

CENTRO DI ARCHEOLOGIA CRETESE
UNIVERSITÀ DI CATANIA

CRETA ANTICA

19

2018



BOTTEGA D'ERASMO
ALDO AUSILIO EDITORE IN PADOVA



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CRETA ANTICA

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*Cretan exploration has immense attractions;
the surprises, which its little explored soil gives
to any one who seeks to open it up,
are among the deepest satisfactions of one's life
as an archaeologist.*

(F. HALBHERR, *AJA*, XI, 1896, 537)

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ART AND AGENCY MEANING-MAKING IN IRON AGE MEDITERRANEAN

Abstract

In a recent work, Marian Feldman questions on what scholars exactly do when they study ancient artefacts carrying visual and formal complexities, commonly referred to as art. The answer has often to do with the concept of meaning, reflecting an attitude aimed to attempt getting at the meaning of a precise work of art. This approach reflects an almost common practice derived from Erwin Panofsky's method concerning iconographic interpretation. Without any doubt, this method provides a huge amount of data, but, in the meantime, bears internal contradictions and limitations (Feldman 2014) for iconography deals with some sort of immateriality that seems to exist outside of the object itself. In this paper I would try to apply an alternative approach to meaning in visuals of the Iron Age Eastern Mediterranean, in order to consistently complete the work carried out by Marian Feldman on Bronze Age Aegean material culture. The concept of meaning-making will be reconsidered as a social generated enterprise conditioned by, or arising from, human-object interaction rather than a static or intrinsic value per se existing, beyond the object itself.

Introduction

Since the end of last century, the study of the interconnections between the Aegean and the Near East has been characterized by a renewed and lively interest¹. New excavations along with re-interpretation of the old ones, raised issues concerning presence of Near Eastern elements in Crete both as imports and imitations as well, more or less having impact on local material culture².

So, a growing interest on trade roots and on exchange systems involved Iron Age Mediterranean, flanking the previous one focused on Bronze Age period. As a consequence, a new form of «Mediterranean Archaeology» has born, involving scholars specialized on different research domains³. In about fifty years, the approach to the study of Near Eastern elements in Crete and, in general, in Greece, varied mostly as a consequence of the adoption of new analysis systems and models offered by theoretical archaeology and anthropology⁴.

¹For an accurate picture of 1st millennium Mediterranean trades see STAMPOLIDIS 1998, 102-134; 2003; PAPPALARDO 2011; 2012.

²See particularly HOFFMANN 1997.

³SHERRATT, SHERRATT 1993.

⁴A synthesis is provided in PAPPALARDO 2012, in particular pp. 161-180.

So, assumptions on the presence of Orientals in Crete have been followed by studies and researches aimed at sifting and demolishing the data on which previous assumptions and interpretations were based.

The most famous case of this kind of approach was the work of Gail Hoffman, followed by the one of D. Jones⁵.

The study of «presence» of foreign features must reasonably focus on two main aspects: analysis of imports, on one hand, and changes in material culture on the other.

Iron Age Crete provides a good laboratory for the study of artistic interactions between Greece and the Near East⁶ for what concerns both levels of investigation.

Additionally, the analysis of traveling objects was progressively enriched through the study of their meaning in contexts different from the ones where they were produced, and new assumptions on their role in producing meanings and conveying messages to the local community were made⁷.

The quite recent studies on images as media (Uehlinger, Suter)⁸ stressed how important is the aesthetic value of an object in contexts lacking textual sources. Images can (sometime must) be read as written texts in order to try an almost summary reconstruction of beliefs and behaviour of people of the past. Scholars provide several interpretations on the presence of objects with an aesthetic value in different contexts, mostly the ones carrying significant symbolic values, often taking the risk of attributing more prominent role to the images than to the objects themselves. Although my personal view is that some time images can talk over the objects and provide information about identity, individual and collective as well, carrying in some case some sort of active role in conveying meanings and messages to the observer⁹, I would try to balance the effective object's role.

The meaning of images

Studies on issues concerning object's «personality», alternatively focus on its effective significance in complex processes of formation (and/or transformation) of precise meanings (agency)¹⁰. We can reasonably consider «meaning-making» as the ongoing outcomes of the processes of engagement between human interlocutors and the materiality of the object itself¹¹, that is to say that an object's meaning can be considered as a socially generated phenomenon linked with human-object interaction rather than a static «epiphenomenal idea existing beyond the object» itself¹². The basic assumption, then, is that «meaning» must be considered as an active process, continuously shifting and adapted, a dynamic value more than a static inherent entity.

In a work focused on the meaning-making of some Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean objects, Marian Feldman provides a valid study-case (concerning glyptic) proposing a new approach aimed to study not just what objects mean, but «how they mean»¹³.

⁵HOFFMAN 1997; JONES 2000.

⁶HOFFMANN 1997, p. 235.

⁷PAPPALARDO 2019.

⁸SUTER, UEHLINGER 2005, p. XVIII; PAPPALARDO 2018; 2019.

⁹PAPPALARDO 2018, p. 110.

¹⁰HOSKINS 2006; PINNEY 2006; KANE 2006; BANN 2003.

¹¹FELDMAN 2014, p. 337.

¹²FELDMAN 2014, p. 337; OSBORNE, TANNER 2007, p. 9.

¹³FELDMAN 2014.

Late Bronze Age period shares with the Early Iron Age one the phenomenon of intercultural interactions and poses issues concerning internationalism in visual arts as a core element in the study of meaning and/or meaning-making of figured objects¹⁴. Feldman, as she states, rather than gazing at (figured) motifs as isolated entities, by considering them as the sole carriers of meaning, scans a wider range of physical and formal qualities that, «among other things bear upon, and constitute the «motifs»¹⁵. In order to do this, the scholar draws upon the theory of «bundling», concerning materiality and meaning, borrowed from Keane¹⁶, according to which «a quality cannot be manifest without some embodiment that inescapably binds it to some other qualities as well, which remain available, ready to emerge as real factors, as *it crosses context* (added emphasis)»¹⁷. On this respect, categories as medium, technique, shape, scale or form, concur altogether to determine an object's significance (and value, then) and have impact on social actions and subjectivities.

According to this assumptions, meaning is always bound up in the historical context and social setting of a give culture and, in the meantime, it can change through the ages, regions and contexts «as different qualities of the bundled materiality come to the fore or recede from attention»¹⁸. More prominently, in this context, raise issues concerning objects of art, where figurative properties are considered key-elements in meaning-making. In particular, problems raise when objects are found far from the original site of production and, contemporaneously, they are spread and widely diffused across the Mediterranean. In this case it is even more difficult to catch an absolute meaning of an object, because «meanings are in constant flux»¹⁹.

Object's meaning must be viewed as the combination of several and different properties, whose value shifts through the ages and different contexts, depending mostly on human-objects engagements. That is to say, can an object carry an absolute value (and, then, an objective meaning) in contexts far one from another? Meanings derive from relationships between a material object and cultural practices²⁰. And, furthermore, how must we relate to a figured object?

In discussing the Panofsky's²¹ three levels of iconographic analysis (pre-iconographic, iconographic, iconological analysis), it emerges as the first level yet could be liable to a subjective lecture. That is to say: a «subject» recognition not necessarily must correspond to the initial artist' purpose, but it can be generated by a posteriori lecture. In this sense the importance of the textual evidence must be stressed, whereas it is not always available (almost never in early Iron Age Mediterranean contexts). Since the first level of the Panofsky's analysis can result not always certain, it rises prominent the effective value of the art craft's interpretation (it would be to say: «a dog is a dog»). But we know that in ancient cultures the very recognition of a subject can incur problems of lecture. An example could be the animal represented on the gold ring from S. Angelo Muxaro, on which scholars commonly think «a wolf is a wolf», but, more probably, in that case, the wolf is a lion)²². As a matter of fact,

¹⁴ PAPPALARDO 2012; 2019.

¹⁵ FELDMAN 2014, p. 339.

¹⁶ KEANE 2005.

¹⁷ KEANE 2005, p. 194.

¹⁸ FELDMAN 2014, p. 339.

¹⁹ FELDMAN 2014, p. 339.

²⁰ VAN WILINGAARDEN 2000.

²¹ PANOFSKY 1939; 1955.

²² RIZZA, PALERMO 2004, tav. XIV, VI149. The Animal re-

presented on a well-known gold ring coming from S. Angelo Muxaro, usually interpreted as a wolf, shows all the features of the lion. Another example of the failure of the first level of iconographic analysis could be provided by the interpretation of a strange element on a bronze patera coming from the Idaean cave in Crete, previously interpreted as an «harp» or a similar musical instrument, where a portion of a table foot was recognized by myself (PAPPALARDO 2011). See POTTS 2003, p. 32.

the social and ideological context becomes fundamental in the process of image reading (and, then, of meaning-making). If we look at the fish of Christian religion, it emerges its strict link with Christ, so deeply rooted to be often represented in those contexts characterized by strong religious meaning, as catacombs and churches. Then, in the case of the Christian fish, the images' value quite substitutes a textual reference being the Greek name for fish (ICHTUS) the acronym of «Iesus Christos Theous Uios Soter». Well, let's try projecting the same process of meaning attribution in early Iron Age Mediterranean by imaging a similar case to the Christian fish, but without the support of the textual evidence. We would be reasonably led to interpret the subject just on the base of its general, objective and common meaning (in the case of the fish, for example, concepts of fertility, abundance, richness would probably be taken into consideration)²³. This process would be even more difficult if we would image a complex scene, formed by more than one subject, possibly found far from the original site of production (and, therefore, conception) and, moreover, in a context of strong symbolic value (sanctuary, cemetery, temple)²⁴. It is almost evident that, in this case, the lecture of meaning and value of the object would be very problematic and we would be inclined, in some cases, to try meaning's reconstruction paradoxical, quite (and often) conditioned by the attitude to apply modern view to the reconstruction of ancient sense and value.

So, in the analysis of meaning-making of objects (and images) of foreign cultures, the first step would be identifying quite exactly the object's (and subject it carries) centre of production, trying to contextualize its deep meaning just in that cultural and social domain which in the object itself recognized the final function, meaning and *raison d'être* (let's try to imagine the Christian fish found in Amazonia...), otherwise there is a risk of depriving the object of an important part of its «biography» and, so, maiming it.

From meaning to agency

Kopytoff's essay 'The cultural biography of things'²⁵ raised precise questions on particular objects, as: Who makes it? In what conditions? From what materials? For what purpose? What are the recognized stages of development? How does it move from hand to hand? What other contexts and uses can it have?

It has been argued²⁶ that some anthropologists focusing on the agentive characteristics of objects, have misunderstood the very idea of the 'cultural biography of things' postulated by Kopytoff²⁷. «The processual model of commoditization that Kopytoff proposed had an impact in anthropology because it coincided with a broadening of research paradigms to include transnational movement and connection»²⁸.

In general, the assumption that objects carry meaning form the bridge between meaning-making and agency, being the power to convey messages conceived as an active role of the objects themselves.

²³Fish is an almost common motif on Iron Age Cretan iconography. It appears both on pottery and in bronze vessels as well, as part of the offers to the deity or as decorative element usually organized in two rows of more than one fish (for the first case see MARKOE 1985, p. 238, cf. 7; PAPPALARDO 2019; for the second one see PAPPALARDO 2015, pp. 430-431, figg. 7-8).

²⁴For a general view on anthropological assump-

tions on the role of Visuals in material cultures, particularly focusing on East-West issues, see: COHN 1998, MIGNOLO 1995, McCLINTOCK 1995.

²⁵KOPYTOFF 1986.

²⁶STEINER 2001, p. 209.

²⁷KOPYTOFF 1986.

²⁸HOSKINS 2006, p. 75.

The Webster Dictionary provides two interesting definitions for the term «Agency»: 1) «the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power»; 2) «a person or *thing* through which power is exerted or an end is achieved».

In the meantime, the definition of the term «agent» is: «a natural force or object producing or used for obtaining specific results».

In last years, Anthropologists have long argued that objects or, in general, things, in precise contexts, are able to act like persons: «they can be said to have a personality, to show volition, to accept certain locations and reject others, and thus to have agency»²⁹.

If we look back to the Marxist view of material culture, it emerges how this considers it as material resources, labour, production, consumption and exchange; the structuralist and semiotic approaches, otherwise, tend to outline the significance and role of objects in the complex domain of social action, through cognition and symbolization³⁰. «Things are meaningful and significant not only because they are necessary to sustain life and society, to reproduce or transform social relations and mediate differential interests and values, but because they provide essential tools for thought»³¹. In this sense, some objects can reasonably be considered as essential and more or less conscious tools for the self-realization and/or representation of identities, by providing a precise not-verbal way of communication. In this sense, material culture in general, figured objects in particular, can be seen as texts to be read and decoded. Then «we ‘talk’ and ‘think’ about ourselves through things»³².

The growing active power attributed to things, nevertheless, has in some cases led to an impoverishment of the role and significance of the human agency and, contemporaneously, of the role both of individuals and complex systems creating material goods themselves, with value and meaning. According to Steiner, for example, the focal issue is not that «things» are alive, but that they are passible of changes and interpretations as long as human agency constructs for them shifting and contested meanings³³.

In *Art and Agency*³⁴, Gell takes this argument further by arguing that anthropological theories of art objects have to be primarily concerned with social relations over the time frame of biographies. He rejects the linguistic analogies of semiotic theories and insists that art is about doing things, that it is a system of social action - and that we have to look at how people act through objects by distributing parts of their personhood into things. He analyses involuted designs intended to entrance and ward off dangerous spirits, tattoos and shields in Polynesia, and idols which are animated in a variety of ways, and able to bestow fertility, sickness, cures or misfortunes.

Gell's arguments partially works as long as objects carrying an intrinsic aesthetic value can concretely produce alterations on their possessors and/or viewers. That is to say, they have some sort of active role in producing something and, thus, they can be considered *per se* agents. What must be kept in mind, nevertheless, is that this role (or power) carries a nuance of subjectivity (that is, an object's «action» exists just in the moment in which there's a viewer) that could diminish the effective value of the object itself as agent. One of the prerogatives of human actions is the objective outcome of the action

²⁹HOSKINS 2006.

³⁰LAYTON 2001.

³¹TILLEY 2006, p. 7.

³²TILLEY 2006, p. 7.

³³STEINER 2001, P. 210.

³⁴GELL 1998.

itself. There are, then, different steps, implicit in human action, from the moment of its elaboration (at the base of which, in some cases, an explicit aim can be evident), the phase of «how» the action is performed, and the final result (often explicitly intended and expected). Whereas an object (of art) determines some reactions on the viewer (thus acting as an agent on the respect of some other), it must be strictly linked to that phase of subjective and individual metabolisation. The image of a crucifix, for example, never will have the same effect (and, then, never will act as agent in the same way) on an atheist or on a Christian or Muslim individual. Well, the unpredictability of an action's outcome should be the key point concerning difference between human agency and object agency. That is to say, there are more than one level of «agency», I think. This kind of approach assumes more value when the role and meaning-making of travelling objects has to be analysed. In this case, indeed, the original link between object and object-creator comes into play: some sort of *fil-rouge* which guarantees a minimum nexus between original aim and final outcome of an action: Creating something for an aim, or for a viewer or for a precise function. This is the fundamental, ancestral link between object and creator; a link that guarantees an agent's role to the thing, because this last has been conceived with a precise purpose. Just this assumption makes the object «active». What if, instead, the object moves far from its producer? What happens when the thread is broken for the object starts traveling till regions so far from the original one?

That is to say, what kind of actions could the aforementioned Polynesian indigenous shield or the crucifix perform on the respect of the observer's fills and emotions, in a chronologically and geographically different context? Can objects, when conceived as agents, carry their role and be agent far from home? Objects haven't memory. They can be viewed as a white canvas where individuals draw their «biography».

An object doesn't change aesthetically but changes in meaning and, then, in agency. Any variation is linked with human beings interacting with the object itself. This is what happens in the experiment of the falling tree³⁵. This last doesn't produce any noise if nobody is attending the falling, being noise nothing but the propagation of sound waves into the tympanum. If nobody is nearby, neither a recording instrument, that noise doesn't exist³⁶. That is, a sound exists if somebody hears it.

The sense of this analogy lies in the solid connection between objects and individuals on which objects determine reaction or by which they are expected to do this. Just on this respect an object carries an instrumental role and value, being tool useful to obtain an aim. That is to say: is it a sword that kills, or who holds it?

Meaning-making far from home

In the analysis of foreign objects it would be necessary trying to reconstruct two different processes, being the first the one where the things are commodified and lose «personality», the other the one where objects are «invested with personality» and have an

³⁵From the philosophical reflection of BERKELEY 1710.

³⁶«Sound is vibration, transmitted to our senses through the mechanism of the ear, and recognized as

sound only at our nerve centres. The falling of the tree or any other disturbance will produce vibration of the air. If there be no ears to hear, there will be no sound», *Scientific American*, April 5, 1884, p. 218.

impact. In this sense it comes into play what Gell calls «instrumentality», that is the range of possibilities of objects' perception and then their role in stimulating emotional responses by being invested with some of the intentionality of their creators³⁷. According to Gell, objects are created *as form of instrumental action* (added emphasis). Artefacts, in particular, could be seen as products aimed to influence both thoughts and actions. This idea is furthermore extended to those things apparently lacking a clear function (the ones theorized as simple objects of aesthetic contemplation) that would be, instead, conceived in order to act upon human beings. This would be consistent with the general modern sense of art as natural expression of human creativity aimed to convey emotions (and messages) to the observer³⁸. In this sense objects can be considered as embodying complex intentionalities and mediating social agency for they produce effects and, then, have impact. Art is characterized by the peculiar function it performs in advancing social relations.

Of course, aesthetic values vary from culture to culture, and their effect may be construed within a different theory of being³⁹.

Any way, it must be kept in mind that the concept of «origin» of an object, linked with its perception as «foreign», forms just a partial value of the object itself: something foreign can be no longer considered foreign being incorporated into new identity and meaning⁴⁰.

As said in the introduction, in recent years, thanks to an evidently growing awareness of the connectivity generated by the Mediterranean Sea, the old opposition between East and West is finally breaking down and the lines of influence are being more closely and analytically scrutinized. A much more complex picture of cross-cultural interactions emerged. Specific studies are devoted to many diverse items spread in the Mediterranean basin circulating through different networks of interactions, and each one likely produced varied long-term cultural effects, more or less evident in the analysis of the archaeological record.

Marian Feldman recently stressed how in Etruscan burials, imported metal vessels constitute part of a social strategy pursued by emerging competing urban elites⁴¹. In that context foreign imports had quite two functions: on one hand they testified contacts with far regions, on the other, they were viewed as implements in important, pre-existing Etruscan social practices, most notably funerary repasts. Wide attention was paid to their foreign origin and to the possible channels of exchange and interconnection. Likewise, the role they played on the formation of new communication codes and technological acquisition was at the centre of several studies on interconnections and cultural exchanges at the beginning of the Orientalizing period. Otherwise, variables as the manner in which they were deposited inside tombs and/or their reciprocal relations with the buried assemblages aren't often enough stressed.

Nevertheless, just the variation in depositional patterns can provide useful information about the «new» use and, then, action power and meaning of foreign objects: their position inside the new context, their state (intentionally broken or integrally preserved) are often witness of a radical change in conception and local response to foreign items. Among Etruscan tombs, the Regolini Galassi provides an example of how foreign bowls

³⁷GELL 1998, p. 68. See also 1992.

³⁸PAPPALARDO 2018; 2019.

³⁹LAYTON 1981, pp. 11-19; see also LAYTON 2003, p.

449.

⁴⁰FELDMAN 2014, p. 339; PANAGIOTOPOULOS 2012.

⁴¹FELDMAN 2016, p. 229.

are found within large sets of drinking and feasting vessels to be reasonably associated with rich funerary feasts according to an Eastern, in particular Levantine, attitude⁴². It would be consistent in this context the assumption according to which this attitude would be the result of a long-term process of social negotiation, not simply to be linked with the adoption of new princely elite lifestyle⁴³. Looking at the earliest examples of bowls depositions in early eighth century burials, it emerges as they are not part of large banquet sets, but rather isolated items, maybe to be interpreted as simple display of social status. The Etruscan evidence shows a process of transformation through the seventh century B.C. in which foreign (Oriental) vessels seem to slowly become coherent part of more complex assemblages of banqueting, cauldrons, firedogs and so on. Their function and conception shifts from single deposition to be probably linked with a status ostentation to part of group of objects, functionally connected with one another, likely practically used in precise contexts. In the meantime, the presence of a hole in the famous bowl from the Regolini-Galassi tomb seems to attest the impossibility of using it as vessel and suggests it was hanging from a wall together with other figured silver bowls and bronze shields. In this case its function is evidently different, being its visual and aesthetic value predominant on its practical use: it was «visually consumed»⁴⁴ (objects had different function in similar contexts).

The same phenomenon regards Iron Age Crete and concerns the famous figured bronze shields, found predominantly in the Idaean Cave and in funerary contexts. There's been a lot of talk about meaning and function of bronze shields and paterae found in Crete and issues mostly focused on their geographic origin, chronology, meaning and conception. In particular, the type carrying protruding lion head in centre shows an Eastern connection⁴⁵. Lion-headed shields were found in the Idaean Cave⁴⁶, Phaistos⁴⁷ and Palaikastro⁴⁸. The tomb L of Afratì (Arkades) provides an almost well preserved example of undecorated lion-headed shield, found in the area near the back wall of the tomb, associated with material dated to the end of the 8th century early 7th⁴⁹. From the same tomb a second specimen of very badly preserved lion-headed shield comes⁵⁰. Finally a very well preserved specimen comes from the tomb A1/K1 in the Orthi Petra necropolis at Eleutherna, in Northern Crete⁵¹.

Cretan Lion-headed shields perfectly fit with issues concerning value, function and role of foreign objects⁵². Since the time of their discovery⁵³, evident Eastern typological and stylistic features were recognized. A comparison was made with the famous relief of the Khorsabad palace, of the period of Sargon II, representing the sack of the Urartian temple of Haldi at Musasir showing shields, with and without projecting animal protome,

⁴²An influence that has also been ascribed to the bowls in Greek contexts as a stimulus for the development of the symposium.

⁴³RIVA 2010, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁴FELDMAN 2016, p. 229. Marian Feldman provides an exhaustive analysis of the possible assemblages' meaning in the Etruscan tombs.

⁴⁵KUNZE 1931. A comparison was made with the famous relief of the Khorsabad palace, of the period of Sargon II, representing the sack of the Urartian temple of Haldi at Musasir. ORSI 1888, p. 818; PAPPALARDO 2016.

⁴⁶ORSI 1888; KUNZE 1931; CANSIANI 1970; PAPPALARDO 2001.

⁴⁷LEVI 1927-29, p. 463 n. 4.

⁴⁸LEVI 1927-29, p. 707; BENTON 1938-1939, p. 51-59. A fragmented lion-headed shield comes also from the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Syme.

⁴⁹LEVI 1927-1929, p. 372, fig. 490 a-b-c-d.

⁵⁰LEVI 1927-1929, note 16, p. 372, fig. 490 a-b-c-d.

⁵¹STAMPOLIDIS 1998, p. 255, n. 319.

⁵²PAPPALARDO 2016.

⁵³ORSI 1888.

hanging on the temple pillars and walls⁵⁴. Lion-headed shields, furthermore, appear on reliefs of the period of Assurnasirpal II⁵⁵, on the Balawat Gates and at Zinçirli and Saçkegozu, in the Hittite domain⁵⁶. Round bronze shields, without lion protome (60 cm diam.), probably votive dedications to the god Haldi, come from the Urartian sites of Altin-Tepe and Kayalidere⁵⁷. Best known are the large bronze shields, bearing dedicatory inscriptions celebrating the God (diam. From 60 to 80 cm), discovered in major Urartian centres, such as Arinberd (Erebuni) and Toprak-Kale⁵⁸. The shields were probably originally deposited in temples dedicated to Haldi, where a cult of weapons is attested (shields, quivers and belts too). Some are undecorated and some filled with rows of lions and bulls. Seventeen shields found at Karmir Blur in the living quarters and storerooms of the citadel were in-scribed with the royal names of Argisti I, Sarduri II (764-735 B.C.), and Rusa I (735-714). Among these, just five are of the decorated type, the others heaving a smooth surface.

Investigations carried out in Urartu, at the Ayanis fortress near Van⁵⁹, provided new information on the use and meaning of the bronze shields in royal context, suggesting to reconsider relationships between Urartian cultures and 1st millennium Mediterranean. The excavations at the Haldi temple, in a pillared area, brought to light a big amount of iron and bronze weapons, among which helmets, quivers and shields, all belonging to the types well-known from previous excavations in Urartu and from the studies of Barnett, Van Loon and Piotrovsky⁶⁰. The novelty consists in the fact that, fallen in the ground, upside-down, a beautiful lion-headed shield has been found just in front of one of the pillars of the northern façade of the cella on which it was probably hanging⁶¹. The lion is snarling, having an open mouth showing teeth. Two round and flat ears were separately made and stuck to the head. The eyes probably housed almond-shaped stone inlays (the same technique being used on the aforementioned Arkades specimen).

According to Rehm, the lion-headed shield must be considered an Assyrian prerogative, as testified on the aforementioned Assyrian reliefs; on contrary, the decoration though registers with walking animals, particularly bulls, must be accounted among the characteristics of the Urartian bronze working⁶². Then, we can assume that in Near Eastern context (Urartu and Assyria) shields with lion protome were used in war (and we can image that the lion head protruding from the centre had an emotional value, terrorizing enemies, as the fantastic creatures along with lions themselves carved in the entrances of the Assyrian royal palaces) as weapons and, in sacred or ceremonial contexts, they were hanging on the walls⁶³.

Lion-headed bronze shields «acted» differently in Iron Age Crete⁶⁴.

⁵⁴ORSI 1888, p. 818; For a Synthesis see PAPPALARDO 2016.

⁵⁵KUNZE 1931, p. 64; STAMPOLIDIS 2011, p. 409.

⁵⁶BARNETT 1960, n. 169a, c.

⁵⁷MERHAV 1991, p. 135.

⁵⁸At Toprak-Kale, some ten such shields were discovered, inscribed with the name of Rusa, son of Erimena (625-609-585), in the temple area. See MERHAV 1991, p. 136.

⁵⁹ÇILINGIROĞLU, SALVINI 2001; REINDELL 2001, pp. 280-83.

⁶⁰PIOTROVSKY 1966.

⁶¹BATMAZ 2012; PAPPALARDO 2016, p. 43.

⁶²REHM 1997. See more recently 2004 for a review. This layout, furthermore, maintains the principle according to which the animals are never represented up-side-down.

⁶³For representations of lion-headed shields see MADHLOOM 1970, tav. 28,6; LUSCHAN 1902, fig. 102; MERHAV 1991, fig. 42a. We could assume a function not too much distant from the one aforementioned, assumed by Gell for the Polynesian shields.

⁶⁴PAPPALARDO 2001.

Every object found into precise archaeological context should be approached being considered within specific and defined social practices in which it participates. According to this process, then, things acquire value not just on the base of their provenance, but on that of their «acts of consumption»⁶⁵. That is to say, emphasis should regard how foreign objects and/or iconographies were taken up, conceived, used in their new environments and, mostly, how they may have influenced new practices and behaviours, sometime strongly conditioning ancient performances

The most part of specimens of lion-headed shields found in the Idaean Cave was, probably, placed as dedication to the sanctuary and, in that context, their Near Eastern features must have played a precise role on a more general social level having their correspondences in the other aforementioned Cretan sites⁶⁶. As for the bowls found in Etruscan tombs, the presence of couples of holes along the rim could suggest they were hanging on the sanctuary's walls together with other figured metal bowls. In this case, then, their function seems to be not practical, being their visual and aesthetic value emphasized: they were «visually consumed»⁶⁷. This objects, nevertheless, in other Cretan contexts, acted differently. The better documented case of lion-headed shield used as a «lid» is provided by the excavations of the necropolis Orthi Petra at Eleutherna by prof. Stampolidis⁶⁸, where the discovery of the chamber tomb A1/K1, unlooted, provided a series of new information on Cretan funerary rituals in the early Archaic period. In particular, a considerable assemblage of metal vessels, mostly decorated with complex scenes, forms an unique study case for this subject matter. In a quite recent work, Stampolidis showed as an huge amount of figured bowls (of the same type of the ones found in the Idaean cave) were practically used to cover cinerary urns, «acting» as lids⁶⁹.

Among these, the lion-headed shield, of about 30 cm diameter, was used to close a PGB urn and, according to Stampolidis, this precise function could be extended to the specimens found inside the Zeus cave on mount Ida where a huge amount of cauldrons fragments were found, maybe originally covered by the shields⁷⁰.

As known, VIII/VII cent. Crete provides a lot of examples of clay lid-shields employed to seal funerary urns⁷¹. The type plausibly derives from the oldest kalathos and, through Protogeometric B and Geometric period developed into slightly different shapes, enriched by figural or geometric decoration often recalling the one of the pithos-urn it covered. Clay lids commonly used to protect cinerary urns were mainly divided into two groups: conical and domed, slightly different in dimension and decoration⁷². A lot of

⁶⁵FELDMAN 2016.

⁶⁶PAPPALARDO 2011, p. 193.

⁶⁷FELDMAN 2016, p. 229. In this case the function of the shield strictly recalls the one of the silver bowls in the Etruscan tombs. Cretan bronze shields were, as known, richly decorated with various scenes and, in the case of the lion-headed specimens, we can imagine they could have a strong impact on the viewer.

⁶⁸See bibliography in STAMPOLIDIS 2011.

⁶⁹STAMPOLIDIS 2011. A bronze plain shallow bowl with Ω handle (A75) covered an Argive amphora (STAMPOLIDIS 2004, p. 246, num. 274); a Phoenician bowl (made in Aegyptianizing style) covered a Theran *stamnos* (STAMPOLIDIS 2004, p. 277, num. 349 with bibliography); a similar bowl (STAMPOLIDIS 2011, p. 400,

fig. 15) decorated with winged griffins (A52a) covered an amphora; another one, with crouching lion-griffins (As8a) covered a necked pithos; two wonderful specimen of deep bowls with scenes of female procession bearing offers (for the type see also ??????)

⁷⁰STAMPOLIDIS 2011, p. 411. This suggestion would be confirmed by the presence in the A1/K1 tomb of a cauldron whose rim was exactly fitting with the bronze shield found there (STAMPOLIDIS 2011, fig. 43-44).

⁷¹Among the first studies on the topic see COLDSTREAM 1994, p. 106.

⁷²COLDSTREAM, CATLING 1996, pp. 325-331.

specimens often perfectly fit with the vase's rim, showing they were originally conceived as lids⁷³; sometime, nevertheless, it seems quite evident they were secondarily adapted to this purpose, being considered as «autonomous» objects (in particular the domed specimens)⁷⁴. In a first phase these lids carry a horizontal handle along their rim which is later replaced by a couple of holes (in both cases it seems they were meant to be hung)⁷⁵. Much has been said about the connections between domed lids and the Idaean cave bronze shields⁷⁶, mostly when the clay items show a figured protruding knob, the best example being provided by the PGB lion-headed lid-shield from Fortetsa⁷⁷, whose decoration furthermore recalls strictly the Idaean Shield n. 1⁷⁸.

So, the Cretan evidence, as the Etruscan one, seem to show a process of transformation through Early Iron Age, in which Eastern features become «coherent part of complex assemblages», naturally and progressively adapted to new uses. If the act of hanging the shields was common in Crete and the East⁷⁹, the use of them as lids seems to be the result of a slow process of meaning-making transformation. Along with the «visual» fruition of the objects, richly embossed with fantastic creatures or complex scenes, a practical use as lids was spread in Crete. Furthermore, the birth of a «parallel» production of clay lid-shields, imitating the bronze prototypes in shape and decoration (as well as in the presence of a plastic protome in centre), used both in domestic and funerary contexts, testifies the deep engraftment of the new use (and meaning as well) of this object in Cretan soil. They are invested with a precise and new personality and have an impact on local societies.

We can go back to previous assumption about the concept of «origin» of an object, linked with its perception as «foreign», and assert that this aspect forms just a partial value of the object itself, may be, we could add, the preliminary one: something foreign is no longer considered foreign in Iron Age Crete, being incorporated into new identity and meaning⁸⁰, and becoming part of a complex and new behaviour in which the object acts according to an original Cretan way.

⁷³BROCK 1957, p. 162, class B.

⁷⁴This kind of lid-shield is also widely attested out of funerary context. Furthermore, in some tombs as T.132a North Knossos and *tholos* J of Tekke they are present in huge amount.

⁷⁵These objects also appear in the sanctuary of Demeter at Knossos: COLDSTREAM 1973, p. 21.

⁷⁶BROCK 1957, pp. 164, 207; BOARDMAN 1967, p. 59; PAPPALARDO 2001.

⁷⁷BROCK 1957, 1439 (tavv. 107, 163).

⁷⁸KUNZE 1931, p. 30 tavv.1-2.

⁷⁹«My officials and officers I sent to the temple of Haldia and Haldia, his god, and Bagbartu, his goddess, together with the great wealth of his temple...6 shields of gold which hung right and left in his house and shone brilliantly, with the heads of snarling dogs (*lions*)», LUCKENBILL 1927, p. 96 (173).

⁸⁰FELDMAN 2014, p. 339; PANAGIOTOPOULOS 2012.

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