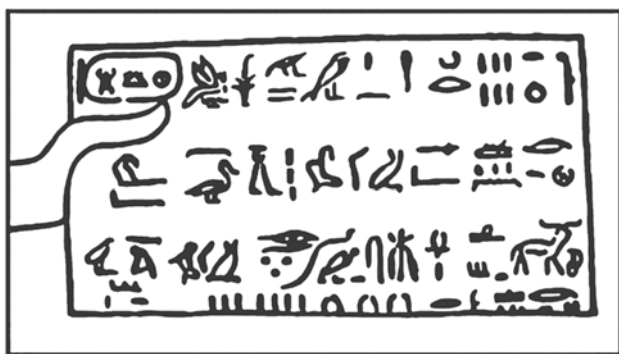


Fig. 3. Facsimile of the writing board or papyrus from the procession of Aamu



Fig. 4. Detail of the procession of Aamu

### The Caption

Above the scene is a horizontal line of hieroglyphs. Although there is disagreement about the exact transliteration and translation, this can perhaps best be rendered as *jtt Hr jnt msDm(w)t jn.n.f aAm(w) 37*; “Coming on account of bringing *mesdemet*; he brought 37 Aamu” or “Coming on account of bringing *mesdemet*, which 37 Aamu brought to him.”<sup>12</sup>

The fact that there are fifteen Aamu represented here,<sup>13</sup> rather than the thirty-seven mentioned in the caption, is most likely an example of the common practice in Egyptian art of depicting a smaller group as shorthand for a larger one. The number of people in the larger group, however, is still unclear. Were there thirty-seven people altogether, counting men, women, and children? Or were there thirty-seven men plus their families, so perhaps more than one hundred altogether?<sup>14</sup> At this point, we can draw no firm conclusion. The commodity mentioned in the inscription is *mesdemet*, which can mean either black or green eye paint, as well as galena, the dark gray lead ore that was the principal ingredient of most black eye paint, and malachite, the mineral used for green eye paint.<sup>15</sup>

### The Royal Document Scribe, Neferhotep

The procession is led by the Royal Document Scribe, Neferhotep (*sS an nswt nfr-Htp*), who has the dark reddish skin usual for an Egyptian male and wears the traditional official garb of a white kilt that comes to midcalf. The text on the writing board or papyrus that he offers to the large standing figure of Khnumhotep II (fig. 3) reads: *rnpt-sp 6 xr Hm n Hr sSm-tAwj nswt-bjtj xa-xpr-ra rxt n aAmw jn.n sA HAtj-a Xnm-Htp Hr msDm(w)t m aAm n Sw rxt-jr 37* (Year 6 under the Majesty of Horus, Uniter of the Two Lands, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Khakheperre [Senwosret II]: accounting of the Aamu that the son of the Mayor, Khnumhotep, brought because of *mesdemet*; being Aamu of Shu, number amounting to 37).<sup>16</sup>



### *The Overseer of the Hunters, Khety*

The second Egyptian official is named Khety. His title, *jmj-rA n nww*, is usually translated as Overseer of the Hunters. Sydney Aufrère offers as an alternative Superintendent of the Desert Policemen, and theorizes that these officials patrolled the deserts, using dogs to help them control the nomadic tribes who traveled along the fringes of the Nile Valley.<sup>17</sup>

### *Abisharie*

Behind Khety is the leader of the Aamu, *HqA-xAswt jb-SA*. The title *HqA xAswt* (ruler of the hill-lands) is familiar in its Hellenized form, Hyksos, most often associated with the Levantine princes who conquered Egypt at the end of the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1650 B.C.). However, this term appears at least as early as Dynasty 6, generally referring to foreign rulers.<sup>18</sup> *HqA*, written with a crook, is commonly translated as “ruler”; the hieroglyphic sign rendered as *xAswt* (or *smjt*) can mean foreign, desert, or hill-land, and is thought to symbolize the undulating pastureland of the Levant or the sandy hills of the desert, in contrast with the relatively flat, cultivated fields of the Nile Valley and Delta. Scholars agree that the name of the chieftain, *jb-SA* (Abisharie or Abishai) is of Semitic origin.<sup>19</sup>

Abisharie wears a brightly colored robe (fig. 4), fringed along the side, that leaves one shoulder bare; this is clearly a non-Egyptian garment, as the Egyptians did not use the tapestry technique until mid-Dynasty 18, while elaborately woven cloth, intricately patterned and colorful (most likely of wool), was a specialty of the cultures to the northeast, in particular the Levant and Mesopotamia.<sup>20</sup>

Abisharie extends his right hand with the palm flat and facing down, in a gesture of respect or submission,<sup>21</sup> toward a large standing figure of Khnumhotep II. With the other, he uses a short staff to restrain a Nubian ibex.<sup>22</sup> His staff might be simply a shepherd’s tool, but might also be a symbol reinforcing his princely status by reiterating

his title (although it is significantly less curved than the hieroglyph for *HqA*). His feet are bare. His skin has yellow rather than red overtones and is much lighter than that of the Egyptian officials who head the procession. Like all the Aamu men, he has a short, pointed beard and wavy hair cut to the back of the neck. This hairstyle has been compared to the “mushroom-head” style seen, for example, on the head of a large fragmentary statue of a late Middle Kingdom Asiatic dignitary found at Tell el-Dab’a; this figure’s garment was also painted in a colorful pattern.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Gazelle Tamer*

Behind Abisharie, a second barefoot man, in a colorful striped kilt, restrains a dorcas gazelle (fig. 4),<sup>24</sup> his right hand on its horns and his left grasping a rope that runs around the animal’s neck. In current photographs, the skin of this man is slightly darker and redder than that of his comrades; however, earlier facsimiles do not show this, and it is clear from the lighter color of the wall, which creates a halo effect, that the figure has undergone cleaning. This present skin color, then, may be the result of cleaning, or perhaps of repainting. A teardrop, colored white and outlined in black, hangs from the man’s beard. Further examination would be needed to understand the possible significance of these odd details.

### *The Bodyguards*

Four men wearing laced sandals,<sup>25</sup> dressed in one-shouldered tunics that reach to just below the knee, some red with gray patterns and the others white, walk behind the gazelle tamer. They are depicted in single file, but might be better interpreted as side by side or in a loose group. The first man holds a composite bow in his visible hand. This weapon, far superior to the simpler self-bow, made of a single shaft of wood, first appears in the late Early Bronze Age (ca. 2200 B.C.) in western Asia, but was not used in Egypt until the New Kingdom.<sup>26</sup> The second man carries a throw stick,

apparently a typical hunting tool and perhaps also a military weapon in his culture,<sup>27</sup> and has a bag, most likely a waterskin, strapped to his back.

The third man holds a throw stick in one hand and a spear in the other; the latter is visible in earlier facsimiles but is now difficult to make out. It would be interesting to ascertain whether this is a socketed spear, which would suggest a date in the Middle Bronze (MB) IIA period. The last man in this group turns to look behind him; he holds another long spear, whose head is no longer easily discernible.

#### *The First Donkey and the Children*

Behind this group is a donkey bearing two children and a saddlebag (fig. 5). Donkeys were domesticated in Egypt by at least the end of the Predynastic period and used to carry loads; however, there is no evidence that they were ever ridden by Egyptians.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Asiatics ride donkeys in both Egyptian and Near Eastern records.<sup>29</sup>

The children seem to be in some sort of carrier made of a red material. This carrier is strapped with fiber or leather bands

to the donkey's back, along with a large saddlebag that may hold gear or other supplies. Between the children is an enigmatic object that appears to be made of leather, accordion folded and held closed with a strap (?), and with two handles, perhaps of wood or bone, lashed to each end. Some scholars have interpreted this object as a skin bellows, without explaining exactly how it would have worked.<sup>30</sup> In fact, its shape is not exactly correct for such a tool: it has two protrusions on each end, whereas bellows would normally have two handles but only one outlet pipe.<sup>31</sup> However, we lack alternatives that can be supported by comparanda,<sup>32</sup> so until a better identification can be made for this mysterious object, skin bellows must remain a possibility. A third, larger child, dressed in a knee-length skirt of red cloth and dark red ankle boots with white bands on the tops, walks behind the donkey, holding a child-size spear.

#### *The Women*

The next group consists of four women (fig. 6), each with a fillet holding her long hair back from her face and wearing a

Fig. 5. Detail of the procession of Aamu showing the first donkey, with an enigmatic object on its back



shin-length, colorfully patterned garment (in three instances covering only one shoulder), along with boots. The first and last women hold one fist to the chest, in a gesture of either greeting or reverence.<sup>33</sup>

#### *The Second Donkey*

After the women comes a second donkey, with a blanket or bag decorated with red zigzags on its back. Strapped to this object is a small red bag or pillow, a spare throw stick,<sup>34</sup> a spear, and a second set of “bellows.”

#### *The Rear Guard*

Behind the donkey is a man in a fringed kilt patterned with red chevrons, wearing laced sandals and carrying a waterskin on his back. As he walks, he plays an asymmetric lyre, a distinctively Near Eastern instrument seen in Egypt for the first time here.<sup>35</sup> Bringing up the rear is an eighth man in laced sandals and a red and white skirt patterned with zigzags and fringed at the bottom; he carries a compound bow and has a quiver strapped to his back. In his right hand he holds a duckbilled axe, distinctive of the Levantine MB IIA culture.<sup>36</sup>

#### DISCUSSION

Several questions emerge from our examination of this scene: Where are these foreigners from? Who are they and what do they do? What event is illustrated here, and what is their role in it?

In the caption and on the writing board carried by the royal official, Neferhotep, the foreigners are designated as “Aamu.” This Semitic loanword, possibly West Semitic and perhaps even Amorite, is usually translated as “Asiatic.”<sup>37</sup> The contexts in which this word appears in the Old through Middle Kingdom suggest that the Egyptians used this as a general term for any Semitic-speaking people from east or northeast of the Nile Valley, including the nomads of the Eastern Desert.<sup>38</sup> This identification is reinforced at Beni Hasan, as discussed above, by details such as the garments of the foreign company and the equipment they carry, as well as by the name and title of their leader. They can be assigned temporally to the MB IIA culture, contemporary with Dynasty 12 in Egypt.<sup>39</sup>

The homeland of these Aamu is still a matter of debate. To date, they have been



Fig. 6. Detail of the procession of Aamu



identified as inhabitants of the Sinai or Eastern Desert, southern Palestine, northern Mesopotamia and Syria, and even northern Arabia.<sup>40</sup> On the writing board, they are called “Aamu of Shu.”<sup>41</sup> Shu can perhaps be linked with the place name Shutu, which appears in the Execration Texts,<sup>42</sup> and is rendered as *R-Swt* in the Speos Artemidos inscription of Hatshepsut.<sup>43</sup> It has also been associated with “*shaddu*,” a term found in the Amarna Letters.<sup>44</sup> Based on geographical considerations and a biblical parallel, Wolfgang Helck links Shu with the nomadic tribes of the area of Moab in southern Palestine, at the southeast corner of the Red Sea.<sup>45</sup> Other scholars also place Shutu in this general area, with some variations.<sup>46</sup>

Thus the bulk of scholarly opinion places the homeland of the Aamu of Shu in the southern Levant, more specifically in the area just east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea; however the possibility that these Aamu came from the Sinai or the Eastern Desert cannot be dismissed.<sup>47</sup> In any case, they were certainly not Egyptian, and whether they were at this point in time living in the Eastern Desert or farther to the north and east, they reflect the material culture of the Levant in the Middle Bronze Age.<sup>48</sup>

What are the Aamu doing in an Egyptian context? A number of scholars think these Aamu were traders, part of a caravan coming to Beni Hasan to deliver goods to Khnumhotep II.<sup>49</sup> William Hayes and others have interpreted the group as diplomatic envoys or political guests of Khnumhotep II.<sup>50</sup> In either case, the assumption is that they are bringing eye paint or galena, either to sell or as a gift. Eye paint had practical uses as well as religious overtones, and from very early in Egyptian history it is listed as one of the essential offerings for the mortuary cult, necessary for the resurrection of the deceased.<sup>51</sup> Galena was mined in the Eastern Desert, mainly near the Red Sea, and also in the Sinai; malachite is found on the surface of copper ore deposits in the same general areas. A key source for galena

during the Middle Kingdom was Gebel Zeit, almost due east of Beni Hasan.<sup>52</sup>

Since galena and malachite could be mined in Egypt, some scholars have questioned the interpretation of the group as traders or envoys bringing these substances from afar, passing through a large amount of Egyptian territory on the way.<sup>53</sup> Hans Goedicke also argues that thirty-seven people are too many for a trading caravan—which would not in any case have included women and children. He suggests instead that the Aamu represent a group of migrant workers coming to work and perhaps settle in Egypt as galena miners.<sup>54</sup> A point he uses to support this theory is the presence of royal officials, who he feels are unlikely to have come to Middle Egypt just to oversee the delivery of eye paint. Instead, they might be here as representatives of the central administration, sent to chaperone the Aamu from the point where they entered Egypt to a temporary home in the Oryx nome. Goedicke’s translation of the accompanying inscriptions leads him to the conclusion that Khnumhotep II is here being notified of this event and taking charge of the migrants who will be working under his jurisdiction.<sup>55</sup> In fact, there is abundant evidence that people from western Asia were moving into Egypt during this period and later.<sup>56</sup> Although some of these may have been brought as prisoners of war,<sup>57</sup> others were likely voluntary immigrants looking for greener pastures.

An alternative scenario, suggested by Detlef Franke, is that the scene commemorates an Egyptian galena-mining expedition led by Khnumhotep II’s second-eldest son with Khety, Khnumhotep III, to the area of Gebel Zeit.<sup>58</sup> Franke suggests that the Aamu represent native desert-dwellers who accompanied the expedition to help them survive in the hostile desert environment, assisting them, for example, to find water.<sup>59</sup> In response to Goedicke’s suggestion, one notes that the quality of eye paint was of great importance to the ancient Egyptians,<sup>60</sup> and imported galena was certainly

used in the New Kingdom, with Asiatics among its suppliers.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the idea of the Aamu as traders or envoys should not be dismissed. As for the Aamu as desert guides, the presence of women and children renders this unlikely.

Another theory is that the Aamu are itinerant metalworkers, coming from an area where this was a well-established profession.<sup>62</sup> Evidence for this idea could be the objects that are carried by the donkeys, if these are in fact portable skin bellows of the sort used to fan smelting fires. The connection between metalworking and the southern Levant goes back at least into the Early Dynastic era (ca. 3100–2649 B.C.), and analysis of subsistence patterns during the early Middle Bronze Age shows that this was an important factor in the regional economy. During EB II, there is evidence that Canaanites settled in the Sinai, most likely to exploit the copper mines there.<sup>63</sup>

If the foreigners are metalworkers, they are perhaps bringing new technologies with them, along with samples of their wares in the form of new types of weapons, such as the duckbilled axe. The *mesdemet* that they bring with them could be interpreted as galena for metalworking, rather than for eye paint. Galena is the main ore for lead, and although lead was never widely used, small figures and jewelry, along with tools such as net sinkers, were made of lead from the Old Kingdom on.<sup>64</sup> Lead can also be used in the casting of copper; the addition of small amounts of this metal to a copper alloy facilitates the casting process by lowering the melting point and reducing the porosity of the metal without weakening it. There is no specific archaeological evidence to support this interpretation: although the technology of adding lead to copper appears in the Middle Kingdom, it is not attested on a large scale before the New Kingdom.<sup>65</sup> A third possibility is that foreign galena with a high silver content is being imported for use in the production of silver, since the silver levels in Egyptian galena are generally low.<sup>66</sup> In

regard to this possibility, it is interesting to point out a scene on the west wall of Tomb 3 that shows an official overseeing the weighing of precious metals, which might include silver.

The lack of a confirmed identification as bellows of the enigmatic objects transported by the donkeys and the fact that the second donkey does not seem to carry an anvil, along with the lack of clear evidence for this theory in the archaeological record, must call into question the interpretation of the Aamu as itinerant tinkers. However, the idea remains intriguing and should not be discarded.

In summary, although it is certain that they came in Year 6 of Senwosret II, along with members of the central administration, it is difficult at this point to draw any firm conclusions about the exact role played by the Aamu represented here. Perhaps the simplest reconstruction is that a group of southern Levantine pastoralists, led by their ruler, have come to Egypt, bringing high-quality galena, either for eye paint or to use in the smelting of metal, as a gift to ensure good relations with Egypt.<sup>67</sup> They might be bringing other gifts as well—one could (very tentatively!) suggest that the two children riding the first donkey are princes who are to be brought up in Egypt,<sup>68</sup> as foreign princes were during the New Kingdom. The third child, who wears a distinctive red kilt that matches the carrier in which the younger children ride and carries a spear (not a usual weapon for a child), could perhaps be an older prince or a high-born honor guard.

#### THE AAMU IN THE CONTEXT OF THE “*INW*” SCENE

It is important now to look at the Aamu scene in the context of the larger *inw* complex of which it forms a part (figs. 7, 8). The focus here is the large figure of Khnumhotep II at the east end of the north wall; he is labeled “Watching the levying of the cattle tax, consisting of all animals: the *inw*-gifts that were brought to him from his towns and his districts of the interior of the Oryx nome, and his

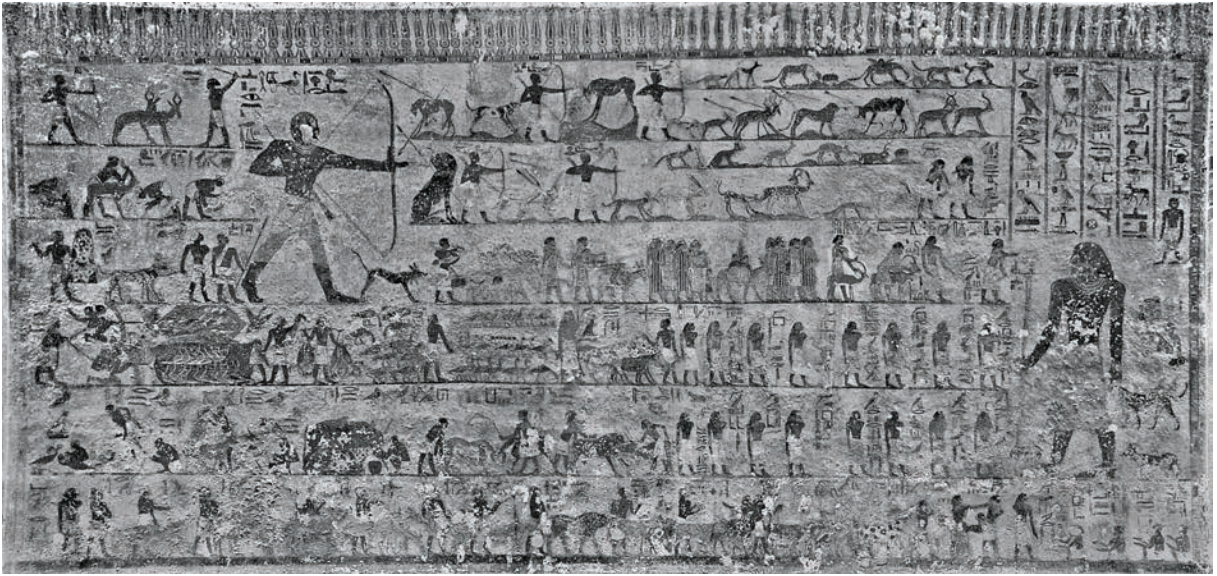


Fig. 7. North wall of Tomb of Khnumhotep II

city.”<sup>69</sup> Khnumhotep II is accompanied by three of his dogs, one of his personal attendants, and the “son of the Mayor . . . Khnumhotep” (his son Khnumhotep III). The Aamu occupy one of five registers associated with this large figure of the tomb owner. In the first register (the second from the top of the wall), desert animals captured in the hunt on the upper and western part of the wall are presented to the tomb owner by a Scribe of the Offering Table, Mentuhotep, who holds out a document on which various desert animals are enumerated,<sup>70</sup> paralleling the writing board held by Neferhotep. In the second register are the Aamu, followed by a flock of cranes and their herder. Directly below, another herdsman tends three flocks of smaller birds. Also in this register and continuing in the one below is a procession of officials, each labeled with his name and title. Most are overseers or stewards of one sort or another, and may be connected with either Khnumhotep II’s official or mortuary estates, or both. In the fifth register of this complex of scenes (the lowest register on the wall), a group of scribes sits at desks, “under” the figure

of Khnumhotep II,<sup>71</sup> while various types of domesticated animals are brought to be recorded. Directly in front of the scribes are three officials, one of whom uses a staff to restrain a prisoner.

The *inw*-gifts, perhaps best translated as “impost,”<sup>72</sup> are most likely being collected by Khnumhotep II on behalf of the royal house, whose involvement is indicated by the presence of several royal scribes. This interpretation is supported by a passage from the autobiography in the tomb of the last nomarch at Beni Hasan, Ameni, which states: “. . . I was praised for it in the king’s house in every year of the cattle tax. I delivered all their dues to the king’s house. . . .”<sup>73</sup> Thus, the scenes in the aggregate express Khnumhotep II’s loyalty to the royal house and his successful efforts on behalf of the king, enhancing his standing and status as an effective noble.<sup>74</sup> Since the king is rarely shown in tombs of this period,<sup>75</sup> Khnumhotep II also acts here as a royal delegate, receiving *inw* as if he were the king, analogously with tribute scenes from later periods in which the king himself appears.

This scene can be understood on a local as well as national level: the goods are being



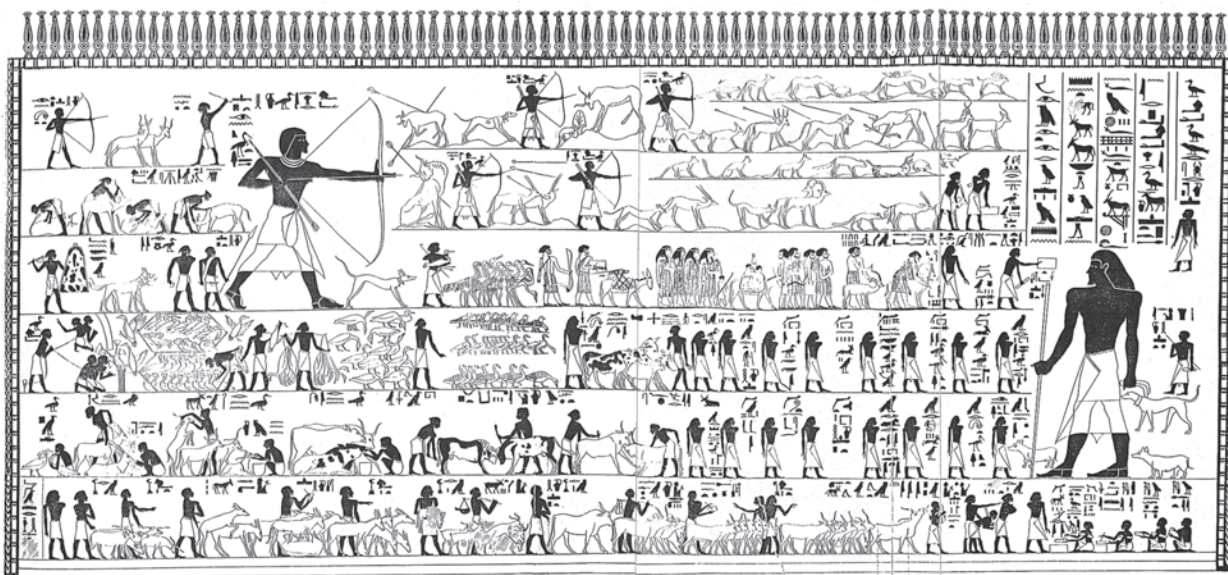


Fig. 8. Facsimile of north wall of Tomb of Khnumhotep II

provided, perhaps through some sort of redistributive mechanism, for the benefit of Khnumhotep II as well as for the king. In a comparable complex of scenes in Ameni's tomb, a scribe hands the tomb owner a papyrus that mentions the *pr-Dt* (house of eternity, that is, the mortuary estate) several times. In this context, the processions here echo those of servants and officials who present offerings to the tomb owner seen in many tombs from the Old Kingdom on. On these levels, both part of the terrestrial realm, the Aamu bring *mesdemet* (for eye paint and/or metalworking) and desert animals (as greeting gifts and/or sacrificial animals for the cult)<sup>76</sup> to the tomb owner and, through him, to the king.

**THE AAMU IN THE SYMBOLIC REALM**  
 As with many other scenes in the tomb,<sup>77</sup> the significance of the Aamu goes beyond the terrestrial level discussed above. Dieter Kessler, for one, explores the scene's symbolic meaning, concluding that the entire wall, taken with other images in the tomb, alludes to the celebration of the New Year's Festival, with Khnumhotep II standing in for the Horus-king at his rejuvenation.<sup>78</sup> Whether or not his conclusions can be

proven, Kessler's multivalent approach to this scene is extremely valuable.

There is certainly important symbolism both embedded in the Aamu scene and expressed through its placement and context. As discussed above, the *mesdemet* brought by the Aamu has cultic overtones, but more evident at this level of interpretation is the significance of the desert animals held by the group's leaders. The cultic importance of the gazelle is particularly well documented.<sup>79</sup> The remains of sacrificed gazelles—some of which appear to have been kept in captivity for a time—have been found in a number of mortuary contexts,<sup>80</sup> in the Late and Greco-Roman periods, these animals were ritually mummified.<sup>81</sup> The association of the gazelle with the cultures of western Asia is also shown, for example, by its appearance in the iconography of the Amorite god Reshef.<sup>82</sup> A late Dynasty 11 inscription of the vizier Amenemhat from Wadi Hammamat illustrates the link between gazelles, sacrifice, and expeditions to the Eastern Desert: during an expedition led by this official to search for stone for his king's sarcophagus, a gazelle arrived and gave birth on the very stone that had

been chosen for the lid. This was taken as a sign of wonder, and the gazelle was sacrificed. Twenty days later, as the block for the lid was being removed, it rained and a well appeared in the desert.<sup>83</sup> Overall, the sacrifice of wild animals was associated with the destruction of the god Seth and the maintenance of the proper order of the universe (*ma'at*) over the forces of chaos (*isfet*).<sup>84</sup>

In the monumental contexts of tombs and temples, foreigners are by nature defined as manifestations of the chaotic powers that surrounded and constantly threatened the created Egyptian world. Although the reality of the relationships between Egypt and its northeastern neighbors was of course a complex one,<sup>85</sup> until the appearance of tribute scenes in the New Kingdom, Asiatics are depicted as enemies of Egypt in the vast majority of representations.<sup>86</sup> By including a group of clearly peaceful Aamu in his tomb, Khnumhotep II was making the statement that these traditional “enemies” had not only been pacified, but were participating actively in the Egyptian economy and cult by bringing products of the desert to Khnumhotep II. They not only bring *mesdemet*, but they even help subdue the forces of *isfet* by taming and offering desert animals. It is interesting to note that the way in which Abisharie holds the ibex, with a curved staff around its neck, directly iterates the gesture of one of the officials in the lowest register, who restrains a wrongdoer. Thus, the Aamu are no longer completely foreign, but, rather, mediate between Egypt and the outside world.<sup>87</sup> They are even permitted to carry weapons: foreigners bearing arms, unless they are part of a battle scene, are unusual in Egyptian monumental art.

The procession takes place between the complex of scenes showing the tomb owner hunting in the desert—symbolizing the triumph of the forces of order over the forces of chaos—and the registers with offering-bearers from the “civilized” world of the tomb owner’s estates—where domesticated animals were kept and scribes and petitioners carried out their business. Although the

Aamu come from the inhospitable desert, they play a part in transforming some of its chaos into properly controlled material that will benefit Egypt on the local, national, and divine planes. Within the larger context of the tomb, the scenes on this wall, including those of the Aamu, contribute to Khnumhotep II’s successful celebration of his mortuary cult and hence to his flourishing in the eternal afterlife. At the same time, he may be seen here as a delegate of both the king and the creator god, and as such helping to maintain the proper cosmic order.<sup>88</sup> Through the agency of this effective royal official, the Aamu both conceptually and visually bridge the gap between the disordered world above and the fully ordered world below.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Joan Aruz for her invitation to speak at the “Beyond Babylon” symposium, and to contribute to this volume. My gratitude also to David O’Connor for his insightful comments and suggestions.

1. For the tombs at Beni Hasan, see Newberry 1893a; Newberry 1893b.
2. The dating of the early tombs is still debated; for discussion of this issue, with references, see Kamrin 1999, pp. 27–28; Rabehl 2006, pp. 18ff.
3. Newberry 1893a, pls. XXV, XXVI.
4. For the location of Menat Khufu, see Kessler 1982; Kessler 1987a, p. 161.
5. Khnumhotep II had a second wife, Tjat; see W. A. Ward 1984.
6. Note that Khnumhotep II did not hold the nomarchial title *Hry-tp aA n mA-HD* (Great Chief/Nomarch of the Oryx Nome). During his tenure as Administrator of the Eastern Desert, there does not appear to have been a nomarch ruling in the Oryx nome. For discussion of this issue, see Franke 1991.
7. For example, Kees (1955, pp. 64–65) suggests that Beni Hasan was the Eastern Gate of Egypt. Kessler (1987a, pp. 161ff.) suggests instead that the Administrator of the Eastern Desert was connected, under the supervision of the nomarch, with a royal cult centered in the area, but does agree that he was involved with prospecting and mining. For a recent discussion of this issue, see Aufrère 2002.

8. For inscriptions germane to this issue, see discussion and references in Franke 1991, pp. 56ff.; Aufrère 2002; Allen 2008.
9. This statue, which is badly damaged, was flanked by images of three women: his principal wife, his mother, and another woman, perhaps his second wife. For a description, see Newberry 1893a, p. 71.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
11. For other reproductions of this scene, see J. G. Wilkinson 1847, vol. 1, pl. XII; Newberry 1893a, pls. XXX (north wall as a whole), XXXI (procession of foreigners), XXXVIII, 2 (writing board/papyrus); Davies (Nina M.) 1936, vol. 1, pls. X, XI; K. Michalowski 1968, p. 212, no. 86 (women only), p. 176, fig. 297; Freier and Grunert 1984, pp. 90–91, fig. 70; Shedid 1994, pp. 60–61.
12. Another translation of this inscription reads: “Arrival bringing kohl which thirty-seven Aamu bring to him” (Newberry 1893a, p. 69). Goedicke, pointing out that *mesdemet* cannot be the antecedent for *in*, divides the inscription into two parts, suggesting: “Coming about bringing (procuring) black eye-paint,” which he takes as a reference to the two Egyptian officials who appear in the scene, and “He (the foreign leader) has brought 37 Aamu” (Goedicke 1984, pp. 205–6). Kessler proposes: “Kommen mit der Augenschminke, indem ihm/er 37 Asiaten gebracht hat” (Kessler 1987a, pp. 150–51). Vernus offers: “Revenir d’aller chercher le collyre, en ramenant 37 Asiatiques” (Vernus 1989, p. 177). According to Rabehl, it might be: “Kommen mit dem Bringen der Augenschminke, nachdem er 37 Asiaten geholt hat” (Rabehl 2006, p. 244). Staubli offers: “Kommen in Bezug auf das Bringen von schwarzer Augenschminke” and “Er [the Aamu leader] bringt 37 *aAmu*” (Staubli 1991, p. 33).
13. The meaning of “Aamu,” generally translated as “Asiatics,” is discussed below.
14. Goedicke (1984, p. 209, n. 39) suggests that the full group might have numbered four or five times as many. On the other hand, Egyptian personnel lists often include both men and women (cf., for example, Hayes 1955).
15. Manniche 1999, p. 136.
16. For translations of this text, see Goedicke 1984, p. 205; Kessler 1987a, p. 151; Vernus 1989, p. 178. Kessler (1987a, pp. 150–51) suggests that this is a shorter, symbolic version of a record of supplies and payments that may have included the names of the thirty-seven Aamu. For a ledger that includes the names of more than forty Aamu immigrants who served on a late Dynasty 12 to Dynasty 13 estate, see Hayes 1955.
17. Aufrère 2002, p. 210.
18. Cf. Bietak 2001, p. 136.
19. Goedicke (1984, p. 203) renders this as Abisha(i), and equates it with the name borne by the brother of Joab and Asahel in the Old Testament (1 Chr. 2:16); Saretta (1997, p. 111, n. 280) also concludes that the best reading is Abishai, which she translates as “My father is a nobleman”; Schneider (1998, pp. 47–48) suggests Abi-sarie, “(Mein) Vater hat geloest/ist stark.”
20. Barber 1997, p. 193; Saretta 1997, p. 131, n. 341.
21. Cf. R. H. Wilkinson 1999, p. 194.
22. Identifiable as *Capra ibex nubiana* (*njAw*); see Houlihan 1996, pp. 58–59.
23. See Schiestl 2006.
24. *Gazella dorcas* (*gHs*); see Houlihan 1996, pp. 61ff., 66, where he also mentions the possibility that this particular gazelle might be a foreign species (p. 65).
25. Although the Egyptians wore leather sandals as well, the sandals worn by the Aamu men are composed of multiple straps, quite different from the simple Egyptian thong.
26. Chapman 1997, p. 336.
27. The Tell el-Dab’a dignitary mentioned above also holds a throw stick against one shoulder (see Schiestl 2006, p. 176).
28. Cf. Gautier 1999, p. 301.
29. Houlihan 1996, p. 31; Saretta 1997, pp. 121–27.
30. Shea 1981, pp. 222–23; Nibbi 1987, p. 33; Staubli 1991, pp. 31–32 and n. 109; Redford 1992, p. 83.
31. My thanks to Deborah Schorsch for her expert opinion on this matter (personal communication). Most representations of Egyptian metalworking show the smiths using pot, drum, or dish bellows. The only example of a skin bellows from ancient Egypt in either an archaeological or pictorial context is from a Middle Kingdom coffin (Scheel 1989, p. 23).
32. We could think perhaps of some sort of small tent, a bag or other container, or, as per a suggestion by Salima Ikram (personal communication), a portable child’s bed, but none of these ideas can be verified at present.
33. Brunner-Traut 1977; R. H. Wilkinson 1999, pp. 194, 198.
34. Redford (1992, p. 83) calls this an anvil, but it looks much more like the throw sticks depicted, for example, elsewhere in this scene.
35. Hickmann 1956, pp. 9, 36ff.; Manniche 1991, p. 37; Saretta 1997, p. 127.
36. See Bietak 1997, p. 125.
37. The case for a West Semitic origin is made in Redford 1986, pp. 131–32; Redford 1992, p. 32. For the possibility of an Amorite origin, see Saretta 1997, pp. 13–28, 65–66. For discussions of this term in the Old and Middle Kingdoms, see Giveon 1975; Redford 1986, pp. 126ff.; Hoffmeier 1996, pp. 56ff.
38. The Aamu first appear, as enemies of the Egyptians, in the Dynasty 6 tomb autobiography of Weni at Abydos (l. 13, see Urk. I [Sethe 1932, p. 101]); then in the autobiography of Pepinakht at Aswan (l. 11, Urk. I [Sethe 1932, p. 134]); and again in the “Instructions for Merikare,” the



- “Prophecy of Neferti,” the “Admonitions of Ipuwer,” and the “Tale of Sinuhe.” They are also mentioned in sources such as a papyrus in the Brooklyn Museum (35.1446), which speaks of forty-five Asiatics among ninety-five household servants, and the “Annals of Amenemhat II” from Mit Rahina (for the latter, see Altenmüller and Moussa 1991). See Giveon 1975, cols. 462ff.
39. Although some chronological details of this era, as well as terminology, are still a matter of intense debate, the early Middle Kingdom in Egypt corresponds generally to the transitional era into the Middle Bronze Age in the Levant. See Bietak 1991; see also Redford 1992, p. 93, n. 122.
  40. For an identification of the Aamu as inhabitants of the Sinai, see Goedicke 1984; of the Eastern Desert, Franke 1991, p. 56, n. 9; of southern Palestine, Helck 1971, p. 46; of northern Syria, Saretta 1997; of northern Arabia, Petrie 1897, p. 172.
  41. This word is determined with the symbol for “hill land.”
  42. See Helck 1971, as Shutu, p. 46, no. 2 (older group of clay vessels) and as Upper and Lower Shutu, p. 59, no. 52, no. 53 (later group of ceramic figurines).
  43. Urk. IV (Sethe 1906, p. 385, l. 13); see Breasted 1906–7, vol. 2, pp. 123–24, § 299: “The land of Reshu and the land of Yu, they cannot [hide] from my majesty; Punt is mine. . . .”
  44. Posener and van de Walle 1940, pp. 89ff., with reference to a writing board in the British Museum (EA 197.29).
  45. Helck 1971, pp. 46, 51, 61–62.
  46. Ahituv (1984, p. 184; Ahituv 1999, p. 188) tentatively agrees with the equation of Shutu with the area east of the Jordan River, perhaps more specifically with Moab; Aharoni (1962, p. 146) also places Shutu east of the Jordan, but farther north, in the Gilead of the Bible; Redford (1992, p. 90) places Shutu more generally in Transjordan.
  47. For example, based primarily on the appearance of this term at Speos Artemidos, Goedicke (1984, p. 210 and n. 45) concludes that Shu refers to the northern Sinai.
  48. Bietak (1997, p. 125) places the transition from EB IV/MB I to MB IIA about 1900/1925 B.C., between the reigns of Senwosret I and Senwosret II, based in part on the pictorial and inscriptional evidence from Beni Hasan. Redford (1992, pp. 76–97) offers an excellent discussion of this period as well. See also Tubb and Chapman 1990, pp. 53–57. A good textual portrait of the seminomadic lifestyle led by the pastoralists of this period can be found in the “Tale of Sinuhe” (R. B. Parkinson 1997).
  49. Klebs 1922, fig. 6, pp. 162ff., figs. 120–21; J. A. Wilson 1950, p. 229; cf. Shea 1981, p. 219.
  50. Hayes 1971, pp. 503–4. Aufrère (2002, p. 211 and n. 9) further suggests that Khnumhotep II is here overseeing an important official event that might be taking place at a “traditional trading post” rather than at Menat Khufu itself.
  51. According to the rubric to chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead, before he will be admitted to the presence of Osiris, the deceased must “utter this spell pure and clean and clad in white garments and sandals, painted with black eye-paint and anointed with myrrh” (Faulkner 2005, p. 141; cf. Manniche 1999, pp. 136–37 and n. 29).
  52. Scheel 1989, p. 20; for other sources of galena, see Ogden 2000, p. 168 (with bibliography).
  53. Goedicke 1984, p. 205.
  54. *Ibid.*, pp. 204–7 and n. 9.
  55. *Ibid.*, p. 205 and n. 14, pp. 206–7. Goedicke (*ibid.*, p. 207, n. 23) discusses the evidence for foreign specialists working in Egypt.
  56. For a discussion of this topic and a review of the relevant sources, see Redford 1992, pp. 76–97; see also Posener 1956, pp. 145–63.
  57. Altenmüller and Moussa 1991.
  58. As an adult, Khnumhotep III held the title Doorway/Doorpost of the Foreign Lands, which has been interpreted to mean that he was a sort of customs officer, dealing with the delivery of foreign peoples and products to the king (Franke 1991, p. 57 and n. 14; Aufrère 2002, p. 212; Allen 2008). Franke also suggests that the title *sA hAty-a Xnm-Htp* (Son of the Mayor, Khnumhotep) is more likely to refer to Khnumhotep III than to Khnumhotep II (Franke 1991, pp. 56–60).
  59. Franke 1991, p. 60.
  60. A late New Kingdom letter, for example, complains of the quality of the galena that has been delivered to the palace (cf. Manniche 1999, p. 137 and n. 31).
  61. Manniche 1999, p. 137. There is apparently no archaeological evidence for imported galena before early Dynasty 18 (Goedicke 1984, p. 204), but the possibility that galena was imported earlier should remain open.
  62. Redford 1992, p. 83.
  63. W. A. Ward 1991.
  64. Scheel 1989, p. 20; see also Ogden 2000, p. 168, for certain lead objects.
  65. Ogden 2000, pp. 154ff.
  66. *Ibid.*, p. 170. Ogden also notes that the first extraction of silver from lead ores most likely took place in western Asia, since argentiferous lead ores are more commonly found in this region.
  67. See, for example, the “Tale of Sinuhe,” in which the hero, singing the praises of the new king, says: “He will not fail to do good to a land that will be loyal to him” (Lichtheim 1973, p. 226).
  68. It is interesting to note that Shea, in his analysis of the scene, suggests that the first group of four men are protecting the children and women who follow, and that the last two men also guard the

- caravan. He sees the two children on the donkey as the central figures, from a visual and aesthetic point of view (Shea 1981, p. 227).
69. See Newberry 1893a, pl. XXX, for facsimile.
  70. See *ibid.*, pl. XXXVIII, 1, for facsimile.
  71. See the census model from the tomb of Meketre in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 46724), for a three-dimensional rendering of such a scene (Tiradritti 1999, pp. 114–15).
  72. For the term as “impost,” see Spalinger 1986, p. 209; Bleiberg (1984, p. 167) interprets this term as a reference to a system in which gifts were given to the king by both Egyptians and foreigners.
  73. Lichtheim 1988, p. 139. Note that Tomb 2 contains a census scene very similar to this one.
  74. Rabehl 2005; Rabehl 2006, pp. 249–50.
  75. There are, however, exceptions: images of the king do appear in several Theban tombs of the Middle Kingdom; see Vasiljević 2005.
  76. For animals as greeting gifts, see Staubli 1991, p. 33.
  77. See Kamrin 1999.
  78. Kessler has written a number of useful articles discussing the importance of addressing different levels of meaning in tomb scenes; see, for example, Kessler 1987b. On the importance of the symbolic levels inherent in Egyptian art, see also Weeks 1979, O’Connor 1991, and Kamrin 1999, pp. 42–44, 139ff. (with bibliography).
  79. See, for example, R. H. Wilkinson 2003, p. 138.
  80. Boessneck 1953, p. 27; De Meyer et al. 2005–6, pp. 67ff.
  81. See Houlihan 1996, p. 66; for an example, see CG 29661 (Ikram and Iskander 2002, p. 11).
  82. Cf. Cornelius 1994, p. 53; R. H. Wilkinson 2003, p. 127. Note also that this god sometimes holds some sort of stringed instrument.
  83. Breasted 1906–7, vol. 1, p. 212, § 436, p. 216, § 451.
  84. See, for example, Derchain 1962; Kamrin 1999, pp. 83–89.
  85. See Tubb and Chapman 1990, pp. 53–57; Redford 1992, pp. 76–97.
  86. Giveon 1975; Schulman 1982.
  87. This can perhaps be compared to later sources, in which foreigners who perform their sacrifices in a similar fashion to the Greeks are seen to be like them, while those who perform their sacrifices differently are seen as “other” (see Nakhai 1993, p. 75).
  88. Kamrin 1999, pp. 146ff.

# The Near Eastern Contribution to Aegean Wall Painting and Vice Versa

*To Irene J. Winter, in friendship*

A building known as the South-West House, located just southwest of the edge of the western court of the palace at Knossos, was first investigated by Sir Arthur Evans in 1923 and was reexplored, with special attention to its complex stratigraphy, in a series of campaigns in 1992/93 by the British School of Archaeology at Athens under the direction of Dr. Colin Macdonald.<sup>1</sup> In nearly every phase of the building's long and complicated history fragments of wall, floor, and ceiling plaster were recovered. Unfortunately, most of the fresco fragments with figural decoration, which include flowers, a male head, and possibly fish, were found in Evans's backfill, and thus can only be dated by style. Based on comparisons with paintings from Knossos and Late Cycladic/Late Minoan (LC/LM) IA Akrotiri, it appears that none of the figural fragments dates earlier than the Neopalatial era, at the earliest Middle Minoan (MM) III, that is, after ca. 1700 B.C. and probably no earlier than 1600 B.C., when the house appears to have been renovated (MM IIIB–LM IA).<sup>2</sup>

However, in the more recent excavations, the corner of one room was preserved, sealed by a destruction level, and could be dated by its context pottery to MM IIA.

Among the material found on its floor were two nonjoining fragments of wall paintings with very well-preserved surfaces, one of which is illustrated (fig. 1). On the well-polished white intonaco layer an abstract linear pattern of thick and thin connected curving lines was painted in black. This pattern closely resembles the color scheme and decoration that occur on an unusual class of Kamares pottery sometimes called print ware, which also dates to MM IIA (fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> Unlike the light-on-dark polychrome decoration of standard Kamares ware, print ware reverses the system, for a black-on-white decorative scheme, like the wall paintings. Furthermore, like the wall paintings, Kamares print ware is also decorated with abstract curvilinear patterns of uneven thickness.

These new fresco fragments join a small but significant corpus of Minoan wall paintings that date to the Protopalatial era (MM IB–IIB) or sometime in the first quarter of the second millennium B.C.<sup>4</sup> Each one is painted with an abstract linear motif such as spirals, quatrefoils, a “labyrinth,” or crescents; one fragment may have a stylized foliate band.<sup>5</sup> Notably absent are representations of any human figures. Rather, as Irene Winter has observed, these patterns closely resemble the motifs found on Kamares ware.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the few extant anthropomorphic images on Kamares ware are based on inventive recombinations of familiar abstract motifs and thus appear more like one-time experiments than traditional ceramic decorative elements.<sup>7</sup> Thus, considering the close similarity between wall painting and vase painting, it would seem unlikely that future discoveries of Protopalatial wall paintings would include a figural repertoire.

How then are we to explain the skillfully painted and thematically varied repertoire of figural images that seems to appear ex nihilo at the beginning of the Neopalatial period, in the seventeenth century B.C.? Not infrequently—indeed since the time of Evans—Aegean archaeologists have



turned their gaze eastward to explain cultural innovations on Bronze Age Crete, be they impulses from Egypt, Anatolia, or the Levant. For example, while some Aegean archaeologists argue that the Minoan palaces evolved from an indigenous Cretan architectural idiom and were only generally influenced by Near Eastern models, others, perhaps more convincingly, argue that the court-centered palace complexes also appear *ex nihilo*, adapting their ground plans and building techniques, such as the use of a leveling course, or *krepidoma*, and orthostats, directly from Near Eastern models.<sup>8</sup> While the palace at Mari has been most often cited as a possible model for the Cretan palaces, the more recently excavated Middle Bronze Age palace at Tilmen Höyük, in the northern Hatay, also offers striking parallels to the Cretan palaces, with its paved western courtyard and irregular western facade, as well as its use of a *krepidoma* and orthostats.<sup>9</sup>

The tablets from the Mari archives record the role of local middlemen in the shipment of tin to Crete from the port of Ugarit and the receipt in return of high-quality finished products for Mari, including gilded weapons with lapis lazuli inlays, metal daggers and vases, textiles, and leather footwear.<sup>10</sup> Most remarkable is the reference to a Cretan interpreter at Ugarit who was paid in tin, perhaps directly by the king of Mari.<sup>11</sup> This document may place an actual Minoan in the court of Zimri-Lim of Mari and, of course, implies that contacts between Cretans, Amorites, and Canaanites were frequent enough to require a full-time resident translator. In the same way that a Cretan translator could be employed in the Levant, on account of his possession of a special skill, in this case his multilingualism, other tablets from Mari document the movements of craftsmen and artisans within the Near East, often lent out by rulers.<sup>12</sup>

It is therefore not at all unlikely that when the decision was made to construct palaces on Crete, Minoan architects traveled east to see these grand edifices, which may have been in various stages of construction,



Fig. 1. Fresco fragment. Knossos, South-West House. Middle Minoan IIA. Knossos Stratigraphical Museum

Fig. 2. Kamares “print ware” sherd. Knossos. Middle Minoan IIA. Knossos Stratigraphical Museum

and learn from their skilled and experienced architects and engineers. Indeed, the tablets from Mari make it clear that the palace was famous in its day for its beauty and the feats of engineering it represented, and requests were made from foreign notables to secure visits.<sup>13</sup> Its sophisticated plumbing system has been cited as another element that Cretan architects may have learned through firsthand observation and instruction in the Near East and brought back to Crete.<sup>14</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that the Cretans also adopted the practice of figural fresco painting from the Near East.<sup>15</sup> But, as noted above, the frescoes on the walls of the first Cretan palaces most likely displayed no figural imagery, unlike their Near Eastern counterparts. Human, faunal, and floral imagery first appears in frescoes on Crete at the start of the Neopalatial period, in MM IIIA, as discussed below.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, it is possible that Minoan craftsmen saw the painted walls of Mari and, indeed, as some scholars have suggested, even had a hand in decorating surfaces there, specifically the upper face of the podium in Room 64 (figs. 3, 4).<sup>17</sup> While plaster pavements with painted decoration are otherwise unknown at Mari, the first Cretan palaces had floors made of durable plaster, decorated with monochrome red and painted patterns.<sup>18</sup> And though the podium's white-on-black decoration may also be unique at Mari, whose walls were painted with a varied polychrome palette, this was the standard color scheme for contemporary Cretan Kamares ware. Indeed, the podium's framing motif of retorted

spirals is a common motif on Kamares ware.<sup>19</sup> On ceramics, this motif appears as a continuous spiral chain, whereas on the podium the paintbrush was lifted at the retort, that is, the center of the spiral.<sup>20</sup>

What seems most problematic here is the main motif, which has been interpreted generally as an imitation of a pavement composed of heavily veined stone slabs, a *faux marbre*. A fragment of painted plaster from the Loom-Weight Basement at Knossos, dated to MM IIB, preserves part of a zone of polychrome wavy bands, which has sometimes been identified as an imitation of stone.<sup>21</sup> However, convincing examples of frescoes with *faux marbre* begin only in the Neopalatial era.<sup>22</sup> Winter thinks that the

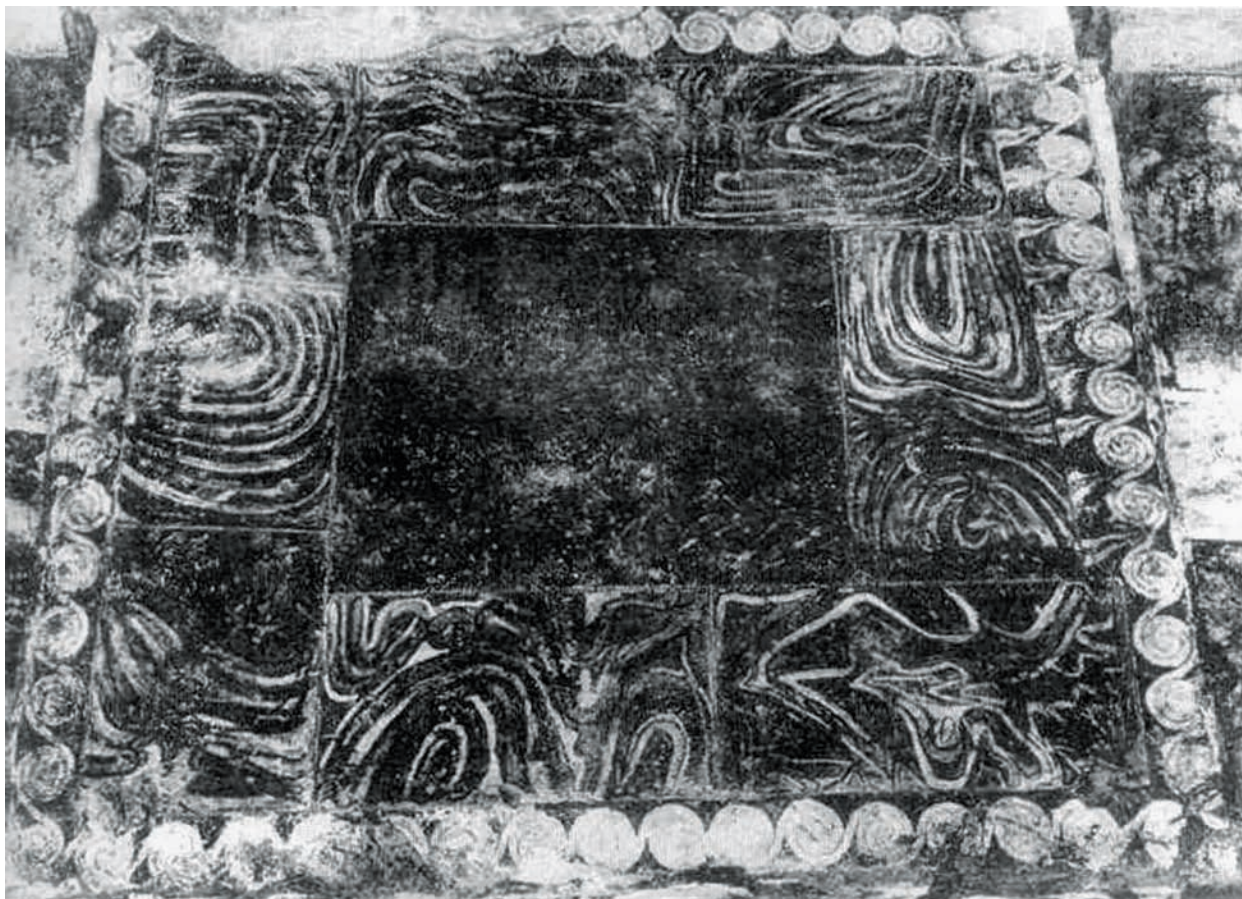


Fig. 3. Painted mudbrick and stone podium. Mari, Palace of Zimri-Lim, Room 64. Old Syrian period



*faux marbre* podium from Mari may have been painted by local craftsmen to compensate for the scarcity of high-quality decorative stones suitable for paving and locally available.<sup>23</sup> Yet, precisely because of this shortage, the plasterers and painters working at Mari might have been unaware that richly veined or variegated stone even existed, let alone that they were used as decorative pavements. But on Crete, where these stones are abundant and occur in a wide range of colors, they had been used for vases and pavements by Minoan stoneworkers since the beginning of the Bronze Age.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps Minoan artists visiting Mari offered their services to paint not only the edge of the podium but an improvised pattern to fill its interior.<sup>25</sup> Thus, as Winter proposes, this *faux marbre* painting may well have been created spontaneously in response to the monochromatic nature of Mari's lithic environment, but by Minoans who were well versed in the wonders and potential uses of Crete's varied geomorphology. The fact that each slab is painted with a unique pattern of veins may underscore the artist's familiarity with these kinds of stones.<sup>26</sup>

Like the Minoan paintings in the first palaces, the decoration of the podium is purely nonfigural, with abstract and geometric elements; figural imagery would have required knowledge by these "guest" artists of local ritual and religious iconographies. In return, the Minoan painters may have been inspired by the figural wall paintings from Mari, filled with their images of ritual activities, where the mundane and divine spheres intersect in a world populated by a repertoire of flora and fauna simultaneously familiar and exotic, natural and supernatural. The opportunity to put into practice what they may have seen in the east came soon enough when one or more earthquakes demolished the first palaces at the end of the MM IIB and the beginning of the MM IIIA periods.<sup>27</sup> This seems to have occurred about the time or just before Mari was destroyed by Hammurabi.<sup>28</sup> Immediately thereafter, in the MM III era, new palatial constructions were undertaken, as at Galatas; older palaces were rebuilt from scratch, as at Phaistos, whose new palace may never have been completed; and other palaces were heavily renovated, as at Knossos.<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 4. Painted fragment of podium in fig. 3, excavated 2004, previously unpublished



The MM IIIA period may have begun shortly after construction started on a new palace at Alalakh (Tell Atchana), the so-called Yarim-Lim palace of Level VII. This palace formed part of a major building program that also included new fortifications and a temple. The palace archives reveal that Yarim-Lim was a contemporary of Hammurabi of Babylon, Shamshi-Adad of Assyria, and Zimri-Lim of Mari, suggesting that construction on the Level VII buildings began in the middle to the second half of the eighteenth century B.C.<sup>30</sup> (For further mention of the Alalakh paintings, see Pfälzner essay, p. 202.) The city was most likely destroyed by Mursili I, ca. 1600 B.C., on his way back to Hattusa after razing Babylon.<sup>31</sup>

Ever since Sir Leonard Woolley discovered wall paintings in the Yarim-Lim palace, he and others noted their resemblance to wall paintings from Minoan Crete, even suggesting that Minoan painters were present at Alalakh and lent their skills to the decoration of its walls.<sup>32</sup> One group of paintings appears to have decorated the walls of a large room that Woolley restored above the small storerooms 11, 12, and 13.<sup>33</sup>

In the doorway between rooms 11 and 12 and in the southeast corner of Room 12, at least 2 meters above the floor, Woolley found fragments of yellow, red, blue, and black horizontal bands, a possible bull's horn, and a fragment that he believed depicted the ear of a bull. At the southwest end of Room 12 and in and outside Room 13, Woolley found fragments of painted plaster that included a design of light-colored spiky leaves against a red background (fig. 5). To Woolley, the large room restored over rooms 11, 12, and 13 had the look of a Minoan hall (which he misnamed "megaron"). He surmised that the room had been divided unequally by two wood (?) columns and that at its southwest end there had been a large window divided by two columns with stone bases, similar, in its use of columns to divide floor space and windows, to the so-called King's and Queen's Megara at Knossos. One entered from a staircase at the east end, where the walls were decorated with a bull procession; at the west end the walls were painted with a more naturalistic scene of swaying sprays of spiky leaves.

These paintings have been recently restudied by Barbara and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, who have offered new reconstructions.<sup>34</sup> They restore the bull's horn and the dark curved fragment that Woolley thought was a bull's ear as a frontal bucranium with a double axe between the horns, citing parallels from Aegean representational art.<sup>35</sup> Woolley's suggestion that the horn came from a procession with a bull is also plausible, and indeed such a scene was painted at Mari, where the bull also has front-facing horns, but in combination with a profile face.<sup>36</sup> As the Niemeiers point out, frontal bucrania do occur in the Near East, although they cite only examples painted on Halaf pottery, dated to the late Neolithic, and on the walls of the fifteenth century B.C. Mitannian palace at Nuzi, claiming a gap in the evidence.<sup>37</sup> However, the gap in frontal bucranium imagery from western Asia may be filled by glyptic

Fig. 5.  
Reconstruction of fresco with spiky leaves; color restored. Alalakh, Level VII Palace, Room 13. Middle Bronze Age



evidence, where it appears as a motif on Old Syrian seals from the region of Alalakh dated contemporary with Level VII.<sup>38</sup> Rather than a Minoan double axe between the horns, the curved fragment from Alalakh might be part of a rosette placed between the bull's horns, as on the fresco from Nuzi, although the Niemeiers note that the rosette would be rather large.<sup>39</sup> With so little preserved, it is simply not possible to determine whether this particular fresco was painted by an Aegean artist or a local one. In either case, it may, indeed, have influenced Aegean iconography, where the frontal bucranium first appears regularly in the Neopalatial era in a variety of media.<sup>40</sup>

In the same area as the spiky-leaf fresco, that is, the southwest end of Room 12 and in and outside Room 13, Woolley found two nonjoining fresco fragments of red bands on a white ground with undulating borders and white overpainting. While he believed that one fragment depicted a tree—it is reconstructed as such in a drawing by William Stevenson Smith—the Niemeiers have shown that this is incorrect.<sup>41</sup> By turning the fragment 90 degrees, they demonstrate that it is a lower red band with two white overpainted parallel horizontal lines.<sup>42</sup> On the other fragment, in its upper-right-hand corner, Woolley saw an overlayer of pale greenish-gray “on which twigs or leaves were painted in a darker green.”<sup>43</sup> In their recent restudy, the Niemeiers reidentified the fragment as the wing tip of a crouching griffin, decorated with a typically Aegean “notched plume” motif.<sup>44</sup> While this is plausible, what is perhaps just as surprising is the unimpressive quality of the painting, notable in the summarily painted feathers on the griffin and the wobbly white overpainted ladder and curved arc patterns on the red zones. The work seems to betray an uncertain and inexperienced hand.

Because the griffin does not appear in the Aegean with any regularity or with a specific set of characteristics until the Neopalatial era (except for a few examples in

Protopalatial glyptics), if this is indeed the work of a Minoan craftsman, perhaps it represents a new artistic experience: the rendering for the first time of large-scale representational figures under the tutelage of Near Eastern painters.<sup>45</sup> Or it may be the work of local craftsmen, for whom the crouching or seated griffin was a familiar motif, as evidenced by its frequent occurrence on Middle Bronze Age Syrian seals.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, its appearance in no-longer-extant, large-scale Middle Bronze Age Syrian wall paintings has been surmised by Bernice Jones, who has perceptively drawn attention to the grand tableau depicted on an Old Syrian-style seal impression from Kültepe Ib, dated about fifty years earlier than Level VII at Alalakh, on which a suppliant stands beside an enthroned divinity who is flanked by a squatting monkey and a seated griffin.<sup>47</sup> Jones furthermore convincingly proposes that the composition and iconographic elements prefigured, and indirectly inspired, the LC I/LM IA “goddess” fresco from Xeste 3 at Akrotiri, with its suppliant and enthroned divinity, who is flanked by a stepping monkey and seated griffin.<sup>48</sup> Also striking is the parallel between the imagery on a later MB Syrian seal in Vienna with Minoan elements and the “goddess fresco,” as discussed by Joan Aruz.<sup>49</sup>

The one painting from Alalakh Level VII that most scholars would agree is closest in style and character to Minoan painting is the fresco with swaying sprays of spiky leaves.<sup>50</sup> However, while it is usually compared with the developed naturalistic figural style of Neopalatial frescoes, several of its features suggest it is actually rooted in an earlier tradition, one that is closer in date to its context at Alalakh. Susan Sherratt finds its red background troubling, as she thinks red backgrounds are rare in Minoan wall painting, and the Niemeiers look for parallels in much later Mycenaean painting. However, this fresco seems rather to reflect the contemporary ceramic style of MM IIB–IIIA Kamares ware, with its light-on-dark color scheme.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the motif of spiky

leaves appears frequently on MM IIB and III pottery. Indeed, the curvature of the sprays seems to hint at a growing interest in naturalism and movement in Minoan painting, as attested, for example, by the curved stems on fragmentary MM III frescoes from Galatas and the swaying palm trees with spiky leaves that decorate several MM III vases.<sup>52</sup> Thus, as at Mari, and, perhaps, at Alalakh we can detect the presence of guest craftsmen from Crete who contributed to a portion of the wall paintings in the grand salon of the Yarim-Lim palace, while observing their Levantine colleagues paint the large-scale figures of bulls and griffins.

Woolley also discovered painted plaster *faux marbre* on the basalt orthostats of Room 5, the “Chamber of Audience,” which he dated to the second phase of the palace, shortly before its destruction in ca. 1600 B.C.<sup>53</sup> By this time, however, the practice of imitating veined stone in painted plaster was a familiar technique in the Aegean and western Asia. As will be discussed below, a plaster floor painted with *faux marbre* panels and floral motifs has recently been discovered in the palace at Tel Kabri (northern Israel), whose construction may be contemporary with or slightly later than that of the Level VII palace at Alalakh, that is, MM III, in the Cretan Bronze Age sequence.<sup>54</sup>

If craftsmen from Crete were indeed present at Alalakh, observing the local wall painters and contributing their own talents, perhaps other Minoan craftsmen were engaged in other activities at Alalakh, as they may have been at Mari. In the current campaign of excavations, fragments of fluted painted plaster were discovered in the stratum equivalent to Woolley’s Level VII. K. Aslihan Yener, director of the current Alalakh excavations, ascribes these to the wings of large-scale sphinxes or griffins that she reconstructs as flanking a throne (see Yener essay, pp. 142–53). It may not be a coincidence that just when the first figural wall paintings appear on Crete, at the start of the Neopalatial era in MM IIIA, as

discussed above (see note 27), a new technique of wall decoration was adopted: the depiction of large-scale figures in painted plaster relief.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps it was at Levantine sites like Alalakh that Minoan craftsmen first became acquainted with the method of modeling plaster figures in three dimensions, in the region where its roots may be traced back to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B era of the eighth millennium B.C.<sup>56</sup> And although the subject here is wall painting, it is worth recalling that Minoan bull-leapers may also have been present at Alalakh, as suggested by their depiction on seal impressions from Level VII.<sup>57</sup>

Chronological primacy also implies that the architectural features which Woolley ascribed to Minoan influence in the grand salon that he reconstructed above storerooms 11, 12, and 13 of the Yarim-Lim palace—specifically, the use of multiple columns to divide floor space and windows—should be regarded the other way around: as Levantine influences on the visiting Minoan architects who were restoring and redesigning the new palaces on Crete at that time. There is another feature in Minoan architecture that it is tempting to consider an adaptation of something seen by Cretan craftsmen in the Near East. In the course of recent core-sampling work at Tell Atchana, it has become apparent that the Orontes River originally ran up to the base of the mound, at a point where Woolley identified a gate in the Level VII fortification wall.<sup>58</sup> This may now be identified specifically as a “river” or “water” gate, similar to the one that Woolley excavated at Carchemish, which led down to the Euphrates River.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the river gates of the Near East inspired Neopalatial architects to construct one at Knossos, in the so-called East Bastion. Erected in LM IA (ca. 1600 B.C.) up against the massive terracing of the palace site, the East Bastion was built of ashlar blocks and resembles a fortified tower in its massive appearance, not unlike the typical Middle Bronze Age Syrian gatehouse. However, this feature at Knossos is



not a fortification but supports a staircase, flanked by a drain and settling tanks, that connected the west bank of the Kairatos River directly to the palace.<sup>60</sup>

The floor and wall paintings recently discovered at Tel Kabri have already been cited in connection with the debate regarding the relationship between Near Eastern and Aegean figural wall painting. In addition to the painted *faux marbre* floor noted above (oddly overpainted with irregular floral chains), the Niemeiers have reconstructed wall paintings that seem to show technical, stylistic, and iconographic affinities with Cycladic wall painting, specifically the miniature fresco from the West House at Akrotiri, with its depiction of coastal towns and griffins, painted against a white background.<sup>61</sup> In the absence of parallels from the Near East, one is inclined to conclude, with the Niemeiers, that the Tel Kabri frescoes were likely painted by Cycladic artisans.

Although the paintings from Tel Kabri date to Middle Bronze IIB or IIC and thus predate their LC I counterparts, new evidence from Thera can now be brought into the discussion about the role of Cycladic wall painters in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>62</sup> During the 1990s, excavations were conducted in the process of constructing a new roofing system at Akrotiri. In the course of digging the foundations for its columnar supports, substantial portions of the MC III town were revealed immediately below the LC I town, which had been the focus of excavations since their inception in 1967. Interestingly, although nearly every building in the LC I town has been found to contain beautifully executed figural wall paintings on a wide range of subjects, none were discovered in the MC III town. Rather, an astonishing assemblage of polychrome vases, decorated with a rich repertoire of human and animal imagery—including griffins—was uncovered. These polychrome figural vases are roughly contemporary with the Cycladic-style wall paintings from Tel Kabri.<sup>63</sup> Although they appear somewhat

naive in style, it is difficult to explain their ambitious imagery, which includes hunting scenes and libation rituals, in the absence of contemporary wall paintings.

Perhaps the vase painters of Middle Bronze Age Akrotiri were inspired by the newly emerging interest in naturalistic figural imagery just developing on Crete, as evidenced, for example, by an imported MM IIIA flask from Akrotiri depicting in ceramic relief a lion attacking a bull.<sup>64</sup> Yet the Cycladic vase painters appear to have been freer in their style of execution, composition, and choice of subjects than contemporary wall painters on Crete and in the Near East. Indeed, these Cycladic vase painters seem to have taken the lead in developing the new artistic vocabulary that by the LC I era emerged in the outstanding series of wall paintings for which Akrotiri is justifiably famous.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps at Tel Kabri, we might again detect the relatively untried hands of Aegean craftsmen working in the Levant, offering their assistance, and experimenting on the spot with images and styles that were only just beginning to take hold in the Aegean.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Dr. Colin Macdonald for his kind invitation to study and publish the plaster and frescoes from South-West House; my contribution will appear as a chapter in the publication, written in collaboration with Polly Westlake, and currently in preparation (Koehl and Westlake forthcoming). I am also grateful to him for allowing me to illustrate and discuss the fragments presented here, and for his very helpful comments on this essay. I also wish to thank Bernice Jones and Michele Mitrovich for their comments and Laetitia Raiciulescu for research assistance. All mistakes are my own.

1. Evans mentions the house briefly in Evans 1921–35, vol. 2 (1928), p. 672.
2. Ibid. According to Macdonald, there are several destruction deposits belonging to the earlier part of MM III, after which major renovations seem to have taken place; Macdonald forthcoming.
3. MacGillivray 1998, p. 58, and see esp. no. 547, pl. 91.
4. Immerwahr 1990, pp. 21–22. On the absolute dating of the Protopalatial era, see Warren and Hankey 1989, pp. 127–35; see also MacGillivray 1998, pp. 107–8. The archaeologically derived absolute chronology for Egypt, whose synchronisms form the basis of the Aegean absolute chronology, is now largely confirmed by carbon 14; see most recently Bronk Ramsey et al. 2010.
5. Immerwahr 1990, fig. 6.
6. I. J. Winter 2000, p. 746.
7. Immerwahr 1990, pp. 33–34, colorpls. II and III.
8. For the indigenous argument, see, for example, Branigan 1970a, pp. 50–52; Graham 1987, pp. 229–33; Warren 1987, pp. 49–50; Schoep 2006; Driessen 2007. For a Near Eastern derivation, see, for example, Watrous 1987, p. 69. On the history of orthostat construction on Crete, see J. W. Shaw 1973, pp. 83–97. For a recent assessment of the question, with bibliography, see Aruz 2008, pp. 74–75.
9. Duru 2003; Marchetti 2006, pp. 277–78. On the adoption of Near Eastern, specifically Anatolian, sealing practices by Protopalatial Cretan society, see Weingarten 1990b; for the influence of Anatolian metalwork on Protopalatial Crete, see Davis 1979.
10. Dossin 1939; Dossin 1970; Malamet 1971; Wiener 1987, p. 262; Cline 1994, p. 27; Guichard 1999; Aruz 2008, pp. 68, 91.
11. Villard in Bardet et al. 1984, p. 528 (text no. 556, ll. 29–31); Villard 1986.
12. Zaccagnini 1983; Sasson in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 95–100.
13. Graham 1987, p. 240.
14. Ibid., p. 232.
15. See Militello 1999; for additional discussion, see Aruz 2008, pp. 74, 130–31.
16. On the efflorescence of Neopalatial figural imagery in MM IIIA, see papers in Macdonald and Knappett forthcoming.
17. Parrot 1958a, pp. 105–6, 165; Parrot 1958b, pp. 67–69, 109–10, fig. 54, pl. 15. For discussion with bibliography on the question of Minoan painters at Mari, see B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 772–73; I. J. Winter 2000.
18. Hirsch 1977, pp. 7–22. The floors of the MM IIA (nineteenth century B.C.) South-West House at Knossos were largely of red painted plaster; Koehl and Westlake forthcoming.
19. Walberg 1976, fig. 37.5; Betancourt 1985, fig. 70K; MacGillivray 1998, for example, pls. 11, 15, 25.
20. Although spirals have a long history in Near Eastern imagery, especially on seals, the retorted running spiral seems to be a specifically Minoan type. For a discussion of Near Eastern and Aegean spirals, see Collon 1975, pp. 135–36; Aruz 2008, passim.
21. Immerwahr 1990, p. 22, fig. 6f; on its date, see Hood 2005, pp. 48–49.
22. Evans 1921–35, vol. 1 (1921), p. 356, fig. 255; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 769–72.
23. I. J. Winter 2000, pp. 750–51.
24. Warren 1969, pp. 124–56; J. W. Shaw 1973, pp. 19–20, 26, 113, 217; Hirsch 1977, pp. 7–22.
25. For similar conclusions, see B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 773.
26. I owe this observation to Michele Mitrovich.
27. Warren and Hankey 1989, pp. 52–54, 131–35; MacGillivray 1998, p. 107. Debate continues over when major cultural changes occurred on Crete; their nature, duration, and effects; and the terms used to mark these changes. For example, while most date the end of the Protopalatial era to the end of MM IIB, MacGillivray now dates it to MM IIIA; MacGillivray 2007, esp. pp. 105–6, 143–44. As this subject clearly lies beyond the scope of this essay, for the most recent discussion of the problems, see Macdonald 2010; Macdonald 2012. I am grateful to Colin Macdonald for his advice and guidance through the subtleties of these murky issues.
28. Margueron in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 27.
29. For Galatas, see Rethemiotakis 2002; for Neopalatial Phaistos, see La Rosa 2002; for Knossos, see Macdonald 2002; Macdonald 2005; Hood 2005; Macdonald forthcoming.
30. On these synchronisms, see Collon 2000, p. 290; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 767, 772; Aruz 2008, pp. 71, 73; Cline, Yasur-Landau, and Goshen 2011, p. 256.
31. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 780; Cline, Yasur-Landau, and Goshen 2011, p. 256.
32. Woolley 1948, p. 14; Woolley 1955, pp. 228–34; W. S. Smith 1965, pp. 102–4; W.-D. Niemeier 1991. For the most recent discussion of the issue, with bibliography, see I. J. Winter 2000; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000; Cline, Yasur-Landau, and Goshen 2011.
33. Woolley 1948, p. 14; Woolley 1955, pp. 228–34.
34. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000.
35. Ibid., p. 781, figs. 14, 15.
36. J. M. Evans in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 33, no. 8.
37. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 781.
38. Buchanan 1966, pp. 177–78, nos. 901, 906; Collon 1975, p. 44, no. 76; Pfälzner in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 228, no. 138.

39. W. S. Smith 1965, p. 113, fig. 51; *Beyond Babylon*, p. 194, fig. 62; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 781.
40. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 781, n. 40.
41. Woolley 1955, pp. 230–31; W. S. Smith 1965, p. 103, fig. 137; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 784–89, figs. 17–21.
42. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 787, fig. 22.
43. Woolley 1948, p. 14; Woolley 1955, p. 231.
44. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 787, figs. 17, 19, 20, 22.
45. For the few examples of Protopalatial griffin images, see Aruz 2008, pp. 107–8, figs. 229, 230.
46. Buchanan 1966, p. 177, no. 901, p. 178, no. 906; Collon 1975, p. 79, no. 145; Buchanan 1981, p. 421, nos. 1214, 1216, p. 422, nos. 1217, 1221, p. 425, nos. 1225–1227, p. 426, nos. 1231, 1232, p. 430, no. 1250; Aruz 2008, p. 108.
47. Jones 2005, p. 714.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Aruz 1995, pp. 14–16; Aruz 2008, pp. 142–43.
50. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 784, for discussion and bibliography; see also I. J. Winter 2000, p. 753.
51. S. Sherratt 1994, p. 237; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 783.
52. Betancourt 1985, pp. 107–9, fig. 84G; Rethemiotakis 2002, pls. XVIa, XVIIa.
53. Woolley 1955, p. 92.
54. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 772. On the dating of the paintings from Tel Kabri, see B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 767–69; Cline, Yasur-Landau, and Goshen 2011, pp. 254–57.
55. Hood 2005, pp. 49, 52.
56. Grissom 2000.
57. Collon 1975, p. 60, no. 111; discussed recently by Collon 2000, pp. 286–87, figs. 1b, 1c; Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 132–33.
58. Yener 2012.
59. Woolley 1921, pp. 103–10.
60. On the East Bastion at Knossos, see most recently Macdonald 2002, p. 43; Macdonald 2005, pp. 140–42.
61. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 776–80.
62. On the date of the Tel Kabri frescoes, see most recently Cline, Yasur-Landau, and Goshen 2011, pp. 254–57.
63. Papagiannopoulou 2008a.
64. Knappett and Nikolakopoulou 2008, pp. 19, 27–29, fig. 17.
65. Vlachopoulos forthcoming.



# Akrotiri, Thera: Reflections from the East

As soon as systematic excavations in the Aegean began, archaeologists there and in the Near East eagerly started seeking evidence to prove the traditional dogma “*ex oriente lux*.” Gradually, however, material evidence accumulated showing the reciprocity of contacts and exchanges. Many and varied are the orientalia that have been encountered at Bronze Age Aegean sites in both Crete and the mainland and islands of Greece,<sup>1</sup> and many are the publications dedicated exclusively to this subject.<sup>2</sup> Discussing some more from Akrotiri, Thera, without changing the overall picture, will simply enhance the role of this island in the interaction between the Aegean and the east.

The deep shafts recently excavated at Akrotiri between the Late Cycladic (LC) I level and the bedrock for the pillars of the new shelter for the Bronze Age city have allowed us to study the site’s stratigraphy from about the middle of the fifth millennium B.C. until the end of the seventeenth or middle of the sixteenth century B.C., when the city was destroyed by a volcanic eruption and buried under thick deposits of pumice and pozzolana.<sup>3</sup> Before the excavations, the wealth and the character of the art revealed in the Late Bronze Age ruins were plausibly understood as the outcome of maritime activities. Our recent investigations not only confirmed this view but they have also demonstrated that the maritime and mercantile history of the settlement at

Akrotiri goes back several centuries earlier. Great numbers of Early Bronze Age transport amphorae from different parts of the Aegean indicate that even before the end of the third millennium B.C. Akrotiri had become a center of trade and transactions,<sup>4</sup> a role that obviously strongly influenced the development of its urbanization. It is also worth noting that, according to the archaeological evidence, viticulture and wine making,<sup>5</sup> as well as tin-bronze metallurgy, were introduced in the Aegean a couple of centuries before the end of the third millennium B.C.<sup>6</sup> Thera, the southernmost of the Cyclades, seems to have played a leading role in these developments, and the sudden appearance of metallurgy evidenced at Akrotiri by the discovery of crucibles, molds, tuyeres, and tuyere holders<sup>7</sup> suggests that its inhabitants were engaged in



Fig. 1. Ceramic pomegranate jug. Thera, Akrotiri. Middle Bronze Age. Museum of Prehistoric Thera. Cat. no. 9144



Fig. 2. Ceramic Canaanite amphora inscribed with the sign *tet*. Thera, Akrotiri. Late Bronze Age. Museum of Prehistoric Thera. Cat. no. 3767



Fig. 3. Ceramic Canaanite amphora inscribed with the sign *kap*. Thera, Akrotiri. Late Bronze Age. Cat. no. 7577

the trade of metal. Thera's strategic situation along the new metals route between Cyprus, an inexhaustible source of copper, and Crete's emerging palatial society brought the maritime community of Akrotiri to the vanguard of this commerce and into direct contact with the eastern Mediterranean world.<sup>8</sup> This activity may explain the presence of orientalia in the city's late Middle and early Late Bronze Age horizons.<sup>9</sup>

Among the least impressive finds of eastern Mediterranean origin are a few pieces of charcoal recovered from a late third or early second millennium B.C. horizon that include specimens identified as cedar of Lebanon and pomegranate.<sup>10</sup> According to archaeobotanical evidence, the pomegranate—native to the region south of the Caspian Sea—was unknown in the Mediterranean

before the fourteenth century B.C.<sup>11</sup> Unless our specimen was introduced to the Aegean via the Black Sea, it probably arrived at Akrotiri together with cedar of Lebanon, thus marking the beginning of a long tradition of sea contacts between the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean. During the Middle Bronze Age the pomegranate became a popular iconographic motif, as a special category of vases indicates (fig. 1).<sup>12</sup>

In the following centuries, imports from the Levant and the Near East increased substantially. Three complete jars have been classed as Canaanite by leading experts, and, as far as I know, no alternative has been proposed by those who have orally argued against this identification.<sup>13</sup> Two of these jars are inscribed. On the shoulder of one, a circle with cross-bars had been drawn with

Fig. 4. Ceramic transport ewer inscribed with the sign of a pentagram, or pentalpha. Thera, Akrotiri. Late Bronze Age



Fig. 5. Detail of fig. 4

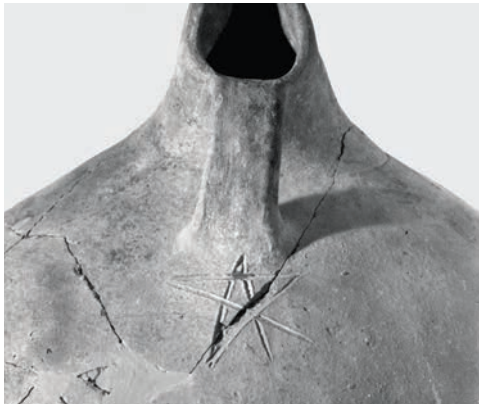


Fig. 6. Ivory seal with the sign of a hexagram. Thera, Akrotiri. Early Middle Bronze Age. Cat. no. 8385



a finger on the wet clay (fig. 2).<sup>14</sup> The sign is not new to the Aegean world. At Akrotiri it is known from a number of pithoi designed for liquids.<sup>15</sup> It also occurs quite often as sign 29 on tablets of the Cretan Linear A script and is identical to sign 77 of the Mycenaean Linear B.<sup>16</sup> The same sign, identified with the Old Canaanite letter *tet*, occupies ninth place in the abecedarium incised on a thirteenth to twelfth century B.C. sherd from Izbet Sartah. According to Frank Moore Cross, this is one of the “earliest extant *tet* signs in Old Canaanite.”<sup>17</sup> The sign occurs again in the Phoenician Ahirom inscription from Byblos, as well as in the earliest Greek epigraphic examples of the letter *theta*. The discovery of the Canaanite jar at Akrotiri establishes an earlier date for the appearance of the sign for the letter *tet*.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, the sign incised on the other jar (fig. 3) resembles a trident and occurs in both the Linear A and Linear B scripts (as signs 54 and 27, respectively).<sup>19</sup> It is the second of four signs in a Linear A inscription on the shoulder of a ewer from Akrotiri<sup>20</sup> and resembles the letter *kap*, which occupies eleventh place in the Izbet Sartah abecedarium. Cross recognized this sign as a “suitable archetype for both [the] Greek *kappa* and the Gezer *kap*.”<sup>21</sup> Whatever the origin of these two symbols, Levantine or Aegean, their presence on the Canaanite jars indicates that they were already in use when early attempts at alphabetic script were made.

Two other incised motifs from Akrotiri may have some connection with the east. The first is on a large transport ewer (fig. 4). Below the handle of this ewer, incised before firing, is a “pentagram,” a five-pointed star drawn as one continuous line (fig. 5). Known also as a “pentalpha,” the five-pointed star was considered in Classical antiquity to be a magical sign for evoking benevolent spirits and averting evil ones. It was used by both the Pythagoreans and the Freemasons. The second example is a button-like small ivory seal found recently in an early Middle Bronze Age horizon. On its discoid surface is engraved a “hexagram,” a six-pointed star composed



of two equilateral intersecting triangles (fig. 6). The hexagram, considered a representation of king Solomon's seal but better known as the Star of David, was also imbued with magical properties. Although it is difficult to interpret the presence of both types of stars on an incised wall-plaster fragment at Knossos,<sup>22</sup> it is interesting that these signs are rather familiar in Minoan contexts, occurring particularly on clay seal impressions that "appear to belong to a class of design that served some religious, perhaps talismanic or apotropaic purpose."<sup>23</sup> The original provenance of these motifs—eastern or Aegean—is debatable. However, the fact that they occur in archaeological contexts in both regions and are associated with more or less the same magical properties indicates at least an exchange of goods and ideas between these areas. These contacts are further confirmed by the discovery of objects such as a pair of wooden clappers (fig. 7),<sup>24</sup> various stone vases of Egyptian or Syro-Palestinian origin,<sup>25</sup> ivory items,<sup>26</sup> and two ostrich eggshells transformed into ceremonial vessels (rhyta) by the application of faience attachments (fig. 8).<sup>27</sup> The



Fig. 7. Pair of Egyptian wooden clappers. Thera, Akrotiri. Late Bronze Age. Cat. nos. 8583, 8584

manufacture of faience has been traced back to late fifth millennium B.C. Mesopotamia, from where it seems to have spread both eastward and westward.<sup>28</sup> Faience objects documented in Early Minoan Crete have been considered imports from the east, as was the technology of making faience, which rapidly developed on the island.<sup>29</sup> The faience items at Akrotiri have also traditionally been regarded as imports from either the east or other parts of the Aegean,<sup>30</sup> but the recent discovery of quartz powder at Akrotiri is indicative of local production.<sup>31</sup>



Fig. 8. Pair of ostrich-egg rhyta. Thera, Akrotiri. Late Bronze Age. Museum of Prehistoric Thera. Cat. nos. 1853, 1854



Fig. 9. Gold figurine of an ibex or gazelle. Thera, Akrotiri. Museum of Prehistoric Thera. Cat. no. 8226



Fig. 10. Ceramic Cycladic White bird-spouted ewer with flying griffin. Melos, Phylakopi. Middle Cycladic. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Cat. no. 5777

The gold figurine of an ibex or gazelle (fig. 9), associated perhaps with religion, seems totally foreign to Aegean art and might be an oriental import, possibly from Mesopotamia.<sup>32</sup> Increased contact with the east during the Late Bronze Age is also suggested by the remains of insects native to the Near East found in stored grains.<sup>33</sup>

Besides the actual presence of materials or artifacts, glimpses of the east can be obtained through artistic themes and motifs. There is general consensus that the griffin was introduced into Aegean iconography from Syria, with early representations appearing on the Middle Minoan II sealings from Phaistos.<sup>34</sup> Almost at the same time, this hybrid creature emerged in the Cyclades as the only decorative theme on certain beaked jugs of the Cycladic White type (fig. 10).<sup>35</sup> It has been suggested that the flying gallop pose was an artistic innovation in the Aegean at the time.<sup>36</sup> If this theory is correct, the early depiction of the griffin in this pose on the Middle Cycladic jugs may indicate that the creature entered Aegean iconography through the Cyclades. The griffin became a more frequent theme during the Middle Cycladic period, as demonstrated by its monumental depiction on large jars decorated in the bichrome technique (fig. 11).<sup>37</sup> This popularity did not fade in the succeeding LC I period, as the wall paintings show (fig. 12).<sup>38</sup>

The thematic repertoire of the Akrotiri wall paintings is even more revealing in subjects and motifs with connections to the east. For example, geometric patterns such as the spiral or the imitation of marble are almost identical in Thera<sup>39</sup> and Mesopotamian<sup>40</sup> art. The Thera painters used images of flora and fauna to define exotic landscapes. Although the palm tree, the lion, and the wild duck were not alien to the Aegean habitat, they certainly suggest elements of a subtropical landscape when accompanied by papyrus and a leopard, as in the Miniature Frieze from the West House.<sup>41</sup> Undeniable too is the oriental influence in the depiction of animals such as antelopes and monkeys.<sup>42</sup>

Besides iconographic motifs, certain pictorial conventions are common to both Thera and eastern art.<sup>43</sup> For example, the Egyptian pose denoting pain or sorrow, known from the kneeling mourners depicted on the walls of funerary monuments at Egyptian Thebes,<sup>44</sup> finds echoes in the attitudes of the so-called Adorants from Xeste 3 at Akrotiri: there, the young woman seated on a rock supports her forehead with her left hand, while with her right one she indicates the source of the pain by holding her right foot, one toe of which is bleeding.<sup>45</sup> The mode of rendering inert or dead human bodies used in Egypt as early as the Pre-dynastic period<sup>46</sup> was adopted by the painter of the Miniature Frieze in the West House to render slain or drowned warriors in the Naval Battle scene.<sup>47</sup>

The superimposing of different scenes or the use of lateral layering to represent moving figures, as well as the vertical layering of static figures to render depth, may also reflect foreign contacts and influences.<sup>48</sup> In Egyptian art human figures are shown with two left or two right hands or feet, depending on the direction in which they are moving.<sup>49</sup> Although the Thera painters endeavored to deviate from this convention, often successfully, there are instances, such as the girl gathering saffron, in which such interventions were apparently not possible and the Egyptian convention was kept.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the standard Egyptian and Mesopotamian rendering of a cow's piebald hide by means of stars with three or four rounded rays<sup>51</sup> is an artistic idiom found also in the art of Thera, exemplified in the West House by the bulls and bull's-hide shields of the warriors in the Miniature Frieze in Room 5 and by the shields and palanquins (*ikria*) decorating the walls of Room 4.<sup>52</sup>

The personification of animals, totally foreign to Aegean art, is undoubtedly attributable to oriental influences.<sup>53</sup> Representations of monkeys playing musical instruments or dancing must have been observed in the east before they were depicted in the Thera



Fig. 11. Large ceramic pithos in the bichrome style with griffin. Thera, Akrotiri. Middle Cycladic period. Cat. no. 8885



Fig. 12. Detail of the Miniature Frieze showing a flying griffin. Thera, Akrotiri, West House. Late Cycladic I. Museum of Prehistoric Thera



wall paintings.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the monkey serving the Mistress of Animals in the wall painting of the Saffron Gatherers is probably an oriental borrowing.<sup>55</sup>

Iconographic conventions common to Thera and oriental art may reveal a much deeper interaction, extending even into the ideological domain. Although later, dating to the twelfth century B.C., the painting in the tomb of Anher-Khaou at Deir el-Medina, Egypt, shows children with partly shaven heads, exactly as boys and girls are depicted in the Thera wall paintings.<sup>56</sup> It is difficult to say whether this hair treatment had the same meaning in Egypt as it did in Thera, where scholars unanimously agree that it designated the child's stage of initiation.<sup>57</sup>

There is no doubt that the orientalia at Akrotiri and the use of certain iconographic motifs, themes, and artistic conventions are evidence of contacts, exchanges, and other transactions between the Near and Middle East and the Aegean. As Béatrice Muller has pointed out, motifs such as the spirals and the imitation of marble, themes such as the stylized papyrus or tree, and scenes such as the Sacrifice in the Court of the Palm Tree appear in wall paintings at the Palace of Mari in the Middle Euphrates and at Knossos and Thera in the Aegean.<sup>58</sup> The organization of the wall surface in three zones, with the middle one reserved for the main theme, and the use of narrow friezes are also practices common to both regions.<sup>59</sup> Taking into account the earlier date of the examples from Mari, which was destroyed by Hammurabi in 1760 B.C., Muller has suggested that the Aegean parallels were most likely the result of influences from Mesopotamia rather than the reverse.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, similar motifs and themes occurring in the mural art at sites of a later date, such as Alalakh in Turkey, Tel Kabri in Palestine, and Tell el-Dab'a in the Nile Delta, are generally considered to reflect Aegean influences.<sup>61</sup> Muller has therefore proposed that relations between the Near East and the Aegean basin from the perspective of mural painting should be seen as a cultural koine

rather than as an acculturation. The dominant movement in the early second millennium B.C. was from the east to the Aegean. This direction was reversed about 1700 B.C., when Syria and the Levant experienced penetration from the Mediterranean.<sup>62</sup>

Whether or not one accepts Muller's suggestion, it is beyond doubt that contacts between the Aegean and the east were established by at least the beginning of the second millennium B.C., and that their reflections we encounter in the archaeological record suggest reciprocal rather than hegemonic interaction.

1. Buchholz 1980; Dumas 1985; Krzyszkowska 1988; Dumas 1992, p. 27; Devetzi 2000; Bichta 2003; Mikrakis 2007.
2. Crawley 1989; Phillips 1997; Cline and Harris-Cline 1998; Karetsou 2000.
3. Dumas 1999; Dumas 2003a; Dumas 2003b.
4. D. E. Wilson, Day, and Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2008, p. 269; Kariotis, Day, and D. E. Wilson forthcoming.
5. Dumas 2006b; Dumas 2008c, pp. 41–42.
6. J. D. Muhly 2004; Bassiakos and Philaniotou 2007; J. D. Muhly 2008.
7. Dumas 2004b, pp. 418–23; Michailidou 2008.
8. Dumas 2007, p. 245; Dumas 2008b, p. 28; Dumas 2010, p. 754.
9. Bichta 2003.
10. Asouti 2003.
11. C. A. Ward 2003, pp. 531–32.
12. Dumas 2006a; Nikolakopoulou 2010, p. 214.
13. Dumas 1994, p. 161, pls. 83b, 84b; S. Marinatos 1976, pp. 29–30, pl. 49b.
14. Dumas 2004a, p. 500, fig. 1.
15. Dumas 1980, pp. 118–20; Dumas 2004a, p. 500, fig. 2.
16. Platon and Brice 1975, p. 176 (Linear A); Hooker 1994, p. 83 (Linear B); Dumas 2004a, p. 499, table 1.
17. Cross 1980, p. 10.
18. Dumas 2004a, p. 500.
19. Platon and Brice 1975, p. 177 (Linear A); Hooker 1994, p. 83 (Linear B); Dumas 2004a, p. 499, table 1.
20. S. Marinatos 1971, p. 44, pl. 109.
21. Cross 1980, p. 11.
22. Cameron 1979.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
24. Dumas 2000b, p. 171, pl. 121d; Mikrakis 2007.
25. Devetzi 2000; Devetzi 2008, pp. 458–59, 464–68.
26. Bichta 2003, pp. 547–49.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 542.

28. K. P. Foster 1979, pp. 22–55.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–59; Panagiotaki 1997, pp. 303–6; Panagiotaki 2000, pp. 154–57.
30. Bichta 2003, pp. 545–47.
31. Birtacha et al. forthcoming.
32. Doulmas 1999, pp. 172–73, pls. 108, 109; Doulmas 2003a, pp. 55–59; Boulotis 2005, pp. 44–46; Masseti 2008.
33. Panagiotakopulu 2008.
34. Tzavella-Evjen 1970, pp. 92–104; Davaras 1976, p. 128; Immerwahr 1990, p. 30; Hood 2000, p. 22.
35. Edgar 1904, p. 109, pl. XIV, 2; Zervos 1957, p. 39, figs. 271–73.
36. Crowley 1989, p. 118, n. 2; Immerwahr 1990, p. 30; Poursat 2008, p. 111.
37. Doulmas 2001; Doulmas 2003a, p. 51; Boulotis 2005, p. 57; Papagiannopoulou 2008a, pp. 436–41; Papagiannopoulou 2008b, pp. 254–55.
38. Doulmas 1992, pp. 48, 65, fig. 32, pp. 131, 159, fig. 122, p. 165, fig. 128.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 50, figs. 14–17 (imitation of marble), pp. 128, 132, figs. 93, 94 (spirals).
40. Parrot 1958b, p. 67; Muller 1995, p. 50.
41. Doulmas 1992, pp. 48, 66–67, figs. 33, 34.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 116–19, figs. 82–84 (antelopes), pp. 111, 120–23, figs. 85–90, pp. 128, 134, figs. 95, 96 (monkeys).
43. Doulmas 1985.
44. Mekhitarian 1954, p. 101.
45. Doulmas 1985, p. 30; Doulmas 1992, p. 136, fig. 100, p. 142, fig. 105.
46. Wolf 1954, p. 26, pl. 5 (above), p. 28, pl. 4.
47. Doulmas 1992, p. 29, pl. 26.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.
49. Gaballa 1976, p. 3.
50. Doulmas 1992, p. 130, pls. 152, 156; Immerwahr 2005.
51. Mekhitarian 1954, pp. 10, 33, 40, 66, 149; Schmökkel 1963, pl. 8; Romant 1978, p. 135; Doulmas 1985, pp. 31–32.
52. Doulmas 1992, p. 47, pl. 26.
53. McDermott 1938, pp. 131–37; Rutten 1938, pp. 98, 105; Vandier d’Abbadie 1966, pp. 185–88.
54. Doulmas 1985, p. 31; Doulmas 1992, pp. 128, 132, figs. 95, 96; Papageorgiou and Birtacha 2008, pp. 302–5.
55. Doulmas 1992, pp. 131, 158, fig. 122, p. 165, fig. 128.
56. For Anher-Khaou, see Erman 1894/1971, p. 219, n. 2; Säflund 1981, p. 207, fig. 26. For Theran wall paintings, see Doulmas 1992, pp. 52–57, figs. 18–25, pp. 112–15, figs. 79, 81, pp. 136–52, figs. 100–116.
57. Davis 1986; Doulmas 1987; Doulmas 2000a.
58. Muller 1995, p. 51.
59. Iliakis 1978, p. 618; Muller 1995, pp. 55–56.
60. Muller 1995, pp. 55–56.
61. W.-D. Niemeier 1991; Bietak and N. Marinatos 1995; N. Marinatos 1998; W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998; Aslanidou 2002; Bietak, N. Marinatos, and Palivou 2007b.
62. Muller 1995, p. 56.

# The Impact of Minoan Art on Egypt and the Levant: A Glimpse of Palatial Art from the Naval Base of Peru-nefer at Avaris

All illustrations are from the joint archives of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Austrian Archaeological Institute. For detailed references, see Photograph and Illustration Credits.

Over the last two decades a sizeable palatial precinct of 13 acres, dating to the reigns of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, was excavated at ‘Ezbet Helmy, near Tell el-Dab’a (figs. 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> By its size, its position at a big harbor basin (450 × 400 m), and its date, this precinct is explicable only as the royal residence at the famous pharaonic naval base Peru-nefer (“happy going forth,” that is, “happy sortie”).<sup>2</sup> The dispute over whether this famous base and its dockyards were likely to have been located near Memphis or in the eastern Nile Delta at Avaris must be decided in favor of the latter. Seagoing ships would not have

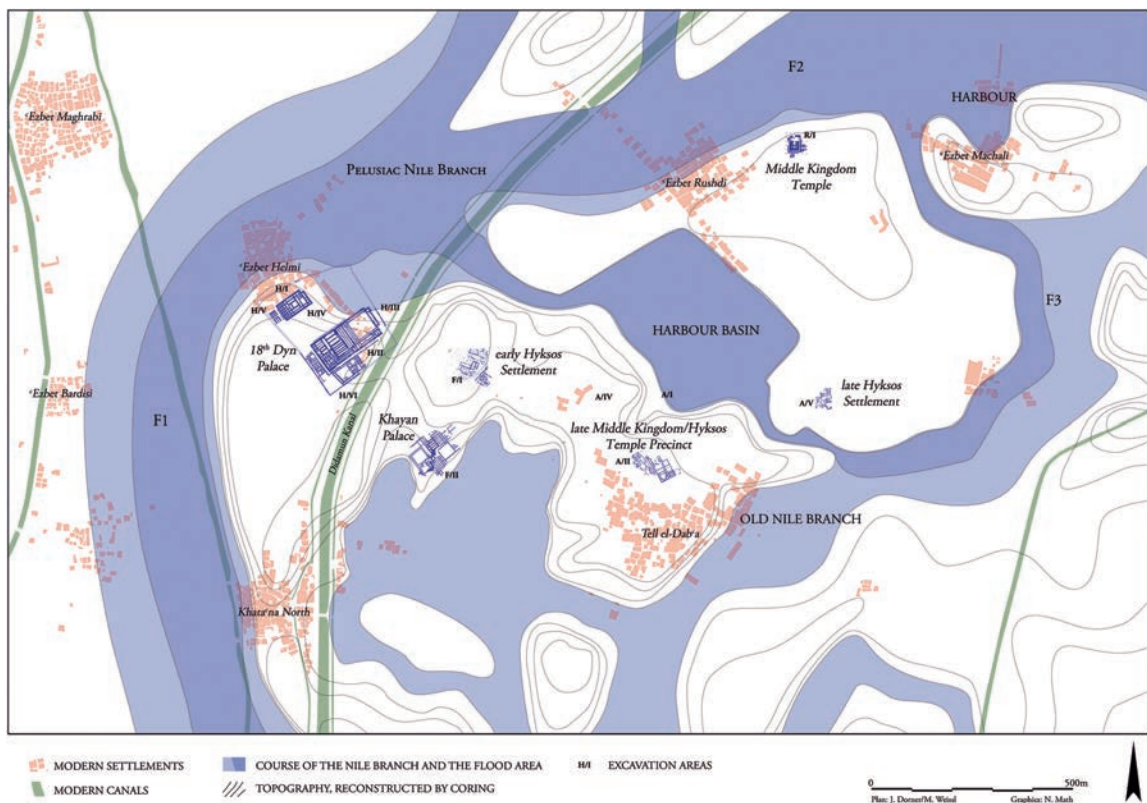


Fig. 1. Map of the harbor basin of Avaris and Peru-nefer showing the site of the Palace precinct



been able to reach the harbor of Memphis during the dry season—March until the end of June—as seawater would have penetrated the near empty Nile channels only up to 40 kilometers from the coast during this time.<sup>3</sup>

Within an enclosure wall we find three palaces of different sizes on high mudbrick platforms, accessible by ramps (figs. 3, 4). Only the substructures were preserved, but a reasonable reconstruction of the plans was possible.<sup>4</sup>

The plans of the large Palace G (160.5 × 79 m [305 × 150 cubits]) and of the small Palace J (ca. 57.5 × 21 m [110 × 40 cubits]) were similar (fig. 3). They both consisted of three main parts: a square, open courtyard, lined with colonnades; a public part, with a portico, a broad vestibule, and a nearly square reception/throne room; and finally the private apartments to the rear.

In Palace G the throne room shared space with rooms that seem to comprise a typical Thutmomid temple. The presence of a temple within an Egyptian palace is very unusual and is perhaps a feature introduced from the Near East, where palaces often integrated a temple. In the case of Palace G the god seems to have had a symbolic abode adjacent to the throne room, thus living side by side with the king. The east side of Palace G housed a narrow wing with storerooms, stairways, and offices. Each palace had a side entrance leading directly to the private apartments. Palace G with its grand scale and number of colonnades appears to have been the more important. Its portico had three rows of columns, its vestibule two, and its throne room four, while small Palace J's portico had only one row of columns, the vestibule one, and the throne room two.

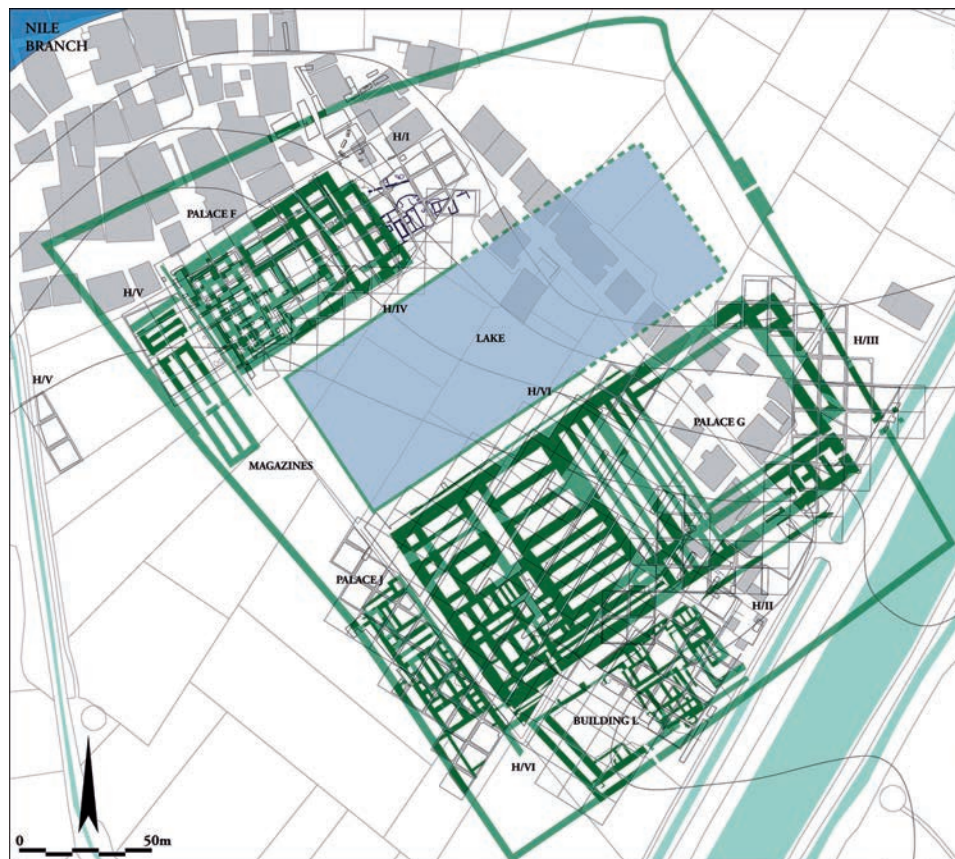
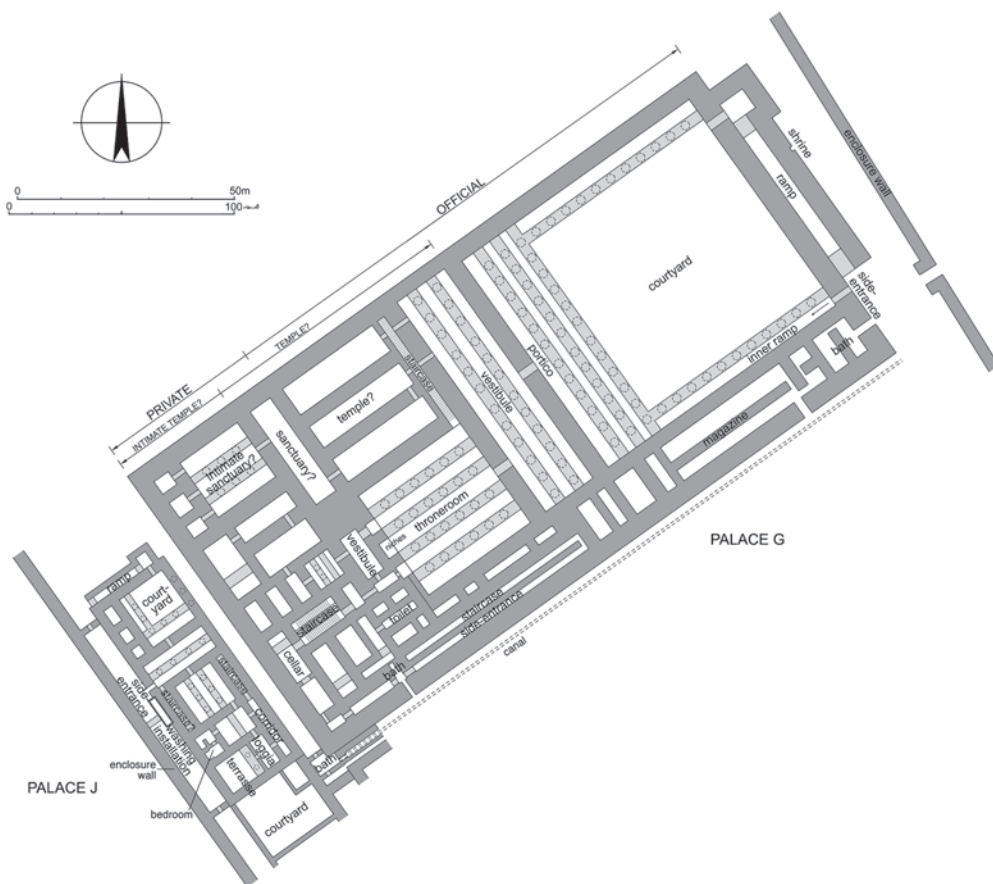


Fig. 2. Plan of the Palace precinct at 'Ezbet Helmy/Tell el-Dab'a

Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the plans of large Palace G and small Palace J. ‘Ezbet Helmy/ Tell el-Dab’a



The midsize Palace F deviated from this scheme (fig. 4). The square courtyard was located not at the entry to the building but at its center. The plan shows what appears to be a winding entrance system, which includes another rectangular courtyard, one without colonnades. The most important part of the building is the southern area, which can be reconstructed from a lattice of walls. Using the contemporary theory of space planning and design of houses and palaces, one can make a reasonably good re-creation of a rectangular throne room with four columns, a two-aisled side room with a single row of two columns, and a sleeping room and/or bathroom on the west side. In front of this complex there is a vestibule. We are missing the private apartments in the rear of the palace. They may have been located upstairs, as there are stairs on both sides of

the ceremonial rooms, but this would—as far as we know—not be in keeping with the Egyptian architectural tradition. We have therefore concluded that this palace was a ceremonial, not residential, one.

It was a great surprise that two of the palaces were furnished with original Minoan mural art. The paintings were found not on the walls but in thousands of fragments at the foot and around the landing of the ramps that led to the palace. The paintings must have flaked off the walls quickly, as the hard lime plaster and the shrinking mudbrick walls on alluvial ground did not technically sit well together—a sign of lack of experience on the part of the artists, who were not familiar with this kind of architecture. The splintered fragments were carried down the ramps and dumped there.

Both the technique of painting in fresco on highly compressed and polished lime plaster mixed with crushed murex shells, and the planning of the scenes and patterns with cord impressions are purely Aegean, as are the style and the motifs. Among the fragments from the medium-size Palace F were found an emblematic griffin on the same full scale as the heraldic griffins in the throne room at Knossos (fig. 5). It had spiral-lined wings and seems to have been accompanied by a lion and a leopard, not yet accommodated in the reconstruction. By analogy with the Knossos paintings, we have to assume that there was, antithetically, a pair of griffins and possibly lions and leopards flanking both sides of the throne. According to Helga Reusch, Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, and Nannó Marinatos, this would be a fitting setting for the patroness of the palace to act as an epiphany of the great goddess, the Mistress of the Animals.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there was a painted fragment of the ceremonial flounced skirt of a full-scale female among the dumps from this palace (fig. 11, top). Paintings of large bulls in

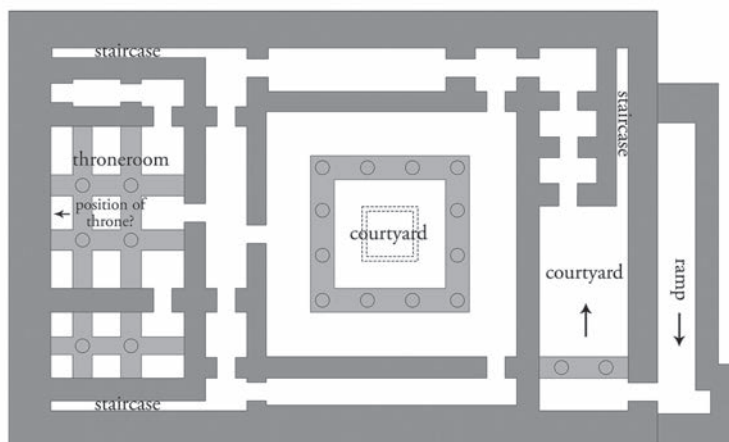


Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the plan of Palace F. ‘Ezbet Helmy/Tell el-Dab’a



Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the paintings of the emblematic griffins on the back wall of the throne room of Palace F



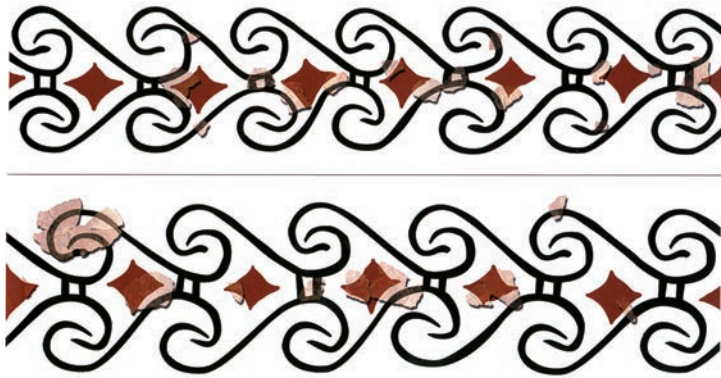


Fig. 6. Reconstruction of decorative friezes from Palace F

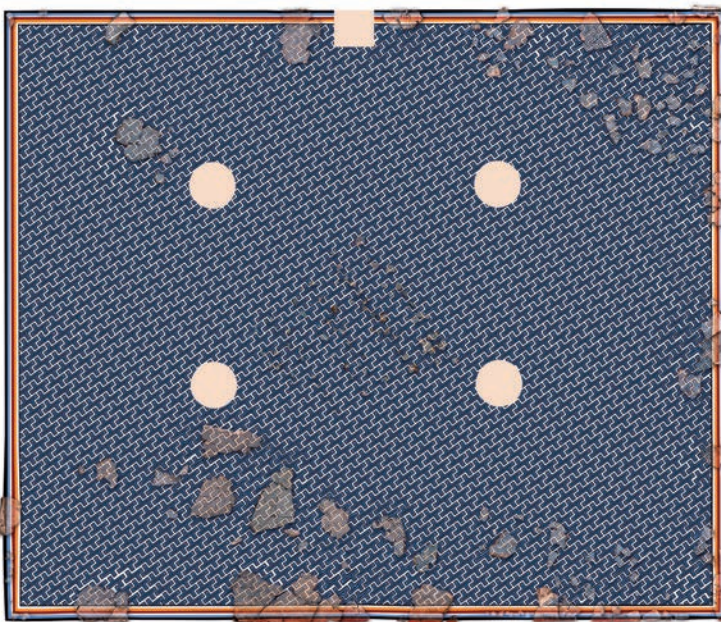
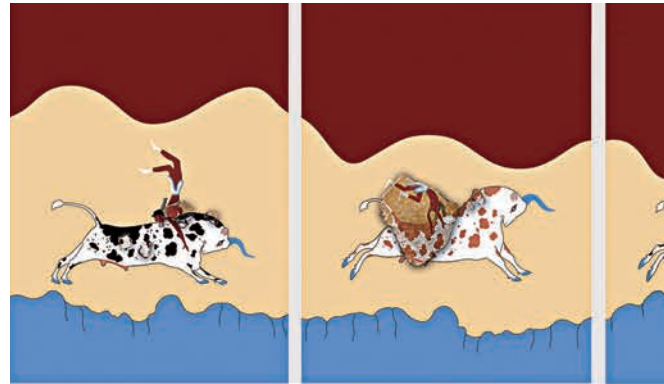


Fig. 7. Reconstructed floor painting from Palace F

all probability also once embellished the walls of this room. Friezes with running spirals and other patterns could have been positioned there, too, framing the figural representations (fig. 6).<sup>6</sup> Fragments of floor paintings with a maze pattern are likely to have belonged to the throne room as well (fig. 7).<sup>7</sup>

One may question whether the throne was positioned in the middle of the back wall, in

keeping with Egyptian architecture and with the apparent position of the throne in the Royal Villa at Knossos (which is approximately contemporary with our palace if not earlier).<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, the throne could have been placed against the middle of the right wall, as in the later Aegean throne rooms at Knossos and Pylos. We believe that the former solution is more likely, because the right wall is shorter and must surely have had a door to the small room on the right side of the throne room. The back wall is also closer to the columns—which would have made the throne more easily visible to visitors. For these reasons we would like to reconstruct the heraldic griffins on the back wall.

Besides full-scale representations, there were smaller friezes (fig. 8), which were still larger than their miniature counterparts at Knossos. Most conspicuous is the bull-leaping frieze against the backdrop of a maze pattern, which represents a palatial precinct, most likely symbolizing the original palace pavement. It ends in an undulating silhouette against a red field above. Two blue-speckled and two reddish-yellow-speckled bulls are shown in two registers, the lower ones along the baseline against the maze as a background, the upper ones along the undulating silhouette against the red background. The animals are engaged by bull-leapers and

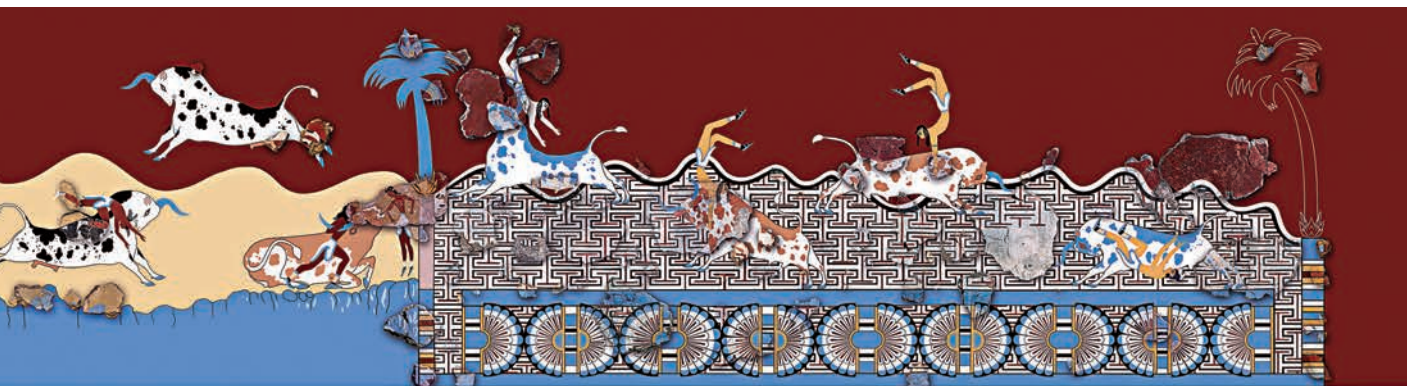


Fig. 8. Reconstruction of bull-leaping frieze. ‘Ezbet Helmy/Tell el-Dab’a, Palace F, throne room.  
© Manfred Bietak, Nannó Marinatos, and Clairly Palyvou

bull-grapplers. Three bulls move toward the left side and one bull turns to the right. There could, of course, have been more than four bulls, but we can offer only a minimal reconstruction.

The leapers are painted in an ocher hue, which is unusual, as leapers are normally rendered in reddish-brown. Along with the partly shaved head of the leapers, this could be a signifier of youth.<sup>9</sup> They wear the Minoan kilt, which opens at the sides and reveals the hem, although the typically Minoan penis sheath is not depicted. This panel is bordered along its base by a frieze of split rosettes, seemingly a court emblem from Knossos, where such half rosettes have been found cut in stone as an architectural motif, possibly framing a “window of appearances.”<sup>10</sup>

The frieze extended to the left beyond a striped column and palm tree in the red upper field. In contrast to the palatial maze panel, the scenery indicates a wilderness. The base consists of a rocky lower area and a light brown/yellowish middle ground, ending in its upper part, in an undulating silhouette, again crowned by an upper section in red. The fragments allow a reconstruction of four bulls, two black-speckled and two reddish-yellow-speckled ones, again in two registers, moving right, in the opposite direction than that of the bulls of the maze frieze. A fifth bull seems to be galloping toward the left, in the other direction.

It is interesting that both friezes have a single bull facing in the opposite direction from the others. This is reminiscent of a hunting frieze on a Mycenaean ivory box from a Late Cypriot IIIB tomb at Enkomi, Cyprus, where three bulls, a fallow deer, and an *agrimi* run to the left, fleeing a hunter on a chariot; only one bull has turned to attack him (see p. 224, fig. 22).<sup>11</sup> The motif of a single assaulted animal turning to face its attacker while the rest of the pack or herd flees can also be found in other animal scenes, such as that on the Mycenaean lion-hunt dagger.<sup>12</sup>

The bulls on the left frieze (fig. 8, left side) were also engaged by leapers and wrestlers; some of these seem to leap along the length of the bull, while others do a side vault across the back of the beast. The first bull on the right has been wrestled to the ground by two acrobats and is on his knees, his head held upward, the muzzle open with the tongue hanging out, signaling defeat.

Both friezes together measure about 4.2 m in length, but there seems to have been another frieze on the right side, cut off by a striped column and perhaps also by a palm tree in the register of the red area. This is where acrobats walking on their hands or somersaulting were depicted within a palm grove. The three panels, each ca. 2.1 m in length, could together have covered the back wall of the room to the left of the throne room, which is more



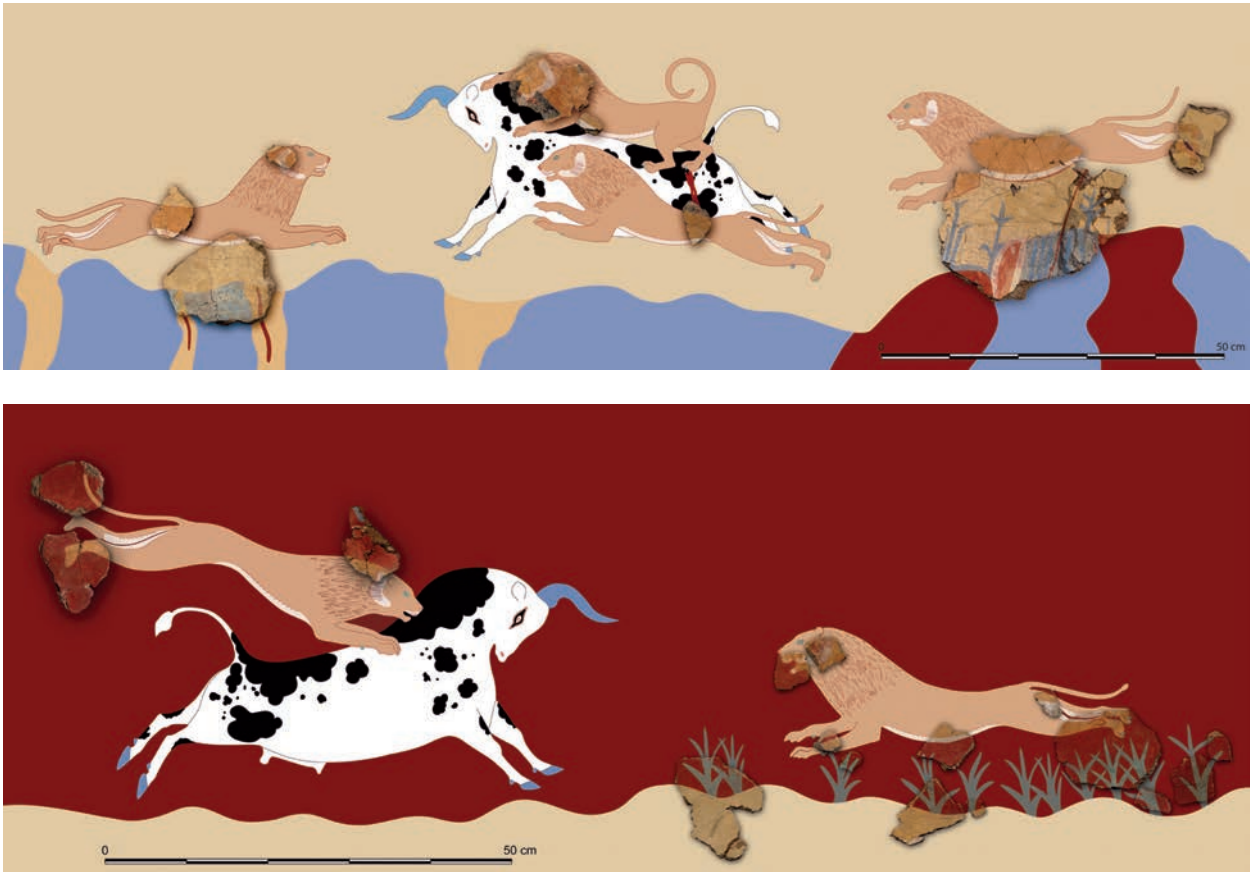


Fig. 9. Preliminary reconstruction of lion friezes. ‘Ezbet Helmy/Tell el-Dab’a, Palace F. © Nannó Marinatos and Marian Negrete Martínez

than 6 m wide. Yet why reconstruct this tripartite frieze with the bull leaping and acrobatic event on the back wall and why in a room other than the throne room?

As the extant representations in the throne room are full size, Lyvia Morgan considers that the rest of the throne room’s walls were likely also covered with full-scale figures.<sup>13</sup> By implication, the smaller size of the bull-leaping frieze suggests that it decorated another room.

As bull-leaping scenes were depicted at that time in mural art only in the palace of Knossos, we may infer that the theme held special importance for Minoan Knossos. Bull games are generally believed to have been part of the initiation rituals for elite youths performed during a festival for the great

Minoan goddess.<sup>14</sup> This event was linked to palatial Knossos and found its narrative in wall art. To find in Egypt such exclusive scenes, absent even from other Minoan palaces, is unique, and proof of a relationship between the two courts. If the back wall of the throne room was given over to the most important icons of kingship in Crete and the Near East—the Minoan type of griffins, with accompanying lions and leopards—this palace wall was of key importance and one may assume that its meaning would have carried over into the adjoining room, expressed in the representation of the bull games, which were of utmost importance for the center of Minoan civilization.

Other friezes—including at least ten lions hunting bulls (fig. 9),<sup>15</sup> at least six leopards





Fig. 10. Preliminary reconstruction of leopards. ‘Ezbet Helmy/ Tell el-Dab’a, Palace F. © Lyvia Morgan and Marian Negrete Martínez



stalking and chasing fallow deer (fig. 10) and other animals,<sup>16</sup> and male hunters with dogs chasing ungulates<sup>17</sup>—fit well into an ideology of a hierarchy in nature and could have been placed on the two long walls of this side room.<sup>18</sup> The action is set in a mountain landscape with vegetation, which could be considered typically Cretan.<sup>19</sup>

The other imagery from this palace, on the same scale as the bull and hunting friezes,

consists of a robed priest and a running athlete,<sup>20</sup> both against the facade of a house. They could have been located in the side room or in the vestibule outside the throne room. Full-scale human representations probably originated in the vestibule in front of the throne room or the porticoed entrance to the palace.<sup>21</sup>

The plaster reliefs of bulls are too few to have covered the back walls of the colonnades



Fig. 11. Painted plaster fragments of figures wearing flounced skirts. 'Ezbet Helmy/Tell el-Dab'a, dumps of Palaces F and G

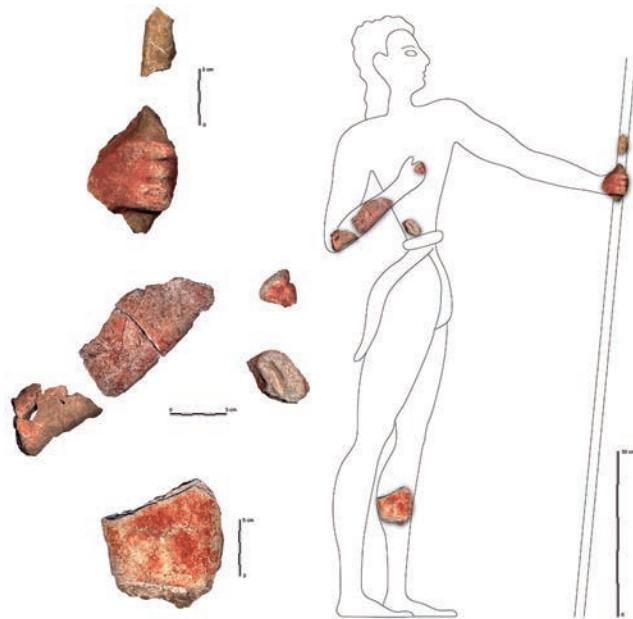


Fig. 12. Plaster relief fragments of young god figure. 'Ezbet Helmy/Tell el-Dab'a, Palace G

around the central court.<sup>22</sup> By analogy with the palace of Knossos, bulls in relief should have been positioned near the entrance. The most effective place would have been the back wall of the portico behind the entrance, to signal to the visitor the symbolism of the palace and, at the same time, to act as an apotropaic image. The painted imitation of an ashlar facade could have come from the walls of the courtyards;<sup>23</sup> the fragments with this pattern are not numerous enough to have covered the outside of the palace.

There is much less material with wall paintings from the large Palace G. Most of the rubbish heaps behind the door in the precinct's northeast wall were destroyed by the excavation of a drain channel in modern times. Besides fragments of a landscape, there is the imposing lower part of a full-scale female figure with flounced skirt and feet with anklets of blue, probably denoting silver (fig. 11, bottom).<sup>24</sup> Is she the representation of a goddess, a priestess, or a queen?

Of special importance are the plaster reliefs, dumped then carried to and fro by modern plowing. Among them is a representation of a young god with extended hand holding a stick (fig. 12), an arm or foot of a full-scale figure against a red background, and the head of a lion.<sup>25</sup> It is impossible to say from where these images came.

The Minoan paintings have been explained in different ways. It is interesting to note that, among the motifs of animals, there is a preference for beasts from Africa, such as lions and leopards. These animals are also well represented in glyptic and other minor arts in the Aegean. It seems strange that as of yet we have no representations of ships at this important harbor town; we should, however, bear in mind that only some five to ten percent of the wall paintings have been uncovered. According to Morgan, the absence of ships may be also a local or a chronological phenomenon. Ships are depicted in the context of festive water processions in the miniature paintings of Thera and Kea, dated to Late Minoan (LM) IA,<sup>26</sup> whereas the paintings in



the palaces of Peru-nefer date later, to LM IB. The presence at Peru-nefer of the Knossian court emblems and bull-leaping motifs are strong evidence of a direct relationship between the courts of Knossos and Egypt, and Aegean arrow tips in fair quantities have been found at one of the palace workshops.<sup>27</sup> Minoan ships in the dockyards of the harbor

stronghold of Peru-nefer are attested in a papyrus in the British Museum.<sup>28</sup> This makes direct maritime links a certainty.

The date of the frescoes at Tell el-Dab'a/ 'Ezbet Helmy coincides with the first appearance of representations of Minoans and Minoan ornamental motifs in Egyptian tomb paintings in the Theban necropolis,

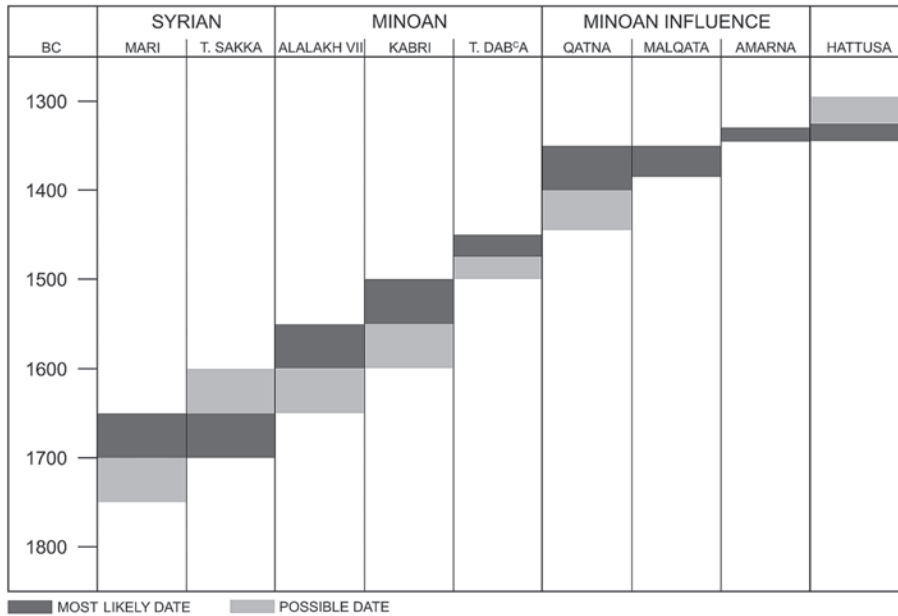


Fig. 13. Wall paintings. Thebes, Tomb of Senenmut. Dynasty 18, reign of Hatshepsut, ca. 1473–1458 B.C. (Top two rows) Ceiling patterns based on Minoan fabrics; (bottom row) Minoan emissaries bearing gifts from Crete to the Egyptian court



Fig. 14.

PROPOSED CHRONOLOGY AND CULTURAL SETTING OF PALATIAL PAINTINGS OF THE MIDDLE AND LATE BRONZE AGE



during the joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III (fig. 13).<sup>29</sup> It is very clear that a special event had taken place, and that it appears to have been related to the port of Peru-nefer during the period when these Minoan delegations were depicted. This makes it highly probable that, early in the reign of Thutmose III, a special agreement had been struck between Egypt and the Minoan thalassocracy, which concerned seafaring and maritime power. Given the mounting threat to Egypt's interests in the Levant and the necessity of engaging in warfare in that area, Thutmose III and Hatshepsut were probably reluctant to rely on troops supplied by the princes of the coastal Levant, who had at that time been infiltrated by Egypt's adversary in the Near East, the kingdom of Mitanni. Thutmose obviously chose to turn instead to the Minoans to build up his fleet. This deal may have been sealed by the customary diplomatic marriage. The representation of females in ceremonial flounced skirts and the painted royal emblems of Knossos on the bull-leaping frieze could be indications that such a political union had been achieved (figs. 8, 11).

The impact of Minoan decorative and figural art can be felt up to the Amarna age, and in decorative art even up to the Rameside age. The depiction of the flying gallop and natural trot of quadrupeds as well as the map-like rendering of landscapes had been adopted from Minoan art for some time, along with decorative patterns.<sup>30</sup>

Minoan paintings and their influence have also been found at other sites in the Levant.<sup>31</sup> They appeared in Miletos, Alalakh, and Tel Kabri in palatial contexts as part of the phenomenon of the widening influence of the Minoan civilization in the sixteenth century B.C., even before their appearance at Avaris/Peru-nefer. There seem to have been more palaces with such paintings in fresco on polished lime plaster. Some fragments of highly polished monochrome plaster have been found in a Middle Bronze Age context at Ebla.<sup>32</sup> Minoan-influenced paintings retrieved from the palace of Qatna date later than the paintings at Avaris/Peru-nefer, most probably to the first part of the fourteenth century B.C. (fig. 14).<sup>33</sup> (For a different opinion, see Pfälzner essay, p. 201.)

How can we explain this expansion of Minoan art into the Levant, which should be seen not as a sudden event, but as a phenomenon taking place over two centuries? Was it a kind of “Versailles effect”—the spread of a distinct palatial art style in the eastern Mediterranean?<sup>34</sup> This is possible. We shall see more clearly if more evidence turns up from other palaces in the Levant. The evidence from Avaris/Peru-nefer, however, seems to be a distinctive case. The volume of paintings, the motif of bull-leaping and other bull games, and the maze pattern and the split rosettes as emblems of the palace of Knossos all point to a special relationship between those two courts in the fifteenth century B.C., attributable to a common political interest. What had happened in Peru-nefer with the embellishment of its palaces with Minoan wall paintings had a strong and stimulating influence on Egyptian art of Dynasty 18, resulting in a marked softening of the severe canon of art and a freer style of two-dimensional art.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I would like to thank Lyvia Morgan for consultation and advice. For the English-language editing I am indebted to Adrian Melman and, finally, to Joan Aruz. All mistakes are, however, mine.

1. Bietak, Dorner, and Jánosi 2001; Bietak 2005; Bietak 2007b.
2. Bietak 2009a; Bietak 2009b; Bietak 2010a; Bietak 2010b.
3. See note 2.
4. Bietak 2005, pp. 145–56; Bietak 2007b, pp. 21–26, figs. 16, 22.
5. Reusch 1958; W.-D. Niemeier 1986; N. Marinatos 1995.
6. Aslanidou 2002.
7. Bietak 2007b, p. 43.
8. For the position of thrones in Egypt, see Bietak 2005; Lacovara 2009; for Knossos, see Evans 1921–35, vol. 2 (1928), pp. 396–413, figs. 225, 232.
9. L. Morgan 1995, p. 42; Bietak 2007c, pp. 77–78.
10. Hägg 1987.
11. Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973, p. 163, no. 1749.
12. Lyvia Morgan, personal communication.
13. Lyvia Morgan, personal communication.
14. Nannó Marinatos (2007, pp. 149–50) postulates a solar goddess, because of the combination with the split-rosette frieze, rosettes on the chest of the griffins in Knossos, and the palm trees. On the festival of the great goddesses, see Cameron 1987.
15. L. Morgan 2004; N. Marinatos 2010.
16. L. Morgan 2010b.
17. N. Marinatos and L. Morgan 2005; L. Morgan 2006; L. Morgan 2010a.
18. For the ideology of a hierarchy in nature, see N. Marinatos 1993, pp. 196–200.
19. This material is being studied by Lyvia Morgan.
20. Bietak and N. Marinatos 1995, pp. 56–57, figs. 9, 11.
21. Aslanidou 2005.
22. Von Rüden in preparation.
23. Clairy Palyvou, of the Technion Thessaloniki, is studying these architectural representations.
24. Bietak 2007b, p. 42, fig. 39.
25. Von Rüden in preparation.
26. Reconstructed representations of ships at Tel Kabri date to the same period. See W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998.
27. Bietak, Dorner, and Jánosi 2001, p. 87, fig. 43.
28. British Museum, London, EA 10056.
29. Vercoutter 1954; Vercoutter 1956; Wachsmann 1987; Matthaes 1995; Rehak 1998; Duhoux 2003.
30. Bietak 2000a, nn. 21, 22; L. Morgan 2006, pp. 251–53.
31. Among a series of similar articles, see W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998. For a new chronological assessment of the paintings, see Bietak 2007a.
32. I thank Paolo Matthiae for showing me the fragments during a 2003 visit to Ebla.
33. For the paintings from Qatna, see von Rüden 2011, pp. 60–63; for those from Avaris/Peru-nefer, see Bietak 2007a.
34. As suggested by Malcolm Wiener, personal communication.

# The Qatna Wall Paintings and the Formation of Aegeo- Syrian Art

One of the most prominent testimonies of the interregional exchange of motifs, styles, and techniques at the end of the Middle (MB) and in the Late Bronze (LB) Age, between the eastern Mediterranean, the Levant, and Egypt is presented by wall paintings. Wall paintings reflecting Aegean style have been discovered at four places in the ancient Near East. The first such discovery was made in the Level VII palace at Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh),<sup>1</sup> located approximately 45 kilometers from the Mediterranean shore in the Amuq Plain of the northern Levant. The excavator, Sir Leonard Woolley, immediately recognized their striking similarity to Minoan frescoes, but argued that the influence moved from east to west, with artists traveling from the Levant to Crete.<sup>2</sup> Wolf-Dietrich and Barbara Niemeier, in their restudy of the Alalakh wall-plaster fragments, concluded that these frescoes clearly derived from Aegean models. Based on the available fragments, the Niemeiers reconstructed two typical Aegean motifs, a griffin and a bull head crowned by a double axe. They argue that the paintings were made in Syria by or under the supervision of Aegean artists who were sent to Syria in response to a request by the local elite.<sup>3</sup>

Paintings in the Aegean style were also found in a palatial building at Tel Kabri,

located in the southern Levant, only 8 kilometers inland from the Mediterranean shore. The best preserved decoration is of a floor, but tiny, crushed fragments of painted wall plaster were also found. The reconstructed scenes—although highly speculative with such few preserved fragments—include a landscape with rocks; the sea, with boats; a griffin; and a view of a town.<sup>4</sup> Both the fresco technique and the motifs are clearly Aegean, so that imported artisans are considered responsible for this decoration as well.<sup>5</sup>

The most renowned examples of Aegean-style wall paintings in the eastern Mediterranean have been found at Tell el-Dab'a (ancient Avaris), in the Nile Delta, about 60 kilometers inland, on the eastern branch of the Nile and, thus, very accessible to sea traffic. They have been dated by the excavator to the early Thutmosid period (ca. 1500–1450 B.C.; see Bietak essay, pp. 188–99). The paintings, carried out in fresco technique, include typical Aegean motifs, especially several bull-leaping scenes.<sup>6</sup> Manfred Bietak suggests the appealing but unprovable hypothesis that the paintings could have been created by Cretan artisans who came to Egypt in the entourage of a Minoan princess married to a member of the Egyptian court.<sup>7</sup> Beyond a doubt, they reflect Aegean art in technique and style.

The latest discovery of wall paintings influenced by Aegean art was made at Qatna, in the 2000 to 2004 seasons.<sup>8</sup> More than three thousand fragments have been recorded, most of them attributed to the small Room N, but single pieces also derived from many other parts of the palace.<sup>9</sup> This indicates that many rooms in the Royal Palace of Qatna had been extensively decorated with colorful wall paintings. Room N is located immediately to the east of the palace well-room and is functionally related to it. As in the previously cited cases, the exact date of production of these wall paintings is difficult to assess. What is without doubt, however, is the fact that the techniques, colors, motifs, and compositions of the Qatna frescoes are closely comparable both to those at Alalakh,



Tel Kabri, and Tell el-Dab'a, and to paintings found throughout the Aegean islands and mainland Greece.<sup>10</sup> This is especially interesting because of all the places with Aegean-style wall paintings yet discovered Qatna is the site farthest east and the most distant from the Mediterranean shore. It lies 85 kilometers from the sea (as the crow flies), separated from it by the steep coastal mountains. The site is located at the eastern edge of the fertile inner Syrian plains, and not far from the Syrian steppe.

Based on the above-mentioned evidence, it should be stressed that the adoption of foreign decorative schemes of painting was exclusively a palatial affair ordered by political elites in the Levant and Egypt as a means of enhancing their reputation and prestige through the presentation of exotic items.<sup>11</sup> Other sites with remains of wall paintings in the Levant, by contrast, such as Tell Sakka,<sup>12</sup> Tell Burak,<sup>13</sup> and Mari,<sup>14</sup> do not show similarities to Aegean painting, but represent scenes from the Syro-Mesopotamian iconographic tradition. They are executed in the traditional Near Eastern technique of *secco* painting, that is, on dry plaster.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, these examples of wall painting date to the MB I–IIA period, and thus predate the paintings displaying Aegean influence, a phenomenon that occurs in the east for the first time during the MB IIB period (ca. 1700/1650–1550 B.C.).

Below, elements of Aegean origin appearing in the Qatna wall paintings, the extent to which they occur, and how they may relate to local elements will be investigated.

#### DATING THE QATNA WALL PAINTINGS

The find context of the Qatna wall paintings does not indicate their date of production, but the date of the destruction of the palace at around 1340 B.C., during LB IIA, provides the *terminus ante quem*. As the Royal Palace existed for a very long time—starting in MB IIA (eighteenth–seventeenth century B.C.)—the architectural and stratigraphic evidence alone cannot sufficiently narrow the possible time frame for pinpointing the origin of the

paintings. A more precise date can only be founded on art historical arguments and on observations on preservation.

On this basis, two alternative chronological hypotheses have been brought forward. Constance von Rügen is convinced that the paintings should be dated in the first half of the fourteenth century B.C. (LB IIA).<sup>16</sup> Her argument is based mainly on the assumption that the well-preserved wall plaster, lacking traces of wear, could not have been in place for more than approximately fifty to sixty years before the destruction of the building. She believes that wall paintings attached to mudbrick walls have a short lifespan. Therefore, the clearly observable Aegean elements could have arrived at Qatna as an effect of interregional communication during the LB IIA period. Bietak agrees with this assumption of a fourteenth century B.C. date, referring to the same argument of the limited durability of wall paintings on mudbrick walls.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, he sees the Qatna examples as the latest of the Aegean-style paintings in the Near East. Ann Brysbaert, following him, argues for the late date of the Qatna paintings on the basis of technological observations demonstrating close similarities to the material from the later Mycenaean period.<sup>18</sup>

This author, on the contrary, favors a sixteenth century B.C. date for the Qatna wall paintings from Room N. This is based on the very close iconographic and stylistic links between some of the Qatna scenes and Late Minoan (LM) IA paintings from the Aegean, primarily from Akrotiri, on the island of Thera. In particular, the river landscape, the palm trees, the rocky landscape, the spiral frieze, and the marble imitation all have very close parallels at Akrotiri. The LM IA period dates to the seventeenth century B.C. (1675–1600 B.C.), according to Aegean High Chronology, or the sixteenth century B.C. (1580–1520 B.C.), in the traditional Low Chronology, which is more plausible from a Near Eastern archaeological and historical point of view. Therefore, a date for the Qatna

paintings in the sixteenth century B.C. is proposed here. The argument of the lack of durability can be countered by reference to a special fastening system used for the Qatna plaster. The mudbrick wall and its mud plaster were densely covered with the impressions of fingers and other indentations, so that the wet lime plaster was pressed into these holes when it was applied to the wall (fig. 1). These “spikes,” all slightly inclined downward, formed a perfect fixing device. In combination with the dense and partly polished surface of the plaster, this assured the long durability of the wall paintings, which could easily have lasted for two centuries.

This chronological argument is further supported by the close similarities between the Qatna and Alalakh painted plasters. These include the frequent use of extended reddish-brown fields as backgrounds and borders and undulating lines indicating rocky landscapes. The Alalakh paintings date to MB IIB (ca. 1700/1650–1590/1550 B.C.), while I propose a date of around the turn of MB IIB to LB IA (ca. 1590/1550–1500 B.C.) for the Qatna paintings. (For an extensive discussion of the Alalakh paintings, see Koehl essay, pp. 170–79.) Thus, the frescoes at

both sites were probably carried out between the late seventeenth century B.C. and the late sixteenth century B.C., when direct inter-regional contacts between the Syrian kingdoms and their Aegean diplomatic or economic partners started to become intensive—and when Aegean wall painting was at its highest point, as can be deduced from the abundant and high-quality fresco remains at Akrotiri.<sup>19</sup>

The Tel Kabri paintings are a matter of chronological dispute as well. They are dated by the Niemeiers to the late seventeenth century B.C. (MB IIB), while Bietak prefers a date between MB IIB and LB I (the mid-sixteenth century B.C.).<sup>20</sup> Leaving this discrepancy aside, this again leads us to the same general period—between the late seventeenth century B.C. and the late sixteenth century B.C.—for the decoration of the Tel Kabri palace, which also finds close parallels in the Akrotiri corpus.

In contrast, the Tell el-Dab’a paintings are later in date. As noted above, Bietak dates them to the early Thutmosid period (ca. 1500–1450 B.C.), which would correspond to LB IB in Levantine terms. Thus, there is approximately a century between them and the older group, consisting of the Alalakh, Qatna, and Tel Kabri examples. This makes the Tell el-Dab’a paintings the latest known examples of Aegean-influenced wall paintings in the eastern Mediterranean, produced at a time of intensified contacts in the region.

#### A TRANSFER OF TECHNOLOGY

A careful technological study of the Qatna wall paintings was carried out by Brysbaert, who has also systematically analyzed painted plaster from many sites in the Aegean and the Near East.<sup>21</sup> Besides style, this is the most important test for evaluating the degree of similarity between the Qatna paintings and Aegean examples, and such comparisons can be done with a high degree of accuracy because of Brysbaert’s systematic and comprehensive approach. At Qatna, the main colors used are red, white, black, yellow, and blue.<sup>22</sup> To a lesser extent, there are also mixed colors,



Fig. 1. Back of painted plaster with oblique spikes for fixing the plaster into the wall. Qatna. Room N

such as green, purple, orange, and brown. This palette is characteristic of paintings in the Aegean sphere. It is noteworthy that green is extremely rare at Qatna—another trait typical of the Aegean tradition. The predominant reddish-brown color was derived from hematite, while the yellow-ocher color was made from goethite and limonite, as at all the other sites analyzed. The blue color could be identified as Egyptian Blue, containing cuprorivaite.<sup>23</sup> It is identical with the Egyptian Blue used on mainland Greece and at Egyptian and Near Eastern sites such as Tell el-Dab'a, Tel Kabri, and Hattusa. Thus, the choice and the fabrication of colors are a strongly unifying element connecting Qatna with all other paintings in Aegean tradition.

The wall paintings of Qatna were executed on white lime plaster varying in thickness between 1 and 20 centimeters.<sup>24</sup> This factor, along with a number of other observations, mentioned below, indicate that, in Brysbaert's words, there was a "serious intention" by the artisans at Qatna to produce frescoes.<sup>25</sup> However, this was not always achieved, as the lime plaster seems to have dried out too quickly, before the painting was finished. This was probably due to the arid climate in inland Syria, very different from the humid Mediterranean conditions. But even when we look at the other Near Eastern and Egyptian sites with Aegean wall paintings, the paintings are rarely executed in fresco alone, but frequently in a combination of fresco and secco, as, for example, at Tell el-Dab'a.<sup>26</sup> In the end, the production process resulted in a shift from fresco to secco painting, depending on the acceleration of the drying process of the plaster after being attached to the wall.<sup>27</sup>

The specific attributes observable on the painted plaster fragments from Qatna that provide evidence for the fresco technique include the impressions of fingernails visible on the surface of the plaster, especially around painted motifs (for example, the palm trees), proving that the plaster was still wet when the painting was executed.<sup>28</sup> In some instances there are even actual fingerprints

(for example, on the turtles). There was also an intentional roughening of the plaster surface at places where blue paint was applied.<sup>29</sup> This is especially helpful for fresco painting. Another observed production process is the "troweling" of the plaster surface, which results in oblong and curved marks made in the course of flattening and smoothing the surface, with the side effect of creating a shiny appearance.<sup>30</sup> As troweling can only be done when the plaster is still wet, in order to fix the paint pigments, this is another hint of the fresco technique. On some fragments from Qatna another very typical technical feature of Aegean fresco painting is visible: the impressions created by snapping a string onto the damp surface in order to create straight lines, which must have been very helpful for organizing the layout of the painted decoration.<sup>31</sup> Other typical Aegean features to be found on the painted plaster of Qatna are underdrawings (sinopias) to guide the painter (visible, for example, in the double line of the spirals);<sup>32</sup> the use of an "impasto" technique, with indentations made in the damp plaster and filled with a specific pigment (for example, the eyes of the turtles); and polishing, carried out before or after the painting in



Fig. 2. Painted plaster showing polishing grooves and sinopias underneath spiral frieze. Qatna



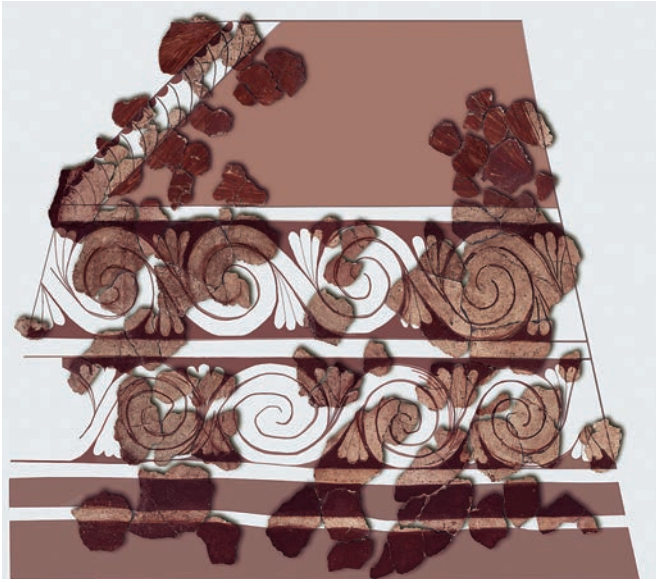


Fig. 3. Double spiral frieze in trapezoidal field. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüdén

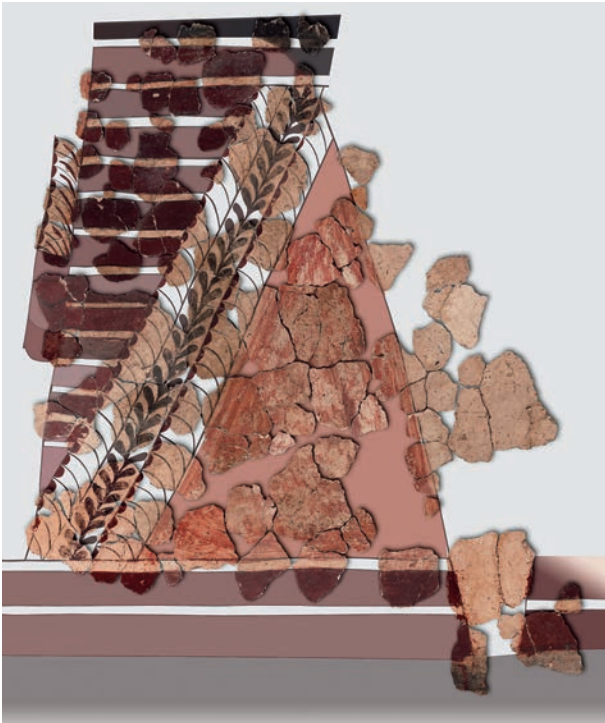


Fig. 4. Obliquely oriented foliate band and triangular red field. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüdén

order to create a shiny surface (fig. 2). These observations are supported by microscopic analysis demonstrating that pigment grain sizes, plaster layer thicknesses, and the sizes of inclusions and pores are very similar for all wall paintings throughout the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean, strongly suggesting common technical procedures at the various sites, including Qatna.<sup>33</sup>

The same is true for the pigments used in the wall paintings. Chemically very similar pigments were used to produce the colors of the Qatna paintings and those from the Aegean.<sup>34</sup> Even the spikes protruding from the back of the plaster, that is, the lime anchors set into holes in the wall in order to fix the plaster firmly to it—at first view a special technical device at Qatna—is not a local invention. Brysbaert observed a similar technique on the majority of Aegean paintings.<sup>35</sup>

When taken in combination, all these features at Qatna suggest a specific *chaîne opératoire* that can unambiguously be identified as Aegean.<sup>36</sup> The transfer of technology that introduced the fresco technique to the Near East<sup>37</sup> could only have been possible through direct contact, as it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to communicate and explain methodology indirectly, in written or coded form. Therefore, we must assume a movement of people with specialized technological knowledge from the Aegean to the Near East. The most plausible explanation is that artisans—plasterers and painters—who had been trained in the Aegean traveled east, perhaps at the request of a foreign ruler.

The west-to-east direction of this exchange is further supported by the absence of comparable precedents in the Levant or the wider Syro-Mesopotamian sphere. The wall paintings of Mari and those of Tell Sakka, dating roughly to the same time (MB IIA), are executed in *secco* technique.<sup>38</sup> This shows that the fresco technique was foreign to the Syrian regions before the MB IIB period, when it first appeared at Alalakh, followed by the paintings at Tel Kabri and Qatna.

#### EXCHANGES OF MOTIFS AND STYLES

While the transfer of technology provides the strongest evidence of the direct contact between Near Eastern and Aegean sites with fresco painting, a transfer of motifs and styles happened simultaneously, as has been demonstrated with regard to the frescoes from Alalakh and Tel Kabri. A similar stylistic transfer will be elucidated below with regard to the Qatna wall paintings from Room N, where many Aegean iconographic elements are embedded into the design. Most prominent is the typical Aegean spiral frieze, finely executed with a thin black line on top of a thin red line that marks the underdrawing, with both remaining visible (fig. 3).<sup>39</sup> The triangular spaces between spirals are filled with trilobed leaves. Besides the famous examples from Knossos,<sup>40</sup> the closest parallel comes from Akrotiri and dates to the LM IA period.<sup>41</sup> It also shows red and gray lines within each spiral.<sup>42</sup>

The foliate band—a tendril of fine leaves—that occurs at Qatna (fig. 4) is another characteristic element of Aegean art, known from the Knossos wall paintings<sup>43</sup> and from vessel decorations.<sup>44</sup> Here,

it appears in two bicolor versions: black on white and white on red.<sup>45</sup>

The frames and borders of images at Qatna demonstrate arrangements of Aegean type. This includes a field of ocher bordered by a gray-blue band,<sup>46</sup> a border of multiple reddish-brown bands with black contour lines,<sup>47</sup> and a band of overlapping ovals painted in red and blue with white interspaces (fig. 5).<sup>48</sup>

The painted marble imitation discovered by Robert Du Mesnil du Buisson in the Royal Palace, in the area of Room R, shows wavy lines in a roughly triangular arrangement, executed in parallel dark red and black lines.<sup>49</sup> It finds its best parallel in the painted marble imitation panels from Akrotiri, dated to LM IA, which depict triangular, parallel lines in an arrangement and colors very similar to those at Qatna.<sup>50</sup>

There are two large landscape scenes, which von Rügen was able to reconstruct from a great number of tiny fragments. Both views are closely related in character to Aegean landscapes. The first one is a landscape of rocks, grass, and palm trees (fig. 5). The palm trees are the eye-catching focus of the scene, as far as it is preserved.

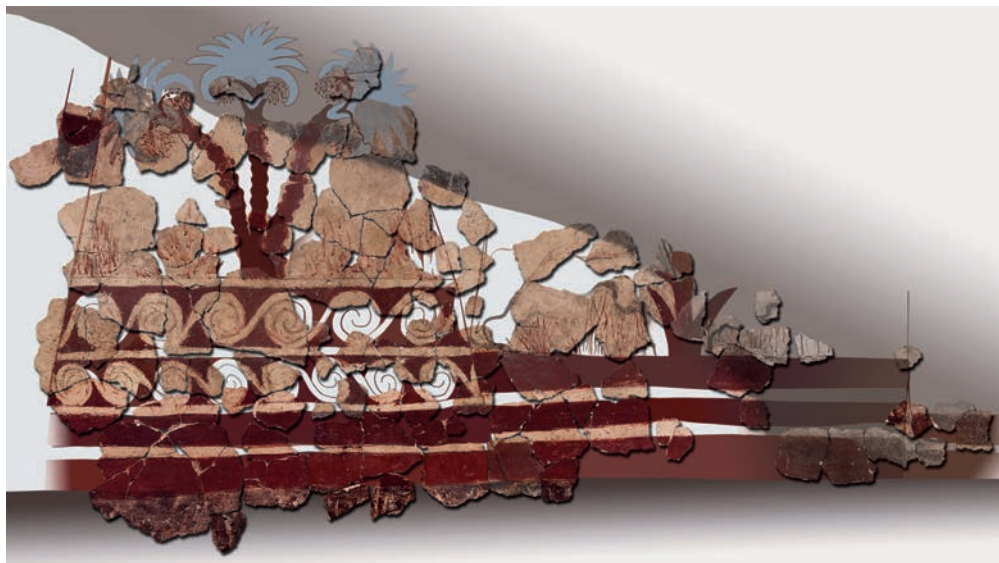


Fig. 5. Landscape with palm trees, rocks, and grass. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rügen

The three-stem palm is characterized by blue leaves with red contour lines, exhibiting a typically Aegean way of depicting these trees.<sup>51</sup> The best parallels for it can, again, be found at LM IA Akrotiri, where there is a two-stem palm,<sup>52</sup> and at Tell el-Dab'a, where, however, there are greater differences.<sup>53</sup>

Arranged next to the palm trees is a landscape of rocks and grass, the rock surface indicated by a gray undulating thick line, while the grass is depicted by gray and red thin, short lines, some of them bent, as if swaying in the wind.<sup>54</sup> A very close parallel exists in the so-called Saffron Gatherers fresco from the Minoan palace of Knossos, where the rocky landscape populated by monkeys is also rendered as a wavy gray line, with grass and flowers swaying in the wind.<sup>55</sup>

The second landscape from Qatna is a river scene (figs. 6, 7).<sup>56</sup> It is a frieze 4 meters in length and 30 centimeters high. It depicts

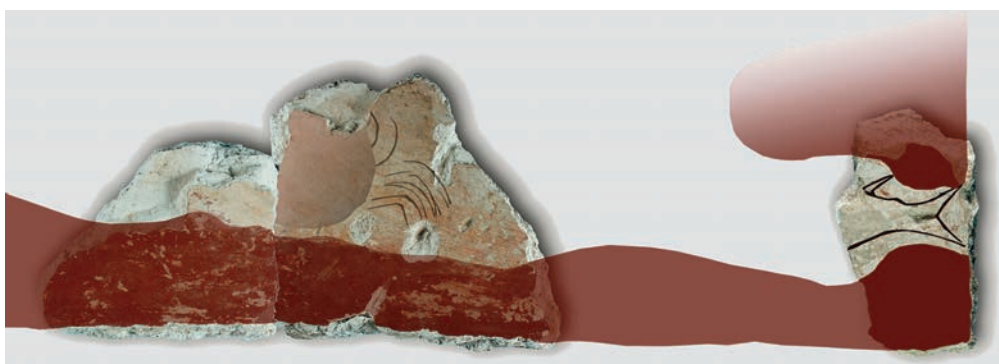
a bending white river bordered above and below by a landscape in red. Plants are indicated by abstract rounded red forms. The hilly landscape is populated by turtles that walk on the undulating contour of the land (fig. 6). There are two turtles on the left side, slightly overlapping each other, and one in the middle part of the scene. The turtles are rendered with accuracy and in detail; note the heads, eyes, feet, and carapaces. The water is populated by several fish and a crab painted with black lines (fig. 7).

This scene is strikingly reminiscent of the famous miniature landscape fresco from Akrotiri.<sup>57</sup> The latter has a length of 1.75 meters and a height of 21 centimeters, and thus is smaller but closely comparable in the relative dimensions. It also shows a bending river in a landscape with naturalistic as well as stylized plants and with animals walking along the banks. It presents a perfect parallel to the Qatna landscape in the general composition, and idea. This

Fig. 6. River landscape with turtles. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüdén



Fig. 7. River landscape with crab. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüdén





comparison also leads us to the LM IA period as the most probable time of direct contact and iconographical transfer from the Aegean to Qatna. A great difference, however, can be seen in the appearance of specific animals, such as the turtles and the crab in Qatna, which are missing in the Aegean image system.

A bundle of papyrus plants from Room N in Qatna, painted in blue with black contours and red internal lines, could not be placed by von Rden within the reconstructions of larger scenes (fig. 8).<sup>58</sup> The treatment is a typical rendering of Aegean papyrus plants, exemplified, once again, by LM IA frescoes from Akrotiri.<sup>59</sup>

One of the most surprising motifs at Qatna is the dolphin, an animal not known in inland Syria and thus a foreign element, albeit one depicted frequently in Aegean art. The Qatna dolphin could be very convincingly reconstructed by von Rden from only a few fragments (fig. 9).<sup>60</sup> The back of the animal is red, and the fins are also painted in red, while the belly is white with wavy black

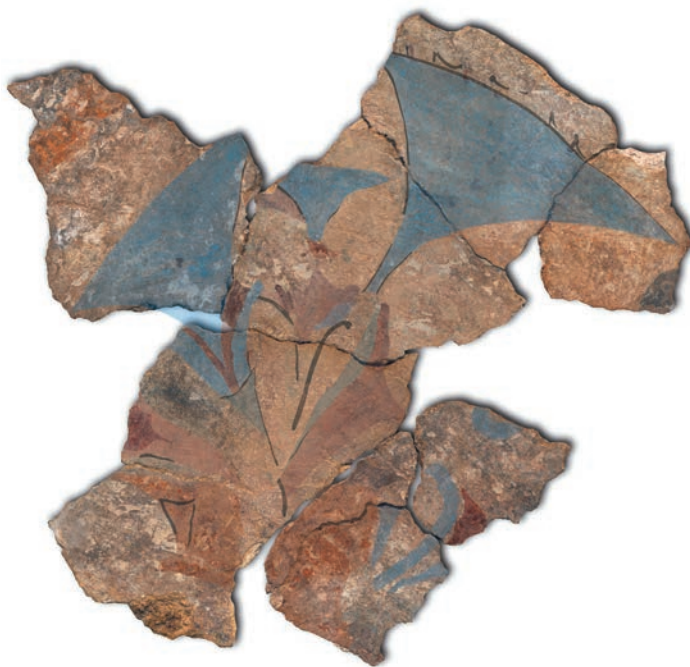


Fig. 8. Fragments of painted plaster with papyrus plants. Qatna, Room N. Reassembling of original pieces by Constance von Rden; blue color intensified

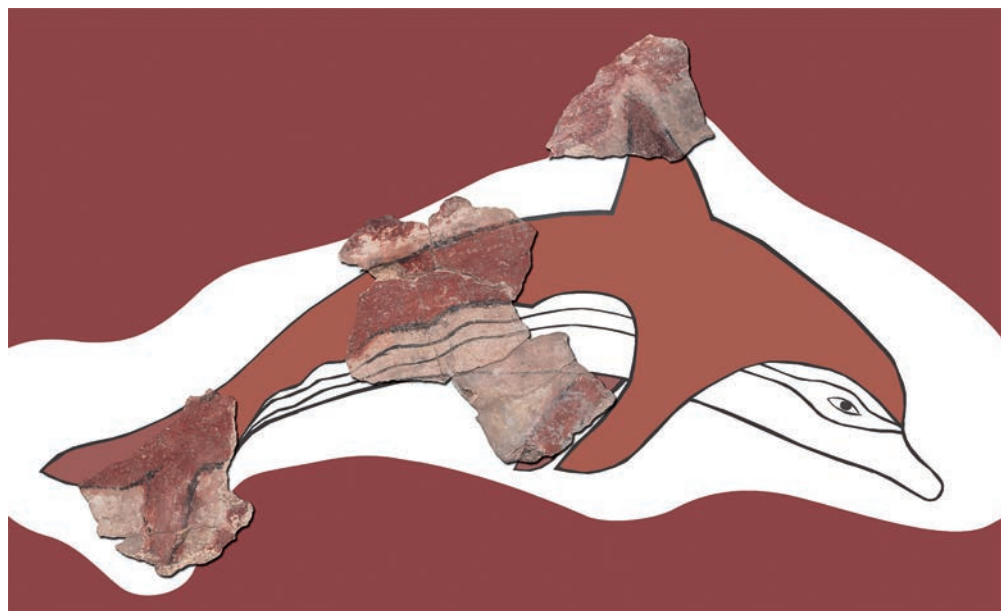


Fig. 9. Dolphin. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rden

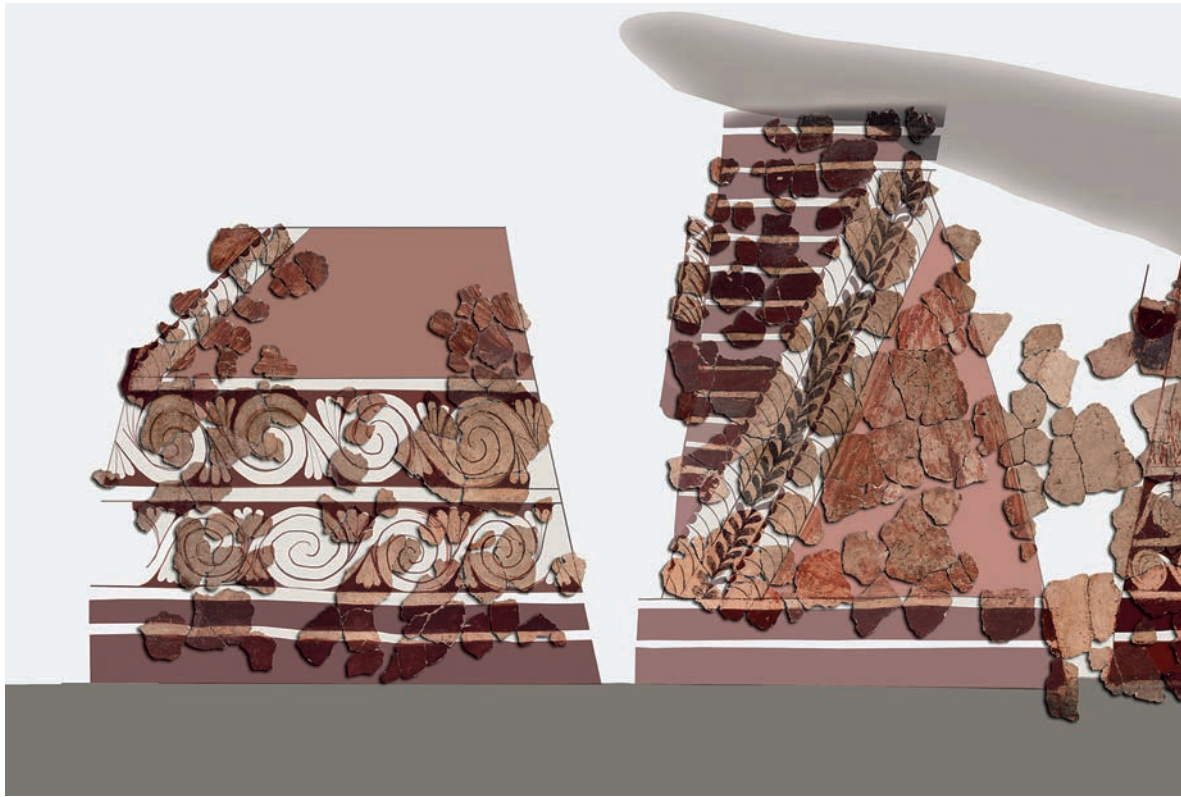


Fig. 10. Reconstructed arrangement of painted plaster decoration on west wall; shadow at right indicates area blackened by charred beam leaning against wall. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüdén

lines. It conforms to the typical representations of dolphins in the Aegean sphere, such as the LM IA dolphins from Akrotiri, which are characterized by the same color variation and wavy lines on the belly.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, Aegean style—defined as a specific combination of techniques, styles, and motifs—is reflected in the Qatna wall paintings in a number of different ways:

- Aegean-type reddish-brown bands, foliate bands, overlapping ovals, and the spiral frieze used for borders and to frame scenes
- the emphasis on pure landscape scenes, integrating floral and animal motifs, and a shared rendering of rocky landscapes
- the organization of scenes, such as landscapes with a river bordered on both

sides by land and animals walking along the undulating banks

- the popularity of animals connected to water, particularly fish
- the use of blue for the rendering of plants and the very rare occurrence of green
- the appearance of animals with multi-colored bodies and those depicted only with black lines together in one scene<sup>62</sup>
- the mostly very accurate execution of the paintings with fine lines and underpainting.

#### ELEMENTS OF REGIONAL STYLE AND COMPOSITION

The obvious Aegean elements are not the only iconographic components of the Qatna wall paintings. There are a number of motifs,



as well as principles of composition, that are not known from the Aegean-style paintings. Therefore, they have to be considered—at least theoretically—to be local or regional elements.

First of all, the turtles depicted very prominently in the Qatna river landscape scene (fig. 6) are not known in Aegean art, nor are they attested in Near Eastern wall paintings. In Mesopotamia, the turtle, a symbol of the fresh water god Ea (the Sumerian Enki), appears on Kassite seals<sup>63</sup> and *kudurrus*.<sup>64</sup> While the turtles in Kassite and later Near Eastern art—the former roughly contemporary with the Qatna wall paintings—are always depicted from above, the turtles of Qatna are shown in side view. This demonstrates that the rendering of the Qatna turtles cannot be regarded as

derived from an established Near Eastern iconographic type but instead represent an innovation. Similarly, the crab featured in the Qatna river landscape (fig. 7), with its round body and long legs carefully illustrated, is not known from Aegean wall paintings,<sup>65</sup> but is at home in Near Eastern iconography, at least in the first millennium B.C., when crabs often appear in Neo-Assyrian landscape scenes as part of the natural environment.<sup>66</sup> Crabs in the ancient Near East seem to have no religious connotations.<sup>67</sup> Again, they can be seen as a new, innovative element at Qatna.

The general composition of the Qatna wall paintings is not found in Aegean art, in particular the preference for triangular or trapezoid pictorial fields (fig. 10); a triangular field of red paint, enclosed by borders of



red lines or a foliate band;<sup>68</sup> a triangular internal frame for the palm-tree group within the larger landscape scene marked by a thin red line and a border of overlapping ovals;<sup>69</sup> or a triangular or trapezoid field with the upper part painted in red and the lower part filled with a double spiral frieze.<sup>70</sup> As von Rden reconstructs them, these triangular fields were arranged in rows of three, or even four.<sup>71</sup> This reflects a very geometrically structured principle of composition,<sup>72</sup> which is foreign not only to the Aegean but also to Near Eastern tradition.<sup>73</sup> The triangular compositional principle can be regarded as another innovative stylistic element at Qatna.

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AEGEO-SYRIAN WORKSHOP

Three major hypotheses have in recent years been put forward to explain the high degree of influence of Aegean frescoes on the wall paintings from Alalakh, Tel Kabri, Tell el-Dab'a, and Qatna. The "foreign craftsmanship theory" assumes that the paintings in the Near East were carried out by traveling artisans from the Aegean, who were sent to the Levant within the framework of diplomatic relations or even as gift exchanges.<sup>74</sup> Alternatively, the transfer of artisans is explained as a by-product of diplomatic marriages or important political meetings.<sup>75</sup>

The second proposal can be labeled the "cultural communication theory." As von Rden argues, the similarity of motifs and styles between the Aegean and the Levantine wall paintings may be a result of the circulation of goods and ideas, so that motifs could have arrived in the Levant, not with travelers, but indirectly, in the form of decorations on exchanged goods such as pottery and textiles.<sup>76</sup>

With regard to the specific case of Qatna, a third suggestion has been developed, the "craftsmanship interaction theory,"<sup>77</sup> which tries to combine the clear evidence of transfer from the Aegean with the observation of local or regional stylistic elements.<sup>78</sup> It is mainly based on the assumption that larger

workshops were established on the spot where a Levantine palace was to be decorated with paintings, such as at Qatna. These workshops must have included artisans from the Aegean, who brought their techniques, motifs, and stylistic principles along with them, and local or regional artisans, who added their knowledge of styles and motifs familiar from the Levantine context. A large workshop would have been necessary in order to carry out the extensive and elaborate scenes that decorated not just one but a large number of rooms within the palatial building.

Thus, Aegean and local Syrian artisans would have worked together and melded their styles. The Aegean artisans must have been primarily responsible for the use of the fresco technique, which is present at Qatna in its complete technical repertoire, according to Brysbaert.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the specific choice of colors for typically Aegean motifs, characteristic Aegean stylistic conventions, and the clearly Aegean nature of some compositions, such as the miniature landscapes, can only be explained by the presence of Aegean artisans active in the production of the painted decoration.

On the other hand, the non-Aegean elements—the turtles, the crab, and particularly the very peculiar triangular and trapezoid structures of the compositions—can be explained by the presence of local or regional artisans who contributed innovative ideas, creating a specific style distinctive of Qatna, that can be understood as the product of an Aegeo-Syrian workshop established at Qatna.

#### THE MEANING OF THE QATNA WALL PAINTINGS

Aegean-style wall paintings are one aspect of the exchange of goods and ideas within the international koine of the Late Bronze Age.<sup>80</sup> Even when it is technological knowledge that is transported—as in the case of the Aegean plasterers—the result is basically a transfer of ideas. The question that arises from this observation is whether ideological

features embedded in the motifs and scenes in their original Aegean context were also transmitted when the imagery was transported. This does not seem possible, because images inserted into a completely different cognitive world necessarily lose their original meaning. Marian Feldman believes that the main purpose of Aegean frescoes in the Near East was to function as “exotic items” that enabled the patron to publicly demonstrate his internationalism. Therefore, it was desirable to maintain the “Aegeanness” of the frescoes as a clearly visible attribute.<sup>81</sup>

Can this be the only significance of this kind of international art in the Levant? With regard to the frescoes from Room N in the Royal Palace of Qatna, their location is an important factor. Room N is not in the center of the palace, where the large formal rooms were located, and personnel and visitors were numerous. Instead, it is a very tiny room located on the northern edge of the building, out of the main lines of circulation through the palace.<sup>82</sup> It adjoins the palace well-room to the east, and was thus associated with a service area. Therefore, prestige was probably not the primary reason for the public presentation of the wall paintings.

However, the proximity of Room N to the large well-room, which served as the only water supply for the palace, might be significant. It is striking that nearly all of the scenes on the wall paintings are associated with water: the river landscape; the fish, crab, and turtles walking at the edge of the river; the palm trees, which require much irrigation; the papyrus, an aquatic plant; and, last but not least, the dolphin. All share a common trait: they either need abundant water or live in it. Thus, the function of this part of the palace and the content of the representations are linked.

Room N probably served as a small sanctuary for some kind of cult or ritual associated with water, and possibly for the ritual purification of the well-room itself. The likelihood of the cultic function of the area

is supported by the discovery nearby of a bronze figurine of a deity during the early explorations at Qatna before Du Mesnil du Buisson’s excavations.<sup>83</sup> This famous figurine, now in the Musée du Louvre, shows no relationship to a water cult, but could support the idea of the religious importance of this part of the palace in general.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The wall paintings in Room N at Qatna are different in content from other objects of the “international style,” which predominantly represent hunting or attack scenes, with animal combats and heroes hunting wild beasts, all of them reflecting a royal ideology of supremacy.<sup>84</sup> At Qatna, however, a clear reference to royal ideology is missing. Instead, it is the power of water that appears as the overriding message of the representations. At Qatna, the wall paintings generated as a result of the direct technological and iconographic transfer that resulted in the creation of a characteristic Aegeo-Syrian style of paintings, were, further, endowed with a new, specific meaning that was embedded in the local religious ideology.

1. Woolley 1955, pp. 228–34, pls. XXVIb–XXVIIIb.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.
3. W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998, pp. 82–85; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 793.
4. W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998, pp. 71–78; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 767–80.
5. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 790–93.
6. Bietak, N. Marinatos, and Palivou 2007a.
7. Bietak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 131; see also Bietak and N. Marinatos 1995, p. 61.
8. Novák and Pfälzner 2001, pp. 183–85; Novák and Pfälzner 2002a, pp. 226–31; Novák and Pfälzner 2002b, p. 95; Pfälzner 2007, pp. 48–49.
9. Von Rügen 2011, pp. 23–32.
10. Novák and Pfälzner 2002a, pp. 226–31; Pfälzner and von Rügen in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 126–27, no. 69a, b; Pfälzner 2008a; von Rügen 2011.
11. Feldman 2007.
12. Taraqji 1999; Taraqji in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 128–29, no. 70a, b.
13. Kamlah and Sader 2010, pp. 108–11.
14. Parrot 1958a; Parrot 1958b.

15. Nunn 1988, pp. 5–6.
16. Von Rügen 2006; von Rügen 2011, pp. 60–62.
17. Bietak 2007a, pp. 272–73.
18. Brysbaert 2011, p. 262.
19. Doumas 1995.
20. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 767–69; Bietak 2007a, p. 272.
21. Brysbaert 2002; Brysbaert, Melessanaki, and Anglos 2006; Brysbaert 2007a; Brysbaert 2007b; Brysbaert 2007c; Brysbaert 2011.
22. Brysbaert 2011, p. 258.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 262–63.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 259; von Rügen 2011, p. 47, figs. 7, 8.
25. Brysbaert 2011, pp. 260, 264.
26. Brysbaert 2007c, pp. 160, 162.
27. A freshly applied thin layer of lime plaster allows for eight hours of fresco painting before the surface is too dry (*ibid.*, p. 161).
28. Brysbaert 2011, pp. 256–57 (macroscopic feature 1).
29. *Ibid.*, p. 257 (macroscopic feature 4).
30. *Ibid.* (macroscopic feature 6).
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 257–58 (macroscopic feature 7).
32. *Ibid.* (macroscopic feature 10).
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 260–62.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 262–63.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
36. Compare the discussion in Brysbaert 2007a, pp. 330–32.
37. Brysbaert 2011, p. 262.
38. Parrot 1958b; Nunn 1988, pp. 66–92; Taraqqi 1999; Taraqqi in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 128–29, no. 70a, b.
39. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 101, fig. 11; von Rügen 2011, pp. 35–37, pls. 1, 2.
40. Evans 1964, vol. 3, pl. XXIII, figs. 221, 222, 228, 229, 252–54; S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, fig. 39.
41. Doumas 1995, figs. 93, 94.
42. The painted spiral frieze on the throne platform of the palace of Mari, dating to the MB IIA period, shows essentially the same motif, but in a much different rendering, carried out much more coarsely, less carefully, and less accurately (see Parrot 1958a, pp. 105–6; Parrot 1958b, pp. 67–69, fig. 54, pl. 15; cf. von Rügen 2011, p. 65, fig. 12).
43. Evans 1967, pl. E.1.
44. Hawes et al. 1908, pl. VII.32; S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, figs. 83, 88, 216 (bottom).
45. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 100, fig. 8; von Rügen 2011, pls. 6, 57, 64, 69.
46. See Pfälzner 2008a, p. 99; von Rügen 2011, pp. 45–46, pl. 11; comparable to borders from Knossos (S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, pl. XVI) and Akrotiri (Doumas 1995, pp. 22–23).
47. See Pfälzner 2008a, p. 99; von Rügen 2011, pls. 1, 7, 8, 52, 54, 58, 59, 64, 66; comparable to borders from Akrotiri (Doumas 1995, figs. 8, 109–11, 114, 127, 139–41).
48. See Pfälzner 2008a, p. 102, fig. 14; von Rügen 2011, pp. 54, 66; comparable to frames from Knossos (S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, pl. XVII) and Akrotiri (Doumas 1995, figs. 93, 94).
49. Du Mesnil du Buisson 1935, p. 143, no. 2, frontispiece; Pfälzner 2008a, p. 100; von Rügen 2011, p. 32.
50. Doumas 1995, figs. 14–17, 49–56, 63, 64.
51. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 101, fig. 14; von Rügen 2011, pp. 39, 74, pls. 54, 66.
52. Doumas 1995, figs. 31, 148.
53. Bietak, N. Marinatos, and Palivou 2007b, p. 89, figs. 46, 59, 60.
54. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 102, fig. 16; von Rügen 2011, p. 40, pl. 66.
55. Evans 1967, pl. I; for rocky landscapes, see also Doumas 1995, figs. 69, 71.
56. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 103, fig. 19; von Rügen 2011, pp. 47–49, pls. 12, 13, 68.
57. Doumas 1995, figs. 30–34.
58. Von Rügen 2011, p. 41, pls. 3, 4.
59. Doumas 1995, figs. 2–5, 33.
60. Von Rügen 2011, p. 49, pl. 14.
61. Doumas 1995, figs. 41–43, 142–44.
62. An example of this is the river landscape from Qatna with the colorful turtles in combination with the crab executed in black lines, which can be compared to the Akrotiri river landscape (*ibid.*, figs. 30–34), with ducks and other animals in color in combination with the griffin in a black line drawing.
63. Thureau-Dangin 1919, p. 138.
64. Hrouda 1991, ill. on p. 253; Black and Green 1992, figs. 90, 150.
65. For depictions of crabs in Aegean art, see von Rügen 2011, p. 84, fig. 42.
66. Hrouda 1991, ill. on pp. 146, 147, 206, 207.
67. Heimpel 1980–83, pp. 223–24.
68. Von Rügen 2011, p. 37, pl. 64.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 39, pl. 66.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 35, pl. 1.
71. *Ibid.*, pl. 69.
72. The idea of Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier (personal communication) that the triangular fields might represent the lower part of decorated robes of persons walking in a row is very appealing on first consideration, but it seems improbable because there are no feet visible at places where the lower edge is preserved, and because robes are not embellished with landscapes in the Aegean or in the Near Eastern tradition, but exclusively



- with geometric and floral decorations, particularly Aegean robes (Doumas 1995, pls. 6, 7, 11, 12, 100, 101, 103, 105, 107, 108, 116–18, 120, 122, 123, 129, 131, 133).
73. See the discussion in von Rügen 2011, pp. 63–64.
74. W.-D. Niemeier 1991; W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998, pp. 88–96; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 793.
75. Bietak and N. Marinatos 1995, p. 60; Bietak 2007a, pp. 280–88, 295.
76. Von Rügen 2011, pp. 99, 111–14.
77. Pfälzner 2008a, pp. 106–9.
78. Brysbaert (2007a, pp. 337–46) argues, in a similar approach, for “cross-craft interaction” (CCI) in Aegean and eastern Mediterranean painted plaster.
79. Brysbaert 2011, p. 260.
80. Caubet 1998, pp. 106–7; Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 123.
81. Feldman 2007, pp. 43, 59–60.
82. See the plan of the Qatna Royal Palace in my essay “The Elephant Hunters of Bronze Age Syria” in this volume, p. 113, fig. 1.
83. Pfälzner 2007, pp. 48–49, fig. 23.
84. Feldman 2006b, pp. 73–78.



Art and Interaction:  
Furnishings and  
Adornment



## Seals and the Imagery of Interaction

In this essay I would like to review some recent thoughts on the dimension of seal studies that has most occupied my attention—that is, the way in which seals inform us about cultural interrelations and the way that cultural interactions have impacted upon the imagery and styles of both Near Eastern and Aegean seals. The evidence we gain from imports or traveling seals comes from many sources and is quite revealing, with a few significant instances mentioned here. The Uluburun shipwreck, of course, presents us with seals en route, which originated in many areas of the Near East, Cyprus, Egypt, and the Mycenaean world, in a variety of materials and conditions.<sup>1</sup> These objects have been instrumental in helping to identify the travelers onboard and other aspects of the nature of the voyage, as Cemal Pulak has elucidated.<sup>2</sup>

As for the evidence on land, two notable instances featured in the “Beyond Babylon”

exhibition may be cited. The lapis lazuli stamp (fig. 1) and cylinder seals in the Tôd Treasure trace a route from Bactria to eastern Iran, Mesopotamia, and the Syro-Levantine region, with one example exhibiting central Anatolian features.<sup>3</sup> While the source of the silver in the hoard remains controversial,<sup>4</sup> there can be no doubt of the Aegean character of the designs on a seal-amulet in the hoard—exceptional for its shape, steatite material, and motifs of spiders and a bee (fig. 2).<sup>5</sup>

The desire for lapis lazuli was apparently not confined to the Near East and Egypt, as demonstrated by the extraordinary hoard of cylinder seals found in a palatial workshop at Mycenaean Thebes. Again, this is not a coherent body of material. It contains official Kassite seals (figs. 3, 4) and Mesopotamian heirlooms, as well as Assyrian, Syro-Mitanni, and Hittite cylinder seals, some in pristine condition, others abraded, damaged, repaired, or re-cut. The workshop also yielded a large group of finely carved Cypriot pieces (fig. 5), as well as Cypriot re-carvings of Mesopotamian works (fig. 6). Edith Porada hypothesized that the Cypriot group reached the Aegean under different circumstances than the Kassite seals. She believed that the Kassite seals represented a single diplomatic gift to the Theban court from Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria, who had removed them from the temple of Marduk at Babylon, where they had been dedicated.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 1. Two sides of lapis lazuli stamp seal. Montu Temple, Tôd Treasure. Dynasty 12, reign of Amenemhat II, ca. 1919–1885 B.C. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 66485



Fig. 2. Two sides of steatite seal-amulet. Montu Temple, Tôd Treasure. Dynasty 12, reign of Amenemhat II, ca. 1919–1885 B.C. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 66479



Fig. 3. Lapis lazuli cylinder seal and modern impression. Thebes, Palace Workshop. Kassite manufacture, Late Helladic IIIB context. Archaeological Museum, Thebes 198



Fig. 4. Lapis lazuli cylinder seal and modern impression. Thebes, Palace Workshop. Kassite manufacture, Late Helladic IIIB context. Archaeological Museum, Thebes 191



Fig. 5. Cypriot lapis lazuli cylinder seal and modern impression. Thebes, Palace Workshop. Late Helladic IIIB context. Archaeological Museum, Thebes 192



Fig. 6. Lapis lazuli cylinder seal and modern impression. Thebes, Palace Workshop. Old Babylonian manufacture with Cypriot re-carving, Late Helladic IIIB context. Archaeological Museum, Thebes 196

There can be no doubt that the grand Kassite seals in the Theban hoard, two of which depict a nature god emerging from mountain streams, are exceptional. One is identified as that of an official of the Kassite ruler Burnaburiash (fig. 3), while the other bears a prayer to Marduk (fig. 4). The third Kassite masterpiece in the hoard (fig. 7), also bearing an inscription naming Marduk, displays dissimilar imagery—a nude hero flanked by rearing ibexes—and a dissimilar execution. Porada noticed that the hero's unusually segmented and elongated body was probably a result of re-carving, which she suggested occurred in Greece.<sup>7</sup> It may be more plausible, however, that, as with



Fig. 7. Lapis lazuli cylinder seal and modern impression. Thebes, Palace Workshop. Kassite manufacture with possible Cypriot re-carving, Late Helladic IIIB context. Archaeological Museum, Thebes 199

all other instances of drastic re-cutting of Theban seals, this occurred on Cyprus. Perhaps the seal carver retooled an abraded image of a nature god, like one on a seal from Baghdad (fig. 8), into a Master of Animals.<sup>8</sup> Cypriot seals with the latter type of iconography are quite prevalent, one interesting example being a Cypriot import discovered on the island of Rhodes (fig. 9).<sup>9</sup> If it is indeed the case that the seal was re-cut on Cyprus, then we may not be able to divide the proposed Assyrian diplomatic gift of Kassite seals from the other seals in the Theban Treasure that passed through Cyprus—an island that has been revealed as a center for the transfer of refurbished lapis lazuli glyptic and possibly of the unfinished pieces in the hoard as well.

The presence of two other seals in the Theban hoard brings us to another aspect

of this discussion: the creation of cylinder seals with mixed imagery. One is made of agate (fig. 10) and the other is of lapis lazuli (fig. 11), both materials richly represented by beads in the palatial jewelry workshop in which this collection of seals was found.<sup>10</sup> I have previously identified the agate seal as an Aegean work with a typically Aegean version of the Master of Animals theme.<sup>11</sup> The lapis lazuli seal has been recognized as Cypriot with Aegean features and offers an arguably less Aegean approach to the shared theme of human and feline attack and domination.<sup>12</sup> Amid a variety of animal motifs and Cypro-Minoan signs in the field, it depicts a hunter attacking a lion; the human figure's feet are lifted off the ground line in a manner uncharacteristic of the Near East. The second scene, as on the agate seal, shows a griffin attacking a stag, here rather stiff and stylized.



Fig. 8. Modern impression of cylinder seal. Kassite period. Iraq Museum, Baghdad IM 22450



Fig. 9. Drawing of modern impression of Cypriot hematite cylinder seal. Rhodes, Ialysos, Moschou Vounara Grave 67. Late Bronze Age. Archaeological Museum of Rhodes 12.665



Porada, whose approach of defining workshops based on individuating features has been of great value in understanding the creation of seals with mixed imagery, assigned the lapis lazuli seal to the same hand that produced a quintessential intercultural style seal: the hematite cylinder in the Yale Babylonian Collection, which has a central theme of animal combat (fig. 12). Here one can detect the various ingredients but also admire the skill with which they are seamlessly integrated to create something absolutely new. The Yale cylinder is one of a number of seals with mixed imagery, in which animal combats involving feline predators are portrayed.<sup>13</sup> An emphasis on this theme for intercultural style seals is not surprising, considering the prevalence in other media of such scenes of fierce animal combat with feline predators. On metalwork, ivories, and other precious objects, we may see excerpts from the hunt. At times attacking hounds act as indirect allusions to royal prowess and powers of protection, more explicit on other works and in some images perhaps symbolic of heroic conquest over supernatural forces (fig. 20).<sup>14</sup> Significant is their manner of expression, highlighting the artistic transformations that occurred in the context of intense trade and diplomacy among the great powers of the Near East and Egypt, as reflected in the Amarna Letters. Based on the evidence of a Mycenaean port as a proposed destination of the Uluburun ship, with two Mycenaean emissaries aboard,<sup>15</sup> along with the stunning glyptic evidence from Mycenaean Thebes, it would be safe to assume Aegean involvement in this system.

The specifics of such artistic transformations can be addressed by closely analyzing the details of the Yale seal (fig. 12).<sup>16</sup> Its central combat scene is comprised of two lions, each upright on a single hind leg, attacking a stag, with an eagle above. The pyramidal composition is framed on a higher level with two motifs: crossing horned animals and a horned animal suckling its young. A lioness, suckling her cub,



Fig. 10. Aegean agate cylinder seal and modern impression. Thebes, Palace Workshop. Late Helladic II–III A manufacture, Late Helladic IIIB context. Archaeological Museum, Thebes 175



Fig. 11. Lapis lazuli cylinder seal and modern impression. Thebes, Palace Workshop. “Cypro-Aegean” manufacture, Late Helladic IIIB context. Archaeological Museum, Thebes 203



Fig. 12. “Cypro-Aegean” hematite cylinder seal and modern impression. Late Bronze Age. Yale Babylonian Collection, New Haven 358

stands on the ground line adjacent to the combat scene. The field is filled with signs and other devices.

The composition of two predators with a victim between them, under an eagle or Imdugud bird, occurs on Syrian seals already in the Middle Bronze Age.<sup>17</sup> In the Near East, however, the felines are rooted to the ground despite their raised forepaws, whereas the bodies of the Yale lions are oblique and maintain their balance on one thin hind leg only, the other kicking forward in a characteristically Aegean manner. The Yale stag, too, while horizontal, as depicted on a Syro-Mitannian seal from Ugarit,<sup>18</sup> is nevertheless in motion, its head dramatically turned back and downward, exposing the chest, while its limbs move, indicating its struggle.

The prototypes for three-figure combats and for the postures of the lions and stag on the Yale seal are found on Aegean stamp seals of various styles. Some examples belong or can be related to the so-called Rhodian Hunt group (fig. 13),<sup>19</sup> which was distributed over an area from Crete and the Greek mainland to the Dodecanese Islands, suggesting perhaps sources of inspiration on, or at least intermingling en route to, the Levantine coast. Yet, when the Yale seal is viewed against these late Aegean examples, the contrasts remain stark. Its animals are

static and exhibit a different sensibility. The lions' feet are on the same ground level, the stag's leg movements are less well defined, and the turn of its head lacks the tension of purely Aegean representations. Thus, in style and posture the seal from Yale stands between Aegean and oriental traditions, providing a subtle blend of elements, further emphasized by the aloof, stiff quality of the lioness suckling her cub, and the overall syntax, with individual, self-contained scenes at different levels in the field.

Another seal (fig. 14), originally in the Colville Collection and now in the Rosen Collection, has been attributed to the hand or workshop of the carver of the Yale seal.<sup>20</sup> The curvaceous bodies of the two lions attacking a bull below an eagle relate them to the animal combat triad on the Yale seal. The Aegean treatment of the kicked-forward hind leg nearest the viewer is combined here with horizontal rather than diagonal bodies and a foreleg on the ground, creating a more static, oriental posture.

The style of a third seal (fig. 15), formerly in the Erlenmeyer Collection and now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum,<sup>21</sup> also shows a mixture of supple, curving bodies, spindly limbs marked with small drillings, and movement informed by restraint. Here, the symmetrically placed lions have been replaced by a solitary griffin attacking a stag, its head contorted in the Aegean manner. The lions have come under the control of a hero who steps with his legs off the ground, his torso turned. Also defying the more static Near Eastern compositional scheme is the group of hero and lions above the stag, whose confinement suggests that the scene was excerpted from the circular field of an Aegean lentoid seal.<sup>22</sup>

While the seal at Yale is reported to have come from the vicinity of Ugarit, which may be supported by the nature of its Cypro-Minoan signs,<sup>23</sup> an attribution to Cypriot manufacture may be supported by a number of other features, including the lioness on the Yale seal, which resembles one on a well-known mixed-style example from Enkomi.<sup>24</sup>

Fig. 13. Modern impression of Aegean agate lentoid seal. Late Bronze Age. Cabinet des Médailles, Paris, Chandon de Briailles 119





Although the sample examined here is small, we can safely say that the imagery on intercultural style seals appears to emphasize conquest and control, expressed in the form of either human hunters confronting lions or felines attacking prey. Both themes appear on Near Eastern cylinder seals dating centuries earlier, that is, seals related to Dominique Collon's "Aleppo Group" of the late Middle Bronze Age (fig. 16).<sup>25</sup> Their animal compositions are infused with a new energy for the time, particularly apparent when juxtaposed with more traditional scenes of gods and rulers. On such works, the parallelism between human and feline combat themes is obvious, as we have seen also on the lapis lazuli seal from Thebes (fig. 11).

Mastery over the most powerful of natural forces—represented by the lion—as well as the feline defeating its prey are pervasive subjects in both the Aegean and the Near East. In both regions, scenes of lion attack and lion domination became metaphors for virile male strength and royal supremacy, themes depicted on seals as well as on instruments of power such as elite ceremonial weapons.<sup>26</sup> Exceptional, however, was Egypt, where, prior to the Hyksos period, the theme of a human attacking a lion—the symbol of the pharaoh—was widely avoided, although the royal beast was depicted among desert animals pursuing its own prey.<sup>27</sup>

One extraordinary work, a dagger discovered at Saqqara, in a burial deposited inside an older funerary temple of the Dynasty 6 queen Iput, near the pyramid of king Teti, appears to have introduced the theme of lion conquest into the Nile Valley (fig. 17). The hilt plate on one side of its handle bears the name of Apophis. On the other side, a hunter, described in an inscription as a "follower of his lord (the Hyksos king), Nehemen," and wearing the kilt of a Middle Kingdom official, spears a lion from below, with a horned animal fleeing in a galloping posture above. Such imagery, in the words of Dorothea Arnold, "delivered an unprecedented blow to Egyptian decorum" and "an insult to Egyptian cultural identity."<sup>28</sup> The depiction is

revolutionary not only in theme but also in style, for here one may see early intercultural style art on a prestige object that Arnold suggests was made in the vicinity of Saqqara.



Fig. 14. "Cypro-Aegean" hematite cylinder seal and modern impression. Late Bronze Age. Jeanette and Jonathan Rosen Collection, New York



Fig. 15. "Cypro-Aegean" hematite cylinder seal and modern impression. Late Bronze Age. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund and funds from various donors, 1992–1992.288



Fig. 16. Modern impression of Syrian hematite cylinder seal. Middle Bronze Age. Private collection





Fig. 17. (Above) Hilt of bronze and wood dagger with gold overlay. Saqqara. Dynasty 15, reign of Apophis, ca. 1581–1541 B.C. Luxor Museum JE 32735



Fig. 18. (Above, right) Gold dagger sheath. Tomb of Tutankhamun. Dynasty 18, reign of Tutankhamun, ca. 1336–1327 B.C. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 61584A

The animal scene—perhaps most closely related to the exuberant feline attacks on late Middle Bronze Age Syrian cylinder seals and Hyksos-style scarabs—appears more than a century before Aegean-style hunting frescoes were painted on the walls of Palace F at Tell el-Dab’a (see p. 194, fig. 9).<sup>29</sup>

By the height of the New Kingdom, the image of the pharaoh as lion slayer becomes standard, paralleling that of the king smiting Asiatic and Nubian enemies.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to the formal rendering of the pharaoh, however,

the animal scenes—particularly those of feline attack, with hunting hounds alluding to human involvement—reflect the dramatic transformation hinted at earlier on. We have only to look at the magnificent array of objects in Tutankhamun’s tomb to appreciate the pervasive hybrid styles adopted to express this theme. One of the most impressive shorthand versions appears on the golden sheath of a dagger found on his mummy (fig. 18), which, along with gold-foil attachments for a chariot, bears imagery emphasizing the traditional association of the pharaoh with the power of feline predators but in a much more dynamic manner. While the superb execution and accuracy in rendering animals and flora on these objects point to fabrication in Egyptian royal workshops, the combat scenes exhibit a style that captures the violence of the moment in the Aegean manner using attack postures familiar from Aegean lentoids. Yet the figures are also depicted with the somewhat arrested movement we find in Levantine interpretations of such imagery.<sup>31</sup> Shared landscape elements closely relate Canaanite metalwork depicting feline attacks with the objects in the tomb of Tutankhamun. Yet, as Helene Kantor noted, the hybrid plants on a bowl from Ugarit (fig. 19) are derivative and demonstrate “ignorance of the naturalistic prototypes of the elements borrowed from the Nile.”<sup>32</sup> On the bowl, two hunters appear in a single scene, spearing and stabbing the rampant roaring lion between them, who has apparently already felled a collapsing stag. Despite the danger of the encounter, the violence of the moment is hardly conveyed, and the feline lunges with rear legs firmly on the ground. Other scenes on the bowl also echo the abstractly rendered character of these savage attacks. The most dynamic are the three instances of lions leaping onto their prey from behind. Reactions to the assaults, however, are expressed only by the turn of the head of one of the bulls, whose rear limbs are extended, and the collapsing forelegs of the other bull and of the ibex.<sup>33</sup>

Much more dynamic are two distinct combats—one with a lion and a hound



Fig. 19. Drawing of exterior relief decoration of gold bowl. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. National Museum, Aleppo M 10129



Fig. 20. Bronze plaque with animal combats. Levant. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 15557



attacking a bull and the other with a leopard or cheetah biting the throat of an ibex (fig. 20). They fill the upper horizontal band of an unprovenanced bronze plaque attributed to Tyre. In contrast to the scenes on the Ugarit bowl and the dagger sheath from Egypt, the savagery of these confrontations is captured in compositions of frontal attack and permeates the bodies of the victims, with their heads contorted and limbs lifted off the ground. The lions leap onto their prey with rear forelegs kicking forward in the Aegean manner, while a hound with open jaws bites the belly, his body overlapped by the raised limbs of the bull. We also find

spirited attack scenes on a few cylinder seals from Ugarit.<sup>34</sup>

Judging from these works, there can be no doubt regarding the prestige attached to innovative interpretations of traditional symbols of power—the parallel imagery of human and feline hunters. Continuing the tradition that brought Aegean-trained fresco painters to adorn eastern Mediterranean palaces and introduced a new spirit into hunting scenes in the tombs of Egyptian nobles, these developments reflect the open world of the late second millennium B.C., when foreign craftsmen were admired and sought-after. This is made so clear in the diplomatic correspondence, where the Hittite king begs for a sculptor from Babylon, and the Kassite ruler asks for Egyptian carpenters to “represent a wild animal, land or aquatic, lifelike, so that the hide is exactly like that of a live animal.”<sup>35</sup>

Certainly, exotic seals of precious materials such as those from the Theban jewelry workshop (figs. 3–7, 11) were probably intended to be transformed into wearable signs of status—what Grahame Clark has called “symbols of excellence”<sup>36</sup>—in a tradition of incorporating foreign-looking cylinder seals into Aegean jewelry. This is evident, for instance, at Kazarma in the Argolid, where amethyst and glass Aegean cylinder seals, along with other seals and beads, encircled the neck of a deceased fifteenth century B.C. ruler.<sup>37</sup> The gifting of precious and rare display items—including necklaces formed of seals—is detailed in the Amarna Letters, in the lists of dowry and

Fig. 21. Two sides of ivory mirror handle. Enkomi, Tomb 17. Late Bronze Age. The Trustees of the British Museum, London 1897.4-1.872



Fig. 22. Ivory game box. Enkomi, Tomb 58. Late Bronze Age. The Trustees of the British Museum, London 1897.4-1.996





wedding presents that accompanied foreign brides to the Egyptian court.<sup>38</sup>

While hybrid-style seals were largely fashioned of hematite (figs. 12, 14, 15), their imagery may have marked them for distinction. Many of them were apparently manufactured on Cyprus. Their carvings reflect the luxury arts of the royal courts, with which copper-rich Alashiya was intimately linked. Similar images of power in a hybrid style persisted in the arts of Cyprus in succeeding centuries, when an Aegean presence was established there (fig. 21). They occur along with other themes related to pharaonic prowess adopted earlier by Canaanite metalworkers, such as the chariot hunt with bow and arrow (fig. 22).<sup>39</sup>

Interpreting the significance of such phenomena on Cyprus, despite the fact that there is little evidence for the administrative use of seals on the island, some scholars suggest that Cypriots linked to overseas political alliances especially with the Aegean realm may have used such seals and pottery stamps as “a deliberate act of self-definition,” symbolizing their elite identity and perhaps their monopoly over imported prestige goods.<sup>40</sup> More generally, Mary Helms has famously written about the powerful symbolism attached to the act of acquisition of both foreign craftsmanship and exotica as marks of exceptionality and the ability to control, themes certainly expressed by the motifs selected for seals with mixed imagery.<sup>41</sup> I hope that this essay will serve to draw glyptic into the discussion of artistic internationalism, in order to further clarify the ways in which the arts reflect and participate in the exchange process—concepts fundamental to the “Beyond Babylon” exhibition.

1. See entries by Aruz, Collon, and Weinstein in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 358, 360–65, nos. 223, 225–32.
2. Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 300–304.
3. Porada 1982. For the Anatolian-style seal, see Porada 1982, p. 299, fig. 3; Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 388.
4. Pierrat-Bonnefois in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 65–66.
5. Aruz 2008, p. 87; Pierrat-Bonnefois in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 65–66, fig. 25.

6. Porada 1981–82, esp. p. 66.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.
8. Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 281–83, no. 177a–c.
9. For this seal, see Pini 1975, no. 657.
10. Aravantinos in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 280–81, no. 176a, b.
11. Aruz 2008, pp. 199–201; Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 286–87, no. 183.
12. Porada 1981–82, pp. 21–23, no. 6.
13. See, for example, Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 399–400, nos. 254, 255.
14. See *Beyond Babylon*, p. 390, fig. 122, p. 417, fig. 131.
15. Pulak 2005, pp. 308–9; Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 300.
16. Aruz 2008, pp. 215–16.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 177, figs. 358, 426.
18. *Ibid.*, fig. 427.
19. For this group of seals, see Younger 1981; Younger 1987.
20. Aruz 2008, pp. 217–18, fig. 433.
21. Aruz in “Recent Acquisitions” 1993, p. 7.
22. Aruz 2008, pp. 218–19, fig. 434.
23. Aruz 2010, p. 77.
24. Aruz 2008, p. 215, n. 128, fig. 407.
25. For this group of seals, see Collon 1981.
26. For scenes of lion attack on Aegean and Near Eastern seals, see, for example, Pini 1988, no. 208; Babcock in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 212, no. 125a, b. On Aegean weapons, see Evans 1906, pt. 1, p. 57, fig. 59; S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, pls. XLIX, L.
27. Newberry 1893a, pl. XIII; Dorothea Arnold in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 117.
28. Dorothea Arnold in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 116–18, no. 65, and personal communication.
29. For the Hyksos-style scarab design, see Yadin et al. 1960, pl. CLXXXVII, 17. For wall paintings, see Bietak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 131; Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 387, 389, fig. 120.
30. See Roehrig in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 418, no. 272.
31. Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 392.
32. Kantor 1945/1999, p. 528; see also Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 240.
33. Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 239, no. 146.
34. For the Tyre plaque, see Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 404–5, no. 259. For a cylinder seal from Ugarit with a vibrant animal attack scene, see Amiet 1992, p. 173, no. 405.
35. EA 10 (Moran 1992, p. 19). See also Beckman 1996, p. 137 (§ 16); Beckman 1999a, p. 137 (§ 16); Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 387.
36. Clark 1986, pp. 3, 67–69, 82.
37. For the Kazarma burial, see Pappi in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 402–3, no. 258.
38. EA 25, i 38, 39 (Moran 1992, p. 73).
39. Fitton in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 412–14, nos. 265, 266.
40. Webb and Frankel 1994, pp. 19, 20; see also Knapp 2008, pp. 156, 158.
41. Helms 1993, pp. 101, 130, 151, 165.

# Of Banquets, Horses, and Women in Late Bronze Age Ugarit

The formalized consumption of food and drink—“table manners” we were taught at our mother’s knee—is one of the most significant indicators of cultural identities and differences. Polite behavior here may raise eyebrows there; the proper setting of the table (in the cultures where there is a table to set!) may vary within a single country according to social rank or family tradition; one need not travel far from home to be puzzled by strange arrangements of plates and cutlery. These differences are not only geographic, but they also change quickly over time. In Europe, for instance, modes of eating and drinking, as well as menus, have undergone great changes since the medieval period, and these changes have accelerated in the recent past. A French child of 2010 would have a difficult time with a family meal of the 1900s or even the 1950s.

Thus, the study of how people partake of food and drink in a given culture at a given period may provide an intimate insight into that culture. In the case of Late Bronze Age Ugarit, much information can be drawn from the written sources, the archaeological remains, and a few images, all of which allow a tentative reconstruction of ritualized eating and drinking. As might be expected, there is more evidence for events, religious or otherwise, among the elites, than there is for the everyday life of ordinary people.

## BANQUETS IN LITERATURE

Banquets and libations have left many traces in the written sources from Ugarit, notably in literature and ritual texts. Ugarit is famous for the epics written in the local language around 1200 B.C. One of the poems in the cycle dedicated to the god Baal describes the inaugural banquet of his “house” (temple):

He slaughters bovids [and] caprovids,  
he fells bulls [and] fattened goats,  
yearling calves,  
lambs (and) great numbers of kids.  
He invites his brothers into his house,  
his kin into his palace,  
He invites the seventy sons of ʿAṭiratu:  
He provides the gods with rams (and) wine,  
he provides the goddesses with ewes (and) [wine];  
He provides the gods with bulls (and) wine,  
he provides the goddesses with cows (and) [wine];  
He provides the gods with chairs (and) wine,  
he provides the goddesses with seats (and) [wine];  
He provides the gods with jars of wine,  
he provides the goddesses with barrels of [wine].  
So the gods eat and drink,  
they take sucklings,  
with a salted knife cutlets from [a fatling].  
They drink wine from goblets,  
red [wine from] golden cups. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Ritual texts record the formulaic minutiae of the many ritual acts that filled the calendar for almost every day in Ugarit. Most consist of the sacrifice of big and small cattle and birds, as well as the offering of fruit, cereals, and wine.

It is unclear whether the priests or the participants in the banquet actually consumed the listed offerings.<sup>2</sup> It is not our concern here (nor is it in my area of expertise) to ponder whether those banquets were funerary, commemorative, social, or political, nor to reflect on the obvious, but probably misleading, parallels with the Bible: was the *marzihu* mentioned in the Ugaritic texts a communal symposium practice comparable to the Hebrew *marzeah*? Is the intoxication of El, father of the gods,<sup>3</sup> a parallel to the

biblical story of the inebriated Noah? The contribution of this essay to those much-debated questions is, rather, a tentative survey of the material evidence for ritualized food and drink consumption at Ugarit ca. 1300–1150 B.C.

#### IMAGES OF BANQUETS

Banquets and libation scenes are depicted at Ugarit on several objects with enough details to provide information about the kinds of vessels and instruments that were used during these events. One notable instance is the fragmentary alabaster amphora inscribed with the name of Niqmaddu, king of Ugarit,<sup>4</sup> that bears the image of a princess pouring wine for the king, sheltered by an Egyptian dais (fig. 1). Of the king himself, only the head survives: he has a non-Egyptian hairstyle of closely cropped curls—the attribute of Asiatic foreigners according to New Kingdom iconography. He probably held a cup to receive the drink poured by the princess, but unfortunately that part of the scene has been destroyed. The princess wears an elaborate headdress and a transparent dress in pure Egyptian style. She pours the liquid out of a thin, elongated alabastron with a pointed base.<sup>5</sup> A table, now missing, probably stood between the two figures, and supported an amphora of a New Kingdom type well attested in Ugarit.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the fragment under discussion is part of such a vessel, a wine container. The head of a bull protrudes from the amphora's neck. This head may be compared to the animal heads above large vases depicted in other banquet scenes from the Levant.<sup>7</sup> They also appear frequently in Egyptian New Kingdom frescoes depicting Aegean vases.<sup>8</sup> Whether they represent sacrificed animals or Minoan style zoomorphic rhyta is a matter of debate. If indeed they are rhyta, depicted here not in the action of libation but waiting to be used, their proximity to the larger vessels provides an additional clue to their usage among the banquet implements.

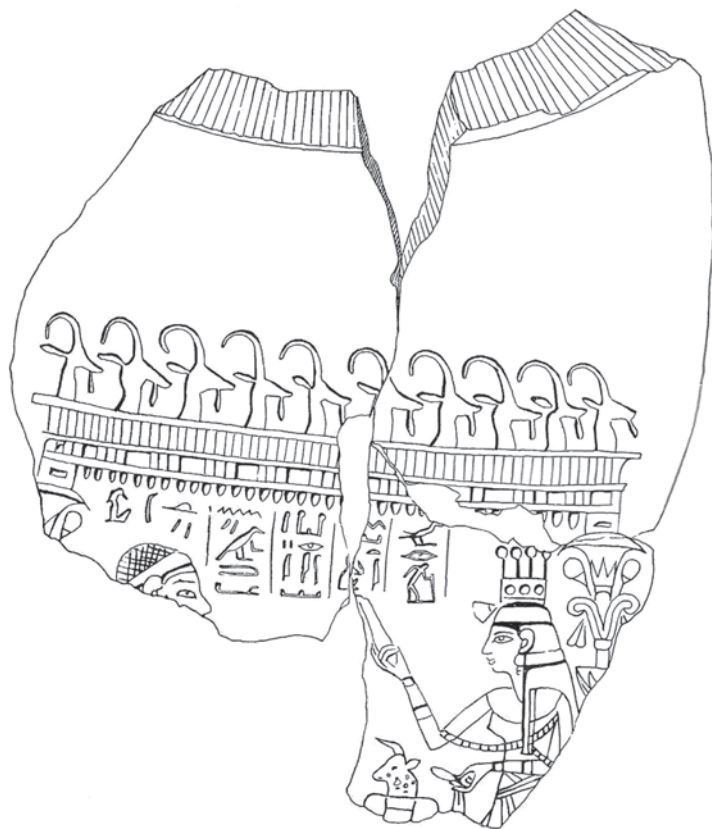


Fig. 1. Drawing of fragmentary calcite alabaster amphora. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. National Museum, Damascus 4160

It is generally assumed that the Niqmaddu amphora is an Egyptian work commissioned for Ugarit for a specific occasion, probably a marriage. Its iconography includes many traits specifically alluding to the Asiatic character of the owner and recipient, the king of Ugarit, such as the king's hairstyle and the frieze of goats over the dais instead of the usual uraei. These Asiatic traits and allusions are expressed in Egyptian pictorial language. One may speculate, then, that the vessels used for the libation ritual on the image—the alabastron, amphora, and rhyton (?)—are Egyptian translations of local, Asiatic vessels.

While the Ugaritic poem and the ritual texts record collective banquets involving



many participants, the images that are preserved show banquets offered to one guest only. In the case of the alabaster vase, the honored guest is specifically designated as the king. The identity of the participants in the ritual painted on a local pottery tankard is unclear (fig. 2):<sup>9</sup> possibly another royal personage, or the god El, attended by Baal.

The locally made tankard is itself a drinking vessel. The painted scene occupies the entire surface and represents a seated figure, holding in his raised hand a hemispherical bowl of a type known in gold, silver, and faience. In front of him is a low table laden with loaves and supporting a krater. He is attended by a standing figure carrying a

Fig. 2. Drawing of scene on painted tankard. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. National Museum, Damascus 6881



Fig. 3. Steatite stele and drawing. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. National Museum, Aleppo 4622



juglet with a pointed base. The scene is strangely completed by a horse, a bird, and a fish, perhaps symbols of the three elements, which would situate the scene in the superhuman world. Whatever the identity of the figures and the significance of the whole scene, what matters for the present purpose is the combination of the vessels and implements necessary to perform the banquet: a krater supported by a low table, a juglet to dip into the krater, and a cup to drink from. The chair of the main figure is a necessary piece of furniture, but it may also be associated with events not implying the partaking of food or drink.

Among the many cultic stelae from Ugarit, two depict a banquet or libation scene. The so-called Homage to the god El stele (fig. 3)<sup>10</sup> is organized along the same lines as the painted pottery tankard: an attendant brings a beverage to a seated figure who drinks from a cup. The cup is a shallow bowl from which rises a triangular mass, a possible attempt at perspective. The seated figure, the god El (?), is attended by a standing figure, Baal or the king (?), carrying a juglet for the libation. He is holding a vertical cylindrical instrument ending in a ram's (?) head. This implement might be identified as a ladle for burning incense, a well-known type in Egypt, although it is held horizontally when depicted in Egyptian art. The closest parallel is one held by priests or attendants on a number of ivory reliefs from Arslan Tash.<sup>11</sup> As on the Ugarit stele, the performers on the ivories carry such a “scepter” vertically in the right hand and a juglet in the left, an indication that they are engaged in a ceremony involving drink. Our particular instrument must therefore be a part of the paraphernalia necessary to the performance of rituals accompanying banquets and libation in the Late Bronze Age and the early first millennium B.C. Perhaps it is a zoomorphic rhyton or situla, operating in conjunction with the juglet in the course of the same ceremony.

Another food-offering scene appears on a stele found on the acropolis at Ugarit (fig. 4).<sup>12</sup> It is inscribed with a hieroglyphic dedication by Maimy, an Egyptian residing at Ugarit, to the god “Baal of the Zaphon mountain.” Maimy bows before the deity, who is depicted standing and holding a *was* scepter. Between them is a table laden with spherical loaves. In keeping with Egyptian etiquette, the deity stands aloof and does not take part in the action. What we see is the statue of the god, not his epiphany, while in the previous images the seated god was the



Fig. 4. Sandstone stele. Ugarit, acropolis. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 13176

Fig. 5. Mycenaean ceramic krater. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 20376



living presence of the deity, partaking of the drink being offered and raising his cup. Here, all that remains of the event of the banquet is the table and the food presented on it.

Banquet scenes on cylinder seals at Ugarit are generally extremely schematic and simplified; because the vessels are too small to be rendered at such a reduced scale, what remains of the components of the performance is the low table in front of the seated figure.<sup>13</sup> In one instance, the seated figure is drinking from a long pipe dipped into a narrow-necked jar:<sup>14</sup> this is a traditional depiction

of beer drinking in Mesopotamian iconography, and a testimony to the cultural diversity of drinking practices and beverages in Ugarit.

#### ARTIFACTS

According to the images, a small table is a necessary piece of furniture for the performance of the banquet in honor of one guest. The royal palace at Ugarit possessed such a table, with a circular ivory top, a floral capital in ivory for the attachment of the legs, and legs ending in ivory lions' paws.<sup>15</sup>



The choice of such a precious material as elephant ivory is in itself an indication of the attention paid to the formality and prestige of the ritual. Ceramic vessels, on the other hand, document the existence of banquets involving multiple guests, like those described in the Ugaritic poems and the Homeric epics. Either for trade or for entertaining on a grand scale, vessels were stored in quantities that exceeded the needs of one household. For example, eighty jars were stored in a cellar of the harbor town of Minet el-Beidha and in a wealthy residence near the palace more than one hundred bowls were piled into a stone basin, as if waiting for somebody to wash the dishes.<sup>16</sup> Tableware includes individual drinking cups and large vessels for serving wine. Their shapes are evidence of different cultural practices, borrowed mainly from the Aegean and Egypt. The krater, an open shape designed for the mixing of wine and water according to Greek customs of formal wine drinking, became popular in Late Bronze Age Ugarit, as well as in Cyprus and the entire Levant. Wine kraters at Ugarit were turned out in many imported and prestigious wares: Minoan, Mycenaean, Minyan, and others (fig. 5).<sup>17</sup> They were associated with complete services of bowls and plates in matching wares.

The conical rhyton, also originating in the Aegean, has been shown to be an essential part of ritual wine drinking.<sup>18</sup> It is characterized by the presence of a small hole at the base, which makes it into a funnel. The contents, most probably wine, were stirred in order to enhance their flavor, while the conical shape helped to mix and strain the ground spices that were added to the beverage. Conical rhyta were produced in even more wares than the krater: Mycenaean, Minoan, and local wares.<sup>19</sup> Some were made of silver and faience.<sup>20</sup> Whether the carved elephant tusk from the royal palace was a rhyton, a bottle, or a musical instrument is a much-debated question.<sup>21</sup> Whatever its exact function, this masterpiece must have been used on the occasion of rituals that were



Fig. 6. Mycenaean ceramic zoomorphic rhyton. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 18521

certainly accompanied by music and included the consumption of food and drink.<sup>22</sup>

Rhyta also adopted zoomorphic shapes, usually a lion's, a bull's or a ram's head—as well as a unique instance of a boar's head—all of them connoting male potency. Zoomorphic rhyta were produced in Mycenaean and local ceramics and in faience (fig. 6). When these vessels are fragmentary and the base with a small hole is missing, it is not always possible to distinguish a zoomorphic rhyton/funnel from a situla, which has only one opening.

Ceremonial wine drinking in Egypt was performed using jars and amphorae. Vessels of Egyptian alabaster were highly precious items, sometimes the gifts of pharaohs, who had them inscribed with their cartouche.<sup>23</sup> Ugarit is the Levantine kingdom where the largest number of such inscribed jars have been found. Ranging from Dynasty 18 to the time of Ramesses II, they are the best evidence for the adoption of Egyptian banquet practices in Ugarit.



Fig. 7. Calcite alabaster drinking cup with ridged sides (tazza). Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 14788



Fig. 8. Fragmentary faience drinking cup (tazza). Emar. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 27746

Individual drinking cups recovered at Ugarit may also shed light on the cultural differences in drinking practices. They occur in many different shapes and materials. Hemispherical bowls, such as the one depicted on the pottery tankard, were also produced in gold and silver.<sup>24</sup> The gold hemispherical cup from the vicinity of the Baal Temple is decorated with repoussé reliefs depicting heroes fighting mythological beasts among sacred trees. I suggest that the many faience bowls found at Ugarit were also part of the banquet equipment. Among these, the “blue bowl” type—which was very popular in Egypt, where its iconography was associated with the Nile and the goddess Hathor—was adopted and imitated in the Levant. Examples from Ugarit display original motifs: one depicts the Egyptian protective *wedjat* (the eye placed above a heart and trachea), the hieroglyphic sign for Good. This is the only known instance in which the magic eye is symmetrically duplicated to give the impression of a human mask *en face*.<sup>25</sup> As we may assume from its chemical composition, this bowl appears to be of local production, suggesting that the Syrian artist adapted a popular Egyptian design, turning it into a new variant of the mask motif as well as a theophany, or visible manifestation of the deity. Another type of hemispherical faience bowl is the ubiquitous floral vessel characterized by lotus petals raised in relief and covered with different colored glazes.<sup>26</sup>

The *tazza*, a carinated bowl with a ridge decoration, is also an Egyptian type,<sup>27</sup> and another possible shape for the individual drinking cup. The alabaster *tazza* was very popular at Ugarit and in the southern Levant (fig. 7).<sup>28</sup> Versions of it in faience (fig. 8) and gold were also produced: the most prestigious is a gold bowl depicting a hunting scene,<sup>29</sup> found with the hemispherical bowl mentioned above.

Lotus-shaped chalices, another Egyptian form, existed in alabaster and faience.<sup>30</sup> As with the blue bowls, their precise meaning and usage are debated, but Egyptian rituals

of wine offering may have been adopted by the elite at Ugarit, along with the artifacts used to perform these rituals.

In addition to the forms borrowed from either the Aegean or Egypt, a number of small local vessels display an iconography that suggests these artifacts were part of local ceremonies. One type is the deep tankard or goblet, with or without a handle. A flat base allows it to stand by itself even when full. The painted tankard (fig. 2) is in this category—among many others in plain local ware—and its association with the banquet ritual is evidenced by its iconography. By analogy, I suggest that a series of goblets in the shape of female heads belongs to the same functional group. Ugarit has yielded more examples than any other Levantine site of these “international style” faience female-head goblets (fig. 9).<sup>31</sup> Their ringlets, lovelocks, and eye shadow give these vessels a fetching appearance, possibly the alluring look of a goddess of sexuality.

The situla or tankard belongs to another functional category. Like the rhyton, once emptied it could only rest on its side, because of its rounded, pointed base. Of special significance was the zoomorphic situla in the shape of animal symbols of male potency, like the lion, the bull, or the ram. The tradition of the zoomorphic situla goes back to the Middle Bronze Age<sup>32</sup> and endures into the first millennium B.C., with the metal situla of Babylonia and Assyria. In shape it closely resembles the zoomorphic rhyton, except that it has one opening only. The situlae from Ugarit were produced in local pottery and faience.<sup>33</sup> I suggest that their function was the same as that of the juglets carried by the attendants depicted in banquet scenes: dipping the beverage from a krater; stirring the contents to mix the wine, water, and possibly spices; and pouring them into a drinking cup. The operation must have been performed in one go: the *Cul Sec* or “Bottoms Up” modern invitation comes to mind. As suggested by the finds from the Uluburun shipwreck, the



Fig. 9. Faience cup with a female face. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 15725

zoomorphic situla was associated with the female-head goblet.<sup>34</sup>

Plain juglets, like those shown in banquet scenes, were a very common type of local pottery. They were probably used in everyday life for ordinary meals, but surviving





Fig. 10. Hippopotamus ivory pyxis. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 14780

visual evidence (fig. 2) points to their use in formal ceremonies as well. One such juglet, bearing a rare painted decoration of birds, has been found in the “Rhyton Temple.”<sup>35</sup>

Closed vessels in faience, alabaster, and ivory have until now been classified as cosmetic vessels, essentially associated with toiletry and beauty: it has been assumed that the “swimming girl” spoon, the duck box, and the lentoid or floral pyxis<sup>36</sup> belonged to the owner’s private beauty kit (fig. 10). I suggest they are instead among the accoutrements necessary to the banquet and may have contained expensive spices and condiments, or even salt, in the form of powder or paste, to be added to drink or food. Their swivel lids, which would have preserved

their fragrance, were easily opened and closed. The ubiquitous stirrup jar, a Mycenaean type imitated in local pottery and faience, was a narrow-necked miniature jar, the contents of which could only be poured by shaking the vessel. Stirrup jars may have contained precious oils to be presented to guests to refresh themselves and soften their hands, a custom inspired by the Egyptian practice of offering guests invited to a feast perfumed grease cones to place on their heads. Alternatively, the stirrup jars may have contained condiments for the banquet: the importance of *garum* later, in Classical antiquity, should draw our attention to the possibility that Bronze Age food was enhanced by such tasty flavorings.

## BANQUET PLACES

According to textual evidence, the ritualized consumption of drink and food took place in many different locations: the royal palace, temples, family tombs and households, and specific buildings, such as the *marzihu*, designed for communal symposia. There is scant archaeological evidence from the field. The “Rhyton Temple” may have been such a *marzihu*.<sup>37</sup> In addition to numerous rhyta in various materials discovered in the building, there were many fragments of Egyptian alabaster vessels, amphorae, tazzas, and chalices, the complete assemblage for Egyptian-style wine drinking.<sup>38</sup>

Another assemblage of the same type of alabaster vessels was found by Claude Schaeffer in “dépôt 213,” at Minet el-Beidha, the harbor town of Ugarit.<sup>39</sup> It may have been the contents of a tomb, except that alabaster vessels were rarely found in private contexts at Ugarit. Most of the imported vessels from private tombs were Mycenaean and Cypriot wares. In the absence of a reliable stratigraphic record, I suggest that “dépôt 213” may have belonged to another building dedicated to ritual events.

## ICONOGRAPHY ON DRINKING VESSELS

Drinking vessels and table sets conveyed a message as to the status and beliefs of the owner. Precious materials and artifacts imported from afar advertised his wealth and importance. Images displayed for the guests to look at when engaged in celebrations are particularly significant. Far more numerous than banquet scenes, horses and chariots were among the preferred motifs for drinking vessels, the most remarkable being the gold hunting bowl and Mycenaean chariot kraters. More such kraters have been found at Ugarit than at any other Levantine site, and they may have been commissioned from Greece especially for the local clientele.

Horses and chariots were of great importance to the pride of Ugaritic society—demonstrating the wealth of the king and of the elite *maryannu*<sup>40</sup>—as they were in all the

Near Eastern kingdoms. In the Amarna Letters, for instance, the polite formal address of the sender to the pharaoh always includes queries about the health of his horses and the state of his chariots. In the same breath, in the same sentence, the letters started with questions about princesses and marriageable maidens to be exchanged between royal courts:

[S]ay [to Nim]u'wareya, the king of Eg[gypt, m]y [brother]: [Thus Kad]ašman-Enlil, the king of Karaduniyaš, your brother. [For me, all indeed goes w]ell. For you, your household, your wives, [and for you]r [sons], your country, your chariots, your horses, your [mag]nates, may all go very well.

With regard to the girl, my daughter, about whom you wrote to me in view of marriage, she has become a woman; she is nubile. Just send a delegation to fetch her. . . . [25 men and] 25 women . . . I send [to you *in connection with the house-opening*]. [. . .] for 10 wooden chariots, [and 10 teams of hor]ses I send to you as your greeting-gift.<sup>41</sup>

An important part of diplomacy and of the alliance policies between dynasties, the quest for beautiful women was a favorite subject in ancient literature. The Homeric story of the Trojan War for the sake of fair Helen compares well with the Ugaritic epic of king Kirta. Seeking a bride to provide him with a son, Kirta besieges the city of king Pabil in order to obtain the hand of his daughter Hurraya. Pabil tries to bribe Kirta with gifts, which he refuses:

What need have I of silver  
and of yellow [gold]  
along with its place;  
Of a perpetual servant,  
of three horses,  
of a chariot in a courtyard,  
of the son of a handmaid?

Rather, you must give me what my  
house lacks,  
give me maid Ḥurraya,  
the best girl of your firstborn  
offspring;  
Whose goodness is like that of ʿAnatu,  
whose beauty is like that of ʿAṭiratu;  
The pupils (of whose eyes) are of pure  
lapis-lazuli,  
whose eyes are like alabaster bowls; . . .<sup>42</sup>

In the Amarna Letters as in the Ugaritic poem, the association between horses, chariots, and women with liquid eyes has an equivalent in the archaeological assemblages at Ugarit, relating to banquets. These finds include Mycenaean chariot kraters, female-head faience goblets, rhyta, and zoomorphic situlae in the shape of lions' or rams' heads. The vessels were probably endowed with symbolic male/female significance, the precise nature of which escapes us. One is tempted to speculate that drinking vessels were assigned to the participants in the rituals by type, according to gender. Images and written sources alike confirm that women took part in the banquet and libation rituals, albeit only as attendants; at Baal's inaugural banquet, gods and goddesses were invited as equals, but the terms designating their seats, drinks, and meats differ according to the gender of the guests.<sup>43</sup>

Although spectacularly well documented, thanks to the combined evidence from written and archaeological sources, the case of Ugarit is nevertheless perfectly representative of the international practices of the Near East during the age of "Art, Trade, and Diplomacy." The imagery displayed due reverence to the gods while attesting to the status and good taste of the owners. The artifacts themselves were both locally produced and imported from afar to answer the needs of the elite. They record their owners' adaptation of elegant table manners borrowed from Egypt, Crete, the pre-Hellenic world, and Mesopotamia. These objects were used during their owners' lifetimes, in various ceremonies, whether social or

religious, and most of which involved ritualized banquets. After death, the vessels were deposited in the tomb—probably after a final funerary meal—ensuring that refined feasts would continue to take place in proper style in the afterlife.

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1. Pardee 1997a, pp. 261–62.
2. RS 19.015 (Pardee 2000).
3. Zamora 2005.
4. RS 15.239 (Desroches-Noblecourt 1956, figs. 118, 126; Caubet 1991, pl. VII, 1; Yon 2006, no. 49; Gabolde in Galliano and Calvet 2004, p. 154, no. 137; Feldman 2006b, fig. 75; Thyrza Sparks 2007, no. 763).
5. For the alabastron shape, see Thyrza Sparks 2007, fig. 8.
6. RS 11.849 (Caubet 1991, pl. IV, 2).
7. For example, an ivory plaque from Megiddo; see Loud 1939, pl. 4.
8. For example, in the tomb of Nebamun; see the tomb tracings by Norman de Garis Davies and Nina M. de Garis Davies in Davies MSS. 10.23.11 and Davies MSS. 10.23.19 (Griffith Institute Archive, University of Oxford). The tracings are reproduced online in facsimile at [www.griffith.ox.ac.uk](http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk).
9. Yon 2006, no. 35.
10. RS 8.295 (Yon 1991, no. 10).
11. Thureau-Dangin et al. 1931, pl. XXXII, 39.
12. Yon 1991, no. 1.
13. Amiet 1992, nos. 230, 236, 247.
14. *Ibid.*, no. 250.
15. Caubet and Yon 1996; Gachet-Bizollon 2007, nos. 372, 373, 287–97, 328–30.
16. Known as the "80-jar deposit," this was probably the cellar of a private house in the harbor town of Minet el-Beidha; see Yon 2006, fig. p. 152. For the stone basin piled up with bowls, see Margueron 1977b, p. 167, fig. 8.
17. Yon, Karageorghis, and Hirschfeld 2000; Montchambert 2004.
18. Koehl 2006.
19. Yon 1987; Yon 1996.
20. For conical rhyta of silver, see Schaeffer 1966; Yon in Cluzan, Mouliérac, and Bounni 1993, no. 183. For examples of these vessels in faience from Minet el-Beidha Tomb VI, see Matoian in Bouquillon et al. 2007, no. 226.



21. Fischer 2007a; Gachet-Bizollon 2007, no. 386.
22. Caubet 1999.
23. Caubet 1991; Thyrza Sparks 2007; Lagarce 2008.
24. For such a bowl in gold in the National Museum of Aleppo, see Yon 2006, no. 57. For a silver hemispherical bowl from the treasure found in 1962 in the “Sud Acropole” trench, see Schaeffer 1966.
25. Matoïan in Bouquillon et al. 2007, no. 211.
26. Caubet in *ibid.*, nos. 15, 16. For examples from Mari and Enkomi, see Weinstein in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 360–61, nos. 226, 227.
27. Thyrza Sparks 2007, fig. 6.
28. Caubet 1991, pl. IX, 1–5, particularly a group from “dépôt 213” (see below).
29. Yon 2006, no. 57; Cluzan in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 243, no. 147.
30. Caubet 1991, pl. IX, 6, 7; Matoïan in Bouquillon et al. 2007, nos. 219–21.
31. Yon 2006, no. 47; Matoïan in Bouquillon et al. 2007, nos. 204–6; Fitton in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 341–44, no. 210; Caubet in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 344, no. 211; Caubet forthcoming.
32. Yener in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 76–77, no. 40, for a lion situla from Kültepe.
33. For situlae of local pottery, see Yon 2008; Zuckerman 2008. For situlae in faience, see Matoïan 2000. Fragments of zoomorphic situlae or rhyta from Ugarit may be reconstructed from examples found at other sites, notably the Uluburun shipwreck; Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 340–41, no. 208a.
34. Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 340–41, no. 208a, b.
35. Yon 2006, no. 29.
36. See Wicke 2008 on the pyxis question.
37. Yon 1987; Yon 1996.
38. Caubet 1991, pl. IX.
39. Schaeffer 1932, pl. VIII, “dépôt à l’enceinte” or “dépôt 213.”
40. Caubet and Yon 1996.
41. EA 3 (Moran 1992, pp. 7–8).
42. Pardee 1997b, p. 337.
43. This repetition with variants may be a poetic device more than a gender-differentiated description of the ritual, but it is consistent and therefore must be significant.

# *Bibru* and Rhyton: Zoomorphic Vessels in the Near East and Aegean

Among the highlights of the Metropolitan Museum's glorious 2008 exhibition "Beyond Babylon" were the various vessels in the shape of animals, some in the form of a complete animal and others depicting only the animal's forepart or its head, with or without a neck. In this essay, I hope to clarify issues relating to the terminologies employed by scholars in discussions of these vessels and to explain their functions based on morphological or formal analyses, in tandem with the evidence from texts and images. The motivation to address these issues arises from the inconsistent terminology used for these vessels, which gives rise to mistaken assumptions regarding their functions. Adopting a more consistent terminology, which alludes simultaneously to the shape and function or uses of these vessels, also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the levels or degrees of contact between the Bronze Age Near East and Aegean.

At the center of this discussion is the inconsistent and often improper use of the word "rhyton" (Greek ῥυτόν) by scholars of the ancient Near East in discussions of zoomorphic vessels. The noun, from the Greek verb ῥεῖν (to flow), refers to a vessel of the Classical period that is open at the top and tapers to a narrow tip, like a bovid horn, which is always perforated.<sup>1</sup> In addition to

actual specimens, images on vases show the rhyton in use: wine was poured through the wide opening in the top and flowed out of the tip into a drinking vessel such as a kylix.<sup>2</sup> In this way, the wine was aerated, thus enhancing its flavor. While the immediate origin or inspiration for these vessels may be attributed to Achaemenid culture—where rhyta are well known—they were adopted by Greeks wherever they lived around the Mediterranean, forming an integral part of the paraphernalia for the symposium, the quintessential male social-bonding experience.<sup>3</sup>

When archaeologists began to uncover the remains of Aegean Bronze Age civilizations at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, a vessel that seemed to correspond morphologically to the Classical rhyton was among the earliest discoveries, most notably in a group of seven from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae, unearthed by Heinrich Schliemann in 1876 and comprising a gold lion's head; a silver bull's head; two silver vessels, one convex-conical, the other shield-shaped; two ostrich-egg vessels; and a marble three-handled vessel. Each has a small, secondary opening in its muzzle, tip, or base, measuring .5 centimeters in diameter.<sup>4</sup> A silver stag-shaped vessel, found with them, with a spout on its back but lacking a secondary opening, is discussed further below (fig. 4).

At present, neither the Minoan (Linear A) nor Mycenaean (Linear B) name(s) for these vessels is known, although Linear A and B ideograms from various sites, including Knossos, Phaistos, Zakros, and Haghia Triada, depict bulls', lions', and possibly boars' heads, which may well refer to inventories of metal zoomorphic head-shaped rhyta like those discovered by Schliemann.<sup>5</sup> Since the decipherment of Linear B in 1952, the names of numerous Mycenaean vessels have become known, although, sadly, rhyta do not yet figure among them.<sup>6</sup>

It was the great German scholar Georg Karo who in 1911, followed by Ernst Buschor in 1919, suggested that these distinctive

zoomorphic vessels, now known from Crete and the Aegean islands, could be called rhyta, on account of the ubiquitous presence of a secondary opening.<sup>7</sup> In addition to zoomorphic rhyta, which occur as either the complete animal figure or its head, Karo included nonzoomorphic vessels in his discussion and typology, the most common shape being a conical or convex-conical vessel that invariably has a .5-centimeter-diameter opening in its tip. The term has stuck, and scholars of the Aegean have been generally consistent and careful in its use.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent to their initial discovery in the Aegean, numerous imported Aegean rhyta and locally made imitations from Egypt and the Near East justifiably allow the observation that by the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, the Aegean rhyton had had a deeper impact on the cultures of the Near East and Egypt than any other single class of Aegean artifact.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, beginning with F. W. von Bissing in the 1920s, many Near Eastern archaeologists have adopted the term “rhyton” for a variety of zoomorphic and figural vessels of entirely Near Eastern pedigree, sometimes using it interchangeably with the more generic term “vessel.”<sup>10</sup> As we shall see, there are factors that do indeed blur the distinctions when trying to classify these odd and distinctive vessels into a consistent taxonomy.

To date, Klaus Tschelt’s synthesis remains the most comprehensive account of zoomorphic vessels in the ancient Near East, although subsequent discoveries from the Chalcolithic Levant have further enriched our understanding of the development and distribution of zoomorphic vessels.<sup>11</sup> While handmade animal-shaped vessels appear sporadically in the Neolithic Near East, it is during the Chalcolithic period that the fashioning of finely wrought zoomorphic vases becomes an integral part of the material cultures of Mesopotamia and the Levant, where they undoubtedly functioned in the capacity of cult equipment. In southern Mesopotamia, zoomorphic vessels in the form of complete animals are especially



Fig. 1. Detail of alabaster Warka vase. Uruk. Late Uruk period. Iraq Museum, Baghdad IM 19606

popular from the fourth and third millennia B.C.; their occurrence during the second millennium B.C. is rare.<sup>12</sup> Known from actual specimens, notably a group from Khafaje in the Diyala region, they are invariably provided with a prominent spout emerging from the animal’s back. This feature also occurs on depictions of zoomorphic vessels, such as on the famous relief vase from Warka, ancient Uruk (fig. 1), and on seals, thus demonstrating that the images depict vessels and not small animals. The clay specimens also have an aperture through the animal’s muzzle or beak. Tschelt, therefore, calls them rhyta, assuming that the spout on the back was an inlet for filling the vessel, while the opening in the muzzle was its outlet. His underlying belief is that these vessels functioned primarily for libations; the animal would be lifted and tipped forward to empty its contents.

However, the zoomorphic vessels depicted on the Warka vase, in the same upper frieze as two chalices—mimetic renderings of the actual vessel on which



they are carved—hover above tables with loaves of bread, baskets brimming with fruits and vegetables, and dismembered animal parts, suggesting that the zoomorphic vessels were also related to the consumption of food. Like the chalices, these objects, too, might be identified as drinking vessels. Indeed, the depictions and the actual extant specimens surely may be identified as *bibri*, the Akkadian word originally meaning bird and at some point adopted widely as the generic term for zoomorphic vessels.<sup>13</sup> I would argue that the spout on the animal's back was used both to fill the vessel and to support a drinking tube through which its contents were imbibed, in the same way that we see people drinking from long tubes inserted into the mouths of narrow-necked vessels on Early Dynastic Mesopotamian seals, Middle Bronze Age Anatolian seals, and a Late Bronze Age relief vase from Hat-tusa.<sup>14</sup> The fact is that any liquid other than water, especially a fermented beverage such as wine or beer, both of which were routinely flavored with various additives, unless thoroughly strained, would quickly clog the putative outlet in the muzzle.<sup>15</sup>

Further, I would argue that the opening in the animal's muzzle on clay specimens functioned primarily as an unobtrusive firing hole. If the only opening on these vessels was the spout in the back, they probably would have exploded in the kiln. With two openings, air and heat could circulate evenly through the vessel during the firing process.<sup>16</sup> As will be seen below, the silver stag-shaped vessel from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae, undoubtedly an imported Anatolian *bibru*, has a spout on its back but no secondary opening in the animal's muzzle, as none would have been necessary during its casting (fig. 4).

It is in the central Anatolian Middle Bronze Age of the early second millennium B.C. that we can pick up the trail of the zoomorphic vessel in the Near East. A possible geographic and chronological link via eastern Anatolia is suggested by a third millennium B.C. stag-shaped vessel from Kangal, between Sivas and Malatya,<sup>17</sup> although northern Mesopotamia and the still relatively under-explored, archaeologically elusive Hurrian-Mitannian culture may yet provide links.<sup>18</sup> During the time of the Old Assyrian Trading Colonies, many

Fig. 2. Ceramic figural antelope *bibru*. Kültepe. Karum Kanesh II, ca. 1950–1836 B.C. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung VI 5930



Fig. 3. Ceramic head-shaped bull *bibru*. Kültepe. Karum Kanesh II, ca. 1950–1836 B.C. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara 1501



of the houses at Kültepe/*karum* Kanesh II contained zoomorphic vessels in the form of complete animal figures and of animal heads (figs. 2, 3).<sup>19</sup> Each of the former has a prominent spout in the middle of its back, whereas the latter are either open just behind the head or have an elongated rim at the back of the head; many of the animal-head type also have a handle. While best represented *in corpore* at Kültepe, Middle Bronze Age documents from Mari attest to the manufacture and exchange of precious-metal zoomorphic head-shaped vessels elsewhere in the Near East.<sup>20</sup>

Written sources and the evidence from actual specimens converge by the Hittite era to provide a remarkable picture of the forms and functions of zoomorphic vessels in use in Anatolia during the Late Bronze Age.<sup>21</sup> As Onofrio Carruba and Hans Güterbock have shown, the Hittites adopted the Akkadian word *bibru* as the generic term for both zoomorphic and nonzoomorphic figural vessels made in a wide range of shapes and materials, including precious metals, stone, and even wood. All these could even be regarded as cult images and were celebrated in a “Festival of the *BIBRI*.”<sup>22</sup> What many of the texts make clear, too, is that these were drinking vessels from which the gods and their earthly avatars, the king or royal couple, imbibed.<sup>23</sup> Remarkably, *bibri* are never mentioned in association with the Hittite verb *šipant*, or “make libation.”<sup>24</sup> Rather, Hittite imagery and archaeological remains again converge to show that libations were poured from beak-spouted, narrow-necked jugs.<sup>25</sup>

Güterbock matched text to object and distinguished the following types of Hittite *BIBRU*:

1. *BIBRU* + animal species + standing on all fours = Figural + specific animal species + *bibru* (fig. 4; National Archaeological Museum, Athens [388]; terracotta bulls from Hattusa and various sites).<sup>26</sup>

2. *BIBRU GU* + animal species + kneeling or standing forward = Animal species + protome *bibru* + *bibru* (see p. 285, fig. 1).

3. *BIBRU GEŠPÚ* = Fist-shaped + *bibru* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [2004.2230]).

While zoomorphic head-shaped cups, like those from Kültepe, have yet to be documented in Hittite texts or material culture, Aslihan Yener has recently published a lion’s-head cup, a chance find from Alalakh, which she dates convincingly to the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age, citing parallels from Kültepe/*karum* Kanesh Ib.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, by the Late Bronze Age zoomorphic head-shaped cups are known widely in the Levant in clay and faience. Uza Zevulun has suggested that at Ugarit, the term for a zoomorphic head-shaped cup was *pn*, or face, based on the words *pn arw* (lion face) inscribed on a ceramic lion’s-head cup from Ugarit.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, texts from Ugarit indicate that a vessel resembling the *BIBRU GU*, or protome *bibru*, also existed in the Late Bronze Age Levant, although no actual specimens have been found there.<sup>29</sup>

While the zoomorphic protome *bibru*, the head-shaped *bibru*, and even the fist-shaped



Fig. 4. Silver figural stag *bibru*. Mycenae, Shaft Grave IV. Late Helladic I. National Archaeological Museum, Athens 388

Fig. 5. Drawing of a Type I figural bull rhyton of uncertain provenance. Late Minoan IB. Heraklion Archaeological Museum HM 6850

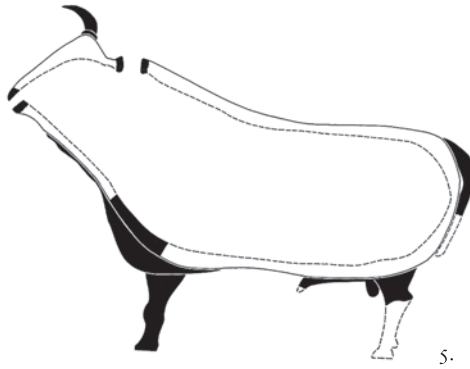


Fig. 6. Drawing of a Type II ovoid rhyton. Pseira, Seager's House B/Building AB, Rooms 7–9. Late Minoan IB. Heraklion Archaeological Museum HM 5411



Fig. 7. Drawing of a Type III conical rhyton. Hagia Eirene, House A, Room 10. Late Minoan IB. Keos (Chora) Archaeology Museum K 4138



Fig. 8. Drawing of a Type IV cup rhyton. Phaistos, Sottoscala 51. Late Minoan IB. Heraklion Archaeological Museum HM 8407



*bibru* are surely drinking vessels, Hittite figural zoomorphic *bibri* once again raise questions of taxonomy and function. The extant specimens comprise a pair of terracotta bulls from Building M, Room 6, of the royal citadel of Büyükkale, Hattusa, which stand three feet high; fragmentary specimens of large-scale terracotta bull-shaped vessels from İnandıktepe, Maşat Höyük, Kuşaklı-Sarissa, and probably Tokat,<sup>30</sup> and the silver

figural stag *bibru* from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae.<sup>31</sup> Like their Middle Bronze Age antecedents from Kültepe, both the terracotta and silver specimens have a prominent spout emerging from the back of the animal. However, the terracotta versions are also pierced through the nostrils and, on some specimens, through the animal's rectum, under the tail.<sup>32</sup> If, as most scholars think, these vessels functioned as rhyta, would



the putative libation have been poured out of the nostrils or via the rectum? Probably neither; rather, as in the case of the vessels' Middle Bronze Age predecessors, the perforations through the nostril and rectum were probably firing holes, placed in anatomically appropriate and thus unobtrusive locations. Again, Hittite imagery clearly shows libations being poured from beaked jugs but never from zoomorphic vessels. In the case of the large-scale terracotta figural bull *bibri*, text and archaeological context converge when we are told that the royal couple drank from these vessels.<sup>33</sup> Their enormous scale makes it unlikely that the royal couple hoisted these vessels to drink directly from their spouts. Rather, I would again propose that the spouts supported long drinking tubes. One could easily imagine that the pair of figural bull *bibri* from Hattusa, perhaps associated with the divine bulls Sheri and Hurri,<sup>34</sup> was placed between the royal couple who, seated on thrones, sipped fermented flavored beverages from long straws emerging from the spouts of these grand vessels.<sup>35</sup>

The argument for identifying these vessels as figural *bibri* rather than rhyta is further supported by the silver stag-shaped vessel from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (fig. 4). Von Bissing's original identification of the vessel as an Anatolian import, based on his perceptive morphological and stylistic comparisons to the then-little-known zoomorphic vessels from Kültepe, is now confirmed by two sets of metallurgical trace-element analyses, which show that the vessel was made from silver mined in the Taurus Mountains of southern Turkey.<sup>36</sup> Like its terracotta correlates, the stag vessel has a prominent spout emerging from the center of its back but, unlike the terracotta versions considered above, it lacks a secondary opening, regarded here as a firing hole. Thus, the vessel was filled through the spout; a tube would have been inserted into the spout, and a beverage would have been imbibed through the tube. A feature of this vessel deserves further attention: the outer edge of one nostril is indeed punctured

with a circular hole, which does not, however, communicate with the interior of the vessel.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps it once held a decorative ring, or it may have been made by an Aegean metalsmith after its arrival at Mycenae, in an attempt to convert it into a "proper" Aegean rhyton.

Indeed, from the third millennium B.C. until the late thirteenth–early twelfth century B.C., vessels that may justifiably be designated as rhyta were an integral part of Aegean Bronze Age material culture.<sup>38</sup> To date, there are nearly fifteen hundred extant specimens.<sup>39</sup> The earliest are figural, zoomorphic rhyta, which appear on Crete in the Early Minoan (EM) IIB period, during the third millennium B.C. These rhyta, like all subsequent specimens, regardless of their type, have a primary opening and a smaller, "secondary" opening. On nearly all rhyta, this smaller, secondary opening is a consistent .5 centimeters in diameter, whether located in the muzzle or snout of zoomorphic rhyta or in the base or tip of figural (i.e., cup, pithos, amphora, basket, bucket, shoe) or geometric rhyta (e.g., ovoid, globular, piriform, conical). The main structural differences on Aegean rhyta that affect their use or manipulation is the diameter of the primary opening and the presence or absence of a resting surface or base. The primary opening is either narrow enough to be covered by a thumb or the heel of the palm, or is too wide to be covered in this manner. Thus, all Aegean rhyta may be separated into four types:

Type I: Narrow Opening/Footed (NO/F) (fig. 5)

Type II: Narrow Opening/Footless (NO/FL) (fig. 6)

Type III: Wide Opening/Footless (WO/FL) (fig. 7)

Type IV: Wide Opening/Footed (WO/F) (fig. 8).

Within these four broad types, classes are distinguished by differences in shape or profile. Thus, a rhyton in the shape of a complete bull would be a Type I: Figural: bull.<sup>40</sup> It may be worthwhile to consider the typological development of the figural bull

Fig. 9. Drawing of a Type I figural bull rhyton. Myrtos-Fournou Korifi, entrance to Room 66. Early Minoan IIB. Hagios Nikolaos Archaeological Museum

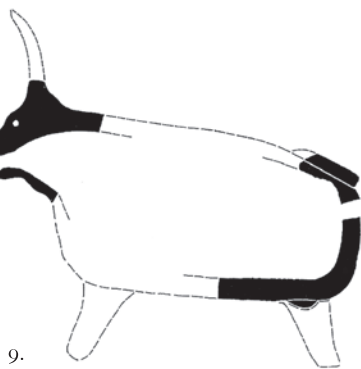


Fig. 10. Drawing of a Type I figural bull rhyton. Koumasa, Area D. Early Minoan IIB–III. Heraklion Archaeological Museum HM 4126

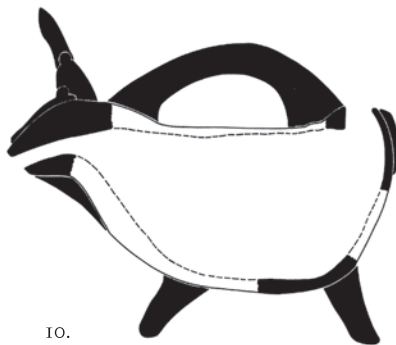
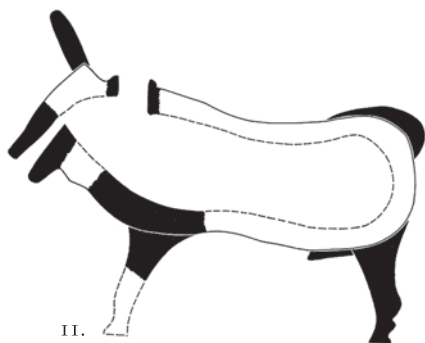


Fig. 11. Drawing of a Type I figural bull rhyton. Mochlos, Tomb XI. Middle Minoan IA. Siteia Archaeological Museum SM 6206, formerly Heraklion Archaeological Museum HM 5558



in some detail for the light it might shed on several questions raised here. On the earliest example, a fragmentary specimen from Myrtos-Fournou Korifi, dated EM IIB, the primary opening, the putative inlet, is the same size as the secondary opening and is located in the rectum, a most inconvenient size and location for a fill hole (fig. 9).<sup>41</sup>

Immediately thereafter, the primary opening moved onto the animal's back (EM IIB–III), first to the rear (fig. 10) and then, by Middle Minoan (MM) IA, behind the bull's head (fig. 11), where it remained until Late Minoan (LM) IB (fig. 5), when the type died out. This primary opening is always small, flat, and unobtrusive; it is never a prominent raised spout, as on the *bibru*.<sup>42</sup>

Based on experiments with replicas and actual specimens, rather than identify the primary opening as an “inlet” and the secondary opening as an “outlet,” as they are almost universally regarded by scholars who have written on the subject, I have argued that both the Type I and Type II rhyta (the latter also has a small primary opening; cf. fig. 6) were filled from the secondary opening.<sup>43</sup> The vessel would have been lowered head first, in the case of the Type I figural, or tip first, in the case of the Type II geometric shapes, and a liquid would have seeped into the opening (fig. 12). Once inside, as air was replaced by liquid, the primary opening could be closed by a thumb or by the ball of the palm, and the liquid would remain trapped inside until the primary opening was uncovered. Thus the flow of liquid out of the secondary opening would have been controlled by opening and closing the primary opening. It may also be noted that on Type I figural rhyta the primary and secondary openings would first have functioned as firing holes during the manufacturing process and afterward would have served in the manipulation of fluids in and out of these ingenious vessels. While I have argued that in the Near East the analogous vessel, the zoomorphic *bibru*, was not a libation vessel but rather a drinking vessel, I do think that the Type I Aegean rhyton was primarily a libation vessel. Its small, unobtrusive primary opening would not have comfortably supported a drinking tube. Rather, like the Type IV rhyton (fig. 8),<sup>44</sup> it would have to have been tipped forward to empty it of its contents. This tipping motion seems to have played an integral role in libation rituals in Anatolia, as noted above, and in Classical

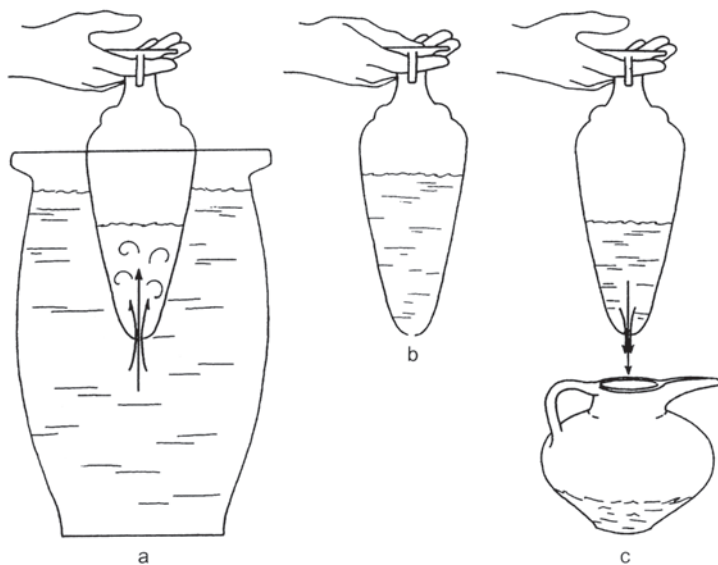


Fig. 12. Illustration of the filling and emptying of a Type II ovoid rhyton

Greece.<sup>45</sup> Remarkably, on a recently discovered vase from Akrotiri, Thera, a youth is depicted holding a cup over a stylized tree. Drops of liquid emerge from its base, showing clearly that the cup is a Type IV cup rhyton being used to pour a libation.<sup>46</sup> A facing youth tips a jug toward the cup, indicating the source of the cup's liquid.

In light of the foregoing discussions, it would appear that zoomorphic vessels developed independently in the Near East and in the Aegean sometime from the late fourth to early third millennium B.C. However, there is a possibility that the Minoan Type I figural rhyton owes its existence in the Aegean to the Near East, specifically to the southern Levant. While a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of the present essay, this author and others have suggested that innovations appearing in the material culture on Crete at the end of the Neolithic period (or Chalcolithic, in Near Eastern terms), ca. 3500 B.C., are best explained by the arrival of new population groups to the island.<sup>47</sup> Various scholars have suggested that one group may have come from the Cyclades and settled in northeast Crete, near modern Sitiea, while another group may have come from western

Asia Minor and settled in north-central Crete, in the area of Knossos.<sup>48</sup>

I propose that a third group settled in south-central Crete, an area known as the Mesara Valley, from the southern Levant, bringing with them elements of the so-called Ghassulian culture.<sup>49</sup> The Ghassulian culture apparently disappeared from the Levant quite suddenly about this time, as implied by the abandonment of most of their sites and the establishment of new sites at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age with a different assemblage.<sup>50</sup>

Among the many cultural innovations that appear in the Mesara Valley during the transition from the Final Neolithic to the EM I period and that find their closest antecedents in Ghassulian culture are secondary burials in tholos tombs, clay ossuaries, red-on-cream linear-decorated pottery, ceramic "churns," pithoi decorated with "rope" motifs, and figural vases.<sup>51</sup> It is these figural vases, many of them zoomorphic, that I believe inspired the earliest zoomorphic figural rhyta, which, indeed, occur first on Crete in this region.<sup>52</sup>

While several generations separate the earliest Minoan Type I figural rhyton from its putative Levantine Chalcolithic ancestor,





Fig. 13. Drawing of a Type III head-shaped bull rhyton. Kommos, Central Hillside, Rooms 41A/47–48. Middle Minoan IIB. Kommos, excavation storeroom C 4235

there is one variety of Minoan rhyton that may have been immediately inspired by a Near Eastern *bibru*, specifically the Type III bull's head (fig. 13). Most likely inspired by the Middle Bronze Age Anatolian head-shaped zoomorphic *bibru* (fig. 3), these rhyta make their initial appearance on Crete in MM IIB, at a time when other innovations in the material culture of Crete, such as the lobed kantharos, may be attributed to Anatolian influence, undoubtedly a by-product of Cretan contacts with Anatolia for the acquisition of metals.<sup>53</sup> However, the Anatolian zoomorphic vessels are not pierced and often have a handle, and thus are a type of cup, whereas the Minoan version regularly has a .5 centimeter perforation through the muzzle and lacks a handle.<sup>54</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the Type III rhyton was used to simultaneously flavor, filter, and aerate fermented beverages such as wine or beer, while filling a drinking cup or another decanter. This is based on experiments and the discovery of imitations of Aegean rhyta from Egypt and Cyprus with strainers on their mouths.<sup>55</sup> In the Aegean, a filter, such as a tuft of clean wool, would be dropped inside the rhyton, nestling in the vessel's narrow base or muzzle, in the case of the bull's-head examples, and ground

spices or other aromatics could have been sprinkled on top of the filter. A fermented beverage poured into the wide opening at the top would emerge from the tip with its flavor noticeably enhanced.

Questions of taxonomy in archaeological discourse are important, if only for accuracy and facility of communication. Based on the foregoing discussions, I propose that the term “rhyton” be jettisoned in discussions, descriptions, and identifications of Near Eastern zoomorphic figural vessels with spouts on their backs and of Near Eastern zoomorphic head-shaped cups, and replaced with the term “*bibru*.” As the Classical Greek word “rhyton” has been adopted into the archaeological vernacular of Aegean scholarship, I think it would be even more appropriate that the term “*bibru*” find a place in the taxonomy of Near Eastern vessels. After all, this was the generic term actually used during the Bronze Age for figural, especially zoomorphic vessels. But rather than adopt the other Near Eastern terms for the variant types of *bibru*, since the languages themselves vary for these subtypes (e.g., Hittite *GU* and *GEŠPÚ*; Ugaritic *pn*), for purposes of clarity and simplicity, I propose a classification parallel to the one employed for Aegean zoomorphic rhyta:

1. Figural + species + *bibru*  
(e.g., figural bull *bibru*)
2. Head-shaped + species + *bibru*  
(e.g., head-shaped lion *bibru*)
3. Protome + species + *bibru*  
(e.g., protome stag *bibru*).

1. Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, bk. 11, ll. 476, 496–97 (Gulick 1980).
2. Hoffmann 1961, pl. 12.1.
3. On the Persian origin of the Attic rhyton, see Hoffmann 1961; as symposium apparatus, see Lissarrague 1990.
4. Koehl 2006, pp. 298–99.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 257–58.
6. Vandenebeele and Olivier 1979.
7. Karo 1911; Buschor 1919, pp. 26–33; for a history of the scholarship, which, oddly, omits Karo, see Tuchelt 1962, pp. 14–17.
8. Most recently, Koehl 2006.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–67, 342–50; Koehl in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 426–30.
10. Von Bissing 1923–24; for example, Yener in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 76–77, nos. 39, 40, pp. 78–79, no. 42; Demange in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 77–78, no. 41; Graff in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 189, no. 114; see also discussion in Tuchelt 1962, pp. 14, 50.
11. For a general survey, see Tuchelt 1962, esp. pp. 17–36; for the Chalcolithic Levant, see Gonen 1992, pp. 64–66.
12. Tuchelt 1962, pp. 17–20.
13. Carruba 1967, p. 89.
14. For Early Dynastic Mesopotamian seals, see, for example, P. Collins in Aruz 2003, pp. 109–10, no. 60c; for Middle Bronze Age Anatolian seals, see, for example, N. Özgüç 1965, nos. 23, 25, 39–41, 46, 49b, 71, 80, 84; N. Özgüç 1986, ill. 4–3 and fig. 4–11; for the relief vase from Hattusa, see Boehmer 1983, pp. 55–59, no. 97. See now McGovern 2009, fig. 13b and pl. 4, for a group of men and women seated around a jar of rice wine in contemporary China, sipping from long reed straws.
15. Gorny 1996.
16. Cf. French 1985, p. 240. I am also grateful to Laurence Bach, a professional Philadelphia potter, for discussing this question with me.
17. Cited in Tuchelt 1962, p. 27.
18. On the Mitanni, see J. M. Evans in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 194–95.
19. For useful syntheses, see Tuchelt 1962, pp. 26–35, 46–49; Yener in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 76–77, nos. 39, 40, pp. 78–79, no. 42; Demange in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 77–78, no. 41.
20. Dunham 1989.
21. Tuchelt 1962, pp. 49–55.
22. Carruba 1967; Güterbock 1970; Güterbock 1983; Güterbock and Kendall 1995.
23. Tuchelt 1962, pp. 50–52; Güterbock 1983, p. 212.
24. Tuchelt 1962, p. 50.
25. For images of Hittite libations, see *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 181, 182, figs. 57, 58. For actual specimens of libation jugs, see Graff in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 190, 191, nos. 115, 116.
26. Graff in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 189.
27. Yener 2005, fig. 4.26, pl. 8; Yener 2007b.
28. Zevulun 1987, pp. 97–98.
29. Lipiński 1983.
30. Graff in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 189 (with bibliography).
31. Koehl 1995 (with bibliography); Koehl 2006, p. 14.
32. Graff in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 189.
33. Güterbock 1983, pp. 212–13.
34. Graff in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 189.
35. On Hittite fermented beverages, see Gorny 1996.
36. Von Bissing 1923–24; Tuchelt 1962, p. 53; Stos-Gale and MacDonald 1991, pp. 271–73, 285; Koehl 1995; Yener in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 77, under no. 40.
37. Koehl 1995, fig. 3.10.
38. For a comprehensive treatment of their forms and functions, see Koehl 2006.
39. As of 2004, there were approximately 1,340 extant specimens, plus an additional 45 non-Aegean imitations known to the author. For a catalogue, see *ibid.*, pp. 71–246. For depictions of and references to rhyta in Aegean texts, see *ibid.*, pp. 246–58.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–64.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
42. During the Mycenaean era, a version of the Type I rhyton reemerged after its disappearance in LM IB, with a prominent spout on its back. These rhyta have a decidedly eastern Mediterranean distribution and may have been manufactured expressly for eastern markets, where they could have been used like the familiar *bibru*, with the spout supporting a drinking tube, or they could have functioned like the conventional Aegean rhyton, with the spout opened and closed to control the flow of liquid out of the secondary opening. On these, see *ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 259–69.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–64.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 262–63, 274–76.
46. Marthari (2008) first identified the cup represented on the vase as a cup rhyton. For an illustration, see Doumas 2006c, p. 315, fig. 478.
47. This question has most recently been considered in Betancourt 2008, esp. pp. 83, 93–96.
48. For the Cycladic migration, see Davaras and Betancourt 2004; for a migration from western Anatolia, see Warren and Hankey 1989, pp. 12, 14.
49. Koehl 2008.
50. On the collapse of the Ghassulian culture, see Gonen 1992, pp. 79–80.
51. On Ghassulian culture generally, see Gonen 1992. The relations between the Ghassulian culture and the beginnings of the Early Bronze Age on Crete will be explored in greater detail as part of a larger study of Cretan Bronze Age society by the present author.
52. For further discussion, see Koehl 2006, p. 15.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
54. *Ibid.*, figs. 13, 14.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 270–72; the Type III conical rhyton is discussed also by Koehl in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 426–30.

# The Art of Ivory Carving in the Second Millennium B.C.

*If you do not know my mother, I will paint  
her portrait for you. . . .  
My mother is beauty itself,  
A fragment of gold, of pure silver,  
A long pendant suspended from the throat,  
A statue of alabaster set on lapis lazuli,  
A perfect carved ivory, replete with  
charm. . . .  
When you find yourself in her radiant  
presence, thanks to this description, say  
to her: Lu-dingir-ra, your beloved son,  
greet you.<sup>1</sup>*

Ivory has been prized as a luxury item since early times, with carved examples dating back to the Paleolithic period. The ease with which it can be worked, combined with its rich color, endows the material with high value. Its relative scarcity assures that demand has always outweighed supply. In the ancient Near East, the possession of ivory became a prime indicator of wealth, status, and beauty, as the poem quoted above attests. For the ancient Israelites, it was a material sign of decadence and immorality: Amos (6:4) declaims, “Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches.” Because ivory is not easily recycled and is able to survive in certain archaeological conditions, we are fortunate to have large numbers of ancient ivories preserved for us today.

Ivory carving reached an unprecedented degree of sophistication during the second half of the second millennium B.C., during the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1600–1200 B.C.). As an indicator of internationalism, Late Bronze Age ivory carving is particularly notable in two respects. First, the art was practiced in almost every cultural area in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East, from Greece to Iran, indicative of both a far-flung community of consumption values and the long-distance trade required for the acquisition of the material. Second, many of the carvings themselves manifested international artistic styles that bound the different cultural regions during this period of intense diplomatic and commercial contacts. Throughout this era, worked and unworked ivory, signaling prestige, status, and power, moved around the regions through complex channels of trade, diplomacy, and warfare. The extent of this circulation is strikingly revealed by the unworked pieces of elephant and hippopotamus ivory that were part of a fourteenth century B.C. ship’s cargo discovered sunk off the coast of Turkey at Uluburun.<sup>2</sup>

Technically, ivory comes only from the tusk of the elephant; however, for the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, the word is commonly applied to hippopotamus canines and incisors as well.<sup>3</sup> Hippopotamus ivory is whiter, harder, denser, and more difficult to work; its relatively small size imposes greater constraints on the types of objects into which it can be carved. However, certain forms like the popular duck container were perfectly suited to its shape. Elephant tusks, with cross-sections of up to 20 centimeters and lengths of as much as 2 meters or sometimes more, permit the creation of large, flat panels; three-dimensional sculpture; and the cylindrical containers generally referred to as pyxides (fig. 1). The tusks’ size and their creamy luster made elephant ivory the more prestigious of the two materials. The distribution of elephant and hippopotamus ivory at the site of Ugarit, on the Syrian coast, highlights this hierarchy, with elephant ivories



clustering overwhelmingly in the main palace, while hippopotamus ivories are found in residences throughout the city.<sup>4</sup>

Ivory could be carved into single objects, such as statuettes or receptacles, or combined with other materials to make larger items of furniture. Cosmetic kits were particularly popular, for example combs and the pyxides and bowls that probably held unguents or perfumes. Individual pieces are executed in varying degrees of bas relief or are incised; inlays might take the form of a solid plaque or a cutout (*ajour*) element. Ivory could be further adorned by being stained, overlaid with gold foil, inlaid with semiprecious stones and glass paste, or carbonized to turn it black. Virtually all of



Fig. 1. Ivory pyxis with sphinxes. Thebes, Chamber Tomb. Late Helladic IIIA–B. Archaeological Museum, Thebes 42459



Fig. 2. Gypsum alabaster wall relief showing royal banquet. Nineveh, North Palace. Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurbanipal, ca. 668–627 B.C. The Trustees of the British Museum BM 124920



the carved plaques and *ajour* pieces—which we mainly recover today as individual specimens—belonged originally to larger chests or other furniture, such as couches or chairs similar to those shown in a later relief from the seventh century B.C. palace of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal at Nineveh

(fig. 2). Actual examples of such inlaid furniture, which illustrate Amos's injunction against those who lounge on beds of ivory, have been found at the second millennium B.C. site of Ugarit (fig. 3) and in a first millennium B.C. royal tomb at Salamis on Cyprus.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 3. Ivory bed panels. Ugarit, Royal Palace, Court III. Late Bronze Age. National Museum, Damascus RS 16.056+28.031,3599



Fig. 4. Wall painting with foreign emissaries bearing gifts. Thebes, Tomb of Rehmire (TT 100). Dynasty 18, reigns of Thutmose III–Amenhotep II



Two main populations of elephants exist today: one in sub-Saharan Africa and the other on the Indian subcontinent. In addition, a native population of elephants appears to have roamed western Syria until the beginning of the first millennium B.C., when they may have been hunted to extinction (see Pfälzner essay, pp. 112–31).<sup>6</sup> Any of these three sources of elephant ivory could have supplied the ancient Near Eastern carving tradition, although the Syrian and African herds seem to have been the most important. In New Kingdom Egypt, reliefs celebrating queen Hatshepsut's expedition to Punt in the south depict ivory as one acquisition, and paintings in officials' tombs show it being brought as tribute from areas both to the south and from the northern Levant (fig. 4). Massive royal expeditions to hunt elephants in the marshes of Syria are recorded by the Egyptian kings Thutmose I and Thutmose III in the fifteenth century B.C., as well as by the

Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the eleventh century B.C.<sup>7</sup> Hippopotamuses are indigenous to the Nile River and thrived in its marshes until the seventeenth or eighteenth century of our era.<sup>8</sup> In the second millennium B.C., they probably also lived in swampy environments of the Levant, such as the Amuq Basin and the Orontes River Valley.<sup>9</sup>

Ivory, both worked and unworked, was a popular item among the diplomatic gifts exchanged through the intricate and widespread channels of international relations, best documented in the letters found at Amarna in Egypt. Its archaeological appearance from Elam in southwestern Iran to mainland Greece charts its widespread distribution. A brief tour of some second millennium B.C. eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern ivory carvings highlights their regional peculiarities, while also shedding light on international relations of the period.





Egypt, as one of the great superpowers of the Late Bronze Age and a prime handler of local hippopotamus ivory as well as elephant tusks from farther south, might be expected to have a highly developed tradition of ivory carving. Indeed, this seems to be supported by textual evidence, including a list of hundreds of boxes, furnishings, containers, and cosmetic items of stained ivory

sent by Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) as gifts to the king of Babylonia, despite a relative paucity of the material in the archaeological record.<sup>10</sup> The main period of ivory carving is Dynasty 18 (ca. 1550–1295 B.C.), when, in the Theban tombs of the nobles, we also see ivory depicted frequently as gift or tribute brought to Egypt.<sup>11</sup> Our richest source of ivory art in Egypt is the unlooted tomb of Tutankhamun, dating toward the end of Dynasty 18, at a time when Egyptian imperial power was at a high point.

Ivories found in Egypt tend to be either small-scale human or animal figurines or inlays in and veneer of larger, multimedia objects, especially of ebony; hippopotamus ivory tends to predominate.<sup>12</sup> In the case of inlay and veneer work, the ivory pieces are often either geometric shapes or simple incised designs, as seen, for example, on a small throne and a footrest from Tutankhamun's tomb.<sup>13</sup> Larger pieces of ivory were crafted into chests, gameboards, and luxurious utensils, with exquisite examples also from Tutankhamun's burial.<sup>14</sup> A particularly impressive piece from the tomb is a headrest made of two large pieces of elephant tusk carved into a figure of the god Shu kneeling between two lions (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup> A popular item that was often carved from hippopotamus ivory was the curved wand. These regularly feature simple incised imagery connected with various magical properties, and their magical nature appears to derive also in part from the material itself, which was associated with the mythological powers of the hippopotamus.<sup>16</sup> Relief carving and *à jour* work are more rare, a notable example being an *à jour* piece found at Tell el-Amarna depicting Thutmose IV smiting an enemy.<sup>17</sup>

Most ivories that we might think of as Egyptian in appearance have, in fact, been found outside of Egypt, mainly in the Levant, which had both strong ties to Egypt and a developed tradition of ivory carving of its own. Ivories such as those from Tell el-Fara (South) or Megiddo in the southern Levant, and duck containers from Ugarit and Kamid el-Loz in the central and northern Levant



Fig. 5. Ivory headrest. Tomb of Tutankhamun. Dynasty 18. Egyptian Museum, Cairo



Fig. 6. Ivory duck container. Kamid el-Loz. Late Bronze Age. Direction Générale des Antiquités, Beirut 24410

were probably produced locally in a purposely Egyptianizing manner (fig. 6).<sup>18</sup> This local Levantine production seems confirmed by items inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphs found at Megiddo that indicate they belonged to local Levantine officials or Egyptian officials posted in vassal cities of the Levant.<sup>19</sup> A fragmentary pen case with the cartouche of Ramesses III has an inscription that appears to name an Egyptian envoy, “Nakht-Amun of the residence,” though there is uncertainty surrounding the translation.<sup>20</sup> Three other ivory fragments name a certain Kerker, who is associated in the inscription with the “prince” of Ashkelon, a neighboring Levantine kingdom on the Mediterranean coast.<sup>21</sup>

We know that several city-states in the Levant were important centers of ivory carving, the most important being Ugarit in the north.<sup>22</sup> From the royal palace comes a furniture assemblage that includes an inlaid circular table and pieces from a bed or couch.<sup>23</sup> They were found strewn across a courtyard, wreckage from the looting that occurred during the city’s final destruction around 1180 B.C. The ivories may represent the dowry of a royal bride, such as the princess Ahat-malki of neighboring Amurru, whose recorded dowry includes “3 ivory-plated beds with their footstools.”<sup>24</sup> As such, the pieces from Ugarit, which are executed in both local and internationalizing motifs, speak to a diplomatic engagement with the wider world.<sup>25</sup>

A more unusual ivory comes not from the palace, but rather from a family tomb associated with a residence in the main Ugaritic port at Minet el-Beidha (fig. 7).<sup>26</sup> The lid to a pyxis depicts a Mistress of Animals with clear iconographic links to the Aegean in its use of specifically Minoan motifs, such as the incurved altar and split skirt. Although there are close parallels from Mycenae (fig. 8), the closest from a chamber tomb,<sup>27</sup> it exhibits anomalies—including the use of the incurved altar as a seat for the female figure—that make it more likely to be a Levantine product. It may reflect overseas connections of the tomb owner, since we



Fig. 7. Ivory pyxis lid. Minet el-Beidha, family tomb. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 11601



Fig. 8. Ivory plaque with seated female. Mycenae, acropolis. Late Helladic III. National Archaeological Museum, Athens 5897

know that several important individuals in the Ugaritic kingdom had mercantile ties to the west, including Sinaranu, whose ships sailed to Crete. These overseas contacts are also evident in the caching of Mycenaean pottery within a deposit in the tomb itself.<sup>28</sup>

This leads the discussion to the west and the area of Greece, Crete, and the Aegean



Fig. 9. Ivory and gold kouros. Palaikastro. Late Minoan IB. Archaeological Museum, Siteia

islands. Ivory was not locally available there, so its appearance, in the form of hippopotamus ivory, in the third and early second millennium B.C. attests to relations with Egypt and the Levant.<sup>29</sup> By the middle of the second millennium B.C., whole, unworked elephant tusks were reaching Crete, as evidenced by their presence in the Late Minoan palace at Zakros, indicating that a local tradition of ivory carving was developing.<sup>30</sup> A particularly impressive product of this activity is a chryselephantine statuette of a young male figure, often interpreted as a deity, excavated from a ritual complex at Palaikastro, on the eastern tip of the island (fig. 9).<sup>31</sup> Standing almost 50 centimeters tall, the figure, with its physically accurate detailing, including muscles and veins, demonstrates the level of skill attained by the Cretan craftsmen by the middle of the second millennium B.C.

With the emergence of the Mycenaean Greek mainland as a major power in the second half of the second millennium B.C., ivory carving flourished there as well. A small triad of two women and a child carved in the round from a single piece of ivory was found in the citadel area of Mycenae (fig. 10).<sup>32</sup> Though its subject remains enigmatic, it seems to speak to specifically Aegean religious or social beliefs.<sup>33</sup> Local ivory production is further evident in the hundreds of worked and partly worked pieces from a complex of four buildings in the lower town at Mycenae that were used for luxury craft production and the storage of high-end agricultural and husbandry products, including wool and spices.<sup>34</sup> The presence of Linear B archives in the complex demonstrates an association with Mycenaean palace administration, as they are one of the few known instances of this bureaucratic script outside of an immediate palace setting.

Mycenaean ties to the Near East are also demonstrated by spectacular relief plaques depicting winged griffins that were found at Megiddo in the southern Levant (fig. 11).<sup>35</sup> The Megiddo plaques reveal close parallels with similar ivories excavated at Mycenae



and Spata, as well as with a gold seal from Pylos and the famous Lion Gate marking the entrance to Mycenae.<sup>36</sup> The Megiddo griffin plaques offer an intriguing window onto the complexity of exchange during this period, from the raw material that must have moved from either Egypt or the Levant to Greece, to the return of this material to the Levant now in value-added carved form.

The island of Cyprus served as an important link in these exchanges between the Near East and the Aegean. With the rise of complex polities in the later part of the second millennium B.C., it, too, witnessed a flourishing of the ivory-carving arts.<sup>37</sup> The city of Enkomi, a major seaport on the eastern side of the island with particularly close ties to Ugarit, has preserved an elaborately carved ivory game board and carved ivory mirror handles from its rich tombs that reflect the island's position as a hub of international exchange.<sup>38</sup>

As one moves inland in the Near East, into the kingdoms of Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam, the quantity of ivories drops considerably, but they do still occur and remain associated with both local authority and international relations. From the Assyrian capital of Ashur come ivory inlays with traditionally Mesopotamian motifs of mountain gods holding flowing vases and winged bulls flanking trees (fig. 12).<sup>39</sup> The work harks back to an earlier Mesopotamian tradition of inlaid shell and stone, seen, for



Fig. 10. Ivory sculpture of two women and a child. Mycenae. Late Mycenaean period. National Archaeological Museum, Athens

example, on the famous Standard of Ur, dating to around 2600 B.C., from the Ur Royal Cemetery.<sup>40</sup> In the tomb of a high-ranking family, a delicately incised ivory pyxis exhibits a juxtaposing of Mesopotamian and foreign elements that bespeaks Assyria's growing power and involvement in the international realm.<sup>41</sup> Elam, though on the eastern margins of the second millennium B.C. exchange network, also engaged



Fig. 11. Ivory relief plaque with winged griffin. Megiddo. Late Bronze Age. Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago A 22212

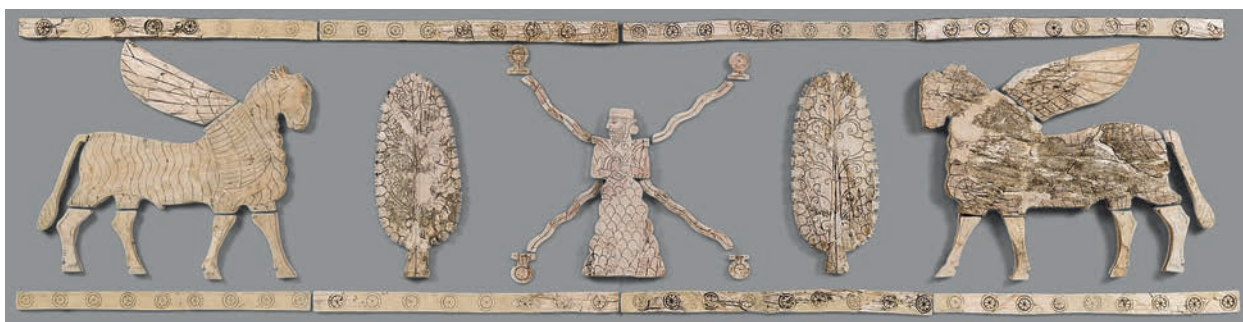


Fig. 12. Ivory inlays of winged bulls flanking trees and mountain god with streams. Ashur. Middle Assyrian period. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin VA Ass 981

in ivory carving as part of its ideological representation. Discovered at the royal cult center of Choga Zanbil, dominated by an enormous ziggurat, were the head of a goddess, inlays forming her wings, and an internationalizing frieze of rampant goats flanking voluted palmette trees.<sup>42</sup>

Another inland area, Anatolia, also shows limited evidence of ivory carving, although a uniquely Anatolian tradition can be discerned. Its most representative works, dating from earlier in the second millennium B.C., comprise a series of sphinxes and other animals that probably adorned furniture. Now in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the so-called Pratt ivories have been attributed to Acmehöyük in south central Turkey, where other ivories, including a square box studded with copper, iron, gold, and lapis lazuli, were found in a burnt palace of the nineteenth or eighteenth century B.C. (fig. 13).<sup>43</sup>



Fig. 13. Detail of ivory box. Acmehöyük. Middle Bronze Age. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara AC O:24

Fewer examples survive from the period of the great Hittite Empire (ca. 1350–1200 B.C.). Only a few stray ivories have been excavated at the capital, Hattusa, in central Turkey, providing a mere glimpse of what must have been one of the wealthiest cities of the Near East.<sup>44</sup> One of the best Hittite ivories, however, was discovered not in Anatolia but in an ivory hoard at Megiddo (see p. 303, fig. 5).<sup>45</sup> The intricately carved small rectangular plaque features a complex composition of divine and mythological figures whose individual motifs find almost exact parallels in Hittite Anatolia, for example, in a rock-relief procession of gods at the open-air sanctuary of Yazılıkaya, near Hattusa, and the carved stone base of a monument at the outdoor sanctuary of Eflatun Pınar near Konya.<sup>46</sup>

While each cultural region produced its own styles of ivories, many late second millennium B.C. examples can be considered truly international in that they elude specific attribution to any one cultural region.<sup>47</sup> Such pieces are found across the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Near East, further attesting to their cosmopolitan nature. Animal attack scenes and fantastic vegetation, hybridized forms derived from multiple artistic traditions, typify this group. One subset of these international ivories, which may derive from a single workshop or group of artists, charts a distribution pattern from the Aegean island of Delos to Cyprus and to Megiddo in the southern Levant, highlighting the mobility

of the material (and possibly also of the artisans who carved it) and its prominent role in the international relations of the day.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the second millennium B.C., ivory carving was intimately tied to palatial power, international diplomacy, and trade. Its high value as a material was further enhanced by the sophisticated techniques of carving and ornamentation that made ivories one of the great art forms of the time. The collapse of the palace system at the end of the Bronze Age brought about an end to patronage for ivory carving and a disruption of the trade routes needed to acquire and circulate the material. A gap of several centuries followed with no preserved ivories. Yet its prestige appears to have survived, perhaps through oral traditions such as those underlying the Homeric epics, while woodworking and ceramics kept the skills and iconographies alive. With the reemergence of wealthy powers in the first millennium B.C., ivory carving in the Mediterranean and Near East appears once more in spectacular fashion.<sup>49</sup>

1. From a Mesopotamian literary composition recounting a man's poetic portrait of his mother's beauty, from a multilingual tablet found in a thirteenth century B.C. private library at Ugarit (RS 25.421; National Museum, Damascus, 6710). Nougayrol et al. 1968, pp. 310–19; see also Westenholz 1992, pp. 383–85; Gadotti 2010.
2. Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 328–30, nos. 197, 198a, b.
3. For general overviews of ivory in the Near East and Egypt, see Barnett 1982, pp. 3–15; Caubet and Poplin 1987; Krzyszkowska 1988; Moorey 1999, p. 115; Krzyszkowska and Morkot 2000; Caubet and Gaborit-Chopin 2004, pp. 11–30; Fischer 2007a, pp. 53–90; Gachet-Bizollon 2007, pp. 15–32; Caubet in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 406–7; Caubet and Poplin 2010.
4. Caubet and Poplin 1987.
5. For the Ugarit bed, see Gachet-Bizollon 2007, pp. 135–46; for the Salamis bed, see Barnett 1982, pls. 52, 53.
6. This is a much-debated question; for discussion and sources, see Moorey 1999, pp. 116–18; Krzyszkowska and Morkot 2000, p. 322; Caubet and Poplin 2010.

7. For the Egyptian sources, see Gabolde 2000; for Tiglath-Pileser I's account, see Grayson 1991, p. 26 (A.o.87.1; col. vi: ll. 70–75).
8. Krzyszkowska and Morkot 2000, p. 320.
9. Moorey 1999, p. 115; Caubet in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 406.
10. EA 14 (Moran 1992, pp. 27–37).
11. Barnett 1982, pp. 18–22.
12. Acquaviva 2000, pp. 93, 99.
13. Edwards in *Treasures of Tutankhamun* 1976, nos. 8, 11; Reeves 1990, pp. 186–87; Hawass 2007, pp. 28, 54.
14. Edwards in *Treasures of Tutankhamun* 1976, nos. 46, 51; Reeves 1990, pp. 160–63; Hawass 2007, pp. 43, 197, 207, 266–67.
15. Edwards in *Treasures of Tutankhamun* 1976, no. 48; Barnett 1982, p. 20, pl. 7b; Hawass 2007, p. 264.
16. Acquaviva 2000, p. 94; Caubet and Gaborit-Chopin 2004, pp. 43–44; Stuenkel in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 147, no. 86.
17. Russmann in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 264, no. 164.
18. Barnett 1982, pp. 22, 25–31; Lilyquist 1998.
19. Fischer 2007a, pp. 150–83.
20. Higginbotham 2000, pp. 67–68; Fischer 2007a, pp. 157–63.
21. Bryan 1996, pp. 58–59; Higginbotham 2000, pp. 68–70; Fischer 2007a, pp. 168–75.
22. Gachet-Bizollon 2007.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–61.
24. RS 16.146+161 (National Museum, Damascus, 4261; translation in Izre'el 1991, vol. 2, pp. 68–72).
25. Feldman 2002.
26. Gachet-Bizollon 2007, pp. 87–92; Cluzan in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 408–9, no. 261.
27. Poursat 1977, pl. XXIX, no. 299 (National Archaeological Museum, Athens, 2473).
28. Monroe 2009, pp. 165–67; Burns 2010, pp. 26–29.
29. Colburn 2008, p. 206.
30. Platon 1971, pp. 244–45.
31. MacGillivray, Driessen, and Sackett 2000.
32. Poursat 1977, no. 49.
33. Vermeule 1964, p. 220.
34. Tournavitou 1995.
35. Loud 1939, nos. 32–35.
36. Kantor 1960, p. 19; Poursat 1977, nos. 285, 298, 312, 448, 455–62.
37. Knapp 2008, pp. 269–72.
38. Fitton in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 412–14, nos. 265, 266.
39. Martin in Harper et al. 1995, pp. 98–99, no. 61.
40. Hansen in Aruz 2003, pp. 97–100, no. 52.
41. Feldman 2006a.
42. Barnett 1982, p. 40, pl. 42.
43. Aruz and de Lapérouse in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 82–90.
44. For example, Graff in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 188, no. 112.
45. Loud 1939, no. 44.
46. Feldman 2009, pp. 181–82.
47. Feldman 2006b.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–97.
49. Barnett 1982, pp. 43–55; Cecchini, Mazzoni, and Scigliuzzo 2009; Herrmann and Laidlaw 2009.



# Ornaments of Interaction: Jewelry in the Late Bronze Age

It is our good fortune as scholars today that an abundance of jewelry has survived from the Late Bronze Age in the greater ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean. In this essay I will focus on one particular group of ornaments, commonly referred to as “Astarte” pendants (for example, figs. 1–5).<sup>1</sup> They share some form of female nudity—depicted frontally and explicitly—and the fact that they all derive from the Levant, the area of ancient Canaan and modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan. In general, they have been studied together as a single corpus of objects.<sup>2</sup> Because some of the figural representations on the pendants have approximate parallels on Egyptian objects inscribed with the names of such Canaanite goddesses as Anat, Astarte, or Qedeshet (figs. 6, 7), scholars have tended to interpret them as images of one or more of these same goddesses.<sup>3</sup> Ugaritic texts document the existence of these deities in the Canaanite religion, as well as another, similar goddess, Asherah. Although it is Asherah alone who has any definitive association with fertility, most modern scholars have assigned a fertility function to all of the above goddesses, or to a syncretic fertility deity who conflates aspects of each. In turn, the same names

have been variously applied to the figures on the pendants, whose overt nudity is deemed to correlate well with the idea of fertility. Earlier scholars supported similar notions, but they viewed objects depicting such images as licentious, sexual-erotic items used in Canaanite fertility cults, perceiving the cults as sordid and orgiastic and the goddesses as sacred prostitutes at best, “whores of Babylon” at worst (fig. 8).<sup>4</sup>

Although these extremely prudish and rather Orientalist views are no longer current, an inclination persists on the part of scholars to associate the iconography of the pendants in a literal manner with one or another of the Canaanite goddesses, or with a syncretic Canaanite deity of fertility.<sup>5</sup> The unambiguous sexuality depicted on them is rarely explored apart from its obvious connection to fertility in some general sense.<sup>6</sup> Some recent studies have presented less narrow approaches and interpretations; however, even these remain focused on finding direct correlations between the images on the pendants and textual or other material references to specific deities, myths, and cultic practices known from the Late Bronze Age.<sup>7</sup> Here, instead of examining the images on these pendants only in terms of trying to identify *whom* they represent, I would like to explore *what* they might represent. The very confusion over the iconography and identity of the nude female suggests an image operating, then as now, on multiple levels, the most basic of which, I will argue, is perhaps purely conceptual—a cognitive construct rather than a literal representation of a particular being.<sup>8</sup>

Although commonly taken as a single category of artifact, this jewelry ranges widely in iconography, style, and context of deposition, aspects that scholars have dealt with extensively.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, its materials, methods of manufacture, and form, which are fairly consistent, are rarely addressed beyond the most basic descriptions. For instance, the material used is almost exclusively a precious metal. Most are fashioned from gold, as discussed here,



Fig. 1. Gold or electrum pendant with schematic representation of nude female. Tell el-'Ajjul, Hoard 1299. Middle/Late Bronze Age. Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums 35.3842



Fig. 2. Gold pendant with schematic representation of nude female. Tell el-'Ajjul, Hoard 277. Middle/Late Bronze Age. The Trustees of the British Museum, London 130761



Fig. 3. Gold pendant with nude goddess. Minet el-Beidha, "dépôt d'enceinte" (dépôt 11). Late Bronze Age. National Museum, Aleppo M 10450

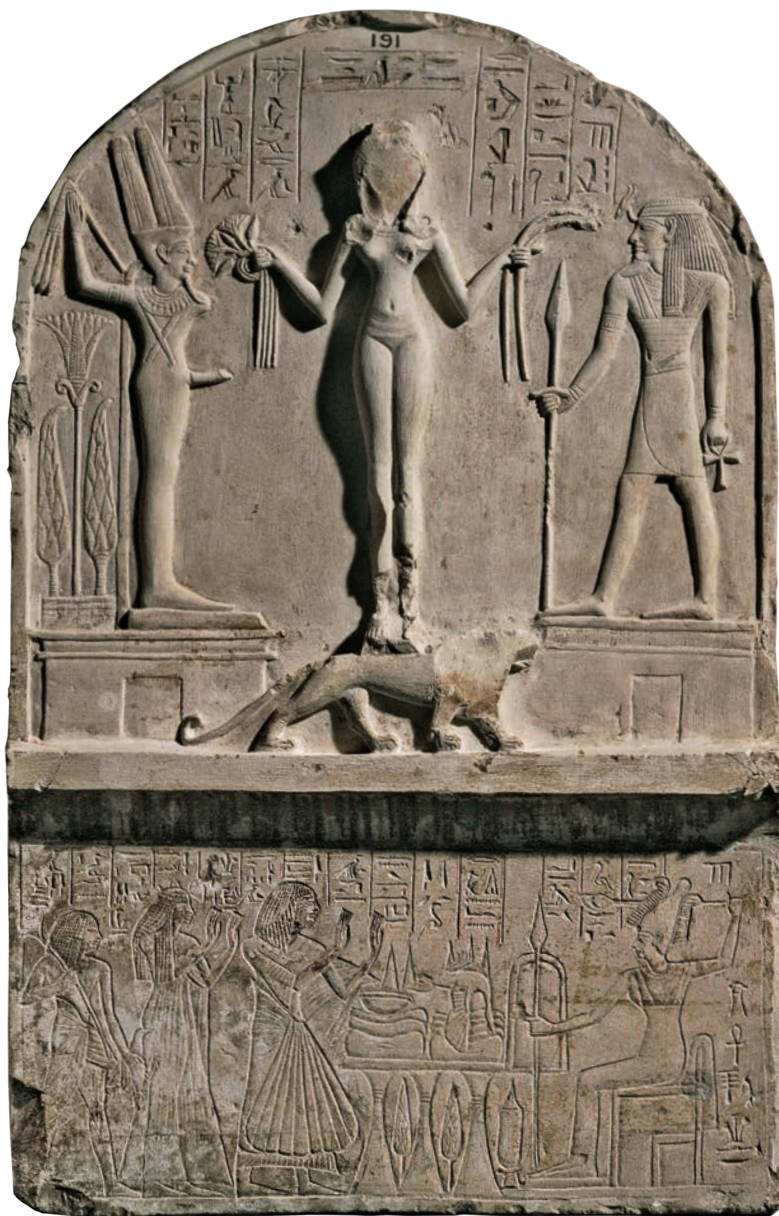


Fig. 4. Gold pendant with nude female. Minet el-Beidha, dépôt 213 bis. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 14714



Fig. 5. Gold pendant with nude female. Uluburun shipwreck. Late Bronze Age. Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology 1.5.87 (KW 703)

Fig. 6. Limestone stele of chief craftsman Qeh. Deir el-Medina. Dynasty 19. The Trustees of the British Museum, London 191



although examples in silver and one in bronze have been found.<sup>10</sup> While the use of gold and silver in the ancient Near East frequently signals an object's ritual purpose, whether religious or royal,<sup>11</sup> in the case of these pendants I would argue that the material carries a different meaning, to which I will return in my conclusion.

The methods used to produce the ornaments are also consistently rather simple. All of the pendants were constructed from a single sheet of gold with the top rolled up and forward into a suspension loop. The figural details were executed in repoussé with some chasing. Striking is the fact that, despite the pendants' being made of





Fig. 7. Stone stele showing goddess on horseback. Tell Zawyet Sultan, Tomb of Nefsekheru. 13th century B.C.

a precious material, the craftsmanship on none of them is particularly refined. The sheet was in most cases roughly cut out, and the edges were neither well trimmed nor neatly finished. The suspension loops were rolled quite casually, so much so that they are lopsided on some of the examples. From the perspective of technique and execution, one would consider these ornaments as no more than moderately prestigious items, perhaps only a step or two above the mass-produced terracotta plaques depicting similar figures (figs. 9, 10). The only characteristic differentiating the pendants in terms of material and manufacture—and therefore potential prestige—is the thickness of the gold sheet, which ranges from very thin and flimsy for some to considerably more substantial for others. In my view, the mediocre craftsmanship supports the interpretation of a private and talismanic function of the pendants over the official one that is favored by most scholars,<sup>12</sup> regardless of the intrinsic value of the material.

A third trait shared by the pendants is form (figs. 1–5). The majority are conceived in the shape that has been described most frequently as piriform, or pear-shaped, when, in fact, this shape's reference to the pubic area, so dramatically featured on the pendants themselves, seems overtly obvious.<sup>13</sup> This conceptually sophisticated use of a visually self-referential image is a representational scheme commonly used in the art of the ancient Near East.<sup>14</sup> This crucial point will be discussed at the end of this essay.

Beyond the three unifying factors of material, manufacture, and shape, it becomes difficult to consider the pendants as instances of a single and specific iconography. The nude females depicted on the jewelry have been most routinely identified in the scholarly literature as Astarte, a Canaanite deity associated primarily with sexuality and war, and then erroneously with fertility as she increasingly became folded into a syncretism with Asherah.<sup>15</sup> When depicted on Egyptian reliefs and ostraca, Astarte often wears the atef crown and is sometimes armed; most frequently, however, she is shown nude and on horseback (figs. 7, 11). Although it is easy to



Fig. 8. William Blake. *The Whore of Babylon*, 1809. Pen, watercolor over pencil on paper. The Trustees of the British Museum, London 1847,0318.123

Fig. 9. (*Right*) Terracotta figurine of nude female. Ugarit, acropolis. Late Bronze Age. Musée du Louvre, Paris AO 18524



Fig. 10. (*Far right*) Terracotta figurine of nude female. Ugarit. Late Bronze Age. National Museum, Damascus 7064



identify her in those media, she is less recognizable on the gold pendants, since none of them presents a nude female wearing an atef crown or mounted on a horse; it is nudity and nudity's potential connection to Astarte's sexual aspect that suggest any association whatsoever. A plaque from Lachish (fig. 12) is the single representation in gold in which Astarte can be clearly distinguished with her attributes and is identifiable as a deity because of the horned crown she wears. However, this is a square plaque, meant to be mounted on some other material, rather than a triangular pendant, and therefore presumably belongs to a completely different category of object.<sup>16</sup> Adding to the confusion is that several scholars refer to Ugaritic texts as confirmation that the nude female on these pendants is Astarte; and indeed certain of these

documents mention "Astartes," together with moon and sun pendants.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, while the visual manifestation of moon and sun pendants is easily imagined and furthermore supported by finds of objects that logically fit these descriptions,<sup>18</sup> no obvious imagery or actual finds can be associated with the term "Astarte."<sup>19</sup> An inventory of jewelry from Qatna and a passage from Isaiah 3 make similar references to moon and sun pendants, yet neither alludes to "Astarte" pendants.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Elizabeth Ellen Platt has pointed to evidence that a certain type of jewel mentioned in Ezekiel 16 is most accurately translated as "a triangular piece," but nowhere is it also referred to as an "Astarte."<sup>21</sup> Rather, it represented an item of jewelry associated with harlots (that is, unequivocally with sex rather than fertility) and was considered by



Platt a depiction of the genital area. Platt therefore logically connected this jewel to the gold pendants under discussion here, albeit with further conclusions that are less convincing.<sup>22</sup> Finally, while crescent moon and sun pendants are shown being worn by figures in other media, depictions of ornaments with images of nude females are virtually unknown.<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that some type of Astarte pendant did not exist; it means simply that the term cannot be firmly tied to those featuring a nude female without any of Astarte's known attributes.

The nude figure on the pendants is also frequently identified as the Canaanite goddess Anat (for example fig. 6, lower portion). Anat is also considered by many scholars a goddess of fertility (for reasons that are not entirely clear) but, most particularly, of violence and war.<sup>24</sup> Like Astarte, she is frequently depicted armed and/or wearing an atef crown. Her usual attributes, therefore, do not correlate especially well with those on any of the pendants, unless one considers her nudity to be the linking feature, as unspecific as it may be. Alternatively, a few scholars interpret Anat as a goddess of female sexual desire, as expressed by her nudity and as distinctly separate from and in contrast to a fertility goddess.<sup>25</sup> Is it possible that the association with raw sexuality is in fact the more potent one, yet the less emphasized in existing studies of the pendants? Is a lingering prudishness still embedded in the scholarship on these deities in general and the pendants in particular?<sup>26</sup>

Qedeshet is the third Canaanite deity often identified with the nude female. For some she is also a fertility goddess but one that is at times acknowledged as more erotic in character.<sup>27</sup> The iconography associated with Qedeshet, known from stelae inscribed with the name (for example fig. 6, upper portion), best fits that seen on a majority of the ornaments. Qedeshet is almost always depicted naked, with Hathor-style hair and standing on a lion. She typically holds serpents, lotus flowers, or both, a stance typical of the Mistress of Animals role she is



Fig. 11. Painted limestone ostrakon with nude goddess on horseback. Thebes. Dynasty 19. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Aegyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung 21826

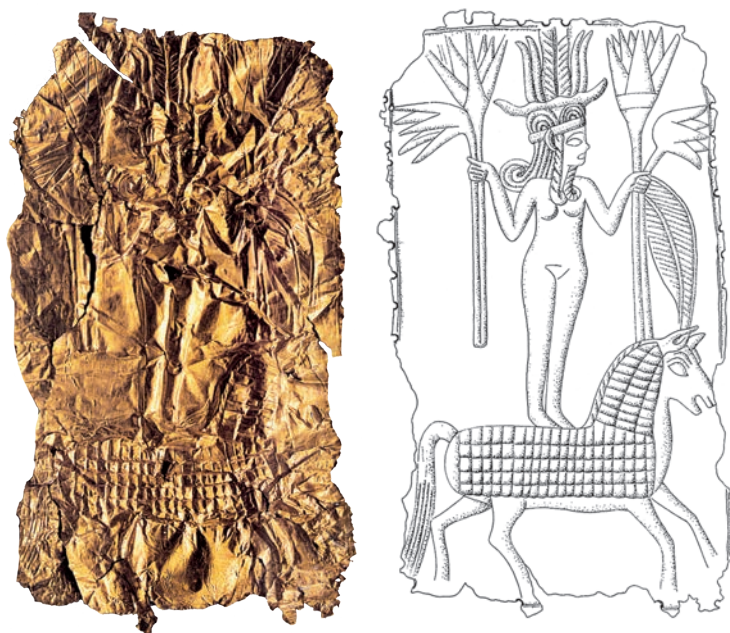


Fig. 12. Gold plaque of Canaanite goddess (drawing at right). Lachish. Late Bronze Age. Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums 78-1



also given. While these elements are not all represented on any single pendant, a significant number can be superficially described in terms of Qedeshet's overall attributes. Even the abbreviated, more schematic females on certain pendants exhibit the Hathor-like hair that is most often associated with Qedeshet, although not specifically diagnostic of her (fig. 3). However, once again iconographic deviations make it difficult to be absolutely confident of such an interpretation. On some of the pendants, the flowers and/or serpents are replaced by gazelles (fig. 4), whereas in others, the hair is not represented in the manner of Hathor or the lion is missing (fig. 5). The nude females featured on many terracotta plaques (fig. 9) similarly resemble Qedeshet figures, although, like those on the pendants, they can be found in multiple variations as well.

While it seems that one could nonetheless be satisfied with identifying the images on both types of objects as the goddess Qedeshet,<sup>28</sup> the situation is more complicated. The problem arises from the fact that Qedeshet cannot be clearly attested as an independent goddess in Canaanite and Ugaritic texts, only in Egyptian texts and on Egyptian stelae.<sup>29</sup> In fact, many scholars believe that "Qedeshet" is an epithet that means simply "holy" and can therefore be attached or applied to any number of deities, including all of the ones mentioned thus far; other scholars associate this title specifically with yet another Canaanite deity, the goddess Asherah.<sup>30</sup> And while an independent deity Qedeshet (for those who argue for her existence) might be linked with an image, no clear pictorial examples of Asherah have come to light. Once again, what is known of Asherah from this period comes primarily from references in Ugaritic texts.<sup>31</sup> Asherah is identified visually only by those who equate her with Qedeshet. Thus, attempts to find possible representations of Qedeshet and Asherah are based on rather fuzzy reasoning and are therefore not reliable.

What does seem clear is that there is considerable variety in how any one nude

female image is presented, whether on gold jewelry, on terracotta plaques, or on Egyptian stelae. Even within each category of object, the imagery varies tremendously. I think it is fair to state that the sole common denominator among these objects is their emphasis on nudity. One solution to this puzzle has been to explain the nude female figures as representing some nonspecific yet purposefully syncretic Canaanite deity.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, Urs Winter has concluded that the nude female or nude goddess cannot be connected to any one deity or to a syncretic deity and also cannot be linked to any of the deities known from texts.<sup>33</sup> To him, the phenomenon of these nude females takes on infinite cultural variations and regional interpretations, so that a generic nude goddess is always incorporated somehow into the local pantheon. In a similar vein, Izak Cornelius refers to this multifaceted nature of the nude female as "the many faces of the goddess" and clearly strains to arrive at his final designation of Qedeshet for the figure on the pendants.<sup>34</sup>

While these lines of thinking are less restrictive than earlier ones in that they do not force a singular identification on the nude female, they nonetheless reflect an inclination to interpret the figure principally in terms of precise and/or literal cultural and religious contexts in which she must represent a goddess. I would like to offer an additional way of approaching these images. Provoked by a recent article by Gebhard Selz in which he applied "prototype theory" from the cognitive sciences to the study of divine kingship in Mesopotamia,<sup>35</sup> I began to think that the ubiquitous nude female was as much a conceptual construct as anything determined by specific religious or cultic contexts. This is not to say, however, that local styles and practices did not inform the conceptual aspect or, inversely, adopt it. For Selz, prototype theory works well for the study of ancient Near Eastern artifacts because it does not draw a clear distinction between natural or mental categories and the physical object. As we know from

certain Mesopotamian texts, concepts were not just represented by objects but were also inherent in those very objects. An example given by Selz is the royal scepter, which not only symbolized rulership but embodied the concept. In other words, the scepter was an attribute as well as an idea. Of interest to me here is the possibility of understanding an image as an idea, as a cognitive construct given physical form, not necessarily or only a visual rendering of a literal object, figure, or narrative.

Returning to our pendants with depictions of nude females, it seems to me that the common denominator of nudity mentioned above might be read as just such a construct or idea. Preserving the notion that the pendants must represent some sort of fertility goddess—even if she cannot be identified or culturally defined—prevents us from exploring other possibilities. Visually, the most immediate and consistent elements are the pubic area, breasts, face, and, in most cases, jewelry worn by the images themselves. While the pubic area and breasts certainly relate directly to fertility, a prominent face and jewelry do not. In combination, these features seem far better suited to a reading of female eroticism than the less controversial interpretation of fertility alone. Ancient Near Eastern cultures were far more comfortable with the idea of overt sexuality than we are today, as evidenced by the numerous accounts of Ishtar's sexual exploits and other literary references.<sup>36</sup> Sexuality, as distinct from fertility, had an unequivocally positive connotation.<sup>37</sup> Irene Winter has established that the element of sexual allure—*kuzbu* in Akkadian—was purposefully depicted in images of the ideal male ruler.<sup>38</sup> For women in the ancient Near East, jewelry and facial cosmetics, in addition to nudity, were specifically linked to sexuality and allure, to *kuzbu*, as opposed to fertility. Zainab Bahrani has written extensively on the equating of nudity, jewelry, and cosmetics with manifestations of sexuality.<sup>39</sup> In much of the literary imagery, it is the nude, bejeweled,

and beautified body that represents the physical manifestation of eroticism and sexual attractiveness, features and characteristics equated in the ancient Near East with vitality, power, and well-being rather than with indecency or vulgarity.<sup>40</sup>

I propose that the concept of sexual allure is likewise expressed visually on these pendants, and that this physical expression of a cognitive concept is one of the multiple ways in which these pendants function. I am not negating alternate interpretations or modes of operation, simply adding yet another level. Any given pendant might refer to a specific deity or myth, which in turn could be rendered in a number of local styles. It might also be a virtual stand-in for or emblem of a deity, if enough of the deity's attributes are present. It might act as a cultic item or votive object, in addition to an item of personal adornment. All these possibilities remain open and are suggested by the varied contexts in which these pendants have been found.<sup>41</sup> However, the primary and most consistent interaction between image and object seems to be one that refers to the elemental aspects of eroticism and sexuality. Perhaps this is why the figure of Qedeset is most recognizable in these pendants, not for her actual role in literature or religion but for her embodiment of these qualities, abstracted here into a cognitive construct expressed in visual form. Therefore, the role of formalized religion or deities cannot be assumed for these pendants any more than for the terracotta plaques. The efficacy and potency of the pendants might derive, directly or indirectly, from a divine source yet not represent a divine symbol or entity.<sup>42</sup>

The design and function of the pendants further reinforce this interpretation, not simply because they depict the sexual parts and illustrate jewelry on the figures but because they recall the shape of the pubic area in the very form of the pendant. In addition, because the pendant itself functions as an item of jewelry to be worn as the depicted figures do, presumably it is capable of endowing, in some talismanic,

propitious, or performative manner, its biological wearer with similar aspects of eroticism and sexual allure. This nesting of multiple representations and the dissolution of boundaries between what is inside and outside the image make these pendants prime examples of what W. J. T. Mitchell calls “metapictures”<sup>43</sup>—they are ultimately images about themselves. They are images that perform sexuality. In a similar vein, it has been argued that precious metals such as gold and silver “attract the eye, drawing attention to the body.”<sup>44</sup> A literary example of this notion is illustrated by the Sumerian composition known as the debate between “Tree and Reed,” in which Earth adorns herself with precious materials to attract the attention of her lover, Heaven.<sup>45</sup> If one considers the pendants under discussion in this light, the gold and silver of which they are made would thus also be performing sexuality, and thereby doubling the performative capacity of the pendants.

Ellen Swift has recently emphasized the power of such doubling of image and materials in terms of Roman jewelry, concluding that “the way in which both materials and motifs were endowed with specific powers . . . amplifies the constitutive and transformative agency of dress accessories in general within the wider social context.”<sup>46</sup> Based on both how the pendants were made and how they may have been conceived visually, I believe these ornaments represented personal, private, and highly animated expressions of sexual allure, or *kuzbu*—images that interacted as powerfully with the individual bodies they adorned as they did with the cultures from which they emerged.

1. A term most probably initiated by Claude Schaeffer (1937, p. 146). Schaeffer (1939, p. 62) associates the images of nude females found on pendants with attestations of “Astartes” in Ugaritic texts, without noting that the texts never actually link the “Astartes” to any pendants or other specific object type. Loud (1948), in his report on the 1935–39 seasons at Megiddo,

likewise refers to “Astarte” pendants, and Albright (1939) considers similar nude female figures in terracotta to be “Astarte” plaques.

2. Maxwell-Hyslop (1971, pp. 138–40), however, identified typological distinctions within the overall group (“representational,” “pictorial,” and “stylized”). Negbi (1976, pp. 95–103) and McGovern (1985, pp. 30–32), among others, followed these divisions with modifications of their own.
3. For a thorough review of the iconography of these pendants as well as of related terracotta plaques and stelae, see Cornelius 2004. In one case, the names of all three goddesses—Anat, Astarte, and Qedeset—are inscribed on the object, while only one nude female is depicted (Cornelius 2004, pl. 5.16).
4. See Bahrani 1996 and Bahrani 2001 for her studies on women and gender in the ancient world and the varying perceptions of and approaches to the subjects by modern scholars; see also Assante 2003 and Cornelius 2004, pp. 11–13.
5. Negbi 1970, p. 30; Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, pp. 138–40; Negbi 1976, pp. 99–100; Platt 1976, pp. 108, 110; U. Winter 1983, pp. 113–14, 309–10; McGovern 1985, p. 102; Lilyquist 1993, p. 49; Pulak 1998, p. 206; Selz 2000, p. 36; Cornelius 2004; Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 347–48.
6. U. Winter (1983, p. 198), Keel and Uehlinger (1998, esp. pp. 105–8), and Uehlinger (1998–2001, p. 57) are among the minority of scholars who distinguish sexuality from fertility when discussing these images, which is not to say that the two concepts are not related and do not coincide in certain instances. Bahrani (2001, pp. 43–45) and Moorey (2003, pp. 10–11) are very articulate about the distinction with respect to similar images on terracotta plaques.
7. Keel and Uehlinger (1998, p. 105) are the least inclined to make any such identifications. However, Uehlinger subsequently (1998–2001, pp. 57, 64) distanced himself even further from the notion that these images must represent a goddess of one sort or another. Likewise, Moorey (2003, pp. 37–40) questions the identification of the nude female figures on terracotta plaques as goddesses, as does Weippert (1988, p. 305).
8. Wiggermann (1998–2001, p. 46) alludes to this from a philological point of view, saying that the divinity (or power) of the nude female “is derived not so much from an objective quality of the surrounding world, but rather from subjective, inter-human emotions (nudity), and that consequently she is affiliated by nature with the affairs of private people, rather than with the more abstract public cults.” For him the nude female belongs in the realm of “social psychology” (p. 52), which is perhaps another way of referring to a cognitive construct. Uehlinger (1998–2001, p. 57) suggests a similar notion, that the nude



- female is a performative image—one that performs youth, integrity, love, and private life. I agree and submit that sexuality is also being performed. Bahrani (2001, p. 44) seems to say the same of the nude females on terracotta plaques.
9. The archaeological distribution and varied contexts of these pendants have been studied and published by McGovern 1985 and Negbi 1976; U. Winter 1983 and Cornelius 2004 have each dealt with the iconography of these and related images in great detail.
  10. For examples in silver, see Caubet in Galliano and Calvet 2004, p. 242, no. 269. For the bronze examples, see Cornelius 2004, pl. 5.21.
  11. See, for example, Ornan 2012; I. J. Winter 2012; Benzel forthcoming.
  12. For example, Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 347.
  13. For mentions of this alternative understanding of the shape, see Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 347, and Benzel in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 349. For further examples, see McGovern 1985, pl. 6 (top row).
  14. See Bahrani 2002, who in this essay applies W. J. T. Mitchell's concept of the "metapicture" (Mitchell 1994, esp. p. 42), or "hypericon" (Mitchell 1986, pp. 5–6), to describe the structure of self-referential images in ancient Near Eastern art. More recently Ellen Swift has written on the topic as it relates to Roman art (Swift 2009, pp. 128–29, 150–51).
  15. See Day 1992a, p. 484; Day 1992b, p. 494; Westenholz 1998, pp. 79–80; Selz 2000, p. 36; Cornelius 2004, pp. 93–94. Westenholz and Selz (contra Day and many others) underscore the problems with assigning a fertility function to Astarte and Anat.
  16. As already mentioned, in my opinion, the form is crucial; contra Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 347, who, along with others, includes the Lachish plaque in his discussion of the pendants. Related figures that are likewise plaques, not pendants, were presumably also meant for a different purpose (see, for example, Tadmor in *Holy Land* 1986, p. 104, no. 39).
  17. Schaeffer 1939, p. 62.
  18. See Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 350–52, no. 217a, b and fig. 111.
  19. See Cornelius 2004, p. 95, for his and others' similar reluctance to relate the Ugaritic texts to specific images.
  20. Bottéro 1949; Platt 1979, pp. 72, 195; Platt 1992, p. 831.
  21. Platt 1976, p. 109; Platt 1992, p. 827.
  22. Platt 1976.
  23. There are, however, depictions of nude females wearing necklaces with pendants that appear to be in the shape of triangles, which clearly could represent the pendant type being discussed here and referred to by Platt (1992, p. 827). Of note is that Ziffer (1990, p. 59\*) sees the star pendants mentioned in the Ugaritic texts—and of which numerous excavated examples exist—as representative of the goddess Astarte.
  24. See Maier 1992, p. 226; Cornelius 2004, pp. 92–93.
  25. For example, see van der Toorn 1998, p. 95; Westenholz 1998, p. 79; Selz 2000, p. 36.
  26. See, most recently, Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 347.
  27. For a summary of opinions on this most elusive of the goddesses in question, see Cornelius 2004, pp. 94–99.
  28. For this interpretation, see, for example, *ibid.*, p. 101.
  29. For example, see *ibid.*, pp. 45–48, 83–84, 94–99; Pulak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 348, n. 5.
  30. See Cornelius 2004, pp. 94–99.
  31. See Day 1992a, p. 483; Cornelius 2004, pp. 99–100.
  32. See Cornelius 2004 for a review of opinions and scholarship.
  33. U. Winter 1983.
  34. Cornelius 2004, p. 101.
  35. Selz 2008; see also Lakoff 1987 for discussions of prototype theory, as originally developed by Eleanor Rosch, in the cognitive sciences.
  36. See, for example, Leick 1994.
  37. *Ibid.* (esp. last paragraph on p. 96); Bahrani 1996; I. J. Winter 1996; Westenholz 1998, p. 64; Uehlinger 1998–2001, p. 57; Wiggermann 1998–2001, p. 47; Bahrani 2001, esp. p. 87; and Moorey 2003, p. 10, among others.
  38. I. J. Winter 1996, pp. 13ff.
  39. Bahrani 2001.
  40. For further philological evidence, see Wiggermann 1998–2001, pp. 50, 52.
  41. See Negbi 1976 and McGovern 1985 for distribution of finds.
  42. Paraphrasing Moorey (2003, p. 40) on the topic of terracotta plaques with nude female figures. Wiggermann (1998–2001, p. 50) similarly notes: "Another reason for the image of a goddess to coincide with the typical [naked female] would be a resemblance of character or function."
  43. Mitchell 1994, pp. 35–82, esp. p. 42; see also Bahrani 2002, pp. 21–22.
  44. Ross 1999, p. 308, citing Simmel 1900/1990, p. 176.
  45. Ross 1999, p. 308.
  46. Swift 2009, p. 186; see also pp. 181–82.

# Remarks on Internationalism: The Non-Textual Data

The remarks presented here do not constitute a formal essay so much as a collection of thoughts that coalesced during the symposium held in December 2008, following the opening of “Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.” During that stimulating conference, I came to muse on the term “internationalism” both as a focus of considerable attention in the past fifty years, which have seen our own world become more interconnected, and as a concept that has been used to interpret many Late Bronze Age objects. My overriding sense from the symposium is that we are using texts disproportionately in our analysis of material culture—and that terms such as “diplomatic exchange,” “greeting gifts,” and “emulation” block a more detailed study of the extant objects and their contexts. We scholars have been dazzled by the gift lists—just as the lists were meant to dazzle the ancients. In fact, a significant part of the production and circulation of luxury goods took place outside the royal sphere.

I believe, for example, that some of the objects found in Egypt could have been made outside Egypt and come there as diplomatic gifts. One instance is an overlay for a chariot from Tutankhamun’s tomb (fig. 1);<sup>1</sup> it is quite different from the king’s dagger hilt, which, in my judgment, was made in an Egyptian royal workshop for use

in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> A wooden pyxis with female sphinxes and Hathor-like protomes might also have been imported.<sup>3</sup> As seen in the style and details of sphinxes and plant motifs, it has a Levantine flavor at variance with the Egyptian canon. The vessel was reportedly found at Gurob with items naming Amenhotep III and Tiye. There is no evidence of a palace there at that time, nor do I know of cosmetic containers being used in religious settings. The pyxis may have been a “diplomatic gift,” but there could be other stories behind its manufacture.

First, we must remember that diplomatic relations existed at the very top of the social structure, among leaders. Second, we should note that we can rarely verify whether gifts listed reached their destinations. More than one intended recipient complains that he has not gotten what he expected, and very few objects can be matched with verbal descriptions in terms of either intrinsic features or context.<sup>4</sup>

For example, a travertine amphora with an inscription of Thutmose III found at Katsamba should be a royal gift in the tomb of an elite person on Crete (fig. 2).<sup>5</sup> However, if we compare it with an amphora from the tomb of Thutmose III’s wives at Thebes (fig. 3),<sup>6</sup> we begin to question its origin. Note the perfect symmetry and crisp detail of the Theban vessel in contrast to the Katsamba amphora, which lists to the left, its right shoulder higher than its left. The side view here shows lumpiness and traces of a drill left under the handles, and its inscription has a very rare, unorthodox spelling.<sup>7</sup> If the Katsamba vessel is a royal gift from Egypt, then Thutmose III must have been sending third-rate items to Crete.

Marian Feldman has proposed that the objects described in the texts as greeting gifts and dowry gifts—which would end up in the hands of the elite—were coded with designs that signified the political status of both donor and recipient.<sup>8</sup> If we look carefully at three of her examples from the Tell Basta Treasure, however, we find that, despite their “international” traits, their



Fig. 1. Gold foil chariot decoration. Tomb of Tutankhamun. Dynasty 18. Egyptian Museum, Cairo Carter no. 122qq-rr, Harry Burton TAA 931



Fig. 2. Travertine amphora. Katsamba. Late Minoan IB-II. Archaeological Museum, Heraklion 2409



Fig. 3. Travertine amphora. Thebes, Wady Qurud. Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose III, ca. 1479-1425 B.C. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1918 18.8.19



roles in society were actually quite different. In common with Egyptian tombs, most of the scenes on the Metropolitan Museum's repoussé bowl are drawn from daily life (fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> The so-called patera of Amy has

“international” motifs on the outer band, but a Nilotic scene on the inner one, while an inscription on the wall of the bowl identifies the owner as a Chantress of Neith.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the person who commissioned the bowl had a religious, not an administrative title, one of several reasons to believe that the vessel was part of a wine service in a temple at Tell Basta. The text, which refers to a cultic celebration, expresses the wish that Amy's “lifespan be doubled in health and life,” that her “step be extended as the morning comes,” and that she “be drunk with wine and pomegranate brew in the open court of Neith . . . the Lady of the House, Chantress of Neith, Amy, justified.” The goat-handled jug of Atumentaneb also had a religious function, as part of a wine service at Tell Basta in the eastern Delta. Like the bowl of Amy it bears wishes that the life force of the owner may endure and, in addition, shows the owner worshipping an Asiatic goddess.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, those vessels were not foreign gifts signaling elite status, but, rather, products of cultural interchange, made in an active



Fig. 4. Silver bowl. Tell Basta. Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 21–22. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1907 07.228.20



Fig. 5. Toilet objects. Deir el-Medina, Tomb of Cha (TT8). Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep III, ca. 1390–1352 B.C. Museo Egizio, Turin S. 8481, S. 8490, S. 8487, S. 8482, S. 8480

workshop in the eastern Delta where materials were supplemented, techniques developed, and motifs mixed. Fifty years ago, Donald Hansen wrote that in the Late Bronze Age “elements of style and iconography of the original arts . . . become so familiar that they remain, as it were, in a state of flux, divorced from the mother art, and capable of being employed by the craftsmen in any of the great cosmopolitan centers.”<sup>12</sup>

Objects in the tomb of a certain Cha also suggest that luxury items manufactured in Egypt might have nothing to do with elite gifts. Cha was an Overseer of Works and Chief in the Great Place (that is, Deir el-Medina, where tomb workmen lived). He was buried there in a small tomb, probably in the reign of Amenhotep III, with extraordinary tapestry-woven textiles, a gilded comb, and luxury vessels made of faience, banded stone, horn, and multi-colored glass (fig. 5). The container and

flask have omega handles, new to Egypt. Where did Cha get his objects? Did some come from Asiatic weavers and glassmakers in Egypt through the offices of the king? That hypothesis probably would not explain the eastern-style horn and banded stone vessel. Were these imported, but passed on to Cha by the king, or made in Egypt in a workshop where Asiatic and Egyptian craftsmen toiled together? Jac Janssen writes that in the fifteenth century B.C. Papyrus Leningrad 1116v, most of the craftsmen in the royal workshop who manufactured objects of ebony and ivory had Syrian names.<sup>13</sup>

The quality of the boxes from Cha’s tomb is wildly different from that of the other items just mentioned. One painted box is decidedly “provincial” in the manner in which the wife’s arm wraps behind her body and in the awkward hieroglyphs, which are misplaced and facing every which way (fig. 6). It would be hard to find anything



Fig. 6. Painted wooden box. Deir el-Medina, Tomb of Cha (TT8). Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep III, ca. 1390–1352 B.C. Museo Egizio, Turin S. 8212

of comparably poor quality in contemporary Theban tomb painting. How are these naïvely decorated boxes to be explained? It is evident that not all luxury objects, whether intended for domestic or foreign markets, were of the highest quality. Nor was the manufacture of these goods restricted to the royal workshops. Janssen notes that Deir el-Medina craftsmen made things for private sale, and there are tomb representations of Syrian traders along the banks of the Nile. In theory, “extramural” objects, made outside the royal workshops and traveling outside the routes of diplomatic trade, could have found their way abroad.

Another collection of instructive objects comes from secondary burials in a large court tomb under the valley temple and causeway of Hatshepsut.<sup>14</sup> They date to Dynasty 17 and early Dynasty 18—that is, before the campaigns of Thutmose III and Thutmose IV and well before the Amarna period. With a crude *rishi* coffin was a pot of painted Levantine type and a clumsily

painted zoomorphic vessel made of an as-yet-unidentified material (fig. 7). Surely the latter container imitates something foreign. How had it come to be at Thebes? Had it been used by the owner?

Elsewhere in this tomb complex were the remnants of a painted chapel with scenes of goods being presented to the deceased, including an elegant vessel with a spiral decoration and a narrow neck and of a reddish hue—probably a copper vase.<sup>15</sup> Before year 7 of Hatshepsut’s reign, therefore, we have a vessel of foreign style in an otherwise entirely Egyptian tomb decoration in Upper Egypt. Where did the painter see such an image? Had someone at Thebes been at the siege of Avaris?

A final group of objects in a revealing context is a Dynasty 18 burial at Abydos, just north of Thebes. A girl of fourteen was buried in a simple grave, and among her possessions were two anthropomorphic vases of strikingly different types.<sup>16</sup> One, depicting a kneeling figure, is charming with soft modeling;<sup>17</sup> the other, showing a standing figure, is much more roughly executed, with sharp details. It depicts a woman wearing an exceedingly long echeloned wig and holding a bird at her waist. Her body is painted with crude red bands and a large black pubis. Who are these females, and who made these unusual vessels? The girl’s grave also contained a painted kernos, which certainly has associations outside Egypt; Egyptian-type painted pottery; beads; a uraeus pendant; and a pair of appliquéd green leather shoes with curled, pointed toes. How did she manage to acquire these extraordinary things in Middle Egypt? Did she bring her green shoes with her from elsewhere? Did someone make them for her at Abydos?

In the end, I am less for grand theories than for detailed studies of objects and their contexts, which can then be compared with the texts. In the December 2008 “Beyond Babylon” symposium, Manfred Bietak stated that Egyptians sent thousands of stone vases all over the ancient Near East. However, the



Fig. 7. Goat-shaped vessel. Thebes. Dynasty 17–18. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JdE 45642



variations in shape, manufacture, material, and, especially, quality among the vessels found abroad, suggest that many of these are of Egyptian type rather than Egyptian. If we are to make progress in the study of internationalism, we must better characterize the objects we discuss, and better analyze the contexts in which they occur.

In conclusion, I believe that many factors other than diplomacy prompted the creation and employment of small objects in the Late Bronze Age. These factors include temple cult use, whether in Egypt or abroad (as Claude Doumet-Serhal spoke of at Sidon), celebrations (as Annie Caubet spoke of at Minet el-Beidha; see Caubet essay, pp. 226–37), and private trade, which seems to have given rise to a “collector’s mentality.”

Beyond the great variety of purposes there was the intermingling of cultures. Canaanite jars are found in Early Dynastic tombs at Abydos, and imported Early Bronze III Levantine combed-ware occurs with locally made versions at late Old Kingdom Saqqara. Following the pyramid age, after the Middle Kingdom and the Hyksos period, Egyptian culture grew more and more diverse. By the Ramesside period in the eastern Delta—when the plentiful silver Tell Basta vessels were made—exchanges between cultures had progressed to such a point that it seems futile to try to sort out whether such objects are “Egyptian” or “Near Eastern,” “soft Egyptian” or “Mesopotamian/Levantine/Aegean.” They are “of Levantine type,” or even “Levantine,” if

the term is extended to include the eastern Nile Delta, as Erika Fischer and Dirk Wicke have suggested.<sup>18</sup> These objects are products of an amalgamated culture, one that is attested by local letters, accounts, and other diverse texts within Egypt that fit better with the extant remains than does the diplomatic correspondence alone.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1. Littauer and Crouwel 1985, pp. 39–40, nos. G22, G23.
2. Edwards in *Treasures of Tutankhamun* 1976, pp. 129–30, no. 20.
3. Wicke 2008, p. 258 (Gurob.1), pl. 25.
4. Lilyquist 1999.
5. Lilyquist 1995, p. 41, no. 95.
6. Lilyquist 2003, p. 145, no. 79.
7. Laboury 1998 gives two examples: p. 66 and pp. 107–8, no. C11-2, and pp. 231–33, no. C-69.
8. Feldman 2006b.
9. Lilyquist 2012.
10. Ibid. Museum of Egyptian Antiquities (Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 53263).
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12. Donald Hansen, unpublished manuscript, 1963.
13. Jac Janssen, personal communication.
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15. Ibid.
16. Lilyquist 2007, pp. 100–102.
17. Bourriau 1987, pl. 29, 1.
18. Erika Fischer and Dirk Wicke, personal communications.







# Literary Evidence for Interaction



# Beyond Babylonian Literature

Historians of antiquity are often confronted with an unfortunate situation in the documentary record: they know that various peoples and cultures made up the world they study and that an understanding of all of them is necessary to study any individual part, yet the documentation available is frequently dominated by one state, whose point of view dictates historical reconstructions. The Roman Empire, for example, is so much better documented than its Parthian neighbor to the east that any study of the Near East in the first centuries A.D. is written with a Roman bias.

Fortunately, this is not always the case. Historians of the ancient Near East can sometimes write what one could call, anachronistically, “international” history and look at the past through the eyes of various peoples whose records are preserved. The second half of the second millennium B.C., the so-called Late Bronze Age, is one such period. We are fortunate that, for the three centuries from around 1500 B.C. to 1200 B.C., we can study the Near East and adjacent areas through rich textual and archaeological material that derives from all over the region. The Near Eastern world formed a single system, whose participants were aware of that fact and in which the histories of all states were fundamentally connected to one another, not only in political terms but also in social, cultural, and economic ones. We have an abundance of sources from the participants in the system: Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Egyptians, Mycenaean, Elamites, and peoples of the

Syro-Palestinian region.<sup>1</sup> This wealth of references allows for the study of many issues from multiple points of view, and scholars have investigated topics like trade, art, and diplomacy in this period from an international perspective.<sup>2</sup> It is no surprise that the title of The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 2008–9 exhibition on the second millennium B.C. stressed those terms. In this essay, I would like to extend this approach to an area of life where international exchange has not been fully appreciated, that is, literate culture.

There are many indications that the appeal of the foreign, the exotic perhaps, was as strong to elites in the Near East of the late second millennium B.C. as it is to many people today. We can observe how people all over the region eagerly adopted cultural influences from abroad. They did not leave these foreign elements unchanged, however, but adapted them to local tastes and mixed them with inspirations from elsewhere. The cultural expressions of the various regions of the Near East show a great deal of hybridity, merging the indigenous and the foreign into a transregional style. The development of new traditions that incorporated multiple inspirations could only have taken place in this international world and became a symbol of it. Scholars of the visual arts have recognized that this was not a one-way street with powerful traditions like the Egyptian influencing others, but that there were exchanges that had an effect on all the cultures involved.<sup>3</sup> The suggestion that artisans produced objects that were purposefully “international” in style, to be used in the well-attested diplomatic exchanges between royal courts, can be challenged.<sup>4</sup> Most scholars, however, accept that, parallel to regional artistic traditions—which themselves merged multiple influences—there existed a range of objects that cannot be firmly placed within one region’s visual expressions alone and that reflect a transregional style. Their creators incorporated iconographic motifs and stylistic features from various places, and we

cannot attach them to a particular locale from which their work would have spread across the Near East.

In the study of literature of the Late Bronze Age Near East, scholars tend to take a different approach. They see one dominant culture—Babylonia—that temporarily inspired all surrounding areas. At the end of the Bronze Age, these contacts ceased, but Babylonian literature continued its evolution, unaffected by its earlier international spread. This image portrays the literati of Babylonia as masters, and those of the periphery as students who often failed to imitate the masters accurately. The latter were mere recipients without an active engagement with the material. I will argue here that such a reconstruction is mistaken.

When using the term “literature” in ancient Near Eastern studies, scholars usually mean writings that extend in character well beyond belles lettres—the mostly poetic compositions that appeal to us because of their narratives and stylistic features. Literature in the broader sense includes all writings that did not document mundane practical matters, such as economic or legal transactions. Word lists with Sumerian entries and their translations into one or more languages; omen compendia, with lists of divine signs about the future and their interpretations; and other non-utilitarian writings are usually also included in discussions.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, such diverse genres are always found together in the excavated collections of cuneiform tablets that modern scholars tend to call “libraries.”<sup>6</sup>

The second half of the second millennium B.C. was a crucial period in the development of all parts of the Mesopotamian literate tradition; an authoritative anthology of Akkadian literature calls it the “Mature period.”<sup>7</sup> Although the third and early second millennia B.C. saw the first examples of creativity in the Akkadian language, it was during the first millennium B.C. that court- and temple-sponsored scribal activity left behind the most complete versions and corpora of Mesopotamian writings.

However, the formats of many works of that time seem to have been the creation of authors who lived in the second half of the second millennium B.C. For example, in the first millennium B.C., a man called Šin-lēqi-unninni was credited with the authorship of the Standard Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—the most famous Babylonian piece of literature, which I will discuss further presently. He is unknown except for later references to him as the ancestor of cult-singers and priestly intellectuals, but the format of his name connects him to Babylonia in the second half of the second millennium B.C., more specifically to the period when a Kassite dynasty ruled the region (ca. 1475–1155 B.C.).<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps ironically, there exist extremely few manuscripts from Babylonia dated to this period.<sup>9</sup> The main reason we suspect much literary creativity there in the second half of the second millennium B.C. is because the available early first millennium B.C. versions seem to be institutional copies of previously composed works. The creative work seems to have been undertaken when a Kassite dynasty of non-Babylonian origin ruled Babylonia, and most intensively soon after the dynasty’s fall in 1155 B.C., when some scholars see a national resurgence.<sup>10</sup> Yet there are many manuscripts of Babylonian literature from locations outside Babylonia in the second half of the second millennium B.C., mostly from before the year 1155 B.C. They appear to the east of Babylonia, in western Iranian sites in Elam; to the north, in Assyria; to the northwest, in several sites in Syria-Palestine; and beyond, in the Hittite state. Even in Egypt, with its old and very distinct literate tradition, some clay tablets with Babylonian literature appear at the ephemeral capital of Amarna in the mid-fourteenth century B.C.<sup>11</sup> The peoples in these regions read literatures in other languages as well, and to all of them Babylonian was a foreign idiom. It was an accepted language of literate culture, however, and so widespread that modern scholars call it

the lingua franca of the Near East at the time. Students of the history of Babylonian literature may feel that there is a dearth of information on this crucial period. That is misleading: there is much evidence, but it derives from non-Babylonian contexts.

Rather than discussing the body of evidence that is available for this period from all non-Babylonian sites, I will illustrate the situation with material from one city where literary activity at the time was great—Ugarit. Albeit a relatively small city on the Mediterranean coast, Ugarit was of great strategic and commercial importance, as its harbor connected northern Syria to the countries along the coast and to the islands of the eastern Mediterranean. The great powers of Egypt and Hatti sought to control Ugarit's king, and its neighbors maintained good relations with him. As a hub of trade, the city housed many foreigners: archaeological remains and texts suggest they came from the rest of Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, the Aegean, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. Ugarit was one of the wealthiest cities of the region; the citadel, in the center of town, comprised a large palace, several temples, and houses of elite members of the society. The French excavations, which have been ongoing at the site since the 1920s, have uncovered a mass of architectural and other remains that attest to the city's prosperity. All the buildings have yielded many luxury goods and art objects in precious materials.<sup>12</sup>

It is remarkable how much textual material was found on Ugarit's citadel. Archaeologists discovered writings in a variety of languages and scripts not only in the city's palace but also in many private houses. At least eight houses on the citadel had substantial collections of clay tablets, usually mixtures of legal and administrative records, letters, and literary texts. These are written in the indigenous Ugaritic in the alphabetic cuneiform, Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite and Hurrian in syllabic Babylonian cuneiform, and Hurrian in alphabetic cuneiform, as well as a few texts in the as yet

undeciphered Cypro-Minoan script. Several stone objects with Egyptian hieroglyphs were also found at the site.<sup>13</sup>

One large house on the east side of the citadel gives a good idea of the riches and variety of textual material we encounter at Ugarit (House 64; fig. 1).<sup>14</sup> In it, two substantial deposits of tablets were excavated in separate locations. Two small rooms in the north part of the house contained sixty-four tablets, almost all written in alphabetic script recording the Ugaritic and Hurrian languages. The texts were predominantly of a religious character, including myths, rituals, offering lists, prayers, and a record of divination. The same script was used for the nine administrative tablets discovered in the house. Two letters were written in Babylonian cuneiform, as was one administrative list. There were also a Sumerian lexical text and two tablets that listed the letters of the Ugaritic alphabet. Also relating to divination were twenty-one clay models of livers, six of them inscribed with alphabetic Ugaritic, and one inscribed clay lung.<sup>15</sup> Scholars refer to the archive as "of the Hurrian priest," as the owner's name remains unknown.

The southwest sector of the same house contained an entirely different collection. All but one of the seventy-six tablets were written in syllabic cuneiform rendering the Babylonian and Sumerian languages, and they were mostly lexical texts and word lists. Babylonian literature was represented by omens, incantations, and wisdom texts, and there were also letters, legal documents, and administrative lists. Because of the presence of lexical texts, this part of the house is considered to have been a school, whose teachers were either Babylonians or trained by Babylonians,<sup>16</sup> and scholars refer to it as holding the "Lamashtu archive."<sup>17</sup> Within the same house then, although not necessarily belonging to the same owner, appeared two very distinct collections of tablets: a mainly Ugaritic one in the north part, and a Babylonian one in the south sector.

This house at Ugarit is a perfect example of the coexistence between indigenous and



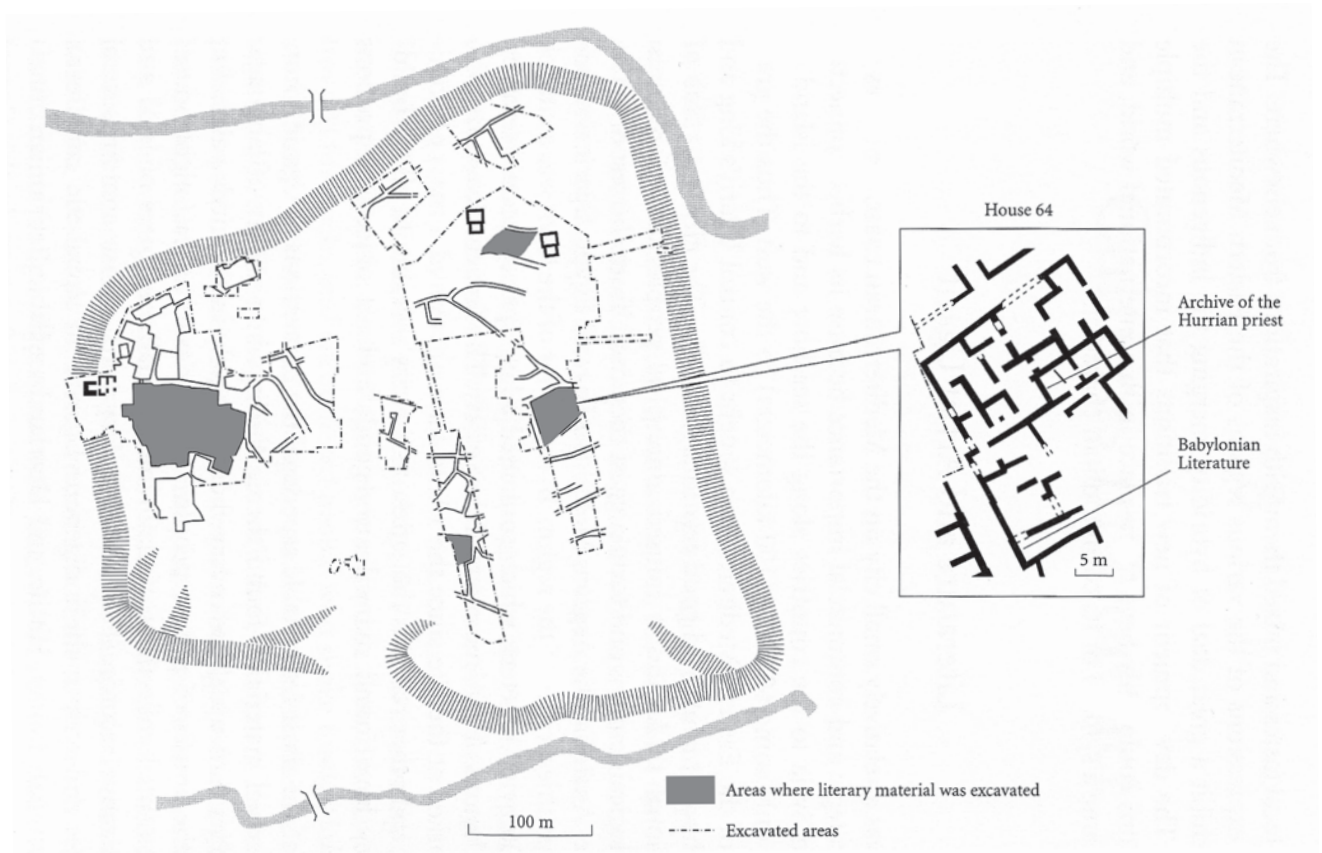


Fig. 1. The city of Ugarit and its archives, with detail of House 64

foreign literate traditions that characterized the Near East in the second half of the second millennium B.C. The indigenous tradition at Ugarit was itself an amalgam of influences, recording at least two distinct languages: West Semitic Ugaritic and linguistically isolated Hurrian. The “foreign” literature, predominantly inspired by Babylonia, comprised the standard genres found in libraries there: lexical lists, omens, and incantations. No items of belles lettres appear, but it would not be surprising if they had. The house shows, however, that matters were not that simple: the traditions, while distinct, were not isolated but influenced one another. The models of livers in the Hurrian priest’s archive are a perfect example of

cultural interaction. A tool for a typical Babylonian practice—divination by examining an animal’s liver—was inscribed in the local Ugaritic language and script.<sup>18</sup>

A substantial publication of the Babylonian material from the entire city of Ugarit, which appeared only recently,<sup>19</sup> still omits the lexical material, about one-fifth of the corpus.<sup>20</sup> The published material—some seventy manuscripts—contains a wide range of genres: divinatory lists, incantations, hymns and prayers, epics, and wisdom literature. There are even two library catalogues that list the titles of Sumerian compositions. The cultural background of all of them was Mesopotamia, more often than not Babylonia. Many of the compositions are known

from that region, though mostly from earlier and later periods, and the genres are typically Mesopotamian.

Not all of the manuscripts are alike in their faithfulness to the Babylonian original, however. Daniel Arnaud, the editor of the material, distinguishes between imported tablets that came directly from Babylonia, Assyria, or Hatti, and local editions of texts. He believes that the latter were always created outside Ugarit and came to the city along various trajectories, picking up idiosyncrasies on the way: from Babylonia via the Middle Euphrates, Assyria, and Hittite Anatolia, from Babylonia via Assyria and Hittite Anatolia, and so on. The scribes at Ugarit were never the authors;<sup>21</sup> the creators lived primarily in Babylonia; sometimes in Assyria; and, rarely, at the Hittite court. It is commonly thought that all syllabic cuneiform literary material from places like Ugarit was educational in character. It would have been used to train the scribes who composed the letters and contracts in the Babylonian language found especially in the Syro-Palestinian region of the second half of the second millennium B.C.<sup>22</sup> As is to be expected from students, they were not all equally skilled, and mistakes entered their work. In many cases the original Babylonian works acquired unorthodox spellings, grammatical mistakes, and other alterations during their migration to Ugarit. The classification Arnaud proposes is based on a painstaking analysis of the manuscripts, not to be dismissed lightly. I want to question the basic assumption behind it—an assumption shared by the majority of scholars working with this material. It follows a strict core–periphery model, with cultural purity in the Babylonian core and bastardization in the periphery. According to this model, the only engagement people from the periphery had with the material was due to failure to meet Babylonian standards.

The manuscripts of the famous *Epic of Gilgamesh* found at Ugarit provide a good example of how difficult it is to determine

the relationship between “core” and “periphery” compositions. Two manuscripts—one well-preserved tablet with the first thirty-eight lines of the epic and three fragments of the same tablet describing the travels of Gilgamesh and Enkidu to the Cedar Forest—appeared in the library from the house of Urtenu.<sup>23</sup> Arnaud assigned them to different traditions: one close to the Standard Babylonian version credited to Sîn-lēqi-unninni and imported from Babylonia (no. 42), the other older and probably transmitted to Ugarit through Assyrian intermediaries (nos. 43–45). According to Arnaud, both tablets were written in Ugarit, as they contain too many mistakes to be Babylonian or Assyrian originals. In a detailed reexamination of the manuscripts, however, Andrew George argues convincingly that both tablets derive from the same tradition, one dissimilar from the later Standard Babylonian version.<sup>24</sup>

A characteristic of Babylonian literature that can be disorienting to the modern reader is the instability of the text. From 1700 B.C. to 700 B.C., if not longer, compositions like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* were always in flux, open to the creativity of authors.<sup>25</sup> No fixed version existed before the librarians of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh commissioned multiple copies of the twelve-tablet version that forms the core of our modern translations—and that perhaps was the work of Sîn-lēqi-unninni. Even afterward, multiple versions may have existed.<sup>26</sup> The fluidity of the text gave authors the freedom to introduce new ideas. Because the manuscripts are very incompletely preserved, we cannot determine exactly when changes occurred, but we can make comparisons among the preserved versions. Ugarit’s version of the epic presents radical changes with respect to what came before. In the eighteenth century B.C., the prologue was a hymn of praise to Gilgamesh, “surpassing all other kings”:<sup>27</sup> his strength was his greatness. The thirteenth century B.C. version found at Ugarit placed fifteen lines before

that statement and stressed Gilgamesh's wisdom: "He who saw the Deep, the foundation of the country, who knew the proper ways, was wise in everything."<sup>28</sup> The version in Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh maintained this focus. In a detailed comparison of the introductions of Ugarit's and Nineveh's versions, George showed that the latter has the greatest poetic coherence, and he interpreted the weaknesses of the earlier composition as mistakes that had crept into the manuscripts during the passage from Babylonia to the Mediterranean coast.<sup>29</sup> But could we not see the differences as creative attempts to make the poem more relevant to a Syrian audience? For example, the Ninevite version invites the reader to climb the walls of Uruk and inspect their qualities.<sup>30</sup> In Ugarit, such an invitation would be ludicrous, so the poem urges, "Go up, O Gilgamesh, on to the wall of Uruk, walk around, survey the foundation platform, inspect the brickwork!"<sup>31</sup> The change may be grammatically awkward—switching from referring to Gilgamesh in the third person to addressing him in the second—but it satisfies common sense.

There are other instances where people in the so-called periphery actively engaged with the epic's language. For example, at Emar, in inland Syria, someone inserted a short passage in the list of lovers whose lives the goddess Ishtar has wrecked: "You loved the [. . .] Sutean, / your house . . . you [. . .] to a tent, / you *broke his [weapons on the field of]* battle, / [you] keep driving (him?) onward. . . . [. . .]"<sup>32</sup> Emar was near the land of the tent-dwelling Suteans,<sup>33</sup> and the addition gave a local flavor to the passage, which would have made little sense in Babylonia. The multiple versions of the Gilgamesh epic that existed in Syria-Palestine and Anatolia emphasized elements of local interest. Although it is hard to draw a firm conclusion from the fragmentary manuscripts preserved, it is remarkable that those found at Hattusa, Megiddo, and Ugarit all treat the voyage of Gilgamesh and Enkidu

to the Cedar Forest, located in the western Near East. The summary Hittite translation of the epic found at Hattusa—itsself a clear indication of creative local engagement with the text—focused on that episode.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the Hittite translation shared the Ugarit version's concern with Gilgamesh's physique.<sup>35</sup>

We should not deny the people of the periphery their creativity, seeing them merely as passive recipients of a tradition formed elsewhere and too complicated for them to master in full. Rather than viewing Babylonian literature as local to that region, we should consider it an example of world literature—the earliest example of such literature, in fact.<sup>36</sup> World literature can derive from "national" literatures, through a process of selecting works that can gain meaning in translation. Such literature invites a reading that reaches beyond place and time.<sup>37</sup> It loses its "national" character and becomes part of a wider community that actively interacts with the material. Babylonian literature was especially suitable for this process, as it was not fixed and so permitted manipulation of the existing material. We continue to be startled by the fluidity of the Gilgamesh epic. Very recently, a manuscript appeared that opens up entirely new vistas on the text. Because it derives from the illicit antiquities trade, the determination of its place and date of origin is guesswork, partly guided by information from other illicitly excavated tablets. The editor, Andrew George, concluded that the manuscript probably dates to the early second half of the second millennium B.C. and comes from the southernmost part of Babylonia, the Sealand.<sup>38</sup> Strangely, though, it contains grammatical features that we tend to associate with the "north-western periphery."<sup>39</sup> Some aspects of the manuscript are amazing: the gods Sin and Ea stand for Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and the events take place in Ur rather than Uruk. Whoever wrote this manuscript knew the Old Babylonian versions of the epic but



somehow saw fit to introduce fundamental changes. It is more than a pity that the indefinite provenance of the tablet prevents us from knowing when and where this happened.

The presence of a world literature does not have to come at the expense of local literatures. At Ugarit, traditions with different languages and using a script entirely distinct from the Babylonian syllabic cuneiform existed side by side with the Babylonian, as the finds in House 64 show. The boundaries between the two worlds were not impenetrable, and it seems most likely that the Ugaritians who wrote Babylonian could also write Ugaritic. There exists a small group of fragmentary tablets on which Babylonian texts, seemingly all incantations, were written out in Ugaritic alphabetic script,<sup>40</sup> while, conversely, a syllabically written text records the Ugaritic language.<sup>41</sup> The writers must have been literate in both languages and both scripts. The incantations seem to have been intended for cult personnel who spoke Ugaritic but had to recite passages in Babylonian, which shows how much the two cultures had merged. I suggest that—as in the case of the visual arts—we see this hybridity as the formulation of a new, transnational idiom.

My aim here was not to diminish the value of Babylonian literature nor to deny the authors from Babylonia—whoever they may have been—credit for their work. I urge us to see the people of other regions also as participants in the creation of this impressive literate culture, which they enriched with new points of view. Historians of

Babylonian literature sense that the second half of the second millennium B.C. was a period of great creativity. They may be frustrated by the scarcity of manuscripts from Babylonia, but perhaps this frustration is misplaced: to appreciate Babylonian literature fully, we need to look beyond Babylon.

1. I describe this system in detail in Van De Mieroop 2007a.
2. For example, Cline 1994; Feldman 2006b; Liverani 2001.
3. Feldman 2002; Feldman 2006b.
4. See Wengrow 2007; Harmanşah 2008.
5. For example, Bottéro 1995. See also Pongratz-Leisten 2009.
6. See Pedersén 1998.
7. B. R. Foster 2005.
8. George 2003, p. 29.
9. Pedersén 2005 lists two groups of nondocumentary writings from Babylon, one mostly omens (pp. 78–82), the other school texts, which seem late Old Babylonian in form (pp. 85–92). Some literary material from the period comes from the sites of Ur and Nippur.
10. B. R. Foster 2005, p. 291.
11. To my knowledge no up-to-date description or catalogue of this material exists.
12. For a convenient overview, see Yon 2006.
13. For surveys of the material, see van Soldt 1991; van Soldt 1995; Pedersén 1998, pp. 68–80; Dietrich and Mayer 1999; Pitard 1999; van Soldt 1999. Images of examples of each script and language can be found in Yon 2006, pp. 124–29.
14. For a detailed description of the finds, see van Soldt 1991, pp. 194–211. A summary is Pedersén 1998, pp. 74–76.
15. For example, Yon 2006, p. 154, no. 42. They are published in full in Courtois 1969; the inscriptions are published in Dietrich and Loretz 1969.

16. Van Soldt 1999, p. 34.
17. Van Soldt 1991, pp. 209–11.
18. Dietrich and Loretz 1969 state they are related in form only to Babylonian divination, not in contents, as they do not contain the same statements as those inscribed with Babylonian cuneiform.
19. Arnaud 2007.
20. Van Soldt 1991, pp. 747–53.
21. The sole Babylonian-language text Arnaud thought to be a creation of Ugarit—a mythological fragment about the god Baal (Arnaud 2007, no. 65)—does not involve that Syrian deity. See Cavigneaux *apud* George 2007c, p. 254.
22. See, for example, Carr 2005, pp. 52–56.
23. Arnaud 2007, p. 36.
24. George 2007c.
25. See George 2003 for a detailed history and George 2007b for a popularized survey.
26. George 2003, p. 31.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 22; George 2007b, p. 449. No actual manuscript with the prologue is known so far, but the first line of the composition at the time is reported in the colophon of the Pennsylvania tablet (George 2003, pp. 180–81).
28. George 2007c, pp. 239–41.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 244–48.
30. George 2003, pp. 538–39, ll. 18–19.
31. George 2007c, pp. 240–41, ll. 20–21.
32. George 2003, pp. 334–35, ll. 28'–31'.
33. Castillo 2005, p. 152.
34. See Beckman 2001; see also Beckman 2003, for a full analysis of the idiosyncrasies of the Gilgamesh tradition in Hatti.
35. George 2007c, pp. 247–48.
36. Damrosch 2004, p. 88.
37. Damrosch 2003.
38. George 2007a.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
40. Dhorme 1940; compare Pitard 1999, p. 52, n. 12. One of the texts has seven lines of Akkadian written in alphabetic script, followed by eleven lines in Ugaritic.
41. Dietrich, Loretz, and Sanmartín 1995, p. 605.

# Under the Spell of Babylon: Mesopotamian Influence on the Religion of the Hittites

“Religion” is a word with many nuances. In this essay I will employ the term to designate the complex of conceptions concerning the character of parahuman elements in the cosmos, the relationship of men and women to these beings and forces, and the practices by which humans serve, manipulate, and communicate with them. Because the Hittites of second millennium B.C. Anatolia, like all the peoples of the ancient Near East, perceived deities, demons, and the spirits of the dead to be involved in even the most mundane aspects of existence, religion was for them an integral part of daily life.

As a practice so closely tied to the everyday and so self-evident to societal contemporaries, religion was seldom the subject of self-conscious reflection or examination in Hatti (as the Hittites referred to their nation and its territory). Accordingly, the Hittites bequeathed to posterity no theological treatises or surveys of their beliefs. Although we possess literally hundreds of texts dealing directly or indirectly with Hittite religion, none of them may be characterized as “scriptures.” Therefore it is necessary for the modern student to reconstruct the religious life of this culture from scattered evidence of the most diverse nature.

First of all, there are cuneiform tablets from the Hittite metropolis and capital Hattuša

(modern Boğazköy, located about a three-hour drive from today’s Turkish capital, Ankara),<sup>1</sup> and to a lesser extent from provincial centers elsewhere in central Anatolia such as Tapikka (modern Maşat Höyük), Şarišša (modern Kuşaklı), Şapinuwa (modern Ortaköy), and Kayalıpınar (ancient name still uncertain).<sup>2</sup> The tablets record hymns and prayers, detailed programs for ceremonies of the state cult, magical rituals, mythological narratives, records of divinatory procedures, inventories of the contents of shrines and storehouses, letters, and so forth.<sup>3</sup>

The excavated remains of more than thirty temples (each called *šunaš per*, literally “house of the god[s]”) in the capital<sup>4</sup> and several more in lesser cities, some with extensive office precincts and food-storage facilities, demonstrate the important role of religious institutions in Hittite society and administration, as well as in the spiritual life of Hatti.<sup>5</sup> The temples were the proprietors of large estates, whose produce, along with additional in-kind taxation extracted from other landholders, sustained a substantial redistributive component of the Hittite economy.<sup>6</sup>

Artistic evidence for Hittite religion is provided by images of gods and goddesses in metal (fig. 1), ivory, and other valuable materials; cylinder and stamp seals and their impressions on clay tablets, vessels, and bullae; sculpture in low relief on rock faces and free-standing stones; and ceramics featuring scenes of worship in relief.<sup>7</sup>

Several basic difficulties bedevil the student of Hittite religion: first, almost all of the available written sources pertain to the state cult or to the spiritual needs of the royal family. We have next to no information concerning the religious beliefs and activities of the ordinary Hittite man or woman. Second, Hittite religion was an amalgam of elements drawn from a number of cultural strata: of the indigenous Hattic people and the cultures of the various groups speaking an Anatolian Indo-European language (Hittite, Palaic, or Luwian).<sup>8</sup> To this mix were added influences from Mesopotamia (Babylonia and Assyria)—discussed





Fig. 1. Silver vessel in the form of a stag with scene in relief showing offerings made to seated deity and deity mounted on stag. Anatolia. Hittite Empire period. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989.1989.281.10

below—and from the Semitic and Hurrian populations of northern Syria.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the continuous development of central Anatolian civilization throughout the Bronze Ages makes it impossible to present within the scope of this essay a picture accurate in all details across the five-hundred-year history of Hatti.

In their cuneiform texts, Hittite scribes placed the divine determinative or semantic classifier (the DINGIR-sign) not only before the names of gods and goddesses but also before those of demons, numinous topographical features such as springs or mountains, and even parts of temples (for example, the hearth or the pillars).<sup>10</sup> That is, this diacritic could be employed to mark any parahuman and immortal force with the power and inclination to intervene in the affairs of humankind.

For the most part, Hittite deities were conceived as human in form, as illustrated by the gods and goddesses sculpted in the relief processions at the shrine of Yazılıkaya (about a mile outside the walls of the capital),<sup>11</sup> some, however, might also on occasion be depicted theriomorphically, that is, in animal form, as the Storm-god in bovine guise or the Protective Deity as a stag. An anthropomorphic divinity is sometimes accompanied by his or her animal manifestation, which may serve as a means of transportation or merely as a mascot. Thus, the Storm-god might ride in a chariot drawn by a bull, while the goddess of love and war Šauška could stand awkwardly upon the back of her lion-griffin.

For purposes of receiving worship, a god's ultimately ineffable essence could be located in an anthropomorphic or theriomorphic image (fig. 2), in a worked stele or a stone left in its natural state (both called *huwaši*),<sup>12</sup> or in a manufactured symbol, such as a disk of gold, and so on. An idea of the sumptuous character of full-size cult images, none of which have been physically recovered,<sup>13</sup> may be gleaned from the following introduction to a ritual for establishing the worship of a goddess in a new location:

Thus says the priest of the Deity of the Night: When a person for whom (the matter) of the temple of the Deity of the Night, that is, (the matter) of the Deity of the Night (herself), has become (incumbent)—When it comes about that (s)he builds another temple of the Deity of the Night from (the base of) this temple of the Deity of the Night, and then establishes the deity independently, while (s)he completes the construction fully, the smiths fashion the deity in gold. They also set about decking her out with the accoutrements appropriate to her. Stuck on her back like beads are sun-disks of silver, gold, lapis-lazuli, carnelian, “Babylon stone,” chalcedony(?), quartz, and alabaster, as well as life-symbol(s) and morning stars(?) of silver and gold. They set about fashioning them in that manner.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps more typical was the smaller image included among the inventory of a shrine in an outlying village:

The town Lapanā, (chief deity the goddess) Iyaya: The divine image is a female statuette of wood, seated and veiled, one cubit (in height). Her head is plated with gold, but the body and throne are plated with tin. Two wooden mountain sheep, plated with tin, sit beneath the deity to the right and left. One eagle plated with tin, two copper staves, and two bronze goblets are on hand as the deity's cultic implements. She has a new temple. Her priest, a male, is a holdover (from an earlier reign).<sup>15</sup>

The small metal figurines of deities, recognizable as such by their horned headgear<sup>16</sup> and found throughout central Anatolia, are probably examples of such local divinities.

In any event, the Hittites were well aware that the divine image, whatever its form,



Fig. 2. Silver vessel in the form of a bull. Anatolia. Hittite Empire period. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989 1989.281.11

did not constitute or contain—let alone imprison—the god or goddess. As in Babylonia and Assyria,<sup>17</sup> the performance of a special ritual was necessary in order to render a man-made or hand-selected object a suitable focus for the divine presence. This presence had its true home in that aspect of the cosmos in which it was immanent, as we shall see in a moment.

As polytheists, the Hittites could comfortably honor an unlimited number of deities.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in the course of their imperial expansion throughout Anatolia and into Syria, they availed themselves of this flexibility by accepting into their pantheon the gods and goddesses of many conquered areas. The process commenced as early as the Old Kingdom (sixteenth century B.C.), with the welcoming of the Storm-god of

the Syrian city of Aleppo into Hatti.<sup>19</sup> It gained momentum in the fifteenth century B.C., with the incorporation of numerous Hurrian deities encountered in southern Anatolia and northern Syria, most importantly the Storm-god Teššub and his spouse Hebat, the latter originally the eponymous deity of Aleppo. The community of deities worshipped among the Hittites ultimately grew so large that it came to be referred to as the “Thousand Gods of Hatti.”<sup>20</sup>

Most prominent among this myriad of gods were those immanent in the natural phenomena upon which human survival most closely depended:<sup>21</sup> Storm-gods, who delivered the rains crucial to the dry-farming economy of central Anatolia and in addition assured the flow of rivers and springs; Sun-deities, whose light was



recognized as the basis of all life; and goddesses of the fertile earth. Other deities presided over warfare, sexuality and reproduction, the world of the dead, particular towns or locations, and so forth. Individual human beings, as well as many significant places, objects, and social phenomena, were each watched over by a patron deity (<sup>d</sup>LAMMA).<sup>22</sup> Thus we meet with the Protective Deity of the King, the Protective Deity of (the town of) Karahna, the Protective Deity of the Army, the Protective Deity of the Quiver, the Protective Deity of the (Palace) Bedroom, the Protective Deity of the Countryside, and many more.

Divinities of similar type often shared a generic designation; accordingly we find “the Storm-god (<sup>d</sup>IŠKUR or <sup>d</sup>U) of (the town of) Pittiyarik” and “the Storm-god of (the town of) Šapinuwa,” or “the War-god (<sup>d</sup>ZABABA) of (the town of) Arziya” and “the War-god of (the town of) Illaya.” The extent to which such gods were considered avatars of a single deity—to borrow a term from the study of the religion of early India—is uncertain: in some cultic texts we find offerings to or invocations of, for example, “all the Storm-gods of Ḫatti,” while in others worship is directed to an individual member of the class.

Examples of explicit syncretism, similar to the Roman equation of their goddess Venus with the Aphrodite of the Greeks, are attested only in the Empire period (mid-fourteenth to early twelfth century B.C.), particularly the identification of Anatolian with Hurrian deities.<sup>23</sup> The most striking example of this is provided by an excerpt from a mid-thirteenth century B.C. prayer of Queen Puduḫepa: “Sun-goddess of (the town of) Arinna, my lady, you are the queen of all lands! In the land of Ḫatti you have assumed the name Sun-goddess of Arinna, but in respect to the land that you have made (the land) of cedars (that is, Syria), you have assumed the name Ḫebat.”<sup>24</sup> It is significant in this regard that the carved labels accompanying the figures of the gods in the temple of Yazılıkaya

present their names in the Hurrian language, not Hittite.

In certain key respects, the divine world mirrored the human societal structure. The pantheon was hierarchical and was ruled by a king, the Storm-god of Ḫatti (or of the Heavens)—later Teššub, alongside his queen, the Sun-goddess of Arinna—later Ḫebat. Along with their son, the Storm-god of (the town of) Zippalanda—later Šarrumma—and grandchildren, Mezzula and Zintuḫi, these monarchs constituted a family, as did other groups of deities at home in various Hittite towns, for instance the deities Zašḫapuna, Zaliyanu, and Tazzuwašši in Tanipiya.

When warranted by common concerns, such as the witnessing of treaties or the rendering of judgment, all the gods of Ḫatti met in an assembly whose structure and deliberations undoubtedly mirrored those of the gathering of Hittite human dignitaries with which it shared the designation *tuliya*.<sup>25</sup> For example, when the late thirteenth century B.C. Hittite king Tudḫaliya IV concluded an agreement with his vassal Kurunta of (the town of) Tarḫuntašša, he invoked all the gods as follows: “And in regard to the fact that I have made this treaty for you, the Thousand Gods are now summoned to assembly in this matter. They shall observe and listen and be witnesses!” (An inclusive list of deities follows.)<sup>26</sup> Any violation of the provisions of a treaty thus concluded in the presence of the pantheon would be severely punished by the gods themselves, on occasion even with the death of the culprit.

We know little concerning how the Hittites conceived the origins or the destiny of their cosmos. However, a ritual passage does relate that in primeval times the celestial and chthonic deities took possession of their respective realms, and that human beings were created by Mother-goddesses, presumably from the clay of a riverbank.<sup>27</sup> If we allow ourselves to extrapolate from Mesopotamian evidence, we may speculate that men and women were brought into existence in order to perform the labor that sustained the leisurely lives of the gods. Such

an etiology would certainly be in harmony with the role actually played by humans in the world, as I will now illustrate.

The universe of the Hittites was an integrated system, with no clear-cut boundaries separating its levels. Under the right circumstances, gods might mingle with humans, as reported in certain myths.<sup>28</sup> The euphemism employed for the death of a king or a member of the royal family, “to become a god” (*šūmaš kiš-*), indicates that a man of sufficient social prominence might attain the status of a minor deity.

As in Mesopotamia, the role of humans was unquestionably to serve the gods, providing for their sustenance, pleasure, and entertainment. That the gods were actually dependent upon these attentions is evident from a passage in a prayer of Mušili II (late fourteenth century B.C.), who reminds them of the consequences of a severe outbreak of plague:

All of the land of Hatti is dying, so that no one prepares the sacrificial loaf and libation for you. The plowmen who used to work the fields of the gods have died, so that no one works or reaps the fields of the gods any longer. The miller-women who used to prepare the sacrificial loaves of the gods have died, so that they no longer make the sacrificial loaves. As for the corral and sheepfold from which one used to cull the offerings of sheep and cattle—the cowherds and shepherds have died, and the corral and sheepfold are empty. So it has come about that the sacrificial loaves, libations, and animal sacrifices are cut off. Yet you come to us, o gods, and hold us responsible in this matter!<sup>29</sup>

In return for the necessary maintenance, the satisfied deities would cause crops to thrive, domestic animals to multiply, human society to prosper, and Hittite armies to prevail in battle. This conception is reflected in a prayer in which a god is

enjoined, “Give life, health, strength, long years, and joy in the future to the king, queen, princes, and to (all) the land of Hatti! And give to them future thriving of grain, vines, fruit, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, mules (*sic!*), asses—together with wild animals—and of human beings!”<sup>30</sup>

Conversely, a neglected or offended god or goddess could wreak havoc on an individual, a household, or all of Hatti. Attested manifestations of divine displeasure include epidemic, military defeat, and the illness of the king. When confronted with misfortune, it was necessary for the individual sufferer—or the royal establishment on behalf of the community as a whole—to determine which deity was angry, the cause(s) of his or her rage, and the appropriate corrective measures.

The power of deities to determine human affairs was known as *parā hand(anda)atar*—literally “prior arrangement,” but often best rendered as “providence.” For example, in his “Apology,”<sup>31</sup> Hattušili III attributes the successful course of his career to the intervention of his patron goddess, Šaušga of (the town of) Šamuḫa. When he had risen in revolt against his nephew, the king Urḫi-Teššub: “Šaušga, my lady, supported me, and things turned out as she had promised me. Šaušga, my lady, on that very occasion revealed her divine providence (*parā handandatar*) in great measure” (by bringing about victory over my rival).<sup>32</sup> Indeed, every Hittite king was under the protection of his own patron deity, as illustrated by a relief in the shrine of Yazılıkaya depicting Tudḫaliya IV in the embrace of Šarrumma (fig. 3).

The human monarch, one of whose titles was “My Sun-god,” stood at the intersection of the divine sphere with that of humans, constituting the linchpin of the entire structure.<sup>33</sup> He had been allotted his paramount position in society by the leading deities themselves: “The gods, the Sun-goddess and the Storm-god, have entrusted to me, the King, my land and my household, so that I, the King, should protect my land and my

household on my own behalf.”<sup>34</sup> In this role he was responsible for ensuring that the people of Ḫatti properly performed their obligations to their divine masters. In principle, the king directed all communal religious activities, serving as the high priest of every deity, most importantly that of the Sun-goddess of Arinna, who from the earliest days was the protector and proprietor of the Hittite state.

While practicalities made it necessary for the king to delegate most of his religious duties, twice yearly, in spring and autumn, he made a progress through the towns of the Hittite heartland, officiating in the sanctuaries of the local divinities. Furthermore, in times of crisis such as the plague addressed above by Muršili II, the ruler appeared in person before the gods to present Ḫatti’s *arkuwar*, “plaidoyer, plea.” The best example of such a brief delivered to a divine authority is that very prayer of Muršili II just excerpted.

As also mentioned earlier, it was of the greatest importance that the monarch and

the gods maintain a regular exchange of information so that difficulties in the functioning of the cosmos might be rectified to their mutual benefit. The king reported directly to his divine lords through his prayers, but traffic in the other direction was necessarily more complex. Accordingly, Muršili II demanded of the gods concerning the cause of an epidemic, “Either let me see it in a dream, or let it be established through an oracle, or let a prophet (*šiuunaš antuḫšaš*, literally “man of god”) speak of it. Or all the priests shall perform an incubation rite (literally, “sleep purely”) concerning that which I have instructed them.”<sup>35</sup> We may observe that the communication media employed by the gods were of two types: those initiated by the divinities (omens) and those solicited by humans (oracles).

A god might contact a person directly by appearing in a dream, cause a third party to utter a prophecy, or send a portent in the form of unusual human or animal behavior.<sup>36</sup> The sign might also be an astronomical occurrence (for example, a solar or lunar eclipse or shooting star), a meteorological phenomenon (for example, a lightning strike), or any abnormal terrestrial event.

Alternatively, through various procedures a specialist serving in the Hittite religious bureaucracy could pose a question to a deity and receive a reply.<sup>37</sup> Divinatory techniques included the examination of the entrails of a sacrificed animal (extispicy), a practice borrowed by the Hittites from Mesopotamia via northern Syria; the observation of the flight and other behavior of birds (augury); incubation; and the still obscure “lot” (KIN) oracle.<sup>38</sup> These various methods were often employed in series as checks upon the results obtained by one or another.

The following is an excerpt from a lengthy series of such questions:

In regard to the fact that you, o deity of Arušna, were ascertained to be angry with His Majesty (the King), is this because the Queen cursed (the palace woman) Ammattalla before the



Fig. 3. Rock relief. Yazılıkaya. Reign of Tudḫaliya IV, ca. 1237–1209 B.C.



deity of Arušna? Because Ammattalla began to concern herself with the deity, yet did not go back and forth (in service to the deity)? Because the son of Ammattalla has dressed himself in garments entrusted to his mother and was summoned to the palace? If you, o god, are angry about this, let the extispicy be unfavorable. . . . (Here the technical details of the observation are reported.) (Result:) Unfavorable. If you, O god, are angry *only* about this, let the duck oracle be favorable. . . . (Result:) Unfavorable. . . .<sup>39</sup>

The programs of the state cult—probably the most numerous type of text among the surviving Hittite records—prescribe the course of worship in great detail. These religious ceremonies were conducted at regular intervals—daily, monthly, yearly, or at some point in the agricultural cycle (such as the harvest, trimming of the vines, opening of the grain-storage vessels, and so forth)—and are designated by the Sumerogram EZEN, “festival.”<sup>40</sup> During these observances, gods and goddesses were lavished with attentions that were likely similar to those customarily enjoyed by the king and his courtiers. The divinities were praised through the recitation of hymns and provided with much food and drink.<sup>41</sup> They were entertained by singers and dancers and amused by jesters, and they observed the best efforts of athletes in various competitions,<sup>42</sup> including footraces, the shot put, and even mock battles. Strict standards of purity were enforced for officiants,<sup>43</sup> and foreigners were customarily barred from the temple precincts. Celebrations might also include a communal meal for a wider circle of human participants,<sup>44</sup> undoubtedly made up of individuals from the higher ranks of society.

We may gain an idea of the character of regular divine service from the following passage:

The king and queen, while seated,  
toast the War-god. The *halliyari*-men

(play) the large stringed instruments  
and sing. The clapper-priest claps. The  
cupbearer brings one snack loaf  
from outside and gives (it) to the king.  
The king breaks (it) and takes a bite.  
The palace functionaries take the nap-  
kins from the king and queen. The  
crouching (cupbearer) enters. The king and  
queen, while standing, toast the (divin-  
ized) Day. The jester speaks; the clapper  
claps; the *kita*-man cries “*aha!*”<sup>45</sup>

In the rite described in this passage, which is quite typical for the festivals, the duties of the royal couple are rather simple. The more technical aspects of worship were the preserve of religious professionals.

The Hittite scribes employed the Sumerogram SISKUR/SÍSKUR, “ritual,” as a label for *rites de passage*, including those concerned with birth, puberty, and death,<sup>46</sup> as well as for ceremonies that were performed only as the need arose—for exigencies such as illness, impotence, miscarriage, or familial strife. These lamentable conditions were held to result from the influence of sorcery or black magic (*alwanzatar*), and/or from infection with *papratar*, “impurity.” The immediate goal of treatment was to remove these malign influences, a task largely to be accomplished through the use of analogic magic, which almost always featured a spoken incantation.<sup>47</sup>

Typical in structure, if unusually colorful in its imagery, is this magical speech from a ritual addressed to deities of the underworld: “As a ram mounts a ewe and she becomes pregnant, so let this (polluted) city and house become a ram, and let it mount the Dark Earth in the steppe! And let the Dark Earth become pregnant with the blood, impurity (*papratar*), and sin!”<sup>48</sup>

It is interesting to observe that women were particularly prominent among magicians,<sup>49</sup> despite their subordinate role among the college of cultic experts in the temples. This is probably due to the special occult knowledge that, as in many other cultures, females were thought to acquire in the

process of giving and assisting at birth. One of the most common titles borne by these female practitioners was “the one of birth” (*hašauwaš*), often represented by the Sumerogram <sup>MUNUS</sup>ŠU.GI, “old woman.”

Many of the descriptions of magical rituals found at Hattuša were collected from practitioners resident in various towns throughout the Hittite realm, apparently to make their recommended procedures available to magic specialists attending the royal family, should one of its members suffer from any of the relevant problems. This body of folk remedies gathered from all over Hatti affords a rare window onto the beliefs and practices of the common people of Anatolia.

The birth of each person was overseen by a group of Mother-goddesses (DINGIR.MAḪ.MEŠ/ḪI.A) and Fate Deities (*Gulšeš*). One of the latter seemingly accompanied the individual throughout life as a kind of guardian angel. The relationship of this protector to a man or woman’s Protective Deity (<sup>d</sup>LAMMA) remains obscure.

The existence of a son or daughter of Hatti did not end with death. Rather, he or she passed to an underworld, about which, regrettably, we are very poorly informed. We do learn, however, that in this Anatolian Sheol or Hades even close relatives failed to recognize one another, and that their daily fare was mud and dirty water.<sup>50</sup> Despite their pitiful lot, the spirits of the dead (*akkant-*, GIDIM; sometimes personalized as the deity Zawalli<sup>51</sup>) could nonetheless intervene for good—but more frequently for ill—in the business of their living descendants.

However, as indicated by the euphemism “to become a god,” the king and his closest relatives were thought to enjoy a more pleasant afterlife. A passage from a royal funerary ritual indicates that the deceased monarch became the owner of a herd of livestock grazing in a kind of Elysian Fields,<sup>52</sup> perhaps a fond reminiscence of a simpler lifestyle practiced by his forebears before Indo-European groups migrated into the orbit of the civilizations of the ancient

Near East. Furthermore, it appears that there was a development in the ideology of kingship during the final decades of the existence of the Hittite state, and that the ruler came to enjoy a certain divine status even during his lifetime.<sup>53</sup>

I turn now to the influence of Mesopotamian culture upon this system of belief, which we have already observed in the areas of divination and of the creation of humankind. As mentioned at the outset, most of our knowledge of Hittite religion is based upon documents from the archives compiled by the scribes of the royal bureaucracy. Because this material is encoded in a writing system originally invented for a foreign language—the Sumerian of southern Mesopotamia—and furthermore a system that makes frequent use of ideograms, or word-signs, to designate deities, it was inevitable that Hittite religion be, to some extent, influenced by that of Mesopotamia, and perhaps also by that of northern Syria, the area from which the Anatolians most directly imported cuneiform and its culture.

In particular, the question I will now focus upon concerns a single ideogram, <sup>d</sup>UTU, employed by the Hittite scribes to designate the Mesopotamian Sun-god Šamaš in Akkadian-language texts borrowed from the south and their own solar deity in those documents composed in the Hittite chancellery, in both the Hittite and Akkadian languages. To what extent were the characteristics and cosmic responsibilities associated with the former transferred to the latter (fig. 4)?<sup>54</sup>

There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of attestations of the expression <sup>d</sup>UTU, with or without phonetic complementation,<sup>55</sup> in Hittite-language documents from Hattuša. Identifying the deity intended in a particular occurrence is largely a matter of assigning the text to the appropriate cultural stratum within the composite culture of Hatti and then attaching the name by which the Sun was known within that group: Eštan in Hattic, Ištanu in Hittite,

Tiwat in Luwian, Tiyat in Palaic, Šimegi in Hurrian, or Šamaš in Akkadian.

In one respect, our problem is simpler in regard to this divinity than for other gods and goddesses customarily written ideographically. We have no evidence in any cuneiform source for the existence of more than one Sun. That is, a single orb illuminates the entire world, however differently various peoples might refer to him or her.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, we may confidently assume that the relationship among all of the various solar deities is one of syncretism. In contrast, for instance, the terms <sup>d</sup>IŠKUR<sup>URU</sup> *Ziplanta*, <sup>d</sup>IŠKUR<sup>URU</sup> *Kuliwišna*, and <sup>d</sup>IŠKUR<sup>URU</sup> *Halpa* might conceivably be variant designations employed in different towns for the same Storm-god; it is also possible that to the Hittites they indicated either completely separate deities<sup>57</sup> or perhaps avatars of an archetype, like the Virgins of neighboring villages in contemporary rural France and Spain.

Let us now take a look at the identities assigned to the solar deity by the constituent strands of the culture of Ḫatti. The Eštan worshipped by the indigenous Hattic people was female,<sup>58</sup> as demonstrated by her epithet *kattaḫ*, “queen.” She might also be referred to by the Hattic epithet *Wurunšemu*, apparently meaning “Mother of the Earth,” or, after her primary cult site—she was the Sun-goddess of the city of Arinna—<sup>d</sup>UTU<sup>URU</sup> *Arinna*,<sup>59</sup> or as Arinnitti (she of Arinna).

Eštan, who appears in the Hittite pantheon as Ištu (also spelled Aštu and Eštu), indeed possessed celestial features, being called, for example, “the torch of the land of Ḫatti,” and quite possibly already represented by the “solar standards” excavated at pre-Hittite Alaca Höyük.<sup>60</sup> But she was most often associated with the Netherworld, in which capacity she also bore the title “Sun-goddess of the Earth.”<sup>61</sup> How are we to understand this wide range of activity? Quite simply, this deity, like the Mesopotamian Šamaš, daily executed a vast circuit, passing from east to west through the sky during daylight hours, and crossing back eastward beneath the earth during the

night in order to begin her journey anew the following morning.<sup>62</sup>

Already during the Old Kingdom, the Sun-goddess was provided with a male counterpart—or perhaps better, a manifestation, also named Ištu,<sup>63</sup> who assumed the celestial duties, leaving the chthonic responsibilities to his feminine counterpart. For purposes of disambiguation, the male figure could be referred to more fully as the “Sun-deity of Heaven” or “of Ḫatti.” In the religion of the Hittite Empire, these aspects of a single divinity with an alternate gender could sometimes appear as separate, individual, entities in offering lists<sup>64</sup> and incantations. For example, note the Luwian speech: “If he or she (a sufferer) is alive, let the Sun-god (<sup>d</sup>UTU-*za*) above deliver him or her. If he or she is dead, let the Sun-goddess of the Earth (*tiyammaššiš* <sup>d</sup>UTU-*za*) deliver him or her—the accursed person afflicted by a (broken) oath!”<sup>65</sup>

As in other aspects of the religious life of Ḫatti, it is difficult to recognize inherited Indo-European features in Hittite religious conceptions concerning the sun. Beyond the conceptualization of the sun’s

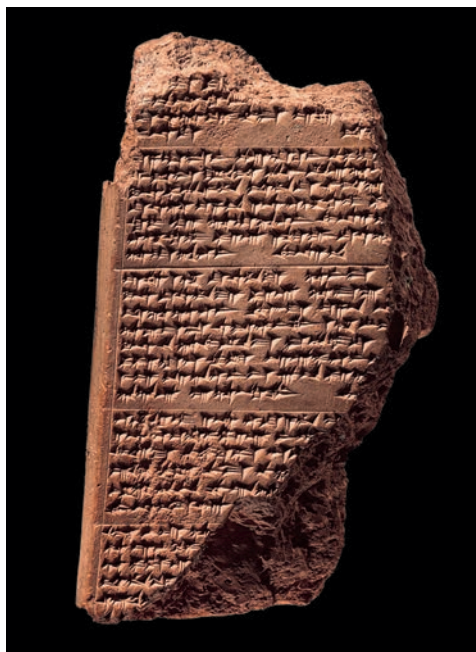


Fig. 4. Fragmentary cuneiform tablet of epic of Gilgamesh inscribed in Akkadian by a Hittite scribe. Ḫattuša. Hittite Empire period. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin VAT12890



passage across the heavens as taking place in a horse-drawn chariot, an idea to which I will return, almost nothing of Ištānu's character must be attributed to the Indo-European heritage.<sup>66</sup> Very little is known about the solar deities of the two other Indo-European-speaking groups in Ḫatti, Tiyat of the Palaeans or Tiwat of the Luwians. Note only that the root from which their names derive (*\*diēu-*) appears in Hittite as the base of the common words for “deity” (*šū(na-)*) and “day” (*šiwatt-*).<sup>67</sup>

The Hurrian Sun-god, Šimegi, cannot (yet?) be distinguished sufficiently from the Mesopotamian Sun-god (fig. 5), so we turn now to Utu of Sumer, more familiar to the Hittites as Šamaš of Babylonia, Assyria, and



Fig. 5. Rock relief depicting the Hittite king Tudḫaliya IV. His religious regalia is identical to that worn by the Sun-god as depicted in the same sanctuary. The king carries his name and titles written in the Luwian hieroglyphic script. Yazılıkaya. Hittite Empire period

inland Syria.<sup>68</sup> This Šamaš, a male deity, was immanent in the fiery ball of the sun, casting his life-giving rays over the entirety of the earth. He emerged in the morning from the heavenly gate in the eastern mountains and retired through the westerly gate in the Cedar Forest every evening, thence passing eastward through the nether sky (AN.ŠAG<sub>4</sub>) situated “above” the Underworld.<sup>69</sup> In the course of his orbit, witnessing everything and every action on the earth and in the Netherworld, Šamaš served as the guardian of justice, as well as the convener and chief judge of the divine assembly. Because he was equally present in the upper and lower realms, Šamaš also functioned as the primary conduit between the living and the dead and as the guarantor of food and libations for the shades.

His place in the Mesopotamian universe is already stated succinctly in the Sumerian poem *Enki and the World Order*, composed in the late third millennium B.C., where, of course, he bears his earlier name, Sumerian Utu:

Young man Utu, . . . father of the Great City (i.e., the realm of the dead)—the place from which the days come out—great herald of the pure sky, judge (in charge) of the decisions of the gods, the one wearing a lapis-lazuli beard, who rises from the horizon into the pure sky, Utu, son born of (the goddess) Ningal—Enki (king of the gods) has indeed placed you in charge of the entire heaven and earth.<sup>70</sup>

Having completed a review of the solar deities familiar in Ḫatti, we may now turn to the nature and function of Ištānu within the composite culture we know as Hittite. These characteristics are most conveniently on view in a series of Hittite-language prayers directed to the sun, the prototype for which may originally have been composed as early as the Old Hittite period.<sup>71</sup> I now present my translation of the hymnic prologue to these prayers, as reconstructed from the several variant texts.<sup>72</sup> This

composition, which we may call “The Great Solar Hymn,” is spoken by a priest on behalf of a client, referred to here as “so-and-so”:

O Sun-god, my lord, just lord of judgment; o king of heaven and earth. It is you who rule the lands, you alone who bestow mastery. You alone are just; you alone have mercy. Only you respond to evocations. You are the merciful Sun-god, and you (indeed) have mercy. O Sun-god, fully grown son of (the goddess) Ningal, your beard is of lapis-lazuli. So-and-so, your servant, has now prostrated himself before you and is speaking to you.

Within the circumference of heaven and earth you alone, o Sun-god, are the source of illumination. O Sun-god, mighty king, son of Ningal, it is you who establish custom and regulation for the people. Ultimate authority has been granted to you alone. You are the just lord of rule. You are the father and mother of every land.

O Sun-god, great king, your father (divine) Enlil has placed the lands and the four corners (of the universe) in your hand alone. You are the lord of judgment, tireless in the place of judgment. Among the ancient gods you are the mighty Sun-god. It is you who prepare the offerings of the gods. It is you who allot the portions of the ancient gods (in the Netherworld). The door of heaven is opened only for you, o Sun-god, and only you, venerated Sun-god, pass through heaven’s gate.

The gods of heaven are bowed down to you alone; the gods of earth are bowed down to you alone. Whatever you say, o Sun-god, in return the gods prostrate themselves only to you. O Sun-god, you are the father and mother of the oppressed and orphaned person. You alone, o Sun-god, exact retribution for the orphaned and oppressed person.

When at dawn the sun rises in the heavens, it is your illumination, o Sun-god, that reaches all the upper and lower lands. You judge the case of the dog and the pig. And the case of the wild beasts who cannot speak with their mouths—that too you judge. You alone judge the case of the evil and malicious person. The person with whom the gods are angry and whom they neglect—you care for him and have mercy on him. O Sun-god, sustain this mortal, your servant, so that he might begin to offer bread and beer to the Sun-god regularly. O Sun-god, take him, your just servant, by the hand.

And the mortal has hereby poured out barley to the team of four that you, o Sun-god, have harnessed. May your Four eat! And while the Four eat the barley, I bless you, o Sun-god! So-and-so, your servant, is now speaking about a matter with you, and he is listening to your words. O Sun-god, mighty king, you go out among the four corners (of the universe). At your right run the Fears, at your left run the Terrors.

[. . . *Three unintelligible lines*] Your vizier (divine) Bunene walks on your right. Your vizier [(divine) Mēšaru (“Justice”)] walks on your left. And you go across the sky, o Sun-god.

And above, [you make an allotment] to the gods of heaven; below, on the Dark Earth, you make an allotment to the ancient gods. But below, [you make an allotment] to the ancient gods of the [Dark] Earth. . . . [So-and-so, your servant, has] now [prostrated himself] before you. O Sun-god, [. . .] him. [Whichever] frightful god [. . .], that deity has turned his gaze aside and does not allow the mortal to act. Whether that deity is in heaven or on the earth, you, o Sun-god, accompany him.<sup>73</sup>

The Mesopotamian features in this Hittite hymn are striking—from the deity’s

parentage, concern with justice, and daily path through the celestial realm to his beard of lapis lazuli. A perusal of preserved Akkadian and Sumerian compositions from Syria and Mesopotamia addressing the Sun-god yields no direct forerunner for this hymn. However, the Boğazköy archives do contain several imported texts concerned with Šamaš that present similar material: an Akkadian-language hymn to this god with a partial duplicate from Ashur, a Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual hymn also found at the Assyrian sites of Nineveh and Sultantepe, and a list of the viziers of Šamaš, duplicated in a tablet recovered in Babylonia.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, we may note several elements foreign to the Mesopotamian tradition, including Šamaš's solicitude for the legal cases of swine and canines, a concern also mentioned in another Hittite royal prayer, and the Sun-god's quadriga. The origins of this vehicle remain uncertain. The Greek Helios also traveled in a horse-drawn chariot, but there is no reason to believe that this conception of solar movement was exclusively Indo-European, and the idea might just as well have been transmitted in the opposite direction, from the Near East to Hellas. Indeed, the earliest datable depictions of a deity aboard a chariot—in this case the Semitic Storm-god Adad—are found on seals from the Sargonic period of the twenty-fourth century B.C.<sup>75</sup>

In any event, the truly significant point here is that this thoroughly Mesopotamian-inspired hymn served as an introduction to a number of prayers directed by Hittite notables to their own solar deity. That is, these borrowed ideas were not employed, say, in a literary exercise of the scribal school, but rather found their way into instruments of actual Hittite religious practice. Ištanu would not have responded favorably to a plea prefixed with praise irrelevant to his person and activities. Thus, we may conclude that, at least for the elite of Hatti, the importation of Mesopotamian cuneiform writing and culture brought with it real consequences for their spiritual and intellectual life. *Ex Oriente lux!*

Abbreviations employed here for the publications of cuneiform texts are:

CTH: Laroche 1971

KAR: Ebeling 1915–23

KUB: *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi* 1921–90

OECT: *Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts* 1923–30

1. For a convenient introduction to the recent state of the excavations, see Seeher 2002.
2. For cuneiform tablets found at Maşat Höyük, see T. Özgüç 1980; Alp 1991; at Kuşaklı, see Wilhelm 1997; A. Müller-Karpe 2009; at Ortaköy, see Süel 2008; at Kayalıpınar, see A. Müller-Karpe and V. Müller-Karpe 2009.
3. For an overview, see Haas 2006; for hymns and prayers, see Singer 2002; for ceremonial programs for the state cult, see Beckman 2005; for magical rituals, see Beckman 1999b; for myths, see Hoffner 1998a; for divinatory protocols, see Haas 2008; for contents of shrines and storehouses, see Koşak 1982; for letters, see Hoffner 2009.
4. Neve 1992.
5. Güterbock 1975; Neve 1975.
6. Klengel 1975.
7. See in general Bittel 1976a; van Loon 1985; Beckman 2004b; for images of deities and cult objects, see Güterbock 1983; for glyptics, see Beran 1967; Herboldt 2005; for sculpture, see Kohlmeyer 1983; Ehringhaus 2005; for ceramics, see Boehmer 1983.
8. For indigenous religious features, see Klinger 1996; on the question of Indo-European relics in Hittite mythology, see Watkins 1995; for elements of Luwian religion, see Hutter 2003.
9. For Semitic influences, see Hoffner 1992; for Hurrian features, see Hoffner 1998b; Trémouille 1999.
10. For the DINGIR-sign before the names of demons, see Carruba 1966; for sacred natural places, see Lombardi 2000; for areas within temples, see Popko 1978.
11. Bittel 1975; Alexander 1986.
12. Hutter 1993.
13. Given the inherent value of the materials from which such statues were constructed, it is extremely unlikely that any will in fact have survived the ravages of conquest and time to be discovered by contemporary archaeologists.
14. For a full translation of this text (CTH 481), see Beckman 2010b, pp. 80–85. Note that the Hittite language does not differentiate between masculine and feminine genders.
15. KUB 38.1 iv 1–7 (CTH 501). For a collection of such texts, see Hazenbos 2003.
16. Beckman forthcoming a.
17. Walker and Dick 2001.
18. For more detail, see Beckman 2003–5b.
19. Klengel 1965.
20. Karasu 2003.
21. For a full listing, see van Gessel 1998.
22. McMahon 1991.



23. Wilhelm 2002.
24. *KUB* 21.27 i 3–6 (CTH 384).
25. Beckman 1982b.
26. Otten 1988a, pp. 24–27, iii 78–iv 15 (CTH 81).
27. Otten and Siegelová 1970.
28. Beckman 1982a.
29. *KUB* 24.3 ii 4'–17' (CTH 376).
30. *KUB* 24.2 rev. 12'–16' (CTH 377).
31. Otten 1981.
32. CTH 81, combined text iv 16–19.
33. Beckman 1995; Beckman 2002.
34. *KUB* 29.1 i 17–19 (CTH 414).
35. *KUB* 14.10 iv 9–13 and duplicates (CTH 378).
36. For contact through a dream, see Mouton 2006; Beckman 2010a; for unusual behavior of sheep as a portent, see Hoffner 1993.
37. Haas 2008.
38. For divination by extispicy, see Schuol 1994a; Schuol 1994b; by bird behavior, see Archi 1975; by incubation, see Mouton 2004; by “lot” oracle, see Orlamünde 2001; Beal 2002.
39. *KUB* 22.70 i 7–11 (CTH 566). Since the diviner had stipulated that an “unfavorable” response would constitute a “yes” to his query, his supposition as to the cause of the deity’s displeasure was thus confirmed. But was there anything else on the god’s mind? . . .
40. Güterbock 1970.
41. Beckman 2003–5a; Beckman 2004a.
42. For singers and dancers, see de Martino 1995; for jesters, see de Martino 1984; for athletic competitions, see C. Carter 1988.
43. de Martino 2004.
44. Collins 1995.
45. *KUB* 25.6 iv 5–24 (CTH 592).
46. For *rites de passage* concerned with birth, see Beckman 1983; with puberty, see Güterbock 1969; with death, see Otten 1958; Kassian, Korolëv, and Sidel'tsev 2002.
47. Beckman 1999b.
48. *KUB* 41.8 iv 29–32 (CTH 446).
49. Beckman 1993.
50. Hoffner 1988.
51. Archi 1979.
52. Kassian, Korolëv, and Sidel'tsev 2002, pp. 382–85.
53. van den Hout 1995.
54. For further details, see Beckman forthcoming b.
55. <sup>d</sup>UTU(-uš/un/i/e); van Gessel 1998, pp. 844–99.
56. See Kutter 2008.
57. Indeed, this term seems on occasion to be used by Hittite scribes to indicate any male deity whose precise character is unknown to them.
58. Klinger 1996, pp. 141–47.
59. For the female deity as Wurunšemu, see *ibid.*, pp. 145–46; cf. Soysal 2004, p. 325; as sun goddess of Arinna, see Yoshida 1992, p. 150.
60. *KUB* 21.19 i 4 (CTH 383); illustrated in Bittel 1976a, pls. 23, 24. Note in this connection *KUB* 38.37 iii 13–14 (CTH 295), which reads, “Thus says Zuwa: ‘The Sun-goddess of Arinna of our grandfather is a solar disk of gold.’”
61. *taknaš* <sup>d</sup>UTU. In this role she would later be identified with the Hurrian Allani.
62. For Šamaš’s transit, see Polonsky 2002; it is uncertain whether this idea ultimately originated in Mesopotamia. For Eštan’s crossing, see Heimpel 1986.
63. See Klinger 1996, p. 143. The male solar deity is first attested in the Akkadian version of the Annals of Ḫattušili I (CTH 4); see Houwink ten Cate 1987, p. 15. Note that where the Akkadian version of the text mentions the male Sun-god, the Hittite-language rendering is <sup>d</sup>UTU <sup>URU</sup>Arinna.
64. On the twelfth day of the *šalliš waštaiš* ritual, offerings are made to both <sup>d</sup>UTU and *taknaš* <sup>d</sup>UTU-uš. See Kassian, Korolëv, and Sidel'tsev 2002, pp. 476–77.
65. *KUB* 35.45 ii 25–27 (CTH 760); Starke 1985, p. 153.
66. See West 2007, pp. 194–217, for the common features of the Indo-European solar deity.
67. Kloekhorst 2008, pp. 763–64, 766–67.
68. See Trémouille 2000, p. 124. At Ugarit, the solar deity *Špš* was female.
69. Heimpel 1986; Steinkeller 2005.
70. Lines 374–79; translated by Steinkeller 2005, p. 18, n. 17.
71. Güterbock 1978, pp. 138–39.
72. CTH 372–74; see Güterbock 1958; Güterbock 1978; Güterbock 1980.
73. For a full translation, see Beckman 2009, pp. 245–49.
74. For the Akkadian hymn, see CTH 792; cf. *KAR* 1.19; for the Sumerian-Akkadian hymn (CTH 794), see J. Cooper 1972; on the viziers of Šamaš and Babylonian duplicate (CTH 793), cf. *OECT* 6, pp. 51ff.; see also Richter 1999, p. 297.
75. For Šamaš’s concern for swine and canines, see *KUB* 6.45 iii 15–16 (CTH 381); Singer 1996, pp. 20, 39; perhaps this topos is simply an elaboration of the deity’s concern for beasts in general. For Helios, see Pfister 2002, p. 30; for this conception of solar movement, see West 2007, pp. 210–11; for the earliest datable depictions of a deity aboard a chariot, see Mellink 1966, p. 83.

# From Pictograph to Pictogram: The Solarization of Kingship in Syro- Anatolia and Assyria

Recent research in the history and culture of the ancient Near East has stressed the fact that the peer polities Egypt, Hatti, Mitanni, Assyria, and Babylonia, which Mario Liverani has called the “Club of the Great Powers,”<sup>1</sup> stood out for their strong political, economic, and cultural interconnectivity. In the field of art history, scholars such as Marian Feldman have refined the investigation of intercultural contact as expressed in the visual arts. Instead of tracing the origin of particular motifs she advocates bringing the concept of hybridity to the study of the decorative style that characterizes the luxury goods exchanged among the political elites of the peer polities of the second half of the second millennium B.C. Thus she suggests a sociocultural notion of an international visual culture in which single constituents are no longer traceable to specific traditions.<sup>2</sup> Ann Gunter has given new prominence to the roles of prestige and status in the construction of elite identities and long-distance interaction, with a focus on the role of consumption in cross-cultural encounters. Rather than examining correlations among ethnic/national boundaries, artifact style, and cultural identity, she argues for the primacy of organized status- and

cult-related acquisitions and emulation. In so doing, she has discovered multiple networks independent of trade routes and determined that the Assyrian empire was the engine driving the emulation of styles even beyond its boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

Marc Van De Mieroop likewise states the importance of realizing “that the elites of the region shared a lifestyle transcending political borders which distinguished them probably more from their own countrymen than from their counterparts elsewhere.”<sup>4</sup> While I certainly can subscribe to the idea of a shared ideology and political lifestyle, as well as a shared artistic idiom, I would still challenge the general notion of a “hybridized expression of generalized kingship” as posited by Feldman.<sup>5</sup> Rather I would like to distinguish between an artistic decorative style expressed in a shared iconographic idiom typical of the luxury goods that were exchanged between the political elites and the specific cultural idiom expressing their individual notions of kingship. I would like to demonstrate that, while the constitutive parts of a given discourse, whether textual or iconographic, may belong to a shared intercultural repertoire of cultural signifiers, the programmatic message of a particular royal ideology remains indebted to its cultural space and time.

In my approach I adopt David Morgan’s definition of visual culture: “the images and objects that deploy particular ways of seeing and therefore contribute to the social, intellectual, and perceptual construction of reality.”<sup>6</sup> The subject of my inquiry is the solarization of kingship, human and divine, as it is reflected in Hittite, northern Syrian, and Assyrian visual and textual discourse. It is not my intention to review all that has been written on the winged disk as an isolated iconographic motif—the evidence of which can be traced from Egypt through the Levant and into Anatolia, as well as into northern Syria and Assyria<sup>7</sup>—but rather to demonstrate that its full meaning as a signifier for kingship can only be grasped if we read it in combination with other iconographic coordinates, with which it forms a

pictogram or pictograph signaling the aspect of solarization. Such pictograms developed against the backdrop of the internationalism that characterized the beginning of the second millennium B.C. and that culminated in the “Club of the Great Powers,” which would dominate ancient Near Eastern politics in the second half of the second millennium B.C. The Assyrians were latecomers to this political scene and, in their ideological representations, were indebted to the Suro-Hittite tradition. With the expansion of Assyria first into a territorial and later into an imperial state, the Assyrians initially emulated this tradition, then transformed it into a new concept: ambitious to enter the international scene, they had to redefine simultaneously the images of the divine and the earthly king. The Ninurta theology in Mesopotamia, revolving around the divine type of the warrior god, played a decisive role in shaping the warrior aspect of the supreme deities Marduk in Babylonia and Ashur in Assyria, and of the Assyrian king.<sup>8</sup> The warrior aspect, however, represents only one facet; it did not suffice to express the expansionist ambitions of either the Hittite or the Assyrian kings, and it was at this juncture that the aspect of solarization began to gain momentum.

As the monarchical system had predominated since the end of the third millennium B.C., the roots of this imperialistic discourse had already emerged at those moments when city-states were striving for hegemony over other city-states.<sup>9</sup> While the ruling elites in the south tended to translate such political achievements into a cosmotopographic discourse reflecting the geographic expanse of the controlled territory, those in the north used the image of the sun to equate supraregional with universal control. The earliest known example of the southern discourse is attested in the inscription of Lugalzagesi, king of Umma, celebrating his conquest of Uruk and other city-states. Lugalzagesi employed two tropes, “from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea” and “from Sunrise to Sunset” to invoke the

geographic extent of his political control in all four directions.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to this southern discourse, the post-Akkadian Hurrian king of the land of Nagar (modern Tell Brak in northern Syria), chose the title “sun (god) of the country of Nagar” for the legend of his impressed seal.<sup>11</sup> What strikes one as particularly interesting—beyond the selection of the sun as a signifier for “universal” control—is that this royal title appears in the legend of a sealing, anticipating a usage that some hundred years later would characterize the aedicule seals of the Hittite kings. The title “sun” for the king, as used by the Hurrian king of Nagar, is, notably, also attested in an Old Assyrian text from Kültepe/Kanesh, where it is used in combination with the name of the “ruler” of Kanesh.<sup>12</sup>

Closest to the textual evidence from Tell Brak and Kanesh is the iconography of the seals from Alalakh VII, which date to the end of the Old Syrian period (ca. 1750 and 1700 B.C.). Several sealings show the king doubled, mirrorlike, so that his image flanks the sacred tree, which is surmounted by an astral symbol, generally the winged sun or the sun and crescent (fig. 1).<sup>13</sup> Two elements of this figurative constellation—the specular duplication of the king and the central pole or tree with an astral symbol—were taken by the Syrian workshops from Egyptian



Fig. 1. Drawing of impression of Old Syrian style cylinder seal. Alalakh, Level VII. Middle Bronze Age. Archaeological Museum, Antakya ATT/31/184



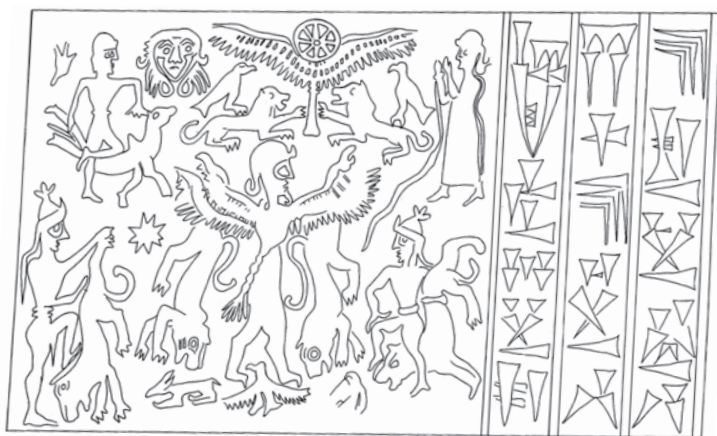


Fig. 2. Drawing of impression of cylinder seal of Saushtatar on tablet from Nuzi. Mitanni period

works of Dynasty 12.<sup>14</sup> In the Egyptian context the two figures represented the pharaoh as king of Upper and Lower Egypt respectively, a repetition itself mirrored in the stylized depictions of papyrus and lotuses, plants with explicitly geographic significance. In Syria and later in Assyria, however, the doubled, mirrorlike figuration of the king, in combination with the winged disk, came to symbolize the universality of royal control. Considered in the broader Egyptian-Levantine-Syrian context, the assumption that the title “sun” was adopted from the Old Babylonian tradition in Mesopotamia seems at least questionable,<sup>15</sup> and one wonders, whether, in this case, intercultural dynamics might not have worked the other way around. Imperialistic implications could be read into Hammurabi’s self-representation as formulated in the prologue to his law stele, where the spreading of light is associated with the subjugation of the four regions: “The pious one, who prays ceaselessly for the great gods, scion of Sumu-la-el, mighty heir of Sin-muballit, eternal seed of royalty, mighty king, solar disk of the city of Babylon, who spreads light over the lands of Sumer and Akkad, king who makes the four regions (*kibrāt arba’im*) obedient, favored of the goddess Ishtar, am I.”<sup>16</sup>

In the fifteenth century B.C., the winged disk appeared in Mitannian cylinder seal iconography,<sup>17</sup> where it is representative of the intersection of politics and religion. Certain compositional configurations in the iconography of the royal seals suggest an ongoing quest for an icon capable of expressing the new concept of kingship, one that reflected the political ambition to compete on the international stage. An artifact of particular interest in this context is the cylinder seal impression of the Mitannian king Saushtatar, which dates to the end of the fifteenth century B.C. (fig. 2). In the upper part, it shows a standard bearing a winged disk and flanked by two lions. To the right stands a protective deity, as we will encounter it several hundred years later in Ashurnasirpal II’s throne relief in Nimrud, then with the king and the protective genius flanking the tree. Below the pictogram of the standard with winged disk, a divine hero smites wild animals, flanked by other deities in combat with wild animals.

Saushtatar’s seal, with its emphasis on the divine battle, ought probably to be read from the bottom up, beginning with the battle and ending with the pictogram that visually encodes the notion of cosmic order, secured by the cultic performance of the king after the battle is over. What is new in this complex iconography is the combination of an icon representing the cosmic order—the standard with the winged sun disk and the king—with a depiction of the preceding cosmic battle. It is notable that, only a few centuries later, Assyrian royal inscriptions would extol the king in assuming the role of the warrior god Ninurta as protagonist of the cosmic battle.<sup>18</sup>

Concomitant with the Mitannian iconographic evidence, the title <sup>D</sup>UTU<sup>ŠT</sup> first appears as a Hittite royal self-designation in the preamble of the treaty between Zidanta of Hatti and Pillija of Kizzuwatna,<sup>19</sup> and then crops up regularly in the documents of Arnuwanda I.<sup>20</sup> Only in the fourteenth century B.C., however, does the winged sun



Fig. 3. Drawings of impressions of royal aedicule seals with inscriptions of Suppiluliuma I on clay plug (*center*) and bullae from Boğazköy. Hittite Empire period

disk make its way into the aedicule seals of the Hittite kings. The title is invariably written as an Akkadogram in the Hittite texts, a reflection of its meaning on the international diplomatic scene.<sup>21</sup> Its visual representation in and adaptation into the state iconography, therefore, must be considered a deliberate action on the part of the king's ideologues.

With his expansion into northwestern Syria, the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I (r. ca. 1344–1322 B.C.) must have felt the need to define a new concept of kingship expressing his new claims to imperial power. The iconography of the Hittite aedicule seals changed decisively during his reign.<sup>22</sup> As a response to the Egyptian cultural tradition, which had already conceptualized a visual representation of the solar aspect of kingship,<sup>23</sup> Suppiluliuma I introduced a pictograph into the royal aedicule seals that combined the Luwian hieroglyphs for the winged disk as signifier for the royal title “sun” and the title “great king,” the latter functioning as two pillars supporting the winged disk (fig. 3). The royal seal depicts

the winged sun disk supported on both sides by the hieroglyph for “king” combined with the volute meaning “great,” each adjacent to the dagger-like sign for Labarna.<sup>24</sup> This specific arrangement of the Luwian signs evokes pictorial scenes representing the Hittite conception of the cosmos. By connecting solarization and the cosmic dimension of kingship, the king's scholars succeeded in blurring the distinction between writing and image in this pictograph,<sup>25</sup> allowing Suppiluliuma I to introduce this image of universal kingship into the royal aedicule seals.<sup>26</sup> Under Tudhaliya IV (r. ca. 1237–1209 B.C.), a contemporary of Tukulti-Ninurta I (r. ca. 1243–1207 B.C.), the cosmic connotation of this pictograph became even more explicit: in the lower register genii now support the pictograph for the name of the king. During that same king's reign, the pictograph was then ingeniously translated into imagery, both on his rock relief at Yazılıkaya and on the monument at the spring at Eflatun Pınar (fig. 4).<sup>27</sup> As suggested by Volkert Haas, the iconographic program of the latter's facade recalls a

passage from an Old Hittite incantation known as “the words of the pebbles,” which was to be recited for the benefit of the king.<sup>28</sup> This incantation refers to two monuments built at the site of a spring, one dedicated to the sun goddess of Arinna and the other to the weather god. The description of the spring of the sun goddess reminds one of Eflatun Pınar: at both sites there are at least two statues of the seated sun goddess set up one on either side of the monument, as well as several statues of felines—also mentioned in the incantation. Although the text dates from the Old Hittite period, implying that similar spring monuments must have existed at the time, it shows that the tradition of such sacred places continued in later periods. The text runs as follows:

The fountain of the Sun (goddess)<sup>29</sup>  
came (bubbled). How is it [made]?  
Above and below it is built of stone,  
cove[red] . . .  
The panthers guard it. Its water [  
flows from the pond. Let the pebbles  
protect the king *labarna!* Let him  
become the iron of the Sun!<sup>30</sup>

The monument at Eflatun Pınar displays three winged disks hovering above the seated figures of the king and queen; together with the genii, the figures, replacing the Luwian hieroglyphs for the king’s titles, now serve as supporting pillars for the winged sun disks. The peculiar configuration of its constituents turns the entire monument into an effective generator of discourse on royal

Fig. 4. Rock relief.  
Eflatun Pınar.  
Hittite Empire  
period





ideology, inviting the viewer to embark on a new reading of familiar signs. It is the broader context of the visual culture concerned with royal ideology, already present in the aedicule seals, that facilitates the reading of the monument. Far from representing a single thing, this monument invited its audience to observe exactly this material transition.<sup>31</sup> Thus, genii are no longer merely genii but act as cosmic pillars for the heavens; the sun is not merely a celestial body, but is active in the engendering of references to political dominion, and the king and the queen are not merely political and cultic figures but act as the principal agents guaranteeing the cosmic and social order as originally designed by the gods. The cross-fertilization of Hittite and Assyrian culture is made explicit in Tudhaliya IV's use of the Assyro-Babylonian title "king of the totality" (*LUGAL KIŠŠATI*) in the cuneiform legend of his seal. This conception of kingship is supported by Ugaritic texts, which use the title "sun, great king" (*špš mlk.rb*) for the Egyptian pharaoh and Hittite king.<sup>32</sup>

A small ivory plaque, part of a cache of ivories found at Megiddo, repeats Tudhaliya IV's atlantid composition but completely changes its imagery (fig. 5).<sup>33</sup> Dated by the excavators and art historians to the thirteenth century B.C., that is, perhaps, the period of Tudhaliya IV, no association with earthly kingship can be detected. Instead, the composition is dominated by two anthropomorphic representations of the sun god with the winged disk hovering above his head, flanked by Janus-headed lion-men, each supporting a wing. Confronted images of the sun god flank a central column composed of the mountain god and Shaushga. Rows of mythological figures, many with raised hands—kneeling and standing bull-men, seated wingless sphinxes with Hathor locks, and winged sphinxes wearing Hittite tiaras with lion heads protruding from their chests—support the two composite representations of the sun god, including the two winged disks.

While the idea of the sun god's universality dominates the composition, the question of whether the programmatic message centers on the sun's generative aspect or its omnipresence probably should not be treated exclusively. What is of central importance is the attraction the original Hittite composition of the pictograph from the aedicule seals had for artisans working in the international arena. The ivory plaque from Megiddo seems to be a product of a Syro-Hittite workshop where the artisans may have had some knowledge of Hittite royal imagery, as evidenced in the aedicule seals and at Eflatun Pınar, but did not intend to reproduce the icon of universal political control. The plaque is a typical example of elite prestige goods emulating elements of royal visual discourse without necessarily re-creating its programmatic message.

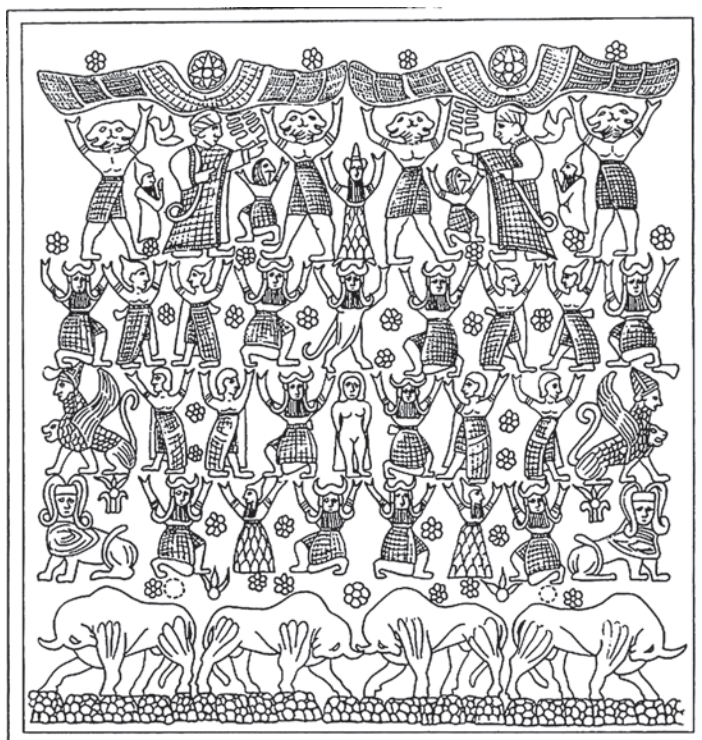


Fig. 5. Drawing of ivory plaque. Megiddo. Late Bronze Age. Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago

The case is substantially different, however, when we come to the Assyrian kings. My suggestion is that the particular composition of the original Hittite pictograph referencing kingship and its aspect of universal control inspired the Assyrians to create their own programmatic expression of kingship, human and divine, in which the ruler as the principal agent of the god Ashur is transformed into one of the essential variables of the pictogram.

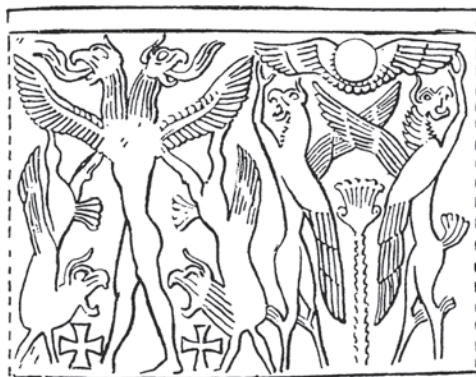
Originally, the god Ashur was a *numen loci* associated with the hilly appearance of the site of Ashur.<sup>34</sup> Only with the city's growth into a city-state and later into a territorial and eventually an imperial state, was he turned into the principal divine agent, who acted on behalf of the Assyrian king. This new image of Ashur emerged with Assyrian imperialism in response to Egyptian and Hittite dominion in the ancient Near East.<sup>35</sup> As we can glean from the Amarna Letters and the Hittite archives, Assyria was a latecomer to the club of international powers and rapidly adopted a military stance to expand its territory. What is more, the Middle Assyrian court very quickly acquired an international character: foreign ambassadors and envoys frequented the royal palace, members of the Mitannian aristocracy were incorporated into the royal administration, and the king took foreign wives and concubines.<sup>36</sup> Military confrontations did not preclude cultural connectivity,

as is apparent in Assyria's reliance upon Mitannian administrative practices with the onset of its imperial ambitions under Adad-nirari I (r. ca. 1307–1274 B.C.).<sup>37</sup>

Peter Machinist has discussed in great detail the Sumero-Babylonian traditions adopted and transformed in the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, a composition of striking literary refinement expressing Assyria's new position at the center of Mesopotamian culture.<sup>38</sup> A further product of this adaptation of Sumero-Babylonian tradition was the redefinition of Ashur as Ashur-Enlil, transferring both divine supremacy (*Ellilūtu*)<sup>39</sup> and the Nippur theology to Ashur. If Tukulti-Ninurta I's epithet "sun (god) of all the people" (*Šamšu kiššat nišī*) was still indebted to Babylonian tradition—Hammurabi uses the title "sun of Babylon" (*šamšu Bābili*) in the prologue of his law stele<sup>40</sup>—the Assyrian ruler's new construct "sun (god) of all the people," with its imperialistic connotations, was aimed also at his northwestern peers on the international scene. In one of his inscriptions, Tukulti-Ninurta I elaborates on his role in the following words: "the one who shepherds the four quarters after Shamash" (*ša kibrāt erbetti arki Šamaš irte'u*).<sup>41</sup> The notion of royal shepherdship by divine selection is a Sumerian one and first appears in a personal name: "Enannatum-is-the-true-shepherd" (En-na-na-tūm-sipa-zi).<sup>42</sup> In Akkadian tradition, "true" (Sumerian *zi*/Akkadian *kīnu*), in the sense of "in accordance with the divine order" and "reliable in social relationships," is linked with "king" (*šarru*), rather than "shepherd" (*rē'u*).<sup>43</sup> The latter function is performed for the people, as is obvious from Hammurabi's epithet "shepherd of the people" (*rē'i nišī*) in his prologue (CH iv 45),<sup>44</sup> which is attested separately before the trope of the sun and its light as a metaphor for dominion over the four regions.

In combining the Babylonian notion of shepherdship with that of control over the universe, Tukulti-Ninurta I created something new by adding an imperialistic element inspired by encounters with Mitannian,

Fig. 6. Drawing of impression of the seal of Eriba-Adad I on tablet from Ashur. Middle Assyrian period



Hittite, and Egyptian traditions.<sup>45</sup> The rise of the Great Powers generated new political ideologies that found their way into diplomatic, ceremonial, and visual channels in all the member states.<sup>46</sup> Creating new imagery to express the might of the king, justifying his inclusion in the club of great powers, represented a new challenge for his ideologues. The result was the new iconography we see not only on the Mitannian and Hittite royal seals, but also on those from Assyria.

The Middle Assyrian king Eriba-Adad I (r. ca. 1390–1364 B.C.) was the first to play with similar motifs on his seal, while relying exclusively on mythological scenes of cosmic battle and cosmic order (fig. 6). His seal shows “two distinct groupings of self-contained, antithetical motifs. In the first a pair of griffin-demons flank a small tree and support above their crossed wings a large winged sun disc. In the second a double-headed griffin-demon holds two griffin-demons by the hind legs.”<sup>47</sup> The first scene, reflecting the imagery of cosmic order, can be read as the positive outcome of the second—the battle scene. Note, however, that the imagery of this period is still restricted

to the mythological realm and does not include the king.

While astral symbols already played a role in the iconographic representation of kingship in southern Mesopotamia,<sup>48</sup> I think that it was more likely Mitannian and Hittite iconography that inspired the Assyrian ideologues to include the winged disk as a new element in the visual representation of Assyrian kingship. They based their choice not only on the metaphorical meaning of the sun disk, but on the compositional character of the Hittite pictograph, which embedded the winged disk in a constellation with other hieroglyphs to create a specific message rather than deploying the disk as the sole iconographic motif. In the Assyrian case, this allowed the anthropomorphic representation of the king to be included.

The anthropomorphizing aspect of the winged disk was a central and new element of the Assyrian visual program. Evidence for the anthropomorphic winged sun disk in Assyria, in combination with the figure of the king, can be found for the first time on the Broken Obelisk of Ashur-bel-kala (r. ca. 1073–1056 B.C.; fig. 7). Two hands are



Fig. 7. Detail of limestone Broken Obelisk. Nineveh. Middle Assyrian period, reign of Ashur-bel-kala. The Trustees of the British Museum BM 118898





Fig. 8. Reconstruction of painted brick orthostat. Ashur. Reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II

depicted reaching toward the king, one in a gesture of greeting, the other holding the bow and the arrow; the latter evokes the king's responsibility to expand the borders of Assyria, as stated in the Middle Assyrian coronation ritual.<sup>49</sup> The anthropomorphic winged disk later occurs in a wall painting in Ashur dating to the period of Tukulti-Ninurta II (r. ca. 890–884 B.C.; fig. 8).

There have been various attempts to identify this figure, and it has been suggested that both the simple and the anthropomorphic winged disks represent the same divine figure, namely, the sun god.<sup>50</sup> While the sun god might appear as a hero (*gardu*) in the royal inscriptions and might be so addressed in hymns, he does not figure as the deity who orders the king to embark on a military campaign, a prerogative held by Ashur (*ina qibīt d'Assur*). It is exactly the communicative aspect between Ashur and the king that I see represented in Assyrian monumental art. Given that the figure in the sun is now depicted as actively engaged in interaction with the king, I would argue that the Assyrians had absorbed the concept of the sun as an icon for universal control and, as such, transferred this identity to the god Ashur.

Only Adad-nirari II (r. ca. 911–891 B.C.) was able to reassert Assyria's might, expanding his dominion into the territories held by the Arameans in northwestern Syria and into the Jezireh and the Nairi lands in the north and clashing with Babylonia in the south. Not until his reign would an Assyrian ruler again fully emulate the concept of the solarization of kingship until then reserved for the god Ashur. As the epithet "sun (god) of all the people" directly follows the epithet "strong king, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters," Adad-nirari II's imperialistic claim for universal control is obvious.<sup>51</sup> Ashurnasirpal II (r. ca. 883–859 B.C.) and his successor, Shalmaneser III (r. ca. 858–824 B.C.), continued to use this epithet in exactly the same context in their annals.

It is, however, only with Ashurnasirpal II that divine and human solarization representing universal kingship was expressed in text and image alike, reserving descriptions in the text for the king and depictions for the god. The royal iconography was completely reconfigured with Ashurnasirpal II's pictorial representations of his conception of universal kingship, depicted in his throne room at Nimrud (fig. 9). While maintaining to a large extent the configurative constellation originally developed by the Hittites and Hurrians, its meaning was now associated more with Ashur's divine kingship than with the human king. The reliefs display the god in the winged disk hovering above the sacred tree, which is flanked by the figure of the king. The solarized Ashur is shown in his radiating brightness, his light permeating—and therefore controlling—everything.

Central to the Assyrian concept is the representation of the god in a posture showing engagement with the Assyrian king; the king, for his part, addresses the god with a gesture of prayer. Note again the depiction of the king not as a warrior but rather in a cultic context—an image that governs all the stelae and rock reliefs set up in the peripheral regions of the Assyrian empire.<sup>52</sup> God and king are thus eternalized in an



Fig. 9. Gypsum alabaster wall relief. Nimrud, Northwest Palace. Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurnasirpal II. The Trustees of the British Museum BM 124531

aspect of intense communication, a visual representation of a concept that drives both Assyrian political and religious pragmatics.<sup>53</sup> The pictogram visualizes the idea of the king acting solely at the command (*ina qibīt*) and with the support of Ashur (*ina tukulti ḏAssur*). The Assyrian king might use the title “sun,” but the pictorial program of Ashurnasirpal II’s throne room in his Northwest Palace in Nimrud, as Irene Winter has also suggested, stresses the king’s role as steward of Ashur, leaving kingship to the god himself.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the central message is that this royal performance only operates and functions through the favor of the god Ashur.

One might argue, then, that it is with Assyria’s imperial expansion toward the end of the second millennium B.C. that the solarization of kingship emerged there. Once established as a signifier for universal control, the sun—visualized in the winged

disk—became a symbol of divine universality assigned to the state god of Assyria. After conquering Babylonia, Tukulti-Ninurta I adopted the epithet “sun (god) of all the people” to express exactly the concept of Assyrian royal ideology, with the king acting as Ashur’s agent to achieve universal control. Following the loss of Assyria’s dominion over Babylonia and other parts of the Assyrian state, the title disappeared, to reemerge with the renewed expansion of the first millennium B.C. By the Neo-Assyrian period, the imperial claim to universal rule was inextricably tied in with the notion of divine universality, finding its climax in Ashurbanipal’s (r. ca. 668–627 B.C.) coronation hymn. The hymn starts its invocation of the gods with the sun god selecting the king “to shepherd the four regions”: “May Šamaš, king of heaven and earth, elevate you to shepherdship over the four [region]s! / May Aššur, who ga[ve y]ou [the

sceptre], lengthen your days and years! / Spread your land wide at your feet!”<sup>55</sup>

The hymn evokes exactly the trope created by Tukulti-Ninurta I, with Ashurbanipal’s invocation of the sun god Shamash inextricably tied in with the claim to universal control. This concept of Assyrian kingship materialized further in the statue “Sun-of-the-Lands” (A[L]AM<sup>1</sup> <sup>d</sup>*šam-šu* KUR.MEŠ), mentioned among the gods of the Ashur temple in a version of the Assyrian banquet ritual *tākultu*,<sup>56</sup> which also dates from the time of Ashurbanipal. Only secondarily does the hymn establish an association with the notion of the king as preserver of justice, that is, taking on the role embodied by the Sumero-Babylonian sun god.<sup>57</sup> The concept of the king as judge was alien to Assyrian royal ideology until the period of the Sargonids.<sup>58</sup> The king did not intervene in legal processes, leaving this role to the governors, the *sukkallu* and the *sartennu*, who exercised justice within the regular framework of the administration.<sup>59</sup> Appeals to the authority of the king (*abat šarri*, “word of the king”) in cases of oppression by members of the administration occurred outside the legal system.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in a highly sophisticated and complex way, Ashurbanipal’s coronation hymn, in solarizing Assyrian rulership, combines the Assyrian and Babylonian concepts of kingship.

What we find in this transcultural royal imagery of the broader ancient Near East is not the attempt to reproduce, first, an Egyptian pictorial concept in a Hittite pictograph and then a Syro-Anatolian figurative discourse in Assyrian iconography.<sup>61</sup> Instead, each culture produced new forms of expression while creatively building on a traditional repertoire common to the international scene of the second millennium B.C.<sup>62</sup> The proof of this is that, in two distinct moments of political expansion and concurrent domestic stability, both the Hittites and the Assyrians, interconnected through the culture of the late Hittite kingdoms,<sup>63</sup> chose a common pictorial program to express an understanding of human and

divine kingship that drew upon similar variables, yet differed significantly in its message. I hope to have demonstrated once more that key metaphors and cultural strategies are not restricted exclusively to either the political or religious discourse, but in the ancient Near East can shift between both.<sup>64</sup>

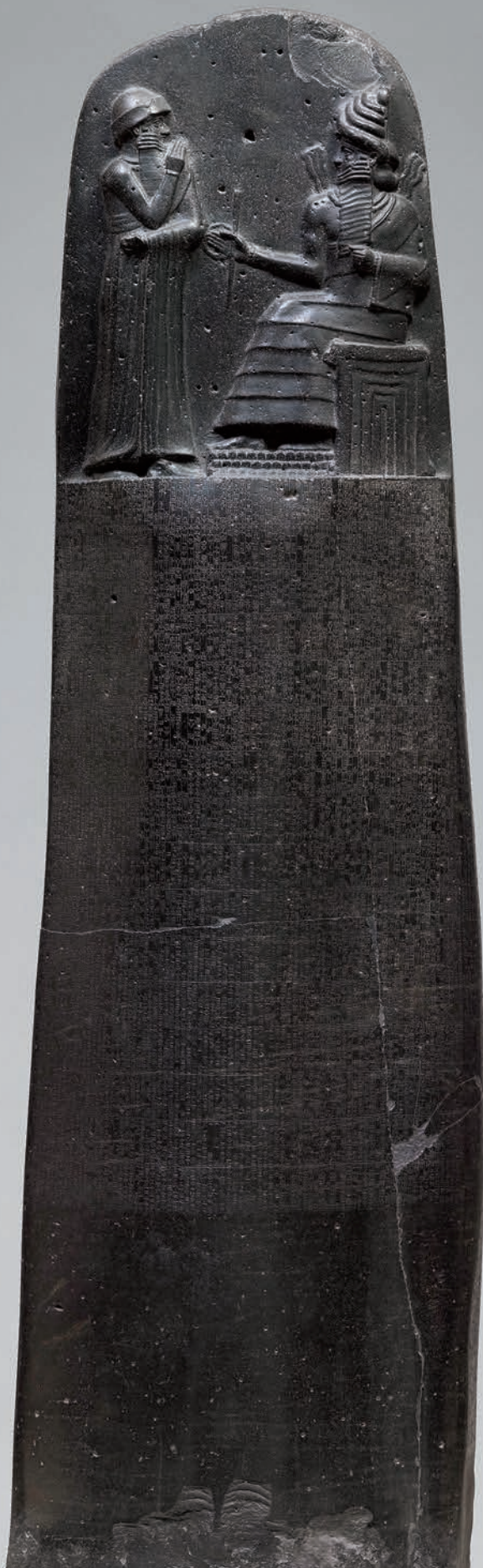
#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been working on the subject of the solarization of kingship since my original lecture at the Scholars’ Day on the occasion of the exhibition “Beyond Babylon.” Since then I have also given a talk at the American Oriental Society meeting in March 2010 in Saint Louis. An earlier version of the present essay was published under the title “Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia.”<sup>65</sup> I thank the editors of this volume for accepting a modified version of an earlier work; further thanks go to Jerrold Cooper and Theo van den Hout, who made most valuable comments in the final stage of this article.

1. Liverani 1990; Liverani 2001.
2. Feldman 2006b. See, however, Fischer 2007b.
3. Gunter 2009, p. 182.
4. Van De Mieroop 2005a, p. 135.
5. Feldman 2006b, p. 13.
6. D. Morgan 2005, p. 27.
7. Opificius 1964; Fauth 1979; Mayer-Opificius 1984; Matthiae 1989; Podella 1996; Kutter 2008; D. L. Stein (2009) proposes that the motifs allude to ritual trance experience.
8. Lambert 1986.
9. As Harvey Whitehouse (2000) stresses, theological and exegetical traditions thrive only in socio-cultural conditions where learning and memory are assisted by written transmission.
10. Luzag. 1, 1:44–2:16 (Steible and Behrens 1982).
11. Matthews and Eidem 1993; Eidem, Finkel, and Bonechi 2001.
12. Balkan 1957, p. 60 n. 98; Fauth 1979, p. 233: *ina* <sup>U</sup>UTU<sup>SI</sup> *ru-ba-um Wa-ás-ḥa-na-i-um i-na sí-kà-tí-im i-tù-ra-ni*.
13. See Matthiae 1989, pl. II, 3–5. In one case the tree is replaced by a frontal representation of a naked goddess with a skip rope.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
15. Beckman 1995, p. 532; Beckman 2002.
16. CH v 4 (Roth 1997, p. 80).



17. See bibliographies in note 7 above.
18. Maul 1991.
19. Otten 1951.
20. Carruba 1974.
21. Beckman 2002.
22. For a tentative origin of Hittite digraphic aedicule royal seals in the period of Tudhaliya I, in which the center is written in Luwian hieroglyphic signs while the outer circle(s) is/are written in Hittite cuneiform, see Hawkins 2008.
23. Bonatz 2000, p. 102.
24. Laroche 1960, no. 277; Güterbock 1940–42, nos. 165–67.
25. Morenz 2004.
26. It is interesting that at the same time Luwian appears as a language in the monumental inscriptions; see Hawkins 2000, p. 3, n. 17, p. 38; Melchert 2004, p. 576.
27. Börker-Klähn 1993, p. 353; Haas 2002. The relationship between the iconography of the Hittite royal aedicule seals and that of the monumental art is not an isolated case; see Hawkins 2003.
28. Haas 2002.
29. Haas (*ibid.*) here takes the solar reference to be to the sun goddess, while Kellerman (1978) assumes this is the male variant of the Sun. I would like to thank Gary Beckman for the latter reference.
30. Kellerman 1978, p. 202.
31. For this reading of the monument I have been inspired by the new approach presented by the contributions assembled in Daston 2004, and particularly by Koerner 2004. I would like to thank Caroline Walker Bynum for drawing my attention to this book.
32. Fauth 1979, with reference to RS 16.117 = KTU 2.23 and RS 18.38 = KTU 2.39.
33. Alexander 1991.
34. Lambert 1983.
35. For the case made regarding Egypt, see Pittman 1996; Feldman 2004. On Assyrian expansionism, see Postgate 1992; Machinist 1993; Tadmor 1999.
36. Parpola 2007, p. 259 (with bibliography in n. 7).
37. Von Soden 1952.
38. Machinist 1976.
39. The idea of divine supremacy being reflected in the divine name Enlil is evident in the fact that a number of balag songs addressed to a variety of male deities were listed in a catalogue and were summarized as thirty-nine balags of Enlil (39 balag en-líl-lá-ke<sub>4</sub>) at the end of this text, 4R<sup>2</sup> no. 53+ obv. 42 (Rawlinson, G. Smith, and Pinches 1891).
40. See note 16.
41. Machinist 1976, p. 473; Machinist 2006. On shepherdship as a topos of royal legitimation, see Westenholz 2004; Westenholz 2007.
42. Westenholz 2007, p. 307.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Such an understanding is corroborated by the Old Babylonian Cuthean Legend, in which the king accuses himself as follows: “I am a shepherd who has not cared for his subjects” (*la mušallim niššū*). Finkelstein 1957, p. 85, col. ii, l. 12.
45. For the encounter between the Hittites and the Assyrians under Tukulti-Ninurta I, see Astour 1996. See, however, the critical remarks on the Mitannian forces as auxiliary troops to the Assyrians by Freu 2003, esp. pp. 111–13; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2008, esp. p. 95.
46. Liverani 2001; Feldman 2006b; Gunter 2009.
47. J. M. Evans in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 210–11, no. 124.
48. I. J. Winter 2004; Ataç 2008.
49. Mayer-Opificius 1984, p. 200, figs. 22, 25.
50. Podella 1996, pp. 146ff. (with literature).
51. Grayson 1991, p. 147 (A.o.99.2:10).
52. Shafer 2007.
53. Pongratz-Leisten 1999.
54. I. J. Winter 1983, pp. 26ff.
55. Livingstone 1989, no. 11.
56. Menzel 1981, vol. 2, T 113–125, 114.
57. Pace Arneth 1999.
58. Tadmor 1987.
59. Postgate 1974.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
61. For the notion of transculturation signifying the creation of new symbolic forms that emerge as the product of intercultural contact and interference, see Gilan 2004, p. 20.
62. For a similar argument, see Alessandra Gilibert’s discussion of the Assyrian orthostats (Gilibert 2004). For the complexity in the coexistence of imperial and local traditions, see Masetti-Rouault forthcoming. I would like to express my gratitude to Maria Grazia Masetti-Rouault and Mark Geller for making the article available to me before publication.
63. Hawkins 2002.
64. Pongratz-Leisten 2002.
65. Pongratz-Leisten 2011.



# Closing Remarks



## “Beyond Babylon”: Closing Remarks

I am the last speaker to address you and I am asked to offer a few remarks as our symposium is closing. I cannot presume that you have heard all the presentations of colleagues brought from far and wide, so, rather than commenting on material that you may have missed—which at any rate includes many topics beyond my depth—I am electing to interpret my commission as the other side of keynoting. That is, instead of rehearsing or decorating the subjects that you have heard, I will offer two parting shots. Because introspection in matters that interest us intellectually can be good for the soul, I will first situate this splendid occasion within a tradition of discussions about the past. To do so, I conjure up a fictitious symposium on the second millennium B.C. that could have taken place a century or so ago at the Metropolitan Museum. It was a far smaller space then, though no less distinguished for its pedagogic efforts. This adventure of mine will not be entirely fictional because I have drawn inspiration from the miniaturized pages of the Sears and Roebuck’s American printing of the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, distributed in 1915–16. Any challenge you have about my facts should be taken up with its editors.

### A CENTURY AGO

It is stunning what one century does to a field of study, in terms of discoveries and knowledge, but even more stunning is what a century does to the vision that gives coherence to what is discovered. By 1908

of our uncommon era, there were two, maybe three, foci to our inspection of the ancient Near East: Egypt, Babylon, and the Aegean. By then, the discoveries of Heinrich Schliemann at Mycenae and the Troad were a generation old. Sir Arthur Evans had just found a trove of tablets at Knossos, but their decipherment was nowhere nearing. While these discoveries sharpened our sense of the Aegean as a partner in the construction of a second millennium B.C. Mediterranean civilization, linkages between the two worlds were still haphazard.

By 1908, however, we had known how to read Egyptian and Akkadian for decades. From the monuments and documents recovered in Egypt, including the Amarna tablets, we could be fairly certain about the empire Egypt built in its Dynasty 18. Hugo Winckler had recovered archives at Boğazköy (today’s Boğazkale) in 1906, so we knew where to locate the home of the Hittites, Egypt’s formidable foe, even if it would take another decade to read the texts with any comprehension.

### *Ubiquitous Hebrews*

Lots of attention was also paid to the Canaanites, as much because their home was to be the Promised Land as because they bridged the space between the Hittites and the Egyptians. Ironically, there was then much conviction about them and their culture since, apart from a few political letters they sent the pharaohs, we had almost nothing of their writings. This gave us license to define them from the pages of the Hebrew Bible, where they were painted luridly as foes of decency and of the one true faith.

If the Hebrews are entirely missing from today’s exhibition, they would have been heavily featured in 1908, and their story linked to the mention of Hapirus in the Amarna correspondence. In fact, in those days, there was also general agreement with Josephus that the Hyksos domination a couple of centuries earlier gave the Hebrews a second millennium B.C. presence in Egypt.

Then, as now, the Sea Peoples and the havoc they created conveniently brought the second millennium B.C. to a screeching halt.

#### *Absent Hammurabi*

As we move to the east, in 1908 Hammurabi of Babylon would have escaped a second millennium B.C. focus, because in those days scholars had him living hundreds of years earlier (about 2350 B.C.). In contrast, the merchants of Cappadocian Kanesh had been placed three centuries later (and in some calculations even later), almost within grasp of the Egyptian Dynasty 18. Still, Hammurabi's impact was pervasive, and cultures away from Babylon were judged on whether or not they had absorbed the legal codification that Hammurabi eternalized on a basalt stele that Jacques de Morgan had found in 1901 at Susa (in Khuzestan, Iran) (fig. 1). The literature of the time heavily discussed the Amorites because they

appeared in many documents of the era. Frequently cited was a certain Abi-ramu, whose name readily conjured the presence of the patriarch Ab-ram, just before he morphed into Abraham.<sup>1</sup>

Such a conjunction might seem trivial today, but at the turn of that century, similar tidbits provoked one of the most vitriolic and nakedly anti-Semitic diatribes ever staged in our field. A learned Assyriologist, Friedrich Delitzsch, who died in 1922 on the day of this symposium, forced the issue on whether Babylon—Babel—was a truer intellectual ancestor than Bibel—the Bible. The arguments were mostly specious and often incongruous; nevertheless, armed with misdiagnosed readings of such texts as the Gilgamesh and Babylonian creation epics, Delitzsch's contrast between Babel and Bibel was meant to establish a pedigree for Europeans that leapfrogged any meaningful dependence on Hebraic ideals.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1. The Law Code of Hammurabi, excavated at Susa during the 1901–2 season by the *Délégation Scientifique Française en Perse*

### *Paradigms for History*

Had you attended our convocation of a century ago, your sense of how the past had unfolded might have been controlled by two powerful paradigms. One consciously retrojected a quixotic vision of Semitic hordes periodically spilling out from the heart of Arabia, overwhelming prevailing cultures, and imposing new perceptions: Akkadians, Canaanites, Amorites, Arameans, maybe the Hebrews, certainly the Arab tribes. This paradigm, in fact, was not fully shelved until the documents from third millennium B.C. Ebla made it clear that most ethnic groups mentioned in later records had been there at least from the dawn of history. And as to those entities not yet reported at Ebla, I would not be shocked if they showed up at another contemporaneous site, perhaps at Tell Beydar.

The other paradigm, however, had a more insidious inspiration, as it was modeled on the forceful control Europe then had over most of the globe. In 1908, those of us who lived in the west could be confident that providence was shaping our destiny and that our capacity to dominate was the consequence of natural selection. In the process, we believed ourselves to be custodians of the past, heirs to the best among preceding cultures. We were the benben capstone of a pyramid, with all previous cultures forming its base. Our museums became their shrines, and we treated their remains with such benevolence and reverence that we could not imagine them resenting our hospitality. In displaying the artifacts, curators of those days frequently accentuated a vision that worked well for the west: the triumph of the better-organized over those thought to lack the will to succeed. Just as museums gloried in the “Splendor that was Greece” and the “Power that was Rome,” they found Majesty in Egypt, Wonder in Babylon, Might in Assyria, and Grandeur in Persia. The better collections of those days did not need to import the tools to preach these lessons, as they were stocked with exactly the sort of evidence taken from Assyria and Egypt that would reinforce the conceit.

### “BEYOND BABYLON” TODAY

The difference that a century makes cannot be better illustrated than by the exhibition that has brought us all here today. The two World Wars shattered the conviction that Europe and America were arenas in which manifest destiny could unfold. Administrative control of the world by the west shrank, but it was replaced by global display of economic and cultural influence. As our own second millennium came to an end, a broader appreciation of the nonmilitary achievements of ancient cultures enriched our vision of the past. The accent would be on ethnic integrity, but also on cultural integration. Decipherment gave the Hittites their voice, and with it we accessed their particular take on mythology, law, and historiography. Hurrian culture became more sharply edged, thanks to discoveries at Nuzi, Alalakh, and now also at Urkesh.

While spectacular archaeological discoveries continue to be made yearly in our own days—think of Ebla, Emar, Tell Beydar, and Qatna—it was a string of successes achieved between the two World Wars that invited us to shift our attention from empire building to achievements that were regional and contacts that were international. Ugarit on the Mediterranean fleshed out the Canaanites, who, not surprisingly, turned out to be hardly less (or more) moral than the Hebrews who condemned them. Sailing on ships that could carry twice the tonnage of Columbus’s *Santa Maria*, Canaanite merchants developed commercial, cultural, and artistic bridges by ferrying the kind of cargo recovered from the Uluburun ship. True, the Hebrews risked losing their footprint on the second millennium B.C., but the instinct that the great James Henry Breasted had about the Amarna period toward the end of that period was being vindicated. For him, the age was characterized by internationalism in our sense of the term, a system for interconnection in which nations with appreciable ethnic differences interacted with one another politically, culturally,



economically, maybe even theologically, because none could afford not to.

#### *The Middle Euphrates Valley in the Middle Bronze Age*

It is in our appreciation of the late Middle Bronze Age Euphrates, however, that we have gained the most. Hammurabi became centuries younger than when we met him in 1908, occupying now a slot in the eighteenth century B.C. We may also say that, in all but the public media, new material about him has made Hammurabi lose some of the sheen he had as a great jurist and as an empire maker. In contrast, we also learned much more about the Amorite tribes. Settled over stretches of western Asia, including Mesopotamia, Syria, Canaan, and maybe also Palestine, Amorites were forming an urbanizing society truly international in scope. True, they fought among one another with delight and abandon; but they also shared cultural traits, theological convictions, and maybe even language. This observation brings me back to the exhibition we are all enjoying today and, with it, to the second, and much briefer, parting shot I promised you above.

I estimate that about two thirds of the displays in the “Beyond Babylon” exhibition are devoted to the Late Bronze Age, as well as about the same percentage of pages in the splendid catalogue about it. This is perfectly reasonable, given the luck of the archaeologist’s spade and the incredibly rich material produced by the Egyptian empire and its contemporaneous powers. Yet the very loquacious written records from the first half of the second millennium B.C. display a western Asia with all the hallmarks of the incipient political and cultural internationalism that is now of so much interest to us. If I may focus on the extensive archives recovered from eighteenth century B.C. Mari, you will find there all the necessary elements for a globalized culture.

#### *The Amorites*

Aside from the unity of language, spoken in a variety of dialects, there was also a

koine in taste and expectations among the Amorites, with hordes of artisans, physicians, musicians, diviners, acrobats, cooks, and animal trainers shuttling their expertise to all quarters, either because they were free to do so or because their patrons dispatched them there. Merchants, too, moved about to distribute their wares, during war no less than during peace. True, they could be mercilessly taxed, detained, or even roughed up; yet even the least civilized local ruler recognized the advantages they brought, not least among them the trafficking of captured soldiers. The biggest contributors to these undertakings were rulers. In those days, western Asia was a Serengeti Plain, where predators operated in packs and their preys feared striking out on their own. Many kings had control over their thrones so tenuously that survival meant finding the right sponsor and evading the wrong one.

In these circumstances, everyone relied on a large retinue of diplomats and messengers. A midlevel king such as Zimri-Lim of Mari had an army of fewer than five thousand men; but when he traveled eastward, aside from 140 cup-bearers, he took along 100 delegates (*ša šipirātīm*) and 64 couriers (*lāsimum*), a remarkably large contingent.<sup>3</sup> Such men were charged with carrying messages as well as delivering princesses to prospective vassals or allies. They also circulated the type of gifts that might well have ended up in the display cases of the “Beyond Babylon” exhibition, including textiles, jewelry, statuary, weaponry, luxury vessels, and other compact and transportable artifacts.

#### *Gifts and Commerce*

Interestingly, the motivation behind this exchange was not commerce in our sense, and certainly not greed in their sense; rather, it was a gauge of their own standing among their contemporaries. Egos were easily ruffled when a gift received was deemed of lesser value than one sent. What if others heard about such an unequal exchange, would it not invite

contempt and scorn?<sup>4</sup> Multiply the gift giving to include the families of rulers, their gods, important officials, and envoys, and you will realize how productive protocol could be as an engine for manufacturing goods. In the Mari of Zimri-Lim, a whole army of artisans was kept busy creating such artifacts, often enough, I am sorry to say, melting down or dismembering what had been received in order to create what was to go.

Not surprisingly, this exchange of goods could be used as a weapon, for in our records we often meet with folks with the attitude of aggressive potlatchers. Let us imagine you were one of the minor rulers of the times. One day, the envoy of the neighboring bully might knock at your gate, bringing you a throne or a palanquin with the emblem of his master stamped on it. He might also bring you a ceremonial garment, and a fancy wig. You were expected to sit on that throne in a public setting and wear the robe and the wig, for all to see how much of a flunky you have become to that gracious bully. You would not dare send these gifts back, not only because you know yourself incapable of matching such ostentation, but also because armies would be at your gate, come springtime.

Or perhaps: if a neighbor with interest in land you owned wished to bankrupt you, he would raise the ante by sending you a gift so far beyond your capacity to reciprocate that only by bartering your towns could you raise adequate funds. We have one very sad note from Ibal-Addu of Ashlakka, in which he begs his overlord not to convey presents because failure to respond in kind would bring him dishonor, shame, and soon dethronement as well.<sup>5</sup> He complains that even visiting messengers were

dismissing his gifts as too paltry for honorable acceptance. As you might imagine, his days were numbered.

#### LESSONS

I have told you all this, not just because I needed to allude to my beloved Mari archives; but also to suggest that each generation of scholars draws on its own cultural experiences to form a vision with which to make intelligible the ancient Near Eastern past. The throne I had you accept in abject servitude a couple of paragraphs ago was actually sent by Hammurabi of Babylon to Atamrum of Andariq.<sup>6</sup> Had it been in our possession in 1908, this throne would have made a fine icon for Babylonian empire building and expansion of power.

Today, we might first use mineral analysis to determine the origin of its raw material. We might then study its shape, decoration, and artistry to trace the aesthetic traditions that streamed into its construction and speculate on the trading channels it traversed to reach its destination. However, the intellectual and emotional investments that it demanded, from those who ordered the throne's fabrication to those who in full humiliation felt forced to sit on it, remain largely beyond our grasp, perhaps because such a trajectory has yet to capture our full interest.

We continue to forge new perspectives, urged on by concerns that change with succeeding generations. I have the greatest hope that, a century from now, when we all meet in this very hall, we will look back at the great exhibition of 2008 and recall that, thanks to the effort of Dr. Aruz, her staff, and many other colleagues, we had already begun to frame such subject matters.

1. Among many examples, I cite Sayce 1905, p. 250.
2. A good overview is in Larsen 1995.
3. Text number M.5696, cited in Charpin 2008, p. 243.
4. A classic example is the letter from king Ishkhi-Addu of Qatna, a town well represented in our exhibition, to the brother of his son-in-law, then ruling in Mari; ARM 5:20 (Durand 1997–2000, vol. 1, pp. 403–5, doc. no. 256):

This matter ought not be discussed; yet I must say it now and vent my feelings. You are the great king. When you placed a request with me for 2 horses, I indeed had them conveyed to you. But you, you sent me (just) 20 pounds of tin. Without doubt, when you sent this paltry amount of tin, you had no desire to have honorable discourse with me. Had you planned sending nothing at all—By the god of my father!—I could have been angry!

Among us in Qatna, the value of such horses is 600 shekels [= 10 pounds] of silver. But you sent me just 20 pounds of tin! What would anyone hearing this say? Would he not mock us?

This house is your house. What is lacking in your house that a brother cannot fulfill the need of his equal? Had you not planned to send me any tin, I should not have been in the least upset over it. Are you not the great king? Why have you done this? This house is your house!

5. ARM 28:49 (Kupper 1998, pp. 73–74). Here is the jeremiad in full:

Today, I am famished and do not live in a home. This past year, I strengthened the

fortifications; but due to bad luck, whatever I fortified the torrents carried off. In the future, whenever I meet my lord, there will be no gifts with which to approach my lord. If it suits my lord, he should not give my servant any gifts. Just now, I have had to borrow 2 shekels to give to my lord's messengers. But they did not accept it, saying, "too little."

6. ARM 26:372, ll. 48–57 (Charpin 1988, pp. 179–82). The relevant segment of a letter sent by a Mari diplomat reads as follows:

Atamrum wrote as follows to Hammurabi: "Shu-Eshtar and Marduk-Mushallim, servants of my 'father' (Hammurabi), arrived here and brought to me my father's message. I was very attentive to what my father wrote to me. I was very pleased when I saw what my father conveyed to me through these messengers: garments, a formal garb, a wig, a throne, and (other objects). I put on the garments and the garb, I sat on the throne that my father sent me, and I am praying continuously for my father. About the tablet with terms of the oath that my father sent me: no additional gods or terms are necessary. And I do not *desire* to add any more gods or words. On this tablet this is what is now stipulated: 'Be hostile to my enemy be at peace with my allies.'"

Hammurabi sent another vassal, Asqur-Addu of Karana, a throne, garments, a formal garb, and a curved sword. The last was held only on ceremonial occasions, often by deities.





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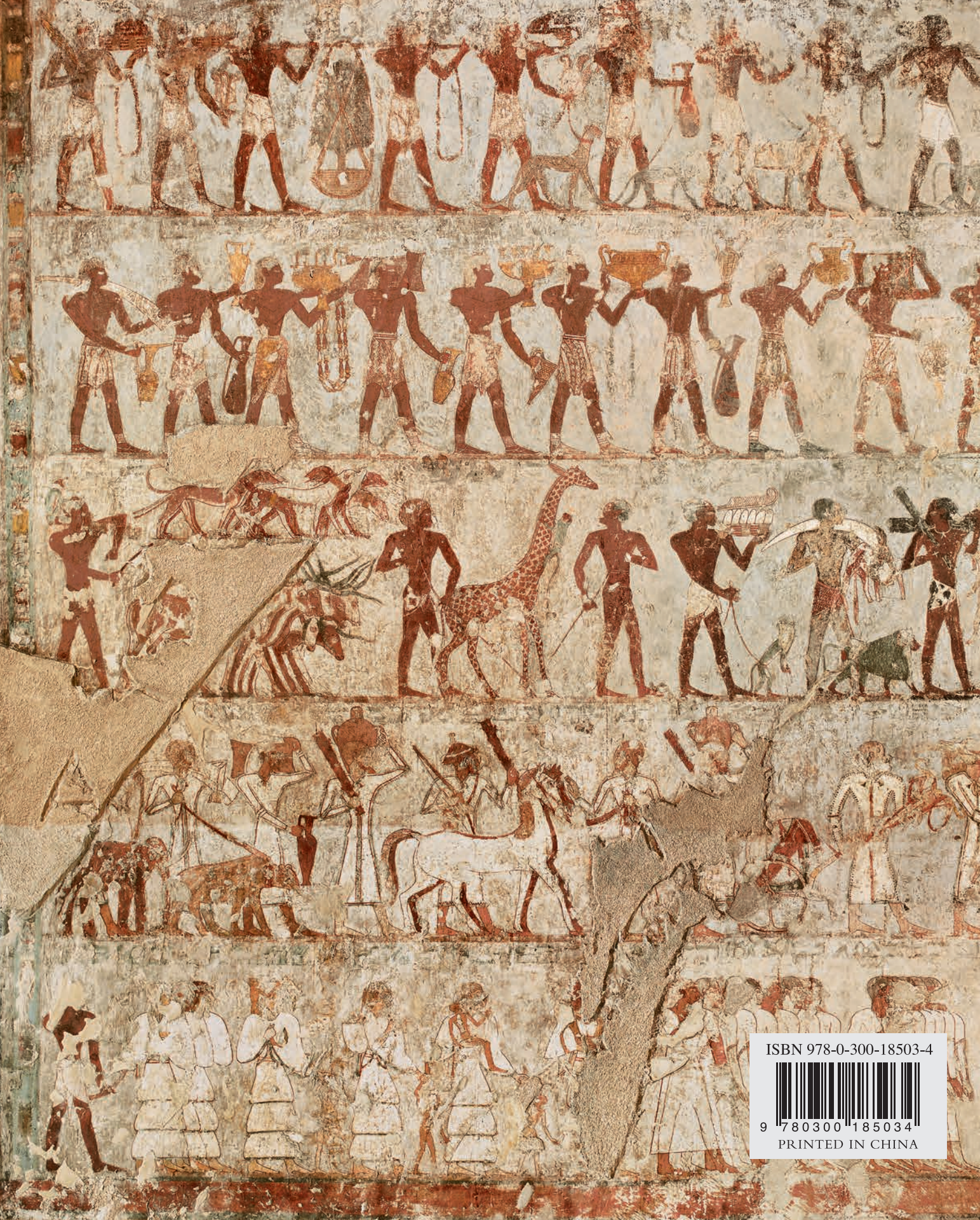
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