

Art/ifacts and *ArtWorks* in the Ancient World

edited by Karen Sonik



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in the Ancient World

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Contributor Biographies

Paul Delnero, Associate Professor of Assyriology at Johns Hopkins University, is an Assyriologist who specializes in the history, culture, and society of ancient Mesopotamia, with a particular emphasis on Sumerian religion and mythology. His dissertation, “Variation in Sumerian Literary Compositions: A Case Study Based on the Decad,” was written on the subject of textual variation in duplicates of Sumerian literary narratives. The primary aims of this work were to answer fundamental questions pertaining to how and why scribes were trained in antiquity, and to develop a text-critical methodology for editing Sumerian literary compositions that takes into account the means by which the sources for these texts were produced. Specifically, the role of memorization in scribal training and the errors in recall that occurred while copying from memory were identified as one of the most common causes of textual variation in the duplicates of these texts. This topic is treated in the article “Memorization and the Transmission of Sumerian Literature” (*Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 2012). His other publications include a book, *The Textual Criticism of Sumerian Literature* (*Journal of Cuneiform Studies Supplemental Series* 3, 2012), and articles on the topics of the Sumerian verbal elements mu-ni- and mi-ni-, the conjugation prefixes im-ma- and im-mi-, and the pre-verbal pronominal element /n/, as well as the place of Sumerian literary extract tablets in the training of scribes and the function of the so-called “literary catalogues” in archiving collections of Sumerian texts in antiquity. His current project is a study of Sumerian cultic, liturgical texts and the political and cultural roles of ritual lamenting in Mesopotamia at the beginning of the second millennium BCE.

Marian H. Feldman is the W.H. Collins Vickers Chair of Archaeology and a Professor in the History of Art and Near Eastern Studies Departments at the Johns Hopkins University. Her research interests include the role of arts in cultural interactions and issues of style, object agency, and materiality. She is the author of two monographs, *Diplomacy by Design: Luxury Arts and an ‘International Style’*

in the Ancient Near East, 1400–1200 BCE (Chicago, 2006) and *Communities of Style: Portable Luxury Arts, Identity and Collective Memory in the Iron Age Levant* (Chicago 2014). Feldman has also co-edited several volumes, including *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art* (with Brian A. Brown; De Gruyter 2014), and is the author of several articles and catalogue essays.

Marcella Frangipane is Full Professor of Archaeology (Prehistory) and has taught Prehistory and Protohistory of the Near East at the Sapienza University of Rome. She is also a Foreign Associate Member of the National Academy of Sciences (USA) and a Corresponding Member of the Italian Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, the Deutsches Archäologische Institut in Berlin, and the Archaeological Institute of America. Dr. Frangipane is the editor of two monograph series, *Arslantepe* and *Studi di Preistoria Orientale* (SPO), and has also served as editor in chief of the journal *Origini*, all published by the Sapienza University of Rome. She has participated in field research in Mexico, Italy, Egypt, and Turkey, becoming field vice-director of the Sapienza excavations at the Late Predynastic site of Maadi (Egypt), and, from 1990, the director of the Italian excavation projects at Arslantepe-Malatya and Zeytinli Bahçe, Urfa (Turkey). The Arslantepe Project, where Dr. Frangipane has worked for more than forty years, is the core of her research activity. The results obtained through interdisciplinary investigation at that site have oriented her main research interests toward themes such as the rise and early developments of hierarchical societies; the emergence of inequality; and the rise of centralized economies, bureaucracy, and the state in the ancient Near East, with particular reference to Mesopotamian and Anatolian environments. For her research at Arslantepe, Dr. Frangipane has received the *Discovery Award* by the Shanghai Archaeology Forum (2015); the *Vittorio De Sica Prize for Science* (Archaeology) (2015); and *Rotondi Prize to Art Savors* (Italy) (2017). She has also received two honorary titles by the President of the Italian Republic and an honorary Ph.D. by the University of Malatya.

Barbara Helwing is Director of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin's Vorderasiatisches Museum. Prior to taking up this position, she was Professor of Middle Eastern Archaeology at the University of Sydney. She also served as Head of the German Archaeological Institute in Tehran, taught at universities in Germany, Turkey, and France; and has directed fieldwork in Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and, most recently, Sri Lanka. As an archaeologist with a focus on the early periods of the ancient Near East, Dr. Helwing's research explores the developments of early social complexity. She is particularly interested in the role that technical and social innovations, particularly the development of early metallurgy, play in these developments.

Joshua Jeffers is a research specialist on the Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period (RINAP) Project at the University of Pennsylvania, where he completed his Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He specializes in Middle and Neo-Assyrian textual and historical studies. In addition to co-authoring the RINAP 5 volumes on the inscriptions of Ashurbanipal and his successors Aššur-etel-ilani and Sin-šarra-iškun, he has published articles on Middle Assyrian calendrics, on the editorial history of Ashurbanipal's Prism F inscription, and on text and image pertaining to the third- and fifth-campaign reliefs from Sennacherib's palace. He is currently completing a book on the Middle Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I, re-evaluating the historical circumstances of that king's reign.

David Kertai is curator of the ancient Near East collections at the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden. He earned his Ph.D. in Near Eastern archaeology at Heidelberg University and his M.Sc. in architecture at the Technische Universiteit Delft. He has taught and conducted research at universities in England, the United States, and Germany including, most recently, the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University and the Freie Universität Berlin. Specializing in Assyria (ca. 1350–600 BCE), Dr. Kertai is the author of *The Architecture of Late Assyrian Royal Palaces* (Oxford University Press, 2015) and numerous articles on Assyrian art, architecture, and history. He is also the editor of *From the Four Corners of the Earth: Studies in the Iconography and Cultures of the Ancient Near East in Honour of F.A.M. Wiggermann* (with O. Nieuwenhuyse; Münster, 2017) and *New Research on Late Assyrian Palaces* (with P. Miglus; Heidelberg, 2013). Since 2005, he has participated in archaeological projects in Syria, Turkey, and Iraq.

Kevin M. McGeough is Professor of Archaeology in the Department of Geography at the University of Lethbridge and holds a Tier 1 Board of Governor's Research Chair in Archaeological Theory and Reception. He has excavated in Israel, Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt. He was the editor of *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* and ASOR's *Archaeological Report Series* and is currently the co-editor of the *Alberta Archaeological Review*. Kevin has published widely on the Late Bronze Age Syrian site of Ugarit, including two books: *Exchange Relationships at Ugarit* (2007) and *Ugaritic Economic Tablets: Text, Translations and Notes* (2011). He is currently researching the reception of Near Eastern Archaeology in a variety of media and has recently published a three-volume book on archaeological reception in the Victorian era, *The Ancient Near East in the Nineteenth Century* (Sheffield Phoenix Press Ltd, 2015). His book, *From Griffith to Grindhouse: Representations of Antiquity in Film*, is forthcoming with Equinox. With his wife, Elizabeth Galway, Kevin has received Social Sciences and Humanities Research

Council of Canada (SSHRC) funding for a project studying representations of archaeology and the ancient Near East in children's literature.

Beate Pongratz-Leisten is Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW), New York University. Her recent books include *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (Eisenbrauns, 2011), *Religion and Ideology in Assyria* (de Gruyter, 2015) and the co-edited (with K. Sonik) *The Materiality of Divine Agency* (de Gruyter, 2015). She is also the author of *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien: Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Gott und König im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (State Archives of Assyria, 1999); *ina šulmi ĩrub: Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der aktiü-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (P. von Zabern, 1994); and numerous articles on topics pertaining to the cultural, intellectual, and religious history of Mesopotamia. Her research interests are extremely broad ranging, as reflected in workshops she has organized during her tenure at ISAW: *The Materiality of Divine Agency in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (2011); *Between Belief and Science: The Contribution of Writing and Law to Ancient Religious Thought* (2012); *Ancient and Modern Perspectives on Historiography in Mesopotamia* (2013); *Ancient Near Eastern Literature: Topics, Issues, Approaches* (2014); *Ritual and Narrative: Texts in Performance in the Ancient Near East* (2015); *The Formation of Cultural Memory: Ancient Mesopotamian Libraries and Schools and Their Contribution to the Shaping of Tradition and Identity* (2016); (with L. d'Alfonso) *The Core of a New Age Northern Mesopotamia and Syria in the late Bronze Age* (2017); and *Text and Image: Transmedial Inquiries into Ancient Near Eastern Cultures* (2018).

Karen S. Rubinson is a Research Associate at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University. She received her Ph.D. in Art History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East from the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University and has excavated in Armenia, Iran, and Turkey. She first investigated the archaeology of the South Caucasus in her doctoral dissertation on the Trialeti Culture (Georgia) in the Middle Bronze Age and has co-edited two important volumes on the archaeology of the South Caucasus: *Ceramics in Transitions: Chalcolithic Through Iron Age in the Highlands* (Peeters, 2008) with Antonio Sagona and *Archaeology in the Borderlands: Investigations in Caucasia and Beyond* (2003) with Adam T. Smith. Dr. Rubinson has an abiding interest in how artistic imagery, artifact types, and technology of production can inform understanding of cultural contact and interaction; this interest has motivated many of her publications on the South Caucasus and also the Eurasian steppe.

Karen Sonik is Associate Professor of Art History at Auburn University and a consulting scholar at the Penn Museum. She earned her Ph.D. in the Art & Archaeology of the Mediterranean World at the University of Pennsylvania and has been a visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard; a postdoctoral research associate at Brown University; visiting assistant professor in Art History at the University of California, Los Angeles; and a visiting research scholar at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University. Her research has been supported by the American Philosophical Society, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Louis J. Kolb Foundation. Dr. Sonik specializes in the visual arts, literature, and culture of Mesopotamia, and her work focuses on issues of agency, identity, and materiality. She is the editor of several volumes including *Journey to the City: A Companion to the Middle East Galleries at the Penn Museum* (with Steve Tinney; University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2019), *The Materiality of Divine Agency* (with Beate Pongratz-Leisten; de Gruyter, 2015), and *A Common Cultural Heritage: Studies in the Mesopotamian & the Biblical World in Honor of Barry L. Eichler* (with Grant Frame et al.; CDL Press, 2011). Her recent studies have examined issues of emotional expression and materialization, the authority of the image, and themes in the pictorial and written mythology in the ancient Near East.

Christopher P. Thornton is the Director of Research Programs at the National Endowment for the Humanities and the former Senior Director of Cultural Heritage at the National Geographic Society. An expert in the origins of metallurgy and early complex societies in Iran and Arabia, he received his Ph.D. in 2009 from the University of Pennsylvania. As a scholar, Dr. Thornton has co-edited two books, *Archaeometallurgy in Global Perspective* (Springer, 2014) and *The Bronze Age Towers at Bat, Sultanate of Oman* (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology Press, 2016), and he sits on the scientific board of the journal *Iran*. In addition to his efforts in grant making and scholarship, Dr. Thornton sits on the U.S. Commission to UNESCO and is Director *emeritus* of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Bat in the Sultanate of Oman.

Greta Van Buylaere is an Assyriologist and research associate at the University of Würzburg. She is currently editing the cuneiform documents in the Babylon Collection of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, and she previously worked on the Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals project. She has also been a research fellow in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge. Dr. Van Buylaere's work focuses on the intellectual and political history of Assyria and Babylonia in the first millennium BCE. Her research

subjects include witchcraft, gender, emotions, and materiality in Mesopotamia. Among her publications are a number of articles; books including the *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals* vols. 2 and 3 (with T. Abusch, D. Schwemer, and M. Luukko; Brill 2016, 2020), the *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals: Glossaries and Indices* (with M. Luukko; Brill, 2019), and *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (with M. Luukko; SAA 16, Helsinki University Press, 2002); and the edited volume *Sources of Evil: Studies in Mesopotamian Exorcistic Lore* (with M. Luukko, D. Schwemer, and A. Mertens-Wagschal; Brill 2018).

Matt Waters is Professor of Classics and Ancient History and Chair of the Languages Department at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses on the ancient Near East and Greece, especially of the first millennium BCE. Waters is the author of *A Survey of Neo-Elamite History* (State Archives of Assyria Studies XII, 2000), *Ancient Persia* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), and *Ctesias' Persica and Its Near Eastern Context* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2017), as well as several dozen articles and related publications. He is a recipient of the Jonas C. Greenfield Prize from the American Oriental Society and has received fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Center for Hellenic Studies, the Loeb Classical Library Foundation, UW-Madison's Institute for Research in the Humanities, and the Institute for Advanced Study.

Rita Wright is an anthropological archaeologist and Professor Emerita of Anthropology at New York University. Her research interests include comparative studies of urbanism, state formation, gender, and cycles of change in early societies. Using texts as secondary sources combined with material culture studies, her work focuses on the nature of leadership and the centralization and division of labor in Mesopotamia. As a specialist in ancient technologies, she investigates women's contributions to history viewed from past economies, religion, and social organization. She has conducted research in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. Her major field work has been in Baluchistan at Mehrgarh and in the Punjab, Pakistan. She directs a landscape and settlement survey along the dry bed of the Beas River, near the Indus city of Harappa, where she has also conducted research, in order to trace the development of rural settlements and their relationship to the larger center. The research also entails reconstructing human interactions with the environment and the resilience of the Indus people as those living in the city of Harappa and in the rural area slowly abandoned their settlements. She is founder and chief editor of the series *Case Studies in Early Societies* (Cambridge University Press), editor of *Gender and Archaeology* (University of Pennsylvania Press,

1996), co-editor (with Cathy L. Costin) of *Craft and Social Identity* (American Anthropological Association, 1998), and author of *Ancient Indus: Urbanism, Economy, and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Acknowledgments

This volume is dedicated to Holly Pittman, who has indelibly shaped the contemporary field of Near Eastern Studies. It could not have been produced without Christopher P. Thornton, who was my partner in planning the volume. Page Selinsky, Director of Publications at the Penn Museum, meticulously oversaw the production of this volume through challenges including but not limited to the coronavirus pandemic. Christopher McNulty and Joyce de Vries have been unstintingly supportive in securing the time and other resources needed to complete this volume. A publication subvention from the College of Liberal Arts and the Department of Art & Art History at Auburn University permitted the printing of color images in this volume.

Neither work nor living would be worthwhile without the “souls that have toil’d, and wrought, and thought with me—”¹ before the world stopped, and after. To Barb Bondy, Beate Pongratz-Leisten, Greta Van Buylaere, Luosha Fang, Michael Djupstrom, Mikko Luukko, Sasha Renninger, Sylvestre Pires, Wu Xin, and Xiaoyi Ma, for unlooked-for gifts of wonderful conversation, humor, and unsparing kindness. To Ariel Smith, Kellie Zimmerman, Donald Allison, and David Kertai, for that rarest of rare beasts, understanding: home is wherever you are found. To Chander, Sikander, Neena, and Gary Sonik, Evelyn He, and Sandra Matsuyama—“Deep roots are not reached by the frost.”²

NOTES:

a.1 Tennyson, *Ulysses*.

a.2 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

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Editorial Note

The spelling of place and personal names throughout this volume has been standardized insofar as possible to the most common American normalization. All diacritics, excepting those appearing in direct quotes, citations, and Akkadian and Sumerian transliterations, have been omitted.

Dedication



D.1 Holly Pittman at Kani Chaie Drawing Seal Impressions

This volume is dedicated to Dr. Holly Pittman, Bok Family Professor in the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania and curator of the Near Eastern Section at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum). It was conceived to honor her extraordinary contributions to the field of Near Eastern studies as archaeologist, art historian, mentor, professor, and friend.

In 1989, Holly arrived at the University of Pennsylvania from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Over the past thirty years, in her multiple roles as

professor of ancient Near Eastern art, practicing archaeologist, and curator at the Penn Museum, she has played a vital role in shaping both the current status and the future of the field of Near Eastern studies. In addition to her active engagement with practicing Near Eastern scholars from around the globe, Holly has been instrumental in training several generations of Near Eastern scholars, scholars who include (as is clear from this volume) philologists, archaeologists, and anthropologists, as well as art historians. In a field that has long seen sharp and unproductive divisions between disciplines, Holly has built bridges, establishing the foundations for collaboration and richly interdisciplinary approaches to Near Eastern things.

To honor the spirit and nature of Holly's remarkable contributions to the field of Near Eastern studies, this volume is designed not as a traditional festschrift but as a gift in kind, a deliberately and thematically coherent work—if one simultaneously very rich and diverse in the breadth of its approaches, theoretical concerns, and case studies—that looks both to the foundations of the field and to its future.

Karen Sonik
Philadelphia, PA | October 1, 2020

Foreword

Thoughts on the Field of the Future: Holly Pittman and Near Eastern Studies

CHRISTOPHER P. THORNTON

I entered the University of Pennsylvania anthropology department as a doctoral student in the fall of 2002, straight from a wonderful year studying archaeological theory at the University of Cambridge. My undergraduate degree had been in archaeological science, involving many hundreds of hours in laboratories of various kinds, so the year in England was meant to complement my more practical background. I came to Penn expecting to complete this archaeological education with a strong, four-fields anthropology degree focused on Iran and Central Asia. “American archaeology is anthropology or it is nothing,” wrote Willey and Phillips in their seminal 1958 volume, *Method and Theory in American Archaeology*. Fueled by these words, I began my year in Philadelphia confident that I was learning what I needed to know to be the best archaeologist and scholar that I could be.

And then I met Holly.

It was at an event at the Penn Museum—some speaker or another had come through to give a lecture—and I was mingling afterwards with faculty and students (including, no doubt, our editor Karen Sonik) when someone introduced me to Professor Holly Pittman. A petite, energetic woman with round glasses that made her eyes look bigger than they are—she looked up at my 6’4” lanky self and asked “What do you plan to focus on?” “Iran and Central Asia,” I told her, confident that I had deflected this inquisitive art historian. Her eyes got wider and she leaned forward intensely, giving me a look that I would later learn meant, “Watch Out!” She replied in no uncertain terms: “If you’re going to work on Iran, then you’re going to work with me!” Who *was* this woman?!



F.1 Holly Pittman (left), Robert H. Dyson (center), Christopher P. Thornton (right)

Before I continue this story, I should probably explain a bit more about how I became interested in Iran. As an undergraduate at Harvard, I had spent most of my sophomore year working on a stable isotope project looking at the diets of pre-Classic Mayan skeletons from Belize. This was to be my senior thesis project. However, politics intervened and I was thrown off the project. Cast adrift and wondering what I could do instead, I approached a professor whose class on ancient civilizations of the Old World had intrigued me. On the day I approached him and explained my tale of woe, Prof. C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky took me down into the storage rooms of the Peabody Museum and told me to pick a project. I picked Tepe Yahya, a site in Southeastern Iran that Karl had excavated back in the 1960s and 1970s, and the rest is (published) history.

Now, given that I was a budding scholar of Southeastern Iran, one would have thought that Dr. Holly Pittman would be well known to me. Indeed, I

had on my shelf her 1984 volume, “Art of the Bronze Age,” which included numerous examples of what we would later know to be objects of the Halil Rud (“Jiroft”) Civilization (of which Tepe Yahya was a satellite settlement). Truth be told, I hadn’t used her book very much in my undergraduate work because it was an art historical approach to mostly looted artifacts. It was my humble opinion at the time that looted artifacts were useless to an archaeologist—probably fake anyway—and that art history was unscientific, lacking both epistemology and methodology. Luckily, I kept those opinions to myself, but I’m pretty sure that she deduced from my tone that I harbored these thoughts. I have often wondered if Holly saw through this arrogant ignorance at our first meeting, or if she simply hoped to redeem some small part of this wayward graduate student. Either way, I’m pretty sure that I was quite unlikeable, but at least I had one thing going for me: I knew the ceramics of Southeastern Iran.

In 2004, Holly began a field project in the Halil Rud at the third millennium site of Konar Sandal in Southeastern Iran. She pulled together a small seminar of graduate students who were planning to work with her at this site. Right from the beginning, Holly made no pretense about the intention of this seminar. This was not a lit-review class about trade and exchange systems or cultural styles and hybridity in the Bronze Age; we all needed to get up-to-speed with the material culture from this region and adjacent regions, and quickly! The seminar was as intense as its creator, full of day-trips to Boston and New York to look at collections, an unbelievable roster of expert guest speakers, as well as hours spent with the unparalleled Penn Museum collections. It felt anachronistic—seminars at Ivy League institutions weren’t supposed to be practical!—as if we were back in the 1930s trying to work out ceramic typologies based on the earliest stratigraphic excavations. The class was thrilling for me—not just for the speed by which we absorbed huge volumes of data, but also because it was my first chance to witness Professor Holly Pittman analyze and synthesize both formal and stylistic traits of various artifacts across a vast geographical and chronological expanse (Egypt to the Indus; Neolithic to historic periods) without a single scientific instrument in hand. This was a revelation.

Duly humbled (ish), I signed up for Holly’s “Ancient Iran” class for the next semester, despite the fact that my department felt this was not a good use of my time towards an anthropology degree. As someone who had already studied ancient Iran for many years at this point, I figured that Holly’s

class would be a “refresher” in which I could breeze through. Wrong again! The class was a *magnus opus* broken into twice-a-week hour-long lectures, each one a fast sprint through the late prehistory of a particular region. While most of the other student struggled to discern Godin from Geoy, or to understand the difference between Aliabad Ware and Iblis IV pottery (ha!), I struggled with how *unfamiliar* all the material was to me. These beautiful artifacts from across Iran, as seen and explained through the gaze of Professor Holly Pittman, opened up an entirely new understanding of this region to me, and I could not understand how I had never seen these objects before. It was like going through the looking glass and finding a parallel world in which the symbols and images I had looked at for years suddenly could speak to me, telling me about intercultural contacts, sociopolitical hierarchies, ideological narratives, and trade and exchange systems at the micro-level.

The most important part of this course was that Holly always explained *how* she knew what she knew about each piece, showing comparanda and pointing us towards key indicators. She didn't expect us to take her analyses at face value merely in deference to her reputation, but instead encouraged us to think critically, question methodologies, and seek alternative hypotheses. I can recall a number of occasions on which I or another student challenged Holly on the interpretation being presented, which inevitably resulted in a flurry of images being shown with other examples of the same trait or feature. I also realize, upon reflection, that Holly showed me and others how to work with looted artifacts—always with a critical eye and a healthy dose of skepticism as to a looted object's provenance, but with a mind open to the possibility that this one artifact could provide the missing link to an important gap in our understanding of the ancient world. This was arguably the most important lesson that I, and others, learned from Holly.

I worked closely with Holly throughout my graduate years at Penn, particularly on the Konar Sandal excavations and on the Cheshmeh Ali material. I relished the long hours spent in her office or at the Penn Museum, pouring over images and artifacts, sharing knowledge with each other (more her-to-me, but I digress), discussing various questions that had arisen in our own research. We each approached ancient Iran from different angles; together we found synthesis. That collaboration has continued to this day, and is one of my most precious relationships with any colleague.

Towards the end of my time at Penn, Holly became embroiled as an expert witness in a repatriation lawsuit to return looted “Jiroft-style” materials back to Iran. Such repatriation cases are very difficult to win, as the onus is on the prosecution to demonstrate without any doubt that the artifacts originated in one specific country. Looking at the corpus of looted artifacts, it was clear that these were made in the Jiroft region, but such artifacts were traded widely in the Bronze Age—indeed, some of the earliest examples known were found during Sir Leonard Woolley’s excavations of the Royal Tombs of Ur in Iraq, the artifacts from which are currently on display in the Penn Museum and the British Museum. Thus, Professor Holly Pittman had been brought in by the prosecution to provide an expert report on the likely provenance of these artifacts, and to demonstrate that such an array of Jiroft-style objects could not have come from anywhere but the Halil Rud of Southeastern Iran.

I remember this work in particular because of the hundreds of hours Holly spent pulling together this report. Time for research and writing is precious to any academic, and I was struck by her devotion to getting this right. She was horrified by the consistent looting of the Halil Rud sites that had first brought this civilization to public attention in the early 2000s, and angered that despite years of Iranian and foreign work in this region, looted artifacts were still appearing on the antiquities market and in major museums. Many archaeologists believe that art historians, particularly those with museum backgrounds, are the main supporters of the antiquities market, as they can fill their exhibits and gain access to some of the best material for study. Watching Holly slave over this legal report unraveled my last prejudice about art historians, which to this day shames me, and inspired my own work with cultural heritage preservation in the years to come.

Holly Pittman will long be known for her work unveiling the ancient world of Iran and neighboring regions, most notably the surprisingly complexity of the Jiroft Civilization of Southeastern Iran. As others in this volume have noted, she will be remembered by her students as a brilliant lecturer, a tough-love mentor, and a dedicated scholar. But to me, Holly will always be my unofficial *Doktormutter*, the woman who (im)patiently forced me to confront my ignorance and prejudice. I have learned from Holly that only an art historical approach to the past can draw out the cultural and ideological aspects of symbolic expression, so critical to the formation and maintenance of social cohesion and identity. Furthermore, art historians

and philologists play an essential role in the fight against looting and the antiquities trade. It is often the case that only the learned and discerning eye of a scholar of the ancient world can make sense of the hundreds of looted artifacts that make their way into the antiquities trade every day, and many (like Holly) dedicate their time and expertise to this cause.

I still believe that archaeology must be driven by anthropological questions or it is pointless. Whether looking at broken pottery, examining the images on a stele, translating an ancient text, or running tests in the lab, the goal should be to learn more about our species and the complex ways in which we relate to each other and to the natural world. To reach these new understandings about ourselves, we must utilize, as is demonstrated by the rich and diverse contributions in this volume, a variety of methodologies and perspectives—art historical, anthropological, philological, and otherwise—in tandem to achieve the most complete picture possible. This I learned from Holly Pittman; I hope that’s what she intended by “you’re going to work with me!”

Christopher P. Thornton,
Washington, DC | October 15, 2020

Introduction

The Ancient Near East: Western | Non-Western

KAREN SONIK

The Near East occupies an extraordinary place in human history. It is the region where agriculture first took hold on a broad scale and where the earliest cities and empires arose (e.g., Tinney and Sonik 2019). As the birthplace of urban civilization, it was integrated into the “story of art”—de facto Western art—and, with Egypt, into the narrative of Western history, long before many other non-Western civilizations. And yet, the Near East continues to occupy a strained and uneasy position within these histories because it remains, in many respects, alien and unfamiliar. The material remains of the Near East, no matter how exquisitely rendered and visually satisfying, were not predicated on European conceptions of fine art as they arose during the Enlightenment or Romantic Age. They do not (and there is no reason we should expect them to) conform to European conceptions of what art does or how it *works*—or doesn’t work—in the world. Indeed, the status of Near Eastern “things” as art, and their incorporation into the Western art canon—albeit in the tacit role of uglier¹ and primitive predecessors to the properly Western and civilized ancient arts deriving from Greece and Rome²—was (and is) dependent on their transformation into “objects.” Objects, particularly art objects, are defined here as belonging to and dependent on us, in contrast to things, which do not and are not (in this volume, see Sonik).

The metamorphosis of Near Eastern *things* into legitimate art *objects* worthy of analysis has permitted the completion of diverse and nuanced studies of Near Eastern visual corpora over the past eighty plus years (e.g., Woolley 1935; Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951; Frankfort 1996 [1954]; Parrot

1961; Moortgat 1969; Pittman 1994; Porada 1995; Winter 1995, 2002; Thomason 2005; Feldman 2006; Evans 2012; Bahrani 2003, 2014, 2017). But this legitimacy has also come at a price: it has precluded the thorough contextualization of Near Eastern things alongside non-Western arts and artifacts that raise pertinent problems and questions and suggest relevant and productive approaches and modes of consideration (e.g., Winter 2000; Bynum 2012). Such broader contextualization and exploration is vital to the sorts of cognitive dilation that would permit us to look at and think about the ancient Near East and the material things that occupy it in new (to us) or unfamiliar ways.³

The call for Near Eastern art's broader cross-cultural contextualization among the non-Western arts may be more generally applied to the ancient arts of all regions, even those more firmly emplaced in the Western category. Jean-Pierre Vernant and other scholars of the *École de Paris*, for example, argued for the “‘desperately foreign’ character of the [ancient] Greeks...[whose characteristic modalities of thought] have more in common with the...[so-called] ‘primitive peoples’ studied by anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss than with those of modern westerners” (Tanner 2006: 15; also Versnel 2011: 10–14).⁴ Near Eastern things, for their part, occupy a peculiar position as both ancient and non-Western—or, from another perspective, neither. (“Ancient” has long been co-opted by the Greco-Roman world exclusively, while “non-Western” generally excludes the Near East because of the latter’s nominal incorporation into the Western narrative.) If this renders them essentially ambiguous, straddling the boundaries between categories, it also opens them to a broad, rich, and mutually illuminating engagement with the things of other peoples, times, and places.

The volume is divided into seven sections addressing topics of contemporary critical concern. The first section, *Art | Artifact*, elucidates key terms and issues pertaining to the classification of (especially ancient and non-Western) arts and artifacts, and their analysis within art historical, anthropological, archaeological, and related frameworks. The second section, *Representation*, encompasses a rethinking of how ancient written and pictorial compositions function (or don’t function) as representations. The third section, *Context*, examines art historical and archaeological concepts of context and the ways in which contextualizing may inform and enrich our understanding of ancient civilizations and their ideological and material productions. The fourth section, *Complexity*, explores the rise of complex

pre-literate societies with an emphasis on the ways in which early glyptic participated in, shaped, and reflected developing socioeconomic, ideological, and political structures. The fifth section, Materiality, elucidates issues of presence, absence, and (gendered) ephemerality as they relate to the archaeological record. The sixth section, Space, explores space as socially and culturally mediated, rather than as universal constant, and examines the utilization of architectural spaces of experience. The seventh and final section, Time | Afterlives, explores the rediscovery, reception, and manipulation of the ancient world in the nineteenth century through diverse lenses encompassing politics, mass communication (the media), reproductions, paintings, and performances. Each of these major sectional themes also thread through chapters in other parts of the volume, evoking interesting resonances and diverse perspectives.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE VOLUME

Section I, Art | Artifact, contains a chapter by Karen Sonik that addresses key issues relating to the classification, analysis, and (mis-)representation of the types of things (ancient and non-Western) explored throughout the volume. It explores how and why, and through what processes and with what implications, some ancient and non-Western things have been selected as “authentic art” objects and others relegated to “mere artifacts.” It examines the manner and locations in which such things are typically displayed or experienced, as well as the effects of physical and other frameworks on how we *reconstruct*—or, arguably, *construct*—the civilizations to which such things belong(ed). It also examines how we define, understand, and apply (and with what consequences) terms such as art and artifact; Western and non-Western; and thing, object, and work. Issues of space, time, and context, and the ways in which these intersect with matter, recur throughout. The chapter concludes by querying whether the locus of a thing’s (and specifically an artwork’s) authenticity and identity must reside in its matter or whether it might reside instead in the thing’s action and use *in* rather than *against* time—even to the point of being changed and, ultimately, used up. What if a thing’s identity depends not on removal from or denial of time but rather on the full acceptance of it and its consequences?

Section II, Representation, contains contributions by Paul Delnero and Beate Pongratz-Leisten. In the first, Delnero explores how studies of

Sumerian laments have frequently treated these compositions as disembodied textual artifacts, without considering the ritual contexts in which they would have been recited, sung, and performed. He examines the content of Sumerian laments more directly in relation to their performative function in Mesopotamian rituals of collective lamenting. More specifically, he argues that the content of Sumerian laments directly reflects the primary function of Mesopotamian lamenting, which was to generate a collective expression of grief and sorrow to awaken the pity of the gods in order to prevent foreseeable catastrophes. After presenting the evidence for the use of Sumerian lamenting in generating grief, Delnero concludes with an analysis of the different ways in which the specific poetic devices employed in the laments were used to induce the emotional effects the laments were intended to produce.

In the second contribution, Pongratz-Leisten investigates the production of royal imagery—with an emphasis on the image of king as warrior as it developed through close communication between the king, scholars, and craftsmen—as well as its conceptual expression and representation of specific cultural and ideological agendas. She argues that the mental image and *Denkform* (conceptual metaphor) of cosmic order is the basis of its realization in every medium (including pictorial, textual, and ritual) and explores issues of inner as opposed to exterior visualizations and the relationship between verbal and pictorial expression. Pongratz-Leisten also investigates the variety of effects—cognitive, practical, and affective—of the image and its capacity to presence simultaneous temporalities as a significant aspect of its agency. The repertoire of divine and royal warrior representations in Mesopotamia serves as case study for these theoretical considerations, and Pongratz-Leisten argues that the affect of such images is promoted by the *gesturality* of human and divine action, which created a powerful *Bildakt* (effect) on the beholder.

Section III, Context, contains contributions by Karen S. Robinson and Matt Waters. In the first, Robinson examines Norman Bryson's discussion of art historical context for its relevance to archaeological context. Her chapter investigates both the art historical and archaeological contexts of a ceramic vessel painted with nine horses that was excavated from tomb 7 at the site of Nerkin Naver in west-central Armenia. Dating to the Middle Bronze Age (last quarter of the third to first half of the second millennium BCE), this tomb contained a single human together with animal

bones—bull, sheep, and horse—and more than 60 ceramic vessels including the jar painted with horses. Robinson demonstrates that, without knowledge of its archaeological context, the Nerkin Naver painted jar, with its unique imagery of horses, could not be fully appreciated or understood. A diachronic review of evidence for the presence of horses in the Bronze and Iron Age South Caucasus, combined with an investigation of the places where such evidence occurs, enrich our understanding of the meaning of the horse imagery on the painted jar. The information gleaned from these analyses enable us to understand *why* the artist responsible for the Nerkin Naver painted jar chose to depict horse imagery; it also raises new questions about other types of imagery and decoration on Middle Bronze Age pottery in the South Caucasus.

In the second contribution, Waters explores intentional ambiguity in portrayals of the Achaemenid king and the ways in which this ambiguity (further) blurred an already nebulous line between king and god. The Achaemenid king never explicitly claimed to be divine, but divine elements of king and kingship were incorporated into Achaemenid ideology. There are intimations of the king's divine essence in the king's relationship with the winged disk and in the doubling of the king's image found in monumental sculpture as well as glyptic. Waters discusses some of these intimations, especially as manifest in images, in their wider context with consideration of parallels and inspiration.

Section IV, Complexity, contains contributions by Marcella Frangipane and Barbara Helwing. In the first, Frangipane discusses the ways in which glyptic images reflect social order in the wider Mesopotamian world from the seventh to the fourth millennium BCE. She identifies a divergence between northern and southern Mesopotamia in terms of the ideological use of images—in particular the images applied to tools in such widespread use as seals—and links this with a profound difference in the nature and exercise of power and its roots. Frangipane suggests also that the images entrusted to the seals were effective in ideological transmission and examines how they reflected the different socioeconomic and political worlds within which they were created and which they had to affirm and promote.

In the second contribution, Helwing focuses on Tal-e Bakun A in southern Iran. Excavated in the 1930s on a comparatively large scale, the site provides some of the best-known evidence for the use of stamp seals in Western Asia during the mid-fifth millennium BCE. Interpreted as markers of early

administration in a pre-state society, the surviving stamp seals and seal impressions play a significant role in the various and partly conflicting proposals that see the site as a center of early complexity. Helwing challenges those reconstructions of Bakun lifeways—which have typically projected backwards in time various economic models for which there is (textual) evidence only from the late fourth millennium BCE onwards—that have equated seals and sealing practices with economic control in an increasingly connected world of circulating goods. After revisiting the glyptic and pictorial records (the latter as extant on painted vessels) for Bakun Period (ca. 4500–4100 BCE) sites, she concludes that the Bakun communities must be understood on their own terms as largely egalitarian social organizations in which power was based on personal prestige and shared values. Seals in this context arguably played an important role in signaling personal and/or group status within the framework of those *communal* activities carried out in prehistoric communities. These prehistoric communities should be regarded as inclusive, allowing all members to participate in collective rituals and feasts and to access various resources that could be consumed or exchanged on the occasion of these events.

Section V, *Materiality*, contains contributions by Greta Van Buylaere and Rita Wright. In the first, Van Buylaere examines the making and functioning of ephemeral artifacts in ancient Mesopotamia. She foregrounds issues of materialization and dematerialization, presence and absence, and enforced transience through a case study focusing on Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals. Anti-witchcraft rituals were performed by exorcists (ritual experts) to free bewitched patients from spells cast and harms inflicted by malevolent warlocks and witches. They often included figurines representing the offending warlock and witch created especially for the duration of the ritual performance: such figurines provided the exorcist with a means to communicate and interact with the world. By the conclusion of the anti-witchcraft ritual, the warlock and witch figurines were destroyed; their existence and significance in the context of ritual performance is known almost exclusively through references to them in the cuneiform texts. The Mesopotamian warlock and witch figurines are striking examples of ancient ephemeral artifacts, possessed of a deliberate transience and yet leaving behind distinct material traces (here in the form of textual references) that illuminate the purposes and consequences of their creation; something of their materiality during their existence; and the circumstances of their demise.

In the second contribution, Wright brings together studies of gendered labor organization and production of material culture, especially textiles, as windows into the status and role of women in history. Her analysis focuses on the burial of Queen Puabi, one of the few royal tombs that was well preserved in the Royal Cemetery at Ur. This burial offers historians a rare glimpse into the high quality and abundance of precious goods consumed by women of high status in Sumerian society and provides an opportunity to construct a complex narrative of the role of queens and their participation in cultic rituals in the Early Dynastic Period. Wright demonstrates how Puabi's burial allows us to reconstruct a portrait of a queen who was dedicated to the ideologies of her time, and who served them in a spectacular performance during a moment in history we might otherwise never have known. By gathering together the various threads that pertain to the production and use of cloth, Wright completes a narrative of (and re-materializes missing elements from) Puabi's funerary performance.

Section VI, *Space*, contains contributions by Marian Feldman and Joshua Jeffers. In the first, Feldman explores the visual rendering of three-dimensional space in two-dimensional media. This topic has constituted a central theme in Western art history, which has been told, in particular, through the story of one-point or linear perspective as an invention of the Italian Renaissance. As early as Henriette A. Groenewegen-Frankfort's *Arrest and Movement* (1951), and through to more recent studies such as John Russell's (1991) discussion of "Space and Time" in Sennacherib's reliefs, this perspectivist narrative has comprised the framework within which the representation of space in Mesopotamian art has been studied. Space, however, as with other concepts previously considered universal, is increasingly understood as socially produced and culturally learned. Thus, we can push our investigations beyond how Mesopotamian renderings of space measure against perspectival space. Focusing on Neo-Assyrian narrative (orthostat) reliefs, in particular those from Ashurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh, Feldman asks instead how renderings of space contribute emotive effects that shape the experience of these artworks, emphasizing the physical presence of the palace walls through the material solidity of the stone orthostats.

In the second contribution, Jeffers re-situates Neo-Assyrian orthostat reliefs depicting a contested military encounter in their three-dimensional spatial context in Sennacherib's throneroom to illuminate the knotty

question of their identification. Military achievements were the primary means through which the Assyrian kings legitimized their reigns to the gods. Given the importance of military success to royal ideology, the kings' inscriptions were replete with accounts of victories and, during the Neo-Assyrian Period, their palace walls were carved with images of martial conquests. In the reign of the Neo-Assyrian king Sennacherib (704–681 BCE), text and image combined to illuminate the details of one particular campaign: Sennacherib's invasion of Phoenicia in 701 BCE. The written accounts of this campaign in Sennacherib's royal inscriptions suggest that the king had difficulty in forcing the city of Tyre to submit to his hegemony. This politically unacceptable situation was resolved over the years subsequent to the invasion. As a result, written and pictorial accounts of the Phoenician campaign were deliberately deployed in the throneroom of Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh to tout the Assyrian conquest of the city of Tyre. Jeffers concludes that these later sources were specifically utilized within the space of the king's throne room to insinuate Tyre's conquest during the Sennacherib's Phoenician campaign, thereby obfuscating the king's initial inability to subdue that city.

Section VII, Time | Afterlives contains contributions by David Kertai and Kevin McGeough. In the first, Kertai explores the complex relationship between Britain's archaeological and political interests during the Victorian era (1840s), taking the Mosul area within the Ottoman Empire and the excavations of Austen Henry Layard in this region as its case study. It highlights the connections between British archaeological exploration, intelligence-gathering activities, and political interests vis-à-vis both the Ottoman Empire and France, as well as the developing public interest in scientific expeditions and in the larger world, which were being shaped and fed by the diverse constituents of the British Press. Layard's career reveals the potential of archaeological exploration for charting a path for oneself in Victorian Britain. Newspapers, increasingly important in the social landscape of Victorian Britain, were very influential in shaping the reception of Layard's work. Preceding his widely successful *Nineveh and its Remains*, published in January 1849, Layard's reception developed out of and was molded by events and by reporting occurring during Layard's presence in the Ottoman Empire. Layard understood how newspapers actually gathered the information they published and used different types of professional and personal networks to define the importance of his

discoveries and, ultimately, advance his archaeological and subsequent political career.

In the second contribution, McGeough discusses the ways in which Austen Henry Layard's discoveries captivated the Victorian public. The removal of the artifacts from the Near East and their installation in the British Museum gave Londoners the opportunity to experience the material culture of the newly discovered civilization (seemingly) directly. Yet the new materialism and consumerism of the Victorian era meant that the reception of ancient Assyrian things was not limited to the confines of the museum. Miniature souvenir porcelains, parodic newspaper images, giant painted canvases, and larger-than-life plaster reproductions allowed the consuming public to experience a manufactured Assyria. Ancient Assyrian artwork thus entered the visual culture of the Victorian world in a manner that both preserved ancient meanings and created entirely new modes of thinking about antiquity in relation to the present. McGeough surveys some of the different popular media in which Neo-Assyrian art was recreated, re-imagined, and re-fashioned in Victorian times and considers the relationship between different visual art genres and Mesopotamia itself as signifier/signified. Addressing Walter Benjamin's argument that auratic objects lose their power when reproduced in mass media, this paper demonstrates, as has been done for ancient Egyptian materials by Lynn Meskell (2004), that antiquities may come to have *different* but no less significant meanings when remade into new objects in new contexts—here in the form of museum souvenirs, political satire, public exhibition (world's fairs), and public performance (theater). In all of these cases, the reception of Assyria through new Victorian things carried some of the contemporary beliefs about the ancient world but allowed those beliefs to be refocused as commentary on the present. As such, Victorian dialogues were facilitated through engagement with ancient Assyrian visual culture.

NOTES:

- 0.1 The adjective “uglier” is deliberately used here to evoke the specter of “beauty,” which continues to haunt our interaction with as well as our scholarship on art and aesthetics in interesting and often problematic ways (e.g., Gaskell 2003, esp. p. 274; Starr 2013; Chatterjee 2014).
- 0.2 The ongoing use of the term “ancient” by publishers and scholars to refer to exclusively Greek and Roman things is a troubling relic—remaining a common practice if not an excusable one—of this view of the world; see, for example, the so-called *Companion to Ancient Aesthetics* (Destrée and Murray 2015) published

by Wiley-Blackwell. This volume, despite its title, concerns itself exclusively with Greece and Rome, leaving the ancient civilizations of the Near East and Egypt, as well as of the rest of the ancient world, entirely out of the picture. The (long discredited) idea that one cannot properly speak of art and aesthetics—or, for that matter, history or civilization or really any other thing—prior to the advent of the Greeks is implicitly propagated by such works. The title of the present volume is an implicit response to such practices.

- 0.3** The purpose of this broader contextualization is explicitly not to sever Near Eastern art from the Western canon nor to separate it entirely from the traditional art historical approaches that have been applied to it over the past eighty years. Nor is it to identify and compare things from disparate non-Western cultural contexts that *look alike* in order to elucidate their points of similarity. Bynum (2014: 345, 347), discussing the problem of pseudomorphism in cross-cultural analysis, neatly exploded the assumption that “the comparanda with which one starts are in some way given or obvious” and observed “how misleading it can be to assume, without sophisticated knowledge of context, that shapes or forms are either like or unlike.” Historically and historiographically, the ancient Near East straddles the line dividing Western and non-Western.
- 0.4** On Vernant and the French structuralists, see, e.g., Stocking 2020. On continuity and difference between us (the contemporary Western we) and the ancient civilizations we study, see further, e.g., Konstan 2006: 5; Sonik 2017: 231. Tanner (2006: 15–16) further notes the contributions of structuralist methodologies to the “sophistication of iconographic studies of Greek vase-painting” as well as post-structuralist contributions to understanding how visual signs might structure “the gender, sexual and political identities of their consumers.” Interestingly, he observes that both new and old Classical art history is characterized by the dominance of philological over archaeological modes of analysis. A similar problem continues to plague Near Eastern scholarship, in which philology reigns supreme and art historical analyses are often dismissed with the verdict *non liquet*, regardless of their methodologies.

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Art/ifacts and ArtWorks: De-Colonizing the Study and Museum Display of Ancient and Non-Western Things¹

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Keywords: ancient; non-Western; art; artifact; aesthetics; aura; context; object; thing;
institutional theory of art; anthropology of art; space; time

ART BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES: ANCIENT AND NON-WESTERN THINGS IN SPACE AND TIME

Art and Artifact: Questions and Issues

In 1988, at the Center for African Art in New York, Susan Vogel curated *ART/artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, a seminal exhibition exploring the relationships between the display and classification—and the resulting perceptions and receptions—of African things in Western contexts (see also Vogel 1997). This came on the heels of the Museum of Modern Art's controversial 1984 exhibition, "*Primitivism*" in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, which deliberately juxtaposed non-Western things (primarily from Africa and Oceania) with well-known modern art by European and American artists in order to establish and explore particular relationships or affinities between them (cf. Green and Daehner 2008; Chi and Azara 2015).

Taken together, these exhibitions, the volumes based on them (Rubin 1984; Vogel 1988), and the responses to the issues and ideas they foregrounded (e.g., Faris 1988; Townsend-Gault 1992; Dutton 1993; Gell 1996; Hay 2016/2017), exposed striking limitations in the capacity of traditional art historical approaches to elucidate the aesthetics, significance, and *functioning* of works from the artworld beyond that of Renaissance and

post-Renaissance Europe and, in later periods, of the so-called Western world more broadly.² Inasmuch as traditional approaches to art were based in primarily European philosophical discourses and designed to apply to primarily European visual corpora (e.g., Morphy 2007), such limitations are, in retrospect, hardly surprising.

These developments in the artworld of the 1980s also stimulated an explicit grappling with more fundamental questions that have become, in our ever more globalized world, critical to art historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, curators, and scholars engaged in material and visual culture studies.³ How might we—the contemporary Western “we”—best define and apply terms such as art, artifact, artist, and aesthetics in cultural contexts that had no native equivalents for our own conceptualizations of these?⁴ How might the art and aesthetics of non-Western civilizations be productively identified, approached, and understood if explicit oral (or written) discourses on these topics are absent or inaccessible? How and where should non-Western things be displayed or exhibited? And what are the effects of such displays on how we reconstruct—or, arguably, *construct*—the civilizations to which the things belong? What is the proper place of non-Western things within the traditionally Western canon of art, if such a canon indeed continues to exist?⁵ On what bases might the authenticity, merit, and value (market and otherwise) of art be assessed and established? To what extent and in what ways does the materiality and agency of art matter? How does art reflect, materialize, or participate in various types of social and other relationships? And to what extent do the very terms we use to discuss such questions themselves arise from and actively contribute to longstanding misconceptions?

Many of the above questions and issues have, in recent decades, been particularly intensively explored with respect to non-Western things, especially those once subsumed under the categories of so-called “ethnographic art” or, even less palatably, “primitive” or “tribal art.” This is perhaps unsurprising given that the place of such things within both the canon of art and the discipline of art history remains the subject of both explicit and implicit consideration and negotiation. A significant and positive byproduct of this negotiation is the cogent articulation of key theoretical frameworks not only from art history and archaeology but also from disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, especially the anthropologies of art and aesthetics, within which such things may be analyzed. The works of anthropologist

Alfred Gell (1992, 1995, 1998) on agency, aesthetics, and the technology of enchantment are particularly well known, but by no means unique, in this regard (e.g., Layton 1991 [1981]; Coote and Shelton 1992; Marcus and Myers 1995; Pinney and Thomas 2001).

Such approaches, moreover, have gained broader currency as they have been applied to art objects of all periods and regions—including, importantly, to those Western arts of the past several centuries for which the conceptualization and related philosophies of “fine art” were first designed. Also notable is the renewed emphasis on materiality and other concerns drawn from material culture studies (e.g., Miller 2005; Meskell 2005; Van Dyke 2015; cf. Ingold 2007; Yonan 2011), as well as the use and refinement of the object biography approach, by art historians and other scholars in a range of related disciplines (for theory: Kopytoff 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Hoskins 2006; Joy 2009; Joyce and Gillespie 2015; for application: e.g., Daston 2000; Meskell 2004; Olson et al. 2006; Tythacott 2011).

My purpose in this essay has been to explore, directly and indirectly, various aspects of the questions posed above as they pertain to ancient as well as non-Western things that have become art—and often art objects in a specifically Western sense—through a variety of means. It has also been to expose and query the numerous and varied slippages, the peculiar conceptions and misconceptions that color every facet of our engagement with things that are, today, classified and displayed as art. Many such slippages and their consequences have been documented and defined by scholars working on African and other “non-Western” arts; it is imperative, I think, that the same be done for the ancient arts (from all parts of the world), even if many of these belong to civilizations that no longer have living representatives to speak for them.

Art and Artifact: The Terms of Engagement

Several terms are used throughout this chapter that are worth defining here in brief, even as they are more fully elucidated through the discussion and case studies below. Primary among these terms are non-Western, artifact, and art. The lattermost of these, art, is notably entangled in this chapter with several additional terms: object, thing, and *work*.

Non-Western is used throughout this chapter. This replaces older and explicitly pejorative designations such as “primitive” and “tribal,” which have rightly fallen into disuse, but it also introduces significant new

problems (e.g., Dufrene 1994). It falsely implies a homogeneity of the very diverse things subsumed under the category of non-Western art and establishes, equally falsely, a diametric opposition of these things with those classified as Western art (a spuriously homogenizing category in its own right). The binary opposition of Western vs. non-Western *art*, moreover, asserts the primacy of the former as the standard against which all other arts are judged rather than as only one—and a peculiarly self-conscious and mannered one at that (e.g., Abrams 1985)—among many temporally, geographically, and otherwise bounded and contingent manifestations of a fundamental human behavior of art-making, “artification,” or “making special” (e.g., Dissanayake 2009; Brown and Dissanayake 2009). That the term non-Western is used in this essay, despite these very significant defects, reflects the absence of a better or at least equally accessible and widely understood word: if non-Western is explicitly problematic, it at least is also expansive enough to encompass a broad diversity of arts, from those of large-scale and literate civilizations such as Mesopotamia and Egypt to those of smaller-scale and non-literate cultures, under its rubric.

The frequent conjunction of non-Western with ancient in this essay is also worth remarking on and explaining, lest it be misunderstood as implying equivalency between the two terms or suggesting that the non-Western is fundamentally “primitive” (Layton 1991 [1981]: 1ff.). This essay deals with things that are or have been transformed into art objects, a category that encompasses many things that precede the rise of Western conceptions of fine art, as well as many things that were created beyond the geographical and/or ideological reach of such conceptions. The terms ancient and non-Western together encompass much of the span of the temporal, spatial, and other disjunctions at issue. As this essay opens a volume of case studies on specifically Near Eastern things, which may be classified as both ancient and non-Western (or, from an alternate perspective, as neither),⁶ the conjunction is also a pertinent one in this context.

The terms artifact and art are also worth introducing briefly before their deconstruction in the main discussion. This essay is particularly concerned with art. But many things that have *become* ancient or non-Western “art”—or, better, many ancient and non-Western things that have become *Western art objects*—were at one time, and in some contexts may continue to be, artifacts. The art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto (1988: 20), in his response to Vogel’s *ART/artifact* exhibit, averred that “the line between

artwork and [mere] artifact” was absolute. The distinction—for him—was not one of outward appearance; the sheer range and variety of things intentionally produced as art by contemporary artists had made this sort of discrimination impossible. Scientific tests and analyses were likewise declared, even where not entirely useless, beside the point. Instead, Danto (1988: 26) took up the Hegelian opposition of the “Realm of Absolute Spirit” (art) with the “Prose of the World” (artifact). Art for Danto—though not for him alone—was the product of the artist-as-genius. It was a vessel of spirit and meaning, made in “the absence of rules of its production,” and the mode of its making was not only unteachable but also unlearnable (Danto 1988: 28–29). He recognized its contemporary status and institutionalization, without regard for whether this was for good or ill, as placeless and useless (in the sense of lacking a use separate from *being* art), both qualities asserting its status as a self-contained and isolated *end in itself*.

The mere artifact, in contrast, was not only a *useful* thing, one designed to function, but also an instrumental one: it served an end *beyond* itself. Danto (1988: 28) invoked, as he elucidated the concept of artifact, Heidegger’s conception of *Zeugganze*, an inter-referential totality of tools: e.g., a hammer, referring to a nail, referring to a board, referring to a saw, referring to a whetstone. Each participant in this economy of things depended on the existence of the other(s): none would have arisen in splendid isolation or as the product of independent and creative genius. The artifact’s embeddedness within broader networks of relationships sharply contrasted with the purported capacity of art to stand entirely outside of such networks as a creation of original genius—which was itself an *invention* of eighteenth-century Europe (e.g., Duff 1767: 35, 48, 1770; Kant 1914 [1790]: 189).⁷ However, even Danto (1988: 29) acknowledged that the isolation of art and similar concepts of originality and creativity were not necessarily the point for so-called “Primitive cultures,” which existed outside the temporal, spatial, and ideological reach of Enlightenment and Romantic era Europe.

There is much that is clarifying and deeply thought-provoking in Danto’s contrast of art and artifact. He was aware that the arts of other cultures—whether temporally or spatially divergent (or both) from the arts of the so-called Western world—could and did have alternate (dual) identities as *both* objects of use and praxis *and* vessels of spirit and meaning (e.g., Danto 1988: 29). He realized, similarly, the barriers to engaging with the things of other cultures on *their* terms (particularly in the absence of knowledge of their

terms) rather than only our own, and he perceived the peculiar distortions we impose on such things through our focus on opticality, aesthetic qualities, and placelessness (Danto 1988: 29, 32). And yet, Danto's work was founded on untenable premises: that art possesses and always has possessed a stable identity; that the boundaries of *what art is* are and always have been fixed and inflexible (so that even things newly attaining the status of art are not transformed but only lately recognized); and that conceptions of art and the artist that were rooted and cultured in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, even if leavened by observations from ancient Greek philosophers and dilated by the experiments of Duchamp and the artists who followed him (Danto 1988: 18ff.), constitute some universal truth.

Danto was conscious of some of the distortions his premises introduced into his analysis, addressing these implicitly and explicitly throughout his work, even as he remained unwilling—or, perhaps, unable—to abandon them. But there is no reason to assume, and many reasons to doubt, that the European conception of “fine art”—with all its emphasis on the art object's isolation, autonomy, imposed uselessness and placelessness, setting it apart from the real world and outside of space and time as an end in itself—is such a universal. If one is seeking fundamental human universals, surely it makes more sense to start not with *material outcomes* or products, with all their culturally invested or assigned qualities (e.g., Benzel 2015), but rather with *common behaviors* and actions (e.g., Dissanayake 1992, 2000; Brown and Dissanayake 2009; cf. Chatterjee 2013) that might yield a diverse *array* of material outcomes possessing not-easily-recognizable things in common.⁸ Danto (1988: 31), perceiving the problem of seeking the essence of art in its matter or form, attempted to shift his ground by conceptualizing matter as embodiment of meaning. This shift necessitated the imposition of an immutable (and ultimately unpersuasive) boundary between artifacts, which “have no meaning to speak of” (Danto 1988: 24), and art, which is pure meaning materialized (Danto 1988: 29).

I am not inclined to fall in with the distinction between elevated and *useless* art as end in itself and utilitarian “mere” artifact as means to other ends. I would observe, among other things, that the independence of art as Danto articulated it is more pretense than reality. Art objects, as Alois Riegl and Ernst Gombrich demonstrated, *depend on us*—the beholder. They are, moreover, in a very literal sense, *our objects*, contemplated, desired, displayed, and otherwise removed from the world and from the flows of space

and time to be preserved for and acted upon only by us. Artifacts, by way of contrast, have more numerous and expansive potentialities through their existence as *things* within the world, participants in interactions not only with *us* but also with diverse spaces or places and times (e.g., Gibson 1977, 1979; Graves-Brown 2000a: 4; in this volume Frangipane; Helwing). They are, as a result, subject to change in the manner of all living and other things in the world, even to the extent of being used up or coming to an end (in this volume, Van Buylaere; Wright). Artifacts are also capable of being transformed into art objects, a metamorphosis that is not an elevation to a higher state of being but only an alteration into a different one. The distinction drawn here between *objects* (particularly “art objects”) as belonging to and dependent on us, and *things*, which do and are not (or not only), is one that is maintained throughout this study (see, further, Ingold 2012: 436, 438; Nussbaum 1995).⁹ The term artwork is one that is deliberately eschewed until the end of this essay as I reserve it for art that *works*, that is, for *things* (not objects) that meaningfully *act* in and on the world. Many of the arts of the world, including those of the ancient Near East, belong to this category and are not diminished thereby.

This lengthy discussion of art and artifact has not been offered only to critique conceptions that have been extensively and cogently examined elsewhere (e.g., Dutton 1993; Errington 1994; Gell 1996). Rather, its intention has been to expose the degree to which our culturally inculcated notions of what art *is*, where it is *encountered*, and what it *does* or *should do* permeate every aspect of how we think about and engage with art objects—even those that were not made within but have only been transformed or appropriated into the modern system of the arts. The following discussion examines the slippages that inevitably result from the collision of our conceptions with things that were not made to conform to our peculiar notions of what art is or should be.

ART BY INSTITUTION: OBJECT/IFYING THINGS

Institutional Encounters: Art Objects & the Beholder’s Involvement

The traditional Western conceptualization of art as the non-utilitarian object of disinterested aesthetic contemplation, a peculiarly decontextualized end in itself, has been thoroughly exposed as a temporally and

geographically bounded construct (e.g., Abrams 1985). It is not only inapplicable to the majority of the (explicitly functional) arts produced throughout much of the historical and geographical expanse of the world but also an idealized fiction mostly inapplicable even within the eighteenth and nineteenth century contexts within which it flourished (Carroll 2009; Gell 1996: 36; cf. Davies 2006). Nevertheless, this conceptualization of art continues to linger, due in part to its deep entrenchment in Western thought during the Enlightenment and Romantic periods and in part to its ongoing reinforcement through the specific contexts in which art objects—or things labeled as such—are encountered. If one wants to look at “art,” one almost inevitably goes to a museum or an art gallery, an institution maintained for the purposes of selecting, displaying, and *viewing* objects.¹⁰ The term *viewing* is here deliberately used to emphasize the unidirectional, individual, and distant nature of the regard directed by the subject *at* the object.

The distinction between *viewing* and *seeing*—the former representing an isolated, unidirectional, and long-distance act and the latter a mutual, interactive engagement replete with sensual and material possibilities—and the implications of substituting one for the other, formed the central conceit of *The Naked Sun*, a 1957 novel by the brilliant speculative writer Isaac Asimov (1957: 63): “‘You’re viewing me right now. You can’t touch me, can you, or smell me, or anything like that. You could if you were seeing me. Right now, I’m two hundred miles away from you at *least*. So how can it be the same thing?’ Baley grew interested. ‘But I see you with my eyes.’ ‘No, you don’t see me. You see my image. You’re viewing me.’” While Asimov’s observations were addressed to human relationships, their salience for the interactions between humans and things—and specifically the subset of things here explored as art objects—has been amply demonstrated through the material culture and materiality studies of recent decades. The *viewing* of objects in museum or gallery contexts, moreover, even if it does not take place at a literal distance of hundreds of miles (though it may do that as well through the proliferation of digitized museum collections over the past two decades), is one that is deliberately distanced in other ways. The range and variety of possible physical interactions is sharply and deliberately circumscribed:¹¹ looking is permissible; other types of physical encounter are not.

One might contend, of course, that material and sensual engagement in institutional contexts takes place *in the mind* even if not *in the flesh*, and that the power of such cognitive and imaginative interaction, far from being

diminished, may even amplify the effects of the object. An illuminating elaboration of this premise occurs in Dudley's (2012: 1) account of her encounter with a bronze horse, which she later discovers to have Han Dynasty origins, at the Compton Verney art gallery in Warwickshire:

The horse was green, over a metre high, and stood considerably higher still as a result of its plinth. I was utterly spellbound by its majestic form, its power, and, as I began to look at it closely, its material details: its greenish colour, its textured surface, the small areas of damage. I wanted to touch it, though of course I could not - but that did not stop me imagining how it would feel to stroke it, or how it would sound if I could tap the metal, or how heavy it would be if I could try to pick it up. I was, in other words, sensorially exploring the object, even though I had to intuit and imagine rather than directly experience most of the encounter. There was no label at all adjacent to the object...I still knew nothing at all about this artefact...nonetheless, its three-dimensionality, tactility and sheer power had literally moved me to tears.

Dudley's encounter, as described here, is profoundly affective. She offers it to the reader as an example both of the power of art for art's sake and of the value of traditional institutional displays of art objects as unmediated (or minimally mediated) by information or context. She suggests, indeed, that the provision of such context would actually impede the viewer's response, "a fundamental, emotional, sensory, even visceral, one to [the art object's] form, materials, colour, scale and texture" (Dudley 2012: 2; also Moore 1941 [below]). Putting aside the second part of her argument, which is extensively addressed below, we are left with a peculiar but compelling question: what, precisely, did Dudley actually encounter in the account quoted above?

Dudley titles her article, "Encounter with a Chinese horse," referencing the Han Dynasty origins of the object she views. The geographical and chronological origins of the horse are indicated on a hand guide accompanying the horse, along with a reference to its original spatial context and function: "Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220): Heavenly Horse, *tian ma*. Bronze. This large horse would have been a funerary offering for the tomb of an élite Chinese man, the intention being for the owner of the tomb to use the horse to pull his chariot in the afterlife" (apud Dudley 2012: 2). But Dudley's actual encounter with the horse takes place in 2010 CE, nearly