

The International Style

Entanglements



Technologies of Enchantment

- Crafted objects are **enchanted**:
 - “one of the technical means whereby individuals are persuaded of the necessity & desirability of the social order which encompasses them” (Gell 1992: 44)
- Power of the object:
 - Technical knowledge /skills
 - Extraordinary transformation of a natural material
- These **beguile** the viewer



Silver pomegranate,
Tomb of Tutankhamun

What is the International Style?

- Shared imagery found across many cultural regions in LBA East Mediterranean
 - Small portable objects of value & carefully crafted
 - Elite find-spots
 - Cannot place the artistic origins of objects with certainty
 - Implies pre-existing culturally specific artistic styles



Alabaster ointment jar
Tomb of Tutankhamun

Participants in International Style

- Objects decorated in “International Style” have been identified in the following places:
 - Mycenaean Greece
 - Cyprus
 - Levant: most notably Ugarit & Megiddo
 - Egypt



East Mediterranean

International Style

- Easily portable luxury objects made of valued materials:
 - Ivory, gold, alabaster, faience
- Decoration: complete hybridism of forms, motifs, materials:
 - Not just borrowing artistic vocabulary from other styles
 - A sophisticated melding of motifs, forms & techniques from a variety of influences
- Emergence of style commonly associated with gift exchange



Faience rhyton, Kition

Defining the International Style

- Feldman (2002): clearer terminology to allow a precise identification of what is international
 - **Indigenous:** features primarily found in a single, bounded geo-political area
 - **Foreign:** features known from one indigenous tradition but found outside this area
 - **International:** features found in different cultural areas & hybridized to the extent that they can not be ascribed to a single regional tradition



Silver bowl, Enkomi

International Style: Political Practice

- “highly politicized use of visual hybridization” (Feldman 2002: 7)
 - Symbolic importance of physical things & images
 - Symbolism referencing highly complex socio-political phenomena
 - Enchanted objects
 - **Entanglement** of people & things
 - Social relations mediated by material culture



Megiddo ivory plaque of sphinx

International Style: Political Practice

- International Style is situated in the cosmopolitan world of LBA international diplomacy
- Rulers from diverse cultural backgrounds interact in “idealized mode of parity & reciprocity” (Feldman 2006: 8)



Amarna letter

International Style: Political Practice

- Enchanted objects circulated within formalised exchange systems as **šulmanu**
- Ascribed symbolic value:
 - Shared register of value
 - Hybridity of image & form
- Created a multicultural system of interaction unifying rulers from very different cultural backgrounds



Gold bowl, Ugarit

Characteristics

- Two main types of imagery:
 - Martial & hunting scenes (human & animal)
 - Pastoral scenes with goats & vegetation, recumbent bulls & lions, supernatural animals (sphinxes & griffins)
- Apparent lack of narrative
- Use of antithetic palmettes
- Organization of the motifs in registers



Ivory pyxis lid Minet el Beidha

Influences

- Many motifs are drawn from Egyptian iconography of kingship:
 - Martial prowess & royal victory, fertility & prosperity
- Lion hunt: ancient Mesopotamian pedigree
- Gambolling animals & bucrania have recognizable Minoan antecedents

Detail of
Megiddo ivory



Uruk lion hunt

Pomegranates

- Highly valued in ancient Near East
 - LB cultivated in Levant
 - Exported to Egypt & Mediterranean
- Consumed in ceremonial banquets



Pomegranate vase,
Tomb of Tutankhamun

Materiality of Pomegranats

- Crafted in luxury materials:
 - Silver, ivory, gold, glass
 - Related to production of international style



Glass pomegranate, Enkomi

Materiality of Pomegranates

- Integrated within ceremonial consumption:
 - Ritual practice, feasting & personal adornment
- Fertility symbol but also associations with death (colour of blood)



Cylinder seal necklace with gold beads in the shape of pomegranates and dates
Cyprus, Ayios Iakovos-Dhima (LC IIA)

Bibru: Gifting & Feasting Elites

- Rare examples of polychrome faience vessels from Cyprus & Levant:
 - Form of animal head or woman's head
- Used in ceremonial performance & high status feasting
- Peltenburg: *bibru* (animal headed cups)
- Zuckerman: gift exchange



Faience cup, palace at Hazor

Hybridity & Shared Cultural Milieu

- **Hybridization:** creation of new social practices & of mixed/altered material culture
- Choices made by social agents within a contact situation
- Cosmopolitan LBA
Mediterranean = **Shared Cultural Milieu**
 - Increasing interactions between peoples of different cultures creating diverse contact situations
 - Does not assume cultural pre-eminence



Silver jug, Tell Basta

Hybridity & Shared Cultural Milieu

- International Style = product of Shared Cultural milieu
- Elites have access to, adopt & adapt material culture
- This is integrated within new social practices:
 - For example ceremonial performance in Canaanite palaces.
- Exchanges (objects & ideas) is facilitated through interaction between elites



Enkomi ivory gaming box

Pastoral Style

- Aegeanizing ceramic tradition from Cyprus in 13th-12th century
- Local response to the imported Mycenaean pictorial vases
 - Bell-shaped kraters
- Influences:
 - Contemporary ivory workshops (mode of depiction)
 - Ionography derives from the International Style



Pastoral krater, Klavdhia

A Taste for the Exotic

- Two centres in particular stand out for consumption of the International Style:
 - Enkomi & Ugarit
- Foreign images widely & regularly consumed at both sites
- Personal display referenced the Aegean, Near East & Egypt
 - Foreign iconographies had a wide currency in certain elements of society
 - Ability to “read” narratives of imported art?
 - The exotic was prized & sought after



Gold “mouthpiece” Enkomi

Summary

- International Style = “diplomacy by design”
- Manipulation of enchanted portable objects to create small greeting gifts desirable amongst international rulers
- Widely attested throughout East Mediterranean
- Multiple workshops specialising in ivories, metalwork, faïences
 - Difficult to pinpoint origins of individual pieces
 - Drawing on inspiration from crafted objects of many regions