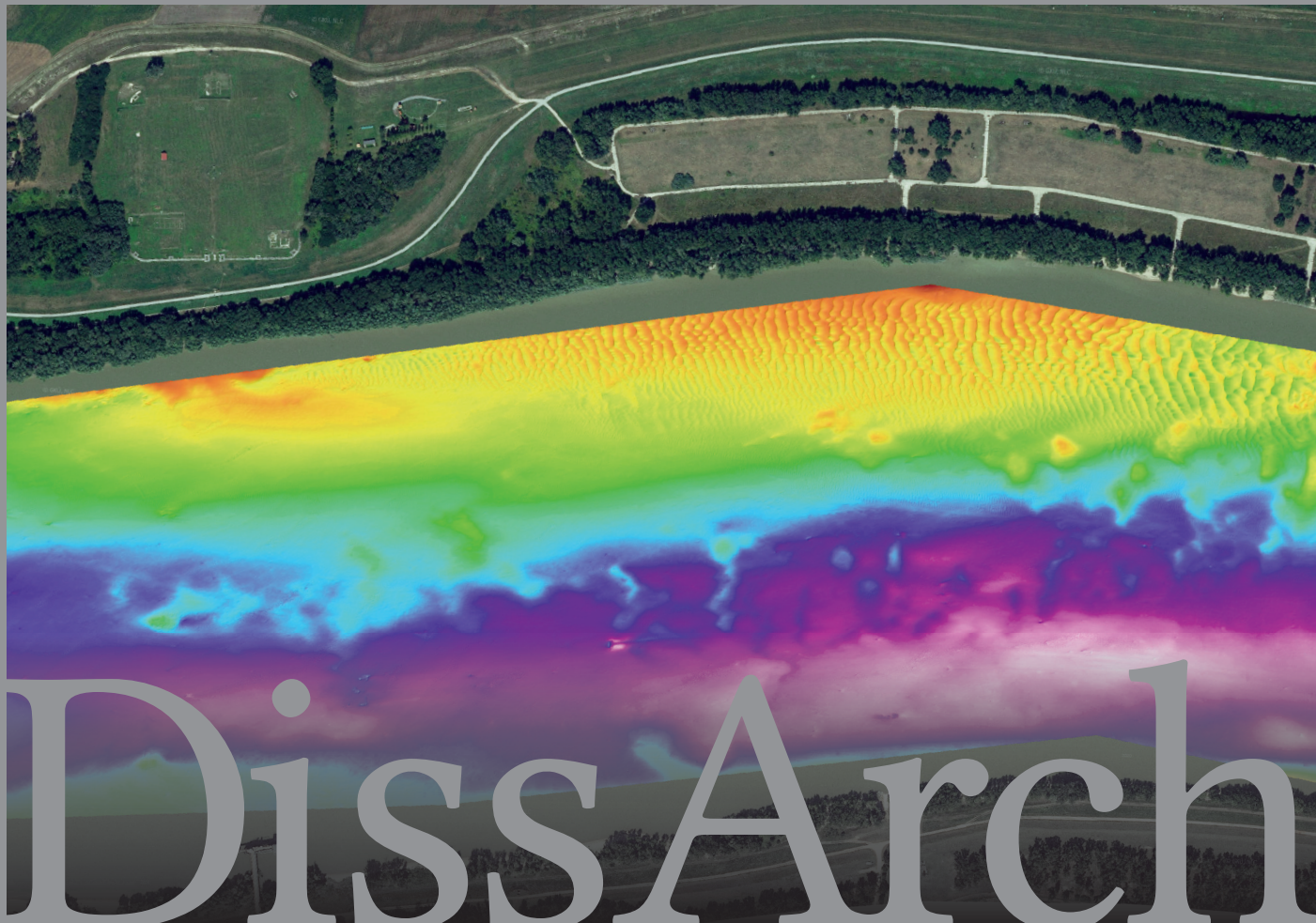


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ex Instituto Archaeologico

Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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Egyptian influence on Late Bronze Age (1600–1200 BC) ivory artefacts from the kingdoms of Ugarit and Qatna

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Abstract: This paper aims to provide insights into the Egyptian influence on ivory art in Late Bronze Age Syria. Numerous ivory artefacts from this period were found in Ugarit and Qatna. The decorations of these objects cover a large variety of themes. Two styles can be distinguished based on how they use foreign Egyptian elements; this article discusses the differences between them. Egyptian influence seems stronger in the ivory art of Ugarit, where the local tradition appears combined with foreign elements. In contrast, in Qatna, fewer Egyptianising objects were made, but these feature exclusively Egyptian motifs.

Keywords: ivory, Egyptian influence, hybrid regional art, Ugarit, Qatna

Introduction

In the Late Bronze Age, the territory of present-day Syria was inhabited by Amorites and Canaanites: the Amorites¹ established the kingdom of Qatna on the mainland, whereas the Canaanites² occupied the coastal region, establishing the kingdom of Ugarit. During this time, Syria was at the crossroads of civilisations. Great powers, such as the kingdoms of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Hittites, exerted control over different parts of the region. Northern Syria was under Hittite influence, while Egypt controlled the southern parts. These cultures brought along their styles, which interacted with local traditions. Artefacts excavated across Syria attest to these different influences (Egyptian, Hittite, and Aegean art) and the amalgamation of local traditions with foreign elements, which led to the emergence of a hybrid art in the kingdoms in the territory of the country. In his seminal study, *The Art of Qatna and the Question of the 'International Style'*, Pfälzner differentiates between three main styles in the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Levant during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages:³

- hybrid interregional styles: no local or regional characteristics can be traced;
- hybrid regional styles: the foreign, international motifs are integrated into a regional style;
- indigenous regional styles: artefacts feature exclusively local or regional motifs (without international ones or other foreign elements).

1 WASSERMAN – BLOCH 2023, 404–421.

2 SUSNOW 2021, 25–55.

3 PFÄLZNER 2015, 185–186.

This paper focuses on the first and second styles in the two kingdoms within the territory of today's Syria: the hybrid interregional and hybrid regional styles, which are represented by either the absence of local characteristics or the merging of local and foreign elements. Their emergence is due to the geographical position of the respective geopolitical units, which made them a meeting point between Mesopotamia, the Hittite Empire, and Egypt. Ivory objects are a great source of information for the research of these hybrid arts. The royal palace of Ugarit must have also been an ivory production centre: large amounts of ivory artefacts were found there, all made in a style that integrates foreign style elements. Similarly, the ivory artefacts known from the kingdom of Qatna illustrate the interplay of local and foreign traditions.

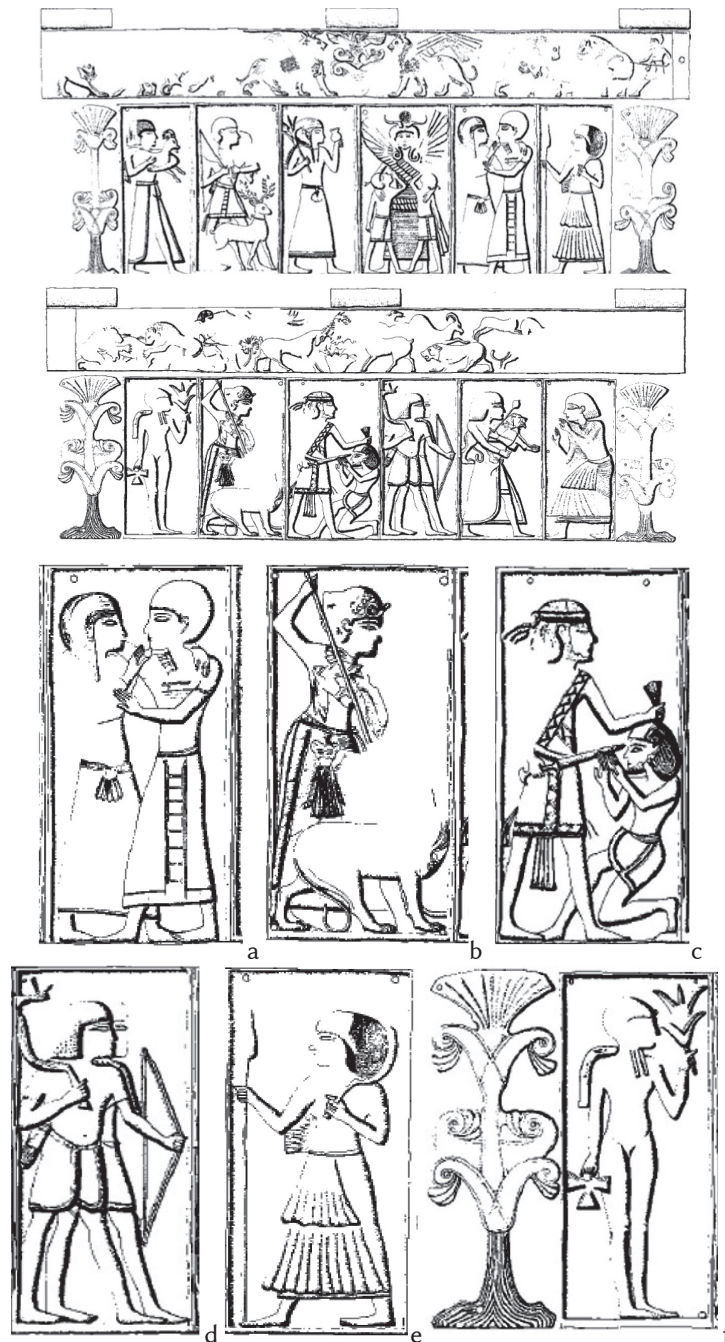


Fig. 1. Ivory bed panel with two decorated faces, containing scenes of 'peace' (top) and 'war' (bottom) (YON 2006, 136, Fig. 21.a–b). a – Couple in an embrace on the 'peace side', b – hunting king on the 'war side', c – king with a prisoner on the 'war side', d – king with a *khopesh* sword on the 'war side', e – king with a *khopesh* sword on the 'peace side', f – acanthus/volute plant on the 'war side'.

Ivory artefacts from Qatna and Ugarit

Ivory comes from two sources: elephant tusks and hippopotamus canines. The hippopotamus tooth is harder, whiter, and denser than the tusks of elephants.⁴ It was widely used in antiquity, while elephant tusks remained somewhat rare, mostly reserved for palace workshops and large, prestigious works of art.⁵

The oldest evidence of ivory use in the ancient Near East dates back to the mid-5th millennium BC in Egypt. The oldest ivory objects in Syria are dated to the Bronze Age.⁶ These include actual elephant bones found in different sites throughout the region, such as Alalakh in the north, Kamid el-Loz in the south, and, most importantly, Qatna in the Orontes Valley. Egyptian kings Thutmose I and Thutmose III mention in their annals that they were hunting elephants near Apamea in the Orontes Valley.⁷ This, in combination with the discovery of elephant bones at Qatna, provides conclusive evidence that elephants inhabited Western Syria between the end of the Middle Bronze Age and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age.⁸ In addition to elephant bones, carved ivory artefacts were also found in large numbers in the Late Bronze Age at Qatna,⁹ but only three of all known objects from the Royal Hypogeum can be assigned to the hybrid interregional style: a Hathor face, a ‘papyrus’ sceptre, and a *djed* pillar. These comprise exclusively Egyptian motifs.



Fig. 2. Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti with their daughters (PRITCHARD 1969, 143, Fig. 411).

It is interesting to note that no elephant bones have been found in the Middle Bronze Age layers of Ugarit, but elephant remains have been recovered from Late Bronze Age contexts there.¹⁰ The 1955 excavations brought to light more than sixty ivory artefact fragments from the ground floor of the Royal Palace, covered with a burnt layer;¹¹ however, no elephant bones were found within the remains of the building complex.¹²

The findings included an ivory bed panel, the two faces of which had been decorated with scenes depicting aspects of everyday and political life. Decorations like this had a long tradition in the ancient Near East, going back to the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC and including the famous Standard of Ur, on which scenes of war (battle, captured prisoners) and peace (celebratory banquet) appear carefully decorated on four sides of the box panels.¹³ The artist in Ugarit merged these popular Near Eastern motifs with foreign, Egyptian elements. Similarly, a pedestal with an elaborate, round top, a miniature figure of a musician, a hunting horn, and a clapper (castanet)

4 MOOREY 1999, 115.

5 CAUBET 2008, 406; MOOREY 1999, 116.

6 TURRI 2009, 189–190.

7 CAUBET – POPLIN 1987, 298.

8 PFÄLZNER 2016, 170.

9 Most ivory artefacts collected in Qatna were made of hippopotamus canines instead of elephant tusks; see CAUBET – POPLIN 2015, 133.

10 PFÄLZNER 2016, 171.

11 GACHET-BIZOLLON – PARDEE 2008, 182.

12 YON 1997, 53, 146–149.

13 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1928-1010-3

also shows enormous Egyptian influence. The ivory objects from Ugarit generally seem to reflect more Egyptian influence than those discovered at Qatna, which may be due to Ugarit being more extensively excavated than Qatna, or it may indicate a more widespread Egyptian presence in the kingdom of Ugarit.

Our knowledge of the production process of ivory artefacts and the related equipment is scarce. The earliest descriptions date from the 11th century AD. It was suggested that the methods and tools of woodworking were also used to carve, smooth, and polish ivory objects. This equipment included awls, chisels, knives, drills, and saws.¹⁴

Egyptian influence on ivory artefacts from Ugarit

A carved bed panel with two decorated faces (elephant ivory)

The bed panel carved of elephant ivory was found in Room 44 of the Royal Palace of Ugarit, on the northwestern side of Garden III. It is 50 cm high and 1 m wide, and it dates to the 14th century BC (Fig. 1).¹⁵ The bed panel has two decorated faces. One, the ‘peace side’, depicts episodes from everyday life; the other, ‘war side’, contains scenes of what might be best described as different aspects of political life (a lion hunt and marching soldiers). The sides of the image fields are closed by acanthus leaf (volute plant) bands, while their tops by friezes featuring hunting and animal fight scenes. The friezes at the bottom of the bed panel have been deformed beyond recognition.¹⁶

The ‘peace side’ of the bed panel is devoted to scenes of daily life. The first two scenes from the left depict two figures with Egyptian hairstyles, dressed in Egyptian attire, and accompanied by animals carried as offerings. The first figure holds a goat in his arms; the artist’s focus here was on emphasising the goat’s features, including the hair beneath its chin and its pointy horns. The figure in the second scene holds a leash in his left hand and leads a deer with a forked pair of horns. Both scenes indicate movement by depicting the figures, as well as the deer, with their left legs stepping in front of their right legs. The same is true for the third scene, where a figure in a long skirt fastened with a belt at the waist carries a goblet of wine (the ‘blood of trees’ in Ugaritic texts)¹⁷ in his right hand and a branch in the left.

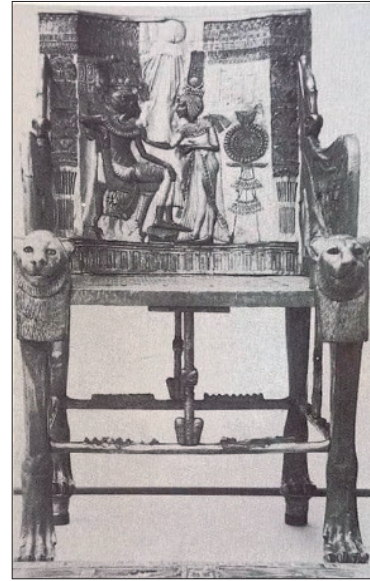


Fig. 3. Tutankhamun’s throne with the depiction of an intimate moment between the royal couple (PRITCHARD 1969, 145, Figs 415–417).



Fig. 4. Amenhotep III (1390–1953 BC) wears a blue crown with the *Uraeus* snake (PRITCHARD 1969, 138, Fig. 395).

¹⁴ TURRI 2009, 190; MOOREY 1999, 125.

¹⁵ YON 2006, 136.

¹⁶ MATOIAN 2008, 110–115.

¹⁷ SCHAEFFER 1934, 130.

The fourth scene depicts a winged deity resembling the Egyptian goddess Hathor with cow ears, a distinctive wig, and a pair of horns adorned with a Sun Disc.¹⁸ The goddess is breastfeeding two infants, whose identity remains unknown; perhaps they represent the king's sons, as known from the myth of Keret,¹⁹ which describes the birth of the future king Isaib and that how he was breastfed by the gods Etherat and the virgin Anat.²⁰

The fifth scene includes the portrait of a pair, presumably the royal couple, locked in an embrace,²¹ with the queen's belly projecting slightly forward (Fig. 1.a). The queen's round belly most likely indicates her pregnancy, and she offers a pomegranate blossom, the symbol of fertility in Ugarit,²² to her husband. The closest parallel to this scene is the famous portrait of Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti (Fig. 2), which depicts a scene from the private life of the royal couple, showing them playing with three of their daughters in the presence of their god, Aten. A similar intimate portrait depicts King Tutankhamun on a throne, while his wife, Ankhesenamun, stands in front of him, touching his shoulder. A similar representation of an intimate moment between the royal couple appears on the backrest of a throne that was buried, together with many other belongings, in Tutankhamun's tomb (Fig. 3).

The last scene on the 'peace side' shows another figure holding a spear in his right hand and a sickle-shaped sword or scimitar (*khopesh* in Egyptian) in the left. Such a sword also appears on the 'war side' of the bed panel; it is discussed in more detail below, in relation to its Egyptian parallels. The figure may represent one of the high-ranking officials attached to the king's personal service.²³

On the other side of the bed panel, six scenes represent different aspects of political life. The first scene from the left depicts a nude goddess with blurred facial features. Her right arm extends along her body, holding the Egyptian Ankh symbol, while the left one is raised, holding a lotus flower. The theme of the second scene is quite different: it portrays the king on a lion hunt, wearing the blue crown of Egypt and a long skirt, and slightly leaning forward (Fig. 1.b). The hunting scene resembles representations in Egyptian art, and the blue crown of the king is a direct link to Egypt, where this particular type of crown appeared in royal iconography first in the Second Intermediate



Fig. 5. The Narmer palette from Hierakonpolis, with the depiction of the king smiting a kneeling prisoner (PRITCHARD 1969, 92, Fig. 296).

18 For this so-called Hathoria decoration, see BASSON 2012, 20.

19 For this fragmentary Ugaritic text, which deals with the hero Keret, see LEICK 1991, 102.

20 GACHET-BIZOLLON 2001, 34.

21 The embracing lovers scene was a common theme of Eastern art, initially representing a god and goddess. Over time, it evolved into depictions of couples, symbolising intimacy. The bed panel scene from Ugarit is a simple expression of closeness between the king and the queen, reflecting an influence of Egyptian art. See GACHET-BIZOLLON 2001, 38.

22 GACHET-BIZOLLON 2001, 38.

23 GACHET-BIZOLLON 2001, 52.



Fig. 6. a – A *khopesh* sword from Ugarit (YON 2006, 168, Fig. 61), b – A scythe-shaped sword (*khopesh*) from Tutankhamun's tomb; its decoration resembles the *khopesh* sword from Ugarit (KANTOR 1945, 117, Fig. 3.61).



Fig. 7. Battle relief of Seti I in Karnak, with the king holding a *khopesh* sword (OIP 107, 231, Pl. 28).

Period,²⁴ became common during the New Kingdom and was most popular with the kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty, including Amenhotep III (Fig. 4).

The third scene also reflects a distinct influence of Egyptian art: the king, in a short skirt, towers above a kneeling and pleading prisoner of war. He holds the prisoner's hair in his left hand and a sword²⁵ in the right (Fig. 1.c). A close parallel to this depiction appears on the so-called Narmer palette, which portrays the Egyptian king Narmer in a similar posture, slaying an enemy (Fig. 5). Narmer was the king who unified Upper and Lower Egypt; the king of the representation in focus perhaps carried out a similar act by unifying the kingdom of Ugarit. Whatever the case may be, the artist of the bed panel evidently drew inspiration from Egyptian art to portray the king of Ugarit as powerful and heroic as his Egyptian counterpart. The king's heroism is also depicted in a straightforward way in the second and third scenes, which combine the theme of the conquering king with that of the hunter, portraying him as a great and powerful ruler who can defend his city against all kinds of evil.²⁶

Two figures appear in the fourth scene (Fig. 1.d), although only the one standing in the front is fully visible. The figure has Egyptian features; he holds a *khopesh* sword in his right hand, a bow in the left, and an arrow quiver hangs from his waist. This representation is

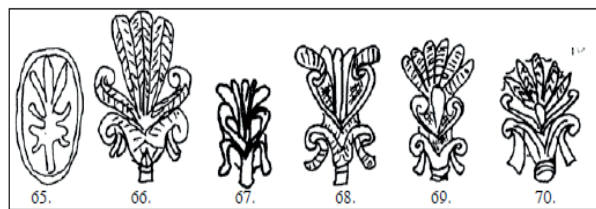


Fig. 8. Acanthus/volute plant variations used at the time of the Eighteenth Dynasty (KANTOR 1945, 263, Fig. 65–70).

²⁴ DAVIES 1982, 69–74.

²⁵ According to Yon (YON 2006, 169), swords of this type, characterised by a long blade, tang, and two cutting edges, were produced in the territory of today's Syria and traded to Egypt, where they first appeared in the 13th century BC. Such a sword was discovered during an excavation in Ugarit (YON 2006, 168, Fig. 62).

²⁶ The lion also appears in inscriptions as the king's prey or companion in battles; see GACHET-BIZOLLON 2001, 48–49.

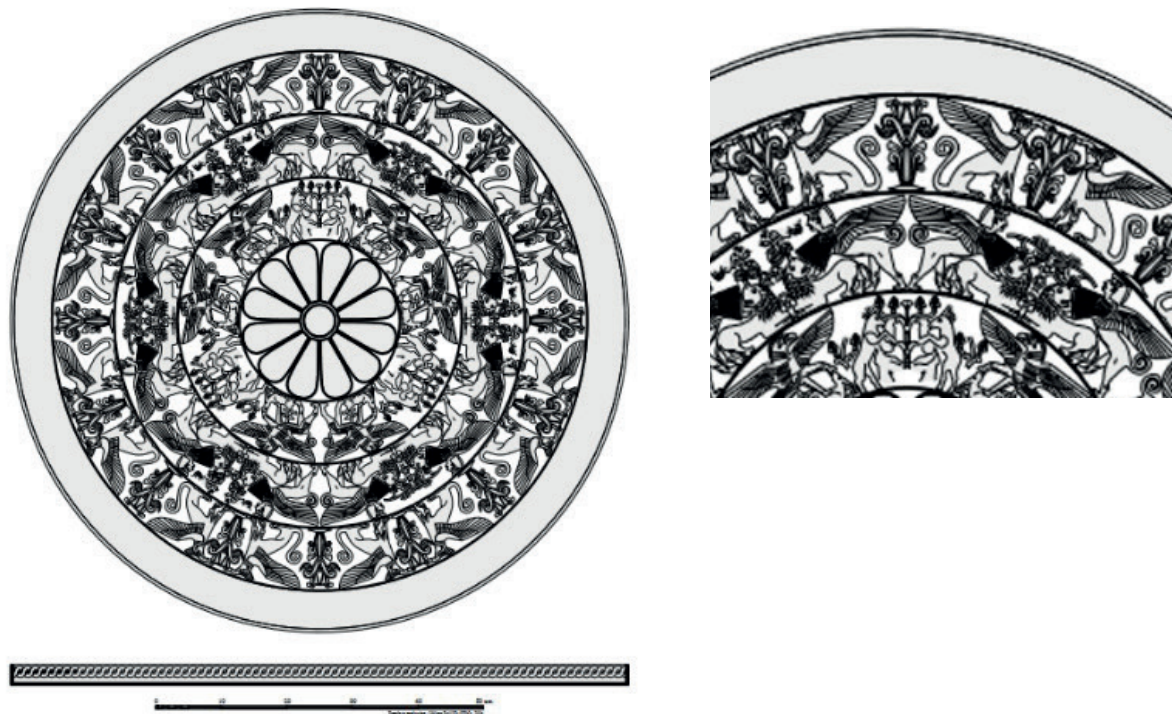


Fig. 9. Reconstructed decoration of the top of the ivory pedestal from the Royal Palace of Ugarit (GACHET-BIZOLLON 2008, 190, Fig. 35b).

analogous to the portrait of the king carrying the same sickle²⁷ on the ‘peace side’ (Fig. 1.e). *Khopesh* swords were cast in one piece; their blade was as long as the hilt. Excavations in Ugarit discovered one such sword in the Lower East City (Fig. 6.a),²⁸ and another example with similar decoration is known from Tutankhamun’s tomb (Fig. 6.b). Additionally, *khopesh* swords also appear in Egyptian figural representation, such as the battle relief of King Seti I, where the ruler is depicted holding such a weapon in his right hand (Fig. 7). The depiction of the sickle in this panel imitates the Egyptian style.

The last two scenes of the ‘war side’ feature a man with Egyptian features, wearing a long skirt. In the penultimate scene, he carries a small lion with a collar around its neck and holds a mace in his left hand. In the last scene, he appears with his arms stretched and his torso bent forward.

Both sides of the bed panel are framed with intricate acanthus leaf (volute plant) patterns (Fig. 1.f). Acanthus/volute plant motifs were used since long



Fig. 10. Stone stele from the palace of Amenhotep III in Malkata (PFÄLZNER 2015, 202, Fig. 37).

27 The sickle, as an agricultural tool, was first developed in Southwest Asia during the early Neolithic period (GOODALE *et al.* 2010, 1193). From the Akkadian period, the sickle was referred to as *niggallu/ningallu*, a term primarily denoting a tool used for harvesting grain crops (CDA 252; CDA G 213).

28 YON 2006, 169.



Fig. 11. Miniature figurine of a musician holding a tambourine, made of hippopotamus tooth (YON 2006, 138, Fig. 24).

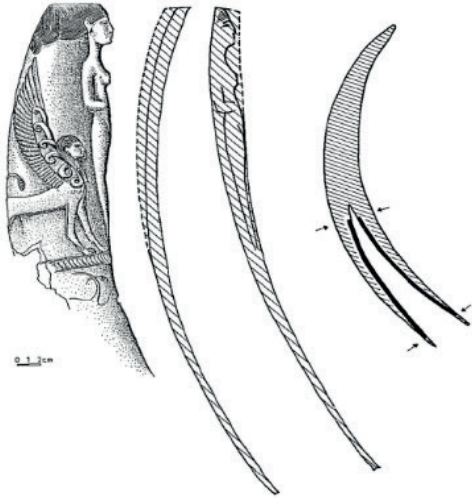


Fig. 13. Horn from the Royal Palace of Ugarit (YON 2006, 138, Fig. 23).

the naked goddess on the 'war side' is depicted from the side, but—unlike all other figures on the bed panel—she does not step forward.

Given the numerous Egyptian influences detailed above, the question arises: Was the bed panel created by a Ugaritic or Egyptian artist? Is it the work of a Ugaritic artist who had travelled to



Fig. 12. Dancers playing tambourines (on the left) on a relief in the tomb of Kahi in Saqqara, dated c. 1500–1200 BC (PRITCHARD 1969, 66, Fig. 211).

in the territory of today's Syria, while in Egypt, this motif only appeared around the end of the Seventeenth Dynasty (mid-16th century BC), becoming common by the time of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Kantor termed its most popular variant 'volute palmette', describing it as a sub-type of the 'South-lower hybrid type'²⁹ (Fig. 8). It is still uncertain if volute plant ornaments originate from Egypt or Asia. Some believe they have an Egyptian origin, from which they were carried to Asia and reintroduced later in Egypt. In contrast, others believe that these motifs have an Asian origin.³⁰

In summary, the two faces of the ivory bed panel depict a wide variety of scenes loosely clustered around two overarching themes: activities carried out during peacetime (ceremonies, intimate encounters between lovers) and those undertaken during times of war and political conflict (marching soldiers, and royal hunts). As with the other figural representations on this panel, the hairstyle and attire—whether short or long loin-cloths, court robes, or tunics—reflect Egyptian influence³¹. The individual scenes are characterised by the identical body positions of all figures, where the right leg steps forward to express motion. Only the two goddesses are portrayed differently: the nursing goddess on the 'peace side' looks towards the viewer, whereas

29 KANTOR 1945, 251–304.

30 KANTOR 1945, 302; PFÄLZNER 2015, 199.

31 GACHET-BIZOLLON 2001, 57.



Fig. 14. Clapper/castanet from Ugarit (LAGARCE 2004, 291, Fig. 341).



Fig. 15. A clapper/castanet with a *Heget* inscription from the Second Intermediate Period of Egypt (BAINES – MÁLEK 1982, 114).

Egypt and gained experience there in this particular form of artistic expression? That would explain the high number of Egyptian motifs on the panel, most of which have their parallels in the art of Akhenaton's Egypt.

Schaeffer dated the ivory finds to the reigns of Amenhotep III and IV (between 1400 and 1350 BC),³² a time when the arts experienced a sense of liberation, particularly in depicting intimate moments between the royal couple, which also influenced the Kingdom of Ugarit.

Pedestal with a decorated round top (elephant ivory)

The pedestal was found in the Royal Palace of Ugarit (Fig. 9). It has an elaborate, round top with a decoration arranged in four concentric, circular bands around a twelve-petalled flower. The innermost band features a dual scene, one with a pair of gryphons trampling goats and another with a pair of rearing goats leaning against the Tree of Life, arranged so that the trampling gryphons face each other and flank the rearing goats on both sides. This composition is repeated three times within the band; it has close parallels on a stone stele in the palace of Amenhotep III at Malkata (Fig. 10). The second band features two sphinxes, the hairstyles and facial features of which show Egyptian influence. They are standing on top of a pair of lions; this composition is repeated six times within the band. The outermost band features a pair of facing gryphons sitting on their hind legs and two types of Egyptian-style volute plant motifs connected by a garland.³³

This pedestal is significant because it features Egyptian influence, but its design is deeply rooted in Near Eastern iconographic tradition. The motif of the juxtaposed rearing goats has a particularly long tradition in ancient Near Eastern art, going back to the Early Dynastic period and the royal cemetery of Ur.³⁴

32 UG. III (1956), 127.

33 PFÄLZNER 2015, 195.

34 PFÄLZNER 2015, 190.

Miniature figurine of a musician (hippopotamus ivory)

This 5.4 cm high miniature figurine, a sculpture in the round carved from a piece of hippopotamus tooth, was found in Tomb 3464 of the South Acropolis (Fig. 11). It portrays a woman sitting on her heels and holding a musical instrument, a tambourine or a pair of cymbals,³⁵ in her hand. She may be Anat, who beats the drum or the tambourine, according to a mythological text devoted to music and dance.³⁶ The tambourine was also known in ancient Egypt, where its depiction appears on the walls of several temples and tombs (Fig. 12).



Fig. 16. Hathor face from the Royal Hypogeum of Qatna (TURRI 2009, 189).

Horn (elephant ivory)

The object was found in Pavilion 86 in the northeastern part of Garden III in the Royal Palace; it is c. 60 cm high, and its mouth is 11 cm in diameter (Fig. 13). It was cut from the hollow part of an elephant's tusk and adorned with relief decoration, a naked woman holding her breasts in her hands, flanked by a pair of sphinxes with unfolding wings. Such instruments were used in Egypt during religious ceremonies; researchers believe that this particular piece was also brought from Egypt to its place of finding.³⁷



Fig. 17. Astar with Hathor's face, a pendant from Ugarit (YON 2006, 166, Fig. 58.a).

Clapper (castanet)

The clapper measures 4.8 × 5.3 × 7.4 × 0.5 cm. It was found in a priest's house in Ugarit and is now kept in the National Museum of Damascus in Syria (Fig. 14). Both its bent shape and the Hathor face decorating it can be associated with the Egyptians, who used such objects as musical instruments in religious ceremonies and often portrayed them in the hands of Egyptian dancers on tomb walls.³⁸ An analogy in bone from the time of the Second Intermediate Period is a clapper in the form of a forearm, featuring the names of the goddess Heget and the prince Sithathor (Fig. 15).³⁹

The decoration of the ivory objects from Late Bronze Age Ugarit encompasses a wide range of topics, portraying them in a highly integrative manner that combines native Syrian patterns with Egyptian solutions and those of the Mesopotamian iconographic tradition. All presented artefacts

35 YON 2006, 139.

36 SCHAEFFER 1963, 132.

37 YON 2004, 290.

38 LAGARCE 2004, 291.

39 BAINES – MÁLEK 1982, 114.

exhibit a clear Egyptian influence, evident in the figures' hairstyles and dresses, as well as the frequent use of sphinxes (pedestal and hunting horn), Hathor motifs (bed panel, clapper), and perhaps the acanthus/volute plant motif (bed panel and pedestal). In addition, the miniature figurine of a musician depicts a kneeling woman playing a native Egyptian instrument, such as a tambourine or a pair of cymbals.

Some of these motifs, like the Hathor face, have also found their way into Qatna. However, compared to Ugarit, Egyptian influence on ivory art appears to have been considerably less significant in Late Bronze Age Qatna, as evidenced by the find material, which includes only a Hathor face, an ivory 'papyrus' sceptre, and a *djed* pillar.

Egyptian influence on ivory finds from Qatna

Hathor face (elephant ivory combined with limestone and gypsum)

The design of the piece found in the Lower Town Palace of Qatna shows clear iconographic and stylistic similarities with the Hathor face (Fig. 16), a popular motif during the Late Bronze Age. In Qatna, it was not only used to decorate ivory but also adorned several gold artefacts. The Hathor face appears on a variety of objects, including ornaments, decorative plaques, and quiver covers, across Syria, as well as at Ugarit (Fig. 17), Byblos, and Tyre.

The Hathor face from Qatna was most likely applied to some furniture or was part of a composite statuette.⁴⁰ The Egyptianising style of the object is evident in the frontal composition, the distinctly triangular face, as well as the proportion and shape of the inlaid eyes. However, some characteristic features of the goddess Hathor, such as the cow ears, are missing.⁴¹ While the object is strongly Egyptianising, one must also keep in mind that depicting human faces has always been of great significance in the ancient Near East, with the earliest evidence—a portrait made of white marble, found in Uruk⁴²—dating back to the 4th millennium BC. Comparing this face to the ivory one from Ugarit, one immediately notices the similarity of the unusually large, almond-shaped eyes and the nicely formed eyebrows, which, unlike those in the face from Qatna, are joined (Fig. 18).

The 'papyrus' sceptre

This amulet was discovered in a sarcophagus within the main chamber of the Royal Hypogeum of Qatna (Fig. 19). The papyrus plant was a common symbol in ancient Egyptian culture, associated with growth, regeneration, and renewal, all connected to the annual flooding of the Nile and the fertility of the land.

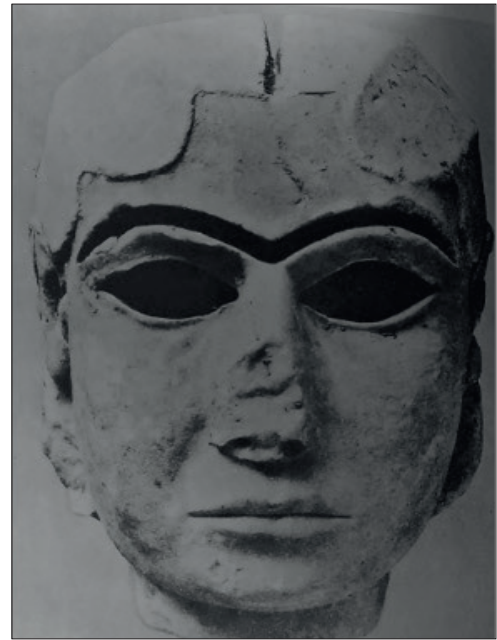


Fig. 18. Female face carved of white marble, Uruk (LLOYD 1965, 42, Fig. 21).

40 BONACOSSO 2008, 233–234.

41 BONACOSSO 2008, 234.

42 LLOYD 1965, 42.



Fig. 19. Ivory 'papyrus' sceptre from the Royal Hypogeum in Qatna (PFÄLZNER 2009, 136).



Fig. 20. 'Papyrus' sceptre from the pyramid temple of Unas (BELL 1995, 37).

The small artefact bears the characteristic form of an Egyptian papyrus column or *Wadj* amulet.⁴³ The papyrus column motif was widely used in ancient Egyptian architecture; the simple variants featured a single row of umbels, while the complex ones displayed multiple rows. One of the oldest known occurrences is the columns in the pyramid of Unas from the Fifth Dynasty. These resemble the ivory piece from Qatna since they also feature a single row of umbels (Fig. 20).⁴⁴

Djed pillars

The last presented ivory objects featuring a strong Egyptian influence from Qatna are the *djed* pillars discovered in the Royal Hypogeum (Fig. 21). The *djed* is the Egyptian sign for 'endurance', meaning 'stability' or 'continuity of power'.⁴⁵ Its oldest appearance is on a frieze at the top of a wall in Temple T, west of the Hebsed Court, in the Step Pyramid complex of Nertjerykhet (Djoser) in Saqqara, dating from the time of the Third Dynasty (2686–2613 BC).⁴⁶ *Djed* pillar-shaped objects were also used as amulets, fastened invariably around the lower torso of mummies.⁴⁷ The ivory *djed* pillars found at Qatna were most likely also used as amulets.

Summary

The Late Bronze Age was a period during which interregional motifs circulated across wide, interconnected regions in the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia. The art of this time can be best characterised through artefacts, including objects made mostly of hippopotamus canines for the less well-off strata of society and ones carved from rare elephant ivory, a raw material reserved for the elite.

⁴³ PFÄLZNER 2009, 136.

⁴⁴ BAINES – MÁLEK 1982, 76.

⁴⁵ HART 2005, 120.

⁴⁶ ANDREWS 1994, 83.

⁴⁷ ANDREWS 1994, 83.



Fig. 21. *Djed* pillars from the Royal Hypogeum in Qatna (TURRI 2009, 188).

Egyptian art had a strong influence on the kingdom of Ugarit, objects of which—such as the carved bed panel or the pedestal with a decorated top—feature themes of power and religion, reframing local traditions in a new, Egyptianising fashion, thus developing a hybrid regional style. The presented ivory pieces from Qatna seem to reflect a different artistic approach, which involves focusing on foreign elements and abandoning all regional characteristics (hybrid interregional style). It is somewhat odd, considering that other (non-ivory) artefacts, including ornaments, decorative plaques, and the quiver cover found in the royal tomb and the royal palace, merge local and foreign elements the same way as the ivory art in Ugarit.

The Hathor face motif is often depicted on ornaments and ivory pieces as a reference to Hathor, an Egyptian goddess associated with fertility, motherhood, and beauty. Her far-reaching influence is evident both in Ugarit and Qatna, where several ivory objects were adorned with her representation. Other objects from Qatna derive from common Egyptian style elements; such items were found in religious and funerary contexts in the royal tomb. In contrast, the ivory pieces from Ugarit are associated with power, music, and religious festivities.

The Late Bronze Age was a period of significant artistic and cultural exchange, during which different regions influenced one another and created hybrid styles and motifs. The artefacts of this era provide a fascinating glimpse into the artistic traditions and cultural practices of the time and continue to inspire and fascinate scholars and art enthusiasts today.

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