

PREFACE

Syro-Phoenician ivories constitute a most significant corpus of the artistic and archaeological documents of the 1st millennium Levant. They are consequently one of the traditional fields of research in the archaeology of the Near East, with many questions having long been the subject of passionate debate: the identification of regional groups and schools, their chronology, styles and iconographies, or, to sum up in R.D. Barnett's words of 1935 «The Problem of the Ivories».

Since F. Poulsen's initial evaluation in *Der Orient und die frühgriechische Kunst*, Berlin 1912 and those of other scholars, together with R.D. Barnett's seminal identification of the North-Syrian and Phoenician groups, research has mainly concentrated on the question of the centers of production. The identification of the Intermediate or South Syrian Group by I.J. Winter, her proposal of the Zincirli and Halaf schools and the identification of the «Flame and Frond» and other groups by G. Herrmann successfully continued this trend. In the meantime, the final publication of the corpus of the Nimrud ivories by G. Herrmann provided an in-depth analysis of the majority of ivories which were produced in different areas and periods. Time and knowledge have apparently refined the terms of the question but not solved «The Problem of the Ivories». New evidence, in fact, from the producing regions is still missing and we have consequently to rely on the Assyrian contexts, mainly Nimrud and the spoils of the booty taken from the western producing centers.

That this subject was a crucial one in any reconsideration of the art of the Iron Age Levant was clear to the participants in the 2001 Fribourg workshop «Crafts and Images in Contact», published in 2005 by C.E. Suter and Ch. Uehlinger. At the end of the conclusive discussions it was commonly agreed that a second workshop had to be devoted to «The problem of the Ivories»; we offered the seat of Pisa, because studies on the Iron Age culture and visual arts were among the favourite topics of our group of research, mostly within the context of the the Tell Afis project. A third workshop was then organized at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität in Mainz in 2005 by A. Braun-Holzinger, U. Verhoeven and D. Wicke and was dedicated to Ägypten und Levante. Kulturkontakt im Spiegel der Kleinkunst vom späten 2. bis zum frühen 1. Jt. v. Chr.

The ivory workshop was held from 9th to 11th December 2004 in the Aula Magna Storica at Palazzo La Sapienza, Pisa. First of all, it offered an opportunity to reappraise many of the traditional topics of debate regarding ivories, especially the workshops and iconographies, but also to present the results of different restoration and museum activities being undertaken at the time, together with projects for the publication of the main corpora. Other important issues that were debated in our workshop but which are not dealt with in the present volume included the new study and publication of the corpus of ivories from Samaria by C. Suter and Ch. Uehlinger, already decided in the Fribourg workshop, the difficult restoration program for the Baghdad Museum collection of Nimrud ivories following the pillaging that occurred in 2002 by E. Bertazzoli, and the research activities and conclusive exposition of the collection of ivories at the Musée du Louvre, by A. Caubet and F. Poplin.

The workshop offered the chance for young and not so young scholars to meet and

exchange ideas and opinions in a very informal manner. G. Herrmann was a true promoter of extremely useful discussions. Her essential volume, «The Published Ivories from Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud» had just been published, providing all scholars with invaluable documentation. Further studies on ivories have also appeared since the workshop, but it has not always been possible to refer to these in our volume. The publication of the ivories from the Italian excavations at Nimrud have just come out, and its preliminary presentation is also included in our acts. Moreover, the workshop also provided the stimulus for new research and the reappraisal of studies of groups known and published quite some time ago, a notable example being the case of the group from Arslan Tash which are now the object of a joint restoration project and new collocation in the Aleppo Museum undertaken by the Musée du Louvre and the University of Bologna.

In the volume, the contributions are ordered according to the main topics of the debate. First we have the presentation and discussion of the materials from Nimrud, Arslan Tash and Hama as they represent the documentation from excavated sites. Critical debate follows, beginning with discussion of methodology, interpretation and proposal of groups, Egyptian and Aegean interconnection, and ending with the relevant 2nd millennium ivories from Ugarit, which constitute the cultural and artistic background tradition for the 1st millennium ivory production.

The editors wish to thank all the contributors and Christoph Uehlinger of the scientific board for their forbearance, and express their gratitude to the colleagues and institutions who promoted and participated in the ivory workshop. Our opening session was chaired by Lucia Tomasi Tongiorgi, Prorettore Vicario of the University of Pisa and Edda Bresciani and Biagio Virgilio, both former directors of the Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche del Mondo Antico. In the poster section included in the workshop two posters were specifically dedicated to Edda Bresciani who founded and developed the Near Eastern section of the Dipartimento di Scienze storiche del Mondo antico at Pisa and to Georgina Herrmann who devoted her studies and passion to the ivories, both women of science and culture in Egyptology and Near Eastern Studies. Their remarkable commitment was an incentive to our research and, ultimately, to the organization of the workshop at the University of Pisa.

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