The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia

Cultures in Contact

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From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in the Second Millennium B.C.

Edited by
Joan Aruz, Sarah B. Graff, and Yelena Rakic

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The Qatna Wall Paintings and the Formation of Aegeo-Syrian Art

One of the most prominent testimonies of the interregional exchange of motifs, styles, and techniques at the end of the Middle (MB) and in the Late Bronze (LB) Age, between the eastern Mediterranean, the Levant, and Egypt is presented by wall paintings. Wall paintings reflecting Aegean style have been discovered at four places in the ancient Near East. The first such discovery was made in the Level VII palace at Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh),[1] located approximately 45 kilometers from the Mediterranean shore in the Amuq Plain of the northern Levant. The excavator, Sir Leonard Woolley, immediately recognized their striking similarity to Minoan frescoes, but argued that the influence moved from east to west, with artists traveling from the Levant to Crete.[2] Wolf-Dietrich and Barbara Niemeier, in their restudy of the Alalakh wall-plaster fragments, concluded that these frescoes clearly derived from Aegean models. Based on the available fragments, the Niemeiers reconstructed two typical Aegean motifs, a griffin and a bull head crowned by a double axe. They argue that the paintings were made in Syria by or under the supervision of Aegean artists who were sent to Syria in response to a request by the local elite.[3]

Paintings in the Aegean style were also found in a palatial building at Tel Kabri, located in the southern Levant, only 8 kilometers inland from the Mediterranean shore. The best preserved decoration is of a floor, but tiny, crushed fragments of painted wall plaster were also found. The reconstructed scenes—although highly speculative with such few preserved fragments—include a landscape with rocks; the sea, with boats; a griffin; and a view of a town.[4] Both the fresco technique and the motifs are clearly Aegean, so that imported artisans are considered responsible for this decoration as well.[5]

The most renowned examples of Aegean-style wall paintings in the eastern Mediterranean have been found at Tell el-Dabʿa (ancient Avaris), in the Nile Delta, about 60 kilometers inland, on the eastern branch of the Nile and, thus, very accessible to sea traffic. They have been dated by the excavator to the early Thutmosid period (ca. 1500–1450 B.C.; see Bietak essay, pp. 188–99). The paintings, carried out in fresco technique, include typical Aegean motifs, especially several bull-leaping scenes.[6] Manfred Bietak suggests the appealing but unprovable hypothesis that the paintings could have been created by Cretan artisans who came to Egypt in the entourage of a Minoan princess married to a member of the Egyptian court.[7] Beyond a doubt, they reflect Aegean art in technique and style.

The latest discovery of wall paintings influenced by Aegean art was made at Qatna, in the 2000 to 2004 seasons.[8] More than three thousand fragments have been recorded, most of them attributed to the small Room N, but single pieces also derived from many other parts of the palace.[9] This indicates that many rooms in the Royal Palace of Qatna had been extensively decorated with colorful wall paintings. Room N is located immediately to the east of the palace well-room and is functionally related to it. As in the previously cited cases, the exact date of production of these wall paintings is difficult to assess. What is without doubt, however, is the fact that the techniques, colors, motifs, and compositions of the Qatna frescoes are closely comparable both to those at Alalakh, Tel Kabri, and Tell el-Dabʿa, and to paintings found throughout the Aegean islands and mainland Greece.[10] This is especially interesting because of all the places with Aegean-style wall paintings yet discovered Qatna is the site farthest east and the most distant from the Mediterranean shore. It lies 85 kilometers from the sea (as the crow flies), separated from it by the steep coastal mountains. The site is located at the eastern edge of the fertile inner Syrian plains, and not far from the Syrian steppe.

Based on the above-mentioned evidence, it should be stressed that the adoption of foreign decorative schemes of painting was exclusively a palatial affair ordered by political elites in the Levant and Egypt as a means of enhancing their reputation and prestige through the presentation of exotic items.[11] Other sites with remains of wall paintings in the Levant, by contrast, such as Tell Sakka,[12] Tell Burak,[13] and Mari,[14] do not show similarities to Aegean painting, but represent scenes from the Syro-Mesopotamian iconographic tradition. They are executed in the traditional Near Eastern technique of secco painting, that is, on dry plaster.[15] Interestingly, these examples of wall painting date to the MB I–IIA period, and thus predate the paintings displaying Aegean influence, a phenomenon that occurs in the east for the first time during the MB IIB period (ca. 1700/1650–1550 B.C.).

Below, elements of Aegean origin appearing in the Qatna wall paintings, the extent to which they occur, and how they may relate to local elements will be investigated.

Dating the Qatna Wall Paintings

The find context of the Qatna wall paintings does not indicate their date of production, but the date of the destruction of the palace at around 1340 B.C., during LB IIA, provides the terminus ante quem. As the Royal Palace existed for a very long time—starting in MB IIA (eighteenth–seventeenth century B.C.)—the architectural and stratigraphic evidence alone cannot sufficiently narrow the possible time frame for pinpointing the origin of the paintings. A more precise date can only be founded on art historical arguments and on observations on preservation.

On this basis, two alternative chronological hypotheses have been brought forward. Constance von Rüden is convinced that the paintings should be dated in the first half of the fourteenth century B.C. (LB IIA).[16] Her argument is based mainly on the assumption that the well-preserved wall plaster, lacking traces of wear, could not have been in place for more than approximately fifty to sixty years before the destruction of the building. She believes that wall paintings attached to mudbrick walls have a short lifespan. Therefore, the clearly observable Aegean elements could have arrived at Qatna as an effect of interregional communication during the LB IIA period. Bietak agrees with this assumption of a fourteenth century B.C. date, referring to the same argument of the limited durability of wall paintings on mudbrick walls.[17] Consequently, he sees the Qatna examples as the latest of the Aegean-style paintings in the Near East. Ann Brysbaert, following him, argues for the late date of the Qatna paintings on the basis of technological observations demonstrating close similarities to the material from the later Mycenaean period.[18]

This author, on the contrary, favors a sixteenth century B.C. date for the Qatna wall paintings from Room N. This is based on the very close iconographic and stylistic links between some of the Qatna scenes and Late Minoan (LM) IA paintings from the Aegean, primarily from Akrotiri, on the island of Thera. In particular, the river landscape, the palm trees, the rocky landscape, the spiral frieze, and the marble imitation all have very close parallels at Akrotiri. The LM IA period dates to the seventeenth century B.C. (1675–1600 B.C.), according to Aegean High Chronology, or the sixteenth century B.C. (1580–1520 B.C.), in the traditional Low Chronology, which is more plausible from a Near Eastern archaeological and historical point of view. Therefore, a date for the Qatna

paintings in the sixteenth century B.C. is proposed here. The argument of the lack of durability can be countered by reference to a special fastening system used for the Qatna plaster. The mudbrick wall and its mud plaster were densely covered with the impressions of fingers and other indentations, so that the wet lime plaster was pressed into these holes when it was applied to the wall (fig. 1). These "spikes," all slightly inclined downward, formed a perfect fixing device. In combination with the dense and partly polished surface of the plaster, this assured the long durability of the wall paintings, which could easily have lasted for two centuries.

This chronological argument is further supported by the close similarities between the Qatna and Alalakh painted plasters. These include the frequent use of extended reddish-brown fields as backgrounds and borders and undulating lines indicating rocky landscapes. The Alalakh paintings date to MB IIB (ca. 1700/1650–1590/1550 B.C.), while I propose a date of around the turn of MB IIB to LB IA (ca. 1590/1550–1500 B.C.) for the Qatna paintings. (For an extensive discussion of the Alalakh paintings, see Koehl essay, pp. 170–79.) Thus, the frescoes at both sites were probably carried out between the late seventeenth century B.C. and the late sixteenth century B.C., when direct interregional contacts between the Syrian kingdoms and their Aegean diplomatic or economic partners started to become intensive—and when Aegean wall painting was at its highest point, as can be deduced from the abundant and high-quality fresco remains at Akrotiri.[19]

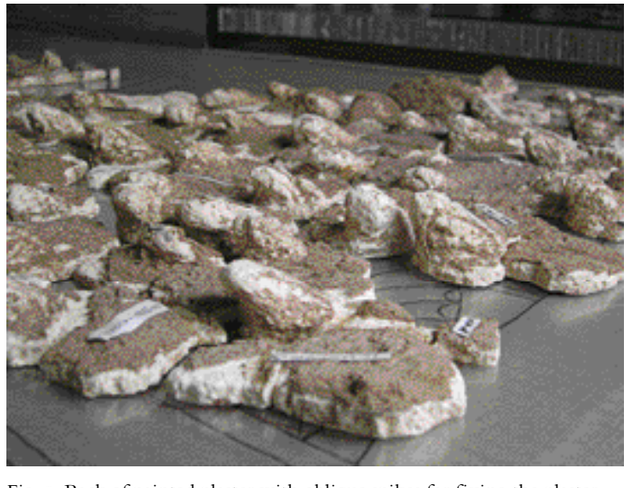

Fig. 1. Back of painted plaster with oblique spikes for fixing the plaster into the wall. Qatna. Room N

The Tel Kabri paintings are a matter of chronological dispute as well. They are dated by the Niemeiers to the late seventeenth century B.C. (MB IIB), while Bietak prefers a date between MB IIB and LB I (the mid-sixteenth century B.C.).[20] Leaving this discrepancy aside, this again leads us to the same general period—between the late seventeenth century B.C. and the late sixteenth century B.C.—for the decoration of the Tel Kabri palace, which also finds close parallels in the Akrotiri corpus.

In contrast, the Tell el-Dabʿa paintings are later in date. As noted above, Bietak dates them to the early Thutmosid period (ca. 1500–1450 B.C.), which would correspond to LB IB in Levantine terms. Thus, there is approximately a century between them and the older group, consisting of the Alalakh, Qatna, and Tel Kabri examples. This makes the Tell el-Dabʿa paintings the latest known examples of Aegean-influenced wall paintings in the eastern Mediterranean, produced at a time of intensified contacts in the region.

A Transfer of Technology

A careful technological study of the Qatna wall paintings was carried out by Brysbaert, who has also systematically analyzed painted plaster from many sites in the Aegean and the Near East.[21] Besides style, this is the most important test for evaluating the degree of similarity between the Qatna paintings and Aegean examples, and such comparisons can be done with a high degree of accuracy because of Brysbaert's systematic and comprehensive approach. At Qatna, the main colors used are red, white, black, yellow, and blue.[22] To a lesser extent, there are also mixed colors, such as green, purple, orange, and brown. This palette is characteristic of paintings in the Aegean sphere. It is noteworthy that green is extremely rare at Qatna—another trait typical of the Aegean tradition. The predominant reddish-brown color was derived from hematite, while the yellow-ocher color was made from goethite and limonite, as at all the other sites analyzed. The blue color could be identified as Egyptian Blue, containing cuprorivaite.[23] It is identical with the Egyptian Blue used on mainland Greece and at Egyptian and Near Eastern sites such as Tell el-Dabʿa, Tel Kabri, and Hattusa. Thus, the choice and the fabrication of colors are a strongly unifying element connecting Qatna with all other paintings in Aegean tradition.

The wall paintings of Qatna were executed on white lime plaster varying in thickness between 1 and 20 centimeters.[24] This factor, along with a number of other observations, mentioned below, indicate that, in Brysbaert's words, there was a "serious intention" by the artisans at Qatna to produce frescoes.[25] However, this was not always achieved, as the lime plaster seems to have dried out too quickly, before the painting was finished. This was probably due to the arid climate in inland Syria, very different from the humid Mediterranean conditions. But even when we look at the other Near Eastern and Egyptian sites with Aegean wall paintings, the paintings are rarely executed in fresco alone, but frequently in a combination of fresco and secco, as, for example, at Tell el-Dabʿa.[26] In the end, the production process resulted in a shift from fresco to secco painting, depending on the acceleration of the drying process of the plaster after being attached to the wall.[27]

The specific attributes observable on the painted plaster fragments from Qatna that provide evidence for the fresco technique include the impressions of fingernails visible on the surface of the plaster, especially around painted motifs (for example, the palm trees), proving that the plaster was still wet when the painting was executed.[28] In some instances there are even actual fingerprints (for example, on the turtles). There was also an intentional roughening of the plaster surface at places where blue paint was applied.[29] This is especially helpful for fresco painting. Another observed production process is the "troweling" of the plaster surface, which results in oblong and curved marks made in the course of flattening and smoothing the surface, with the side effect of creating a shiny appearance.[30] As troweling can only be done when the plaster is still wet, in order to fix the paint pigments, this is another hint of the fresco technique. On some fragments from Qatna another very typical technical feature of Aegean fresco painting is visible: the impressions created by snapping a string onto the damp surface in order to create straight lines, which must have been very helpful for organizing the layout of the painted decoration.[31] Other typical Aegean features to be found on the painted plaster of Qatna are underdrawings (sinopias) to guide the painter (visible, for example, in the double line of the spirals);[32] the use of an "impasto" technique, with indentations made in the damp plaster and filled with a specific pigment (for example, the eyes of the turtles); and polishing, carried out before or after the painting in

Fig. 2. Painted plaster showing polishing grooves and sinopias underneath spiral frieze. Qatna

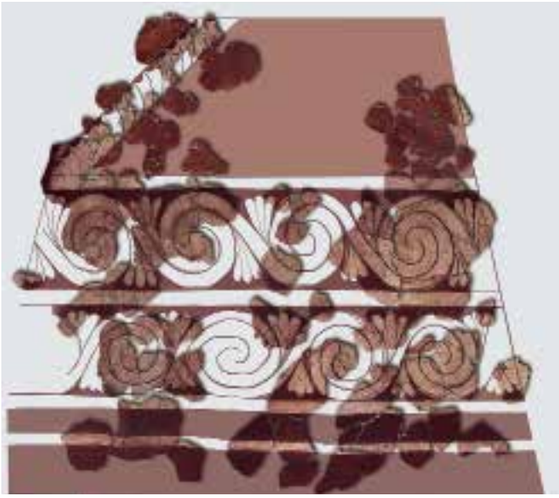

Fig. 3. Double spiral frieze in trapezoidal field. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüden

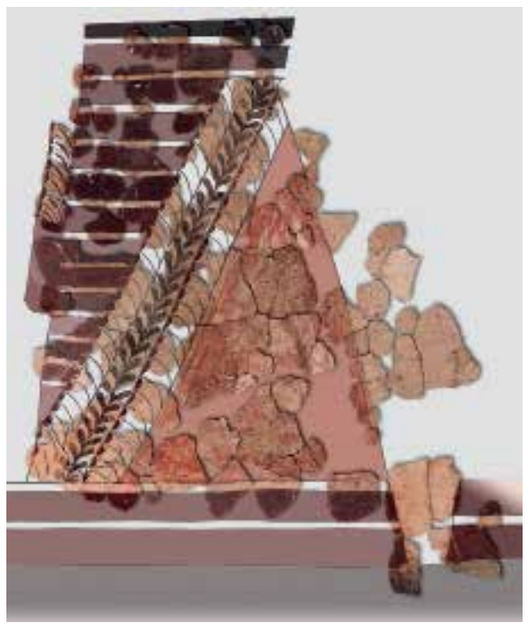

Fig. 4. Obliquely oriented foliate band and triangular red field. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüden

order to create a shiny surface (fig. 2). These observations are supported by microscopic analysis demonstrating that pigment grain sizes, plaster layer thicknesses, and the sizes of inclusions and pores are very similar for all wall paintings throughout the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean, strongly suggesting common technical procedures at the various sites, including Qatna.[33]

The same is true for the pigments used in the wall paintings. Chemically very similar pigments were used to produce the colors of the Qatna paintings and those from the Aegean.[34] Even the spikes protruding from the back of the plaster, that is, the lime anchors set into holes in the wall in order to fix the plaster firmly to it—at first view a special technical device at Qatna—is not a local invention. Brysbaert observed a similar technique on the majority of Aegean paintings.[35]

When taken in combination, all these features at Qatna suggest a specific *chaîne opératoire* that can unambiguously be identified as Aegean.[36] The transfer of technology that introduced the fresco technique to the Near East[37] could only have been possible through direct contact, as it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to communicate and explain methodology indirectly, in written or coded form. Therefore, we must assume a movement of people with specialized technological knowledge from the Aegean to the Near East. The most plausible explanation is that artisans—plasterers and painters—who had been trained in the Aegean traveled east, perhaps at the request of a foreign ruler.

The west-to-east direction of this exchange is further supported by the absence of comparable precedents in the Levant or the wider Syro-Mesopotamian sphere. The wall paintings of Mari and those of Tell Sakka, dating roughly to the same time (MB IIA), are executed in secco technique.[38] This shows that the fresco technique was foreign to the Syrian regions before the MB IIB period, when it first appeared at Alalakh, followed by the paintings at Tel Kabri and Qatna.

Exchanges of Motifs and Styles

While the transfer of technology provides the strongest evidence of the direct contact between Near Eastern and Aegean sites with fresco painting, a transfer of motifs and styles happened simultaneously, as has been demonstrated with regard to the frescoes from Alalakh and Tel Kabri. A similar stylistic transfer will be elucidated below with regard to the Qatna wall paintings from Room N, where many Aegean iconographic elements are embedded into the design. Most prominent is the typical Aegean spiral frieze, finely executed with a thin black line on top of a thin red line that marks the underdrawing, with both remaining visible (fig. 3).[39] The triangular spaces between spirals are filled with trilobed leaves. Besides the famous examples from Knossos,[40] the closest parallel comes from Akrotiri and dates to the LM IA period.[41] It also shows red and gray lines within each spiral.[42]

The foliate band—a tendril of fine leaves—that occurs at Qatna (fig. 4) is another characteristic element of Aegean art, known from the Knossos wall paintings[43] and from vessel decorations.[44] Here, it appears in two bicolor versions: black on white and white on red.[45]

The frames and borders of images at Qatna demonstrate arrangements of Aegean type. This includes a field of ocher bordered by a gray-blue band,[46] a border of multiple reddish-brown bands with black contour lines,[47] and a band of overlapping ovals painted in red and blue with white interspaces (fig. 5).[48]

The painted marble imitation discovered by Robert Du Mesnil du Buisson in the Royal Palace, in the area of Room R, shows wavy lines in a roughly triangular arrangement, executed in parallel dark red and black lines.[49] It finds its best parallel in the painted marble imitation panels from Akrotiri, dated to LM IA, which depict triangular, parallel lines in an arrangement and colors very similar to those at Qatna.[50]

There are two large landscape scenes, which von Rüden was able to reconstruct from a great number of tiny fragments. Both views are closely related in character to Aegean landscapes. The first one is a landscape of rocks, grass, and palm trees (fig. 5). The palm trees are the eye-catching focus of the scene, as far as it is preserved.

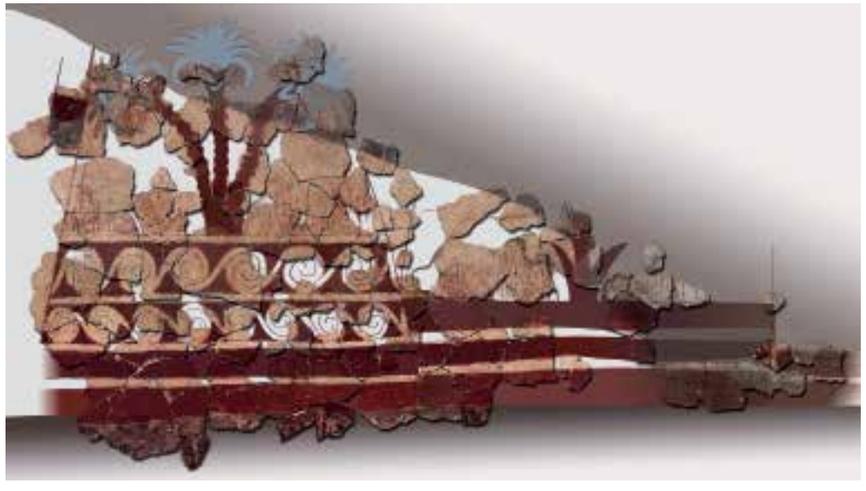

Fig. 5. Landscape with palm trees, rocks, and grass. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüden

The three-stem palm is characterized by blue leaves with red contour lines, exhibiting a typically Aegean way of depicting these trees.[51] The best parallels for it can, again, be found at LM IA Akrotiri, where there is a two-stem palm,[52] and at Tell el-Dab'a, where, however, there are greater differences.[53]

Arranged next to the palm trees is a landscape of rocks and grass, the rock surface indicated by a gray undulating thick line, while the grass is depicted by gray and red thin, short lines, some of them bent, as if swaying in the wind.[54] A very close parallel exists in the so-called Saffron Gatherers fresco from the Minoan palace of Knossos, dating to the Middle Minoan II/III period, where the rocky landscape populated by monkeys is also rendered as a wavy gray line, with grass and flowers swaying in the wind.[55]

The second landscape from Qatna is a river scene (figs. 6, 7).[56] It is a frieze 4 meters in length and 30 centimeters high. It depicts a bending white river bordered above and below by a landscape in red. Plants are indicated by abstract rounded red forms. The hilly landscape is populated by turtles that walk on the undulating contour of the land (fig. 6). There are two turtles on the left side, slightly overlapping each other, and one in the middle part of the scene. The turtles are rendered with accuracy and in detail; note the heads, eyes, feet, and carapaces. The water is populated by several fish and a crab painted with black lines (fig. 7).

This scene is strikingly reminiscent of the famous miniature landscape fresco from Akrotiri.[57] The latter has a length of 1.75 meters and a height of 21 centimeters, and thus is smaller but closely comparable in the relative dimensions. It also shows a bending river in a landscape with naturalistic as well as stylized plants and with animals walking along the banks. It presents a perfect parallel to the Qatna landscape in the general composition, and idea. This comparison also leads us to the LM IA period as the most probable time of direct contact and iconographical transfer from the Aegean to Qatna. A great difference, however, can be seen in the appearance of specific animals, such as the turtles and the crab in Qatna, which are missing in the Aegean image system.

Fig. 6. River landscape with turtles. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüden

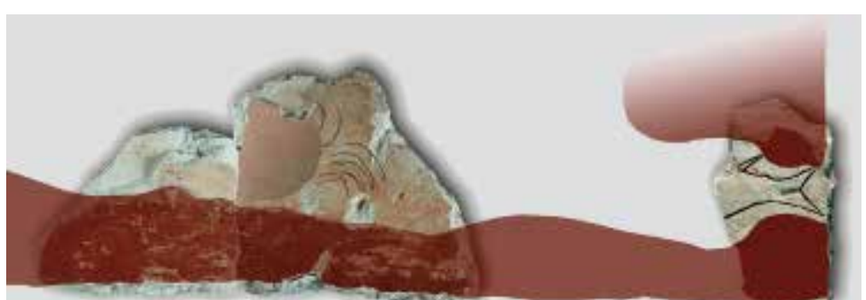

Fig. 7. River landscape with crab. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüden

A bundle of papyrus plants from Room N in Qatna, painted in blue with black contours and red internal lines, could not be placed by von Rüden within the reconstructions of larger scenes (fig. 8).[58] The treatment is a typical rendering of Aegean papyrus plants, exemplified, once again, by LM IA frescoes from Akrotiri.[59]

One of the most surprising motifs at Qatna is the dolphin, an animal not known in inland Syria and thus a foreign element, albeit one depicted frequently in Aegean art. The Qatna dolphin could be very convincingly reconstructed by von Rüden from only a few fragments (fig. 9).[60] The back of the animal is red, and the fins are also painted in red, while the belly is white with wavy black

Fig. 8. Fragments of painted plaster with papyrus plants. Qatna, Room N. Reassembling of original pieces by Constance von Rüden; blue color intensified

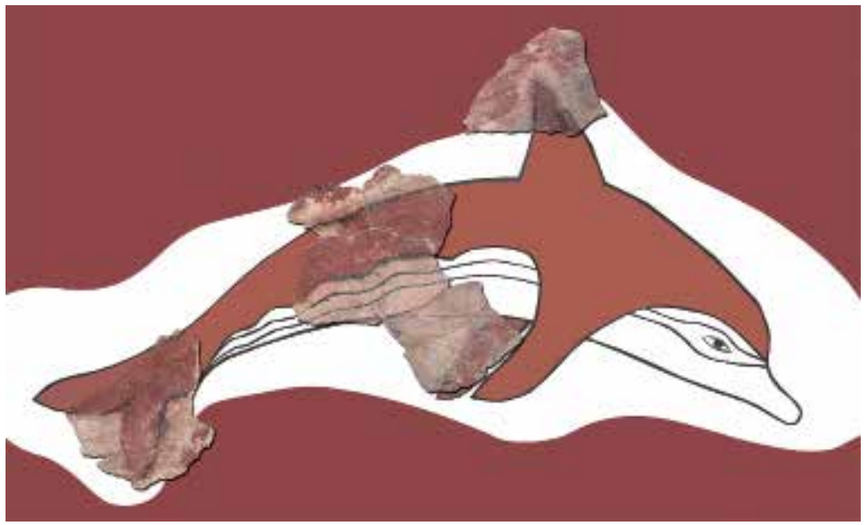

Fig. 9. Dolphin. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüden

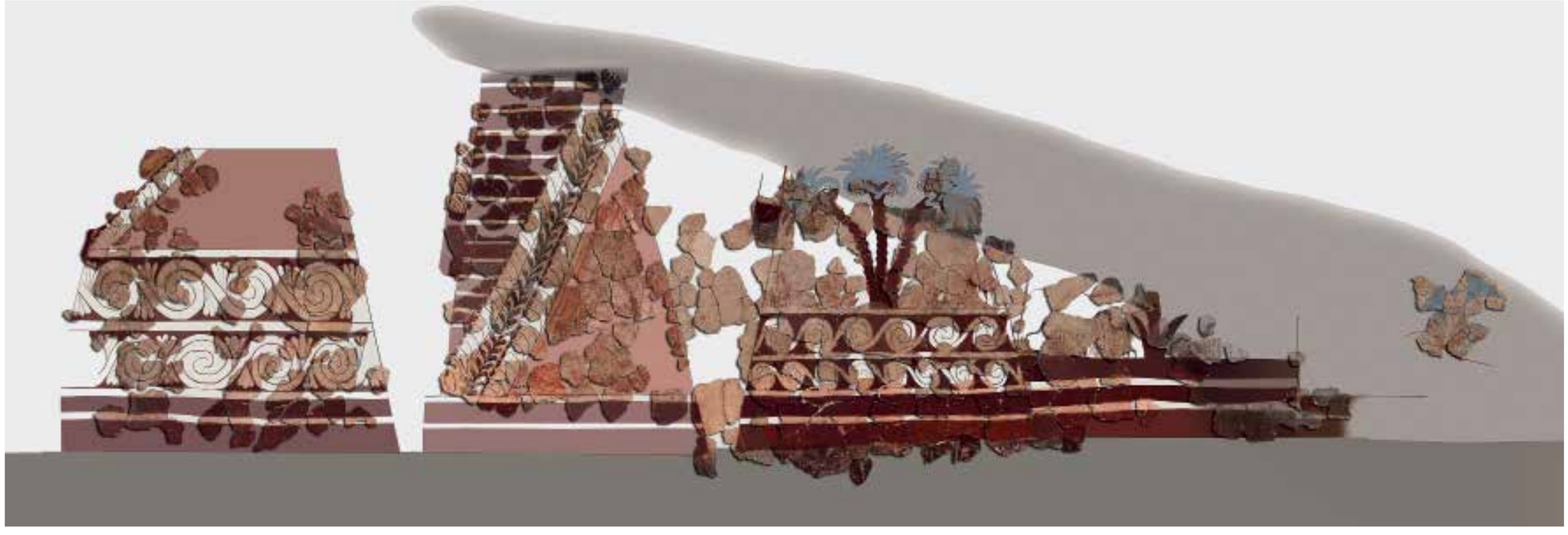

Fig. 10. Reconstructed arrangement of painted plaster decoration on west wall; shadow at right indicates area blackened by charred beam leaning against wall. Qatna, Room N. Reconstruction with original pieces by Constance von Rüden

lines. It conforms to the typical representations of dolphins in the Aegean sphere, such as the LM IA dolphins from Akrotiri, which are characterized by the same color variation and wavy lines on the belly.[61]

In summary, Aegean style—defined as a specific combination of techniques, styles, and motifs—is reflected in the Qatna wall paintings in a number of different ways:

- Aegean-type reddish-brown bands, foliate bands, overlapping ovals, and the spiral frieze used for borders and to frame scenes
- the emphasis on pure landscape scenes, integrating floral and animal motifs, and a shared rendering of rocky landscapes
- the organization of scenes, such as landscapes with a river bordered on both sides by land and animals walking along the undulating banks
- the popularity of animals connected to water, particularly fish
- the use of blue for the rendering of plants and the very rare occurrence of green
- the appearance of animals with multicolored bodies and those depicted only with black lines together in one scene[62]
- the mostly very accurate execution of the paintings with fine lines and underpainting.

Elements of Regional Style and Composition

The obvious Aegean elements are not the only iconographic components of the Qatna wall paintings. There are a number of motifs, as well as principles of composition, that are not known from the Aegean-style paintings. Therefore, they have to be considered—at least theoretically—to be local or regional elements.

First of all, the turtles depicted very prominently in the Qatna river landscape scene (fig. 6) are not known in Aegean art, nor are they attested in Near Eastern wall paintings. In Mesopotamia, the turtle, a symbol of the fresh water god Ea (the Sumerian Enki), appears on Kassite seals[63] and *kudurrus*.[64] While the turtles in Kassite and later Near Eastern art—the former roughly contemporary with the Qatna wall paintings—are always depicted from above, the turtles of Qatna are shown in side view. This demonstrates that the rendering of the Qatna turtles cannot be regarded as derived from an established Near Eastern iconographic type but instead represent an innovation. Similarly, the crab featured in the Qatna river landscape (fig. 7), with its round body and long legs carefully illustrated, is not known from Aegean wall paintings,[65] but is at home in Near Eastern iconography, at least in the first millennium B.C., when crabs often appear in Neo-Assyrian landscape scenes as part of the natural environment.[66] Crabs in the ancient Near East seem to have no religious connotations.[67] Again, they can be seen as a new, innovative element at Qatna.

The general composition of the Qatna wall paintings is not found in Aegean art, in particular the preference for triangular or trapezoid pictorial fields (fig. 10); a triangular field of red paint, enclosed by borders of

red lines or a foliate band;[68] a triangular internal frame for the palm-tree group within the larger landscape scene marked by a thin red line and a border of overlapping ovals;[69] or a triangular or trapezoid field with the upper part painted in red and the lower part filled with a double spiral frieze.[70] As von Rüden reconstructs them, these triangular fields were arranged in rows of three, or even four.[71] This reflects a very geometrically structured principle of composition,[72] which is foreign not only to the Aegean but also to Near Eastern tradition.[73] The triangular compositional principle can be regarded as another innovative stylistic element at Qatna.

The Establishment of an Aegeo-Syrian Workshop

Three major hypotheses have in recent years been put forward to explain the high degree of influence of Aegean frescoes on the wall paintings from Alalakh, Tel Kabri, Tell el-Dab'a, and Qatna. The "foreign craftsmanship theory" assumes that the paintings in the Near East were carried out by traveling artisans from the Aegean, who were sent to the Levant within the framework of diplomatic relations or even as gift exchanges.[74] Alternatively, the transfer of artisans is explained as a by-product of diplomatic marriages or important political meetings.[75]

The second proposal can be labeled the "cultural communication theory." As von Rüden argues, the similarity of motifs and styles between the Aegean and the Levantine wall paintings may be a result of the circulation of goods and ideas, so that motifs could have arrived in the Levant, not with travelers, but indirectly, in the form of decorations on exchanged goods such as pottery and textiles.[76]

With regard to the specific case of Qatna, a third suggestion has been developed, the "craftsmanship interaction theory,"[77] which tries to combine the clear evidence of transfer from the Aegean with the observation of local or regional stylistic elements.[78] It is mainly based on the assumption that larger workshops were established on the spot where a Levantine palace was to be decorated with paintings, such as at Qatna. These workshops must have included artisans from the Aegean, who brought their techniques, motifs, and stylistic principles along with them, and local or regional artisans, who added their knowledge of styles and motifs familiar from the Levantine context. A large workshop would have been necessary in order to carry out the extensive and elaborate scenes that decorated not just one but a large number of rooms within the palatial building.

Thus, Aegean and local Syrian artisans would have worked together and melded their styles. The Aegean artisans must have been primarily responsible for the use of the fresco technique, which is present at Qatna in its complete technical repertoire, according to Brysbaert.[79] In addition, the specific choice of colors for typically Aegean motifs, characteristic Aegean stylistic conventions, and the clearly Aegean nature of some compositions, such as the miniature landscapes, can only be explained by the presence of Aegean artisans active in the production of the painted decoration.

On the other hand, the non-Aegean elements—the turtles, the crab, and particularly the very peculiar triangular and trapezoid structures of the compositions—can be explained by the presence of local or regional artisans who contributed innovative ideas, creating a specific style distinctive of Qatna, that can be understood as the product of an Aegeo-Syrian workshop established at Qatna.

The Meaning of the Qatna Wall Paintings

Aegean-style wall paintings are one aspect of the exchange of goods and ideas within the international koine of the Late Bronze Age.[80] Even when it is technological knowledge that is transported—as in the case of the Aegean plasterers—the result is basically a transfer of ideas. The question that arises from this observation is whether ideological features embedded in the motifs and scenes in their original Aegean context were also transmitted when the imagery was transported. This does not seem possible, because images inserted into a completely different cognitive world necessarily lose their original meaning. Marian Feldman believes that the main purpose of Aegean frescoes in the Near East was to function as "exotic items" that enabled the patron to publicly demonstrate his internationalism. Therefore, it was desirable to maintain the "Aegeanness" of the frescoes as a clearly visible attribute.[81]

Can this be the only significance of this kind of international art in the Levant? With regard to the frescoes from Room N in the Royal Palace of Qatna, their location is an important factor. Room N is not in the center of the palace, where the large formal rooms were located, and personnel and visitors were numerous. Instead, it is a very tiny room located on the northern edge of the building, out of the main lines of circulation through the palace.[82] It adjoins the palace well-room to the east, and was thus associated with a service area. Therefore, prestige was probably not the primary reason for the public presentation of the wall paintings.

However, the proximity of Room N to the large well-room, which served as the only water supply for the palace, might be significant. It is striking that nearly all of the scenes on the wall paintings are associated with water: the river landscape; the fish, crab, and turtles walking at the edge of the river; the palm trees, which require much irrigation; the papyrus, an aquatic plant; and, last but not least, the dolphin. All share a common trait: they either need abundant water or live in it. Thus, the function of this part of the palace and the content of the representations are linked.

Room N probably served as a small sanctuary for some kind of cult or ritual associated with water, and possibly for the ritual purification of the well-room itself. The likelihood of the cultic function of the area is supported by the discovery nearby of a bronze figurine of a deity during the early explorations at Qatna before Du Mesnil du Buisson's excavations.[83] This famous figurine, now in the Musée du Louvre, shows no relationship to a water cult, but could support the idea of the religious importance of this part of the palace in general.

Conclusions

The wall paintings in Room N at Qatna are different in content from other objects of the "international style," which predominantly represent hunting or attack scenes, with animal combats and heroes hunting wild beasts, all of them reflecting a royal ideology of supremacy.[84] At Qatna, however, a clear reference to royal ideology is missing. Instead, it is the power of water that appears as the overriding message of the representations. At Qatna, the wall paintings generated as a result of the direct technological and iconographic transfer that resulted in the creation of a characteristic Aegeo-Syrian style of paintings, were, further, endowed with a new, specific meaning that was embedded in the local religious ideology.

1. Woolley 1955, pp. 228–34, pls. XXVIb–XXVIIIb.
2. Ibid., pp. 74–75.
3. W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998, pp. 82–85; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 793.
4. W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998, pp. 71–78; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 767–80.
5. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 790–93.
6. Bietak, N. Marinatos, and Palivou 2007a.
7. Bietak in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 131; see also Bietak and N. Marinatos 1995, p. 61.
8. Novák and Pfälzner 2001, pp. 183–85; Novák and Pfälzner 2002a, pp. 226–31; Novák and Pfälzner 2002b, p. 95; Pfälzner 2007, pp. 48–49.
9. Von Rüden 2011, pp. 23–32.
10. Novák and Pfälzner 2002a, pp. 226–31; Pfälzner and von Rüden in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 126–27, no. 69a, b; Pfälzner 2008a; von Rüden 2011.
11. Feldman 2007.
12. Taraqji 1999; Taraqji in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 128– 29, no. 70a, b.
13. Kamlah and Sader 2010, pp. 108–11.
14. Parrot 1958a; Parrot 1958b.

15. Nunn 1988, pp. 5–6.
16. Von Rüden 2006; von Rüden 2011, pp. 60–62.
17. Bietak 2007a, pp. 272–73.
18. Brysbaert 2011, p. 262.
19. Doumas 1995.
20. B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, pp. 767–69; Bietak 2007a, p. 272.
21. Brysbaert 2002; Brysbaert, Melessanaki, and Anglos 2006; Brysbaert 2007a; Brysbaert 2007b; Brysbaert 2007c; Brysbaert 2011.
22. Brysbaert 2011, p. 258.
23. Ibid., pp. 262–63.
24. Ibid., p. 259; von Rüden 2011, p. 47, figs. 7, 8.
25. Brysbaert 2011, pp. 260, 264.
26. Brysbaert 2007c, pp. 160, 162.
27. A freshly applied thin layer of lime plaster allows for eight hours of fresco painting before the surface is too dry (ibid., p. 161).
28. Brysbaert 2011, pp. 256–57 (macroscopic feature 1).
29. Ibid., p. 257 (macroscopic feature 4).
30. Ibid. (macroscopic feature 6).
31. Ibid., pp. 257–58 (macroscopic feature 7).
32. Ibid. (macroscopic feature 10).
33. Ibid., pp. 260–62.
34. Ibid., pp. 262–63.
35. Ibid., p. 259.
36. Compare the discussion in Brysbaert 2007a, pp. 330–32.
37. Brysbaert 2011, p. 262.
38. Parrot 1958b; Nunn 1988, pp. 66–92; Taraqji 1999; Taraqji in *Beyond Babylon*, pp. 128–29, no. 70a, b.
39. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 101, fig. 11; von Rüden 2011, pp. 35–37, pls. 1, 2.
40. Evans 1964, vol. 3, pl. XXIII, figs. 221, 222, 228, 229, 252–54; S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, fig. 39.
41. Doumas 1995, figs. 93, 94.
42. The painted spiral frieze on the throne platform of the palace of Mari, dating to the MB IIA period, shows essentially the same motif, but in a much different rendering, carried out much more coarsely, less carefully, and less accurately (see Parrot 1958a, pp. 105–6; Parrot 1958b, pp. 67–69, fig. 54, pl. 15; cf. von Rüden 2011, p. 65, fig. 12).
43. Evans 1967, pl. E.1.
44. Hawes et al. 1908, pl. VII.32; S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, figs. 83, 88, 216 (bottom).
45. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 100, fig. 8; von Rüden 2011, pls. 6, 57, 64, 69.
46. See Pfälzner 2008a, p. 99; von Rüden 2011, pp. 45–46, pl. 11; comparable to borders from Knossos (S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, pl. XVI) and Akrotiri (Doumas 1995, pp. 22–23).
47. See Pfälzner 2008a, p. 99; von Rüden 2011, pls. 1, 7, 8, 52, 54, 58, 59, 64, 66; comparable to borders from Akrotiri (Doumas 1995, figs. 8, 109–11, 114, 127, 139–41).
48. See Pfälzner 2008a, p. 102, fig. 14; von Rüden 2011, pp. 54, 66; comparable to frames from Knossos (S. Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, pl. XVII) and Akrotiri (Doumas 1995, figs. 93, 94).
49. Du Mesnil du Buisson 1935, p. 143, no. 2, frontispiece; Pfälzner 2008a, p. 100; von Rüden 2011, p. 32.
50. Doumas 1995, figs. 14–17, 49–56, 63, 64.
51. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 101, fig. 14; von Rüden 2011, pp. 39, 74, pls. 54, 66.
52. Doumas 1995, figs. 31, 148.
53. Bietak, N. Marinatos, and Palivou 2007b, p. 89, figs. 46, 59, 60.
54. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 102, fig. 16; von Rüden 2011, p. 40, pl. 66.
55. Evans 1967, pl. I; for rocky landscapes, see also Doumas 1995, figs. 69, 71.
56. Pfälzner 2008a, p. 103, fig. 19; von Rüden 2011, pp. 47–49, pls. 12, 13, 68.
57. Doumas 1995, figs. 30–34.
58. Von Rüden 2011, p. 41, pls. 3, 4.
59. Doumas 1995, figs. 2–5, 33.
60. Von Rüden 2011, p. 49, pl. 14.
61. Doumas 1995, figs. 41–43, 142–44.
62. An example of this is the river landscape from Qatna with the colorful turtles in combination with the crab executed in black lines, which can be compared to the Akrotiri river landscape (ibid., figs. 30–34), with ducks and other animals in color in combination with the griffin in a black line drawing.
63. Thureau-Dangin 1919, p. 138.
64. Hrouda 1991, ill. on p. 253; Black and Green 1992, figs. 90, 150.
65. For depictions of crabs in Aegean art, see von Rüden 2011, p. 84, fig. 42.
66. Hrouda 1991, ills. on pp. 146, 147, 206, 207.
67. Heimpel 1980–83, pp. 223–24.
68. Von Rüden 2011, p. 37, pl. 64.
69. Ibid., p. 39, pl. 66.
70. Ibid., p. 35, pl. 1.
71. Ibid., pl. 69.
72. The idea of Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier (personal communication) that the triangular fields might represent the lower part of decorated robes of persons walking in a row is very appealing on first consideration, but it seems improbable because there are no feet visible at places where the lower edge is preserved, and because robes are not embellished with landscapes in the Aegean or in the Near Eastern tradition, but exclusively with geometric and floral decorations, particularly Aegean robes (Doumas 1995, pls. 6, 7, 11, 12, 100, 101, 103, 105, 107, 108, 116–18, 120, 122, 123, 129, 131, 133).
73. See the discussion in von Rüden 2011, pp. 63–64.
74. W.-D. Niemeier 1991; W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier 1998, pp. 88–96; B. Niemeier and W.-D. Niemeier 2000, p. 793.
75. Bietak and N. Marinatos 1995, p. 60; Bietak 2007a, pp. 280–88, 295.
76. Von Rüden 2011, pp. 99, 111–14.
77. Pfälzner 2008a, pp. 106–9.
78. Brysbaert (2007a, pp. 337–46) argues, in a similar approach, for "cross-craft interaction" (CCI) in Aegean and eastern Mediterranean painted plaster.
79. Brysbaert 2011, p. 260.
80. Caubet 1998, pp. 106–7; Aruz in *Beyond Babylon*, p. 123.
81. Feldman 2007, pp. 43, 59–60.
82. See the plan of the Qatna Royal Palace in my essay "The Elephant Hunters of Bronze Age Syria" in this volume, p. 113, fig. 1.
83. Pfälzner 2007, pp. 48–49, fig. 23.
84. Feldman 2006b, pp. 73–78.

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