

In evaluating the utility of theoretically informed modes of analysis in regard to the exploration of cultural contact and the material-social lifeworld of the Bronze Age East Mediterranean through their application (in the form of world systems theory), there naturally exists an epistemological gulf between subject and student which informs the analysis bred from a combination of paucity of sources and the fundamental difference between the circumstances of the time and those of the modern scholar, especially given the grounding of Wallerstein's analysis in the emergence of industrial modernity. As such, there is a hard upper limit to the utility of any theoretically informed framework. However, with these limitations accepted as a given, reviewing the application of world systems theory on an analytical basis to archaeological case studies shows a consistently high correlation between the theory's premises and those conclusions reachable by analysis of the record in each case. More broadly, while a theoretical informed approach such as that of world systems theory might be less individually tailored to the specific context of the Bronze Age East Mediterranean than more 'bottom-up' models, this allows for greater perspective in assessing the exploration of cultural contact and the material-social lifeworld associated therewith through each case study, thus increasing the utility of the framework on net.

For the first such case study, take the northern Sinai in the later Bronze Age. During this period - particularly during the territorial apogee that corresponded to the reign of Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC) the territory was under Egyptian hegemony if not integrated rule from the 16th century BC onwards, with overland trade largely routed through the system of outposts colloquially known as the 'Ways of Horus' established subsequent to the defeat and expulsion of the Hyksos by Ahmose I, and argued by Bergoffen to constitute a natural "outgrowth of the long-established policy of safeguarding the eastern Delta[...] through a system of outposts"¹. Gaza, the terminus of the Ways, acted variously as "a "finger" of Egypt pointing into Canaan[...] Egypt's principal administrative seat in Canaan[...] [and] a vital center of operations"². The standard of living was largely unimpressive in the New Kingdom, and, while periods of relative prosperity may be discerned by the emergence of new towns along the route (a phenomenon largely correlated with the development and quality of the transit trade), hard limits on prosperity were irreducibly extant due to the "land's [inability to] support an agriculturally-based economy"³, with limited evidence for craft specialisation beyond weaving (itself largely present at a single site, Bir el-Abd), luxuries appearing almost exclusively to be imports ("Egyptian faience and alabaster vessels"⁴) and unique or non-functional items being extremely rare amongst the "Late Cypriot ceramic assemblage[...] [and] repertoire of Macedonian forms"⁵.

This basis established, the utility of world systems theory in interpreting the subject is straightforward. Egypt constitutes the imperial 'core', Canaan the 'periphery', and northern Sinai an artery facilitating the former's exploitation of the latter, with the admitted qualification that the overland route was always secondary to maritime traffic via the port of Byblos - which may be considered 'semi-peripheral' in function if not in strict adherence to Wallerstein's original definition. The function of the Ways, beyond their initial defensive purpose, was less that of a highway for commercial exploitation than creating the infrastructure to maintain a military presence, which in turn allowed for periodic expansion ("a vital

¹ (Bergoffen, 1991)

² (Bergoffen, 1991)

³ (Bergoffen, 1991)

⁴ (Bergoffen, 1991)

⁵ (Bergoffen, 1991)

artery for military transports in Egypt's many Asiatic campaigns"⁶ - see the reigns of Thutmose I and III in particular), the maintenance of the inflow of "remarkable sums of silver and personnel [as tribute]"⁷, and the deterrence of rival imperial actors (i.e. the Hittite Empire). What emerges from this application is less a disconnect between the strange vistas of the later Bronze Age and the 20th century world scene analysed by Wallerstein than a remarkable degree of continuity. Egyptian military forces of the kind garrisoning the Ways might be compared to the presence of American troops in South Vietnam - the terminus of Gaza to that of Saigon. In both cases, military forces stationed by a state comfortably in the "core" of the international system protect a strategic and economic investment with an ostensibly defensive rationale rooted in precedent as justification - see Bergoffen's description of the Ways as an extension of previous Egyptian defensive strategy vs the Truman Doctrine. The analogy is crude, but revelatory, especially when the clear hierarchy of kingship and detailing of a graded system of international diplomacy across the Bronze Age *ecumene* evidenced by the Amarna Letters is taken into account - with Ashur-uballit I referring to Akhenaten as "My brother"⁸ being, stripped of the familiarity, akin to the attention paid to the Soviet embassy in Washington as opposed to that of, for example, Spain (itself closer if not an exact parallel to the deference shown in EA 158 - i.e. "[A]s you are my father and my lord"⁹).

So, with this continuity of functions and priorities amongst imperial powers and peripheries established, the imperative question of a framework's utility lies in its capacity, however true to the slings and arrows of the economic and political sphere, as a reflective and analytical tool in the exploration of cultural contact in the Bronze Age East Mediterranean. In this regard, form may be understood as perhaps more useful than function, as if the underlying purposes and processes retain a similarity (i.e. the international system vs. the United Nations), then the differences of expression may be taken as indicative of the peculiar characteristics of a subject era, expressive of its priorities and epistemological world-view. For example, the northern Sinai, while short on luxuries and in hard terms something of a backwater relative to Byblos or Egypt proper, is, when analysed through the lens of world systems theory as applied to its archaeological record, expressive of a great many defining characteristics of the East Mediterranean Bronze Age *ecumene* it was situated within.

Neither metropolitan nor fully colonial, it constituted a kind of liminal frontier, its economy defined by a combination of undergirding scarcity, the Egyptian military presence (Bergoffen goes so far as to hypothesise that "[t]he goods and "salaries" provided to the soldiers and service personnel stationed there may have been the principal source of revenue"¹⁰), and, fundamentally, the need of the Egyptian imperial core to secure a military highway to the resources, human or otherwise, of the Canaanite frontier. Utilitarian in theory, it was fundamentally cosmopolitan in function, just as it was imperial - for, as the material record of the northern Sinai indicates, the two were synonymous in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean during the Bronze Age. That what luxuries are in evidence were imported is at once evidence of and the fruit of the function of the Ways - to establish an avenue for expansion into

⁶ (Bergoffen, 1991)

⁷ (Gonen, 1984)

⁸ (Moran, 1992)

⁹ (Moran, 1992)

¹⁰ (Bergoffen, 1991)

and defence from Egypt's near-abroad, and, in so doing, secure access to resources both conventional and symbolic.

That is, while Egyptian imperialism in the Levant sought to establish access to those resources termed functional (in the sense of the division of labour) by Wallerstein, within the context of the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean 'enchanted' objects in the Gellian sense ("[a] technical means whereby individuals are persuaded of the necessity and desirability of the social order which encompasses them"¹¹) constituted another form of resource as a consequence of their exoticism and thus the securing of the means of their conveyance a valid strategic objective for the Egyptian state. With reference to the international style ("features that have been hybridi[s]ed to the extent that they can no longer be attributed to a single specific regional tradition[...] the highly politicised use of visual hybridi[s]ation"¹²) that fully coalesced in the Late Bronze Age then, we may infer that form and function assume an ouroboros aspect in tandem with the priorities of Bronze Age monarchies and the culture of the East Mediterranean social-material lifeworld they shaped and, in turn, were shaped by increasingly over time. Thus, with the applicability of world systems theory to the region's geopolitics factored in, the calculus of power between core and periphery and the mirroring of that dynamic not only in diplomatic forms, but in the material evidence of the resultant cultural lexicon's priorities demonstrates manifest utility in the application of Wallerstein's theory to cross-cultural contact and the material legacy of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze Age, thus constituting what may fairly be called an 'enchanted' world system.

The relevance of world systems theory in this instance lies less in the resultant objects themselves than their underlying significance and exemplary (not in the sense of excellence, but of impact) on both a cross-cultural and a hard-power level, as exemplified by the creation of the International style as a shared cultural lexicon of power throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Take, for example, the Megiddo Ivories - "a massive assemblage of more than 382 carved ivories found sealed by destruction debris"¹³ in a complex variously hypothesised to constitute a treasury by Loud and mooted as a "royal tomb"¹⁴ if not an ivory workshop by Fischer. While Feldman makes a strong case for these ivories as exemplars of the archaeological record of Megiddo itself rather than as "as representative of [late Bronze Age] ivory carving in general[...] [and a] unique archaeological case"¹⁵, the very "startling disparity in styles and production locales"¹⁶ she identifies as well as the history of the site itself (that is, that of Megiddo) may be considered ample evidence of a cross-cultural legacy of quite literally embodied social relations identified by Feldman herself as having its origin point in the campaigns of Thutmose III, with the capture of the city itself following the Battle of Megiddo in 1457 BC acting as the firing gun for both the international style and the fruition of the Bronze Age iteration of Wallerstein's world system. Which is to say that, just as the Ivories may be considered an artistic perfection upon the themes of the international style that coalesced in the late Bronze Age, that process of artistic perfection may be considered

¹¹ (Wells, 1992)

¹² (Feldman, 2009)

¹³ (Feldman, 2009)

¹⁴ (Fischer, 2007)

¹⁵ (Feldman, 2009)

¹⁶ (Feldman, 2009)

ultimately downstream of the core-periphery dynamic Thutmoses III himself perfected upon (relative to his predecessors).

While Loud argued strongly for the status of the Ivories as essentially a local product, however influenced by the cosmopolitan nature of the later Bronze Age ("whether the inspiration for certain pieces be an Egyptian painting, a Hittite relief, a metal vessel perhaps from the Aegean, or any other source distant from Megiddo, the finished product is definitely an expression of local art"¹⁷ - a case oddly resonant with Feldman's argument for their being considered in isolation), the artistic preponderance of cosmopolitan and international-stylistic motifs (particularly Egyptian) is undeniable and indicative.

The presence of a fragmentary Akkadian iteration upon Gilgamesh, while as a cultural influence having its origin point outside the East Mediterranean world, "formed the core of every [Late Bronze Age] scholarly curriculum"¹⁸ and acted as a cultural touchstone, a detail that, while taken by Feldman as evidence of "[a] flourishing of scholarly training"¹⁹, seems more indicative of a keen eye for the aesthetic lexicon of power (and thus, as Feldman admits, participation in "the international realm in which Akkadian served as the lingua franca"²⁰.

While the presence of Egyptian themes (broadly agreed to be an inevitability by Loud and Feldman on the basis of "the pharaonic presence in the area"²¹ as the latter put it) is heavy, there is widespread scholarly agreement (with the exception of Singer) as to this not constituting evidence of an especial or acute aegyptophilia as much as a broader cosmopolitanism, with Loud insisting upon the status of the Ivories as a "[definite] expression of local art"²² while acknowledging the influence of "the inspiration for certain pieces [being] an Egyptian painting, a Hittite relief, a metal vessel perhaps from the Aegean, or any other source distant from Megiddo"²³ on the resultant product; Higginbotham citing the presence of Syrian, Hittite, Cypriot and Mycenaean styles as evidence towards the claim that "In fact, when viewed as a whole, the artifact assemblage appears more cosmopolitan than strictly Egyptian"²⁴; and Feldman, while essentially arguing for the city's archaeological record to be seen through the lens of it as a discrete entity unto itself, makes note of Megiddo's "cosmopolitan character"²⁵ and draws attention in particular to the symmetries between Aegean art and the "subtle modelling of the animals' bodies"²⁶.

That this cosmopolitanism seems to belie Megiddo's subordination, cultural or otherwise, to the Egyptian core is a matter of cosmetics - of far greater importance is the manner in which the

¹⁷ (Muller and Loud, 1940)

¹⁸ (Feldman, 2009)

¹⁹ (Feldman, 2009)

²⁰ (Feldman, 2009)

²¹ (Feldman, 2009)

²² (Muller and Loud, 1940)

²³ (Muller and Loud, 1940)

²⁴ (Higginbotham, 2022)

²⁵ (Feldman, 2009)

²⁶ (Feldman, 2009)

archaeological record bears out a deeper conformity with the underlying assumptions of the Bronze Age enchanted world system. The use of deliberately exotic and esoteric imagery (see: the griffon on plate 32a), the shared use of idealised pastoral and hunting scenes (see: the beveled and incised scenes of ibexes and foliage featured on plate 113-a-to-c), and the occasional evocation of the archetype of the hero-king (see: the singular chariot scene on plate 33). The symbolic and aesthetic is as one with the to-and-fro of core and periphery, as both are mediated through the same cultural norms, and constitute the frame of reference by which the main operative drivers of cross-cultural contact and, if not the sole, then the greatest sources of capital for any cultural agenda at the time set the agenda (Sherratt and Sherratt's "older-established urban areas at the centre of the system of interlocking cultures"²⁷).

The forms are themselves functional, because they, in an almost evolutionary sense, are adapted to that function. Just as the Bronze Age world system was formally mediated through the conceptual framework of familial relations (i.e. the equivalence between a king of superior rank and a father, as shown in the Amarna Letters - "My father and my lord"²⁸), so too, through the consistent and politicised cultivation of prestige and the application of funding, did the older-established urban areas (that is, the core) create an aesthetic lexicon that "persuaded of the necessity and desirability of the social order which encompassed"²⁹ the whole Eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean. Where individual objects might enchant the individual viewer, the sunk impact of the collective was to enchant and reify the dynamics of a whole world system, such that the International Style and the terminology of the Amarna Letters may be termed 'of a piece'. The utility of the world-systems framework in interpreting this context lies in its recognition of the primacy of the economic over the political - the utility of it in assessing cross-cultural exchange as mediated through the material-social culture in evidence through analysis of the archaeological record is to understand that, in this context, cross-cultural exchange is a function of the economic and cultural dynamic between core and periphery.

Which is to say that, if culture is assigned value as a resource, then Aegean stylings are no more exempt from Wallerstein's dynamic of unequal exchange ("appropriation of surplus from the producers of low-wage (but high supervision), low-profit, low-capital intensive goods by the producers of high-wage (but low supervision), high-profit, high-capital intensive [goods]"³⁰) than timber sourced from modern Lebanon. If culture is thus understood as a resource, with the exotic and esoteric (and accordingly far-flung) deliberately sought out by the core and those semi-peripheral entities with the resources to aspire to ape its fashions, then the utility of world systems theory as a lens through which to examine the Bronze Age context becomes self-evident. In much the same fashion as Gell's appreciation of magic as essentially technical in aim and process, and with reference to his definition of enchantment, the international style that typified at once the ideal and the reality of Bronze Age cosmopolitanism is demystified and rendered a function of the mechanics of a world system. The aesthetic significance and gradation of status assigned to provenance, material and motif are no less a component of the "social system[...][s] boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence"³¹ described by Wallerstein than the terminology in evidence from the Amarna Letters. Just as the latter's use of

²⁷ (Cline et al., 1997)

²⁸ (Moran, 1992)

²⁹ (Wells, 1992)

³⁰ (Wallerstein, 1976)

³¹ (Wallerstein, 1976) (b)

familial language to frame international diplomacy is indicative of the grammar of thought prevalent in ruling classes across the East Mediterranean world-system (those with the greatest capacity to engage in and shape the form of cross-cultural contact), so too can the international style be taken as evidence of the possession of "[t]he initiative for change [by] the older-established urban areas"³² as a function of their comparative wealth.

This is not to argue that world systems theory is the only or the most useful framework for the analysis of the Bronze Age. Indeed, Wallerstein largely concerned himself with modernity, defined in his analysis by the rise and presumptive fall of a capitalist (in the modern sense) world-system, and, with it, the concurrent seismic transformations of the Industrial Revolution, the World Wars and the postwar period. The scale of such changes and their influence on the theory he first formulated are such that it is worth posing the question of the very applicability of world systems theory to such a remote period. The application of world systems theory to the cross-cultural phenomena of medieval Europe would be wrenching enough a chronological disconnect - to apply it to the Bronze Age still more.

Yet there is an essential continuity of function - if not of form - evidenced by the archaeological record. The preference for imported ceramics and presence of Cypriot imports in the northern Sinai is indicative of the influence of the international style, and thus of the capacity of the ruling castes, such as they were, to act as cultural tastemakers - even in relatively backward frontier zones. By the same token, while the initial purpose of the Ways was primarily defensive, their historic role was overwhelmingly as a means of allowing Egypt, a core state, to obtain assurance of secure access to the resources, material *and* cultural, of the periphery and near-periphery. As such, they were at once military and cosmopolitan, and in both functions facilitated exploitation. Likewise, the presence of motifs as disparate as the archetype of Gilgamesh and griffons at Megiddo serve as statements of prestige and upward mobility; a conscious buying-in to a broader international system that extended to the cultural as well as the political rather than simple emulation of a single patron. These archaeological evidences need not solely be understood through the lens of world systems theory - but such a framework is useful in their analysis.

To conclude, through analysis of the archaeological record, relevant scholarship and the historical context, it is apparent that cross-cultural exchange and the material-social world of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze Age were fundamentally shaped by the economic dynamic between core (i.e. Egypt, the Hittite Empire etc.), semi-peripheral (i.e. Megiddo, Byblos) and peripheral entities (i.e. Canaan). This dynamic was exploitative, but vital to the course Bronze Age cultural cross-pollination took. In it, culture was analogous to capital, and the exotic accorded greater status. These trends, filtering downward through society, were influential even in relatively backward areas (see: the northern Sinai), informally codified as the international style (which made cosmopolitanism and hard power synonymous), and constituted via the net impact of the resultant art an 'enchanted' aesthetic that reified extant geopolitical, economic and cultural norms. World systems theory, while imperfect, highlights the economic character of this 'enchanted world system', and has utility in providing a framework for its internal dynamics.

³² (Cline et al., 1997)

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