

THE 'INTERNATIONAL STYLE': COLOUR AND POLYCHROME FAIENCE

Andrea SINCLAIR

Classics and Archaeology
School of Historical and Philosophical Studies
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010
AUSTRALIA
E-mail: andrea_sinclair9@hotmail.com

Abstract

*The 'International Style' is an artistic style replete on small luxury artefacts found in elite contexts from the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean. This visual idiom has been identified by the cohesive fusion of specific hybrid iconographic motifs and themes sourced from the polities of the eastern Mediterranean region. Previous scholarship on this subject has focussed on the characteristic visual idiom, value of exotic materials employed and issues of agency and recipient. This examination proposes to introduce the context of colour value in an assessment of this style and examines those ostensibly 'International Style' objects which employ colour in their decoration, polychrome vessels and tiles in faience from Cyprus, Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant.**

The discussion of issues of iconographic transference from the regions of the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean and greater Near East is an area fraught with ambiguities and pitfalls. This circumstance has come about largely as a result of contemporary scholarship's increasing awareness of the heightened socio-political interaction occurring between the polities of the

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region.¹ It is currently acknowledged that this period of political parleying and reciprocal exchange of both luxury commodities and essential ingredients for technology, such as copper and tin for the production of bronze, facilitated the appearance in visual media of a hybrid iconographic style equally constructed in the prestigious materials circulating between the powerful states. This 'International Style' is argued to represent an elite aesthetic broadcasting membership in an exclusive 'club' of powers and fusing the visual styles of the cultures of the region.²

This paper proposes to address a less scrutinised aspect of visual culture for this iconographic style. It examines the significance of colour in the visual idiom of the luxury commodities flowing between the elites and courts of the ancient Near East. In this respect, specific emphasis has been placed on the employment of colour in the decoration of vitreous materials, particularly faience artefacts, such as vessels and architectural tiles from elite funerary contexts and palaces. Before addressing the issue of colour use and semantics in the context of the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean, however, it shall be necessary to outline the nature of the media under examination, vitreous materials, and subsequently to clarify the criteria for recognition of the 'International Style' itself.

Faience

The vitreous material faience is a precursor to the more ubiquitous glass and is composed, like glass, predominantly of silicates, like sand or finely ground quartzes. In addition to this primary mineral matrix, the phosphates natron or plant ash were added with soda and lime, which under furnace conditions caused the fusion of the core into a solid material which naturally exhibited a lustrous glossy glaze.³

Faience glazes were potentially coloured with a variety of mineral pigments and it has been proposed that the same mineral element could create a range of hues, depending on the method of application, the composition, oxidation state and kiln atmosphere under firing conditions.⁴ Each factor contributed to the production of a wide range of subtle tints. In the

¹ Liverani 1990, 2008; Zaccagnini 1987; Sherratt and Sherratt 1991.

² Smith 1965; Schachermeyr 1967; Crowley 1989; Peltenburg 1991; Caubet 1998; Liverani 2000; Feldman 2006; Aruz 2008.

³ Kaczmarczyk and Hedges 1983, p. 6; Peltenburg 1987, p. 5; Tite and Bimson 1987, pp. 81–82; Nicholson 1993, p. 9, 1998, p. 50; Nicholson and Peltenburg 2000, p. 177; Bouquillon et al. 2005, pp. 13, 17; Vandiver 1983, pp. 22–24, 2008, pp. 37–43.

⁴ Kaczmarczyk and Hedges 1983, p. 140; Rehder 2000, p. 35.

Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean the predominant mineral pigment employed for faience was copper-oxide, producing an attractive green-blue glaze. This glaze could then be decorated with a dark brown-black pigment derived from manganese. Because of the nature of the fabric and the manufacture process, faience was employed to produce small objects, such as beads, amulets, vessels, figurines, inlays for jewellery and furniture, architectural tiles and small vessels.⁵ The formation of more elaborate objects,⁶ such as the Cypriot vessels under discussion in this study, required the use of two part moulds, hand turning, multiple segments and multiple firings.

In the Late Bronze Age vitreous technology reached a creative apogee for the entire region and thus the range of colours produced for faience equally was unsurpassed in sophistication and technical expertise.⁷ It was in this period that the colours employed in faience manufacture expanded dramatically. Cobalt blue was used to produce vivid blues through to violets and greys. Lead-antimonate yellow was introduced to produce an opaque yellow and green. In addition, pure white from unadulterated quartz, subtle shadings of pink, purple and grey appeared.⁸ Faience cores were enhanced and hardened with the introduction of glasses and glassy frits. Purer, more saturated colours for body glazes were made possible through applying a preliminary fine white quartz layer to a faience core before the final glaze was applied.⁹

At a practical level, archaeological evidence for the production of vitreous technologies in this period reflects the same elite monopoly as it has in the past for metallurgy. From Egypt, Syro-Palestine and the Aegean we have evidence for faience and glass production occurring in direct relation to elite palatial and temple sites.¹⁰ Vitreous technologies, particularly those related to glasses and the mineral colourant cobalt, were elite technologies associated physically and metaphorically with royal prerogative and cult throughout the entire region.

⁵ Particularly in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages where small amulets and beads were ubiquitous to funerary and temple assemblages (Patch 1998, p. 32).

⁶ Not large objects by comparison to lithic and ceramic forms.

⁷ Vandiver 1983, 108–109; Caubet 2008, 420; Kaczmarczyk and Vandiver 2008, 59; Bouquillon et al. 2008, 94.

⁸ Vandiver 1983, pp. 108–9; Kaczmarczyk and Vandiver 2008, pp. 59–60.

⁹ An Egyptian innovation (Peltenburg 1985, p. 189).

¹⁰ Nicholson 2007, pp. 22–23, 2008, pp. 2–7; Bouquillon et al. 2008, p. 94; Hughes–Brock 2008, p. 136; Panagiotaki 2008, p. 47.

The Value of Vitreous Materials

In Egyptian texts faience is referred to as *tjēnenet* or *tjehnet*, which is a noun cognate with 'luminosity', 'scintillation' and 'brilliance'.¹¹ It was an epithet borne by both 18th Dynasty rulers and by the gods.¹² *Tjehnet* was likened to the luminous qualities of the sun and moon and to the minerals gold and silver.¹³ It was not a quotidian material, and was employed in the main for cult and funerary objects, most frequently for the construction of funerary amulets and figurines, for, as a component of its solar association, it was connected symbolically with regeneration and rebirth.

In the broader Near East values for synthetic lithic materials were consistent with the Egyptian. The Hittite word *zāku-(wa)-nnan/na⁴kuuanna(n)*¹⁴ designated a variety of dark blue materials, including beads, ornaments, precious stones and copper.¹⁵ This term was cognate with the Ugaritic *iqni*, the Akkadian *uqnû* and the Sumerian ZA.GÏN.¹⁶ All three noun forms stemmed from a Mesopotamian '*Kulturwort*' for lapis lazuli, but were equally applied to synthetic materials, for example: '*uqnû kûrî*', 'ZA.GÏN. GIR₄' lapis of the kiln'.¹⁷

The glossy lustrous qualities made faience a suitable alternative to precious stones such as lapis lazuli and turquoise, but this does not infer a deflated value for the material. The fact that it was employed in juxtaposition with highly valued materials, such as semi-precious stones, gold, electrum and silver, decries this assumption.¹⁸ Glasses, frits and faience thus bore the value and lustrous qualities of the precious minerals which were essential elements in the construction of elite identity in the Late Bronze Age. They could be employed in conspicuous display for jewellery, votive weaponry, furniture and architecture. Finally the process of vitreous manu-

¹¹ Nicholson 1998, p. 55; Bianchi 1998, p. 24; Caubet et al. 2005, p. 27; Kaczmarczyk and Vandiver 2008, p. 57.

¹² Friedman 1998, p. 20.

¹³ In the offering lists for the ritual performance of New Years rites, faience is carried separately in conjunction with pairings of gold with silver and lapis lazuli with turquoise (Friedman 1998, p. 20).

¹⁴ Friedrich 1952, p. 122; Muhly 1973, p. 176.

¹⁵ Hittite copper derived from azurite (Foster 1987, p. 11; Bennett 2008, p. 160) or calcium copper silicate, 'blue frit', (Halleux 1969, pp. 62–66).

¹⁶ Not *zāamûtu* (na⁴KU.AN) as some texts cite. na⁴KU.AN has been identified as meteoric iron, but is transcribed as 'metal from heaven' (Labat 1976, p. 211, n. 468; Borger 2004, p. 415, n. 745).

¹⁷ Landsberger 1967, pp. 150–152; Oppenheim 1970, p. 10; Foster 1979, p. 112; Moorey 1994, p. 85; Griffith 2005, p. 330.

¹⁸ Bianchi 1998, p. 14.

facture through furnace technology under the aegis of both temple and palace enhanced the end product's semantic value.

The International Style

Having established the value of faience in the Late Bronze Age and its connection to elite prerogative, it behoves us to turn briefly to address the 'International Style' as it is currently defined. Prestige objects bearing this visual idiom occur in the expected range of luxury materials known to be circulating between the courts of the period, such as ivory, gold, electrum, alabaster, silver, blackwood, ebony, precious stones, glass and naturally faience,¹⁹ and are found in archaeological contexts throughout the eastern Mediterranean. They come from Egypt,²⁰ the Levant,²¹ Cyprus²² and the Aegean²³ and are found among assemblages from elite funerary, palatial and cult contexts.

These objects may be recognised by their visual and material hybridism, encompassing their composition, the sophistication of technological artifice and primarily, for the (usually seamless) fusion of diverse visual motifs replete on their surfaces. This visual idiom manifests a limited repertoire of formal characteristics and individual subjects.²⁴ The characteristics which identify this are a mobility and naturalism of expression for animal figures in open, non-narrative compositions.²⁵ There is minimal use of a ground-line or any attempt at portraying depth. The central figural design is usually bordered by ornamental bands which may be continuous schemes of rosettes, wavy lines, petal ornament, pomegranates, guilloche and running spirals. The central imagery displays a visual hybridism and is a homogeneous fusion of representational styles from the Aegean, Egypt and the Near East (Fig. 1: 1–2).²⁶

¹⁹ Feldman 2006, pp. 115–128; Caubet 1998, p. 105–111.

²⁰ Thebes, Valley of the Kings, KV 62 (Tutankhamen) and KV 46 (Yuyu and Tuyu) and Tell Basta/Bubastis in the Delta (also possibly Malkata, Tell el Yehudiya and Qantir).

²¹ Ugarit, Tyre, Byblos, Lachish, Ekron, and Megiddo.

²² Kition, Enkomi and Paphos.

²³ Mycenae, Spata, Athens and Delos. Here I employ Feldman's (2006, pp. 31–55) group of 'notable examples.'

²⁴ Prey; bulls and caprids, and predators; lions, leopards, hunting dogs, griffins and sphinxes.

²⁵ Usually lending themselves to the spatial constraints of the media, such as inlay panels for furniture or military-hunt equipment.

²⁶ Feldman 2006, pp. 5, 23.

As with other objects situated within the 'International Style' the faience artefacts display features which confound identification through the fusion of hybrid forms and decoration. These features include Aegean ornamental elements²⁷ and vessel forms,²⁸ Egyptian floral motifs,²⁹ inlay and glazing techniques and northern Syrian visual conventions, such as antithetical figural designs. Three primary faience objects are the focus for this study a vase, an amphora and a conical rhyton from the site of Kition in southern Cyprus. These three vessels rate precedence due to their unique decoration and relatively pristine condition.

The monochrome vase (Fig. 1: 3; 2: 1) manifests an overall glaze which would originally have been pale blue and is decorated with brown-black linear onglaze. There are two registers manifesting contiguous scenes, one of animal hunt, the other of animals flanking sacred voluted trees. Each register is framed by an ornamental border of wavy lines, papyrus and five point stars.³⁰ The polychrome amphora (Fig. 1: 4; 2: 2) was primarily glazed again in a pale blue decorated with darker lavender blue faience insets. The principal register bears a scene of blue caprids and birds flanking sacred voluted trees. This is framed by a frieze of brown running spirals and brown double wavy lines. The base is decorated with a large, opaque yellow and pale blue lotus blossom with radiating petals.³¹

Finally, the polychrome conical rhyton (Fig. 2: 3) depicts two contiguous scenes of red hunters and animals in flying gallop interspersed in flowering vegetation. The lowest register is decorated with vertically aligned yellow running spirals. These scenes are set into an overall background glaze of dark grey-blue.³² In addition to these three objects the discussion also compares eight fragmentary, ostensibly related, coloured faience vessels and tiles from Mycenae in Greece, Minet el Beida in Syria, Sinai, Tell el Yehudiyah, Malkata and Qantir in Egypt. Each object has been chosen due to the employment of related iconographic idiom, such as, animal attack or frolic scenes (caprids, lions or griffins) in vegetal settings with ornamental borders of rosettes or spirals.

²⁷ Torsional compositions, figures in running gallop, running spirals and pendant vegetation.

²⁸ Conical rhyton.

²⁹ Lotus, lily and papyrus.

³⁰ Caubet 1985, pp. 64–68; Yon and Caubet 1985, figs. 33, 38; Peltenburg 1985, p. 190.

³¹ Caubet and Peltenburg 1982, pp. 83–85; Caubet 1985, p. 71; Yon and Caubet 1985 figs. 33, 40; Peltenburg 1985, p. 191.

³² Karageorghis 1974, Vol. 2, pls. C, XCIV; Peltenburg 1974, pp. 116–126.

The Value of Colour

Understanding Colour

Before addressing the issue of colour and the perception of colour in antiquity, it is first necessary to establish clear definitions of the criteria for interpretation. It is important to be aware that with colour perception all such definitions are largely dependant on subjective parameters, but essential nonetheless to conveying conceptual arguments. Here I propose to begin with a brief introduction to the mechanics and history of colour theory, then through to regional analyses of colour values in antiquity, and finally to the colours employed in faience and vitreous material production.

Colour value may be defined and understood in multiple ways. Initially, it is understood as a purely mechanical process of the physical environment. That is, the result of light refraction and reflection from physical surfaces as recorded and interpreted by the ocular system. The retina of the human eye possesses thousands of receptors or 'cones' which are sensitive to light and colour and transfer the data they receive from an object viewed to the human brain.³³ Primates appear to have developed colour perception as a method of refined visual differentiation, evolved through the process of food gathering. Human colour vision appears subsequently to have developed from the necessity to distinguish ripening fruit from a background of variegated light and foliage. This skill is not just associated with colour differentiation but also entails the assessment of a dappled, variegated or unevenly lighted background.³⁴ Here the value of play of light and contrast is equivalent in force to hue.

It is from this point that ambiguity slips into a discussion of colour. The practical application of the physical processes is well understood, however the biological and subjective processes entailed in the perception of this same mechanical action are variable and manifold. In observing an object, the human brain is able to make a general assessment of shape, texture, reflectivity (gloss), colour and environmental illumination, and with this data is efficient at recognising both an object's nature and likely composition.³⁵ Assessments of colour equally must take account of the subjectivity of the viewer (and whether or not they have 'normative' vision) and then also the nature of environmental factors such as external illumination,

³³ Schafer and Maxwell 2000, p. 52.

³⁴ Mollon 2000, pp. 10, 24.

³⁵ Schafer and Maxwell 2000, p. 53.

material texture, surface reflection and even comparative cleanliness!³⁶ Equally, when observing colour images in scholarly publications the viewer must be aware of different chromatic values in the printer's ink, the choice of background, contrast and environmental illumination at the time. Understandably this is why references to colour value in archaeological literature can be widely divergent, maddeningly subjective and entirely ambiguous.

These obstacles notwithstanding, it is this author's conviction that a syncretic approach to the interpretation of an artefact can not exclude the colour values, particularly when the medium under examination is faience. In the theoretical evolution of modern colour classifications the hallmark references are the theories of two early 20th century scholars, Munsell³⁷ and Ostwald.³⁸ Their systems rested upon a three tiered classification of colour encompassing primarily an achromatic or 'greyscale' of levels of brightness, ranging from white through gray to black. Secondly, a circular hue scale of tonal colours graded according to their similarity or dissimilarity (opposite and complementary hues: blue contra orange). Finally, they are measured according to relative purity of hue. That is, the degree of similarity and contrast and labelled saturation.³⁹ For convenience I shall call these three categories, brightness, hue and saturation.⁴⁰

When examining the evidence for an understanding or concept of colour in antiquity, it is necessary to step aside from contemporary hue drenched perceptions of colour. That is, the visual design 'colour chart' of colour imbued shades and hues which permeate contemporary media and to consider colour in terms of a natural environment. In the Bronze Age this was an environment wherein bold unsaturated hues would have been associated predominantly with natural phenomena such as the sea, minerals and flowering or fruiting vegetation. Beyond the natural environment, the only arena within which boldly unsaturated colours could have been viewed would have been within the ritual and display of elite palaces and temples. In these environs, bright colours and patterning would have been an outward symbol of opulence.

In examining non-Western pre-modern cultures we are faced with the dilemma of accurately defining abstract concepts, such as colour and hue.

³⁶ Schafer and Maxwell 2000, pp. 54–65.

³⁷ Munsell 1975.

³⁸ Ostwald and Jacobsen 1948.

³⁹ Munsell referred to this scale as chroma and compared it to the greyscale. Ostwald measured this through degrees of whiteness (tint) greyness (tone) or blackness (shades).

⁴⁰ Wurmfeld 2000, pp. 32.

In antiquity, perceptions of aesthetic value for coloured material such as semi-precious stones and faience were dependent on different criteria,⁴¹ they were valued for ‘fitness for the purpose intended’, creation of ‘awe and wonder in the spectator’, but most importantly, high cultural value was placed on objects constructed employing ‘light’, ‘radiance’, ‘luminosity’⁴² and exhibiting ‘ornamentation’.⁴³

In order to undertake an examination of colour in antiquity, it is essential for us to return to philology and briefly tackle linguistic approaches to colour theory. The model for the development of colour terms developed by Berlin and Kay in the early 1970s still looms over all discussion of colour theory today.⁴⁴ This argued that languages gradually evolve a lexicon of terms for colour in a fairly rigid sequence of seven stages: from ‘black’ and ‘white’ (Stage I), to ‘red’ (II), to ‘green’, then ‘yellow’ or ‘yellow’ followed by ‘green’ (III and IV), to ‘blue’ (V), to ‘brown’ (VI), followed finally by the shades ‘pink’, ‘purple’, ‘orange’ and ‘grey’ (VII). This sequence is argued to develop in conjunction with social complexity in any culture, because ‘the encoding of perceptual categories into basic colour terms follows a fixed partial order’.⁴⁵

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
black	red	green	yellow	blue	brown	pink/grey
white		yellow	green			purple/orange

However, as with aesthetic responses, contemporary parameters for colour classifications are not relevant to the assessment of perception of colour in antiquity or for that matter, for non-Western cultures. It is ill advised to assume that colour was understood as discrete units which graduate in subtle gradations into each other, as with the contemporary colour models and spectra.⁴⁶ These concepts evolved out of studies of pigments and ocular perception and involve a level of technological sophistication and experimentation which is irrelevant to the study of colour values in the ancient world.

Assessments such as those by Berlin and Kay, therefore, should be used as guidelines to scholarship, not hard and fast rules, as they do not take into

⁴¹ Winter 2002.

⁴² In Mesopotamia: *namru/ZALAG₂* was the ideogram for light and employed as an intensifier for colours (Landsberger 1967, p. 145) in Egypt *tjenenet*–faience.

⁴³ *burrumu/DAR* in Mesopotamia covered the semantic range of ‘coloured’, ‘inlay’, and ‘ornament’ (Labat 1976, p. 91, n. 114; Borger 2004, p. 293, n. 183).

account conceptual vagaries in interpretation, such as the clearly profound value placed upon the quality of light or visual resonance in an appreciation of colour. Equally, modern evaluations neglect the high value placed upon patterning and ornament. These were not perceived as isolated individual colours but as a colour term in itself. This is a concept which is entirely alien to the contemporary audience, and therefore has received little scrutiny in scholarship.

Colour Symbolism and Polysemy in the Late Bronze Age

The academic study of colour significance in antiquity is a discipline which is still evolving. Textual evidence for the ideological and ritual significance of colour use is meagre for Egypt, somewhat less for the Near East and even more limited for the Aegean, where the residual written evidence is limited to administrative texts. However, it is possible for scholars to postulate certain values for colour and the relationship of material to colour. My discussion in this chapter entails examining both the textual and material evidence for colour values in the eastern Mediterranean and begins with Egypt.

The Egyptian colour palette appears on linguistic grounds to have been limited to five core terms for colour values, attested from as early as the 3rd millennium BCE. These terms were: ⁴⁷

White	<i>ḥd</i>
Black	<i>km</i>
Red	<i>dšr</i>
Green/Grue ⁴⁷	<i>w3d</i>
Multicoloured ⁴⁸	<i>s3b</i> ⁴⁹

This is compatible with the Berlin and Kaye model Stage III. No other terms existed for shades or hues, although it is probable that descriptive and comparative terms functioned adequately alongside core colour terms. In application, the Egyptian vocabulary was capable of employing colours

⁴⁴ With some modifications by later research, see Baines (1985a, p. 282).

⁴⁵ Berlin and Kay 1999, pp. 4–5, 104.

⁴⁶ Wurmfeld 2000, pp. 31–32; Kuehni and Schwartz 2008, p. 93.

⁴⁷ 'green-blue'.

⁴⁸ A term used to describe the skins of animals and feathering of birds.

⁴⁹ Baines 1985a, p. 283; Schenkel 1963; Robins 2001, p. 291.

from the natural environment in the pursuit of descriptive veracity, thus the sky could be described as lapis lazuli *'hsbd'* or turquoise *'mfk3t'*.⁵⁰ This terminology, however, does not account for the functional range of colours employed in visual design for the entire Egyptian historical period. Blue and yellow appear to be absent from the lexicon of base colour terms, yet they occur in the wider context of comparative terminology for objects, materials and livestock.

With the advent of a broader range of pigment colours in the New Kingdom, the lexical vocabulary did not similarly expand, and *w3d* is believed to encompass all possible variants of blue-green, including the colours violet and indigo. Such an incongruity may appear baffling to the modern spectator, but if these words embrace a more abstract notion, possibly based on intensity and contrast, rather than a specific hue or tone, their value makes a modicum of sense.⁵¹ In this instance, the interpretation of the base term 'red' would encompass the entire range of warm hues, and thus entail the range of shades from red-brown through red to orange, and lastly even yellow. Green, in juxtaposition, would encompass the range of 'cool' colours and cover greens to aquamarines and blues, and thus to purples and indigos.⁵²

Here then the value of colour is not directly associated with hue, but rather with tonal qualities. As with iconography, the Egyptian colour lexicon appears to have not been concerned with naturalistic veracity but rather with the importance of legibility of meaning.⁵³ The application of colour in visual design was therefore formulaic and clearly structured. Colours were employed in with the same methodical regime as for the visual idiom; they were used as a tool to indicate the specific class and value of an object.

The Early Dynastic period in Egypt saw the foundation of the Egyptian state as it was to remain for over three thousand years and with this came the adherence to a rigid visual repertoire. This canon functioned as a medium for the expression of state ideology. All Egyptian state sanctioned imagery reinforced this value of unity through balanced opposing forces, order (*Maat*) over chaos (*Isfet*), masculine with feminine, earth with sky, fertility (the Nile basin) over sterility (the desert).⁵⁴ Colours conveyed the same strictly encoded messages regarding the unity of opposites as the images themselves did.

⁵⁰ Warburton 2004, p. 128.

⁵¹ Warburton 2004, pp. 128–129.

⁵² Baines 1985a, pp. 285–286.

⁵³ Baines 1985a, p. 284, 1985b, p. 139.

⁵⁴ Robins 1997, pp. 17–18; Kemp 1978, p. 11; Eaverly 2004, p. 53; Davis 1989, pp. 64–65.

With respect to colour, this duality was expressed through the dark and light renderings for skin tones in human males (dark red-brown) and females (ochre-yellow, white or pink).⁵⁵ A colour convention perhaps reflected in the choice of red insets for the hunter figures of the rhyton. The symbols of Egyptian unification were the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt. These were worn as a composite crown by the ruler as a display of his function as conveyer of universal order. The fertile Nile floodplain of Egypt was the 'Black Land,' the sterile desert was the 'Red Land.' Black held contexts of night, fertility and regeneration, the underworld god Osiris was 'the black one'.⁵⁶ The colour red-yellow held a plurality of semantic values, signifying both beneficent solar and malignant typhonic forces.⁵⁷ It could be employed for fecundity figures⁵⁸ and yet was the colour of the leonine solar goddess Sekhmet in both her nurturing and scorching aspects.⁵⁹ As a consequence of its negative connotations, it was only employed for the writing of limited hieroglyphic inscriptions.⁶⁰

In the representation of deities, particularly in descriptions of statuary, the very bones of the gods are described as silver, their flesh gold⁶¹ and their hair lapis lazuli.⁶² This threefold combination may reflect the unified cosmic nature of divinity, with the lithic materials symbolically referencing the sun/masculine and moon/feminine dichotomy, and lapis lazuli the heavenly firmament through which they travel. Regardless, this conscious choice of minerals specifically reflects the precious materials considered fitting for the incarnation of deities when they resided in their cult statues.⁶³

In isolation, colours could convey different messages. White was symbolic of purity, sacredness, the mineral silver and the moon.⁶⁴ The colour

⁵⁵ Figures of foreigners as forces of chaos were not required to conform to local canons. Also this strict male-female dichotomy was loosened during the late 18th Dynasty Amarna Period, but only for members of the royal family, who were depicted with the red-brown tones of the masculine force, both male and female. This break in convention has been argued as representative of an ideological shift through the institution of the worship of the solar deity, the Aten (Eaverly 2004, pp. 53–5).

⁵⁶ Robins 1997, p. 14, 2001, p. 291.

⁵⁷ Ragai 1986, p. 74; Hodel-Hoernes 2000, p. 20; Robins 2001, p. 292.

⁵⁸ Baines 1985b, p. 142.

⁵⁹ Bianchi 1998, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Black was the preferred colour for texts.

⁶¹ A description of the sun god Ra from 'The Destruction of Mankind', where he employs the goddess Hathor in her destructive aspect, the goddess Sekhmet, to annihilate humankind (Lichtheim 1976, pp. 198–199; Lewis 2005, p. 83).

⁶² Here lapis is conflating with black, blue hair for both gods and rulers was a visual convention from New Kingdom Egypt (Griffith 2005).

⁶³ Robins 2005, pp. 1–6; Lewis 2005, p. 83.

⁶⁴ Robins 2001, p. 291; Ragai 1986, p. 75.

green was employed for malachite and invoked notions of fertility and regeneration, the word itself being cognate with 'fresh' and the papyrus stalk.⁶⁵ Deities of fecundity like Osiris and Min could be depicted in visual media with green flesh, but certain gods could also be blue fleshed, the Theban god Amen-Ra, Nile gods and the goddess Hathor.⁶⁶ The Mediterranean was the *w3d-wr*, 'Great Green,' a title which also had resonance in the Egyptian use of the colour for deities of fertility, regeneration and rebirth. Where these terms become problematic however, is the notion of green as distinct from blue, particularly with regard to faience glazes, where copper oxide blue-green conflates with what a modern audience would perceive as separate hues. The association of fertility and regeneration with the colour green extends out to include the colour blue, and thus lustrous turquoise and faience glazes were deemed appropriate for objects associated with the goddess Hathor in her regenerative capacity. In the Egyptian colour lexicon, lapis lazuli (*hsbd*) appears to have been the epithet applied to blue or dark blue materials in differentiation from green.⁶⁷

The colour blue has fuelled debate from the perceived absence of a basic developmental stage in colour perception terminology. Why is Egyptian lacking a core term for the colour blue, or indeed, was it? Some have argued for the conflation of the term green to include the colour blue,⁶⁸ others for the existence of a separate term.⁶⁹ Whichever solution is correct, if indeed such a concept is valid to an assessment of values in antiquity, there is no question of the manifestation of the hue 'blue' in the Egyptian colour palette, both in pictorial imagery and the decorative arts. Most particularly for the period we are examining here, blue became the most prestigious colour and visually associated with luxury, status and elite display.⁷⁰

In the New Kingdom, blue took a quantitative leap into the visual plane of Egyptian imagery, the likes of which is not repeated again until the Ptolemaic Period. With the use of cobalt pigment, it stepped resoundingly from a conceptual and material unity to two discrete entities, one, of intense dark lapis lazuli blue and the other, of pale turquoise blue.⁷¹ In the late 18th Dynasty, dark blues were actively employed to decorate alabaster

⁶⁵ Baines 1985a, p. 284, 1985b, p. 142; Ragai 1986, p. 77; Robins 1997, p. 15, 2001, p. 291.

⁶⁶ Baines 1985b, p. 142; Robins 1997, p. 15; Wilkinson 2008, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Baines 1985a, p. 286.

⁶⁸ Baines 1985a; Schenkel 1963.

⁶⁹ Warburton 2004, p. 128.

⁷⁰ Baines 1985a, p. 287, 1985b, pp. 141–142.

⁷¹ This is achieved visually by the use of vitreous materials for both shades or lapis lazuli for dark blue, and turquoise or feldspar (less common) for light blue. It should also be noted that these minerals can manifest a range of colour values depending on source and quality.

vases, ceramics and vitreous materials, replacing the previously dominant use of iron red and manganese black linear detail.⁷² Lighter turquoise blues compliment lapis lazuli and cobalt faïences in inlays in elite jewellery, weaponry and furniture. This juxtapositioning of colour was most frequently employed in combination with red minerals.⁷³

There is no question that the combination of red, dark blue and light blue held specific semantic value. Many commentators have argued, with complete validity, for the binary nature of Egyptian imagery,⁷⁴ but if one looks at funerary assemblages, particularly objects from the decorative arts, the outstanding colour application is of black, white and red or dark blue, light blue and red.⁷⁵ A tri-colour system presumably fusing three symbolic elements, 'dark,' 'light' and 'heat,' most commonly in combination with gold, the solar symbol, again a warm hue aligned to red.⁷⁶ Is it possible that this repeated motif was an iconographic mapping out of the three-part nature of the Egyptian cosmos, through which the sun god⁷⁷ must pass each day?

In monumental temple architecture there is a direct correlation between the use of mineral elements and the visible manifestation of the mineral composition of the earth. Such ornamentation symbolically represents the temple as the primeval mound within which creation was engendered, and the plethora of mineral elements, the elements fundamental to creation.⁷⁸ This is complimented by the conscious employment of the colours black, white and red in the decoration of temple and mortuary complexes. The colour scheme was again this tripartite combination, which reflects visually the unity of the state and the cosmos. Here then, it may also be argued that the use of faïence for architectural tiles, particularly in the 18th and 19th Dynasties, was a conscious element in this notion of universal harmony.

In the Near East, the linguistic employment of colour terms reflects that of Egypt, but in no way can be ascribed to an Egyptian influence or vice a versa. In Mesopotamia, both Sumerian and Akkadian textual evidence is limited to five basic colour terms. These too match the Berlin and Kaye model Stage III.

⁷² Hope 2001, pp. 24, 43.

⁷³ Carnelian, jasper, faïence, glass paste or red gold (Robins 1997, p. 15).

⁷⁴ Eaverly 2004; Baines 1985a; Robins 1997.

⁷⁵ Robins 2001, p. 292.

⁷⁶ Interestingly, this tripartite combination employs the earliest Berlin and Kay model stage II.

⁷⁷ And indeed the deceased regenerated as the solar deity.

	Sumerian	Akkadian
Black	GI ₆ /GE ₆	<i>šalmu</i>
White	BABBAR	<i>pešu</i>
Red-brown	SU ₄ /SA ₄	<i>sāmu</i>
Green-yellow	SIG ₇	<i>warqu/urqu</i>
Multicoloured	UGUN/DAR	<i>burrumu</i>

The latter term *burrumu*, cognate with ‘inlay’ and ‘intricate’, was an epithet of the goddess Ištar, but also conflated with red and is represented by the ideogram for a bulls horn.⁷⁹ *šalmu* was inauspicious, cognate with ‘image,’ ‘statue’ and ‘night’ and embraced all subtleties relating to sombre, shadow and dark hues, grey, blue through to black⁸⁰ *urqu* and *sāmu* both functioned as similes for ‘brilliant,’ ‘radiant’ or ‘luminescent,’ with *urqu* cognate with ‘plant’ or ‘vegetation’ and equated with the precious mineral gold. *sāmu* was auspicious, averted hostile forces and a colour specifically associated with the features of gods. *pešu* was an epithet of the sun god Šamaš, the noun for ‘day’ and was derived from the term for ‘light’ or ‘bright,’ as the sun is bright. The ideogram derived from an image of the rising sun. As *urqu* was symbolically equated with gold, *pešu* was equated with silver.⁸¹ In this lexical context, in Mesopotamia, as with Egypt, it is interesting to note that there was no core term for the notion of blue, and yellow was conflated with green.⁸²

Beyond these base terms, which were applied to describe the hues of precious stones, dyed textiles, animal hides or physical features of the human body, Mesopotamian literature employed comparative description to express notions of colour and most importantly adjectives of intensification, particularly for shades of red. Thus there were terms for intense red, dark red, bright red and burning red, also radiant, shining, matt and dull.⁸³

Precious stones were rarely named for their colour, except carnelian, and lapis lazuli again appears to have been the commonest descriptive epithet for objects of blue, dark blue or black. Texts referring to blue wools commonly employ the prefix ZA.GÌN (lapis lazuli) to describe varying shades of materials such as threads and fabrics.⁸⁴ In literature the three heavens

⁷⁸ Bianchi 1998, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Unger 1971, p. 24; for the lexical citations see Labat (1976) and Borger (2004).

⁸⁰ Unger 1971, p. 25.

⁸¹ Unger 1971, p. 25.

⁸² Landsberger 1967, pp. 139–140.

⁸³ Landsberger 1967, pp. 146–147.

⁸⁴ Preceded by the determinative for wool, SÍG (Labat 1976, p. 225, n. 539), blue wool was also considered efficacious in healing rituals (Oppenheim 1970, p. 12).

were described as constructed of precious stones, the uppermost, belonging to the god Anu, was red carnelian. Also the throne of the gods was composed of lapis lazuli and lit with red amber.⁸⁵

With respect to the visual repertoire, images in the form of wall paintings are rare, so material evidence depends more on the plastic and the decorative arts. In the decoration of jewellery, the colours black (bitumen), white (limestone, shell or ivory), red (carnelian) and blue (lapis lazuli) dominated. These were juxtaposed within matrices of gold, silver or electrum. Thus, the dominant combination was again the pairing of red and blue or black. This dichotomy has been argued as symbolic of fertility and the dual nature of the universe, masculine balanced with feminine, divine sphere with human and elite power as mediator between the two worlds.⁸⁶ It was also likely to function as a metonym for the divine pairing of the goddess Ištar and her consort Dumuzi, wherein the goddess is inferred by the colour red and the shepherd god, the blue.⁸⁷ This rationale is augmented by the war goddess bearing the epithet *mùš-me-huš*, 'she of the red face,' a title reflective of her astral nature as goddess of the morning and evening star, the planet Venus.⁸⁸

The most cogent values for colours, and for that matter, minerals, were again the tonal qualities of light and translucency. In Mesopotamia, the radiant or luminous qualities of an artefact reflected its spiritual and aesthetic value. Luminous colours were synonymous with the presence of divinity; they manifested sensations of piety, beauty and perfection.⁸⁹ Therefore, the perception of colour is again strongly influenced by notions of tonal resonance not applicable to contemporary discussions of colour, but very suitable to a discussion of the value of lustrous faience and other vitreous materials.

The Levant and Cyprus present a more problematic area for discussion, as in the past they have been dismissed as reflective of the visual styles of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and thus not to manifest a specific symbolic vocabulary. This is an issue which is difficult to refute on the basis of current visual evidence. The influence of the greater states of the eastern Mediterranean littoral cannot be overlooked, particularly in the context of the internationalism of the Late Bronze Age, but it would be naive to assume

⁸⁵ Landsberger 1967, p. 154; Rochberg 2009, p. 66.

⁸⁶ Winter 1999, p. 52; Barrett 2007, pp. 26–27.

⁸⁷ And perhaps equally directly referenced the goddess's androgynous nature, as her figure is traditionally adorned with blue lapis jewellery (Groneberg 1986; Barrett 2007, p. 27).

⁸⁸ Barrett 2007, pp. 25–26.

⁸⁹ Winter 2002, p. 13; Rochberg 2009, p. 50.

there were no local visual traditions.⁹⁰ However, this may be more applicable to quotidian production rather than the prestige materials and artefacts we examine here. It has been suggested however, that in the Levant (Israel) red was employed to indicate the sacredness of an object or building. In Anatolia the combination of red, blue and yellow may have served a similar function.⁹¹

In the Aegean, the association of linguistic terminology to values for colour is quantitatively harder to pin down, but on the basis of the limited archival evidence certain conclusions may be drawn. Unlike the previously discussed cultures, Mycenaean Linear B texts appear to have a vocabulary that included the colour blue. However, the attestation of blue or for that matter any colour term existing in Mycenaean culture should be qualified by the fact that the evidence for colour terms in the Late Bronze Age are dependant on administrative texts.⁹² Therefore, examples are limited to descriptions of commodities, textile colours and dyes, the hides of livestock and palace inventories of worked goods and raw materials.⁹³ This does not guarantee a core lexical function for a colour term, nor does it exclude the likelihood that any given term does not name a material, mineral pigment or a production technique, rather than a colour term.⁹⁴

It is impossible, therefore, to apply the Berlin and Kay model with any confidence. For in doing so one arrives at a too simplistic stage of development. Within these parameters, there were at least thirty-nine terms for colours in the Linear B documents.⁹⁵ Equally, these texts also possessed a term associated with 'ornamented,' 'patterning,' variegated' or 'dappled,' *po-ki-ro*, equivalent to the Classical period term, *ποικίλος* (*poikilos*).⁹⁶ These terms do not appear to describe hues, rather they favour nuances of saturation and brightness.⁹⁷ Of the thirty nine terms, nineteen refer to aspects of brightness/light and somberness/dark. Next in precedence are shades of red-purple, then there are two tones for yellow and two for blue, each a lighter and a darker shade.⁹⁸ Astonishingly there is no extant lexical term

⁹⁰ Webb 1999.

⁹¹ Zevit 2001, p. 272.

⁹² Monroe 2009, p. 196.

⁹³ Nosch 2004, p. 32; Gillis 2004, p. 58.

⁹⁴ Gillis 2004, p. 58.

⁹⁵ Blackolmer 2004, p. 64.

⁹⁶ Blackolmer 2004, p. 64.

⁹⁷ Gillis 2004, pp. 58–59.

⁹⁸ The identification of *κυανός* and *γλαυκός* with dark and light blue is debated in scholarship and is best understood as shades of lightness and darkness or intensity, and not of hue (Clarke 2004, pp. 131–9).

for green.⁹⁹ This evidence supports certain conclusions regarding the perception of colour in the Aegean. Emphasis, yet again, resided in the value of brightness and saturation over hue.

With respect to the visual repertoire, an examination of Aegean approaches to colour values must first look to Middle Bronze Age Crete for inspiration. In Minoan fresco representation specific colours were favoured at different periods. Other colours were equally under-represented. For the MM IB-IIA at the palace of Knossos the range of colours employed was broad, with nine colour categories identified, the most common being black, white, red and yellow. In the transition to the MM II, the colour palette expanded, but the actual range of colours employed reduced to seven. There was a dramatic increase in the use of blue, which replaced yellow in precedence. As we have already seen for the wider region, the dominant colours favoured were white, red and blue. Yellow and green were in the minority, purple was virtually absent.¹⁰⁰ These changes cannot be ascribed to scarcity of pigments, but rather to the conscious manipulation of the colour palette.¹⁰¹

In pottery, colour schemes were dominated again by the chromatic grouping of black, white and red, most exemplified by the 'light on dark' Kamares Style of the Middle Minoan period and never entirely abandoned in Aegean ceramic design in subsequent periods.¹⁰² This combination of light/white, red and dark/black has been identified as a specific Aegean visual design pattern convention which extended to the decoration of textiles as well.¹⁰³

In Minoan faience the adoption of polychrome techniques facilitated a wider colour palate, employing shades of brown, beige, green, turquoise, red and yellow.¹⁰⁴ These however gave way to the colour blue in the Mycenaean period and vitreous technology in the form of glass or vitreous paste, inlays, insets and relief beads. By the end of the period under discussion, dark blue vitreous inlays and beads were a Mycenaean elite phenomenon, associated in particular with funerary contexts and palace displays of prestige.¹⁰⁵ They were often intentionally juxtaposed in design with the mineral

⁹⁹ Blackolmer 2004, p. 64.

¹⁰⁰ Peters 2008, pp. 192–195.

¹⁰¹ Gillis 2004, pp. 57–58.

¹⁰² Blackolmer 2004, p. 62.

¹⁰³ A '*Farbentroika*' (Gillis 2004, p. 36).

¹⁰⁴ Foster 1987a, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵ The majority are dark blue with a lesser proportion of pale blue, any glass paste not conforming to these pigment colours has been found to be corroded of the original glaze (Nightingale 2008, p. 64; Hughes–Brock 2008, pp. 132, 135).

gold.¹⁰⁶ In the Aegean, yet again, blue was specifically associated with elite prerogative and was commonly juxtaposed with precious minerals.

Colour and the 'International Style' Faience

In addressing the relationship between colour use and objects in the 'International Style' one is constrained by the meagre repertoire of acknowledged artefacts in this iconographic style. The majority of artefacts are incised ivory and precious metal plaques, and therefore monochrome in isolation. However, many of these were components and inlays from larger composite objects of furniture and chariotry. Subsequently, the final assembled object would have manifested a range of textures and colours, combining luxury materials in an extravagant display of wealth.

Individual objects from the repertoire represent a much more telling example of the juxtapositioning of coloured materials. To cite one brief example, an inlaid red wood chest from the treasure of Tutankhamen is veneered and gilded and combines coloured inlays of ivory, black ebony, cream calcite, red and blue faience and glass paste.¹⁰⁷ The iconography manifests Egyptian scenes of the young ruler and his wife participating in recreational hunting activities¹⁰⁸ and on two faces, scenes from the 'International Style' repertoire of animal attack within lush foliage. It is impossible for the analyst in this instance to separate the values for colour from the symbolic resonance of the precious materials involved in the manufacture of such an object. Nor is it possible to separate Amarna period Egyptian visual ideology from that of the 'International Style'.

However, it is the employment of colour as carefully positioned overlays which makes this object such a visually splendid artefact. The predominant colours employed being cream, red and black, with lesser values of blue and white. An object such as this broadcasts technical excellence and the close relationship between elite ideology and luxury commodities, incorporating the skills of woodworking, metallurgy, ivory sculpture and vitreous technology in one artefact.

Objects replete in the 'International Style' appear to be cramming as many prestige materials into as small a space as possible and to the modern eye could be perceived as manifestations of gratuitous wealth. However, what if the extravagant incorporation of materials, textures and colour has

¹⁰⁶ Nightingale 2008, p. 80.

¹⁰⁷ Hawass 2007, p. 177; Schorsch 2001, pp. 68–69.

¹⁰⁸ Canonical imagery reinforcing the notion of fitness to rule.

intrinsic semantic value? Visually these reflect a notion of lavish ornamentation and multi-colouring. The strategic positioning of the earth's wealth conveys an ideological message of the harmony of the universe through the juxtapositioning of natural elements. These objects do not just display elite control over materials and technology, but equally convey a fusion of the minerals contained in the earth and thus the elements essential to creation. Such power over natural elements would guarantee divine rejuvenation and therefore be essential to funerary and cult equipment.¹⁰⁹ Finally, these objects also fit snugly into a colour value primary to all cultures of the eastern Mediterranean, the multicoloured value, which appears to be intrinsic to the colour lexicon of each language.¹¹⁰

Faience vessels in the 'International Style' present an opportunity to address this same semantic value in the Late Bronze Age. If the application of colour in the decorative arts is not arbitrary, but rather is an essential element of the syncretic whole, then the colours manifested upon these 'International Style' faience vessels and inlays ought to reflect the foregoing discussions on colour values. Equally, yet again the colours employed appear to reference notions of regeneration and elite ideology, particularly associated with the presence of divinity and otherworldliness.

Of the faience artefacts under scrutiny here, the glaze colours represented are dominated by blue.¹¹¹ Both the body of the amphora and vase from Bamboula would have been a luminous turquoise blue, the rhyton from Kition may well have been a dark rich lapis lazuli blue in antiquity and has now faded (Fig. 1: 3–4). After blue, red (red-brown), pale yellow and white are well represented, with green and black-brown employed for linear detail. In combination, blue is paired predominantly with white or pale yellow and with red. It is challenging to consider that while blue has no apparent place in any colour lexicon, it dominates visual style in the Late Bronze Age. This may well be ascribable to the equation of the colour with the value of minerals, particularly lapis lazuli, which was the epithet most often used to convey a notion of this hue.

Blue exhibits considerable semantic resonance as a signifier of opulence. But not blue alone, blue juxtaposed with the colour red, and with white and most importantly, as a luminous vitreous glaze. The majority of the objects under discussion bear a glossy, and, in some cases, highly translucent, metallic gleaming glaze. This underpins their symbolic value and asso-

¹⁰⁹ Bianchi 1998, p. 26.

¹¹⁰ 'Burrumu', 'szb', 'ποικιλος'.

¹¹¹ Predominantly a grey-violet blue pigment derived from copper oxide but also some instances of cobalt blue, usually as vitreous insets.

ciates them visually and semantically with kingship, otherness and the divine in all cultures residing on the eastern Mediterranean littoral. Ubiquitous faience artefacts,¹¹² from the various regions in our study, occur in a more limited range of hues, in the main copper oxide blue-green. Equally they were decorated in a bichrome brown or black.

Faience vessels in the 'International Style' are, in contrast, noticeable for their juxtapositioning of bold colours and glossy luminous glazes. It is this author's conviction that this is not an arbitrary decorative device, but is rather consciously executed, visually manifesting an international elite aesthetic that encompasses fabric, form, iconographic idiom, lustre and colour.

Faience is the perfect medium through which to illustrate the ideologies present in the eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age, for it manifests tangible evidence for elite display throughout the entire region. Faience held visual and material value as a precious lustrous stone which could be manipulated and sculpted to form ornate designs, inlays and vessels. It could bear upon its translucent surface the vibrant colours that also conspicuously advertised elite ideological notions of both cult and power. The colours constructed from precious minerals, most importantly the rich hues of blue and purple, colours most associated with prestige and elite display, equally broadcast this same message of fitness to rule and divine sanction. The faience in the 'International Style' undeniably manifests the propaganda of power and kingship, but the intimate relationship between the spheres of the sacred and the profane in antiquity may never be undervalued.

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¹¹² I hesitate to employ the term quotidian, as faience never appears to have a mundane character even when constructed on a larger scale. Take, for example, the faience rings produced at Amarna as commemorative gifts from the ruler Akhenaten to his indigent population, their function while broader in impact, still relates directly to political and religious ideology, see Patch (1998, p. 33).

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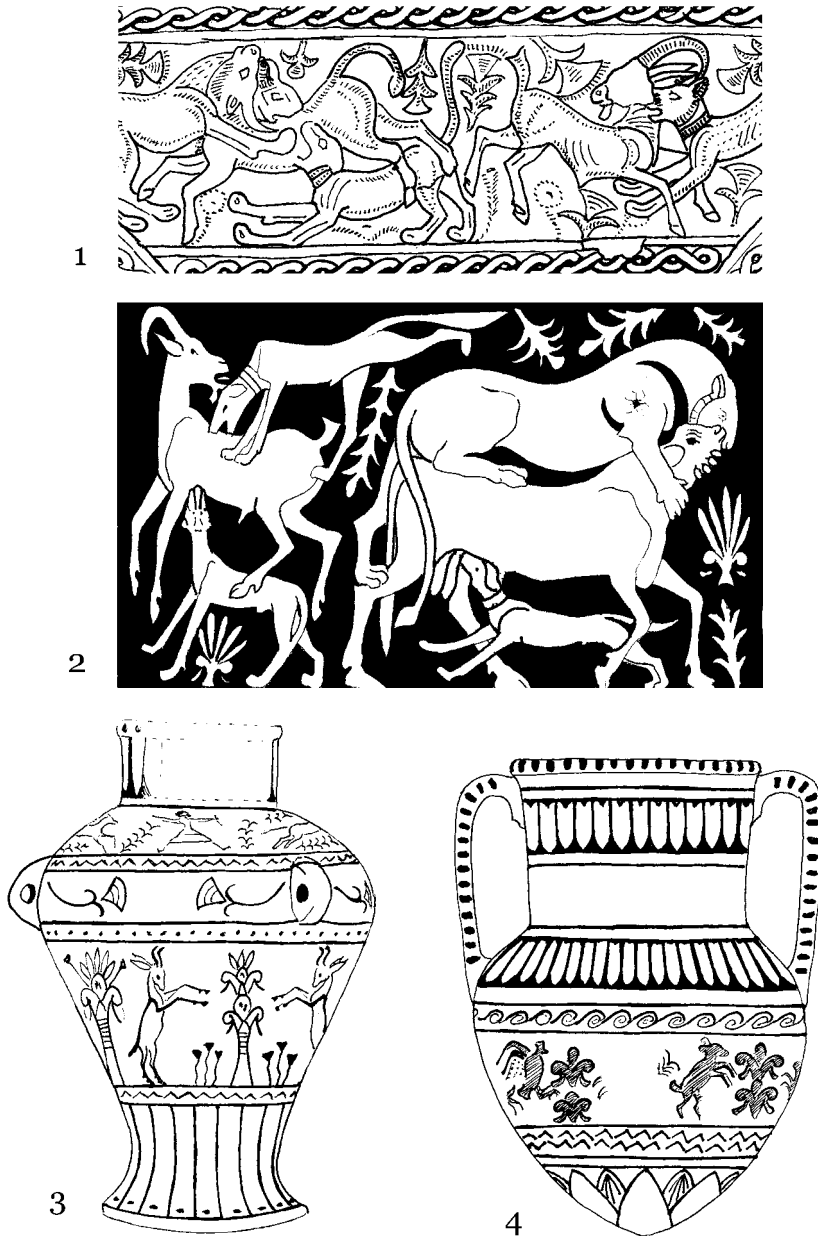


Fig. 1

1. Detail of bronze plaque with animal combat, Levant, Louvre Museum (A. Sinclair, after Aruz *et al.* 2008).
2. Detail of alabaster vessel inset with dark blue pigment showing a scene of animal combat, from the tomb of Tutankhamen, Cairo Museum (A. Sinclair, after Feldman 2006).
3. Bichrome faience vase with scenes of animal pursuit and caprids flanking sacred trees. Overall pale blue glaze with brown-black linear detail from Kition-Bamboula, Cyprus, Cyprus Museum (reconstruction A. Sinclair).
4. Polychrome faience amphora with imagery of caprids flanking sacred trees. Overall pale blue glaze with yellow base, dark blue insets and brown-black linear detail from Kition-Bamboula, Cyprus, Cyprus Museum (reconstruction A. Sinclair).



Fig. 2

1. Bichrome faience vase with scenes of animal pursuit and caprids flanking sacred trees (photo courtesy of the Director of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus).
2. Polychrome faience amphora with imagery of caprids flanking sacred trees (photo courtesy of the Director of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus).
3. Polychrome faience conical rhyton with scene of animal pursuit.
Overall deep blue glaze with red insets, and yellow and green detail from Kition, Cyprus, Cyprus Museum (photo courtesy of the Director of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus).