EAST GREEK OR HITTITE?

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The ivory 1964.36 in the Antikenabteilung der Berliner Museen, published in detail by Adolf Greifenhagen in 1965 (1), has no certified provenance (Figs. 1-3). It must have been ripped out of its Anatolian context and no amount of guesswork can restore it to the place and level in which it was historically embedded.

The piece consists of a female figurine standing on a sphinx. On top of the woman's rounded hat is a sturdy, oversize duck's or swan's head finial. A fragmentary tenon for an upper attachment projects from the bird's neck; the sphinx has oblique drilled channels for the insertion of dowels fastening a lower attachment. Only a slice of the sphinx remains. The group is basically vertical, its three components superposed in the same axis. In profile the pronounced curvature of the bird's neck breaks the verticality.

Greifenhagen hypothesized that the piece formed part of a kithara. By analogy with the reconstruction of a Samian kithara by D.Ohly, Greifenhagen tentatively made the Berlin piece into the arm of a kithara, to be matched by a counterpart at the other side, the two figures of women facing inward toward the strings.

The artistic milieu for the ivory carving has generally been sought in Lydia or in the environment of the Artemisium of Ephesos, with its rich harvest of semi-Ionic, semi-Oriental ivory figurines, and a date of ca. 600 B.C. was suggested in the original publication. This date has met with general approval. K.Schefold and R.Lullies put the piece in the first half of the sixth century B.C. (2) R.D.Barnett agrees with the suggestion of an Ephesian school and a date of ca. 600 B.C. (3).

In his book Orient und Okzident, Ekrem Akurgal carefully weighs the stylistic and iconographic aspects of the Berlin ivory, and comments: "Die Berliner Statuette ist ein dem Orient stark verhaftetes Kunstwerk... Der
Künstler mag freilich ein in Ephesos wirkender Schnitzer syrischer Herkunft gewesen sein, der noch vorwiegend in Stil der altherkömmlichen syrischen Schule arbeitete. (4).

These wise words are to be heeded as we extend our observations in the direction of Anatolia, offering the following comments with deep appreciation of the many stimulating and basic contributions Ekrem Akurgal has made through his lifelong study of Greek, Anatolian and Near Eastern art.

1. The female figure. The body is relatively slender, but the head is large, its width exaggerated by the ears which stand out from hair and hat. The facial features with wide full cheeks, prominent nose, firmly modelled, barely smiling mouth, and fleshy chin, are familiar from Hittite figurines, male and female, such as the Lattakieh and Boğazköy bronzes, the rock crystal figurine from Tarsus, or the seated miniature goddess in the Schimmel collection (5). The eyes and eyebrows of the ivory figurine are outlined by incision, probably once filled with color. The bronzes just quoted had inlaid eyes, as did the best preserved face of monumental Hittite sculpture, one of the sphinxes from Yerkapi, whose eyes are carefully contoured; the features of this face help us to see the Hittite traits in the ivory (6).

Large ears are a characteristic of Hittite male and female figures from the Old Hittite period on; earrings, ring- or disc-shaped, protrude below them (7). The hair of the Berlin figure in front and on top is covered by her hat, but in the back it emerges in a thick triple braid below the rim of the hat. It is carefully patterned to show the plaited strands as far down as the belt, below which it continues in three smooth ridges, perhaps wrapped in fabric.

Hittite goddesses, as seen in the Yazılıkaya reliefs (fig. 4) and in miniature replicas of cult figures in the round, had long braids in the back, while the hair is pulled back from the front, where it may be completely hidden under the hat, as in the case of the gold seated goddess in the Schimmel collection (8), whose four braids appear in the back from the lower edge of her large disc-shaped hat. Simpler versions still emphasize the presence of wide plaits in the back, partly obscured by suspension rings as in the gold amulet from Boğazköy, or the silver one in the Schimmel collection (9). The braids of such figurines descended below the belt to the hem of the robe, as is clearest in the electrum figurine from the Nelidow collection which is in standing pose and completely finished in the round (10). Her triple or quadruple plaits are marked with simple hatching all the way down. The braids of the Yazılıkaya goddesses are similar, as is best preserved in the Yekbas relief (fig. 5) (11).

The costume of the Berlin figure consists of two separate parts. The woman wears a long dress of soft material which resembles the Greek chiton, fluted to indicate folds, straight in the skirt, gently following the curvature of the breasts in the upper part. The belt is a simple round band, fastened in the center in front where a large buckle is suspended on the tassel. The shoulders are wrapped in a smooth short veil or cape, the edges of which are seen following the rounding of the arms and disappearing into the belt in center front. The veil does not continue up over the hat, and protects the back and upper arms only. It must be short enough to be tucked into the belt (unless the belt forms its lower edge).

This costume is related to, but not identical with that of the Yazılıkaya goddesses. They, too, have a long fluted skirt, which is shown in movement with the stride of the goddesses. They wear plain wide belts, above which the costume either shows no folds at all, or fewer, finer striations (12). In all cases, a long veil appears hanging down from the right arm. This veil, reaching to the feet, would seem to be a separate garment, which must have been wrapped around the shoulders, and in this case, around the left shoulder with a short end, covering just the upper body. The edge of the veil never shows on the left side, unlike the rendering on the Berlin ivory. The Yekbas relief is unambiguous about the manner in which the upper body is wrapped solidly in undifferentiated cloth (fig. 5).

The matter of the analysis of Anatolian and Greek costumes has recently been studied by İlküre Özgen, to whose study we may refer for details (13). The belt of the Berlin figure is unlike the wide flat belt of the Yazılıkaya goddesses, especially in its central appendage. The miniatures in precious metal are not much help in this respect. The electrum Nelidow figurine (figs. 6-8) has the most detail, since she is standing. Her ‘chiton’ shows folds in the skirt which rise to a division in the center, below the rolled (not flattened) belt. Folds also appear on the bodice in front, but the upper part of the back is smooth, as are the sides of the bent arms. The Boğazköy miniature (9), may have a cloak wrapped around her back and skirt, just barely leaving the arms free.

The hat of the Berlin figure in general shape is not unlike that of the Nelidow goddess, a polos with rounded top. The Nelidow polos has some vertical ridges. The headgear of the Yazılıkaya goddesses is rectangular at
the top and clearly articulated by vertical ridges; it may also have
crenellations. The Berlin figure wears her bulbous polos smoothly fitted
around her head. In the center front the lower edge of the hat has an apex,
like a central part. From the top of each ear rises a relief band diagonally to
the center of the hat, where the two bands merge, with a thickening for an
ornament, and a thin continuation which disappears under the bird’s
neck. These relief lines either represent an appliquéd ornament
(Greifenhagen) or a strap which could be worn under the chin or pulled up
and fastened on top of the polos. The thickening could be the device to
tighten the strap. It seems unlikely that the lower edge with the part should
be seen as hair. A similar notch appears in the lower edge of the horned
helmet of the Yerkapi gate sphinx (14).

The most Hittite aspect of the Berlin figurine is her pose, with rounded
back and arms, and the head set slightly forward. The way in which the left
arm is wrapped in the veil and curved evenly to the front is typical of
Hittite artistic idiom as represented in the Yazilikaya goddesses (Figs. 4-5)
and the Neflidow miniature (Figs. 6-8). Similar, although affected by the
seated pose, are the arms and shoulders of the Schimmel miniatures and
the Boğazköy pendant.

The ivory woman had her arms extended symmetrically in front,
holding some objects which were dowelled on with the hands. We can only
guess at the attributes, which would have masked part of the body.
Greifenhagen proposed kithara and plectrum, in line with his
interpretation of the original purpose of the carving. Hittite goddesses
would hold bowl and identifying symbol, whether an artefact, pictogram
or animal.

2. The Sphinx. The sphinx on which the woman stands elevates her into
a special realm. Many cult figures of deities are described in Hittite texts as
supported on their attributive animals. Few survive in the round. In Hittite
art a deity stands on a single animal, feet firmly planted on its back, and
facing forward in the direction of the animal, whether moving in
procession or standing still. This is the manner in which the ivory woman
stands on her sphinx, although her feet are enveloped in her long robe.

The sphinx is frontally aligned with the woman. The coiffure of the
sphinx is a long Hathor wig with firmly incised lines curving down to spiral
locks. A fringe of torsional pattern forms the edge of the hair on the
forehead. The face of the sphinx is lost except for the left cheek and ear.
Eyes and eyebrows were detailed with incision. The cheek is prominent; the
ear less disproportionate than that of the woman. On chest and shoulder
the sphinx has a globular bead pattern; straight lines mark the wing which
is rising from the left shoulder.

For relatives we may look at the Megiddo ivories. Hathor wigs occur
there in less rigid linear style on female heads that served as attachments
(15). Sphinxes on a rectangular box (Megiddo No.1) have the beaded
section and straight-feathered wings of the Berlin piece, but their Hathor
wigs are carved differently without incision (16). Yet the Megiddo group
has closer affinities to the Berlin piece than we can find in the Syrian group
of Nimrud ivories.

In major art, the sphinxes on orthostats from Al-Dara have an
imbricated disc pattern on the chest and straight-feathered wings. Again,
their Hathor wigs and ears are in the Syro-Hittite tradition also evident in
the unfinished basalt sculptures in the quarry at Yesemek (17).

The stylistic traits of the sphinx therefore are found in the mixed
context of the Megiddo ivories at the end of the Late Bronze Age, and in
the North Syrian, early Iron Age (?) architectural sculpture of Al-Dara,
which iconographically is close to the Hittite tradition.

Anatolian sphinxes with Hathor coiffures start in the Old Assyrian
period, as known from the Asemhûyê ivory (18). They help us
understand the early component in the tradition of Hittite and Syrian ivory
carving, and may also help to explain the triangular protrusion on the wig
of the Berlin ivory, which could still be a vestigial uraeus, already
simplified to a ridge in Asemhûyê (19).

Hittite deities rarely stand on composite animals in preserved art. The
Hittitizing ivory plaque from Megiddo introduced both the Hathor-
locked sphinx and the double- (human-and-lion-) headed sphinx in its
repertoire of satellites and supporting figures of deities (20). This
double-headed sphinx is stylistically related to the sphinxes with imbricated
patterns on chest and shoulder and straight feathers for the lower wings.
The double-headed sphinx supports Shaushga on the Hittite gold seal-ring
in Oxford, in Hittite-Hurrian context (21).

Descriptions of seated Shaushga statues refer to a winged awiti (lion?
or sphinx?) under the pedestal of the goddess, flanked by Ninatta and
Kulitta (22).
The iconography of the Berlin ivory suggests that the female figure is of divine rank, standing on a supporting animal. The sphinx as a hybrid attributive animal is to be expected in the orbit of Hurrian or Syrian forms of Ishtar or Shaushga, who in turn are adopted into the Hittite pantheon.

3. The duck's head finial. The finial rising from the top of the woman's polos does not belong to her realm. While the relatively small sphinx is proportionate to the figure of the goddess and serves to elevate her as a member of the pantheon, the duck's (or swan's) head is oversize and has no relation to the meaning or appearance of the goddess. Instead, it leads us to a functional aspect in which bird's heads are transitional decorative parts of composite constructions. These may be furniture, musical instruments, scepters and wands, but especially ceremonial and ritual objects: stands, tables, pedestals.

Hittite musical instruments played in Old Hittite cults, as illustrated on the relief vase from Inandik, have bird's head finials for the top members of portable kitharas and large harps, with corresponding curved animal head finials for the lateral uprights (23).

Although we are beginning to learn more about furniture and ivory decoration of the Hittite Empire, the popularity of the duck's head ornament is best documented in the koine of Egyptianizing Syrian art. In the Megiddo hoard many attachments in this shape were found; they are, however, separately made to be fastened to pyxides as handles. The head is rarely curved back against the neck, as in the Berlin piece (24). Complete examples of such pyxides are now best known from Kamid el-Loz (25).

In Egypt, the tomb of Tutankhamun gives a good set of examples of ivory and wood carving in which duck's heads form transitional elements, e.g. the folding stool with ebony and ivory legs ending in duck's heads holding the lower crossbars in their bills, and a smaller ivory headrest of similar design (26).

4. The original object. The duck's head attachment suggests that the Berlin ivory was part of a larger composition, a piece of precious furniture in which the bird's head formed the transition to another member of a decorative complex.

The figure of the goddess on the sphinx, strictly vertical and rather rigid in its frontal view, is perfectly embedded in its function as a vertical support. It is unlikely that the figure was a singular upright, especially in view of its supporting function. In this sense it differs radically from the ivory and ebony carvings of curved, bent figures of a Syrian and African prisoner on Tutankhamun's wands (27), although the era of figural carving may be the right one for comparisons. We could see the Berlin figure, matched by at least one counterpart, serving as the frontal supports of a stand. The sphinx could have been attached to a furniture leg or horizontal intermediate strut. The Berlin fragment could thus have been an element of a larger composition in which one or more figures of lesser deities performed supporting roles. In a hypothetical vein we may think of the subordinate figures of Ninatta and Kulitta incorporated in a ritual stand for the cult of Shaushga.

We do not have examples of such furniture from Hittite contexts, although we should admit the Acemhöyük ivories as evidence for the early existence of Hittite composite furniture, into which the sphinxes were dowelled at top and base. Hittite texts referring to ivory may some day supplement the material evidence (28).

In final support we may compare two categories of related material. The ceremonial bronze axe from Şarküşla, part of cult inventory, is decorated in high relief with a hierarchy of superposed mountain god, lion protome, and sun god, single frontal figures, with symmetrical satellites in the shapes of griffin men, and winged lion- and griffin-protomes; the edges of the blade end in birds' heads (29). The iconography of this ritual object demonstrates the artistic range of winged hybrids and the use of birds' head finials in Hittite-Hurrian art to an extent hitherto unsuspected.

Later survivals of the Hittite-Hurrian tradition in ritual equipment can be seen in Urartian furniture. Temple furniture from Van has static figures of Teshub and other deities built into the uprights of thrones and tables. Bronze, ivory, white stone and gold foil are used in this precious joinery (30). As R.D. Barnett pointed out, Assyrian parallels are attested by texts and finds, as well as by relief renderings of tables and thrones in Khorsabad (31). A fragment of an ivory furniture leg from the burnt complex at Hasanlu preserves the feet of a deity standing on a lion which was dowelled to the lower part of a relief-decorated leg (32). This is local work in the neo-Hurrian tradition.

5. The place of origin. The strong Hittite imprint of the Berlin figure has made us look to an area where Hittite art blends with the Syrian traits so clearly discerned by Ekrem Akurgal. There are possibilities from Kizzuwatna to Carchemish. In the 14th and 13th centuries B.C., we should
not be surprised by the gentle modelling of the chiton on the upper body of the goddess. Amarna art has had its kolne impact.

These notes therefore advocate that we look away from the Ephesian milieu, which could hardly have maintained such a strong link to Hittite art and iconography, and search for the relatives of the Berlin ivory in the world of the greater Hittite Empire.

FOOTNOTES

(1) A. Greifenhagen, Jahrzehnte der Berliner Museen 7 (1965) pp. 125-156.
(3) R. D. Barnett, Ancient Ivories in the Middle East (Qedem 14, Jerusalem 1982) p. 59, pl. 60 c-d.
(4) Ekrem Akurgal, Oriental and Okzident (Kunst der Welt, Baden-Baden 1966) p. 214 and fig. 166.
(6) Akurgal-Hirmer, op.cit. pl. 69.
(7) Akurgal-Hirmer, op.cit. pl. 50, 53; at Yazılıkaya, Hepat and the goddesses Nos. 45 and 46.
(9) O. W. Muscarella, op.cit. No. 121; K. Bittel, Bogazköy III (Berlin 1957) pl. 27, pp. 30-31; cf. the pendant from Çöflk, K. Bittel, Die Hethiter (München 1976) fig. 170.
(11) K. Bittel et al., Yazılıkaya (Berlin 1975), pls. 36: 3; the reliefs are fairly consistent in leading the braid over the belt, cf. the drawings pls. 58-59; in the main scene there is some ambiguity in Nos. 43 and 45-46.
(12) K. Bittel et al., Yazılıkaya (Berlin 1975) p. 147.
(14) E. Akurgal and M. Hirmer, Die Kunst der Hethiter (München 1951) pl. 69.
(16) G. Loud, op.cit. No. 1, pls. 1-3 and frontispiece.
(19) It still exists in the large sculptured sphinx protome from Zincirli U.B. Alkin, Anatolia I (Archaeologica Mundi 1968) pl. 158; W. Ortmann, Untersuchungen zur spät Ministério Kunst (Bonn 1971) p. 550, K8, pl. 67 b.