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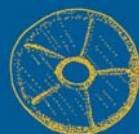
ORIGINI

*PREHISTORY AND PROTOHISTORY
OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS*

XLI
2018-1

PREISTORIA E PROTOSTORIA
DELLE CIVILTÀ ANTICHE

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A “FLAME AND FROND” IVORY PLAQUE FROM THE
NEO-HITTITE EXCAVATIONS AT ARSLANTEPE/MELID.
REGIONALISMS AND COMMUNITIES IN IRON AGE ANATOLIA.

Federico Manuelli*
Holly Pittman**

ABSTRACT – *This paper presents a new outstanding discovery from 2016 at the site of Arslantepe (Malatya, SE Turkey), a finely made ivory plaque found in an Iron Age context approximately dated at the beginning of the 8th century BCE. The object belongs to the well-known “Flame and Frond” ivory carving school and its discovery at Arslantepe suggests intriguing cross-cultural relationships with the Levantine and northern Mesopotamian worlds. The article describes and discusses the new find within the corpus of the 1st millennium BCE Near Eastern production of ivory and luxury goods. It aims at evaluating innovative aspects of intercultural communication as well as the legacy of ancient traditions in the formation of the new artistic trends at Arslantepe and within the flourishing of the Iron Age societies.*

KEYWORDS – Arslantepe, ivory carving, Iron Age, luxury objects.

RIASSUNTO – L’articolo presenta una nuova ed importante scoperta avvenuta nel 2016 nel sito di Arslantepe (Malatya, Turchia SO). Si tratta di una placchetta d’avorio finemente realizzata e proveniente da un contesto dell’Età del Ferro, datato grossomodo all’inizio del VIII secolo a.C. L’oggetto appartiene alla famosa scuola eburnea denominata “Flame and Frond”, e la sua presenza ad Arslantepe suggerisce affascinanti relazioni culturali con il Levante e la Mesopotamia settentrionale. L’articolo descrive e discute il nuovo ritrovamento nel contesto degli avori e degli oggetti di lusso vicino orientali del I millennio a.C. L’obiettivo è di esaminare gli aspetti innovativi di scambio interculturale così come il retaggio lasciato dalle più antiche tradizioni nella formazione delle nuove tendenze artistiche ad Arslantepe e nell’ambito dell’evoluzione delle rigogliose società dell’Età del Ferro.

PAROLE CHIAVE – *Arslantepe, intaglio dell’avorio, Età del Ferro, produzioni di lusso.*

INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first centuries of the 1st millennium BCE in south-eastern Anatolia and northern Syria are marked by the emergence of numerous artistic centers characterized by manifold traits and styles. The so-called Neo-Hittite kingdoms that rose from the ashes of the Late Bronze Age empires reached their political and social climax in the 9th and 8th century BCE, as a consequence of a gradual consolidation of their regional authorities and increasing intercultural communication. This

prompted competition and conflicts but also encouraged reciprocal cultural interplay and assimilation (Mazzoni 2013: 466-469). The later Assyrian expansion of the 8th and 7th century BCE led to phenomena of emulation and appropriation (Gunter 2009: 34-40; Feldman 2014: 95-100; Liverani 2017: 66-78) and eventually facilitated the cultural homogenization of the political entities and, on a wider scale, the spread of the so-called “Orientalizing” style (Gunter 2014: 96-100).

Artworks and luxury goods provide a vivid picture of the flourishing creativity characterizing this period of social, territorial

and ethnic cosmopolitanism. It stimulated the circulation of models and trends among different centers and regions, within a composite artistic scene involving Levantine orientations (Feldman 2014: 3-41; Weber 2017), Assyrian influences (Gunter 2009: 95-123; Wicke 2015), Hittite traditions (Mazzoni 2013:469-480; Manuelli 2016: 28-31), as well as the entanglement of Egyptian and Aegean components (Gubel 2000; Matthäus 2009).

In this stimulating environment, ivory carving presents an interesting case. Despite the fact that the competition between the artistic groups tended to create distinctive regional styles starting from approximately the late 10th century BCE, the identification of workshop centers and schools is still an open question (Herrmann 2005; Winter 2005; Wicke 2013: 563-567; Di Paolo 2014; Feldman 2014; Suter 2015). While aspects of cross-culturality facilitated a community of tastes and iconographic motives as well as the creation of a network of globalism, they also hinder the identification of specific boundaries and of the circulation of goods (Caubet 2013: 455-457).

Insights into these issues and new food for thought are offered by the results of the recent investigations carried out by the Italian Archaeological Expedition of Sapienza University of Rome on the Iron Age levels at Arslantepe (Malatya, SE Turkey). During the 2016 excavation campaign, a marvelous ivory plaque, belonging to the so-called “Flame and Frond” school, was brought to light.¹ This discovery is particularly significant especially when contextualize into the historical background of the site at

the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE. The demise of the Hittite empire in central Anatolia affected only marginally some of its peripheral areas (Seeher 2010: 220-221). In this framework, during the 12th century BCE Arslantepe emerged as the capital of the independent reign of Malizi. New research shows that the crisis at the site was contained by the rising of local elite, which adopted strategies of territorial control and ideological continuity with the Hittite tradition (Manuelli, Mori 2016: 210-216). The following development of the site as the capital of the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Melid during the 9th century BCE projected Arslantepe within a wider network of international relationships involving the Levantine kingdoms as well as the Phrygian, Urartian and Assyrian powers (Bryce 2012: 181-192).

In this perspective, information from Arslantepe sheds new light on the stimulating topic of the role played by elements of cultural tradition and innovation in the formation of the new Iron Age political entities, and offers insights into their aspects of regionalism and community. Below we present the new discovery and discuss it in the framework of the historical and artistic development of the Syro-Anatolian, Levantine and northern Mesopotamian societies at the dawn of the new millennium.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND ITS DATING

The late 2nd and 1st millennium BCE at Arslantepe has presented scholars with stark ambiguities for a long time. On the one hand,

¹ For preliminary data and information about the discovery, see Frangipane *et alii* (2017: 83-84; 2018: 4-7).



Fig. 1 – Arslantepe 2016, plan of the excavated areas (©MAIAO).

the spectacular recovery of the “Lions Gate” during the 1930s (Delaporte 1940) and the final assessment of the Luwian hieroglyphic collection (Hawkins 2000: 282-329) provided a clear idea of the monumentality and importance of Neo-Hittite Melid. On the other hand, the discovery from the 1970s

onwards of the imposing proto-historic structures did not allow for a continuous investigation of the historical levels and for a definite clarification of the archaeological and historical context of their extraordinary remains (Frangipane, Liverani 2013: 349-353).²

² For the early activities of the Italian Archaeological Expedition during the 1960s, see Pecorella (1975), and for further interpretations, Pecorella (2004) and Manuelli (2013). For the prehistoric and proto-historic remains, see among the most recent, Frangipane (2010; 2012; 2016).



Fig. 2 – Arslantepe, the new excavated sector facing East. The Neo-Hittite multiple-spaced building (photo by R. Ceccacci, ©MAIAO).

In 2007 a new targeted project of excavation and study began with the aim to finally provide valid answers concerning the development of the site during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. It focused on exploring a large area next to the spot where the “Lions Gate” was discovered (Liverani 2010: 649-650). Excavations carried out from 2008 to 2010 and again in 2015 and 2016 made it possible to inspect a long and uninterrupted sequence, characterized by the presence of monumental structures and fortifications that span from the mid-12th to the 7th century BCE. The stratigraphic and architectural sequence allows us to reconstruct a chronology

that distinguishes two Early Iron Age phases (EIA I: ca. 1200-1000 / EIA II: ca. 1000-850 BCE) and a Middle Iron Age phase (MIA: ca. 850-650 BCE).³ The results provided fresh data for a better assessment of both the old sculpted bas-reliefs found reused in the “Lions Gate” (Manuelli, Mori 2016: 219-228), and the general development of the site sequence during the late 2nd and 1st millennium BCE (Manuelli 2011: 70-72; Liverani 2012a: 327-336).

In 2016 a new excavation area was opened and a sequence covering roughly the 9th to the 7th century BCE has been investigated (Frangipane *et alii* 2017: 83-84; 2018: 4-7). The new sector is located

³ For an assessment of the sequence, see Manuelli (in press) and for a general insight into the Iron Age chronology of the Upper Euphrates region, see Köroğlu (2003).

ca. 20 meters south-eastward of the "gate area" and extends over approximately 120 square meters (fig. 1). The purpose of this operation was to inspect the development of the inner Iron Age citadel at the site and to understand its relationship with the fortified structures and sequence unearthed northwards. Preliminary excavations had earlier been conducted by the Italian expedition during the 1960s (Puglisi, Meriggi 1964: 27-29; Pecorella 1975: 20-21). They brought to light various remains belonging to different Iron Age phases, unfortunately leaving unsolved many problems concerning their synchronic and diachronic relationships.

The new excavation activities have shown a complete correspondence with the main phases brought to light in the northern area. At the same time the presence of a more articulated and complex stratigraphy and architectural sequence was observed.

Two proper Neo-Hittite architectural levels have been unearthed. The later one is characterized by a series of large and smaller post-holes and stone-blocks, as well as plastered pits, symmetrically distributed over a wide area. They suggest the presence of a series of pillars and columns that recall the so-called "pillared halls" of the 8th century BCE associated with the main use of the "Lions Gate", though in a more restricted and damaged form (Liverani 2011; 2012b; Manuelli 2011: 70-72).

An earlier level, consisting of a multi-spaced building, was also unearthed. It is comprised of three rooms: a large hall and two smaller rooms adjoining it on the northern side (fig. 2). The large hall had a repeatedly plastered floor and rebuilt walls that changed its arrangement. Despite the edges having been completely

removed by erosion, it is possible to reconstruct its internal layout which in its later phase is characterized by the presence of a double-chambered hearth (fig. 3). The two smaller rooms have been better preserved. Three phases of plastered floors with traces of fire activities have been identified. It can be assumed that the whole building corresponds to the first phase of construction of the "Lions Gate" and the so-called "early orthogonal building" of the late-9th and early-8th century BCE (Manuelli 2010: 71-75; Liverani, Frangipane 2013: 356-357).

At the eastern edge of the large hall a small pit has been found. The finely carved ivory plaque that is the focus of this article was found in its filling. Although partially eroded by the slope, the stratigraphic relationship of the pit with the abovementioned structures is guaranteed by the fact that its western border was found sealed by the later floor of the hall.

THE IVORY PLAQUE: ICONOGRAPHIC, STYLISTIC AND TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The ivory plaque is rectangular in shape, 8.1 cm in length, 4.3 cm in height, and 0.5 cm thick. It is flat showing only very slight curvature of the elephant ivory tusk (fig. 4). The back and all of the sides are scored with diagonal and sometimes overlapping scratches which would have allowed the ivory to be set in an adhesive matrix holding it to its support (fig. 5). The plaque would have been removed from the very base of the tusk where the curvature is the least pronounced (Caubet, Gaborit-Chopin 2004).

The face is carved with two ibexes facing a central volute tree. The composition is strictly symmetrical with

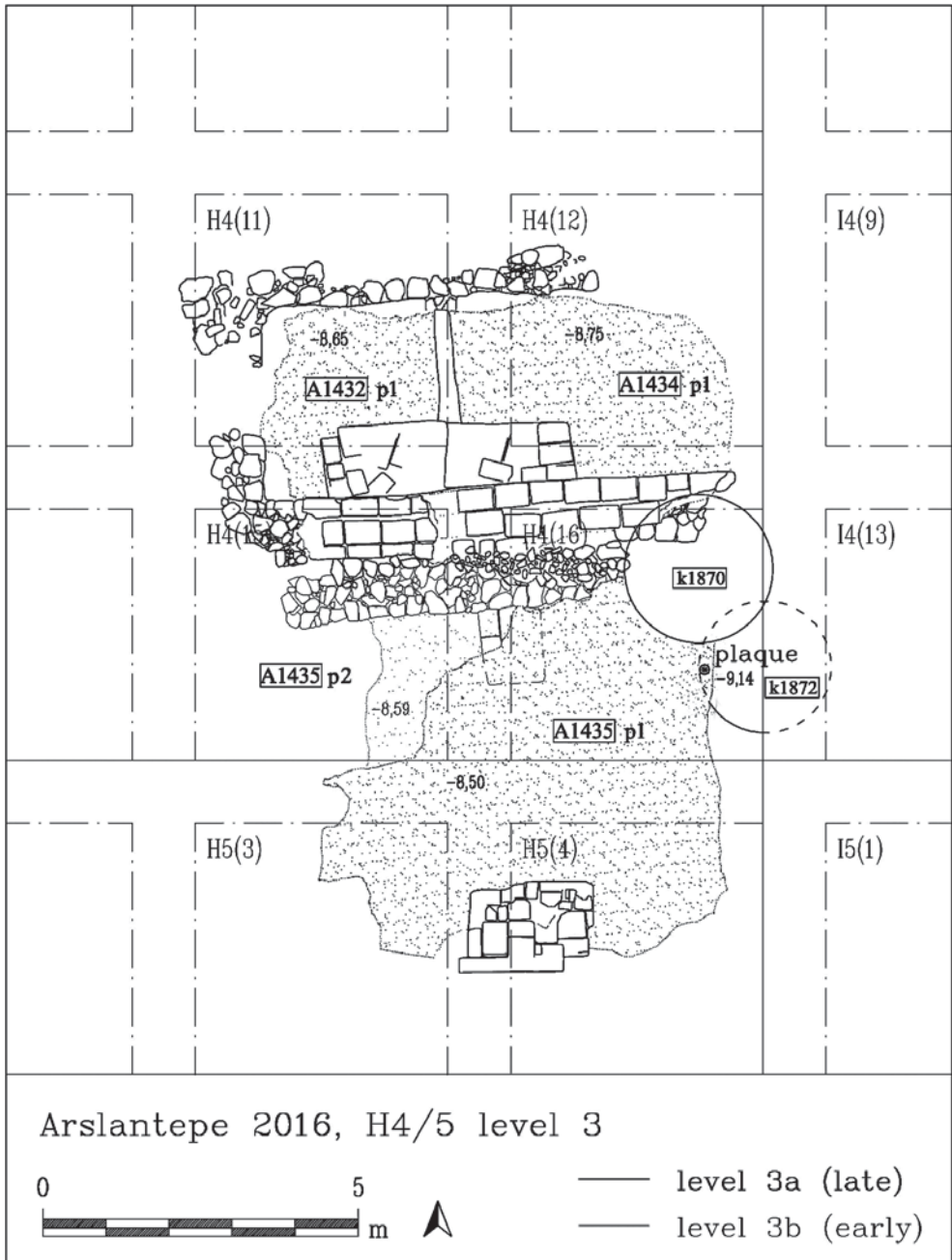


Fig. 3 – Arslantepe, plan of the Neo-Hittite multiple-space building (realized by G. Liberotti, ©MAIAO).



Fig. 4 – The ivory plaque, front side (photo by R. Ceccacci, ©MAIAO).

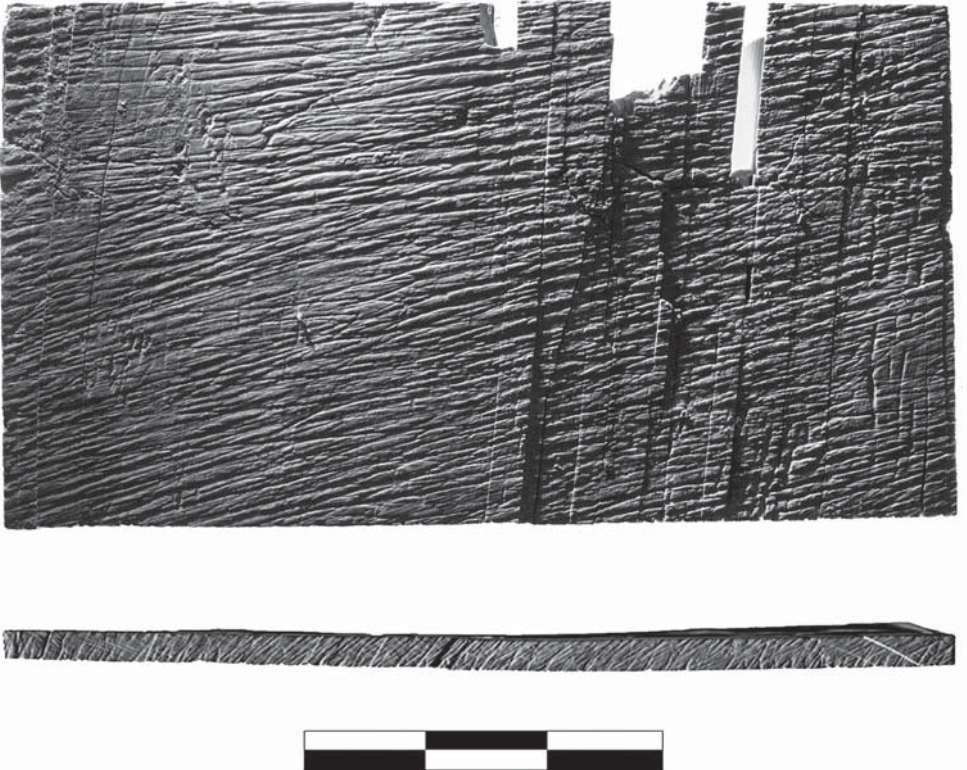


Fig. 5 – The ivory plaque, back and top sides (photos by R. Ceccacci, ©MAIAO).

only slight variation in the markings on the vegetation and the bodies of the animals. The scene is framed on all four sides by a border ca. 0.4 cm wide. The top and bottom of the frame are elaborated by three straight, deep grooves; along the sides, a single groove defines the right one while the slightly damaged left side appears not to have had a similar groove. This suggests that there may have been an identical plaque placed next to this one on its original support. There are remains of a black substance in the grooves along the top which may be some kind of colored agent.⁴ The condition of the ivory plaque is almost perfect with only small and recent losses along the top. It would have originally been inlaid into a larger object, probably a piece of furniture or a box to judge from comparable material.

Stylistic features allow the plaque to compare closely with North Syrian ivories known in large numbers from among the enormous quantity of specimens found at Nimrud. More specifically, distinctive markings on the animals' bodies and features of the central volute tree allow us to place it in the much discussed "Flame and Frond" group of North Syrian ivories (Herrmann 1989).

The central element of the composition is a tree with a trunk supporting stacked volute pairs and emerging fronds. The base of the upwardly tapering trunk is flanked on each side by a single outward turning volute. The top of the central trunk splits to form a pair of outward turning volutes. At the place of the split is a teardrop shaped form. A second pair of inward turning volutes rise from a

diamond shape resting above the teardrop. At the base of the upper volutes is a small diamond from which four fronds emerge each having a central ridge from which short leaves emanate to each side. Each frond bends to conform to the edge of the top frame of the plaque. Individual fronds emerge from the juncture of the upper and lower volutes and two fronds emerge from beneath each of the lower volutes. The outline of the trunk, volutes, teardrop and diamond shapes are all elaborated with an internal linear groove.

To each side of the central volute vegetal element is the profile depiction of an ibex facing the tree. Each animal places its near front hoof on a small rock while raising the other bent front leg so that the hoof meets the fronds protruding from the lower volute. Behind each rock a vegetal element on a long undulating thick stem gradually rises on a diagonal path passing behind the body of each ibex. The plant terminates above the hind end of the animal in a lotus blossom emerging from a pair of outward turning volutes. Similarly to the tree, the volutes and the lotus blossom are defined by internal grooving.

The quadrupeds are naturalistically proportioned and subtle modeling defines their contours and musculature. In addition, incised linear definition is used extensively to mark muscle passages, hair, and the boney structure of the animal. Of all of the stylizations, this linear definition is the most diagnostic for categorizing this piece within the larger world of Levantine ivory production.

The most salient linear elaboration on

⁴ Chemical analyses have not yet been undertaken on the ivory, so that it is unfortunately not possible at the moment to provide any insights into the origins and composition of the colored agent.

each ibex are the two flame-like patterns emerging from the front of the thigh which serve to define the muscles of the haunch. The flames are tapering sinuous forms that are given sculptural dimension through modeling that is subsequently outlined with a shallow groove. It is this feature that motivated the rubric "Flame" for this ivory type. Two parallel grooves join the back of the rear flame and continue down the back of the haunch and the hind leg to the fetlock. The muscles and boney structure of the front near leg are also articulated through grooving. The foreleg and elbow joint are defined by a double inverted U-shape; two lines define the front cannon leading to the hoof. The interior of the front leg is also marked by parallel lines on the foreleg and cannon. The fore part of the body is both sculpted and detailed by grooving. The powerful neck of the animal has five sinuous folds of muscle and skin that begin at the back of the head and continue down the back of the neck to define the powerful muscle of the chest. The lowest fold is shaped as an elongated C which serves to define the shoulder. Behind the shoulder both at the joint with the foreleg and on the back are three or four parallel curving grooves which extend toward each other but do not meet. The ribs of the animal are denoted by four slightly curving parallel diagonal lines. Running along the back of the animal is a sinuous groove with pendent notches. Like the flame pattern, this notched line is present on all animals of the "Flame and Frond" tradition.

The head of each animal is extraordinarily lively, with a slightly open mouth, and an alert eye rendered by a drilling that was certainly originally filled with a colorful substance. The beard is slightly curved and emphasized with two

internal grooves. The muzzle has a single nostril in front of three grooved folds. The open eye is surrounded top and bottom by ridges and grooving with a single brow on the forehead. From the brow springs the powerful and distinctive horns of the ibex, an image familiar in Late Bronze Age and earlier imagery, but surprisingly rare in the corpus of Iron Age ivories. The horns are marked at intervals with multiple chevrons to render the notches typical of this ovine creature. Finally an ear extends behind each head, alert for any threatening sound.

THE NEAR EASTERN IVORY INDUSTRY: A SCHOLARLY DEBATE

Before entering into specific discussion of the ivory, it is useful to briefly summarize the history of Iron Age ivory scholarship and the lively debate in which it now engages.

As a luxury material elephant ivory was appreciated in the Middle East and especially in the Levant from the Neolithic period onwards, reaching its peak during the early centuries of the 1st millennium BCE (Barnett 1975; 1982). The source of elephant ivory is still a matter of discussion. While elephants were certainly present in Syria during the 1st millennium BCE, it is possible that ivory was also imported as raw material from Africa through Egypt (Caubet, Poplin 2010). The production of carved ivory objects seems to have come to an end with the complete domination of the small kingdoms of Syria and the Levant by the Assyrian empire in the 7th century BCE. During the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1600-1200 BCE), hippopotamus tooth was used together with elephant ivory for inlay plaques for furniture as well as for small

containers (pyxides) and free standing sculptures (Caubet, Poplin 1987; Kantor 1956; Feldman 2006). The evidence for this luxury industry is concentrated in the Levant and the Aegean, with finds from Ras Shamra/Ugarit, Tell Fara, Megiddo, Tell Fakhariyah, Tell Lachish, Byblos, Delos, Enkomi, and Minet el-Beida (Kantor 1956; Decamps de Mertzenfeld 1934). Some evidence is also documented in Hittite Anatolia and at Middle Assyrian Assur, but for the most part, production and consumption were concentrated in the Aegean and the Levantine west. Some of the most popular conventions of the later ivory industry originated in the earlier Late Bronze Age, including a version of the patterning seen in the “Flame and Frond” animal style (Kantor 1956; Herrmann 1989) to which the Arslantepe ivory belongs.

The largest concentration of worked ivory in the Iron Age comes from the site of Nimrud, the capital of the Assyrian empire until Sargon II moved it in 720 BCE to Khorsabad. The early excavations at the site by William Kennett Loftus who investigated the “Burnt Palace” produced some of the finest of the ivories (Barnett 1975; Herrmann, Laidlaw 2013). These would be augmented through excavations led by both the British and the Iraqi archaeologists over the decades. Richard Barnett initiated the study of this enormous and growing corpus in 1935, followed by Max Mallowan and Georgina Herrmann who has dedicated her career to the careful and comprehensive publication and the thoughtful interpretation of the thousands of ivories found at the site (Barnett 1935; 1975; Mallowan, Herrmann 1974; Herrmann 1986; 1989; 1992; Herrmann, Laidlaw 2009; 2013).

The largest number of ivories served as decorative elaboration for furniture, beds, chairs, stools, tables. These objects were generally in the form of plaques carved either as flat panels or with open work designs, although small sculptures in the round were also part of furniture elaboration. Other ivories are small luxury objects including small canisters (pyxides) some carved in high relief with elaborate figural narrative scenes. Still other types are small scale sculptures made from the solid tip of the tusk as well as furniture parts such as legs, protomes, and finials.

Although found at Nimrud, scholars understood early on that the majority of the ivories had not been manufactured there, but were imported to the site, certainly as a part of the booty and tribute recorded in the annals that the Assyrian kings demanded from their western dependencies. Since 1935 a great deal of scholarship has focused on this important corpus of Iron Age luxury objects. It is a complex and diverse body which has been divided into various groupings which do not always have clear cut boundaries. More recently, attention has been paid to methodology focusing on the criteria for group membership (Herrmann 2005; Winter 2005; Feldman 2009; 2012; 2014). Because the bulk of the corpus was found outside of the centers of production, and was deposited in mixed contexts at a date considerably later than manufacture, a fundamental challenge for scholars has been to sort the ivories from Nimrud into groups that reflect their origin, date and original function. This monumental task has been organized primarily around style. It is made considerably more difficult by the fact that only small numbers of Iron Age ivories have been

found outside of Nimrud, including at Arslan Tash, Hama, Tell Halaf, Tell Tayinat, Zincirli, Tell Afis, Samaria and other sites in Israel. All of these, as well as other sites, are potential candidates as centers of ivory production. More recently associating centers with different style groups has been challenged by Silvana Di Paolo (2009; 2014), Marian Feldman (2014) and Claudia Suter (2015) who argue that craftsmen were mobile and not necessarily anchored to single production centers.

From the early systematic studies, two primary groups were identified in the scholarship: North Syrian and Phoenician (Poulsen 1912).⁵ These two designations were intended to associate different style groups in the Nimrud assemblage with distinct geographical regions of production. The style of the North Syrian group was closely associated with the carved stone orthostats at sites in the region, while the Phoenician group showed strong iconographic and stylistic affinity to Egypt. Irene Winter (1981) introduced a third designation, the South Syrian group to account for ivories that shared features of both the other styles. She posited the production of this style in the region of Damascus.⁶ In spite of the lack of evidence for the production of carved ivories at sites in North Syria and the Levant, we remain confident that the majority of the ivories were produced

there both because of the existence of local finds having stylistic affinity and because of the extensive reports in the Assyrian texts of ivories both as tribute and as booty coming from the western kingdoms. While remaining in use, these group designators have been extensively critiqued in the scholarship, in particular over the past two decades.⁷ On the basis of her study of the large collection of ivories from Samaria, Suter (2010) continued to argue for a geographic distinction between the South Syrian and Phoenician groups on the basis of stylistic and iconographic features. Returning to the subject in 2015, she revised her previous proposal and suggested instead that the relationship between these two groups should perhaps be understood as chronological rather than regional. Following the path-breaking work of Marian Feldman (2006; 2012; 2014), scholars are giving less consideration to recognizing the locations of varying workshops of production, and giving greater attention to the identification of smaller groups based on iconographic and stylistic features.⁸ This has allowed the variety within the corpus to be considered as a product of time as well as one of space or workshop. We are not looking at regional styles, but perhaps at more fluid structures of production which crossed spatial and temporal lines. There seems to be general consensus that the production

⁵ Indeed the corpus as a whole was labeled Syro-Phoenician by Helen Kantor (1956).

⁶ Herrmann (1986) rejected Winter's South Syrian group and replaced it with the designation "Intermediate Style" in order to categorize ivories that shared features of both styles. In 2009 Wicke made a strong critique of the "Intermediate Style" arguing that it be no longer used in the study of Iron Age ivories.

⁷ See for example Feldman (2014); Wicke (2009) and Suter (2015). Indeed recent scholarship has argued convincingly that there is no identifiable Phoenician art before the 4th century BCE, see Quinn (2017) and Martin (2017).

⁸ See Wicke (2005); Scigliuzzo (2005; 2009) and Affanni (2009).

of the North Syrian group was limited to the 9th and 8th centuries BCE.⁹ It is beyond the scope of this contribution and the competence of the author¹⁰ to critique these categories beyond their immediate relevance to the Arslantepe ivory, which can be placed without question in the North Syrian tradition, and further, as mentioned above, in the “Flame and Frond” group, to which we now turn.

THE “FLAME AND FROND” IVORY SCHOOL DISCUSSION

As a distinctive category, the features of the “Flame and Frond” group of North Syrian ivories were first noticed by Richard Barnett (1935) when he observed the characteristic flame patterning on the haunch of various quadrupeds, which was frequently combined with linear markings along the back and the legs of animals. Helene Kantor (1956) drew systematic attention to these distinctive patterns and observed that they were closely similar to those carried on ivories and other media of Late Bronze Age date. In 1989 Georgina Herrmann bestowed the moniker “Flame and Frond” on the group and identified its members both at Nimrud and at other sites. She observed the frequent association of quadrupeds with the volute and frond tree, there, thereby combining them within a single style group. Among the most prominent features of the style are flame marks on the thigh, the line with V-shaped markings on the back of the animal; vertical lines separating that line from the tail; ribs marked by lines

sometimes enclosed in a box. These stylistic conventions are carried on a variety of quadrupeds including especially lions, bulls, cervids, short horned goats, and sphinxes. The trees associated with such elaborated animals are of the volute variety with fronds which are remarkably similar to the plants on Late Bronze Age ivories, having fronds emerging from various parts (fig. 6).

In her study, Herrmann recognizes that ivories with these features are not a homogenous group that could without question be assigned to a single closed workshop. However, they do all share features including forms of volute and frond vegetation, stocky proportions of human figures as well as other traits that grouped them broadly with the North Syrian production. From there, Herrmann developed the parallel, earlier observed by others, of the close similarity of the “Flame and Frond” style to the carved orthostats at the site of Tell Halaf. In both phases of the relief program at Tell Halaf (pre-Kapara and reign of Kapara), the flame motif on the haunch of quadrupeds was, with very few exceptions, prominent (figs. 7; 8). Also frequently present was the notched line on the back and other linear markings. This led Herrmann to propose that Tell Halaf was in fact the site of the production of the ivories belonging to the group.

Despite the fact that Herrmann’s proposal has generated considerable discussion and debate without resolution, she continues to support the idea of Tell Halaf as the site of production (Herrmann

⁹ As first suggested by Winter (1976). See Suter (2015:42) for a summary of this evidence.

¹⁰ I am grateful to both an anonymous reviewer and Marian Feldman for crucial critique of my discussion of complex history of scholarship on this fascinating body of evidence.



Fig. 6 – Nimrud, examples of “Flame and Frond” ivories: *a*, pyxis from the “Burnt Palace” (adapted from Barnett 1975: pl. XXI: S6a-b; Ht. 6.0 cm); *b*, open work panels from Fort Salmanassar (adapted from Herrmann 1986: pl. 138: 586; Ht. 12.2 cm).



Fig. 7 – Tell Halaf, sculpted reliefs from the Pre-Kapara Period (*a*, adapted from Moortgat 1955: taf. 70: A3, 115; Ht. 0.67 m; *b*, adapted from Moortgat 1955: taf. 86: A3, 48; Ht. 0.68 m).



Fig. 8 – Tell Halaf, sculpted relief from the Kapara Period (adapted from Moortgat 1955: taf. 106: B4, 4; Ht. 1.28 m).

and Laidlaw 2013). In 1989 Irene Winter presented a counter argument based on her former study published in 1981 of the importance of Karkemish in the Neo-Hittite world. Acknowledging the close stylistic association of the “Flame and Frond” group with the reliefs from Tell Halaf, Winter proposed that the Tell Halaf reliefs were produced following models found in “Flame and Frond” ivories. She argues that it was much more likely that Karkemish than Tell Halaf was the center of the workshop of the “Flame and Frond” ivories. Karkemish was a much larger, more diverse, better connected center that had a robust craft industry. However, no evidence of ivory production has been found in the extensive old excavations and new round of investigations at the site. The ramifications of the debate are important to establishing directionality of influence from small scale to major art forms. Neither Herrmann nor Winter attempt to differentiate between the earlier and the later reliefs at Tell Halaf in relationship to the “Flame and Frond” ivories. It is clear however, that the later reliefs are considerably more restrained in their linear elaboration.

More recently, Stefania Mazzoni (2009) has argued from the material at Hama that the “Flame and Frond” group may have been located at a workshop at that site based on the frequent appearance of that style there. In the same volume, Giorgio Affanni (2009), from an analysis of a subset of the “Flame and Frond” school that includes only sphinxes, proposes five groups made in three different locations over an extended period of as long as 150 years. The Arslantepe plaque belongs within his group 1-2 which he puts at the beginning of the tradition, as early as the

10th century BCE. This suggestion that the “Flame and Frond” school is a long-lived tradition is particularly convincing given the stylistic differences that can be detected within the group. More recently, Marian Feldman (2014) has argued that the quest to associate different style groups with distinct locations is probably not relevant because she believes that the craftsmen were highly mobile and produced ivories in different styles in different locations. She argues for communities of producers and consumers who signaled each other through distinct stylistic features. Further, she persuasively argues that the continued use of stylistic features from the Late Bronze Age, so clearly visible in the “Flame and Frond” group, articulate a collective memory of a “golden age” that encompassed all of the eastern Mediterranean.

LUXURY GOODS, ARTWORKS, AND EXOTIC PRODUCTIONS. CULTURAL GLOBALISM AT IRON AGE ARSLANTEPE

To evaluate the ivory plaque and contextualize it in the picture of the early 1st millennium BCE at Arslantepe and the wider scenario of the artistic interculturality of the Iron Age societies, a short appraisal of the known collection of artworks as well as precious objects and exotic artifacts discovered at the site is essential.

In general, the presence of portable luxury goods seems to be very limited at Arslantepe in this period and only few noteworthy items are attested. Two specimens, brought to light during the first round of investigations at the site by the Italian expedition during the 1960s, are worth considering. The first is a small knob-shaped ivory object



Fig. 9 – Arslantepe, Iron Age luxury artifacts: *a*, knob-shaped ivory object; *b*, bone spoon with duck-shaped protome; *c*, bronze fibula (photos by R. Ceccacci; drawings by T. D’Este, ©MAIAO).

(fig. 9a), whose rounded extremity is finished by means of an applied bronze stud (Pecorella 1975: 50). Comparative objects generally tend towards the Iron

Age of the Levant, as shown by similar discoveries stemming from the cemetery at Hama (Riis 1948: 178).¹¹ The second is a finely made bone spoon, whose grip end is delicately decorated with a folded duck head (fig. 9b). Luxury objects with duck-shaped protomes are considered typical Levantine-style artifacts of the Late Bronze Age, suggesting fascinating ties with the Egyptian world (Aruz 2015: 43-54).¹² They show a long life span, as they are attested up to the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE (Ben-Shlomo 2010: 141-142). Besides the ivory plaque, the only distinguishable luxury item brought to light during the new excavations at the site is a remarkable triangular bronze fibula (fig. 9c) (Manuelli 2012: 369-371). The type emphasizes further connections with the Levantine as well as with the Assyrian regions especially during the 7th century BCE (Pedde 2001: 490-492).

The picture can be enriched by considering the large repertoire of stone sculptures coming from Arslantepe (Manuelli, Mori 2016: 222-228). Besides the fact that they reveal ideological and celebratory messages addressed to a larger segment of the community, their occurrence is certainly representative of the vivid artistic fervor and wide-ranging reach of the site. It is interesting to observe that the closest iconographic comparisons with the ivory plaque are restricted to the bas-reliefs of the so-called III-Malatya-style (Orthmann 1971: 94-95). It is especially the recently discovered block, with a strict symmetric composition involving hybrid-apotropaic

¹¹ Several examples have also been found at Nimrud, especially in the SE Palace, see Barnett (1975: 212-23).

¹² The decorative motif is also well-represented in Assyrian contexts, see D’Agostino (2007: 342-343) and Wicke (2010: 160).



Fig. 10 – Arslantepe, Early Iron Age figurative bas-relief (photo by R. Ceccacci, ©MAIAO).

figures at the side of a stylized palmette, which evokes affinities with the ivory plaque (fig. 10). Recent studies have allowed us to chronologically locate this sculptural group at the very beginning of the 10th century BCE (Manuelli 2016: 28-29). It is especially interesting to stress that if on the one hand the persistence of the Late Bronze Age legacy is evident in the stylistic aspects of these reliefs, on the other hand their iconographic

repertoire is projected towards a new set of themes and figures typical of the Syro-Mesopotamian tradition (Manuelli, Mori 2016: 224-226).

Further considerations arise from analyzing some distinctive “exotic” ceramic wares discovered in association with the building in which the ivory was found.¹³ The most interesting group is represented by an outstanding collection of red-slip ware (fig. 11).¹⁴ Its coating consists of either

¹³ Despite differences in quantity, the presence of the following wares has been already noticed from excavations on the northern area in 2008, see Manuelli (2010: 76-79).

¹⁴ A preliminary quantitative analysis of this material reveals that red-slipped sherds represent approximately the 30% of the pottery material in this phase. The large amount of red-slip ware was already noticed from the first round of Italian excavations at the site, see Pecorella (1975: 40-45).



Fig. 11 – Arslantepe, selected red-slip sherds (photo by R. Ceccacci, ©MAIAO).

a thick red layer accurately burnished or a light orange wash only hastily finished. Morphology also emphasizes a wide variability, characterized by the presence of carinated bowls as well as larger and deeper open shapes and jugs. “Red Slip Ware” is considered one of the hallmarks of the whole Levantine area from the 9th to the 7th century BCE (Soldi 2013: 199-200). Its exact chronology and the dynamics of its circulation are still a matter of discussion among scholars, although nowadays it is mostly accepted that it originated in the coastal regions and spread toward the inner Syrian territories (Bremer 1986: 241-246; Venturi 2007: 300). It actually seems that within a common trend and definition, the term “Red Slip Ware” refers to more than one regional production, mostly distinguished on the basis of the fabric quality and associated shapes (Lehmann 1998: 13).

Interestingly monochrome and bichrome painted wares are also attested in the collection (fig. 12). Most of the items consist of body jars with brown linear painted decorations realized on

white-slip treatments. Moreover, sherds of globular jars with red and black circular patterns made on brown-orange pastes, as well as fragments with black linear painted decorations on red-slip surfaces, also occur. These painted productions can be precisely linked with Cypro-Phoenician ceramics, specifically with “White Painted IV”, “Bichrome III-IV” and “Black-on-Red” wares (Gjerstad 1948: 48-72; Karageorghis 2003: 64-76). They are widely attested at Cyprus from approximately the 9th to the 7th century BCE and in the Levant as well (Gilboa 1999). In addition, several cases of import and imitation also appear in coastal Cilicia (Hansen, Postgate 2007: 345-347; Lehmann 2008).

Moving outside of their main areas of distribution, the impact of red-slip and Cypro-Phoenician wares drastically decrease. Along the Euphrates at the Syro-Turkish border and throughout the south-eastern Anatolian territory their influence is very limited, as shown at Karkemish (Bonomo, Zaina 2014: 141-142; Pizzimenti, Zaina 2016: 370),

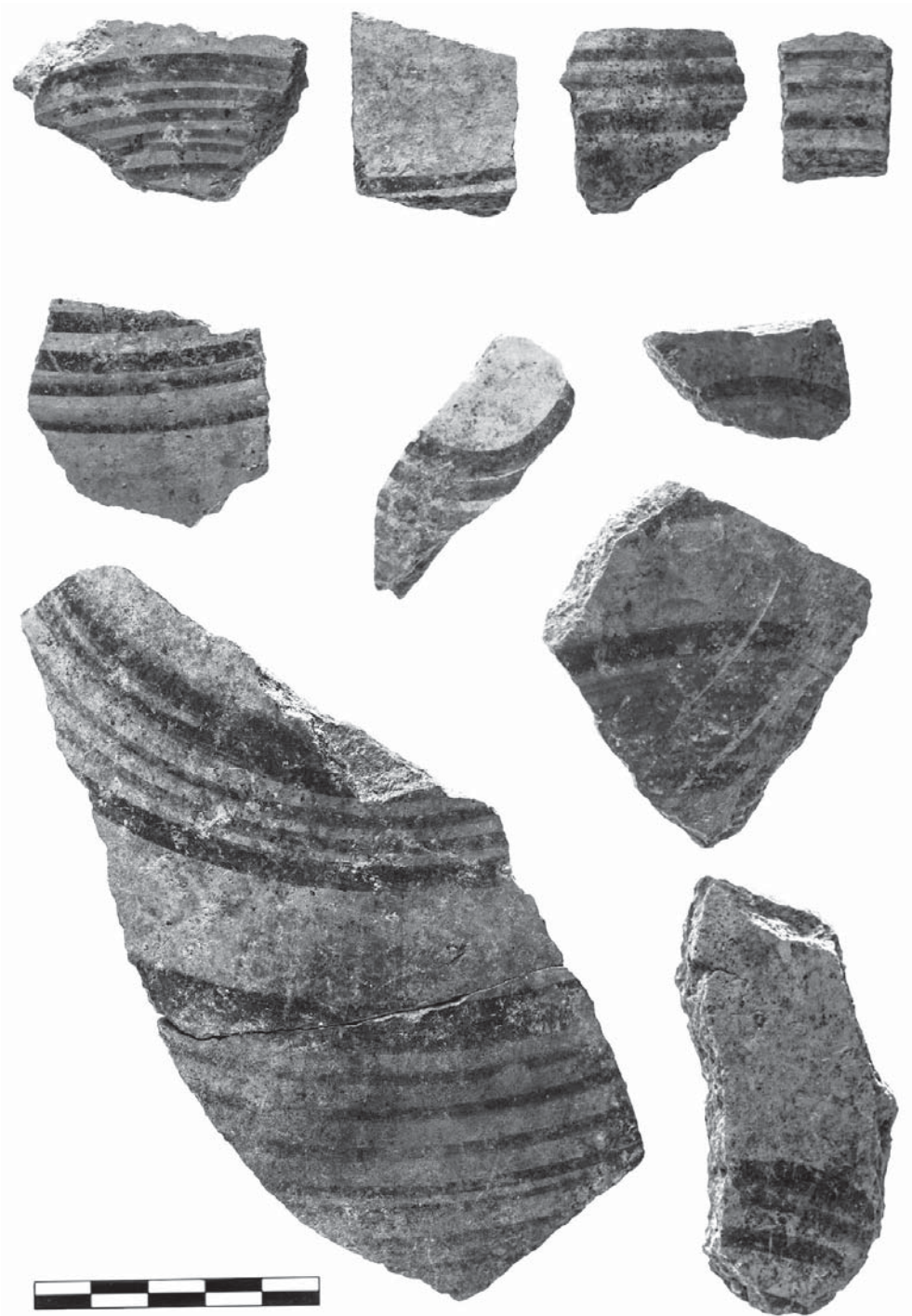


Fig. 12 – Arslantepe, selected Cypro-Phoenician sherds (photo by R. Ceccacci, ©MAIAO).

Tille Höyük (Blaylock 2016: 51-64) and Zincirli (Soldi 2013: 214). The same trend characterizes the Upper Euphrates region, where these “exotic” productions are scarcely attested and exclusively restricted to the Karakaya area, or the territory west of the river. Interesting examples come from the 8th century BCE levels at Köşkerbaba (Bilgi 1991: 12-13), Imamoğlu (Ökse 1992) and Değirmentepe (Ökse 1988: 89-90).

Petrographic analyses conducted on the Arslantepe material, on both red-slip and monochrome and bichrome wares, show that samples are roughly consistent with autochthonous sources, leading to the preliminary conclusion that these productions were locally made.¹⁵ This shows furthermore that in spite of the noticeable impact of foreign cultural influences, the artistic trends and productions at the site at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE are still deeply linked to aspects of local continuity and development.

THE ARSLANTEPE DISCOVERY WITHIN THE CULTURAL SPHERE OF THE IRON AGE SOCIETIES

With that background of the scholarly debate and the analysis of the collection of further exotic and precious goods coming from the site, we can turn in conclusion to a more focused discussion of the Arslantepe plaque and its place within the corpus of North Syrian ivory production of the Iron Age.

While the flame pattern, the notched

line along the back, and the rib markings require our ivory to be included in the “Flame and Frond” group, some features that set it apart deserve discussion. First, the prominent and extensive modeling on the body of the animals, particularly on the neck and the shoulder, is not typical of other exemplars of the “Flame and Frond” group. Further, the linear stylization and patterning of the animals’ bodies are far more extensive than is usually the case. This heavy use of linear detail is best paralleled in the early (pre-Kapara) reliefs at Tell Halaf (fig. 7) (Moortgat 1955; Orthmann 1971: 119-129). As observed above, the later reliefs from the Kapara period proper are much more restrained and refined (fig. 8). While it is beyond the aim of this contribution to argue for or against the site of Tell Halaf as one location of a “Flame and Frond” workshop, the close similarity of the Arslantepe ivory to the early Tell Halaf reliefs suggests that the plaque should be placed early in the production of North Syrian “Flame and Frond” ivories, i.e. closer to 1000 than to 700 BCE, making it an heirloom in its archaeological context. This is consistent with the earlier date proposed by Affanni (2009) for the North-Syrian-style ivories that are closed flat plaques rather than open work examples which the author thinks were made later. It also is supported by the earlier archaeological contexts as well as inscriptions of Hazael carried on some North Syrian ivories (Suter 2015: 42).

Moreover, it is interesting to briefly reflect on the iconography of the Arslantepe

¹⁵ The analyses were carried out by Dr. Pamela Fragnoli (Archaeological Institute of the Austrian Academy of Science in Vienna) on thin sections using a polarizing light microscope. Preliminary observations show the existence of two homogeneous petro-fabrics that correspond to the ware-groups identified macroscopically (red-slip and Cypro-Phoenician). Further investigations, supported by a wider-range of thin sections and chemical analyses, are currently underway.



Fig. 13 – Nimrud, pyxis from the NW Palace (adapted from Herrmann, Laidlaw 2008: pls. 48-49; IM 79515; Ht. 9.2 cm).

plaque. What is rendered on it is the age-old symmetrical image of two ibex rampant against a flowering plant which first finds its expression in the 3rd millennium

BCE (Amiet 1972: no. 978). In the Iron Age corpus of ivories, there is no lack of symmetrically arranged compositions of identical creatures flanking a volute. What

is striking, however, is how rare the ibex with its powerful horns appears in the Iron Age ivories. Cervids, lions, sphinxes, and less frequently short horned goats appear with regularity. But in a survey of the entire corpus of the Nimrud ivories there are very few ibexes. Indeed there is only one close parallel among all of the published Nimrud ivories, rendered on a pyxis found in the "Burnt Palace" (fig. 13). The latter ivory shows ibexes with arching horns, the flame pattern and notched line rampant against a more elaborate version of the frond tree. Another example is carried on a tall pyxis from the south east palace at Nimrud which shows rampant ibexes together with addorsed sphinxes (Barnett 1975: pl. 33, 34). Two other images of such an ibex are depicted grazing together with cervids on Assyrian style ivories (Mallowan, Davies 1970: pl. 35). Another shows addorsed ibexes kneeling toward a version of the volute tree (Mallowan, Davies 1970: pl. 39). Outside of Nimrud, ibexes are also rare. On a relief from Karatepe there is one stone orthostat that bears a symmetrical rampant ibex against a tree (Genge 1979: abb. 67). And at Tell Halaf, a gold pendant with precisely the same motif was found in an early grave (fig. 14) (Moortgat 1955: abb. 2). Although difficult to tell in the photograph, the rampant ibex both seem to have the flame pattern on their haunch.

If we look at the ivories of the Late Bronze Age, the ibex is quite frequently represented both in hunt scenes and as symmetrically composed scenes with the volute tree (Decamps de Mertzfeld 1954). It seems that the centrality of the ibex found in the Late Bronze Age was lost during the last centuries of the 2nd millennium BCE while sphinxes, cervids and the short horned goat continue on in the Iron Age ivories. Although it is

impossible to determine the reason, it could be argued that the theme of the symmetrical ibex against the volute tree was one which looked back to the Late Bronze Age tradition. As Kantor remarks and Feldman argues in her meditation on "communities of style" there was an intentional revival of the Late Bronze Age practices that can clearly be detected in the Iron Age production of luxury goods. The animal style using the flame pattern and notched line is one very obvious example of this adaptive continuity and intentional connection to the past. The use of the ibex as an age-old symbol from an earlier period may perhaps be another. On the pyxis from Nimrud the ibex is combined with another age-old theme of a frontal nude goddess spreading her wings (fig. 13). The Arslantepe plaque can perhaps then be understood as one of the early examples of the continuity of the ibex theme, which gets supplanted in the later production primarily by sphinxes.

In a wider perspective, the persistence of the Late Bronze Age tradition is clearly visible in motifs and details characterizing the bas-reliefs found at the site and its surrounding. This allows us to underline a generalized trend of emulation that links iconographic messages and ideological memory and that seems to represent a collective manifestation of the Iron Age societies (Manuelli, Mori 2016: 232-234). It is also possible integrate into this picture the abovementioned bone duck-head spoon found at the site, which might suggest a fascinating association with the Late Bronze Age Levantine tradition.

Some final remarks might be spent concerning the archaeological and historical context of the discovery. The bad state of preservation of the structures does

not allow for any conclusive interpretation concerning their function. Nonetheless, the presence of the large-sized multi-spaced building and its association with a double-chambered hearth leads one to assume that this was a domestic structure belonging to some high-ranking official or public figure. Despite the fact that the stratigraphy does not leave any doubt about the relationship between the building and the pit where the ivory was found, the erosion of the slope makes difficult to draw specific conclusions. It might be assumed that the small pit was a sort of cache where precious objects with high-symbolic and ideological value were stored as a realm of cultural collective memory (Balza, Mora 2015: 427-430).

To conclude, the discovery of the “Flame and Frond” plaque at Arslantepe brings it into dialogue with other members of this style group found outside of Nimrud at Hama, Tell Tayinat, Zincirli, Tell Halaf and Hasanlu. At the current state of the analysis and with the hope that new results from the excavation and the improvement of the research will bring fresh data for a better understanding of the discovery, it is only possible to infer that the plaque ivory represents a foreign valuable object that reached Arslantepe in the framework of the relevant network of communications that the site developed with the surrounding kingdoms and empires. While it does not, by itself, contribute to the ongoing discussion of the organization of production of these wonderful objects, it may be an example of one of the earliest manifestations of this style, illustrating on the one hand the cross-culturality that affected Arslantepe and the Iron Age societies and on the other the strong legacy of the Late Bronze Age tradition at the site.



Fig. 14 – Tell Halaf, gold pendant (adapted from Moortgat 1955: 6, abb. 2; scale unknown).

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