front matter at the end
please see bookmarks

Iconology in the Light of Archaeological Reason

Giorgio Buccellati

University of California, Los Angeles/International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies

Abstract: The thrust of the iconological approach was to identify a unifying point of reference behind the formal details of iconography. This can help us approach cultural traditions for which there are no longer any living carriers. 'Archaeological reason' defines the conditions of possibility for reaching behind the gap and suggests ways to re-appropriate the lost experience. In this way we develop a semiotics that can be controlled formally, particularly through distributional and perceptual analysis.

Keywords: culture, iconology, archaeological reason, referentiality, metatext, Erwin Panofsky

Facing broken traditions, as we do in archaeology, opens the vista on data that are not part of the continuity of our own tradition. To bridge the gap between us and the brokenness of such other traditions is the task of what I have called 'archaeological reason.'[1] Such task is, in many ways, similar to what iconology proposes to do. In this article, I will first review the notion of iconology, especially with regard to Panofsky's formulation, and will then address the issue of its relevance for archaeological reason.

Gregory Areshian has systematically pursued the goal of recognizing the deeper meaning of works that hail from precisely such broken traditions,[2] drawing on all elements from both material culture and the textual record. Without using the terms, he has effectively addressed the concerns with which iconology and archaeological reason seek to deal: thus I trust that the approach I am outlining here may appeal to him, and underscore for him the converging of our shared efforts as we seek to revive, with a properly arguable method, lost modes of human experience. It is thus a special pleasure to participate in this ideal symposium in his honor, having lived together through so many changing historical moments, and having shared for so long in personal and institutional situations. Across continents, whether in the halls of academia or in the roughness of field work, it was always the consonance of intellectual goals that brought us happily together.

Iconology

Four frames of reference

In order to properly gauge the meaning of iconology as a concept, we must view it within the context of 'referentiality,' by which I mean the manner in which any given cultural element is understood as a link to some other such element. More generally, we may say that the essence of logical thinking lies in the ability to brace elements that are not contiguous with each other. It is this bracing that establishes a reference. And in this regard, we may distinguish four steps of referentiality.

The first step is that of establishing an internal or closed frame of reference, one that derives its validity from the congruence of the data as observed. In a given painting (Figure 1), we can identify shapes and colors within the single unifying frame of the painting itself: a unifying golden background, vertical lines that are surmounted by a pointed arch, well defined shapes with darker colors, and so on. Reference is here made only to traits internal to the painting itself, each element being seen in its relationship to the other contiguous elements. We may call this an *inner-* or *non-referential formal analysis.* It is a form of grammar where the elements are devoid of explicit associations to the larger world we share.

Such an association is proposed by the next step, when each element is inserted in a larger frame of reference, one that considers the world as it exists outside the elements themselves. In a first approximation, the vertical elements within Figure 1 are understood as columns, the larger shapes as human figures, the slender shapes as flowers, and so on. This is the level that is familiar to every human being. It is, in other words, based on a universal frame of reference, that is not related to any specific cultural context. We may consider it as a lexical level, where correlations are established at the simplest level.

Reference to a given cultural context brings us to the next level, one that is, therefore, culture bound, where the degree of specificity becomes progressively more explicit.[3] In the case of our example, we can recognize the representation of a given event (the Annunciation), where the two central figures are identified as Mary and the archangel Gabriel, and the figures on the sides as idealized witnesses that are not part of the event

[1] Buccellati G. 2017.

[2] Areshian 1992; 2003; 2006a; 2006b.

[3] This results in a systems overlay, which is what characterizes the -emic understanding of cultures, Buccellati, G. 2006; Buccellati G. 2017.

Annunciation by Simone Martini

as it took place. We may call this a *referential elemental analysis*: each formal element is related to a single referent (Mary, the angel, etc.). It is a form of lexicon where a two-dimensional association is given of one element with another (including also composite elements like the overall subject matter, in this case the Annunciation). We may associate this with semantics, where ranges of meaning are established for any given single element.

The fourth step links not only single elements belonging to different systems, but complete systems in their entirety. We may call this the level of *referential systemic analysis.* Thus the scene in the Annunciation painting with all its details is now put in correlation with the system of representational mechanisms that are common to the region and period when it was created, and beyond that with the system of values which underlie the whole conception of the work. Thus we learn the name of the painter (Simone Martini), the date when it was painted (1333), the fact that it was produced to be exposed in a church (the Duomo of Siena), which helps to narrow down the frame of reference in terms of the intended audience. The correlation with the text of the Gospel where the Annunciation is described provides a broader dimension of spirituality, and the correlation with other renderings of the same subject matter underscores an important subtle dimension of the scene: the strong vertical element that separates the two central figures (the angel and Mary). Thus the formal elements that have been noted in the first step, and the lexical and semantic identification that has been proposed in the second and third, are now integrated into a deeper level of meaning, which may be linked to the notion of semiotics.

Panofsky and theory

The four frames of reference will be immediately recognized as matching in part the three 'strata'

described by Erwin Panofsky: pre-iconographic, iconographic, and iconological. If I have rephrased the terms in function of a referential system, and further subdivided Panofsky's second 'stratum,' it is in order to emphasize the theoretical import of the distinctions. This serves not only to give greater conceptual coherence to the system of analysis as a whole, but also to highlight its broader applicability beyond the figurative arts. It can in fact be applied not only to written texts but also to elements of material culture other than artworks.

It is interesting to note, in this regard, how limited is Panofsky's direct interest in the theoretical dimension. This is already apparent from the fact that the very term 'iconology,' or its derivatives, occur remarkably seldom in his work. Other than in the title of one of his major books, it is used only twice in Panofsky 1939 *Studies* (pp. 49, 89), and only once in Panofsky 1955 *Meaning* – except for the Introduction to the latter book (pp. 31-33, 38-40). But in this case it is significant that, while this text is the reprise of the introduction to the 1939 volume (*Studies in Iconology*), which is in turn the reprise of an article published in 1932 ('Zum Problem'), the references to iconology are for the most part found only in the latest version. Here, in addition, we find an explanation of the meaning of the term in its opposition to iconography (Panofsky 1955 *Meaning*, p. 31 f.). The term 'iconology' occurs as well in the preface to the 1962 edition of Panofsky 1939 *Studies* (p. v), where Panofsky argues against a critic who had objected to the '*general validity of the 'iconological' method for the interpretation of Renaissance and Baroque art*': but the argument is about details of specific pictures, and not about methodology. The relative profusion of the term in just one item, namely the revised introduction to Panofsky 1955 *Meaning,* points unequivocally, I believe, in two directions.

The first is that Panofsky introduced the term only as an afterthought. In spite of the fact that he chose it for the title of one of his books, and in spite of the fact that it has become inextricably tied to his name, it was not really central to his thinking.

The second betrays a deeper state of affairs: Panofsky's concern for theory is in effect marginal. It is not only that the amount of space devoted to it is extremely limited.[4] More importantly, the impact on the actual text of his other works is minimal. It appears as though, reflecting on the concerns with which he was approaching and assessing specific works of art, he felt the need to summarize, almost in passing, his own methodology. And even this summary is, in the final analysis, rather skimpy and not particularly well thought out.

And yet. The disproportionate success of the term and of the very brief methodological summary that Panofsky devotes to it, is indicative of a great weight of the argument as such, greater than Panofsky himself envisaged. This I will delineate briefly, in order to highlight the deeper value of the system seen in its theoretical underpinnings, and in order assess the significance it has for our concerns.[5]

Panofsky's system

As I mentioned already and as is well known, Panofsky identifies three 'levels' as they are normally called (or 'strata,' as he calls them). They overlap, in ways that I will discuss now, the four frames of reference, and corresponding types of analysis, which I have described above ('*Four frames of reference*').

The pre-iconographic level is that of formal analysis, which envisages 'pure forms,' so that, *stricto sensu* one should not even reach a level of definition whereby a given form can be identified as 'man' or 'horse.' Panofsky refers back for this to Wölfllin (1915 *Grundbegriffe*) who underscores the need to define shapes and their configurations. Such an analysis is wholly neutral as to referential identifications. This is implied by the term 'pre-iconographic,' which indicates that the forms are seen apart from their potential association with any potential level of signification. At this stage, the forms are seen not as signs for a given signified, but purely in terms of their internal organization. This is therefore the most objective starting point, one that is anchored in the incontrovertible observation of primary data (shapes and such), without any further assumptions as to what they stand for.

By contrast, all subsequent levels of analysis presuppose a reference to the outside world, hence a signified behind the shape that now becomes a sign.

Panofsky defines the next level of analysis as 'iconographic,' and he describes it as relating to a 'secondary or conventional subject matter.' None of these terms is particularly felicitous, just as 'pre-iconographic' is not particularly specific. A 'conventional' meaning links, in everybody's understanding (hence 'conventional'), a certain 'image' ('icon') with a specific aspect of reality. But there are two very distinct types of 'convention.' In one case,

[4] The famous three levels of analysis are contained in just a few pages of Panofsky 1955: 28-32, plus the chart on p. 40f.

[5] Attention to Panofsky's work has continued, along with criticism. For an overall assessment of his work I have found of great interest the work by Holly, see especially 1984; 1992; and 1996, especially 1996: 155-162. The 1992 book, available only in Italian, develops more at length some of the issues I discuss in this article, in particular the relationship between theory and what I call 'competence.'

referentiality	non-referential	referential		
Panofsky's three levels	**pre-iconographic**	**iconographic**		**iconological**
		(figurative)	(iconographic proper)	
structure	formal attributes	elemental non culture-bound	elemental culture bound	systemic
~ linguistics	grammar	lexicon	semantics	semiotics

the convention is universal, i.e., it is not conditioned by a specific cultural frame of reference. In the other, instead, the convention is specifically culture bound. Thus I would divide Panofsky's second level in two sub-levels, which may be called 'figurative' and 'iconographic proper.' A figurative level describes the case where forms can be matched with figures that are recognizable on the basis of simple human perception, outside of any cultural convention – such as a sitting woman in Simone Martini's annunciation. (It is at this level that one can recognize a shape as a 'man' or a 'horse,' a step that, as we have seen, caused a problem for Panofsky.) A level that is properly iconographic adds a cultural definition: the sitting woman is Mary listening to a specific message from an angel, thirteen men sitting at a dining table are a depiction of the Last Supper, and so on.

The third level in Panofsky's analysis is that of iconology proper, which he describes alternatively as relating to the intrinsic meaning or content, to the underlying principles, to the 'symbolical' values, to the emotional attitude. Also relevant in this respect is the title of the second major collection of studies, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955). This 'meaning' is the deeper or 'intrinsic meaning' which he considers as the distinctive trait of iconology. In his words, the '*intrinsic meaning* or *content*, constituting the world of '*symbolical' value'* is based on '*synthetic intuition* (familiarity with the *essential tendencies of the human mind*), conditioned by personal psychology and '*Weltanschauung*'.' The result is a 'History of *cultural symptoms* or '*symbols*' in general (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, *essential tendencies of the human mind* were expressed by specific themes and concepts).'[6] These definitions remain somewhat vague, because it is not shown how the notions of 'intrinsic meaning' and 'cultural symptoms' can be implemented methodologically, and are left ultimately to a 'synthetic intuition,' a concept with which Panofsky does not feel fully at ease: 'To grasp these principles we need a mental faculty comparable to that of a diagnostician, a faculty which I cannot describe better than by the rather discredited term 'synthetic intuition', and which may be better developed in a talented layman than in an erudite scholar.'[7]

We can thus subsume Panofsky's 'strata' under the theoretically more cogent conceptual organization based on the notion of referentiality as indicated in the chart that follows, where we may also see the correlations with categories drawn from linguistics.

Semiotics

Taken literally, semiotics might be seen to overlap with referentiality: when a shape is taken to refer to an entity in the real world, it becomes a sign that points to a signified. In the painting we have been using as an example, a given shape emerges as a sign when it is taken to refer to a woman, who is then more explicitly identified as Mary, who is further understood as being the recipient of a special message. In fact, however, the concept is restricted to just the last level, the one that Panofsky calls iconological and that can be considered to define referentiality as occurring among full systems of signs. The notions of lexicon and semantics are thus useful to distinguish semiotics proper from its non-systemic counterparts.

A *lexical* identification defines a figure in the most immediate and universal terms: a human figure, a human figure with wings (not a given in normal perception, but a conflation of two realities that are given in different contexts), flowers, etc. The referential link is between single elements that correspond to the most elemental human perception as such, not yet invested by the additional layers of meaning that a cultural system imposes on them.

A *semantic* identification presupposes such cultural system, and, while still limited to an individual element, it sees it as endowed by a broad range of significations, which all converge to propose a comprehensive physiognomy of the intended character. Thus in the Annunciation scene, Mary is the referent for the seated

[6] Panofsky 1955: 40-41.

[7] Panofsky 1955: 38.

woman: she is 'signified' as such by a number of 'signs': the halo, of course, but then, more specifically, her stance relative to the overall composition of the scene. The halo identifies the other figures as belonging to the supernatural sphere (the angel, the saints). The dove in the upper center signifies the Holy Spirit, whose 'halo' consists of eight seraphims. And so on. The iconographic approach remains two-dimensional in the sense that it establishes a correlation with a single referent, whether a figure or a larger scene.

A properly *semiotic* identification searches for referential links within clusters of systems. In the case of the Annunciation event as portrayed in Simone Martini's painting, the referent is the entire Christian doctrine of the incarnation, which undergirds the composition and its details. Thus, the vertical element that separates the angel and Mary is the sign that points to the virginal conception (a barrier between male and female figures), as is the breath that comes from the dove towards Mary, which is specular, in its diagonal direction, to the strip with the written words of greeting by the angel to Mary; Mary's recoiling attitude refers to her surprise and receptivity, at the same time, when faced with announcement of a virginal conception; and so on. These are broad ranges of signification, and corresponding wide clusters of signs: the overlay of such ranges and clusters is complex and proportionately difficult to argue in all its ramifications. It also requires a great measure of control with regard an immense variety of sources, not only stylistic, but also historical, literary, theological, and more.

It was in this measure of control that Panofsky excelled. He had been putting in practice the principles which were intuitively clear to him, and which, as I suggested, he eventually, if almost casually, brought together in the set of principles for which he is especially remembered. But his forte remained the implementation more than the articulation of these very principles. Time and again, he showed how concretely one could relate, through the *practice* of iconology, to the witness of a given work of art, bringing out in a controlled, and thus arguable, manner its implications, its deeper meaning. It was the practice of humanism seen as the appropriation of values, in their full import – through a reasoned discourse which could elicit a response beyond the mediation of philological analysis.

Competence

There is another aspect that we must consider, one that is not envisaged by Panofsky or, more generally, by scholars dealing with iconology and its implications (but see below, chapter '*Perceptual analysis*'). The system as described, and as I have re-proposed it here from a theoretical point of view, focuses on referentiality as intrinsic to a given work: it is the elements of that work that display a referential link, at various levels of complexity, with the outside world as it was present to the author of the work itself (Simone Martini in the case of our example). But the question may also be asked as to the degree to which this entire referential system affects those to whom the fruition of the work is offered. Can they internalize the same broad system of values that the work embodies, and respond to it in ways that call for a *living* perception, in the here and now, of that system?

We may first consider the impact that the three types of analysis have on the target of the research, namely on the audience to which the results of the analysis are addressed. There is a proportionately inverted measure of involvement as one moves from formal analysis to iconology. The referential scope of each type of analysis has a clear effect on the degree to which a response can be elicited. A system that has no reference to the outside world (the pre-iconographic level) implies simply a recognition of the validity of the reconstruction of the internal structure as proposed by the scholar: there can be no emotional response to that. Even iconographic analysis may remain at the level of erudition: the two-dimensional referential dimension is so minimal as to be inconsequential with regard to sensitivity. But with iconology, matters are different: the multi-dimensional scope of the referential system does entail the need to develop sensitivity for values. Appreciating the full impact of the notion of the virginal conception on the part of Mary goes beyond the mere acknowledgment of what is perceived as a fact by the painter and his culture: appropriation, here, means responding to values and not only to notions that have a minimum of reference to the real world.

In order to appreciate the scope of the problem we may think of what happens with the study of a so-called 'dead' language. 'Dead' are only the speakers, not the language: for instance, there is no native speaker, today, of Babylonian. But generations of scholars have reconstructed in great detail the many levels through which Babylonian can be understood (grammar, lexicon, semantics, semiotics). Can we then claim a degree of competence analogous to that of a native speaker? For our current concerns it is not a matter of claiming the technical ability to fluently speak Babylonian, one that would allow us to presume that we might be able to readily converse with a native speaker. It is sufficient to consider a degree of competence that shows a sensitivity for the language that is borne out of having internalized the formal rules. One may then, for instance, formulate potential statements of non-occurrence that are suggested by the intuitive appropriation of the rules, statements that may then be verified objectively with recourse to the data.

It is this competence that we see displayed in Panofsky's writings. Upstream of any theoretical formulation, he had absorbed the tenets that informed the initial production of the works he was analyzing, and had correspondingly shaped his deeper understanding of the same and of their broader cultural environment.

Archaeological reason

The concept

The question of competence, just raised, will serve to illustrate the central concern behind the notion of archaeological reason. Simone Martini's work fits within a tradition that is very much alive, the tradition of Italian and of Christian culture. The inner spring that motivated the painter's choices in the past motivates today's choices of many who are carriers of the same culture. Archaeological reason addresses the converse case, the one of a broken tradition, where there are no living carriers of the tradition. Of a broken tradition we have the signs, but not, at least not immediately, the signified to which they respond. Archaeological reason[8] is therefore the function of human reason that seeks to bridge the gap of brokenness, and to reach for the signified behind the sign, and thus to reactivate the motor that gave rise to experience.

Iconology works in the same direction. Panofsky's effort pertained to a body of data that is in fact within the stream of living cultures, especially the European Renaissance and Baroque. But in effect the effort was that of identifying rich clusters of explicit formal traits (the signs) leading to the inner spring, the 'synthetic intuition,' that corresponded to the signified, and founded it. That is why I have stressed the semiotic dimension (see above '*Semiotics*'). It is in an analogous sense that we can claim to retrieve experience where we have only fossils – in much the same way that a 'dead' language (i.e., a language for which there are no more native speakers) can be reactivated as the living structure that it was, and thus no longer in effect be 'dead.' We can rightly speak of a semiotics of experience: we seek to establish how the carriers of a given broken tradition responded to stimuli that are otherwise hidden to us, cut off as we are from the living awareness of what these stimuli were.

Panofsky's three steps of formal analysis, iconography and iconology, in the revised sense I attributed to them ('*Four frames of reference*' and '*Panofsky's system*'), are the ones that allow us to retrieve the referential world to which the work belonged. Here, I will refer briefly to two methods that can be used in this research: distributional and perceptual analysis. It may seem unnecessary to produce theoretical scaffolding for a practice that yields already good results – and in effect I will give, in what follows, a few examples drawn from archaeology, which in practice apply the methods I am describing without referring to the theory I am articulating. But these considerations affect each and every effort at proposing a theory as such. The virtue of theory resides in defining with greater clarity the precise parameters within which the practice takes place, and which implicitly are always present in everyone's approach. Just as importantly, theory serves a major heuristic function when working on actual data, by pointing at possible reconfigurations of the data, with an inverse relationship between a deductive and an inductive approach.

It should be noted that this approach sheds a new light on the question of the relationship between form and content. We may say that archaeological reason is faced with only the form, as the concrete embodiment of meaning: form is all that is left in archaeology. But it is also clear that – precisely because content or meaning were, at the moment of creation and of early fruition within the context of a living tradition, inextricably linked with form – precisely for this reason it is possible to construct an argument that traces our way back from one to the other.

Distributional analysis

In linguistics, distributional analysis offers a precise way of defining patterns of co-occurrence. The correlations are formally defined, and on this rests the inference that is drawn from them. Its validity depends in the first place on its own internal logic. Thus, to infer cultic significance for a given object found in an archaeological excavation one should go beyond the mere mental shortcut that reads special relevance in an unusual cluster of attributes. Which suggests a second major factor in assessing the validity of the inference: the size of the sample. If the definition of 'unusual' rests on a very limited assemblage, then the very validity of the qualification is obviously correspondingly limited. And this in turn leads us to appreciate the great significance of a statement of non-occurrence: to say that something does not occur is very different from saying that it could not occur, but is more or less founded depending on the range of potential occurrences.

Areshian provides an excellent example of distributional analysis.[9] The sequence of three animals (wolf-goat-stag) is seen as a paradigm that occurs in an astonishing variety of contexts (textual, archaeological, iconographic, folkloristic), a paradigm

[8] I have developed this concept in detail in Buccellati G. 2017. It is interesting to note that Panofsky uses a similar term in describing his efforts: 'the art historian subjects his 'material' to a rational archaeological analysis,' Panofsky 1997: 14.

[9] Areshian 2000, with a new introduction in Areshian 2006b.

that allows Areshian to propose that the sequence of the three animals 'signifies' the sequence of birth-death-resurrection. He calls this paradigm a 'metatext': the term refers appropriately to the fact that the distribution of elements, seen in their paradigmatic correlation, goes beyond the value of any individual element. Just as, in a linguistic paradigm, the pair of forms 'I read' and 'he reads' may be considered a metatext in the sense that each individual form acquires a special valence by virtue of its univocal correlation to the other; so the sequence of the three animals is a metatext in that each individual animal acquires a special valence by virtue of its univocal correlation to the others. In terms of the argument developed above, we may say that the two-dimensional (iconographic) identification of each single animal acquires a multi-dimensional (iconological) definition because of the recurrent (paradigmatic, metatextual) clustering (distribution) of the single elements. Or again: the linked sequence (wolf-goat-stag) is the metatext of the unlinked sequence wolf, goat, stag.

The existence of distributional patterns first, and, second, its recognition in the record, entails the assumption that there is in fact a structural whole. The very notion of paradigm, or of metatext, implies a structure that overarches the individual elements and gives meaning to their correlation. Thus semiotics, while building on the two-dimensional correlation between a given item as a sign and its signification, goes beyond it and applies as well to clusters of items. These clusters will normally include heterogeneous assemblages, and this may be called 'cultural semiotics' as well argued by Areshian:

'Here appears the advantage of an application of basic principles of cultural semiotics, that allows us to reveal hidden links between archaeological and linguistic evidence. Semiotics would perceive and analyse the data from linguistics, philology, folklore, archaeology, and art history as components of an integral cultural metatext communicating specific messages through a variety of codes.'[10]

Archaeological reason builds precisely on such cultural semiotics. To reach behind the brokenness of a tradition means to identify patterned structural wholes, and to seek for the inner spring that motivated them – much as we seek the vanishing point in defining the integrity of perspective in a painting (the classical study of Panofsky 1927 is significant even in this regard). Archaeology lends itself ideally to this task because of the enormous quantity of data that emerge from the ground in an apparent state of disaggregation. And in this task, the digital dimension is essential, in ways that go well beyond the technical aspect of data processing. Quantitative analysis offers more than philological control over a large mass of data. It allows, in ways unimagined before computers, an immensely higher degree of awareness for structural correlations than mere intuition might otherwise make possible. For instance, the quantity of iconographic motifs in Mesopotamian glyptics will allow, within a properly digital framework, the identification of significant iconological inferences (as articulated early on in Kelly-Buccellati 1977). Analogously, the daunting quantity of ceramics, whether whole vessels or sherds, can yield unsuspected new vistas into the function of assemblages and their actual use in given contexts (a major digital publication that fully implements this analysis for the entire ceramic corpus of Urkesh is in preparation by Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati; it will be available for open access in 2017 within the website urkesh.org).

Perceptual analysis

Areshian's interest in myth as a unifying theme of cultural semiotics is also a case in point. Already in his 1992 article he brought out extensive 'clusters' of linguistic and archaeological elements,[11] seeking for 'the deep relation of the revealed mythologema.'[12] This 'deep relation' corresponds to the inner spring behind the data, and the 'revealed mythologema' correspond to the structural wholes that can be described formally, and on which the semiotic interpretation rests. In this case, myth provides the unifying thread, the perception of reality of which the various forms (from material culture to folklore) give expression.

Perceptual analysis may be viewed as a way to achieve a specific type of contextualization, namely one that considers the receptivity context: how would given structural elements have been perceived? In this respect, there are a number of other types of analysis that have broached the same problem, for example with regard to written documents (e.g., the 'Sitz im Leben' approach to biblical texts) or to spoken language (as with pragmatics) – not to mention, of course, iconology. More specifically, in our case, we would want to ask: what clues are there that may allow us to reconstruct such assumed perception?

We will look here briefly at two specific situations where a special approach to perceptual analysis may be proposed: the built environment and movable objects.

The built environment

I have used the concept of perceptual analysis in the practice of excavation as a way to articulate strategies.[13]

[10] Areshian 2006b: 283.

[11] Areshian 1992: 21.

[12] Areshian 1992: 22.

[13] Buccellati F. 2010; Buccellati G. 2017.

The main goal, in that case, is to identify what the ancient perception of the built environment might have been: this will then provide a sense of direction to the excavation process, in such a way that the exposure of remaining architectural volumes may match, as much as possible, the ancient point of view. The question I ask during excavations is: how would a given building, of which we have now only a corner, relate to other partially excavated buildings, and to the open spaces, within the con- text of the larger urban texture? And how should then the excavation proceed, in order to expose not only the individual buildings, but also their reciprocal connection as would have been viewed, and sensed, by the people on the ground? These principles guide the excavation also in function of how the results may be presented to viewers, in other words, the *conservation* strategy is built into the excavation strategy itself, so as to preserve not only the individual structures, but also the larger coherence of the urban landscape to which they belong.

Three-dimensional visual reconstruction of buildings, and occasionally also of settlements, has been common practice. A study of their diverse styles, and even the occasionally fashionable transfer to modern architectural structures,[14] highlights the significance that this approach has had in the field. Virtual reality has in the meantime become the privileged venue for giving shape to what may have been the ancient visual experience of the built environment: with the possibility of dynamic walk-throughs, of viewpoints rotations, of lighting variations, and so on, the interaction with the model is immeasurably more effective than with standard graphic three-dimensional renderings, whether graphic or plastic. Here I wish to point out only two factors that are pertinent to perceptual analysis: the documentary and the heuristic dimensions that pertain to all these gradations of visual reconstructions.

The documentary value is often obscured by the sheer aesthetic quality of the visual representation. But it does provide means to contribute in an essential way to the quality of the record. When first experimenting with virtual reality, I remember being impressed by a statement of colleagues in the school of architecture who had been creating 3-D reconstructions from floor plans and elevations of buildings as drawn in the past even by renowned architects and architectural historians. Their comment was that more frequently than one would expect, the two (plans and elevations) did not match: in other words, the two planes had been seen as independent entities. An immediate check against the data from which the reconstruction is generated is indispensable, and to the extent that it can be carried out directly in the field, at the very moment of excavation,[15] it serves as a very powerful documentary tool, especially to the extent that actual data are distinguished graphically from reconstructed ones.

The second important factor that pertains to perceptual analysis in an archaeological context is its heuristic function. The three-dimensional rendering is regularly an expansion of the data: many facets are added, not only in terms of colors and textures, but also in terms of portions of actual volumes. There is a double heuristic function of this approach, made possible by the relative ease with which one can produce these renderings. On the one hand, it helps in evaluating alternative proposal for reconstruction, with a flexibility that encourages one to retain a certain distance from any given interpretation, by keeping the alternatives present at the same time. On the other, it proposes, where a structure is still being excavated and such a rendering is available during excavation, parallel paths through which the excavation strategy can be channeled: each path can be quickly adjusted depending on the progress of the actual work (I described this procedure in the very early stages of what used to be called 'computer applications' to archaeology[16]).

In general, we may say that the identification of perception of the spatial relationships within a built environment aims in the same direction as iconology. It infers from a variety of spatial factors an organizing vision that would have coordinated this organization. Not that we need to assume a conscious process of urban planning in every case: but even in the simplest of organic developments there is a sense of how volumes cluster together as new are added to old ones. This approach ties in with the notion of a psychological response to architecture,[17] in that it focuses on the target which the initial structural whole envisaged (see above, '*Semiotics*'). It is also in this direction that other current research points, narrowing the area of perception to specific elements, such as the one dealing with sensory experience of architectural spaces.[18] I may finally refer also to the notion of perceptual geography, which extends the method to the landscape as such, apart from the built environment.[19]

Objects

How were given items inserted in the fabric of life? What was, in other words, the perception the ancients had of objects we see today severed not only from the tradition but also from the locale of which they were part? How can archaeological reason propose to heal

[14] Micale 2007; 2008; 2010.

[15] Buccellati F. 2017.

[16] Buccellati 1988.

[17] Buccellati F. 2010; see also the seminal and still relevant 1886 study by Wölfflin.

[18] McMahon 2013; Thomason 2016.

[19] Buccellati 1990: 90f.

the brokenness? I will briefly refer to three examples, where the recognition of perceptual receptivity appears as progressively more hypothetical.

The first is the posture which we may arguably presume the ancients would have had vis-à-vis specific elements of material culture. Let us consider, by way of example, the stela of Hammurapi that displays his so-called code of laws, rendered in beautiful cuneiform writing of which the vast majority of its contemporaries could only appreciate the calligraphic dimension. At the beginning of the epilogue, the text relates Hammurapi's words as follows:

'Let any man who is a party in a lawsuit
come in front of my image, the king of justice [as depicted on top of the stela],
and let someone read aloud to him what is written in [the body of] the stela

so that he may listen to my words that carry great weight,
and so that my stela may clarify the terms of his case
and he may as a result see a proper resolution [of his case]
and thus may breathe easily again.

May he say 'Hammurapi... is like a real father for his people...,'
and may he pray for me with his whole heart
in front of Marduk my lord and Zarpanitum my lady.'

It is a heartfelt statement that places the stela in a living context, an ekphrasis not of an object, but of a situation. It gives a whole new life to a 'monument' that, seen today in its museum context, is devoid of the living relationship it was originally intended to have for a concrete audience. We need not be too cynical and dismiss off hand the statement as mere rhetorical propaganda. But if you wish to take that stand, you would have to concede that such a rhetorical reading of the stela would still help us to project a dynamics and to stage a scene, even if seen through the eyes of those who wanted to create a deliberate and non spontaneous setting.

The second example relates to the use of glyptics. In the case of seal impressions, we deal with the actual target for whom the message of the seal was intended. An eloquent case in point is that of the hundreds of seal impression from the palace of Tupkish at Urkesh. They were found in the place where they were dropped after the containers they sealed were opened. The people responsible for this operation were undoubtedly cognizant of the figurative representation on the seal, and indirectly of the cuneiform legend that accompanied it: and they were thus receptive to the intended message, however subliminally. The whole issue of portraiture and identity[20] is central to this type of analysis: the visual imagery was richly detailed in Urkesh glyptics, and it is a plausible assumption that this was not just a stylistic trait, but also served the specific function of communicating an understandable substantive content to those who viewed them. The writing could not be read, but its mere presence implicitly validated the nature of the figurative representation. For our current interest, this suggests that it is plausible to postulate an open channel to perception.

The third example is that of the reception of sculptures. What was the target audience, or rather, in the plural, the target audiences for whom these pieces were intended? While mural paintings are tied to their architectural setting, and thus can more readily be linked to the perceptual response they would have evoked within the space they 'inhabited,' sculptures are often found apart from their original context, and without a 'caption' such as we have seen for the stela of Hammurapi. Take for example a plaque with two male figures found in our excavations at Urkesh: found broken in a secondary context, we have no stratigraphic definition of its original context. Its subject has been convincingly identified as a representation of Gilgamesh and Enkidu,[21] and it can safely be assumed to have been produced in Urkesh for local use. In this case, the question about potential perception of the target audience is thus wholly hypothetical. But even just posing the question is suggestive of potential lines of inquiry. We can assume, for instance, that this audience was familiar with the poem of Gilgamesh, which we know was available in a Hurrian version in later times; that the theme was popular enough to be transferred onto a relief with a figurative rendering of a central scene of the poem; that it may in some ways have appealed to the values embodied in the poem and in this scene in particular. Questions such as these may, if nothing else, have a heuristic function by pointing in the direction of other elements from the excavations that may help in defining further the very nature of the question itself.

Hermeneutics

Archaeological reason is the faculty by which we identify with, and relate to, a form of human experience that is not dialogically present to us. Distributional and perceptual analyses are two methods whereby archaeological reason can operate and effectively bridge the gulf that separates us from a broken tradition. There is an ascending degree of potential risk as one moves from the pre-iconographic level all the way up to iconology. The formal identification of shapes in the first level is clearly more easily arguable and 'objective' than the suggestions of meaning relating, as in the

[20] Kelly-Buccellati 2010; 2015.

[21] Kelly-Buccellati 2006.

example of Simone Martini's Annunciation, to such questions as the virginal conception occurring of Jesus.

Iconology is thus the most complex of the frames of reference within which these methods of analysis take shape. It is the systemic or multi-dimensional extra-referential analysis as it relates to figurative works of art, hence it is limited in scope, but very powerful in that it deals with cultural elements of great depth, elements that incorporate a massive (i.e., highly multidimensional) intuition of meaning and its corresponding formulation.

A critique of archaeological reason is the theory that looks upstream of all of this, at the faculty as such and at the conditions of possibility for its operations. In this regard, we may say that a critique of archaeological reason *coincides*, tout court, with hermeneutics. The apparent difference is that hermeneutics (as it is normally understood) presupposes a living stream of self-awareness, and builds on that, whereas archaeological reason, by definition, implies an interruption of that very same stream. And there is at first blush much to support this distinction.

And yet. It is also true, paradoxical though it may seem, that all traditions are broken, including the living ones that have active carriers aware of their own tradition, 'native speakers,' so to say, of their culture. Even my own personal tradition is, if you will, broken, in the sense that my current awareness of my past is not my past, and may in fact differ from what that past actually was.

From this perspective, archaeological reason emerges as the more objective form of hermeneutics, in that it is based on the assumption that we may identify with a human experience that is not able to actively dialog with us in the here and now, but resonates nevertheless with all the power of a life once lived. There is fluidity in this, a fluidity that poses risks.[22] But a fluidity that archaeological reason, starting out as it does from an accepted situation of brokenness, is best equipped to handle. It is also the approach that can best deal with the 'archaeology' of Foucault, by defining the structural elements that supported experience in the broken past, and can support it again today.

Bibliography

Areshian, G. 1992. Armenian and Indo-European Cosmogonic Myths and their Development. In J. A. C. Greppin (ed.), *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Armenian Linguistics*: 1–36. Delmar and New York, Caravan Books.

Areshian, G. 2003. The Zoomorphic Code of the Proto-Indo-European Mythological Cycle of 'Birth-Death-Resurrection': A Linguistic-Archaeological Reconstruction. In K. Jones-Bley, M. E. Huld, A. Della Volpe, and M. R. Dexter (eds), *Proceedings of the 14th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference*: 228–249, Washington, DC, Institute for the Study of Man (= *Journal of Indo-European Studies,* Monograph Series 47).

Areshian, G. 2006a. Cyclopes from the Land of the Eagle: Anatolian Background of *Odyssey 9* and of the Greek Myths Concerning the Cyclopes. In K. Jones-Bley, M. E. Huld, A. Della Volpe, and M. R. Dexter (eds), *Proceedings of the 17th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference*: 31–50. Washington, DC, Institute for the Study of Man (= *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Monograph Series 52).

Areshian, G. 2006b. Sequences of Signs: Eurasian Archaeology from a Perspective of Cultural Semiotics. In D. L. Peterson, L .M. Popova, and A. T. Smith (eds), *Beyond the Steppe and the Sown. Proceedings of the 2002 University of Chicago Conference on Eurasian Archaeology*: 282–295. Leiden – Boston, Brill (= *Colloquia Pontica 13,* Monograph Supplement of *Ancient West and East*).

Buccellati, F. 2010. The Monumental Temple Terrace at Urkesh and its Setting. In J. Becker, R. Hempelmann and E. Rehm (Hrsg.), *Kulturlandschaft Syrien: Zentrum und Peripherie. Festschrift für Jan-Waalke Meyer*: 71–85. Münster, Ugarit-Verlag.

Buccellati, F. 2017. *Three-dimensional Volumetric Analysis in an Archaeological Context.* Malibu, Undena Publications.

Buccellati, G. 1988. Computer applications: Introduction, In G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati (eds), *Mozan 1. The Soundings of the First Two Seasons*: 100–101 (available online at giorgiobuccellati.net), Malibu, Undena Publications (= *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 20).

Buccellati, G. 1990. 'River Bank,' 'High Country' and 'Pasture Land': The Growth of Nomadism on the Middle Euphrates and the Khabur. In S. Eichler, M. Wäfler and D. Warbuton (eds), *Tell al-Hamidiyah 2*: 87–117. Göttingen, Vandenhoek and Ruprecht (available online at giorgiobuccellati.net).

Buccellati, G. 2006. On (e)-tic and -emic. In *Backdirt. Newsletter of the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology*, Winter 2006: 12–13 (available online at giorgiobuccellati.net).

Buccellati, G. 2010. The Urkesh Temple Terrace: Function and Perception. In J. Becker, R. Hempelmann and E. Rehm (Hrsg.), *Kulturlandschaft Syrien: Zentrum und Peripherie. Festschrift für Jan-Waalke Meyer*: 87–121. Münster, Ugarit-Verlag.

Buccellati, G. 2017. *A Critique of Archaeological Reason.* Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press.

Davey, N. 2006. *Unquiet Understanding. Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics.* SUNY series in Contem-

[22] Davey 2006.

porary Continental Philosophy. Albany, State University of New York Press.

Holly, M. A. 1984. *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.

Holly, M. A. 1992. *Iconografia e iconologia. Saggio sulla storia intellettuale*. Milano, Jaca Book.

Holly, M. A. 1996. *Past Looking. Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.

Kelly-Buccellati, M. 1977. Towards the Use of Quantitative Analysis in Mesopotamian Sphragistics. *Mesopotamia* 11: 41–52.

Kelly-Buccellati, M. 2006. Gilgamesh at Urkesh? Literary Motifs and Iconographic Identifications. In P. Butterlin, M. Lebeau, J.-Y. Monchambert, J. L. Montero Fenollós and B. Muller (eds), *Les espaces syro-mésopotamiens. Dimensions de l'expérience humaine au Proche-Orient ancien. Volume d'hommage offert à Jean-Claude Margueron*: 403–414. Turnhout, Brepols Publishers (= *Subartu* 17).

Kelly-Buccellati, M. 2010. Uqnitum and Tar'am-Agade. Patronage and Portraiture at Urkesh. In J. C. Fincke (ed.), *Festschrift für Gernot Wilhelm anläßlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 28. Januar 2010*: 185–202. Dresden, ISLET.

Kelly-Buccellati, M. 2015. Power and Identity Construction in Ancient Urkesh. In P. Ciafardoni and D. Giannessi (eds), *From the Treasures of Syria. Essays on Art and Archaeology in Honour of Stefania Mazzoni*: 111–130. Leiden, Nederlands Instituut Voor Het Nabije Oosten.

McMahon, A. 2013. Space, Sound and Light: Towards a Sensory Experience of Ancient Monumental Architecture, *American Journal of Archaeology* 117: 163–179.

Micale, M. G. 2007. Riflessi d'architettura mesopotamica nei disegni e nelle ricostruzioni achitettoniche di Assur e Babilonia: Tra realtà archeologica e mito dell'architettura monumentale. In J. Mª. Córdoba, F. Escribano e M. Mañé (eds), *Further Approaches to Travellers and Scholars in the Rediscovering of the Ancient Near East*, vol. II: 117–140. Madrid, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid Ediciones (= *ISIMU* 10).

Micale, M. G. 2008. *The course of the images*. Remarks on the architectural Reconstructions in the 19th and 20th centuries: The case of the Ziqqurrat. In J. Mª Córdoba, M. Molist, Mª C. Pérez, I. Rubio and S. Martínez (eds), *Proceedings of the 5th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 2: 571–580. Madrid, UAM Ediciones.

Micale, M. G. 2010. Designing Architecture, Building Identities. The Discovery and Use of Mesopotamian Features in Modern Architecture between Orientalism and the Definition of Contemporary Identities. In P. Matthiae, F. Pinnock, L. Nigro and N. Marchetti (eds), *Proceedings of the 6th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1: 93–112. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz.

Panofsky, E. 1927. Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form.' In *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* 1924-1925: 258–330. Leipzig and Berlin, 1927 (published in English as *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. New York, Zone Books, 1991).

Panofsky, E. 1932. Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst. *Logos* 211: 103–119.

Panofsky, E. 1939. *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. Oxford, Oxford University Press (reprinted with a new preface at New York, Harper and Row, 1962).

Panofsky, E. 1955. *Meaning in the Visual Arts. Papers in and on Art History*. Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday Anchor Books.

Thomason, A. K. 2016. The Sense-scapes of Neo-Assyrian Capital Cities: Royal Authority and Bodily Experience. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26: 243–264.

Wölfflin, H. 1886. *Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur*. Inaugural-Dissertation der hohen philosophischen Fakultät der Universität München. München, Kgl. Hof- and Universitäts-Buchdruckerei von Dr. C. Wolf and Sohn.

Wölfflin, H. 1886. 1915. *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*. München, Hugo Bruckmann (translated in 1932 as *Principles of Art History. The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art,* from 7th German Edition (1929) by M. D. Hottinger. New York, Dover Publications, New York).

Bridging Times and Spaces

Papers in Ancient Near Eastern, Mediterranean and Armenian Studies

Honouring Gregory E. Areshian on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday

edited by

Pavel S. Avetisyan
Yervand H. Grekyan

Archaeopress Archaeology

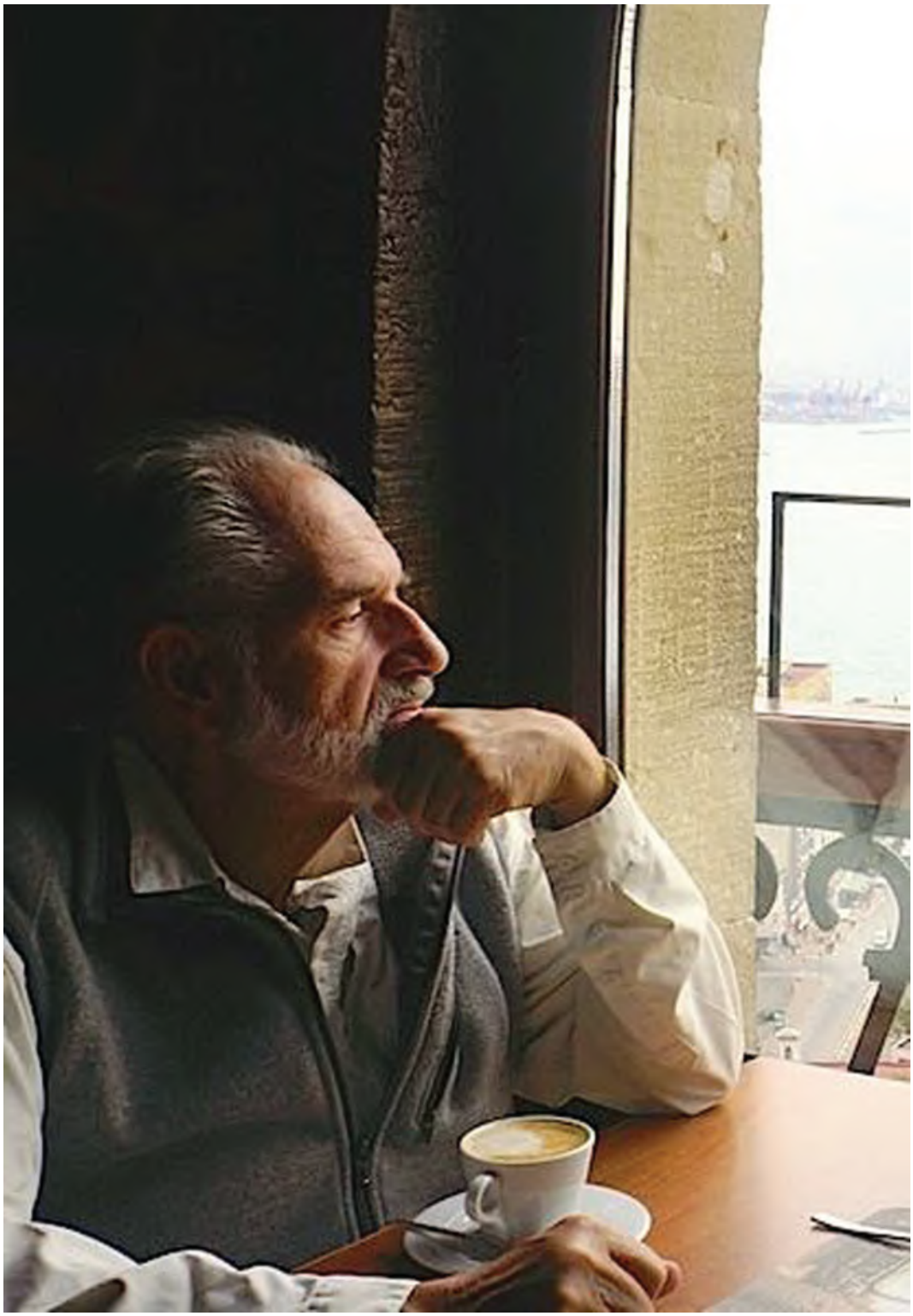
Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 78491 699 2
ISBN 978 1 78491 700 5 (e-Pdf)

Front cover illustration: Altar, *ca.* 1500-1400 BCE, Karashamb Cemetery, Armenia.

Printed in England by Oxuniprint, Oxford
This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com



Gregory E. Areshian

Contents