Greek Art and the Orient

For more than a century, scholars have recognized an “Orientalizing period” in the history of early Greek art, in which Greek artisans fashioned works of art under the stimulus of Near Eastern imports or resident foreign artisans. Previous studies have emphasized the role of Greek and Phoenician traders in bringing about these contacts with the civilizations of the ancient Near East and Egypt, debating their duration or intensity in the Greek world. In this study, Ann Gunter interrogates the categories of “Greek” and “Oriental” as problematic and shifts emphasis to modes of contact and cultural transfers within a broader regional setting. Her provocative study places Greek encounters with the Near East and Egypt in the context of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which by the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E. extended from southern Turkey to western Iran. Using an expanded array of archaeological and textual sources, she argues that crucial aspects of the identity and meaning of foreign works of art were constructed through circumstances of transfer, ownership, and display.

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# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Illustrations</th>
<th>page vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface and Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Introduction

1. **Art and “Assyrianization” along the Imperial Frontiers**
   - Cyprus and the Neo-Assyrian Empire 17
   - Assyrian and Non-Assyrian 20
   - “Assyrianization” and Its Visual Culture in the Empire’s Western Regions 28
   - “Assyrianizing” and “Local Style” at Hasanlu, Western Iran 34

2. **Conceptual Geographies and Frameworks**
   - “Greece” versus “the Orient” 50
   - A Mediterranean Culture? 58
   - Ancient Frameworks: Homer, Phoenicians, and the Concept of an “Orientalizing” Phase 61
   - Modern Frameworks: Chinoiserie and Japonisme 70

3. **Defining and Interpreting Styles**
   - Toward a Definition of “Orientalizing” 80
   - Ethnicity, Material Culture, and Style 84
   - Carved Ivories: Styles, Traditions, and Technological Style 91
   - Neo-Assyrian Sources on Regional Production 95
   - The “Availability” of Near Eastern Styles 106

4. **Gifts, Exchange, and Acquisition**
   - Rethinking Exchange 124
   - Acquisition and “Distance Made Tangible” 128
Contents

The Heraion at Samos and Investment in Greek Sanctuaries 142
Sanctuary Networks? 152

5 Imperial Ideologies and Modes of Appropriation 155
Negotiating Distance 156
Artisans and Mobility 160
Tribute, Booty, and Gifts 164

Conclusions 178

Notes 185
Selected Bibliography 235
Index 253
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

MAPS

1. The Neo-Assyrian Empire in the late 8th century B.C.E. .................................................. page 11
2. Distribution of “flame and frond” group of artifacts. ....................................................... 100
3. Sources of textiles and ivory and wooden objects, reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.E.) ............................................................. 109
4. Sanctuaries on the Greek mainland, Crete, and Aegean coasts. .......................................... 127

FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

1. Stele of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.); Kition. Basalt; H. 2.09 m. Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum 968. ................................................................. 19
List of Illustrations

7. Drawing of decorated breastplate shown in Figure 6. 27
8. Barrakib enthroned, with his scribe. Zincirli, palace, ca. 730 B.C.E. Basalt; H. 1.12 m. Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum 2817. 33

CHAPTER TWO

16. Bowl decorated with concentric friezes, Cypro-Phoenician style. Idalion, ca. 700 B.C.E. Silver-gilt; H. 3.6 cm; Dia. 18.5 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, AO 20134. 67
17. Amphora, Dipylon Master, Late Geometric I (750–725 B.C.E.) Terracotta; H. 1.55 cm. Athens National Museum 804. 75
18. Kitagawa Utamaro (1754–1806), Tomimoto Toyohina, ca. 1792. Woodblock print; 25.2 × 37.6 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Clarence Buckingham Collection 1928.1037. 76
List of Illustrations


CHAPTER THREE


28. Detail, cauldron from Salamis Tomb 79 (see Figure 4).


List of Illustrations

32. Carved furniture panel, North Syrian tradition, “flame and frond school.” Nimrud, Fort Shalmaneser, Room NW 15; 10th–mid-9th century B.C.E. Ivory; H. with tenon 14 cm (H. of panel 11.5 cm); W. 11 cm. London, British Museum ANE 132258. 99


35. Griffin protome. Olympia, ca. 700–650 B.C.E. Bronze; H. 27.8 cm. Olympia Museum (B 145). 105


40. Relief depicting courtier carrying lion-headed situlae. Khorsabad, palace of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.). Alabaster; H. 2.87 m. Paris, Louvre Museum AO 19881. 120


CHAPTER FOUR

42. Horse frontlet inscribed for Haza’el, North Syrian. Samos, Hera sanctuary, 9th–8th century B.C.E. Bronze; L. 27.3 cm. Samos, Vathy Museum (B2579). 125

List of Illustrations

44. Man and dog, Babylonian, ca. 750–700 B.C.E. Samos, Hera sanctuary. Bronze; H. 8.6 cm. Samos, Vathy Museum (B2086).

45. Figurine of Neith, Egypt, ca. 650 B.C.E. Samos, Hera sanctuary. Bronze; H. 22.5 cm. Samos, Vathy Museum (B354).

46. Horse-shaped cheekpiece, Neo-Assyrian, ca. 650 B.C.E. Samos, Hera sanctuary. Bronze; L. 16 cm. Samos, Vathy Museum (B1215).

CHAPTER FIVE


This book had its origins in a paper I presented in a session titled “Defining Modes of Influence: Artistic Relations between Ancient Greece and the Near East,” organized by Margaret Cool Root for the College Art Association Annual Meetings in 1985. As my thinking gradually evolved, I concluded that a study focused largely on the conceptual framework of the questions under debate might prove useful in reevaluating the assumptions and categories of description and interpretation we currently employ. Given the enormous range and complexity of the material, and the vast literature generated by an impressively prolific group of scholars engaged in the study of “East-West” interaction, this book is necessarily selective in its treatment of many issues and previous studies. I have chosen to emphasize historiographic and methodological concerns and propose different frameworks for investigating cross-cultural interaction, and I realize that I often raise many more questions than I answer. I hope that my book will engage both Hellenists and Near Eastern specialists and further the lively ongoing dialogue on this fascinating and important set of issues.

A study concerned with issues of influence and interaction will particularly absorb its author in identifying the many sources of inspiration without which it would not have come into being. Margaret Cool Root and Amélie Kuhrt encouraged me to pursue this investigation, and their scholarly example and friendly support have been vital to my completing this task. Betsy Bryan, Jerry Cooper, and Glenn Schwartz made helpful comments on an early draft, Steven W. Cole kindly corrected several errors, and Richard Jasnow provided welcome moral support. Carla M. Antonaccio and François de Polignac read an earlier draft and offered many useful suggestions for its improvement. Jan Stuart kindly steered me toward the work of Craig Clunas, whose influence will be readily evident in these pages. I am also grateful to the three anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press, who pointed out mistakes and helped me reshape the book’s focus and scope. Mariana Giovino...
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