Women of Ivory as Embodiments of Ideal Feminine Beauty in the ancient Near East during the First Millennium BCE

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of History of Art and Architecture

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ABSTRACT

This thesis identifies and explores aspects of ideal feminine beauty embodied in first millennium BCE Levantine ivory sculptures of women. A corpus of two hundred and ten works, which were examined firsthand, is the subject of interdisciplinary analysis. In Part I, the ivory sculptures are studied through traditional visual and art historical methods. Also, in order to add precision to visual observations and to reveal information not evident through visual investigation alone, a collaborative quantitative analysis of the figures’ characteristics, attributes, and proportions is pursued.

In Part II, with the aim of interpreting the meaning and cultural significance of the ivory sculptures and the ideal feminine beauty that they represented, comparative materials are introduced. Archaeological, textual, and ethnoarchaeological evidence are presented as in-roads to the ancient visual record. Comparative study illuminates cultural conceptions of beauty during the first millennium BCE and stimulates new ways of looking at and thinking about the ivories.

Overall, this thesis hopes to demonstrate the significance of representations of women (and living women themselves) in the ancient Near Eastern experience. Most excavated Levantine ivory objects derive from northern Mesopotamian, Neo-Assyrian royal contexts, where they (and the women they depicted) were appreciated as attractive,
if not exotic. The idealized women represented in ivory would have played a unique and essential role in the visual experience of the court and are likely to have been compared to living queens.

Comparative records indicate that the beauty of the ivory women may have referred to human fertility, among other positively coded traits. Mirroring the significance of the living queens, this thesis proposes that Levantine ivory sculptures of women displayed in Neo-Assyrian palaces may have contributed to an ideology of dynastic vitality and regeneration through the representation of ideal feminine beauty.
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For Poppy Gansell, who introduced me to artifacts.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The known ancient Near Eastern record, which predominantly preserves the history of men, is also the product of cumulative scholarly emphasis on the male role in politics, war, religion, and the economy. With some exceptions, vestiges of the ancient Near Eastern female are more subtly embedded in the legacy of this civilization. However, it is possible to reintegrate women into past culture. Through an analysis of ideal feminine

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beauty, this thesis aims to elucidate positive conceptions of femininity and, in turn, to help reconstitute the importance of women in ancient Near Eastern society.\(^3\)

As aesthetically pleasing luxury goods, ninth- to eighth-century BCE Levantine ivory sculptures offer a fertile starting point from which one may study ideal feminine beauty. The ivories offer the most detailed, carefully crafted corpus of ancient Near Eastern female imagery known and preserved today. Over two hundred ivory figures are available to American scholars for first-hand examination. Hundreds of additional works, not all of which are published, are currently inaccessible in Iraq but may eventually be incorporated into future phases of this project.\(^4\)


METHODOLOGY

In pursuit of ancient Near Eastern conceptions of ideal feminine beauty, this study employs an interdisciplinary approach suited to its objectives and the available evidence. In Part I (Chs. 2-5), visual and art historical techniques are combined with cutting-edge quantitative methods typically used by scientists to analyze large pools of data for meaningful information. The artistic expression of beauty in ancient culture is further illuminated in Part II (Chs. 6-8) through archaeological, textual, and ethnographic comparisons.

First-millennium BCE Levantine ivory sculptures of women, two hundred and ten of which were examined first-hand, provide the primary body of evidence for this investigation (Ch. 2). The ivories are described visually, in terms of which features occur most consistently, are carved in the most careful detail, and are either exaggerated or minimized (Ch. 3). Next, both to balance any cultural biases inherent to the observation of the sculptures and to reveal essential design criteria indicative of beauty that may be invisible to the uninformed eye, a collaborative quantitative analysis of the ivories is pursued through applied mathematics and statistics (Ch. 4). The ivories are then contextualized in relation to other corpora of first-millennium Levantine and Assyrian art to clarify which features might be specifically feminine or attractive and which are the result of artistic convention or regional style (Ch. 5). Contextualization also aids in the interpretation of the social identities of the women portrayed. Furthermore, a comparison

to other artworks illuminates the unique roles of ivory sculptures (and the ideal feminine beauty they expressed) in ancient Near Eastern visual culture.

In order to define and interpret ideal feminine beauty through the corpus of available ivory sculptures, relevant archaeological (Ch. 6), textual (Ch. 7), and ethnoarchaeological evidence (Ch. 8) is introduced. In Chapter 6 adornment and grave goods found in the tombs of elite women (mostly Neo-Assyrian queens) are analyzed to reconstruct ideals of feminine beauty that the deceased might have embodied. Archaeological materials are also compared to the visual record as an aid to the iconographic interpretation of the women and personal adornment portrayed. Chapter 7 presents a large assortment of ancient Near Eastern texts in Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Akkadian, and Sumerian. Together the texts, which, among other types of documents, include myths, love poems, and dowry lists, present evidence for cultural values relating to women and beauty. They also help to establish the perspectives from which female attractiveness might have been evaluated. Finally, ethnoarchaeological analysis considers living communities as models for the past (Ch. 8). Ideals reported in ethnographies as well as observed through my fieldwork may clarify ambiguous or fragmentary ancient evidence, while offering possible scenarios for the expression, enhancement, and appreciation of ancient Near Eastern feminine beauty (Ch. 8).


IDEAL FEMININE BEAUTY

“Ideal” indicates cultural preferences, realistic or not, that may be emulated (such as the American “Barbie” doll). “Ideal” does not necessarily pin-point an exact prototype but may express a desirable range. Ideal characteristics are identified as perfectly expressed traits, and configurations of ideal characteristics may form ideal types.

Physical and conceptual ideals embodied in the ivory sculptures are explored. Physical ideals represented in art may be discerned by analyzing which visual traits are more significant across a body of related material. Conceptual ideals are not necessarily tangible but may be symbolically manifest in art and interpreted through the analysis of iconography, aesthetics, and other patterns in the cultural record.

Here, “feminine” refers to pubescent and fully developed biological women. Fantastic creatures, such as human-headed sphinxes, may be designated as female based on comparison to human figures. While biological sex and social gender were closely linked in ancient Near Eastern culture, men and eunuchs may have displayed feminine characteristics, and some women may have possessed traditionally masculine traits.7

In ancient Near Eastern art, an established visual language marked masculinity and femininity through height, physique, facial features, dress, adornment, hairstyle, and

These signals coexisted with, but may be separated from, gender-common characteristics reflecting more general human ideals. Sometimes slightly different ideals can be linked to the same masculine and feminine visual cue (for example, “long hair” may be a desirable male as well as female trait, but its significance and/or style of rendering may differ according to gender). Likewise, the same ideal (such as reproductive fertility) may be applicable to men and women but could be represented differently.

In addition to “ideal” and “feminine,” “beauty” must be carefully defined before it can be studied. Beauty itself is a perceptible phenomenon that evokes sensory and cerebral pleasure and incites positive responses; portrayed in art, beauty reminds the beholder of these pleasures and may inspire equivalent reactions. “Beauty” represented in art is explained as the manifestation of abstract ideals through physical forms and qualities collectively recognized and appreciated as attractive with regard to a specific subject. The consistent representation of a subject as “beautiful” implies its appreciation and meaningful role in a given society.

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The beauty of an artistically rendered subject, however, lies within several layers of creation and response. Especially relevant to the present analysis are: 1) the cultural appreciation of nature versus its representation in art; (2) the cultural appreciation of artworks versus the subjects they portray; (3) cultural intervention in the natural subject represented; (4) the cultural significance of the subject.

First, with regard to nature, the aesthetic appeal of a natural subject differs fundamentally from its representation in art. Nature is interpreted as beautiful according to a culture’s aesthetics, while art is a manmade product that reflects a culture’s judgment of nature. Representations of natural beauty, then, are often artificially composed to emphasize desirable features.

Second, when attempting to study beauty represented in art, an observer’s response to what is portrayed must be separated from appreciation of the artwork itself. Standards of artistic excellence (relating, for example, to symmetry or the skillful replication or abstraction of reality) may overlap with, but do not necessarily correlate to, the culturally recognized beauty of the physical or conceptual subject portrayed. In addition to its


masterful production, response to an artwork may also be influenced by the innate properties and social values of its materials (such as ivory, precious metals, or certain stones, including alabaster and lapis lazuli).  

Third, especially with regard to human appearance, cultural intervention in nature may be fused to what is accepted as living beauty. That is, a beautiful living woman may be both innately attractive and finely crafted. In pursuit of hypothetical models, cosmetics may enhance the color and form of physical features; body shape and size may be manipulated, and jewelry, coiffure, fragrance, clothing, tattoos, and surgery, among other treatments, may “perfect” and embellish the face and body. Representations of beautiful women and cultural definitions of feminine beauty may, then, incorporate aspects of conceptual ideals, innate human characteristics, and personal enhancement.  


Finally, the beauty of a subject (in this case, women) depends on its significance to the culture evaluating it. Also, within a given culture, female identity, and therefore the standards of beauty that women are compared to, may differ based on age, rank, reproductive potential or history, health, physical strength, kin-group, character, intelligence, and wealth, among other variables.

In the formulation and implementation of any study of “ideal feminine beauty,” a framework of inquiry is best established according to the culture under investigation. Ideals of beauty and the meanings embedded in perceptible properties and visual characteristics of facial and bodily forms and ornaments have been studied in both Western and non-Western cultures by art historians and anthropologists. Feminine beauty in living Near Eastern cultures has primarily been considered through literary analysis. And, incorporating more visual evidence, studies on ideal feminine beauty

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represented in the people and arts of African cultures have contributed a great deal to the formation of this thesis.\textsuperscript{17}

From culture to culture, beauty is defined and measured uniquely. For example, beauty in Hebrew terminology (\textit{yapha}) is evaluated as something a subject emits, such as a glow or bloom; Navajo beauty (\textit{hozho}) is based on normal, balanced patterns of nature; Sanskrit beauty (\textit{sundara}) carries a sacred valence; and what is beautiful to the Yoruba of Western Nigeria is both visually and intrinsically “well-made” (\textit{ewà}).\textsuperscript{18} Expressed through a range of vocabulary, the nuances of ancient Near Eastern “beauty” are addressed in Chapter 7.\textsuperscript{19}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{18} Lawal 1974, p. 239; Crispin Sartwell, \textit{Six Names of Beauty}, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2004, pp. 28, 61, 135.}

Ancient Near Eastern literary texts compare physically ideal men and women to shiny figurines. This thesis, however, seeks to identify ideal feminine beauty as it was manifest in and read from actual ivory sculptures representing hypothetical women. The ivory craftsman’s conscious goal would perhaps have been to produce an aesthetically pleasing *sculpture* using the best materials and carving techniques, while also representing what would have been perceived as an attractive *woman*.20 Although significant aspects of attractiveness would have been inspired by nature, the ivory sculptors (demonstrating their skill and excellence) created composite images from established iconography and stock elements configured according to standard patterns.

**ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SCHOLARLY CONTEXT**

Propagated through survey books and museum exhibitions, most “masterpieces” of ancient Near Eastern art derive from an extensive pool of monumental sculptures of men. Far fewer medium- and large-scale works representing women have been excavated, inhibiting their integration into broader studies of ancient Near Eastern visual culture.

Substantial corpora of female images *do* exist but comprise assemblages of small-scale portable or applied-art, such as terracotta figurines and ivory appliqués. Traditional art historical labels of “minor art,” “decorative art,” and “craft” have isolated and

collapsed these assemblages, leading modern perspectives to question why there are “so few” (large-scale) representations of women in ancient Near Eastern art. Alternatively, we might query what specific roles the hundreds or even thousands of non-monumental female representations could have fulfilled.

Living ancient Near Eastern women generally fell outside the domain of public political power, the realm of which was saturated with elite men and their monuments. But accepting that historians can access cultural values through phenomena beyond large-scale public and political developments, analysis of a corpus of smaller-scale images of women may provide a fresh window onto ancient Near Eastern culture. Female images surely carried extensive ranges of meaning, which may have overlapped with, enhanced, or have been independent of those associated with representations of men.

Reinforcing modern perceptions of ancient Near Eastern female imagery as exceptional and peripheral, women in large- and small-scale art are often portrayed nude, with fantastic attributes, or in the company of men. Most scholarship dealing with images

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of women emphasizes their alterity and their blatantly erotic nature. The topics of women and sex in the ancient and Islamic Near East have appealed to popular and scholarly interests since Westerners began to colonize, explore, and excavate this region in the nineteenth century (Figs. 1.1, 1.2). Today historians are challenged to identify and dismantle orientalist distortions in their evidence and in their own interpretations, while seeking more objective modes of investigation.

Recently, scholars have begun to employ diverse approaches to contextualize ancient Near Eastern gender and sexuality. Particularly over the past decade, the sexual attractiveness of nude women to male viewers has received attention.

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Often considering social and sexual power dynamics, these interpretations tend to emphasize the primacy of the female body as a site of male pleasure and consider representations of idealized women to have served to elicit and entertain the male gaze.28 Here, however, I am interested in the properties underpinning the sexual connotations of the female form, while emphasizing the presence and active significance of women in ancient Near Eastern visual culture.

Pursuing new insight onto ancient Near Eastern gender through the representation of ideal feminine beauty, this thesis also hopes to complement scholarship addressing the symbolically expressive properties of the male image. Analyses aimed at decoding

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“culturally and historically specific” meaning embedded in visual characteristics interpret
the royal male body, for example, as reflecting ideals of kingship.\(^\text{29}\)

In the study of figural imagery, “portraiture” must be considered. Differing from
Western traditions, ancient Near Eastern portraiture has been defined as a
“representational category…situated somewhere between idealization and realism.”\(^\text{30}\) In
this sense, individuals were not depicted exactly as they appeared, but they could have
been identifiable through idiosyncratic details. Otherwise portraits were based on ideal
forms and characteristics that may be identified through their consistent portrayal on elite
and divine figures (such as the long beards of Neo-Assyrian rulers and the full faces of
their queens).\(^\text{31}\)

\(^{29}\) Guitty Azarpay, “A Photogrammetric Study of Three Gudea Statues,” \textit{JAOS} 110
(1990): 660-65; Gay Robins, “Proportions of Standing Figures in the North-West Palace

\(^{30}\) Irene J. Winter, review of A. Spycket, \textit{La statuaire du Proche-Orient ancien}, in \textit{JCS} 36
Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7-11, 1995},
to Winter, more traditionally Western considerations of portraiture prevailed (Betty L.
Schlossman, “Portraiture in Mesopotamia in the Late Third and Early Second Millennium B. C., Part I: The Late Third Millennium,” \textit{AfO} 26 [1978-79]: 56-77; Betty L.
Schlossman, “Portraiture in Mesopotamia in the Late Third and Early Second Millennium B. C., Part II: The Early Second Millennium,” \textit{AfO} 28 [1981-1982]: 143-70; Agnès

With respect to the ivories, there is no evidence that the images they carried were portraits. However, anthropometric, qualitative, and iconographic observations reveal ranges of both consistent and idiosyncratic characteristics, which might define regional styles or local workshops in a region. Depending on the frequency and regularity with which some variables occur, they could also reflect the “hand of the carver” or even the “whim of the carver.” In this study, separating traits indicative of ideal forms (such as the infrequent portrayal of the acceptable, and probably desirable, physical characteristic of lumbar dimples) from those potentially indicating “portraiture,” “regional style,” “workshop,” or “hand” is a complex, inevitably subjective process.\(^{32}\)

The major studies addressing Levantine ivory carvings focus on the identification of regional carving styles and workshops. Further subgroups have been proposed based on the prominent physical traits of some figures.\(^{33}\) The use of iconographic and

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qualitative variables as sorting criteria in these groupings reflects principles established in
the nineteenth century to aid in the analysis and attribution of Italian Renaissance art.\textsuperscript{34}
Through related (Morellian) methodologies, workshops and “hands” of Greek vase
painting and Cycladic sculpture have been proposed, and, in the archaeological sector,
typologies of objects such as pottery and figurines have been created.\textsuperscript{35}

Visual criteria have also been used in the aesthetic judgment of two now-famous
Near Eastern ivory sculptures (Figs. 1.3-1.5). Since its 1952 discovery in an ancient well
at the site of Nimrud, one ivory head, known as the “Mona Lisa of Nimrud,” has been
admired as “beautiful” (Figs. 1.3, 1.4). With reference to this sculpture, the excavation
director, Max Mallowan, combined the question of regional identity with cultural

\textsuperscript{34} Winter, “Establishing Group Boundaries,” 2005, pp. 23-42. In the late nineteenth
century, Giovanni Morelli developed a methodology of classification based on individual
artists’ recurrent portrayal of idiosyncratic details and personal flourishes that fell outside
of broader workshop conventions (Giovanni Morelli, \textit{Italian Painters: Critical Studies of
their Works}, translated by C. J. Ffoulkes, London: John Murray, 1892). Morelli’s general
principles have been applied with some degree of faithfulness and productivity (Bernard
Berenson, \textit{Rudiments of Connoisseurship: Study and Criticism of Italian Art}, New York,
N.Y.: Schocken, 1962 [reprint of \textit{The Study and Criticism of Italian Art}, 1902]), but
Morellian methods have also been subject to significant reevaluation and revision (Max J.
Friedlander, \textit{On Art and Connoisseurship}, translated by Tancred Borenius, Boston, Mass.:
Beacon, 1960; Richard Wollheim, “Giovanni Morelli and the Origins of Scientific
1973, pp. 177-201).

\textsuperscript{35} J. D. Beazley, \textit{Attic Red-Figure Vase Painters}, New York, N.Y.: Hacker Art Books,
1989 (1962); Pat Getz-Gentle, \textit{Personal Styles in Early Cycladic Sculpture}, Madison,
Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001. On archaeological sorting, see Margaret W.
Conkey and Christine A. Hastorf, eds., \textit{The Uses of Style in Archaeology}, Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1990; James N. Hill and Joel Gunn, eds., \textit{The Individual in
Prehistory: Studies of Variability in Style in Prehistoric Technologies}, New York, N.Y.:}
aesthetics by asking: “Whose ideal of maidenhood…Assyrian, Phoenician, or Aramaean” does this ivory beauty represent? 

Just a few days after finding the “Mona Lisa of Nimrud,” another ivory head was excavated from the same well. This work, which Mallowan suggested may have portrayed an “elderly” woman, was nicknamed the “Ugly Sister” (Fig. 1.5). In contrast to the “Mona Lisa’s” plump and shapely features, the “Ugly Sister” displays a more angular bone structure. Today the “Mona Lisa’s” nose and elaborate hairstyle are restored, but the “Ugly Sister’s” curls and overall condition remain starkly damaged.

Although the “Mona Lisa of Nimrud” is favored (partly on account of its restorations) according to modern Western aesthetics, the ancient artist surely did not intend to portray an unattractive counterpart or fail to effectively represent stock “attractive” features on the “Ugly Sister.” Indeed, many similarly configured ivory faces were also discovered at Nimrud, verifying that the “Ugly Sister” was an intentionally carved and appreciated stylistic type.

SCHOLARLY CONTEXT OF THE STUDY OF BEAUTY

Anthropological investigations present their own challenges and complexities, but being able to interact with a living population seems at times enviable to the ancient art


37 Mallowan 1966, pp. 132-33, 535, fig. 73.


39 Mallowan 1966, pp. 530, 535, fig. 449.
historian, who deals with the products of mute and invisible populations. In field studies investigating the representation of ideal feminine beauty (such as those conducted in Africa, cited above), the visual record is considered in the context of a living population that may be observed and interviewed regarding the intentions of the artists and the perceptions of the viewers. The costumes, body types, hairstyles, and facial features, for example, that are portrayed in art may be compared with the actual men and women in whose culture the images exist. Furthermore, the investigator may collect and compare responses to questions, such as: “What is beautiful?” “Is this beautiful?” “What makes it beautiful?” “How did you (the artist) make it beautiful?” Regarding feminine beauty, one could ask: “What does this kind of beauty indicate?” “Does the image physically refer to your population?” “Does this beauty symbolize any (intangible) qualities?” “Why did you portray a ‘beautiful’ woman, as opposed to an ‘average’ woman, or an ‘ugly’ woman?”

“What is the antithesis of the beauty represented here?”

Nonetheless, recent studies of ideal feminine beauty in past cultures demonstrate a promising array of tactics for reconstructing what an inaccessible culture might have considered attractive (and how, and why). In particular, investigations of Roman, Byzantine, and Italian Renaissance beauty have contributed to the formulation of the present project. A study of women and beauty in Pompeii primarily considers texts and archaeological material in a manner that highlights living intentions to fit public ideals. It includes descriptions of both attractiveness and repulsiveness to estimate hypothetical models and realities. An analysis of Byzantine beauty emphasizes grooming and

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40 Van Damme 1987.

adornment. Visual and archaeological evidence from the Byzantine period demonstrates the importance of cosmetics and jewelry in personal enhancement and social identity, despite texts that criticize feminine vanity. Finally, the expression of personal virtues through the representation of ideal feminine beauty has been explored in Renaissance portraiture. Renaissance artists’ visual emphasis of particular characteristics and their subjects’ efforts of personal enhancement demonstrate the significance of women’s portraiture as a social record.

Studies of African, Roman, Byzantine, and Renaissance beauty prepare the investigator for potential complications in reading ancient Near Eastern evidence. Major issues include the interdependence among adornment, personal enhancement (such as cosmetics and coiffure), and beauty; the interdependence among personal visual presentation, social identity, and beauty; the roles of visual, moral, and social attractiveness in beauty; the roles of male physical and emotional desire for women in the cultural conception of feminine beauty; the possible co-representation of physical reality, visual fantasy, and abstract ideals in art portraying the beautiful; and the necessity of considering all diverse and potentially contradictory records available. Additional matters entail the distinction of feminine beauty from masculine or general human attractiveness; the necessary separation of individual artists’ interpretations of beauty, general stylistic conventions, and an underlying template indicative of beauty; the range of variation or the boundaries of beauty; the coexistence of different types of beauty; and possible overlaps

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42 Walker 2003.

43 Brown et al., eds. 2001.
and disjunctions between the anticipated meaning of a work of art and observers’ interpretations of it.

SUMMARY

By reintegrating female imagery into visual culture and interpreting it as a meaningful part of elite experience and ideology, the significance of living women may also be brought to light. Although small in scale, ancient Near Eastern ivory sculptures of women embellished elite male and female domains as vivid complements to the better known large-scale images of men. Their presence alongside male imagery would not only have diversified the ancient visual experience but would have reflected the presence of women as well as men in the palace, in the pantheon, and in nature in general.

Through an analysis of ideal feminine beauty embodied in the ivory sculptures – that is, by defining what made them “attractive” and what values might have been bound up in the construction of their attractiveness – more general cultural conceptions of feminine beauty may be revealed. It is hoped that the questions and answers offered here may open pathways by which broader conceptions of ancient Near Eastern beauty and gender may be approached.

The present analysis is indebted to the previous and ongoing excavation and publication of ivory sculptures and to the large body of scholarship focusing on the stylistic classification of Levantine ivories. While the results of this thesis contribute to an understanding of ideal feminine beauty, it is anticipated that this project – especially its quantitative component – might offer new data and results that could be applied toward
future distinctions of ivory carving traditions, workshops, intermediate groups, and “hands.”
This chapter describes ivory as a raw material, explains first-millennium BCE ancient Near Eastern regional carving traditions, and discusses the known distribution of finished sculptures. A summary of the excavation of the ivories and the past century of interpretative scholarship is also offered. The iconographic repertoire of the sculptures is then presented, and the sample providing the primary pool of evidence for this thesis is introduced.

THE MATERIAL OF IVORY

Elephant ivory has been carved and valued by diverse cultures from the prehistoric period until its modern prohibition. While an ecologically limited supply underlies its social value as a luxury material, the creamy color, intricate grain, shiny surface, and translucent

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nature of ivory contribute to its visual and tactile appeal. Ivory is a relatively soft medium, well-suited for expressing fine linear and modeled details. Sculptures in the round can be carved from the solid tip of a tusk, and the hollow shaft offers seamless circular walls suitable for producing round boxes (pyxides) and tubular vessels (rhyta) (Fig. 2.1). Any part of the tusk may yield smaller objects as well as slim plaques that can be combined into panels and fitted together to form sculptural compositions decorating, for example, the backs of chairs (Fig. 2.2).

45 The natural sheen of ivory results from collagen that is diffused through the grain bringing oil to the surface. This may be enhanced by polishing a sculpture and rubbing it with additional oil (Anthony Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory: Sources, Techniques, and Uses in the Mediterranean World: A.D. 200-1400*, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985, pp. 16-17).


Some ancient Near Eastern ivory sculptures were covered with gold or silver leaf; inlaid with glass, stone, or pigment; colored by staining or painting; and possibly “ebonized.” As surface ornaments and furniture components, ivories were sometimes juxtaposed with metals and dark woods. A similar effect is achieved by the traditional Middle Eastern craft of intarsia (Fig. 2.3). Today wooden furniture, boxes, tools, and doors are inlaid with mother-of-pearl, bone, and even white plastic.


Ancient Near Eastern ivory sculpture (that is, ivory *carved* in the Levant or Mesopotamia) was derived from African elephants and now extinct “Syrian” elephants (which were related to Asian elephants), along with, perhaps, Asian elephants from India. African tusks and ebony wood were imported via Egypt to the Levant, where they were carved. Most ivory entered Mesopotamia as finished sculptures or complete, ivory embellished objects (Fig. 2.4). However, ancient texts, images, and archaeological finds also attest to the importation of raw ivory from the Levant to Assyria (Fig. 2.5). Demonstrating the local use of ivory as a raw material in Mesopotamia, some ivories from Nimrud are carved in an Assyrian style (but only one Assyrian-style ivory is included in this thesis due to their general lack of female imagery).

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LEVANTINE IVORY SCULPTURE IN THE LEVANT AND ASSYRIA

“The Levant” not only refers to the Syro-Palestinian littoral of the eastern Mediterranean, but it is also identified as a broader region corresponding to present-day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria west of the Euphrates River, and Turkey south of the Taurus Mountains from the Hatay to the Euphrates. In this thesis, “The Levant,” encompasses the Mediterranean coast, most of modern Syria, and parts of south central and southeastern Anatolia. The Levant’s northern Mediterranean coast is referred to as “Phoenicia,” and the interior is described as “North Syria” and “South Syria.”

“Assyria,” situated in northern Mesopotamia, was home to the Neo-Assyrian state during the first millennium BCE. Mesopotamia itself includes the riverine zones and the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Iraq and eastern Syria. Northern Mesopotamia (Upper Mesopotamia) is differentiated from southern Mesopotamia (Lower Mesopotamia) on the basis of its increased rainfall. Within Upper Mesopotamia, the Assyrian heartland was located around the area of the modern city of Mosul, Iraq (refer


throughout to the map, Appendix A, for the location of most ancient and modern cities and sites).

The motivations for first-millennium (Iron Age) Neo-Assyrian acquisition of raw and worked ivory are not completely understood, but second-millennium (Late Bronze Age) relationships of international exchange would have underlain later Assyrian transactions and collecting behaviors.\(^\text{56}\) Second-millennium ivories discovered at the Levantine and Mesopotamian sites of Assur,\(^\text{57}\) Tell Fakhariyah,\(^\text{58}\) Alalakh,\(^\text{59}\) Ugarit,\(^\text{60}\)

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Megiddo,\textsuperscript{61} and Lachish\textsuperscript{62} provide a precedent for the Near Eastern appreciation of ivory images of women during the first millennium (Figs. 2.6, 2.7). These second-millennium corpora also demonstrate the antiquity of first-millennium artistic traditions through continuities in iconography, style, and carving techniques.\textsuperscript{63} Some first-millennium Levantine ivory figures display formulaic physiognomies that had been represented in Syrian stone (as well as ivory) sculpture, for many centuries (Figs. 2.8, 2.9).\textsuperscript{64}

Nevertheless, it is first-millennium ivories, and specifically those of Levantine manufacture or style, that serve as the basis of this study.

No ivory “workshops” or production centers, either in the Levant or in Assyria, are archaeologically confirmed, but they have been avidly hypothesized. West Semitic inscriptions on some ivories, stylistic affinities of ivory carvings to regional and site-specific visual traditions in other media, and Assyrian art and texts suggest a variety of


possible production origins that may be linked to specific Levantine sites and historical events.  

 Probably produced in the Levant during the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, Levantine ivories remained in use in Assyria into the seventh century BCE.  

 No absolute (numerical) or historical (event-specific) dates have been linked to the production of any works, but Assyrian records log and narrate acquisitions from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (r. 883-859 BCE) through Ashurbanipal (r. 668-627 BCE).  

 Internal regional chronologies of manufacture and use remain to be resolved and synchronized, but sculptures of Phoenician make may postdate those of North Syrian production (the “Phoenician” and “North Syrian” styles are explained below).

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During the first millennium BCE, Levantine ivories circulated interculturally and sometimes traveled great distances. Near Eastern works have been recovered in the Aegean,\(^69\) at Carthage,\(^70\) as far west as Spain,\(^71\) and to the east at the site of Hasanlu in northwest Iran.\(^72\) Related works were produced in Greece and the eastern Anatolia state of Urartu.\(^73\) These peripheral ivories parallel Levantine designs and reflect first-hand knowledge of Phoenician and/or Syrian sculptures.


Scholarly interest in the cultural and geographic origins of Levantine carving traditions responds primarily to the relatively few examples of ivories that have actually been discovered in the Levant.\textsuperscript{74} Enough ivories to suggest the presence of furniture sets have been found at the sites of Samaria in Israel and Arslan Tash in Syria.\textsuperscript{75} But at Levantine sites, such as Sarepta,\textsuperscript{76} Hama,\textsuperscript{77} Tell Halaf,\textsuperscript{78} Carchemish,\textsuperscript{79} and Zinjirli,\textsuperscript{80} fewer ivories have been found.

\textsuperscript{74} Winter 1973, pp. 283-86.


\textsuperscript{77} Harald Ingholt, \textit{Rapport préliminaire sur sept campagnes de fouilles à Hama en Syrie (1932-1938)}, Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1940, pp. 104-105, pl. 34.


Most first-millennium Levantine ivories have been excavated from Neo-Assyrian palaces in Mesopotamia. At Khorsabad, ivory sculptures were discovered in the palace and between the outer and inner courts of the Nabu Temple. A few examples come from the Southwest Palace at Nineveh and elite domestic contexts at the provincial center of Til Barsip (modern Tell Ahmar, Syria). Thousands of ivories, however, were excavated at Nimrud (Fig. 2.10). Here ivories were found in the Northwest Palace, the Nabu


Temple complex (the “Ezida”), the Southeast (“Burnt”) Palace, and Fort Shalmaneser (labeled on earlier maps as the “Southwest Palace”). Inexact nineteenth-century excavation records and discrepancies in museum notes also suggest that three ivory sculptures in the round of female heads (one from “Nineveh” [BM 118217] and two from “Sharif Khan” [BM 118228, 118229]) might have been found together at Nimrud in rooms situated near the Northwest Palace.

The systematic mapping of the deposition of ivories by building, room, and floor level has begun to be pursued for Nimrud and other sites. Based on general data, their distribution across court, ceremonial, ritual, domestic, storage, and disposal contexts (such as in wells) attests to the profusion of carved ivory throughout royal space. The discovery among the burials of royal women in the Northwest Palace (Muzahem M. Hussein and Amer Suleiman, *Nimrud: A City of Golden Treasures*, Baghdad: Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage, 1999, pp. 110, 127, 128). No illustrations or specific descriptions of the ivories are provided, but at least one of the sculptures is recalled to portray the “woman at the window” motif (Herrmann and Millard 2003, p. 389).

Nimrud’s Southeast Palace and Nabu Temple were initially believed to constitute a single structure, referred to in earlier publications as the “Burnt” Palace (Barnett 1982, p. 52; Mallowan 1966, p. 342). Ivories were excavated from this area by W. F. Loftus, who died in 1858 as he was returning to England from the field. Loftus had not yet written a comprehensive report of his excavations, which were not reopened until nearly a century later by Max Mallowan (Herrmann 1986, p. 29; Mallowan 1966, pp. 200, 210-22, 342-47).


of ivory in almost exclusively royal contexts, however, may reflect selective excavation in addition to elite access to luxury goods.\(^89\)

LEVANTINE IVORIES: REGIONAL CARVING TRADITIONS AND STYLES

The Levant was not united linguistically or politically during the first or second millennium, and it encompasses environmentally diverse terrains and climates. Levantine ivories themselves are not artistically homogenous, although they share a general repertoire of imagery and are stylistically more similar to one another than to Assyrian works.

Ever since they were revealed by archaeologists in the mid-nineteenth century, scholars have emphasized the potential cultural and geographic origins of ancient Near Eastern ivory sculptures. Allison Karmel Thomason’s dissertation identifies four distinct phases of scholarship.\(^90\) In addition to being products of the intellectual cultures of their times, the contributions within these natural and necessary phases have been dependent on the growing numbers of excavated and published ivories.

Over the past thirty years, while the excavation and publication of new ivories has slowed down, scholars have begun to reconsider the organization of the ivories into regional styles, groups, and subgroups. It has also been possible in recent decades to reflect upon issues of manufacture, function, and aesthetics, as well as the cultural and

\(^89\) Herrmann 1986, p. 47; Herrmann and Millard 2003.

\(^90\) Thomason 1999, pp. 16-54.
ideological meaning of Levantine ivories in Assyrian contexts. Recognizing the association of the ivories’ stylistic characteristics with different regions, if not workshops and hands, is a fundamental prerequisite to the visual analysis of ideal feminine beauty pursued here. However, ultimately emphasized in this thesis is the ivories’ meaning in relation to the experience of the carvers and, especially, of the beholders in terms of cultural ideals as well as state ideology.

When first discovered in Assyria, Levantine ivories were viewed as stylistically anomalous, Egyptianizing artworks. Their origins were soon linked to regions west of the Euphrates River. With the excavation of many more ivories in the early twentieth century, following the efforts of Frederik Poulsen (himself a Classicist), Levantine ivories were categorized as “Phoenician” and “Syrian.” On the basis of iconography and expressive properties, Richard Barnett, British Museum curator from the 1930s to the

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92 Byzantine response and experience with relation to ivories is discussed in Cutler 1994, pp. 19-40.


1970s, sorted and catalogued the museum’s large collection of Nimrud ivories according to these regional “schools.”

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, new excavations at Nimrud (cited above), led by Max Mallowan, followed by David Oates, revealed thousands more ivories that required cataloguing and publication. Barnett’s 1957 publication of the nineteenth-century Nimrud finds provided a comparative foundation for the interpretation of the newly excavated works. From the 1960s to the present, the ongoing publication of the bulk and diversity of the Nimrud finds has motivated, necessitated, and provided data for refinements in the regional grouping and subgrouping of various media of Levantine art.

Beginning in the 1970s, Irene Winter sought to define more precisely the sites of production, geographic boundaries, and distribution of regional carving styles of the ivories. She has emphasized the significance of “style” over iconography alone as a sorting criterion. Employing overlapping but contrasting approaches, Winter and Georgina Herrmann, who has published most of the mid-century Nimrud finds, attempted to isolate meaningful groups and subgroups of ivories (reflecting production centers and workshops) within broader regional designations.

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95 Barnett 1957.


Presently, scholars identify, but continue to revise and refine, at least three visually distinct Levantine carving traditions: “Phoenician,” “North Syrian,” and “South Syrian” or “Intermediate.” Over the past decade and a half, Herrmann has enabled ongoing research by continuing to clarify the methods, terminology, definitions, and hypotheses established by her Nimrud fascicles.  It is recognized that while specific criteria define each group, the exclusive boundaries of these “groups” are rather indistinct, and the weight and selection of the grouping criteria are currently under rigorous investigation. Some ivories seem to fall between established designations, while others demonstrate significant

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relationships to more than one group; some sculptures are anomalous, and clusters of others may constitute new groups.100

“Phoenician” describes artifacts produced in an artistic tradition associated with the geographic zone of coastal Israel, Lebanon, and Syria, extending inland to the Anti-Lebanon Mountains.101 Sidon, Tyre, and Sarepta are among the urban centers that thrived amid this cultural and political mosaic during the first millennium BCE. Phoenician artistic style emulates, but does not duplicate, Egyptian art. Human figures may be physically rendered and dressed in an Egyptian manner, and Nilotic and Egyptian mythological iconography are prominent. Affinities to Egyptian art are also evident in the attenuation of forms poised in spatially balanced tableaux (Fig. 2.11).102 Furthermore, polychrome inlay on Phoenician ivories may be compared to the ornate colors preserved on Egyptian woodwork.103

“North Syrian” ivories are presumed to have been manufactured in northern present-day Syria and southern Turkey, in an area situated east of the Amanus Mountains and west of the Euphrates River, bounded by the Taurus Mountains to the north and the


Orontes River to the south. The first-millennium BCE cities of Guzana (today’s site of Tell Halaf), Aleppo, and Carchemish are among those in this region. Compared to Phoenician-style art, characteristics of the “North Syrian” style include more robust figures, more powerful dynamics of movement, and a tendency to fill available space rather than to incorporate it into the rhythm of an image (Fig. 2.12). While Egyptian iconography is referenced, North Syrian artists quoted it in the local style and often corrupted motifs that were more accurately (but not perfectly) depicted in Phoenician art.

“The South Syrian” designates a third potential regional tradition of ivory carving. Situated in southwest Syria, this zone includes the cities of Hama and Damascus. The “South Syrian” tradition seems to be a hybrid of Phoenician and North Syrian styles, but its actuality remains debated. Herrmann, for example, refers to this phenomenon as an “Intermediate” style, the identity of which she does not necessarily link to a unique region. Recently, Dirk Wicke questioned the validity of any “Intermediate” or “South Syrian” tradition, suggesting that ivories categorized in this manner might be poor quality sculptures of Phoenician craftsmanship.

106 Winter 1981.
As mentioned above, there is no unequivocal evidence of any permanent ivory production workshop. But at the city of Hamath (modern Hama, Syria) an excavated room revealed ivory chips and splinters.\(^9\) Similar evidence has been found at other Levantine sites, and ivory tusks and “Egyptian” blue paste uncovered at Nimrud’s Fort Shalmaneser suggest that at least some Levantine-style sculptural production or repair took place in Assyria.\(^10\) Additionally, a relatively recently excavated undecorated, roughly carved ivory sculpture from Til Barsip implies local production at this peripheral Neo-Assyrian site.\(^11\) Detracting from a positive identification of any of these contexts as a “workshop,” tools have never been found in association with debris.\(^12\) A lack of tools, however, may be explained by scenarios in which craftsmen (either local or itinerant) would have carried their own implements to and from ateliers.\(^13\)


\(^10\) Layard 1882, p. 195; Mallowan 1966, pp. 482-83.


\(^12\) Regarding the archaeological identification of workshops, see Gubel 1987, p. 27; Lafrenz 2003, pp. 57-58. On the types of tools probably used by ivory carvers, see Barnett 1982, pp. 11-14; Gubel 1987, p. 32; Herrmann 1986, pp. 55-56; Mallowan 1966, pp. 483-84. A comparative assortment of bone and ivory debris and objects in various phases of production has been excavated from the Palatine Hill in Rome (Archer St. Clair, “Evidence for Late Antique Bone and Ivory Carving on the Northeast Slope of the Palatine: The Palatine East Excavation,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 50 [1996]: 369-74).

LEVANTINE IVORIES: OBJECTS AND ICONOGRAPHY

Although the origins and production schemes of Levantine ivories remain unresolved, having recovered thousands of sculptures from archaeological contexts, it is possible to consider their original uses. In general, Levantine ivory adorned and constituted a range of objects including statuettes, fans, mirrors, rhyta, pyxides, cosmetic palettes, furniture, and horse trappings. Sculptures may also have decorated walls and doors.114 Considering the assorted ways in which ivory was employed, works may have been owned, used, and/or seen by men, women, and eunuchs associated with and visiting the Neo-Assyrian court.115 A well-known relief sculpture from the North Palace at Nineveh demonstrates this type of mixed-gender audience (Figs. 2.13a-b). Here the ruler, Ashurbanipal (r. 668-627 BCE), and his queen, Libbali-Sharrat, are shown banqueting in a garden. The array of furniture and furnishings at the banquet includes types known from texts and the archaeological record to have been decorated with or made entirely of ivory.116


116 Curtis 1996; Gubel 1987; Herrmann 1996; Mallowan and Herrmann 1974; Thomason 1999, pp. 393-401; Winter, “Ivory: Exotic Furniture,” 2005. An indigenous Assyrian production of the couch on which the king reclines has recently been proposed (Ellen Rehm, “Assyrische Möbel für den assyrischen Herrscher!,” in Crafts and Images in Contact: Studies on Eastern Mediterranean Art of the First Millennium BCE, edited by Claudia E. Suter and Christoph Uehlinger, OBO 210, Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005, pp. 187-206). However, I would argue that it is indeed likely (and would have been ideologically significant) that the couch is of Levantine origin – the Assyrian style of the figures depicted on its supports may be attributed to the Assyrian artists who carved the orthostat.
A varied but relatively limited iconographic repertoire is represented on Levantine ivories. In addition to female imagery, the sculptures portray Egyptian mythology, heroes slaying lions and griffins, banquets, animals, vegetation, and geometric decoration. Architecture (with the exception of plaques depicting the “woman at the window” motif) and military combat are generally not represented in Levantine ivory carving but do occur on Assyrian-style ivories. In most cases, Levantine imagery transcends regional/stylistic boundaries, and a cross-cultural or cross-regional iconographic repertoire appropriate for ivory carving was probably also employed for metal, steatite, bone, and wooden objects.\textsuperscript{117}

Images of human and fantastic women occur in standard iconographic formats across the Levantine carving traditions. Sphinxes typically have female heads (Figs. 2.14-2.16). The motif known as the “woman at the window” portrays heads and sometimes also the necks and shoulders of human women peering out of window frames (Figs. 2.17, 2.18). Full-length female figures are depicted in the nude (Figs. 2.19, 2.20) as well as in long robes (Figs. 2.21-2.23). The dressed figures include winged women participating in rituals and wingless elite women banqueting, holding flowers, and playing musical instruments.\textsuperscript{118} However, the majority of the surviving ivories of women preserve only heads (Figs. 1.4, 1.5, 2.24-2.26). The original association of these heads with human or

\textsuperscript{117} Similarities between first-millennium BCE Levantine ivory sculptures and steatite pyxides and cosmetics spoons or “hand-lion bowls” dated to the same period from Syria are striking and warrant future investigation (Mazzoni 2005, pp. 43-68; Winter 1973, pp. 399-401).

fantastic bodies, window frames, and/or narrative scenes can be reconstructed in many cases. But some heads might have been intended as independent components of objects (such as knobs for boxes).

Unlike male figures, women are not shown hunting, but, as “mistress of the animals” (*potnia theron* in the Greek tradition), they are represented holding lions upside down by their tails (Fig. 2.19).¹¹⁹ Men and women are sometimes portrayed banqueting in mixed company and working together in ceremonial contexts. Only women are ever portrayed in window frames.¹²⁰ Most sphinxes are female, but some are bearded, indicating their masculinity, and the gender of others is indistinct. Female clothing entails long dresses (Figs. 2.21-2.23), while bare-chested men wear short kilts, often slit to reveal the thigh (Figs. 2.11, 2.12). Nude women carved in relief and in the round face forward displaying their breasts, pubic areas, and buttocks (Figs. 2.19, 2.20, see also, Fig. 3.3). Male figures, however, are mostly carved in relief and shown in profile; their genitalia and nude buttocks are not shown.¹²¹


Elaborately coiffed and adorned ivory women are depicted in direct association with favorably regarded or auspicious imagery such as blooming flowers, elite males, and divine emblems. The ivory subjects of nude women, winged women, and female-headed sphinxes occurred in Levantine and Neo-Assyrian cultures on metal jewelry, ivory and metal equestrian gear, and large-scale architectural stone sculptures marking liminal spaces. In these contexts, images of women appear to have served supernaturally protective roles.122

Women were conspicuously rare in the Neo-Assyrian visual record, which differed stylistically and iconographically from that of the Levant. Assyrian orthostats, steles, and sculptures in the round primarily portrayed elite and supernatural men, while a similar inventory of figures predominated in small-scale media such as seals and Assyrian-style ivory carving. The discovery in royal Assyrian contexts of hundreds of Levantine ivories portraying women provides an exceptional corpus well suited for consideration of the expression and appreciation of ideal feminine beauty in the ancient Near East. The sculptures document both Levantine gender aesthetics and their Assyrian appreciation.

From a Neo-Assyrian perspective, Levantine ivories and the women depicted on them may have been viewed as desirably “exotic” on a literal and/or ideological level.123


123 Thomason 1999.
Also, in Assyria, the women represented may have been particularly appealing because of the rarity of indigenous female imagery/imagery of indigenous women.

**THE RESEARCH SAMPLE**

Attributes of gender have not previously been defined for figures depicted in Levantine ivory carving. The sculptures included in this research sample are determined to represent women on the basis of their faces, bodies, clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, and iconographic context. Two hundred and thirty-five figures (some of which are positioned back-to-back as single sculptures) were initially examined. Of these, a total of two hundred and ten ivories were determined to be relevant and now constitute the final sample. Among these are fifteen female-headed sphinxes, thirty “woman at the window” plaques, thirty-eight partial and full-length nude figures, and twenty-two partial and full-length clothed figures. Also included are fifty-seven female heads and faces, many of which are fragments of sphinxes, window plaques, or full-length figures. The remaining forty-eight ivories are fragments undoubtedly derived from female statues (such as a hand holding a breast). Of the total two hundred and ten examples, one hundred and seventy ivories are from Nimrud; thirty are from Arslan Tash; seven are from Khorsabad; one may be from Nineveh, and two may be from Sharif Khan.

**IVORY SCULPTURES AND FEMININE BEAUTY**

It is my argument that ivory carvings not only displayed positively coded decorative iconography but also communicated cultural values. The luxury material, the long-

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124 Cheng 2001, p. 63, n. 27.
distance circulation of carved ivories, the formal conservatism of the sculptures, and their collection in elite contexts attest to the significance of the female imagery displayed. For this reason, as well as in response to the paucity of images of women in other finely rendered visual media, ivories form the core of visual evidence for this thesis. Previous scholarship on ivories has focused on the objects themselves (moving from general to specific classification as additional ivories have been excavated and published) and more recently has explored the function, deposition, and meaning of Levantine ivories in Assyrian contexts.\textsuperscript{125} This investigation considers images of women carved in ivory more generally within visual and material culture as a case study aimed at defining and interpreting ancient Near Eastern ideal feminine beauty.

\textsuperscript{125} Thomason 1999, pp. 16-54.
CHAPTER 3

VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE IVORIES

This chapter offers a visual survey and analysis of the ivories, based primarily on objects examined first-hand, but taking into account all published first-millennium BCE Levantine ivory carvings portraying women. The aim is to identify essential aspects of feminine beauty from a visual perspective – the perspective the ancient viewers (none of whom, however, would actually have seen this broad sample) may have shared.

The observations offered below were made following the study of an initial sample of over two hundred figures. Having sketched and taken standardized notes on each ivory, I developed a familiarity with the range of variations represented among them. From this perspective, visual trends and discrepancies are reported and preliminary interpretations are offered.

Three main objectives are addressed throughout. First, the formal properties of the figures are presented, and the general frequency in the occurrence and typological variation of particular physical features and personal ornaments is discussed. Second, features consistently receiving the most careful efforts in crafting are identified. To the ancient artists and beholders, these may have been among the most visually appealing and/or meaningful characteristics of the sculptures. Finally, variations in detail are pointed out that may not have carried meaning in terms of beauty, but which may
nonetheless be relevant to studies of provenience or even to the identification of individual craftsmen’s “hands.”

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE FACE

The heads and faces of Levantine ivories received by far the most attention from craftsmen and were probably the most important parts of full-length sculptures. On fantastic figures, female bodies are never associated with animal heads, but creatures such as sphinxes are given female heads (Figs. 2.14-2.16). Also, evidence of gold leaf overlay is mostly associated with hair and headdresses. Attaching material wealth to the head would corroborate its value, and gold — more radiant than ivory — would attract the viewer’s eyes to the head first.

Across regional style groups of ivory sculpture, female faces, framed by ornate hairstyles and jewelry, tend to have big eyes, plump cheeks, prominent ears, and small mouths. Each carving is a unique work of art, but individuals are not discernable among the hundreds of generic faces, which are composed from combinations of stock features.

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127 Other heads were intended as independent images, possibly serving alone as protomes on containers or as the primary imagery of framed panels representing the “woman at the window” motif. Overall in ancient Near Eastern art, the female head tends to be displayed more prominently and in more detail than the female body. Conversely, the male body, rather than head, seems to have been emphasized (Michelle I. Marcus, “Art and Ideology in Ancient Western Asia,” in Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, edited by Jack M. Sasson, New York, N.Y.: Scribner, 1995, p. 2501).
HAIRSTYLES

An ancient reality in which hair was meticulously styled and appreciated as a primary component of female (and male) attractiveness may underlie the careful attention hairstyles received from the ivory artists. Although texts indicate that women pinned up their hair, and large-scale Levantine art often depicts women wearing veils (Figs. 5.18-5.21, for example), the ivories (representing ideal beauty) almost always display long, free hairstyles.

Two main hairstyles prevail: an Egyptian-style wig, which is segmented into small square sections (Figs. 2.16, 2.18, 2.22), and a long and wavy style, which has several variations (Figs. 2.15, 2.17, 2.19, 2.20, 2.21, 2.26). Similar to the long and wavy style is a rather close-fitting coiffure incorporating a narrow row of tight curls across the hairline (Figs. 2.14, 2.25). Other designs include multiple narrow braids or a single, broad braid (Figs. 3.1-3.3). The broad braid is closely related to second-millennium BCE hairstyles, exemplified on an ivory statue from Megiddo (Fig. 3.4).

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129 Similarities between the hairstyles, headdresses, and bodies (especially the lumbar dimples) represented on this second-millennium ivory sculpture and on various first-millennium ivories encourage a careful review of the dating of the Megiddo sculpture or of the Level VIIA palace stratum from which it was excavated (Gordon Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories*, OIP 52, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939, pp. 9-10, pl. 39, no. 175). Further challenging the Late Bronze Age date assigned to the Megiddo ivory are affinities between a flask from the same stratum and a tenth-century ivory pyxis from Tell Halaf (Richard D. Barnett, *Ancient Ivories in the Middle East and Adjacent Countries,*
during the second as well as the first millennium BCE are “Hathor curls” (Fig. 3.5). In ivory, a distinct version of this hairstyle, with a double layer of curls, occurs on winged-disk figures (Fig. 3.6).

The Egyptian hairstyle depicted on both men and women in ivory probably refers to a wig rather than actual hair (Figs. 2.11, 2.12, 2.16, 2.18, 2.22). Women generally wear a longer version that reaches to the shoulders or below, while male “wigs” end above the shoulder. In living culture, this hairstyle might have been worn by Egyptian women in the Levant, and, although undocumented, elite Near Eastern women themselves could have had wigs of this style as exotic luxury adornment. In any case, when portrayed in art, it would likely have been recognized in the Levant and probably also in Mesopotamia, as a foreign, Egyptian hairstyle.

The wig consists of small square sections of hair. These are sometimes secured with single or double bands, which may also delineate the boundary of the hairline (Figs. 2.18, 3.7, 3.8). On some examples, the square segments are smooth (Fig. 2.16). In other cases, they are incised to indicate strands of hair. When incised, the hatching among the segments may form a herringbone pattern (Fig. 3.7). Alternatively, hatch marks on the

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130 A. C. Merriam was the first to point out that this hairstyle, which is often portrayed in conjunction with bovine ears, was associated with the Egyptian cow-goddess Hathor (A. C. Merriam, “The Arrangement of Hair on the Sphinxes of Eujuk,” *AJA* 1 [1885]: 159-60).


right side of the head slant to the left, and marks on the left slant to the right (Fig. 3.8). Variations in the presence and style of bands and hatching probably reflect artistic choice or conventions, not different hairstyles. Some clearly Egyptian-style figures are also portrayed with long hair divided into parallel sections (Fig. 2.23). This may be another way of rendering the wig with square sections, or it could be a different style entirely.

The other main hairstyle is described as “long and wavy” (Figs. 2.15, 2.17, 2.19-2.21, 2.26, 3.9). This coiffure is specifically feminine and is similar to the hairstyle on a monumental ninth-century BCE stone sculpture from the North Syrian site of Tell Halaf (Fig. 5.11). The long and wavy hairstyle is not portrayed on Assyrian women in Neo-Assyrian art, but it would have been known in Assyria from the ivory sculptures and could have been worn by women of foreign or Assyrian origin at the Assyrian court.

The long and wavy hairstyle represented in ivory generally entails straight centrally parted hair that gives way to finger-curls and/or wavy tendrils falling at least to the shoulders. All versions are depicted in careful detail with fine incised lines indicating individual strands of neatly combed and arranged hair. Variations differ based on the treatment of the hair around the forehead, the curls flanking the face, and the styling of the locks falling down the back of the head.

Most examples of this hairstyle entail straight hair at the top of the head that is divided consistently into five sections (Fig. 3.10). Typically the hair is centrally parted across the forehead (Figs. 1.4, 2.15, 2.17, 2.19, 2.20, 2.24, 2.26, 3.9), but variations include thick straight “bangs” (Fig. 3.11) and short spiral-curl “bangs” (Fig. 2.21). Finger-curls positioned in front of the ears may be carved in the round with fine lines etched around them to indicate a spiral (Fig. 2.26, compare to the large-scale North Syrian
funerary monument, Fig. 5.10). Otherwise, faces are framed by curls portrayed in relief that are positioned either in front of the ears (Figs. 2.21, 3.12), behind the ears (Figs. 2.15, 2.17), or over them (Fig. 3.9).

The long and wavy hairstyle shows considerable variation in the treatment of the hair around the head. One version is almost completely straight except for deeply drilled twists across the bottom (Fig. 3.9). Variations incorporating bangs are complemented by long finger-curls all around the head (Fig. 3.11). When hair is centrally parted across the forehead, the bulk of the coiffure usually consists of wavy locks instead of finger-curls (Fig. 3.12), but braids are sometimes also worn (Fig. 3.13).

Long unbraided hair typically occurs in association with headbands tied behind the head (Fig. 3.12), while braided styles are associated with crowns (Fig. 3.13, also see Fig. 3.1). Occasionally, however, plaiting is depicted in the presence of tied ribbons (Figs. 3.2, 3.14), verifying that this was an acceptable option.

Examination of the ivory furniture panels from Room SW 7 of Fort Shalmaneser at the Neo-Assyrian capital of Nimrud demonstrates the close relationship and even ambiguity between the Egyptian-style wig and the long and wavy hairstyle. In some cases, men’s locks and beards are composed of short, intricately carved spiral-curls resembling the spiral-curl bangs occurring with long and wavy female hairstyles (Figs. 2.21, 3.15). But sometimes the segments of men’s hairstyles and beards are diagonally hatched in the manner of Egyptian-style wig segments (Fig. 3.16, compare to Figs. 3.7, 3.8). In other cases, rows of dots or tiny squares represent both male and female hair on

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associated ivory panels (Fig. 3.17). In these examples, the plain square segments are probably a stylistic convention for rendering curls rather than a “wig” (compare to Fig. 2.21), although the “curls” look like Egyptian-style wig segments (Figs. 3.18, 3.19).

The conflation of Egyptian-style wigs and other hairstyles or the lack of careful differentiation among hairstyles suggests that all figures portrayed with segmented hair may not be wearing Egyptian-style wigs, or visa versa. In any case, variations in the long and wavy hairstyle in the SW 7 ivory corpus suggest that certain differences in detail may not have had stylistic or iconographic meaning, especially on their own. In fact, it seems that, at least in some cases, the artistic styling of hair may have been more important as visual ornament than it was as an iconographic device or marker of regional production.

EYES AND EYEBROWS

Eyes are the most visually prominent facial feature on the ivories. They are often oversized and rendered in considerable detail. Arching broadly over each eye, brows are typically incised, and on some larger-scale faces they are inlaid (Figs. 1.4, 1.5, 2.8). There is no evidence that eyelashes were illustrated, but originally they could have been depicted with paint.

Three conventions of portraying eyes may be differentiated based on the articulation of the upper and lower eyelids, only the upper eyelid, or no eyelids (Fig. 3.20). Irises are sometimes outlined, and pupils (or, possibly in some cases, irises) are usually excised or finely drilled, probably to receive inlay (Fig. 3.21). Occasionally the irises or pupils themselves were drilled off-center, overlapping with, or even situated partially outside of the boundaries of the eye (Fig. 3.22; the best example of this is an
overall poorly crafted and possibly unfinished sphinx head in the Louvre [AO 11463] that is not published and not available for illustration).

NOSES

Two main types of noses are represented: an aquiline nose and a tri-lobed bulbous nose with a broad bottom and low bridge (Fig. 2.24 is bulbous; Fig. 2.26 is aquiline). Generally, the aquiline noses occur in association with thin lips, and bulbous noses are associated with fuller lips. While they may portray specific facial types, these pairings of nose- and lip-forms may also be products of (regional) artistic style.

Nostrils are drilled or excised, suggesting that they were not considered unsightly or unfeminine. On a few sculptures, in the same manner as seen on some eyes, the drill holes are slightly misplaced or inappropriately large (belonging to the same group of “woman at the window” plaques as Fig. 3.22, the nostrils on Fig. 3.8 are slightly misplaced, although the rest of the sculpture demonstrates careful craftsmanship).

MOUTHS AND LIPS

Mouths are relatively small, extending only about the width of the nose, and are always shown closed. Sometimes they give the sense of an “archaic smile” (Figs. 1.4, 2.24, 3.9). Both thin and full lips are portrayed (compare Figs. 2.24, 2.26). Thin examples are depicted by a protrusion, across which a fine straight line marks the meeting of the upper

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and lower lips. Full lips are more naturalistically modeled and are separated by a line often terminating in “tucks” at the corners of the mouth (Fig. 3.8). Very rarely is the outline of the lips articulated on either type of mouth.

EARS

Rather carefully and naturalistically rendered, ears are shown on many of the ivory women. Not all ears have earrings, but, in the absence of earrings, a few examples have small indentations (but not perforations) in the earlobes, as if they were intended to appear pierced (Fig. 3.8). Ears may have been considered attractive features, and the inclusion of ears on a sculpture would have enhanced its intricacy and allowed the craftsman to further display his skill.

Ears are generally positioned with their tops approximately at the brow-line and their lobes near the bottom of the nose. The ears of sphinxes tend to be positioned higher up on the face, but especially high ears also occur on some human figures (Figs. 2.15, 2.16, compare to Fig. 3.22). Overall, the scale, position, and alignment of the ears are more likely to be awkward or unnatural on less finely carved faces.

FACIAL STRUCTURE AND SOFT TISSUE FEATURES

Most faces on ivory figures are oval, but narrow (Fig. 2.18) and round examples also occur (Figs. 2.14, 2.17). The arc of the hairline and the shape of the chin determine the

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\[135\] This “tucked” line has triangular-shaped ends, presumably reflecting the shape of a percussion tool used to make the indentations.

shape of the face. Hairlines range from oval, to round, to almost square. Linked to hairstyle and hairline, foreheads are generally quite low, even on longer, narrower faces. Chins range from pointed to nearly flat, but most complement the oval shape of a face.

Underlying bone structure and soft tissue features play a significant role in facial appearance. The ivory women have relatively high cheekbones, and on most of the figures, the cheeks themselves, especially the apples of the cheeks, are plump. Even when cheeks are not full, they tend to consume most of the visible surface area of the face.

The portrayal of soft tissue features corresponds to the degree of detail observed on the entire sculpture. Some very sensitive treatments of the mouth show the labrale superius (the indentation above the lips and below the septum) and labrale inferius (the indentation below the bottom lip) (Fig. 3.1). Assuming a mimetic function of the sculptures, the infrequent representation of these features may be due to the variation in their visibility among the living population as well as the miniscule carving format of the figures.

Cheek dimples are not shown, but occasionally single or double chin dimples are excised or drilled (Fig. 2.14). The utter absence of cheek dimples may signal that they were not considered particularly attractive or interesting, while the inclusion of chin dimples suggests that this characteristic was admired. However, as with some treatments of the mouth, because dimples are not common among the living population, it might have seemed unnatural to show them on all or most of the ivory carvings. They could also have been depicted because their natural infrequency made them especially desirable.
SKIN

The surfaces of well preserved ivory sculptures show that the face and body were modeled to reflect the taut but supple tissue and musculature of youth. Occasionally whorls in the ivory accentuate the cheeks, the tip of nose, the arch of the back, or the shape of the thighs and calves.\textsuperscript{137} Although details ranging from chin dimples to toenails are delicately carved and individual strands of hair are precisely incised, the only lines ever shown on female skin are broad parallel arcs beneath the navel referring to creases or folds in the flesh of the belly (Figs. 3.23, 3.24).

Polished ivory was probably at least partially exposed on chryselephantine sculptures to indicate bright, fair skin. Herrmann, who has examined thousands of ivories, reports that “remains of gold sheet can frequently be seen on the hair and garments of human figures, as well as sometimes on faces, necks and hands.”\textsuperscript{138} Among my comparatively small final sample of two hundred and ten figures, I observed intact gold foil on hair, headdresses, wings, a sphinx smock, and the eyes of a figure (Fig. 3.25).\textsuperscript{139} Only a single sculpture I saw (Karlsruhe 72/523 from Arslan Tash) had any gold on the face, and this seems to be a displaced fleck that became adhered to the forehead during the modern conservation process.


\textsuperscript{139} Among the sculptures I examined that preserved gold leaf are Arslan Tash ivories MMA 57.80.4a-b, AO 11471; “Sharif Khan” ivories BM 118228, BM 118229; Nimrud ivories BM 118235, and Birmingham 1956A488. Also see M. E. L. Mallowan, \textit{Nimrud and Its Remains}, London: Collins, 1966, pp. 210, 214, 254, figs. 146, 159, 224.
BODIES

A well proportioned, slender but curvy, youthful physique was represented in ivory. For women, an hourglass figure prevails, with girth based on frontal/back width as well as on the projection of the bust and buttocks in profile. Women have proportionally small waists but typically have a slightly protruding belly (for a more exaggerated example, see Fig. 3.26). Torso musculature may be demonstrated through an indentation running between the ribs and/or extending above the navel, and, as noted above, parallel arcs indicating creases or folds in the flesh may be etched in the belly below the navel (Fig. 3.23).

Round breasts of medium to large size may be rather conical or hemispherical in form and often have erect nipples (Figs. 2.19, 2.20, 3.23, 3.26). The pubic area is indicated as a triangular zone, sometimes incorporating an incised vertical line marking the vulva, and hair is represented as horizontal rows of hatches or dots (Fig. 3.24). Arms and legs are generally slim and well proportioned with a muscular curvature. Thighs tend toward being plump but remain proportional. On rare occasions, the backs of figures in the round have lumbar dimples (Fig. 3.3). Underlying bones, including joints, shoulder blades, ribs, and the collarbone are not portrayed. Likewise, obesity, pendulous breasts, and actual rolls of fat (as opposed to incised lines on the smooth belly) are never shown.

NUDITY

Men are not depicted nude in ivory sculpture, but nudity was commonly employed to display the female body. The primary sexual parts of the female figure – the breasts and vulva – are represented in relative detail. Despite their lack of clothing, the women are
usually adorned, suggesting that their nudity is a positive and inherently meaningful state. Furthermore, nude figures show no signs of modesty: they face forward with their feet together. Occasionally women cup their breasts (Fig. 2.20); otherwise, their arms are at their sides or extended away from the body to hold palmettes or other attributes (Fig. 3.23). Some nude figures wear divine Egyptian headgear, stand atop lotus flowers, and/or grasp lions by their tails (Fig. 2.19). Through their supernatural iconography, sexual bodies, and the display contexts of some ivory plaques, nude figures may have served apotropaic as well as aesthetically stimulating purposes.¹⁴⁰

AGE

The ivory women are best described as ageless, youthful adults. Full breasts, belly fat, hourglass shapes, and hair-covered pubic areas demonstrate their post-pubescent development, while the firmness of their bodies and the roundness of their breasts indicate youth (or perhaps bodies that have not yet carried a pregnancy).

ETHNICITY

Racial differentiation is not evident among Levantine ivory women, but through iconography and physical features they might have been recognizable as Egyptian, Levantine, or generally Near Eastern. Although it is impossible to draw a direct relationship between ancient artworks and modern individuals, the visual similarities between the ivory figures and twentieth-century CE inhabitants of Turkey and Syria serve as a reminder that the ivory women’s physical features probably reflected the idealized appearances of ancient living populations.141

PERSONAL ADORNMENT

Personal adornment would have communicated status and encouraged visual interest in the figures as well as in the sculptures overall. Ivory women were depicted with an array of personal adornment including headgear, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and anklets.142 Some carefully coiffed and shaped ivory women, however, have no ornaments, and no single type of jewelry occurs on every adorned figure.


Three main types of headgear are represented: crowns, headbands, and forehead ornament diadems. A crown is characteristically rigid. It encircles or is worn overtop of the head (Figs. 2.20, 3.1, 3.13, 3.25, 3.26). Ovals and rectangles are often carved around a crown, and some crowns have wells in them that presumably would have been inlaid (Figs. 3.13, 3.27).

Headbands (also referred to as “fillets” or “circlets”) encircle the head but do not cover the top of it (Figs. 2.26, 3.2, 3.12, 3.14). Most bands are portrayed as if they were tied on, having what appears to be a knot with pendant ribbons at the back of the head (Figs. 3.12, 3.14). Pins similar in form to the “knots” depicted on the ivories have been found in Anatolian archaeological contexts, and a closely related ligature is represented on an early-first-millennium BCE basalt sphinx from the site of Tell Tayinat in the Syrian Amuq region (Fig. 3.28).

A less common type of headband consists of a narrow fillet with a single ornament or rosette positioned over the hair at the center of the forehead (Fig. 3.9). Otherwise, the

144 John Curtis, “Glass Inlays and Nimrud Ivories,” Iraq 61 (1999): 59-69. Many British Museum glass pieces are unpublished (John Curtis, personal communication, 2005), but in the future I hope to examine and directly compare them to the inlay wells on the British Museum ivories. Similar glass pieces were found at Arslan Tash; for a description and summary of their publication, see Ellen Rehm, Kykladen und Alter Orient, Karlsruhe: Badisches Landesmuseum, 1997, pp. 163, 430.
entire length of a headband is decorated with flowers and/or circles. As on the crowns, the circles are actually round inlay wells, and occasionally matter can still be observed in them (Fig. 3.29). In some cases, gold leaf is preserved on the headgear, and at Tell Halaf gold foil overlays were discovered that correspond to types of headdresses and hairstyles depicted on ivory women (Fig. 3.30).  

The third type of headdress, the forehead ornament diadem, is known from archaeological contexts at Nimrud. It consists of a frontlet attached to a circlet that is sometimes also secured by straps that cross the top of the head (Figs. 2.17-2.19, 2.24). The frontlet is an ornamental rectangular or square plaque worn over the hair at the center of the forehead. On the ivories, a single or double border of dots may bound the plaque. Its interior may be plain or filled with pin-pricks, an “X,” hatches, or cross-hatching. The bottom edge of the plaque is typically embellished with a fringe of tassels or pendants, some of which have terminals in the form of pomegranates.

In conjunction with the forehead ornament diadem, many of the ivory women are shown wearing earrings of a standard type consisting of a crescent from which three prongs extend (Figs. 2.17-2.19, 2.24). Assyrian-style ivory plaques portraying tribute processions suggest that this triple-pronged earring was an imported Levantine luxury good (Fig. 3.31).

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146 Barthel Hrouda, *Tell Halaf IV, Die Kleinfunde aus historischer Zeit*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962, pp. 9, 21, pl. 12, figs. 80-86.


Torques or wide collars sometimes adorn the necks and shoulders of nude women (Fig. 3.26). This broadly depicted manner of adornment is known from Egyptian as well as earlier second-millennium BCE Levantine artworks (Fig. 3.32). Similar Egyptian-style smocks are worn by sphinxes but are probably best identified as a type of “sphinx,” rather than “feminine,” adornment (Figs. 2.8, 2.15, 2.16).

The most frequently occurring type of neck ornament, which is often worn in conjunction with a floral headband and no earrings, consists of several tiers of beads and circular medallions that cover the throat and upper chest (Figs. 1.5, 2.26, 3.23).\textsuperscript{149} The actual means of attaching the necklace is never visible below the hair at the back of the neck, but occasionally the filaments on which the beads are strung are depicted on the side of the neck as they pass beneath the hair (Fig. 3.13). Similar necklaces have been excavated from royal female tombs at Nimrud and are recognized in earlier Mesopotamia art from the second millennium BCE (Fig. 3.32).\textsuperscript{150}

On some sculptures, a bounded row of dots occurs below the neck (Figs. 3.1, 3.25). In a few examples, this likely indicates a decorative neckline on the bodice of a garment (Fig. 3.34). But when only a woman’s head and neck are visible above the window sill, it is not clear whether the row of dots represents a garment decoration or a necklace. Despite this ambiguity, what remains significant is the consistent interest in adorning the female neck.

\textsuperscript{149} Musche 1992, pp. 212-13, fig. 2.

\textsuperscript{150} Damerji 1998, fig. 100.
Finally, ivory figures of women, both nude and clothed, are portrayed wearing bracelets and anklets. When a woman is shown dressed, her forearms are typically exposed, displaying wrist ornaments. Anklets, however, disappear beneath or may be completely obscured by a garment hem, leaving the extent of a woman’s leg adornment unclear (if not piquing curiosity). Bracelets and anklets are either portrayed singly or in what may be stacks of two to six hoops (Figs. 2.2, 2.19, 2.21, 3.11, for example). Alternatively, the “stacks of hoops” could have been intended to represent ribbed cuffs or spirals.\textsuperscript{151}

Typically, bracelets and anklets occur symmetrically on each limb. For example, if one bangle adorns the right wrist, one adorns the left wrist; if two bangles adorn the right wrist, two adorn the left wrist (or, matching double spirals or bi-ribbed cuffs are represented). When bracelets are worn, anklets are not always present or visible, and when anklets are worn, bracelets are not necessarily depicted. Also, while the number of ornaments is typically equivalent on each wrist and each ankle, when both bracelets and anklets are worn, the number of bracelets does not necessarily equal the number of anklets. In fact, it seems that more (or larger) anklets than bracelets are usually portrayed. This may reflect the ease of carrying heavier weight on the ankles, the smaller size of wrists compared to ankles, and/or that bracelets and anklets may have had slightly different social or cultural meaning.

DRESS

Among women portrayed in ivory, clothed figures are almost always shown in profile, and nude women are posed frontally to display the body. Female garments consist of long, sometimes belted, robes with full- or three-quarter-length sleeves. A great deal of variation occurs among the dresses, but two general types can be differentiated: a heavy, often girded style and a plain, clingy or diaphanous style (compare Fig. 2.21 [heavy style] with Fig. 2.23 [clingy style]). Both types of garments have relatively high necks and extend just about to the ankles. The heavier style obscures the physique and may be compared to garments portrayed on women in North Syrian stone sculpture. The clingier style usually reveals the outline of the legs and may be influenced by Egyptian fashion or artistic style.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the visual components and iconography of women portrayed in Levantine ivory have been formally described and organized. It is clear that Levantine ivory sculptures of women were produced according to stylistic conventions and formulaic configurations of stock features. Nonetheless, as hand-carved objects, each figure is unique. Slightly different combinations of features are put together in each work, and rare and unique artistic flourishes appear. The stock features vary within what are probably acceptable ranges of attractiveness, and idiosyncratic details may reflect atypical but pleasing variations.

The ivories represent youthful but post-pubescent adults with smooth, white skin. Nude figures display appealing feminine physiques that emphasize women’s breasts,
small waists, buttocks, and pubic zones. But the features receiving the most attention overall by craftsmen, and presumably by beholders, seem to be the hair, eyes, and jewelry. These details would have been visually interesting from an artistic perspective and are likely to express primary aspects of feminine beauty. Coiffure and jewelry may also have indicated regional ethnicity, social identity, and elite status – factors which themselves could be tied to ideals of beauty.

The physical variations portrayed among ivory women surely would have been admired among ancient populations. The hairstyles, jewelry, and clothing depicted are likely to reflect styles worn by elite or otherwise archetypal living women (such as brides) in the regions where the ivories were produced (the Levant) and displayed (the Levant and Assyria). Despite regional specifications, it is argued here that the ivories would have served as meaningful embodiments of ideal feminine beauty to diverse women and men of the early first millennium BCE.
CHAPTER 4

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IVORIES

It has been argued since the “New Archaeology” of the 1970s that, when there is a sufficient sample, quantitative analysis is effective in processing archaeological data, especially pottery. I would argue here that quantitative analysis of art can also be effective in revealing information not accessible through visual study alone. Therefore, in addition to using visual analysis in the study of ivory sculptures, this thesis employs a quantitative component that I hope will prove to be both innovative and productive.

Because rigorous quantitative analysis entails expertise in mathematics and, today, in computer science, the investigation presented below represents an ongoing collaboration with Columbia University’s Department of Statistics and the Department of Applied Physics and Applied Mathematics at Columbia’s Fu Foundation School of Engineering.


153 Professor Chris Wiggins, Department of Applied Physics and Applied Mathematics, The Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science, Columbia University, and Professor Tian Zheng, Department of Statistics, Columbia University, currently lead technical aspects of this project. For the contribution of preliminary results to the regional classification of the ivories, see Amy Rebecca Gansell et al., “Predicting Regional Classification of Levantine Ivory Sculptures: A Machine Learning Approach,” in *Digital Discovery: Exploring New Frontiers in Human Heritage. CAA 2006, Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology, Proceedings of the 34th*
This chapter introduces the background, objectives, methodology, and preliminary findings of a large-scale project that has the possibility of offering new and more objective descriptions of ancient Near Eastern ideal feminine beauty. Using quantitative methods, the ultimate goal is to elucidate the design templates according to which Levantine ivory sculptures of women might have been carved. These otherwise invisible models would essentially reflect the physical prototypes of beauty embodied in the ivories.

Models of ideal appearance may be based on combinations of proportional, qualitative, and iconographic characteristics. However, when dealing with so many variables and combinations of variables, weaknesses in visual analysis are that potentially significant design criteria may be overlooked, while other criteria can be inflated in importance. Also, the vast number of multivariate combinations of attributes composing intentionally configured facial, corporeal, and iconographic types cannot be visually tracked. Moreover, especially when studying "beauty," the ancient significance or insignificance of attributes (that is, the "weight" or taxonomic "rank" of variables) and their acceptable ranges of variation may be misinterpreted outside of original contexts. In short, our working premise has been that employing quantitative analysis in conjunction with the visual analysis of the ivories should reveal culturally significant data overlooked

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by human observation alone and might clarify whether visually derived data and analytical results were more or less meaningful in ancient conceptions of beauty.

BACKGROUND

It is customary to employ quantitative analysis in the classification of archaeological objects such as pottery and stone tools. But visual analysis (according to which the ivory corpus is iconographically organized in this thesis) prevails in the classification of art, assemblages of which tend to offer smaller yet more diverse and subjectively described samples. Efforts toward the regional classification of Levantine ivories have pursued multivariate analyses, but their classification criteria are identified by the (inherently biased) visual perception of the modern beholder and are often manually (and subjectively) sorted. The search for quantitatively derived, ranked and clustered characteristics defining regional types and subtypes has recently been called for. While

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models of beauty are pursued here, scholarship on regional classification provides the foundations and impetus for this project.

Most closely related to the objectives presented in this chapter is a study by Claudia Suter of ivories portraying the “woman at the window” motif.158 Although relying on visual methods, Suter identified ten “woman at the window” templates based on combinations of variables including hairstyle, jewelry, facial features, general proportion, and the architectural structure of the window frames (Fig. 4.1). While Suter herself did not present numeric data, she was the first to seriously consider facial proportions and sorted the ivories partially according to facial shape. Building on this and considering an array of iconographic formats in search of beauty templates, I was intrigued by the potential of an anthropometric (the mathematical analysis of the raw measurements of physical features) evaluation.

Prior to Suter, only one scholar had considered the proportions of the ivories. Using raw measurements, Irene Winter compared head-to-body ratios of figures depicted on a set of furniture panels from Arslan Tash. She concluded that proportional differences may reflect regional carving styles of the same iconographic themes.159 Winter’s study, based on a very small sample, was simple, manual, but effective. Most important, it demonstrated the significance of anthropomorphic proportion in Levantine ivory designs.


Also providing early models for the present collaboration are anthropometric studies of other corpora of ancient Near Eastern art. Using computers, these efforts employed the statistical techniques of cluster analysis and correspondence analysis. Most significant in this corpus has been the work of Guitty Azarpay, Michael Roaf, and Gay Robins.

Azarpay used photogrammetric measurement (a remote sensing technique for measuring two- or three-dimensional objects through photographs) to evaluate stone sculptures in the round of the third-millennium BCE ruler Gudea.160 From her data, she hypothesized a model for the statues and proposed a canon of proportion based on a conception of the body as six vertically stacked modules. Azarpay was also able to demonstrate that sculptors sometimes prioritized accommodating the dimensions of their precious raw material (diorite) over adhering to the ideal design. Potentially similar needs to adapt designs to the dimensions and carving potentials of the valuable medium of ivory will be considered here.

Roaf’s analysis of Persepolis reliefs considered both anthropometric and iconographic details.161 Among his results is evidence of the transmission of images from

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designers to artists to craftsmen, a process that may result in physical copies many degrees
removed from the original designs. When seeking conceptual templates of beauty through
physical evidence, such as of the ivories, it is important to keep this process in mind.

Finally, Gay Robins, herself an Egyptologist, used hypothetical grids (documented
for Egyptian art in sculpture and painting) to analyze the proportions of male- and eagle-
headed genies portrayed on Neo-Assyrian relief sculptures.\(^{162}\) She suggested that physical
exaggerations evident in the underlying model deviated from nature to express ideals of
masculinity. Demonstrating the likely correlation between mathematical proportions and
conceptual ideals of the human body, Robins’ conclusions also help to establish a
precedent for the present study.

Before a quantitative methodology was finalized for this project, I also consulted a
range of anthropometric studies on the art of cultures beyond the ancient Near East.
These projects responded to various research questions and technical circumstances not
necessarily addressed in scholarship on the ancient Near East and were essential
references in formulating a methodology tailored to the investigation of feminine beauty
in the small-scale ivory sculptures.\(^{163}\)

\(^{162}\) Gay Robins, “Proportions of Standing Figures in the North-West Palace of

\(^{163}\) For example, see John F. Mosteller, “The Problem of Proportions and Style in Indian
Art History: Or Why All Buddhas In Fact Do Not Look Alike,” *Art Journal* 49 (1990):
388-94; Gay Robins, *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art*, Austin, Tex.: 
University of Texas Press, 1994; K. M. Varma, “A Note on Nine Dispositions of a
Navatāla Figure in Art in Graphic and Plastic Media,” *East and West* 48 (1990): 457-67; J.
de Vries, “Pattern and Precision: Taking the Measure of Early Cycladic II Spedos Variety
Especially relevant is the work of Eleanor Guralnick, who undertook an extensive study of the proportions of archaic Greek kouroi and korai sculptures in the round.\textsuperscript{164} She collected point-to-point measurements and conducted a comparative statistical study of the data using the multivariate procedures of cluster analysis and principal components analysis.\textsuperscript{165} Guralnick then sorted her proportional data for meaning in terms of canons of proportions reflecting workshops, foreign Egyptian prototypes, and human reality. As a result she was able to calculate the proportions of “hypothetical perfectly average” men and women (or their artistic models).

Another study of particular interest here is a proportional analysis of the famous atelier model for a bust of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti.\textsuperscript{166} The geometric proportions of


\textsuperscript{165} Guralnick 1978.

this sculpture are considered to have reflected a facially ideal Amarna-period woman, a hypothesis supported by the fact that the name Nefertiti is derived from the Egyptian word for “beauty” (*nefer*). Recent study of the surface of this object suggests that the Nefertiti model may not have portrayed taught, youthful skin. Rather, it seems that an aging woman was depicted, suggesting that *proportions*, more than youth or age at all, might have defined Egyptian ideal feminine beauty.\(^{167}\)

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this project is to offer quantitatively derived templates for types of ideal feminine beauty represented among the ivories. The first aim is to articulate these types in terms of standard configurations of proportional ratios and typologies of fundamental iconographic and qualitative characteristics (such as hairstyle, nose shape, etc.). A second goal seeks to illustrate the resulting types through prototypical drawings (similar to Suter’s contribution, Fig. 4.1) indicative of the conceptual designs emulated in the production of ivory carvings of women. At present, all data have been collected, and analyses indicating the most significant variables in the representation and evaluation of ideal female forms have begun to yield results.

DATA COLLECTION AND PREPARATION

The predominant method for collecting anthropometric data involves the evaluation of works in relation to a physical, photographic, or computer-generated grid-overlay reflecting a culture’s metrology and/or conceptual units of the human form. This method is most effective when a culture’s system of measurement is known and when the figures under study are of a similar size, depth, and posture. Alternatively, point-to-point measurements may be taken by directly measuring the objects. This technique has been demonstrated to be more accurate for some corpora, but point-to-point measurements are not always an option, as they are more time consuming to collect and require close contact with the objects (fortunately neither of these constraints were present for this project).\textsuperscript{168}

On account of their different formats and necessary accommodations to the medium, the ivory sculptures vary significantly in size (maximum dimensions range from about five to fifteen centimeters) and depth (some works are carved in the round; others are nearly flat). In addition, no canon of human proportion is known to have been followed. Therefore, with permission to handle and measure a large sample of sculptures, point-to-point measurement was employed.

Between 2004 and 2006 I visited twelve museums in the United States, Europe, and Syria, collecting both anthropometric and visual data for two hundred and thirty-five ivories.\textsuperscript{169} Using calipers held parallel to the surface of the objects, I took up to seventy-

\textsuperscript{168} de Vries 2001.

\textsuperscript{169} The following museums kindly permitted me to examine ivories in their collections: The Aleppo National Museum (Syria), The Ashmolean Museum (Oxford, U.K.), Das Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe (Germany), Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (U.K.), The Boston Museum of Fine Arts (U.S.), The British Museum (London), The Louvre (Paris), The Manchester Museum (U.K.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New
five measurements of each sculpture (Figs. 4.2, 4.3). In addition, for each figure, over sixty iconographic and qualitative characteristics were recorded and described using a standard paper form (Appendix B).

All of the ivories were drawn and, when permitted, photographed. To minimize opportunities for external variations in data collection, measurement was consistently executed by the same “eye,” if not “hand.” Throughout each day of measuring I would occasionally use a bubble level to check that the calipers were parallel to the object, and a few random measurements were re-checked each day.

A more formal test for accuracy was also established. The same six objects (each representing a different image-type) were measured on three different days over a ten-month period, and the daily results were compared. This procedure detected the margin of error for point-to-point distances to be a negligible +/- 0.02 cm. The diameter of drill-holes was measured with even greater accuracy (+/- 0.01 cm). Additionally, this test showed that some distances cannot be accurately measured; these data were then discarded.171

170 I took all measurements myself, with the exception of those collected at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where I oversaw measurement conducted by Shawn Osborne, member of the museum staff, who alone was permitted to handle the objects.

171 For example, attempts to measure the distance from the bottom central boundary of the eye to the jaw-line produced erratic results.
FROM DATA TO INFORMATION

Once all reasonably accessible ivory sculptures portraying women were examined, the final record of all anthropometric, iconographic, and qualitative data for two hundred and thirty-five preliminary objects totaled over thirty-one thousand items of data. In 2005, collaboration with Professor Chris Wiggins of Columbia University’s Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Sciences was initiated with the hope that the data could be transformed into useful (and “newly discovered”) information through computer-aided quantitative analysis.

Before any analysis could begin, the data needed to be “cleaned” and prepared for computer handling. To begin, the sample was refined. Objects that did not date to the ninth or eighth century, were of non-Levantine style, or displayed any ambiguity in gender were removed from the sample. Heavily restored or severely damaged works were also eliminated. Two hundred and ten of the two hundred and thirty-five objects originally examined were retained. The data for these were then input into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet file. The Excel file was also saved as a comma-separated file for handling and processing by various types of statistical and “data mining” software (described below).

Before processing, the data were proofread manually against the original paper forms and compared to the drawings and photographs. Next, data were edited for consistency within the spreadsheet using three different, but complementary, computer programming functions (called “sed,” “awk,” and “grep”) as well as tools available in Excel. The raw measurements were converted into ratios reflecting a standard list of up to forty anthropometric relationships or proportional ratios (such as eye height to face
height). Ratios were generated through a custom-written computer program sensitive to potential pitfalls – for example (with reference to the “woman at the window” figures): “If the top of the head is not visible within the window, do not calculate any ratios that rely on the measurement ‘top of head to chin.’”

The collaborative team then customized a methodology. Art historical concerns, the type and amount of data, and the capacity of available mathematics and technology to respond to objectives were carefully considered. Innovation was necessary as the major quantitative analyses of proportional and typological design in figural art (discussed above) had been conducted mostly between the late 1970s and early 1990s using what are today outdated statistical procedures, computers, and software. Ultimately, due to the high dimensionality of the data in the ivory corpus, the team agreed that “data mining” in conjunction with “information theory” approaches were best suited to this project.

Data mining – an exploratory process also called “knowledge discovery in databases” (KDD), “information discovery,” and “data archaeology” – is a computer science subfield that analyzes large amounts of data.172 It is employed, for example, in the Human Genome Project.173 Basically, data mining looks for informative patterns within seas of data. There is a variety of processes available for data mining, but those favored for the ivory data were support vector machines (SVMs – the term “machines” is

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somewhat misleading, since it refers to algorithms) and Naïve Bayesian (NB) classifiers.\textsuperscript{174}

SVMs and NB classifiers have been employed in a number of real-world applications including personal credit evaluation, email spam-filtering, and handwriting recognition.\textsuperscript{175} Aptly, unaware of what might be offered by data mining, a recent artistic historical description of the complexities involved in the regional classification of ivory carvings referred to the challenge as “not unlike that faced by forensic experts who deal with handwriting.”\textsuperscript{176}

This project employs two cutting-edge open-source data mining software suites, Weka and Orange.\textsuperscript{177} Weka consists of a set of machine learning algorithms.\textsuperscript{178} Its Sequential Minimal Optimizer (SMO), a simple, fast algorithm that works well with sparse data sets, has proven to be particularly useful when dealing with data from


\textsuperscript{178} Weka can be downloaded for free at http://www.cs.waikato.ac.nz/ml/weka.
fragmentary archaeological objects. Orange is a data mining suite that is similar to Weka, but it can produce unique diagrams and visualizations of relationships among data.

In addition to data mining, the collaborative team chose to incorporate information theory, a subfield of applied mathematics that discerns “signals” from “noise” and is used in compact discs, modems, and satellite communications. Information theory can also be applied to a database, that is, a noisy data source. By analyzing the frequency of the entries, it can read otherwise invisible patterns in the data as “information.” Here, Matlab software is used to build and solve information theory problems that elucidate new and meaningful patterns among the ivory data.

The data mining and information theory analyses led by Wiggins include iconographic and qualitative characteristics (data that can be defined by its presence or absence, referred to as “categorical data”) as well as numerical proportions. A significant challenge of data mining and information theoretical methods is that when working with a large, diverse dataset, it is not practical to ask the computer to identify groups or patterns without some guidance. One must begin by teaching the computer to make predictions based on examples.

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180 Orange can be downloaded for free at http://www.ailab.si/orange/.

Because the template for ancient Near Eastern beauty is presently unknown, indeed that is what this project seeks to elucidate, the computer must be “trained” to recognize and identify other relationships among objects that are at least partially understood. Therefore, the computer was “taught” to recognize the regional style groups “North Syrian” and “Phoenician” with the hope that this would reveal variables most relevant to the general composition of the ivory figures. Because the interest here is in how the computer recognizes manmade categories, it is acceptable to use these imperfectly understood regional designations as the “training set.” An example is provided below based on regional style group, but the same technique can be applied in the recognition of gender, iconographic types, or potentially anything else.

The computer, of course, cannot “see” the ivories but instead relies on the mass of raw data representing each object. During the training process, the computer, in a simple example, receives data for a number of female sculptures and is “told” that they are all “North Syrian.” The computer, in turn, “learns” to recognize North Syrian works by what it “sees” as a meaningful pattern represented across all of the examples. In information theory terms, it finds a North Syrian “signal” in the “noise” of all of the data representing each object.

Next, using various data mining and information theory techniques the composition of the pattern/signal detected by the computer can be revealed. Results are composed of select variables, ranked according to their usefulness (in the computer’s “eyes”) in recognizing what it was “taught” to “read.” Continuing with the example above, the computer might recognize a “North Syrian” female figure as primarily

182 Gansell et al. 2007.
composed of variables A through E, in the order of significance “C, A, B, D, E.” The pattern/signal defining “North Syrian,” then, would be “CABDE,” with “C” being the most diagnostic and “E” being the least important but still significant. However, while variable “C” is the most diagnostic, it could still occur on non-“North Syrian” objects. More important than any single variable in the identification of a “North Syrian” object is the unique signal of “CABDE.” This signal and the variables that compose it may then be checked by the art historian and evaluated as potentially essential to the underlying design of North Syrian images of women.\(^{183}\)

Quantitative investigation of this sort complements visual study by clarifying seen and unseen variables and combinations of variables underlying visually recognized types. Data mining and information theoretical methods can also measure the significance of variables/input in relation to one another (results suggest, for example, that there is a meaningful relationship between the manner in which eyelids and nostrils are depicted). Additionally, quantitative approaches can judge the significance of variables themselves (for example, a test for differences among types of heavy garments did not reveal any meaningful divisions, indicating that the variations may not be relevant to regional designs).

Despite a reliance on hard data, the quantitative research described above is not an entirely objective process. First, it is the researcher who collects and selects the data for analysis and who designs the computer program. Only with human involvement and, indeed, influence, can a computer have data (input) to read and make decisions about. Second, the researcher can either accept or disregard the computer’s results (output),

\(^{183}\) One could also use this newly discovered information to determine whether objects of unknown regional style might be “North Syrian” (Gansell et al. 2007).
which may, for example, be skewed due to irrelevant coincidences among the data (such as occurred in this study when several sculptures were deemed related based primarily on their damaged noses).

In a project of this nature, collaboration between art historians and mathematicians and computer scientists is vital. While technical expertise is essential to quantitative analysis, only a visual expert, versed in the cultural and visual style, iconography, and context of the objects, as well as in current scholarly interpretations of them, can identify “significant” results – that is, what information is “new” and “useful.” A visual expert can also detect “wrong” results that may be traced back to errors in the data or flaws in mathematical or computer processes (as with the broken noses). Consequently, the subjective human role in quantitative research often enhances its accuracy and relevance.

Many of the data mining and information theory methods discussed above employ algorithms that resemble procedures used in multivariate statistics. Actual multivariate statistical techniques (which can be implemented independent of other methods) are also being considered for this project through collaboration with Professor Tian Zheng, Department of Statistics, Columbia University. Zheng has begun analysis of the numerical anthropometric data with the aim of discerning patterns of proportion through principal component analysis, regression, clustering, and correspondence analysis using the software packages Matlab, R, and STATA. She is in the process of determining the best methodological approach keeping in mind the diversity and fragmentary nature of the dataset (for a list of the sixty-six raw values and twenty-two ratios currently being tested, see Appendix C). Useful but uncorroborated information has been elucidated thus far. Below, therefore, the results of Wiggins’ data mining and information theory approaches
are presented and not Zheng’s statistical analyses, which are significant, but presently in earlier stages of development.\textsuperscript{184}

Because results are necessarily obtained through experimentation with custom-built equations and computer programs, patience and flexibility are essential to the success of this quantitative study.\textsuperscript{185} Nevertheless, preliminary results verify the success of the data mining and information theory approaches overseen by Wiggins and have contributed new and useful information not available through visual analysis alone.\textsuperscript{186} Described below are the findings most relevant to templates of ideal feminine beauty.\textsuperscript{187}

RESULTS

Proportions and characteristics of the face and head dominate present results. This is due to the smaller sample of bodies available for comparison and perhaps also to the visual or conceptual importance of the face and head in this corpus.\textsuperscript{188} Current results are

\textsuperscript{184}It is anticipated that I shall be able to incorporate these results in any post-dissertation publication. Ultimately I hope to synthesize the results of Wiggins’ and Zheng’s approaches.

\textsuperscript{185}In fact, it has become clear that this project would best be handled through a funded research group including computer science consultants, programming technicians, digital artists, and data entry assistants.

\textsuperscript{186}The details of the mathematic operations and custom-written computer programs that produced results are not included here, as they are the work of the mathematical experts of this collaboration (see Gansell et al. 2007). Some of the custom-written programming code is freely available at http://www.artstat.sourceforge.net.

\textsuperscript{187}Results contributing to regional classification are presented in Gansell et al. 2007.

\textsuperscript{188}Although many ivories represent full-length figures, because so many of the statues are broken and others were never intended to be full bodies, a statistically meaningful comparison of bodies may not be possible based on the current sample.
preliminary and are therefore discussed in general, rather than technically, in relation to the representation of ideal feminine beauty.

So far it has become evident that: (1) female statues were carved according to a different template than male statues; (2) the proportion of features in relation to the length of the face was significant to physical design templates; and (3) eyes, hairstyle, and jewelry in general were important variables across the corpus. Results also suggest that details of the eyes were probably drilled after the faces were carved and that variations in details of certain attributes may not have been intended to carry iconographic meaning.

First, a test for errors in regional classification (that is, does this sculpture, generally accepted as “North Syrian” on the basis of visual analysis, fit the quantitative profile for “North Syrian” works?) indicated that male sculptures do not fit the same proportional model as female sculptures. In this case, without being “told” about uniquely feminine attributes (such as jewelry) or sexual differences (breasts), the computer identified two “North Syrian”-style males (put into the batch as test cases) as “not North Syrian.” Indeed their regional carving style is indisputably “North Syrian” – these two figures are carved alongside two “North Syrian”-style women on what is probably either a fan handle or a furniture component (MMA 52.23.2). However, the North Syrian criteria that the computer was trained to recognize were based on female statues only, and so the male figures appeared as errors. It is possible to propose, therefore, that, at least among North Syrian-style sculptures, a quantitatively recognizable design for female sculptures differed from a male design.189 That is, craftsmen would not have simply added feminine

189 In the future, a larger sample will be tested to strengthen these results.
attributes and sexual traits to a general human form, but they would have consciously represented physically distinct female and male figures.

The second set of results deals with female facial ratios. Across regional style-groups, the ratio of eye height to face length is quite consistent. Although it has not been tested against a human sample, this ratio appears to reflect an unnaturally oversized proportion. Exaggeration may be interpreted as idealization, which would be motivated by cultural values of attractiveness.

Also, the relative size of all female facial features (except for ears) in comparison to the length of the face (the distance from the hairline to the bottom of the chin) and the length of the head (the distance from the top of the skull to the bottom of the chin) appears to be an important variable in the recognition of regional types. In this case, the ratios may show some variation across regions, but it is evident that craftsmen were concerned with – that is, their conceptual models were based on – the scale of individual features in accordance with vertical frameworks. Facial proportions on a vertical axis may be proposed to underlie models of attractiveness, although preferences or conventions may have varied slightly from region to region.

The third set of results describes which categorical variables are most important in the general regional classification of the ivories (for a list of sixty-three variables currently being tested, see Appendix D). Data relating to eyes, hair, and jewelry repeatedly demonstrate the most significance.\textsuperscript{190} If aspects of eyes, hairstyles, and jewelry have more

\textsuperscript{190} Specifically important is the form of the eyes, differentiated by whether upper and lower eyelids, only the upper eyelids, or no eyelids are portrayed (Fig. 3.20).
weight in the determination of regional style, they are likely to be particularly meaningful characteristics of female imagery, if not attractiveness.

Additional results relate to the drilling of the eyes. Drilled pupils or irises show remarkable consistency (some, however, were excised or unarticulated). Results indicate that the same size drill-bit was used on ivories of both regional style groups, revealing a standard Levantine toolkit, if not a general aesthetic preference for the degree of visibility of the pupils/irises.191 It is therefore surprising to find that sometimes eyes, as well as nostrils, were drilled off-center and occasionally made with drill-bits too large to fit the outline or contours of the feature (Figs. 3.8, 3.22). Cases of “sloppy” work imply that the drilling occurred after the ivories had been carved. Otherwise, one would expect a carver’s careful hand to have accommodated the drill-holes when outlining of the eyes or modeling the nose. Drilling, at least in some cases, might have been done by someone other than the carver, who after spending considerable effort producing a well-crafted sculpture, would be unlikely to have drilled (not one, but in most cases, two holes) inaccurately.

Finally, quantitative results indicate that variations in the details of some attributes do not correlate to regional style or any coherent grouping of objects (except “hand”).192 Comparison of the frontlets on “forehead ornament diadems” suggests that variations among them are not significant (Figs. 2.17-2.19, 2.24). Being potentially interchangeable, all frontlet variations might be schematizations of a single type, or, at least within the

small-scale ivory works, differences were not intended to carry meaning. Similar results demonstrate that differences in the rendering of hatch marks and bands on Egyptian-style wigs are probably insignificant in terms of iconography. Even if distinct varieties of forehead ornament diadems and Egyptian-style wigs are depicted, they do not seem to change the identities (and what might be evaluated as the attractiveness) of the women wearing them.

SUMMARY

While the ultimate goals of this collaboration continue to be pursued, preliminary results already shed light on underlying templates of ideal feminine beauty emulated in the production of ancient Near Eastern ivory carvings of women. This quantitative analysis supports the hypothesis that the carving of first-millennium BCE ivory sculptures of women was motivated by common aesthetic preferences for certain features, characteristics, and attributes. The proven statistical significance of hairstyle, eyes, jewelry, and, especially, the relative size of features in relation to the height of the face and head across regional types reveals what may the building blocks of ancient Near Eastern ideals of beauty. Most significant, current results demonstrate the utility of quantitative analysis in conjunction with visual study, as mathematical results confirm that the ivories do indeed embody an underlying prototype of beauty that is specific to female figures.
CHAPTER 5
OTHER VISUAL MEDIA

This chapter surveys small- and large-scale images of women in Levantine and Assyrian art of the early first millennium BCE. The intention is three-fold: first, to understand better the visual components and iconography of the ivory women; second, to separate evidence potentially relating to ideal feminine beauty from other visual information; and, finally, to contextualize the ivory sculptures in Levantine and Neo-Assyrian visual cultures so that their ancient values and implications may be interpreted.

First, comparing the ivories to culturally analogous Levantine art of the same period may aid in the iconographic analysis of various details and overall designs. This, in turn, could help to reveal the social and cultural identities of the women portrayed. Also, after scrutinizing what is preserved on the ivories, comparison to other visual art may be applied in the reconstitution of the original, intended appearances of the ivory women.

The second goal is to clarify which visual attributes of the ivory women were a result of regional style and crafting convention but might not have been particularly relevant to femininity or physical attractiveness. Likewise, some details may be found

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193 Although not pursued here, the relationships of small-scale ivory imagery to large-scale art have been debated.

to communicate social or cultural identities or ideals but are not necessarily linked to
gender.

Finally, the third objective seeks to contextualize the ivory sculptures in Levantine
and Neo-Assyrian visual culture. As a result, it may be possible to establish the relation
of the ivory women to other Levantine media and to see what unique roles they might
have fulfilled in the royal Assyrian contexts of their documented collection and display.

A broad range of selected works portraying women is presented below, organized
by culture/region of production (“the Levant” and “Assyria”) and by scale (“small-scale”
and “large-scale”). Many of the small-scale objects are dated rather generally to the early
first millennium BCE. Monumental Levantine art spans the end of the tenth through the
eighth centuries BCE, and most of the large-scale Neo-Assyrian works date from the
eighth and seventh centuries. This period corresponds to the probable era of Levantine
ivory production (ninth to eighth centuries) and appreciation (into the seventh century).

While not all of the objectives discussed above can be fully resolved here, this
chapter aims to present and organize the evidence so that it may continue to be used
toward these ends. Nonetheless, in some cases it is possible to offer promising hypotheses
based on comparisons of the ivory women to the art described below.

ART OF THE LEVANT

Women were not uncommon in Levantine art of the early first millennium BCE. The
personal and official identities of elite and divine women were represented in a variety of
visual media, including ivory carving. The following survey first highlights non-ivory small-scale images of women and then looks carefully at a number of large-scale Levantine stone sculptures.

Levantine art is visually differentiated by at least two regional styles: Phoenician and North Syrian. However, fewer Phoenician than North Syrian sites have been excavated (many ancient Phoenician centers, including Sidon and Tyre, are still populated today); as a result, more North Syrian images of women are known. Further contributing to this perceived imbalance is a general dearth of more durable monumental sculpture in the Phoenician tradition.

SMALL-SCALE ART OF THE LEVANT

Women are portrayed in the small-scale Levantine media of terracotta figurines, cylinder and stamp seals, jewelry, and metal bowls. The works presented here complement, but do not duplicate, aspects of ideal feminine beauty represented in ivory carving (a small-scale Levantine medium itself). Divine, fantastic, and ideal women are portrayed. Some of the women are nude, and no specific, mortal women are known to be depicted.

Handmade and composite mould- and handmade pillar figurines are common in the Levant from the eighth century BCE onward.\(^{195}\) These schematically rendered women

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are probably portrayed clothed, with the skirt of a long dress producing their “pillars.”

But, as if their chests are exposed, the figures usually hold or cover their breasts (Fig. 5.1). Otherwise, the gender of the pillar figurines is primarily communicated through jewelry – necklaces and bracelets are typically represented despite the abbreviated nature of the sculptures.

Mould-made terracotta plaques portraying nude women derive from first-millennium BCE contexts in Phoenicia and, further south, in Palestine. These sculptures resemble ivory women through their long hairstyles, jewelry, modeled breasts, and articulated pubic regions. But, iconographically, mould-made terracotta figures differ from the ivories: some of the terracotta women hold infants or tambourines, and others lie on beds (Fig. 5.2). The more intimate nature of some terracotta imagery might be attributed to private display contexts or simply be due to its unique genre.

Tiny intaglio imagery on Levantine cylinder and stamp seals depicts women as well. In this medium, a female figure (possibly the goddess Astarte) is either shown nude, bare-breasted, or holding her garment to reveal her belly and pubic region (Figs. 5.3, 5.4). The figures are curvaceous and frontally posed, but details such as jewelry and

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labia are rarely articulated. Unlike Neo-Assyrian glyptic imagery (discussed later in this chapter), the nude women on Levantine seals generally do not have wings.

Other Levantine seals carry Mesopotamian iconography of the goddess Ishtar, whose only physical indication of femininity is the lack of a beard. Equivalent to Neo-Assyrian examples, Ishtar is shown in her astral and warrior aspects and is recognized by her attributes: she stands atop a lion, has weapons, is surrounded by stars and rays, and/or is associated with seven solar orbs (Fig. 5.5).¹⁹⁸

At the North Syrian site of Zinjirli, a number of small silver and gold plaques were found that were presumably jewelry elements worn as pendants.¹⁹⁹ Most represent Ishtar in her warrior aspect, but, similar to some ivory sculptures, one pendant displays a frontally posed curvaceous nude woman holding plants in her upraised hands (Figs. 5.6, 5.7, compare to Fig. 2.19). Her centrally parted hairstyle is not completely preserved, but her breasts, navel, pubic hair, and wrist and ankle ornaments are discernable.

The final type of small-scale Levantine art discussed here includes silver, gold, and bronze bowls that have been found throughout the Near East and eastern

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Mediterranean. The interiors are typically decorated with divine and fantastic figures, plants, and animals, but a unique bronze example found at Nimrud depicts four look-alike female heads with long hair tucked behind their ears (Fig. 5.8). The heads are positioned around a central, textured space that may represent a field or lake. Behind them is a bumpy mountain range on which various animals graze among natural and schematic vegetation. Egyptian symbols and divine figures embellish the edge of the dish. Although seemingly incongruous with their surroundings, the women are probably linked to the abundance of the verdant landscape.

**LARGE-SCALE ART OF THE LEVANT**

A diverse corpus of large-scale sculptures from early-first-millennium BCE North Syria depicts women. Demonstrating iconographic variation and consistency, the survey below includes images of elite mortal women, followed by representations of divine and fantastic

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201 Layard 1853, pl. 61.

202 Compare to Layard 1853, pl. 66.

203 Expertise in Egyptian iconography might help to relate this scene to the images of nature and women portrayed in the center of the dish.
females. Select works are presented from the sites of Tell Halaf, Zinjirli, Carchemish, and (reputedly) Marash. Produced mostly under Aramaean and Neo-Hittite administrations, the sculptures date from the tenth through the eighth centuries BCE and are roughly contemporary with the period during which the ivories were carved and viewed. In fact, at Tell Halaf three ivory female heads in the round were discovered in a burial urn associated with one of the statues discussed below (Figs. 5.12, 6.2, 6.3).

Most images of mortal women are funerary monuments intended to represent specific people. The figures are not facially unique, but overall each monument is

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205 The Marash monuments were not excavated scientifically, and their exact discovery contexts are not known (Orthmann 1971, pp. 84-85).


distinct enough that it would have been recognizable to informed viewers. Rendering it impossible for an outsider to identify who is represented, however, most sculptures are not inscribed, suggesting that inscriptions were reserved for those of the highest ranks or means. Nonetheless, because monuments would not have been available to all members of society, the individuals whom they memorialize were probably elite.

Three stylistically similar ninth-century funerary sculptures of women were discovered at Tell Halaf.\(^\text{208}\) In reference to a funeral repast, the seated figures hold cups on their table-like laps.\(^\text{209}\) The first two examples are freestanding works that were buried in a mortuary temple (Fig. 5.9). One woman does not wear a headdress or any jewelry, and her blocky body, dressed in a long robe with zigzag borders at the sleeves and hem, reveals no physical indication of sex (Fig. 5.10). In addition to her beardlessness and possibly her garment, the femininity of this figure is referenced through her long and wavy hairstyle (Fig. 5.11, compare to Fig. 3.12). Incised finger-curls in the round extend in front of her ears to below her shoulders, and layers of wavy hair fall to her mid-back (compare to ivory sculpture Fig. 2.26). Her face is rather flat and schematically rendered (compare to Fig. 2.9). She has a pointed chin, deep-set outlined eyes, high cheekbones, a large nose, and thin lips similar to those depicted in ivory carving (Figs. 1.5, 2.26).

The second Halaf statue, which was positioned over the burial urn containing the above-mentioned ivory heads, is more visibly feminine (Fig. 5.12). The woman has a

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\(^{208}\) Moortgat 1955, pls. 1-9.

round face with full cheeks and a double chin. Her eyes are outlined, and her mouth is full. Although the sculpture is blocky, the body has relatively soft dimensions and ample breasts. She wears a plain ankle-length dress, three beaded necklaces, and two bracelets on each wrist. Similar to the crowns portrayed on some of the ivory women (Figs. 3.1, 3.25, also see North Syrian monuments Figs. 5.14, 5.15), her headdress consists of a circlet with upright feathers or vertical lobes. Falling to the middle of her back are braids that resemble hairstyles depicted in ivory (Fig. 5.13, compare to ivory Fig. 3.1).

The third funerary monument from Tell Halaf is a sculpture in the round of a couple, probably a husband and wife (Figs. 5.14, 5.15).210 The woman is situated to the right of the man from the viewer’s perspective, and her face is a bit broader and rounder than the man’s face is. Her plump cheeks and full mouth are analogous in their undercutting to examples preserved in ivory (Figs. 1.5, 2.8). In addition to facial characteristics, the woman’s femininity is indicated through her breasts, two necklaces, and longer hair. She wears a long-sleeved dress with undecorated bands at the neck and wrists. The man is dressed in a similar short-sleeved garment, and his costume incorporates a diagonal band that crosses his chest and back. He has no headdress, but the woman wears a circlet with upright feathers or vertical lobes (Figs. 5.12, 5.13). Her hair, which falls behind and below her shoulders, consists of striated parallel tendrils in relief that probably represent thick ringlets or braids (Fig. 5.15, compare to ivory Fig. 3.1). In contrast, the man’s hair, carved in relief, consists entirely of short spiral-curls and does not reach past his shoulders.

A second front-facing seated couple is portrayed on a ninth-century funerary stele found near Marash (Fig. 5.16).\textsuperscript{211} Emphasizing their union, each figure wraps an arm around the other’s back. With their free hands, the man holds grapes, and the woman, who is shorter and positioned on the viewer’s right, holds a mirror.\textsuperscript{212} The facial structures of the man and woman are similar and include heavy eyebrows, large eyes, and small mouths (although the man’s lips are turned down). Where the man has a beard, the woman’s chin is contoured to suggest a cleft.

The woman wears a short-sleeved robe with a fringed hem, a horizontally layered belt, a fibula, and a shawl or veil. Her breasts are not apparent. The man is dressed in a similar garment, but with a plain waistband and an “apron” on his lap. He wears no jewelry except for a narrow circlet around his head. The woman has earrings and four anklets. A short fringe of hair skims her forehead from beneath a cap or veil that is secured by a band of alternating rosettes and disks, similar to the headbands of some ivory figures (Fig. 2.26).

Banqueting is a common theme in North Syrian funerary art, and presented next are two particularly detailed examples of the subject.\textsuperscript{213} The first work, an eighth-century funerary stele from Zinjirli, shows a woman dining in the presence of a young male attendant, who is probably portrayed as less mature to communicate his status as her son


\textsuperscript{212} Most hand-held attributes shown on grave monuments are both funerary and gender-specific (Bonatz, “Syro-Hittite Funerary Monuments,” 2000, p. 191).

\textsuperscript{213} Female banqueters are represented in small-scale media such as ivory carvings found at Nimrud (Fig. 2.20) and a gold pendant from Zinjirli (Liane Jakob-Rost et al., \textit{Das Vorderasiatische Museum [Berlin]}, Mainz: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1992, p. 232, no. 176).
and heir (Fig. 5.17). Rendered in profile, the facial features of the woman and unbearded boy are quite analogous. Her feminine sex is suggested by her own beardlessness, but it is confirmed by her costume, jewelry, and bosom, which is carved rather unrealistically in low relief. Comparable to women’s garments depicted in other examples of Levantine art (compare to Fig. 5.18, described below), her skirt has vertical folds or pleats. Three anklets are visible below the hem of her dress, and she has four bangles on her left wrist. In addition, she wears a rosette bracelet, a choker, a U-shaped fibula, and a tight-fitting cap encircled by a rosette band with a long dorsal ribbon.

A second banqueting relief, likely to be from Marash and dated to the end of the ninth or early eighth century BCE, portrays a family (Fig. 5.18). To the right of a seated man and dining table are two female figures, the smaller of which stands in front of a seated woman and is probably the couple’s daughter. The facial profiles of all figures are comparable, but the female faces might be differentiated through flatter foreheads and smaller lips and eyebrows. Both females hold pomegranates; in addition, the girl holds a mirror. The women’s costume is distinct from that of the man: they wear veils with scalloped or segmented borders, horizontally layered belts, and vertically sectioned or pleated skirts (compare to Fig. 5.17). The “daughter” has a bracelet on her right wrist and three anklets on each leg, but (except for his circlet) the man and seated woman do not wear jewelry. Although larger figures traditionally represent the dead and smaller figures refer to the living, here, the marked discrepancy in the degrees of adornment among the

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figures suggests that the smaller female is particularly honored (a similar instance, Fig. 5.19, is described below).

Reputedly from Marash as well and dated to the eighth century BCE, a funerary stele portrays, in profile, a boy standing on a woman’s (presumably his mother’s) knee. Depicted in association with writing materials, the son, named “Tarhupiyas” in an accompanying inscription, is a scribe (Fig. 5.19). Facialy, mother and son are very similar: they have small mouths, slightly bulbous chins, and huge outlined eyes. However, Tarhupiyas is more ornately bedecked than his mother. A patterned V-neck and a tasseled hem enhance his garment. The mother wears a horizontally layered belt around her plain short-sleeved ankle-length dress. Single bands mark the hem of her skirt and the cuffs of her sleeves, and a double band embellishes the top of her garment. Plain bands across her forehead and a long veil with a scalloped border completely obscure her hair. She does not wear any jewelry, but Tarhupiyas is bedecked with earrings, a necklace, an armband, and wristlets. Instead of ankle bangles (commonly portrayed on women, Figs. 5.16-5.18), he wears elaborate shoes or sandals. The personal inscription and the degree of his adornment suggest that this stele specifically honors Tarhupiyas, but his small size and the embrace he receives typically identify surviving family members.

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218 A similar female garment design is portrayed on another relief believed to be from Marash (Bonatz, *Das Syro-Hethitische Grabdenkmal*, 2000, pl. XVIII, no. C51).

Images of women as well as men sometimes were accompanied by personal inscriptions. An inscribed tenth- or ninth-century BCE orthostat from Carchemish memorializes BONUS-tis, queen of Suhis II (r. 900-880 BCE) (Fig. 5.20, here she is portrayed next to a nude, winged goddess, discussed below). Shown seated in profile, her image is poorly preserved, and a careful description of her face is not possible. She wears a long veil with an unembellished border from which a bit of hair is exposed at the upper corner. Her short-sleeved, full-length garment has plain edges and is secured with a horizontally layered belt. On her visible wrist, three bangles are depicted; the opposite hand holds a spindle.

Unlike the above works, the final example of mortal women included in this survey of large-scale Levantine art does not portray or honor specific individuals, but it more generically represents a female activity or occupation (Fig. 5.21). A long series of late-ninth-century orthostats from the Neo-Hittite King’s Gate at Carchemish shows a procession of women or priestesses approaching a seated deity, presumably Kubaba, the city’s patron goddess. The women on the slab illustrated here hold mirrors and what may be grain and cultic supplies. They are dressed in plain short-sleeved, full-length robes fastened with horizontally layered belts. Their breasts are not apparent, and veils falling to the hems of their dresses conceal their hairstyles. Their generic faces and almost identical, incorporating oversized outlined eyes,

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large noses, small mouths, square jaws, and bulbous chins. Most of the women wear two bracelets on one or both wrists but are otherwise unadorned.222

In addition to the significant number of mortals depicted in large-scale North Syrian art, monumental images of divine women also occur. Introduced below are three reliefs that may represent the goddess Kubaba as well as sculptures portraying an unidentified nude goddess, a divine caryatid figure, and twin sphinxes.

An eighth-century BCE relief from Zinjirli shows a goddess in profile whose divine status is indicated by her horned headgear (Fig. 5.22).223 Similarities between her facial features, hairstyle, garment, and headdress and those portrayed on an earlier (tenth- or ninth-century) sculpture from Carchemish suggest that both of these works may represent the goddess Kubaba (Fig. 5.23).224 In the manner of the Carchemish “priestesses” (Fig. 5.21), the Zinjirli goddess strides forward holding a mirror. Similar, too, to the costume of mortal women (Figs. 5.19, 5.22), she wears a short-sleeved, full-length garment with a plain band at the hem and a horizontally layered belt. A single bangle is visible on her left wrist, and a double row of beads encircles her neck.

222 David Ussishkin has pointed out that the priestesses’ ears are revealed and concealed in a pattern that is similar to the depiction of soldiers’ ears on a related relief (David Ussishkin, “On the Dating of Some Reliefs from Carchemish and Til Barsip,” AnSt 17 [1967]: 184-85; Woolley and Barnett 1952, pls. B2a, B2b, B3b). Because a series of figures is portrayed in procession, similar to the case of the ears, I would attribute the inconsistency in the presence of bracelets to artistic variation.


224 An inscription near her head is presumably an epigraph, but it is too poorly preserved to read (Hawkins 2000, pp. 200-201).
An inscribed eighth-century BCE stele from Carchemish names Kubaba and portrays a front-facing standing woman whose head is missing (Fig. 5.24).\textsuperscript{225} Indicating her femininity, the figure holds a spindle and probably a distaff in her right hand and has a mirror in her left hand. She is dressed in a striated long-sleeved ankle-length garment, behind which the edges of a veil are visible. Several necklaces or a cloak decorated with medallions and rosettes cover her torso.\textsuperscript{226}

Also found at Carchemish is a tenth- or ninth-century BCE relief of a nude goddess (Fig. 5.20).\textsuperscript{227} Situated on an orthostat next to the queen’s clothed, profile image (described above), the goddess faces forward cupping her breasts. A horned cap and two upright wings indicate her divinity. Her round face is damaged but is dominated by oversized eyes and framed by Hathor-curls.\textsuperscript{228} The goddess appears to wear two bangles on each of her wrists and ankles, and the edges of a full-length garment or veil are visible behind her. She has a curvy physique with ample hips and a narrow waist. Her breasts are round, and her pubic triangle and labia are defined.


\textsuperscript{226} I have not seen this sculpture in person and therefore cannot offer a more specific description. A useful line drawing is published by Bittel (1980-1983, p. 261, fig. 1), but this is based on a photograph.

\textsuperscript{227} Woolley and Barnett 1952, pls. 37a, B40b.

\textsuperscript{228} Regarding Hathor-curls, see A. C. Merriam, “The Arrangement of Hair on the Sphinxes of Eujuk,” \textit{AJA} 1 (1885): 159-60.
Originally standing atop a lion supporting the façade of King Kapara’s “Temple-Palace” at Tell Halaf, is a ninth-century BCE colossal female caryatid (Figs. 5.25, 5.26).\footnote{Moortgat 1955, pls. 133-35. For a translation and discussion of the inscription, see Bruno Meissner, “Keilschrifttexte auf den steinernen Orthostaten und Statuen aus dem Tell Halaf,” \textit{Aus Fünf Jahrtausenden Morgenländischer Kultur: Festschrift Max Freiherrn von Oppenheim zum 70. Geburtstage Gewidmet von Freunden und Mitarbeitern}, AfOB 1, Berlin: Weidner, 1933, pp. 72-74; Moortgat 1955, p. 117.} In the style of the male figures flanking her (and similar to other sculptures from this site, Figs. 5.9-5.15), her body is blocky, but her breasts are indicated, and her face, featuring a cleft double chin and full cheeks, is rounder than those of the bearded men flanking her. She is dressed in an ankle-length robe embellished with beaded or segmented borders and a fringed or tasseled hem. All of the caryatids wear floral circlets. The men, however, wear no further adornment, while the woman displays six strands of neck beads, four bracelets per arm, and at least three bangles on each ankle. A pattern of alternating crescent moons and rosettes might constitute another necklace or be a garment border (Fig. 5.27). The treatment of her hair also differs from that of the male statues: it resembles a partially braided version of the long and wavy hairstyle represented in ivory carving (Fig. 5.28, compare to Fig. 5.11 and ivory sculpture Fig. 3.14). Her face is framed by straight, centrally parted hair with tendrils that are combed in front of her ears and then pulled back.

The final example included here of divine, or at least fantastic, monumental Levantine female imagery is a pair of twin sphinxes supporting a large column base from
Zinjirli dated to the eighth century BCE (Fig. 5.29). Their wavy hairstyle is not exclusively worn by women (compare to Fig. 5.30), but their full, beardless faces strongly indicate femininity. The facial features and hairstyles of some small-scale ivory sphinxes (described by Georgina Herrmann as the “round cheeked and ringletted group”) are closely related to the creatures depicted on the column bases (Fig. 2.14).

**SUMMARY OF WOMEN IN LEVANTINE ART OF THE 1ST MILLENNIUM BCE**

Because the objects included in this survey of first-millennium BCE Levantine art represent a range of centuries, sites, media, and scales, it is expected that variations should occur in their iconography. Nonetheless, it is useful to consider the group as a whole in order to make general observations. Consistently represented feminine features may be signals of gender as well as female attractiveness. Other details could identify rank, divinity, or ethnicity, in addition to or independent of gender. Moreover, some

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characteristics might more generally be the products of regional style, artistic convention, or general aesthetic preferences.

Female figures are recognizable as divine or fantastic through unrealistic factors, such as standing atop a lion, being (publicly) nude, and having wings. The primary difference between clothed, human-looking goddesses and mortal women is horned headgear and possibly elaborate necklaces of the types represented on the full-length Carchemish figure and the Halaf caryatid (Figs. 5.24, 5.27). Otherwise, equivalent facial features, hairstyles, bodies, dress, adornment, and hand-held attributes are associated with divine and mortal women. The physical model for goddess imagery appears, for the most part, to have been derived from the living world.

Breasts and veils are immediate markers of femininity in Levantine art. Also, when a man and woman are represented together, from the perspective of the viewer, the woman tends to be positioned to the right of the man and is often shorter. In addition, certain hand-held attributes, including mirrors, spindles, and pomegranates, seem to be linked to femininity but may communicate deceased status as well.⁵³³

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Facially, women have broader, rounder faces than men do. Their cheeks, mouths, and chins tend to be plumper, and women are beardless. Across media and scales of Levantine art, eyes are consistently oversized and carefully carved on men, women, and even animals. Eyes, therefore, probably indicate more general Levantine notions of the most significant feature of the face. A beautiful woman would certainly be conceived of and portrayed with large eyes, but large eyes would not have been considered uniquely feminine.

Some of the same hairstyles are portrayed on men and women, but braids and long finger-curls may be particularly feminine attributes. Overall, women tend to have longer hair than men do, even when they have similar coiffures. Lending some credence to ancient gender differentiation through hairstyle, when men and unveiled women are depicted together (Figs. 5.13, 5.14, and, in ivory carving, Fig. 2.2) they do not have the same hairstyle.

Jewelry expresses wealth and thereby social status. Portrayed in art, adornment may reflect living traditions, and, by adding detail to an image, it may enhance a work’s visual appeal as well as demonstrate a craftsman’s skill. In Levantine art, both men and women are shown wearing earrings, bracelets, and necklaces, but anklets might be an exclusively female form of adornment. Women are portrayed wearing jewelry more often then men are, and women are consistently shown wearing more jewelry at once than men are.

Female nudity in Levantine art is generally reserved for divine and small-scale figures. Women are otherwise depicted clothed in loose, modestly cut, ankle-length

dresses. Sometimes the hems of their skirts are a bit shorter in the front to reveal ankle ornaments, and breasts are occasionally apparent. Male and female clothing is similar, but, when represented together in one work, men and women wear slightly different garments. Female costume sometimes entails a horizontally layered belt and what is probably a pleated skirt.

Veils, which are never worn by men, are possibly the strongest marker of femininity, but not all women are shown wearing them. The obscuring of female hair and physique through veils and clothing is unlikely to undermine the importance of these physical features to feminine beauty or human attractiveness. In fact, veiling may reflect an ideal of public modesty and imply that hair, skin, and the body, which are exhibited through nude imagery, were exceptionally appreciated.

A number of similarities between large- and small-scale Levantine art and the ivory carvings (especially their facial features, hairstyles, and headgear) have been pointed out above. While some characteristics communicate femininity, the significance of headgear is more complicated. Floral headgear is worn by women portrayed in large-scale art as well as in ivory carvings (Figs. 2.24, 2.26, 3.14, 5.17, 5.23, 5.26). It is also represented on a sphinx from Zinjirli, a male ruler from Malatya, and the head of a horned deity from Carchemish. The distribution of this headgear indicates that it does not specify gender and probably does not express divinity, but it is likely associated with elite rank. The rosettes may reflect dedication to a particular deity (such as, Kubaba, the patron

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goddess of Carchemish). Additionally or alternatively, they could be emblematic of regional or urban affiliation (with Carchemish, for example) or express a general cultural value such as life or abundance.

When the rosette headdress is represented on women of ivory, it may have the same significance as it does in large-scale works. Otherwise, ivory craftsmen may have copied the floral headband from monumental art, where it had specific meaning, and depicted it on the ivories as purely visual embellishment. It is possible, too, that the ivory work stimulated the sometimes more crudely carved large-scale sculptures.

The “feather”-topped headgear represented on monumental sculptures of women and on some ivories is complicated to interpret (Fig. 5.12). In addition to being portrayed on women, it is shown on elite men and fantastic male creatures. The floral headband worn by the horned deity from Carchemish (cited above) has feather-like elements along the top of it, and similar feather-topped headgear is worn by Neo-Assyrian gods and goddesses (Fig. 5.5).

[236 Winter 1976, p. 46.


238 Moortgat 1955, pls. 142, 149.
NEO-ASSYRIAN ART

Large- and small-scale Neo-Assyrian art, including Assyrian-style ivory carvings, primarily portrays the male ruler, male gods and genies, and male and eunuch courtiers. Images of women are far less numerous than they are in Levantine art, and many of the women depicted on large-scale Neo-Assyrian palace orthostats are not elite Assyrians, but defeated enemies. Some liberation from male-centered iconography (and, probably, ideology) appears during the last decades of Neo-Assyrian dominance in Mesopotamia, in as short as a fifty-year period, from the end of the eighth century to the beginning of the

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seventh century BCE.\textsuperscript{241} Most of the large-scale images of women presented here derive from this phase. They include sculptures in relief and in the round depicting queens and goddesses.

Large numbers of small-scale female images were probably produced throughout the Neo-Assyrian period, but those that are preserved are generally not very detailed and do not demonstrate much variety. Unlike some large-scale works, they do not portray actual women but refer to divine and perhaps prototypical female figures. Nonetheless, in the visual experience of the Neo-Assyrian palace, images of women in small-scale media (including imported Levantine ivory sculptures) would have played an important if not essential role as complements to the male-centered royal and divine narratives dominating large-scale visual programs.

\textbf{SMALL-SCALE NEO-ASSYRIAN ART}

Reviewed below are examples of terracotta pillar figurines, seals, jewelry, and an Assyrian-style ivory carving. In small-scale Neo-Assyrian art, female figures occur more often (apparently with less restriction) than they do in large-scale art, but women still are not featured as frequently as men are.

When women are portrayed in Neo-Assyrian terracotta sculptures, their figures are often somewhat androgynous (Fig. 5.31). Instead of being shown nude, the pillar form refers to a long garment (compare to Levantine pillar sculptures, Fig. 5.1).\textsuperscript{242} Breasts are not always evident; otherwise femininity is indicated through beardlessness, neck ornaments, and, occasionally, suckling babies.

Neo-Assyrian glyptic art provides substantially more images of women. A stamp seal known from impressions found at Nineveh and Assur portrays a ruler and queen in profile as they worship a goddess, either Ishtar or Mulissu, who stands atop a lion (Fig. 5.32).\textsuperscript{243} The ruler, recognized by his fez, and the queen, recognized by a crown of city walls, both wear long garments.\textsuperscript{244} In addition to her queenly headgear, the gender of the female worshipper is designated through her shorter stature, lack of a beard, and secondary position behind the king. The figures are too miniscule, schematic, and poorly preserved to identify any further attributes or indications of gender. But also of interest on


the impressions is a scorpion, a motif known to be associated with Assyrian women, suggesting that the seal may have belonged to an elite or royal woman.\(^{245}\)

Ishtar is depicted quite frequently on Neo-Assyrian cylinder and stamp seals.\(^{246}\) Warrior, astral, and probably sexual aspects of the goddess are represented independently.\(^{247}\) In most cases Ishtar the warrior is identified by her lion and her weapons (a bow and arrows and a sword) (Fig. 5.33).\(^{248}\) She wears a horned and/or feather-topped crown and a masculine-style garment that exposes her muscular leg to about the knee. In an unusual and detailed carving, martial Ishtar is ornamented with anklets and bracelets (Fig. 5.5).

An astral aspect of Ishtar is probably indicated by a beardless divine figure encircled by a “nimbus” of “globe-tipped rays” or simply positioned within a pattern of


\(^{246}\) In addition to Ishtar, Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals depict Mulissu, the consort of the state god Assur, and Gula, the goddess of healing, who is typically shown enthroned atop a dog. Mulissu and Gula wear masculine-style open robes and are identified by their beasts and hand-held attributes (Dominique Collon, Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in The British Museum: Cylinder Seals V, Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods, London: British Museum, 2001, pp. 122-26, 138).


orbs. No beast or attributes are typically associated with this figure, who may alternatively represent the goddess Mulissu (whose identity is discussed below). One seal showing a goddess surrounded by a double circle of orbs and wearing a horned headdress with a divine, masculine-style robe might depict a female worshipper as well (Fig. 5.34). The femininity of the beardless worshipper is supported through hairstyle: a fillet appears to be worn overtop the hair, which is gathered in a large bulge or bun at the nape of the neck.

Occurring least frequently on goddess seals is imagery probably representing the sexual aspect of Ishtar: a frontally posed, nude woman who usually has four wings (Fig. 5.35). The example illustrated here is particularly detailed; most carvings are more schematic. Despite variations in detail, the figure is consistently shown with round breasts, a narrow waist, and heavy hips and thighs. Her arms extend out from her body, and her head is turned to the side to show her wavy, shoulder-length hair. Facial features are minimal, and adornment is rarely depicted. One unusual seal (BM 89382) portrays

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249 Rather than astral imagery, the “nimbus” might be a generic divine aura (Collon 2001, p. 138).


251 Alternatively, this figure could represent the goddess Shala, wife of Adad, who was associated with agriculture (Black and Green 1992, pp. 144, 172-73).


253 A seal in the British Museum (BM 104867) shows a similar nude figure wearing a double belt (Collon 2001, p. 91, pl. XXI, no. 155).
the nude, winged goddess holding pomegranates, potentially linking female nudity to sexuality through notions of human and environmental fecundity.254

Neo-Assyrian jewelry, such as a gold crown found in a queen’s tomb (Tomb III) at Nimrud, also occasionally depicts women (Fig. 5.36).255 The crown described here features pomegranates, flowers, grapevines, and eight female figures. The women, whose gender is evident through their beardlessness and breasts, are portrayed frontally wearing belted and striated short-sleeved, ankle-length dresses. They extend their arms outward beside them, and have four wings each. No jewelry is visible on them, and their hairstyles, which are difficult to discern in published photographs, may consist of wavy bangs and long locks.

Ivories carved in Assyrian style predominantly portray men in royal narratives, but an exceptional example may represent the sexual aspect of Ishtar or another supernatural female.256 Similar to some of the glyptic images described above (Fig. 5.35), this fragmentary incised plaque from Nimrud shows a frontally posed four-winged woman


with outstretched arms (Fig. 5.37). Her face and lower legs are lost. Her head is turned to the side, and a mass of long, wavy hair reaches her shoulder. A long skirt or veil is visible behind her (compare to Fig. 5.20), and her body is covered by a short-sleeved lattice-pattern bodice with a cross-hatched design over the pubic area. Breasts are not depicted, but an hourglass figure and round hips and thighs, in addition to her stance, imply femininity.

LARGE-SCALE NEO-ASSYRIAN ART

The best-known large-scale Neo-Assyrian image of an Assyrian woman is an orthostat from Room S\textsuperscript{1} of Ashurbanipal’s palace at Nineveh (Fig. 2.13a-b). This relief shows the king Ashurbanipal (r. 668-627 BCE) banqueting with his primary wife, Libbali-Sharrat.\textsuperscript{257} Although she is not identified in an inscription (her name is known from other sources), the queen is recognized through her intimate leisure with the ruler, her extravagant dress and adornment, and especially her mural crown.\textsuperscript{258} She wears a rosette bracelet on each wrist and ornately fringed crescent earrings. High around her neck is either a collar or a choker. Disks, at least some of which probably represent metal appliqués, are etched over


the surface of her tasseled shawl and dress. Stepped motifs resembling the crenellations of her crown are depicted along the borders of her robe and the tops of her shoes. Her hairstyle, earrings, and rosette bracelet are not gender-specific, but they are consistently associated with Neo-Assyrian royalty. The crown, neck ornament, and garment may simultaneously distinguish her gender and her status as queen.

Libbali-Sharrat is seated in a high-back chair, while Ashurbanipal reclines on a couch behind the table, emphasizing his primary status. Standing below them are female or eunuch attendants. In contrast to the bearded king’s slender physique, the queen and the attendants have ample but compact bodies and chubby, beardless faces with round cheeks and bulbous chins.


260 Her shoes are of a type depicted on Neo-Assyrian rulers beginning in the reign of Sennacherib (r. 704-681 BCE) (Madhloom 1970, p. 74).

261 Albenda 1976, p. 64.

A second representation of Libbali-Sharrat occurs on an inscribed limestone stele from Assur (Fig. 5.38). This fragmentary relief preserves little more than her head, shoulders, and hands. The queen’s face, shown in profile, has an oversized eye, a small nose, pudgy cheeks, and a full chin. A bit of wavy hair frames her forehead and is visible falling down the back of her head before the sculpture breaks off. Around her head is a mural crown, and one rosette bracelet and part of an earring are preserved. Rosettes and fringes decorate her dress. Extending down her back is a tassel, which may be part of her garment or a necklace counterweight.

Another image of a queen, in this case Naqia (also known as “Zakutu”), the wife of Sennacherib (r. 704-681 BCE) and mother of Esarhaddon (r. 680-669 BCE), is preserved on a bronze plaque (Fig. 5.39). An inscription identifies the queen, but the unnamed male monarch may be either her husband or her son. Depicted in profile, Naqia displays a plump face and a small but voluptuous body that differs from that of the king in its shorter stature and less defined arm muscles. She wears a mural crown, and a pendant band is visible behind her shoulder. Naqia also holds a mirror that might signify her femininity and/or queenship.

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A statue in the round from Assur probably represents a Neo-Assyrian queen as well (Fig. 5.40). The damaged face has full cheeks and a soft jaw-line. Along with this facial form, the figure’s ample hips and breasts reveal that a woman is portrayed. The typical Assyrian hairstyle does not confirm any identity, but its length further suggests femininity. Her bare feet and folded hands indicate mortal piety, rather than divinity. No jewelry is portrayed (or preserved), and her garment is plain, except for a horizontally layered belt (compare to Fig. 5.18). Despite a lack of any inscription or iconographic clues, the height of this statue (70 cm, or about two and a quarter feet) suggests that it represents a royal consort. A text (SAA XIII, 61) indicates that a sculpture of Naqia was placed in the temple of Nabu and Tashmetu at Nimrud. One, then, may reason that this unidentified votive statue might represent a queen or queen mother, such as Naqia. Alternatively, the figure might represent a priestess, cultic singer, or other woman of rank.

In addition to queens, goddesses—especially Ishtar and Mulissu, who are highlighted here—appear in large-scale Neo-Assyrian art. In art, their gender is


269 Börker-Klähn 1982, p. 29.

270 Ishtar and Mulissu are represented on various monuments over a period of about a century (Richard D. Barnett and M. Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-nasir-apli II*, 883-
sometimes solely communicated through beardlessness, and their identities are expressed through divine attributes. Both goddesses are portrayed monumentally among the main deities of the pantheon and are often associated with lions. While Ishtar was an independent goddess with martial, astral, and sexual aspects, Mulissu (the Assyrian name for Ninlil) was the wife of Assur, the state god, and may have had the properties of a mother goddess. As the consort of the pantheon’s head male, Mulissu also might have served as a model for Assyrian queens (on a queen named “Mullissu-Mukannishat-Ninua,” see Ch. 6). Her iconography does not seem to have been as specifically and consistently developed as Ishtar’s was, but one of her unique divine attributes appears to have been a mirror.

Both Mulissu and Ishtar are represented on Sennacherib’s (r. 704-681 BCE) colossal cliff relief at Maltai (Fig. 5.41), and a probably conflated Ishtar-Mulissu figure is portrayed on his Bavian rock relief (Fig. 5.42). In the Maltai sculpture, Sennacherib


272 Reade 1987, p. 143.


flanks a line of seven major Neo-Assyrian deities who are portrayed in profile upon their beasts. Assur leads the line, followed by Mulissu, who sits on a globe-backed throne. The final figure in the procession is Ishtar. The faces, bodies, hairstyles, costumes, and jewelry of the goddesses are damaged but appear to be comparable to those of the male deities. Their identities are indicated through their beardlessness, divine iconography, and position in the scene.

The Bavian goddess is less well preserved but is more detailed than the Maltai sculpture (Figs. 5.41, 5.42). At Bavian, Ishtar/Mulissu stands atop a lion facing Assur on his mount; Sennacherib (r. 704-681 BCE) flanks the scene, which, as at Maltai, is carved on a cliff overlooking a Neo-Assyrian canal. Her neck and wrists are heavily embellished with rosettes. She holds a divine ring and a staff topped with a composite tree, the branches of which terminate in pomegranates. The goddess’s floral and vegetal imagery as well as her association with the watercourse communicate abundance.275

Finally, dedicated to Ishtar, is a life-size (or slightly smaller) nude sculpture in the round, the head of which is lost (Fig. 5.43).276 The petite body is plump with round breasts and curls carved over the pubic area. Found at Nineveh’s Ishtar Temple, this sculpture dates to the eleventh century BCE and bears an inscription from the Middle Assyrian ruler Ashur-bel-kala (r. 1073-1056 BCE) describing the pleasing properties of

275 Winter 2003, p. 258.

Although pre-dating the Neo-Assyrian period, this work shows ancient indigenous admiration of this female body-type.

**SUMMARY OF NEO-ASSYRIAN ART**

Neo-Assyrian art is dominated by large-scale images of men. Nonetheless, goddesses, the wives and mothers of rulers, and generic ideal figures are represented in large- and small-scale against this visually and culturally masculine backdrop.

The royal consort consistently wears a long robe and a mural crown. Emphasizing her modesty and piety, she is shown in private or cultic pursuits usually accompanied by and positioned behind the taller ruler. Through inscriptions and historical context, many of the royal women portrayed in art can be identified as specific individuals. Their images, therefore, may be understood as “portraits,” rather than general female iconography.

Ishtar is usually shown in her masculine warrior or astral aspects, but a sexual figure is also represented. Probably portraying or associated with Ishtar, small-scale imagery and an earlier large-scale nude depict compact but curvaceous bodies with narrow waists and round breasts. This physique corresponds to the queens’ voluptuous clothed forms, suggesting that a general physical ideal was portrayed, rather than the coexistence of a girlish body shown in the nude versus a matronly figure shown

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clothed. Clothing, in any case, might have contributed to the aesthetic appeal of royal women and would have immediately expressed their wealth and rank.

Although they are rarely preserved in large scale, Neo-Assyrian images of royal women and goddesses were clearly appreciated and created according to iconographic and physical standards. In the courtly realm, Assyrian images of women seem to have been displayed in more private contexts. This circumstance may parallel the public visibility (or lack thereof) of elite women at the Neo-Assyrian court.

The discretion with which large-scale female imagery was represented does not necessarily undermine the appreciation of women or representations of them; it merely implies the privacy with which women and their images may have been admired. Moreover, the ideals of modesty and piety expressed through Neo-Assyrian images of women may, in the courts of most rulers, have been too private to have been respectfully displayed.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Through the analysis of images of women in non-ivory media, it is possible to associate ivory sculptures with broader artistic traditions and thereby interpret their regional and iconographic significance. Through this process, attributes of feminine beauty may begin to be separated from other visual information. Once the relationship of the ivory imagery

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278 Bahrani (1996, p. 12) legitimately supports a youthful interpretation of the Nineveh statue, and Harris (Rivkah Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*, Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000, p. 93) interprets Neo-Assyrian images of women, such as that of the banqueting queen (Fig. 2.21), to refer to realistically mature women. I, however, propose a general ideal that supersedes age.
to other visual media is established, the unique role of the ivory sculptures in ancient Near
Eastern visual culture emerges.

Iconographic similarities in facial features, hairstyle, body type, costume, jewelry, and hand-held attributes among the ivories and other Levantine artistic media have been discussed above. For the most part, ivory imagery reflects established standards for the portrayal of women across Levantine media. But some characteristics, such as Egyptian-style wigs and forehead ornament diadems (Figs. 2.16-2.19, 2.22-2.24, 3.7, 3.8, 3.22), were not observed through this survey. More thorough research is needed, but I would propose that these forms of female embellishment share a cultural origin not well represented in Levantine art – that is, they might be specific to Phoenician culture.279

Also, although triple-pronged earrings and forehead ornament diadems are documented in Neo-Assyrian contexts (Fig. 2.17, compare to Figs. 6.17, 6.18, 6.23), this does not require them to be of Assyrian production or indigenous Assyrian style.

Comparison of ivory iconography to female imagery across Levantine art suggests that while the ivory women likely portray ideal and fantastic, if not divine, figures, they did not represent ranking goddesses. Goddesses in Levantine art wear horned headgear or are accompanied by worshippers or specific attributes. Also, because large numbers of

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nearly identical ivory images of women were produced, it is improbable that specific individuals, as occur in large-scale Levantine and Neo-Assyrian art, were depicted.

Finally, in terms of iconographic conclusions, a consistent link between female figures and vegetal abundance is observed across cultures and media of first-millennium BCE Near Eastern art (Figs. 5.7, 5.8, 5.36, 5.42). Depictions of motherhood (as portrayed in Figs. 5.1, 5.18, 5.19) and women’s voluptuous bodies (both nude and clothed) may suggest conceptions of ideal women as healthy, fertile sites. Overall, notions of human, environmental, and/or ideological fecundity appear to be referenced through at least some female imagery.\footnote{Winter 2003, p. 258.}

Concerning ideals of feminine beauty, this survey reveals a shared Near Eastern visual preference for women with full faces, voluptuous bodies, and ornate adornment. Specific types and variations of dress and adornment, as well as hairstyle, probably reflect regional and historical fashions. In some cases personal embellishment may communicate rank or office in Levantine and Assyrian society.

Although nude women were portrayed in ivory, many ivory women are shown clothed or are represented only by their heads. Even in small-scale Levantine and Neo-Assyrian art, the nude female body is displayed with apparent discretion (for example, pillar figurines [Figs. 5.1, 5.31], the heads depicted on the metal bowl [Fig. 5.8], and the clothed figures decorating an elaborate crown [Fig. 5.36]). Large-scale art of both the Levant and Assyria most often shows women wearing loose garments, and Levantine women are frequently shown wearing veils. This evidence suggests that female modesty might have been considered an ideal attribute, but it does not contradict any appreciation
for the female physique. In fact, the less common, but bold, frontal depictions of female nudity attest to the importance of the female body.

The final topic addressed by this chapter entails the contexts in which the ivories were produced and viewed. Although the actual circumstances of their presumably Levantine production and use remain, for the most part, unknown, overall, women were more commonly portrayed in Levantine art than in Assyrian art. In the Phoenician and Syrian regions of their production, ivory sculptures of women fell within a tradition of portraying idealized elite and divine female figures. Ivory artists would have sculpted works according to their cultures’ established conventions for depicting women, the appearance of living Levantine women, and local artistic styles.

The fineness of the ivories’ craftsmanship, compared to most large-scale Levantine images of women, supports their significance as expressions of ideal feminine beauty. It is possible to gain insight onto aspects of beauty, particularly those that were shared by Levantine and Assyrian cultures, by looking at the feminine attributes represented on the ivories and other ancient Near Eastern artworks. Commonalities between Levantine and Assyrian visual idealizations of women include round faces, voluptuous bodies, luxuriant hairstyles, bracelets, necklaces, and regionally distinct headgear.

Because the vast majority of Levantine ivory sculptures were excavated from Neo-Assyrian contexts, more can be inferred about their roles in elite Assyrian visual culture, where, indeed, they might have had a profound function. Considering the relative rarity of women in the royal Neo-Assyrian visual record, Levantine ivory carvings would have significantly filled this void and thereby played an important, if not essential role in the
visual experience of the Assyrian court. Here they decorated palace furniture, walls, portable objects, and even royal horse trappings with attractively rendered, sometimes nude images of women. Ivory sculptures in general may have been especially appreciated by the Assyrians because of their foreign, if not exotic, nature, and their display could have been alluded to Assyrian conceptions of imperial geography. Furthermore, their eroticism, their association with female reproductive fertility, and their references to earthly abundance could have contributed to the ideological vitality and regeneration of the Neo-Assyrian state.

A final point of consideration is the relationship of the ivory women to the Neo-Assyrian queens who would have viewed, used, and have been physically juxtaposed with the sculptures. While queens, themselves, were rarely represented in art, the ivory sculptures may have mirrored and evoked their ideal feminine beauty. In such cases, in Assyria, as well as in the Levant, ivory sculptures of women and the ideal feminine beauty they represented would have played unique and vital roles in elite values and experiences.

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Through a study of archaeologically preserved clothing, jewelry, and toiletry items, this chapter analyzes ancient Near Eastern tomb assemblages belonging to elite women as evidence of ideal feminine beauty during the early first millennium BCE. The aim here is to elucidate cultural practices of personal enhancement and the archetypes of beauty that they may have aimed to achieve. Related ideals may have been emulated in ivory carving and certainly would have underlain the evaluation of female imagery in art.

Similar to the visual record, tombs preserve carefully planned and idealized images of the deceased. Identity, status, and, I would argue, beauty, may be expressed through the elaborate adornment and mortuary provisioning of elite and royal women, who might have been prepared to be seen by the living for the last time, to meet with other dead, and/or to interact with divine spirits or deities. Moreover, as human models of

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283 Gender tends to be more evident in elite tombs, where it is bound up in courtly identities and ranks (such as “king” and “queen”).
ideal feminine beauty, in death, the beauty ascribed to elite women may have served as an enduring symbol of state ideology.

The material evidence emphasized here demonstrates fashions and practices of personal enhancement, but it does not necessarily determine personal appearance in life. Across the (mostly Neo-Assyrian) tombs considered, jewelry and clothing were preserved on many of the skeletons, and a great number of objects are known from the treasuries of grave goods that accompanied the bodies. Other artifacts may have been left in the tombs after having been used to purify, prepare, and beautify the corpses.284 In addition to artificial ornamentation, physical remains, also summarized below, document the health and body types of the deceased as living individuals.

The relationship between actual elite women and female figures portrayed in ivory sculpture is not entirely clear, but during their lives, the (possibly Levantine) occupants of the Neo-Assyrian royal tombs discussed here would have been in direct contact and visual juxtaposition with the Levantine ivory sculptures of women decorating their palaces. Living women appear to have had more than a superficial relationship with the imagery: some jewelry found in tombs corresponds to types of adornment depicted in ivory, and in at least two cases ivory sculptures of women were discovered with female remains. These

archaeological finds confirm the realistic basis of the ivory imagery, clarify the general identity of the women portrayed, and establish the relevance of living traditions of beauty to those depicted in art.

EVIDENCE

Only a few intact elite female tombs are known from the ninth- to eighth-century BCE contexts of ivory production and use in the Levant. The North Syrian site of Tell Halaf provides the most relevant Levantine examples from this period. Here two urn burials dated before the mid-ninth century were found in shafts below monumental funerary sculptures portraying the deceased (Figs. 6.1, 6.2; for the monuments, a larger, southern statue and a smaller, northern statue, see Figs. 5.9-5.13). Some jewelry, grave goods (mostly ceramic vessels), and the cremated remains of a woman were discovered in eachurn burial (a third shaft tomb contained the remains of man).285 One of the urns (associated with the smaller, southern statue marking a female interment) included fragmentary ivory sculptures of female heads and detached gold foil overlays – originally these would have belonged to one or more luxury objects or pieces of furniture (Figs. 6.3, 3.30).286


286 Hrouda 1962, pp. 9-10, 21, pl. 9, figs. 46-48, pl. 12, figs. 80-86; Mazzoni 2006, p. 6; Moortgat 1955, p. 13, figs. 11, 12.
By far, the most evidence comes from the Neo-Assyrian capital of Nimrud in northern Mesopotamia. At Nimrud’s Northwest Palace, four royal female tombs, dated to the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, have been excavated. One tomb (Tomb II) included a yet unpublished “woman at the window” ivory plaque, and thousands of ivory carvings were discovered in temporally equivalent strata across the site.\textsuperscript{287} The deceased at Nimrud were ornately dressed and adorned and provided with extensive grave goods. Because the bodies were not cremated (as at Tell Halaf), some artifacts were found positioned on and near the skeletons as they would have been worn or used. However, hindering a complete study of the deposition of objects, at this time not all excavation records are published.

The first Nimrud tomb was discovered in the early 1950s among other burials inserted beneath the floor of Room DD in the royal domestic (female?) quarters of the Northwest Palace (Fig. 6.4).\textsuperscript{288} Dated no later than the eighth century BCE, this tomb was occupied by an unnamed woman in a terracotta coffin. More recently, in 1988 and 1989, in the same general area of the Northwest Palace, three purpose-built vaulted tombs (Tombs I-III) containing the wealth and remains of several more women were excavated.\textsuperscript{289}

\textsuperscript{287} Herrmann and Millard 2003, p. 389. In the excavation inventory of Nimrud’s Tombs II and III, an ivory “head” (IM 115424), five “people” of wood and ivory (IM 118197), and four wooden “people” (IM 126281) are listed, but these objects are not illustrated or further described (Muzahem M. Hussein and Amer Suleiman, \textit{Nimrud: A City of Golden Treasures}, Baghdad: Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage, 1999, pp. 110, 127, 128).


\textsuperscript{289} Muyyad Said Damirji, “The Second Treasure of Nimrud,” in \textit{Near Eastern Studies Dedicated to H. I. H. Prince Takahito Mikasa}, edited by Masao Mori et al.,
In Tomb I, built beneath Room MM, the body of an unidentified fifty to fifty-five-year-old female was found in a terracotta sarcophagus (Figs. 6.4, 6.5). Tomb II was constructed below Room 49 and is dated to the eighth century on the basis of inscriptions (Figs. 6.4, 6.6). Here two women between thirty and forty years old shared a stone sarcophagus in which a small and poorly carved “woman at the window” ivory was included. Tomb texts and inscribed objects identify the occupants as Atalia, the wife of Sargon II (r. 721-705 BCE) and Yaba, the wife of Shalmaneser V (r. 726-722 BCE). The West Semitic name “Yaba” is also recorded on tomb objects by its Assyrian equivalent “Banitu.” The bodies appear to have been deposited twenty to fifty years apart, suggesting a relationship of mother and daughter or grandmother and granddaughter (but they were not necessarily related).


290 Dalley 1998, pp. 94-95; Abdulilah Ali Fadhil, “Die in Nimrud/Kalhu aufgefunde
Grabschrift der Jaba,” BaghM 21 (1990): 461-70; Ahmed Kamil, “Inscriptions on
Objects from Yaba’s Tomb in Nimrud,” JRGZM 45 (1998): 13-18; Behzad Mofidi
Nasrabadi, Untersuchungen zu den Bestattungssitten in Mesopotamien in der ersten Hälfte
des ersten Jahrtausends v. Chr., Baghdader Forschungen 23, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern,

291 Herrmann and Millard 2003, p. 389.
6.4, 6.7). An inscription on the lid of the sarcophagus identifies its missing occupant as “Mullissu-Mukannišat-Ninua, queen of Ashurnasirpal (II) [r. 883-859 BCE], king of Assyria, and (mother of) Shalmaneser (III) [r. 858-824 BCE], king of Assyria.”292 In the antechamber of this tomb, however, were three intact bronze coffins containing the remains of several secondarily interred individuals with inscribed artifacts dating to the late eighth century (post-dating the looted ninth-century primary interment).293 One of the sarcophagi preserved the body of an unidentified woman between twenty and thirty years old who was buried with a fetus and four children between the ages of three and eleven. The second coffin held two unnamed bodies: a woman around twenty years old and a six-to twelve-year-old child. In the third coffin were the remains of two women and three men or eunuchs.

Presented below and organized by object type, are archaeological finds relating to elite female dress, adornment, and toilette preserved primarily from the burials at Nimrud, along with a few comparative examples available from Tell Halaf and other sites. The focus here is on excavated material associated with deceased women. Relevant objects found outside of female mortuary contexts are for the most part excluded, as are objects from burials of unknown gender.

Following the survey of objects is a discussion of the Nimrud queens’ skeletal remains, prominent iconography across the burials, and the potential roles of personal enhancement in the beautification of elite women. Additionally, the tomb assemblages


293 Oates and Oates 2001, p. 86.
are compared to ivory imagery in an effort to generally identify the types of women portrayed in ivory and to interpret aspects of ideal feminine beauty that they might have embodied.

DRESS

There is no definitive evidence of clothing or garment decoration preserved in the female urn burials at Tell Halaf. But a slightly earlier male burial at Halaf confirms a Levantine practice of embellishing garments with gold studs, bands, and appliqué ornaments, as is documented in Mesopotamia for men and women.\(^{294}\)

The recently discovered Nimrud tombs provide extensive remains of luxury textiles, if not elite female apparel.\(^{295}\) The deceased were probably dressed, but the amount of linen discovered in Tomb II suggests that the bodies may also have been shrouded and/or may have had garments or fabrics piled on top of them. The material was not dyed, but it incorporated embroidery and tassels (Fig. 6.8). Inspection suggests that “the beauty and value of the fabrics … depended on the quality of the flax, the fineness of the spinning and weaving, and the elegant variations in the simple constructions.”\(^{296}\)

In addition to tassels, embroidery, and possibly pleats, the primary means of embellishing the white-to-tan-colored Nimrud textiles was with semi-precious stone and metal appliqués (compare to the dress depicted on Ashurbanipal’s [r. 668-627 BCE]

\(^{294}\) Hrouda 1962, pp. 43, 45, pl. 30, nos. 20-24, pl. 34, nos. 70-85.


\(^{296}\) Crowfoot 1995, p. 113. Future study might investigate whether the use of undyed cloth might have been a mortuary custom, similar to Jewish and Muslim traditions.
Queen, Libbali-Sharrat, Fig. 2.13b, as well as clothing described in the textual record [see Ch. 7].

The precise deposition of decorations overtop the skeletons is not published, but comparison to garment appliqués found in burials at the first-century BCE site of Tillia Tepe, Afghanistan, offers some idea of how the Nimrud ornaments might eventually aid in the reconstruction of ancient Near Eastern costume (Fig. 6.9).

In Tomb II, beads of gold and semi-precious stone were discovered in the folds of one layer of cloth, and dispersed amidst the women’s bones were banded-agate (eyestone) studs and nearly a thousand gold appliqués in the forms of rosettes, stars, circles, and knobby triangles that evoke clusters of grapes (Figs. 6.10, 6.11, compare to 6.29). The means by which the metal plaques would have been attached to the fabric varies in relation to the shapes of the ornaments. Some are perforated, and others have a ring on their undersides (Figs. 6.10, 6.11). Pierced strips of gold, the function of which is less certain, might also have decorated the textiles (Fig. 6.12).

ADORNMENT

Adornment of gold and semi-precious stones survives in large quantities in elite tombs. While such assemblages may represent a preference for gold and stone jewelry, the rarity


299 Due to publication discrepancies (Hussein and Suleiman 1999, fig. 100), what is reported as “carnelian” is cited more generally here as “semi-precious” stone (unless its identity is confirmed by an illustration).
or absence of objects made of bronze and silver might be partially attributed to the nature of these metals to corrode more easily. Adornment would have been the most valuable means of personal enhancement included in burials, but it would also have been essential to the royal identities and the individual beauty of the interred women. Furthermore, it might have provided the deceased with some means of eternal protection and personal preservation (as jewelry may be considered the “the only beauty that blooms eternally,” especially taking into account the physical stability of gold and semi-precious stones).  

In any case, the personal significance of adornment, discussed below by object type, is made vividly clear by an inscription from Tomb II at Nimrud that curses interlopers, including anyone who “lays hands on my jewelry with evil intent!”

NECKLACES

Beads are the most common form of adornment found in tombs, but it is difficult to reconstruct beaded necklaces because the filaments on which they were originally strung are rarely preserved. As a result, loose stone and metal beads are often found scattered atop and around a skeleton. Beads may be associated based on their deposition, form, size, and material, but it is less clear whether they are the remnants of one or multiple single-strand necklaces, one or more multi-tiered necklaces, other items of adornment

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(such as bracelets or earrings), capes or collars made entirely of beads, and/or decorated textiles.

Beads were found with the skeletons in all of the Nimrud tombs. In the grave discovered by Mallowan, carnelian, lapis lazuli, amethystine quartz, and glass beads were found around the neck of the deceased. Tombs I-III included beads of gold, banded-agate, and other semi-precious stones estimated to have belonged to over one hundred necklaces (Fig. 6.13). In addition, a group of gold pomegranate-shaped ornaments with rings attached to their tops was found in Tomb I. These may have been part of a necklace (Fig. 6.14), but they could also have belonged to other types of adornment (such as a headdress, discussed below). Necklaces structured with rigid spacers are much better preserved. Among the Nimrud tombs, these often include banded-agate eyestone medallions evoking the disks embellishing the necks of some ivory sculptures of women (Figs. 6.15, 6.16, compare to Figs. 1.5, 2.26).

EARRINGS

The earrings most commonly depicted on the ivory figures consist of a crescent from which three prongs extend (Figs. 2.17, 2.24). This triple-pronged earring is primarily

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303 For a possible reconstruction of a necklace incorporating these ornaments, see Damerji 1998, p. 60.


depicted on men in Neo-Assyrian art and was represented in the male burial (mentioned above) at the North Syrian site of Tell Halaf. No examples of this exact type from the royal female tombs at Nimrud are published, but a collection of thirty-nine similar gold earrings incorporating an elongated, bud-like central “prong” was discovered in Tomb III (Fig. 6.17). Another related form consists of a crescent shape embellished with three globular decorations (Fig. 6.18). Tomb III contained eight small earrings of this variety, which correspond to a previously excavated example from the Room 2 of the same (Northwest) palace.

In addition, gold earrings of simple crescent designs and more elaborate styles corresponding to examples depicted in large-scale Neo-Assyrian art, but not typically shown on the ivories, were found in Tombs I-III (Fig. 6.19).

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306 Hrouda 1962, pl. 33, nos. 61-63; Madhloom 1970, pls. LXVIII, LXVIX. Another kind of earring, consisting of a crescent with a single bud-like extension, is typically portrayed on men in Neo-Assyrian art, but this type was found in the Middle Assyrian Tomb 45 at Assur in association with probably female skeletons (Ralf-B. Wartke, “Les objets de parure de la tombe n° 45 à Assour,” Cornaline et pierres précieuses: La Méditerranée, de l’Antiquité à l’Islam, Actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre par le Service culturel les 24 et 25 novembre 1995, edited by Annie Caubet, Paris: La documentation française/Musée du Louvre, 1999, p. 335, fig. 12).

307 These are most similar to Madhloom’s “Type D2” earrings, which are represented on men in large-scale art during the eighth century BCE (Madhloom 1970, pp. 91-92, pl. LXIX, no. 21).


309 Hussein and Suleiman 1999, pp. 98, 104, 122, figs. 158, 166, 167, 178, 179.
illustrated here, which consist of a thick crescent from which a fringe of several bud or leaf-like elements dangle, can be matched to the style worn by the Neo-Assyrian queen Libbali-Sharrat (wife of Ashurbanipal, r. 668-627 BCE) on the banquet relief from Nineveh (Fig. 2.13b).\textsuperscript{310}

**Garment Pins**

Some of the most ornate examples of small-scale jewelry found in the Nimrud tombs were fibulae, which would have fastened the garments or burial wrappings of the interred. Without extensively preserved textiles or access to excavation records, it is not possible to reconstruct exactly how the pins were worn.\textsuperscript{311} Archaeological examples of fibulae are widely distributed across the Near East and eastern Mediterranean, but they are less commonly illustrated in the visual record.\textsuperscript{312} Fibulae are sometimes shown on female costume in large-scale North Syrian art (Fig. 5.17), although they do not appear on women depicted in ivory carving (probably due to limitations of scale) or in Neo-Assyrian images of women.\textsuperscript{313}

Despite their paucity in the visual record, at Nimrud, fibulae were significant aspects of elite women’s individualistic adornment in death (if not within the Neo-


\textsuperscript{313} Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, pp. 260-64.
Assyrian court). A bronze fibula was found on the shoulder of the woman interred in the tomb discovered by Mallowan. Suspended from a gold chain, a Neo-Assyrian-style chalcedony seal (known as the “Nimrud jewel”) was attached to this pin. Tomb I preserved a seal similar to the “Nimrud jewel,” which was connected to a gold fibula with sculpted figural imagery that may have been intended to protect women during childbirth.

ARM AND LEG ADORNMENT

Bracelets and anklets were discovered in Tombs I-III at Nimrud, sometimes situated on the women’s skeletons as they would have been worn. When not associated with a body, however, it is difficult to judge whether a ring would have been intended for the wrist, upper arm, or ankle.

Often occurring in matching pairs, four main types of arm and leg ornaments are represented in the Nimrud tombs: bands with central medallions, ribbed cuffs, single-ring

314 Curtis and Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, pp. 102-105; Mallowan 1951, p. 53, pl. V; Mallowan 1966, p. 114, fig. 58, p. 115; Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, pp. 233-34; Musche 1992, p. 221, fig. 7. Various cylinder and stamp seals were discovered in the Nimrud tombs, but they are not discussed here because their imagery and descriptions are not yet published (Hussein and Suleiman 1999, pp. 99, 119, 121, 122).


bangles, and coils. Bands with a central ornament or medallion are well documented in the Neo-Assyrian and Levantine visual records; men wear them on their wrists and above their elbows, and women wear them as bracelets (Fig. 2.13a-b). The gold examples illustrated here from Tomb II at Nimrud are inlaid with banded-agate eyestones and colorful friezes of Assyrian-style imagery (Fig. 6.20).

Gold ribbed cuffs of various types were found in Tombs I-III at Nimrud and have been excavated from other Neo-Assyrian contexts as well (Fig. 6.21).\(^{318}\) They were typically hinged and secured with a pin slid through interlocking teeth.\(^{319}\) Possibly reflecting where on the body they would have been worn, cuffs vary in size and weight (the largest examples from Nimrud weighed as much as eleven hundred grams – or almost two and a half pounds).

Wrist and ankle adornment commonly portrayed on women in Levantine ivory sculpture and in large-scale Levantine art may correspond to types that were excavated from the Nimrud tombs (Figs. 2.19, 2.21, 5.16, 5.26). In artistic representations, however, it is not possible to tell whether the fused rings of a ribbed cuff are portrayed or if figures are shown wearing stacks of single-ring bangles or one or more coiled bracelets (archaeological examples of all were found at Nimrud).\(^{320}\)


\(^{320}\) Damerji 1998, fig. 29; Hussein and Suleiman 1999, fig. 186.
FINGER RINGS

Women are not portrayed wearing finger rings in large- or small-scale Levantine or Neo-Assyrian art. The apparent absence of finger rings from the visual record is probably on account of their size, not necessarily because they were less significant aspects of elite costume.

Finger rings were among the few grave goods preserved in the female burials at Tell Halaf. Each female urn burial included an ornate gold ring with an eyestone-style bezel (Fig. 6.22). In Tomb I at Nimrud, five rings were preserved on a single finger, and several rings were also found in Tombs II and III. Most examples were simple gold loops without a bezel, but a child interred in Tomb II wore a pair of gold bracelets from which five chains attached to a corresponding ring (with an inlaid bezel) on each finger.

HEADGEAR

No headgear was preserved at Tell Halaf, but a great deal of evidence is available from Nimrud Tombs I-III. Of primary significance is an archaeologically documented example of the forehead ornament diadem depicted on women in Levantine ivory carvings (Fig.

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321 Hrouda 1962, p. 44, pl. 33, nos. 50-51.

322 Damerji 1998, p. 6; Hussein and Suleiman 1999, pp. 98, 105, 120, fig. 185.

323 Hussein and Suleiman 1999, fig. 151.
6.23, compare to Figs. 2.17, 2.18, 2.19, 2.24). Published as a “belt” and a “collar,” as well as a “diadem,” comparison to the visual and ethnographic records clarifies that this article of adornment, which was found near the skulls of the two women buried in Tomb II, was intended to have encircled the head. Its gold mesh band is decorated with stone inlays, including several banded-agate eyestones. The bottom border of the central forehead ornament and the end of the dorsal ribbon are embellished with fringes terminating in tiny gold pomegranates, loose examples of which were found in Tomb I and might originally have belonged to similar headgear (Fig. 6.14, discussed above).

Other items excavated from the Nimrud tombs, I would argue, are the remnants of additional diadems of this type. If the bands of these lost diadems were made of leather or other less durable materials, they would have disintegrated, leaving only their stone and metal ornaments. Among these are fringed eyestone dorsal tassel terminals (Fig. 6.24, for example), eyestone disks, and frontlet plaques (Fig. 6.25).

Previously published as a pair of earrings depicting a naturalistic and a composite palm tree against a lapis lazuli background are what I would identify as two components of a forehead ornament triptych (Fig. 6.26a-b). Three plaques were actually found together, but the third plaque is rarely published as it is missing its inlay. The hinges of these three plaques appear to fit together so that the narrower plaque portraying the

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326 Irene J. Winter, “Ornament and the ‘Rhetoric of Abundance’ in Assyria,” ErIs 27, Special issue in honour of Hayim and Miriam Tadmor, edited by Peter Machinist et al. (2003): 253. Winter’s argument is strengthened by considering a symmetric arrangement of these ornaments (which would evoke the central position of the composite palm tree on large-scale palace sculptures) as part of royal female forehead adornment.
composite tree would be positioned in the center, flanked by the wider elements, which both may have shown naturalistic palm trees.\textsuperscript{327}

In addition to the forehead ornament diadem, which is frequently depicted on ivory women (Figs. 6.23-6.26), two further examples of headgear were found in the Nimrud tombs. The first is a rigid gold circlet embellished with three rows of three-dimensional flowers (Fig. 6.27).\textsuperscript{328} Floral headgear is worn by women portrayed in large-scale North Syrian art as well as Levantine ivory carving, but no headdress precisely replicates this archaeological example.

Even more unique is an adult-size gold floral crown that was found on the head of a child in coffin 2 of Tomb III (Fig. 6.28); nothing of the sort is known to be documented in the ancient Near Eastern visual record.\textsuperscript{329} The bulk of the crown consists of five alternating tiers of outward-facing pomegranates and flowers. Clusters of blue stone grapes dangle from the bottom edge (Fig. 6.29). Above the fruits and flowers is an open section supported by eight winged female figures (Fig. 5.36), and the top of the crown is covered with leafy grapevines.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Damerji 1998, p. 9, figs. 41-50; Hussein and Suleiman 1999, figs. 159-60.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
UNIDENTIFIED ORNAMENTS

Several remaining articles of adornment from the Nimrud tombs are unidentified, although further publication of their find-spots and dimensions might help to clarify matters. At present I would propose that many of these items might have been worn overtop of clothing, veils, and/or shrouds as body ornaments-cum-garment decorations (Figs. 6.30, 6.31).

TOILETRY OBJECTS

In addition to clothing and adornment, toiletry items compose a third source of archaeological evidence for studying ideal feminine beauty. The most broadly preserved objects are vessels; mirrors and toiletry tools are also represented. Pots of any form found in the tombs might have been used to wash the body or hair (such as the silver bowl found beneath the skull of the woman interred in Tomb I at Nimrud), but the focus here is on smaller containers, such as unguentaria (jars and narrow-necked bottles that may have held oils or salves) and pyxides (small, lidded boxes that probably held cosmetics).330 Tombs I-III at Nimrud included a variety of cosmetics or aromatics containers –

including a rock crystal example in the shape of a pomegranate.\textsuperscript{331} Lids are rare but not entirely absent from the assemblages.\textsuperscript{332}

Small containers, larger vessels, and mirrors tend to occur together forming a female toilette set.\textsuperscript{333} To the south of the sarcophagus in Tomb II, for example, were an electrum cosmetics box (inscribed with the queen’s name “Bani’tu”) and an electrum mirror that appears to have served as the lid (and was inscribed with another queen’s name: “Atalia”) (Fig. 6.32). Also, inside the Tomb II sarcophagus, placed atop the chest of the upper woman, was a bronze mirror with a palmette handle of inlaid ivory and a gold bowl that held eleven tiny small-necked gold bottles (Figs. 6.33, 6.34). Nearby was a larger gold flask on a chain, which matches the form of the small bottles and most likely belonged to this lavish cosmetics kit.\textsuperscript{334}

\textsuperscript{331} For additional unguentaria and possible cosmetics jars, see Hussein and Suleiman 1999, figs. 7, 8, 175, 211. For the pomegranate-shaped cosmetics spoon found in Tomb II, see Damerji 1998, fig. 24; Oates and Oates 2001, pl. 8a. Similar objects in the form of pomegranates lack archeological provenience but have votive inscriptions dedicated to the Levantine goddess Ashtart (Michel Heltzer, “Two Inscribed Phoenician Vessels in the Form of Pomegranates,” \textit{Aula Orientalis} 14 [1996]: 281-82).

\textsuperscript{332} Vessels might otherwise have been closed with organic materials, such as wax, cloth, or leather – compare to a sealed Egyptian vessel (MMA 36.3.82) (Manniche 1999, p. 117). Descriptions or illustrations of the lids and stoppers from the Nimrud tombs are not yet published by the excavation team (Hussein and Suleiman 1999, pp. 106, 127). However, Dominique Collon reported that one bottle from Tomb III had a stopper in the form of a figure holding an iron peg (Oates and Oates 2001, p. 86).


\textsuperscript{334} Damerji 1991, fig.6.
Unfortunately the physical contents of the “cosmetics” containers do not survive (as they sometimes do in Egypt). However, occasionally preserved in Near Eastern contexts are delicate hand-held toiletry tools, which were typically made of soft, less durable materials, such as silver, wood, ivory, and bone. Cosmetic applicators can be distinguished from pins by their rounded, not pointed, tips – a silver example from Nimrud tapers into the form of a snake’s head. The excavation inventory of Nimrud’s Tombs I–III includes a few references to “little sticks” made of silver and ivory, which might also be cosmetic applicators. In addition, the Nimrud tombs preserved tweezers, wooden and ivory combs, and long-handled wooden spoons.

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337 Hussein and Suleiman 1999, fig. 219.

338 These objects are not illustrated (Hussein and Suleiman 1999, pp. 110, 128). Kohl sticks and kohl containers similar to types still used today in the Middle East have been excavated from Iron Age contexts across the Near East, but no examples derive from unequivocally female tombs (Felix von Luschan, Ausgrabungen in Sendschirli V: Die Kleinfunde von Sendschirli, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1943, pl. 3f; P. R. S. Moorey, Cemeteries of the First Millennium B.C. at Deve Hüyük, near Carchemish, Salvaged by T. E. Lawrence and C. L. Woolley in 1913, BAR International Series 87, Oxford: BAR, 1980, figs. 15, 16; Oscar White Muscarella, “Kohl Containers/Schminkdosen,” Source 14 [1995]: 1-7).

339 The combs and probable tweezers (published as “tongs”) are not illustrated (Hussein and Suleiman 1999, pp. 110, 128). The cosmetic function of long-handled spoons (Hussein and Suleiman 1999, fig. 173) may be proposed through comparison to similar Egyptian objects (Manniche 1999, p. 89).
INTERPRETATIONS OF THE EVIDENCE

Analysis of the Nimrud women’s skeletons suggests that they were sedentary, ate extremely soft foods, and suffered from degenerative joint diseases and chronic colds.\(^{340}\) Despite physical realities, these royal women are likely to have represented living fantasies of ideal feminine beauty through dress, adornment, cosmetics, aromatics, and coiffing.

In addition to physically demonstrating their beauty through personal enhancement, verbal rhetoric expressed and reinforced the beauty of Neo-Assyrian queens. The personal name Yaba/Banitu, referring to the queen buried in Tomb II, means “well-formed” or “attractive.”\(^{341}\) And a unique but highly significant palace inscription dedicated by Sennacherib [r. 704-681 BCE] to his queen, Tashmetum-Sharrat, states: “beloved wife, whose features [the god] Belit-ili has made perfect above all women” [Layard MS C 55 verso – 56 verso, slab 4, lines 15-16].\(^{342}\) Sennacherib’s monumental


expression of personal adoration for his queen would have reiterated her appearance as desirable and ideal.

The women buried at Nimrud wore light-colored tasseled garments embellished with gold appliqués and colored stones. In Tomb II, so many gold appliqués were found in association with the bodies that it is unclear how much fabric might have remained visible were all of the ornaments sewn onto the women’s dresses – that is, the queens might have been sheathed in gold. In addition to such luminous and precious attire, the women wore headgear, necklaces, earrings, fibulae, bracelets, anklets, and finger rings primarily made of gold and semi-precious stones. Beneath their finery, queens were presumably meticulously groomed in life and death. Their toiletry kits, made of exquisite materials, would have stored premium cosmetic, aromatic, and hygienic treatments.

Among the grave goods and personal ornaments preserved in the Nimrud tombs, floral and vegetal imagery, pomegranates, and eyestone designs are prominently represented. Vegetal and floral imagery, epitomized by the headgear from Tomb III (Figs. 6.28, 6.29), abounds in the royal Neo-Assyrian visual record. It is probably an expression of state abundance and vitality, as well as feminine beauty and its aspect of reproductive fertility. Although many of the objects found in the tombs would have originated from living contexts, when interred with deceased royalty, their imagery might further imply the vital durability and regeneration of Assyria. The diadem triptych depicting palm trees would have been worn in the center of the forehead (Fig. 6.26a). In addition to expressing the fertility of the state, this ornament may have communicated the identity of the wearer

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as a central link, through her own reproductive fertility, in the royal dynasty and the life of the state.

Floral imagery and pomegranates are associated with women in large- and small-scale Levantine art (Figs. 5.7, 5.8, 5.18, 5.23). Flowers and vegetal motifs are abundantly portrayed in Levantine ivory carving (Figs. 2.2, 2.22), and ivory women are often portrayed wearing headgear incorporating rosettes, which could be associated with the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar as well as with Kubaba, the Syrian mother-goddess of Carchemish (Figs. 2.24, 2.26).344

Closely related to vegetal and floral imagery, pomegranates are depicted in Neo-Assyrian art in conjunction with composite palm trees and bud-and-palmette motifs, indicating their role in an ideological “rhetoric of abundance.”345 They are also depicted as elements of male jewelry, such as the earrings worn by Sennacherib (r. 704-681 BCE) and the state god Ashur on the Bavian rock relief (Fig. 5.42); situated at the source of a royal canal, the Bavian pomegranate imagery was clearly linked to the agricultural and figurative prosperity of the state.346 When incorporated into Neo-Assyrian female costume, pomegranates may also have been related to women’s procreative potential (Figs. 6.14, 6.23, 6.26, 6.28). Pomegranates often embellish the forehead ornament diadems depicted on ivory figures, and they occur on excavated components of headgear


345 Winter 2003, figs. 2-5.

from Nimrud (Figs. 2.17, 2.24, compare to Fig. 6.23). They are also associated with elite and divine women in monumental North Syrian sculpture (Figs. 5.18, 5.23).

Eyestones, usually made of banded-agate and probably understood to protect the wearer, constitute the third major visual theme among the Nimrud tomb materials (Figs. 6.15, 6.16, 6.20, 6.23, 6.24, 6.25). Given the reproductive role of royal women in the enduring existence and “order” of the Assyrian world, their well being and physical protection would have been of paramount importance. There is no evidence of royal women being armed, but their personal security could have been enhanced through the abundance of eyestones evidently been displayed on their necklaces, bracelets, and forehead ornament diadems. Eyestones might have provided and/or repelled vision at sites on the body from which one cannot (naturally) see (that is, the diadems would have offered “eyes in the back of the head”). Furthermore, worn in burial contexts, eyestones could have maintained vigilance in the eternal protection of the bodies and belongings of the royal women.

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348 Also note the inscribed pomegranate vessels cited above (Heltzer 1996).


Eyestone-style bezels embellished the women’s rings excavated from the Tell Halaf burials (Fig. 6.22), and a glass eyestone-style bead was found at the Phoenician settlement of Sarepta, indicating a broad Levantine awareness of this imagery.\textsuperscript{351}

Although eyestones are not evident in the adornment of women in Levantine art, many of the ivory figures wear headbands and necklaces that incorporate circular inlay wells that could have been filled with eyestone motifs (Figs. 1.5, 2.26, 3.7, 3.12, 3.30).\textsuperscript{352}

The regional style and origin of the personal enhancement artifacts preserved in the Nimrud tombs is difficult to resolve but may be significant to conceptions of beauty linked to luxury, wealth, exoticness, and imperial power. The tasseled and ornamented garments of the deceased women are comparable to those depicted in the Assyrian visual record and would have been of recognizable Assyrian style. However, the flax or woven linen from which their dresses were produced may have been imported from the lowlands of the Levant or even from Egypt.\textsuperscript{353} Most of the jewelry discovered in the Nimrud tombs is Assyrian in form and iconography.\textsuperscript{354} But elite women presumably wore the finest


\textsuperscript{352} The small dots or pin-pricks visible in the centers of some of the wells were intended to help inlaid materials adhere and are not visually related to the eyestone motif.

\textsuperscript{353} A luxury in ancient Mesopotamia, linen is agriculturally and industrially labor-intensive to produce (D. T. Potts, \textit{Mesopotamian Civilization: The Material Foundations}, London: Athlone, 1997, p. 119). The flax from which linen is woven is best suited to lowland ( Levantine and Egyptian) cultivation, although some flax seeds have been found in Neo-Assyrian contexts (J. M. Renfrew, “Finds of Sesame and Linseed in Ancient Iraq,” \textit{Bulletin of Sumerian Agriculture} 2 [1985]: 63).

\textsuperscript{354} A careful study of beads might suggest foreign provenience for some necklaces.
jewelry available – the foreign production of which might have increased its luxury.\textsuperscript{355}

And in some cases, in addition to the Assyrian crown, royal women might also have worn, or at least have continued to own, headgear indicative of their rank and status in their native courts.

Anklets and some types of bracelets, which are prevalent in the burials, are commonly portrayed in Levantine art, but they are not depicted on women in the Neo-Assyrian visual record. In this case, the discord between the visual and archaeological records may be due to the very small corpus of large-scale Neo-Assyrian art available for study. Also, women’s garment hems, when preserved in Neo-Assyrian images of Assyrian women, fall to the feet, potentially covering any ankle jewelry that might have been understood to be worn.

On Levantine ivory carvings, triple-pronged crescent earrings adorn female figures, and examples have been excavated from the male grave at Tell Halaf.\textsuperscript{356} They are also represented on male and eunuch figures in Neo-Assyrian art, and a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal depicts an earring of this type in association with the goddess Ishtar (Fig. 5.5). Related forms have been found in the women’s tombs at Nimrud (Figs. 6.17, 6.18). Assyrian-style incised ivory plaques showing men bearing gifts indicate that at least some triple-pronged earrings entered Assyria as tribute (Fig. 3.31), possibly originating from the Phoenician city of Sidon.\textsuperscript{357} This type of earring therefore appears to have been an elite Levantine style of jewelry that was admired by the Assyrians who might have worn

\textsuperscript{355} Curtis 1994, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{356} Damerji 1998, fig. 177; Hrouda 1962, pl. 33, nos. 61-63; Postgate 1994, pp. 242-43.

\textsuperscript{357} Gubel 2005, p. 131.
foreign and locally produced versions of it. Indeed, the triple-pronged crescent earring may have been part of an elite international style of adornment.\(^{358}\)

Absent from the Assyrian visual record, the floral circlet (Fig. 6.27) and the crown of flowers, pomegranates, and frontally posed winged women (Fig. 6.28) that were found at Nimrud might not be Assyrian artifacts.\(^{359}\) And while diadems with dorsal ribbons are depicted on the Neo-Assyrian ruler and crown prince (Fig. 2.13a), these examples never include a frontlet of the type incorporated into the excavated example (Fig. 6.23) and depicted on Levantine ivory carvings of women (Figs. 2.17-2.19, 2.24).\(^{360}\) At first glance, the forehead ornament diadem and loose components from decayed examples found in the Nimrud tombs would seem to be Levantine in style, if not in production. However, closer consideration reveals a more complex situation.

The intact forehead ornament diadem and related elements from Nimrud include eyestones, which are not presently confirmed to have been incorporated into Levantine headgear of this type, but certainly do not contradict a Levantine provenience.\(^{361}\) More significant to this investigation are the distinctly Neo-Assyrian-style plaques depicting

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\(^{359}\) The four-winged women on the crown (Fig. 6.28) resemble Neo-Assyrian figures (Figs. 5.35, 5.37), but their garments are similar to dresses depicted on some Levantine ivory women.


\(^{361}\) Eyestones are also represented as necklace spacers and medallions in the Middle Assyrian Tomb 45 at Assur (Wartke 1999, p. 338, fig. 11).
palm trees (Fig. 6.26). If these were incorporated into a diadem of the sort depicted on Levantine ivory carvings of women, a mixture of Levantine and Neo-Assyrian traditions would be represented.

Perhaps the most convincing explanation is that the Neo-Assyrian palm tree plaques had been retrofitted into a Levantine headdress in exchange for its original variegated stone panels (Figs. 6.23, 6.25). Another possibility is that the diadem and related components from Nimrud are Assyrian artifacts that replicate a Levantine adornment tradition in form, but which sometimes used indigenous Assyrian imagery, such as the palm tree plaques. Finally, among a range of other possibilities, the forehead ornament diadem might represent a pan-Near Eastern or “international” elite fashion, individual examples of which would have varied according to region.

In the category of toiletry items, an assortment of Neo-Assyrian objects and luxury imports are represented at Nimrud. The mirror from Tomb II, or at least its ivory palmette handle, is clearly of Levantine style (Fig. 6.33). Also from Tomb II are a gold dish

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362 In addition to providing the headband with flexibility, the hinges on the vertical edges of all of the forehead plaques might permit them to have been interchanged.

363 Were the forehead ornament diadem a specifically female type of headdress, it would not be expected to match the diadems portrayed on Neo-Assyrian men.


365 Palmette handles are represented as luxury items in both Neo-Assyrian and Levantine art (Figs. 2.13b, 5.18).
decorated with Phoenician-style imagery and the pomegranate-shaped North Syrian-style rock crystal cosmetics spoon (Figs. 6.35, 6.36).\textsuperscript{366} Imported luxury goods, such as a Phoenician amphora made of Egyptian alabaster bearing a pseudo-hieroglyphic inscription, were found elsewhere at this site.\textsuperscript{367}

The representation of local, imported, and possibly international luxury goods in the Nimrud tombs might be traced to mid-third-millennium BCE Mesopotamian traditions of elite mortuary provisioning, as represented in the “Royal” Cemetery at Ur.\textsuperscript{368} And surely it corresponds to imperial Assyrian collecting behaviors, which had been established for at least half a millennium.\textsuperscript{369} This is best documented in the elite Middle Assyrian burials of Assur Tomb 45, the assemblage of which is parallel to the later

\textsuperscript{366} The decorated gold dish belongs to a corpus of metal bowls bearing Levantine imagery that have been excavated from Mediterranean and Neo-Assyrian contexts (see Fig. 5.8). Regarding Levantine spoons similar in form to the rock crystal example from Nimrud, see Stefania Mazzoni, “Pyxides and Hand-lion Bowls: A Case of Minor Arts,” in Crafts and Images in Contact: Studies on Eastern Mediterranean Art of the First Millennium BCE, edited by Claudia E. Suter and Christoph Uehlinger, OBO 210, Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005, pp. 43-68.


\textsuperscript{368} C. L. Woolley, Ur Excavations II: The Royal Cemetery, London: Joint Expedition of the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania to Mesopotamia, 1934. Similar jewelry sets, including elaborate vegetal headgear, crescent earrings, and beaded necklaces, might also be considered as enduring Mesopotamian systems of expressing elite identity (regarding the jewelry sets at Ur, see Amy Rebecca Gansell, “Identity and Adornment in the Third-Millennium BC ‘Royal Tombs’ at Ur,” Cambridge Archaeological Journal 17 (2007): 29-46.

\textsuperscript{369} Allison Karmel Thomason, Luxury and Legitimization: Royal Collecting in Ancient Mesopotamia (Perspectives on Collecting), Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005, pp. 93-101, 120-55.
Nimrud materials (Figs. 6.37, 6.38). In this fourteenth- to thirteenth-century BCE interment, two probably female bodies were adorned in Assyrian-style jewelry incorporating eyestones and pomegranates. They were surrounded by local and imported luxury goods and toiletry items, including an ivory cosmetics container of Levantine or international style embellished with female heads in the round (Fig. 2.7).

When considering the Neo-Assyrian queens’ tombs from Nimrud, there is yet an additional twist. Atalia, the wife of Sargon II, and Yaba/Banitu, the wife of Shalmaneser V, may have been Levantine princesses who married into the Assyrian court as engines of political alliances. The clues to ideal feminine beauty represented in their tomb (Tomb II) in particular may be relevant to Levantine as well as Neo-Assyrian standards of beauty.


Perhaps their burials demonstrate internationally appreciated ideals of feminine beauty, and a similar dynamic may have motivated Neo-Assyrian appreciation of the Levantine ivory carvings decorating their palaces (environments into which Atalia and Yaba/Banitu would personally have been integrated).

In addition to demonstrating imperial geography and wealth, the inclusion of at least some Levantine objects in the Nimrud tombs might be accounted for by the ethnic backgrounds of some of the women. An inscription on the gold dish with Phoenician imagery (Fig. 6.35), for instance, identifies it as the property of “Yaba.” The use on a Levantine artifact of the West Semitic version of this queen’s name (“Banitu” in Akkadian) suggests that it could have been part of her dowry or that it was sent as a gift from her native court (and therefore bears her native name).373

Dowries also included jewelry, which might account for the presence of the forehead ornament diadem and related components in this tomb. In fact, the imperial integration of a Levantine princess (whose identity might have been communicated through this type of diadem) into the Neo-Assyrian court could have been visually reinforced by fitting her original Levantine diadem with Assyrian-style palm tree plaques. In this manner the headgear of her native court could have been transformed to celebrate political alliance, while also promoting her reproductive abundance and its/her role in Neo-Assyrian ideology.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Based on excavated archaeological evidence from female tombs, this chapter necessarily focuses on royal burials in the Neo-Assyrian Northwest Palace at Nimrud. The Nimrud tombs represent the most elaborate, intact elite female grave assemblages of the early-first-millennium BCE Near East. They are especially relevant because their occupants lived at Nimrud contemporary with the use of carved ivory objects, which may have metaphorically mirrored them during their lives at court. Additionally, at least some of the Nimrud queens themselves could have represented Levantine as well as Assyrian aspects of ideal feminine beauty and might have been at least partially adorned in native Levantine fashions.

Whether or not some of the Nimrud queens were of Levantine origin, all of them could have used and admired Levantine ivory objects embellished with images of women. Standards of beauty for indigenous Assyrian women might have differed from Levantine models. However, Levantine and Assyrian conceptions of ideal feminine beauty certainly appear to have overlapped, while specifically Levantine traits may have been appreciated as exotic in Assyrian traditions.

Within the palaces, the Neo-Assyrian queens would have been juxtaposed with Levantine sculptures of ivory women. The beauty of the living women and the female figures depicted in ivory are likely to have been evaluated according to similar standards, such as: does the woman display a wealth of jewelry, and is her hair carefully coiffed? Other characteristics, such as physique and facial structure, may also have been compared.

On the most basic level, women’s dress, adornment, and personal toilette were their primary means of demonstrating outward attractiveness. Queenly attractiveness was
expressed and maintained through a palpable excess of wealth (such as golden garments, ornate diadems, and sumptuous aromas), and their appearance was enhanced using costly tools and materials (evidenced in the Nimrud tombs, for example, by the silver snake-headed make-up applicator, the chryselephantine handled mirror, and the set of gold unguentaria [Figs. 6.32-6.34]).

The beauty of a queen may have accentuated the vitality and virility of the king and fundamentally have expressed the prosperity and fecundity of the state. Floral, vegetal, and pomegranate imagery contributed to an ideological rhetoric of Assyrian abundance, and it asserted and honored women as the reproductive centers of the Neo-Assyrian state. An abundance of eyestones may have protected the women, who were the state’s most vital regenerative organs, from physical and supernatural malevolence. Found in Tomb I, two faience or frit plaques bearing erotic scenes evoke the queens’ sexual and reproductive identities.374

Elite graves are emphasized here, because elite women would have been looked to as models by society. Queens would have had the resources to emulate most closely conceptions of ideal feminine beauty and would have had access to luxury goods, including ivory objects depicting ideal women, which might have provided them with visual models. Also, during their lives, the queens buried at Nimrud would have been in personal contact and visual juxtaposition with ivory embellished furniture and objects depicting women.

Ivory carvings would thus have played a crucial role in reflecting and reinforcing the beauty of women at court. The close parallels demonstrated here between artifacts

associated with Neo-Assyrian queens and the representation of ideal feminine beauty in ivory demonstrate the utility of archaeological data to hypotheses relating to ancient Near Eastern ideal feminine beauty, especially as it is represented in Levantine ivory carvings.
This chapter explores aspects of ideal feminine beauty preserved in ancient Near Eastern texts. Its aim is to clarify and strengthen the visual evidence analyzed in this thesis and to identify the cultural perspectives from which Levantine ivory sculptures of women would have been created and evaluated during the first millennium BCE. Even if there was little communication between the authors of written sources and the artists of visual sources, considering texts with images expands our perspectives on general conceptions of beauty. A large assortment of texts written in a number of different languages is brought together here with the hope that overlapping motifs and shared details among them might illuminate characteristics and models of ideal feminine beauty that were deeply embedded in ancient Near Eastern culture.

Ancient Near Eastern “beauty” seems to have been based on the presence of various characteristics, not all of which are physically visible and not all of which must be demonstrated concurrently. This chapter considers attributes of physical attractiveness, personal enhancement (such as cosmetics), and inner, non-visible qualities through descriptions of the appearance, non-visual impressions (including scent and feel), personal

characteristics, and behaviors of women who are either indicated through narrative context or established vocabulary to be admirable and desirable.\textsuperscript{376}

Surveyed texts include Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Sumerian compositions.\textsuperscript{377} Although modern translations of ancient vocabulary use the words “beautiful,” “fair,” and “lovely,” the manner of a woman’s “loveliness” may be obscured by ambiguities in both the modern and ancient languages. Further complicating interpretations, two or more terms, both of which may have been essential to intended meanings, were sometimes employed to express beauty.\textsuperscript{378} Irene Winter points out that a girl described in translation as “so pretty, so fair,” might have been understood in the original language (in this case Akkadian, $ša\ kī’am\ damqat\ kī’am\ banāt$) to be “beautiful” in the sense that she is “so auspicious/good, so well-formed/well-bred.”\textsuperscript{379} By considering both the original vocabulary and its contexts of use across a variety of sources, a more precise understanding of ancient conceptions of beauty might be approached.

\textsuperscript{376} In texts, female physical attractiveness is a highly regarded characteristic. It is typically cited in combination with other positive attributes and could be considered auspicious or protective. However, some literary examples demonstrate and caution against what appears on the surface to be “beauty” but does not correspond to positive personal qualities (true beauty, as defined here [see Ch. 1], is more than skin-deep). In these cases, physical attractiveness may be used to manipulate or deceive.

\textsuperscript{377} I have read all texts in translation but have considered the occurrence and semantics of particularly significant terms in their original languages.

\textsuperscript{378} Word pairs may express one complete thought (hendiadys). They may also approximate a sentiment between the two terms cited, or the second term could serve to clarify the first (Margaret Jaques, \textit{Le vocabulaire des sentiments dans le texts sumériens: recherché sur le lexique sumérien et akkadien}, AOAT 332, Münster: Ugarit, 2006, pp. 473, 476).

\textsuperscript{379} Winter 1995, p. 2573.
The most common signifier of feminine beauty in Ugaritic texts is the word n’m.\textsuperscript{380} The closely related Hebrew root n’m, as well as yph and tōb, among others, are employed to describe pleasing women in the Bible.\textsuperscript{381} Akkadian texts frequently use the terms banû and damqu.\textsuperscript{382} These Semitic (Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Akkadian) words all connote “good,” as in beneficent, and/or “good” with respect to quality or origin. The Sumerian term generally translated as beauty is sagû. A frequently cited aspect of beauty is hi-li, which best translates as “allure” and is often associated with luxuriance.\textsuperscript{383}

Conceptions of beauty in Sumerian, a non-Semitic language, specifically intersect with

\textsuperscript{380} Other less common Ugaritic terms for beauty include tsm, tp, and knyt (Gregorio Del Olmo Lete and Joaquin Sanmartín, \textit{A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition}, Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2003, pp. 451, 613-15, 874, 880).


Semitic notions. *Kuzbu*, the Akkadian equivalent of *hi-li*, plays a major role in Akkadian descriptions of beauty, perhaps suggesting a general Mesopotamian concept of beauty expressed in two different languages.\(^{384}\)

THE TEXTS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTER

The length of this chapter corresponds to the bulk of material it incorporates. It includes two major parts: “Levantine Texts” and “Mesopotamian Texts.” In Part I, the Levantine section, evidence is presented under the subsections of “Hebrew Bible” and “Ugaritic Texts.” Part II, “Mesopotamian Texts” includes three subsections: “Neo-Assyrian Historical and Archival Documents,” “Literary Texts known during the Neo-Assyrian Period,” and “Second-Millennium BCE Literary and Religious Texts.” In order to facilitate comparison and cross-referencing among regional textual genres, all of the subsections in Parts I and II are organized under three headings: “Physical Ideals,” “Personal Enhancement,” and “Personal Qualities.”

Evidence is gleaned from historical, archival, religious, and literary texts.\(^{385}\)

Historical and archival documents preserve the names, roles, marriage circumstances, and

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personal property of actual women. They provide a window onto what realities may have underlain metaphorical and visual portrayals of beauty and how/why living women might have emulated conceptual models of ideal feminine beauty. Most of the individuals whose records survive were elite, and they themselves might have served as living models of beauty in society.

Religious and literary compositions reveal concepts of ideal feminine beauty through devices such as tropes, hyperboles, metaphors, and epithets. While these texts discuss goddesses or legendary figures rather than living women and/or are simply too fantastic to be taken literally, they are valuable indicators of which factors were most significant to ancient conceptions of feminine beauty. Furthermore, it is possible that literary and mythological figures might have inspired some ivory imagery.

In addition to representing different genres and languages, the texts presented in this chapter date from different periods (from the early second through the first millennium BCE) and derive from different cultural domains and geographic zones within the broadly designated sphere of the ancient Near East. Trying to reconstruct cultural perspectives relevant to early-first-millennium BCE ivory sculptures from documents that do not all correspond to the centuries and sites of the ivories’ production and appreciation is not without its problems. However, the range of texts included here demonstrates a

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386 Because this study emphasizes the expression and appreciation of ideal feminine beauty in Levantine and Mesopotamian cultures (and to necessarily limit this already large survey), Hittite and Egyptian texts are not considered here.
striking continuity of ideas across regions and centuries, and it shows significant parallels to the first-millennium BCE visual record.\textsuperscript{387}

The Levantine written record is represented by biblical and Ugaritic texts. Because of their temporal correspondence to the period of ivory production, biblical texts are presented first, followed by the earlier Ugaritic texts.\textsuperscript{388} In addition to the Hebrew Bible, in cases where descriptions of women demonstrate continuity, some post-biblical texts, which mostly are dated to the final centuries of the first millennium BCE, are also cited in the biblical section.

Second-millennium BCE Ugaritic compositions are included here to enrich and corroborate the early-first-millennium biblical material. Although Ugaritic texts predate the ivories by four to six centuries (they were written in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries), the absence of an excavated first-millennium literary record in Phoenicia does not necessarily indicate that these second-millennium texts – or the values that they carried – were unknown in the first millennium. In fact, Ugaritic deities are still


\textsuperscript{388} The ivories under analysis were manufactured in the Levant in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, during which time the Hebrew Bible was probably being written down. Early-first-millennium Neo-Assyrian rulers are mentioned throughout the Hebrew Bible, and ivory embellished furniture is referenced as well (Amos 6:4; 1 Kings 22:39) (Georgian Herrmann and Alan Millard, “Who Used Ivories in the Early First Millennium BC?,” in Culture through Objects: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of P. R. S. Moorey, edited by Timothy Potts, Michael Roaf, and Diana Stein, Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2003, p. 397).
mentioned in first-millennium BCE documents and are attested as theophoric elements in first-millennium BCE Levantine personal and place names.\(^{389}\)

Mesopotamian texts are discussed under the headings of “Neo-Assyrian Historical and Archival Documents,” “Literary Texts known during the Neo-Assyrian Period,” and “Second-Millennium BCE Literary and Religious Texts.” Presented first are Neo-Assyrian texts known from ninth- to seventh-century contexts contemporary with the display of Levantine ivory carvings in Assyria. These first-millennium BCE texts are almost all written in Akkadian and are roughly contemporary with the biblical literature cited in the Levantine section. The historical and archival records were produced during the Neo-Assyrian period, and the religious and literary works (one included here is in Sumerian) were mostly composed during the second millennium BCE but were copied and preserved in first-millennium archives. In addition, cited in cases where they offer similar but more detailed or supporting material, some later Akkadian texts from the Neo- and Late-Babylonian periods (the seventh to third centuries BCE) are referenced.

Finally, following the first-millennium, select second-millennium BCE Mesopotamian texts written in Akkadian and Sumerian are integrated as evidence. These include mostly literary and religious compositions that have not been discovered in any first-millennium BCE contexts. During the period of ivory production and appreciation (the ninth to seventh centuries), these works may no longer have been known, or they may

have been known to only a few (who, however, would probably have been among those interacting with the ivories). The demonstrated Neo-Assyrian retention of some second-millennium literature allows for the possibility that other second-millennium texts were retained but did not survive or have not yet been excavated.\textsuperscript{390} In any case, the ideals communicated by second-millennium texts may reflect the roots of Neo-Assyrian cultural values relating to women. In fact, aspects of feminine beauty indicated in some second-millennium BCE documents correspond to preferences evident in Near Eastern folk culture today.

Overall, this chapter is organized according to region and chronology. First, reflecting the values of the Levantine cultures that produced and viewed the ivory sculptures under analysis, first-millennium biblical texts are discussed, followed by second-millennium Ugarit works. Mesopotamian records reflecting conceptions of ideal feminine beauty in the culture consuming the ivories are then presented. Texts derived from Neo-Assyrian and related contexts are described first, after which the second-millennium material is offered. The conclusion reviews relationships across the regional and historical boundaries of all the texts considered, presenting an overall view of ancient Near Eastern ideals of feminine beauty understood through the written record.

PART I: LEVANTINE TEXTS

THE HEBREW BIBLE

Female (and male) beauty is most frequently referenced in the Hebrew Bible and post-biblical literature using words derived from the roots *yph*, *tob*, and *n'm*. Beauty is sometimes expressed through two parallel terms, and, although it is typically explained as something that is seen or observed (that is, people are beautiful in their appearance), biblical beauty encompasses more than just external appearance. Beauty tends to be useful, and its emphasis in amorous contexts suggests its erotic implications.

The narrative of Leah and Rachel (Gen 29) introduces the significance of both physical attractiveness and positive personal qualities, implying their ideal concurrence in one woman (also see Prov 11:22: “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful [*yph*] woman without good sense”). Rachel, the younger of the two sisters, is “graceful and beautiful;” that is, she is “beautiful (*yph*) in form (*’ar*) and beautiful (*yph*) in appearance (*mar’eh*)” (Gen 29:17). Leah’s overall physical appearance is not as highly praised, but

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her eyes are described as “lovely” (rakkot). Jacob marries both sisters, but he prefers Rachel on account of her outward appearance. In the end, however, he favors Leah, who is devoted and bears several children. In contrast, Rachel’s lengthy barrenness provokes her to become unattractively bitter and jealous of her sister.

Of particular relevance to the topic of female beauty is the “Song of Songs” (sometimes called “Canticles” and the “Song of Solomon”). The Song of Songs is a relatively short poetic work dramatizing the love between a man and woman through their monologues and dialogues as they seek and find one another. The lovers praise each other’s beauty in figurative and hyperbolic language. The fabulous imagery contained in the Song cannot sensibly be transferred to the body (or else the lovers would appear as

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394 Coogan et al. 2007, p. 51 Hebrew Bible. Some translations describe Leah’s eyes as “weak” or “weary,” but it is more likely that she had pretty, delicate eyes (E. A. Speiser, Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 1, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1964, p. 225, n. 17).

monsters constructed out of various plants, animals, and elements of architecture), but it nonetheless succeeds in expressing quintessential beauty. In fact, the metaphoric distance between the descriptions and referents may produce “greater psychological arousal” and thereby intensify the audience’s “aesthetic pleasure” in the subjects.

Overall, women in the Hebrew Bible were physically evaluated in terms of their faces, bodies, skin, and hair, which they enhanced through bathing, cosmetics, fragrance, dress, and adornment. Women were also admired for various qualities and virtues, especially those relating to bridal and wifely identities. Below, external attributes and internal qualities of ideal feminine beauty are presented through analysis of the Song in conjunction with evidence from other biblical and post-biblical texts. Physical ideals, personal enhancement, and personal qualities are considered.

**Physical Ideals:** Although the Song of Songs describes the female beloved poetically, her attractiveness is clear: “How fair (yph) and pleasant (n’m) you are, O loved one, delectable maiden!” (Song 7:6). A basic understanding of how the female image was perceived might be gleaned by simply observing which parts of the body are discussed and which are not in the perusal of feminine beauty in the Song. The upper body and head (especially the breasts and the eyes) seem to have been the focus of attention. Features specified include her head (7:5), hair (Song 4:1, 6:5, 7:5), eyes (Song 4:1, 4:9, 6:5, 7:4), nose (Song 7:4), cheeks (Song 1:10, 4:3, 6:7), mouth/lips (Song 4:3, 4:11, 7:8-9), teeth

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(Song 4:2, 6:6), neck (Song 1:10, 4:4, 7:4), breasts (Song 4:5, 7:3, 7:7, 7:8, 8:10), belly (maybe referring to her womb, Song 7:2), navel (a possible euphemism for “vulva,” Song 7:2), thighs (that are “the work of a master hand,” Song 7:1), and feet (Song 7:1).³⁹⁸

The Genesis Apocryphon, known from the Dead Sea Scrolls, also contains a head-to-toe account of feminine beauty.³⁹⁹ Originally written in Aramaic and probably composed during the first century BCE, this text elaborates upon the beauty of Abraham’s wife Sarah (1Qap Gen XX, 2-8a).⁴⁰⁰ Her beauty is said to surpass that of all virgins and brides. Sarah’s face, eyes, nose, breasts, arms, hands, legs, and feet are praised.

The feminine features receiving significant attention throughout the Hebrew Bible and post-biblical texts are the eyes, hair, and fair skin. Eyes in general may have been particularly important in the evaluation of female attractiveness, given the emphasis on Leah’s eyes (Gen 29:17). In the Song, the woman’s eyes are compared to “pools” (Song 7:4), suggesting the large, iridescent, and/or liquid quality of the iris, a trait that is admired in Arab folk culture yet today.⁴⁰¹ Furthermore, the overwhelming allure of women’s eyes is demonstrated by Proverb 6:25, which warns against adulterous women who might ensnare men with their eyelashes.

³⁹⁸ Coogan et al. 2007, p. 966 Hebrew Bible.
⁴⁰¹ The Hebrew and Arabic terms for “eye” also mean “spring” or “water source.”
Women’s hair was undoubtedly an important aspect of attractiveness – it is coiffed (Isa 3:24) and praised (Song 4:1, 6:5, 7:5; 1Qap Gen XX, 2). In the Song, the woman’s hair flows over her shoulders and down her back (“your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead,” Song 4:1).\footnote{Coogan et al. 2007, p. 963 Hebrew Bible.} Implying its erotic allure, at least under certain circumstances, a woman might cover her head and hair in modesty (Gen 24:65), while exposing a woman’s hair against her will could shame and humiliate her (Isa 47:2, Sus 1:31).\footnote{It was apparently standard practice in ancient Israel for women to cover their hair with a headscarf, but the face does not typically seem to have been concealed (Julian E. Reade, “Sexism and Homotheism in Ancient Iraq,” in \textit{Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001}, edited by Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting, Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002, pp. 559-61; Jack M. Sasson, “The Servant’s Tale: How Rebekah Found a Spouse,” \textit{JNES} 65 [2006]: 241, 265; Karel van der Toorn, “The Significance of the Veil in the Ancient Near East,” in \textit{Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom}, edited by David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz, Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995, pp. 329-330).} Further demonstrating the significance of women’s hair, in Isaiah 3:24 vain women with elaborate coiffures are condemned to baldness, and women in mourning might shave their heads (Deut 21:12).

In the Genesis Apocryphon, Sarah’s face is described as radiant, and her skin is white (1Qap Gen XX, 2-4). A fondness for light skin and blushing cheeks is most evident in the Song: at its opening, the woman states that she is dark-skinned, but nonetheless attractive (\textit{na’veh}) (Song 1:5-6, 4:3, 6:7).\footnote{Regarding a preference for fair, ruddy skin on men, see Song 5:10, Lam 4:7-8 (Coogan et al. 2007, pp. 960, 1176 Hebrew Bible).} Her neck is equated with an ivory tower...
(Song 4:4), and her belly is called a “heap of wheat, encircled with lilies” (Song 7:2).405 In addition, she is compared to a mare with adorned cheeks – in reference to ornate horse trappings (Song 1:10). Some luxury horse trappings of the biblical period were made of ivory, so this metaphor might suggest the smooth white surface of her cheeks.406 The description immediately precedes a reference to “ornaments of gold, studded with silver,” so it may additionally, or alternatively, refer to actual jewelry or cosmetic designs embellishing her cheeks.

Personal Enhancement: In the Hebrew Bible and related texts, women of diverse status beautify themselves with jewelry, eye makeup, and fragrance in order to please and manipulate men.407 Although personal enhancement itself is not despised, its potential for ill-use is clear, and vanity is denounced (Prov 31:30, Isa 3:16-24). For example, the image of the seductively adorned, ill-fated Phoenician queen, Jezebel, is put forth as a negative role model in Second Kings 9:30: “When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; she painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked out of the window.”408

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405 Coogan et al. 2007, p. 966 Hebrew Bible; Herrmann and Millard 2003, p. 397.


number of other references associate women’s garments, jewelry, makeup, and fragrance with moral corruption and prostitution (Isa 3:16-24, Jer 4:30, Ezek 16:15-18, 23:40-42). In Proverb 7:17 a harlot uses fragrance to lure a man to her bed, which is scented with “myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.”

In the apocryphal book of Judith (a Hebrew text written between the mid-second and mid-first centuries BCE), the wealthy widow Judith (who was “beautiful in appearance, and was very lovely to behold,” Jdt 8:7) puts on a tiara, festive attire, and sandals; then, piece by piece, she ornaments herself with jewelry (Jdt 10:3-4, compare to the Mesopotamian descent myths, below). Fully arrayed after having been in mourning, Judith astounds the town elders with her attractiveness (Jdt 10:7). Through both her appearance and her intelligence (“when the men heard her words, and observed her face – she was in their eyes marvelously beautiful,” Jdt 10:14), Judith is able to beguile and gain access to the enemy Holofernes, whom she kills in his bed (Jdt 13:6-10). In this case, her morally ambiguous ornamented image has dangerous ramifications for the foe (she was “dressed to kill”), but she saves the city of Jerusalem. Her toilette and special costume may even have protected her during this dangerous mission (also see Esth 5:1).409

Personal enhancement can only increase the beauty of virtuous women (“o desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in crimson, that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with paint? In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you,” Jer 4:30; also see Prov 11:22), and attractiveness and personal

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409 Coogan et al. 2007, p. 44 Apocrypha.
enhancement are frequently associated with positive female role models. Some biblical women’s names reflect aspects of beautification, such as “Mahalath” meaning “adornment” (Gen 28:9; 2 Chr 11:18) and “Basemath” meaning “one fragrant with balsam” (Gen 26:34, 36:3, 1 Kings 4:15). One of Job’s daughters (“there were no women so beautiful [yph],” Job 42:15) was named “Keren-Happuch,” or “Horn of eye-paint” (Job 42:14), and another was called Keziah (“Cinnamon tree,” Job 42:14).

Fragrance is often cited as a desirable characteristic, and the basic preference for a hygienic and pleasantly scented body is summarized by a condemnation directed toward arrogant women: “instead of perfume there will be a stench” (Isa 3:24). Both Judith and Susanna, who are known for their beauty, bathe and apply oil and ointments (Jdt 10:3, Sus 1:17, also see Ruth 3:3). In the Song, the fragrance of the female beloved is praised: “how much better is…the fragrance of your oils than any spice” (Song 4:10); “the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon” (Song 4:11). Clothing may be scented with myrrh, aloes, and cassia (Ps 45:8). In the book of Esther, Esther, who was innately “fair” (yph) and “beautiful [in appearance]” (tôbat mar’eh) (Esth 2:7), undergoes a year-long process of aesthetic preparation and purification before being fully integrated into the


412 The apocryphal book of Susanna might have been composed as early as the sixth century BCE (Coogan et al. 2007, p. 194 Apocrypha).
royal Persian court. This entails six months of conditioning with myrrh-scented oil, followed by six months of perfumes and cosmetics (Esth 2:12) and would probably have been achieved through topical treatments and fumigation.

Women’s clothing and jewelry may have been appealing in their design, color, brilliance, and through the sounds of their moving parts. Especially if women customarily covered or bound their hair, elaborate dress and adornment, which receive substantial attention in texts, might have been the most visually apparent aspect of the public female image.

Fine garments communicate wealth and metaphorically could express a woman’s honor (Prov 31:25). Women who were not wealthy still put on their best clothes with the intention of pleasing men (Ruth 3:3). Descriptions of textiles focus on their quality and the color (usually red, blue, and/or purple) of their dye or dyed thread (Exod 39:1-31, Judg 5:30, Prov 31:21-22, Jer 4:30). A beautiful (yph) royal bride is described as wearing “many-colored” and “gold-woven” robes (Ps 45:13-14), which may have been embellished with gold appliqué ornaments (2 Sam 1:24) or embroidered with gold thread (“gold leaf was hammered out and cut into threads to work into the blue, purple, and crimson yarns and into the fine twisted linen, in skilled design,” Exod 39:3).

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Adornment is usually specified as being made of gold, silver, and gem stones. In the Song of Songs, the woman wears a necklace (Song 1:10, 4:9), and her neck is described as a tower on which shields hang (Song 4:4), evoking the medallions of a necklace (see ivory sculptures Figs. 3.7, 3.24).\textsuperscript{416} Other types of jewelry worn by women include headgear, earrings, nose-rings, bracelets, and anklets (2 Kings 9:30, Isa 3:18-23, Ezek 16:12, Jdt 10:3).\textsuperscript{417}

In the Hebrew Bible (and across ancient Near Eastern texts), jewelry is used as marital prestation. The weight of its metal reflects standard economic means, while the ornaments themselves might please and beautify the bride.\textsuperscript{418} This is vividly exemplified in Genesis 24.\textsuperscript{419} A servant is sent to find a wife for Abraham’s son Isaac. When the servant identifies friendly and attractive (יְבֵקָה) Rebekah at the well, he gives her a gold nose-ring weighing a half shekel and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels (Gen 24:22, 47). Later, while negotiating their marriage with her family, he presents Rebekah with “jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments” and offers unspecified “costly ornaments” to her mother and brother (Gen 24:53).

Jewelry is also a significant aspect of wedding costume (Isa 49:18, Jer 2:32). God’s actions are compared to bridal preparation: “God…has clothed me with the

\textsuperscript{416} Coogan et al. 2007, p. 963 Hebrew Bible.

\textsuperscript{417} Platt 1992, pp. 830-32.

\textsuperscript{418} Regarding different forms of marriage prestation, see Martha T. Roth, “Marriage and Matrimonial Prestations in First Millennium B.C. Babylonia,” in Women’s Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia, edited by Barbara S. Lesko, Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989, pp. 246-50.

\textsuperscript{419} Sasson 2006, pp. 261-62; Speiser 1964, p. 182.
garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom
decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels” (Isa 61:10). In
Ezekiel 16, God dresses and adorns the sexually mature body of the personified city of
Jerusalem. Her costume, representing either bridal apparel or matrimonial gifts, includes
a crown, earrings, a nose-ring, a necklace, bracelets, and clothing of silver and gold (Ezek
16: 10-13). Once adorned, her appearance is exceptionally beautiful (yph) and “fit to be
a queen” (Ezek 16:13), but, corrupted by her attractiveness, she behaves as a harlot (Ezek
16:15-22).

Personal Qualities: In the Hebrew Bible and post-biblical literature, positive female role
models have a respectable pedigree (“tell me whose daughter you are,” Gen 24:23) and
are described in terms of their attractiveness and their potential for or fulfillment of wifely
roles. An ideal wife is strong, intelligent, and contributes to the household through her
spinning, weaving, and food provisioning (Prov 31:10-31). The apocryphal book of Ben
Sira reiterates these traits. In addition to having an attractive appearance, a good wife is
a good housekeeper who keeps prudently quiet and has a lovely face, a pleasing figure,
and nice legs and feet (Sir 26:13-18).

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420 Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and
279; Marjo Christina Annette Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew

421 Also known as Sirach and Ecclesiasticus, the book of Ben Sira was composed in
Hebrew during the second century BCE.

422 Also see Pope 1977, pp. 54-55. For a brief history of this composition, see Benjamin
Female strength is particularly admired and may be symbolically imparted through dress: “She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong;” “strength and dignity are her clothing” (Prov 31:17, 25). Although derived from a traditionally male domain, imagery describing the female beloved in the Song, such as military towers (Song 4:4, 7:4), lions and leopards (Song 4:8), and a mare (Song 1:9), could express physical and emotional heartiness.423 As a betrothal candidate, Rebekah’s physical endurance is proved through her hauling of water from the well to Abraham’s servant and all of his camels (Gen 24:20-21).424

In bridal contexts there may be a particular association between dressing and acquiring wisdom.425 The Genesis Apocryphon showcases female charm and intelligence. Sarah, stolen on account of her beauty from her husband Abraham to be the wife of the Egyptian ruler, uses her wit to spare Abraham’s life (1Qap Gen XX, 9-10). And Esther and Judith, both of whom are described as especially attractive, become heroines through their courage and cunning (for example, Esth 4:16-5:8, 7:1-7, Jdt 13:6-10).

A woman’s sexual fertility is paramount in her role as an ideal wife (for example, Gen 29:31-30:24). Female reproduction may function as a metaphor for populating a

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423 Female leadership in the household may also be implied (Carol Meyers, “Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs,” Hebrew Annual Review 10 [1987]: 221).


divinely sanctioned nation, as is exemplified by Sarah’s conception in old age (Gen 21:2-7). In general, human fertility may serve as a reminder of the divine act of earthly creation (Gen 1-2). Cultivated zones provide environments for amorous experiences, but they are also the sites of erotic temptation (Gen 2-3, Sus 1:15-21). The mandrake (duwday, literally “love plant”) serves as an aphrodisiac and cure for infertility (Gen 30:14-24; Song 7:13), and plants, trees, gardens, orchards, and vineyards are linked to sexuality, fertility, love, and beauty.\footnote{Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry, New York, N.Y.: Basic, 1985, pp. 185-203; Meyers 1987, p. 212; Pope 1977, p. 54.}

For example:

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens. As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste (Song 2:1-3).

Also cited as emblems of male and female attractiveness and erotic desire are the delicious and nourishing properties of food and drink (such as milk, honey, and wine, Song 4:11, 5:1) and the graceful movement and supple forms of doves and roe deer/gazelle (Song 2:14, 4:5; Job 42:14). “Gazelle” in Hebrew has a homonym meaning “beauty.”\footnote{Coogan et al. 2007, pp. 961-62 Hebrew Bible.}

\section*{The Ugaritic Tradition}

documents, two are of particular interest: “Daughter of Gazelles” (ḥtzli) and “My mother is Anat” (anati-ummi). Gazelle-metaphors refer to women across ancient and modern Near Eastern literature and may express graceful form and movement. “My mother is Anat” evokes qualities of Anat, the compassionate young goddess of war and hunt.

Administrative texts provide only limited references to living women, but Ugaritic mythology is the most significant non-biblical ancient West Semitic literary source for evidence of ideal feminine beauty. Implying grace, delight, well-being, and elegance, the term n’m (as an adjective, n’mt) is used most frequently in Ugaritic texts to denote feminine attractiveness. Although a portrait of any one beautiful woman is lacking, by considering an array of myths, it may be possible to reconstruct cultural models of ideal feminine beauty through references to physical ideals, personal enhancement, and personal qualities. Women’s eyes, lips, breasts, and bodies are praised, and female


Evoking Anat’s warrior aspect, the surname “Son of Anat” was used by Hebrew military families into the first millennium BCE (F. M. Cross, “Newly Found Inscriptions in Old Canaanite and Early Phoenician Scripts,” BASOR 238 [1980]: 7).


attractiveness is augmented through bathing, cosmetics, and adornment. Overall, maidenhood is valued, and women’s sexuality and fertility are persistently referenced.

**Physical Ideals:** Physical descriptions of women in Ugaritic mythology emphasize the eyes, lips, breasts, and genitals. Portrayed in detail are the lapis lazuli and gleaming alabaster eyes of the mortal Lady Huraya, whom the legendary king Kirta desires for a wife (*CAT* 1.14 iii 43-45, vii 29-30). It may be the luster of her eyes and the contrast between her dark (blue-black) irises and the whites of her eyes that Kirta admires. In addition, he praises her gaze: "Who'll transfix (?) me… I’ll repose in the gaze of her eyes.” Attractive eyes and an intent look may be attributes of the goddesses Anat and Athtart, to whom Lady Huraya’s beauty is compared (*CAT* 1.14 vii 26-28). Notably, the name “Anat,” may connote eyes or vision (see below for further discussion of this goddess). Lips, too, represent an attractive and erotic female feature. In “The Birth of the Gracious and Beautiful Gods,” kissing symbolizes procreative intercourse, and the woman’s lips are said to be as sweet as pomegranates (*CAT* 1.23:49-54).

The mythological female body is conceived of as terrain that is owned and cultivated. The goddess Nikkal’s body is described as a “field” (*CAT* 1.23:13, 1.24:22),

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“vineyard” (*CAT* 1.24:22), and “orchard” or “flower garden” (*CAT* 1.24:23) – fertile spaces that yield abundance through planting. Furthermore, Nikkal’s vulva is referred to as a “source” or “well” (*CAT* 1.24:8) that delivers “water” (*CAT* 1.24:11). Similarly, the names of Baal’s “Three Women,” as well as the names of their mothers, are associated with fertility and meteorological or chthonic sources of water: *TØly* (“Dewy”), daughter of *Rb* (“Showers”); *Pdry* (“Flashy”), daughter of *Ar* (“Mist”); and *'ArsØy* (“Earthy”), daughter of *Y’bd'r* (“Copious Flow”?) (*CAT* 1.3 i 22-25, iii 6-8; 1.4 ii 14-18).

The physical form or eroticism of breasts is not attested, but their nourishing properties are emphasized. Goddesses serve as wet nurses (for Anat, see *CAT* 1.15 ii 26-28), and Anat is called “Breast of the Nations” (*CAT* 1.13:19-22). Overall, descriptions of suckling are blatant, such as “suck the milk;” “drain the breasts;” and “suck the nipple of the breasts” (*CAT* 1.15 ii 26-27, 1.23:24, 59, 61).

**Personal Enhancement:** Aspects of personal enhancement described in Ugaritic myths include bathing, fragrance, cosmetics, and adornment. In preparation for battle, Anat wears henna, the scent of coriander, and purple dye from murex shells (*ANHBM*) (*CAT* 435 Marcus 1997, p. 215.


436 In contrast, the penis is called the “hand” (*CAT* 1.10 iii 7, 1.23:33, 1.24:8), “finger” (*CAT* 1.10 ii 8), and “flesh” (*CAT* 1.24:9) (Korpel 1990, pp. 123-24; Pardee 1997, p. 280, n. 48).

437 Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2003, pp. 94-95, 108, 663, 727-29, 889, 946; Pardee 1997, p. 250, n. 69, p. 251, n. 84; Walls 1992, pp. 93, 120. Designated by the term “klt,” the three women are probably Baal’s nubile daughters. Alternatively, they could be his brides (Marsman 2003, p. 60; Pardee 1997, p. 261, n. 173).


After a victory she immerses herself in the gore of the slain and then washes, oils, and re-applies her 'ANHBM dye (CAT 1.3 ii 30 – iii 3). In this context, cosmetic and aromatic treatments might be linked to the purification and physical protection or empowerment of her body. Later in this text and elsewhere, Anat prepares herself in a similar manner, intending to charm the god Baal (CAT 1.3 iv 45-46, CAT 1.10 i 1-7).

In the myth of the divine betrothal of Yarikh and Nikkal, Yarikh offers Nikkal silver, gold, and lapis lazuli (probably as items of jewelry, not raw materials) (CAT 1.24:19-21). Adornment itself is not frequently cited, but Athtart (a younger goddess and huntress, on par with Anat) wears a necklace and an unspecified type of jewelry that “glitters like the stars” (CAT 1.92 rev. 25-29). Shiny ornaments such as this might have contributed to a woman’s visual radiance, a potential property of beauty. The Katharat matchmakers, patron goddesses of marriage and pregnancy, are, themselves, called “the radiant daughters of the new moon” (CAT 1.24:5-6, 40-42).

Personal Qualities: Anat, whose name may refer to “water source,” “eyes” or “sight,” and/or “force, violence,” is variously interpreted as the sister, consort, or wife of the god

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440 Korpel 1990, pp. 424-26; Marsman 2003, pp. 136-37. It is not specified where Anat applies the henna and murex dye, but in Middle Eastern cultures today henna is used on diverse parts of the body, including the hands, feet, and the hair (see Ch. 8).

Baal, and she is identified as an adolescent, unmarried virgin.\textsuperscript{442} Anat plays a major role in Ugaritic myths and may personify ideal feminine beauty. Her primary epithets, \textit{bttl} and \textit{rhm}, describe her youth and female gender respectively. \textit{Bttl}, which has cognates in Hebrew (\textit{bētūlā}) and Akkadian (\textit{batultu}), is generally translated as “maiden,” or a young marriageable woman who has not yet given birth.\textsuperscript{443} While a maiden’s virginity is presumed, this epithet primarily communicates her age and/or developmental state of adolescence.\textsuperscript{444} \textit{Rhm}, meaning “one with a womb,” identifies Anat as female and is usually translated as “damsel.” Based on the context of its use (\textit{CAT} 1.6 ii 27), \textit{rhm} seems to carry connotations of care and concern.\textsuperscript{445} Supporting this meaning, the Hebrew cognate term for “compassion” (\textit{raḥāmim}) is closely related to the Hebrew word for “womb” (\textit{reḥem}), and the related Akkadian word \textit{rēmu} signifies both “womb” and “compassion.”\textsuperscript{446}


\textsuperscript{444} Walls 1992, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{445} Marsman 2003, p. 136; Walls 1992, pp. 79-81.

Although her sexual activity is debated, favored here is a description of Anat as a young woman ripe for marriage, who is not sexually active, but who is desired as a sexual figure very much on account of her virginity. Anat’s pubescence and maternal aspect, but not necessarily literal motherhood, are demonstrated by her role as a wet-nurse to gods and royal humans (CAT 1.15 ii 26-28). In addition, Anat displays typically masculine qualities as a warrior (CAT 1.3) and hunter (CAT 1.18, 1.22 i 11, 1.114:22-23). Most important to this study, however, she is the “loveliest among the sisters of Baal” (n’mt. bn. Aht. b’l) (CAT 1.10 ii 16).

Anat’s innate youth and sexuality are essential to understanding her attractiveness. Similarly, nubile status is integral to the identity of other desirable female figures, such as the goddess Nikkal (CAT 1.24), Lady Huraya (CAT 1.14), and Baal’s three daughters or brides (CAT 1.3 i 22-25, iii 6-8; 1.4 ii 14-18).

In the myth “The Betrothal of Yarikh and Nikkal-Ib,” which may have been used as an actual marriage blessing, the West Semitic moon god Yarikh chooses the goddess Nikkal for his wife over other women, praising her potential to bear children (CAT 1.24:7). The myth includes an ode to the Katharat goddesses of marriage and pregnancy (CAT 1.24:5-6, 40-42) and applauds a mortal bride, who is called “the fairest

(dmqt) and youngest of the Katharat” (*CAT* 1.24:45-50). In the Kirta Epic, the widowed king Kirta is enchanted by the attractiveness of Lady Huraya. He calls her “Fair (n’mt) One” (*CAT* 1.14 vi 25) and compares her beauty (using the terms *n’m* and *tsm*) to that of the goddesses Anat and Athtart (*CAT* 1.14 iii 41-42, vi 26-28).

Finally, in the Baal Myth, for fear that they would “fly off” or “be taken away,” Baal refuses to have a window installed in the part of the palace inhabited by his three women (*CAT* 1.4 vi 7-11). This act of possession/protection implies the women’s attractiveness, sexual fertility, and also the dangers of visually stimulated male desire. Dated up to five centuries later, Levantine “women at the window” ivory panels may play upon this dynamic, teasing the (male) viewer with hypothetical glimpses of beautiful, secluded women.

PART II: MESOPOTAMIAN TEXTS

**NEO-ASSYRIAN HISTORICAL AND ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS**

Historical and archival Akkadian texts from the Neo-Assyrian period provide contemporary evidence of the cultural milieux in which the first-millennium BCE Levantine ivories would have been collected and appreciated. These texts shed significant light on women in the Neo-Assyrian royal court, some of whom may themselves have served as live models of ideal feminine beauty.453 In addition to Neo-


Assyrian documents, when they clarify or augment Neo-Assyrian evidence, Babylonian texts dating from the seventh to third centuries BCE are cited in this section as well.

Presented below is a summary of textual data relating to women’s potential roles in the Neo-Assyrian court and in society as a whole. Their identities as royal wives and mothers, female physical ideals, aspects of personal enhancement, and personal qualities are also considered. Both youth and maturity seem to have been valued, and an overview of all materials suggests that the reproductive fertility of the highest women in the court had personal, political, and ideological implications.

No cuneiform document reports the chronological age of a bride and groom or their parents at marriage or upon the birth of a child, but it appears that women in their mid to late teens married men who were in their late twenties to early thirties. In an extreme case, twenty years into his reign, Ashurnasirpal II (r. 883-859 BCE) seems to have married the twelve-year-old daughter of his cupbearer.

The highest ranking woman in the Neo-Assyrian court was the ruler’s mother (the “queen mother”). Ranking second to the queen mother among palace women was the

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456 Melville 1999, p. 31.
king’s primary wife or “queen” (MI₂.E₂.GAL, *issi ekalli*, or *segallu*).\(^{457}\) The queen, mother of the crown prince, not only had rank and power within the court, but, at least in some cases, appears to have been favored above other wives in the heart of the king.

When Esarhaddon’s (r. 680-669 BCE) queen Esharra-Hammat died, he constructed a mausoleum for her (Ass. I.; SAA XII 81, lines 8-9) and recorded her death in the Babylonian Chronicles (Chronicle 14, line 26).\(^{458}\)

It appears that Neo-Assyrian queens led primarily private lives. Yet, according to a letter from Assur (SAA XVI 95, lines 1-10), upon the announcement and mourning of Sennacherib’s death in 680 BCE, the governor’s wife came out of the palace to perform a sacrifice.\(^{459}\) If the wives of high officials could have public roles on rare (which the very


mention of it implies) occasions, queens, too, might have made exceptional public appearances. Although it is not possible to conclude that Neo-Assyrian queens personally represented a public model of ideal feminine beauty, the reputation of a queen’s physical presence, garments, and adornment could have permeated society. Moreover, a practice of general seclusion might have bolstered public fascination with the queen’s image (similar to modern American interest in the private lives and appearances of celebrities).

At court, a queen would have interacted with the king, her children, other wives, female and eunuch servants, priests and priestesses, and the gods. Here (privately), the traits and qualities that she demonstrated could have been cultivated and appreciated. Because a queen’s identity was based on the production of a male heir, she was a vital link in the prosperity of the state.

It may be significant that palace women of various ranks came from the Levant, a region particularly appreciated by the Assyrians for its luxuriance. Among Assyrian queens of apparent Levantine origin are “Semiramis” (that is, Sammu-Rāmat, the wife of Shamshi-Adad V [r. 823-811 BCE], whose factual history is inextricably mixed with legend), Naqia (the wife of Sennacherib [r. 704-681 BCE] and mother of Esarhaddon [r. 681-669 BCE]), and others. Palace records and literary sources indicate that foreign brides brought with them at least some women, such as her childhood “nanny” or personal servants, with her from her homeland (Sasson 2006, pp. 247, 263). Regarding Assyrian conceptions of the Levant, see Mordechai Cogan, “...From the Peak of Amanah,” Israel Exploration Journal 34 (1984): 255-59; Allison Karmel Thomason, “Representations of the North Syrian Landscape in Neo-Assyrian Art,” BASOR 323 (2001): 63-90.

680-669 BCE]), Atalia (the wife of Sargon II [r. 721-705 BCE]), and Yaba (the wife of Shalmaneser V [r. 726-722 BCE]).

In addition to historical circumstances that support their western origins, all of these queens have West Semitic as well as Akkadian names. Naqia, for example, is identified in inscriptions by the Akkadian name “Zakutu,” which is not an established Assyrian name, but an Assyrian translation of “Naqia;” both mean “Pure.” The artificial nature of the name “Zakutu” would not have disguised foreign ethnicity. “Yaba” and “Atalia” might be Hebrew names. “Yaba” (most likely based on the Hebrew root yph, discussed above) and its Akkadian semantic equivalent, “Banitu,” are inscribed on this queen’s tomb materials and grave goods. Both versions of her name mean “well-formed.”


462 In first-millennium BCE Assyria, having a West Semitic name would not necessarily have been viewed as unusual or “particularly foreign” (Melville 1999, p. 16). A Neo-Assyrian registry (K 8434) lists a hundred and eighteen female names, of which about eighty are preserved; almost half of the legible names are West Semitic (F. M. Fales, “A List of Assyrian and West Semitic Women’s Names,” Iraq 41 [1979]: 56). Indigenous Assyrians might have been given West Semitic names as a fashion, possibly in reference to the aromatic cedar mountains, lush terrains, or Mediterranean coast of the west, if not also in emulation of elite Levantine women living in the Neo-Assyrian court. At least some indigenous Neo-Assyrians already spoke Aramaic (a West Semitic language) at this time.

or, more loosely, “attractive.” Unlike the artificial name “Zakutu,” “Banitu” is an attested component of male and female personal names during the Neo-Assyrian period. Nonetheless, having the “same” name in two languages suggests that one version (the Akkadian one in this case) would have been adopted for purposes of cultural integration.

Physical Ideals: Accounts of Neo-Assyrian women’s physical features or bodies are lacking – perhaps they violated standards of modesty and/or were viewed as inauspicious forms of exposure. However, a unique building inscription on the colossal lions from “door a” of Room LXV in Sennacherib’s (r. 704-681 BCE) palace at Nineveh dedicates this part of the building to his queen Tashmetum-Sharrat, who appears to have been his second wife (following Naqia). The inscription describes her as his “beloved wife, whose features [the god] Belit-ili has made perfect above all women” (Layard MS C 55 verso – 56 verso, slab 4, lines 15-16). By complimenting her appearance rather than


any other characteristic, it is evident that physical attractiveness (as opposed to ugliness or average appearance) was a desired attribute of a wife and queen.

*Personal Enhancement*: Historical and archival documents provide descriptions of clothing and adornment, but they do not always specify to whom they belonged or for what they were intended. For example, a Neo-Assyrian palace inventory of aromatics lists fumigants and ointments, but it does not provide any reference to their use or ownership. One of the substances is for the “neck” (SAA VII 147, line 7; also see SAA VII 146), an attested erotic part of the feminine body in second-millennium BCE literature (but the neck could need ointment for various reasons). Texts do not describe living women’s garments or jewelry as they were worn on the body, but they are cataloged as material wealth in dowry lists and palace inventories. In addition, a queen could receive, and presumably be ornamented in, jewelry and clothing received as state tribute and audience gifts (SAA I 34, lines 14-16, rev., lines 8-9).

A young bride may have planned to maintain her attractive appearance throughout her marriage by bringing fine garments, jewelry, mirrors, and (although undocumented)


cosmetics with her when she entered her husband’s household. She might have received similar gifts from her new husband, who would have provided payment and gifts to her family as well. A Neo-Assyrian dowry list from Nimrud (IM 63414) includes gold and silver jewelry and ornaments (lines 7-12), linen and dyed wool garments (lines 14-21, 23-29), a mirror (line 31), household items, and furniture (lines 22, 35, 35). Neo-Babylonian dowry texts, too, record garments and adornment (mostly torques, rings, and earrings, which further investigation might determine to represent a standard jewelry set).

Through foreign brides and tribute, non-Assyrian clothing, jewelry, perfumes, cosmetics, and toiletry tools and containers probably entered the Neo-Assyrian court. Shamshi-ilu, a quasi-independent Neo-Assyrian governor based at Til Barsip (r. 780-745 BCE), for example, received precious metals, furniture (which could have been decorated with ivory images of women), and a royal “daughter with her extensive dowry” from the ruler of Damascus (AO 105, lines 4-10).

Exposure to exotic products and beautification

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473 Dalley 1998, p. 95. A necklace of probable Egyptian origin, for example, is displayed on Ashurbanipal’s (r. 668-627 BCE) banquet relief (Fig. 2.13a) as a royal trophy (Pauline Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs in the *Bīt-Hilāni* of Ashurbanipal” [continued from *BASOR* 224], *BASOR* 225 [1977]: 33-36).

474 Records of Neo-Assyrian international marriages are cited in Dalley 1998, pp. 83-84, 94-96. For the Shamshi-ilu stele inscription, see A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the*
practices could have had an effect on Assyrian conceptions of attractiveness and may have been relevant to Assyrian evaluations of Levantine ivory figures.

Probably dating from the reigns of Esarhaddon (r. 680-669 BCE) and/or Ashurbanipal (r. 668-627 BCE), storage tags and inventory lists found at Nineveh describe royal jewelry and garments of linen and wool (SAA VII 93-116). Although not specified as women’s property, the records illuminate some details of Neo-Assyrian costume. Among the jewelry listed are coiled bracelets (SAA VII 67, i, line 5) and eyestones (SAA VII 64, ii, 3; SAA VII 86, lines 1, 3, 4), examples of which have been excavated from the burials of royal women. Garment features that are noted include “fringes” (SAA VII 109, line 3), “pomegranates” (SAA VII 109, line 2), stone studs (SAA VII 97, line 13), “felt” (SAA VII 97, line 4), and red and polychrome cloth.

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475 For a very fragmentary jewelry inventory associated with a queen, see Fales and Postgate 1992, p. 90, text 70.


Variations in the weight, dye, and embellishment of garments belonging to cult statues reflected divine rank, and, among mortals, clothing would presumably have expressed courtly rank. The Neo-Assyrian queen mother and queen, then, would have had the most ornate female wardrobes in the palace. These may have contributed to their visual appeal, expressed their wealth, and indicated the esteem with which the king regarded them. The gleaming metal of their clothing and jewelry might have endowed their images with the divine and royal attribute of “awe-inspiring radiance” (me-lám in Sumerian, melammu in Akkadian). Literature portrays women’s skin in terms of radiance, and costume may have served as an external expression of this innate physical ideal.

The significance of royal costume and its association with divine dress are strengthened by stele inscriptions praising the mother of the Neo-Babylonian ruler Nabonidus (r. 555-39 BCE), Adad-Guppi, who was Assyrian by birth (Nabon. H 1 A and Sippar According to the Texts from the Ebabbar Archive, OBO 218, Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006, pp. 23-49).

478 For example, see Zawadzki 2006, pp. 91, 95, 100-102.


Adad-Guppi is said to have piously rejected elaborate costume during life, offering it instead to the gods. But in death she was given fine linen and wool garments along with silver and gold jewelry – items that may have constituted her royal regalia (i 21-26; iii 10-16).

Personal Qualities: While a youthful age-grade represents a nubile ideal, the queen mother and queen, whose ranks depended on the birth of an heir-apparent, clearly represent another, more mature prototype. Both models (young and mature) are defined by a woman’s reproductive fertility.

As live models of royal regeneration, the innate and enhanced appearances of the queen mother and the queen may have contributed to an Assyrian “rhetoric of abundance,” which was otherwise expressed through palace inscriptions, figural imagery, architectural ornament, and royal landscapes. The most detailed visual image of a Neo-Assyrian queen quite literally depicts this ideology: the well-known banquet relief (BM 124920) of Ashurbanipal (r. 668-627 BCE) shows the voluptuous

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and ornately embellished queen Libbali-Sharrat banqueting with the king in the midst of a luxuriant royal garden (Fig. 2.13a).\textsuperscript{483}

It is evident that Neo-Assyrian royal women could be beloved in private and were symbolic of prosperity within the court, but texts do not directly define their personal qualities. Naqia, the most famous queen mother (the mother of Esarhaddon [r. 680-669 BCE]) was known to the ruling classes across the territorial state of Assyria as a rich, powerful, and pious woman.\textsuperscript{484} Although it is not certain whether her reputation, which was promoted through text and image, represented particularly feminine traits, it certainly expressed acceptable if not admirable qualities. Similar to Naqia’s piety, the Neo-Babylonian queen mother Adad-Guppi’s rejection of elaborate dress and adornment, whether or not it was exercised in reality, exemplifies humility.

One might further approach the subject of ideal personal qualities through the semantics of female personal names.\textsuperscript{485} For example, the name “Naqia” means “pure,” and “Banitu” means “well-formed.” Women’s names in general may reflect positive aspects of femininity and may have echoed and reinforced evaluations of women across all levels of Neo-Assyrian society. Two female names of preliminary interest include Kuzbānītu (derived from the adjectival form of kuzbu, referring to allure, but maybe also expressing polychrome brilliance) and Larindu (literally “Pomegranate,” a fruit associated


\textsuperscript{484} Melville 1999, p. 37; Melville 2004, pp. 52-53; Melville 2005, p. 223.

with royal and divine imagery and attested as an aphrodisiac).\textsuperscript{486} Other names evoke qualities such as “friendly, pleasant, good” (K 8434 ii 22) and “strong” (K 8434 ii 26), and many state familial position or lineage, reiterating the significance of women’s generative roles.\textsuperscript{487}

**LITERARY TEXTS KNOWN DURING THE NEO-ASSYRIAN PERIOD**

While the literature cited here was known during the Neo-Assyrian period, all texts had earlier origins and might have reflected earlier times (similar to fairytales and religious narratives today). Nonetheless, it has been established, and is currently being pursued in a Helsinki dissertation, that literary texts could yield important information about “women’s ideological place in society.”\textsuperscript{488} Mesopotamian literary documents are of particular value to this thesis, because they describe aspects of feminine beauty more specifically than historical and archival texts do (probably on account of their different genre and because they do not refer to living women). Still, these texts tend to portray women’s physical appearances poetically, rather than literally.

In this section, evidence is drawn from a sample of five literary works selected for their relevance to topics of ideal feminine beauty: the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Descent of


\textsuperscript{487} Fales 1979, pp. 63-64.

\textsuperscript{488} Teppo 2005, p. 123.
Ishtar, the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, the love lyrics of Nabu and Tashmetu, and the poem of Enlil and Sud. All but the latter, which is written in Sumerian, are Akkadian texts. The Epic of Gilgamesh relates the adventures of two young men: Gilgamesh and Enkidu.  

"Heard and read by an overwhelmingly male audience, it is a significant source for interpreting male attitudes toward women."  

The remaining works are primarily religious in nature. Ishtar’s Descent, which was preceded by a related second-millennium myth in Sumerian (Inanna’s Descent), records Ishtar’s regalia as it is stripped off of her body while she passes through the gates of the netherworld.

The Nergal and Ereshkigal myth is a tale of seduction and marriage, and the love lyrics of Nabu and Tashmetu comprise an amorous poetic dialogue that may have been affiliated with an annual cultic festival enacted for the protection and blessing of the Assyrian king and royal family.

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489 The epic is cited as “EG” based on Andrew R. George, The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts, New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2003. It is derived from an Old Babylonian composition (c. 1700 BCE) that, itself, incorporates earlier Sumerian Gilgamesh tales. The first-millennium BCE version is known from a large number of manuscripts, many of which are from the palace library of Ashurbanipal (r. 668-627 BCE) at Nineveh (George 2003, pp. 3-54; Jeffrey H. Tigay, The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic, Wauconda, Ill.: Bolchazy-Carducci, 2002 [1982], pp. 11-16).

490 Rivkah Harris, Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia, Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000, p. 120.


Finally, the poem of Enlil and Sud relates the god Enlil’s discovery of the beautiful young Sud, whom he takes as a wife and elevates to the status of goddess (Sud is then renamed “Ninlil”).

Evidence of physical ideals, aspects of personal enhancement, and admirable personal qualities is presented below. Overall, both nubile and mature women are admired for their fertility, sexuality, and maternal natures. Women are portrayed as physically alluring, and they enhance their beauty through elaborate processes of toilette, dress, and adornment.

*Physical Ideals*: The allure of maidens is made clear by Gilgamesh’s lust after daughters and brides (EG I 72-77) and by Enlil’s desire for the young Sud, whom he mistakes for a prostitute in the street (ES A15-16). The appeal of mature, sexually active women is apparent as well. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the harlot Shamhat seduces Enkidu by exposing her breasts and genitals to him (EG I 188-94). The mature goddess Ereshkigal uses her body to charm her male beloved, Nergal. While dressing, she allows him to glimpse her flesh, after which the two embrace and go to the bed (NE iv 4-10).

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A damaged section of the Epic of Gilgamesh refers to seductive female bodies (EG I 230-31), but appreciation of the female body is best represented by Nabu’s praise of the goddess Tashmetu’s body (NT rev. 1-4). He compares her thighs to a gazelle, her ankles to an apple, her heels to obsidian, and her entire being to a tablet of lapis lazuli. In the poem of Enlil and Sud, Sud is compared to a “tall, beautifully shaped cow” (ES A8), evoking her feminine curves.\footnote{Also see Foster 2005, pp. 876-77; N. Veldhuis, \textit{A Cow of Sin}, Gronigen: Styx, 1991.} Although female nudity is typically portrayed as enticing, in the Descent myth, without her clothing and adornment, Ishtar becomes powerless before her sister Ereshkigal, whose netherworld throne she comes to usurp. Ishtar’s incapacitation, however, is primarily due to the loss of her regalia, rather than her nudity.\footnote{Dina Katz, “Inanna’s Descent and Undressing the Dead as Divine Law,” \textit{ZA} 85 (1995): 224; Dina Katz, \textit{The Image of the Netherworld in Sumerian Sources}, Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2003, pp. 259-60.}

Women’s faces are not portrayed in detail, but their eyes receive special consideration. Enlil says to Sud: “Kiss me, my lady of most beautiful eyes” (ES A26), and Nergal calls Tashmetu’s eyes “lapis cups” from which tears flow (NT rev. 8).

\textit{Personal Enhancement:} Cleanliness, fragrance, coiffure, cosmetics, dress, and adornment are cited as aspects of a woman’s personal enhancement. Before meeting a male deity, with hopes of pleasing him, the goddesses Ninsun (EG III 37-41), Ereshkigal (NE iv 4-10), and Tashmetu (NT rev. 7) bathe and carefully prepare themselves. Ninsun washes with soapwort, literally, the “make yourself pure” plant, and water perfumed with
tamarisk.\textsuperscript{497} After her bath, she dresses in a fine garment, puts a piece of jewelry (in the form of a stag?) on her chest, and places a crown upon her head. Her toilette, dress, and adornment may reflect standard preparations for conducting divine business, and they may have enhanced her power to sway the god Shamash’s response to her requests. The consistent literary theme of female preparation before interacting with a man may be related to conventions of feminine flirtation, bridal preparation, and/or the enticement of male fantasy.

As above, female clothing is primarily mentioned in the context of a goddess getting dressed or undressed. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the value of a fine garment is clarified by Enkidu’s demand that the best dress of Shamhat the harlot be soiled as a punishment (EG VII iii 109-110). In the tale of Enlil and Sud, upon seeing Sud for the first time and being struck by her attractiveness, Enlil says to her: “I will make you perfect in a queen’s dress” (ES A15). While implying that he will give her an exquisite garment, symbolically Enlil may mean that by taking Sud as a wife he would make her image more respectable and increase her rank.

In addition to clothing, adornment plays a central role in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the love lyrics of Nabu and Tashmetu, and Ishtar’s Descent. For example, jewelry occurs as marriage prestation in the courting tale of Enlil and Sud (ES A83). Also, before love-making (maybe as flirtation or in exchange for her intimacy), Tashmetu asks Nabu to adorn her: “My lord, put an earring on me, that I may give you pleasure in the garden!” (NT 13-14). He responds with bracelets of carnelian (NT 17-18). In the context of this narrative, adornment may also help to qualify Tashmetu for promotion among the

\textsuperscript{497} George 2003, p. 811.
pantheon (NT rev. line 22). In addition, putting on jewelry may enhance her sexual
appeal and stimulate his and her desires and fertility.\footnote{Nissinen 1998, p. 588, n. 21.}

In the Descent of Ishtar, through each door that Ishtar passes, the gatekeeper strips
off an item of her adornment. Removed in succession are her crown (agâ rabâ), earrings
(in, sabate ša uznî), neck beads (\textit{"nu\textasciido{194}erimmâti[NUNUZ.MES]} šá kišādî), breast pin/breast
plate (dudinate šà irtî), girdle of stones (šibbu aban alâdi šá qablî), wrist and ankle
bangles (šemerî qātîa u šēpî), and garment or undergarment (subat balti) (IshD 41-62). At
the commencement of their encounter, Ereshkigal strikes the naked Ishtar with diseases
and “kills” her (IshD 69-75). During the time that Ishtar is incapacitated, no man or
animal on earth impregnates a female (IshD 76-80, 86-90). So that fertility may be
restored, Ishtar is revived and given back her clothing, jewelry, and crown; she then
returns to the living world but in cyclic exchange for her beloved, Dumuzi (IshD 114-30).

Ishtar’s regalia may be seen as activating her innate divine powers, which maintain
life on earth. In addition, it may have represented queenly attire, without which she could
not rule the domain of the dead, that she had come to usurp.\footnote{Katz 1995, p. 224; Katz 2003, pp. 259-60.} Here, in addition to
expressing elite status and femininity, her jewelry and clothing appear to have been
empowering and protective. Moreover, the association of the dressed and adorned body
of Ishtar with earthly fertility might be linked to bridal adornment in living society.

In the last section of Ishtar’s Descent, Dumuzi’s sister Belili tears off her jewelry
during his visits to the netherworld (IshD 130-35). Specifically, Belili removes
ornamental eyestones (naṭīmāte [IĜI.MEŠ-te] IshD 134). Through this mourning practice, she could make herself sympathetically vulnerable, corroborating the significance of jewelry as protective as well as beautifying. Furthermore, the removal of jewelry might imply abstinence from sexual activities, as adornment is closely linked to the amorous realm. Belili’s own denial of her sexuality would reiterate the infertility created by Ishtar’s absence from the living realm.

**Personal Qualities:** Through the diverse literary figures of Shamhat, Siduri, and Ninsun in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the potential of physical attractiveness, motherliness, domesticity, wisdom, fertility, and sexuality is demonstrated to coexist in women (or in masculine conceptions of women). Ninsun, Gilgamesh’s mother, is “clever” and “wise” (EG III 17), but she nonetheless beautifies herself (EG III 37-41). Shamhat the prostitute and Siduri the tavern keeper, whose roles threaten the traditional family structure, counsel Enkidu and Gilgamesh, respectively, and ultimately behave maternally. Similarly, the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal concludes with the couple’s “marriage” (NE vi 48-51), prior to

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500 Eyestones are typically made of banded-agate, cut in a manner that resembles an eye. In ancient Near Eastern culture eyestones were linked to supernatural protection (E. Ebeling, “Apotropaen” and “Auge,” in *RIA*, edited by E. Ebeling and Bruno Meissner, Vol. 1, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1928, pp. 121, 313; Prudence O. Harper et al., eds., *Discoveries at Ashur on the Tigris*, New York, N.Y.: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995, p. 94; Marie-Louise Thomsen, “The Evil Eye in Mesopotamia,” *JNES* 51 [1992]: 26). For Assyrian examples of eyestone jewelry, see Figs. 6.15, 6.16, 6.20, 6.22-6.25. Still today eye emblems are common apotropaic devices in this region (see Ch. 8).

which Ereshkigal seems to have domesticated Nergal through sex, as did Shamhat with Enkidu.  

Ishtar’s descent to and return from the netherworld directly impact the impregnation of humans and animals. Shamhat (I 188-94), Ereshkigal (NE iv 10), Tashmetu (NT rev. 18-25), and Sud/Ninlil (ES A 148) all have sex. Tashmetu invites Nabu into the sanctuary, which offers the shade and protection of cedar, cypress, and juniper trees (NT 8-11), setting up an erotic atmosphere of luxury, seclusion, and sweet fragrance. Enlil and Sud/Ninlil make love “in the flowered bed…like a cedar forest” (ES A 148). Nabu and Tashmetu’s sexual intimacy is figuratively described as going to the garden where the lovers may pluck one another’s fruits and hear each other’s birdsongs (NT rev 18-25). Lively garden imagery (and descriptions of scents) express sexuality and symbolize reproductive fertility.  

Agricultural abundance is also associated with love-making and procreation. In the tale of Enlil and Sud/Ninlil, their sexual activity is directly linked to “growing grain, the life of Sumer” (ES A 158; in general, see ES A 156-170).

SECOND-MILLENNIUM BCE LITERARY AND RELIGIOUS TEXTS

Of all Mesopotamian texts, second-millennium BCE Mesopotamian literature, religious hymns, and temple documents offer the richest descriptions of ideal feminine beauty.

502 Harris 2000, p. 143.

503 Thomason 2001, p. 91.
This section introduces Akkadian and Sumerian compositions that have no demonstrated first-millennium BCE legacy, but which may be relevant to later Neo-Assyrian culture on account of their similarities to other second-millennium texts that survived into the first millennium BCE.

Further indicating the potential bearing of second-millennium BCE literature on Neo-Assyrian culture is a Middle Assyrian document from Assur known as KAR 158. This text demonstrates that an entire genre of Sumerian and Akkadian love poems, which were composed in the second millennium and appreciated at least on the cusp of the first millennium, is lost. At what point these works fell into obscurity is unknown. KAR 158 lists hundreds of incipits of Sumerian and Akkadian amatory poetry, but no more than three of the Sumerian works have been identified, and only one of the Akkadian texts is recognized.\(^\text{504}\)

In the following discussion, references to desirable female appearance, personal enhancement, and admirable personal qualities are drawn together from a pool of select works and incipits. Three literary compositions are presented: Inanna’s Descent, the tale of Enlil and Ninlil, and the Letter of Ludingira to his Mother. Several examples of (mostly sacred) love poetry are cited as well. In addition, references are included to a few

praise hymns to the goddess Inanna and to two archival temple inventories that list items of dress and adornment associated with cult statues of the goddesses Ishtar of Lagaba and Ningal of Qatna.

The literary ancestor of Ishtar’s Descent, “Inanna’s Descent” is written in Sumerian and survives in early-second-millennium and later manuscripts. Each goddess’s descent narrative includes sections not represented in the other, but both emphasize the goddesses’ adornment (which differs somewhat, reflecting cultural and historical variations in fashion and/or subtle differences in the attributes of the Semitic goddess Ishtar compared to the Sumerian deity Inanna). Of particular interest, Inanna’s Descent incorporates a detailed description of her personal enhancement before descending to the netherworld (InD 14-25).

The tale of Enlil and Ninlil is related to the poem of Enlil and Sud, which was found in Neo-Assyrian libraries. But instead of relating the couple’s courtship and wedding, in this myth their interactions entail illicit sex and childbirth outside of marriage. In the end, it praises the couple’s fertility with “no moral overtones.”

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507 The myth of Enlil and Sud is cited as “EN” based on Black et al. 2004, pp. 100-106. Also see Cooper 2002, pp. 91-112.

The unique Letter of Ludingira to his Mother is dated to roughly the mid-second millennium and is preserved on six tablets: four Old Babylonian Sumerian texts and two trilingual (Sumerian-Akkadian-Hittite) documents.\textsuperscript{509} One of the trilingual tablets was excavated from Ugarit, where it had been imported in antiquity. In addition to its literal title, the “letter” may be interpreted as a divine exaltation or expression of erotic love. Its relevance to this study lies in its account of the positively regarded feminine qualities by which a man (Ludingira) describes his mother to his courier so that he can recognize her (in order to relay Ludingira’s message that he is well). The mother is identified in terms of five literary “signs” that constitute the quintessential woman: her role as pious wife and the manager of the household (LL 13-20), her physical attractiveness (LL 21-31), her reproductive fertility (LL 32-39), her joyfulness (LL 40-46), and her sweet fragrance (LL 47-52).

Amatory poetry relates the love and erotic interaction between men and women and offers metaphoric descriptions of desirable women, their bodies, their personal enhancement, and their sexuality.\textsuperscript{510} Most poems are written in Sumerian and convey the

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
relationship between Dumuzi and Ishtar, either as virgin and suitor or as bride and groom.

KAR 158 demonstrates that similar works existed in Akkadian.

The Dumuzi-Inanna poems reflect Mesopotamian customs of courtship, betrothal, and marriage and are likely to predate the early-second-millennium cuneiform tablets from which they are known. Some love poems appear to have been secular in nature, or at least they are not overtly religious. Nonetheless, religious poetry, which was romantic and sometimes racy may have had profane origins and could have permeated extensive social boundaries, especially in oral form. There is no reason to discount that priestesses, such as Enheduanna, who authored hymns in praise of Inanna, might have been involved in the creation of amorous narratives or that lay women could have been familiar with love lyrics from either sacred or secular contexts. Women may even have emulated female protagonists in pursuit of romance and self-excellence.

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511 The Dumuzi-Inanna texts are cited by composition number (i.e., Dumuzi-Inanna text A = DI A) based on Yitzhak Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian: Critical Edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna Songs*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan-University Press, 1998. In order to limit the present inquiry, Shusin love songs and related poetry are incorporated primarily as comparative material. These and the Dumuzi-Inanna poems have been viewed as evidence for Sumerian “sacred marriage” rites, but a discussion of this potential practice is not pursued here (for a summary of “sacred marriage,” see Sefati 1998, pp. 30-49).


Physical Ideals: Male response to female attractiveness was heavily based on visual criteria: “He gazed at her, rejoiced in her, embraced her, kissed her…” (DI C1 21-22).

Ninlil’s mother warned her that stimulating the male gaze could also be dangerous: “His eye is bright, he will look at you! Straight away he will want to have sex, he will want to kiss! He will be happy to pour lusty semen into your womb…” (EN 23-21; also see EN 22-30).

But what exactly was it that would have appealed to Enlil’s gaze? In texts the female body is figuratively compared to bright or luminous things, materially valuable things, and things that are desired but out of human reach. Metaphors also evoke sweet tastes and surfaces that would be soft and moist to the touch. For example, the second sign in the Letter of Ludingira describes his mother’s physical attractiveness as:

...like the bright light in the sky, a doe on the hillsides. She is the morning star, shining even at noon-time. She is precious cornelian [sic], a topaz from Marhaşi. She is the jewellery of a king’s brother, full of beauty. She is a cylinder seal of nir stone, an ornament like the sun. She is a bracelet of tin, a ring of antasura stone. She is a nugget of shining gold and silver, but which is living and draws breath...She is an alabaster statuette of a protective goddess standing on a pedestal of lapis lazuli. She is a polished rod of ivory, with limbs full of beauty (LL 22-31).515

A Dumuzi-Inanna poem portrays the goddess:

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She finds the buttocks-beads, puts them on her buttocks, Inanna finds the head-beads, puts them on her head, She finds the greenish lapis lazuli blocks, puts them on her nape...She finds the jewel “which drips with honey,” puts it on her eyes, She finds the jewel “the outer shrine,” puts it on her nose...She finds the beautiful dove(-like) ring, puts it on her navel, She finds the “flask of honey and sweet water,” puts it (on) her hips, She finds the bright alabaster, puts it on her thighs, she finds the willow(-like jewel) with its black lofty foliage, puts it on her [vulva] (DI T 11-24).516

Demonstrating emotional desire, love, too, is depicted as luminous and precious:

your love shall be obsidian, your smiles shall be gold (KAR 158 vii 43-44).

my love is the nīru-constellation (KAR 158 vii 45).517

Physically, both female and male bodies are identified as carved statues of masterful make and precious materials: Dumuzi is “my pure figurine (dim-kù-ga-mu)...alabaster figurine” (DI B 31-32; also see DI Y 45-57), and Ludingira’s mother is “an alabaster statuette” (dim-ma-zu-til-la-àm, LL 30).518 These descriptions connote a well proportioned, symmetrical, flawless figure, in the manner of the Akkadian term banû, which refers to socially well-formed individuals as well as to physically well-formed people, animals, and objects.519


518 Black et al. 2004, p. 191. Also see Çiğ and Kramer 1976, pp. 416, 418; Sefati 1998, pp. 129-130, 277-78. In the biblical Song of Songs, discussed above, the woman’s thighs are similarly described as “the work of a master hand” (Song 7:1).

The female body may be studied feature by feature through descriptions of the
goddess Ishtar/Inanna. Facialy, her eyes and lips receive the most praise. In amorous
poetry, Inanna’s eyes are a powerful feature that delight and seduce her lover through their
attractive appearance and their gaze (DI B 4). An Akkadian hymn (c. 1683-1647 BCE) in
praise of Ishtar identifies her as “well-formed,” compliments her facial coloring (rosy
cheeks?), and portrays her eyes as “lustrous” (*bania šīmtāša bitrāma īnāša šit’ara*, AO
4479, 12).520 Dazzling, flecked, or iridescent (*zarriqu, barmātu* in Akkadian) eyes were
particularly admired among divinities, men, women, and animals (AO 4479, 12; MAD V
8, 13-14; KAR 158 vii 42).521

Through song (DI H 4), laughter (KAR 158 vii 3, 36-37), and speech (“your mouth
– its utterance delights me,” DI B 5), the mouth plays an important role in erotic
communication.522 The allure of the mouth is clear – it is cited in love poems in reference
to kissing (“making tongue,” DI D 13; “when you have seized my lips in your mouth,” DI
B 24) and is compared to a sweet vulva (DI Y 49; Shusin A 21).523 A desirable mouth
also tastes sweet – Inanna/Ishtar’s mouth and lips are like honey (AO 4479, 9; DI B 5).524

520 Foster 2005, pp. 65-68; Leick 1994, pp. 180-81; François Thureau-Dangin, “Un hymne
à Ištar de la haute époque Babylonienne,” *RA* 22 (1925): 172.


523 Jerrold S. Cooper, “Kuss,” in *RLA*, edited by Dietz Otto Edzard, Vol. 6, New York,

The attractive female body is depicted as sexually mature. Inanna’s breasts and hair-covered vulva (gal-la in Sumerian, more modestly translated as “nakedness”) are emphasized as the primary erotic aspects of her sexualized figure.\(^{525}\) Occasionally her body is portrayed as having just developed:

Behold, our (var. “my”) breasts have become firm, Behold, our (var. “my”) [vulva] …. has sprouted hair, Baba, going to the lap of the bridegroom, let us rejoice! (DI C 39-41).\(^{526}\)

Demonstrating the erotic appreciation of both the breasts and genitals, these features are mentioned together in contexts of love-making: “reach forth with your left hands and stroke our vulva, play with our breasts…” (Ki 1063 i 13’-14’).\(^{527}\) The vulva is frequently indicated through metaphor:

My high field which is well-watered, My own [vulva]…, a well-watered, a rising mound – I, the maiden – who will plow it? My [vulva]…, the wet and well-watered ground – I, the young lady – who will station there an ox? (DI P ii 24-28).\(^{528}\)

Other desirable parts of Inanna’s body include the neck (DI C 17-18), navel (DI T 20), thighs (DI E 10; DI T 22; Ki 1063 i 15’), and buttocks (DI T 11; DI P 13, 15). The attention that these features receive may indicate their aesthetic and erotic appeal. Most

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\(^{525}\) For praise of the vulva, see “Inanna and Enki,” segment A, lines 1-10 (“Inanna and Enki,” Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.3.1, accessed May 10, 2008).

\(^{526}\) Sefati 1998, p. 137. Also see Alster 1985, pp. 151-52.


\(^{528}\) Sefati 1998, pp. 224-25.
aspects of the female face and body that are praised are equally admired on men (such as his navel [DI E 9], thighs [DI E 10], and eyes [DI D 14]) – their significance to female beauty is not exclusive.\textsuperscript{529} However, while men’s and women’s thighs, for example, can both be sexy, their appeal and appearance would certainly differ.

Gender-specific appreciation does seem to be given to the female neck – a part of the body that in traditional twentieth-century Japanese culture, for instance, is considered a highly erotic site.\textsuperscript{530} Inanna’s nape receives exceptional attention – it is cited in relation to her jewelry and long hair, which would frame, embellish, obscure, and reveal the flesh:

Lapis lazuli beads she tied on her neck, Their knob she [laid] upon her neck sinews, [and] [tossed] the seal on her nape… (DI E 13'-15').\textsuperscript{531}

My locks were loosened – I tightened them, Tossed them to the sides of (my) nape…Small lapis lazuli beads I tied on my neck, Their knob I laid upon my neck sinews (DI C 14-18).\textsuperscript{532}

\textit{Personal Enhancement:} By far the most emphasized aspect of female personal enhancement and overall appearance in second-millennium BCE literature is adornment, but women’s hygiene, fragrance, eye makeup, and coiffure are also described in relative detail.\textsuperscript{533} Offering the reader a view of Inanna’s toilette, Dumuzi-Inanna texts describe the

\textsuperscript{529} In the future, it is hoped that this study of women may contribute to comparisons of male and female attractiveness.


\textsuperscript{531} Sefati 1998, p. 314.

\textsuperscript{532} Sefati 1998, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{533} These processes may reflect bridal preparations. An Old Babylonian text listing wedding expenses notes “the day they [the bride and groom] bathed” (UET 5 636, line 32), and Assyrian laws refer to a day of bathing and describe anointing as a marriage rite
goddess bathing (for example, see DI P i 27-28), anointing herself with oil (DI R 12-13; DI C 13), fixing her hair (DI C 13-15), applying eye makeup (DI E 3'-4', 12'), putting on jewelry (DI C 16-18), and dressing in a special robe (DI P i 29-30). A voyeuristic audience’s interest might be piqued through the details of each typically private step:

I bathed in water, scrubbed myself with soap, I bathed with water of the pure ewer, scrubbed myself with the soap of the bright bowl, anointed myself with the good oil of the bowl, I donned the royal garments of the queenship of heaven, therefore I roamed around in the house. I painted my eyes with kohl, the upright hair on my nape I straightened, my hanging hair I washed, tested my weapon, making the reign pleasant for him. (The hair of) my head was disheveled – I straightened it, my locks were loosened – I tightened them, tossed them to the sides of (my) nape. A golden bracelet I fastened on my hand, small lapis lazuli beads I tied on my neck…. (DI C 3-17).  

Physical cleanliness and anointing with oil are means of purification and beautification. Inanna’s oil (“good oil, good oil…I am sweet fragrance,” DI R Source A, 12] and possibly her soap (na-ma, Emesal dialect for naga, DI C 5) are scented. Body odors (“your vulva, stinking of urine,” MAD V 8, line 16) were viewed as unbecoming and anti-erotic. Pleasurable scents, therefore, would have served as aspects of and

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535 Similar to that used by Ninsun in the Epic of Gilgamesh (GE iii 38, cited in the previous section), Inanna’s soap was derived from an alkaline plant, the pollen of which was used for cleaning and the seeds of which were used as a spice (Sefati 1998, pp. 141, 238).

metaphors for attractiveness. The Letter of Luddingira contains a section (the fifth sign) about the mother’s fragrance that compares her to “a phial made from an ostrich egg, overflowing with finest oil” (LL 52). Fragrance further appears to have contributed to erotic environments: “…your caresses are sweet, growing luxuriantly is your fruit. My bed of incense is ballukku-perfumed” (Ki 1063 i 6'-8').

In terms of cosmetics, eye makeup (kohl), which Inanna “blends” before applying (DI E 1 3-4), plays a major role in the goddess’s personal enhancement. In Inanna’s Descent, her eye makeup itself, which she applies during her toilette but is not commanded to remove as she enters the netherworld, is named “May a man come, may he come!” (šembizi-lú-hé-em-du-hé-em-du, InD 22). Kohl even may be an attribute of her identity – Inanna is called “Kohl (šim-zi) of the king, kohl of Dumuzi” (DI V 1-2).

Female hair is described mostly in terms of its coiffure, rather than its physical properties (the opposite phenomenon is found in ethnographic evidence derived from veiled populations). The careful arrangement of Inanna’s wet lettuce-like hair into a “graceful crown” is related in detail (Shusin C 1-8). More general preparation of Inanna’s hair consists of the goddess herself letting it down to bathe and then straightening and refastening it with combs (muštû). Before sex, her lover Dumuzi

539 Westenholz 1987, p. 422.
542 Sefati 1998, p. 317, see pp. 143-44 for a discussion of “combs.”
releases it: “let me loosen your combs on the luxuriant couch” (DI H 21). By freeing
the hair, it becomes an erotic feature. It could move and bounce; it could obscure and
reveal the face and body; it could become more lustrous and exude scent, and it could be
caressed and tousled.

In mourning for Dumuzi, who is banished to the netherworld in exchange for
Inanna in the Descent myth, Inanna tears her hair out like grass (InD 384-93). This act of
self-mutilation is similar to Belili removing her jewelry in response to Dumuzi’s death
(IshD 130-35) – both actions are common mourning practices and may be seen as a
woman’s rejection of vanity.

Descriptions of feminine beauty that rely on metaphors of precious stones and
ornaments (LL 22-31; DI T 11-24) suggest that adornment might not have been viewed
strictly as external items that “decorated” the body but may have been considered essential
aspects of a wholly attractive female figure. Unlike hair (which is let down) and clothing
(which is removed), for love-making Inanna does not take off her jewelry. Exemplifying this practice, the adorned body of the goddess (here, Ishtar) is documented
just prior to intimate contact:


544 Thirteenth-century BCE lead plaques from the Middle Assyrian city of Assur portray
nude women wearing necklaces, armlets, bracelets, and anklets during and in preparation
for sex (Julia Assante, “The Lead Inlays of Tukulti-Ninurta I: Pornography as Imperial
Her Students, edited by Jack Cheng and Marian H. Feldman, Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2007,
p. 376). An argument has been put forth, however, that, in reality, adornment would have
been removed (even stripped off as an act of sexual enticement) for more comfortable
love-making (Julia Asher-Greve and Deborah Sweeney, “On Nakedness, Nudity, and
Gender in Egyptian and Mesopotamian Art,” in Images and Gender: Contributions to the
Hermeneutics of Reading Ancient Art, edited by Silvia Schroer, OBO 220, Fribourg:
O by the crown of our head, the rings of our ears, the mountains of our shoulders, and the charms of our chest, the bracelet with date spadix charms of our wrists, the belt hung with (lapis-lazuli) frog charms of our waist, reach forth…” (Ki 1063 i 9'-13')545

Inanna/Ishtar has a reputation for her adornment (“you, who wear ornaments,” The Shepherd and the Farmer, line 17).546 Divested of dress, jewelry, and hand-held attributes (such as the measuring rod and line, in Sumerian: gi-diš-nindan ěš-gana2 za-gin) at the culmination of her descent to the netherworld, Inanna is essentially stripped of her power and of her life (InD 164-72; IshD 68-75).547 Dress and adornment, then, were fundamental to the goddess’s identity and divine authority.

Inanna/Ishtar’s jewelry customarily incorporates a bracelet (DI C 16; InD 24; IshD 90-91), lapis lazuli neck beads (DI E1 13'; InD 20), nunuz/egg-shape beads (InD 21; IshD 49), inbu/fruit-shaped beads (AO 4479, 6, 8), a breast ornament (InD 23; IshD 51-52), earrings (DI T 15; IshD 45-46), a cylinder seal (DI C1 ii 17), and a pin that may have secured her seal (DI C1 ii 15).548 Corroborating this literary assortment of jewelry are roughly contemporary (non-literary) inventories written in Akkadian that record the treasury contents associated with cult statues of Ishtar at Lagaba and Ningal at Qatna.549

545 Westenholz 1987, pp. 422-23.
546 Sefati 1998, pp. 95, 332.
548 Inbu literally means “fruit,” referring to the shape of the bead (Inbu, CAD, “I & J,” Vol. 7, 1960, pp. 144-47). It has erotic connotations and may be translated figuratively: “Ishtar is … adorned with seduction (inbi)” (AO 4479, 6, 8, see Leick 1994, pp. 181, 221.) Nunuz is Sumerian for “egg.” Although referring to the ovoid form of the bead, it also could imply reproductive fertility.
549 Treasury contents may include offerings and ritual equipment as well as the goddess’s regalia and personal paraphernalia. The Qatna and Lagaba (LB 1090) texts are identified
The lists include finger rings (kamkammatum, L 2), bracelets and anklets (hullu, Q I 18; insaptu, Q I 19; šemīru, Q II 3, 12), necklaces (kišādu, Q I 8), nunuz beads (Q I 52), inbu beads (L 25), beads in the form of specific fruits such as “dates” (tittu, Q I 8) and “pomegranates” (nurmu, Q I 208), breast ornaments (tudditu, L 5; Q I 6), earrings (insabtum, L 6; Q I 48), and cylinder seals (kunukku, L 29; Q I 24, 31).550

In addition to jewelry, the Lagaba and Qatna inventories document garments, ribbons, and textiles belonging to the goddesses (L 14-19, 31-36; Q III 24). In literature, Inanna is described as wearing a pala-robe of queenship (túg-pala, túg-nam-nin-a, DI P i 30; DI C 7; InD 21). As regal apparel, her robe and crown (túgšugurra, InD 17) would indicate her rank in the pantheon (Inanna is referred to as “Ningal,” “Queen of the Palace,” DI P iii 1).551 Like the garments belonging to cult statues, literary references to divine garments imply that they were woven with gold and silver threads and decorated with metal appliqués.552 Clothing, then, could have had much the same effect as jewelry. A brilliant robe worn in conjunction with jewelry would augment a figure’s visual


550 Leemans 1952, pp. 1-11. Also mentioned at the beginning of this text, but poorly understood, is an element of adornment apparently associated Ishtar’s headdress that is translated as “vulva” (āru, L 2, 26) (Leemans 1952, p. 4; Sefati 1998, p. 253). On the significance and possible iconography of breast ornaments (tudditu), see George F. Dales, “Necklaces, Bands and Belts on Mesopotamian Figurines,” RA 57 (1963): 32-33.


luminosity and might have added to, activated, or have served as a channel for the
goddess’ aura (me-lám, in Sumerian; melammu, in Akkadian).553

*Personal Qualities*: The behavior and social descriptions of model women help to
establish some basic qualities. Four female life-stages are represented in second-
millennium literature: the unmarried virgin (EN 31; DI A; “The Shepherd and the
Farmer”), the sexually active unmarried woman (EN 78-84), the sexually active bride (DI
Z), and the mother who manages the prosperity of the household (DI O 11; LL 13-20).
Despite behavior or age, sexuality and fertility are evident across these life stages.

Additional aspects of ideal feminine beauty may be gleaned from figurative
language and ancient vocabulary that expound upon the images of admirable and desirable
women. Overall, women are portrayed in terms of preciousness (“she is the jewellery of a
king’s brother,” LL 25; “my pure figurine…alabaster figurine, adorned with the lapis
lazuli diadem,” DI B 32), luminosity (“she is the morning star, shining even at noon-
time,” LL 23; “shining sister,” DI C 32; “Ninlil, so beautiful, so radiant,” EN 40), sweet
tastes (“my sappy vine, my honey-sweet, my mellifluous mouth of her mother,” DI B 3),
and fruit and vegetal lushness (“my mother is…a garden…a well-irrigated pine tree…a
Dilmun date, a prime date much sought after,” LL 33-39; “my blossoming garden of
apple trees,” DI B 28).554 In addition, implying graceful form, strength, and movement,

553 Cassin 1968, pp. 4-6; Garelli 1990, pp. 176-77; “Melammu,” *CAD*, “M,” Vol. 10, pt. 2,

“ibex” and “deer” refer to Inanna (DI R, Source A, 3-4), and Ludingira’s mother is a “doe on the hillsides” (LL 22).

Preciousness, luminosity, sweet taste, lushness, ripe fruit, and strong, graceful animals may all be tied to physical attractiveness, allure, sexuality, and/or reproductive fertility. The Sumerian word “hi-li,” like its Akkadian equivalent kuzbu, translated as “beauty,” “loveliness,” or “allure,” is frequently employed in descriptions of desirable men and women. Hi-li may connote sex-appeal and/or luxuriance, and it sometimes describes fertile land (“the barley in the furrow overflowing with loveliness [hi-li]” DI A 5; DI E 3) or fruits (ripe dates are “full of abundance” [hi-li guru-me], Hymn to Inanna and her Self-praise, ii 7). Inanna, the mother of Ludingira, and gardens/fields are variously “full of,” “enveloped in,” “wearing” or “adorned with” hi-li (for example, Inanna B 147, 154; DI A 3-5; DI V 3; LL 31). Parallel to the Sumerian formula, Akkadian texts describe Ishtar as “adorned with” kuzbu (AO 4479, 6). In Inanna’s Descent, one of the elements she prepares herself with before descending to the netherworld is hi-li. Along with her “May a man come, may he come!” eye makeup, Inanna’s hi-li is never removed and may be viewed as an essential element of her identity that cannot be displaced.


Winter has suggested the consistent translation of hi-li as “allure,” noting that more specific connotations may be explained through literary context and word pairs, rather than various translations of the term itself.\(^{558}\) In Sumerian literature an assortment of words is paired with hi-li – two include ma-az and ku7-ku7. “Ma-az” may be translated as “delight” (Inanna B 147; DI A 5).\(^{559}\) The mother of Ludingira, who demonstrates hi-li, for example, is also portrayed as a joyful woman (LL 41-46). Joy, laughter, and playfulness are, not surprisingly, cited in erotic contexts (for example, KAR 158 vii 7, 31, 37) and may be corollary aspects of abundance and wealth.\(^{560}\) “Ku7-ku7” indicates “sweetness” (DI D 5; Shusin B 2, 4).\(^{561}\) In an amorous narrative (Ishmedagan I iv 95) hi-li (allure) and ku7-ku7 (sweetness) are enjoyed in Inanna’s lap.\(^ {562}\)

The ambiguous manner in which allure (hi-li) and other positive states (such as delight [ma-az] and sweetness [ku7-ku7]) are associated with the body implies that they may have had visual and/or energy-bearing properties.\(^ {563}\) Their association with the body might be linked to fecundity as well – consider the fruit-shaped (inbu) beads cited above. In a similar, if not related manner, Winter has pointed out the floral embellishment of a


\(^{559}\) Jaques 2006, p. 548. For additional attestations of this pairing, see Sefati 1998, p. 126, n. 5.

\(^{560}\) Groneberg 2003, p. 68; Jaques 2006, p. 18.

\(^{561}\) Sefati 1998, p. 158, n. 5. Ku7-ku7 literally refers to the sweetness of honey (ku7). The duplication of the element ku7 heightens the intensity of this term to “very sweet.”


first-millennium sculpture of a syncretic Ishtar/Mulissu goddess of abundance – the property of abundance that she embodies is expressed through blossoming bodily adornment.\textsuperscript{564}

CONCLUSION

Ancient Near Eastern texts describing feminine beauty stimulate all of the senses evoking women’s visual appearances, their scents, the sounds of their laughter and their voices, the sweet tastes of their kisses, and the feel of their soft skin and lush genitals. Women embodying ideal feminine beauty demonstrate diverse personal qualities, including sexual fertility, joyfulness, strength, wealth, modesty, piety, purity, and intelligence.

The range of Levantine and Mesopotamian first- and second-millennium BCE texts presented here draws upon a common pool of metaphors and phrases.\textsuperscript{565} These topoi are generally consistent with aspects of feminine beauty represented in the ancient visual and archaeological records. They also parallel later Arabic literary and ethnographic materials corresponding to the regions in which the ivory sculptures under study were produced and displayed.

A shared emphasis on certain characteristics across ancient Near Eastern texts allows for the discussion of a general ancient Near Eastern model of ideal feminine beauty. Physically, female facial and bodily appearance was praised, and fair skin was admired. By far the most significant facial feature was the eyes (and their gaze). Attractive eyes, especially enhanced with kohl, are dark, bright, iridescent, and may have

\textsuperscript{564} Winter 2003, p. 258.

\textsuperscript{565} Westenholz and Westenholz 1977, pp. 218-19.
a liquid nature to them. Lips are the second most significant facial feature and are often
described in terms of their sweet taste.

The specifications for an attractive body are not provided beyond a general
preference for an adult but youthful figure with flawless, well proportioned features.
Metaphors comparing women to nimble animals might allude to poise, balanced posture,
and a graceful gait. The physical features receiving the most attention are the breasts and
vulva. Breasts, although not described in detail, are both nurturing (mostly in the Ugaritic
tradition) and erotic. The vulva is appreciated in a sexual sense; it is wet and sweet. In
addition, the female neck seems to elicit particular appeal.

Jewelry and clothing are used to embellish, frame, cover, protect, and possibly
empower the body. Earrings, bracelets, and anklets are frequently mentioned, but across
all literature necklaces and headgear appear to be the most essential type of female
adornment. In addition to jewelry, an ornate garment, fit for a goddess-cum-queen, was
an integral aspect of female attractiveness. The prototypical divine or queenly garment
was sometimes dyed with purplish hues, embroidered with gold and silver threads, and/or
embellished with appliqués of precious stones and metals. While garments would be
worn in public and to present one’s body to a lover, nudity was clearly appreciated in
sexual contexts (although jewelry might remain on the disrobed body).

Non-material aspects of personal enhancement include cosmetics, hairstyle, and
fragrance. Noted above, eyes were darkened and enlarged with kohl to enhance their
innate characteristics. For hair, long tresses were enjoyed. Heightening its private
delights, at least outside of Neo-Assyrian traditions, women’s hair seems to have been
covered or bound in public. Finally, a pleasing scent was important to a woman’s
personal presentation and could be achieved through washing with scented soaps, applying perfumed oils or ointments to the skin, or exposing hair, skin, and clothing to burning incense.\footnote{Albright 1974.} A pleasant scent might also communicate, without or before contact, a woman’s delightful taste. Moreover, fragrance, like radiance (\textit{me-lám/melammu}), could emanate from a woman as an “aura” or palpable energy.\footnote{Cassin 1968, p. 126.}

Essential aspects of womanhood entail potentials of erotic sexuality and reproductive fertility.\footnote{Cooper 1989, p. 88.} Highly regarded women of all ages demonstrate an array of positive personal qualities including joy, intelligence, faithfulness, modesty, strength, piety, and courage. An ideal woman rears children, diligently supports her household, and is pious in her faith, while maintaining a pleasant attitude and an attractive facial and corporeal appearance. Metaphors of luxury and royalty describe women and goddesses, and the wealth, power, and prosperity of queens and their households were admired, not condemned. The quintessential female figure could balance an array of positive personal qualities with wealth, sexuality, purity, and physical attractiveness.\footnote{Similarly Jaques discusses the principal values of Sumerian culture as including aesthetics, morals, wealth, strength, and wisdom (2006, pp. 13-19).} However, women could be corrupted by aspects of their own beauty, acting in lust, greed, arrogance, deceit, and violence.

Drawing together textual evidence from Levantine and Mesopotamian sources, I would propose two general models of womanhood: the virgin bride/lover and the matron
queen/wife/mother. Living women could fulfill these categories, but, maybe because they are immortal, goddesses tend to display characteristics of the virgin bride/lover and of the matron queen/wife/mother without completely fulfilling either identity. For example, Inanna and the Ugaritic goddesses are represented across both categories. Ishtar may embody a more mature queenly figure, but she is unmarried. Only in the late Neo-Assyrian period, when Ishtar appears to be conflated with Mulissu, wife of the national god Assur, does the goddess represent both queenly and wifely aspects ideal feminine beauty (which are emphasized in the Hebrew Bible during the same period). As early as the ninth century, Ashurnasirpal II’s (r. 883-859 BCE) wife/queen was named “Mullissu-Mukannishat-Ninua,” demonstrating a conceptual if not ideological link between living queens/wives/mothers and goddesses.\footnote{Abdulilah Ali Fadhil, “Die in Nimrud/Kalhu aufgefundene Grabinschrift der Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua aus Nimrud/Kalhu und andere in ihrem Grab gefundenen Schriftträger,” \textit{BaghM} 21 (1990): 471-82.}

Nubile women are represented in texts primarily in terms of their physical attractiveness, sexuality, and procreative potential, while married women (both of and beyond childbearing age) are most admired for their piety, household economics, motherhood, and wisdom.\footnote{Harris 2000, pp. 26, 88-118.} All of these characteristics could be found in the perfect bride as well as the perfect wife by taking into account her past, present, and potential virtues. Thus, it would have been possible for one person, at least conceptually, to demonstrate and permanently possess both stages of ideal feminine beauty.
Physically, while a youthful body is preferred, a more mature, but well proportioned (as might be carved by the hand of a master) woman was equally desirable. The matron queen’s beauty draws directly upon the standards established by the image of the young bride. Through her jewelry, “the only beauty that blooms eternally,” fragrance, and other aspects of personal enhancement, the visual appeal of an aged woman may have been understood to remain intact (symbolically, if not literally) despite physical changes. Likewise, the positive personal qualities of a truly beautiful woman would never flag, and in fact might manifest themselves in her face and body, if not be exuded as a radiance or energy.

With respect to the ivories, the analysis of texts offers vital information for understanding conceptions of ideal feminine beauty in the regions the sculptures were carved and displayed. It is clear that common, underlying values across the Near East would have motivated the production and appreciation of the ivory figures. Texts also offer insight onto important aspects of beauty, such as a woman’s scent, radiance, reproductive fertility, and personal characteristics – qualities that might have been cued through the visual properties of the ivories but cannot be interpreted from modern perspectives through visual analysis alone. Pursued in conjunction with visual analysis, then, the written record is a rich and vital source for understanding the significance, in both Levantine and Assyrian contexts, of the early-first-millennium BCE ivory sculptures of women and the ideal feminine beauty that they represented.

CHAPTER 8
ETHNOARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF IDEAL FEMININE BEAUTY

Through the method of ethnoarchaeology, this chapter explores living folk practices relating to feminine beauty in the Near East. “Ethnoarchaeology” is a primarily anthropological endeavor that offers models for the interpretation of past cultural phenomena through the application of living cultural and material records to ancient evidence.573 Through ethnoarchaeological analysis, knowledge of modern practice, regardless of direct continuity or formal affinities, can contribute to the understanding of ancient life.574


For present purposes, ethnographic material has the potential to elucidate ancient culture in three main ways: first, it may serve as a guide, suggesting where to look for what within the ancient evidence; second, it may offer literal models that aid in reconstructing the ancient functions and physical forms of artifacts; and, third, ethnographically documented symbolism may provide paradigms for interpreting the meaning of ancient objects and practices.

First, observations of a parallel ethnographic record can direct researchers to data embedded in the ancient evidence that would otherwise have been overlooked or undervalued. For example, a study of the use of spouted vessels in modern ritual contexts revealed uses for ancient Mesopotamian spouted vessels that were previously unrecognized, because they were not represented in the ancient visual record. However, prompted by the living record, the archaeological record was re-examined and evidence of additional uses was discovered. In this case, the ancient evidence demonstrating the full range of use for this type of vessel had been available for over half a century, but it had been not been fully interpreted prior to ethnoarchaeological consideration.

Second, ethnographic comparison can offer examples for how ancient objects might have been used. For instance, by comparing the archaeological deposition of various pins on skeletons to those worn by a living population, one could propose styles in

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which ancient women might have pinned their hair and garments. Similarly, archaeologically preserved vessels and tools may be compared to contemporary examples to help reconstruct their ancient contents and uses (such as containers for cosmetics and tools for applying eyeliner). Modern comparisons may also aid in the restoration or interpretation of damaged artifacts or objects depicted in fragmentary or poorly preserved artworks.

Finally, especially when traditional symbolism observed in living culture is formally related to ancient examples, living evidence may be used to hypothesize ancient meaning (as in the comparison of modern amulets portraying eyes and ancient eyestone jewelry). Similarly, modern figurative language and personal names may be explored as possible repositories of ancient thoughts and values among living ethnolinguistically related populations.

This chapter applies these three ethnoarchaeological modes of study with the aim of corroborating and expanding our understanding of ancient Near Eastern beauty as exemplified by first millennium BCE ivories. Certain similarities between the ancient and modern evidence are likely to represent long-term cultural continuity, which may strengthen the relevance of some interpretations, but this does not grant free application of

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living evidence to the ancient record (in fact, the temptation to jump from “analogy” to “answer” must be rigorously avoided). That is, the utility of ethnoarchaeology lies not in simply matching “like” to “like” or completing a “fill-in-the-blanks” exercise (especially across three millennia of culture) but in establishing productive scenarios for thinking about the ancient evidence in its own context.

The background of and evidence for this investigation are laid out below. Then, a composite description of living Near Eastern ideal feminine beauty, based on traditional physical ideals, forms of personal enhancement, and personal qualities is presented. Relevance to the ancient record is noted throughout and expanded upon in the conclusion, which returns to the ethnoarchaeological utility of living culture as a guide, a model, and an interpretive paradigm for decoding and reconstructing ancient Near Eastern ideal feminine beauty.

BACKGROUND

Striking and intriguing similarities between ancient and modern culture underlie the consideration of ethnographic evidence for this thesis. I first became acquainted with Near Eastern conceptions of ideal feminine beauty in 1996 while on an archaeological excavation at the north central Syrian village of Tell Ahmar (ancient Til Barsip, where, notably, a handful of first-millennium BCE ivory sculptures has been found). One day I was invited to tea by some local women who, upon finding out that I, a nineteen-year-old female, was unmarried, told me that I must “Eat, eat, eat!” so that a man would find

580 Among the ivories were a female head and a portion of a window frame from a “woman at the window” plaque (Guy Bunnens, “Carved Ivories from Til Barsip,” AJA 101 [1997]: 438-39, 449, figs. 1, 16).
me attractive and chose me for his wife. Implied that my slimness (in their perception—not in terms of Western high fashion) was perceived as a negative quality in the male evaluation of betrothal candidates, their advice contradicted everything I knew about feminine beauty growing up in the United States. They explained that a slight build meant that I might not be able to bear many children (whether on account of physical or biological reasons, I do not know). Furthermore, a desirable wife must be “strong” so that she can contribute to household labor, and, contrary to Western ideas of fitness, a thin woman’s strength is suspect.

After this encounter I began to wonder whether the female body was evaluated according to ideal wifeliness or ideal attractiveness, and if, in traditional Syrian culture, these two qualities were separable. Several years later, during July 2002 and January 2006, I followed up on these early impressions and questions through ethnographic field surveys in Syria.581 Focusing on traditional female adornment and bridal beauty, I visited the villages of Bakha (2002) and Djubbadin (2006) in the Anti-Lebanon region as well as two villages, Mshanef (2002) and Bosan (2006), in the Hauran.582 Evidence gathered over

581 The Harvard University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research determined this project to be exempt from review. Travel research was supported by the G. Sinopoli Memorial Grant for Research in the Near East (2002) and a grant from the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (2006). Many thanks to my hosts, translators, and field assistants: Tony and Georgette Khouri (2002), Joseph Malki (2002), Marwan and Hanan Materwani (2006), Bacel Moqaw (2006), and Ahmad Shadeh (2006).

the course of this research supplements a large pool of nineteenth- and twentieth-century
documentation of Near Eastern women and their beauty practices.

The ivory sculptures of women under study in this thesis were certainly
appreciated in Mesopotamia as well as in their Levantine regions of origin. Parallel to this
geographic range, the ethnographic evidence brought together and treated in whole here is
derived from across the Fertile Crescent (mostly from modern Israel, Palestine, Syria,
Iraq, and Kuwait). General consistencies in concepts of attractiveness and beauty
practices are evident in the material. Furthermore, in traditional communities across this
otherwise socially, culturally, and environmentally diverse landscape, the primary aim of
female beauty seems to be the same: to attract and retain a (preferably prosperous)
husband and to produce many (preferably male) heirs. The physical traits that are valued
(or that would meet basic requirements to stimulate male erotic interest and are thereby
considered desirable by both men and women) underlie conceptions of ideal wives. As
my first encounter with this topic indicated, in traditional Near Eastern communities, a
beautiful woman/wife is an attractive embodiment of reproductive fertility, maternity,
physical strength, and joy.

Motivating and buttressing this ethnoarchaeological study are formal consistencies
between some types of ancient and traditional Near Eastern adornment. A specific type of
female headgear, attested archaeologically and depicted on some of the ninth- to eighth-
century BCE ivory sculptures, provides the most powerful example: it consists of an
ornamented headband and a dorsal ribbon terminating in tassels (Figs. 2.17, 2.24, 6.23).583

583 Gansell 2007, p. 449, figs. 1-5. This tasseled diadem and other Near Eastern forehead
ornaments have been compared to phylacteries (Richard D. Barnett, *Nimrud Ivories in The
Variations of this headdress are evident in the Levant as early as the thirteenth century BCE, and, dated more than a half millennium later than the ivory sculptures, similar adornment is portrayed on funerary sculptures of women from the first- to second-century CE Roman-Parthian site of Palmyra in the Syrian desert (Fig. 8.1). In the last century, strikingly analogous headgear was (still) worn by women in Jordan and Syria (Fig. 8.2). The case of this headdress may provide a model for formal continuities in various aspects of ancient Near Eastern feminine beauty and adornment, and, presently, it serves to foreground the potential of an ethnoarchaeological investigation.


In addition to material evidence, the natural resources and indigenous populations of the Near East might motivate comparative studies between ancient and modern cultures. With reference to beauty, common natural resources may contribute to the use of equivalent materials for grooming, cosmetics, perfumes, textiles, and adornment.\(^{586}\)

For example, a variety of traditional Persian and Iraqi “beauty secrets” involving natural materials were recorded by Freya Stark, a Western woman living in Baghdad in 1931.\(^{587}\) She reported a hair treatment concocted out of egg, butter, saffron, rose, and mahlab (a spice made from the ground pits of the St. Lucie cherry tree [Prunus mahaleb]). Recipes such as this could be compared to those preserved in ancient texts to determine if ancient women might have had similar beauty regimens.\(^{588}\)

Ancient and living women of the Near East may well, on a fundamental level, be physically analogous. Today’s population can generally be described as dark-haired, dark-eyed individuals, demonstrating recognizable ranges of facial structures and physiques.\(^{589}\) If physical appearances across temporally distant populations were

\(^{586}\) Winter 2000, p. 132.


comparable, the present-day enhancement and/or suppression of features (such as dark eyes) and characteristics (such as thick hair) may indicate areas of focus in the presentation and evaluation of ancient Near Eastern beauty.

The potential of the ivory carvings to have reflected specific ethnic and regional physical types could also be investigated.\textsuperscript{590} Although not pursued here, the likely mimetic relationship of the ancient ivory sculptures to living populations could be explored through comparison of ancient works to modern Near Eastern women descended from ethnically homogenous populations.\textsuperscript{591} Relationships could clarify the regional identities of the women portrayed in the ancient sculptures and/or the regional production origins of the works themselves.\textsuperscript{592}

THE EVIDENCE

The information presented here is drawn from the experiences of male and female travelers and visitors as well as the reports of trained anthropologists and ethnographers.


\textsuperscript{591} A study comparing the proportions of archaic Greek koroi statues to living Greek, Turkish, and Italian men, for example, has suggested that the ancient sculptures were related to real human proportions (Eleanor Guralnick, “The Proportions of Some Archaic Greek Sculptured Figures: A Computer Analysis,” \textit{Computers and the Humanities} 10 [1976]: 154, 159).

\textsuperscript{592} A constraint on such a study of Near Eastern material would be that while ethnicity may be linked to region, over the course of millennia, populations have shifted locations on local and international scales, and many previously mobile groups have become sedentary. See collection of essays in W. H. van Soldt, ed., in cooperation with R. Kalvelagen and Dina Katz, \textit{Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the 48th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Leiden, 1-4 July 2002}, Leiden: Netherlands Institute for the Near East, 2005.
All of this evidence is pooled, and interpretations of the living culture are offered.

The bulk of the material is derived from nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographies and travel memoirs written by Western observers and participant-observers. Although intending to record traditional ways of life and not necessarily focusing on women, early studies frequently reported on gender roles in society and, in turn, revealed cultural values relating to women. In addition, rites of passage were often documented, as these tended to entail public ceremonies that were accessible to the visitor.

During rites of passage and other festivals, community members may wear special costumes that express cultural aesthetics and identity. Of particular interest to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century observers, and to this investigation, were extravagantly dressed and adorned brides (Figs. 8.3, 8.4). In addition, some ethnographers wrote down the words of wedding songs (awsāf) that describe and praise a bride’s beauty from head to toe.

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As consciously managed presentations of sexual attractiveness, brides represent the epitome of feminine potential and beauty. In traditional Near Eastern cultures, every girl is expected to someday become a bride, and she is raised from the earliest age to prepare for her wedding and the role of wife. Children can be betrothed at birth, but whether or not such an arrangement is made, the ethnographer Hilma Granqvist observed that in Palestine female newborns were sometimes called “brides.” In addition, Granqvist reported that girls made their own dolls in the forms of adult women, which they referred to as “brides.”

A girl’s appearance and potential as a wife are evaluated in making betrothal arrangements; young women who are very beautiful (based on characteristics described below) can command a higher bride price and even marry “up” on the social ladder. Although it may be traumatic for many reasons, the wedding is the brief phase in a girl’s life during which she receives the most attention and admiration for her beauty. Even a


bride whose attractiveness is below average (and who may have a lower bride price than others in her community) is primped, adorned, and praised by other women for her best features.598

In considering ethnographic evidence, it has been necessary to screen for evaluations and descriptions based on the experiences and values of members of the population under study, rather than the opinions of outside observers. In a hypothetical scenario, a traveler describes the “beautiful” women of a harem. While these women may be considered beautiful in their own culture and their attractiveness may partially account for and be visibly embellished through their status as members of an elite harem, the observer’s opinion of their beauty would not be relevant. Pertinent, however, would be the criteria in their own culture by which their beauty is defined and ranked. This could be recovered through the opinions of members of the culture as well as through patterns (but not impressions) discernable to objective observers.

It is therefore useful to analyze outsider observations of feminine appearance, especially those of women whose status is linked to or even relies on their attractiveness, such as girls carrying a high bride price, women selected for elite harems, young co-wives chosen to visually delight older men with aging wives, and prostitutes. In the above example, although the outsider’s basis for judging beauty would be discarded, an observation such as “all were exceptionally fair skinned and wore huge gold wrist and ankle bangles” would be highly relevant. This statement would begin to tell us that fair skin may be intentionally selected and that female status may be displayed through

While it may seem that the fondness of individual men for specific types of brides is idiosyncratic, the research presented in this chapter found that traditional preferences across the Near East correspond to a general prototype. In essence, what may be seen as personal choice is in fact a decision, conscious or not, by most men to follow cultural norms in their selection of what are considered attractive women. At the same time, women, recognizing a standard of beauty, may judge others according to it and strive themselves to conform to the ideal.

In addition to considering published ethnographies and travel memoirs, twentieth-century ethnographic archives containing portrait and documentary photographs of daily life were consulted. One source, the Marie-Thérèse Baroness Ullens de Schooten Collections at Harvard University, 1927-1989, is stored in the Fine Arts Library. It contains slides, photographs, notebooks, audio recordings, and films on the cultures of Iraq and Iran. The Gertrude Bell collection was also consulted. It consists of about seven thousand photographs, as well as letters and diaries, documenting Bell’s experiences in the Near East, c. 1900-1918. Most of the Bell material has recently been made available on-line through Newcastle University’s Robinson Library. Forty additional unpublished packets are stored at the Robinson Library in England. The unpublished material entails a large number of photographs, including pictures of Kurds and “Marsh Arabs,” but I was told that there are no significant images of women. At present, I have


600 Personal communication, Dr. Melanie Wood, Special Collections and Archives Librarian, Robinson Library, Newcastle University, Newcastle on Tyne, U.K. (September 30, 2007).
looked over a great deal of the Ullens de Schooten slide collection and the on-line Bell photographs. Preliminary inspection of this material did not yield any unique finds, but these archives are vast and likely to be of eventual value.

In the future, toward a more systematic survey, access might be sought to the original notes and documentary materials collected by ethnographers; although, for now, not all research archives are located or are publicly available. The survival and/or location of the unpublished contents and original media of the Henry Field collection, for example, remain unknown. Most of Field’s early-twentieth-century ethnographic research in the Near East is published on microfilms (which will be fully utilized in a future phase of this project) stored at Harvard University’s Tozzer Library.601

In some cases, ethnographers, due primarily to a lack of funds, were not able to publish all of their records.602 In his 1937 monograph, Sigmund Sussia Reich stated that although only a handful of photographs are illustrated, he had collected almost two thousand images during the course of his fieldwork.603 Hilma Granqvist, too, regretted her inability to publish most of her photographs.604 At the time of her death in 1972, she was organizing the images she had collected over the course of her career; in 1981, a

601 Personal communication, Dr. Gregory Finnegan, Associate Librarian for Public Services and Head of Reference, Tozzer Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. (September 30, 2007).

602 Regarding the unpublished collections discussed below, at present, I do not know if the images survive or where they are likely to be today. I hope, however, to pursue this in the future.


604 Granqvist 1947, preface.
small selection of these (from at least one thousand pictures) was published. Also, any surviving output and archives of professional photography studios, such as Lévy et Neurdein réunis, Paris, which produced postcards portraying the Near East and North Africa during the early twentieth century, might be equally useful, despite the evident Western biases of the posed images (Fig. 8.5).

In addition to these anthropological sources, costume collections, such as that of Widad Kawar in Jordan, and exhibitions containing items of dress, adornment, and toiletté are considered here. Ideally, costume would be studied first-hand in collections and in the field. Collectors, themselves, might also be valuable informants.

What is offered in this chapter is by no means an exhaustive study of all potentially relevant records, but an array of materials and perspectives is included. The sample incorporated here, however, is particularly valuable as it contains a variety of


608 The reconstruction of a women’s reception room in the Azem Palace Museum, Damascus, includes models wearing costume elements associated with bathing and weddings. Studying costume in living culture would provide more accurate impressions of how and in what contexts clothing and jewelry are typically worn. Videorecordings are also a valuable resource – for example, see Farah Munayyer and Hanan Munayyer, dirs., Palestinian Costumes and Embroidery, Caldwell, N.J.: Munayyer Collection, 1990, videocassette, 35 min. (available at Barnard College library).
unintentional, and thereby less biased, documentation of feminine beauty.\textsuperscript{609} Furthermore, much of the information was recorded during contexts of greater cultural isolation (the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries) than exist today and therefore provides benchmarks for cultural change.

The following section is organized categorically by descriptions of ideals relating to physical characteristics, personal enhancement, and personal qualities (including physical abilities, social identity, and symbolic conceptions). Traditional values and folk practices are discussed primarily in the present tense, as they pertain to the present era. Many aspects of traditional culture remain intact (or have not been proven to be extinct), and, when outdated by a generation or two, their memories often survive. Generalizations are not made based on individual instances, but specific examples of broadly attested beliefs and practices are offered for illustrative purposes.\textsuperscript{610} It should be noted that the ideals presented here are not always followed, and, even when they are, they may not be consciously recognized by all members in a given society.

PHYSICAL IDEALS

In popular Arab belief ideal beauty is of distinct consequence: a beautiful face is


\textsuperscript{610} Winter 2000, p. 151.
auspicious; an ugly person brings bad luck. Physical ideals describe the face and the body. The face is almost always discussed in detail, feature by feature. A full face is preferred, and plump cheeks are admired. A folk song extols a woman’s cheeks and the “round shape” of her “broad face;” another song praises a face resembling the “full moon.” A case is also reported in which a woman in her early thirties worries that she is losing her beauty through age. While waiting over a decade for a husband, her heart has grown “narrow and cramped;” she sees this reflected in an unattractive “narrowing” of her face. A heart full of love and joy may then be manifest in a “full” (and beautiful) visage.

The most habitually discussed facial feature is the eyes; ideally they are large (“the size of eggs”), black, and pool-like, resembling “little coffee cups.” Women’s eyes are compared to gazelles’ eyes – a relationship that may be enhanced through the use of

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611 Behrens-Abouseif 1998, p. 64.
612 Fernea 1965, p. 137.
613 S. H. Stephan, “Modern Palestinian Parallels to the Song of Songs,” Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society 2 (1922), pp. 244-45, 267, 271. Lunar references also indicate a preference for radiant faces. The moon has been associated with the female face in the Near East from ancient times through the present era (Sonbol 1994, pp. 57-58). A study of Islamic and Arabic literature would likely reveal a great deal of continuity in verbal descriptions (if not cultural conceptions) of feminine beauty. For example, see Sells 1989.
614 Fernea 1965, p. 160.
kohl. While dark eyes are preferred, blue eyes are not only considered unattractive but may be feared to be capable of evil.

Dark eyebrows, shaped like “swords” or “crescents,” contribute to the attractiveness of the eyes, and cosmetic techniques are employed to enhance them. Long eyelashes, as one would expect to find on a deer or gazelle, are highly admired. A folk song describes a woman’s long lashes as “stolen from a gazelle,” and a female personal name documented in Palestine means “long eyelashes.”

The innate qualities of female hair, rather than coiffure, receive the most admiration (hair is typically covered in public). Beautiful hair is long, thick, black, and shiny, and cosmetic processes enhance its scent and sheen. A superlative braid may be described as “thick as an arm” or “a tent rope.” Henna is sometimes used to prevent hair from thinning or falling out, in addition to coloring it shades ranging from purple to

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617 Blue-eyed ethnographers have reported difficulties building a rapport with their informants (Ochsenschlager 2004, p. 20; C. T. Wilson, Peasant Life in the Holy Land, London: John Murray, 1906, p. 48).


620 Jaussen 1927, pp. 50, 52; Ochsenschlager 2004, p. 20

Demonstrating the importance of hair as a factor in female attractiveness, in Palestine the woman hired to beautify a bride for her wedding is called a “hairdresser,” although her duties as an aesthetician extend far beyond this. Also, indicating the pride taken by women in their hair, is the tradition of selflessly cutting one’s hair to mourn.

The practice of veiling one’s hair in traditional Near Eastern cultures – Christian, Jewish, and Muslim – suggests the power of its allure. Its attractiveness to men may be exemplified by a bride’s unloosening of her hair in a seduction dance on the occasion of her first sexual encounter. While female hair is covered to protect it from non-intimate male eyes, when exposed, hair is sometimes decorated with shiny foil and blue beads intended to deflect envy.

In contrast to dark eyes and hair, a light complexion, exemplified by the Palestinian female name “Fair-skinned” (“Shakra”), is highly regarded. “Wheat-” and


624 In the early twentieth century, it was observed that women of the Moab region (near the Dead Sea in Jordan) not only cut their hair in mourning, but they then decorated the burial site with their cut locks (Jaussen 1927, p. 94, fig. 8).


626 Weir 1989, p. 264.

627 Delaney 1995, p. 56; Reich 1937, figs. 26, 27.

628 Granqvist 1950, p. 33; Sonbal 1994, p. 58.
“gazelle-”colored tones are specified as desirable. As an aspect of beauty, skin color can play a role in the selection of a wife. A Western visitor, for example, was perplexed by an Iraqi man who did not seek to marry a young woman who in her eyes, had “everything: beauty, a warm heart, [and] intelligence;” instead, he chose her lighter-skinned sister. A proverb, however, encourages men to look at a girl’s descent, rather than her beauty, when seeking a wife. Specifically, it encourages suitors to disregard “that she is dark,” implying the potential for outward appearance to distort perceptions of who may be beautiful overall (compare to Song of Songs 1:5-6, discussed in Ch. 7).

Women’s cheeks are frequently described with fruit and dairy metaphors that are either red or white, such as apples, roses, fresh cheese, and milk. Blushing cheeks, probably indicative of modesty, are reported in the context of a bride viewing her groom. Furthermore, “plump” cheeks may be implied through imagery of blooming flowers or ripe apples.

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629 Fernea 1965, p. 306; Grant 1907, p. 47; Jaussen 1927, p. 50.
630 Fernea 1965, p. 306.
631 Granqvist 1931/1935, p. 66.
633 Pierotti 1864, pp. 194-95.
634 Fernea 1965, p. 137.
In addition to being fair and prone to blushing, an ideally attractive female face has radiant skin and lustrous teeth. White teeth “made of silver” are described as “pearls” or “transparent hailstones.” Radiant faces are compared to moonlight and the Pleiades. A Palestinian wedding custom enhances a bride’s face by covering it with gold leaf. Referred to as the “transformation,” this procedure is said to make the girl even more beautiful. Her golden face is only revealed when the groom lifts her veil and is presumably is “blinded” by her beauty.

In terms of body type, a sturdy, voluptuous (but not obese) figure is preferred. Elizabeth Fernea, in a memoir about her experience as a Western woman living in an Iraqi village during the 1950s, reported being the object of concern among local women on account of her “thinness,” closely echoing my own experience in Syria. The women she encountered also judged American babies to be too small (and susceptible to disease), because American women are too thin.

Full breasts, hips, and legs are especially admired. Folk songs refer to breasts as apples and pomegranates, implying their ideally round, firm, and possibly “juicy”

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635 Jaussen 1927, p. 51; Stephan 1922, p. 201.


638 Fernea 1965, pp. 133, 294.

nature. In another description, a “groom may take one breast for a cushion and the other as an eider-down quilt.” Similarly, songs specify the belly as an erotic feature and refer to it as being “soft like a fold of cloth” or having “one fold over another.”

Finally, height is admired. An ideal bride is described as being tall enough to “shut the window without a stool,” as tall as a “beech log” or “palm tree,” or nearly as tall as the groom. Long legs and a long neck specifically contribute to an attractive woman’s height, and comparisons to gazelles and thoroughbred horses express the grace of feminine movement.

PERSONAL ENHANCEMENT
Primary forms of personal enhancement include hygienic practices, fragrance, cosmetics, body marking, dress, and adornment (hair is primarily appreciated for its qualities, rather than coiffure). The following discussion focuses on folk practices that may be more relevant to ancient traditions but acknowledges that today, even in rural and non-sedentary

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640 Stephan 1922, pp. 237, 243-45, 253-54.

641 Stephan 1922, p. 201.

642 Stephan 1922, pp. 263, 267.

643 Jaussen 1927, p. 50.

644 Pierotti 1864, p. 194; Stephan 1922, pp. 253-54, 268. Height may also refer to a girl’s maturity. A woman I interviewed in Syria, for example, was married in the 1930s when she was only nine years old and not yet fully grown (Gansell 2007, p. 454).

cultures, women use modern toiletries and wear elements of Western-style clothing. Jewelry, however, tends to follow traditional forms. It is typically produced and purchased in cities, but until relatively recently in rural Palestine, both village inhabitants and non-sedentary groups bought jewelry from itinerant vendors and craftsmen, whose wives would sometimes offer tattooing services.646

Physical cleanliness and a pleasing scent are the foundations of personal enhancement and play a major role in bridal preparation.647 The skin is scrubbed and softened with loofahs and pumice-like stones. Pulverized *sidr* tree (*Ziziphus spina-christi*) leaves may be used on their own to clean the hair and skin; otherwise, olive oil soaps scented with rose, saffron, and frankincense are common.648 In a Palestinian tradition, brides bathe in water scented with cloves, and the soaked cloves are then strung as aromatic necklaces worn by the bride and bridal party.649 Married women also wear clove necklaces as aphrodisiacs.650

In addition to bathing, especially in preparation for the wedding night, body hair is removed.651 “Sugar wax” (conventionally made of sugar, terebinth resin, water, and

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antimony) is used. Today toothbrushes are readily accessible, but traditionally a "chewing stick" from the hamdh plant (Salvador persica) may be used to clean the teeth and refresh the breath. Once the body is clean, a woman may apply perfumes, oils, and other scented treatments (practically, aromatics also repel some insects). Emphasizing the significance of a pleasing scent, songs and poetry describe attractive women through metaphors of fragrant fruits, flowers, and trees.

In terms of cosmetics, receiving by far the most attention are the eyes, which are enhanced with kohl. Kohl is akin to eyeliner, but it is stored in a small container or vial and applied with a dipped wand in the manner of Western mascara (Fig. 8.6). Some containers and wands are kept in colorful ornamental pouches, which may be embellished with pendants, beads, tassels, and feathers.

In addition to beautifying, kohl counteracts glare, wind, airborne debris, and bacteria. Both men and women protect their eyes from the harsh glare of the sun with

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654 Grant 1907, p. 61; Pierotti 1864, p. 195; Stephan 1922, pp. 213, 214, 241, 243.
655 Field 1958, pp. 112-31.
kohl, which also improves vision in bright light. Furthermore, applied to the conjunctival surfaces of the eyes, kohl stimulates tearing (possibly linked to an aesthetic of “liquid” eyes), which keeps the eyes cool, moist, and flushed of sand and dust, thereby treating redness, burning, and inflammation.

Kohl is also used to treat and prevent eye infections – to this end it is even applied on babies. Sometimes mixed with pulverized almonds, kohl’s mineral components, which include galena (lead sulphate), stibnite (an antimony compound), and copper, are toxic to infectious bacteria carried by flies and water. While cosmetic kohl is traditionally black in color, blue/green (copper-based), white (antimony-sulphate-based), and red (from the fluid of cochineal insects) varieties serve medicinal and therapeutic purposes. All types of kohl, however, are believed to “strengthen” eyesight and deflect the “evil eye.”

Central to this study is the underlying premise that kohl also beautifies. Demonstrating the erotic implications of kohl, in addition to letting her hair down, a bride

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659 Jaussen 1927, p. 71.


661 Stark 1946 (1937), pp. 214-15. For additional types of kohl and their Arabic names, see Jaussen 1927, p. 70.


might wave a kohl container about during her nuptial dance of seduction. As an aesthetic device, kohl enlarges and darkens the eyes by outlining them and elongating their outer corners so that they resemble those of a gazelle (Figs. 8.3, 8.4). Women who have naturally gazelle-like eyes are referred to in Arabic by the feminine nominative form of the word “kohl” (“kahla”), and wearing kohl can make a woman appear as a veritable “kahla.” In some instances, kohl also is used to darken the eyelashes and eyebrows. It may be applied to laterally extend the brows or to join them in the center. Other techniques of enlarging and darkening the brows include a specific way of trimming or brushing them, and, as a permanent option, tattooing them.

Lips, too, are enhanced with cosmetics. A type of bark may be pressed against the lips, dying them a reddish-brown color and causing them to swell. The effects of this treatment last for a few days. Sometimes lips are tattooed with blue or black markings as well as with designs around their edges that augment expression (Fig. 8.7, compare to Fig. 3.8).

Body marking, through henna and tattoos, embellishes specific features and ornaments the skin. Henna is most often applied to the hands and feet, and tattoos are

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665 Jaussen 1927, pp. 70-71.
666 Field 1958, pp. 112-13; Stephan 1922, p. 217.
667 Field 1958, fig. 9, nos. 1674, 1677; Stark 1946 (1937), pp. 215-16.
668 Stark reported that “Persian women in Kuwait” used dairam, a bark imported from India (1946 [1937], p. 216). Also see Fernea 1965, p. 155.
predominantly worn on the face and body, although any part of the body may be marked by either method. A bride’s face and body may be decorated with tattooed motifs or impermanent designs in henna or other more easily dissolved pigments (Figs. 8.3, 8.4, 8.8). On the face, the center of the forehead, the apples of the cheeks, the mouth, and the chin are typically decorated. A basic type of body tattoo consists of a line extending down the throat and chest between the breasts. In more elaborate examples, the central line may branch out and be accompanied by other markings on and around the breasts, navel, and belly (Figs. 8.9, 8.10). Women’s lower backs, thighs, ankles, and feet also receive tattoos.

Like kohl, facial and bodily decorations are considered to protect and strengthen a woman wherever they are worn. Tattoos are applied in order to heal an injury, improve eyesight, or relieve headaches or rheumatism. Some tattoos are referred to as the body part they adorn (“this [tattoo] is my ‘wrist’”). Otherwise they are named after their design (such as a “scorpion” or “wheel”) or are called the “shadow” of the nearest piece of jewelry (the “shadow of the nose-ring,” the “shadow of the anklet”). As if they “dress” the body, henna patterns typically bear the names of embroidery patterns (such as “palm tree,” “cypress tree,” “kohl pot,” or “necklace”).

Body markings of all kinds augment beauty and may be viewed as seductive

670 Field 1958, pp. 33-34; Reich 1937, p. 113; Weir 1989, p. 250.

671 Field 1958, pp. 14, 25; Reich 1937, pp. 87, 113.


673 Field 1958, pp. 142-44.

Fernea, a newlywed, reported that local women urged her to get a tattoo so that her husband would still desire her after her body aged. Additionally, a study of prostitutes in Arabia found that most had tattoos on parts of their bodies that would normally be clothed, and the women claimed that the markings functioned both as visual ornaments and sexual stimuli.

Costume includes jewelry and clothing, which operate together to create a comprehensive visual effect while enhancing and concealing parts of the face and body. In Near Eastern culture, an ambiguity between “jewelry” and “clothing” is evident, for example, in the naming of some embroidery patterns after types of jewelry (such as an embroidered collar or pectoral zone that is called a “necklace”). This likely reflects a custom in which women, especially for festive occasions, may embroider their garments to replicate pieces of jewelry that they do not own. Similarly, in Syria a type of choker with metal and stone ornaments has, since the 1930s, begun to be replaced by the less expensive alternative of neckline beading and embroidery (Fig. 8.11).

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675 Charles 1939, pp. 109-10; Field 1958, pp. 25, 26, 37, 43, 47; Rejab 1989, p. 112.
676 Fernea 1965, p. 133.
677 Field 1958, pp. 54-55.
imitating jewelry, embroidery patterns could be vestiges of designs sewn onto garments with metal appliqués (Fig. 8.12).

The close relationship, or even fusion, of “jewelry” and “clothing” in Near Eastern folk costume is further demonstrated by the headdress that incorporates a dorsal band (Fig. 8.2). Worn on top of a scarf or veil, the part of this headdress that adorns the head is primarily made of metal ornaments and sometimes incorporates temple pendants that mimic earrings in their position and form. In contrast to this head “jewelry,” the attached dorsal element typically consists of an ornamented fabric band with tassels of thread, closely relating it to the garment over which it falls.

The types of adornment typically worn by women throughout the Near East include headgear, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and finger rings. A variety of headgear is worn, both beneath and overtop of headscarves and sometimes integrated into caps. The beginning of this chapter discusses the formal similarity between ancient and twentieth-century CE diadems. But even more meaningful in view of ethnoarchaeology is that styles of headgear vary distinctly as recognizable markers of regional and ethnic groups.682 The ethnographic record shows that a woman of one particular group would not wear headgear that was associated with another group – even if she relocated, or if she was a nomad who became sedentary.

Today traditional Near Eastern adornment displays influences from Byzantine, Egyptian, Turkish, Persian, Arabian, and, among others, Central Asian cultures.683 Many forms can be traced to the ninth century CE, but vestiges of much earlier styles are also

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observed. Ribbed cuffs fastened with pins worn by Syrian and Iraqi women are formally comparable to jewelry represented in the ancient visual and archaeological records (Fig. 8.13; for example, see Figs. 2.19, 5.26, 6.21). And in Iraq today, simple round bracelets are sold to and worn by women and girls in sets of six. These may be compared to what appear to be stacks of bangles portrayed in ancient sculptures.

Earrings incorporating three pendants (Fig. 8.14, compare to Figs. 2.17, 6.18) or embellished with a fringe of small pendants (Fig. 8.15, compare to Figs. 2.13b, 6.19) also resemble ancient styles. Other types of folk jewelry include belts, dorsal jewelry (Fig. 8.16), temple ornaments worn over the head (Fig. 8.17), and plait pendants (Fig. 8.18). These less familiar forms of adornment might eventually be useful in interpreting unidentified types of ancient jewelry found in archaeological contexts (such as Figs. 6.30, 6.31).

In traditional Near Eastern communities, even poor women wear jewelry, but their ornaments may be made of less expensive metals, such as bronze or copper. Based on the weight of the metal and actual coins often incorporated into designs, jewelry can also serve as a “savings account” or a woman’s “insurance against

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disaster.” Jewelry itself is essential to a woman’s identity as it reflects her wealth and status. By displaying one’s jewelry, a woman shows off her assets, which she may have “earned” through her honor and beauty and as well as through her roles as a wife and mother.

Because it communicates social information and because it is linked to beauty, it is important that jewelry is worn, not just owned. Despite its weight, even when performing heavy labor, women may wear jewelry from head to toe. Fernea reported that the Iraqi women among whom she lived inquired why Western women keep their jewelry hidden away in little boxes. Similarly, a Syrian woman whom I was interviewing about her own jewelry told me that it was shameful for me to have pierced ears but to “leave them empty” if I had any earrings.

Brides are most ornately bedecked with jewelry, and after marriage women may continue to wear elements of their wedding jewelry as personal assets, even during daily activity. Marriageable girls also may be adorned with quantities of jewelry to communicate their wealth, social identity, and beauty. Jewelry is said to play upon

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689 Rajab 1989, pp. 110, 112.

690 Rajab 1989, p. 110.


male curiosities – an Arabic folk song, for example, expresses the enticement of a woman’s wrists as she kneads dough wearing bangle bracelets.693 Also, since female beauty could invite envy, certain jewelry offers protection from the “evil eye.”694

Clothing is valued for its material, decoration, and fineness of craftsmanship; expert embroidery is particularly praised.695 When I showed an antique portrait of a bride to informants living in the same village today, several women independently noted a partially visible embroidered flower at the bottom of the photograph (Fig. 8.3).696 Their eyes were directed by local knowledge that unique floral patterns were embroidered on all bridal dresses.697 For practical reasons and because the handmade designs are treasured, women may re-use embroidered parts from discarded garments.698 One woman showed me an embroidered portion of her deceased mother’s wedding dress; the dress itself had been cut in half.699 Demonstrating the

693 Stephan 1922, p. 258.
696 Gansell 2007, p. 454.
697 While designs may be unique to each garment, general patterns and even the preferred colors of thread vary by village and region (Samih K. Farsoun, Culture and Customs of the Palestinians, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2004, pp. 55, 59, 61).
698 Zerrnickel 1992, p. 179.
699 The informant showed me the embroidered lower half of the dress (Gansell 2007, p. 479, fig. 9). I do not know what happened to the upper portion. However, this type of dress typically has an embroidered chest panel, which may have been incorporated into another garment or given to someone else.
significance of embroidery on female garments, in mourning, women of rural Palestine may tear the embroidered panels on the chests of their dresses and wear them in this condition for forty days.\textsuperscript{700}

While clothing covers the body, protecting it from view, even long, loosely cut garments could be flirtatious. The inner facing of a type of full-length Syrian coat, for example, is decorated with colorful silk and satin appliqués (Fig. 8.12). Only visible as flashes when a woman walks, this “peek-a-boo” feature is intended to draw attention to her attractive gait.\textsuperscript{701}

It is perhaps surprising that descriptions of beauty from the ethnographic record and from my own field surveys rarely discuss clothing or jewelry. Likewise, female beauty tends not to come up in field interviews about costume. Descriptions of beauty focus on facial features, hair, skin, body type, and the use of fragrances, kohl, henna, and tattoos. Conversations about costume emphasize materials, techniques, and social meaning.

Jewelry and clothing apparently do not serve to “beautify” a person in the Western sense. My research on bridal adornment in the Anti-Lebanon region of Syria helps to clarify the relationship between feminine beauty and costume. While the bride’s beauty is evaluated in terms of her face, body, skin, and hair, the extent of her jewelry, clothing, and make-up correlates to her innate beauty more than any other characteristic (Figs. 8.3, 8.4).\textsuperscript{702} Although it is the beauty of a bride’s image, not her personal attractiveness that is

\textsuperscript{700} Farsoun 2004, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{701} Zerrnickel 1992, pp. 188-89, figs. 467-72.

\textsuperscript{702} Gansell 2007, pp. 452, 454; Reich 1937, p. 114.
aesthetically appreciated in the wedding context, more attractive women have the privilege of more elaborate adornment, which is believed to protect them against the inherent danger of being envied for being beautiful.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

PHYSICAL ABILITIES

During youth, a girl’s age is described relatively according to the domestic tasks she can do (old enough to brush her hair, to chase chickens out of the room, to make bread, etc.), and, as she matures, her age is expressed through her marital and maternal status. These age-grades parallel the prototypical woman, who is ideally a responsible homemaker and mother. It is necessary that a woman be strong in order to perform sometimes strenuous household and agricultural labor and that she be healthy and fertile in order to conceive and bear many (male) children. Physical strength and reproductive ability are closely linked in traditional conceptions of ideal womanhood. Regarding strength, which signals reproductive heartiness, Granqvist reported that women are proud to be able to carry heavy burdens and are praised for this. In fact, by performing heavy labor in public, some girls furtively demonstrate their strength to potential suitors in order to communicate their wifely potentials.

Tattoos not only beautify but are applied as simple dots or marks on women’s

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703 Granqvist 1931/1935, pp. 34-37; Granqvist 1947, p. 137.


705 Ochsenschlager 2004, p. 20.

706 Granqvist 1947, p. 158.
wrists and forearms to enhance physical strength.707 Because strength is such a positive attribute, the mark of its enhancement, the tattoo, may come to be admired as part of a woman’s appearance (it becomes a “beauty mark”). Strength may be imparted through adornment as well. Informants interviewed in Syria explained that the necklaces of teeth worn by traditional brides were intended to make the girls “strong.”708 Related to this ideal, a wedding song calls for the bride to be adorned with “with beauty, strength, and courage.”709

SOCIAL AND CONCEPTUAL IDEALS

Socially, an ideal woman should have a good pedigree or family background. This is most always considered in the selection of a bride and in the negotiation of her bride price.710 However, a very beautiful girl with a poor or undesirable background could overcome this through a marriage arranged in favor of her attractiveness.711

Cultural ideals are sustained and revealed through personal names. A survey of names taken by Granqvist over half a century ago in Palestine showed that more female than male names referred to personal qualities. By far the most popular female names


708 I did not realize at the time that these descriptions might refer to physical strength; rather, I thought the strings of teeth offered strength against the evil eye (Gansell 2007, pp. 454-55). Kalter points out that animal teeth are considered phallic symbols in Syria, and they are incorporated into boys’ amulets to ensure their fertility (Kalter, “Syrian Folk Jewelry,” 1992, pp. 100-101, fig. 219).

709 Pierotti 1864, p. 192.


711 Gansell 2007, p. 455.
including, “Bahiye,” “Dabla,” “Hasna,” “Hesen,” “Jamile,” and “Shelebiye”) indicate physical beauty, and some names describe bright, precious, and attractive objects (such as “Fadda,” meaning “silver,” “Bannura,” meaning “crystal,” and “Nijme,” meaning “star.”). The modern Arabic word *hlawa* is the term for “beautiful” most often used to describe brides – it also identifies a pastry as being honey-sweet. Indeed, the woman’s name, “Helwe,” interpreted to refer to a “sweet” nature, was the second most frequently occurring name reported in Granqvist’s study. Other Palestinian female names describe positive qualities, such as “bright/clever” (“Zarife”), “modest” (“Akle”), “noble” (“Azize”), “gentle” (“Halime”), “content” (“Radiye”), and “friendly” (“Sabha,” “Sabiha,” and “Latife”). Additional women’s names of interest here derive from words referring to plants (for example, “Ward il-Sham,” “Ghusun,” and “Khadra”), soft earth (“Raya”), and life (“Aysha,” “Eshe”).

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The principal traits of ideal feminine beauty indicated across ethnographic records of the Near East include long, thick, dark hair; large dark eyes, complemented by dark lashes and brows; fair skin; a full face; and a voluptuous, relatively tall, well proportioned figure. The luster of the eyes, hair, *fair* skin, and teeth is emphasized. Other important

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712 Granqvist 1950, pp. 32-38. It would be useful to look at names across generations, languages, Near Eastern regions, and even émigré groups.


714 Granqvist 1950, p. 27.

715 Granqvist 1950, pp. 27, 32-33.
characteristics are a woman’s physical strength and ability to become pregnant and bear children, a respectable family background, and a sweet, modest, and joyful nature. These external and personal qualities are displayed and enhanced through fragrance, kohl, tattoos, henna, dress, adornment, behavior, and personal names. Male response to women and male selection of wives may reiterate these ideals and encourage female emulation of them.

Ethnographic evidence also demonstrates the close relationship between innate characteristics of the physical body and aspects of personal enhancement, ranging from hygiene to cosmetics to costume. The conflation of kohl with ideally attractive eyes epitomizes this phenomenon. Similarly, an inseparable relationship of various types of body markings from the body itself, jewelry, and embroidery is evident. Also demonstrated ethnographically is the interdependence and even interchange between clothing and jewelry. Finally, the association between costume and beauty is clarified. In traditional Near Eastern conceptions, costume is not part of the primary source of beauty (which may be defined as the innately attractive, scented, made-up woman with well maintained hair), but it expresses, protects, and correlates to the degree of a woman’s beauty.

Striking and detailed similarities between ethnographic descriptions of women and the ancient ivory women (our understanding of which is enhanced through archaeological and textual evidence) are observed, such as: “Her long, glossy black hair, plaited and curled at the ends, hung down her back.” Referring to the coiffure of a Turkish bride in

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the 1850s, this description could match the hairstyles shown on some of the ivory figures from Nimrud (Figs. 3.2, 3.3). Sometimes incised parallel lines indicate folds of flesh below the navels on ivory figures (Fig. 3.23); in the same manner, Arabic poetry praises women’s bellies having “one fold over another.” Also, the application of gold leaf to a Palestinian bride’s face elicits a similar aesthetic effect as would have been produced by ivory statues whose hair and headdresses were once covered with gold foil (Figs. 3.25, 3.30).

The aim of ethnoarchaeological analysis here, however, is not to use modern evidence literally (and simplistically) to illustrate ancient ideals of beauty. Rather, the utility of ethnoarchaeology lies in the discovery of formal or conceptual intersections between the living and ancient records. From these junctures an understanding of ancient Near Eastern ideal beauty (especially as represented in first-millennium BCE ivory sculptures) may be reevaluated, expanded, and reinforced. Returning to the points laid out in the introduction to this chapter, through ethnoarchaeology, living evidence may serve as a guide to the ancient material; it may offer models for the reconstruction of ancient objects and phenomena; and it may provide symbolic paradigms contributing to the interpretation of ancient meaning.

As a guide to the ancient record, ethnographic consideration reinforces the potential productivity of considering bridal evidence in the analysis of feminine beauty. To this end, ancient texts describing dowries and bridal preparations of living women and literary/mythological female figures might be considered in greater depth. It is clear from the ethnographic record that women’s beauty plays a major role in the selection of wives

717 Stephan 1922, pp. 254, 257.
and is therefore closely related to the characteristics of an ideal wife. Ancient visual and textual descriptions of wives (especially queens) might therefore be pursued as essential evidence of ideal feminine beauty. In addition, ethnographic data suggests the relevance of female personal names (an ancient source of evidence that has not yet been fully explored) in investigations of cultural conceptions of ideal feminine beauty.

In terms of physical traits, ethnographic sources stress the attractiveness of the contrast between a woman’s dark hair and eyes and her fair skin. Based on this, the ivories might be examined specifically for further evidence of pigmentation, inlay, and gold leaf that would have contributed to an aesthetic of luminous contrast. Remnants of painted eyelashes or dark kohl lines around the eyes could also be sought. In this manner, and if any new coloration were discovered, ethnoarchaeology could contribute to the reconstruction of the original appearance of these sculptures.

Additionally, ethnoarchaeology may aid in the interpretation of ancient costume as it is depicted in art and known from the archaeological record. The ethnographically documented assortment of traditional female jewelry including headdresses, necklaces, bracelets, and anklets is the same as the adornment typically depicted on the ivory statues (although this combination of jewelry is worn in many cultures). What is significant here is the potential of formal parallels between some types of ancient adornment and clothing, which might allow for the physical reconstruction of ancient jewelry and “animate” the effect of adornment when worn by a living woman. For example, the ethnographic record could illuminate how ancient beaded necklaces might have been strung and attached, or how an attractive woman might have walked like a gazelle while wearing heavy gold anklets.
Finally, when interpreting ancient evidence, ethnoarchaeology may offer a great deal of insight onto symbolic and conceptual issues. In terms of the body, ethnographic data demonstrates that a youthful, sturdy figure is believed to be ideal for childbearing and is appreciated in general as being fit for performing household labor. Similarly, the body type portrayed in ivory is not overly lean; perhaps a careful study of ancient medical texts or pregnancy incantations might offer a link between this body type and a woman’s health and reproductive potential.

Values associated with particular parts of the face and body might be studied across the ancient and ethnographic records. For example, possibly related to the frontlets depicted on many of the ivory figures and broadly attested in Islamic culture, forehead jewelry, tattoos, and cosmetically applied symbols decorate this site and may repel danger. The glabella (the area between the eyebrows) itself might be considered a particularly vulnerable as well as a desirable feature in ancient and living Near Eastern cultures. The ancient conception of the glabella as a distinct part of the face is already evident in Ugaritic mythology of the second-millennium BCE Levant, where it is referred to as the “thin-haired spot” (CAT 1.101 6). In the ethnographic record, a woman of twentieth-century CE Assyrian culture explained that the tattoo she received as a child between her eyebrows was intended for beauty, and an Arabic folk song expresses a

718 Henri Charles, Tribus moutonnières du Moyen-Euphrate, Documents d’Etudes Orientales 8, Beirut: Institut français de Damas, 1939, pp. 108-11; Reich 1937, pp. 87, 113. The ancient Assyrians also decorated and protected their horses with (Levantine ivory) frontlets that were placed between the eyes. This type of ornament has been compared in its apotropaic function to Jewish head phylacteries (Gubel 2005, p. 130; Winter 1973, pp. 333-34).

man’s desire to kiss a woman between the brows.\textsuperscript{720} With these examples in mind, the ancient record might be reconsidered specifically for evidence supporting the significance of adorning the glabella or of the attractiveness of this feature itself, as on the ivories, where the space between the (often inlaid) brows is in vivid contrast to the dark, full eyebrows.

Ethnographic evidence makes clear the importance of jewelry – especially headgear – in communicating women’s status and identity, as well as her beauty. The complex relationship between innate beauty and personal enhancement demonstrated in the ethnographic record is a fertile paradigm to be explored in ancient evidence – particularly with respect to forehead ornaments visible on many ivories. This relationship may also provide perspectives, for example, on why nude ivory figures are often adorned and why it is sometimes ambiguous whether a necklace is depicted or the neckline of a garment is shown. Furthermore, women’s body markings and jewelry are described in the ethnographic record to represent beauty and to serve as sexual stimuli even after the body has aged. This phenomenon may enhance our understanding of the endurance of feminine beauty despite age and the importance of personal enhancement in ancient culture.

Although the ivory carvings and ancient comparative materials document elite and divine women, the evidence presented here offers tantalizing glimpses onto possible continuities rooted in ancient traditions that may have passed down to many levels of society. More significant, however, the evidence establishes sufficient parallels to justify the ethnoarchaeological application of living evidence to future research designs devoted to considerations of ancient Near Eastern ideal feminine beauty.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{720} Stephan 1922, p. 243.}
The present chapter has sought to establish foundations for the validity of such ethnoarchaeological research. With attitudes toward ancient and traditional “beauty” as a primary goal, the systematic analysis of Arabic literature, poetry, and songs praising women as well as comprehensive field research are eagerly anticipated. These sources would certainly expand and strengthen the preliminary pool of evidence introduced here. Ultimately, as the relevance of previously unrecognized, undervalued, or under-explored aspects of feminine beauty (such as the relationship of personal enhancement to beauty) are recognized through ethnoarchaeological consideration, going back to the ancient evidence, new and further understanding of ancient culture may be fruitfully explored. For now it may be demonstrated that ethnographic evidence offers vital new ways of thinking about ideals of ancient Near Eastern feminine beauty, while strongly reinforcing visual observations of ideal feminine beauty embodied in ancient ivory carvings.
CHAPTER 9
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present thesis has engaged an interdisciplinary methodology, incorporating standard forms of visual and art historical analysis along with comparative archaeological and textual materials, in addition to the less expected approaches of quantitative analysis and ethnoarchaeological investigation. The quantitative component represents a collaborative project engaging the expertise of applied mathematicians and statisticians. Quantitative study has strengthened and added precision to visual observations, while also revealing formal information contributing to ideal feminine beauty not evident through visual study alone. Ethnoarchaeological procedures have introduced the observation of living traditions with the goal of gaining insight onto ancient, archaeologically attested cultures. Through ethnoarchaeological study of Middle Eastern folk culture, new inroads to issues pertinent to ancient Near Eastern values and representations of beauty have been revealed.

Together, visual, art historical, quantitative, archaeological, textual, and ethnoarchaeological approaches contribute to a multi-faceted perspective on ideal feminine beauty represented in first-millennium BCE Levantine ivory carvings. The resulting interpretations would not have been possible without this interdisciplinary methodology, which has proved vital to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the contextualized role and significance of Levantine ivory sculptures of women.

It is hoped that this study of ivory sculptures may also help to reconstitute the presence and importance of female representations, and of women themselves, in ancient Near Eastern elite culture. The analysis of ideal feminine beauty embodied in hundreds of
excavated ivory figures has identified components of female physical attractiveness and has allowed for the interpretation of desirable feminine qualities. By articulating components of ideal feminine beauty represented in the ivory corpus, and by engaging comparative records, the literal and symbolic significance of women in the ancient social and ideological experience of the highest levels of Neo-Assyrian society can be clarified.

Prototypes of ideal feminine beauty are conceptual in their purest forms but are referenced in a variety of visual and non-visual media and may be compared to living women. Different combinations of observable ranges of ideal characteristics constitute prototypes of feminine beauty, which are studied here as they are embodied in and expressed through first-millennium BCE Levantine ivory sculptures of women.

Across ancient Near Eastern cultures and regions (including Assyria/northern Mesopotamia and the Levantine areas of Phoenicia, North Syria, and South Syria), ivory sculptures displayed slightly different visual models of feminine beauty, representing the fashions, attitudes, and possibly the ethnic features of distinct populations. Even within stylistic groupings associated with specific production regions, visual models may differ according to scale, craftsmanship, date, workshop, hand, and display context. But cutting across sources of evidence, regional distinctions, and variables of production and display, consistent attributes may still be identified as constituting a fundamental core of features and characteristics associated with ancient Near Eastern ideal feminine beauty.

While the discussion below is specifically applicable to ancient Near Eastern cultures producing and displaying ivory sculptures of women during the ninth to seventh centuries BCE, these ideals and phenomena may have crossed some ancient geographic and social boundaries. Historically, visual and comparative evidence indicates that the
values embedded in the first-millennium BCE ivory sculptures originated in earlier Near Eastern traditions. Additionally, some aspects of ideal feminine beauty appear to have survived in form and/or meaning for several centuries after the ivories had fallen out of use, if not until the present day. Some ancient values may even have permeated later cultures outside of the Near East through shifting populations, long distance trade, and the shared culture of Islam.

Most of Part I of this thesis (Chs. 2-5) focused on the material corpus of ivories in an effort to identify visual aspects of feminine beauty. First it is established that the ivories themselves and the images of women that they carried would have been recognized as aesthetically pleasing and positively coded (if not auspicious or apotropaic). The careful craftsmanship of these tiny figures (ranging in size from about five to fifteen centimeters) and the luxury of their material attest to their visual and tactile appeal. Most ivory sculptures demonstrate more detail, careful craftsmanship, and idiosyncratic embellishment than are found in larger-scale figural art. The archaeological discovery of ivories in storage contexts, public areas of the palace, elite domestic quarters, temples, and royal female burials indicates their profusion in royal space and underscores their aesthetic appreciation by elite, if not also divine, observers.

Through first-hand examination of a final sample of two hundred and ten ivory sculptures, visual and quantitative analyses have revealed which features were most consistently portrayed and received the most careful attention from craftsmen. Aspects of feminine beauty are separated from iconographic and stylistic information by comparing the ivory figures to other Levantine media. Visual and art historical observations have thus far been corroborated by a preliminary quantitative study of their categorical features.
and anthropometric proportions. Although this is not the usual engagement of the art historian, measurement and computer-aided sorting have proved fruitful in adding precision to visual observations and have begun to reveal evidence not accessible through visual analysis alone.

Both the heads and bodies of ivory women were significant, but heads seem to have been of primary importance. Through hairstyle, facial features, and adornment (especially headgear), heads could designate regional origin, and they provided opportunities for the display of elite status through jewelry. The head is also the site of the eyes (and their gaze), which, across visual, quantitative, and comparative evidence, appear to have been one of the most essential aspects of female attractiveness.

On the ivories, faces are configured according to standardized patterns incorporating stock features, which, themselves, vary within recognizable limits. Across facial types, quantitative results suggest that the proportions of features were determined in relation to a vertical axis. In addition to the eyes, plump and/or broad cheeks are consistently represented, and most faces have a soft or fleshy jaw-line and sometimes portray dimples or clefts in the chin. Overall, facial fullness seems to have been considered healthy, youthful, and attractive. Moreover, it could have reminded the viewer of the woman’s curvy physique, whether or not the body was shown.

Voluminous, carefully coiffed hairstyles complement the full faces and curvaceous bodies of the ivory women. Different styles and variations in detailing appeal to the eye and would have connoted regional origins. If women’s hair was typically concealed in public, as it appears to have been in at least some Levantine contexts, the portrayal of
elaborate hairstyles on the ivory women may connote their ideal if not fantastic nature, while it also may have stimulated observers’ fascination with them.

In order to display the attractiveness of the female physique, many of the ivory women are shown nude. Their nudity may be understood as symbolic, since the sculptures are not representations of actual women or ranking goddesses (who are discussed in myths bathing, breastfeeding, and having sex, but whose bodies are not described physically). Nudity may have expressed female sexuality and procreative fertility in the manner that an image of a blooming flower might evoke the aesthetic pleasures of nature and refer to earthly fecundity. As hypothetical, ideal imagery, the ivories would not have threatened the privacy of the elite living women with whom they would have been visually, physically, and conceptually associated.

The bodies of the ivory women, whether dressed or nude, vary in terms of their mass, but are never disproportional, saggy, obese, or especially slim. Frontal physiques are defined by round breasts, a small waist, a protruding belly, curvaceous hips and thighs, and a distinct vulva. The reverse sides are elegantly rendered, including slender backs and plump buttocks, occasionally complemented by lumbar dimples (Fig. 3.3). The body’s fair and radiant “skin” was evoked through the ivory itself (which originally would have been creamy white, but today, it is often grey, brown, or black in color due to age and exposure in antiquity to destructive fires). Faces, too, were probably left as bare ivory, although (drawing attention to the head) gold foil sometimes covered the hair and headdress and may have been inlaid into the eyes (Fig. 3.25).

Nude ivory women represented on equestrian gear have been previously interpreted as apotropaic based primarily on their display on face pieces and blinkers...
where they could have confronted and deflected malevolence. Why not then consider the nude women on ancient furniture and furnishings equally auspicious or apotropaic? Certainly royal buildings were vulnerable sites, and various objects, from colossal guardian creatures (known as lamassu in Akkadian) to ferocious figurines buried beneath thresholds, attest to attempts at supernatural protection (although through very different imagery) in the Neo-Assyrian palaces where the ivories were collected.\footnote{John E. Curtis and Julian E. Reade, eds., \textit{Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in The British Museum}, London: Trustees of The British Museum, 1995, pp. 56-59, 109-17; Anthony Green, “Neo-Assyrian Apotropaic Figures,” \textit{Iraq} 45 (1983): 87-96.} In addition to the bodies of the ivory women, their eyes and direct gazes might well have had protective properties. This possibility is strengthened by the eyestone jewelry worn by mortal Levantine and Assyrian women, which most likely functioned in an apotropaic manner.

Not all of the ivory figures are portrayed wearing jewelry, but most have some or all of the following: headgear, earrings, necklace, bracelets, and anklets. Elaborate and conspicuous adornment, especially headgear, immediately clarifies the women’s wealth and elite status, despite their nudity, recognizably foreign origin, and small scale. In fact, some of the types of jewelry shown on the ivory figures correspond to examples portrayed on elite and royal men, women, and eunuchs in other visual media. Corresponding examples also have been documented in archaeological and textual sources in association with queens and goddesses.

In ancient iconography and in traditional Near Eastern cultures today headgear is an immediate and rarely negotiable indicator of identity. Headgear expresses both regional origin and rank, and thereby confirms that elite women were alluded to in the small-scale ivory sculptures. Comparison to other visual media and the archaeological

record suggests that meaningful types of headgear were portrayed, although they were not all gender- or office-specific. The forehead ornament diadem depicted on many ivory women, however, is most likely an elite Phoenician style of female headdress. The discovery of an intact gold diadem of this type in the tomb of a Neo-Assyrian queen of probable Levantine origin demonstrates Assyrian familiarity with and appreciation of it (Figs. 6.23, 6.24).

Through their fair skin, facial features, hairstyles, and adornment, the ivory women would have fulfilled visual expectations of ideal feminine beauty. Especially when ivory women are shown nude, their jewelry helps to clarify that they are not depicted without clothes in order to humiliate or dis-empower them (as, for example, captive enemies are shown). On account of their standard iconography, the luxury of their materials, their masterful craftsmanship, and their exotic and politically significant foreign provenience, the women sculpted in ivory would have been fit for kings, queens, and other high-status elites to observe. They are unlikely, however, to have been passive objects intended solely for the (especially male) gaze; rather the ivory women hold their heads tall and look straight ahead (often directly at the viewer), as if they, themselves, were the beholders of the spaces they embellished and the life transpiring within them.

The final chapter of Part I (Ch. 5) considers representations of women in other visual media. Visual and art historical comparison helps to determine the femininity, cultural origin, and relevance to issues of beauty of various attributes represented on the

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ivory women. In addition, it allows for a broader perspective from which similarities and differences in images of women across diverse types of Levantine and Neo-Assyrian art may be observed.

Levantine ivory sculptures of women are iconographically related to both large- and small-scale stone and metal images of women from Levantine sites, but some of their features, such as dimples on the lower back, appear unique to the medium of ivory. The large quantity but fine detail in which ivory sculptures were hand-produced would have provided opportunities for such flourishes. Nonetheless, across ancient Near Eastern art, women’s eyes, full faces, curvaceous bodies, and adornment are emphasized. Female heads overall are shown more frequently and in more detail than women’s bodies tend to be portrayed. Also, on the ivories and in other Near Eastern art, women, to a greater degree than men, tend to be associated with vegetal and floral imagery, implying connections between femininity, fertility, and abundance.

Most significant to the present study of ideal feminine beauty is the consideration of the ivories in the contexts of their display. Because few Levantine ivories have been excavated from Levantine contexts, the focus here has been on their meaning in Neo-Assyrian royal spaces where the large majority of the works have been found. In Assyria, the ivories were foreign luxury goods, and their presence would have communicated and reinforced royal wealth and power. The women portrayed in ivory would have been recognized as foreign on account of their hairstyles, jewelry, and possibly also ethnically distinct facial features. Their ascription of “beauty” from an indigenous Assyrian perspective might have been enhanced by their exotic “Western” origins.
In Neo-Assyrian elite spaces, women were only exceptionally represented in large-scale; monumental stone sculptures of the king, male courtiers, and fantastic male creatures visually dominated almost every decorated room and wall. However, displayed alongside these better-known large-scale images of men, royal furniture and furnishings bore hundreds, if not thousands, of small-scale images of women carved in ivory. Ivory sculptures would have brought feminine beauty and Levantine “women” into the space of the Neo-Assyrian court, serving as constant reminders, against a ubiquitous larger-than-life backdrop of masculinity, of the unique contributions and aesthetic appeal of elite women.

Part II of this thesis (Chs. 6-8) introduced comparative archaeological, textual, and ethnoarchaeological materials. Non-visual evidence facilitates aesthetic and symbolic interpretations of ideal feminine beauty beyond what is observed on the ivories. Comparisons direct attention to aspects of the sculptures that might be overlooked through visual study alone. Comparative materials also reveal aspects of ideal feminine beauty not documented in the visual record, but which, from ancient Near Eastern perspectives, may have been understood to be associated with and embodied in the physically attractive women portrayed.

In terms of physical attractiveness, comparative evidence reiterates the characteristics discussed above, but various references also draw attention to the female neck and feet. These features are represented on the ivory figures, but I had not previously considered them in terms of women’s beauty, although their ancient producers and beholders might have especially admired them. Adornment depicted on the ivories can be more completely understood through vocabulary and three-dimensional examples.
Texts, archaeology, and ethnoarchaeology suggest that the ivory women’s jewelry may have incorporated colorful inlays and eyestones motifs. And, while not typically pigmented or preserved on the ivories, the ideal color of women’s hair and eyes is revealed through comparative sources to have been dark and lustrous. Cosmetics (especially kohl) played a major role in beauty, and it is possible that the outlining of the inlaid ivory women’s eyes would originally have been painted black or would have evoked kohl-enhanced eyes.

Furthermore, by considering evidence beyond the visual record, it is possible to discuss aspects of feminine beauty that could not be demonstrated in art, such as hygiene, a pleasing scent, soft skin and hair, sweet-tasting mouths and vulvas, and tinkling jewelry. Although not shown on the ivory sculptures, these characteristics may well have been referenced through the physical attractiveness of the figures.

Comparative materials offer a great deal of evidence toward the internal properties that would have contributed to ideal feminine beauty. These properties may have been read through external appearance and embodied in the formal properties of the ivory sculptures, but they are not possible to interpret without the perspectives of ancient Near Eastern culture. For example, rounded facial and body types are preferred on account of their association with youth, strength, and fertility. Large, shiny, dark eyes might be associated with a powerful, sharp-sighted gaze and are compared to the gazelle, an animal admired for its graceful form and movement. Shiny, thick, dark hair implies youth and fertility. Thick, wavy hair complements physical curves, and the dark color of the eyes as well as the hair would highlight ideally fair, radiant skin. Radiance is a divine and royal
property that probably contributed to conceptions of beauty and which could have been enhanced through gleaming jewelry.

According to comparative sources, adornment reflected and reiterated a woman’s innate and life-long attractiveness, and it could have protected and strengthened her as well. Pomegranate-shaped jewelry elements depicted on the ivories have several positive connotations (Fig. 2.24). However, especially in the contexts of the ivories’ display in Neo-Assyrian palaces, pomegranates would have visually linked the ivory women to Assyrian iconography of abundance (which also depicts pomegranates). Ivory women are portrayed in association with vegetal and floral imagery, too. On their headdresses and in fantastic vignettes, images of plants may have, among other connotations, referred to their fertility, vitality, and, again, to general conceptions of abundance.

Based on comparative evidence, the primary role of living elite women in the ancient Near East seems to have been reproduction, for which they were recognized both before and after having children. Health, strength, fertility, sexuality, and a sexually desirable presence were therefore important components of ancient Near Eastern feminine beauty. Although not all of these traits can be physically represented, they are likely alluded to in the bright fair skin, hairstyles, full faces, large eyes, and well proportioned bodies of the ivory women. Notably, pregnancy and childbirth are not depicted in ivory sculpture, as these may not have been considered particularly attractive (or auspicious) images of female fertility.

Finally, comparative material brings to light the range of ages represented by ideal women. While rather youthful faces and bodies are portrayed in ivory sculpture, actual queens, who probably represented model mortal women, would have had at least one male child (and therefore would never have been “maidens”) and lived into middle and old age. It may seem at first as if two conflicting age-grades of ideal feminine beauty existed – a youthful, nubile, figure and an older, maternal figure – but the hypothetical beauties represented in ivory probably referred to an ideal that was relevant to (elite) women of all ages. In fact, comparative evidence suggests that a woman’s youthful attractiveness may have endured through coded references expressed by her fragrance, dress, and adornment. Female fertility, even after child-bearing, is recognized through a woman’s achievement of reproduction, while positive personal qualities, to which could be added intelligence and joy, may persist. Thus, the ivory images could have been emulated by and compared to beautiful women of any chronological age.

Putting together the evidence and analyses pursued in Parts I and II, at issue is the role of the ivory women and the ideal feminine beauty they represented within the Neo-Assyrian royal contexts of their documented appreciation. While it is unlikely that Levantine ivory objects were custom-made for the Assyrian court, once in Assyrian possession, they may have been conceptually customized for Assyrian use.

The significance of Levantine ivory sculptures of women in Assyria, I propose, was related to actual dynamics between Assyrian rulers and their queens. Texts and archaeology demonstrate that Levantine princesses married into the Assyrian court as engines of political alliance and sometimes even became Neo-Assyrian queens. This
practice reveals an Assyrian view of Levantine women as desirable and shows the function of Levantine women as reproductive links in Neo-Assyrian dynasties.

The potency of Assyrian kings would have been irrelevant without women to produce heirs. Although Neo-Assyrian queens seem not to have played a large public role in society, they would certainly have been essential to royal lineage. More subtly represented in ancient records, they had their own wealth and power and are documented to have been adored by their husbands, the kings (such as in a monumental dedication by Sennacherib to his "beloved wife, whose features [the god] Belit-ili has made perfect above all women," Layard MS C 55 verso – 56 verso, slab 4, lines 15-16). And in cases of international marriages, foreign queens would also have represented diplomatic relationships and political prosperity.

The ideal feminine beauty of the ivory carvings would then have filled the Neo-Assyrian court with positively coded female imagery. Levantine ivory sculptures of women may have expressed and reflected beauty attributed to elite Assyrian women, whether of indigenous or foreign birth. Surrounded by Levantine ivory carvings, the beauty of living women might have been referenced, inspired, reinforced, and even protected.

As has been demonstrated in previous studies, the Neo-Assyrian palace was full of an iconography of abundance, tended by men in large-scale, but, I would argue, also tended by women in small-scale (Figs. 2.22). We might therefore imagine the female ivory figures operating in tandem with large-scale male figures carved in stone. In some

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cases, ivory women may even have been seen to embody the fertility of the state. Certainly, as visual counterparts to large-scale images of men, the ivories would have demonstrated the vital presence of women within the state as well as the necessary balance of nature.

The few large-scale Neo-Assyrian images of women that are known either depict ranking goddesses or specific queens (the nude statue inscribed by Ashur-bel-kala [r. 1073-1056 BCE] predates the Neo-Assyrian period and is unique). Levantine ivory carvings offered an alternative type of female imagery: fictional, generalized, and ideal. By representing hypothetical, exotic beauties in small scale, ivory sculptures of women might have avoided conflict with the privacy of the living Assyrian (and Assyrianized) queens. The ivories’ foreign origin and status as booty and tribute would have served as a reminder of Assyrian imperial geography, but the close proximity to official Assyrian imagery in which the ivory women were displayed might also have referred to alliances between the Levant and Assyria. These political links, among other benefits, would have strengthened the Assyrian state generatively (through the marriages of Levantine princesses to Assyrian kings resulting in royal Assyrian offspring).

While monumental male imagery would have been primarily intended for visual observation, the ivories would have been available to touch as well as to view. On account of their scale, to look at the images on an ivory object, it would generally have been necessary to pick the object up and angle it for viewing. In fact, it may not have been possible to avoid touching the ivory women, as they constituted and embellished furniture, hand-held cosmetics dishes, portable vessels and containers, and the handles of mirrors and fans (one handle that I examined [BM 126787 from Nimrud] had wear marks
across the figure’s face and breasts at precisely the points where my own grip made contact).

Through touch as well as sight, then, in the Neo-Assyrian courts of their display, interaction with female ivory imagery would have been more intimate than with the large-scale images of men. I am only beginning to explore this issue, but it may have been linked to the power of the ivory images to express and promote, at a more personal level, visual and non-visual properties of ideal feminine beauty (including aspects of abundance, prosperity, and fertility).  

When the king or other elite men might have handled ivory images of women, the ruler, the royal house, and the state itself could have been symbolically balanced and rejuvenated. Perhaps especially significant on a personal level would have been contact between the ivory images and elite women or queens (especially those royal consorts who owned or wore the same types of Levantine jewelry – which they probably brought with them from their native courts – as were portrayed on the ivory women). But for any elite Assyrian woman, who herself may have been a living representation of ideal feminine beauty, touching and viewing the ivory images could have reiterated and honored her role in the court. Because both Neo-Assyrian queens and the ivory women were seen, touched, and admired by male rulers, their ideal feminine beauty might have been conflated and sustained.

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In closing, it is my hope that reinstating ivory carvings of women (with their unique imagery and properties) into the elite Neo-Assyrian experience will begin to balance the picture we have of an overtly male-dominated ancient Near Eastern royal visual and social culture. By identifying, defining, and interpreting the importance of female imagery and the attendant properties of ideal feminine beauty, we might also understand how and why images of women would have been significant components of the elite palace environment. Probably due to their small scale, discoloration, and fragmentary preservation (few have been restored), the beauty and importance of first-millennium BCE Levantine ivory sculptures have been undervalued by modern audiences. But, intact and in context, the ivory women would have played a visible and vital role in ancient Near Eastern elite culture and ideology through the representation of their ideal feminine beauty.
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APPENDIX A

MAP OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION SHEET

HAIR
1) peg wig
   a) striated
   b) alternating pegs
   c) secured singles
2) curls
   a) corkscrew/finger
   b) Hathors
   c) ocean waves
3) straight
   a) center part
   b) plain/solid
   c) striated
4) tendrils in front of ear
5) braided

comments/ill.

HAIRLINE
1) straight across
2) round
3) distance hairline to top brow

comments/ill.

JEWELRY
1) headcharm
   a) raised over hair
   b) securing band visible
   c) central medalion
   d) dangles
   e) dims
   f) material?
2) earrings
   a) form
   b) L 1
3) necklace
   a) form
   b) distance below chin
   c) thickness
4) other

comments/ill.
EARS
1) form
2) position vs. brows
3) R = L
4) distance outer ear to outer ear

comments/ill.

EYEBROWS
1) monobrow
2) thickness
3) distance between
4) distance above top of eye
5) form/arch
6) significant depth

comments/ill.

EYES
1) full R = L
2) eyeball R = L
3) pupil
   a) drilled
   b) diameter R = L
   c) distance between centers of pupils
4) distance bottom eye to bottom jawline R = L
5) form
6) position vs. nose/side hairline

comments/ill.

NOSE
1) width at base
2) distance from bottom to top lip
3) nostrils
   a) chipped
   b) visible head on
4) form
5) profile

comments/ill.
LIPS
1) th
2) appear equal length vs. nose base?
3) form
4) distance bottom to bottom chin

est/smaller: 0.3

comments:

CHIN
1) w
2) dimple
3) double chin?
4) form (pointy, round, square, etc.)

CHEEKS

NECK

SHOULDERS

FACE/HEAD
1) top hd to chin
2) hairline to chin
w @ hairline
w @ eyes
w @ mid nose base
w @ lips

comments/ill.

Full 06; l=16cm
w @ b ott: 1.6
w @ top: 6.3

slightly damage, move, wider
FULL FIGURE

h top of head to bottom of feet 10.96
h shoulder to bottom of feet 8.31

w @ shoulders 3.13
@ waist 1.32
@ hips 1.85
@ knees 0.63
@ ankles 1.13

th arm R 0.65 L 0.65
thigh R 0.92 L 0.61
calf R 0.46 L 0.59
ankle R 0.38 L 0.58

navel diameter 0.18

height of legs from pubis V "knee to buttocks = 4.51,
navel to buttocks = 5.75.

chin to top navel = 2.56
navel to buttocks = 5.75.
APPENDIX C

RAW VALUES AND RATIOS TESTED

RAW VALUES
1) distance from hairline to the top of the right eyebrow
2) distance from hairline to the top of the left eyebrow
3) length of right ear
4) length of left ear
5) width of right ear
6) width of left ear
7) distance from right ear to left ear
8) thickness of right eyebrow
9) thickness of left eyebrow
10) distance between eyebrows
11) distance from the bottom of the right eyebrow to the top of the right eye
12) distance from the bottom of the left eyebrow to the top of the left eye
13) full length of right eye
14) full length of left eye
15) full height of right eye
16) full height of left eye
17) full length of right eyeball
18) full length of left eyeball
19) full height of right eyeball
20) full height of left eyeball
21) diameter of right iris/pupil
22) diameter of left iris/pupil
23) distance between the centers of the irises/pupils
24) length of the nose
25) width of the bottom of the nose
26) distance between the bottom of the nose and the top of the lips
27) diameter of the right nostril
28) diameter of the left nostril
29) thickness of lips
30) length of lips
31) length of the head\textsuperscript{726}
32) profile distance from tip of the nose to the back of the head
33) profile distance from tip of the nose to the hairline at the side of the face
34) length of the face\textsuperscript{727}

\textsuperscript{726} The length of the head is measured from the crown of the head to the bottom of the chin. If headgear obscures the true top of the head, no measurement for the length of the head is made.
35) width of the face at the hairline
36) width of the face at the level of the center of the eyes
37) width of the face at the level of the bottom of the nose
38) width of the face at the level of the center of the lips
39) length of the figure from the top of the head to the bottom of the feet
40) length of the figure from the shoulders to the bottom of the feet
41) frontal width of the figure at the shoulders
42) frontal width of the figure at the narrowest part of the waist
43) frontal width of the figure at the widest part of the hips
44) frontal width of the figure at the
45) profile width of the figure at the most greatly protruding part of the bust
46) profile width of the figure at the narrowest part of the waist
47) profile width of the figure at the most greatly protruding part of the belly
48) profile width of the figure at the most greatly protruding part of the buttocks
49) frontal width of the figure at the knees
50) length of the right arm
51) length of the left arm
52) frontal width of the right arm at the fullest point
53) frontal width of the left arm at the fullest point
54) length of the right leg from the crotch to the bottom of the foot
55) length of the left leg from the crotch to the bottom of the foot
56) width of the right thigh at the fullest point
57) width of the left thigh at the fullest point
58) width of the right calf at the fullest point
59) width of the left calf at the fullest point
60) width of the right ankle at the narrowest point
61) width of the left ankle at the narrowest point
62) diameter of the navel if round
63) length of the navel if elongated in form
64) width of the navel if elongated in form
65) distance from the hairline to the top of the right eye if no brow if depicted
66) distance from the hairline to the top of the left eye if no brow if depicted

727  The length of the face is defined as the skin exposed below the hairline to the bottom of the chin. If the hairline is not visible below the headgear, no measurement for the face is made.
RATIOS
1) length of the head : length of the face
2) height of the right eye : length of the face
3) height of the left eye : length of the face
4) length of the nose : length of the face
5) distance between the centers of the irises/pupils : width of the face at the level of the center of the eyes
6) width of the bottom of the nose : width of the face at the level of the bottom of the nose
7) width of the lips : width of the face at the level of the center of the lips
8) width of the face at the level of the center of the eyes : length of the head
9) width of the face at the level of the center of the eyes : length of the face
10) width of the face at the level of the bottom of the nose : length of the head
11) width of the face at the level of the bottom of the nose : length of the face
12) width of the face at the level of the center of the lips : length of the head
13) width of the face at the level of the center of the lips : length of the face
14) full length of right eye : full height of right eye
15) full length of left eye : full height of left eye
16) full length of right eyeball : full height of right eyeball
17) full length of left eyeball : full height of left eyeball
18) diameter of right iris/pupil : full height of right eyeball
19) diameter of left iris/pupil : full height of left iris/pupil
20) length of nose : width of the bottom of the nose
21) thickness of lips : length of lips
22) length of the head : length of the figure from the top of the head to the bottom of the feet
APPENDIX D

CATEGORICAL VALUES TESTED

So that the computer can work with categorical variables, variables are often stated as questions that can be answered either with “yes” or “no” or with predetermined options (such as “below the shoulders,” “only to the shoulders,” :only above the shoulders,” for length of hair). For a given object, it is necessary to answer some of these questions with “not applicable,” and often with “not preserved.” The computer is trained to overlook/neutralize these entries.

1) Iconographic type (i.e., sphinx, “woman at the window,” head, full-length figure)
2) If it is a human figure, does it have wings?
3) Primary view (frontal or profile)
4) Does the figure wear an Egyptian-style wig?
5) Are the wig sections incised?
6) Are the wig sections exactly aligned?
7) Do the wig sections have no bands, single bands, double bands?
8) Does the figure have a “long and wavy” hairstyle?
9) Hathor curls?
10) Finger curls?
11) General wavy style?
12) Does the figure have tendrils of hair in front of the ears?
13) Does the length of the hair extend below the shoulders, only to the shoulders, only above the shoulders?
14) Is the hairline curved or square?
15) Is there a border at the edge of the hairline?
16) Does the figure have any braids?
17) Are the braids secured at their ends or unsecured?
18) Is the figure nude?
19) Does the figure wear a forehead ornament diadem?
20) If the figure wears a forehead ornament diadem, are the bands that secure it around the head visible?
21) If the figure wears a forehead ornament diadem, do the pendants attached to the central ornament fall below the hairline?
22) Does the figure wear a headband?
23) If the figure wears a headband, does it tie in the back?
24) Does the figure wear Egyptian-style headgear?
25) Does the figure wear a crown?
26) Does the figure wear another type of headgear?
27) Does the figure wear earrings?
28) If the figure wears earrings, are they the tripe-arm type?
29) Does the figure wear a necklace?
30) If the figure wears a necklace, is it beaded?
31) If the figure wears a necklace, does it incorporated medallions?
32) If the figure wears a necklace, are its filaments visible going underneath the hair?
33) Are the figure’s ears depicted?
34) Are the figure’s eyebrows depicted?
35) Are the eyebrows inlaid(originally inlaid)?
36) Are the irises/pupils articulated?
37) Are the irises/pupils drilled?
38) Are the nostrils articulated?
39) Are the nostrils drilled?
40) Does the line separated the upper and lower lip end in triangular indentations?
41) Are both the upper and lower lip depicted, or only the lower lip?
42) If the upper lip is depicted, is it V-shaped?
43) Is the labrale superius depicted?
44) Is the labrale inferius depicted?
45) Is there no dimples, one dimple, or two dimples in the chin?
46) Is there a cleft in the chin?
47) Is there an indentation beneath the chin?
48) Is the chin bulbous?
49) Are the cheeks especially chubby?
50) Does the figure have a “double chin”?
51) Is the profile of the nose especially aquiline?
52) If the figure is a “woman at the window,” are her shoulders visible?
53) Is a navel depicted?
54) Are breasts depicted?
55) Are the nipples articulated?
56) Are there incised marks on the belly?
57) Is pubic hair depicted?
58) Does the figure wear bracelets?
59) If the figure wears bracelets, how many are worn on the wrist bearing the most bracelets?
60) Does the figure wear anklets?
61) If the figure wears anklets, how many are worn on the ankle bearing the most anklets?
62) Are lumbar dimples depicted?
63) Are no eyelids depicted, only an upper eyelid, or both an upper and a lower eyelid?
ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1.1

Fig. 1.2
Fig. 1.3

"A Mona Lisa of 2500 Years Ago", The Largest and Finest Carved Ivory Head Ever Found in the Ancient Near East - An Assyrian Polychrome Ivory Head Found in a Well at Nippur (Natural Size)

On page 205-206, Professor Maloney describes some of the outstanding discoveries made in the recently excavated ruins of Assyria, Babylonia, and Minard, in Iraq. The most remarkable of these is the ivory head we shall hear of which the Professor writes: - "It was indeed a thrilling moment when we saw that lovely figure from the deep waters of the well where she was buried to rest for more than 3000 years. Carefully we wiped away the dirt and dust that had accumulated over the centuries. The head was then polished with a soft cloth moistened with oil. The ivory was still radiant with light. The face, as a whole, was of the natural ivory hue against the dark brown tones of life that turned the head outward with the well-rounded curve of the face to give an extraordinary impression of life. The slightly parted lips appeared to have a light reddish tint - the black pupils of the eyes were encased in dark blue; the crown, bibico and stand were of a rather darker brown than the face. Originally crown and head must have been decorated with ivory hair, of which only one remained. One end was made up of the graving of the ivory, which showed a disadvantage on the side, while the cheeks were already covered with a fascinating golden glaze. Large bunch of beads which had turned to the consistency of a red cloth had replaced the head from the back and in the side, and then preserved a red clay substance and the face to disintegrate. It was, in fact, at once the joy and the heart turned red for in what may be deemed to be the moment the figure and the head were removed for in what may be deemed to be the moment the figure and the head were removed."

"We cannot be certain of the exact time that this head was made, but for various reasons a date of about 150 B.C. is probably not far off the mark."

SATURDAY, AUGUST 16, 1932
Fig. 2.4

Fig. 2.5
Fig. 2.6

Fig. 2.7
Fig. 2.10
Fig. 2.13a

Fig. 2.13b
Fig. 2.17

Fig. 2.18
Fig. 2.24

Fig. 2.25

Fig. 2.26
Schematic illustration of carved “eyeforms”

Fig. 3.20

Fig. 3.21

Fig. 3.22
Fig. 3.25

Fig. 3.26

Fig. 3.27
Fig. 3.34
Fig. 4.1

4a-j. Typenvergleich zu den Eichenholzreliefs mit dem Motiv der Frau am Fenster

4a. Frau am Fenster, Serie A

4b. Frau am Fenster, Serie B

4i. Frau am Fenster, Serie C
Fig. 5.20
Fig. 5.25
Fig. 6.17

Fig. 6.18

Fig. 6.19
Fig. 6.26a

Fig. 6.26b
Fig. 8.1

Fig. 8.2
Fig. 8.5

Fig. 8.6