Introduction

International diplomacy in the Late Bronze Age

The late second millennium before the Common Era is lauded in scholarship as a period of unprecedented prosperity and dynamic political interaction for the various polities of the eastern Mediterranean region. Within the three hundred and sixty or so years from around 1550 BCE to the disruptions of the Sea Peoples in 1186 BCE, the great states of Egypt, Anatolia and Mesopotamia reigned in sumptuous ascendancy over the region.[1] To the north-west in the Aegean, the Mycenaean elite equally built vast fortress palaces and partook in the diplomatic negotiations and exchange of precious commodities that served to reinforce their fitness to rule in a culture of kingship and brotherhood. Cyprus in the centre of this vortex of trade and diplomacy went from a provincial outpost in the Middle Bronze Age to an active and important participant in this ostensibly international world of wealth and prestige.[2]

While once scholarship was satisfied with viewing the many cultures of the region as self contained entities in relative isolation from external cultural influences, we are now facing a substantially nuanced vision of interregional trade and diplomacy for this period, as we are in fact for the entire Bronze Age Near East and eastern Mediterranean.[3] From the earliest formation of stratified society the primary impetus for this enhanced regional interconnectivity appears to have been the pursuit of precious natural resources and exotic commodities. These luxuries could subsequently be transformed into outward manifestations of elite prerogative within the temples and palaces of these various regions. This dissertation is concerned with the physical manifestation of the internationalism of the Late Bronze Age. That is, the visual culture of statehood; elite diplomatic gifts and the associated prestige artefacts that were an essential component of eastern Mediterranean diplomacy.

One scholarly outcome of the study of this Late Bronze Age regional internationalism[4] has been the recognition of a unique visual style that currently may not be ascribed

---

[1] The chronology employed is Kitchen 2007 for Egypt: for the Levant and Syria, Höflmayer 2015; Morandi Bonacossi 2014; the Aegean and Cyprus, Knapp 2008; Steel 2013.

[2] Hordern and Purcell 2000, 124–6; Sauvage 2012; Steel 2014.

[3] Trigger 1989, 330.

[4] There is a degree of anachronism attached to the use of the word international to describe the political system of the Late Bronze Age, as this assumes a modern notion of national status on the many polities of the eastern Mediterranean and arbitrarily includes the many indigenous traditions within rigidly defined geographical zones. In the Late Bronze Age such notions are problematic as regional boundaries were in continuous flux.

to any single culture in the ancient eastern Mediterranean, the 'international style', 'international artistic *koiné* (style)' or 'Mediterranean *koiné* style'.[5] Objects bearing this ostensibly internationally entangled visual and material idiom are attested in elite funerary and cult contexts from widely diverse regions of the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean littoral. And this in some way has contributed to the use of the current names for this material. The application of these distinguishable and yet ambiguous terms, 'international' or '*koiné*'[6] for this iconography has come about as a direct result of scholarship finding itself confronted with visual idiom on prestige artefacts that defies traditional art historical methods for cultural identification. Of the various terms available to me, I prefer for convenience to retain the original term 'international style' (note the absence of capitalisation) that was coined by the curator of the Metropolitan Museum, William Kelly Simpson, in the late 1950s to describe hybrid idiom from the Tell Basta treasure in Egypt.[7]

This usage was later adopted by the curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, William Stevenson Smith, in his publication on interconnections in Near Eastern art and it has stayed with us until the present, with some varied attempts at remodelling by recent scholarship.[8] In fact, the term international style is not unique and has prior use within the discipline of art history. It may be applied in academic literature to describe a twentieth century architectural style or a homogenous fifteenth century style within Late Medieval Gothic art.[9] The latter term, 'international artistic *koiné*', shall not be used here due to the opaqueness of the idea of *koiné*, 'shared', which like international is frustratingly vague, and also due to the equally lengthy history of this Greek term in scholarship. There is currently an almost confusing range of scholarly applications to which *koiné* may be applied.

Koiné as an academic term began originally in the early twentieth century as a designation for an eastern Mediterranean shared dialect of Hellenistic Greek. Later it came to be applied to early Greek art,[10] then Iron Age,[11] and further to Bronze Age Mycenaean and Minoan languages and cultural styles.[12] In the late twentieth century it acquired wider scope and embraced the idea of shared eastern Mediterranean material culture, becoming a cultural *koiné*[13] or an artistic *koiné*[14] and finally in the last twenty years it has been expanded even further to designate shared culture of widely varied nature, from eastern Mediterranean cult covering the second to first

---

[5] Feldman 'Luxurious Forms' 2002, *Diplomacy by Design*, 2006a; Crowley, *Aegean and the East*, 1977/1989; 'Iconography and Interconnections', 1998, 171–80.

[6] '*Koiné*' from κοινός: Ancient Greek for 'shared' or 'held in common', Liddell and Scott 2010.

[7] Simpson 1959, 31.

[8] Smith 1965; Feldman 2002: 2006a; 'international artistic *koiné*'.

[9] See Swarzenski (1952), it is worth noting that this article may provide clues to the original appropriation of this term, as it is followed by another by Smith writing on an Egyptian cosmetic box with international idiom.

[10] Petrakis 2009, 13.

[11] Higgins 1961, 95; Desborough 1977.

[12] Furumark 1944, 194; Bartonek 1966; Immerwahr 1971, 114; Papadopoulos 1995; MacSweeney 2008.

[13] Schachermeyr 1967; Burkert 1985; 1992; Morris 1992, 120.

[14] Knapp, 1998, 198; Feldman 2006a.

millennia,[15] to a Bronze Age musical *koiné*.[16] In truth, the addition of 'shared in common' to the original idea adds nothing to resolve the problem and in rare instances it is even possible for a scholar of this topic to conflate the use further by calling this group of hybrid artefacts a 'shared international *koiné*'.

Regardless of the less than fortunate choices that have been made in scholarship in the pursuit of a way to designate this hybrid material, traditional art historical methods for cultural identification, such as the comparison of stylistic details, themes and visual idiom have also failed to resolve this conundrum. For these objects are argued to confound formal identification by bearing entangled themes, motifs and idiom from a plurality of visual traditions. However, currently there is an imbalance within the treatment of this topic, as scholarship has been enormously active for certain material aspects of this purported visual style. The ivory inlays and some gold vessels from Levantine, Aegean and Cypriot sources have been exhaustively studied in the past, and in fact continue to be. This is not so for Egypt. While there is a small and very famous corpus of prestige artefacts that are cited for this style from New Kingdom Egypt, no synthetic analysis of objects bearing exotic features has taken place beyond some detailed analyses by Egyptologists of one group from the end of the Late Bronze Age.[17] It is the intention of this dissertation to address the breach and in doing so propose a nuanced interpretation of the Egyptian royal material that exhibits hybrid features.

The structure of the dissertation

In order to proceed with some degree of rational order, and working on the assumption that not every reader is cognisant of the theories surrounding this rather obscure visual style, I propose to implement my discussion with a brief overview of the temporal and geopolitical context for the eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age. The diplomatic climate of this period is the lynchpin around which much academic rhetoric has circled and evolved. Once the regional political framework is established, the state of Egypt's social and political position is briefly outlined, then the international style artefacts are situated in their physical context and the features of the iconography outlined.

In Chapter One the historical narrative from archaeological scholarship is addressed, outlining the origins for the Egyptian and the foreign international style material, with some reference to the physical evidence that has contributed to our understanding of interregional ebb and flow of material culture. Proceeding from the archaeological beginnings of this notion of an international style as it has evolved over the previous two hundred years it appears natural to then turn to the academic response to this evidence. Therefore, the following section discusses the progression of the controversy over the

---

[15] Marinatos 2000, also a *koiné* of magical images.

[16] Franklin 2006, *Lyre Gods and a Bronze Age Musical koiné*; Marinatos 2012, 116, 'iconographical *koiné*'.

[17] Simpson 1949; 1959; Lilyquist 2012.

possible cultural origins for these various prestige objects. This will traverse the late nineteenth century and some heated exchanges between many of archaeology's great names, to the mid to late twentieth century and the gradual recognition in academic circles of this imagery as a unique entity.

Thus Chapter One is intended as a retrospective view over the past academic development of this notion of a mixed visual style, from its beginnings in stylistic arguments within eastern Mediterranean scholarship from the twentieth century to the present day. This shall naturally include art historical and archaeological narratives regarding the tracking of the transference, adoption and origins of this idiom between the polities of Egypt, the Aegean, Cyprus, Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Levant. The evolution of academic theory relating to this visual idiom is an organic process that has evolved over time as research continually contributes data to the assembled corpus. As a component of this discussion images provided in Chapter One will be from the original narrative.

In Chapter Two the visual idiom that is thought to define this topic is introduced and the theoretical dialectic over cultural features and origins for motifs and themes are summarised. This will be prefaced with a discussion of visual semantics, establishing guidelines and clarifying terms that shall govern the dialogue. Then I address the criteria and evidence for this visual style as it currently stands in cross disciplinary scholarship from the Aegean, Levant, Cyprus, Syria and within Egyptology. From this point onwards illustrations of idiom and artefacts in the text are predominantly my own work and are intended to serve as reading aids.

The third chapter moves on to address the material realm. This entails a resumé of the materials and technologies of this international age with particular emphasis on military technology, vitreous and precious metals, and winding up with the human element of international diplomacy. The chronological focus is on the Late Bronze Age, but is also consciously inclusive of evidence from the entire Near Eastern second millennium. The discussion then follows in Chapter Four with the artefacts from the eastern Mediterranean littoral that have contributed to past discussion and some that have not. These objects are introduced in terms of their cultural, chronological and material context, before moving to New Kingdom Egypt and the evidence for intrusive idiom there. It is my intention to firmly embed the broader context for these objects beyond art historical narratives where the iconography or the object is viewed in isolation from its social existence. In this way the reader should be fully prepared for the core study material of the dissertation: the Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian artefacts.

In the second half of the dissertation the evidence for hybrid or intrusive idiom is viewed from Egypt, beginning in Chapter Five with the Tell Basta treasure from the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty and then moving to the many eclectic examples from prestige objects in various media that have previously informed this discussion. In Chapter Six the focus study of the work is introduced: the Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian evidence with a secure date and context from the tomb of Tutankhamen. The focal material is approximately thirty[18] high prestige objects in precious materials from KV 62 in the

---

[18] This number may be reduced or expanded according to author and is entirely dependent on the

Valley of the Kings in Western Thebes. This Egyptian sourced 'international' material is described and analysed with regard to the global context, addressing visual idiom, medium, form, function, text and equally the original royal funerary context.

As a result of examining the extensive excavation records for KV 62 in conjunction with the digital corpus on the Griffith Institute site: *Tutankhamen: Anatomy of an Excavation*,[19] the original small corpus of luxury artefacts from this royal funerary context that are ubiquitously cited in scholarship on royal gifting and an international visual style will be augmented by additional objects that have thus far escaped notice. These also bear relevant idiom that under the current criteria qualifies them for inclusion in this style, or in fact changes the rules completely for this group. Once this specific royal context has been established, the discussion moves to the final chapter, Chapter Seven, and the evidence for these themes and motifs from fourteenth century royal palaces at Malqata and Tell el Amarna and from both royal and elite tombs for the entire Eighteenth Dynasty.

The historical context: The internationalism of the Late Bronze Age, audience gifts and a brotherhood of kingship

> *'If [the king] of Egypt is his majesty's [friend], he shall be your friend. [But] if [he] is my majesty's enemy, he shall be [your enemy]. And the kings who are my equals in rank are the king of Egypt, the king of Babylonia, the king of Assyria, and the king of Ahhiyawa.'*
> Tudhaliya IV of Hatti to Šaušga-muwa of Amurru (late 13th c.).[20]

The eastern Mediterranean Late Bronze Age spans the chronological range from the middle of the second millennium, ca. 1550 BCE, to the social catastrophes and human migrations of 1200–1186 BCE, and often this period may be effusively described as 'the cultural zenith of the eastern Mediterranean Bronze Age'.[21] For it was at this time that the breadth of trade connections for Egypt, the Aegean and the Near East were at their most extensive, spreading from the Baltic Sea in northern Europe, far west into Afghanistan, east to Spain and Sardinia and further south-east into the Arabian Peninsular and south to central Africa.[22] It was the moment in antiquity wherein the expansive empires of Hatti and Egypt attained their political and artistic apogees under charismatic rulers such as Tuthmose III, Amenhotep III, Ramesses II, Muwatalli II, Šuppiluliuma I, Hattusilli III and of course Akhenaten.[23] Both Egypt in north-eastern

---

nuances between Feldman's acknowledged group and those objects that she assigns to the presence of intrusive motifs on indigenous material.

[19] http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/discoveringtut/
[20] Boghazkoy Archive 17.11, Beckman 1995, 101.
[21] Monroe 2009, 37.
[22] Sauvage 2012; Potts 1995, 1451–63; Astour 1995, 1400–20; Stos-Gale and Macdonald 1991, 249–88.
[23] Leonard 2003; Knapp 1998; Ragionieri 2000.

Africa and Hatti in central Anatolia were the veritable superpowers of this period, since each was at the height of their respective political expansions and controlled vast tracts of land and neighbouring states. These military juggernauts naturally came into conflict with each other in the northern Levant and Syria where they jostled for control of the major inland and maritime trade routes and for control of trade emporia until diplomatic solutions became more convenient methodologies of statehood.

This culture of interregional diplomacy has been variously described as a 'great powers club', a 'brotherhood of kings', and even the rather fanciful 'Club Med' in previous scholarship.[24] The acknowledged great powers of this system were naturally Egypt and Hatti. Ranked immediately beneath these high kings (but technically of equivalent rank in letters) were the great kings of Hurrian Mitanni, Kassite Babylon, Cyprus (Alašiya),[25] Mycenae (probably Ahhiyawa), Arzawa (Anatolia) and, after the fall of Mitanni in the mid fourteenth century, Assyria. Finally, the rulers of the smaller states and city-states parleyed with the greater powers for their own political and economic security. These were states like Kizzuwatna, Ugarit, Qatna and Amurru and smaller Levantine city-states such as Tyre, Byblos and Megiddo. Each individual ruler cajoled, whined, negotiated and played other allies and enemies off against the other in a complicated political routine designed to protect his own political interests both internally and externally.[26]

The powerful states and smaller city states competed energetically for hegemony and for access to luxuries, raw materials, finished commodities and particularly metals.[27] Copper was the most important trading commodity in this period. While it is ostensibly a mundane material, it was at that time an essential ingredient of industry: for tools, for the construction of bronze weaponry, moulded glasses, ceramic and faience glazes, and for providing the technologies to create these commodities. The island of Cyprus, like Egypt, had ample internal supplies of copper, which endowed it with unprecedented political currency in an environment of intercultural reciprocity.[28] Equally, the Levantine city states like Ugarit, Tyre and Byblos, on the maritime trade routes near Cyprus, were ideally positioned to exploit the movement of similar prestige commodities throughout the region. However, this also made control of these regions of paramount importance to the major players in the diplomacy game.[29]

---

[24] Liverani 2000, 6–7; Podanyi 2010, Parts III–IV; Hitchcock 2009; M. van de Mieroop 2007, 129; Bryce 2003, 70; Zaccagnini 1987, 141.

[25] The identification of Cyprus as Alašiya has been resolved by the matching of clay samples from Amarna tablets: Goren et al, 2003, 233–55. However, this is still disputed by Cypriot archaeologists (see Iacovou 2001, 89 and Knapp 2008, 298–303) and does not preclude the possibility that Alašiya, if it was Cyprus, referred to a regional city-state and not the island proper.

[26] Liverani 1990; Bryce 2003, 81–4; Cohen and Westbrook 2000; Mynářová 2007; 2012, 551–8; Cline and Cline 2015, 17–44.

[27] Sherratt and Sherratt 1991; Liverani 2008, 161–3; Monroe 2009, 290; Stos-Gale and Macdonald 1991, 249–88.

[28] Knapp 1986, 71; 2015: Steel 2014, 650; Webb 1999, 3; Papasavvas and Kasianidou 2015.

[29] The differentiation between entrepreneurial activity and king's trade will not be dealt with here, as the artefacts under study may be positioned in the realm of royal interaction. For a discussion of the problems inherent to identifying entrepreneurial trade within this system see Monroe 2009, Chapter 5, 'Relations Between Traders and Ruler', 151–203.

Palaces throughout the eastern Mediterranean littoral and further east exchanged extravagant gifts, raw materials, processed commodities, technological innovation and skilled tradesmen.[30] Servants and royal princesses were equally an essential ingredient of this process and dynastic marriages were made between states to formally cement allegiances and construct a tangible notion of filial connection. Kings addressed each other as brothers in correspondence and sent ostensibly expensive greeting gifts to each other. Both of these functioned presumably as exercises in extravagant display and as metaphors for their own power and prestige.[31] In the royal correspondences communication was couched in circumscribed verbal formulae, which reinforced and iterated the pre-existing hierarchical structure between rulers.[32] The 'great kings' addressed each other as 'my brother' and the lesser rulers of the smaller city states addressed the senior protagonists as 'my father,' or 'my lord'.[33] This carefully circumscribed rhetoric established a symbolic familial relationship between the correspondents, which, combined with royal marriages, served to reinforce the sense of alliance and membership in this elite cohort of power.[34]

These interactions between the distant polities were maintained via royal emissaries bearing such aforementioned extravagant gifts and the accompanying formal correspondences. Thus, it may be assumed that diplomatic envoys accompanied by small armies for security were continuously criss-crossing the greater region. The presentation of these *šulmanu*,[35] 'greeting' or 'audience gifts',[36] was an essential component of these negotiations and an object of considerable public prestige for the recipient.[37] These aforementioned strategies were arguably an efficient improvement on outright military hostilities which had previously been the solution to political expansion and the quest for raw materials and exotica in the middle of the second millennium.[38] Objects decorated in a homogenous visual style could thus in this diplomatic climate serve to cement bonds of kinship between elites, just as effectively as dynastic marriages could.[39] Elite ownership of exotic, skilfully constructed luxury objects was a conspicuous signifier of power over the natural world and of rapport with the divine realm. Thus exotica outwardly manifested material evidence for fitness to rule and divine sanction for the greater and lesser kings.[40] But equally, this prestige material by virtue of it's 'foreignness' could be manipulated by a great or lesser king for his internal audience

---

[30] Moorey 2001, 1–14; Zaccagnini 1983, 245–64; 1987, 57–65; Niemeier 1991, 189–200 and 2005, 199–204; Hitchcock 2005, 691–9; 2008, 17–8.

[31] Liverani 2008, 162–3.

[32] Bryce 2003, 81–4.

[33] Liverani 1998, 134; Izre'el 1995, 2413; Feldman, 2006a, 146.

[34] For the importance of constructing kinship ties in forming power alliances see Levi-Strauß 1969, 134–45, 233–54; Zaccagnini 1987, 59; Avruch 2000, 162–3.

[35] From the Akkadian *šulmu/šalāmu* 'health', 'well being', *ORACC*; Black et al 2000; Borger 2004, 411.

[36] Liverani 2008.

[37] Oller 1995, 1465–73; Liverani 1990, 2000, 2008; Jacob 2006, 12–30.

[38] Bryce 2003, 52.

[39] Schulman 1979, 177–93; Liverani 2000, 26–7; Bryce 2003, 81–4; Meier 2000, 165–73; Beckman 2013, 209.

[40] Helms 1993, 197–9.

to demonstrate his power over foreign lands and of 'the other'. This latter policy was essential to the political rhetoric of the Egyptian great king where the adoration by and subjugation of foreigners were essential symbols of his triumph over chaos.[41]

It was in the second millennium that the nature of kingship matured throughout the Near East and as a part of this there was much greater emphasis on royal prerogative, the divine status of kingship and on intimate relationship between palace prestige and the control over the movement of resources and technological innovation. This ideological and trade interconnectivity fuelled the production of technologically sophisticated and exquisite works of craftsmanship like those under examination here. Such a climate of heightened diplomacy and interaction, however, was not a spontaneous phenomenon, but rather the culmination of burgeoning social complexity in all regions from the second half of the third millennium to the middle of the second millennium.[42] In this climate of cultural interaction, the creation of a hybrid or entangled iconographic medium, such as the international style, was theoretically an effective means for the elites of the Late Bronze Age to symbolically engage with each other *in absentia*. For in reality, considering the vast distances that separated these states, the great kings of the ancient Near East would never have met each other face to face.[43] These prestige objects, made of exotic precious materials, with sophisticated technologies and decorated in this unique visual style, were arguably an efficient method for elites throughout the eastern Mediterranean to publicly and privately signal their membership in this royal brotherhood of power.

Egypt and the empire builders of the New Kingdom

The purpose of this study is to examine the ideological expression of the Egyptian position in this period of intense interregional diplomacy and reciprocal transference of visual culture. For with Egypt we are in a unique position, both with the extant visual material and the vast textual material that is available. But equally, because Egypt, of all the polities participating in royal diplomacy in this period, held a unique stance in its interaction with its political allies.[44] As a regional superpower Egypt was in fact under no pressure either internally or externally to conform to international political pressures or decorum of conduct. The Egyptian rulers received foreign princesses into their courts, but contrarily returned the favour to no ruler.[45] Equally, for the benefit of internal politics, rulers were able to conflate gift exchange with foreign tribute in their propaganda for an internal audience.[46] In fact the only motivation for an Egyptian ruler from the international point of view would have been access to prestige commodities that enhanced his public display of power.

---

[41] Schneider 2010, 147–8; Booth 2005, 9; Luiselli 2011, 18–9; Frandsen 2008, 47–74; Davis 1989, 80.
[42] Podanyi 2010, 63–93; Liverani 1990, 14; Leonard 2003, 349, 364; Wastlhuber 2011, 173–82.
[43] Bryce 2003, 52.
[44] Jakob 2006, 12–30.
[45] Podanyi 2010, 217–42; Liverani 2008, 163–4; Bryce 2003, 108; Schulman 1979, 179.
[46] Panagiotopoulos 2008, 167–83; Kubisch 2007, 65–86; Hasel 1998, 69–71; Kemp 1978, 14.

Therefore, it would not be exaggeration to state that Egypt's position in this period of heightened interaction was, of all participants in the Brotherhood of Kings, most secure. The rulers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties were the wealthiest and, through the telescope of the twenty-first century, the most charismatic figures in Egypt's three thousand year history. For the first time in a long span of dynasties and relatively insular culture the rulers of Egypt looked aggressively outward towards their neighbours.[47] While there is no question that trade in resources from beyond their borders was a longstanding practice for Egypt, at this time New Kingdom rulers began to look beyond the Nile basin in an expansionist and martial light. They pushed Egypt's border north-east into the northern Levant towards Syria and southwards into Nubia towards central Africa.[48] The motivation for this change in outlook may be ascribed to the pursuit of precious raw and finished commodities and new technologies needed to support the vast Egyptian political and religious edifice in this period. In fact, this was no doubt the motivation for all participants in this interregional network of kings.

The prosperity and outward vision of the Late Bronze Age in Egypt is in marked contrast to the period which immediately precedes it, yet in some ways could be seen to be a direct product of this predecessor. The Second Intermediate Period saw approximately a hundred years of political division within the Egyptian geo-political landscape. In the north Egypt fell under the rule of foreign kings, the Hyksos, who were most likely people of Semitic northern Levantine cultural origin, who via Egypt's strong connections to the region around Byblos from the Twelfth Dynasty gradually settled and flourished in the Nile Delta region of Egypt.[49] These kings ruled Lower Egypt from the city of Tell ed Dab'a that was strategically positioned in the eastern Nile Delta on the northern maritime and overland trade routes. In Upper Egypt a Theban royal dynasty held uneasy sway between its purported enemies in the north and the prosperous Nubian kingdom of Kush to the south. These two potential threats to the native dynasty were eventually successively repelled, first south to Kush and later north into the eastern Delta by the last kings of the Seventeenth Dynasty and first of the New Kingdom around the middle of the sixteenth century BCE.[50]

Having re-established local rule and reunited Upper and Lower Egypt under one ruling dynasty, the kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty did not rest on their laurels, but rather began looking outward towards western Asia, central Africa and the Levantine trading cities in a manner that was to change the political landscape of Egypt for centuries. This process was initiated by Thutmose I who claimed to have hunted elephants in the northern Levant, and this expansion was later resoundingly augmented by the ambitious expedition southwards to Punt instituted by Hatshepsut.[51] And then by the martial

---

[47] Podanyi 2010, 131–63; Liverani 2008; Kemp 1978; 2005; Frandsen 1979, 167–90.
[48] Höflmayer 2015, 193–5; Redford 2003, 185–90; Weinstein 1981; Edwards 2004, 101–3; Török 2008, 157–68.
[49] Bietak 2010, 139–63.
[50] Ca. 1550 BCE, Dodson and Hilton 2004, 114–28; Phillips 1997, 423–57; Bietak 2010, 140.
[51] 1479–1457 BCE.

activities of her co-ruler and successor Thutmose III,[52] who marched his army into the northern Levant and scuffled with the Hittite king around the city of Megiddo. It is perhaps at this point in time that Egypt entered the sphere of interregional diplomacy with a vengeance, and along with the wealth of luxury commodities that were brought back by these rulers were no doubt skilled craftspeople, foreign wives, servants, raw materials, exotic flora and fauna and innovative new technologies.[53]

From this moment New Kingdom rulers embraced the exotic and their world view expanded to include diplomatic negotiation for imported prestige commodities and for the evolution of a scribal etiquette of eastern Mediterranean correspondence. The Eighteenth Dynasty rulers who succeeded Thutmose III continued to increase their personal and political wealth with the age of international diplomacy in full flourish and culminating in the reign of Amenhotep III in the early fourteenth century.[54] By the mid fourteenth century Egypt's wealth and artistic zenith were both resoundingly achieved, however the subsequent Amarna period appears to have been a low point for many players in the brotherhood, with the internal repercussions in Egypt of Akhenaten's religious reforms. Egypt was not alone at this time, as Hatti and Cyprus similarly seem to have suffered economic setbacks and epidemics.[55] However, this does not appear to have deterred Hatti from finally successfully removing their long time adversary Mitanni from the political landscape in the middle of the fourteenth century and pushing their political borders south past Ugarit, Amurru and Qatna, where they could brush directly against Egyptian political boundaries.[56]

How the demise of the Eighteenth Dynasty and Mitanni affected interregional dynamics is problematic in the absence of extant diplomatic texts for this period, with the followers of Akhenaten, such as Tutankhamen, Ay and Horemhab, contributing a bare few diplomatic letters,[57] however the succession of the Ramesside Nineteenth Dynasty pharaohs to the Egyptian throne initiated a further period of flamboyant wealth and diplomacy, with the next apex of Egyptian pharaonic imperialism residing under the rule of Ramesses II.[58] This charismatic ruler again tested the mettle of the Hittite ruler and his army in the battle of Qadesh in Syria in the years around 1275 BCE. This series of events was publicly hailed by both great kings as an outright victory in their internal political rhetoric, but as to be expected, terminated in the lengthy negotiation of a treaty between the two states.[59] Again, this royal treaty, apart from the exchange of lavish commodities, was officially sealed by the marriage of a Hittite princess to the Egyptian king.

---

[52] 1479–1425 BCE.

[53] Redford 2003, 248–51; Galàn 2008, 22–5.

[54] 1390–1352 BCE.

[55] With later Hittite rulers attributing some blame to Egypt for contagious diseases. The Alašiyan correspondence (EA 35) which refers to a plague has also been ascribed to this period, Rainey et al 2015, 18, 30.

[56] For Ugarit see Yon 2006, 20; Margueron 2008, 237; Qatna, Pfälzner 2012, 771.

[57] EA 41, 223, 367, may date after Akhenaten, but are problematic, as the recipient is unclear.

[58] 1279–1213 BCE.

[59] Spalinger 2005, 209–226.

This fluctuating dynamic of military expansion and contraction, negotiation and compromise on the part of the great kings, their allies and vassals is the environment that is argued to have generated this oddly fused iconographic style in cultures which ostensibly had otherwise always clung to quite rigid artistic canons. In this system of power and power politics it is argued that the individuals at the apex of the ideological food-chain were receptive to a notion of elite differentiation that traversed cultural boundaries and united ruling elites in a private club of reciprocity and ideology. The material under discussion here is situated across this chronological span of the New Kingdom from the late Eighteenth Dynasty to the end of the Nineteenth.[60] The latter include some gold and silver vessels from the Tell Basta treasure that date between the reigns of Ramesses II to queen Tausret. However, the vast majority of well provenienced Egyptian international style artefacts are situated in the late Eighteenth Dynasty, particularly the period covered by the reigns of Amenhotep III to Tutankhamen. It is with the well preserved assemblage from the tomb of the latter that resides the largest and most eclectic distribution of artefacts ostensibly bearing this shared iconographic idiom.

The criteria for an international style in Late Bronze Age visual culture

The term international style was first coined in scholarship in the late 1950s[61] to describe a small group of luxury objects which bore anachronistic iconography and that are attested from various unrelated archaeological contexts throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The most readily identifiable feature for objects belonging to this group is their visual hybridity. The iconography of this 'international' or 'intercultural' style may be argued to be a discrete fusion of elements ostensibly contributed from the artistic canons of at least three major eastern Mediterranean stylistic traditions: Egyptian, Aegean and northern Mesopotamian or Syrian traditions.[62] Although, this statement is predicated on scholarly assumptions about the definitions of cultural style and is heavily embedded in quite narrow art historical approaches to the nature of art.

The artefacts bearing this visual idiom are argued to combine these disparate motifs so effectively that scholars have been at loggerheads for decades trying to accurately identify their cultural and technological origin. However, all previous attempts to identify place or culture of origin for these artefacts have been futile. For, if one excludes entangled iconography, even chemical analysis can only establish a source

---

[60] Depending on the author, this group varies, but a general consensus includes the Tell Basta treasure, the tomb of Tutankhamen, KV 62 and the tomb of Yuya and Ṯuya, KV 46.

[61] Originally to describe the two Ugarit gold vessels and the Egyptian Tell Basta gold and silver vessels, Simpson 1959, 31.

[62] This is in fact a facile generalisation which will need be examined further in the chapter 2.3.1 on visual semantic, suffice to say that there are more cultural styles and idiom embraced by these broad envelopes. Equally relevant is to be aware that terms like 'hybridity' and 'entanglement' impose a notion of an assumed original 'pure' form for a culture, which is problematic in itself.

of core materials. And in the example of this period of commodity exchange these are diverse and do not necessarily indicate point of manufacture or of distribution. It is equally maintained that art historical methodologies for analysis of this imagery are a self defeating exercise, as the disparate iconography is arguably seamlessly and cohesively incorporated together.

The choice of form and fabric for these artefacts is equally reflective of cultural hybridity and due to the heightened regional interaction of the time and local emulation or adoptions of foreign models they are again no means for clarification or identification. The extant artefacts, however, appear to be consistently made from the prestige raw materials known to be circulating in the Late Bronze Age, such as gold, silver, ivory and ebony. They are constructed using equally international technologies, such as glass and sophisticated metal alloys. And the many of the objects themselves are small luxury commodities, usually personal domestic articles, ritual vessels, or the trappings of hunting or battle which would eminently suit the role of prestige gifts and are documented as such in royal correspondences from this period. The artefacts are not common and come predominantly from archaeological loci flanking the eastern Mediterranean basin. When they do occur, they are found in elite archaeological contexts, such as royal and elite tombs, cult emplacements, sanctuaries and in temple hoards.

The visual characteristics which identify this iconographic style can be summarised as follows: a primary composition of an animal combat or frolic that has no strong central subject, theme or narrative structure. This is rendered as a torsional[63] or open composition within which motifs are usually not constrained by the presence of a groundline. The themes employ a limited repertoire of stock motifs: predators such as griffins and lions pursuing prey which are usually bulls or ibex. Additionally, there is limited or no use of human protagonists in this imagery. In conjunction with these mobile scenes there is also a convention of antithetically arranged caprids or sphinxes heraldically flanking a distinctive sacred tree. There is a restricted range of vegetal motifs employed as background fill, particularly the voluted sacred tree, or volute palmette. The focus composition may be framed by a variety of decorative bands, such as running spirals, rosettes, lotuses or guilloche.

These various themes and motifs when combined together in a cohesive design are argued to illustrate this international idiom. When they are on objects of multivalent material, technology and mixed cultural style they are considered to be tokens of kingship and markers of membership in this 'club'. My argument in this dissertation is that whilst these objects display visual and material hybridity, they are eminently meaningful to both the agent of their production and their recipient, the possessor, in this case the Egyptian ruler. However, this meaningfulness may not be the same for each individual involved in this system. Therefore, it can be assumed that at all stages of these object's personal biographies their meaning and value ought to have been multivalent. Objects need symbolic framings, storylines and human narrators

---

[63] Spatially circular, rather than linear or horizontal.

in order to acquire social lives.[64] Thus one may posit that within the New Kingdom Egyptian court this visual idiom may have acquired specific significance apart from functioning as a signal of club membership.

One reservation that I have is the current rationalisation that for these prestige artefacts all cultural and religious signifiers have been suppressed to expedite their reception by divergent cultural recipients.[65] This suits the construction of a notional entangled visual style, since in this manner no single culture could be perceived to dominate a shared visual idiom. But it precludes issues of multivalency and equally it overlooks the fact that at this time, the second millennium, there was no clear differentiation in the great states between kingship and state cult. The Egyptian ruler, for example, held office by virtue of his semi-divine nature and by the sanction of the gods. Therefore, with this borne in mind, I believe that these artefacts could potentially possess multivalent significance, both of power and divine sanction. That in fact each interpretation may vary according to different regions, agent and patient, producer and recipient, but that there is considerable significance possessed by these objects beyond vague notions about the iconography exclusively referencing royal prerogative with a *soupçon* of generic symbols related to fecundity.[66]

In addition, the extant textual evidence from the royal correspondences that is heavily relied upon to argue this thesis, while compelling, does not consistently support current theory regarding the diplomatic function of these objects. At present there are no formal correlations between diplomatic texts and material artefacts. While texts hint at the nature of kingly gifts they do not supply direct parallels and this caution has been raised by previous scholars,[67] but this does not prevent many others leaning on the textual evidence to prop up this discussion. The other undervalued aspect of the textual evidence is context and sheer volume, while most gift exchanges between royal peers are fairly circumscribed and consist of servants, chariots and a few pieces of jewellery, the truly vast inventories of luxury goods are exchanged as a part of the kinship process, via princess's dowries, their retinues and bride gifts.[68] This is a subtly different type of shared visual culture.

That having been said, the materials themselves, their luxury status and their presence in elite contexts infer a very high value may be placed on their production and on their ownership. It has been argued that these objects bearing hybrid iconography are badges of membership in an elite club of great kings. That they are symbols of differentiation which mark the great kings as separate from the rest of eastern Mediterranean society. One qualification could be that until we find material evidences for this style from Late Bronze Age Hatti, Babylonia, Assyria or Mitanni perhaps these objects might be better described as 'Club Med' cards belonging to the Mediterranean maritime elite or even as indicators of membership in Egypt's extended alliance.

---

[64] Appadurai 1986; Pels et al 2002, 11.
[65] Feldman 2006a, 10, 13.
[66] Feldman 2006a, 13.
[67] Lilyquist 2013, 268; Harmanşah 2008, 4; Fischer and Wicke 2011, 248–9.
[68] Compare EA 7–11, 15–6, from Babylon and Assyria to EA 13, 14 and 23 from Babylon to an unknown king, Egypt to Babylon and Tušratta to Egypt, Rainey et al 2015.

It is the intention of this dissertation to examine the extant Egyptian artefacts that have been identified in previous scholarship as belonging to this international or *koiné* visual style. While extensive research has been done in the past examining the ivories that bear this imagery from the Levant, Cyprus and the Aegean, the artefacts hailing from Egypt have received minimal detailed study and tend to be assessed with respect to the more well published ivories and also those in precious metal from Ugarit. This appears to be anomalous, since, of all the objects that are hailed as belonging to this style, the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty pieces are in many cases chronologically fixed and represent a large corpus, also representing a wider variety of media and technology. It is also incongruous that while the 'celebrity' pieces from Egypt are repeatedly cited and employed to support arguments regarding objects in other media, they have not themselves been addressed holistically.

The past sixty years of scholarly narrative associated with the international repertoire ivories has been allowed to overshadow all discussion of objects bearing this and similar mixed cultural styles from the Late Bronze Age. I would argue that this is flawed methodology, particularly when comparison is drawn with the Egyptian material, as there are no or few formally acknowledged ivories bearing this idiom from New Kingdom Egypt.[69] The extant Egyptian material is constructed in an eclectic variety of the precious media that are documented as circulating between the great kings at this time. Media such as gold, silver, electrum, cedar, ebony, ivory (as inlay), lapis lazuli, carnelian, alabaster (calcite), glass, faience and combinations of these. They also similarly represent an eclectic mix of ostensibly portable prestige objects consisting of cosmetic and unguent vessels, inlaid plaques, furnishings, embroidered linen, jewellery, weaponry, chariots and chariot fittings.

In addition, when we read contemporary discussions of the topic of this culturally entangled visual idiom, there is tendency for authors to approach this discussion as a homogenous temporal whole that embraces a two hundred year period from approximately 1400 to 1200 BCE,[70] sometimes even the entire Late Bronze Age, choosing to avoid specific time framings due to the rather weak chronological framework that we are dealing with in regard to many artefacts. This is because the majority of well documented objects that exhibit these features are sourced from secondary archaeological contexts, or are heirlooms from later contexts and therefore may not be dated with precision. However, this is not the case for the relevant Egyptian material bearing this idiom. Another equally flawed approach is the almost 'one-eyed' obsession with citing three or four famous objects as representative of this style without ever looking further. As case in point would be the almost ubiquitous employment of images of the gold sheath of a dagger and a chariot appliqué from the tomb of Tutankhamen and similarly of the gold vessels from the Temple of Baal at Ugarit which have been the pin up objects for this topic for decades since the beginnings of the twentieth century.

---

[69] Again this decision is predicated on the choices of individual scholars.

[70] Most recently Louise Steel (2013, 52) has contracted the dates even further and contained this style to the aftermath of the Amarna period in Egypt, therefore from ca. 1330 to 1186 BCE.

With these concerns borne in mind, one approach to this research is the conscious application of a temporal model to a discussion of this notion of elite gift exchange and an international *koiné* of visual culture. Within this examination there will be a determined attempt to track the chronological and depositional situation of the Egyptian and Near Eastern artefacts. Emphasis shall be on those Egyptian objects which have secure archaeological contexts and dates, thus opening up the potential for a diachronic approach. As a component of this approach it will be necessary to track the temporal framework that we are working under from the end of the Middle Bronze Age in Egypt. However, as the tracing of origins for many ubiquitous visual motifs for the entire region is a self defeating process, it shall not be considered a priority of this discussion. Rather it is the transmission, reception and ideological value of this idiom for the Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian court that is of interest to me.

First and foremost, when this material is discussed in academic treatises current theory advises assessing the transculturality or hybridity of these artefacts in terms of their entire construction, that is in terms of their exotic or hybrid forms, precious fabric and the fused iconography. All facets of these objects are argued to be witness to entangled cultural idiom and materials, and not just the visual idiom. This is done often in exclusion of the evidence of the Egyptian material and their holistic context, primarily because the Egyptian material in many instances is juxtaposed seamlessly with canonical Egyptian royal texts, iconography and object typologies. However, this in fact does not argue for these objects being the outcome of royal gift exchange, unless they are smaller components added to an object later by Egyptian artisans, or alternatively, that it is the precious materials and skilled artisans that are the actual objects of gifting, rather than the objects themselves.

There also seems to be two parallel methodological trajectories occurring with regard to this material when it is discussed in literature. That of the discipline of Egyptology where awareness of this theoretical notion of visual hybridity for the New Kingdom is discretely alluded to in exhibition publications that discuss certain objects bearing intrusive or hybrid idiom. Although, it must be emphasised here that this is usually only applied to the famous international examples. The other trajectory is the sphere of theoretical archaeology where the discussion of complex or entangled cultural interaction and the semantic expression of same: visual hybridity, transculturalism or entanglement theory is academically *de rigueur*,[71] but which itself fails to provide solutions by virtue of an assumption of inextricable cultural entanglement for objects bearing mixed iconography or adapted cultural forms. It is my intention to attempt to reconcile these two disciplines within the one study.

If one excludes self defeating avenues of cultural style for these objects and returns to the physical process of elite gifting in the Late Bronze Age we are faced with the mundane reality of these ostensibly hybrid artefacts: royal diplomatic gifting. This must take into account such issues as agency, reception and the possibility that they may have more complex object biographies than just a one to one, royal agent and royal recipient life span. Equally, there is the potential for multivalency or syncretism in relation to

---

[71] Hodder 2012; Stockhammer 2012, 43–58.

the visual semantics expressed within these objects. It is also essential to examine the cultural reasons why these particular artefacts bearing this anomalous idiom have been regarded as prestigious, rather than assume that this was the case. There has originally been an art historical approach to discussions of this iconography which focuses on the imagery in isolation from an assessment of the whole artefact. Equally, it has been commonplace for find context to be overlooked or at least only considered in broad terms. These are issues that many academics raise in their critiques of this style, yet often they themselves commit the same errors when they then employ these methodologies in their own discussions. In fact, how does one discuss an iconographic style in exclusion of a discussion of visual idiom?

That being said, I wholeheartedly concur with rejecting stylistic approaches that seek to track cultural origin for visual motifs in the Bronze Age, as this methodology, when applied to many ubiquitous shared motifs of the second millennium, is too narrow. However, with the firmly situated pieces from Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt this process, for some reason, has continued to be applied, but the temporal context for these artefacts is entirely different, for many artefacts we are in possession of firm dates and precise find contexts. They are components of elite and royal funerary equipment from well documented royal tombs which also happen to belong to rulers who have left abundant material culture and are equally well documented. This provides a perfect opportunity for assessing the visual content of the international style from an entirely different angle: the view as it were from New Kingdom Egypt.