

DI PAOLO, S. (ed.) — Composite Artefacts in the Ancient Near East. Exhibiting an imaginative materiality, showing a genealogical nature. (Archaeopress Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology, 3). Archaeopress, Oxford, 2018. (29 cm, VI, 96). ISBN 978-1-78491-853-8. £ 24.00.

The third volume in the series Archaeopress Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology contains the proceedings of a workshop organized in the context of the 10th ICAANE held in Wien in 2016. The title of the book is a rephrasing of that of the workshop in which the sentence order has been changed, thus putting the key-word “composite artefacts” in the first place. In the introduction, which has the significant subtitle “New Lines of Enquiry for Composite Artefacts?”, Silvana di Paolo, organizer of the workshop and editor of the volume, sets its agenda beside sketching its contents: starting from the writing of the artist and art theorist Enrico Prampolini on the definition and nature of *arte polimaterica* in the context of Italian Futurism as an art and not a mere technique and its evocative power, the scholar places “the complex relationship between environment, materials, society and materiality” as expressed by composite artefacts in the Near East at the core of the workshop focus and therefore of the here published papers. The term “composite” is discussed by di Paolo who underlines the double meaning of the word, both “made of separate parts” and “made of recognisable elements”, as for example many artificial materials such as bronze or glass, in which technology too plays an important role side by side with inventiveness and can be investigated accurately only by means of scientific analyses. No clear cut is made however between one definition and the other and the selection of case studies represented is in fact even wider: not only objects made of composite materials but also composite beings, theme of Chikako Watanabe’s paper (see

below). The cognitive aspects behind the creative process of composite artefacts would be an ultimate goal to reach and certainly a main concern in di Paolo’s perspective, which however remain poorly investigated by most of the papers, as recognized by the author.

The book is divided up into three sections according to different perspectives of the individual papers. Some matches work better than others, as for example in the first section, “The Planning: Materiality and Imagination”. The paper by di Paolo “From Hidden to Visible” raises again the terminological issue in the context of a classification of composite objects. One question is represented by the materials involved, since in many cases some are concealed beneath others, therefore assuming “a mimetic and illusionist aspect which transforms the base material into an ‘indifferent’ material”, as, for example, wood covered by metal sheets in Assyrian palaces. On the other hand, gilding of divine as well as royal statues is seen not only as a technical means to hide less precious materials underneath but also as the way to express more complex concepts symbolized by gold such as eternity which, in the case of the royal statue of Hazor, is extended also to its insignia. Another technique commented upon is the insertion of different materials which is particularly encountered in goldsmiths: here, however, bad state of preservation can sometimes prevent from recognizing recycle/reuse, as in the case of the gold sheet from Kaman-Kalehöyük. An issue addressed in relation to the famous inlaid vessel found in the Inanna temple VIIB level at Nippur is that of the process of artistic creation and its relationship with world views and conceptions: though certainly an important question, it does not appear related to composite artefacts only but to all art objects.¹) Another category described are those items in which different materials are assembled by juxtaposition, although here the distinction from the previous one appears subtle and not entirely convincing (small objects with a smooth surface, freestanding pictorial panels, such as Syrian and Levantine Middle to Late Bronze bone inlays, versus “solid body of one material [...] cut out to receive sections of another to form the surface pattern”) and in fact, as acknowledged by di Paolo herself, the two categories somehow overlap. A further confirmation of the fuzzy edges of the aforementioned categories is offered by the last category which in fact includes polymateric objects showing a mixture of different materials and techniques such as Iron Age ivories, in which aesthetic as well as widely shared symbolic values are clearly at stake. In the last paragraph, “At the Intersection between Materiality and Knowledge: the Body Metaphor”, drawing upon recent advancements in the studies on the evolution of human brain in relation to complex tool production, composite artefacts, by “mixing ideas, beliefs, materials, techniques, and assembling methods”, are considered to “have greater potentials to accumulate meanings and connections than single objects because of their ‘assembled biographies’” and thoughts are here offered on the boundary between reality and imagination, perception and creation. In this context Anzu/Imdugud (lion-headed) eagle representations are chosen as examples in which symbolic associations can be found behind the use of different materials. The assemblage of distinct and contrasting materials also in terms of colours in one and the

¹ On this question see for example Selz 2004, esp. ps 36, 37.

same object is also a means to visualize the importance of the whole over its composing elements: here what is called “the Body Metaphor” – the body meant not only in a natural but also cultural and social sense – of which the use appears strictly linked to existing world’s views and which is attested by the frequent representations of human body parts on their own as for example hands or eyes. Divine statues are often built up by discrete parts made of different materials, in which each of them plays an important role. As stated by the author at the end of the article, “this topic is intriguing but also problematic and complicated” but worthy of further investigation. It is clear that there is much study and research behind this article (the author announces a book *Divinely Inspired, Divinely Planned! Approaching Multi-Materiality in the Ancient Near East* in preparation): however, not all issues raised can be developed here thoroughly nor illustrated by a number of cases, and some passages of this dense and thought-provoking paper may result not entirely clear.

Alessandro Di Ludovico chooses to approach the question from the perspective of the extraordinary mosaic decoration of Eanna public buildings of the 4th millennium BC. Such topic has recently raised renewed interest not only in the context of the Uruk exhibition in Berlin in 2013 but also thanks to an article of the same year written by two neuroscientists specialized in visual information processing, Ph. Roi and T. Girard, which argue that the pattern of mosaic decoration was built in such a way because the ancient builders, aware of the mechanisms of human eye vision in discrete points, conveyed coded information which could be easily reproduced in other places as well. Di Ludovico, highly critical of this view, moves the discourse in the context of the debate on the development of the “earliest historical societies” and though acknowledging the concept of discretisation at the basis of the transformation of continuous motifs into assemblages of basic units, i.e. the clay cones, by making reference to current audio digital recording techniques, envisages such decoration as a further expression of the high level of abstraction achieved by the Uruk community which in fact in the same period arrives to the invention of writing.

The section “Symbols in Action” accommodates three totally different papers: the first, by Chikako Watanabe, is the only one in the entire book which takes into examination not composite artefacts, but composite creatures, the lion-dragon and what is believed to be its antecedent, the lion-headed eagle, although a marginal consideration of actual representations of the latter, which often involves the use of different materials, is included. Starting from a short review of the state of question in the discussion on materiality, the scholar describes the origin and development from one figure to the other from an iconographic point of view. The issue is a complex one since it is not certain that the two figures are actually the same; the ED plaque from Tello taken to support her idea would instead appear to me evidence that they are in fact different, at least in this period, although it is true that the lion-headed eagle almost disappears from the 2nd millennium while the other is increasingly attested from then onward. The reason for that may lie however in the popularity of the god Ningirsu/Ninurta in comparison with other Storm deities such as Ishkur/Adad, with whom the lion-dragon appears associated since the 3rd millennium. The latter figure is amply discussed by Watanabe, mostly on the basis of texts: following the interpretation that the latter figure

should be a late version of Anzu, Watanabe comments on the question of the existing parallelism between its Sumerian and Akkadian names and the association of the figure, in fact a winged roaring lion, with thunderstorm and discusses the mythological accounts attested from the 2nd millennium onward in association to the god Ninurta. Its figurative attestations with other deities in the 1st millennium leads the author to suggest a development into a sort of “neutral symbol” which remains matter for future discussion.

Changing subject and area, Elisa Roßberger examines some composite artefacts of the jewellery corpus of the Royal Hypogeum of Qatna in Syria: developing on the concept of enchantment behind similar objects, elaborating on A. Gell’s ideas, the author chooses curiously three (in fact four but the first two are placed under one and the same heading) very specific and disparate types, drop-shaped pendants and a rectangular shaped object, composite rosettes and composite eyes. Most attention is devoted in fact to the latter two types (rosettes and eyes): for both Roßberger suggests an use in diadems on the basis of the finding spots and reference to sculptural representations, possibly even combined together as often in Mesopotamia. Eyes as part of statues are also mentioned although no examples are attested in the funerary complex, as well as references to floral or eye ornaments found in contemporary texts in Syria.

The paper by Cifarelli faces the interesting question of the complex biography of composite artefacts dealing with materials from another funerary context, in first millennium Hasanlu, Iran. Here, female individuals in burials of level IVb are differentiated from male ones by pin-fastened clothes; some of the wealthiest among them have a special type of beaded chest ornament made of different materials. Beaded ornaments are also found in burials, both male and female, in association with different body parts (neck, hands and wrist). A very specific type is made by beads of *Arcularia* shells from the Mediterranean sea which become common in Middle Bronze Age burials not only at Hasanlu, the case-study, but also across a large area encompassing Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, Syria and Northern Mesopotamia (similar beads for example have been found in association to a bronze disc, maybe part of a belt, in a tomb at Qatna: Morandi Bonacossi 2011, ps 24, 25, figs 26, 27). Some items have also been found in later elite contexts such as the treasury of temple BBII in level IVB where they were possibly kept as heirlooms: as such, they could have played some role not only in the construction but also in the maintenance of prestige of local hierarchy. Cifarelli suggests a complex life cycle for these exotic items with successive transformations, from the initial processing to first use in burial equipment to final reuse in a ritually significant context, maybe as gifts to the gods. Another instance of long-living objects in the context of composite artefacts are copper alloy and iron armour scales of northern manufacture which, decorated with beads, were used as breast ornaments in some women burials of level IVB: originally part of the male military equipment, armour scales were also found elsewhere at Hasanlu IVB citadel, as for example in the treasury of temple BBII or in a storage room in the residence BBIII, but never clearly associated to male bodies found in the destruction of the site at the end of the 9th century B.C. Although the sequence leading to transformation into female ornaments is difficult to reconstruct, Cifarelli’s conclusion is that “they contributed to the construction and performance of a complex social

identity, one with ties to the past, as well as links to a particularly northern, militarized masculinity”.

In the last section, “Sum of Fragments, Sum of Worlds”, Jean Evans confronts herself with the Mesopotamian tradition of composite sculpture focusing on Early Dynastic specimens found in temples: in particular, those early specimens representing bull-men and kneeling belted human figures presumably dedicated by kings as revealed by extant cuneiform inscriptions. Composite statues involving the use of precious stones and metals are also found among later ED votive statues, although most are made by limestone apart from inlaid facial features. One example is represented by the well known statuette from Inanna temple VIIB in Nippur in green translucent stone, which shows drilled holes enabling the attachment of parts such as the head (presumably in wood), with a gold face and inlaid eyes, and the feet, now missing. The same assemblage technique is found in most of votive statuettes in Mesopotamia, which are thus considered by Evans all composite although made from one and the same material. The author elaborates further on this aspect suggesting that this technique would reveal the importance of such detached parts, head and feet, which are often found in temple deposits by themselves and would attest the practice of defunctionalizing the statuettes, somehow similar to the long-standing tradition of breaking the heads of clay figurines. If this could be a possibility, it is difficult to follow the author when includes in the discourse head and feet pendants too (i.e. finished objects by themselves), found in the same contexts: the latter should represent a different thing from the detached parts of statues, for which the technological issue is certainly determinant, and rather attest to the importance of these body parts in cultic environments. This is exactly the case of 2nd millennium clay heads and body parts clay which are also included by Evans in her overview although they clearly not only belong to a different production but also serve different purposes, some fitting well in the tradition of sculptural representations of body parts in need for healing attested in many holy places in different periods.²⁾

Frances Pinnock in her paper brings attention back to Syria and concentrates on polymateric materials from 3rd millennium Palace G in Ebla, consisting not only of sculptures but also pieces of furniture. The article offers a very detailed analysis of many of the finds, showing local peculiarities in relation to Mesopotamian counterparts: I would however mitigate the statement that polymaterism was “not such a diffused practice” there as well as the one that wooden furniture was a North Syrian trait, since chance of discoveries along with preservation issues prevent from driving a similar conclusion. Among the most interesting finds were certainly the remains of panels which decorated the walls of the Administrative Quarter, showing both military and court subjects; large size statues placed at the entrance of significant spots in the palace; miniature anthropomorphic sculptures, possibly part of what the Ebla équipe has reconstructed as “standards”, carried in ceremonies as indications of status or role by officials or, in a more elaborate version, by the upper level of hierarchy, as in the case of the well known *maliktum* and en’s standards, the latter much more fragmentary and already discussed by the author in an article of 2015.

² Moorey 2004, p. 118. The large-sized heads should instead be *partes pro toto* representing real figures: see Felli 2015, ps 219, 229 and 230.

In her reconstruction, the whole set of composite artefacts found in the palace with their precious materials and contrasting colour would have played a fundamental part in the ceremonial life of the local royal court.

The last paper by Anna Paule looks at the Near East from a Mediterranean perspective: jewellery is here examined confronting outstanding pieces within the Cypriot repertoire, for which Near Eastern (including Egypt) antecedents have already been suggested, not only from a typological but also technological point of view. The three case-studies concern examples of Late Cypriot and Archaic composite jewellery, the first two pins, combining either gold with faience or metal and organic materials (in this case the use to fasten clothes is less certain), while the third one is a single, extraordinary object, the gold necklace with an agate bead pendant from the sanctuary of Aphrodite in Arsos (6th century BC), for which Aegean, Phoenician and Egyptian links can be established. The discussion of the second category includes an ivory pomegranate “pinhead” from Enkomi which is suggested to belong to a class of ivory rods diffused in the Levant and in the Eastern Mediterranean.³⁾ Jewellery inlaid with coloured material is also considered: the broad collar from tomb Br. T. 93 in Enkomi, so similar to *usekh* collars, is certainly a clear example of the influence of Egyptian jewellery at the time of 18th-19th Dynasties and also one of the few possible objects in Cyprus pertaining to the royal court. Finally, considerations over the use of different materials and colours in Cypriot jewellery are included, with particular reference to the use of enamel/inlay.

In sum, the volume is a very heterogeneous collection of papers, composite in kind, in accordance with the topic; from mythological creatures to polymateric statues, from mosaic decorations to beaded jewellery, it is a bit difficult to see a *fil rouge* connecting all evidence described, apart from being composite in some way. The too wide scope covered by the papers both in terms of time and place is another obstacle to address in a meaningful way “the complex relationship between environment, materials, society and materiality” sought in the introduction. Almost none of the well written papers go in fact much beyond the descriptive level and when so, interpretations are highly speculative and not very interactive one with the other. The editor is certainly to be praised for addressing such an underrated topic in the field and is clear that a first important step has been accomplished by pulling together a number of scholars around it: however, a more circumscribed panorama would probably be desirable to produce future advancements in this avenue of research as wished.

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³ The inscribed piece from Jerusalem, although acknowledged as controversial, is still taken as a parallel to suggest a possible use as ceremonial sceptre which would not be otherwise attested.

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