

Object Analysis

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An Ivory Plaque from Bronze Age Megiddo

Within the University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications Volume LII, Gordon Loud discusses his Megiddo ivories' find. While all these ivories are interesting and have different features, there is one that stands out from the rest. This ivory, seen in Figure 1 at the end of the paper, is a small plaque measuring 5.7 cm in height, 26 cm in length¹, and 1-1.5 mm thick.² The plaque is a composite of two scenes separated by a vertical row of some type of plant. Starting from the plaque's right, a figure of importance, stated by Liebowitz as a prince, is depicted in a chariot pulled by a horse.³ In front of this chariot are two nude and bound men, more than likely prisoners of war, being led by a soldier. Other features of this side include a soldier behind the chariot carrying a sickle-sword, more plants, and a winged sun disk just above the prince's chariot. To the left of the plaque is what appears to be a feast scene, with; presumably, the exact figure sitting on a throne with an Egyptian sphinx to the side. There are two servants in front of the prince, one of which is playing a lyre, and two more behind him with what has been described as a mixing bowl between them.⁴ Many animals are depicted, including birds, some feline type, and possibly an ibex or gazelle in the mixing bowl. A couple of broken places (the bottom right corner and upper left corner) obscures what was to be represented in these areas. The back of the ivory is plain with no markings.⁵ *good description*

The ivory was discovered in a room along the western wall of a palace in Stratum VII A.⁶ The ivories were in disarray, many of them broken and on top of one another, and were

¹ The Israel Museum, 2021.

² Loud, 1939, p. 13.

³ Liebowitz, 1980, p. 165.

⁴ Liebowitz, 1967, p. 129.

⁵ Loud, 1939, p. 13.

⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

intermingled with other pieces, such as gold jewelry and pieces of alabaster.⁷ Loud placed a date for the movement from Stratum VII to Stratum VI at 1150 BC, using a model pen case with Ramses III's cartouche as the anchor in time.⁸ The ivories appeared to be much older than this, so a date of construction, using the pottery found in Stratum VII, was established from 1350 to 1200 BC.⁹ These dates do not seem to be contested, as Liebowitz¹⁰ and Feldman¹¹ do not contradict the dates provided by Loud.

The reason for the disarray is unclear, and many hypotheses have been given to explain this and the purpose of the room. Loud believed the room to be a treasury in which the king of the palace collected pieces of ivory and had them placed on shelves along with other valuables.¹² He states that invaders were the likely cause of the ivories being broken and discarded as found because they could not be readily recycled for other uses (gold could be melted down and recast into coins for the invading kingdom).¹³ However, Feldman believes the ivories represent a burial hoard of goods that could be passed on to the individual who buried it in the afterlife.¹⁴ Her reasoning for this is the presence of an animal skeleton that was laid directly on top of the ivories, which appears to be intentional since there was no debris separating the ivories from the skeleton.¹⁵ This seems more likely, as it utilizes all of the ivories' archeological data and does not focus only on what could be biasedly considered necessary in the dig. Also, ivory would have been an expensive item and, therefore, had a type of monetary value, which is usually

⁷ Ibid, p. 7.

⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Liebowitz, 1967, p. 129.

¹¹ Feldman, 2009, p. 188p.

¹² Loud, 1939, p. 9.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Fieldman, 2009, p. 189.

¹⁵ Ibid.

present in this type of hoarding. Another consideration would be that the ivories were found densely packed together;¹⁶ which if invaders were looting and discarding the ivories, it would be unlikely they would have made such a conscious effort to pile them to this effect.

Returning to the ivory plaque in question, it appears to have been originally a part of a piece of furniture.¹⁷ There have been examples of furniture overlaid with ivory at Late Bronze Age Ugarit and in first millennium BC royal tombs at Salamis on Cyprus.¹⁸ Having furniture overlaid with ivory would be expensive, requiring great skill to incise the piece with the design and then secure it to the furniture itself. A good argument for this piece coming from some type of furnishing would be the plain back of the plaque;¹⁹ if this side were not to be seen, it would make sense for it not to be decorated. The plaque would have commemorated a notable victory over the prince's enemies, and therefore would likely have been placed on a furnishing that could be shown to a broad audience.

Even though the ivory plaque may have been initially a part of some type of furniture, that is not how it came to be with the hoard. Loud states the room where the ivories were found could not possibly hold a large amount of furniture.²⁰ Also, since the ivories were so densely packed together, it would suggest the piece, along with the rest of the hoard, was already separated from its furnishing.²¹ This separation from its original use could account for the two breaks in the piece. It was discovered broken, and other pieces around it were already broken as well, with fragments nearby that could be reconstructed.²² The presence of the ivory plaque with

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 186.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 184.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Liebowitz, 1967, p. 129.

²⁰ Loud, 1939, p. 9.

²¹ Feldman, 2009, p. 186.

²² Loud, 1939, p. 7.

the rest of the hoard gives the impression of what Feldman calls “opportunistic collecting.”²³ She observes that since there is no “evidence for reconstructible furnishings” and that the “model writing palette (pen case) typical of private burials may indicate opportunistic collecting of a kind that might only have been possible in times of dissolving social and political order;”²⁴ parenthesis mine. Whether this collecting took place during Loud’s invasion or done so at some point after the fact is a question that remains for the moment.

On stylistic grounds, the ivory plaque has an evident Egyptian influence. The inclusion of the sphinx is the most explicit influence coming out of Egypt.²⁵ However, another feature that may be overlooked would be the horse on the plaque's right side. Liebowitz made a comparison of the artistic style of this horse and Egyptian representations of horses.²⁶ Since the Megiddo horse is hitched to a chariot and not rearing, he only made comparisons of Egyptian horses with similar traits.²⁷ Liebowitz dates the plaque on the stylistic grounds of the horse to the Ramesside period.²⁸ The reasoning for this is the position of the legs of the horse.²⁹ Looking at the plaque, the section that depicts the horse’s legs has been broken off, and therefore a full analysis is impossible at the current time. But there is just enough of the front legs present to see that one leg is going straight down while the other is raised. Liebowitz states this correlates with “the manner of treatment characteristic of the Ramesside Phase.”³⁰ The far front leg is almost perpendicular to the ground, and the near leg is brought forward and lifted, a stylistic trait that he

²³ Feldman, 2009, p. 186.

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 186-187.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 180.

²⁶ Liebowitz, 1967, p. 130.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 130-131.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 134.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

claims often occurs during this period.³¹ He gives an example of horses on a relief on a wall of the Temple of Ramesses II at Abydos,³² seen in Figure 2 at the end of the paper.

Comparing these two images, one can see the legs are depicted in the same manner. However, looking at the overall style of both horses tends to make this observation possibly questionable. There are more differences between these two images than there are similarities. The Megiddo horse has a simple mane and is leaner, with lines along the side, possibly representing the animal's ribs. Also, the mane and tail style has many lines in them, indicating more detail and allowing for a more hair-like display. The Egyptian horse has some type of headdress on it and is plumper. The hair on the tail also lacks the detail found on the Megiddo horse. There could be some reasons for these differences in style between these two. First, the Megiddo horse appears to be returning from battle and, therefore, would possibly show signs of distress and hunger. Secondly, the Egyptian horse is a part of a procession in which Ramesses is making a sacrifice.³³ With these contrasts considered, Liebowitz's conclusion could still be accurate as he states that this treatment of the forelegs "does not make an appearance elsewhere" and that it was likely "borrowed from the Egyptian repertoire."³⁴ A discussion of this borrowing will be considered further below.

Another stylistic component would be the winged sun disk. The winged sun disk is a feature of Egyptian art, and it has been stated that Middle Eastern countries borrowed it from them.³⁵ However, Michaux-Colombot argues that the winged-sun disk could have independently

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Abdelrahiem, 2013, p. 3.

³⁴ Liebowitz, 1967, p. 134.

³⁵ Michaux-Colombot, 2008, p. 330.

appeared in Hittite culture.³⁶ This is due to stylistic differences beyond this paper's scope, but it is worth noting that the winged-sun disk could have come from another culture.

The Megiddo ivory plaque appears to carry on a tradition of Middle Eastern cultures of borrowing designs from neighbors close to them, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia.³⁷ The artists of Megiddo appear to have incorporated their own designs to these stylistic features from other groups; Kantor states that even though the plaque has “Egyptianizing details and stimulation, the total effect is un-Egyptian.”³⁸ This could explain some of the stylistic differences between the two horses mentioned earlier and how the legs' feature could have come from Egypt with more liberty given to the other features. Another possible example of borrowing artistic styles could be from the plants depicted on the plaque. While it is unclear the type of plant that is depicted, Kantor notes that many Megiddo ivories show “the sacral ivy motive in so purely Mycenaean a form that they could be considered imports save that such friezes have not yet occurred in Greece on ivory.”³⁹ He also notes an evident blending of Mycenaean and Canaanite styles that overlaps so well it is hard to distinguish the origins between the two.⁴⁰ While these plants on the Megiddo ivory may not be these sacral ivies, it does open the possibility of these plants' style coming from a possible foreign influence. With these considerations in mind, it would not be hard to conclude the likelihood of the winged sun disk coming from a region outside of Egypt. While an Egyptian influence may be more likely, it would be unwise to rule out a possible Hittite influence in this regard.

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 334-336.

³⁷ Kantor, 1956, p. 154.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 169.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

How these styles merged in this region is still up for debate. Barnett offers a possible solution in that ivories of similar style as Megiddo have been found in numerous places, including Ras Shamra in North Syria, Cyprus, Rhodes, Delos, Mycenae, and Attica.⁴¹ He suggests a possible closed guild of wandering ivory carvers that traveled to various cities where temples are located to perform their craft.⁴² This is a compelling thought; whether it occurred as he described or not would require further research.

The Megiddo ivory plaque is an extraordinary piece that is both exquisite to look upon and engaging in discussions of discovery, style, and use. The scenes depicted show the prince wished to commemorate a significant victory over a group of people and had this scene carved for what was likely some piece of furniture. Its appearance in the Megiddo hoard suggests it was buried by someone in a ritualistic fashion, having an animal skeleton atop of the ivories. More research into this ivory may shed light on who this ruler was and the people he conquered.

⁴¹ Barnett, 1948, p. 1.

⁴² Ibid, p. 2.



Figure 1 Megiddo Ivory Plaque⁴³

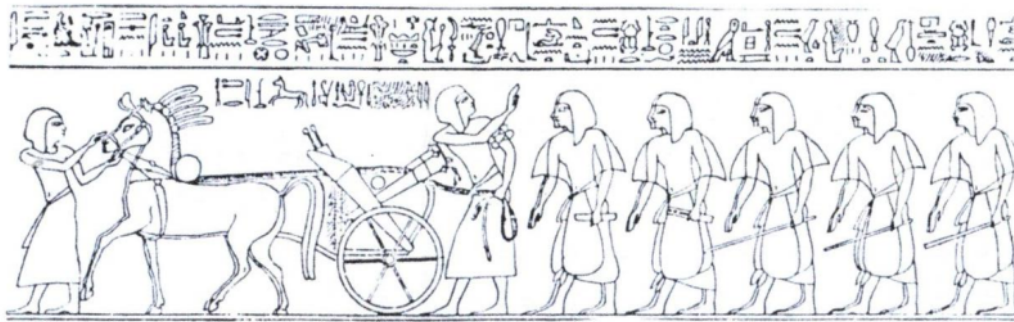


Figure 2 Egyptian Wall Relief⁴⁴

⁴³ Liebowitz, 1980, p. 165.

⁴⁴ Liebowitz, 1967, p. I.

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Object Analysis

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

66/100

Instructor

This is a very well researched and clearly written object analysis. Your discussion was situated within the literature on the Megiddo ivories, and is good contextualisation. .Where I think you can do a bit more is to put yourself in the analysis - your own interpretation of the object and its use, with reference to some of the theories we cover in the module. Otherwise this is a really good piece of work. Well done!

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Comment 1

in what way?

In fact you have chosen one of y favourite images!

Text Comment. good description

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