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Studies on ancient Near Eastern artefacts
and the Bible inspired by the work
of Othmar Keel

edited by

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and Christoph Uehlinger



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An ivory statuette depicting an enthroned figure from Tel Rehov

Amiḥai Mazar

A unique composite ivory statuette depicting an enthroned figure was discovered at Tel Rehov, in the Beth Shean Valley, Israel, in a ninth century BCE archaeological context. The technique of a composite figure sculptured in the round with head, arms and legs made separately is unusual. The subject matter and few details are rooted in second-millennium art of the Levant, yet the object should be seen as a product of a local workshop in the kingdom of Israel. Based on earlier parallels, it is suggested that the statuette depicted an enthroned king.

The following short paper on a unique ivory object from Tel Rehov is dedicated to Othmar Keel, whose wide scale research on iconography in biblical times and the extensive publications he initiated and edited changed the scope of this field of study.

1. The site

The 10 hectare mound of Tel Rehov is composed of a lower city and an upper city.¹ Four excavated areas in the lower city and four in the upper city excavated during seven seasons between 1997-2005 revealed remains of one of the largest Iron Age cities in the Land of Israel. In each of these excavation areas we counted several local stratigraphic phases, starting from the end of the Late Bronze Age and ending in the eighth century BCE. Three strata (VI-IV) yielded rich pottery assemblages belonging to the Iron IIA and these were dated by many ¹⁴C dates and comparative pottery studies to the tenth to ninth centuries BCE (Mazar 1999; 2005; Mazar et al. 2005). The last of these strata (Stratum IV) was destroyed by severe fire,

¹ The excavations at Tel Rehov, directed by the author, have been conducted since 1997 under the auspices of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University and generously sponsored by Mr. John Camp. Area C, in which the ivory object was found, has been supervised by Nava Panitz-Cohen. The main publications on this dig as well as additional pictures and other materials can be found on the internet at www.rehov.org.

followed by abandonment of the lower city, where no finds later than Iron IIA were found. This violent destruction may be attributed to the Aramean wars against Israel led by Hazael king of Damascus following the end of the Omride Dynasty, ca. 840-830 BCE. Indeed, ¹⁴C dates from Stratum IV are no later than 830 BCE. Following this destruction, the lower city was abandoned, while the upper mound (an area of ca. 5 hectares) continued to survive until the Assyrian conquest of 732 BCE (Stratum III).

Strata V and IV yielded a large collection of objects including dozens of seals and seal impressions, a rich collection of clay figurines and a number of pottery altars, some decorated with female figures in relief. A very rich collection of restorable local pottery, as well some imported Phoenician, Cypriote and Greek pottery (Coldstream & Mazar 2003) and several inscriptions (Mazar 2003), make Tel Reḥov one of the more important sites for studying the material culture of Israel in the tenth to ninth centuries BCE.

2. Context

The ivory object which is the focus of this paper (registration number 44601, Area C, Square Y/3, Locus 2417, Stratum C-1a [general Stratum IV], level 87.32 m) was found in occupation debris in an open space – a street or a piazza – located just south of Building F. The latter was a building of unique plan (Mazar et al. 2005: 236, fig. 13.33) which yielded rich finds, including an unusual model shrine decorated with an animal figure and human heads, a fragmentary pottery altar decorated with three nude female figures, an inscription incised on a jar mentioning the name *nmš* (Mazar 2003: 178-181), a fragment of a Greek Early Middle Geometric skyphos (Coldstream & Mazar 2003: 35-35), a large pottery crater with a handled lid, and a rich Iron IIA pottery assemblage (Mazar et al. 2005: 238-243). Seven radiocarbon dates of charred grain found inside a jar in Building F were measured at the University of Groningen. Their weighted average date is 2758±16 BP, the calibrated dates in 1 sigma range is 918-870 BCE and in 2 sigma range 969-833 BCE; the highest probability is between the years 877-840 BCE (Mazar et al. 2005: 243-244). The relationship of the ivory object to this particular building is not entirely clear, since the object was found outside the building to its south, while the entrance to the building was from the north. Yet the exquisite finds from the building indicate its prestigious function, as does the ivory object itself. Thus, this area of the town appears to have been of special importance.

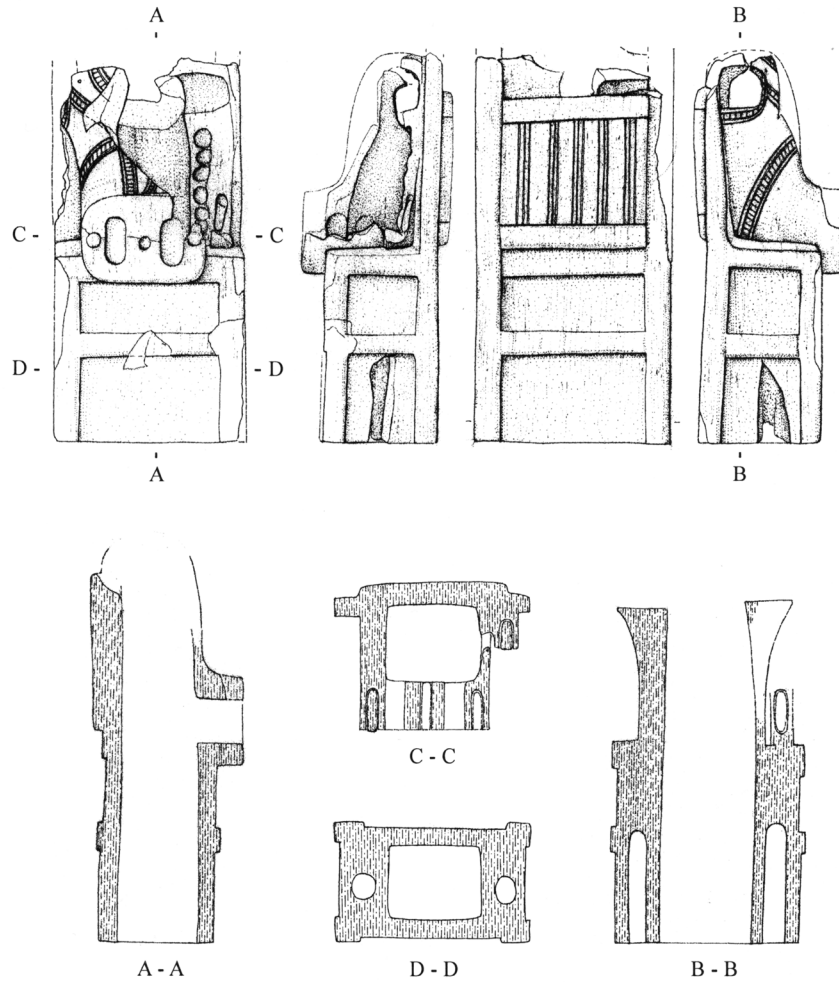


Fig. 1 The ivory object from Tel Reḥov: four faces and sections (drawing by Carmen Hersch).

3. Description

The object is 8.5 cm tall, 4.4 cm wide and 3.5 cm maximal length on its bottom side. It was found in three fragments broken lengthwise. The object is made of pink-yellowish ivory², yet it was impossible to say whether it

² Examination with binocular microscope was carried out by Dr. Liora Kolska Horwitz in the archeo-zoological laboratory of the Hebrew University. She confirmed that the material is ivory, and cannot be bone.

was made from elephant or hippopotamus tusk. At places, the surface is shiny. It was made of one piece of ivory, hollowed at the center all the way through (**fig. 1; pl. XIX**).

The object is a three dimensional depiction of an enthroned human figure. The hollowed interior was worked to square form, leaving walls 10 mm thick on the sides of the chair, 3-4 mm at the front and back and 2 mm at the chest area of the figure's torso.

The throne was preserved almost completely, except its top; it is depicted as a network of vertical and horizontal flat ridges which probably represent wooden beams. Its structure is simple. Two circular holes at the base, each 5 mm in diameter and 25 mm deep indicate that the chair was solidly connected to a base, whether a pedestal or another object of unknown nature. The lower front, two sides and lower back of the chair each contained two plain, sunken panels. Such panels appear on the back of the chair in a fragment of a miniature three dimensional depiction of an enthroned figure sitting on a chair with two sphinxes decorating its sides found among the Megiddo ivories in Stratum VIIA (Loud 1939: pl. 4:3).³ The upper part of the back side, at the back of the enthroned figure, slightly protrudes from the rest of the chair and is slightly convex, as if depicting some kind of cushion. This recalls an ivory relief from Samaria showing an enthroned figure who sits on a cushion that is shown folded behind the chair (Crowfoot & Crowfoot 1938: pl. XI). This back "cushion" is decorated by five vertical groups of incised lines made with a sharp tool, each composed of three lines, dividing this area into six vertical plain stripes. Similar stripes can be seen on the Samaria throne mentioned above, where the lower side of the chair is divided into vertical stripes by single vertical incisions. The upper part of the back in our object is convex near the break, perhaps depicting a folded cushion like the one in the Samaria example.

The torso of the enthroned figure was cut from the same single piece of ivory as the chair, yet the head, hands and legs were made and attached separately and not preserved. The torso was broken in front and its right side is missing. The figure wears a garment with decorated fringes. The fringes are depicted as a strip bordered on both sides by two incised lines and divided by short perpendicular incisions into small rectangular zones. Three stripes are seen on the front and side, indicating a fringed garment wrapped around the body; yet the depiction is schematic and the details of the garment cannot be deciphered. A similar design is used to frame the neck and the connecting holes for the two hands. The design and the decoration of the neck recall the dress of the ruler in the Late Bronze ivory plaque from Megiddo which shows an enthroned ruler approached by his queen (Loud 1939: pl. 4:2). A fringed garment also appears in the depiction

³ My thanks to Christoph Uehlinger for bringing this parallel to my attention.

of the enthroned figure from Samaria mentioned above, though there, the fringes were shown as a series of rounded knobs.

The head was made separately and connected to the body, as can be seen from remnants of the original ending of the hole in the upper part of the torso, into which the head was inserted. We have no idea how the head looked, but we should mention again the ivory relief of the enthroned figure from Samaria. The latter was also found broken below the neck, yet another fragment of the same relief shows two heads, with the one on the right probably the head of the enthroned figure and the second probably belonged to a servant or nobleman whose feet were preserved, indicating that he stood behind the enthroned figure, with a lotus flower separating them. The head at Samaria is shown in profile with large eyes and ear and an unusual headdress composed of vertical lines. A small remnant of what seems to be a beard can be seen on the upper part of the torso near the neck.

The arms of our figure were made separately and connected to the body by way of almost square holes at the upper sides of the body. The front was not symmetrical. The right side of the human figure is completely preserved and there is no sign that his right hand was attached to the body, and thus it must have been rendered free from the body, either bent and holding an object (such as a cup, for example) or straight alongside the body. The broken left side of the human figure shows a series of five drillings (about 1 mm in diameter each) at the inside side wall, just where we would suppose to find the left side of the body. Near the lower part of these drillings there is an oval depression with remains of a tang that must have connected a certain object and below it is a small protrusion, perhaps the base of this object. This indicates that the figure's left side looked different than the right side, and perhaps showed that the left hand of the person was bent, attached to the body and hold an object – perhaps a scepter or goblet, part of which was located where we would expect to find the left side of the body and garment.

The legs were made separately as one unit that was attached to the body; in the front of the body we can see the oval shape of this connection point and two oval depressions that could hold tangs carved as one piece with the legs. There are also three small holes at the center and on both sides of this oval part; they are tiny (about 3/4 of mm in diameter), and in one of them a metal nail was preserved. This was analyzed and proved to be made of copper based metal.⁴ It can be assumed that the feet rested on a podium or another type of flat surface to which the throne was also connected.

⁴ The analysis was performed by Naama Yahalom-Mack in the Kimmel Center for Archaeological Sciences in the Weizmann Institute for Science, Israel, using a Jordan Valley EX-310 LC X-ray Fluorescence Analyzer. I thank Naama Yahalom-Mack for this information.

4. Parallels and discussion

The subject of enthroned figures sculptured in the round is well known from the second millennium BCE in the Ancient Near East, and especially in the Levant. The earliest depictions of this subject seem to be those of Gudea king of Lagash. In Syria, the statues of the king of Ebla constitute an example from the Middle Bronze Age and that of Idrimi king of Alalakh from the Late Bronze I. At Hazor, four basalt statues of seated males were found in the Late Bronze Age levels. The ruler on the ivory plaque from Megiddo and the tenth-century relief on the sarcophagus of Aḥiram show such figures in shallow relief (for comprehensive discussion and previous bibliography see Beck 2002b: 59-62, 83-84; Beck 2002c: 338-346). We should also mention the small stone statue from Tel Şippor (Biran & Negbi 1966: pl. 23), the ivory statuettes of a seated male from Kamid el-Loz (Hachmann 1983: 80, Abb. 44), and the miniature statuette from the Megiddo ivories mentioned above (Loud 1939: pl. 4:3), all from the Late Bronze Age. Since some of these are securely identified as depicting kings rather than deities, I would not hesitate to identify all the figures of this type as kings or local rulers, though the claim that such statues were used for the worship of deceased kings should not be ruled out (as suggested by Yadin and others; see Beck 2002c: 345 for references). In light of these second millennium BCE parallels, it seems probable that our figure represents an enthroned king. In the ninth century BCE, when the state of Northern Israel was at its heyday, depictions of kings in the local art are conceivable, though the functional meaning of the object remains unknown. Other Iron Age depictions of enthroned figures, such as on the shallow ivory relief from Samaria and on the Aḥiram sarcophagus, depict presentation scenes in relief, like many other representations of palace scenes and banquets in Ancient Near Eastern art.

As far as I can judge, our example is the only free standing, three dimensional depiction of such an enthroned figure known from the Iron Age, and as such it may be taken as retaining second millennium traditions well into this period. Thus, our figure should be seen as being at the end of an iconographic tradition that is rooted in second millennium BCE Syria and the Levant. Such traditions were observed also in cult objects from Tel Reḥov, such as several four horned pottery altars found in the Iron IIA strata (two examples are shown in Mazar 2003: 150 fig. 11 and 151 fig. 14). The best parallels for these are in the Late Bronze Age sites of the Upper Euphrates region like Tel Meskeneh (Emar). A pottery model shrine (as yet unpublished) found in Building F, near the location of our ivory, is the latest in a series of such model shrines which were common during the Late Bronze and the Iron Age I periods (for discussion of second millennium BCE traditions in the Iron II art of Palestine, see Beck 2000).

The technique of creating a composite human figure with head, legs and hands made separately and connected by tangs is unusual in the Iron Age II. Late second millennium BCE ivories include several composite object types, which include separate elements connected by tangs; such are the “swimming girls” from Megiddo which had separately made heads, connected through holes at the back (Loud 1939: pls. 40-42, objects no. 177-179). Several ivory human heads from Megiddo and Lachish were definitely connected to a body or to another object (Loud 1939: pl. 48, no. 193-196), and duck-shaped cosmetic bowls had heads and wings made separately (Loud 1939: pls. 30-31, no. 157, 158; pl. 45, no. 205-209; pl. 46, no. 212). Such objects continue to appear until the Iron Age I at Tell Qasile and Tel Miqne (Mazar 1985: 10; Ben-Shlomo & Dothan 2006: 190 fig. 12). The use of small circular tangs can be seen on small cylindrical objects and plaques from Megiddo (Loud 1939: pl. 32:160; pls. 55:281; 58:306-307; 321-324). Late Bronze and Iron I ivories also include several fragments of human heads, hand and eye which apparently belonged to composite statues or statuettes, combined with wood and other materials (e. g. at Lachish, see Tufnell et al. 1940: pl. XVI:2, 3, 5, 7, 8). The rich collections of Iron Age ivories from the ancient Near East include only a few such composite figures. At Nimrud, several human figures had wigs made separately and attached to the head such as in the famous lion and black man combat scene (Mallowan 1966: frontispiece); the nose of the ivory head from Well NN was connected by a metal peg (Oates & Oates 2001: 90 fig. 50), and in at least one composite work of art from Nimrud, the human head, hands and legs were made of ivory (op. cit. 103, fig. 61; see also the composite object, op. cit. 100, fig. 59). Few ivory separately made arms, hands and legs from Nimrud may have belonged to composite statuettes, yet the examples are very few comparing to the huge amount of ivories from Nimrud (Herrmann 1986: nos. 1311, 1312, 1322, 1324; Herrmann 1992: nos. 203, 204, 221, 348, 347, 349; note in no. 349 a bronze or copper rivet like in our case). To the best of my knowledge, none of the Late Bronze or Iron Age II ivories show a complete human figure with head, hands and legs made separately.

The definition of local ivory workshops is one of the major issues in current research on ancient Near Eastern ivories (see the papers of Winter, Herrmann, Wicke, Uehlinger and Suter, in Suter & Uehlinger 2005). In her study of a South Syrian school (or schools) of ivory carvings centered in her view at Damascus, Winter (1981) anticipated the existence of additional local schools in the various local polities in our region (op. cit. 130; see also Barnett 1982: 88). Herrmann defined a local bone-carving school (Fischer & Herrmann 1995: 148-154), as well as several local ivory works, mainly from Hazor (op. cit. 154-160). She also attempted to attribute several ivories from Nimrud to local workshops in the southern Levant. In contrast, most of the Samaria ivories are defined as Phoenician, and were probably imported from Phoenician carving centers or produced locally by

itinerant craftsmen or craftsmen trained and/or inspired from Phoenician art (for recent discussion see Uehlinger 2005). Our ivory is most probably one example of a very small group of objects which may have been produced in local Israelite workshops. It is indeed extraordinary among all ivory objects known from the Levant in its mode of production, technique and style, while the subject matter is based on a long-lived second millennium BCE tradition. It is difficult however to assign additional objects to the same workshop. The ivory and bone objects defined by Herrmann as local southern Levantine (in particular those from Hazor) differ stylistically from our object and they may have been produced in a different local workshop. Thus our object remains unique, in spite of its being well-anchored in terms of time and place to ninth century BCE Northern Israel.

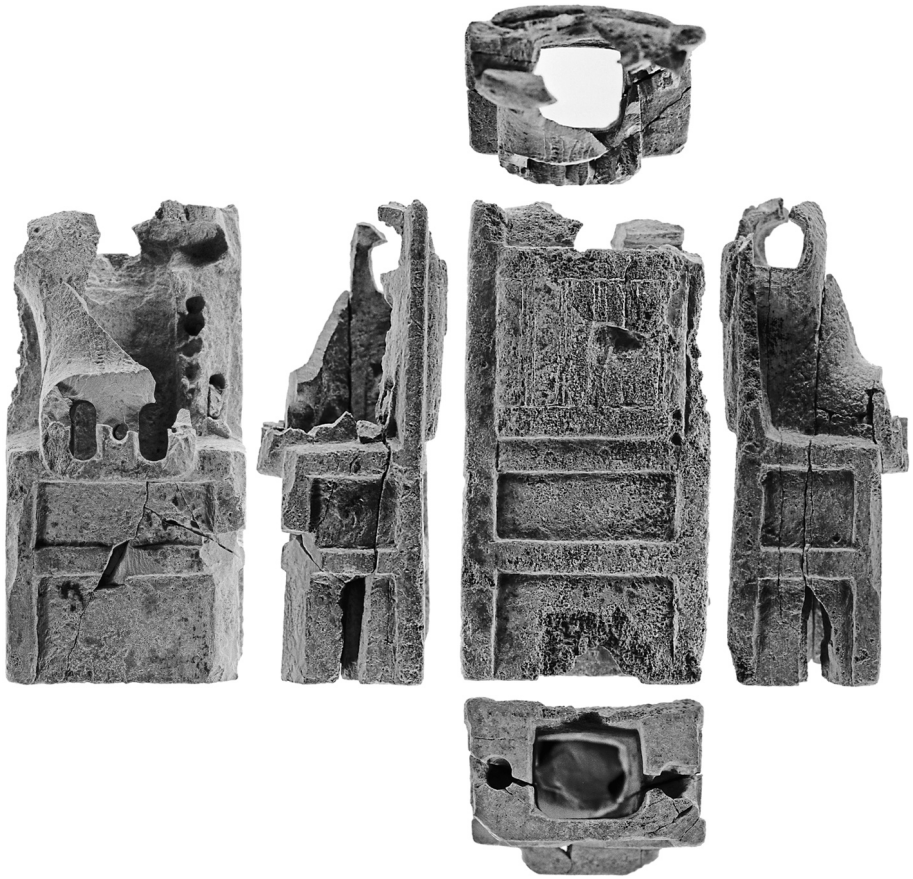
In terms of social and political significance, our object may be regarded as a luxury item, perhaps related to the activity in the nearby high-ranking Building F (see above). The ninth century (or earlier) date of our object is confirmed, based on the context of this find and radiocarbon dates from the nearby Building F (see above). It is thus one of the few ivory carvings well-dated to this century. A depiction of an enthroned king in this particular time and region may be related to the rise of the prosperous Omride dynasty in Israel. Tel Rehov was no doubt one of the largest and most opulent cities of their kingdom, and the depiction of an enthroned king in this locale and time may be related to the special role of the Omrides, the ruling dynasty at the time of Rehov Stratum IV. Whether the figure depicted a particular identified king cannot be said with any certainty. The use of carved ivories of a local school in ninth century Northern Israel may also give further weight to the biblical recollection of an "Ivory House" built by king Ahab, probably at Samaria (1 Kgs 22:39).

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The ivory object from Tel Reḥov (photographs by G. Laron).

Abstract

To consider images as sources in their own right for the history of ancient Near Eastern culture and religion; to correlate them, whenever appropriate, with biblical texts; thus, to have introduced a new way of looking and reading to biblical studies – these may be the most salient characteristics of Othmar Keel's internationally recognised scholarship. The papers published in this volume express the gratitude of many students and friends to a teacher and colleague with whom they have shared many years of inspiring research partnership.

Part I includes original publications of hitherto unpublished artefacts. In Part II, better or lesser known objects and images are studied anew in their cultural and socio-historical contexts. Part III brings biblical texts into a conversation with iconography and places them into the context of ancient Near Eastern religion and culture. Part IV opens wide religio-historical and theological horizons in the perspective of «vertical ecumenism». The volume comes with a comprehensive bibliography of Othmar Keel's published works from 1955 to the present.

Contributors to this volume include: Daphna Ben-Tor, Susanne Bickel, Izak Cornelius, P. M. Michèle Daviau, Michal Dayagi-Mendels, Jürg Egger, Christian Herrmann, Oskar Kaelin, Max Kuchler, Joel L. LeMon, Aren M. Maeir, Nanno Marinatos, Amihai Mazar, Stefan Münger, Tallay Ornan, Daria Pezzoli-Olgiate, Albert de Pury, Benjamin Sass, Adrian Schenker, Bernd U. Schipper, Silvia Schroer, René Schurte, Ursula Seidl, Thomas Staubli, Ephraim Stern, Brent A. Strawn, Christoph Uehlinger, Uza Zevulun, Irit Ziffer, Wolfgang Zwickel.