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An exploration of artefact imagery: its nature and sources

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*University of Wollongong*

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AN EXPLORATION

OF ARTEFACT IMAGERY:

its Nature and Sources

Vol. 1

by Joyce Warren

B.A. Hons. (Fine Arts)
University of Sydney

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Creative Arts
University of Wollongong

January 1994

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ERRATUM: pages 439 and 442

Due to a printing error two lines of text have been omitted between pages 439 and 442. Sense will be restored if the following two lines REPLACE the last line of page 439 and the first line of page 442:

need, once again, to spend time developing a new range of glazes that fell within my previously held aesthetic. And under the influence of my earlier training in overseas
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ILLUSTRATIONS: indicated in text as (figs.)
Abbreviations of references:

A A C A  Ancient Arts of Central Asia, Tamara Talbot Rice.
A & A Ch  Art & Archaeology in China, Edmund Capon / William MacQuitty.
A A J  Arts of Asia (journal).
A A N E  Art of the Ancient Near East, Seton Lloyd.
A & C T A  Ancient and Classical Art, P.P. Kahane.
A Ch  Arts of China, Michael Sullivan.
A G N S W  Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia.
A P M W E  The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe, Andre Leroi-Gourhan.
Apollo  Apollo (journal).
Bau  The Bauhaus: Masters and Students, Barry Friedman.
Ber Mus  Berlin Museum, Berlin, Germany.
B Or A  The Birth of Greek Art, John Boardman.
Bk Mus  Brooklyn Museum, New York, U.S.A.
Cair Mus  Cairo Museum, Egypt.
Ch Ex  The Chinese Exhibition (catalogue) 1977.
Ch O I  Guide to the Chicago Oriental Institute Museum.
Ch Om  Chinese Ornament: the Lotus and the Dragon, Jessica Rawson.
Ch P  The Chinese Potter, Margaret Medley.
Cop Tex  Coptic Textiles, Ludmila Kybalova.
Cr Expl  The Creative Explosion, John E. Pfeiffer.
D Civ  Dawn of Civilisation, ed. Stuart Piggott.
Dr Emp  Dragon Emperor, Mae Anna Pang.
E Mes Ir  Early Mesopotamia and Iran, M. E. L. Mallowan.
E B W Porc  English Blue and White Porcelain, Bernard Watney.
E Is Pott  Early Islamic Pottery, Arthur Lane.
Fiz Mus  Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, U. K.
Froz T  Frozen Tombs, British Museum.
Fae SI Cat  Faenza Slide Catalogue, (Diapositive, Serie Faentina), Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche, Faenza, Italy, 1980.
G A A Is  Greek Art of the Aegean Islands, Nikolaus Yalouris.
G B A Ch  The Great Bronze Age of China, ed. Wen Fong.
Gk A  Greek Art, John Boardman.
Gk A Dev  Greek Art: Its Development, Character and Influence, R. M. Cook.
Gk Ov  The Greeks Overseas, John Boardman.
Hb Ch A  Handbook of Chinese Art, Margaret Medley.
Her Mus  Hermitage Museum, (Leningrad) St. Petersburg.
Hist J  History of Jewels, John Anderson Black.
Im I A  Images of the Ice Age, Paul G. Bahn / Jean Vertut.
Imp Ch  Imperial China: the Living Past, Edmund Capon, Jackie Menzies, Yang Yang.
Im &Id  Image and Idea, John Houston.
Ir Mus  Iraq Museum, Baghdad, Iraq.
Is A  Islamic Art, David Talbot Rice.
Isl GI  Islamic Glass, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S.A.
Kaw Jp  Kawasaki Collection, Japan.
Keram  Kerameikos Museum, Athens, Greece.
L R H C  Lucie Rie, Hans Coper and their Pupils, Cyril Frankel, Tony Birks.
M Myc A  Minoan and Mycenaean Art, Reynold Higgins.
Mes Myth  Mesopotamian Myths, Henrietta Mc Call.
Met Mus  Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S.A.
Mor Mus  Moravske Museum, Brno, Czech Republic.
M Top Mus  Masterpieces from the Topkapi Museum, M. S. Ipsioglu.
Mun St Ant  Munich Staatliche Antikensammlungen.
Myth  Mythologies, Roland Barthes.
Nat Mus  National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece.
NG A  National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, A.C.T., Australia.
NG V  National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic., Australia.
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85. (left) Painted jar, by Elizabeth Fritsch, England, c 1978 AD; (right) ethnic pot by Fritsch, 1972. LRHC

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96 a. Great Goddess, Tree of Life and horseman, felt appliqué tomb hanging, Pazyryk, High Altai Mountains, Siberia, 5th C BC. A A C A Her Mus

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98 a. Gold six-petalled rosette with granulation, with raised lion-head; from Rhodian workshop, orientalising style, Greece, 630–620 BC. G A A Is...Nat Mus

98 b. Gold six-petalled rosette with granulation, and raised griffin head; from Rhodian workshop, orientalising style, Greece, 630–620 BC. G A A Is Nat Mus

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101. Tree motif “Ram caught in the thicket”; offering stand, Royal Graves of Ur, Sumer, Mesopotamia, 3000–2500 BC...A A N E Br Mus

102. Dragons chasing through clouds; drawing of painting in Liao imperial tombs, 11th C AD., Ch Orn

103, 103a Dish and plates, lustre-painted, with arabesque motifs; Rayy. Persia, late 12th C AD....E Is A

104. Porcelain dish, underglaze blue, with arabesque motifs; Ming dynasty, 1368–1644 AD, China. Y P S

105. The chaitya arch: (above) used in the gold Bimran reliquary, height 6.5 cm, Gandhara; (below) in stone panel with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, height 18.1 cm; Gandhara, 2nd–3rd C AD. Ch Orn...Br Mus

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107. Four foliated artefacts: (top left) silver, 10th C AD, China; (far left) lacquer, 14th C AD, Japan; (left) lacquer, 15th C AD China; (above) porcelain, 14th C AD, China. Ch Orn

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113. Suggested development of thunder-pattern motif, China. S Ch A
114. Low-temperature porcellainous pourers and bowls, with varying translucence; fired 1100-1120 degrees C; by Joyce Warren; exhibited in Sydney and Canberra, Australia, 1973. Pr Colls NGV...NGA
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116. Paintings by Guy Warren, late 1980's, (top) acrylic on canvas, "Wingman and Mist", (below) watercolour on paper, "Wingman and Cliff". Pr Colls
117 b. Undecorated bowls, by Joyce Warren, from exhibition at Macquarie Galleries, 1991; (left) thrown, moulded and altered, with grey-green glaze inside and outside; (right) thrown and altered, with grey-green glaze inside and unglazed outside.

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Fig. 1. Winged mythical animal, China, Warring States (475-221 BC)
Use unknown, length 40.5 cm inlaid bronze
(Imperial China)
Abstract

This work is an exploration of the nature and sources of the imagery, or visual form and decoration, of selected artefacts which, for the most part, do not fall into the accepted categories of conventionally so-called “fine art”. There appears to have been little discourse in this enormous, universal and varied field of creative and visionary human activity, that might have focussed upon it as a unique and an autonomous oeuvre which has developed for its own particular reasons. This thesis sets out to open up questions, issues and argument, with the aim of increasing interest, understanding and appreciation of one of humankind’s oldest activities, the making of artefacts. The artefacts mainly studied here are those of ancient cultures, because they do not suffer the problems of confusion which modern instantaneous and mass communication of ideas, pressures and influences places upon the artefact. Other selected discourse on human thought and activity is brought into the study where it is thought to be relevant and of use in pursuing the aim of the work. Part I consists of explanatory introduction. Part II sets out to question, argue and discuss issues and qualities that are common to many artefacts and their imagery. The role, also, of the individual craftworker is considered in relation to the development of the whole image of the artefact, that is, its decoration and its form. Part III takes specific examples of imagery and applies to them some of the arguments in Part II. Part IV discusses briefly some Australian artefacts (so-called crafts or decorative arts) of the twentieth century in terms of the arguments in Parts II and III. Specific examples of ceramic artefacts made by the author of this thesis are also used to test and enquire further into the issue of diffusion and local invention, especially as it may be applied to Australian artefacts. This study aims only to open up speculation and investigation in this vast area of universal human activity, and into its nature and sources. It is envisaged that the following argument and discourse may lead others to continue and extend the exploration of this fascinating and integral area of human creative achievement.
Part I. INTRODUCTORY

Preface

This study is an attempt to establish, or open discussion upon, interpretative argument and techniques for the appraisal of the imagery of artefacts. Tools and commonly used artefacts, as well as luxury and status objects will be examined and redefined as visual and physical phenomena that are unique and idiosyncratic, and in some ways different from what has been conventionally acknowledged as "fine art".1 Many artefacts have been discovered and studied within the contexts of archaeology, anthropology, religion, sociology and psychology. Few have been considered in the context of art history and theory, or in the context of the role of the craftworker, yet artefact imagery has frequently been the antecedent of later "fine art" imagery. The terms "minor art", "decorative art" and "applied art" used universally to define artefacts and their imagery, have tended to marginalise them, and preclude their study from serious art historical discourse.2

Until the mid-twentieth century the term "fine art" referred generally to painting, sculpture and a few groups of artefacts such as, for instance, selected Chinese porcelains, religious objects or tribal pieces. Since the rise (and fading) of dematerialisation and conceptualism as major art dogma of the nineteen sixties and seventies the boundaries around the term "fine art" have been battered down somewhat, and few today are prepared to limit the scope of the term. But despite this there appears to have been little study undertaken of artefacts and their imagery. The fact that, in 1976, Mukarovsky defined the term "artifact" as a physical representation of a work of art, does not interfere with the present study of artefacts that are seen to be objects which, in most cases, have been devised,

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1 The term "fine art" usually refers to painting and sculpture, although in some instances certain artefacts have been regarded as "fine art", for example, some African tribal artefacts. This is because of their influence and impact upon Western concepts and styles at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, on the work of, for instance, Braque, Picasso and Matisse.

2 These terms have been used constantly and universally by art historians throughout this century; for example, Eneide Miniacca, *(personal communication, 1978)*, to preclude the study, at the University of Sydney, of Della Robbia ceramics within a Renaissance art historical and theoretical context.
made for and applied to specific activities within a given culture.³ Mukarovsky has used a different interpretation of the word. He writes:

"...some "thing", some "artifact"... represents the work of art in the outside world and may be perceived by one and all...however it is not possible to reduce the work of art to that "artifact", since it may happen that the artifact, shifted in time and space, will completely alter its appearance and inner structure..."⁴

As a maker and a researcher into porcelain, and a writer on ceramics and artefacts made in other media, I recognise that the birth and the continued existence of an artefact of a given form and imagery almost always depend on perceived need, available materials and learned processes within a given set of social circumstances.

Whilst the imagery of artefacts, until now, has been defined in terms of the contexts listed above, it would seem to be useful, additionally, to redefine artefacts and their imagery in the context of the actual making and the processes, techniques, materials, and the experiences of invention and craftsmanship. Emphasis in this study is on the physical visuality of the image as a phenomenon of the creativity that is an inherent potential within the craftworker and within the ambit of the making of an artefact, and the subsequent implications of this. As a maker of ceramics and a lecturer in art history and theory I have found that there is a need for more to be written specifically for the guidance of art students in the area of the nature and sources of artefact imagery. Hence this exploration of artefact imagery as a distinct and idiosyncratic entity which has its dynamics as much in the physical processes of its making as in its assumed or proven symbolic, or other, associations with the mythologies and rituals of humankind. To a great extent this study is working in unknown territory, and therefore much of the thinking is exploratory; it

³ It is possible, of course, to include painting, sculpture and architecture within the category of artefact because they can be seen to fall within this definition. These three activities, however, are covered elsewhere and exhaustively in many works by many scholars.

asks questions and poses problems rather than providing answers. I have referred to a range of written works whose foci are on other purposes, and based upon this, and on my own practical experience in the area of artefact making, I have pursued my exploratory arguments.

Objects have been selected from most ancient cultures, and form the major part of the study. But because of the great renaissance movements in the western world in handmaking and the crafts, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their sources in older concepts and aesthetics, some aspects of these are also considered in the light of earlier imagery. My own workshop research into a specific and fairly narrow field of ceramic materials, carried out from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, and again, spasmodically, until 1990, is described in Part IV. It is used as an example of one consequence of the spread and adaptation of fundamental concepts from other and ancient cultures, which resulted in the craft renaissance in the western world during the second and third quarters of the twentieth century.

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Thesis: The Nature and Sources of Artefact Imagery

This thesis proposes that artefacts and their imagery have not been studied, as far as it has been possible to ascertain, as an autonomous oeuvre to which are attached many common universal qualities, arguments, questions and discourse. This thesis proposes the existence of such commonalities, and explores, queries and evaluates the nature, sources and diffusion of the imagery of artefacts, especially in terms of a craftworker's circumstances, attitudes, skills, knowledge of materials, and techniques. The phrase "imagery of artefacts" embraces not only two- and three-dimensional marks made upon an artefact but also the form of the artefact itself. The thesis will also demonstrate that this body of visual expression has unique characteristics which have grown, not only out of human mythologies, but also out of the circumstances of need, making, local invention, diffusion, and available talents and materials. Artefacts and their imagery have been developed in every kind of human condition. Apart from food production, reproduction of the species, shelter-finding and making, the production of artefacts is the most widespread and oldest activity of the human species. Artefacts and their imagery have been frequently the carriers of ideas and concepts from one region or culture to another, and these have resulted, sometimes, in changes in some aspects of the receiving culture. They have also provided evidence of mythological and behavioural patterns of a community. Because the area of artefact making and its imagery is vast, both historically and geographically, this study aims only to open up speculation and investigation into its nature and sources. It is envisaged that the study might lead others to take these investigations further.

Whilst artefacts refer to, and are tied intimately to the social, economic or political circumstances that prevail in a given society or group their imagery can also be seen as

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autonomous because their characteristics often tend to be especially idiosyncratic, and self-referencing to the materials and to the techniques used, as well as to their makers. There can be fundamental differences between a given image on an artefact and its counterpart in what is generally referred to as “fine art”, such as painting, drawing or sculpture. This is because the disciplines and circumstances of making have been fundamentally different. And any differences between artefact and “fine art” imagery, and the idiosyncrasies of the former are to be perceived not as aberrations from “fine art” imagery but as evidence of an independent and autonomous oeuvre which some may or may not choose to classify as “fine art”. In some cases imagery of artefacts predates the use of such imagery in “fine art”. One of the purposes of the thesis is to consider the inventive brilliance and also the pragmatism that is frequently at the heart of artefact-making and the cause of uniqueness in its imagery.

It is true that since the times of classical Greece and Rome, some artefact imagery has been based on the visual imagery and stylistics of mythical figures from Greece and Rome, and on Renaissance painting and sculpture as source material. Two outstanding examples of the latter come from the oeuvre of white-glazed and polychrome painted terracotta wares known as majolica, which were produced in northern Italy from at least the fourteenth century on. One is a large, shallow dish painted with The Death of the Virgin based on an engraving by Martin Schongauer (1,445–1,491) (fig. 2). Two others are a low-footed goblet painted with the narrative scene of The Adoration of the Child Jesus copied from an engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi, and a platter, the centre of which shows Hercules with his club and the Nemean lion skin (fig. 3). Frequently the master painters and modellers of ceramics in this region used Classical and Christian subject matter, and copied the works of painters and engravers but within the limitations of available techniques and materials.
Fig. 2. Majolica dish, white ground, painted with "Death of the Virgin". From an engraving by Bavarian Martin Schongauer (1445-91), known in Italy as 'Bel Martino'. Faenza. c. 1510-1515 AD. TG Pott
fig. 8 Majolica plate, centre with Hercules and Nemean lion skin, and pastiche of Chinese landscape and calligraphy; diameter 16.5 cm; Faenza, Italy c. 1510-15 AD

(Plate 61 colt)
As Caiger Smith writes:

"... The classical Graeco-Roman heritage, its mythology, history and allegory was... highly suitable subject-matter for generations who felt themselves to be spiritually the heirs of Greece and Rome... The works of a large number of painters and engravers were used by pottery-painters. Amongst the most popular were Bramante, Mantegna, Raphael, Raimondi, Burkmaier, Durer and Schongauer..."  

Whatever the source, this kind of artefact imagery is, in itself, evidence of remarkable skill, creative craftsmanship and knowledge, as well as evidence of the taste of the patronage of the times. But it has helped to foster a general opinion that the imagery of artefacts is not original, and that it has come from "fine art" sources, (it is not the outcome of ideas generated locally by the artefact itself or its associated culture and purposes) and therefore it is not worthy of serious art-historical consideration. It can be proved, however, that much "fine art" imagery has had its own foundations in ancient mythical imagery used originally on artefacts of more ancient times, such as, for instance, that of ancient gods, goddesses and heroes, the mythical Tree of Life, the dragon image, and so on. As Fuller wrote in his collected essays, when discussing the status of artefacts:

"...we appear to be witnessing a revival of handicrafts:... And yet this is a curious kind of revival. The Fine Arts having arisen within, and transcended the crafts, fell into decadence when they could no longer draw nourishment from them..."
and as Gombrich writes, in referring to the making of art objects in fifteenth century Italy when there was little or no discrimination between what was to be differentiated in later times as either artefact or “fine art”:

"...artists, like all artisans and craftsmen, were organized into guilds. These guilds were in many respects similar to our trade unions....To be admitted into the guild the artist had to show that he was able to reach certain standards, that he was, in fact, a master of his craft. He was then allowed to open a workshop, to employ apprentices, and to accept commissions for altar-paintings, portraits, painted chests, banners and coats of arms, or any other work of the kind...”

It has been on and of artefacts that some significant imagery has been generated out of mythology, local invention, creativity and circumstantial need. Specific examples of this fundamental imagery will be considered, and traced in various materials, techniques and styles in selected cultures.

This study aims to be as objective as possible. This is difficult to achieve, however, because there are limits to the amount of information that is available regarding artefacts of very ancient cultures. Those made in pre-literate societies are known only from the material finds of archaeology, and it can only be from these that assumptions can be made and conclusions drawn, and it is only on these that arguments can be based. But even in later societies when written records can provide evidence, or clues at least, it is still difficult to achieve total objectivity. This is because it is impossible to avoid the flavours and prejudices of the time and place of writing, and these cannot fail to affect objectivity to some degree.

There is always the possibility, also, that artefacts, their imagery and their apparent significances may not have been what they seem. They could well have been produced by the maker for no conscious purpose other than providing goods that would fill,

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profitably, known "market" demands and preferences. After all, a vast number of artefacts fall into this category! (And so might some so-called "fine art"!) Even when the maker has not set out to make imagery which has other than market significance it is still possible for the user/viewer to perceive significances in the imagery quite apart from its marketable acceptability. As Lloyd points out in a discussion of the ibex imagery on ceramics from the Susiana plain (c.fourth millennium BC) (fig. 4):

"... But, the ibex-symbol... is recognizable merely as a decorative unit... its very identity has become irrelevant, since the painter himself, concerned only with its decorative value, may well have been ignorant of its traditional significance."10

Without attempting to explore any more than a few of the more obvious mythic systems, some of the background symptoms and conceptual foundations will be analysed, which might be perceived to lie behind the form and imagery that has been used without any apparent awareness on the part of the maker of the original concepts which brought the imagery into being.

When form and imagery have been transferred from one culture to another it has seemed inevitable that they become transformed to some extent.11 And not only is the outward appearance changed, but frequently the original symbolism which was inherent is also changed, lost or replaced. With the adoption of form and imagery into a new culture new symbolism, concepts and perceptions relating to the adoptive society will tend to grow around the introduced form and imagery. Not only is this the result of changed circumstances of their making and use, but it is also the outcome of the use of materials and techniques which vary from those used in the culture where the form and imagery originated. And more importantly, the new craftworkers involved will inevitably apply their own expertise, which may well be different from that of the original makers.

These factors will be taken into account during the course of the thesis and, as stated above, I use my own experiences and practice of artefact-making of thirty years to question and discuss some of these problems and possible theories, whilst drawing on published material in archaeology, anthropology and art history. My own original work in low-range temperature porcelain research (1,100–1,120 degrees C) will also be cited, which has for its foundational influences the ceramics and associated perceptions of cultures that flourished long before the twentieth century. The oeuvre is, nevertheless, a product of its time and circumstance, and is a combination of outside influences and of local invention.
fig. 4. Beaker, Susa A, Iran. c. 4000-3500 BC (A.S.C.I.A)
Methodology

The plan, at first, was to take a number of artefacts and their imagery, and investigate, in turn, their various characteristics, natures and sources. It soon became apparent, however, that certain qualities existed which were universal, unchanging and intelligible concepts, applicable to all artefact imagery. These intelligibles are listed therefore as chapter headings, and are discussed as they have been manifested in the sensible forms of selected artefact imagery. Throughout the text examples are drawn from cultures separated widely both geographically and in time. Whether the object being studied is an object from fourth millennium BC Iran, from fifteenth century Italy or from twentieth century Australia, common factors and issues can be recognised which form a body of argument, and which can help the perceptive understanding of artefact-making and its imagery. There are four Parts to this thesis, the first being introductory, while Part II concentrates on unique aspects, as well as on some of the universal and fundamental issues, using selected imagery and objects. But inevitably the dialectic can be made clearer by discussing additional examples in greater detail, and therefore a small group of specific imagery has been selected for discussion in Part III. In Part IV one particular oeuvre, produced in Australia, will be discussed in relation to some of the issues explored in Part II and Part III. The Appendix aims to enlarge upon those topics which seem to need additional background information. The Glossary contains brief descriptions of technical terms, and there is a Bibliography. When they have been available, illustrations have been included where it has seemed useful to clarify a point.

Because the area of artefact making is huge, only certain exemplary imagery will be selected and studied. There will be brief references to archetype, art-theory, creativity, symbolism, realism, intervention, technique, embellishment, schematisation, order, hierarchy, religion and socio-political circumstance. In order to do this, examples are referred to constantly from a very wide range of cultures and timespans. There may be other obviously interesting examples which have been ignored, but arbitrary decisions of
exclusion have been necessary in order to limit the length of this thesis. Available illustrations are included where they seem to elucidate the argument. Discourse will be tied, where it is relevant, to the concerns and conditions of the craftworker, whose role is central, and who is responsible in the final analysis, for the intimate moments of immediate decision-making that effect the final shape an artefact's form and imagery. Where questions or theories are proposed, concrete examples are used, where possible, on which to test or apply these. I will also use my own experiences and practice of artefact-making to question and discuss theoretical issues, whilst drawing on published material in archaeology, anthropology and art history. My own original work in low-temperature porcelain research will also be cited as an example of artefact making that has its foundational influences in the ceramics and associated perceptions of cultures that flourished long before the twentieth century. The work, however, is evidence of the times and circumstance of its making, and can be, therefore, a product both of outside (or foreign) influences and of local invention.

As Gombrich explains about his methodology, I too, have demonstrated my propositions by “adducing a number of mutually independent examples from many parts of the globe”. He writes:

“... I could not demonstrate the workings of universal psychological tendencies without adducing a number of independent examples from many parts of the globe... The reader must therefore be willing to move from abstract theories to concrete instances, and to regard them, in their turn, as test cases for the hypotheses under discussion. There is no danger of circularity there, for the field remains wide open for the production of further examples which might serve to support or to refute my general approach ...”\(^2\)

It is acknowledged that myth and ritual and associated activities have apparently provided sources, and have been the reasons for a great deal of artefact image-making. And there

is an overwhelming body of published work about this. Brief references will be made to some of these where they seem to be applicable, but as stated previously, one of the main thrusts of the present study is the ambit of the craftworkers who have produced the artefacts and their imagery.

It is not possible to know the full circumstances that have lain behind the making of an artefact in an ancient culture. All that is available from prehistoric cultures is the found material evidence, and from these a great deal of information has been claimed in other disciplines, with reasonable proof of its veracity. But there must have existed unknown and unseen circumstances, motivations and ephemera which may have been, also, the matrix out of which an artefact and its imagery arose.

I refer to my occasional reading of works concerned with aesthetics, perception and poetry because these terms are used in the thesis, but only as they are understood by me in a general sense as a layperson. I use some aspects of the methodology of art history and other disciplines where they seem to help. But it has been necessary also to attempt other methods suited to the topic. To some extent, therefore, I am asking questions and making propositions in terms of the maker and user of artefacts, as well as from the point of view of the finder, viewer or critic.

These methods have been adopted in response to the general attitudes of orthodox discourse towards artefacts and their imagery. The relegation of this huge area of creative skill and endeavour to such categories as "applied art", "decorative art" and "craft" automatically decrees that it is other than proper art. It has set huge areas of this enormous oeuvre, therefore, outside the vocabularies of orthodoxy which are used for the study of proper or "fine art". This makes it not only acceptable, but desirable, to search for suitable vocabularies and methods which may be unorthodox in some cases, in order.

13 The works on anthropology by Claude Lévi-Strauss for instance. In the popular press there are the works of Joseph Campbell, both in book form and on audio-visuals.
to investigate this fascinating area which is one of the oldest, most widespread and fundamental of human activities. This method, therefore, allows me the freedom to discuss and investigate the qualities of the autonomy of the image, by whatever method seems appropriate.

Although the genesis and sources of artefact imagery are often problematic, attempts will be made to clarify some aspects of its nature and its inextricable role in human society. Whether an image is the result of diffusion, whether it might have been the result of the genius of local invention, or whether it has developed from a mixture of both, will be discussed. It will also be shown that in many cases artefact imagery has also developed directly out of the craft processes, limitations and the fortuitous opportunities which are an integral part of object- and image-making. Materials, processes, techniques and styles will be considered, not merely as formal elements, but as significant controls in the development of an image, whether or not the content of the imagery is believed to have originated in mythology.

Imported influences and local invention will also be demonstrated in the recording of my own research, practical experimentation and production of ceramics. My development of theoretically and empirically based experiments in the late 1960’s, early 1970’s and 1980’s with low-temperature porcelains will be described. It will be shown that need and circumstance induced me to produce a small body of work that is original, and which derived from the cultural conditions of the mid-twentieth century. A brief description of these circumstances will be included, as they existed in Australia during the period of the mid-twentieth century, and of their influence on the hand-making of certain groups of artefacts which are usually referred to as crafts or decorative arts. They will also be discussed in relation to my porcelain work since the 1980s.

This will add to the main thrust of the present study, which is the questioning of, and the searching for, a place in which to position that enormous body of human achievement –
artefacts and their imagery – which have been so frequently bypassed or not focussed upon by other studies.

Limited dipping into some of Lévi-Strauss’s works on mythologies seems to be valid in this present study,14 because the mental, spiritual and material processes of making are integral in the consideration of artefacts and their imagery whether they are geographically or historically positioned. And much of the imagery to be studied is from ancient cultures, and therefore informed only by evidentially based knowledge gained from the finding and consideration of physical objects. Some consideration of the evolutionary processes of object-making is necessary, however, and the term “evolution” presupposes a belief in history. At various times circumstances in given cultures have broken with established patterns of conceptualising, to the extent that new conceptual structures, apparently imported, have appeared, to fill the void. And in many cases the imagery of artefacts can be seen to exist in a historical framework of cause and subsequent effect.

Structuralism, as it is used by Lévi-Strauss as a method for the analysis of myth, does seem to offer some useful pathways for the purpose of this thesis. Brief references are made to his work, therefore, where it seems to help to clarify some aspects of artefact imagery. In their paper Bennington and Young begin by stating that:

“...It is no accident that the essentially spatial model of structure seems to work well for a phenomenon such as myth, where the usual historical discourse is unavailable...”15

As much of the artefact imagery discussed in this thesis is most ancient, some of the discourse concerned with it is based on archaeological evidence and consequent

deductions. By its nature this kind of evidence is incomplete, because it is all that is available.

Some of Barthes’ original theories on semiotic signification are useful in the context of this study also, and they are applied in the chapter Mythologies and Signs.16

Inevitably any attempts to define, analyse or understand the non-verbal processes of making through another medium, such as language, must fall short of the perceived phenomena of the object-making. Therefore the current study, like all language-based activity, has to be accepted as only an approximation of the results of the workings of a craftmaker. Language, aided by visual reproduction, is the clearest way to study and communicate about these material expressions of human perceptual activity.

In both anthropological and archaeological discourse the artefact is one of the fortuitous remains of evidence of cultural activities, and while the found objects are frequently studied in great detail they do not usually occupy a central role, but are used as evidential factors. The autonomy of the artefact and its imagery, and of the person of the craftworker, tends to be treated peripherally. And in the discipline of art history most artefacts and their imagery (except the most hallowed examples, as indicated in the Preface) have been treated continuously as minor arts, that is, something less than proper or “fine arts”, and this is a term which has been used in art historical writing continuously, along with the terms “applied arts” and “decorative arts” which are mentioned previously in the Preface.17

This lacuna, which exists by default is the “chimney” (to use a rock-climbing term) that has to be explored for the purposes of this thesis, and lit, wherever possible, by suitable

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17 See comments in the Preface, and footnote 2.
flashes of other helpful theories, even if they themselves appear to have been bypassed for the time being by newer and more recent theoretical discourse.

As discussed earlier in the chapter “Thesis:” there is no way in which the present study can claim to be totally objective and therefore outside the proposed theoretical positioning of artefact imagery, either ancient or modern. But the inevitable limitation of some degree of subjectivity can also be claimed as a positive stance in the sympathetic consideration, especially in Part IV, of the situation in which the Australian craftwork movement and renaissance of the middle and late twentieth century has found itself. As a founder-member of that movement I cannot be, and do not want to be, totally outside or unrelated to it. In this last decade of the century, however, it does seem possible to withdraw a little from the centre of internationally based, but individually motivated endeavour, and relate it to wider horizons, and to observe its dependence upon the works of ancient craftsmakers, which are the main focus of this thesis.
Analysis and Wholism as Method

It would be reasonable to propose that most ancient artefacts and their imagery referred to in this thesis were made and decorated for specific purposes, under conditions of patronage connected with religious cults and social needs, with the recording and expression of tribal intelligence, with trade or with the display and maintenance of power. With this in mind it does not seem advisable to separate the image from its context when attempting to appraise and understand it. A wholistic approach, that is, the consideration of the artefact image in the context of its whole form and apparent intended use, would seem to offer the best method of study. It is doubtful whether an analytical method would be as profitable. When separated from each other, and from their context, the individual parts or units which make up an artefact and its imagery, could hardly provide a true or complete interpretation. And this would apply even when the known cultural context is incomplete (as is often the case with ancient artefacts). The whole artefact and its attendant imagery can provide much more information than only its intended, specific use. Clues to cultural attitudes, to social and religious hierarchies, and to relations with neighbouring societies can be deduced. But the degree of accuracy of these deductions is entirely proportional to the amount and quality, and the verifiability of the associated material evidence that is available. The examples to be quoted later, from ancient Mesopotamia, are cases in point. As has been shown, attitudes, skills and experience of the craftworkers involved in the making of these objects are often evident in the artefacts themselves, and these help to throw light on the state of the societies concerned and the relationships within them.

The wholistic approach to the content, form, style and technique sees that these are tightly bound in with the cultural context of the society, just as much as with the creative spirit of the maker. The unity of the physical and the non-physical in an image is a double-sided phenomenon of creativity. Neither can exist without the other, and both were born out of circumstance and need. The imagery of artefacts is part of a continuum of phenomenal expressiveness and therefore should not be isolated from the context of the basic category of artefact on which it might appear.
Definitions of “Image”, “Imagery” and “Form”

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary attaches ten uses to the noun “image”. Of these, the most appropriate for this present study are “form, semblance, counterpart, simile, metaphor, idea, conception and figurative illustration”.

The term “image” will be used to include not only marks upon an artefact but also the shape or form of the artefact itself because the conceptualisation of a form is frequently just as much the visual expression of an idea as the marks made upon it. The notion of form is understood as the sensible perception of shape in the world of appearances, and not as the Platonic perception of form in the generic, immutable sense of intelligible being. The forms of the specific artefacts to be discussed will therefore be regarded as the results of sensible perception, and the expressions of intelligible concepts. As an example, the concept of a bowl is an immutable, intelligible concept, but the form in which this concept is expressed by a craftworker is a peculiar, idiosyncratic or particular shape which can change with every occasion and circumstance of making.18

It is proposed that both “image” and “imagery” will be used to describe or classify the following visual phenomena:

1. any mark (even a single line or dot) whether it has, or does not have, a significant spatial relationship, in the eyes of the viewer, to the area or form on which it appears;

2. visual marks, produced by any techniques, which represent, or resemble metaphorically, conceptually or realistically, any physical creature or plant or inorganic phenomenon for the apparent purpose of the expression or communication of an idea.

3. the shape or form of an artefact.

18 Adrian Snodgrass, Architecture, Time and Eternity, Delhi, India,1990, Aditya Prakashan, pp. 8–11.
The terms “image” and “imagery” will be used in the contexts of:

a.  semiotic signification
b.  visual symbolism
c.  visual communication
d.  relics of original imagery, either with or without residual meanings
e.  archetype and race memory
f.  imported, or diffused, marks, forms and ideas
g.  the genius of spontaneous generation and local invention.
The Use of the Terms “Image” and “Art”

The words “image” and “imagery” are used deliberately rather than the word “art”. This is because discourse on definitions and interpretations of the term “art” are not central to this thesis. Whether or not the marks, motifs, imagery, materials, styles or techniques might qualify as “art” does not seem to help the main themes which are the nature, sources and diffusion of imagery. But because the subject of this study is the phenomenon of visual expression that is evident on and of artefacts, it does seem reasonable to examine the topic sometimes in art-historical terms where it helps. Therefore it is useful to include brief quotations and an Appendix on the topic of “art” in order to demonstrate the position of some art-theoretical discourse in relation to the imagery of artefacts.19 And because there is inevitable subjectivity and some contemporary self-consciousness about the interpretation and meaning of the term “art” it can confuse the study of artefact imagery.

Since the Renaissance the terms “ornament” and “decorative art” have been attached to artefact imagery, in order to differentiate it from what was perceived as “fine art”. The establishment in the middle of the nineteenth century of guidance and training in the production of well-designed artefacts was aimed at the apprentice/artisan class who were hardly to be regarded as “gentleman artists” capable of making “fine art”.20 These terms have carried with them ideas that this kind of imagery is inferior to, or less important than, the imagery of picture-painting and sculpture. This argument may or may not be defensible, but such classifications are the product of subjective or judgemental opinions (which are the product of the times and context in which they were written) about the quality or merit of an image in the eyes of the viewer or critic.

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19 See Appendix: “Kandinsky & Brook...”
The definition of art is obviously not clear-cut, and both Collingwood and Brook explore this problem extensively. Brook maintains, for instance, that:

"...the concept of art is a relatively new one in human historical terms, but that is not to say that nothing collectable under the concept was made until there were recognised art institutions - including among them the conventional use of a word ('art') taken to signify something importantly other than a variety of, or a special excellence in, craft skill... Either there is a phenomenon that we shall call art, importantly distinct from craft skills and from design processes, that must be properly and separately conceived, or there is not..." 21

In another paper Brook suggests classification of "artefact art objects" as "works". He says that art objects are subjected to an appraisal of their aptness for use, and as such, are given a transinstitutional role. He says they are the manifestations of voluntary actions which also have non-voluntary components.22

Brook also discusses the differences between skills and art, and maintains that art differs fundamentally from skills because skills are intentional but art is not. Skills are understandable in terms of concepts of expertise, of craftsmanship and design. Art, he says, is not an exalted degree of these. It has been understood for millennia that people cannot make real art intentionally, because nobody knows even what it is. He does propose, however, that art may be the source of language, because it enables us to select objects and events out of the general flux of the world. In this sense he seems to be assuming that art is a selective and judgemental process of decision-making, and is therefore subjective. 23


22 Donald Brook, "A New Theory of Art", The British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 20, No. 4, Autumn 1980, pp. 305-321; also, see Appendix, "Kandinsky and Brook".

Although the stance is taken that it is acceptable sometimes to discuss artefact imagery within art-historical methodology and the art-critical climate of today, it has also to be remembered that the majority of examples to be cited are the artefacts of ancient cultures. Therefore to label some of them as art could infer that there existed such a separate category at the times of their making, and this could distort contextual argument. This makes it advisable therefore to consider the various examples of imagery by other methodologies also. And this is where a craftworker's skills, and the relationship of idea, content, style and technique to chosen material, can act as controlling mechanisms. On occasions when the term "art" was used in ancient times its meanings were equated with and embedded in those attached to craft-skills, virtuosity and the fulfilment of a function. It carried no aesthetic burden that was separate from craft skills and expertise. And in recent writing on prehistoric archaeology scholars have used the term "art" freely and without any suggestion that there could be problematic discourse involved in its use as a definition of ancient objects. There are examples of this to be found throughout Lloyd's work, for instance. And Leroi-Gourhan also uses the term without querying its implications when discussing prehistoric imagery. For instance, in a chapter, "The Beginnings of Art", Leroi-Gourhan begins with a question:

"Did man's first primitive tools already show signs of the obscure aesthetic drives which would later produce masterpieces, even before the appearance of prehistoric works of art proper?...The appearance of works of art in the Upper Paleolithic is a recent phenomenon, if not in relation to prehistoric time - since they are credited with an age of some forty thousand years - at least in relation to biological time: nine tenths of the history of mankind had unfolded when the ivory statuettes and the animals decorating the walls of caves suddenly appeared. Were there any true works of art before them?...We have now drawn up an inventory of the minor arts of the Upper Paleolithic..." 

And Mallowan used the phrases:

“...the remarkable similarities in the art and architecture of Brak with that of Uruk eight hundred miles downstream; well before 3000 BC... The amulets discovered at Brak...display...a high degree of artistry and skill in the cutting of stone ...” 26

And Lloyd associates,

“...the first considerable manifestations of creative art...in Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium BC...with the Gerzean period in Egypt...” 27

Many other examples can be found, in the writings in disciplines other than art history. The term “art” is used as a synonym for visual imagery in general, as a synonym for “skill”, and also as a term of differentiation between “skill” and some other thing that is, as Brook puts it in a quotation above,... “taken to signify something importantly other than a variety of, or a special excellence in, craft skill...”

When, today, we appraise an ancient object in terms of something other than standards of expertise, we place our criticism in the position of raising, or lowering, the assessment of it to some other level other than those of skill, virtuosity and functional aptitude, and this assessment is identifiable with non-physical and involuntary achievement. It is separate from, and dissimilar to, assessment based on the quantifiables of skill, virtuosity and functional aptitude. At this point we may be perceiving something that may have been perceived also by the ancients. That aspect of achievement which, today, we separate out as, perhaps, visionary, creative, intuitive or involuntary, is appraised today as “art”. And this can be so whether or not the object has been made skilfully, or whether or not it is successful in performing its intended function. This critical separation of skill from

something else, which allows us to bestow the label “art” upon an image, did not happen until about three hundred years ago, according to Collingwood. 28

Despite the necessity for the above examples of modern argumentation and discourse around the term “art” to be included here (for the purpose of locating the terms “image” and “imagery” contextually) the discourse on “art” and how it might be defined, is still a separate concern, and one that may continue alongside the arguments and questions of the present thesis. The arguments for “art” or “not art” could be interposed at any point in the appraisal of an artefact image during this present study. But in order to clarify the stances taken in this thesis, it has been decided to use the terms “image” and “imagery” to describe the artefactual representations of both physical and non-physical concepts, whether or not they have been appraised at any time as “art”. To make constant decisions as to whether these representations are to be classified as “art” would seem to be beside the point, and perhaps even confusing and superfluous. To make decisions as to whether a particular artefact image is, or is not, “art” would make it impossible to avoid subjectivity (even though the assessment might be based upon formidable evidence) and this would mean that, inevitably, assessment would be liable to change with every critic. As Collingwood says:

“…what makes a building or a cup a work of art is different from what makes it an artefact…” 29

To use the term “art” in connection with artefact imagery is to claim for it separate, additional qualities which are external to the factors which make the imagery suitable for its function as an artefact. An example can be taken of the ibex image on a goblet, (already mentioned) dated to the fourth millennium BC, from the ancient necropolis at the site of Susa, north of the Persian Gulf (fig. 4). 30 It could be assumed that the goblet

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29 ditto, pp. 43
would still have fulfilled its physical function as a container, whether or not the figuration had any symbolic, social or political significance, or whether the image was used purely as a decorative device to make the container more attractive to whomever had ordered that it be made. Neither would the intrinsic value of the artefact and its image be altered whether or not this painted image was carried out by the decorator in a manner that would arouse late twentieth century approval of it as something more than just a competent decoration on a well-made artefact. Our (subjective) perception of it as a poetically inspired image of an ibex might well be totally different from the perceptions of the ancient rulers for whom, apparently, it was made.31 But we cannot be sure of this. Even if the users of such a goblet had responded to the imagery and its organised stylisation in the same way that we respond to it in the twentieth century, the power achieved by the artist-decorator in the image would still be, for us, a separate quality from its aptness as an artefact, because the imagery in this case, is not integral in the functioning of the goblet.

Susan Pollock interprets the special quality of the ibex decoration as an indication of social ranking within the Susiana culture. She argues that:

"...higher-status individuals will have more energy expended on their funerals...distinct levels of energy expenditure will reflect distinct levels of rank... Kilns dating to Susiana (c.4,200 BC) have been discovered at Jaffarabad...and Choga Mish...lending some support to the proposition that there was specialised pottery production. However, most, if not all, villages apparently continued to produce some ceramics... In short, there appears to have been some specialization of pottery production, though such specialization was probably restricted to prestige-related items...the high level of settlement integration and the presence of a clearly paramount center in Susa A as well as what we know of this period from excavations combine to indicate the existence of a distinctly stratified society in Susa A. On this basis we can expect to find a

31 Although this is the subjective opinion of the writer, it is one that is also held by others; eg., Lloyd, \textit{The Art of the Ancient Near East}, op. cit., pp. 18, 19, 21–24, and Mallowan, \textit{Early Mesopotamia and Iran}, op. cit., p. 29.
category of prestige-related vessels which will exhibit a high level of redundancy in their painted designs...”32

It could be inferred from this analysis, therefore, that the embellishing decoration of an artefact, such as this, and other Susa A goblets (c. 4,000 BC–3,500 BC), would bestow upon it greater importance and prestige because of its sophisticated complexity and because of the energy (time, expertise and skill) expended on it. Pollock does not make any claims for an aesthetic or “art” content in the imagery of the Susa A goblets; and this kind of reasoning places the imagery in a relationship to other artefacts which is defined by skill and energy expenditure, (and therefore with a sociologically determined material value). As far as we know it was not necessarily assessed by the Susiana society (or by the twentieth century anthropologist, Pollock) by a perceived aesthetic quality or a perceived “something else” within the image. The fact that, in twentieth century eyes, this particular imagery is subjectively viewed as having qualities additional to craft skills, and being therefore classed as “art”, is still beside the point within the terms of this present thesis.

Even if the users of such a goblet, however, had responded to the imagery and its organised stylisation in the same way that we respond to it in the twentieth century, the power achieved by the artist-decorator in this image would still be a separate quality from its success as an artefact even though the patrons or original users of it may not have seen it as a separate quality.

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fig 5. Bone artefacts with deliberately engraved lines in systematic patterns. Bilzingsleben, Germany. 350,000 - 300,000 B.P.
Part II. AN EXPLORATION OF NATURE AND SOURCES

The Making of an Artefact and its Imagery

Artefacts and their imagery can be used as convenient evidence of a basic distinction between the human and animal species. Humans make artefacts, animals do not, although some birds and animals are known to manipulate natural objects, such as stones and twigs, as quasi-tools.\(^ {33}\) While Lévi-Strauss quotes incidents of symbolic behaviour in certain animals which can be seen to have similarities with certain symbolic behaviour in humans, this kind of activity is different from that of the conscious and self-conscious activity of the making of artefacts and their imagery.\(^ {34}\) The development of the intelligible concept of artefact will be considered as it is expressed in concrete and sensible objects which may or may not carry additional concepts unconnected with the original purpose of their making.

It is taken for granted nowadays that artefacts were being made by hominid species more than a million years before the advent of *homo sapiens*. They include artefacts which were formed simply by splitting off portions from a stone until a useful edge was produced. It appears that there was no apparent effort to do this in an ordered or decorative way and neither is there any evidence of other, additional markings which might be construed as decoration. The earliest evidence yet known of what appears to be decoration (for unknown reasons) is dated to 350,000 to 300,000 BP. These are the bone artefacts found at Bilzingsleben, Germany, by Dietrich and Ursula Mania between 1980 and 1986 (*fig. 5*).


DELIBERATE ENGRAVINGS ON BONE ARTEFACTS OF HOMO ERECTUS

By Dietrich Mania and Ursula Mania
The Abstract at the beginning of their paper reads:

"Abstract: An occupation floor at the Middle Pleistocene hominid site of Bilzingsleben, near Halle, German Democratic Republic, has been dated to the penultimate interglacial. Four bone artefacts found among remains of *Homo erectus* bear indisputable intentional engravings. The markings document the production of systematic patterns, and they provide the first unequivocal evidence that *Homo erectus* produced incipient art – thousands of centuries before the advent of Upper Paleolithic art."

These ordered patterns have not yet been connected with any intended use of the artefacts, or with any other concerns within the group where they were made, neither do the marks appear to coincide with any known patterns produced fortuitously by geological or organic action. At the present time it can only be concluded that the sense of order which is evident on these artefacts is of human origin. As Gombrich puts it, when discussing order in ornament:

"...it is precisely because these forms are rare in nature that the human mind has chosen those manifestations of regularity which are recognisably a product of a controlling mind and thus stand out against the random medley of nature..."  

Before any artefact was made a perception had to exist that there was a reason for the necessity of acquiring an object which would extend the effectiveness of the human hand or mind. No proof is available of this, but it would seem reasonable to assume that, if no natural object could be recognised as suitable for the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of the human hand (such as a blunt or sharp stone, a bone, a branch of a tree or a shell) then the early hominids made one of the greatest creative leaps ever, and proceeded to change the shape of the stone, bone, branch or shell in an effort to satisfy a

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36 Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, Oxford, U.K., 1984, Phaidon Press, pp. 5 & 7. In his phrase "the random medley of nature" Gombrich is not taking into account, in this instance, repeated and ordered patterns which occur in the natural world, such as crystalline and molecular formations.
perception of need. This activity of changing the shape of material has been fundamental to the making of every artefact since the first artefact was made, whenever or wherever that may have been. The exception to this is the found object and the recognition of its usefulness for a particular purpose without the need for alteration of any kind. But the original perception of the need to apply an object to a particular use still remains. Some of these original perceptions of need may perhaps be as follows:

1. the use of an artefact to aid physical survival activities such as acquiring and preparing food and providing shelter;

2. awareness of human inability to control the natural elements such as the weather, the seasons; attempts to do this as a result of the consequent frustration when food supplies were short or there was a life-threatening situation;

3. awareness of ignorance about the role of humankind in the cosmos, and the subsequent desire to pull away the curtain of the unknown, and to seek answers;

4. awareness of ignorance about the phenomena of birth and death; and the consequent growth of activities such as ritual and myth;

5. as an offshoot of the survival instinct; the ambition to have power over others;

6. an awareness of an apparent age-old need for self-expression and self-fulfilment;

7. the urge for communication and contact with other individuals and groups for any of the previous six reasons;

8. the urge for genetic survival.

Listed very generally and simply, the artefacts that have resulted from these perceptions include:
a. tools and utensils to aid the activities of daily living;

b. symbolic objects which may have been made to accompany ritual behaviour or dance;

c. iconic objects which appear to have been expressions of attempts to come to terms with the mysteries of birth, life and death;

d. artefacts and their imagery which replicate the artefacts of earthly life, and which were buried with the deceased, apparently as accompaniments to a supposed after-life;

e. weapons to control, intimidate, harm or subdue others;

f. body ornamentation (dress, jewellery) to advertise the wearer’s perceived prestige, sexual attractiveness or position in society, or to fulfil other functions such as those connected with magic, symbolism and religion;

g. any of the above classes of artefacts that were conceived and made with more imagination and sensitivity than was necessary for basic, efficient functioning;

h. the development of image-bearing artefacts, both secular and religious, which would have been capable of communicating visually, didactic messages to the viewer.

Although this is a simplified list, nevertheless most artefacts and their attendant imagery may appear to fall into one or more of these possible categories.

How closely these perceptions were interlocked with mythic systems cannot be quantified, but Lévi-Strauss, when discussing the origins of mythic systems refers to the modification of the myth by “the proximity of different techno-economic infrastructures”.37 The question may be asked, whether these infrastructures included

37 This is discussed in greater detail in the chapter “Myth and the Image.”
systems which caused the making, supplying and using of artefacts which, in turn, in a
circular determinism, were affected by the mythic systems of the community.38

The mythologies of a community appear to lie in a position also where they may modify
aspects of artefacts and their imagery, and these cannot be isolated from the mythic
systems which enclose them. But if this kind of situation operates then it must exist
conversely, in relation at least to some of the techno-economic infrastructures, which in
turn are themselves candidates for change through the agency of artefacts and their
imagery. If such a situation exists, this circular or spiral system of constraints and
influences cannot avoid setting up a theory of determinism. And this would seem to
apply either in the culture of origin or in a foreign culture with which for some reason,
artefacts and their imagery were brought into contact.

If one specific example can be cited which falls into the above categories it is the portable
art of the Upper Paleolithic. It appears to emanate from the needs, systems and
mythologies of its eras. But because they are portable three-dimensional objects, and
classed as artefacts, their imagery varies considerably from that of parietal art
(figs. 6 a., b.).39 Not only is their imagery determined broadly by the mythologies of
the culture, it is also informed and controlled by the functional purposes for which the
artefacts have been made, and constrained by the exigencies of material and technique.
Nevertheless Leroi-Gourhan assumes that the making and decoration of artefacts was
linked with the parietal art and sculptures in their underground sanctuaries as an
inextricable part of the practices and beliefs of an Upper Paleolithic community when he
discusses chronological correspondences and the variations in the stylisations on objects
which are expendable and those which are intended to last:

pp. 628, 629.
39 The terms ‘portable’ and ‘parietal’ are used by the anthropologist to distinguish objects such as tools,
iconic figures and body ornaments from wall paintings, bas relief and sculptures of the Paleolithic eras.
Both Leroi-Gourhan and Bahn use these terms.
fig. 6a.

Portable artefacts, Upper Paleolithic, France
(A.P.M.W.E.)
fig. 6b.

Portable artefacts, Upper Paleolithic, Spain

(A.P.M.W.E.)
"...the decorated objects provide us with our surest chronological guidelines...one might assume, a priori, that the most brilliant period of cave painting and engraving would correspond to the time of the richest minor arts...the conventional character of the shorthand representations is paralleled by no less rigid conventions of realistic representation;... Every species of animal and every type of sign engraved on these objects is found again on the cave walls... The number of decorated objects is, all in all, very limited – spears, harpoons, pierced staffs, spear-throwers, spatulas, half-rounded rods, and objects to be hung or strung...there is the characteristic lateness of figurative art in the Upper Paleolithic, at least on objects of practical use. The finds dating from before the Gravettian (c. 23,000 BP) are extremely rare, and the decorations on them are rudimentary... (there) seems (to be) apparent specialization of decoration: it is realistic on objects expected to last, schematic on more expendable objects. This...suggests that the same themes were susceptible either of full treatment or of a treatment one might almost call 'shorthand'. It is advisable not to confuse this shorthand schematism with the schematic 'degeneration' which Breuil showed conclusively to characterize works dating from the end of the Magdalenian..."\(^{40}\)

It is not known whether portable art that was decorated or deliberately shaped was conceived and produced before parietal art appeared on cave walls. The recent finds, however, of the deliberately marked bone fragments, dated to c.300,000 BP at Bilzingsleben, Germany, suggests that such activities did predate known image-making on cave walls.\(^{41}\) It cannot be argued, however, that parietal art must have followed necessarily in the steps of artefact imagery. The varying circumstances which must have engendered perception of the need to place marks upon a particular wall surface, or to fashion and decorate an object must be seen as the matrix which gave birth to appropriate imagery and form.

Although the finding of the Bilzingsleben artefacts postdates Leroi-Gourhan’s work by decades the latter’s comments are still useful when he discusses artefacts, especially


when he considers what appears to have been an apparent specialisation of decoration on
different classes of artefacts.

Leroi-Gourhan does not specifically equate the development of decorated artefacts with
the development of mythology, but, in a general way, appears to assume that there is a
connection between the "decoration of useful objects" and systems of symbols:

"...the only known authentically primitive art discloses the existence of a far
more complex mentality than had been imagined... From the aesthetic and
philosophical point of view, the existence of a system of symbolic
representations in the Upper Paleolithic is highly instructive... Its employment
by Paleolithic man in the decoration of useful objects will enable us to
understand hitherto unexplainable elements in cave art, where symbolic signs
occur constantly..."42

The Role of the Craftworker

The craftworker has at his or her disposal two categories of imagery which may be chosen for the making of a given artefact; two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Two-dimensional images are complex arrangements of graphic units.\textsuperscript{43} In a three-dimensional image, the third dimension, volume/space, is integral.\textsuperscript{44} Both categories have been used in connection with artefacts. The choice of type of imagery is often related to the conceptualisation of the artefact itself and to the practical purpose and intended use for which the artefact has been made. Without a circumstance that required their existence neither the artefact nor its imagery are likely to have been created. Purpose and use therefore become additional dimensions that are integral in the artefact and its imagery, just as, inversely, imagery can be integral in its purpose and use. Whether this is true also, when an image seems to have been applied to an artefact, apparently purely as a decoration that is not integral within the functional form, is doubtful, unless it can be argued that decoration in itself is a purpose. For instance, in the case of many ancient examples, from pre- to post-Neolithic times, it would be difficult to prove that imagery was the result only of the whim of the maker and that it had no connection with a practical or socially significant use. Some imagery, although it may not seem to have been integral in the practical purpose for which the artefact was made, it may well have had some mythic significance which is not apparent within the physical functionality of the artefact. And it may be that even the maker of the imagery was not consciously aware of any connections between the imagery of his or her making and the circumstances that prevailed within the social group. And yet, despite this, it would be difficult to believe that some imagery which embellishes artefacts has not been made purely as an autonomous decision by the individual maker, responding to what appears to be an inherent human urge, as stated previously, to make marks upon surfaces. When


\textsuperscript{44} K. Nicolaides, \textit{The Natural Way to Draw}, M. Harmon, (ed.) Boston, U.S.A., 1941, Houghton Mifflin. Throughout the book this is demonstrated both in the text and in practical drawn examples.
this happens it can be argued that this also is a purpose; it is the provision, possibly, of delight and satisfaction for the maker and user. And there can exist the potential for the maker to perceive the achievement of a kind of immortality by making his or her own unique marks upon an artefact which may outlast the lifetime of the maker. In a recorded radio interview, and in a radio Talk, the late Peter Fuller said:

"... I believe there are relatively enduring values in art and that those things are not simply dependent on the latest twist of fashion or style...the crafts retain, when they are successfully pursued, some particularity which allows the individually creative human subject to leave something of his or her imprint upon the thing that is made... (crafts) deal with objects that retain some element of individuality of the person who made them... The ornamental impulse merges into the making of autonomous representations of what has been seen, dreamed or imagined..."45

To return to specific artefacts and imagery made in ancient times, examples can be taken from among artefacts of the Epipaleolithic and Neolithic periods in Mesopotamia. At the Zawi Chemi settlement and the Shanidar cave aceramic sites, artefacts have been found that date back to the middle of the ninth millennium BC. These include hammer-stones and small stone palettes which show distinctive and deliberately incised decoration (fig. 7).46 Beads of tubular bone, and flat beads of steatite, greenstone and marble have also been found. The imagery on the stones, and the beads (which are a decoration in themselves) poses questions which cannot be answered with certainty, although inferences can be made. Were these objects made by specialist craftworkers for other members of the community, for use in a burgeoning cultural system? Or were they made and decorated purely for the satisfaction and delight of those who made them? Beads and altered stones both represent many hours of hand-work. Was it possible that these early communities could afford for some members to be occupied with labour that produced

fig. 7
\[ \text{Zawi Chemi, and Shanidar cave.} \]
\[ \text{flint microliths, bone and flint knife and sickle, beads, palettes and whetstones} \]
\[ \text{C. 8500 BC} \]

fig. 8
\[ \text{Nth. and Central Mesopotamia: plain and painted pottery} \]
\[ \text{6200 BC - 5700 BC} \]

fig. 9
\[ \text{Tepe Sarab, central Mesopotamia.} \]
\[ \text{fired clay figurines} \]
\[ \text{5,800 BC} \]

(N.N.E.)
neither food, shelter nor clothing? The making of these artefacts required a considerable degree of specialist skill, and knowledge of materials. This suggests that even in such early times there existed, in a community, some talented members who were allowed, and perhaps even encouraged, to specialise in artefact-making and decoration for the use of the rest of the community.

At the later ceramic site of Tepe Sarab (also in the Zagros zone and south of Zawi Chemi and Shanidar) extremely well-made earthenware ceramic bowls have been found, which have been dated to c.5800 BC. They have been carefully made, well-proportioned, burnished, decorated and then expertly fired, by someone obviously skilled and experienced in the working and firing of clay. The well-ordered banding of one bowl and the all-over orderly, scraped decoration of the other are further evidence of skilled specialisation. These ceramics, and others found at sites in the Zagros region (for instance, at Tepe Guran and Jarmo – c. 6,000 to 5,600 BC) can only have been made, as were others such as the artefacts found at Zawi Chemi and Shanidar, by experienced specialist craftworkers (fig. 8).... It must be assumed that they worked within the cultural systems of the communities for these specialised purposes, for at least some of the time.

This kind of inference can also be made in the case of two female figurines, also found at Tepe Sarab, and modelled in fired clay (fig. 9). Because other found evidence

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47 ditto, p. 86. Earthenware is defined as ceramic that is still permeable, with varying states of porosity, which are greater than those of stoneware, which has 2% to 8%, and of porcelain which has nil porosity. It is usually fired at lower temperatures than either stoneware or porcelain; these may range from 800 degrees C (bonfire heat) to around 1150 degrees C, but choice of a suitable temperature depends basically upon the type of clay body that is used.

48 Burnishing is carried out when the clay of the pot is almost dry, but not quite. The pot is polished with a smooth stone or bone until a shiny surface is achieved. This remains even after the firing process, and can help to make these early unglazed pots slightly more impermeable.

49 The efficiency of the firing is evidenced in the colour of the fired clay, which in these cases is buff. This means that the fire must have been controlled in a some kind of kiln situation where a clear, bright, non-smoky fire has been maintained to produce an oxidising atmosphere. If the fire had been smoky during critical stages of the firing process, as happens in primitive, open bonfire firings, then the clay would have become coloured in a range of greys to black, as a result of the reducing, smoky firing atmosphere. When there is smoke the amount of oxygen is reduced, and the fire draws oxides out of the iron in the clay (that is responsible for the buff colour). Because of the change in the chemistry of the iron, the colour of the fired clay is changed. Pottery produced by extremely primitive cultures is frequently greyish to black.

indicates that a Neolithic lifestyle was in the process of developing, it must be inferred, also, that there was already some kind of cultural organisation of group concepts. As in other cultures this could indicate ritual practices, some of which were connected with fertility rites, the success of food production,\textsuperscript{51} and perceptions connected with the metaphysical, and belief in some kind of after-life. This is also borne out by the apparent ritual use in some burials of red ochre, and the inclusion with the deceased of what might be interpreted as personal belongings such as artefacts, tools and decorative objects.\textsuperscript{52}

But what of the individual man or woman who was the maker and/or decorator of the artefact? It is not possible, in the case of ancient artefact imagery, to know much, if anything, about the individual ambitions of the maker. We can only make assumptions, based on evidence, about the circumstances surrounding him or her, in the light of twentieth century knowledge. It is obvious that many artefacts and their imagery were the work of someone with special skills and knowledge and this leads us to argue that in some cases, at least, the maker of a particular artefact was someone who had spent a considerable amount of time in the production of artefacts. In the light of modern experience it would appear that the continuous practice of a particular kind of work may produce, in the long run, craftworkers who, as a class, tend to show talents and personality tendencies of a kind specifically related to their type of work-activity. The learned skills, using available materials, manipulated through the medium of the personality, predilections and limitations of the individual craftworker, must have affected to some degree the look of an artefact and its imagery, while still falling within the mythic and stylistic parameters that were acceptable within the craftworker’s community. Lévi-Strauss addresses this idea:

\textasciitilde \ldots (The conductor); \ldots had observed that the personality of a musician is often in harmony with the one evoked by the timbre and techniques of his instrument...he


could expect the oboist to be prim and touchy, the trombonist to be expansive, jovial and good-natured... Popular thought has always strived to discover such analogies - a mental activity in which we will recognise one of the prime impulses of myth creation... (there are) old and widespread beliefs that there is homology between two systems; that of professional occupation and that of temperaments... Nearly a century ago Sebillot broached this topic... (He) lists basic personality traits traditionally associated with the practice of various crafts...”53

Further examples are cited by Lévi-Strauss, particularly in relation to the potter and the smith, but only in terms of their role in society, and not in terms of individual personality traits. He suggests, however, that the practice of pottery does affect the craftsman’s moral and mental disposition in his discussion of American Indian ideas which link pottery and marital jealousy, and writes;

“...conquering fire was a difficult achievement for humans, but once they had succeeded, fire was theirs forever... But in their possession and practice of pottery, they are constantly challenged, for the rivalry between the powers Above and the powers Below never comes to an end...men are contaminated by the spirit of jealousy that animates these contending powers. Consequently, the practice of pottery is subject to countless rituals and fussy, cautionary measures, and this does not fail to affect the craftsmen’s moral disposition...”54

It could be useful to cite here, also, the specific case of the sixteenth century French glassmaker turned potter. The story of Bernard Palissy provides an intriguing insight into his probable character and personality traits, his obsessive doggedness in the face of repeated disasters and family despair, and his eventual success with Royal patronage. His own biographical writing shows him to be subject to great depression, and to be so

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53 Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Jealous Potter, B. Chorier, trsl., Chicago, U.S.A., University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 3, 4, 9, 10, 48, 49. According to Lévi-Strauss, Sebillot continues...”First, the physical aspect; perhaps because they worked in a sitting or squatting position, weavers and tailors were depicted as dwarfs or cripples...Almost unanimously old European folklore brands weavers, tailors and millers as thieves who pilfer the raw materials their patrons give them - yarn, cloth, clothing or flour...distinctive psychological traits are attributed to each category of craftsman...To explain the English phrase ‘as mad as a hatter’.

54 ditto, p. 49.
obsessive as to be irrational. His glazes were based on lead, and lead poisoning, as we
have known since the late nineteenth century, can be responsible for, among other
symptoms, mental instability, and eventually, death. The case of Palissy would appear
to be somewhat parallel to that of the traditionally mad hatter who uses poisonous
chemicals in the processing of fur.

In the craft renaissance of the twentieth century there are many examples of the situations
and problems faced, and sometimes overcome, by the individual studio potter, for
whom, his or her own individual personal traits are of paramount importance when
relating to the materials, and to the manipulation of the materials being worked; clay,
minerals and fire. For instance, in an autobiographical article, Daniel Rhodes discusses
his life as a potter in the U.S.A., and writes:

“...The plasticity and impressionability of clay make it very revealing of the
intentions and spirit of the person who did the shaping... Feelings can flow
through the fingers and into the clay in a very direct way... To a degree,
reflection, judgment and planning can be suspended, at least, for a time. This
quality of directness, of immediacy, is a quality that I value, and I believe that it is
relatively rare in art.... Although I am well aware of the various messages which
can be and have been conveyed through art, the most significant quality for me is
the unimpeded flow of sensibility into the work... I find this quality in ancient
Iranian pottery, in old Japanese folk pottery, in Shaker furniture, even in
Peruvian weaving and in Egyptian stone carving... It is in the paintings of
Matisse...”

Most ancient craftworkers could hardly have enjoyed the freedom that studio
craftworkers enjoy in the twentieth century in some sections of the Western world, when
they are usually free to create their own individual objects of self and community
expressiveness. Nevertheless, within the social, political and economic constraints of the
systems within which the ancient craftmaker worked, there would still have been the
opportunities, however limited, to experience this "unimpeded flow of sensibility" from
the fingers of the craftworker into the material. And from observation of both ancient and
modern artefacts, it can be postulated that this intimate, physical manipulation of material
can touch upon the unconscious recesses of the mind, and can have the potential to be the
cradle of poetic and spiritual content in an artefact and its imagery. But of course while
this can only be a personal and subjective judgement here, nevertheless this attitude is
widespread and tacitly accepted in the general climate of art viewing and criticism today.
And it applies not only to the manipulation of clay but to the manipulation of all other
media when they are used to make, by hand, artefacts of all kinds.

It is here that the means of production cannot be emphasised too much. But for some
theorists in the late twentieth century the manipulation of materials and tools and the
physical production of an object tends to be dismissed as less important than the
conceptual content of the finished work. It is the perception of the balance between the
disciplines enforced by medium or technique and the conceptual content of the imagery
that is at the heart of the problem. In developing the form of an artefact and its imagery
the craftworker is forced to make critical decisions in relation to the material to be used,
the tools that can best manipulate the material, and the way in which his or her skills and
knowledge are applied. Every second in the production of an individual artefact is a vital
one of decision-making. The craftworker is often engaged upon a journey of refinement,
honing down to essentials, of reducing the form- and image-potential to their most
efficient and expressive state. And this lies within the conceptual area of Gombrich's
statement about simplicity, and his quoting of the famous statement by the architect Mies
van der Rohe that... "less is more".\footnote{Gombrich, Sense of Order, op. cit., pp. 17, 18–20.} (This is an essentially twentieth century approach,
however, and efficacy of expression must also take into account perceived reactions of
the viewer/user to the non-material purpose or potential of an artefact which may be enhanced sometimes by a proliferation of decorative elements.) Iconicity, symbolism, potency, poetic transcendence, sensitivity to idea, material and technique; all these attributes may or may not be achieved by the craftworker during those moments of decision-making. And it is in any of these moments that the die is cast as to whether an image rises above the mundane and merely adequate, to achieve transcendence, or something greater than its intended self.

Artefacts produced either by individual craftworkers or by a close-knit group can be explicit evidence of the maker’s skill or lack of it, imagination or lack of it, powers of creativity or lack of it, sensitivity or lack of it. Artefacts and their imagery from ancient times may not provide intimate details of the psyche or the details of daily life of the makers, but they are poignant witnesses to the mundane or the transcendent role that the craftworker has played in the cultural systems of his or her society, and to the complex ways in which it has evolved. As Bahn says, of parietal and portable art of the Paleolithic:

"...The development...was probably akin to evolution itself: not a straight line or a ladder, but a more circuitous path - a complex growth...with occasional flashes of brilliance...Each period...almost certainly saw the coexistence...of a number of styles and techniques... It is naive to assume that all Palaeolithic images are purposeful masterpieces..."58

The origins and the development of imagery cannot always be clear, and neither can the sources or context of their making, although there is much research and theorising about it. For instance, in his consideration of the question, Wen Fong quotes theories proposed by two nineteenth century scholars, Semper and Riegl, and by the more recent works of Wolfflin. He says that Semper proposed that the origins of art lay in the interplay of material, practical purpose or function, tools and technique, and that he

58 Bahn, Vertut, Images of the Ice Age, op. cit., p. 65.
explained the style of the work of art largely in terms of the mechanical properties of the material and the technical parameters of manufacture. Wen Fong compares this approach with that of Riegl who reacted against what he called Semper's pernicious materialistic philosophy, and advocated the concept of "kunstwollen" or artistic volition, by which he saw artist's mental activity as the principal source of what he terms "art". 59

In this instance, Wolfflin, like Semper, also approached the topic mechanistically but used style as the yardstick. According to Wen Fong, Wolfflin's insights, which are profound, are taken for granted in art history. 60 As an example Wen Fong cites the efforts by Western art historians and archaeologists to sort out, classify and place in chronological sequence the various motifs, symbols and inscriptions on the bronze vessels of the Shang and Zhou periods in China. 61

This present attempt to approach and understand the role of the craftworker is, to some extent, different from these three theories which do not seem to address the whole situation. They seem to ignore the broader social circumstances and the conditions of patronage and need in which most craftworkers appear to have been situated. And they seem to ignore subsequent influences and pressures that may impinge even upon the most intimate, immediate and perhaps unconscious, decisions that a craftworker may have to make during the processes of artefact and image-making. All these can ultimately affect the finished artefact and its imagery.

Bahn also has something to say about stylistic sequencing as an approach to imagery. On the topic of Upper Paleolithic imagery he questions Leroi-Gourhan's and Breuil's approach to imagery through style, and maintains that:

60 ditto, p. 24. But even this stylistic approach has been queried in the last twenty years by various Western scholars whose interests seem to emphasise fundamental problems of language, semantics and meanings, rather than the unique visuality of a work, and all that this infers.
61 ditto, pp. 24 to 28, where he discusses briefly the research by Karlgren, Guo Moruo, Timperley, Loehr and Davidson and their various approaches to the history and development of China's bronze art.
Paleolithic art did not have a single beginning and a single climax... (but) many of both, varying from region to region and from period to period... periods of stagnation, improvement and even regression, with different influences, innovations, experiments and discoveries coming into play... the sporadic appearance of genius during this timespan cannot really be fitted into a general scheme..."  

To summarise, he postulates that the development of art was complex and circuitous "with occasional flashes of brilliance"; that there was a wide range of talent and ability, from crude beginners' work to masterpieces. He implies an integral and reflective role for the makers of imagery as their work inevitably fluctuates and changes over a lifetime, and this would seem to agree with the present discourse in its context of artefact imagery that is being considered from many different regions and timespans.

It appears that the craftworker controls, to some extent, the development or the changing of imagery in a given culture or period. The techniques needed to materialise a physical representation of a concept or an object (such as, for instance, plant, bird, flower, animal or human forms) has to be learned by the craftworkers involved. The visual translation of an idea, at any reasonable level of expertise and clarity, is time and labour intensive because it must involve much trial and error, and experimentation. Every medium has its own specific characteristics, possibilities and limitations. Once the techniques for producing an image have been learned it is much easier, less time-consuming and therefore cheaper, for the craftworker to use the same learned sets of imagery, or variations of it, wherever possible. This pragmatic necessity must always have been responsible for a great deal of repetitive use of known and acceptable imagery, and for a slowing up of the creative urge to develop new and experimental imagery.  

And of course it must always be easier to make imagery that is already acceptable to the

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62 Bahn, Vertut, op. cit., pp. 64–65. His statement that "art is produced by individual artists..." should be read in the context of this thesis as referring to the individual output of each artist who may also be involved cooperatively in a group to produce a complex artefact.

community; it is easier to take the line of least resistance and continue to produce well-known and acceptable imagery rather than to take risks in experimenting with untried and unfamiliar imagery.
Substitution of Material

One of the commonest practices in the making of artefacts is the substituting of one material for another. There can be several different reasons for this. The first is an attempt to copy an object and its imagery made in expensive materials with labour-intensive techniques in a different medium which costs less and which perhaps may be labour-saving. A second reason may be the unavailability of the original material. A third may be the existence of a potentially profitable market demand (perhaps in a lower price range) which does not necessarily demand that the object be made in the original material. A fourth may be that there is, in the local consumer demand, a preference for one material over another, and this may arise out of religious, social or political circumstances.

The ramifications of changes in material are central to the issues involved in the study of artefacts and their imagery, and they are referred to frequently throughout this present study. But it is useful to collate these here so that the importance of this common practice can be appreciated as fundamental in relation to the transference of concepts into three-dimensional physicalities.

The transfer of materials from one region to another has been a major factor in the visualising of many concepts. Even as early as the Natufian culture carnelian travelled by some means which we do not know, from the Indus Valley to Palestine. It was found as part of a necklace which included shells from the Mediterranean seaboard. The Egyptians, during the Middle Kingdom period, brought turquoise and apatite from the mines at Sinai, and used these copper-bearing rocks with imported carnelian and lapis lazuli in the magnificently inlaid jewellery and other artefacts of the Pharoahs (fig. 10). The technique of inlay had been practised by the Mesopotamians from at least the late

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64 An example can be found at the Nicholson Museum, The University of Sydney, and dated to c.5,500 BC.
fig. 10. Double small container, gold, silver, inlaid lapis lazuli, turquoise, carnelian, red limestone, used for unguent. Tutankhamun tomb c. 1334 BC, Egypt.
fourth millennium BC and for example, they, in turn, had used lapis lazuli imported from Iran for the eyes of statuary, and for the beard of the bull on the lyre found in the Royal Graves of Ur.) The time and labour involved in cutting precisely the minute pieces of stone for inlay was considerable, and in Egypt this practice was gradually dropped as techniques for cloisonné enamelling were developed. The change from stone inlay to cloisonné affected the stylistic detail of Egyptian jewellery; it became more intricate and smaller in scale, but in the process lost the tough, handsome vigour of earlier jewellery, imparted by the inlaid stones (fig. 11). Whether the reasons for the importation of foreign materials lay in the desire to imitate imported (and therefore expensive) artefacts, or whether the raw materials were brought by traders in the hope of selling or bartering them is not known. But implicit in the use of new materials is the development of new techniques to deal with their potential. And this brings the discourse back to the main topic, the substitution of materials.

It is not easy for a maker of artefacts to copy, precisely, the style, detail and spirit of an image which has been made by someone else, perhaps in a different region or epoch. (The concern here is not with forgers who aim to deceive by attempting to imitate perfectly, but with the craftworker whose handwork will always carry, however slightly, something of his or her own characteristics.) When different materials are used there are inevitable changes which may alter something of the feeling or sense of the imagery in spite of any attempts to copy the original exactly. And stylistic differences are likely to develop because different techniques must be used which suit a new material. The differences can be useful however to the historian because such changes can provide clues to the passage of concepts and knowledge from one culture or from one epoch to another.
Fig. II. Flexible collar of vulture goddess, Nekhbet, gold with glass inlay, imitating inlay of semi-precious stones, on Tutankhamun mummy, c. 1334 BC, Egypt

(W. Tut)
There are many examples of the substitution of materials. In ancient China for instance, during the Tang dynasty (618-906 AD) there was widespread copying of metal objects, many of which had been imported via the Silk Roads from cultures such as the Sassanian and the Persian. Bowls, platters and pitchers, originally made in copper or bronze, were imitated in ceramic material, either thrown in ceramic (earthenware or stoneware) material or moulded in the porcellainous material that was being developed at the time by the potters in China.\textsuperscript{65} They imitated the long-spouted copper or bronze pitchers, or ewers, imported from Iran, and the Islamic Seljuk potters, in turn imitated the Chinese porcelain pitchers of the Ming dynasty, in white-glazed earthenware (figs. 12 a., b., c.). The chased or repoussé imagery of the metal ewers was copied by carving and incising into the clay. The intrinsic nature of fine clay tends to give a softer, more subtle edge and outline both to the form of the artefact and to the imagery carved into it. Also, the skin of glaze produces a softer, sometimes translucent and more subtle surface than that of polished metal, and it can lie more thickly in the carved hollows than on the rest of the form. The effect is totally different, therefore, from that achieved with metal and metal forming techniques. That is not to say that the ceramic artefacts were any worse, any better, or not as acceptable; they were simply different, and as a result a new oeuvre was developed which was in vogue right through to the Yuan period (1279 to 1368 AD) when the decorative motifs began to be painted on, rather than carved into, the pots. Their long thin and elegant spouts and handles were eminently suitable when made in metal which has natural tensile strength, but forms such as these were not really suitable for making in stoneware or porcelain, and one wonders how many spouts and handles warped inevitably in the firing, or were subsequently broken, with the result that the pots had to be discarded. Also, the rigours of usage must have taken a toll on these fragile porcelain forms as it still does on even sturdier spouts and handles which are applied to modern ceramics, such as teapots, jugs and cups. But even if there were a high percentage of

a. (left) Chinese Tang earthenware ewer influenced by Sassanian metalwork (right), and by Sassanian archer-on-horseback imagery.

b. Seljuk imitation of Chinese porcelain and imagery; blue over white glaze.

c. Chinese underglaze blue + white porcelain ewer. 14th C AD.
wastage in the production of the Chinese porcelain ewers it is quite likely that, despite this, they would still have been cheaper to produce in ceramic than in metal.

There are countless other examples of this kind of substitution of one material for another, and which appear, simply, to have been solutions to the problems of producing cheaper artefacts. There is an example in the bronze vessel shape known as “hu” which apparently developed its particular vocabulary of forms, for use as a wine vessel, during the Anyang period of the Shang dynasty (c. 1,650–1,128 BC) (fig. 13 a.). By the fifth century BC (Eastern Zhou) both the form and the moulded decoration on the “hu” had become more subtle and curvilinear (fig. 13 b.). During the late Zhou (late second century BC) this container form was being decorated with inlaid gold in exquisitely fine abstracted and curvilinear motifs (fig. 13 c.). During the Han the “hu” form was being made both in painted ceramic (fig. 13 d.) and in lacquered wood with decorative motifs in red on black (fig. 13 e.). The decorative motifs on this last example, however, are a poor imitation only of the earlier authoritative Shang and the elegant Zhou bronze containers. Although there is no documented evidence that some were made for a lower price range, it is clear that the cost of moulded and inlaid bronze would have been far greater than the cost of lacquer or painted ceramic. And the question that can be asked is, were there market forces at work rather than changes in the taste and circumstances of the patronage of the times? And were less costly copies of the bronze “hu” also made during the Shang and Zhou periods? As far as is known at present, there does not seem to be evidence of this.

Another outstanding example is the substitution of ceramic for jade. The “cong” ritual jades are believed to have been used by the Emperor, together with the flat circular “bi”, in the ritual worship of Earth and Heaven. The “cong” vary greatly in height, but all are cylindrical internally and squared on the outside, and have come to be generally
fig. 13a. Bronze "hu", Shang, 1300 - c. 1030 BC. H. 51 cm
(G.B.R.C.)
Fig. 13b. Bronze "hu", China, Eastern Zhou period (early 5th C BC)
height 44.2cm, weight 5.77kg.

(G.B.A.Ch.)
fig. 13c. Bronze “hu”, China, Western Han period (late 2nd c BC) height 44.2cm, weight 6.55kg.

(G.B.A.Ch.)
fig. 13 d. Painted ceramic vessel based on bronze "hu". China, Han, 2nd C BCE. Height 48 cm.

(A.A.Ch.)
fig. 13e. Painted lacquer vessel based on bronze "hu". Mawangdui tomb, China; Han 2nd C B.C. height 57cm (A+A.Ch.)
acknowledged as symbols of the Earth (figs. 14 a., b., c., and 15 a., b., c.). Similar “cong” forms were made during the Song dynasty in porcelainous stoneware, with a delicately translucent and pale bluish glaze, known as ching-p’ai, which was no doubt intended to approximate a translucent jade.

The second and third reasons for the substitution of material occurred when the potters in cultures such as Islam (from the ninth century AD) and the countries of Western Europe (from the fifteenth century on) attempted to imitate imported Chinese porcelains (figs. 16, 17 a., b.). This was because the materials needed to make Chinese hard-paste porcelain materials were unrecognised for their porcelain-making potential in the West. Western potters did not discover for centuries China’s closely guarded secret of how to make hard-paste porcelain, and in their efforts at imitation they used different materials and produced white-glazed and painted earthenwares and stonewares. The fineness, translucence and subtlety of the Chinese bodies was unattainable in these materials, but the so-called majolica, delft and faience wares which were the results of the imitative efforts of European potters, filled the huge and eager international demand throughout Europe for affordable goods that looked somewhat like the costly Chinese porcelains that were so prized, sought after and collected by the wealthy. These earthenware and stoneware imitations supplied a ready market, were far cheaper to produce, and therefore could be afforded by the majority of the people. But these classes of ceramics grew to become an magnificent oeuvre in their own right with their own special and unique characteristics that have been appreciated by the market place ever since. And they have become prized and expensive objects sought after and collected by the connoisseur.

The fourth reason for substitution, that is social, religious or political preference, applies to Islamic artefacts. Where earlier Central Asian and Western cultures used gold, silver and precious stones in the making of artefacts for the rulers and the wealthy in the

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figs. 14 b. and c. "Cong" tubes, brown-grey jade. Neolithic. b. 7.3 cm, c. 33.2 cm. Also recorded as used by Emperor in worship of the Earth.

(Inv. Ch.)
fig. 15a. "Cong" tube, white jade with brown markings. Song (960-1279 AD) China. Height 19 cm.

fig. 15b. "Bi" disc, green jade, with relief dragons. Qing (1644-1911 AD) China. Diameter 20 cm.

fig. 15c. Pendant, white jade, inscribed and cut. Qing, Qianlong mark. China (1735-96 AD) Height 10.5 cm.
fig. 16. Bowl, white tin-glaze on earthenware, painted in impure cobalt-blue and copper-green; Mesopotamia, 9-10th C AD.

(T.G. Pott)
fig. 17a. Small deep bowl, with Coptic priest, censer and tree (or 'Ankh' sign); white clay slip over buff earthenware, clear gloss glaze and gold/bronze lustre. Silhouette figures and decorative incising into pigment is slightly reminiscent of Greek black-figure vase painting.

(Cairo, early 12th C AD.)
fig 17b. Small ewer; white tin-glaze with deep brown lustre.
Based on beaten metal forms; Blue glaze inside. Rayy, Persia
late 12th C AD.

(T.G. Pott.)
community, the dictates of Mohammed precluded the use of such materials as worldly. As a result food and wine containers for the rich and powerful, which would have been made of precious materials, were made in less costly materials such as ceramic and copper and bronze (figs. 17 a., b.). And the craftworkers of Islam, and the potters in particular, in all the regions from Iran to Spain, enjoyed valuable patronage from the courts of the Caliphs. They were also in a position to experiment and develop their white tin-glazes and their blue and polychrome painted decoration, in imitation of the Chinese, and even made some tentative efforts to produce what is now known as soft-paste imitations of porcelain clay bodies, in the never-ending search for a substitute for the fine hard-paste porcelains of China. And so it can be said that the religious veto on precious metals and stones was responsible to a great extent for the invention by the Islamic potters of an oeuvre that has come to be known as majolica, tin-glaze or delft ware. They invented opaque white tin-glazes, which the Italian sculptor, modeller, goldsmith and potter, Luca della Robbia, reinvented in the early fifteenth century, and which was used for the developing Italian oeuvre of maioliche, or majolica ware, discussed above.67 Glass was also developed in the Islamic countries to an extraordinarily high standard, both in form and in imagery. Although founded on older Romano-Syrian traditions and skills, Islamic glass forms frequently imitated metal forms, especially as mosque lamps and decanters, and their imagery can be seen to have followed much of the motifs and stylistics of manuscript illustration, carpet decoration and ceramics. And drinking vessels, such as goblets and beakers, were also made in painted glass instead of in metals. It is thought that in their quest for the excellent imitation of shining metal surfaces they were largely responsible for the development of metallic lustre glazes on glass and ceramics (figs. 17 a., b., 18 a., b., c.).

fig. 18a. (left) Islamic glass decanter, Chinese influenced cloud-collar and lobed panels; early 14th C AD.

fig. 18b. (right) Islamic glass bottle; mixed Islamic and Chinese stylistics and imagery; late 13th C AD.

fig. 18c

Islamic glass cup, reminiscent of Roman "skyphos"
The Physical, the Poetic and the Spiritual

Is it possible to appreciate fully or to do justice to the vision, the spirit, the enterprising ingenuity and the creative skills of the ancient makers of two- and three-dimensional imagery? Implied answers to this kind of rhetorical question appear to be informed by the various disciplines which are usually concerned with the imagery made by humankind for one reason or another. When the imagery of pre-literate communities is under discussion all that is left to us as evidence of the well-springs of poetic and spiritual creativity are the fortuitously preserved physical remnants of lost, decayed or overtaken cultures.

One of the earliest examples of the inventive use of materials comes in what is referred to as the Neanderthal flower burial in the Shanidar Cave in northern Iraq. Dated to c. 60,000 BP the remains of a young male body was found that had been ringed with flowers, as evidenced by fossilised pollen grains.68 This is a case of the creative use of found materials, rather than of the making of artefacts. The discoverer, R. S. Solecki, sees that there was a significant level of invention and metaphysical reasoning or belief in this act of the flower-arranging. (The collecting of the bunches of flowers from the surrounding hill country would have been, in itself, a time-taking exercise that required dedication and belief.) There is the possibility that the flowers were laid there for perceived healing powers, but this cannot be proven. Solecki proposes that the association of deliberately placed bunches of flowers adds a dimension to our knowledge of humanness, and indicates the presence of metaphysical awareness. This is fortified, he says, by our knowledge that the Neanderthal did also practise funerary rites.

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68 Ralph S. Solecki, “Shanidar IV: a Neanderthal Flower Burial in Northern Iraq”; Science, Vol. 190, No. 28, 1975, pp. 880–881; and “The Flowers Found with Shanidar IV, a Neanderthal Burial in Iraq” Science, Vol. 190, No. 7, pp. 562–564. The pollen grains found were from flowers which still grow in Iraq, and some of which are regarded as herbs with medicinal properties.
It is from early examples such as this, and the even earlier find at Bilzingsleben, that conclusions can be drawn when considering origins of deliberate marks and activities. Unlike the Shanidar burial however, it is unlikely that any spiritual or poetic inferences might be drawn from the markings on the Bilzingsleben bones, despite the fact that these marks indicate clear evidence of human intelligence, skill and ingenuity. These two examples show totally different kinds of approaches to the making of imagery, but it could be postulated that both arose out of perceived need, aspiration or a desire to exercise imaginative or creative potential.

Archaeology and anthropology are directly concerned with material and contextual evidence, and the physical and metaphysical conclusions to be drawn from it. There seems to be a need also to consider some of the most significant kinds of material evidence; the artefact image itself, as a phenomenon in its own right, with its own procedural structures; an outcome of the exigencies of materials, individual skills, and community perception, and the discipline that arises out of such a framework. Leroi-Gourhan, for instance, saw a kind of academic discipline in the art of the Upper Paleolithic:

"...The horses on the spear-throwers, or on the carved silhouettes, the ibexes and the reindeer, impose the existence during the Middle Magdalenian of a real syntax of drawing ...This finding is far removed from the idea one might form of a primitive draftsman who, suddenly inspired by the sight of an appetizing bison, proceeds to draw it with his flint burin...it is obvious that they are just as 'academic' as the horses in English sporting prints or in Chinese painting...This academism provides us with valuable pointers when we pass from the decorated objects to the art of the caves... For instance, the spear-thrower with the rearing horse...which dates from Magdalenian IV, can serve as a key when it comes to interpreting the several dozens of horses painted or engraved in the caves."

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Because of this there is a need to consider, not only the craft skills, experience, expertise, and the inventive imagination of the makers themselves, but also their ability to project their vision, and their community’s mythologies and beliefs, into some kind of disciplined artefact imagery. The imagery can show evidence of creative insight, of humankind’s awareness of the non-physical (and of the subconscious?), even in earliest times. And it can prove that ancient humankind was as articulate as twentieth century societies in its ability to encapsulate, symbolise and conceptualise visually. Of this, Leroi-Gourhan writes:

“...When more than one subject is represented (on a decorated object), the groupings too are of a different character from those we find in cave decorations...The most common grouping of the cave walls – horse/bison – does not appear (on pierced staffs)...Elaborate decoration hardly appears before the Magdalenian, but that it arose out of far older tradition is attested by scattered rough works that may go as far back as the Aurignacian (c.29,000 BP).... The invariability of the subjects represented, which we find in every category of object or on the cave walls, pre-supposes deep-rooted oral traditions and testifies to a precisely codified body of beliefs...”

This kind of evidence (as well as the subjectively biased evidence of our own eyes) proposes that in Paleolithic imagery, long before the advent of Neolithic and post-Neolithic imagery, and long before the advent of written language, there existed the capability and potential for the translation into physical form of poetic and powerful visual expression, and the communication of aspects of the human spirit. It also proposes (as does Lévi-Strauss in his works) that there were systems of mythology which lent themselves to physical adaptation or translation into visual marks or forms. And Leroi-Gourhan also states:

70 See footnote above, on “Shanidar IV”.
72 Leroi-Gourhan, The Art of Prehistoric Man In Western Europe, op. cit., p. 63.
73 ditto, p. 80.
"...abbreviated representation is not a secondary phenomenon in Paleolithic art:...the symbolic signs make their appearance at the outset, and the earliest were still in use during the last period... Nor is it a local phenomenon;...from Spain into central Europe the same signs stand for the same figurative representations...from the first to last the meaning of the signs, even of the most abstract ones, was clear to all who used them... This is proved by repeated revivals of realism in every period...such facts can only find their explanation in a body of generalized oral traditions, as may occur with a body of religious traditions..."74

Whatever time-span or cultural circumstance is reviewed, the individual's facility for poetic insight seems to have existed universally, from time immemorial, and made possible the creation (when?) and the development of, what Lévi-Strauss maintains are mythic systems:

"...every myth...must have its origin in an individual act of creation...but in order to achieve the status of myth, the created work must cease precisely to be individual...behind each mythic system there loom others...which speak through it and echo each other down the ages..."75

If it is assumed that there is some connection with mythic thought behind the making of most objects and their imagery, then it is useful to quote here Lévi-Strauss's opinions on the "nature of mythic thought";

"...Every myth confronts a problem, and it deals with it by showing that it is analogous to other problems, or else it deals with several problems simultaneously and shows that they are analogous to one another...No real object ever corresponds to this set of images, which mirror each other...we could say that a myth is a system of logical operations defined by the "it's when..." or "it's like..." method... A solution that is not a real solution to a specific problem is a way of relieving intellectual uneasiness and even existential anxiety when an anomaly, contradiction, or scandal is presented as the

74 ditto, p. 80.
manifestation of a structure of order that can be perceived more clearly in aspects of reality (such as artefacts) that are less disturbing to the mind and the emotions..." 76

This is to say that the subject matter of artefacts and their imagery have been involved with the myths and beliefs of the community as concrete mechanisms, in the creative leaps of visual expressiveness. But also, and most importantly and unavoidably, artefact subject matter has had to take into account, or exploit, available materials, techniques, and cultural attitudes and mores connected with the processes of the craft itself. The human spirit of the individual and of the community, linked with developing technical skills, has lain behind the achievement and the shaping of artefact imagery from time immemorial. Is this also at the heart of the phenomenon of creativity? An attempt will be made later to understand something about the creative urge, and the need for visual expression and communication through the use of materials, and the external forces which impinge upon them.

All that is left for us to study from most ancient cultures are those sites, objects and images which have survived through the millennia. Like non-material activities such as dance or ritual, objects or marks made on ephemeral, or perishable, materials have also disappeared. So assessments have to be made from the evidence of fortuitously found objects and imagery, made of materials that have not perished with time, or have not been transformed into other objects. An image need not necessarily be made by human hand; it can be a “found” object, a mark upon a stone, a rock with a potentially useful or intriguing shape, a fallen tree-branch or a piece of bone. In the present study they are called “images” when they have been recognised and utilised, either for the making of artefacts, or used in their existing or altered state, as artefacts. The crucial factor in the found object/image is the human perception and reaction to it which has bestowed upon it a significance beyond its primary existence. Leroi-Gourhan states:

76 ditto, The Jealous Potter, op. cit., p. 171.
"...from the close of the Mousterian on (c. 40,000–35,000 BP) the collecting of natural oddities signaled mankind’s earliest aesthetic or religious interest of which we have knowledge... The first objects to be suspended make their appearance at the beginning of the Chatelperronian (c. 35,000 BP)... These are teeth of carnivorous or herbivorous animals, some of them provided with circular holes, others with a number of small grooves traced with a flint around the base of the tooth..."77

Cognition, recognition and utilisation of a found object, therefore, are first steps in the process of transforming it into what we, in the twentieth century, deem to be an artefact that may contain poetic or spiritual potential. Whether an object is found or made, the perceptive capacities of the viewer are essential for the judgement to be made that poetry or spirituality may be seen to exist in an artefact, and this is so, whether or not the maker or user may have perceived these qualities. This exercise of judgement is, in its very nature, subjective, however universal and well documented are similar judgments made by others. This calls to mind, again, the Platonic argument that “good” art is “poetic”, and to be preferred (and therefore superior) to “bad” or mimetic art. This argument, discusses the qualities of visual representation in painting. We are discussing the imagery of artefacts, and while the intervention of the exigencies of materials and skills may play a far greater role in the final representation of the subject matter of an artefact and its imagery, the argument can be seen to be related, also, to the imagery of artefacts.

To refer back to the cultural attitudes and mores inherent in the physical processes of the particular craft that is used to make a given artefact, it is apparent, in some cultures at least, that even the basic materials themselves have behind them many varied and convoluted mythic systems of beliefs which spill over into the processes of the actual making of the object. Various American Indian cultures, for example, connect clay, and the pots made from it, with such beliefs. The pueblo Indians see that their pots have

77 Leroi-Gourhan, op. cit., pp. 74–77. Since this was written the findings by D. ad U. Mania at Bilzingsleben have been published, and these were discussed earlier.
necks, bellies and souls; they are metaphoric expressions of the human form. And, as mentioned above in the chapter on The Role of the Craftworker, the Jivaro culture links clay with marital jealousy. The southern Californian Indians believe that early humankind was made of clay. Lévi-Strauss explores these mythic systems in great detail.78

The connection between the potter’s work and that of the metal smith has been the subject also, of much myth-making in ancient cultures. The fact that both craft processes use fire has linked them together, and in some societies, has placed them physically outside village confines or in a special section, and as a result, beyond the pale of normal village life. The ability to control fire so that it can metamorphose the raw materials of bronze, iron and clay has been responsible, also, for the attribution of supra-normal or magical powers to them and their families. In Africa, the metalsmiths of the Benin culture, and their families, lived together, in their own quarter in Benin City, apart from the rest of the community, and when one considers the noise, smells and potential danger attached to the smelting and fashioning of metals, this is not surprising. But it would also enhance the building up of popular mythologies around these specialised families or groups, whose work was closely connected with the patronage of the King.79 According to Lévi-Strauss, in popular European thought the potter’s work was viewed as a paler version of the smith’s work. And, as American data from the Indian clay cultures proves, the potters, who lived and worked near their sources of clays, and away from the village community, also became the repository of magical and mystical values. But in European Renaissance societies, although pottery was practised by groups or by several members of one family, as in the case of the Della Robbias, potters do not appear to have lived apart, but as respected members within a community.80 And Luca della Robbia, and other members of his family who worked in ceramic sculpture, were in the first place,

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distinguished members of their community as sculptors in marble, wood and metalwork. Regarding the pottery makers of the North American Indians, however, Lévi-Strauss points out:

"...pottery was often practiced by groups instead of by isolated individuals. There were families of potters, and everyone put a hand to the wheel...a potters’ workshop, sometimes a group of workshops, would select a spot outside a village, close to the clay deposit necessary to their trade... In such cases potters formed a small society distinct from the village community...the potter took his products to the market or the fair or left them with a retailer... In their day-to-day activities, people did not come into close contact with him..."81

The practical reasons for living and working close to the source of the material to be used is evident. Clay is heavy, and the carrying of it absorbs both time and energy, and is therefore to be avoided or minimised wherever possible. Is it possible to infer that some of the mythic thought that has been built around the potter (as well as other craftworkers) is related to the special position held by the craftworker, who, sometimes of necessity, lived and worked away from the rest of society? Another physical cause of myth-making, in the case of, say, the Jivaro Indians, could have been the clay itself.82 The most plastic clay, and therefore the most satisfactory to use for the production of vessels, is secondary clay. Primary clay is weathered and decomposed white feldspathic rock. In most ancient times, some of these deposits of primary clay have been washed away by rain from their sites of origin, and deposited in what eventually became lake beds or the banks of streams.83 It happens that, almost without exception, materials foreign to the primary clay are also deposited and mixed with it. Some of these materials are inorganic (such as metal oxides). But sometimes there is also an accretion of organic materials in and around the deposited clay, (that is, plant and animal matter), which means that the inherent decaying process of organic matter takes place in intimate relationship with the

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82 ditto, p. 33.
deposited clay. The decayed materials that are inorganic can colour the clay and change its whiteness, permanently, to various shades of greys to buffs and red-browns. The organic decayed materials, which are carbonaceous, can also colour the original white clay that has been deposited, and give temporary grey to black discolouration which can be fired out, however, so that the original whiteness is eventually restored. Also, the various odours which are given off in the process of organic decay can, depending upon the find-site, become entrapped with the carbonaceous materials in the clay, and linger in it as it is collected by the potter. It is this organic decay which is thought to provide the plasticity that is a valuable and necessary property in clay intended to be thrown or coiled. But the unpleasant smell of decayed organic matter can occasionally be strong enough to be associated with faeces. If this situation happened with the clays used by the various Indian potters, it is feasible to suggest that it would further strengthen the anal mythologies which Lévi-Strauss quotes, and which also concern a woman potter who was the cause of a marital jealousy myth. She was also claimed to be Earth woman, initiator of pottery, either the mythical creator of clay, or the woman metamorphosed into clay.84 There is also an intriguing connection with clay in ancient Mesopotamian creation mythology where the demiurge Mukat modelled human beings out of clay, put them out to bake in the sun, and depending upon the degree of exposure, they became white, red or black.85

Just as the foreign matter becomes entrapped in secondary clays, so the community's mythologies become entrapped within the craft mythologies of pot-making traditions, and persist within the finished and fired pots themselves. Especially has this been so in the case of the pueblo Indian potters in the southwestern states of the U.S.A. The late nineteenth century revival of their ancient pottery traditions and imagery was largely tourist- and market-oriented as a result of the building of the railways, but the spiritual and mythological memories still linger even in the somewhat commercialised imagery and

85 ditto, p. 151.
the forms of the pots, which are still identified with the human body parts and the human spirit. And in most cases, it is the women who make the pots, while the men paint the decorations, although this system is breaking down as both the men and women in the potter families see the profit to be had in satisfying the market demand created by the museum curators and the tourist.86

**Diffusion and Local Invention**

Davis defines the term “diffusion” as follows:

“...Diffusion refers to the processes whereby an idea or information is communicated through specific channels within a specific social context over time... To say that a material innovation was adopted means that one or more individuals, having learned about an object or physical trait from someone else, proceeded to make or acquire the innovation for themselves... Manifest adoption may occur when the new adopter either replicates the innovation (stimulus diffusion) or obtains it through exchange...diffusion is not a cause of the spread or adoption of cultural traits but only a way of referring to a class of processes that are engendered by a diverse range of cultural factors.”

Davis also sets up a “general framework for investigation of stylistic diffusion” which he says:

“...must provide for the consideration of the following elements: (1) the object, or kind of entity, that diffuses...(2) the units between which diffusion occurs; (3) the media of diffusion (i.e.the ways that adopters acquire information about the object); and (4) the social context in which diffusion occurs... In a given social context all innovations might be ranged according to five empirically interrelated but logically distinct attributes; (1) relative advantage; (2) compatibility; (3) complexity; (4) trialability; and (5) observability... The focus of enquiry is thus shifted from any innate qualities of innovations to the social and cultural contexts within which innovations are introduced... Although the results of diffusion may be identified in terms of similarities between settlements (or assemblages), innovations are only transmitted between settlements in a secondary, figurative sense... Patterns of diffusion between communities occur as a result of patterns in interactions among individuals...diffusion is a product of communication...”

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88 ditto, pp. 61–63.
These definitive propositions appear to be useful and straightforward. But the condition of diffusion inevitably presupposes, also, that other conditions exist which make it possible to differentiate the condition of diffusion from other processes. Therefore, at the extreme end of differentiation, an opposite condition must exist; that of local invention, or "spontaneous generation". This proposition is put forward and discussed by Wittkower, where he states that the term "diffusion", when used in relation to the imagery of artefacts, denotes the opposite of local invention or "spontaneous generation" (to use Wittkower's term). He sees these two theoretical methods as antagonistic to each other:

"...For almost a century ethnologists have worked with two antagonistic theories; diffusion of techniques, idea, concepts, and art form versus independent, 'spontaneous generation' of culture in different parts of the world... These mutually exclusive working methods have been hotly debated ever since A. Bastian, in the second half of the 19th century, propounded his evolutionary thesis that similar cultural characteristics arise at parallel phases in the development of different societies... For the high civilizations with literary traditions diffusionism has been developed into a universally accepted technique of research; in art historical controversies the degree and character of diffusion may be debated, but the principle of diffusion is not called into question... The ultimate test of diffusion lies, of course, in the proof of the existence of definitely traceable roads of migration..." 

Both these theoretical methods can pose certain problems however. When some forms of visual imagery are studied, it becomes apparent that sometimes it may not be possible to make a clear distinction between the two. Frequently diffusion and spontaneous generation are mingled in the imagery of an artefact, and it can be difficult to separate precisely the two sources of production. And if the term "local invention" is used to indicate spontaneous generation (in order to clarify the intended meaning of Wittkower's

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90 ditto, p. 10.
fig. 19a. Terracotta oinochoe (wine jug); Rhodian orientalising style with griffins, sphinx, birds, goats, deer, and formalised floral ornament. 650-640 BC, Greece.

(G. A. A. le.)
phrase), it will be seen that the term "local" is a relative term that cannot be universally defined by one or another set of parameters. What is "local"? Or for that matter, what is "spontaneous"? It may indicate, in some instances, a comparatively small area, or a comparatively brief time-span (for example, the city of Ur in the first or third quarter of the third millennium BC), or it may indicate a whole state or region, or a long era (for example, the culture of ancient Egypt, from Unification of the Lower and Upper Kingdoms, around 3,000 BC, to the beginning of the New Kingdom c. 1,550 BC).

Political boundaries and power structures can change in a short space of time without simultaneously affecting community conceptualisations that can be the basis for the production of artefacts and their imagery. Frequently it has been the regions at the farther edges of an economic structure that have been the birthplaces of significant change in the conceptualisation of artefact imagery, because these are the regions whose links with the centre of influence were probably weaker, while at the same time they would have been in closer contact with other adjacent cultures. But this issue is not always quite so simple; and, as Davis says:

"...It has long been a general principle of diffusion research that the efficiency of diffusion is primarily (but not exclusively) an inverse function of geographic distance... The notion that cultural similarities decrease with distance from centers of innovations is at the heart of the gravity model of cultural interaction... This principle has always been thought to apply more directly to primary (intrasocietal) diffusion and less directly to secondary (intersocietal) diffusion on the grounds that societies' boundaries create obstacles to communication and the adoption of innovations, regardless of geographic distance... The principle that communication (and diffusion) decreases with distance from the innovator has been most closely studied by geographers... The principle is often referred to as either distance decay or the neighborhood effect..."91

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91 Davis, op. cit., p. 65.
There are many examples where a clear pattern can be cited of the movement of ideas and/or imagery from one relatively close region to another. One example is the appearance during the first half of the first millennium BC of West Asian iconography and stylistics in the Greek Ionian settlements on the western coast of Asia Minor. From there these motifs and stylistics of form and imagery were carried across the Aegean Sea to the Greek islands, and eventually to the cultural and trade centres of mainland Greece. Many of the Ionian coast and the island settlements were closer to the cultures of Asia Minor than they were to the cultural centres of mainland Greece, and eventually, over time, mechanisms and circumstances existed whereby a diffusionary process developed from Asia Minor into the mainland of Greece, and this affected deeply the content and style of Greek artefact imagery (figs. 19 a., b.). But this is only one small regional example from the huge range of diffusionary activities that continued over a long period, in several regions, stretching from North Africa, through Egypt, mainland and island Greece to Anatolia, Syria and Mesopotamia. From the times of the Mycenaean of the Bronze Age in Greece (second millennium BC) through to the Alexandrian Empire, there is an enormous amount of material evidence at an enormous number of sites in these regions, of the diffusion of mythologies, of cultural ideas, and of technical skills and stylistics. As well as architectural remains, ceramics form one of the major classes of material evidence. In their forms and in the decorative imagery painted upon them, there is ample evidence for a theory of diffusion. But there is also evidence in the imagery, of the ways in which imported iconographies have been transmuted, mingled with, and absorbed into local stylistics and iconographies. In many of these artefacts and their imagery it can be inferred that there is evidence both of diffusion and spontaneous generation or local invention, brought about by the complex trading, military and cultural contacts that were carried on. For instance, it is patently obvious that in the post-

92 Nikolaos Yalouris, Greek Art of the Aegean Islands, New York, U.S.A., Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979, pp. 17 to 22.


94 ditto, p. 2.
fig. 19b. Reliefs with orientalising influence and themes; winged Artemis with birds of prey and lions; Centaurs hold fawns; (reminiscent of Gilgamesh imagery). Repoussé electrum (gold/silver alloy) with pomegranate pendants. Rhodes 640-630 BC
**Fig. 95c** Gold diadem

Found on Kos
Rhodian, about 630–620 B.C.
Length, as preserved, 24 cm. (9 7/16 in.)
Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. 6242

(1975), p. 375, fig. 5a; R. Laffineur, L'Orfèvrerie rhodienne orientalisante (1978), p. 222, no. 159, pl. 19; Paris Cat. (1979), pp. 147–48, fig. 84.

Sphinxes alternate with rosettes of two types: those with twelve petals have, in the center, a goat's head with long horns. This type of diadem originated in Assyria and spread through Syria to Cyprus and the Greek part of the Mediterranean.
Orientalising period, in the mid-first millennium BC, the imagery and styles absorbed from Western Asia had been transmuted, especially on ceramic forms, into imagery that is recognised as unmistakably Greek, and thus offers possible evidence of both diffusion and the genius of local invention (figs. 19 a., b.). And Boardman provides two other clear, concise examples of the mixing of West Asian and Egyptian influences, and their transmutation into Greek artefact making and decoration. One is the Proto-attic (sixth century BC) amphora with the Artemis motif ("Mistress of the Animals") whose ancestry appears to be based in the ancient imagery of both Astarte and Gilgamesh (fig. 20). The other is the three alabastrons of the fifth century BC, referred to below (fig. 21).

But the diffusion of ideas and imagery is a two-way phenomenon. As Mallowan points out in the editorial foreword to Boardman’s work *The Greeks Overseas*, the diffusion of ideas and imagery between the Greeks and the peoples of the surrounding regions with whom they traded was, to some extent, reciprocal. And, as Mallowan adds:

"... And how fascinating it is to discover the imprint of the Greek genius in the most distant parts of the civilised world...at Pasargadae in Achaemenian Iran...(and) Persian sculptured draperies were to follow a Greek mode...and Susa was importing Greek vases... Greek pottery may be found in Babylon or Nubia, Greek bronzes on the Seine, and Urartian bronzes in Olympia...we find ourselves confronted by a flux of cosmopolitan trade..."  95

The proximity of the far older Anatolian and Levantine and Mesopotamian cultures, and their iconography, had influenced that of Greece at least from the time of the Mycenaean culture, surviving the so-called Dark Ages of the Dorian invasion, and re-appearing in the Geometric and Orientalising periods. The sea-borne trading expeditions of the Bronze Age Mycenaean to the coastal regions of Anatolia and the Levant, and the later re-establishing of Greek contacts and trading enclaves on these coasts, provided the earliest recorded opportunities for the transfer and the eventual diffusion of Western Asiatic

iconography into the Aegean sphere. But the adopted iconography did not remain unchanged in its new locations. It was absorbed into Greek culture, and altered in the process, so that there came to be an unmistakable Greekness in the work, although the fundamental imagery had been imported. In the editorial foreword to Boardman’s work, Mallowan begins:

“…We…trace the stages by which the Greeks had left their imprint east and west, beginning with the first steps that had already been taken by the Greek-speaking Mycenaeans at the end of the the Bronze Age…the most rewarding period…lies between the beginning of the 8th century BC and the aftermath of the Persian invasion of the 5th century BC…Shortly before 700 BC there was a powerful orientalising influence on Greek art which can be discerned through imports on Greek sites, but after 700 BC this eastern style was gradually transmuted and hellenized, as the Greeks brilliantly transformed eastern inspiration and made it their own…”  

Boardman records the return of the Greeks to places once visited five hundred years before by the Mycenaeans:

“(The tenth and ninth centuries)…saw…the regeneration of prosperity in Greece…and also the beginning of renewed interest in lands overseas and of migrations to new homes…a return to towns and islands in the east which already once had been visited by Mycenaean Greeks…Muskebi, near Halicarnassus (on the southwest coast of Ionia)…and two other sites in this area, have tombs with Proto-Geometric pottery…(9th century BC)…”  

According to Boardman there were close trading contacts between mainland Greece and Egypt. He provides evidence of this with illustrations of three alabastrons. One is made of clay, by the potter-painter Amasis of Athens, and the other is an almost identical form made in Egypt, of stone. A third alabastron is illustrated which is decorated with the painted figure of a Negroid man, which Boardman suggests indicates close contacts

96 ditto, p. XV.  
97 Boardman, ditto, p. 20.
between Greece and Egypt (fig. 21). He suggests also that, as the Greeks were inveterate travellers, it is not unlikely that Greek artists, as well as sea-traders and farmer-migrants might have travelled to Egypt.98

The foregoing evidence shows that both diffusion and local invention have been present in many examples of imagery, but that they are, nevertheless, two quite separate conditions of influence which may become inextricably mingled in the making of an image.

But it can be problematic, also, to make assumptions about what is a diffusionary influence and what is a product of local invention. When two or more images from different cultures or time-spans appear to have remarkable similarities, it might be excusable to say, without further enquiry, that they provide evidence of diffusionary activities of some kind; that they show clear evidence of the spread of idea, mythology, visual form, technique or material-usage from one region, culture or time-span to another. And conversely, if an image appears to be unique, that is, of spontaneous generation or local invention, this must indicate the lack of influences from outside, and that the existence of the image is due solely to local mythologies and circumstances, and to the creativity and skill resources of the community credited with its making.

If we now discuss the first condition, diffusion, this problem arises. Images from different cultures or periods might bear strong physical similarities to each other, and yet they cannot be the result either of premeditated, or accidental, contact between cultures that existed far apart in either time or geographical distance. One example is the dragon imagery of both Western and Oriental cultures. The list may also include, for instance, the spiral, the meander, and the concentric circle. Two answers can be proposed. The first is based on Jung’s theory of the archetype, and this is referred to below. The

98 ditto, pp. 150, 151.
second is that the human race in all its ethnic variations stems from one common physical ancestry, *Homo Sapiens*. Lévi-Strauss often refers to the implications of this latter theory in relation to mythologies surrounding the origins and nature of clay.99

Jung’s theory of the archetype is considered first. According to Jung:

“...the concept of the archetype...is derived from...repeated observation that...myths...of world literature contain definite motifs which crop up everywhere... These typical images and associations are what I call archetypal ideas...the archetype...is an irrepresentable, unconscious, pre-existent form that seems to be part of the inherited structure of the psyche...archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree...” 100

Examples of archetypal imagery include the circle, the spiral, the maze, the dragon, the griffin, the meander, the square. It is possible to find variations of archetypes such as these in cultures far apart in distance or time, and where it is not feasible to deduce diffusional causes. Local invention is the only logical assumption that can be made. Idea-content that may be associated with archetypal imagery will vary to a greater or lesser degree depending upon the way the image is visualised and used, or, as Jung says “...filled out with the material of conscious experience...” 101

It is interesting to make some comparisons here. They concern the known general body of European Upper Paleolithic imagery and that of post-Neolithic societies. In both the parietal and portable art of the former many abstract and geometric images have been identified, but to date no idea-content or meaning is certain. Neither is the significance known of other so-called abstract marks and schemata, although unproven theories

101  ditto, p. 411.
suggest that they may be notational. The fertility figurines and the representations of animals are generally assumed to have been connected in some way with ritual and ephemeral activities. But the general consensus of opinion so far seems to be that specialised behaviour or image-making was concerned more or less directly with the urges of survival. In Upper Paleolithic imagery no paintings, drawings or modelling are known of any figuration which might be classified as representing mythical or fantastic creatures. (Even the well-known and so-called "Sorcerer" image is categorised as a man dressed in an animal skin.) It was only after the passage of several thousand years that the imagery of mythical or fantastic creatures appears. These began to appear, as far as we know at present, in Neolithic and post-Neolithic cultures both on artefacts and in murals. These societies which developed into highly organised, sophisticated and urbanised cultures appear to have invented for themselves imagery which was universal in its intelligible forms, but which was visualised physically in many and varied sensible forms. And these appear to demonstrate Jung’s theory and description of archetype.

The many variations of universal imagery, such as the dragon and the griffin or the phoenix appear to have been attempts to visualise growing bodies of myths, social mores, rules, regulations, laws, conventional and metaphysical beliefs and taboos. In many cases it is believed that they were aimed at controlling and shaping community ideas, attitudes and behaviour patterns for the general good, but they could have been developed, also, for the benefit and success of those who were the most powerful in the community.


104 Lloyd, The Art of the Ancient Near East, op. cit., pp. 135–136. Four discernible griffins appear in what is assumed to be a Dedication scene, in the mural from the Palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari, dated c. 2000 BC. Also Wen Fong, (ed.) The Great Bronze Age of China, op. cit., pp. 103-104, pl.5, and fig. 23; (highly stylised dragon imagery, of the Shang dynasty, mid-second millennium BC, on a lidded bronze tripod container.)
The characteristics that may have been dominant in a community were to a large extent the result of physical, climatic and economic circumstances particular to the region or time-span. But there were other needs besides those of material survival and prosperity, and these also were, largely, universal. These concerns were to do with the metaphysical and with humanity’s perceived spiritual needs and awareness of its helplessness in a cosmos that was not understood. Figuration which symbolised superhuman power and the forces of Nature developed during the post-Neolithic era into complex mythologies, philosophies and religions. The common problems of the individual human being and his or her primitive and instinctual nature were, as Jung says, symbolised in the animal motif and in sacrifice. He says that even the most civilised of human beings must accept their powerlessness in the face of violent emotions which can erupt from the unconscious. It is not possible to tell, however, how much of the artefact imagery of the Upper Paleolithic era was the visual and physical expression of symbolism, even though it is generally accepted that some imagery of the epoch does seem to have been connected with ritual or beliefs of some kind, as evidenced by the finds in the Tuc d’Audubert cave in France.

If Jung’s theory of the archetype, as described above, is adopted then it must be assumed that race-memory might have been involved and that the Neolithic and post-Neolithic images of mythical creatures were created out of the collective unconscious, to be used as mechanisms for the communication of abstract concepts of common concern within a given group. This creation of imagery to express visually the concepts, about morality, tribal responsibilities and hierarchical positioning, that had developed as a result of settled living patterns and the beginnings of organised urbanisation, would seem to be the logical extension of the “archetypal image” theory which promotes the feasibility of local invention or spontaneous generation when imagery that is remarkably similar occurs in cultures that are totally separate.

The second theory accepts that, despite wide ethnic variations, common physical ancestry has programmed the human race to react in similar ways in similar circumstances. Humankind shares a common psyche and physiognomy, and therefore a shared propensity for similar reactions to universal problems, even though local exigencies will produce variations in the formal and stylistic outcomes. Similar circumstances can make possible the production of similar expressive visual imagery, in widely separated regions and epochs, because the universal nature of the problems of the physical and the spiritual, and the unsolved riddles of life, death, Nature and the universe, appear to have beset humankind everywhere and at all times. The communication of these universal and fundamental concerns appear to have produced, in the imagery of artefacts, "the mechanisms of mythic thought". As Zavriew writes:

"...he (Lévi-Strauss) has speculated 'that all mythology comes back finally to posing and resolving a problem of communication; and that the mechanisms of mythic thought, confronted by logical circuits so complex that it cannot make them all function together, consist of the connecting and disconnecting relays'..."\(^{107}\)

A prime example of this is the almost universal imagery of the so-called fertility goddess figurines. Although the forms, stylistics and techniques can be drastically different from one culture, or one epoch, to another, the idea of using a female form that is, frequently, obese, or heavily pregnant, as a visual, iconic expression of the concept of fertility has been very widespread. Leroi-Gourhan categorises the many variations in style, technique and material.\(^{108}\) These many variations, in different regions and epochs, are the result of local variations of the universal mythologies surrounding the archetypal concept of fertility, and the consequent local predispositions to style, as well as to the exigencies of the availability of technique and material. This can be demonstrated by observing the Lespugue Venus, carved out of mammoth bone, and found in the pre-Solutrean level in


\(^{108}\) Leroi-Gourhan, *The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe*, op. cit., fertility figurines, see (fig. 40).
the Haute Garonne (25,000–20,000 BP), which has nothing in common physically with
the stone-carved Willendorf Venus (25,000 BP), or with the Dolne Vestonice female
figurine of baked mud and bone (25,000 BP), or with the Grotte Grimaldi "Polichinelle"
which is carved out of green steatite. Expressed stylistically in all cases in
steatopagous female forms, the prime concern is believed to have been with the visual
expression of fertility, and therefore survival, and this appears to be common to all four
figurines; that fertility must be encouraged by the production (and, possibly, by the use
in ritual?) of three-dimensional icons of the fruitful female. It is the varying forms and
the use of different materials and techniques for the visual expression of the universal
concept that are unique to a group, region or epoch. Whether these were used in
connection with ritual or ceremony is not known, although other three-dimensional
objects have been found in remote areas of caves, difficult of access, which suggest that
special rituals of some kind were practised.

There is a uniqueness in the varying forms, despite the apparent universality of the
intelligible and fundamental concept, and it is this locally unique quality of the specificity
of the sensible forms, therefore, that must be the product of local invention. And the
fundamental concept of the necessity of fertility for survival, however universal, can be
postulated also as a product of local invention, born out of local needs. Whether there
was, through interaction between adjacent groups, a degree of diffusion of the idea of
this universal necessity, as well as of the technical mechanisms for the expression of the
basic fertility concept, has not yet been discovered.

Stylistic aspects of imagery that may be similar in unrelated cultures must also spring
partly from the fact that the anatomical means (the hand, eye and mind) are equally
available to all humankind for the expression of non-physical ideas. This must have been

109 ditto; also, Grahame Clark, "The First Half-Million Years", Stuart Piggott (ed.) Dawn of Civilisation,
op. cit., pp. 19–40; James Mellaart, "Roots in the Soi", also in Piggott, ditto, pp. 41–64.
the case in all circumstances, whether the maker was a member of an ancient nomad tribe in Central Asia, a craftsman in a ceramic workshop in sixth century Greece or a trained operator in a porcelain factory in Ming China. This pattern of argument can be applied to many other examples of artefact imagery, and specific artefacts and their imagery are discussed in a later section.

It becomes clear, therefore, that claims of local originality, and claims of diffusion, are frequently not clear-cut or separable from one another. The generic visual imagery that is conceptualised by one culture might well be a factor of diffusion when it is imported into another culture. But the adoptive society can add local invention, originality and ingenuity to it through the locally available materials and means of its making, and through the employment of style that is affected by local, culturally based perceptions and predispositions. This is the kind of process that typifies the Greek absorption and adaptations of foreign iconographies, as discussed above.

One of the basic factors, therefore, in the production of imagery of significant content, either on or in the form of the artefact, can be the fact that even the conceptual essence of an existing image is controlled, not only by the predispositions of the adoptive culture, but also by the disciplines inherent in the materials and techniques available and selected for the production of the artefact and the imagery in the adoptive society. Also, as stated above, new conceptual associations are likely to become factors of change when an artefact/image is transferred from one culture to another. Not only are the craftworkers of the adoptive society the product of their particular social, economic, political and climatic circumstance, but the techniques and materials which they select are likely to be at variance with those of the culture where the artefact and its imagery originated, and might therefore, have the potential to influence significantly the conceptual essence of the incoming imagery.
Arguments for and against local invention and/or diffusion have been published about one of the most fascinating bodies of artefacts and their imagery. This is the group of painted ceramics found at the Neolithic settlements of Yang-shao, Pan-shan, Pan-p’o (Ban-bo), Ma Chia Yao and Miao-ti-kou in north-central China, which is known by the type-site name of Yang-shao. Dated between c. 4,600–2,000 BC the oeuvre includes painted terracotta bowls, urns and storage jars, some of which were found in dwelling-sites, and some, with evidence of food contents, were found in opulent burials, with the bodies of the deceased (figs. 22 a.,b.,c., and 24).

If an analytical method of identification into media, style and technique were to be used the conclusion could be that the forms, technique and imagery were, to some extent at least, the result of the diffusion of ideas and expertise from Western Asian cultures, possibly through the medium of similar ceramic containers carried along the ancient nomadic routes across Asia. This theory was proposed and accepted by some in the West for the first few years after the first finds of these ceramics by Swedish archaeologist, J. G. Andersson, and who saw this theory as the only reasonable explanation for their comparatively sudden appearance in these regions of China. In his paper Andersson ponders the remarkable similarity between some of the Chinese Neolithic ceramics and the pottery produced before and contemporaneously in the Near East. After Andersson's first finds much work was done in the ensuing years, by Andersson and others, and a typology and a chronology were built up which support the view that the ceramic activities in the Neolithic north-central region of China were, after all, the result of local invention and development. The term “local”, however, refers to very wide areas of east, south and central China, where related ceramic remains have been found. And, as Huber points out, there are two opposing theories about the


**Fig. 23** Coiled earthenware bottle for carrying liquids. Coarse sandy clay, uneven open fire gives blackish surface. Nomad culture, Pazyryk, Siberia 5th C. BC. Froitz. Her Mus

**Fig. 26** Earthenware bowl-shaped hearth; raised coil, and scalloped edge; Aibom people, Sepik, PNG. (below) detail. TPPNG AGNSW

**Fig. 25** Earthenware jars, coiled decoration and scalloped edges. Middle Jomon, (3000-2000 BC); Japan.

Earthenware funerary urn with spiral borders and a wavy band in red and black. Pan-shan type. Neolithic period. Kansu Yang-shao culture. Height 42.5 cms, width 41 cms.


Earthenware funerary urn with spiral border and a wavy band in red and black. Pan-shan type. Neolithic period. Kansu Yang-shao culture. Height 43.5 cms, width 41 cms.

fig. 24

(AA1) MFEA
possible place of origin; the Nuclear Theory that Neolithic ceramic imagery originated in central China, and the older Two Culture Theory which proposes two distinct cultural systems in China.\textsuperscript{113}

In his paper, Cheng Te-K’un draws the conclusion that:

"... There is as yet no evidence to conclude that the ancient artists had received any direct influence from abroad..."\textsuperscript{114}

In his work, \textit{Cradle of the East}, Ho Ping-ti also sets out to demolish any theories of possible linkage between the Western and the Far Eastern Neolithic cultural styles, which were raised by Western scholars in the decade following the 1921 discoveries and identification of the Chinese Neolithic painted ceramics.\textsuperscript{115} He finds it necessary to question statements such as the following, by Andersson:

"... I noticed (in the Tripolje sherds) figures strikingly like our cowrie designs upon the Kansu urns... Miss Hagberg had, already, quite independently of me, connected the serrated designs of the death pattern of the Kansu pottery with the folklore elements studied by her... Dr. Hanna Rydh...called my attention to the similarity of the Kansu death pattern to the incised designs upon certain megalithic mortuary urns of Scandinavia..."\textsuperscript{116}

Ho refutes the possibility that there are diffusionary links between the pottery of the two cultures and quotes a later statement (1943) made by Andersson which, while questioning the idea of influence from the West on the Yang Shao pottery, still proposes a Western connection with the pottery of Ma Chang.\textsuperscript{117} Ho also classifies, in enormous

\textsuperscript{113} Huber, op. cit., pp. 6–9, 97–102.


\textsuperscript{115} Ping-Ti Ho, \textit{Cradle of the East}, Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, pp. 122 and following.

\textsuperscript{116} ditto, which is quoted from Andersson, op. cit., \textit{B.M.F.E.A.}, No.15, 1943.

\textsuperscript{117} ditto, p. 168, in which Ho refers to Andersson, ditto, p. 287.
detail, the various groups of motifs,—geometric, plant-and-flower based, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic,—which he maintains are totally unlike those of Western Asia.\textsuperscript{118}

Despite the fact that there is no material evidence for a diffusion theory, the fact remains that pottery technology and decoration had been practised at a highly sophisticated level in Western Asia\textsuperscript{119} since at least the sixth millennium BC, and that is more than one thousand years before the first painted ceramics are known to have been produced in China. For instance Mellaart describes finds at sites that range from Syria to the River Euphrates, the Zagros mountains and the lowlands of the Tigris River. He cites burnishing, and the painting of naturalistic, abstract, geometric and dynamic swirling shapes of great sophistication and virtuosity.\textsuperscript{120}

Common to both Eastern and Western pottery firing techniques was the acquired ability to control and achieve clear, smoke-free firing conditions which resulted in higher temperatures and more vitrified pots. This technique also preserved the natural colour of the clay. Primitive, inefficient, and smoky firing leaves the clay more porous, impregnates it with carbonaceous material and changes its colour to greys and blacks.\textsuperscript{121} This development in firing technology in both the East and the West must be seen as a natural local progression in skills, and in no way related to diffusion theories. And in East and the West imagery that is accepted as having originated in the patterns of matting, rope and weaving motifs, and imagery of schematised drawings of animals seen in everyday life, appear to be the products of local invention. These are coincidences that can be construed as inevitable, and the results of pragmatism, given the common circumstances and conditions of Neolithic life wherever it developed.

\textsuperscript{118} ditto.
\textsuperscript{119} From the geographical viewpoint of Australia the term "Western Asia" seems to make better sense than referring to the region as "the Near East", although most of the literary sources used in this thesis are of European origin and use the term "Near East", and occasionally, "Middle East".
\textsuperscript{121} Janet Deboos, Stephen Harrison, Leonard Smith, Handbook for Australian Potters, Sydney, Australia, Methuen, 1984, pp. 127, 197.
So, discounting the possibility of the diffusion of form and imagery between East and West, there still remains the puzzle of the remarkable similarities of style and techniques, and the plausible time-lag, in the case of their apparent, sudden use in the Neolithic cultures of China, with no developmental build-up yet discovered in earlier cultures of the region. But despite this, neither is there, as yet, any firm evidence to back up a theory of diffusion from West to East. The mystery remains, of the sudden appearance of these highly sophisticated, superbly made, fired and decorated pots in a region which, until 4000 BC, had, as far as is known, produced only rough, cord-marked and undistinguished grey wares, in primitive smoky firings. Apparently the more primitive greyish wares (made with primitive firing techniques) were still being made during and after the Yangshao painted pottery period, and so it would seem that a hierarchical social situation could well have existed, which would explain why the highly specialised, labour-intensive terracotta ceramics were found both at dwelling-sites and in well-furbished, and therefore possibly important, grave-sites. Those found at the grave-sites were decorated with red pigment and with serrated-edge bands and, apparently, were used only in the village necropolis, to contain sustenance for the deceased in the after-life. (Andersson labels this the ‘death-pattern’ and sees symbolic significance in the use of red, the colour of blood, with the rituals of death and burial, although he “refrains from any attempt to interpret its origin and meaning.”)

There is a problem, too, with diffusion and its definition, especially in such cases as these Neolithic ceramics in China. How near or how distant does an influence have to be, to qualify as diffusion? After the incursions of the Shang peoples from the north-east, which apparently interrupted the existent Neolithic cultures in the regions of the Huang-ho and the River Wei, the making of the distinguished painted terracottas eventually ceased in the Yang-shao culture region. In the following centuries

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122 As discussed by Pollock in her paper on the ceramics of Susa, Iran. “Style & Information: ...” op. cit.
124 Andersson, ditto, No. 1, p. 69.
undistinguished grey (primitively fired) wares continued to be produced, but alongside this, there was also another apparently long-established pottery type, the Lungshan. Named after a typical find-site in north-eastern China it is extremely well-made, thin, occasionally blackish and hard-fired, but unlike the Yang-shao group, it is unpainted. The situation with regard to ceramics in the pre-Shang period is a very complex one, with similarities and differences, in style, type and technique, appearing in many areas in southern, central and eastern China. Even painted pottery, of varying standards, appears at various times in regions other than the Yang-shao and Kansu, and Huber discusses the various types, painted, and unpainted in central, south and eastern China in critical detail, but does not offer interpretations of the decorations on the painted ceramics. Neither does she enter into the early debate about the possibility of Western influences. According to Huber, the Lungshan type continued at many sites in southern and eastern China up to and during the centuries of the Shang culture. She suggests that:

"...we may feel certain that the situation prevalent during Shang times of a powerful civilization, surrounded by less advanced, some more alien and some more 'sinicized', peripheral cultures, pertains as well to the Neolithic, for during this early period there was in the Chang-yaun (the Yang-shao) an extraordinarily impressive, vast and apparently fairly unified culture, known to us primarily through its vessels..."

But whatever the state of the cultures which surrounded them, the Shang seem to have devoted what must have been a considerable accumulation of knowledge of the working and firing of clay, to the production, mainly, of ceramic moulds for bronze-casting. And dated to the late Shang period there are also, some fine white pottery pieces which were made "from almost pure kaolin". Sullivan describes them:

[Notes: 125 126 127 128 129 130]
"... The beautiful white Shang pottery is unique in the history of Chinese ceramics. So fine is it that it has been taken for porcelain, but it is in fact a very brittle ware made from almost pure kaolin, finished on the wheel, and fired at about 1000 degrees... Many writers have remarked how closely its decoration echoes that of the bronzes, but there is no proof that this style in fact originated in bronze... Southeast China had already evolved a technique for stamping designs in the wet clay, which in turn influenced bronze design...(this) white stoneware urn... is indeed very close in design and decoration to a bronze vessel...  

And earlier, dated to the Middle Shang, there is a series of jars with sharply defined shoulder and neck, and impressed cross-hatching. Some jars are glazed on part of the surface (fig. 28 b.). Sullivan continues:

"... Some of the grey and buff ware found in Shang sites in Honan and Hupeh is glazed. While in some cases the glaze was produced accidentally when wood ash fell on the heated pottery in the kiln, in others it is a true felspathic glaze, generally reddish-brown or greenish yellow, applied very thinly and evenly to both inner and outer surfaces of the vessels. The Shang glazed wares, which are being excavated in ever-increasing quantities, are the remote ancestors of the renowned celadons of later dynasties...”

These emergent glazes are, in their formulation, totally unlike the alkaline (turquoise to green) glazes and the lead-based glazes already known and used in the West, and they are, therefore, without question, a product of local invention.

To return to the study of the Neolithic Yangshao (Chung-yuan) and Kansu terracottas. If they are studied as a single body of work, rather than being split, analytically, into various aspects, it does becomes apparent that there is an overall quality that is unlike the ceramic aesthetic of the ancient Western Asian cultures. Even if we concede that

131 ditto.
Fig. 27. Beads, discs and engraved fragments of ostrich eggshell. Upper Palaeolithic. India.
immigrant groups might have infiltrated into the Yangshao region in the Wei River valley, and brought with them technical knowledge, or actual pieces of decorated pottery, acquired through direct or indirect exchanges with more westerly cultures, it would still be apparent that the Chinese ceramics possess a distinct and unique non-Western flavour that has to be seen as the result of spontaneous generation or local invention. This is in connection, particularly, with the style of the decorative imagery on the painted ceramics.

One outstanding example is a flaring, shallow bowl of red earthenware of the Miao-ti-kou style, from the P’ien-hsien site in Kiangsi Province, and dated to late third millennium BC (fig. 22 b.). Its method of making (coiling) and its materials (unglazed, burnished red earthenware with red (iron), white (clay) and black (manganese) decoration was widely used also in early Western ceramics. But its form and the stylistics of its decoration is unlike anything known in contemporaneous or earlier Western cultures.

Another example is the narrow-necked storage jar (a universal form) (fig. 22 c.). This comes from the Ma-chia-yao site, Kansu (c.3,000–2,500 BC). It is decorated with what are described by Gyllensvard as highly schematized frogs among dynamic black spiral forms. The distinctive and superbly well-organised, calligraphic style of the sweeping dynamism of the brushwork in these two pots is recognised today as uniquely Chinese. It could only have been achieved by someone accomplished in the use of some kind of a brush. The strokes are totally spontaneous and confident, and with characteristics that relate, quite strongly in fact, to much later Chinese calligraphy. Whilst there is no suggestion here that there might have been a continuous line of development from this to calligraphy, nevertheless, it does bring to mind the possibility that, within the psyche of some, there already was a predilection and an inborn facility to wield a brush in

134 ditto, p. 74.
135 The standard and styles of the brushwork, however, vary greatly among these ceramics, from the roughly drawn to the highly skilled examples quoted, and from free-flowing, almost calligraphic dynamism to the careful and precise delineation of geometric motifs.
a calligraphic way that has never been surpassed in the western world. Sullivan writes of other, similar, finds:

"... Sherds...reveal a quite sophisticated brush technique, in one case, depicting plants, each of whose leaves ends in a sharp point with a flick of the brush – the same technique that was used by the Sung artist, three thousand years later, in painting bamboo..."136

This particular style of decoration is totally unlike the carefully drawn and tight precision of much of the best of the Western Asiatic decoration, such as the Susiana ceramics for instance, discussed earlier and referred to below.137 But some of the Yangshao pieces, especially those with what appear to be geometric and matting-based motifs, are executed, also, in an exceedingly precise style that is not dissimilar to western stylistics. Despite this, however, the style of the equally splendid ibex and associated images of fifth-fourth millennium BC Susa, for instance,138 are conceptually as well as stylistically worlds apart from the free-flowing examples in Neolithic Chinese stylistics such as those described above. An analytical study of separate units in the motif making of both cultures, (the Mesopotamian/Iranian and the Chinese) could argue, purely on a stylistic basis, that the similarities of execution between the geometrically based motifs must be more than just coincidence. And yet, a study of the whole body of the ceramics of both cultures, reveals that, on a stylistic basis, there are significant differences. Is it, perhaps, these stylistic differences which point to local genius and invention as the source of the Yangshao ceramics? As stated above Ho Ping-Ti dissects, in enormous detail, the four classes of motif units in both cultures, and compares them.139 And, as a result, he is firmly of the opinion that there cannot have been diffusory influences between the East and the West.

137 Ping-Ti Ho, Cradle of the East, op. cit., pp. 131-175.
138 Mallowan, Early Mesopotamia and Iran, op. cit., pp. 29-33.
139 Ping-Ti Ho, Cradle of the East, op. cit.
As far as archaeological evidence can tell us there is no proof that there were any lasting material influences or contacts at this time. It is well known, of course, that from time immemorial, nomadic groups travelled well-used tracks right across Asia, and it would be difficult to believe that contacts, and the diffusion of ideas and goods through barter between nomadic groups, did not happen. It could have taken generations for cultural ideas or objects of barter to travel across the vastnesses of Asia. But, still, this cannot be offered as proof of the diffusion of specific techniques or styles in ceramics. Also, judging from the lack of material evidence in nomadic chieftain burials, such as the “frozen burials” of the first millennium BC nomads at Pazyryk in the Altai Mountains northwest of China, ceramics did not play a significant role in nomad culture for the obvious reasons that ceramic material is heavy to carry, and its propensity for breaking easily would have made it an unsuitable material for artefacts destined for the nomadic life. Nomad artefacts were culturally defined by, and confined to, the parameters of maximum portability and lightness.

In barrow 2, in the frozen burials at Pazyryk, a narrow-mouthed bottle was found, however, that is roughly like the amphora form that has been used widely (fig. 23). It is made of coarse, sandy clay by the coiling method, covered with slip, and fired in an open fire. This container, presumably used for liquids such as fermented mare’s milk, is dated to the fifth century BC but it is a primitive pot by comparison with pots of the same period in China and elsewhere. And the difference is even more apparent when it is compared with the standard of the Chinese pots which were made three thousand years earlier in the Neolithic cultures (figs. 22 a., b., 24). Apart from this rare pottery vessel the other known artefacts used by the Asian nomads were made of materials which were essentially portable, such as leather and felt, besides small objects of gold, bronze and wood which were used as decorations for clothing and for horse trappings. And as far as

ancient finds on the Asian nomad tracks are concerned, there is, to date, no material evidence, whatever, of the carrying of Neolithic pots from the West to the East.

Some of the Yangshao pottery found in burials have decoration which might show, however, other possible outside influences from regions other than the West, such as the Pacific rim. Some of the earliest pottery of this culture was "cord-marked". Ho Ping-Ti records this:

"...The stratigraphical sequence...shows that the cord-marked pottery stratum represents the earliest phase of the Yang-shao culture, followed by several phases of the same culture characterized by painted pottery..."¹⁴¹

This motif-making may be evidence of the method used to cope with the need to support the wet clay while the pot was being built.¹⁴² The painted motifs on the later Yangshao ceramics can be seen as having been based on rope-patterns (or basketry?), such as, for example, vessels held by The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, Sweden (fig. 24)¹⁴³ Can it be seen, also, to have diffusionary, as well as stylistic, relationship with some of the rope motif-making of peoples in the Pacific region? Ho Ping-Ti discusses the similarities between the pottery of various regions of the Pacific rim, (in Taiwan, North Vietnam and north-west Thailand) and speculates about the possibility that the Neolithic Jomon culture of Japan may have spread "over a considerably larger area" (than Japan). He claims that:

"... The 'linear relief' pottery...unearthed from several sites belonging to the Jomon culture in Honshu, Japan, dates as far back as 10,000 BC, and thus precedes the first appearance of pottery in the Near East by three and a half millennia...the ceramic cultural affinities between ancient Japan and Taiwan, let alone the mainland of East and Southeast Asia, are uncertain...Although the

¹⁴¹ Ping-Ti Ho, Cradle of the East, op. cit., p. 126.
¹⁴² A method still in use today, in the building of large storage jars; in Crete, for instance.
¹⁴³ Gyllensvard, Arts of Asia, op.cit., pp. 78, 80, 81.
Near East was the cradle of the world’s civilisation, it was not the first area in the world to invent pottery...” 144

Because of the physical remoteness of the Jomon people from the Neolithic Chinese of the inland Yang-shao cultures, the likelihood is slim that there were diffusionary flows between them. From at least c 3,500 BC, the fishing and gathering communities in Japan made extravagantly decorated pottery vessels (fig. 25), and the Taiwanese had made cord-marked pottery long before 2,500 BC. It would be difficult not to associate the pottery of both cultures with rope and basket forms that would have been used commonly in connection with fishing activities carried on in both coastal regions. 145 And in the twentieth century, the Aibom people in Papua-New Guinea still make remarkable earthenware bowls with outstanding three-dimensional coiled and incised decoration, and it would be difficult, also, not to relate these stylistically to rope-based pattern-making basketry (fig. 26). 146 (No ancient pots are known from this area; the climatic conditions of this equatorial zone make the survival of artefacts of ancient times, including low-fired pottery, very unlikely.) Current theories, based on linguistic traces, propose that in prehistoric times there was a continuous migratory movement of Pacific-rim peoples southward, from China, through South-east Asia, and eventually to the Pacific island zones. And this theory can be fortified by comparative studies of similar stylistics, motifs, techniques and materials which occur throughout the Asian and South-east Asian regions. 147 It is tempting, therefore, to see such artefacts as basketry providing fundamental shapes and inspiration for the decoration of artefacts made in another medium such as clay, and to believe that there could have been contacts between the

144 Ping-Ti Ho, Cradle of the East, op. cit., pp. 122–127. (This statement of precedence challenges the generally held belief in the West that the oldest known pottery—which is from Gandjareh in Western Iran—is dated to the eighth millennium BC. If the relevant evidence is available, further research could be interesting and useful in the continuation of the search for sources.) Mellaart, The Neolithic of the Near East, op. cit., pp. 74, 77, 78.

145 Ho Ping-Ti, Cradle of the East, op. cit., p. 123.


fishing communities of the coastal Pacific regions. There is a lack of material evidence of contacts or migration, however, and this relegates common-sense assumptions, unfortunately, to the level of intelligent guesswork, and therefore it is not possible to make positive claims for diffusionary theories. But the similarities are hauntingly close.

To return to the evidence of the imagery on some of the Chinese Yangshao ceramics, it seems that, if the theory of textile origins for some motifs is acceptable, then the origins of other painted imagery of the Chinese Neolithic could also be attributed to local inspired rope and matting and their decorative potential. But even if this is so, and given that these inland Neolithic groups fished the rivers that flow eventually into the seas between China and Japan, it would still have to be deduced that the use, if any, of rope-patterned motifs was one of local invention, with very little possibility that there were diffusionary influences from regions as far away as Japan. And this line of argument can be referred back to the quotations used earlier in this chapter, and taken from Davis. It is useful to quote, again, his statement that:

"...It has long been a general principle of diffusion research that the efficiency of diffusion is primarily (but not exclusively) an inverse function of geographic distance. The notion that cultural similarities decrease with distance from centers of innovations is at the heart of the gravity model of cultural interaction..." 149

In contrast to the argument and discourse among Western and Chinese scholars (with predictably opposing views) regarding possible diffusionary influences and/or the genius of local invention, there is a report from India of the manipulation of ostrich shell fragments that is much earlier, and an outstanding example of what is arguably "spontaneous generation" (to use Wittkower’s phrase).

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148 Evidence for this lies in the claims made by Gyllensvard, Arts of Asia, op. cit., p. 74, and Sullivan, Arts of China, op. cit., p. 19, that some of the motifs used are schematized versions of fish.

149 D. Davis, Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory, op. cit., p. 65.

150 Ping-Ti Ho, Cradle of the East, op. cit., p. 122, pp. 126–175.
In north-central India, in a much earlier epoch than that of the Neolithic culture of the Wei and Yellow River regions of China, some interesting artefacts have been found. In some cases, at rock shelter sites where Upper Paleolithic people drew “dynamic dancing figures” there have been found fragments of ostrich shell that have been decorated, and cut into small rough roundels, which suggest a bead-making activity (fig. 27). It is at present being assumed that they are the result of local creative image-making. There is an abundance of ostrich shell in this region, and the assumption of spontaneous generation or local invention can be based on two observations; the first, Wobst’s assertion that Paleolithic nomadism in these epochs was minimal. He sets up a group of basic assumptions about the cultural systems of Pleistocene societies, which include:

“... Paleolithic social groups are territorial... ‘Territorial’ implies that the members of a given social group moved within an area which was more or less delineated by social factors, by the proximity of other such groups, by consideration of distance, by familiarity with the environment, and by natural obstacles... Given the generally low Pleistocene population densities, and the relatively small number of people required for Paleolithic cultural units, the size of the maximum band was maintained at an equilibrium level due to a balance between the procurement strategies, the mating system, and the population sex ratio, mortality, and fertility rates... The spatial extent of a given society can then be estimated from the equilibrium size of the maximum band and the carrying capacity of the regional environment... Societies articulate the components of their cultural system in response to stimuli from their natural and social environment. A major change in stimuli will require a different articulation of the systemic components...”

Wobst continues:

“...(The) traditional view (that one should not rule out the probability of great treks, over very long distances)... cannot be maintained for a variety of

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demographic and cultural reasons... The absence of skis, sleds, the wheel boats, draft animals, and beasts of burden in the Paleolithic cultural equipment implies that Paleolithic man had to walk and carry his necessities on his back whenever he wanted to move. The purposeful acquisition of surplus for some future necessity appears to be foreign to those hunter-gatherers who have been studied by ethnographers (Lee & DeVore 1968; 12). These factors place a restriction on the distance to be covered and on the ease and speed of movements... The movement of entire maximum bands, or their components, beyond the area which their cultural systems permitted them to exploit, and with which they were familiar is also effectively blocked by social boundaries..."152

A further observation is proposed by another anthropologist, Clegg:

"... Questions of how and where materials were obtained and processed then become relevant. The normal approach is to start by finding which materials are available locally, and employ the following model: ‘laziness wins’: only the most easily accessible materials and techniques are used. If the second most available is used, there must be a reason. The question of why the particular media used were chosen leads into questions of cultural, functional, idiosyncratic, convenience, habit, ritual or other significance..."153

Therefore, if these observations are accepted, the migration of ideas from distant and culturally unconnected societies, about activities, such as bead-making techniques and their material, form or visual imagery, can be seen to have been minimal, if not non-existent.

This forces the conclusion that the appearance of artefacts, such as the ostrich-shell beads in ostrich-breeding regions of India, were the products of the genius of local invention. When the concept of spontaneous generation or local invention, however, is placed as an opposing theory to that of diffusionist inspiration and influences, a problem arises.

There is a point in the case of some artefacts and their imagery where the inspirational or cultural processes which were responsible for local creativity will inevitably be confronted with the cultural ideas and practices of those adjacent societies, discussed by Wobst, who form the surrounding hexagonal patterning of social interaction necessary for “the marriage networks that guaranteed…biological survival”:

“…The regular hexagon appears to be the best geometric abstraction for much human spatial organization. Among the regular polygons, only the hexagon combines efficiency with minimal movement and boundary costs optimum packing ...(Haggett 1966: 49)...the fact that minimum or maximum bands of hunter-gatherers on the average find themselves surrounded with close to 6 neighbouring bands recommends this spatial patterning as an ideal approximation of Pleistocene conditions... While at least potentially self-sufficient, a given minimum band tends to participate in a larger social network in order to enhance its chance of biological and cultural survival... Thus, food sharing and visiting between adjacent bands create an atmosphere conducive to the exchange of mates... Barter meetings and work parties between members of different bands... At the same time, the former process provides a given band with exotic raw materials, while the latter increases the exploitative efficiency of local groups…”154

Thus, contact with adjacent but foreign concepts can have occurred within this hexagonal spatial patterning. While these may be associated only vaguely with local concepts, a combination of the two occurrences might well begin to provide inspirational sources of imagery, and this possibility can be responsible for an indistinct twilight zone, because it would seem to be very difficult to make a line of demarcation between what is perceived to be “local” and what is perceived to be “foreign”.

Within each region and epoch there seems to be, sometimes, a heartland in time or space where a particular set of images, styles, forms or techniques seem to be at their purest peak, in a kind of essence that offers the clearest signalling about some aspects of that

particular region, culture or epoch (even though they may provide clues to past
diffusionary influences). Instances that come easily to mind are widely separated
demographically and in time. They are the sculpture and ceramics of the High Classical
period in Greece (480–420 BC), porcelains and landscape paintings of the Song dynasty
in China (960–1,279 AD), the screen-painting of the Tosa school in Japan (16th and 17th
centuries AD), and Japanese tea ceremony ware. Whilst all of these do throw clues about
their formative influences, nevertheless they all reached a stage of maturation which offer
examples of what has come to be accepted as typical Greekness, Chinese-ness, and
Japanese-ness. But these occasions are outstanding among the hundreds of thousands of
examples of artefacts that have been fortuitously preserved for us today where influences
from outside have produced mixed and less determinate imagery. Examples of cultural
artefacts which have had no outside influences at all, as far as is known, would include
old (that is, earlier than the mid-nineteenth century) objects produced by Australian
aboriginal peoples. But even here there are intriguing parallels between the Australian
spear-throwers and those of the Upper Paleolithic in southwest France, and also the
similarities of style and apparent subject matter between some cave paintings by Australian
aborigines and those found in caves on Koh Khian Island, southwest Thailand. In
the case of spear-throwing, did each culture arrive separately at the same ingenious
solution to the problem of increasing dramatically the distance that a spear might be
thrown? And in the case of the cave-painting, is there any possibility that there may
have been relics left on cave walls which influenced later artists?

The diffusion of an image through the transfer of an artefact from one culture or epoch to
another can also provide the climate and the catalytic opportunity for the creative
imagination of the craftworker, coupled with the forces of pragmatism, to invent,
apparently spontaneously, a new style or new visual path to existing symbolic representations. Also, as has been stated previously, the exigencies of a craftworker's circumstances can also lead the adopted imagery into becoming, either, less meaningful or the carrier of new meanings. The final devaluation happens when the imagery becomes meaningless space-filling ornamentation that is used upon an artefact because it is thought to be pleasing to the prospective consumer. It is used to make the artefact more saleable, and the imagery exists there for no other purpose. In this latter category, of course, can be included the artefacts that have been manufactured in their millions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to fill the demands of the consumer economy. But although these decorative motifs may no longer carry internalised significances, they still carry, unavoidably, semiotic messages about the culture and the times in which they have been produced and used.
Physicality, Concept and the Making of an Image

The relationship between physicality and concept during the making of an image is closely connected with the intended style of the imagery. Style, however, is a separate and distinct attribute, although it is one which, in art-historical writing, embraces both the physicality and the concept. But from a craftworker's point of view the physicality and the concept are separate entities from style, and should be treated as such.

Style, as discussed in conventional art-historical contexts, has been the major clue to the identification of an image, to its attribution to an artist, and to its placing in time and cultural and regional frameworks. Friedlaender's work provides an example. Although Van Eyck to Bruegel was written around 1920, this work by Friedlaender is still regarded as very useful for its analytical knowledge of the styles and techniques of the Flemish painters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In one instance it provides a good example of the way in which style has been used as the basis upon which to differentiate and identify a work of art and the personalities of two artists. For example, Friedlaender writes:

"... Hulin (in his publication ‘Les Heures de Milan’) believed that he had discovered in the prayer book something more than the Eyckian style of 1417. It seemed to him, that the personalities of Hubert and Jan emerge here more distinctly than in the Ghent altarpiece... The wide divergence of style between the two brothers around 1417 seems remarkable..."\(^{157}\)

Style, in painting or sculpture, is of two kinds, the voluntary and the involuntary. The first is the deliberate and conscious decision of the artist to work within a particular style. The second is the involuntary and unavoidable presence of the artist's own "handwriting" which is observable as a separate manifestation within the general framework of the chosen style.

Both have been, in art historical studies, important means of identifying both the maker and a particular work of art. The subject of style, which is a significant factor in artefact image making, however, will be discussed in a later chapter. The concern of this present chapter is the physical visuality which can either grow out of a chosen style, or be the fundamental basis on which a style of some sort is developed. Both the physicality and the style are evidence, not only of the concept behind the making of artefact imagery, but, also, they are mirrors of the craftworker and his temperament and abilities.

Skill is also important in the making of a picture, a sculpture or any other kind of artefact. Nevertheless, in the making of artefacts other than pictures or sculpture, emphasis is likely to be placed on the effects of the idiosyncratic nature of the physical material at hand and available techniques. This means that both the concept and the final visuality, that is, the physical appearance as a whole, might change more dramatically than it might in a picture or a sculpture. It is more likely to happen in artefact making because of the sometimes unexpected exigencies of the available materials. But this does not alter the argument against the differentiation between “fine art” and “artefact” or “craft object”. Brook’s discourse on this subject, quoted in Part I, and in the Appendix, proposes that “art, so-called” is an involuntary quality that can be perceived in an object, whether or not it has been classified by convention as “fine art” or “artefact” or “craft object”. I make this statement, about the central role that can be played by material and technique, from my own personal experience as a craftworker. The unexpected can and still does happen, and it has to be coped with, even though, as in my case, there is an accumulation of thirty years’ experience and acquired skills in the working with various kinds of earthenware, stoneware and porcelainous clays, and in the inventing, making and testing of suitable accompanying glazes. The sometimes unpredictable nature of a potter’s materials and techniques has to be coped with, often on an ad hoc basis using acquired knowledge, and this is only too well known among potters of the twentieth century, and was, no doubt, a familiar situation in all epochs and cultures. No
amount of theory can substitute for practical workshop experience. Examples from other
times and other cultures will help to fortify this notion. Alan Caiger Smith makes a somewhat
wry comment about the problems of coping physically with materials in *Tin-Glaze Pottery.*
With regard to the mid-sixteenth century Italian writer, Picolpasso, and his first-hand
observations in his manual on European pottery, Caiger Smith points out the inadequacy of
written theory without the benefit of the personal contacts and experiences that can be handed
down from one craftworker to another. He says:

"... Picolpasso’s professed aim is to reveal the technical basis of a craft which had
hitherto been passed on by demonstration and word of mouth from master to pupil,
father to son, and whose ‘secrecy’ had been too closely guarded... Picolpasso
underestimated the depth of traditional knowledge passed on and increased
generation by generation. Like many others, even in our own day (the 1970's) he
did not fully appreciate that skill of hand and experience of materials may be harder
to acquire than theoretical knowledge and new ideas..."\(^{158}\)

The problem of the connections and the gaps between the nature of materials and techniques
and that of the concepts inherent in artefacts and their imagery was faced by the potters of
Islam and provides another example. During the ninth to the sixteenth centuries AD, they
faced this kind of problem. When centres of power shifted from one region to another in the
Islamic empire the potters and other craftworkers followed, because it was these ruling
houses which provided the major patronage of ceramics as well as of other artefacts. These
migratory potters who moved with the expectations of rich patronage were faced with major
voluntary, conscious and subconscious decisions in their attempts to produce familiar forms
and imagery in new and unfamiliar materials. It would be difficult to believe that the
conceptual base of some imagery was not changed to some degree in these circumstances.
Despite their obvious accumulation of skill, practical experience and theoretical knowledge

\(^{158}\) Alan Caiger Smith, *Tin-Glaze Pottery*, op. cit., p. 100.
they had to contend with the physical differences and characteristics they found in new local materials. There was an inevitable amount of re-learning, about new materials and suitable techniques, and to some extent, a re-working of old and familiar concepts and imagery in order to produce them by other techniques in other materials. Not only was the physicality of their ceramics altered to some extent, but any poetic content that may have been present was also a candidate for change. Arthur Lane, a former Keeper of the Department of Ceramics, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, wrote:

“... When Egypt in turn broke away from the (Baghdad) Caliph’s power, it too fostered a notable school of potters; and... they carried on traditions that had been developed in Baghdad. We could reasonably explain the decline of the Baghdad school in the tenth century, if we assumed that the potters migrated with their secrets to Cairo. In style and technique... we must see the earliest (Egyptian) Fatimid pieces as a continuation from the stage reached at Baghdad about the middle of the tenth century...(but) the body materials used in Egypt differed completely from the finely sifted, compact pink or yellowish Baghdad clay... they varied a good deal... and were... comparatively sandy and coarse. The potting was thus apt to be clumsy, and the shapes lacked that refinement in which the Baghdad potters so carefully followed the Chinese...”

Caiger Smith also writes of similar circumstances as they happened when the fashion and the markets for Italian majolica spread throughout Europe:

“... Maiolica from Italy was traded to most of the large cities of Europe and sold without difficulty... Where their work found a good reception, the potters themselves soon followed... the ceramists of Faenza had left their crowded workshops at the end of the fifteenth century and spread over half of Italy, so during the next fifty years, the Italians dispersed into Europe... Setting up a maiolica workshop in a strange country required the conjunction of a number of talents... knowledge of natural clays, to select the right chalky clays to make the special body

for maiolica. He (the potter) would have to begin compounding glazes from unproven materials, some of which might have to be imported... Many trials would have to be made before anything could be made for sale...”160

All these are factors which affected the chosen style, imagery and ultimate physicality of the pottery produced in a particular region at a particular time. But even where the craftworker enjoys a total familiarity with the chosen material, this, in itself, can also be a fulcrum upon which conceptual decisions may be made one way or the other on a minute-to-minute basis during the actual process of making. This kind of experience is well known among twentieth century craftworkers, but the personal experiences of one craftworker of longstanding expertise and prestige is quoted here as evidence; those of Liz Jeneid, a weaver and craftworker involved in practical and theoretical teaching. She writes:

“... Artists approach their work in many different ways. There are those who have an idea, a concept... want to say something which will, for them, determine the use of materials and method of execution. Then there are the artists who have worked with a particular medium over a long period of time, and have become so familiar with its particular qualities that the process is not so controlled. It's as if the subconscious is allowed to operate and the artist is able to respond to the process without being consciously aware of how or why it is happening at that precise moment. Many artists work of course, in both of the ways I’ve talked about, and demonstrate the interplay of intellect and intuition... An example of responding to materials in my experience was when I worked as a weaver producing cloth. I became aware of the difference between the cloth I wove, and the cloth that my trainees produced under my instruction. My planning did not, and could not, allow for those impulses, those responses, that I (myself) experienced during the process of weaving which (because of my total familiarity with the expectations of the material) added a more interesting dimension to the work...”161

161 Elizabeth Jeneid; I am indebted to Ms. Jeneid for this personal, unpublished commentary and record of working, and of teaching problems; University of Wollongong, Australia, 1991.
And besides all this there is still the involuntary and unavoidable presence of the maker's own "handwriting" which can also affect the conceptual and the physical aspects of imagery to a great extent. This means that, in the making of artefact imagery, materials are likely to be the cause of inevitable variations in physicality and concept from piece to piece. Incidental variations inevitably occur, such as for instance, the moistness or the texture of the clay, the micron measure of the wool, the grain and hardness of the wood, and so on. In the case of the potter, while he or she is throwing on the wheel, hand-building or coiling, the state of the clay on that day (degree of moistness) can change the whole visual concept, and even the form and style of a piece. The possibilities during the making of such artefacts are therefore extremely fluid. What might have started out as a plan to make a particular kind of form, in a particular style, can be changed by the craftworker as the possibilities and limitations of that particular piece of clay become apparent. Therefore, the influence of the material itself and the techniques necessary to shape it become central to the final visuality of the artefact, and this may affect intimately the concept that is perceived in the finished object. This situation can occur during the use of any material which the craftworker may be using.

To demonstrate this it could be assumed that the potter who made the Susa A goblets could well have made many others which, instead of being elaborately decorated, were deemed fit enough, or even deliberately intended, for general daily use only and not "good enough" to be honoured with inclusion in a chieftain household or in a chieftain burial. In today's terms the equivalent would be the inexpensive, easily affordable bowl that is seen to be only fit for general kitchen use, compared with the bowl that is displayed in an art gallery, and sold at a far higher price as an "art object". And yet both bowls could have been made from the same batch of clay on the same day by the same potter. The instantaneous decisions during the making process, whether dictated by the condition of the clay, by the technique used, or

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162 Pollock, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, op. cit.; And as discussed in Part I, the chapter, "The Use of the terms "Image" and "Art"."
even by the mood, the outside influences, and physical health of the potter on that day, all have major influences on the physicality, concept and style, and therefore on the final, visual state of the finished artefact imagery.

There is another aspect to the making of artefacts, apart from that of individual production; and that is mass production. But even in this kind of procedure there are two totally different outcomes; one outcome can be cited from the twentieth century, and one from, say, the Ming dynasty period in China (1,368–1,644 AD). The twentieth century situation will be dealt with first.

Whether made by hand or by machine, repetitive artefacts are something different, and the whole argument around the production of an individual artefact, as discussed above, is reversed. Before an object can be made by mass production the market potential, the material and the techniques must be thoroughly researched, modified and planned so that there is, theoretically, no room or need for interruptions in the production process for ad hoc decisions to be made during the production process. Production virtually becomes relatively uninterrupted mechanical imitation. In this kind of process the visuality of a mass-produced image in most cases, suffers a degree of deprivation. However successful the artefact might be in fulfilling its function, or however well-designed it might be, the "life" or perceived spirituality of the image is reduced or can disappear altogether as a result of deliberate and detailed pre-planning carried out by designers who have little or no part in the eventual processes of making. This would seem to happen because few or no decisions were left to be made by the craftworker during the process of manipulating the material and producing the artefact and its imagery. The well-known attitudes of both Ruskin and Morris during the nineteenth century, and their vehement dislike of mechanical mass production are embedded in this perception, as well as their awareness of the result of impersonalised repetitive work on the quality of the life of the individual worker and on the community at large. And in his
work, *A Potter’s Book*, which was a powerful influence on the craft works of the western world from the 1940s on, Bernard Leach also follows this line of argument in a declaration of his philosophy in regard to the making of ceramic objects, and the potter’s “loss of our birthright of traditional craft lore”. In Leach’s writings, however, he is also concerned specifically with the low level of the critical appreciation of handcrafted work resulting from industrialisation, rather than with vilifying industrialisation itself as a means of production. Leach writes:

“... This book is the outcome of thirty-three years’ experience of making pots by hand processes in the Far East and in England... During twelve of those years I...(gained) an insight into the spirit and methods by which early Oriental pottery was made. Here I have attempted to state these simply and openly, and to relate them to our Western need primarily for the sake of other potters who suffer inevitably from the almost entire loss of our own birthright of traditional craft lore... My frequent criticism of mass-produced wares should not be regarded as an attack upon the machine so much as an exposure of the false standards of beauty...which have accompanied the rise of industrialisation...the bulk of pottery turned out in England today is mass-produced and of inferior form and decoration, its inferiority is not so much due to the manner of its production...but for various extrinsic reasons... The want of artistic initiative on the part of the manufacturers must be ascribed to the general lowering of taste under conditions of competitive industrialism...”

It is not quite as simple as this, however, because some of the most admired and venerated pots made in China during the Ming and earlier dynasties were the products of a kind of mass production, if not industrialisation by machine in the modern sense of the term. The various pre-determined processes in which different workers of the Ming dynasty were involved at different stages of the making of a pot, were carried out individually, by hand,

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164 Pere d’Entrecolles, *Letters*; these were written c. 1712 to his superior in France, but the translation remains unpublished in English. I am indebted to Mr. J. H Myrtle of Sydney for his personal comments on this topic.
and this very fact must have led to personal, judgemental participation by the individual craftworkers, even if it was in the smallest degree possible.

This kind of argument places materials and techniques and the personality of the craftworker in a central role in the conceptualising of artefact imagery. Minute-by minute decision-making is part of the intimate dialogue between the individual craftworker and his or her medium. But it also shifts, in a broader sense, some of the responsibility for the physical and conceptual outcome of production on to the shoulders of those who create the market demand; the patrons and their perceived predilections.
Artefact imagery can be seen to fall into three categories: illustration, decoration and symbol. First, there is the motif which does not carry any burden of inferred meaning, and which ingenuously embellishes an object, possibly decorating its basic form by emphasising the characteristics of that form, for the pure and simple pleasure of aiming to enhance that form. This kind of motif can include the use of imagery that is already familiar; the patterns, for instance, which arise out of plaiting or weaving, and the ordered placing of linear motifs, where there is no intended symbolism in their use. They are simply acceptable motifs in daily use and well within the parameters of the iconography and the cultural perceptions of the community. The Severe or Impoverished Style used in the amphora decoration during the Dark Age of Greece (c.1,100–900 BC) is an example (fig. 28 a.), and so also are the textile-like impressions on the partly glazed jars of the Shang period in China, discussed earlier (fig. 28).

Second, in the case of the Gerzean ceramics of pre-dynastic Egypt (c.3,500 BC) the embellishment is of a totally different kind (fig. 29). It is accepted that the figurations are images of hills, possibly seen from the sea, of long-legged water-birds, of the hot, dazzling, tropical sun, and of the high-prowed sea-going boats, the belems, of the Mesopotamians who carried trade-goods around the coast of Arabia to Egypt. These images appear to fall into the category of direct, if schematised, illustration. The stylisation is, to some extent, the result of the limitations of either the craftworker and/or his materials. The placement of the images upon the large ceramic storage jars appear to be somewhat haphazard and there is little attempt to relate the forms of the images to the forms of the jars. As far as can be assessed there is no intended symbolism or conscious

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fig. 29 Bull earthenware storage vessels, iron decoration; boats for long-range travel and landscape motifs; height 31.4cm. Egypt. 3200-3000 BC

(W.Cer)
messaging in this imagery. It appears simply to be descriptive illustration, which, nevertheless has provided invaluable semiotic evidence about the trading relations between Mesopotamia and Egypt in the latter's pre-dynastic epoch167.

The third category of imagery either on or of an artefact is that which carries motifs that have been recognised as carrying symbolic content. For example, the vast majority of the artefacts made during the dynastic periods in Egypt for Pharaonic or priestly use either in life or in death, are based on religious symbolism, and this is corroborated by the surviving literature of ancient Egypt. The functional purposes for which some artefacts, such as body adornment, were conceived in the first place, seem to play an almost subordinate role to the importance of the symbolic imagery carried by the jewellery. The most obvious examples of this are the pectoral plaques (fig. 30). The brief text which describes one particular pectoral, found in Tutankhamun’s tomb (1,325 BC), describes the symbols used:

"...this intricately designed necklace and pendant reflects aspects of the traditional religion that the young king restored... The central motif depicts the rising of the sun. The scarab beetle, who sustains its young from the ball of dung it carries, was associated in Egyptian mythology with the sun, as the means by which it crosses the heavens every day. Here, the golden beetle, inlaid with lapis lazuli, is in the bark (barque?) of the sun holding the solar disc in its front legs and the ‘shen’ hieroglyph (“infinity”) in its hind legs... The scarab is accompanied by two baboons, animals frequently associated with the rising sun. Moreover, the god Thoth, who is often represented in the form of a baboon, usually accompanies the sun in the bark...The clasp, which also functions as a counterweight, depicts Heh... Holding the sign of “infinity” (shen) above his head, he is flanked by cobras wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt...”168

Fig. 30. Detail of necklace with pendant: scarab beetle, inlaid with lapis lazuli, silk rising sun (carnelian) and lunar discs c.1334 BC, Tutankhamun tomb treasury, Egypt
Whether symbolic imagery was used in much earlier times in southwestern France by the
craftworkers of the Upper Paleolithic cannot be proved, although the circumstantial
evidence, described in great detail by Pfeiffer, for instance, in the Tuc d’Audubert cave in
southwest France, is overwhelmingly convincing that objects found in remote chambers
difficult of access, were intended as iconic symbols for ritual purposes. But whether
the decorations on the bone and stone tools of the Upper Paleolithic also served symbolic
purposes is problematic. Some of these are in the form of animals or parts of animals
(fig. 31 a.). Now it may be that the inherent desire of humankind to make marks and to
embellish surfaces and forms (which has been discussed earlier) was in these instances
merely being satisfied without any further thoughts of symbolic meanings. But it is also
reasonable to wonder whether there was a connection between the purpose for which the
tool was made and the decorative motif upon it, and which may have acted as a
sympathetic magical symbol; the artefact being involved with the hunting, killing or
subsequent preparation of a carcass or its hide. Two examples can be studied, for
instance; the carving of an ibex with its head turned backwards, forming the end of a
shaft of some kind, and found in the cave at Bedeilhac, France (fig. 31 a.), and the
curved spatula-shaped artefact carved at the handle end with a very realistically conceived
fish, which was found at Isturitz, Spain (fig. 6 b.). The ibex fragment is one of many
Paleolithic artefacts which are thought to have had symbolic significances possibly
connected with the successful hunting of the animal. The broad spatula from Pekarna
(Czech Republic), with horse-head symbols may, according to Leroi-Gourhan, belong to
the category of male symbolism (fig. 31 b.). Whilst there is no proof of these
theories, contextual evidence is used by those such as Leroi-Gourhan who have spent
years studying the art of the Upper Paleolithic groups in an attempt to show that this kind
of theorising is soundly based.

170 Leroi-Gourhan, op. cit., p. 64.
171 Leroi-Gourhan, op. cit., p. 63.
fig. 31a. Bison with head turned back, La Madeleine, France, Upper Paleolithic.

fig. 31b. Spatulas: top, "buttoned" figure, Bruniquel, France. Mu St. Gel., middle and lower, Broad spatula, c. 34 cm. with male (horse-head) symbols, Pekarna, Moravia, Mus. Nus.

Road signs: fig. 32. "Slippery When Wet"
fig. 33. "Beware of Kangaroos"
Symbolism has two faces; natural and artificial. When an image is directly analogous with its subject a viewer, unversed in any cultural ideas which may be connected with the image, can see that the image is self-explanatory and carries visually the message that it is intended to convey. Twentieth century graphics used in public transport systems are sometimes good examples of this. An adequate graphic will symbolise visually the intended message without the need for further explanations in words. Common examples might be the graphic sign for a slippery stretch of road (fig. 32), and the walking figure illuminated in green at a pedestrian crossing, alternating with the static figure in red. That is natural symbolism. But the colours, red and green, are not natural symbols, because it is necessary to acquire cultural intelligence about their meaning in this kind of context. When an image is not analogous and it is necessary to educate the viewer in the intended meanings of the image then the symbolism of that image is labelled artificial. It happens of course that sometimes imagery does not fall clearly into one or the other of these two categories, and an intelligent guess at possible meanings may be necessary to provide the right answers! Referring again to twentieth century road signs, those depicting animals in a schematic but clearly illustrative style, such as a hopping kangaroo or wombat in profile, are ambiguous symbolically (fig. 33). While they can be understood as indicating the presence of these animals in the vicinity, they do not visually describe the fact that they might be crossing the road, thus becoming not only a hazard for the motorist, but also an accidental victim. We only know the full meaning of these symbols because of the external evidence that their carcasses provide on the side of the road.

Bahn, in discussing symbols, refers back to late Upper Paleolithic imagery, to motifs dating to the Magdalenian period and the possibility that they may be symbols which carried meanings that were clear and understandable to the maker, user or viewer. He

172 Lauchlan Chipman; I am indebted to Prof. Chipman for this theoretical categorisation of symbol.
parallels them with twentieth century road signs and their meanings which he says may be classified as either natural or artificial symbolism:

"... Where motifs on portable objects are concerned... it is still possible that they include some sort of 'pre-writing'... What is almost certain is that the meaning of the signs and marks ... must have been clear to the maker and to those who saw and/or used them. We can see this today with our road signs and warnings; some have meanings obvious to everyone, others have to be learnt, but all are known to those who operate within that system..."173

This kind of categorisation of symbols can be applied to the artefacts of the Neolithic and Bronze Age in the Aegean. The capacious and generous forms of Cretan-Minoan terracottas, and the forms of the later Greek amphora, hydria, kylix and lekythos demonstrate their ample ability to contain the grains, water, wine or oil for which they were used (fig. 34). But this is hardly symbolism in the sense in which it is presently being used. Containers such as these provide some indications that are more closely connected with semiotic intelligence as to their function, rather than symbolic imagery. The painted decoration upon many of these artefacts, however, may fall into any of the three above categories of imagery; decoration, illustration and symbolism (both natural and artificial). Higgins does not attempt to categorise the Minoan iconography as symbolic, but assumes, in his descriptions of the various motifs, that they exist as joyously decorative, and naturalist and illustrative reflections of the life of the Cretans. The huge pithoi, used for the storage of foodstuffs in the basement magazines of the Cretan palaces in the second millennium BC would seem to echo this idea, but they also appear to describe the method of their making. Still today there are Cretan potters who make these enormous coiled jars, and in order to support and stabilise the wet clay while it is being built, rope is wrapped around the pot to prevent it from collapsing. Such a technique seems to have provided the decoration on at least some of these jars that were

173 Bahn, Vertut, Images of the Ice Age, op. cit., p. 146.
made in the Bronze Age. (fig. 35)\textsuperscript{174} Several hundred years later, on mainland Greece, the palmette, imported from Asia Minor via Ionia and the Aegean islands, was developed into tightly disciplined borders on post-Orientalising amphorae, whose sole function was subsidiary zonal decoration without any symbolic meaning (fig. 36). From the Archaic period on, incidents from myths and legends, used as focal features on the main areas of a vase, are narrative illustrations which celebrate the Greek heritage of mythology and religion, while the palmette border is one of the commonest space-filling motifs on the neck of amphorae. (fig. 37).\textsuperscript{175}


\textsuperscript{175} Boardman, \textit{The Art & Architecture of Ancient Greece}, op. cit. pp. 174, 175, pls. XIV, XV, XVII.
Fig. 34 (top) Palace jar with all-over Floral Style plant motif; Crete 1900-1400 BC

(lower) "Pilgrim Flask" with all-over octopus figuration; Crete 1900-1400 BC.

(M Myca)

Fig. 35 Huge storage-jar for foodstuffs, from magazine in basement, Knossos Palace Crete 1900-1400 BC

(M Myca)
Fig 26: Palmette motifs, detail, Amphora, by Phintias, c. 520 BC, Athens, Top Mus

Fig 37: Palmette decoration, Amphora painted by Evakiias, c. 525 BC, Athens, Br Mus
The Dynamics of Inter-relationships

Inter-relationships of some kind, perhaps for reasons of inter-marriage, food and tool exchange, are also a pre-requisite for the transference of imagery from one culture to another. But it is worth asking whether there may be other significant events which can be the result of inter-relationships between communities. Does there seem to be some correlation between the spread of ideas brought about by contact or inter-relationship of some kind, and a society’s development or change? Without investigating the anthropological circumstances of two totally unconnected cultures it would seem reasonable to make an observation about a state of their cultures that is common to both.

The societies in question are South American Aboriginal tribes of the Amazon region and the Aboriginal people of Australia. Until the recent inroads made upon them by Western civilisation, both groups practised Paleolithic and/or Mesolithic lifestyles, apparently for thousands of years. And for thousands of years these two groups of peoples have existed in near, if not complete, isolation from other societies. Most other known cultures, in other and less remote parts of the ancient world, have had considerable contact with other groups at some time, and have developed, or at least changed and moved, into different modes of living. Is there some causal link between the isolation of the Aboriginal peoples and the fact that their lifestyles have changed very little over thousands of years? Where there has been change at all, those changes have been extraordinarily slow by comparison with those of most other cultures. Even a changing environment, such as that experienced apparently by the Australian Aboriginal peoples over thousands of years, did not drastically change their nomadic, hunting lifestyle, and according to Flood this is borne out by the unchanging nature of those of their artefacts that have been dated with reasonable certainty.176

Whenever a culture is investigated which has had major occasional contacts, or continuous interaction for any reasons, with another culture, there seems to be evidence that observable changes have occurred in either or both cultures. That is not to say that a primitive or undeveloped culture is better or worse; usually these changes are assessed as developmental in that the net result appears to be that they produce more "comfortable" or more sophisticated lifestyles and/or more efficient methods of government, food-production, clothing and shelter. The changes, after inter-cultural contact, seem to affect, also, their systems of metaphysical or religious conceptualisations, which frequently become more complex, combining local traditional beliefs with new imported ideas. These changes also affect artefacts and their imagery, and of course it has often been the evidence of artefacts and their imagery, found in archaeological searches, which have provided clues to the changes that have occurred. Also, as stated previously, Wobst's proposition that the power of outside influences is in direct relationship to the distances between the affected groups, is vital. Such examples are to be found in the Sumerian eye-idols of the third millennium BC, where the finds show that the decreasing influence on these iconic artefacts is in direct relationship to the distance from Ur which was the centre of power and religion. The influences from the temple, religion and rituals of this great trading centre of Sumer spread out like decreasing ripples through the more northerly provinces. Further examples can be found in the trade relations that flourished between pre- and early dynastic Egypt and Mesopotamia, from the late fourth millennium BC on.

With these observations as a basis it would seem reasonable to postulate that the dynamics of a society's development (or change) spring to some extent from the catalytic results of inter-relationships. These may consist of migration, trade or conquest. They

177 Mallowan, Early Mesopotamia and Iran, op. cit. The influence, for example, of the Sumerian traders on the more northerly centres on the Mesopotamian trade routes; evidenced in the temple complexes, and the Eye idols, pp. 42, 44; also the trading relations between Sumer and Iran pp. 20–25.

178 The adoption by Egypt of building with plano-convex bricks, the concept of a written language and the adoption for trading purposes of the cylinder seal were all Mesopotamian inventions. Mallowan, Early Mesopotamia and Iran, ditto, pp. 13–15, 39, 59–64; Lloyd, Art of the Ancient Near East, op. cit., pp. 44, 80–81, 92.
may be positive, friendly, productive (for the purposes of trade or marriage), or they may be unfriendly, aggressive or conquistadorial (short of genocidal). And it does seem to be an acceptable theory, therefore, that a culture or society or a civilisation cannot, or does not, change to any great extent without the occasions of inter-relationship with at least one other culture. These may determine, not only advances towards more complex socio-systems and ideas, but possibly also regression and the partial disintegration of a culture. The most obvious example of the latter lies in the case of the Australian Aboriginal cultural heritage which, until recently, had been eroded and overtaken by its contacts with the incoming Europeans.

Inter-relationship is linked therefore with ideas of creativity. Creativity appears to have been an attribute of *homo sapiens* since earliest traceable times, and Pfeiffer discusses it in great depth and breadth. Conjunction, transference, adoption and adaptation between societies has resulted in changes in the direction, power, purpose and/or quality of creativity, as well as the physical and visual evidence of changes in creativity (within the area of object/craft/artefact-making) and these are the particular concerns of the present study. And at this point it is possible to theorise that inter-relationships are the specific occasions which have provided the momentum for creative change and initiative in the production of artefacts and their imagery. And inter-relationships and the subsequent interaction of ideas between two or more groups seem to be as significant as any inherent creativity that might exist already within a given group.

From an anthropological point of view the actual mixing of heterogeneous types of peoples seems also to have some catalytic effect on the rate of development (or change) within a society. Mellaart cites the three types which cohabited at Çatal Huyuk in ancient Anatolia; “the Eurafricans, the Mediterranean second kind of dolichocephalic stock and the brachycephalic Alpines”. He states that this heterogeneity “accounts in large measure

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for the inventiveness and the rapid advance in every field of cultural activity seen at Çatal Huyuk.”

“... The population of Çatal Huyuk is in fact mixed... Eurafricans descended from an Upper Paleolithic type like Combe-Capelle man, formed about 59 per cent of the population... Proto-Mediterraneans of finer build (about 17 per cent) are a second dolichocephalic stock, but the third group consists of brachycephalic Alpines (24 per cent)... Such a heterogeneous population accounts in large measure for the inventiveness and the rapid advance in every field of cultural activity seen at Çatal Huyuk...”

Myth and the Image

To suggest that it is possible to know precisely the mythic origins of some kinds of imagery can be fraught with difficulties, because, although the earliest known artefacts have been dated to more than one million years ago,\textsuperscript{182} dating of the earliest mythic concepts would be impossible. As Lévi-Strauss wrote, of myths and mythic systems:

\begin{quote}
"...behind each mythic system there loom others, which were the dominant factors in determining it; it is these other systems which speak through it and echo each other down the ages; if not indefinitely, at least as far back as that irrecoverable moment in time, hundreds of thousands of years ago – or perhaps even longer ago still, as may one day be claimed – when mankind, in the beginning, produced its first myths..."\textsuperscript{183}
\end{quote}

This would seem to apply to some extent also to visual imagery because although there is now dating on the earliest known artefacts, the dating of the beginnings of imagery that was first applied to artefacts is not known. Neither is it known whether visual imagery appeared on artefacts before or after it first appeared on rock surfaces. Nevertheless it is still valid, in the context of this present study, to make the observation that some so-called fine art imagery has indeed developed and modified from imagery which has appeared earlier, on artefacts. Lévi-Strauss continued:

\begin{quote}
"... This is not to say that, at each stage of this complex development, the myth, in passing from one community to another, has not been modified by the proximity of different techno-economic infrastructures which exert an attraction on it. It has to adapt to their mechanisms... Each version of the myth, then, shows a two-fold determinism; one strand links it to a succession of previous versions...while the other operates...through the constraints arising from the infrastructures which necessitate the modification of some particular element,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{182} Pfeiffer, \textit{The Creative Explosion}, op. cit., pp. 77–84.
with the result that the system undergoes reorganisation in order to adapt these
differences to necessities of an external kind."\(^{184}\)

This seems to be a parallel situation with both so-called fine art and artefact imagery. In
fact, not only is there a parallel, but there is also a cross-linkage, because a significant
amount of both kinds of imagery either cross-reference to or are the outcome of oral and
written myths. It will be seen also, during the course of this thesis, that some artefact
imagery appears to have been generated in the first place as spontaneous reaction to local
need, invention, and circumstance, whether or not the fundamental reference points have
been mythologically based. Some of this imagery which appears to be fundamental to
later so-called fine art imagery (in painting and sculpture) will be considered and traced,
as far as it is possible, in selected cultures, taking into account the variety of materials,
techniques and skills that have been used.

The fact that humanity has, from earliest Paleolithic times, done more than has been
absolutely necessary for material survival provides a starting point for this consideration
of humankind's inventiveness.\(^{185}\) At many times, in varying locations and by different
groups of people, there has been extra activity, sometimes apparently connected, either
consciously or unconsciously, with physical, non-physical (spiritual), and aesthetically
based concepts. It appears, on the fortuitous evidence available to us in the twentieth
century, that for many thousands of years humanity has had a desire or need to make
visual marks and objects which have adorned, fortified, aided and transcended the
necessities of daily subsistence and survival. This also includes, of course, myth-based
imagery. Activities which fall into these categories of human endeavour are cave-
painting, body-ornament, object-forming and decoration, tool, icon and utensil-making,
the making of embellishing marks, and the forming of objects (artefacts), and the

\(^{184}\) ditto, pp. 628, 629.
\(^{185}\) As demonstrated by the numerous finds dated to the Paleolithic eras, and even earlier, and as reported by
recognition of some quality in found objects which can be associated more with metaphysical than physical needs.

From these early beginnings, two-dimensional and three-dimensional visual imagery has developed, sometimes in long, connected strings of cultural and mythological coherence,\(^\text{186}\) sometimes in looser associational relationships connected, for instance, with trading, exogamy, migration or conquest. Sometimes it seems to have developed, at different times and in cultures thousands of miles apart, as spontaneous generation.\(^\text{187}\) In cultures where evidence provides suitable clues it can be observed that such imagery can be seen both as symbol and as signifier of a society’s concepts, perceptions and social, economic and political circumstances.

Is it possible to bring to mind any particular artefact imagery which is not either an analogous representation, a non-analogous symbol, or a sign with semiotic signification?\(^\text{188}\) Although there are later theories than Barthes’ discourse on semiological signification, nevertheless, a reading of Barthes is interesting in terms of artefacts and their imagery because, of all the activities that may fall into the category of art, the making of artefacts and their imagery can be a direct response to the needs and perceptions of a given society. And the material nature of the artefact itself makes it an ideal candidate for Barthes’ theory of signified/signifier/sign (fig. 38.). The question asked, therefore, would lead to the proposition that it is not possible for an artefact and its image to be other than a semiological representation; that any artefact imagery must fall into one or two of these categories, and therefore cannot avoid communicating in some way with the user/viewer (or finder and critic). Mukarovsky goes further, and in identifying the work of art (which, as discussed in the Preface, he calls the “artifact”, and


\(^{187}\) Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*.

Barthes’ diagram of semiological systems, applied to artefact imagery when it is transferred from one culture to another; changing, and losing old concepts, and gathering new significances.

Fig. 39 (top) Primitive bowls from Byblos, Lebanon; Neolithic, before 5000 BC.

(right) Primitive bowl from level II, Çatal Huyuk, Anatolia, c. 5300 BC.
therefore could be seen to include painting, sculpture and craft objects in one and the same category), he says:

"...the basic constitution of the individual consciousness...derives from content belonging to the collective consciousness...any mental content that exceeds the bounds of the individual consciousness acquires the character of a sign by the very fact of its communicability...a work of art is at one and the same time sign, structure and value...here is always some "thing", some "artifact", that represents the work of art in the outside world and may be perceived by one and all..."189

The nature of the communication is mythologically based, according to Barthes' theory; that is, the communicating imagery presents, through some visual means, references to circumstances or ideas which have been focussed upon by the society from which the artefact emanates, and which have been conceptualised visually. If Barthes' theory is applied, myth is an interpretative phenomenon, frequently conveying messages which are coincidental to the image, and which have no natural symbolism connecting them with the image.190

It is easy to recognise the mythological sources in imagery that are directly analogous. And if the cultural conditions are known in which the artefact was made, then it should be possible, also, to guess at the artificial symbolism which might lie behind the decision to use such imagery. And it should be possible, also, to recognise the inadvertent or involuntary signs within imagery which provide the viewer with insights into the time or circumstances of the making or using of the artefact; that is the semiological information.191 In the case of pottery, for instance, the kind of clay used, the pigments used for decoration, the firing techniques, and the style of both the form and the decorative motifs can give, to the expert in these areas, sufficient information to be able to

189  Mukarovsky, *Semiotics of Art*, op. cit., p. 3.
191 For example, the evidence that may be provided by the materials, techniques, style and idea-content that have been used by the craftworker to make the artefact.
identify with reasonable certainty, the time and circumstances of making. These
deductions can be fortified by information supplied by contextual evidence that may be
available from further anthropological and archaeological studies. But how much there
might be of the mark- and motif-making that can be assumed to fall into the third
(Barthes’) category of “sign”, is problematical. In the case of artefacts which were made
in pre-literate societies there is of course no written proof of intended or unintended
meanings connected with the artefacts. Comparative typological studies and other
material evidence from the find-site of the artefacts, however, can help to extend our
knowledge and assess whether there is a possibility that the imagery might contain natural
or artificial symbolism. And artefacts, in certain circumstances, can also be used as signs
which enable conclusions to be drawn about other and wider aspects of the community
involved. In preliterate societies therefore, marks, symbols, or imagery of any kind
usually need the affirmation of external or contextual evidence if the intention is to
discover mythological signification. As Mukarovsky put it:

“... Every work of art is an autonomous sign composed of: (1) an artifact
functioning as a perceivable signifier; (2) an “aesthetic object” which is
registered in the collective consciousness and which functions as “signification”;
(3) a relationship to a thing signified (this relationship refers not to any distinct
existence - since we are talking about an autonomous sign - but to the total
context of social phenomena, science, philosophy, religion, politics, economics,
and so on, of any given milieu)…”192

The next question is whether it is possible for an artefact or its imagery to be totally
devoid of both intended and incidental signification. The answer should be “No”. This
is because an artefact with its imagery, despite itself, contains a “sign” which came into
existence only as a result of previous sets of concepts (the signified) which were
concretised (the signifier) and resulted in the making and embellishment of the artefact.
Even if the decorative imagery of or on an artefact is limited to the simplest and most

neutral of marks they will still provide some evidence, or possibility of evidence, about the object or the maker, or the society for which it was made. A case in point is the pottery of the so-called Dark Age of mainland Greece (c.1,100–900 BC) (fig. 28)\textsuperscript{193} The potters of the period had not lost their ability to produce fine, authoritative forms of well-balanced proportion, but the decorations upon them are reduced to a minimum. Simple banding and concentric circles are the sole embellishment, even though the earlier Mycenaean, Cycladic and Minoan pots had been splendidly decorated with schematic, figurative imagery. This kind of less costly simplification, coupled with many local variations, is seen to indicate what was, in fact, the situation; that for the time being there was no longer any kind of central power or wealthy patronage which could afford to pay for labour-intensive decoration.\textsuperscript{194} According to Boardman, however, the influence of the incoming Ionians from the coastal regions of Asia Minor was responsible for the critical placement of these simple decorative elements, and is “a precursor of the rhythm and symmetry of later Greek art”.\textsuperscript{195} Cook, however, doubted this, and wrote:

“... At its best Proto-Geometric was a respectable style, simple and sturdy but limited; though it provided a discipline that Mycenaean lacked, to see in it the germ of Classical Greek art is a romantic assumption…”\textsuperscript{196}

It is doubtful whether there could ever be a deliberate limiting of semiotic significations, even when there are historical (written) records which purport to define the areas of meanings attached to an artefact and its imagery. Anyone at any time may be able to place interpretations upon the visual imagery of an artefact, which might be justified in terms of a subjective point of view. And can it also be postulated that the very act of making or decorating an artefact is in itself an expanding or limiting process which can set up the original signifier and sign? It is a process of selection for the purpose of articulating and

\textsuperscript{193} Boardman, \textit{The Art and Architecture of Ancient Greece}, op. cit., pp. 119–120, fig. 57.  
\textsuperscript{195} Boardman, \textit{The Art and Architecture of Ancient Greece}, op. cit., p. 120.  
\textsuperscript{196} Cook, \textit{Greek Art}, op. cit., p. 132.
concretising concepts which have in turn originated in perceived circumstances, and this is unavoidably subjective. Any articulation, either verbal or visual, is at the same time both expanding and limiting. Innate in the nature of articulation is the potential for the expansion of meanings, symbols, signifiers and signs. And innate also, is the potential for limitation by the very physical and ideational nature of the chosen signifier. Mukarovsky discusses the changes that can be the result of applying imagery of any kind to a basic artefact that was originally made as a “non-artistic, practical intentionality”.197 It is useful to apply, here, Barthes’ theoretical construct in his analysis of imagery. In the imagery of artefacts it can happen, through changing social circumstances, that the first and third elements of Barthes’ tripartite system (the signified and the sign) can be lost. The loss of signification, or sign quality, in an image is exactly proportional to the degree of loss of the first element (the signified, or the idea-content). The second element (the signifier, or the artefact image) is the only remaining element of the original tripartite set. When this signifier, or artefact which carries the physical relict of the original idea is without its conceptual substance, it is more than likely that it will attract to itself and accumulate other concepts which in turn, will become the new signified. Thus the tripartite system is reborn; the artefact imagery with its adopted concept combine to make a new sign, which of course is different from the original.198 This is the kind of situation that can occur when an artefact and/or its imagery is transferred, for one reason or another, from one society to another or from one epoch to another.

Such new concepts, or mythologies as Barthes called them, originate in conditions relevant to the society which has adopted the form (that is, the second element or signifier) without also taking in the former mythologies that were associated with it. There is also the possibility that the artefact itself and its imagery may project into the mind of the viewer/user/finder new meanings or implications which arise purely out of

the form and decoration of the artefact. The universal urge of the craftworker to embellish the artefact in a structured and ordered way, perhaps regardless of the intended social uses of the artefact, makes this a possibility. In cases like this we are faced with a whole new set of signified, signifier and sign which do not necessarily have any links with any other, and which derive solely out of material, technique and the personality, predilections, mythic basis and limitations of the maker. But the maker is inevitably a product of the society in which he or she works. The imagery, or decoration chosen, might, conceivably, comment solely upon the formal aspects of the artefact, but is more likely, also, to give some clues, through the nature of the form and the marks used, which relate to aspects of the society which has adopted the idea of the artefact for its own use, despite the conscious intent of the maker to express his or her own personal marks. It is possible, of course, for the embellishing marks to be so basic and universal (such as banding, stripes or circles) that signification would have to be found either in the social background for the use of such basic imagery, or in the particular material and techniques used, (as in the case of the Greek Dark Age pottery mentioned above).

But some forms in themselves (such as bowls and beakers and plates) are so fundamental that they were made universally by ancient societies or groups, and are difficult to differentiate and identify as signs of a particular community (fig. 39). And if signification or identification were to be sought in the material itself, there could be problems. Materials such as metals, in their pure form (such as copper) hardly vary from region to region, and in any case might have been transported from one region to another. In the case of clay it may be possible for chemical analysis to identify regions of origin, but this is doubtful. The present lack of any extensive studying of such primitive forms in terms of ordering, or evidence of creative decision-making, fortifies the proposition that such artefacts have so universal a commonality that they do not offer any useful signification or mythology that may point to differentiations between tribes or

groups. And as such, they have not yet offered fertile ground for serious study within a theoretical construct.

The idea of humankind’s universal urge to decorate or embellish in an ordered way is the theme discussed by Gombrich. The sense of order, as Gombrich sees it, is innate in the making and the embellishing of an artefact. The ordering and decoration of an artefact is part of the process of the materialisation of the concept that created the need to make it in the first place. And so the tripartite nature of semiotics can become, in the case of the artefact, a circularity, a continuing, or a trinity, which may be temporarily broken but which will remake itself. The very fact that an artefact is the materialisation of some concept ensures this. A physical object which is purposefully produced, or found and recognised as a useful artefact, cannot help but bring with it, its own innate significations, even if those significations are universal and therefore non-differentiating. Without the perceived need in the first place, the artefact would not have been conceived or acquired, or subsequently made to satisfy a need. And the perceived need is a direct outcome and reflection of some aspect of the society that sanctioned its making.

Such activity probably begins to equate at some point with the act of creativity. Can creativity then be seen as a kind of hole-filling exercise which finds a solution to a problem, either by means of logical reasoning or by apparently intuitive leaps, or by a combination of both? If this is so, then the claim made by some is untenable, that artefacts and their imagery are only “minor arts”. 200

To revert to Barthes’ theory that an artefact must always be capable of providing evidence of mythologies, it can be argued that this depends to a large extent upon the interpretation of the term “mythologies”. Barthes’ theory proposes that “a myth is a system of communication”. Can it be postulated that the conceptualised need for a given artefact

200 This prejudicial labelling was discussed in the Preface.
does not necessarily provide a “mythology” in the case of the production of artefacts?

There are two kinds of need; the first arises out of the instinctive urge for material survival, and the second arises out of a need for social, non-material and spiritual survival. Some artefacts aim to satisfy both needs, and some aim to satisfy one or the other.

In the case of the first need, the form and imagery on and of the artefact which has been made to satisfy it, will, in most cases, carry signifiers of mythologies which may or may not be related to the practical uses to which the artefact might be put. But it is true that there are artefacts (mentioned above) that have been made in very undeveloped or primitive societies, which are so basic and neutral (bowls, for example) that their significations are universal and undifferentiated, and therefore non-specific to that particular society. Treistman records three instances of this kind of pottery where only the most basic and universal techniques are found to have been used, and their apparent intended uses are also universal and non-differentiating:

“... Six thousand years ago (in Eastern Siberia, the Lake Baikal region)... The people made pottery, at first crudely fired and decorated only by the nets in which they were fashioned... The use of permanent containers suggests that the women may have been collecting the wild products of the forest... In Chita Oblast, where the Amur River joins the Shilka River, a valley adaptation of the taiga way of life took place around 3,000 BC... The pottery of the forest efficiency is handmade, often using the paddle-and-anvil technique, decorated with incised designs and cord and mat impressions...”

Other non-differentiating examples can be cited from the works of Mellaart, Aldred, Watson, and Phillips in summarised versions of their individual surveys of early human cultures. Pottery with shapes and imagery that are universal and therefore non-specific are mentioned briefly (fig. 39). In most cases it seems apparent that Gombrich’s “sense

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of order" only developed later, to provide these artefacts of material survival with characteristics, some of which might possibly be useful for identification. Mellaart, Aldred, Watson and Phillips provide examples of these. Mellaart says:

"... The earliest inhabitants of Khirokitia (Cyprus c.5,500 BC) made a few clumsy attempts at pottery, but soon abandoned this for stoneware that is their most characteristic product...Crude and unsophisticated by comparison (with Hacilar c.5,000 BC) are...comb-ornamented pots from Byblos, on the Lebanon coast...Painted pottery techniques did not reach here until considerably later than 5000 BC... (At Jarmo) Seven metres of debris contained about 15 building levels, the top five with primitive pottery..."

Aldred discusses the development from primitive pots in pre-dynastic Egypt:

"... Common to them all (the Amratians and the Gerzeans) was pottery, shaped by hand, each period developing its characteristic shapes... By 4,000 BC the... pottery (of El-Badari) was no longer coarse and ill-fired... (In early pre-dynastic Egypt) Cooking vessels and food containers were made of pottery and this industry shows a steady advance from the coarse clay cups and bowls of Faiyum ‘A’ (in the north) and the ill-fired ware of Deir-Tasa (in the south)..."

Watson mentions primitive pottery in China:

"... In inner Mongolia many sites are found characterised by tools...(which) suggest a parallel with the microliths of the Mesolithic cultures of Europe. The Chinese microliths are often found associated with rough reddish and grey pottery..."

And Phillips lists similar non-differentiating characteristics of primitive pottery in Russia and the Danubian basin before the development of more significant pottery types:

"... Ordinary domestic pottery of a plain kind was made (in the Tripolye culture, South Russia, 3,000–1,700 BC), probably by the women, from stocks of prepared clay, such as were discovered in some houses... (In the Usatovo
culture, near Odessa) Degenerate pottery...found in both kinds of burial, and also a coarse ware bearing cord-impressions which some have thought characteristic of the early Indo-European peoples... Simple forms and impressed decoration characterise the pottery of the Danubian Neolithic though later wares were painted before firing, in the Anatolian and Mesopotamian traditions.”

Could it be claimed that their non-specificity and their universal techniques of making and decorating suggest that they cannot be truly identified as useful evidence of mythologies? This must be so if the prime purpose of separating out a theory of mythology is to identify what it is that is particular to a given society. Does the presence of attendant mythology appear at the moment when there is an apparently different characteristic added to the form (imagery) of the signifier (the basic artefact, such as a bowl) which can point to some unique or particular conditions in a given society? This question is complicated by the example of the bone markings of Bilzingsleben, dated to c 300,000 BP. They certainly appear to have a simple scheme or order in their placement, and this fact carries the argument that they are human-made and not incidental or accidental. But because there are, to date, no other finds in the area with which they can be compared or contextualised, it would not seem possible that unique or particular conditions could be inferred. Any uniqueness that may be claimed for these marked bones cannot be justified because, to date, no other similar objects have been found of a similar dating.

If examples of artefacts which do not carry the signs of mythologies are studied, it will be seen that it is not possible to differentiate one group of such artefacts from another because there are no features which distinguish the containers made by one group from those made by another. In the case of bowls, for instance, clays may have been used which are virtually identical because they have come from the same geological region.

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And primitive techniques of making are seen to be universal. Or, they can be carved from stone, in regions where there is little detectable variation from one district to another. And because the human hand, from whatever region or epoch, is basically the same anatomically, it is not surprising that some of the most primitive and basic artefacts are impossible to differentiate, one from the other, because the human hand will inevitably use basic techniques and make basic forms for basic needs that are, in many cases, impossible to distinguish one from the other.

It might be useful in this context therefore to consider the term “mythology” itself. If it is applied to an object which fulfils a basic material need such as a primitively fired clay container for, say, food or drink, and if that container has no peculiar or particular characteristics which make it different to some degree from other similar containers, then the only mythological intelligence that is available is that it is a container made by someone who was able to harden the clay in a fire. And if the provenance of the container is not known, then it is not possible to conjecture with any confidence about any other circumstances of its making or use, unless the material used is region-specific. In this case, the only perceptible mythology (using the word to denote, as did Barthes, “communication”) is that it is a container for food or drink, but in the present study this kind of basic information about universal behaviour is not of any great use in attempting to discover and appraise semiotic intelligence or to discover the nature and sources of artefacts and their imagery. Food and drink containers are so universal in most ancient cultures, as we have seen, that such a piece of intelligence is of no special value (except in a negative way) in the context of this present study. Only objects which have some extra characteristics which offer evidence of additional mythologies, can be of use. They can then qualify in the present context as examples of artefacts to which Barthes’ semiological theories can be applied.

\[204\] Analysis of the material used might offer information about the site of its making, but this is barely enough to be cited as “mythology".
In the case of the second kind of need, the non-physical, it would seem that it would be impossible to make an artefact to answer such a need, which did not carry inevitably the tripartite semiotic messages. The artefact would have been developed as a result of mythologically based concepts which must have been existed to some degree beforehand. The artefact holds, therefore, within itself, those predetermining mythologies in a visualised, illustrative, abstracted or symbolic form. It is conceivable that they can be, not only the signified, but also the signifiers and the signs of other, pre-existing conditions. They can form a kind of sub-set, a semiological trinity, that is layered within the outer shell of the symbolic imagery of the artefact.205

Examples can be cited which fulfil the two kinds of need, the material/physical and the non-physical or spiritual. The earliest known, basic, common, unremarkable vessels found in Neolithic China filled the first, and material, need of providing containers. But when Chinese culture developed with the blossoming, first of the Neolithic, then of the Shang, Zhou and Han dynasties, elaborately decorated and labour-intensive artefacts were being made for those who could afford them, and which were far more complex than was absolutely necessary for the satisfaction of basic material needs. But, as mentioned previously in the chapter, Diffusion and Local Invention, basic, unremarkable and undifferentiated vessels were also being made concurrently, and used in the humbler and poorer sections of society.206 In this instance, while they do not add to our knowledge of the mythologies of the people who used them, their existence alongside more elaborate artefacts does at least fortify evidence of hierarchical structure in the society. Unremarkable domestic pots without distinguishing imagery, are the evidence of long usage in ancient societies, of providing basic vessels (artefacts) for activities associated with the most basic and universal of survival needs, and it might even be maintained that in fact they present a kind of anti-mythology because they are so non-specific and universal.

205 Barthes, Mythologies, op. cit.
In the case of the artefacts which were made apparently for non-physical or spiritual needs, such as the figurines of the European Paleolithic which are generally cited as being “fertility goddesses”, local stylistics cannot fail to be evident in their forms, and thus automatically offer semiotic intelligence (fig. 40). (This is coupled with the arguments put forward by Wobst that the range of travel and the carrying of goods and artefacts during the Paleolithic was limited, which suggests that the transfer of iconic objects such as these must have been rare, unless they were small enough to be of inconsequential weight or bulk.) It is useful to quote Wobst again where he states that in the absence of methods of hauling goods, Paleolithic humankind had to walk and carry his or her necessities on the back whenever he or she wanted to move. (see Wobst, quoted in chapter, Diffusion and Local Invention).
The figurines offer semiotic intelligence because the need for the icons was a non-physical concept held by the group concerned, and did not have visible form until it was expressed in the artefacts (the figurines) by the makers who, through the apparent lack of earlier models, were forced to create their own iconography, and this must therefore have had mythological reference to the social group where it was being made. Whereas, with the making of basic food vessels the physical requirements were already evident and the makers were restricted by the demands of efficient performance, and by the material at hand, to produce forms that, as functional objects, were universally similar, before any idiosyncratic symbolism or mark-making was indulged in which would have provided semiotic information.

For the purposes of this present study it might be suggested then, that the implements, or artefacts, made to assist the most basic survival activities, only graduate into mythology-status when they carry extra visual evidence related to human conditions and concepts which are peculiar or specific to one or more groups or time-spans.

If this theory of specificity is not acceptable, then the term “mythology” would have to be seen as also encompassing what could be termed universal circumstances. During the millennia of dawning consciousness early humankind existed in sets of circumstances which made attractive the development of basic material aids to survival. But the earliest known aids, such as the stone artefacts of *homo erectus* from the Leakey explorations of the Olduvai Gorge in Africa, and the deliberately marked bones from the site of Bilzingsleben in Germany are further examples of undistinguished and universal objects which present us with anti-mythology.²⁰⁷

Mythologies and Signs

It would seem, from lack of evidence to the contrary, that the making of cave and rock shelter art, and the making of "fertility" figurines diminished in the Mesolithic period, and that this coincided roughly with humankind's development of built dwellings. The question then arises, how could communication and indoctrination processes have been carried on in societies that were increasingly sedentary and complex if there were no major visual messaging methods or sites, such as cave art? (This is assuming that Paleolithic imagery did have a didactic, mnemonic or messaging purpose, as Leroi-Gourhan and Pfeiffer have proposed, and that they were not simply visual phenomena made solely for the pleasure or satisfaction of the maker and/or the community.) If cave art imagery did in fact cease to be a major factor even though there was a growing complexity and interdependence within a community, and a consequent need for communal messaging, did artefacts, and possibly ephemeral activities associated with them, and with shrine-buildings, (such as those found at Hacilar and Catal Huyuk in central Anatolia) develop into the main message-carriers and the visual mnemonic means whereby the tribal encyclopoedia (as Pfeiffer called the accumulation of tribal knowledge) was learned and understood by new generations? (fig. 41) As communities developed more sophisticated lifestyles with more or less permanent homesites the number, range and sophistication of artefacts increased. The two situations seem to have developed more or less concurrently. During the Neolithic and post-Neolithic epochs in Southwest Asia artefacts and the techniques used to make them also became more refined and complex. And so did the imagery of their form and their decoration (fig. 42). How much of this imagery had a didactic purpose is impossible to judge. Neither is it possible to assess whether or not they were also accompanied by objects made of ephemeral materials, or by the ephemera of rituals and community


messaging. In prehistoric cultures, such as the Anatolian cultures mentioned above, it can only be from contextual evidence, artefacts and site conditions, that possible inferences can be made that ephemeral activities took place at all.²¹⁰

Before and after the invention of a written language in Sumer c.3,500 BC, however, the post-Neolithic and by now largely urban societies living east of the Mediterranean had developed well-established and well-regulated complex trading systems which connected with regions from Anatolia in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south. (They had also developed impressively huge temple structures which were the foci for trade and religion (figs. 44 a., b.)²¹¹ It must be that, even before writing had developed to the point where it was providing adequate communication for trading transactions among participating groups, the imagery of artefacts was a necessary communications device. And at a local level of communication of the ruling hierarchy with the general population, this must also have applied, because even after writing was invented the vast majority of the populace would not have had access to the clay tablets on which the writing was impressed. Visual imagery was an important means of relaying information and cultural concepts to the populace. The evidence of the Catal Huyuk wall-painting, however, suggests that in some places at least internal walls were being used in place of cave and rock shelter surfaces, for image-making which apparently carried didactic messaging and tribal intelligence, or even visual records of ritual or festivities.²¹²

Because of the particular kind of imagery used in Mesopotamia on some fourth and third millennium BC artefacts, (such as the votive figures and “eye idols” of Tell Asmar and

²¹⁰ Catal Huyuk, in central Anatolia, c. 5000 BC, provides a good example of artefactual evidence for proposed ritual activities, in rooms which contain carefully arranged bull-horn cores, a female (mother goddess) in birthing attitude, breasts modelled in plaster, on the walls , and traces of wall-paintings of excarnation by vultures. (Mellaart writes, “...the dead were exposed to vultures and insects, and after excarnation were wrapped in cloth, mats or baskets (for children), and then interred.”) Mellaart, The Neolithic of the Near East, op. cit., pp. 101-102 ; Also Powell, op. cit., p. 73.

²¹¹ Mallowan, Early Mesopotamia and Iran, op. cit., pp. 41, 78; Lloyd, op. cit., p. 46.

fig. 4.5b. Votive statuettes found in pit in floor of sanctuary; Abu Temple, Tell Asmar, Mesopotamia 2900-2370 BC
(E Mes 1r)

fig. 4.5a Tallest of votive statuettes (height 30 inches); Abu Temple, Tell Asmar. Remains of child's foot and leg, with female figure.

fig. 4.3 Many thousands of eye-idols were found in the temple at Brak made of black or white alabaster. The thin biscuit-like body is surmounted by a pair of eyes; some examples have more than one pair, others are crowned. The lower right-hand example with two idols superimposed on a larger idol may possibly represent a mother with children.
Reconstructed drawing of a temple of the Early Uruk period at Eridu

Fig. 44a  Plan and reconstruction of White Temple, Uruk, 3200-3100 BC (E Mes 1r)
Tell Brak, referred to below)\(^{213}\) it is reasonable to deduce that some of the imagery, at least, could have played a useful part as indoctrination or reminders of community mores, practices, and attitudes to authority. Much of the imagery used in these times appears to have been a kind of stylised shorthand, of schematisation and abbreviation. The ideas expressed in the imagery frequently appear to uphold this proposition.

By 3,000 BC in Mesopotamia, sacrificial and “presentation” scenes involving priests and rulers, heroic incidents and victories in battle, and man and “bull-man” overcoming wild beasts were common currency in artefact imagery,\(^ {214}\) as were trees, birds and game animals (fig. 42). In most instances the subject matter is stylised to the point where the most is expressed in the minimum of imagery and technique. If this is so, then the semiological system of deciphering the myth-content of artefact imagery holds good. In many cases, in fact, the abstraction and schematisation that is evident falls neatly into Barthes’ theory of “second-order signification”\(^ {215}\). The signified and the signifier together produce an abbreviated sign of mythologies, which itself becomes a signifier in an internalised second-order trinity.

As an example, two sets of what are apparently votive figurines will be discussed; they comprise one set from Tell Brak and one from Tell Asmar, mentioned previously. The first group are figurines found at Tell Brak near the Habur River in northern Syria, and they are usually referred to as the “eye idols” (fig. 43). They fit well into Barthes’ theory. These small, flat, incised figurative objects, carved out of thin flakes of alabaster feature a variety of detail and are construed as single and family dedications, or permanent supplications, to the deities of the day.\(^ {216}\) It would seem that these objects were signifiers and carriers of several messages. Although they are are highly stylised


\(^{214}\) Lloyd, ditto, p. 39 (illustr.) alabaster vase from Warka, pp. 81, 84, 85; also, Mallowan, ditto, pp. 74-77; also, Powell, *Origins of Western Art*, op. cit., p. 26.


and simplified to the point of abstraction, they are still recognisable as representations of people, with large, much exaggerated eyes. Some, wearing headgear, appear possibly to be male; those without are thought possibly to be female. Some have small figures incised or carved into the front, and these are interpreted by Mallowan as possibly representing a god, goddess and family groups. Some have what he interprets as "crowns" and therefore represent rulers.\(^{217}\) The figurines, of which there are thousands, appear to represent the members of the community. Decoding suggests that they are evidence of ritual of some kind in the temple site where they were found, which equates them with the Barthes' term "sign". If, in turn, this evidence of "religious ritual" is taken as a signifier, the concept that is being signified is that of supplication to a powerful deity. (The exaggerated stare of the enlarged eyes is interpreted by Lloyd as symbolic of concentration upon the worship of a god, or of supplication.)\(^{218}\) The fact that thousands of these small "eye idols" were found buried in the lower levels of older temples which had existed previously on the same site suggests that the whole community were, over a long period, indoctrinated to offer these cult objects to their god. And this, in turn, offers evidence of a situation where the population was well controlled and obedient to a powerful priestly hierarchy. The fact they had apparently been buried in the floor of an older, lower temple also offers information, possibly, that they had been dedicated or sanctified, and could not therefore be put to other, later use, because they belonged to the temple.\(^{219}\)

One of the signs that can be decoded from this second-order trinity arises out of the visual interpretation of the idea-content. The objects are carved as a minimal expression that can scarcely be accepted as a first visual interpretation of the idea of representing the people in the community. It is more reasonable to assume that they were derived from richer, more naturalistic sources. They therefore offer evidence (but without complete proof) of

\(^{217}\) ditto, pp. 44–50.
\(^{219}\) Mallowan, *Early Mesopotamia and Iran*, op. cit., pp. 41, 42.
diffusion of this imagery from elsewhere. It is known that somewhere other than Tell Brak was the centre and source of the ideas and practices of religion, trade and economic power. That there was such a place is well-recorded, written on clay tablets, and in dated objects found in the most southern region of Mesopotamia, near the head of the Persian Gulf, at the site of Uruk. According to Mallowan this was the “White Temple” of the ‘Ubaid period at Uruk (fig. 44 a.). The “Eye Temple” at Tell Brak and its plan is basically the same as that of other Sumerian temples, and in particular, is similar to the great “White Temple” at Uruk. In relation to the Uruk temple, (and possibly others before it at Eridu (fig. 44 b.)), Tell Brak is seen to be a faraway provincial outpost of Sumerian power and influence. Mallowan writes:

“...in addition to the more complex temples there were others, of a simpler type, devoted to less important divinities, more in keeping with rustic worship...and these were widespread in Mesopotamia... One of the most interesting...is the earliest shrine of the Abu Temple at Tell Asmar...(and we) may turn to the Eye Temple at Tell Brak...800 miles upstream from Uruk...”

Of carved stone figures found, Mallowan writes:

“...the sculpture from Tell Asmar...appears to be relatively provincial and sometimes crudely carved...”

This is a second set, of twenty-one figures. It was found “in a pit beneath the floor in the Abu Temple at Tell Asmar “ (figs. 45 a., b.). (Tell Asmar was about 200 km north of the great centre of trade and religion, Uruk.) According to Mallowan they had been “piously buried, having outlived their usefulness, but once dedicated in the temple, they could not be discarded.” There appear to be two theories that have been put forward by Mallowan, Frankfort and Lloyd. The first is that, because two of the figures are larger

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220 ditto, pp. 40-41.
221 ditto, pp. 40, 44, 104-106.
222 ditto, pp. 42, 43, 45, 104.
223 ditto, p. 45.
than the rest, they represented cult deities.\textsuperscript{224} (Beside the foot of the female figure there is also a vestige of a figure of a child.) But this theory is queried by Lloyd because, he argues:

\textquoteright\textquoteright... Like all the other statues in the group they stand in the same conventional attitude of worship and the hands clasped across their breasts hold small vessels for pouring libation. They are also a family of worshippers...probably a family of special distinction...\textsuperscript{225} Further confirmation comes from inscriptions found on figurines from yet another site, Lagash, which read, \textquoteleft\textquoteleft It offers prayers'' and \textquoteleft\textquoteleft Statue, say to my king (god)...\textquoteright\textquoteright\textsuperscript{226}

In both the Tell Brak and the Tell Asmar imagery there appear to be several mythologies which can be decoded. It is doubtful, however, whether all of the mythology embedded in these objects could have been deduced with confidence from the imagery alone. Other archaeological finds in related contexts have provided extra typological evidence of activities such as trading, religion, hierarchy, power, domestic circumstances, building techniques, and so on and these are recorded by both Lloyd and Mallowan.

If the limestone and marble used to make the set of figures found at Tell Asmar and Lagash had to be imported from elsewhere, as did the semi-precious stone, lapis lazuli, for the inlaid eyes, the figures would have had considerable value bestowed upon them. (Lagash was in the riverine plains of the Tigris, and Tell Asmar was in the valley of the Diyala River, many miles north of the Sumerian centre.)\textsuperscript{227} The necessary costs incurred in trading to procure these materials would have ensured this. Only the wealthier members of the population, therefore, could have afforded such expensive votive figures. Whereas, at Tell Brak, the thousands of very simple and very small flat "eye idols", found buried under the temple floor, would have been affordable, no doubt,
for the mass of the population of that region because such small objects could be made easily from the residue of chippings from large three-dimensional figures. Lloyd points out that a great deal of sculpture has been unearthed from the ruins of Sumerian temples in many regions of Mesopotamia, and "all conform to the same stylistic conventions."  

The large over-exaggerated eye form which features in both groups of objects from Tell Asmar and Tell Brak has a curiously strong hypnotic quality, and it would be easy to interpret this obsessive stare as an expression of a belief in, to quote Mallowan, "...an all-seeing god who (demanded worship and offerings and) watched over the fortunes of the city..." The implications are that it all sprang from a strong centrally governed, well-ordered, hierarchical and sophisticated culture.

Such a proposition might also see a double role for each set of objects; one of representing supplicants, and one representing the power of the god. Both groups leave no doubt in the viewer’s mind of the considerable creative abilities and technical skill of their makers, even though those from the more remote provincial centres are more clumsily made. They conceptualised in visual forms the idea of all-encompassing spiritual power capable of controlling a whole system of government and culture and its populace, who are seen to have worshipped with concentrated earnestness and hypnotic awe. It is easy to imagine the scenario of a theatrical build-up of an intense non-physical presence when these staring-eye idols were assembled in the temples, which in themselves were huge and impressive structures, built on the ziggurats, over the ruins of past temples. The signs that spring from these two groups of carved stone imagery are of course fortified by other archaeological remains at the site, but they do offer a lot of inferred information about some aspects of this Mesopotamian culture.

228 ditto, p. 100.
229 Mallowan, Early Mesopotamia and Iran, op. cit. p. 48.
230 ditto, pp. 48-50.
The fact that the sites lie on trade routes that ran to the north from the great centre of Uruk makes sense of the idea that such idols and the ritual practices connected with them had diffused throughout a very wide region indeed. The vitality of this Sumerian culture which had spread as far as Tell Brak, 500 km to the north, is well-documented. In south Mesopotamia, a region which offered the settlers, in some areas, little more than fertile estuarine flood plains of mud, and limitless marsh reeds, the Sumerians in the fourth millennium BC had created out of such unpromising materials splendid arched and vaulted reed architecture. But they had also developed well-organised trading relations and had imported stone, metals and semi-precious stones, and with these materials had achieved craftsmanship of a very high order indeed. Their creativity and skills were extraordinary. When this is taken into consideration it is not surprising that the ideas and cultural and religious practices of such a vital and enterprising civilisation spread widely to other communities along the great river valleys of the Euphrates and the Tigris.

To return to the Barthes theory of decoding, the Tell Brak “eye idols” can be read as signifiers of the Tell Asmar figures, and both groups together signify the power of the cultural concepts that were created and developed in Sumer and then diffused to provincial centres along the trade routes. These idols have provided evidence, however, of only part of the mythologies of the regional cultures of the period. Other signifiers have filled out more details of the life-style of the people. These include building foundations, ceramics, and human and animal remains found alongside jewellery in the richer burial sites.

Whilst applying the Barthes theory in this kind of deciphering exercise it is fascinating to recall a much earlier theory which also aimed at decoding for the purpose of clarifying and perceiving as fully as possible the significances attached to visual imagery. This is

232 ditto.
Panofsky’s theory of cognition. His deciphering structure is also tripartite. But unlike Barthes, Panofsky cites his three perceptions as wholly internalised, in the mind of the viewer, which limits those perceptions to the experiences and knowledge of the viewer, predetermines that they shall be subjective, and that they will vary to some extent with every viewer. Barthes bases his three perceptions objectively within the visual imagery under consideration, but it is doubtful whether even this method, based solely on physical evidence observable to any viewer, could ever be totally objective and impartial.

Also, the first two of Barthes’ factors, the signified and the signifier, must combine to make the third, the sign. Panofsky’s three factors build upon each other, as serial steps in the one activity, cognition, which develops progressively in the mind of the viewer. Barthes’ three factors are essentially different from each other, and in terms of their usefulness, in decoding. Panofsky’s three are merely successive steps of increasing cognition within the mind of the viewer, from the simple to the complex, each building on the other.

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Idea Transformed into Visuality

The attempt to transform an abstract concept into a visual, physical equivalent is a dramatic translation which the maker and decorator of an artefact must achieve to the satisfaction of his or her patron. Whether the transformation can ever achieve an exact equivalent is doubtful, and can never be proved. Neither does it seem possible to equate exactly an idea that has been expressed in one form (e.g. verbal or literary) with its translation into another. It only seems possible to approximate it in another medium with, what is at best, a poetic realisation of the original concept, and at worst, an imprecise, or even inadequate, variation. The original concept cannot avoid being controlled to some extent by the medium in which it is rendered. This applies also to the translation of an image from one medium to another, for example, from silver to clay, or from clay to textile. The new material must inevitably alter not only the style and character of the imagery, but it might alter, also, the original idea, to some extent. Frequently, also, there seems to be a kind of correspondence between the nature of an idea and the way in which it is visualised in any chosen medium. An example, though not in artefact imagery, but in painting, is quoted by Sullivan:

"... The Chinese, in their landscapes, invariably identify the agreeable idea with the agreeable form. They do not make paintings of landscape concepts which are disagreeable..."234

When this theory is applied, for instance, to the bronzes of the Shang dynasty, (c.1,650–1,028 BC) one is aware that in the instance of some Dao-die masks, unpleasant and ferocious imagery has been used to visualise the idea of a threatening monster, which some, such as Sullivan and Medley, claim to have been used as a symbol to warn against the evils of gluttony. Wen Fong, however, suggests that the animal masks which are

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creatures of the imagination, represent humankind’s primeval response to the elemental forces of Nature. 235

But observations such as these bring up a more basic problem. Why do we associate ideas like “unpleasantness, disagreeableness, threat, gluttony, fear” and so on, with certain kinds of marks, forms and imagery? And why do we associate ideas like “pleasantness, elegance, harmony, delight, urbanity” and so on, with other groups of marks, forms and imagery? Of course, humankind has been conditioned and educated over millennia to make these associations, and they are not, therefore, original ideas; they are inherited intelligence. But why did this formula develop in the first place? Perhaps its origins lay in observed human facial expressions connected with these emotions, or the link between the snarling expression of hunted animals at bay, and accompanying expressions of fear and dread in the face of the hunter. But whatever the format a convergence is brought about between the poetic component of such an idea and its stylistic visualisation in one medium or another. And we are brought back again to the important role played by the individual craftworker and the materials themselves in which idea and emotion is visualised. Variations in the message-carrying marks inevitably happen when the idea is visualised in different media, and this is discussed in the chapter, The Role of the Craftworker.

The fact that the frontal animal head, often without the lower jaw, appears in the iconography of many ancient cultures was discussed by Lévi-Strauss in connection with what he saw as related or universal mythologies. Sometimes, as in China, the animal head (or mask) is horned, and sometimes it is ambiguously visualised both as a frontal image and two profile mirror-images which confront each other (fig. 46). Wen Fong suggests that in the Shang dynasty these were primitively conceived dragon forms, but

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Fig. 46 "Ding", bronze, with "dao-die" motif, height 54 cm, c. 1500 BC, Shang dynasty, China.
He zun. Late 11th century B.C. (fifth year of Cheng Wang's reign). Height 38.8 cm. (15 3/8 in.); diameter at mouth 28.6 cm. (11 1/4 in.); weight 14.78 kg. (32 lb. 8 oz.)

China.

(GBA Ch)
there is a certain amount of ambiguity, and the characteristics of several real animal likenesses can often be discerned (fig. 47).²³⁷ But the choice of frontality or profile views of either animal or human imagery seems to have been influenced sometimes by a decision to show the most characteristic aspects of various parts of the body in the clearest possible way.²³⁸ Among the best known examples of this are the mural paintings in the royal tombs of dynastic Egypt, where, in a single figure, the various parts of the body are illustrated in whatever way is the most easily recognisable. The foot and the face, for instance, might be in profile while the shoulder-chest portion of the torso is frontal (fig. 48)²³⁹

There are theories about what is regarded as development in stylistics in visual imagery, from the primitive through the archaic to the classical, the baroque and mannerist phases, and to the eventual disintegration of the original visual expression into separated and meaningless units which devolve into elements which can be read solely as abstracted decoration.²⁴⁰ Apart from examples of Shang Dao-Die imagery, it is possible to look at the imagery in other cultures and periods and extrapolate this theory of the developmental changes in the visuality of expressive imagery. In the case of Greece, from about 900–300 BC, the changes in the visuality of the imagery follows this pattern, and is useful because the sequential changes are clearly both historically placed and related to socio-economic circumstances (figs. 49 a., b., 50 a., b., 51 a., b).²⁴¹

Whether a similar pattern can be assumed for the development of Dao-die imagery would need to be examined in great detail. But what is easily recognisable is the change which developed between the visuality of the Shang imagery and that of the succeeding Zhou. It appears to reflect the power change from the tyrannical Shang rulers to the more benign

²³⁸ ditto, p. 28.
Fig. 48 Tutankhamun and his "ka" with Osiris; in typical combinations of frontal and profile figuration. Egypt c. 1334 BC
and philosophically oriented house of Zhou (figs. 52, 53, 54 a., b.). The harsh and simplistically brutal rectilinearity which is a hallmark of Shang iconography softens down remarkably through the centuries of Zhou rule and through the Warring States period. It becomes curvilinear; the animal mask motifs are transformed into more curvilinear and flowing forms. The hierarchical nature of the imagery changes and incorporates, along with abstracted swirls and spiral relics of earlier animal styles, a newer vernacular which reflects the new patrons of the bronze-casters. These are the local landlords and warring rulers, who prefer to see their own exploits in battle and the hunt reflected in their bronze artefacts, rather than the abstract virtuosity of swirls and spirals which had devolved from the earlier animal-based symbolism of the Shang.242

Wen Fong points out another example of developmental visuality which demonstrates that style arises out of "ideational visualisations". He traces:

"...the archaic mode of largely frontal forms from the Eastern Zhou (sixth century BC) to the late Six Dynasties (265–587 AD)...(followed by) transitional and organic relationships between parts of the figure...(and then) to the Tang (late seventh to early eighth century AD)...(where Buddhist imagery was created with)...well-articulated, three-dimensional human bodies with naturalistic drapery...(which can be) documented by dated Buddhist sculptures almost decade by decade..."243

In these kinds of arguments it can be seen that the physical visualisation of an idea is a changing phenomenon which is also integrally connected with style. (Style is considered in a later chapter.) Only the intelligible concept of the notion of visuality is unchanging.

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Fig. 52. "Fang lei", bronze, with 'Dao-de' motif, height 52cm, c.1300-1030 BC, Anyang period, Shang dynasty, China
Hu. Eastern Zhou (late 6th–5th century B.C.). Height 39.9 cm. (15 5/8 in.), diameter at mouth 13.4 cm. (5 1/4 in.), diameter at base 14.2 cm. (5 5/8 in.), weight 6.5 kg. (9 lb. 14 oz.) C190-a

(See A C Ch.)
Imagery as Sublimation of an Idea

Is the act of translating an idea or concept into physical, visual imagery a kind of sublimation? Can it be the distillation of a concept which may not yet have been crystallised precisely? It does seem to be a form of substitution as well as an attempt at representation. An example can be taken from the human situation regarding animal and plant food sources and their relation to climatic conditions. It must have taken many generations for ancient humankind to come to realise that there was a direct relationship between fruits, nuts and other edible plants, the quality and time of their seasons of ripening, and the presence, or absence, of sunlight and rain. At some time this sequential situation became conceptualised and came to be recognised as extremely important to the survival and welfare of the community, even though the mechanics of the growing and ripening processes cannot have been understood. And the acquiring of protein through the slaughter and eating of animal flesh also came to be recognised as a prime necessity; the hunting of larger animals required more than the efforts of lone individuals.

To pass this kind of acquired intelligence on to the next generation became crucial to a group’s survival, according to Pfeiffer. But humankind’s inability to control the climate, and therefore the quality of available food supplies, must have been all too apparent. From this point on, according to the general consensus of interpreters of Paleolithic and Mesolithic imagery, one of the major concepts which developed was that it might be possible, at least to influence the climatic conditions of growing, and the processes of acquiring both plant and animal food. This idea appears to have to continued to accompany Neolithic humankind’s essays into agriculture and the herding of animals. According to most prehistorians (including Pfeiffer) attempts to do this developed in two forms. One was a mental, metaphysical or spiritual mode of ritual behaviour, which, by its very nature was ephemeral. The other was a material mode

which may or may not have been connected with the first. It is the fortuitous remnants of the second which are mostly found in ancient sites, which, because of their visual expressiveness, sometimes add up to assumptions of connected ephemeral, ritual behaviour, such as the famous Paleolithic “Sorcerer image”, or the statues of supplication at Tell Asmar, mentioned above. They provide evidence of humankind’s varying degrees of success in translating or sublimating conceptualised ideas into ephemeral activities and into material objects. Another obvious example can be found in Egyptian iconography. It is the sublimation, during the dynastic period, of the sun into a disc of shining gold. Such a natural symbol was analogous and easily recognised. In New Kingdom Egypt during the reign of the revolutionary pharaoh, Akhenaten and his wife, Nefertiti, the golden disc (the Aten) was worshipped as a symbol of Aten, the sun-god, in a monotheistic cult. And even later, when orthodoxy had returned to the worship of Amun, the golden disc is in central bas relief on the inlaid gold back of Tutankhamun’s chair (fig. 55 a., b.). Lines from the Hymn to the Aten suggest that the pharaoh saw the golden disc as a conceptual sublimation which would unequivocally represent the Sun which he saw as a living god:

“... Thou risest beautifully... O living Aten who creates Life... Thou art beautiful, great, gleaming and high over every land... When thou sendest forth thy rays... Thou shinest as Aten... The trees and herbage grow green... All flying and fluttering things live when thou hast shone upon them... Creator of germ in woman, who makest seed in men, Who givest life to a son in his mother’s womb... Thou disk of the Day... Thy rays nourish every field....²⁴⁵

It is not difficult to imagine how, in the case of the material sublimation of an abstract concept, such as the all-powerfulness of the sun, that the disc of precious gold itself became a sacred iconic symbol to be worshipped, especially in a country where, for most

of the time, the sun is unclouded and relentless. The same kind of transformation took place with other iconic objects, in other cultures. Having been created to symbolise community concepts, they were transformed in the minds of the community into becoming the concepts themselves; a kind of transubstantiation, or sublimation. And in some societies they were regarded as being charged with the potency of the concept itself (that is, the god figure with supernatural powers), but this is discussed in the later chapter “Symbolism, Icon and the Transfer of Potency”.
Fig. 55a  Akhenaten, Neferiti with three daughters, and rays of sun-god Aten; limestone stela. c. 1300 BC  Egypt
fig. 55b  Tutankhamun and wife, with rays of sun-god Aten (Amon); c. 1300 BC. Egypt.
**Image and Creativity**

The development of a concept that made the making of imagery a logical step in the evolution of humankind's creative potential is a phenomenon that can only be argued on circumstantial evidence. Imagery, or art, as Pfeiffer calls it:

"...seems somehow to have risen from play, in a uniquely human spin-off process which has acquired a life of its own. Both involve imitation, pretending...fantasy, the freedom to improvise, to make and break rules and create surprises..."

He goes on to suggest that the evolution of play mirrors the evolution of the brain, and that the most intelligent animals tend to be the most playful, and the most likely to experiment, by trial and error, in a creative way. This is the point where it becomes apparent that humankind made a great leap and became conscious of a need and the ability to transform concept into physical form and imagery.

Sublimation of the abstract concept into the material requires a good deal of creativity in the processes of translation. The phenomenon of creativity is integral to some degree in the forming and embellishment of any artefact. The exception to this is the mass-produced artefact which requires little or no original thought for its production. The only act of creativity here is that involved in producing the original model to be reproduced by mass-production; only competence in copying and repetition is necessary for this.

But what is meant by creativity? As nothing in this material world can be truly created, or totally destroyed, we are left with a concept of an activity that is physically impossible. And yet in everyday language the term is generally understood as an act which results in the production of something which we call "new". Perhaps a more exact description of
what we perceive as creativity might be “change” or “re-arrangement”. The Oxford English Dictionary describes “creation” as “a production of the human intelligence”. Does this pre-suppose that something must already exist which human intelligence can manipulate and interfere with, resulting in the production of significant, or at least noticeable, change or re-arrangement? Certainly this line of argument fits well into a discussion of artefacts and their imagery. In this sense creativity on the part of the craftworker can be seen, because of his or her vision and technical ability, to be an intervention by, and a production of the human intelligence. This makes it possible for a concept to be visualised, through the re-arrangement of physical materials, into a so-called “new” physical image. Or an existing physical image can be changed in an inventive way by re-arrangement.

Creativity is the main theme in Pfeiffer’s work, and he explores the evidence of the relatively sudden appearance of creativity. He cites the sudden creative advance into more sophisticated and specialised flint toolmaking by the Neanderthal species, and cites the fact that their cranium capacity has been found to have been larger than that of *homo erectus*. 247 Bahn is also intrigued with the concept of creativity, and writes:

“... Art, or at least the ability to create images in materials that have survived, appears relatively suddenly in the archaeological record at roughly the same time as the appearance of Homo sapiens sapiens; clearly something had developed in the mentality of our sub-species (and perhaps in that of its predecessors?) which enabled or stimulated it to produce pictures, to adapt pre-existing shapes or to visualise new forms before they existed...” 248

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247 ditto, pp. 88–93, 96, 101, 120, 244–246. Could this leap into a new dimension of toolmaking be seen as the beginning of deliberate design processes which resulted in ordered imagery? On p. 100 Pfeiffer writes “... at Neanderthal sites... (were found) pieces of black manganese and red ochre rounded and pointed like pencils, indicating that people were painting their bodies—a practice that may have started several hundred years earlier... at the Riviera of Terra Amata... (and) at Shanidar the skulls of two males strangely shaped... indicating deliberate deformation... the evidence of a sense of personal aesthetic....”

To attempt to rationalise and analyse the various processes involved in the act of creativity, into segments and developmental steps, could be unsatisfactory. Creativity is not necessarily an instantaneous flash of insight and idea nor a logical sequence of steps. It frequently seems to be achieved by trial and error, and by the evolution of a craftworker's imagination and skills over long periods, even over generations. Analysis and rationalisation could belittle these processes, and also the final results of the creative mind at work. And one of the dangers of analytical dissection is that non-physical and spiritual qualities which may be perceptible in the image-and-object as a whole may be lost when the parts are studied separately (as has been discussed previously). When viewed wholistically the image-and-object can add up to more than the sum of its parts. The material evidence of poetic and creative expression in an artefact is more likely to be perceived in the object as a whole, and seen, where possible, in a meaningful context. The study of details and individual parts can divert appreciation from the poetry of the whole image and any likely spiritual implications or expression. Yet despite this some analytical decoding can also be useful.

This proposition can be tested with a group of ancient ceramics from the very late fifth and early fourth millennia BC. One example, from Persepolis, can be cited whose decorative ibex motif has been so stylised as to be intimately involved with the conical form of the bowl (fig. 57 b.). Other examples include a Susa A beaker which has a brilliantly ordered row of highly stylised long-legged waterbirds in the top zone, an elongated dog in the border below, and stylised ibex imagery in the main panels (fig. 59), and similar goblets and bowls found in the necropolis at the Susa A site, which is also in southwest Iran (figs. 4, 56 a.), not far north of the Persian Gulf 249

Many of the goblets and bowls have been painted with geometric decoration whose origins are believed to have been in textile or basket-weaving patterns. Variations of

Fig 5b. Group of beakers, Susa A, S.W. Iran. 4000-3500 BC

(Mus. St. Germain-en-Laye, France)
fig. 56b Beaker with geometric, weaving and stylised plant motifs; Susa A, S.W. Iran, early 4th mill. BC
E Mes Ir Louvre Mus.

fig. 60b Painted hand-built pottery, from tombs at Eridu, S.W. Mesopotamia, 4000-3500 BC
E Mes Ir Ir Mus
Many designs on pottery were sensitively adapted to the form and shape of the pot and are particularly characteristic of the Iranian ware of c. 3500 BC. On this example from Persepolis the design is based on ibex horns (cf. III: 16). Here the horns swelling upwards from four inter-linked ibex at the base of the vase fill the main surface.

(E Mes Ir)

Fig. 57a. Yellow terracotta bowl, geometric motif (from weaving?) Hapilar, S.W. Anatolia; late 4th millennium BC

(A. Cl A)
fig. 57c Motifs possibly influenced by weaving techniques. Middle left: plate with ibex motifs, Samarra, North Mesopotamia, 5500 BC.

Lower centre: plate with fish and fantastic bird motifs; Hajji Muhammed, South Mesopotamia, 4750 BC.

fig. 58 Motifs possibly derived from weaving techniques. Painted shallow dish with bird motifs; Samarra, North Mesopotamia, 4500 BC.
fig. 59 Beaker with ibex, elongated dogs and in top zone long-legged waterbirds. Susa A, SW Iran 4000-3500 BC
Louvre Museum
weaving motifs are common in the decoration of ancient ceramics and make reasonable the assumption that the artefactual use of reeds, grasses and even wool predated the use of fired clays.²⁵⁰ So it can hardly be claimed that the craftworkers were involved in a major breakthrough into new imagery when they adapted well-known patterns from other media to decorate these ceramics. And yet they rearranged the textile motifs into a brilliantly creative order to suit the forms of the bowls and beakers (fig. 56 b.). Much the same observation can be made about the stylised bird and animal imagery, which are noted by Mellaart and Charleston on pottery dated to the fifth and fourth millennium BC.²⁵¹ Stylised ibex and bird images appear on shallow bowls or platters from northern and southern Mesopotamia (c.4,500 BC) which leave little room for doubt that the zig-zag nature of the lines of these images originated in weaving patterns (figs. 57 c., 58 ). And from the fourth millennium BC site of Hacilar in Anatolia there is a vertical-sided terracotta bowl, the imagery of which is so close to basketry-weaving techniques, that the whole artefact and its decoration seems to be imitating a basket form (fig. 57 a.). Other wares feature even simplified human forms.²⁵² But Mellaart also compares pecked ibex and human figure forms of a final phase of rock art in the Taurus Mountains with the ibex forms used in pottery decoration in these regions.²⁵³ So there appear to have been precedents for schematic transformation from one medium into another, though it is not known whether there was any contact through trading, and therefore the passage of ideas, between the Taurus Mountain region and the southern peoples of Susiana. Some Susa ceramics have brilliantly ordered and schematised rows of water-birds around the top zones, with weaving motifs above the ibex panels.²⁵⁴ To date no proof has been found that these motifs originated in textile patterns, but it would seem reasonable to assume that lack of evidence could be due to the non-permanent nature of

²⁵¹ ditto, p. 156, 158; also Charleston, ed., World Ceramics, op. cit., p. 16.
²⁵⁴ See illustrations. Most of the less skilfully painted bowls were found in dwellings; about 24% were found in burials. Pollock, Journal of Anthropological Archaeology 2, op. cit.
organic materials such as textiles. Archaeological evidence is inevitably fortuitous.\textsuperscript{255} There is also, in the Louvre Museum, Paris, an example of a fifth millennium BC jar from Djafferabad which has, as decoration, simple linear motifs which could also be interpreted as having originated in rope or weaving patterns (fig. 60 a.). Its style is somewhat loose and rudimentary when compared with the slightly later ceramics of Susa A ceramics. But the form of this vessel, the thinness of its potting, as well as the painted style, gives the impression that it could well be an ancestor, to some extent, of the more sophisticated Susa A pottery. And then there is another group of small pots, found at Eridu and dated to the mid-fourth millennium BC, whose plant and weaving motifs are clumsily painted, yet they are more or less concurrent with the splendid Susa A artefacts (fig 60 b.). Why such discrepancy occurs is not known, beyond guessing that individual talents and circumstances of patronage must have varied from one region to another, just as they have always done. We can refer back to Bahn’s comments on the development of Paleolithic imagery in the chapter, The Role of the Craftworker, where he states that:

“...development...was...a complex growth with occasional flashes of brilliance... It is naive to assume that all Paleolithic images are purposeful masterpieces...” and “...the sporadic appearance of genius...cannot really be fitted into a general scheme...”

This brings the argument back to the question of creativity, what it is, and how it is, or if it can be, measured. Analysis of the individual images as they appear on these artefacts leads us to conclude that such images already existed in other media, such as in rock art and in textiles, but which had been manipulated to become decorative units in another medium, that is, fired clay. But if each of the objects is studied as a whole, then it is obvious that, although the decorative motifs themselves were not an original invention of the craftworker, the use of them in these particular ways can be an example of creativity

fig. 60a. Large jar with simple linear motifs. c. 5500 BC; Tepe Djaffarabad, S.W. Iran
Louvre Museum
60c. (above) Rare instance of a human figure, on a Susa bowl, c. 3500 BC; (below) Elongated dog, bird, ibex, fish, horse stylised to hieroglyphs; proto-literature Mesopotamia, Susa Aceramics.
of a very high order indeed. The authoritative quality and the confident draughtsmanship
of the Susa A and the Persepolis pots make them outstanding examples of vital and poetic
expression.

The designs are obviously the result of much trial and error, and of great refinement.
Simply drawn in iron/manganese pigment, their realisation and the proportional
placement of the imagery is sophisticated to a high degree. The poetic distortion of the
ibex, pond, water-bird, dog and weaving forms, as part of the schematisation, is so well
ordered that many fit perfectly the vase, goblet or bowl on which they have been drawn
(fig. 60 c.). The purpose of the goblet forms themselves is not proven. Some are more
elegantly proportioned and slenderer than others. According to Pollock some had been
used for secondary interment of the long bones of a human skeleton. But whatever
the intended or eventual use, the sophisticated orchestration of decoration and form
signifies that it was not simply a utility container for everyday usage, but that they were
important objects on which was bestowed a considerable amount of time, skill and above
all, creative manipulation of familiar motifs. It is the apparent presence of a high order of
creativity which signifies that someone in the society was aware, and placed value upon,
the poetic expression of the material and the non-material. The fact that these vases, or
goblets, were discovered in richly furbished graves suggest also that they were made for
(or commissioned by) someone of authority and wealth. As such they proffer much
semiotic information about a vertically as well as a horizontally stratified society.

Most burial pieces are of a very high quality technically and could only have been made
by skilled craftworkers. The vessels were fired in an oxidised atmosphere so that they
kept the natural colour of the clay and this process requires a good deal more skill than a
simple “bonfire” process which would have greyed or blackened the clay. This means
that the potters came from a tradition of craftworkers whose expertise in manipulating

257  ditto, p. 386.
258  ditto, pp. 358, 367.
firing temperatures and atmospheres was well-developed. The firing process as well as the decoration (which appear to have been produced on an individually creative basis) was not only highly skilled but also labour-intensive. Pollock observes that they were found in the most densely populated area in the region, and that the standard of making was lower in the sites further away from the centre. She proposes that such artefacts contain semiotic messages which may indicate:

"...emotional state, membership in a class or other social group, social rank, authorship, religion, political affiliation, prescription and proscription... Regardless of their precise content, they all contribute to processes of social integration and differentiation...stylistic messages help to define and establish predictable patterns of behaviour prior to or in the absence of verbal communication..."  

Although Pollock does not discuss it specifically she seems to take for granted that creativity is at the basis of all these deductions. It is the differentiating, or creative, factors which make it possible to decode any or all of the messages which she maintains are apparent in the artefacts. The ceramics found on sites other than burials, for instance, are more roughly made and decorated than the goblets and bowls found in burials.

By the evidence of these ceramics (and also of well-made copper tools and mirrors, and of linen) it is apparent that already, by the late fifth millennium BC, there was, in the Susiana culture, an accumulation of experiential categories of visually expressive imagery. For whatever ritual, political or social purposes, certain local imagery had been translated and developed into visual motifs which related apparently to the society's cognisance and acceptance of concepts which, as yet, had not developed into symbols which would eventually become the foundation of a written language. Even as early

259 ditto, p. 356.  
260 ditto, p. 357.  
261 ditto, p. 360, 364, 384.  
as the Djafferabad and Susiana epochs the idea of “an innocent eye” had long since passed.263 Already the community, apparently, had a reference bank of imagery which provided readymade symbols or decorative motifs for familiar and shared concepts. And right throughout this region there was an already established technical know-how and experience in decorating and firing buff and red clay ceramics painted with dark (manganese?) geometric motifs. It was apparently upon these foundations that the artist-craftworkers were able to draw for the making and decorating of the Susa ceramics. The creative acts, in this situation, were the decisions taken during the actual processes of making by the individual makers as to the mode of employing familiar subject matter to specific artefacts and their forms.

The fact that some versions of the motifs and subject matter existed before the making of the Susiana ceramics does not argue against the native creativity of the makers concerned. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that, in this limited geographic region, these magnificent forms and imagery were the product of highly creative minds of considerable refinement and sophistication. And it also reinforces the proposal that creativity is a kind of rearrangement (as discussed above).

Although no one, as yet, seems to have identified what exactly is meant by the act of creativity, it would seem that, given the above situation in ancient Susa, the act of creativity must have derived from influences outside the pottery-making situation. These would have been the socio-economic circumstances and visual phenomena of the region, the limitations and possibilities of techniques and materials available at any given time and, most of all, the innermost spirit of the potters themselves. And of course there is a circularity here, because these craftworkers were in the situation of being embedded in the mores and mythologies of their culture.

The Susa ceramics are compared above with the so-called small “egg-shell” ceramics of the mid-fifth millennium BC from tombs at Eridu (fig. 60 b.).\textsuperscript{264} Like the Susa ceramics they are also very finely potted and well fired, but by contrast their decoration is somewhat haphazard with little apparent relationship to the forms. If a criteria of fitness of image to form, of agreeable proportions and a general sense of harmony are to be the measure of these ceramics, then they do not compare well with the Susa A ceramics. This is the point where we are faced with the concept of the sense of order and are also faced with making subjective judgements on standards of creativity. Both groups of ceramics appear, from available archaeological evidence, to have been the result of local invention and the local genius of creativity, but the difference in their aesthetic and poetic content is considerable.

Because these ceramics emanated from preliterate cultures, and because material evidence and context is limited, any interpretation of the symbolic content of their imagery can only be guessed. As Pollock maintains, however, (see above) they do provide evidence (as do other rich finds in other regions and epochs) of socio-political circumstances and regional characteristics. For instance, water-birds would have abounded in those fertile marshy plains of the lower Tigris-Euphrates estuarine lands where wool-producing animals were herded and husbanded. Without the local availability of stone, or forest timbers, grasses, reeds and mud were major materials for the making of architecture and artefacts.\textsuperscript{265} The use of reed and basket patterning, as well as wool weaving, points to the skeuomorphic nature of some of the designs on the ceramics. That these prototypes were so magnificently abstracted in the manufactured goods of Susiana, and that they achieved highly sophisticated and fitting decoration on the artefact forms, is further evidence that only highly trained or gifted artisans could have been the authors of these pieces.

Susa was already, by the end of the fifth millennium BC, an urban centre with a large population. This is known because the ceramics under discussion were found only in the richly furbished graves amongst two thousand other burials in the necropolis. No artefacts of similar brilliance are known from any other culture of the same epoch. They are unique as products of local invention. And when the known circumstances of their making is considered it has to be deduced that at the heart of their brilliance is the creative genius of those who made them. And that comes down to the nature and spirit, and the genes, of the makers themselves, regardless of outside influence or circumstance.

The nature of such labour-intensive artefacts, and the existence of other unremarkable ceramics in burial situations less prestigious than the rich burials, offer evidence that the Susiana culture had developed a vertical or hierarchical complexity of socio-political organisation. And as stated above, they offer evidence of horizontal stratification, with the town of Susa as a focal centre for outlying settlements where ceramics of a lower standard were made. Pollock proposes that the goblets under consideration were examples of "sumptuary or prestige goods" which had required high energy to produce them, and were therefore regarded as fitting for the mortuary use of high-ranking personnel, possibly chiefs.

Deductions such as these however do not provide some of the answers hoped for in a discussion of creativity. The full context and circumstances of making, patronage, marketing and use are not known even though the Susiana Plain cultures labelled a, b and c which preceded the Susa A site have been thoroughly investigated. Among the questions which remain unanswered are:

• had the use of weaving and basket patterning become, by the time of Susa A, merely an acceptable, saleable, familiar decoration without symbolism or meaning?

267 ditto, pp. 382, 383, 384.
• Did the use of the ibex, the long-necked water-birds, the dog, the lake, the bow- and-arrow man, weaving and other motifs, have any conscious symbolic function?

• If there were symbolism attached to these motifs, which social unit in the hierarchy of the Susiana society promulgated such symbolic significations?

• If there were no deliberately intended symbolic meanings why were these particular motifs chosen for prestigious mortuary and non-mortuary occasions?

• If symbolic meanings did not exist, who then made the decisions to use these particular motifs? Was it the potter/decorators, was it the patron, or in the case of mortuary ware, those who arranged the burials?

If the potter/decorators were the originators of the decisions to use these motifs, it is not conceivable that they made these artefacts suddenly, at such a high standard, without any previous or contemporaneous work which could be seen to have been precursory. Pollock quotes the discovery at some sites, of what were probably kilns which produced such specialised pottery, whilst, she says, general and undistinguished pottery production of a general, utilitarian nature was carried on in most outlying villages in the region. It follows therefore that there must have been an elite body of well-trained and highly skilled craftworkers who were capable of developing ware of a very high standard, such as that under discussion. But the question must be asked; were they aware of any symbolic significance (if, indeed, there were any) in the imagery used by them?

And whoever might have made the decision on the content and forms of the vessels, it must be to the potter/decorators that the credit is given for the inspired making of wares which display highly refined sophistication and sensibility, and a good deal of creativity.
AN EXPLORATION

OF ARTEFACT IMAGERY:

its Nature and Sources

Vol. 2

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Style

It might be useful to test a theory of Sauerlander’s on Style, to see how it relates to the deliberations in this present study of the imagery of artefacts.268

The term style can apply to three separate aspects or levels of image-making. Firstly, it can refer to a particular manner in which the idea-content has been materialised into a visual image, for example; naturalistic, archaic, idealistic, decadent, romantic, poetic, imitative, abstract, and so on. Secondly, style can refer to the physicality of the method of making, for example; linear, plastic, silhouette, calligraphic, painterly, and so on. Thirdly, the term style can refer to the culture or period from which the image has emanated, for example; Assyrian, Chinese, Classical Greek, Mesopotamian, Early Dynastic Egyptian, and so on. This last group also incorporates a more expansive frame of references, such as chronological and cultural frameworks.269

But whichever category of style is applied to an image on an artefact it is usual that one is applying a particular set of “rules” or “norms”270. Inevitably they must be specific measures or labels which classify and identify the imagery of an artefact with other imagery to which it can be seen to relate. Style, within this set of conceptual meanings, can be seen as a particular kind of recognition which should help to group together given examples of imagery. The purpose of using this concept of style in art-historical studies is to do just this, and to clarify and aid understanding and interpretation of imagery, and the ideas and associations which may be inherent in them. Whether the style of a visual image is discernible at one or all of the foregoing levels will vary with each image. In this sense the concept of style should prove to be useful in the present study of the imagery of artefacts.

269 ditto, pp. 261–266.
270 ditto.
According to Sauerlander, however, the "rules" and "norms" meanings of style have been used since at least Cicero, but he maintains that modern art-historical criticism (since 1753) uses the term to prove the opposite, that of differentiation. This concept has been based, not on rules and norms, but on originality and individuality. In this way the peculiar and the particular components of an image are separated out from other imagery. Differences and uniqueness are discerned.

When such differentiations are discerned in an image, however, then a new category of style is born, and this then joins the already accepted body of classifications of "rules" and "norms" or groups of styles. The two interpretations and uses of the term style can be seen therefore as two opposing but complementary methods with the one aim in view; that of increased recognition, clarity and understanding.

Either of these two sources of imagery can be difficult to prove, however, when, as in the case of this present study, we are dealing with artefacts which, in some instances, derive from pre- or proto-literate cultures. It is often true that incontrovertible proof is lacking in the available evidence, and much of the theory connected with this ancient imagery has to be based on circumstantial implication and typological evidence.

Susan Pollock, in her paper on Style and Information, referred to in the previous chapter, Image and Creativity, uses the Susiana ceramics upon which to test her theories. She leans heavily upon the concept of style to aid the identification from an anthropological viewpoint, of the structure of a prehistoric society which inhabited regions immediately north of the Persian Gulf. She proposes that style is:

271 ditto, p. 254.
"...a mode of communication that signals social group identification and helps to maintain boundaries between social groups... Styles change when both horizontal and vertical differentiations in a society become more complex..."273

She uses visual stylistic complexity as an indicator of socio-political stylistics; she uses style in one context to describe style in another.274 She goes on to suggest that the form and degree of stylistic changes in a region relate in some way to socio-political changes, and that style can be related to them:

"...the participation of artifacts in processes of information exchange... Production and utilisation of artifacts...are one mode of human communication... (but) artifact message codes change slowly and are "costly" to produce...therefore commitment is required..."

Pollock also proposes that stylistic messages are relevant only to peoples within a certain social range, and that the greater the social interaction between producer and receiver, the less need for stylistic messages. She says that stylistic messaging is at its most potent when the social distance between groups is neither too close nor so distant that the receiver has no chance of receiving or decoding it.275

Although Pollock comments that stylistic messages can be expected to vary with the degree of labour invested in the production of various artefacts (for whatever social, hierarchical or political reasons) she does not consider the effect upon style that a change in craftworker or medium might produce, regardless of any external pressures or circumstances.276 As discussed in the chapter on the role of the craftworker, the individuality of the maker and the idiosyncrasies of the chosen material must inevitably have some bearing also on the finished

273 ditto, p. 354.
274 ditto, p. 356.
275 ditto, p. 357.
276 ditto, p 364.
artefact and its style. In the case of the Susiana ceramics the type of ceramic materials used seems to have varied little for at least one thousand years. There is no way of discovering information about the identity of the craftworkers involved, but on the basis of stylistic analysis it would seem that the makers were bound into narrow disciplines of content, aesthetic, technique and style, and that this was helped by the comparative sameness of the clays and pigments that were used.

When the terms “original”, “individual”, and “unique” are applied to an image, we are faced with three possibilities; that it is either an example of local creativity, genius and invention, that it is an example of the migration of ideas and/or imagery, or that it is a combination of both. In the case of the first proposal proof must lie in the absence of evidence that the image has any stylistic connections with any other groups of imagery. This is an uneasy situation, because it is a negative proposition, and might, one day be overturned by anthropological or archaeological discoveries which prove migration theories. The second proposal, migration, is on the other hand, more easily proven because positive evidence of relationships can be found among other artefacts of other times or cultures. Proof may also lie in contextual or circumstantial evidence which is external to the artefact itself.

The use of style as a social identifier, therefore, can be seen to be an ambivalent method that, for the present study, is not infallible. And it can also be misleading when questions of archetype are raised. Twentieth century scientific testing methods can prove claims of regional sources of materials, and can verify chronologies. But style is a non-material result of material resources, and might be wrongly identified by circumstantial evidence or informed opinion which may not be aware of the possibility that its source may be archetypal and not the result or partial result of the migration of ideas.
fig. 61 Realistic auroch, horse and bull paintings, Lascaux Cave, c. 14,000 BC

fig. 62 "Leaping horse", Sumerian, figurine from Uruk, Iraq, c. 3100 BC
It is possible to test this hypothesis by observing some very early imagery, that of the late Upper Paleolithic and the Mesolithic phases. The style which corresponds to the majority of the best known Paleolithic imagery on cave walls can be called naturalistic or poetically realist, and this appears to be a generally broad and regionally recognisable style which occurred in the south-west of France and in the north-west of Spain (fig. 61). (Those apparently abstract and geometric parietal marks, of which there are many, have yet to be interpreted satisfactorily, and are not included therefore in this present study (fig. 78).)\textsuperscript{277} In the case of the portable artefacts which have been found, however, in these regions, at cave and rock-shelter sites of late Paleolithic and Mesolithic dating, it can be seen that decorative embellishments have been used which sometimes take advantage of natural and accidental forms that occur in or on the materials of which the artefacts have been made (fig. 62). According to Leroi-Gourhan, both the imagery and its style seems to have been inspired sometimes by the shape and possible purpose of the artefact itself.\textsuperscript{278} The imagery on these objects (often tools and hunting equipment) ranges in style from the relatively realistic to the abstract. Judging by the samples available, the maker has been influenced, not only by the natural accidents of shape, but also by the nature of the chosen material and by the tools which were used to make them, and of course by the state of the maker’s own expertise, creativity and cultural parameters. This is a very complex area of study, which would need to be analysed in great detail if the concept of a general regional style also applied to the artefacts of the region.

According to Leroi-Gourhan there appears, as yet, no material evidence of a continuous linkage of cave art sites with man-made shelters which might show an unbroken line of inheritance of ideas and styles between the Upper Paleolithic and those of the Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures. Mellaart maintains, however, that in the Levant, at least:

\textsuperscript{277} Early investigations are being carried out at present, by various scholars, into the possibility that they might be the first efforts to communicate with abstract signs that correspond to vocal sounds, in other words, a proto-language. I am indebted to Prof. Brook for this opinion.

\textsuperscript{278} Leroi-Gourhan, \textit{The Art of Prehistoric Man}, op. cit.
rock carvings or paintings have not yet been discovered... at present there is no evidence to date of any Near Eastern rock art earlier than the Natufian (in Palestine) or possibly the late Kebaran (in the Levant)... This would put its beginning somewhere around 12,000–10,000 BC... In recent years examples of cave art have been found (accompanied by ‘art mobilier’) in the caves and rock shelters of the Antalya region in Anatolia, ...in the upper Euphrates valley, and in the open-air rock sanctuaries of Kobystan near Baku on the Caspian...” 279

Mellaart offers an example of art mobilier in the form of a Kebaran animal-headed bone reaping knife with a flint blade, dated to 10,000–9,500 BC(fig. 63). So, with this later information, there might be the possibility that there was some kind of continuous diffusion of ideas and imagery from one epoch to another, and this is referred to above in the context of the Susiana ceramics. But without firm evidence, it must be concluded for the time being that the imagery and eventual stylisation of artefact form and decoration, in pre-ceramic Palestine at least, must have been largely the result of local invention and creativity. 280

Bahn discusses the style of the imagery at some Upper Paleolithic sites as an identifier of works produced by individual artists or groups. He writes:

“...Some clusters of images are stylistically and technically so similar that it is virtually certain that one artist or group is responsible...in the case of the Altamira ceiling...scholars' intuitions (were) that the ceiling was largely the work of one 'master'...on portable objects similar figures often form friezes and were almost certainly the work of one artist...” 281

Although as a general rule the stone votive and iconic sculptures of the Neolithic and the post-Neolithic Near East (Western Asia) were frequently realistic, they were carried out

280 The term “local” is relative, and not precise, but in the present context it is used to specify the activities of a specific community at a specific site, without any reference to any contacts with outside groups.
in simple, archaic styles. But the painted imagery upon artefacts was highly schematised, simplified and often disciplined into ordered decorative repetition that is highly developed (as in the example of the long-necked water-birds on the Susa A goblets (figs. 4, 59). It is evident that there seems to have been a difference in styles between that of iconic figures and artefacts. In Neolithic Anatolia examples of the wall imagery and sculptures of the late seventh and sixth millennia BC, suggest that earlier rock and artefact imagery of the Upper Paleolithic were not known at all, and that craftworkers and decorators were almost “starting from scratch” with highly stylised, but graphically descriptive imagery that bears little relation to the parietal rock art of any region at all (figs. 41, 64). An interesting sidelight, however, is a khilim style used as wall painting. Straight lines with jagged edges, and what appears to be a fringed end infers that this rug technique was already practised and that its designs may have had some kind of symbolic significations for the community to the point where they were imitated on wall surfaces. As far as ceramics are concerned, the forms themselves, developed for utilitarian purposes, presented surfaces and fields which limited, but also inspired, the style of imagery painted upon them. One of the earliest known fired pots in the world, found at Haçilar in Anatolia (c. 6,800 BC), has an abstract and decorative motif painted upon it which shows unquestionable evidence of a graphic sensibility on the part of the decorator (fig. 65). The curvilinear painting sweeps around the form of the narrow-necked jar as an entirely abstract motif which emphasises admirably the shape of the pot. The style of the decoration is totally subservient to the form of the pot itself.

Referring to another jar from Haçilar, Powell says:

“...the decorations of the jar from Haçilar (c 5,500 BC) are very abstract. The figure of a woman (or goddess) is barely recognisable; it has been reduced to an arrow-shaped design which satisfyingly fills the shape of the pot...” (fig. 66).

282 Mellaart, *The Neolithic of the Near East*, op. cit., p. 152; (the alabaster figurines, for example, from Tell-es-Sawwan in the Zagros zone, c.5600 BC).
285 See illustration of jar, held at The British Museum, London, U.K., fig. 65.
fig. 64. Earthenware jar with iron decoration, Anatolia, c. 6800 BC.

fig. 65. Excavation scene, with vultures and headless bodies, from the Hittite site Huyuk, Anatolia, c. 6000-4500 BC.

fig. 66. Earthenware jar, with stylised figure, Haghia, Anatolia, c. 5500 BC.

fig. 67. Impression from a cylinder seal; the goddess Ishtar tries to prevent the killing of the Bull of Heaven, by Gilgamesh and Enkidu; possibly 3rd mill. BC, Mesopotamia.
This awareness and sensibility of the relationship of form to image is characteristic of much Neolithic artefact making, where figures and animals were frequently simplified into decorative but recognisable motifs and repetitive patterns that were subservient to the overall form of the artefact. The crafts of house building, weaving and pottery offered new opportunities for humankind once again to fulfil the age-old urge to embellish and decorate. The discipline of the forms and the materials available enforced, or provided the opportunities for, the expressing of a predilection for order in mark-making. The essence of pattern-making is a rhythmic repetition of a motif, and an interest in rhythm and repetition perhaps reflects one of the great creative developments in the Neolithic period. Regular rhythm and repetition appear to be fundamental. Powell writes that there is an order and a pattern behind life which regulates the seasonal changes and governs the cycles of life and death. Repetitive pattern-making does not seem to have been practised, however, to any great extent on the artefacts of the Upper Paleolithic. It might be interesting to note that these earlier lifestyles must have been somewhat more haphazard and subject to the vagaries of the climate, and to the incidental animal and plant food that was available for hunting and gathering. Is it possible that this state of things is reflected in the freer stylistics of the Upper Paleolithic?

Unlike the poetic, and generally naturalistic styles of much of Upper Paleolithic art, the style of a great deal of Neolithic imagery developed into schematic symbolism and spatially ordered systems of figuration, often with repetitive, decorative zonal ordering. Subject matter consisted largely of manipulated and abstracted weaving, rope and matting motifs, of animal life, some instances of simplistic human figures and of plant forms. This applies to Neolithic cultures in virtually all regions under discussion in this thesis. Because of the contexts in which many Neolithic artefacts are found, their form and decoration are generally regarded as simplified symbols that relate to myth-based lore, as well as to social, political and economic ideas that dominated group imagination and

287 ditto, p. 25.
behaviour. It is generally assumed that they were related symbolically to the mysteries of birth, life and death, the potency of the sun and the rain, the fertility of humankind and of the earth, and to the social and hierarchical ordering of society. As already cited, Mellaart discusses this in relation to Anatolian artefacts, Pollock to the Susa A ceramics, Huber to Chinese ceramics, and Wen Fong to Shang China bronzes. Unlike the style of the Upper Paleolithic, the styles in many Neolithic cultures were drastic translations from known forms and subject matter into highly schematised, referential imagery. One proposition that might be considered of course is that some of this imagery may have been translated into popular vernacular and decorative stylistics, without continuing to carry any deeply structured or meaningful symbolism.

This can be discounted, however, at least in some instances, because there seems to have been some sort of parallel between imagery development and the development of the social and economic patterns of the communities themselves. In the growing and increasingly complex, but pre-literate societies the need developed for the ordering and ritualising of group beliefs and social, political and economic behaviour and systems. With written language not yet developed before 3500 BC, it is generally believed that artefacts (including statuary and iconic objects) were used as communicative media for the didactic and expressive messaging of social mores, beliefs and the maintenance of hierarchical status. And in the case of the ancient Anatolian cultures of Haçilar and Çatal Huyuk, the relics of wall painting, bas-reliefs and iconic figurines also offer evidence of such possible messaging.

Stylistic variations of a single mythic idea seem to have been infinite. One of the oldest, and best known mythologies (from archaeological evidence and from later literature) is the imagery, discussed earlier, which expresses the idea of the young, reformed god-

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hero-king, Gilgamesh (fig. 67). This legendary searcher for immortality was conceived as a profligate tyrant-turned-knight-errant, who came to exemplify virtue, courage and concern for his fellow humans. His superhuman exploits to rid the world of evil, in the company and with the help of his part-human and part-bull, magical friend Enkidu, was expressed as visual imagery on many kinds of artefacts, including cylinder seals, palettes, vases, diadems and knife-handles in cultures throughout the Near East from about 3,500 BC to at least the first millennium BC. And in all of the renderings of this imagery, the styles have varied tremendously, depending upon the region and epoch in which they were made, the materials used and the talents of the individual makers.

Another example of enormous stylistic variation is the imagery of the griffin. This mythical creature varies in physical detail, as well as in the style of its rendering, in almost every instance (figs. 68 a., b., c., d., e.). Its zoomorphic form changes from animal-headed to bird-headed, from winged to unwinged, from four-legged to two-legged. Different visual figurations were produced in different cultures and different epochs, and in most cases the stylistic renderings followed the art styles of the cultures in which they were produced and of course were inevitably disciplined by the materials used and by the talents and limitations of the craftworkers who made them. The griffin imagery appears in cultures from Siberia, through Central Asia, to Western Asia and the Aegean, and will be discussed in a later chapter.

fig. 68b. Gold engraved ring. 15th C BC, Mycenae. Mirrored bird-head griffins.

fig. 68a. Griffin-head handle from bronze cauldron; inlaid eyes, incised scales; late 17th C BC. Greece.
fig. 68a  Ivory pyxis, Athens 14th C B.C. Winged griffins hunting deer M Myc A

fig. 68b  Crouched bronze shield plaque, Olympia 7th C B.C. Griffin with young.  Gk A

fig. 68c  Terracotta relief pithos, Crete, c 675 B.C. Animal-head and bird-head griffins stamped on neck.  G A A I S
Image and Order

Accompanying the slow evolutionary changes from Paleolithic to Neolithic lifestyles there was also a change of subject matter in the imagery selected for portrayal upon artefacts. From the evidence known, the subject matter of Paleolithic cave and rock-shelter drawings and of portable artefacts, was most frequently of animals, sometimes of men, occasionally of birds, but rarely of plant life. Bahn suggests that the harpoon forms of the Magdalenian period (c. 17,000–12,000 BP) could well be branch-and-bud imagery, but there is no proof that this is so (fig. 79). With the increasing complexity and sedentary nature of Neolithic communal life, and the changes from hunting and gathering to agriculture and herding, the development of social organisation, of hierarchical systems of religion and power, and the expansion of contacts with other communities both near and far, the subject matter of visual expression changed dramatically. It was expanded to include ideas and concepts which reflected these lifestyle changes. Trees, flowers, plants and birds were added to the repertoire of human and animal imagery, to become, frequently, the schematized symbolic imagery of growing metaphysical awareness, and of a community’s identification with its environment and lifestyle. And, as stated in the previous chapter, stylistics varied from one region to another and from one epoch to another, for the previously stated reasons.

Gombrich discusses the schematisation and ordering of visual imagery when he blames Ruskin for our inherited perception that there is “opposition between the untamed exuberance of life and the dead perfection of engineering” He claims that Ruskin was “blinded to the kinship between rational and organic orders”. This is an interesting idea for the present study because it is hardly possible to set these two terms in opposition to each other in the context of artefact imagery. This is because, within all the organic and

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291 Bahn and Vertut, Images of the Ice Age, op. cit., pp. 17, 81, 82, 97, 133, 150.
292 ditto, p. 17.
inorganic systems of nature there appears to be, consistently, rational engineering and the
matrix out of which this is derived; predictable and logical orderliness. If this is so, then
it must be accepted that system and design are components of sets of universal laws
which govern the structures of all organisms and of which there are limitless and
apparently chaotic (exuberant?) variations. Even in rocks, invertebrates and the
organisms that are undetectable except by electron microscope, rational, disciplined order
is an underlying principle of their structures.\textsuperscript{294} And if Lovelock's Gaia theory is
accepted, that the Earth, is one whole, grand, ordered organic system in control of itself,
then any ideas of Ruskinian "untamed exuberance" and absence of "the dead perfection of
engineering" (or order) do not make sense.\textsuperscript{295} Neither is it feasible therefore to accept
the Platonic idea that only man, as distinct from other forms of life, is capable of what
Gombrich labels "a sense of order".\textsuperscript{296}

With this in mind it seems reasonable to ask why the human race, the most complex of all
living organisms, should not be predisposed towards the ordering of its visual
expressiveness. In the present study visual expressiveness within and upon artefacts is
the case in point, and the geometric, repetitive and frequently rational disposition of such
imagery must therefore appear to have been a process that has developed inevitably as a
result of our own biological make-up. The many ways in which imagery as visual
expression has developed builds upon this predisposition, and of course they have been
conditioned and varied by geography, time and local circumstance.

Pfeiffer cites two examples of ancient ordered imagery. The first is a Neanderthal site, a
shelter in the Ukraine where:

\textsuperscript{294} ditto, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{296} Gombrich, \textit{The Sense of Order}, op. cit., p. X.
"...there is) a large oval area surrounded by heavy mammoth bones which enclosed fifteen hearths. This complex probably represents the remains of a hut, with the bones serving as anchoring elements to hold down the edges of skins..."

The second and third examples are also Neanderthal sites, in coastal Italy, and in Central Asia:

"...the innermost chamber (of the cave) contained a ring of stones surrounding a skull with a hole bored in it...(and) another (in Central Asia)...of ibex horns stuck in the ground around the skull of a young boy..."297

These three examples indicate that a sense of order can be seen to have been operating long before the appearance of parietal and portable imagery in the Upper Paleolithic era.

Gombrich discusses the phenomenon of the straight line of geometry as an image. It is possible also to include the dot as a minimal phenomenon of imagery. In the case of these two marks the relevance of placement is of paramount importance, and this is discussed by Arnheim.298 The straight line will be dealt with here. In his discussion of Franz Boas' statement that the "straight line is a rare occurrence in nature" Gombrich regards it as a:

"...man-made order...which...humankind has chosen...(and) which is recognisably a product of a controlling mind and thus stands out against the random medley of nature..."

Further on, however, Gombrich discusses the geometry of assembly, and offers the example of straight lines in organic matter, such as the crystalline form of molecules.299

It is interesting to pursue the idea, that whilst the straight line may not be a frequent

occurrence in living matter, it is more frequent in the world of geology, such as land masses, sedimentary rock structures, lakes and oceans. It would be difficult to believe that ancient humankind, in their nomadic lifestyles, were not aware of long, flat horizons or vertical cliff faces in either the landscape or over stretches of water. They must also have been well aware of the straight lines of grass stems and reeds which, in the Mesolithic epochs at least, were apparently used to weave matting, the basic nature of which is a construct of straight lines. From these earliest times the craftworker has utilised the repetitive and ordered disposition of straight lines in the decoration of artefacts. The thoughtful ordering of straight lines has produced outstanding imagery, first in matting and weaving, and later, in iconic figurines carved out of stone, and in the decoration of ceramic and metal objects.

Gombrich says, however, that humankind's attempts to build structures out of straight-edged stones and bricks seems to have stemmed out of "convenience rather than an act of creativity". And this attribute of convenience becomes an integral aspect of the of the use of the straight line in such a context, but then the curve of the non-straight line also becomes an integral aspect of structure-building when the curve is used in certain contexts. Convenience and the intrinsic nature of the medium can be the naissios d'etre, therefore, for the decision to create a chosen kind of image that is based on either the straight line or the curve. And so convenience can thus become a function of creativity. But in this context, does the straight line also indicate the inability of humankind to create structures or objects with organic complexity comparable with those of living nature, of plant organisms or molecular structures, for instance? If buildings can be included as "artefacts", then as far as simple organic shapes are concerned, mud-brick structures of Africa and grass and reed architecture of the marsh Arabs of the Persian Gulf have demonstrated also the creative use of non-straight lines. And Piggott points out that in ancient Celtic Britain housing, and sacred enclosures such as Maiden Castle and
Stonehenge, were frequently circular.\textsuperscript{300} Much ancient building, however, consisted of three-dimensional forms produced by the use of the straight line, such as the cluster-housing complexes in Neolithic Anatolia and Mesopotamia. And the basic building format of domestic and temple structures in ancient Western Asia, Egypt and the Aegean, for example was post-and-beam.\textsuperscript{301} The straight line is also integral in many twentieth-century building techniques where mechanical systems are used. The straight line is certainly a convenience in these terms, and it can and has produced extremely creative solutions for the effective use of available materials, such as mud, fired clay, timber, stone and concrete. Humankind has used the straight line constantly as a unit of designing, and it can be seen therefore both as a convenient limitation as well as a potentially creative phenomenon. Whether humankind's achievements as a result of the use of the straight line are to be judged as "bad" or "good" is another discussion, and outside the scope of the present study.

As far as the imagery of artefacts is concerned the maker embarks upon his or her solution to the translation of a concept into a material object as a response not only to what Gombrich has called convenience, but also to another condition. This is order, and there are two distinct layers of this which engage and influence the decisions made by the craftworker/decorator in the process of making or decorating an artefact. First there is the inherent discipline of the nature of the medium itself. And following this, is the order of the conceived physical form of the artefact which itself imposes a discipline, or order, upon any intended embellishment which may be placed upon it. The discipline of order can offer both limitation and creative opportunity to the craftworker. When the general concept and form of the artefact already exists the addition of imagery may interrupt or deviate from the basic form, and it is at this point that the perceptions of the viewer or user of the artefact are affected.\textsuperscript{302}

Whatever the situation, however, the artefact and its imagery are the result of the skills of the maker, which in turn are the result of ordered intelligence and movement. And the sense of order must inevitably extend beyond the individual and the materials and the skills at hand, to the wider community and its perceptions and concepts which through time and circumstance have developed into ordered ways of thinking, seeing, behaving, believing and understanding.
Image and Taste

When Winckelmann first commenced to dig for buried “treasure” in the eighteenth century he and those after him were primarily interested in objects which were either made from precious materials or were of a high aesthetic order within the parameters of the taste of the day. What is admirable and aesthetically acceptable in any era, of course, is constantly subject to change. The inevitable judgemental and subjective attitudes propounded by the archaeologist and the art historian towards discovered artefacts, from ancient times to the twentieth century cannot help but influence their study. But since the early twentieth century archaeologists have been using social relevance as the prime measuring stick of an artefact’s worth. And in recent decades art historians also have been using social, political and economic conditions as a priori measures of relevance. Traditional ideas about aesthetic worth tend to have been relegated to a place of secondary importance.

Every culture and every era has had its own predominant parameters of taste. As an example, the predilections of the mid- to late eighteenth century in England were for neo-classical values. The taste of the day applauded and applied to art and artefacts the rediscovered precepts of high classicism of fifth century BC Magna Graecia. Out of favour were Hellenistic exuberances and Roman-based stylistics which in their turn had profoundly influenced the Italian Renaissance period.

Taste can be used as a valuable pointer to semiotic information about a culture or an era. And the swing away from concerns with aestheticism in art, of recent decades, to concerns of a social, political and economic nature are more an indication of the critic’s and viewer’s attitudes and circumstances than an indication of the intrinsic value of an object.
The two faces of taste, that of the maker and that of the patron, are not equally powerful in shaping perceptions about art practices. As far as can be ascertained the taste of the makers of artefacts has always been influenced by the demands of patronage and of the market. The taste of the patron has had the potential to over-ride the decisions that must be faced constantly by the craftworker during the processes of making. Now, when the artefacts of any epoch are studied critically and historically, their interpretation comes under the pressures of a third face of taste; the prejudices of the critic/viewer. The influences of Marxist-based ideologies and theories have infiltrated twentieth century Western art history and theory, but since the upheavals in Russia and Eastern Europe in 1989 which devalued such materialist theories, newer attempts are being made to evaluate the making of artefacts within present post-Modernist parameters. In both approaches, however, the concept of aesthetic values has been denigrated in favour of social, political and economic considerations. To make critical comments for or against these major movements in taste in relation both to ancient and contemporary artefacts is not the purpose of this present study, but they have to be recognised as shifts of taste which change inevitably any perceptions or judgments about artefacts and their imagery.

The crude searchings for “good” examples of artefacts, preferably made of precious materials, which were carried out by archaeologists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have been replaced in the twentieth century by painstakingly detailed and scientifically based expeditions, whose main purposes have included the appraisal of social, political and economic circumstances of ancient cultures. As an early example of this shift in taste and subsequently of method, the recordings of the excavations undertaken by Mellaart in Anatolia and the regions southwest of the Caspian Sea indicate, for instance, that simply decorated tools, shell and bone jewellery, and sherds of ceramics, are “good” and valuable archaeological evidence for the pursuit of these aims.303 This is not because they might be made of precious materials, or that they have,

303 Mellaart, The Neolithic of the Near East, op. cit.
necessarily, any great aesthetic value. It is because they help significantly to build up theories about the lifestyles of the people who lived and traded in these regions from the seventh millennium BC. Whether their forms or their decorative imagery can be classified as aesthetically satisfying has been beside the point in these expeditions.

One of the problems of taste lies in the near impossibility of viewing an artefact with the eyes of those for whom it was intended.\(^{304}\) A typical example of this was remembered by an erstwhile student of an eminent archaeologist in the first half of the twentieth century. What he then regarded as pieces of jewellery more associated aesthetically with the cheapest of chain-store jewellery were, in fact, diadems worn by Court attendants at Ur when they accompanied royalty to their death in the third millennium BC (fig. 69).\(^{305}\) Made of hammered sheet gold and semi-precious stones, lapis lazuli and carnelian, in an arrangement of wreaths and stemmed flowers and leaves, it would be difficult to imagine that either the wearer or the subject-peoples who might have seen the finery, could have viewed it in such a light, as tawdry. Yet few professional jewellers today would contemplate producing such “artless” work, which nevertheless, displays a fine and strong sensibility of order, skill and discipline in its designing. The reason for this kind of statement must lie in awareness of an enormous difference between the taste perceptions of the ancient patrons and those of that twentieth century archaeologist.

Whether it is reasonable to formulate aesthetic judgments regardless of the circumstances in which an artefact has been made is arguable. As the above example shows it is possible that an artefact which might today be universally categorised as “tawdry”, “vulgar”, “insensitive”, “clumsy” or “over-decorated” might yet be highly successful in expressing ideas connected with its apparent symbolism, or in conveying unintended semiotic messaging to the critic or viewer of a later epoch. Whatever the taste might have been of the maker or the patron, or whatever the taste of the subsequent finder/viewer,

\(^{304}\) Bahn and Vertut, *Images of the Ice Age*, op. cit., p. 185.

the value of such artefacts in providing insight, cultural evidence and semiotic information is very great.
fig. 69 Head-dress and other jewellery, possibly of Queen Pu-Abi, in gold, lapis lazuli, carnelian. Royal Graves of Ur, Sumer, Mesopotamia, 4000-3500 BC.

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How successful some of the very ancient artefacts were in promulgating intended ideas and messages is difficult to assess in most cases, and impossible in others. Once artefacts were buried with the deceased (as they frequently were) any symbolism, meanings or influence they may have had on a community’s perceptions would have decreased progressively. And by the time they were discovered in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries their associations with a community’s perceptions would have long been forgotten in the regions of their finding. This is particularly so in the case of artefacts from the Upper Paleolithic era to the Neolithic. But when, for instance, the treasures of the Royal graves of Ur were discovered it was with the help of archaic literature uncovered with the treasure that the contextual evidence appeared to support the archaeologist’s interpretations of the probable intended messaging of the artefacts. But even so, the story of any symbolism, messaging and meanings must be incomplete, and flavoured with the predilections of the twentieth century. It would be difficult for scholars of today, with the best will in the world, not to apply current taste-concepts, even inadvertently, to the found imagery, during the course of their interpreting. And such judgments need not arise solely out of current attitudes. It may be that an image which appears to express an obvious concept quite clearly and succinctly might in fact be found to contain three kinds of messaging. The first is the conditioned recognition by the viewer that it is, or is not, a satisfactory example of the visual expression of either an abstract concept or a physical entity. The second is that much of any power which it may be perceived to possess lies in the innate order and discipline of its production, which could encourage the viewer to consider the image within the parameters of aesthetics and how they are regarded, and this will inevitably impinge upon taste. The third kind of messaging can depend upon typological identification, and a consideration of any

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307 Both Pfeiffer and Bahn make this proposition in their various discussions of the context of Upper Paleolithic cave art.
stylistic, semiotic or symbolic links it may have with the imagery of other artefacts and other cultures that have been the subject of investigation and interpretation.

It often happens that our inherited criteria of order, proportion sensitive placement and visual dynamism are often apparent in the imagery of domestic and ritual artefacts and cult objects from most ancient cultures. So, it would seem that these criteria do not belong exclusively to the post-Greek and Roman eras, but that there always has been some kind of conscious correlation between criteria of this kind and the artefact. The Susiana examples can be cited again. Many decorated bowls were found in the necropolis of Susa, in graves that were obviously poorer than the rich burials where the famous goblets and bowls were found. In the case of the latter it is apparent that more care has been taken in the actual painting of the motifs, more precision, a greater sense of proportion and a more poetic rendering of the subject matter has been bestowed upon these pieces from the rich burials, and this was discussed in a previous chapter, Image and Creativity. Many other parallel examples can be found in other cultures, from Mesopotamia, Egypt, China and the Aegean.

The movement of visually powerful imagery from one culture to another appears to occur only when social, economic or political circumstances are receptive to the intake of new sets of imagery and/or concepts; when there is a need and when the time is ripe. The circumstances themselves, however, may not have any connection with the conceptual basis of the incoming imagery. The immigration of an image seems to happen when there appears to be a perceived inadequacy in the body of visual expression in the adopting community, and an image that has already been visually conceived and poetically expressed elsewhere, becomes acceptable to fill the vacuum. This is made more likely by the fact, stated earlier by Pollock, that the development of new artefact imagery can be slower than the development of the causal concepts, because methods of

production may have to be tested and tried and this can be a time-taking and expensive process.

An example from the late nineteenth century seems useful. In the last thirty years of the century Morris's earlier prophetic repulsion against heavy surface over-embellishment on irrelevant forms led the great Arts and Crafts Movement away from post-Baroque and Rococo ornamentation, as a display of technical virtuosity for its own sake, into a new order, a rich (often decorated) but gentler and more restrained climate of simpler functional forms and organically based motifs which were truer to the materials and the craft skills used to create them (fig. 70). And artefacts were designed to relate more suitably to their intended function. The inflow of styles and imagery from Japan, Persia and medieval England was welcomed and, divorced from their original context, they were adapted to serve the purposes of the Movement. By Morris's time the great needs of the earlier years of the century had gone. No longer was there an urge to celebrate, with as much artifice and virtuosity as possible, the inventions and technological achievements of the Industrial Revolution. The inventions of industrial creativity were now taken for granted, and the tired eye of the viewer/user was to be refreshed with objects made by self-fulfilling hand-work and with simpler orders of design. Motifs were devised that looked romantically at the exotica from the Near and Far East. The rural life of pre-industrial England was romantically and quite inaccurately remembered as a kind of lost Utopia. The transference of imagery and styles did not achieve its authors' intended aims at social improvement. Neither were the concepts which originally pertained to the imagery carried into Western cultures. But the

309 But inevitably the idealistic aims of Morris failed to some extent. The hand-work of skilled craftsmen and women was expensive. Despite all Morris's idealism and desire to provide the working classes with more self-fulfilling work and with better designed artefacts, it was not possible for any other than the well-to-do to buy the handmade articles produced by the Arts and Craft movements. And it was not practical for the working man or woman to find the time to indulge in hand-making after very long hours of poorly paid work. Even the ensuing Art Nouveau style seemed more to be the end of an epoch rather than the start of a new one. But World War I made a decisive break with the past and created a partial vacuum ready for the input of new ideas and imagery. See Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, London, U.K., Studio Vista, 1971; Also, W. Gaunt & M. D. E. Clayton-Stamm, *William de Morgan*, Greenwich, Connecticut, U.S.A., 1971, New York Graphic Society Ltd.
fig. 70 Drawing room, Red House, Berleyheath, UK, designed by Philip Webb and William Morris; 1860.

fig. 71 Marcel Breuer's earliest tubular chairs, 1926-1927; featured in Standard Möbel catalogue, printed at the Bauhaus.
revolutionary ideas of the Arts and Craft Movement did, nevertheless, have a profound effect upon the imagery of succeeding periods in Britain and Europe.

By the early twentieth century the pendulum had swung even further away from the last vestiges of the Rococo and from nineteenth century concepts of machine-made cleverness. Europe was ready to receive not only new imagery, but the conceptualisations that went with it. But this time the invention of new ideas was not only an importation, but the result, also, of local genius and the rational evolution of creative thinking. Partly under the influence of Russian revolutionary ideas of egalitarianism, but also under the influence of the movements in art and architecture circles in Europe towards a new functionalism and the need to design for industry, the Bauhaus was born in 1919. Most decoration which was deemed to be irrelevant was annihilated, and as a general rule, only decoration that was seen to be part of the intrinsic design of the form itself was permitted. Order in decoration was totally subservient to the functional order which dictated the form of the artefact in the first place and to the limitations and possibilities of the chosen materials (fig. 71). The messaging that was inherent in the new artefacts and their imagery was that art and design had come to terms, at last, with industrial methods, mass production, profitability, and the consumer market. To achieve this, the old principles of acceptable aesthetics and style were discarded and the Bauhaus credo that form (and therefore imagery) should follow function revolutionised the taste and perceptions of the consuming public.

In each of these movements of judgemental taste there was an element of morality which had developed as a reaction against the immediate past of nineteenth century romantics and over-blown embellishment. This is hardly surprising when it is remembered that one of the greatest influences in the so-called decorative arts during the nineteenth century was the writings of John Ruskin. They are akin to sermonising; his themes are

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inextricably connected with "morality" and "goodness" as he applied them to crafts. He related morality to appropriateness. Which brings the discussion back to the ancient jewellery and diadems of Queen Pu-Abi of Ur and her attendants (fig. 69). That their adornments were "right" or "good" for their purpose cannot be proved but only guessed at. (Whether they were worn in the lifetime of their owners or whether they were specifically made as funerary decorations befitting their rank is not known.) But if, in their time, they were regarded as appropriate images for the carrying of the message of the concept of queen-ship and power, then it is reasonable to consider the circumstances of production, and observe how these relate to the use of such jewellery in the royal graves. When the gold and lapis lazuli headdresses and jewellery were commissioned it must have seemed proper that royal adornment should be made of the most rare, precious and prestigious materials available. The trading and economic situation of the day made imported gold from early dynastic Egypt, and imported lapis lazuli from Medan in Persia available to the craftworkers of Sumer, but no doubt at great expense. Despite the total lack of local raw materials such as minerals of any kind, the Sumerian artisans had become supremely skilled in handling imported metals and stones. The importation of these foreign materials had been established for almost a millennium. (The only local available materials were mud, reeds and grasses, clay, shell, bone, and the products from the animals they herded.)^311 There was a severe limitation therefore on materials that were suitable for the display of royal power.^312

Whilst the extravagant use of expensive imports might have provided reasons for arguing against the use of gold and lapis lazuli it must also be remembered that, as messaging symbols of successful government and prosperity they were entirely appropriate, embedded as they were in the economic trading life of the society whose exports were

^312 The mud-brick faced ziggurats, the temples and palaces in the hinterland, and the splendid reed and mud buildings of monumental proportions in the drying-out delta of the Euphrates demonstrate that these peoples were conscious of the significance of demonstrating the hierarchical structure of the societies with buildings that were commensurate with status in the community. Lloyd, The Archaeology of Mesopotamia, op. cit., pp. 129, 229, 265; also, Leonard Woolley, Ur of the Chaldees, New York, U.S.A.,1965, Norton & Co. Inc.
wool, skins and textiles. So, again, circumstances unconnected with the actual imagery of the diadems and jewellery themselves, may have rendered as appropriate the use of these materials as messaging symbols of the power and majesty of the state. And the chosen imagery of flowers used in the diadems, may well have symbolised queenliness and/or the flowering of womanhood, and can in this context also be seen to have been an appropriate messaging choice, and therefore, “good”.313

Also, the use of foreign and precious materials which were unfamiliar to the general populace would inevitably have a fascination. Because they were exotic they must have been synonymous with mystery. Those who had the authority to use and wear these materials must therefore have been perceived to be in a special position apart from the general populace, and to carry prestige, superiority, power, and possibly mysteriously divine connections with the gods of the culture.314

This theory can be applied to any number of examples, in other cultures and at other times. For instance, the use in Stonehenge of “blue stones” which had been transported from the Prescelly Mountains in Wales more than 224 kms.(140 miles) to the site of Stonehenge is a good and intriguing example.315 Local sandstone was available for the building of Stonehenge, and was used later for the huge “Sarsen” (sandstone) stones. Why was the bluestone imported? Was the alien nature of the stone a factor in this extraordinary choice? Were there already other mystical concepts associated with bluestone which is volcanic in origin?

Through the ideas of strangeness and eventual mysticism associated with hitherto unknown imported materials it would seem that the elite groups who use or are associated

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313 To use the Ruskinian set of moralising values as a measure of the success of an image.
314 Throughout history there is ample evidence that the mystery associated with the exotic attracts ideas of separateness, and by implication, ideas of super-humanity in a hierarchical system. The descent of ancient kings, emperors and chieftains from the gods can also be seen as a connected mythology.
315 Leonard Cotterell, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Archaeology*, London, U.K., Hutchinson, 1960, p. 426; Bluestone is a term used for rocks such as dolerite, rhyolite and volcanic ash.
with them become in some way identified with their mysterious qualities and thus acquire prestige and power within the social structure. These are considerations in the development of taste and of intentional messaging in a culture.

How much of the original messaging can be transferred when the physical artefact itself is transferred to another culture? The transference of artefacts from one group or culture to another is most ancient and trading networks have been recorded from as early as Upper Paleolithic times. The analogous or non-analogous nature of the message-carrying image must be a factor in the diffusion of ideas through artefacts from one culture to another. The translation of the original message-carrying artefact and its imagery into another culture must offer opportunities to add ideational variety. The transposing of the original object into a recognisable expression of itself in what might be totally different materials must inevitably cause some changes to be made. Variations in style through the limitations of the chosen new materials, and through the available skills of the craftworkers, has been discussed previously, and must cause changes to be made, to a greater or lesser degree, in the messaging potential of the imagery. Cultural preferences in the adoptive society can also force variations to be made in the ordering of motifs. This process of shift can produce several results. The very act of translating a visual concept into new materials (for instance, from ceramic into bronze) can refresh the concept and either give it a new lease of life or produce an artefact that is less satisfactory because of the limitations of the new material. This can also happen when an artefact is translated from one medium into another within its society of origin, and where there is no diffusion from one group to another, except perhaps the micro-change from one group of craftworkers within the society, to another. As Gombrich says:

316 Pfeiffer, The Creative Explosion, op. cit. p. 64.
317 Which related back to Barthes' second-order trinity of signification; see (fig. 38).
"...The first pattern (of images) having lost its charm by having become automatic (and totally familiar), a new one (is) needed to experience the pleasure of mastery (of the concept)..."\textsuperscript{318}

This statement can be extended to propose, also, that when an image-pattern is altered so that it can be translated into different materials and when it is made by different craftworkers, the inner concept itself can be gradually re-stated until the original idea may be changed entirely. This kind of metamorphosis is teleologically involved with the culture and society in which it has been developed. This same kind of metamorphosis can apply when the artefact is transferred from one society to another, whether the circumstances are the result of trade, migration or conquest.

To quote Gombrich:

"...Karl Popper's 'searchlight theory of the mind' comes into play when the opportunity occurs for a known, understood and accepted idea to be re-stated in a novel or refreshed way. The collective mind of the society receives the new symbol or image (imported or indigenously created), and immediately commences to appraise it in terms of the current social needs and aspirations. From this point on, the image and its ordering are subject not only to changes because of the exigencies of available material and techniques, but also because of the metaphysically based requirements of the receptor society..."\textsuperscript{319}

Examples where metamorphoses such as these have taken place can be cited in examples from many cultures and epochs, such as the griffin and the dragon, and these are discussed later, in Part III. According to Gombrich, it was Gottfried Semper, who, in the nineteenth century asserted that the first axiom of applied art is the law of making a virtue out of necessity, and this is another way of viewing the teleologically based changes in artefact imagery that have already been discussed.

\textsuperscript{318} Gombrich, \textit{The Sense of Order}, op. cit., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{319} ditto, p. 1.
Image-Making and Local Invention

Belief in the power of an icon has been universal, apparently since earliest times. Some artefacts have been given icon-status and they have been endowed with the belief that they could affect aspects of life or circumstances if approached in a suitable manner. This is believed to have been a basic assumption by humankind since most ancient times. According to material evidence provided by archaeology, ritual and ceremony have been practised in physical proximity to an icon or group of icons since at least mesolithic times, and according to Pfeiffer, since Paleolithic times.

The image acquired, in fact, an even closer relationship than that of being an analogue of an abstract or metaphysical concept. Because the icon/artefact was believed actually to hold the power of the concept (god, spirit) it came to be perceived as the concept itself. (This is discussed in the chapter on Symbolism, the Icon and the Transfer of Potency.) What had been expressed visually in material form became the Idea itself. The host-image/icon was the result of the visual expression of concepts about potent spirits or gods and the icon was believed to possess, therefore, certain powers associated with the perception of these supernatural entities, and so the distinction between abstract concept and physical imagery diminished. The power of the spirit lived in, or was, the image/icon. Even as late as the Renaissance in Italy this kind of belief was alive, or at was at least revived. According to Gombrich, Ficino "admits his belief in the magic potency of the image quite openly…” This ancient pagan habit of belief had been at the root of the problem centuries earlier, which had seen the rise of the early Christian iconoclasts, and their fear of image-worship.

It would seem to be self-evident that humankind did not have to wait until the human race had developed a body of philosophical and rational traditions, or even a written language,

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before it became able to create symbolic and semiological imagery for the race’s perceived spiritual needs.\textsuperscript{323} Apparently for thousands of years before the human race had learned to communicate with written signs in a language form, or had developed any form of sedentary or urbanised lifestyle, it had found meaningful analogues in the forms of visual imagery (which, it is thought, was accompanied by ephemeral activities of some kind). Visual imagery discovered in the Upper Paleolithic caves and rock shelters in France, Spain and northern Mesopotamia is believed to express, identify and communicate non-visual, non-physical concepts. The same is claimed for the burials at Sungir in Russia.\textsuperscript{324} These concepts were universal, and concentrated primarily upon the facts of human existence, birthing, surviving, dying and the possibility of after-life.

The instinct to survive as long and as comfortably as possible has been responsible for some of the most basic, most poetically succinct and powerful imagery known. The cave-paintings of 40,000 to 10,000 years ago made by Paleolithic peoples in regions as widely separated as France and Spain, and Australia are, apparently, examples of this.\textsuperscript{325}

The point that is relevant to the present study is that these ancient images and forms were all, without exception, the end-result of an urge, deep in the human psyche, to assist survival, or to comment upon it. And they were frequently connected with artefacts. The variations in human-survival solutions differ from region to region. Nevertheless there was a good deal of image-making in widely-separated communities which had marks, signs or apparent concepts in common.\textsuperscript{326} We must assume that they were spontaneously generated in each region, and all are concerned with universal concepts.

\textsuperscript{323} Mania & Mania, \textit{Rock Art Research}, Vol. 5/2, November 1988, op. cit.; also, Bahn, Vertut, \textit{Images of the Ice Age}, op. cit., pp. 72–74.
\textsuperscript{326} Lévi-Strauss, \textit{The Science of Mythology}, op. cit. This is a major theme throughout this work, where he discusses the commonality of factors in myths and accompanying imagery.
about survival. These visual expressions also derive from the state of the physical capacities of homo sapiens. It is generally accepted that, although we still do not know whether *homo sapiens* originated in one or several regions, his and her physical, mental and spiritual abilities have produced many similar signs, images and interpretive symbols in regions that were distant from each other and apparently unconnected.

The profundity, expressiveness, clarity, and transcendence of many of these marks, signs and symbols have varied considerably between peoples and regions. But despite this, it seems to be generally accepted that there is no ambiguity about their nature. They have welled up from the common human psyche, and are symptomatic of universal needs, hopes, desires and visions born out of a universal *homo sapiens* wherever he or she may have lived.327

Even as early as Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic cultures, there were at least four, and possibly five, different universal categories of artefacts and attendant imagery. Apart from flints used for survival activities, and which do not appear to bear any markings other than those that formed the flint into an efficient tool, there are found objects which have been selectively chosen and altered to a more or less degree to enhance their capabilities as proficient artefacts. Those that have survived seem to have been found as idiosyncratically shaped remnants of antler, horn, bone, shell and ivory. The second group includes objects of personal adornment which may or may not have had a purpose other than private aesthetic satisfaction, and those which a consensus of opinion agrees were indications of personal status within a hierarchical structure. A third group of universal artefacts covers the vast quantity of fired clay containers, of which the earliest known are dated to around the seventh millennium BC. (Artefacts made of organic, and therefore perishable materials such as textile or wood, have largely disappeared. Also much early metalwork has been melted down and remade, and even stone may have been

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reworked by later generations.) A fourth group consists of objects which seem to have had some iconic function, possibly connected with ritual and belief, with situational ephemeral ceremony, or with indoctrination. The fifth group, which is classed by some as “artifact” consists of cave and wall paintings which are generally believed to have been connected with ritual and accompanying artefacts. Included also are the many non-figurative marks and signs which can be described as ideographic, as distinct from pictographic, and which may yet be proved to be memory-aids, maps, notational signs or encyclopaedic information for later reference, for the benefit of later generations. The purposes of such form and image-making in these categories is sometimes self-evident, and although they have a generic universality and intelligible form, nevertheless, in their diverse and sensible forms they display unequivocal evidence of local genius and invention.
Reality and Intervention

It must be assumed, for want of evidence otherwise, that the exigencies of the materials, the individual capabilities of the makers, and the techniques developed in order to manipulate those materials as well as possible, were major interventionist factors in the ordering of artefact image-making. This fundamental fact has been repeated and discussed many times in this present study in relation to various aspects of making, trading, using and viewing of artefacts and their imagery. But these exigencies, or interventions, go even further; they were and always will be major factors in the reductive processes of realising an image which may or may not have been already concretised in some form or other. Many ancient artefacts, housed in the major museums of the world are regarded as remarkable, memorable, significant or just plain beautiful simply because they are the result of the intervention of their makers to achieve this reductive or poetic state. The survival of transcendental content and relevance through many generations has been achieved often through processes of refinement and selectivity forced upon the maker by material and technical exigencies.

The viewer/user also has an interventionist role. At this point the image is frequently seen as a visual metaphor, taken to the point of maximum reductivity, for the expression of a metaphysical or a non-physical (spiritual) concept. In many cases the visual metaphor can be more powerful and more pertinent than any verbal statement or any detailed, naturalistic portrayal of the subject matter. In searching for possible reasons for this phenomenon it is necessary to look briefly at the various senses that are applied to the appraisal of an artefact. It is evident that the sense of sight can accept a message immediately in one hit. Sight does not need the medium of time, necessarily, in which to consume the visual message. It can be virtually an instantaneous cognitive reaction, whereas the medium and dimensions of time are indivisible from the experience and comprehension brought about by of hearing and touch. And time is also integral, through sight, in the comprehension of verbal or written messages. Time is also an
integral component of dance, theatre, music and film. It is only the graphic, visual presentation of a concept which can offer the possibility of instantaneous impact and immediate messaging. (This of course does not include the possibility of added comprehension which might be achieved if the image is viewed for a period of time.) Is it perhaps the immediacy of the impact of the image on the eyes of the viewer which adds to any inherent power that may be present in the image? The possibility that the image may be a metaphor suggests that the viewer is activated to use his or her own internal mechanisms to identify for him or herself the concept demonstrated by the image. Increased viewer participation, therefore, is a form of intervention which reinforces the drama or power of the image because it has to be accepted that with every individual viewer there is the possibility of a unique reaction.

The concept of “realism” has been mentioned in the context of poetic reality apparent in imagery such as the ibex motifs of Susa A. But a concept of reality needs to be considered here in relation to the concept of intervention. Havelka discusses reality, and he says:

“...a theory of art is...concerned with the problem of reality. Every experiencing organism responds to a variety of forces and energies that are classified as 'external reality', as well as to others that arise 'internally' and are not so classified...”

This interpretation of “internal” forces as non-reality differs from that used when the significance of imagery is being considered in this present study. For the purpose of the current investigation of the artefact image and its development, translation and journey through cultures, regions and centuries, the term “reality” would seem to encompass also the “internal” or mental, psychological, philosophical and imaginative energies which have gone into the creation and the experiencing of imagery through the ages. To modern, as well as to ancient humankind the concepts which have given birth to mythology, ritual, religions and metaphysical activities, and which have resulted in the

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physical and visual expression of imagery seems to be equally as "real" as the material of "external" aspects of life.

Havelka also follows up this proposition by commencing with a specific example:

"...patterns of acquired communication agreed upon by preceding generations...present us with the 'reality', for instance, that 'the sea is blue'..."329

Parallel with this are the age-old communications among tribes and nations that certain metaphysical mysteries exist for humankind as perceived "reality". The ways in which these have been expressed, placated, worshipped, sacrificed to, and dealt with to try to provide collective peace of mind have commenced with non-physical concepts. These must be accepted as "internal" or spiritual realities, as a result of which the "external" realities have been created; visual, material, physical imagery.

This seems to make it feasible for a set of new, so-called "realities" to be born out of other accepted realities. "The uneasiness of resigned credulity", to use Havelka's phrase, is brought about in a given society by common consent about the nature, classification and language-labelling of a perceived "reality". Havelka's example quoted above, is inevitably a group compromise and has the potential to be the state of mind and spirit which is a pre-requisite for the birth and development of doubt about such a status quo perception, and a possible springboard for creative thought. As Havelka points out "any (subsequent) change is apt to cause difficulties and confusion" where cognitive agreement has been established and accepted as the way things are.330 Time taken to comprehend a change, however, can be seen as a time for testing and proving the viability and validity of new thoughts and concepts. The learning by a community of newly created ideas and of developing, either internally or externally, a new cognition of either established realities or new realities not hitherto experienced are the steps by which a rebel image or

329  ditto, pp. 11, 28, 29.
330  ditto, pp. 12 and following pages.
idea evolves. In other words it can be the circumstances which encourage critical doubt and eventual creativity. It begins as an anti-social reaction to what the artist/creator sees as the existing but inadequate labelling, perception or expression of a non-physical or a physical reality in the community. Eventually a new interpretation of existing concepts, perhaps in terms of a new visual imaging, becomes a socially acceptable reality.

This kind of evolutionary process, which can be assumed on the evidence of the progression of the idea and the image in ancient artefacts, to have been a basic pattern in the development of visual imagery as symbolism, whether or not the image has been imported (diffused) or locally and spontaneously generated. Examples can be drawn from almost any culture where idea and imagery offers a continuity which demonstrates change that sometimes may be gradual and sometimes sudden. The stylistic progression from black-figure to red-figure vase painting on the ceramics of sixth to fifth century BC Greece shows quite clearly a constant stream of dissatisfaction with the status quo, and the trial of new ideas of methods in which the vases could be decorated (fig. 72) \(^{331}\)

And the developmental changes can also be cited, in the form, style and decorative motifs of the Minoan ceramics of the Bronze Age in Crete (such as the “Octopus” motif; (fig. 34) when Mycenaean influences overtook the Cretan craftsmen and changed the image of the octopus into a tighter and more constrained decorative unit.\(^ {332}\)

Havelka describes language as “substitution”, that is, replacing visual reaction to a visual image with what he calls the “semantic conventions” that are integral in language.\(^ {333}\)

Does this imply also the possibility of constriction, restriction, regulation and metamorphosis of a concept into something that is either more or less than the original?

Fig. 72 Black and red-figure painting. Below, black-figure kylix, with athletes and referees, by painter Lydos; Greece, c. 550 BC.

Left: Red-figure wedding lebes, with presentation of gifts to married couple. Greece. 5th C BC.
Or, at best, something that is different? Of course it is also possible that language has the potential, when describing image or idea, to promote the expansion, freeing, and de-regulation of the viewer/reader's cognition. The choice, placement and patterning of a group of words can be the fuel which sparks creative thought even though the language used was, in itself, never intended to be so.

This kind of unforeseeable intervention through language is parallel to some extent with the reaction of the viewer when confronted with the visual, non-verbal reality of the concept-carrying object or artefact. The idea, visually expressed in an artefact, made with known imagery and already conventionalised materials, skills and techniques can, like language, have the potential both for limiting the perceptions of the maker and the viewer and for being the stimulus for new, creative, not-yet-conventionalised concepts. This kind of process must have been to some extent the method by which ideas expressed in visual imagery have been created, altered, developed, metamorphosed, and even killed, through countless generations, from the time of the first scratchings, clay markings and object-making of most ancient humankind. Intervention would appear to be a constant factor through all cultures and all epochs.

Tensions are created between the social censoring of the cognition and perceptions of visual realities. The inevitable inadequacies inherent in any attempt whatsoever to describe or communicate a perceived reality through another medium would seem to have provided the state needed to force rogue, revolutionary, evolutionary or creative energies to the surface of the mind of a potential creator or viewer of imagery, who must inevitably be cast in a dissident and interventionist role, at least, in the first stages of the development of new imagery.

The perception of reality, and what it is seen to be, might then be at the heart of the creative process. Reality, which Nochlin discusses at great length, is not an unchanging phenomenon, or an unequivocal condition upon which everyone can agree. She
discusses the intervention by the artist/maker between the original idea and its physical realisation. If this is the case it would seem to be reasonable then to suggest that the inherently changeable nature of perceived reality is a necessary factor in any creative process.

Humankind's experience of socially accepted realities was apparently manifested in Neolithic lifestyles as ritual and ceremony, fortified with, and communicated to the participants by means of artefacts (fertility figurines, bucrania, iconic figures and symbols, weapons and vessels, for instance), and also by means of two- and three-dimensional imagery upon the walls of what may have been shrines, or at least established places where ritual was enacted. If available archaeological evidence can be regarded as adequate for the drawing of conclusions (and there is nothing else available) it would seem that these rituals and ceremonial group activities were concerned with the great mysteries of human existence. Whether sounds (eventually socialised into language, song or dance) were also significant or essential components, for example, of ritual in Neolithic Anatolia, we have no means of knowing. All we have as evidence is visual imagery in the form of artefacts placed in deliberate patterns of ordering (in rooms larger than those in domestic houses); sculpture which was either either bas-relief or free-standing, two-dimensional mural imagery. But although song, ritual sounds and dance are ephemeral activities, a few of the artefacts connected with them such as musical instruments, have survived. Some have been proven, by musicologists, to have clear tonal sounds and organised musical scales not dissimilar to those of much later musical systems. And by the late fourth millennium BC in the civilisation of Ur there were well-organised and sophisticated musical instruments, such as the lyres found in the royal burials.

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335 Mellaart, The Neolithic of the Near East, op. cit. p. 91 and following pages.
337 Mallowan, Early Mesopotamia and Iran, op. cit., Chapter 5.
The introduction of meaningful spoken sounds, and ultimately, written language, must have been, as Havelka asserts, a "promoter of meaningful classification...and an enforcing censor of the individual’s participation", and an agent of intervention. The specific example of Neolithic ceremony and imagery, such as the excarnation and seasonal burial rites in the Anatolian cultures of Çatal Huyuk and Haçilar (c. 6,000–5,000 BC), (fig. 64) and the inevitable limitations arising out of group communication and participation brings the discussion back to Havelka’s proposition stated above. Limitations inherent in conventionalised group-communicated experience would seem to provide the necessary opportunities for irritation, doubt and dissidence. These are the conditions that encourage the urge for creative intervention, new conceptualisation and the expression of metaphysical concepts that are both established and new, and ultimately, the urge to make appropriate artefacts and their imagery.

Although Plato appears to have been the first to attempt the delineation, on a critical basis, of art into “bad” (mimesis, imitative copying), and “good” (distillation or transformation into poetic essence), both of these Platonic criticisms of visual expression were manifested in times more ancient than those of Plato. With no more than the simplest interpretation of “reality” in mind (that is, re-presentation or imitation), it is evident that from the earliest times on record, of the production of two-and three-dimensional imagery, these delineations can be applied just as effectively to pre-Platonic visual manifestations.

Take for example the schematized and decoratively organised “travel documentaries” drawn on the Gerzean vases of Egypt (c 3,500 BC), (fig. 29). It is believed that they were an attempt to depict the experiences, the landscape and some of the realities of the journeys from southern Mesopotamia, down the Persian Gulf, around the coast of Arabia and north, up the Red Sea to Egyptian ports. The jagged, linear images that express the

338 Mellaart, The Neolithic of the Near East, op. cit., Chapter 3.
burning shimmer of desert sun, the rows of trotting ostriches, the wind-formed
triangularity of the sandhills give the viewer more than just a diagrammatic representation
of some of the phenomena along the sea-route from the Persian Gulf around Arabia to
Egypt. Simple to the point of stick-figure naivete, these images are intensely evocative,
however, and provide the viewer with a simple but poetic interpretation of some of these
realities experienced by the ancient sea-traders of the region.\textsuperscript{340} They can be contrasted
with the later horizontal bas relief representations of trades, industries, crafts and
agriculture featured on the walls of Old Kingdom tombs at Sakkara, Egypt.\textsuperscript{341} These
later representations are much more skilful in terms of visualising the human body at
work, and they are extremely informative, but there is no suggestion that the artist was
attempting in any way to evoke any response other than recognition by the viewer of the
activities involved. In them there is no sense of any higher or poetic reality, no attempt to
find essential or characteristic truths or essences peculiar to the subject matter of the
murals. Whether they can be justly categorised therefore as “bad” art in Plato’s terms
presents a problem, but if the Platonic argument is to be applied then they must be seen as
less “poetic” (and therefore “bad”) than, say, the much earlier, pre-dynastic Gerzean vase
painting, despite the fact that the latter are more naively and primatively depicted than the
Old Kingdom imagery. Such a critical decision cannot avoid being a subjective one,
because it is the viewer who has to decide whether or not there is any more in the
visualisation than a matter-fact recording of certain activities. To twentieth century eyes
there does not seem to be much spiritual or poetic content in these particular Egyptian
murals, yet they provide a non-mimetic realism that is full of practical detail and
information for which twentieth century viewers are grateful. The Gerzean vase-
paintings also provide non-mimetic and informational imagery but which is stylistically
diagrammatic. But in these the artist has managed to indicate some of the essence of the

\textsuperscript{340} A\textit{ Guide to the Oriental Institute Museum}, Chicago, U.S.A., The Women’s Board of The University of

\textsuperscript{341} Lloyd, \textit{The Art of the Ancient Near East}, op. cit., pp. 70, 72, 73, 76–77; also, J.R. Harris, \textit{Egyptian Art},
features that are drawn; the shimmering heat of the desert sun, the characteristic procession of the birds, and the featureless monotony of the wind-blown sandhills. All of which reinforces a decision to say that the Gerzean vase-paintings are “good” art by Platonic standards because they present a poetic attempt at powerfully evocative symbolic images.

The imagery of both offer realism, but they achieve two entirely different kinds of reality, and it was the interventionary role of the artist and/or the patron which decided the character of the two examples. And now, in the twentieth century the viewer makes informed but subjective judgements which in themselves are interventionary.

If it seems problematical to compare in this way two sets of totally different images, produced in widely separated eras, then the same discourse on reality and the image might be tested on the dragon image in Chinese art. Unlike the Dao-die mask of the Shang dynasty which was frequently a major motif on the bronze vessels, (and believed to have been of great potency by some), the dragon on the other hand, appeared on the Shang bronzes as a secondary, minor or non-threatening image with little or no poetic perception in its rendering. The dragon was basically a benign motif, but carried out as it was in the brutally severe and rectilinear style of the Shang, it tended to become merely a decorative space-filler along with other schematised animals in a complex over-all design of animal motifs, all dominated by the threatening Dao-die or glutton mask that is believed by some to have warned of the dire consequences of over-eating and over-imbibing. Poetic reality belongs without a doubt to the Dao-die mask by contrast with the other animal motifs, and as such can be classified as “good”. But both the Dao-die and the other animal images have been disciplined by the intervention of the craftworkers in ceramic mould-making and bronze-casting who manipulated their crafts and the imagery within the limitations and possibilities of the materials.

By the time of the Yuan dynasty the kuei dragon had developed into a major motif, and was magnificently drawn and painted on porcelains (fig. 73). By now the symbolism of the ancient mythical Emperor Yi who sought his lost wisdom was poetically portrayed as the dragon chasing the flaming pearl of wisdom across the heavens. Later, in the Ming and Qing dynasties the dragon became an almost mandatory thematic motif which was carried out in luxurious embroidered gold bas-relief on Imperial robes, on lacquer, jade, carved wood and porcelains mainly intended for Imperial and palace use. In the late nineteenth century, in the last decades of the Qing, the symbolic significance and the dragon-ness of the dragon became overly curvilinear and almost kitsch-like, elaborately over-decorative to the point where technique tended to swamp any poetic power which it may have had in earlier times (fig. 74). Despite the fact that the dragon was still intimately connected with the symbolic role of the Emperor in the rituals performed to bring on the spring rains and fertility of the land, the dragon-ness of the dragon was now subservient to the stylistic demands and the amazing virtuosity of the craftworker/embroiderers whose skills satisfied the stylistic demands and taste of the nineteenth century Imperial court.

In the case of the dragon motif the non-reality of the physical existence of an animal labelled “dragon” is not under discussion, but rather the reality of the expression of the mythical concepts associated with it. Traditionally symbolising the Emperor, the quality of the reality of the dragon changed with succeeding dynasties. The perceptions of Shang society produced brutal, strong and relatively simple imagery on the bronzes, but the dragon tended to be a subsidiary motif. The dragons of the Han, on moulded ceramic tomb tiles and pillars, have a freer, pictorial style, and are included with birds and embryonic landscape motifs (fig. 75). The figuration of the Yuan dragons developed on porcelains appears to have been a response to the richly decorative and energetic style
fig. 73 Kuan (wine jar) Yüan period, 1279-1368 AD
China
YRS Mus 80s

fig. 74 Guangxu Emperor's blue formal court robe; with dragons in silk tapestry weave, 1875-1908 AD, China.
Dr Emp Pail M. Bei
Also diagram of dragon motif placement on semi-formal robe.

fig. 75 Detail, ceramic pillar, with bas-relief dragon motifs and tentative landscape features; from Tomb, Han dynasty, 207 BC-220 AD, China.
Gui Mus

fig. 73

fig. 75

fig. 74
preferred by the Mongol rulers. During the Ming the dragon, with the flaming pearl, became elegantly decorative and superbly colourful as a result of polychrome glazing and rich embroidery, and presented something of the perceived majesty and glory of the Emperor in his divine role. By the time the stylistics and virtuosity of the Qing dominated the symbols of Imperial power, the reality of the mythical symbolism that had accrued to the dragon tended to be overshadowed by the blaze of technical brilliance. Almost the only reality that remained were the vestiges of a highly conventionalised symbolism, which helped to provide semiotic intelligence and information about the circumstances of the times. This sumptuous and technically brilliant decoration of late Qing imagery sends messages to the viewer about supremely wealthy patronage and of the growing decadence of an aristocratic section in society which could be content with imagery that expressed, more than anything else, the self-importance, wealth and vanity of its patrons.

On the basis of a comparison of this example with something a great deal simpler and more direct in its symbolic imagery (such as the Gerzean vase-painting) (fig. 29) it might be concluded that perhaps simplicity and comparatively innocent visualisation might even present the essence of a concept more powerfully than one that is embedded in complex techniques. This cannot be stated as applying to all imagery, however. But in this instance, at least, there appears to be an inverse ratio where the more complex the style and technique the less likelihood there is of powerful messaging of the original intended meanings. The enormous interventionist input into complexity, by both the craftworker and the patron, would seem to work, in some cases, against expressions of potent or poetic reality in this case.343

It is true to say that the artefact/image-makers have always been the decision-makers at the final point of material conceptualisation, and as such are interventionist whether or not they are conscious of the fact. But equally, they have never been totally free to make

their decisions, or totally responsible for the ultimate visual phenomenon. Social, political and economic environments, as well as patronage, have dictated aspects of the making of physical imagery, and as such are also interventionist either directly or indirectly.

The circumstances of decision-making and production within a given society are of interest and importance just as much to the making of artefacts and their imagery as they are to other manifestations of a culture. Influential intervention as a function of artefact-making, therefore, should be examined. To be able to intervene at all it must be granted that a concept already exists in some form or other, otherwise the intervener would need to be the creator of the concept as well as the maker of its physical expression. But as a general rule the maker fulfils a secondary role, even though the visual imagery for the concept might not yet exist in a material form, and may not until the craftworker commences to translate the concept into a medium of one kind or another.

During the process of interpretation from an abstract concept to a physical and visual expression in a chosen medium, it would be difficult to avoid any of the three interventionary paths of decision-making. The first is DIRECTION. It is impossible to conceive that this is not affected to some degree by the society in which it is made. But the most immediate intervention comes from the maker and the choice of materials and technique. This kind of influence can infer a potential change or variation in the original concept. The second is LIMITATION. The inevitable framing of the concept must lie within the physical potentials of the maker and of the chosen materials and technique, and is thus unavoidably limited by them. The third is EXPANSION. By virtue of the chosen materials and techniques, and the imaginative potential of the craftworker it is possible that the original concept might be expanded to become even more significant, poetic or powerful. But, as an umbrella over all, there is the indirect influential intervention of the culture to which the craftworker belongs.
An example of the first two paths of intervention can be seen in the already cited sun-motif on the Gerzean vases of c. 3500 BC. Its visual imagery and style is clearly limited by the materials and the techniques available to the potter and/or decorator. But it is conceivable that the maker’s own creative input gave direction to the creation of the inspired jagged character of the encircling lines which are assumed to be descriptive of, and analogous with, the shimmer of heat and dust-haze. As stated earlier this can be seen as a poetically interpretive visualisation of the kind of sun and heat experienced in and around the tropical lands and coasts of Arabia and Egypt where the sea-going merchants collected and traded their wares.

The third possibility, of expansion, can be proposed in some examples from the Bronze Age of the Aegean. These are the beak-spouted jugs found at Vasiliki, and made during the Middle Cycladic period in Crete, c. 2000–1850 BC (fig. 76 a.). They are decorated simply with markings that are assumed to imitate the surface of earlier vessels carved in stone, and with exaggerated spouts which relate in shape to earlier metal forms of Western Asia. Curves and spirals were developed a little later, and eventually the decoration included marine motifs and fanciful birds. But the forms of the jugs are probably the most interesting part of the imagery. They are a translation of bird-forms which affect, and improve, the function of the jug as a pouring vessel, but the imagery goes to extremely decorative lengths which are beyond the needs of efficient functioning of the vessels as pourers. The exaggerated spouts extend from slanted long necks. The later beak-spouted jugs in the Kamares style, from Phaistos, dated c. 1900–1700 BC, and others from the island of Thera, dated to c. 1500 BC, go even further in the three-dimensional representation of bird imagery, with painted and ringed, and sometimes embossed, eyes (fig. 76 b.).

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345 Higgins, ditto, p. 59.
Beak-spouted clay jugs

fig. 76a. (left) Vassiliki style
late 3rd millennium BC.
Crete

fig. 76 b. (right) Kamares style
1850-1700 BC. Crete
(A & Ch. A.)
The imagery, and therefore the viewer's perceptions, are expanded in these Cretan jug forms beyond the obvious concept of the decoration of an efficient, liquid-holding-and-pouring container, and the viewer and user is invited to share the delight of the makers in their imaginative expansion into humorously creative analogues.

The Bronze Age Cretans, however, whose forebears are believed to have migrated from regions of Western Asia (probably Asia Minor), were not the originators, apparently, of the beak-spout concept. An exaggerated beak-spouted jug found in Anatolia at Kultepe has been dated to 1,800 BC, an earlier example from Yortan in Anatolia is dated to c. 2,500 BC, and yet another from Uruk in Southern Mesopotamia has an even earlier date of c. 3,500 BC.\textsuperscript{346}

To date there is no absolute proof that the idea of beak-spouted containers was carried or diffused by some means or another by the ancestors of the Cretans to their new island home. But if, in fact, it were to be proved that the Cretans had been, indeed, emigrants from Anatolia, or Mesopotamia, then they themselves and their forebears must have been the creators of the concept. It is also conceivable that the form in ceramic was derived originally from copper vessels made in Southern Mesopotamia in the late third millennium BC, and that this form was known through trading contacts. The idea itself, of a greatly extended spout, is the kind of concept that would arise more naturally out of the characteristics of copper-working than out of the technical characteristics of ceramic materials. The trading contacts were considerable between Anatolia, Syria, and Northern and Southern Mesopotamia, especially during the third millennium BC when copper, tin, obsidian and silver were traded both as raw materials and as artefacts along the Euphrates trade routes. As has been stated previously, the re-usable nature of metals is the major reason why there are so few examples extant, and why artefacts made of non-re-usable ceramic material have remained as a major residue of past cultures, and have provided us, therefore, with copious material evidence.

Unlike the practice of modern times, the makers of artefacts in ancient times are not seen to have produced non-commissioned objects in the hope of eventual sales. Apart from artefacts for simple daily, personal and domestic needs, objects which required significant amounts of labour and time, or the use of expensive materials, were made only when they were commissioned, or, in the case of artefacts for export, they were made in the knowledge that they were readily acceptable as goods for barter or sale. Even as late as Renaissance times paintings, sculptures, and artefacts, both secular and religious, were almost without exception, commissioned. Thus the patrons, or commissioners were cast in the role of intervenors and arbiters of taste. They were in the privileged position of being able to choose the subject matter, and in the cases where costly materials were to be employed, they dictated to some extent the style and technique. But not all materials were expensive or difficult to obtain, and these, such as wood, stone, bone, shell, leather and textile, had been at hand at least since Neolithic times, if not earlier, and were readily available to a craftworker. It is tempting to imagine that the decorating of some ancient artefacts was a labour of enjoyment, a leisure occupation perhaps worked on after a hunting or gathering expedition was over, or waiting for the rain to clear. Or, in Neolithic times the periods of waiting for crops to grow, or the passing of winter months in colder climates must be seen to have been periods when those who were capable would fill in their time with the making and decorating of artefacts either for their own use or for local bartering within the community. This has certainly been so in more recent times, especially where folk art is concerned. In this kind of situation the craftworker had greater opportunities to make personal and perhaps creative decisions on the choice of subject matter and concept. The sheer satisfaction of making marks and images has been around, possibly, since before the Neanderthal epoch, and this was discussed earlier in relation to the Bilzingsleben bone artefacts of *homo erectus*.

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Whether any kind of ritual, magic or symbolism was attached to the earliest imagery on artefacts is not known. Whether the idea of decoration for its own sake came before or after physical imagery was developed as iconic, magic and symbolic representations is not known either. But it always seems to have been a fact that in the buying or selling or bartering of goods that a decorated article would sell more easily than an undecorated one, or that it would be more acceptable to the patron who commissioned the making of the artefact in the first place. Only in occasional instances has a lack of decoration been regarded as a virtue. This was so, for instance, in China, during the Song dynasty (906–1279 AD) when a considerable number of bowls and vases were left undecorated, or only minimally embellished; they relied largely for their exquisitely refined qualities on subtle proportions and outstanding glazes. Even today, they are still regarded by both Eastern and Western cultures as outstanding. And in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was the great pendulum swing against the sentimental and florid vulgarities of the Industrial Revolution. The new ethos, first of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and then of the the Bauhaus school in Germany was largely responsible for the birth of a taste for artefacts whose functional forms were the total image. The Bauhaus credo and its reductivist attitude that “less is more” made embellishment for its own sake redundant.\(^{348}\) It appears to have been a cathartic and necessary swing to a new direction. But these were rare situations in times of great sophistication when taste had grown to be extremely refined. And in the case of the Bauhaus movement of the twentieth century, there was the added and timely devotion to the idea of designing well for mass production in industrial situations.

The patron has always been the prime intervenor, and represents the market force that has to be satisfied with the choice and style of imagery. A secondary but still interventionary role is played by the purchaser of a non-commissioned artefact because he or she represents a collective interventionist influence, expressed in market terms, which has its

\(^{348}\) Droste, *The Bauhaus*, op. cit.; Mies van der Rohe, the architect (and a teacher at the Bauhaus) is credited with making the statement that “less is more”; this has been quoted so often that it has become almost a cliche during the mid to late twentieth century.
foundations in the taste and state of society. And in the twentieth century mass advertising campaigns have manipulated the consumer taste of the mass market in a major interventionary way.

In all situations, however, the maker/designer/decorator has always had the role of arbiter and intervenor at the final and intimate point of the making of the artefact, to a greater or lesser degree. As discussed in the chapter on the Role of the Craftworker, the intimate decision-making that happens at the point of contact with the material through the techniques employed are the moments of truth when creativity, reality, and great heights of poetic statement may or may not be made. And this is despite the patron or any other marketing situation. And this applies even when, in the production of an artefact, the idea and style were well-established and conservative to the point of being cliche. And it applies whatever social, political or economic circumstances might prevail. The craftworker’s own individual talent, prejudices and taste are the interventionist means of producing imagery that is, in Platonic terms, “good” or “bad”. But the intervention of the craftworker is most marked in one interesting example, cited by Delaney, where the cultural parameters of the individual craftworker are very much in evidence. A bronze cauldron made in Sicily before 550 BC, and found in the Celtic Hochdorf tumulus in Germany, has decorative cast lions around the lid, which had been mass-produced. One of these, however, had apparently been missing, and a replacement had been made by a Celtic craftsman. According to Delaney, a Celtic sense of humour is noticeable in the replacement and it is also quite different in style from the two other original lions on the cauldron. Without actually making a cast from one of the two original lions it would have been virtually impossible, of course, for the Celtic craftsman to copy exactly the original decorations, if indeed that was what he may have wanted to do. And so we have an example of intervention by the craftworker that may or may not have been desired or intentional. Another example is the second millennium BC bronze dagger blades, inlaid with gold, silver and niello, and found in Mycenaean graves. It is accepted that they

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were made for Mycenaeans, but they are believed to have been the work of Minoan craftsmen, because the exuberance, characteristic energy and the natural realism of the figuration that is regarded as typically Minoan, is seen as an inevitable (and possibly involuntary) intervention by the craftworkers (fig. 77).

All three aspects of intervention, direction, limitation and expansion, are integral in all imagery, but there are also other occasions of intervention. The intervention of the viewer in the perception of an image is interesting because it brings with it a range of semiotic perceptions. An image can be seen by anyone who cares to pay attention to it, and it can be remembered as a discrete image by that viewer. That viewer can also pass on the visuality of the image to someone else, either by drawing or by photographing it. But this visual recording and rendering will no doubt accrue to itself, perhaps quite innocently, semiotic messaging which will intervene in the comprehension of the image by the receiver of the image. There is no way that this kind of communication of the image can be an exact replica of the original. It can only be an approximation. It is not possible to pass on to anyone else the exact or complete range of sensations or reactions which might have accompanied the original viewing of the image. And if the communication about the image had taken place verbally there would be even less correspondence between the original and the transmitted image. And even if two people view the image at the same time in the same place, their experiences of it will be different. Therefore it can be said that no image can exist identically for everyone. There is no way that one viewer can match perfectly his or her reactions to an image with those of

someone else. The image is what the viewer makes of it. Every viewer brings his or her own idiosyncratic associations and constructs to bear on the significance of the image. Beyond the basic visual reality of the object there are limitless possibilities that can be associated with the image and which will intervene with it in some way. The viewer in the role of a transmitter of an image then becomes a post-making participant in the artefact and its image. So it seems that the basic physical reality of an image can only exist within its own physical presence; any representation of it is only a shell, or at best, an imprecise indicator of possible characteristics and significances.

The reproduction of an image for the purpose of communicating it to others may be at least one of the factors in determining that a particular image, or style of imagery, might be more pertinent to, or typical of, one culture or epoch rather than another. It is concerned with the viewer’s/user’s confrontation with the imagery. Even its stylistic significance depends entirely on the nature of the reproduction and the subsequent judgemental participation of the viewer, who will interpret its style in some preconditioned and preconceived format. This phenomenon is constantly proved by students who have become familiar with images from earlier periods through slides, film, video or book illustration. The observer is essentially a producer of relative and subjective reactions. And when the student is confronted for the first time with the actual physical object and its imagery it frequently happens that existing perceptions are severely jolted if not totally transformed. This is particularly so in Australia where students are remote from the major museum collections in the rest of the world, and their first physical confrontations with imagery which they have studied in a second-hand way, by reproductions, can be a most profound experience which may alter their preconceived attitudes considerably. But in no way can their perceptions, at any point, be totally objective or separate from the conventionally accepted realities of the community or culture in which they live.
This argument leads to the fact that all imagery is relative, that its reality changes with every observer and in every different kind of condition or circumstance and that it has multiple, even infinite numbers of realities. The image, when applied to an artefact especially, has always been, at best, a visual and physical approximation of a given concept. The viewer's participation therefore can only be an approximation that may be even further away from the concept which was originally intended by the patron and/or the maker of the artefact.
Deduction, Assumption and Inference

In this study of the nature and sources of artefact imagery a great deal of the exemplary material used comes from pre-literate cultures. One of the great difficulties, when dealing with pre-literate cultures is the very fact that there is no contemporaneous written corroborative information. However misleading or limiting the written language might be, it can provide, nevertheless, either facts, proof or climate in which the available material evidence can be posited and assessed with a certain amount of confidence. When there is no written language the found material evidence is the only base from which conclusions can be drawn. A priori reasoning has to be used to make deductions or inferences, from the general to the particular. It can be dangerous however to make assumptions too easily, because, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “to assume is to take upon oneself...arrogantly”. It is tempting, in the light of accrued knowledge, to make assumptions about these ancient cultures and their artefacts but it has to be used carefully, however attractive an assumption about a given artefact might appear to be in twentieth century eyes.

The research and documentation by most, of the pre-literate, and early literate, societies and their material remains are necessarily full of such deductions, assumptions and inferences. It is only in this way that critical theories of evaluation can be arrived at. And apart from factual, material or physical evidence of an ancient culture it is also possible to build up acceptable theories that arise from the aura that is present when a significant amount of found remains are available for study. This aura or climate might be difficult to define (impossible in scientific terms) but it is nevertheless an important means of assessing an ancient culture and its artefact imagery.

In a discussion of the possible symbolic content of ancient imagery (or of any other kind of content) it is necessary to “deduce from evidence”, to “draw assumptions from”, and to “make inferences”. Therefore this chapter will consider the use made of these three
terms with regard to ancient imagery, because it is in the study of ancient cultures that these kinds of statements must constantly appear. While the first, to deduce, seems an acceptable stage in art historical discourse, the two latter stages, assumption and inference, might have less firmly grounded bases on which to build theories of imagery, although in practical use the meanings of deduce, assume and infer, overlap to some extent, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Stuart Piggott discusses this problem in relation to his study of the Druids and the comparatively scant material evidence that is available on which to build his theories.351 The problem (as with all pre-history) was that there was no written documentation that might support material evidence or typology. Material evidence, by its very physicality, cannot be identical to, or incontrovertible proof of non-physical and/or metaphysical states within the life of a given community. Piggott claims that assumptions are unacceptable, but that inferences can be made from a study of material evidence, especially when it matches or correlates to some degree with other material evidence from another region, culture or time-slot.

An example of this problem exists in a statement made by Pfeiffer that cave art imagery was made as part of a ritual designed to reduce conflict among prehistoric hunter-gatherers. Without further corroboration it would seem that there is an assumption here that prehistoric hunter-gatherers found it necessary to fight, for some reason or another, such as population pressure.352 Yet there seems to be no corroborative evidence to date that this was so, unless seasonal variations in the supply of locally available food made it necessary for one group to confront another for its procurement. But is it reasonable to assume that fighting would have been necessary at all, in the times of the Neanderthal and of the later homo sapiens? It is generally agreed, from existing evidence, that they were exceedingly small, scattered groups of hominids who dwelt among vast numbers of animals which could be hunted and killed for food, if the skill to do so was there. In such conditions one wonders whether in fact it would have been necessary to fight for

food of any description. The question that cannot be answered is "how drastic was the decrease in numbers of large game animals after the peak and retreat of the last Ice Age (c. 20,000 BC)? And when the huge numbers of caves in France and Spain alone are considered, it would hardly have seemed necessary, either, to have fought for shelter. There is always the possibility of course that sexual partnering might have been a cause for fighting. Many species of the animal kingdom engage in competitive gesturing and combat for mating rights, and some fight to wound or kill, but we do not have any evidence that this was a general behaviour pattern for humankind. Perhaps the phrase "reduce conflict" is rather meant to convey the encouragement of communal harmony and understanding among those who used the cave and were aware of its imagery. Pfeiffer certainly infers that the cave imagery and artefacts were visual methods of didactic communication networks in pre-literate communities.353

Cave art and artefacts cannot prove that such behavioural or ephemeral concepts and actions were extant in any given community. There is general acceptance, however, that cave paintings and artefacts had socio/ritual significances, and it is from this material evidence that such assumptions and inferences have been made.

Certainly the actual materials used in art-making by ancient humankind provide clues to activities, which, in turn, offer obvious opportunities for assumptions and inferences to be made. For example, flints made from particular rocks have been found at sites up to two hundred and fifty miles (410 kms) from the place of origin of these rock types.354 It seems safe here to assume that either individuals, or the group, travelled this distance in order to collect the rock pieces for the purpose of making flints from them. Or, the assumption may be made also that individuals or groups met and exchanged either rock pieces, or already manufactured flints, or that the flints were found accidentally while hunting or gathering, appreciated as useful tools and taken back to the home grounds.

354 ditto, p. 64.
This kind of assumption is made on the basis of the knowledge of general human behavioural patterns.

Any of the three alternatives above can be inferred or even assumed to have happened, because the found rock material was foreign to the findsite. But deduction could be too strong a word, because it suggests the possibility that there is proof of some kind, which, to date, does not exist. More certain are the assumptions made that trading was carried on by Australian aboriginal people before and during the last one thousand years, because pearl shells, volcanic green-stone for axes, a psychotropic plant and ochre pigments have been found hundreds of kilometres from their sources.355

Inferences and assumptions, but not deductions, can be made about all kinds of other pre-literate material evidence in most ancient times. For instance, body adornment has been found dated to 40,000 BC to 20,000 BC, in the form of red-ochre, in graves such as the one at the site of Sungir, north of Moscow. Graves were also found to contain “mammoth-ivory beads, bracelets and head-bands, rings and shell-clusters”.356 Because only some of the burials contained these artefacts Pfeiffer makes the assumption that there must have existed in the community some kind of inequality of status. It seems reasonable to make this kind of assumption here because items such as these which were not essential to basic survival, may be evidence of either inequality of possession or some system of hierarchical positioning in the community.

Another example, again quoted by Pfeiffer, gives him enough evidence to make inferences about ancient beliefs and concepts. He describes Solecki’s find in the Shanidar Caves of the remains of a young Neanderthal male of c. 60,000 BC. The body was surrounded by the fossilised remains of more than 2000 grains of pollen, and it had been laid on a bed of red, white, yellow and blue flowers which in themselves have long

traditions of possessing healing powers. The inference is that there must have been a group belief that humankind had within its power, with the aid of the pollen and the flowers, the ability to change and improve the human condition from sickness to health. But it would seem too much to assume that this “flower-burial” arrangement was evidence of a ritual activity connected with death and a belief in some kind of after-life. The fact that the chosen flowers have had a long tradition of possessing healing powers suggests that it is reasonable to assume that some similar kind of belief in the healing powers of the flowers existed even as long ago as 60,000 BC, although we have no proof of this either.

In his discussions of the creative activities of ancient humankind Pfeiffer makes many other fascinating deductions, assumptions and inferences. For example, he describes the difficult and sometimes dangerous routes to the sites of Paleolithic imagery within the caves. The choosing of such remote sites suggests to him that the climactic drama of finally viewing the imagery is parallel to some degree to twentieth century methods of “brain-washing”. Memorising and indoctrination, he assumes, were the aim of the imagery, and this was aided by the fact that access was extremely tortuous and difficult and that the imagery could be greatly dramatised with carefully arranged spotlighting at appropriate places. He also assumes that the different classes of imagery carried different classes of messages that were deemed necessary to pass on to others. He makes this assumption because some of the imagery is realistically representational but with powerfully poetic impact. Some images, however, are regarded as abstract, and are thought by some to be notational in character and to relate more to didactic pre-language communication, and possibly to diagrammatic “maps” of the terrain, such as water-holes or rivers (fig. 78). Examples include those drawn for instance by Australian aboriginal people for use in ceremonies, and also a still uninterpreted group of pecked markings of

357 ditto, p. 99; also, Solecki, Shanidar IV, A Neanderthal Flower Burial in Northern Iraq, op. cit. p. 190.
concentric circles and lines, on a small outcrop of rock at Ewaninga in Central Australia from which vantage point enormous distances and landforms can be observed.\footnote{Pecked markings on a small but prominent group of rocks, in flat country, but from which landscape features in the far distance could be viewed, such as low hills, creek beds, waterholes etc.; photographed by Guy Warren at Ewaninga, near Alice Springs, N.T. Australia, 1988; Also Flood, \textit{Archaeology of the Dreamtime}, op. cit., pp. 122-125.}

Archaeologists are, however, extremely cautious about interpretation unless identification is certain. But whatever form the imagery takes, it would seem reasonable to infer that the prime purpose was group communication of some sort, rather than merely individual self-expression. (And while self-expression is an unavoidable and integral by-product of any image-making it need not have been achieved, necessarily, as a conscious intention.)

Going to such extraordinary lengths as did the Paleolithic peoples of France and Spain, of making imagery in remote, dark places, it is assumed by Pfeiffer to be evidence that it was engendered by powerfully felt needs of the community. And the deliberate choosing of different classes of imagery has to infer well-developed intellectual capacities and a resulting urge to communicate different kinds of intelligence.\footnote{Pfeiffer, \textit{The Creative Explosion}, op. cit., pp. 130-131.}

As far as present evidence can show it would seem that cave-art was not necessarily connected with, or symbolic of, concepts of death or after-life. Pfeiffer deduces this because there is no evidence of burials within the caves where cave art and artefacts have been found. He therefore makes the reasonable assumption that such art imagery was concerned with aspects of survival, daily life and/or seasonal and geographical food-finding.

Pfeiffer also discusses the find in Central Asia of the skull of a youth, placed “within a ring of ibex horns” in a deep ravine, and a cave on the Mediterranean coast whose innermost chamber contained a skull with a hole bored in it, surrounded by a ring of stones.\footnote{ditto, p. 102.} It would be difficult not to read deductions, assumptions and inferences into these extraordinary finds. Those who arranged the ibex horn burial had what we in the twentieth century would recognise as a developed aesthetic sensibility. There is no
possibility that the placing of the horns had been accidental, and so it must have been an occasion for an expression in material terms of a non-physical concept. The Mediterranean skull is evidence also of deliberate organisation. Pfeiffer makes the assumption that there must have been some already established form of memorial or death-ritual. The third possibility is that the skulls were the remains of ritual sacrifice, and this is fortified by the fact that the remains of the rest of the bodies were not found with the skulls.

The material evidence available to date suggests that, during the Neanderthal era, a sensibility had already begun to develop in the human psyche which allowed for the translation of non-physical ideas into arrangements of physical, visual systems, signs or symbols. The need or desire to creatively materialise the non-material has been at the core of visual imagery ever since. From current available archaeological evidence the process appears to have been gradual. But Pfeiffer makes a fascinating statement. He says that the disappearance of the Neanderthal hominid and the arrival, c. 30,000 BC, of *homo sapiens* at Cro-magnon (with an increased frontal cranial capacity) seems to have coincided with a comparatively sudden “explosion of creative activity”. This is indicated, according to Pfeiffer, by the great increase in imaginatively conceived artefacts which do not appear to have any direct connection with basic material survival. Rather, they point to the development of a need for the survival of the spiritual, mental and imaginative aspects of living, and the material conceptualisation of these is only limited by the intelligence of the individual and society.

In this discourse on the use of deduction, assumption and inference, a very well-known Upper Paleolithic image might well be used. The so-called “sorcerer” image in the Trois Freres Cave offers a good opportunity for assumptions to be made about it. Dated somewhere between 18,000 BC and 16,000 BC the accepted interpretation of the image is that its purpose is one of magic, myth and possibly ritual. Apparently it has never

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362 ditto, pp. 120, 124.
363 ditto, p. 107; Also, Clark, *The Dawn of Civilisation*, op. cit., p. 28.
been seriously proposed that it might have been merely a fanciful doodle to while away time by a member of the group who had a natural talent and an urge to draw. Neither has it ever been suggested that it might be an illustration of fun “dress-up” activities used to pass the time, and that it might be the earliest evidence yet of the development in *homo sapiens* of a sense of fun and humour. Which brings up the fact that there is apparently little or no other evidence of fun in artefact imagery, apart from those artefacts which may have been toys for children, and the board games, counters and so forth that have been found in Neolithic burials in Mesopotamia and in tombs of dynastic Egypt. Is it either that humour was a later development, or that evidence of it has not been recognised as such? Certainly there is evidence of organised game-playing. Is it that we are limited in a search for a prehistoric sense of humour because we may not be able to appreciate what may indeed have been regarded as fun or good humour in those times? But one well-known example which comes to mind is the small turquoise-blue faience hippopotamus painted with lotus and other flowers, from the Middle Kingdom period in Egypt (fig. 81). Lloyd says of it:

"...In this little figure it is easy to see the Egyptian’s humorous regard for the ubiquitous and ungainly beast, whose grossness is further emphasised by the delicate plants, birds and butterflies that bedeck his flanks..."

Can we assume that a sense of humour was just as much a part of ancient cultures as it in present-day society, despite the fact there are very few surviving examples of what we in the twentieth century might interpret as humour?

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364 A gaming board of Ur, held at the British Museum, is probably one of the best known examples. Lloyd, *The Art of the Ancient Near East*, op. cit., p. 128.
fig. 90. Head of Senusret III, red quartzite, Middle Kingdom. Egypt, 2040-1650 BC.

fig. 81. Hippopotamus, turquoise blue glazed faience, Middle Kingdom, Egypt, 2040-1650 BC.
Pre-historians and archaeologists must make many unproven but reasonable interpretations and deductions about their finds. There is another interesting example, in the Tuc D’Audoubert Cave in France which has evidence that leads to the assumption that ephemeral activities were practised there. Dated c. 15,000 BC to 10,000 BC the find includes animal bones, paintings, heel-prints and a sculptured bison in clay. There had been obvious pre-planning of place, space, climax and viewing conditions, along with evidence of enormous physical effort used in the production of the imagery. Pfeiffer believes that this kind of evidence must lead to inferences that serious occasion, ritual or ceremony were the reasons for its apparently carefully planned and laboured making.\textsuperscript{366} In other words, this kind of complex and theatrically organised imagery suggests that it was devised as the symbolic and iconic backdrop for activities connected with group expression of spiritual and metaphysical conceptualisations.

Again, the earthy cylinders of coloured clay mosaic-like rosettes, and the partly buried and carved rock, with half-feline, half-human face in a Spanish cave must be interpreted, according to Pfeiffer’s assumptions, as physical remnants of ephemeral and meaningful activities carried out in theatrically devised situations, for maximum impact.\textsuperscript{367}

\textsuperscript{366} Pfeiffer, \textit{The Creative Explosion}, op. cit., pp. 109–118.
\textsuperscript{367} ditto, pp. 115–116.
Symbolism, Icon and the Transfer of Potency

It is difficult to find imagery which cannot be classified as either intentionally symbolic, or unintentionally symbolic. (The definition of the term "symbol", for the purpose of this study, is cited in the O.E.D.). Apart from non-representational marks which are as yet undeciphered (such as those found in caves used in Paleolithic cultures), and apparently non-representational decoration found on some artefacts, all other visual imagery can be classed as symbolic, because it represents, or is a token of, something other than itself.

There are two kinds of symbolism; natural, and artificial. Natural symbolism can be realist, stylised or abstracted representations of external, physical phenomena which might also be analogous to a non-physical concept. Artificial symbolism includes marks and figurations of all kinds which bear no analogous relationship to the physical or non-physical concepts that have, by convention, become attached to it, as discussed earlier.

Examples of natural or iconic symbols include the group of ancient "fertility goddess" figurines which have exaggerated female parts that are known from our own human experience to be connected with, and the result of, fecundity. The idea of fecundity is the non-physical concept which is associated with, and symbolised in, the physical phenomena of the female figurines (fig. 40). It is believed to have suggested to the viewer, and to have been accepted generally that this imagery was the symbolic materialisation of the desire to influence the processes of fertility in some way, possibly in connection with some some ritual use of these icons. The Upper Paleolithic "sorcerer" image, referred to in the previous chapter, has suggested to many that there was in existence an idea that human ritualistic behaviour might influence the supply and the

368 *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*: "symbol - 1. Thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought - 2. Mark or character taken as the conventional sign of some object or idea or process..."

successful hunting of game animals. In this context the image might then be interpreted as the iconic description of a ritually based natural symbolism. Other examples of natural or iconic symbolism include the many variations of the Tree of Life, the phoenix, and the griffin in Persian, Assyrian and Asian Nomad art, but these images are discussed later.

The Chinese pi (bi), the round disc often carved out of jade or nephrite, and with a round hole in the middle, is also a natural iconic symbol that would appear to be analogous (fig. 14). Said to symbolise the sun or the heavens, with a central void from which lightning (the bringer of rain) emerges, this circular form can be interpreted is a simple but poetic interpretation of the way in which the heavens appear to be circular within the circularity of the field of vision when one’s face is turned up to gaze at the sky.

The artificial or non-iconic classification of symbolic imagery includes marks and figurations which bear no analogous relationship to a non-physical concept. The symbolic meanings that have been attached to this kind of image only exist when they have been established and accepted by the culture which uses it.

In ancient cultures there appear to be many more examples of iconic imagery in proportion to the non-iconic although there is no proof of this. This may be due to the lack of, or scarcity of, written communication. Messaging and indoctrination had to be expressed in known imagery that could be readily recognised as representing the intended messages; a kind of visual literature. There is a most famous ancient set of non-iconic symbols, however, which is still in use in Chinese culture today; the Pa-kua, or the Eight Tri-grams. Two straight lines only are used. One line, broken, represents the yin or female principle of earth, moon and darkness. The other line, unbroken, represents the yang or male principle of heaven, sun and light. These two lines are combined in sets of threes, thus giving dominance to one type of line. These ranks of three lines,

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combined in sixty-four ways to produce symbols, have no visual or analogous connections with the content of the fortune-telling, divination or religious symbolism that is associated with their use. They are symbolic of prophecies only because, through many, many generations, Chinese culture has attached such conventionally accepted meanings to them.

In the twentieth century the pedestrian-crossing is a non-iconic symbol. The yellow or white bars painted on the roadway bear no physical resemblance to the activity of walking across the road, yet this imagery is accepted internationally as a symbol for the place where a pedestrian may cross the road, hopefully, in comparative safety. On the other hand the lit sign at traffic lights of a geometrically stylised figure in a recognisable walking posture is a natural, iconic symbol because it is analogous to the idea of walking without hindrance. The green colour of the walking figure, however, is artificial symbolically, because the concept of safety which has been attached to the colour green is an assigned and accepted convention within modern society. The red standing figure of the lit sign at the crossing takes its artificially symbolic meaning from the association of the standing-still figure with the colour red which is a conventionally accepted, and therefore artificial, symbol for danger.

It can be argued that the dragon imagery in Chinese culture is non-iconic. As an accepted symbol of rain, Spring, floods, good harvests, beneficence and also of the Emperor, it is not clear why such an imaginary creature should symbolise so many ideas which at first appear to be very diverse. As Yetts suggests, however, the source of the image might well have been the alligator which inhabits the Yangtse River. If this were so, then the concepts of rain, floods and the consequent abundant growth of Spring can be seen to be connected with this powerful creature, especially as it emerges from hibernation with the coming of the Spring and the rainy season.371 In this context the dragon in all its

variations becomes, to some extent, a natural and iconic symbol for these ideas. But as a symbol for the abstract concept of royalty and power, the dragon has been associated with this only by the ancient mythology of China, where from most ancient times the dragon-image has been used as the visual representation of the Emperor. Also the cultural practice of rain-making ceremonies was performed annually in the Spring by the Emperor, who as the perceived Son of Heaven was responsible for the bringing of good rains. Thus there was a conventional development of the association of the Emperor with the dragon who rose out of the waters at the end of his hibernation. The dragon can be claimed in this particular context, therefore, to be a non-iconic or artificial symbol.

In Neolithic and post-Neolithic imagery symbolism, both natural and artificial, is apparent even though there had appeared to be a significant movement in style away from the dominant naturalism of the Upper Paleolithic to ordered, schematic figuration and repetitive markings. The main evidence for this lies in the decorated artefacts found at many Neolithic sites. While these marks are essentially decorative, having been disciplined to complement and enhance the form of the artefact, it is believed that they are frequently referential, symbolic and related to earlier naturalistic imagery.

Although naturalism dominates the parietal art of the Upper Paleolithic, and is regarded as having purposeful and symbolic significances, there were also some figurations on artefacts, most of which were highly ordered and schematised. Whether they also carried symbolic significances is not known, but both Leroi-Gourhan and Bahn discuss this possibility. In some cases the stylised motifs fit the forms exceptionally well, and are evidence therefore, of the visionary skill of the maker in the marrying of the form and its decoration to the function of the artefact. It is evidence once again of humankind’s cognitive imagination and the eternal urge to decorate a form or a surface regardless of whether or not the image carried any symbolic or iconic meaning. On the other hand, as

most of the cave-paintings and sculptures are themselves assumed to contain purposeful symbolism, it would be surprising if artefact embellishments did not also have some kind of symbolic meanings attached to them.

The abstract and geometric markings which have been found on cave walls (often in the proximity of animal drawings), and to a lesser extent on artefacts of the same periods, have not yet been interpreted with certainty, and are still the subject of much discussion and conjecture (fig. 78). Theories today suggest that they may be early steps in the development of written language signs. If this is eventually proved to be so, then these marks fall into the category of non-iconic symbols for the purpose of communication of some kind.

In the most ancient examples, such as female fertility figurines, non-physical concepts are expressed by representational imagery of a quite extraordinarily poetic and powerful kind of symbolic realism. To date, however, evidence of close links between the Upper Paleolithic culture and art and that of the Neolithic are extremely tenuous, because as Leroi-Gourhan claims, Paleolithic art had disappeared by the end of the Magdalenian period (c. 9000 BC). Is it reasonable to propose that developments in the Neolithic over subsequent millennia, of non-physical conceptualising about the prime mysteries of life on earth, might still have had their origins (however tenuously) in such expressionistic and iconic forms from the Paleolithic that are so powerfully concerned with expressing symbolically the basic, instinctive urges for survival? There is no evidence of a substantial body of imagery in the Neolithic epoch which was as realistic or poetically evocative, as that of the Paleolithic, and it is impossible to believe that the mainly schematic and ordered style of artefact imagery in the Neolithic arose, suddenly,

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374 Bahn, ditto, p. 163; Bahn maintains that these figurines were not about fertility, but about womanhood; also, Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, op. cit., p. 184.

out of nowhere, with no antecedents. The logical inference then must be that Neolithic imagery was a secondary development based upon the older realism of the Paleolithic. Mellaart says that the ceasing of cave painting in Neolithic Anatolia coincided with the onset of wall-painting in domestic or shrine-rooms, and with the development of artefact-making.\textsuperscript{376} One of the outstanding aspects of Neolithic stylised imagery is its ability to represent, in "shorthand" symbolised versions, ideas which are basic to the human psyche, and which were attached frequently, also, to much earlier imagery. But the Neolithic maker of artefacts also developed the ability to express other abstract and spiritual concepts which had not been represented previously, in poetically apt iconic imagery of the Paleolithic.\textsuperscript{377}

There is a whole area of imagery and visual symbolism which was apparently almost totally ignored by the Paleolithic and early Neolithic craftworkers. Within the whole of the known visual vocabulary of these epochs there is very little representation of tree, flower or plant forms of any kind, and this was noted earlier (fig. 79).\textsuperscript{378} It can only be assumed that there was little perceived need to represent them in any kind of symbolic way, and this raises a question. Were they so abundant that fruit, nuts and grains were there for the taking without any communal effort or planning? If this were so then there would not have been any need for the invocation of "magic" or the communal learning of techniques, through the device of iconic symbolism, to harvest them. Neither would there have been an urge to highlight or concentrate upon the means of successfully gathering such foods, and marks and imagery therefore would have been superfluous. The lack of such imagery contrasts with the huge quantity of brilliant art connected with animals and associated rituals, and possibly helps to corroborate the theory that Paleolithic art was concerned with the successful hunting of game animals. Many of the

\textsuperscript{376} Mellaart, \textit{The Neolithic of the Near East}, op. cit., pp. 92, 93.
\textsuperscript{377} Lloyd, \textit{The Art of the Ancient Near East} op. cit., pp. 98–101; also, Mallowan, \textit{Early Mesopotamia and Iran}, op. cit., pp. 42–49; for example, the Tell Asmar figures, and the "eye idols" of Tell Brak, discussed in the chapter, "Mythologies and Signs".
\textsuperscript{378} Joyce Warren, AURA Congress, Darwin N.T. Aust., August, 1988; also letter from Bahn to J.W., September, 1988, which deals briefly with this subject; also, Bahn, Vertut, \textit{Images of the Ice Age}, op. cit., pp. 17, 132.
animals known so far to have been portrayed by Paleolithic peoples are those which could be caught and killed only with great skill and cunning. Paleolithic man's awareness of his own physical limitations in this area could be seen to have been the springboard for the development of concepts of the need for "super-power" or group-power which might help to bring down the huge beasts that provided, when killed, such magnificent food. Did he become aware of his own ability to concentrate his will and determination by reproducing the animals of prey in two and three-dimensional imagery? Was there even a primitive idea that, by drawing the animals, their strength and power might be transferred to the hunters? Certainly the urgent need to know how to chase, wound and kill, and thereby survive, were the ideas which must have attended the naturalistic but dramatic renderings of the animals. This of course is conventional theory. So too is the theory that ritual and symbolic ceremonial was developed in hidden cave locations difficult of access, out of this intensive effort to achieve supremacy over the game animals.

It is universally recognised that these superb and energetic cave images are evidence of the stature of primitive people’s ability to create poetic analogies of living creatures. But an even more remarkable aspect of these drawings, sculptures, bas-reliefs and artefacts is that they are evidence of the human ability to produce potent imagery which transcends pure physicality, and expresses poetically the spiritual, the non-physical and the very life-force of the beasts portrayed.

Whether Paleolithic peoples were themselves self-consciously aware of their own extraordinary ability is not known. But through the millennia of increasing sophistication in methods of survival, shelter and food-acquisition, objective awareness and belief seems to have developed into man-made imagery of great potency. Did the peoples of Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures grow to understand that not only did they have this

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creative talent, but that they might be able to use, direct and control it for perceived specific needs and purposes within their social group? Evidence of this awareness can be noted in some of the earliest Neolithic art known; in the Natufian human and animal figurines of Palestine c. 9,500 BC. Mellaart regards this pre-pottery culture as "falling clearly in the final Upper Paleolithic phase...with its double tradition of naturalistic and geometric styles." And he points out that all this imagery is on "art mobilier" and that similar imagery in either rock carvings nor paintings has yet to be discovered. In the absence of these there is a question that has not yet been answered; whether the imagery on such artefacts carried symbolic significances and imagined potency, or whether they exist purely as evidence of humankind's innate desire to decorate and create marks upon surfaces and forms. But there can be no doubt about the painted excarnation scenes of bodies with hovering vultures on the walls of a so-called shrine at Catal Huyuk in Anatolia, or about the bulls' and rams' horns, the bas-relief breasts, or the jaws and skulls of scavenger animals and birds in other so-called shrines. These, and the anthropomorphic female forms carved in stone or made into fired clay beakers, and other improbable sculptures such as a woman giving birth to bulls' or rams' heads, or holding a small animal-headed child, can hardly be explained simply as meaningless decoration. Together with the intriguing rows of paired horn cores embedded in platforms, the assumption is that it all added up to iconic representations of very powerful symbolism indeed. And much if not all seems to have related to birth and death, which also implies accompanying ephemeral ritual or ceremony

It does not seem to have been a very great step from the awareness of a potent presence in an image to a subsequent belief that the image itself was endowed with the wished-for

380 Mellaart, The Neolithic of the Near East, op. cit., pp. 34, 39; These include a faun (or gazelle) head carved at the end of a reaping knife, figurines, and a ruminant carved in limestone, and rich findings of artefacts decorated with carved relief, but also with incised and abstract patterns.

381 ditto, p. 92. The Anatolian site of Beldibi C is quoted as having a "rock engraving using natural contours...showing a bull with its head turned back as well as a running stag..." This seems to be one of the few known examples of rock art in Anatolia where there may have been tenuous links with the later Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures of the region. Powell, The Origins of Western Art, op. cit., pp. 22-25.

power of the concept that is symbolised. The image became the power and the concept; the physical and its non-physical connotations became one and the same. The point when the image, in the collective mind of a community, became one with the potency of the concept would be impossible to ascertain, but this kind of identification seems to have existed within the religious ideologies of at least some Neolithic societies. The Tell Asmar and Tell Brak figurines and statuary are deduced to be examples of this (figs. 43, 45 a., b.). This concept of the transference of potency still operates today, but in decreasing numbers of third-world communities, because twentieth century influences tamper with traditional and tribal concepts and procedures.383

The creative ability to produce potent imagery inevitably produced a body of artefacts that, in any given society, would also prove to be semiotically significant. Jewellery, body ornament, utensils, tools, weapons and symbols of kingship, royalty, power, authority and religious beliefs were, with increasing frequency, the bearers and mirrors of the ideas, mores, and political, social and economic circumstances of the societies which made or used them. (This topic is discussed earlier in the chapter Mythologies and Signs.) The degree to which the ideas of potency were believed to reside in the many forms of visual expression must have varied with every artefact and every culture. Those artefacts which were held to have potency such as, for instance, a kingly sceptre or the statue of a powerful deity, were more likely to be regarded as being the bearers or holders, rather than merely the visual representations of “magic” or potency.

To refer back to the general change of emphasis in the stylistics of imagery from the Paleolithic representational realism (however poetic) to the ordered schematisation of Neolithic symbolic imagery, it is necessary to consider the processes of the making of the imagery. As the lifestyles of the Neolithic became more complex tools, utensils, jewellery and weapons increased in variety, and in turn, became more complex. They

383 One Neolithic example is the already quoted group, of iconic figures found at Tell Asmar. And to quote an example in the twentieth century, the tribal beliefs and gods of New Guinea highlanders have suffered disintegrating influences at the hands of missionaries, and modern commercialism and exploitation.
were seen by those who commissioned them and those who made them as convenient vehicles for the visual expression and symbolism of society. No longer were cave walls and rock shelters the major vehicle for visual expression and communication in pre-literate communities.\textsuperscript{384} It is difficult in the late twentieth century to fully comprehend the importance of visual imagery in pre-literate societies. It was the only method of permanent community messaging. Ritual and ceremony and oral communication can be passed from one generation to another but their ephemeral nature makes unavoidable the changes that occur in the process of passing such information between people. Artefacts made of durable materials such as ceramic or stone can survive from generation to generation with their visual symbolism intact, and are useful for the carrying of inherited information and intelligence. But it is not suggested, however, that the imagery of every artefact was burdened with symbolic messaging, even though the fact cannot be avoided that they are semiotically significant.

The carved gazelle-head at the end of a reaping knife (referred to earlier, and found at the Natufian site of El Wad, has been posited as an example of a transitional style between Paleolithic realism and schematic Neolithic, but the simplification of the image brings other questions to mind (fig. 63).\textsuperscript{385} There appears to have been a deliberate ordering and stylising in its rendering; and the carving is hardly the result of the working of an unskilled hand. The gazelle, according to archaeological records, was plentiful in the region during the Natufian periods (from 10,000 BC) and it is presumed, from the huge numbers of gazelle bones found in settlement areas, that it was a major source of food. As a comparatively easy animal to hunt there could have been little need to create any potent or magic imagery to conjure up its successful catching and killing. In this instance, of a decorated reaping-knife handle, one of the most consistent human urges might perhaps have been satisfied; that of making marks or forms of the maker's own

\textsuperscript{384} For example; the Mycenaean bronze 'Lion' dagger with inlaid scenes of hunting (c 1500 BC), the Chinese Shang bird-form bronze, the jade dragon of the Anyang period, and the late Shang wine vessel in zoomorphic form with a man clinging to the mythical creature (c 1,200 BC), and many others. 

\textsuperscript{385} Mellaart, \textit{The Neolithic of the Near East}, op. cit., p. 34.
choosing, for his own or for others’ delight. And so it would seem doubtful that there would have been any intention to charge this handle with meaningful and potent symbolism. Some making of body ornament and jewellery, and the decorative carving of objects, can be readily guessed to have been a product of leisure hours, a gratification, a search for imaginative expression, and proof of dexterity and not necessarily an icon for ritual use, or a necessary part of an artefact’s functional form. The carved gazelle-head might have served also as a knob to secure a reed or leather carrying-loop, but a plain knob or hook could have served that purpose just as well. If function had been the sole aim of the carving, simpler forms could have been made more easily and more quickly.

Simplification is often a factor in the process of ordering, schematisation and style development. Non-essentials are eliminated and only the most recognisably characteristic aspects of the original subject-matter are retained. The reasons for simplification are several. However gifted or skilful the craftworker may be, he or she is constrained to work within the limitations of the material and the techniques available, and also to work within the capacities of the tools that are available. But limitation can also present new possibilities which may provide opportunities to order and design an image into a system which relates to the basic form upon which it is made. Similarly, forms as well as the images upon them, can be varied, without losing their functional capabilities, so that they relate visually and expressively to the preferences of a community. Both image and form can, as a result of schematising and stylisation, provide a high order of symbolic and poetic expression of great potency. These are some of the factors which produce style in visual imagery that relates to a specific period of culture. But they are not only a function of limitation. The potential of all of these factors can be one of expansion and development and creativity. An inspired or exalted state of mind in the craftworker can,

386 ditto, p. 72. And especially as the apparent intended use of the knife was for a purpose other than the killing or preparation of the gazelle for food; the silica sheen on its surface is regarded as evidence that it was used for the reaping of grains or grasses.

387 The findings of single, unique objects tends to fortify this theory; it can be assumed that it is doubtful that they were examples of an organised industry. Whereas the Tell Brak ‘eye idols’, found in huge quantities, makes likely the theory that they embody meaningful group symbolism.
at any time, synthesise the limitations, as well as the possibilities of a given material into visually expressive imagery which may, or may not be symbolic or iconic, but which may well carry a good deal of semiotic information.

An example of limitation imposed by the medium can be cited. It is held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; it is the red quartzite head of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom Pharaoh, Senusret III (or Senwosret) (fig. 80). This stone carving (or what is left of it) is not only a highly skilful record of deceased royalty, but it is an expressive achievement of what Seton Lloyd quotes as “pensive melancholy” and “haunting humanity”. Lloyd recognises “a metaphysicality of approach...a new emphasis on the gravity of a ruler’s responsibility”.388 And Dorman writes:

“...the brooding melancholy countenance...the furrowed brow – heavy-lidded eyes and the grim, disdainful mouth...the selection of the dull-surfaced, gritty brown stone as the medium has produced an effect of strength and ruggedness...”389

The limitations of carving such a hard stone are considerable, but the sculptor has used the intractability of the material to make a simple, but powerfully charged portrait of great subtlety, despite the hard and gritty nature of the stone. Another example (quoted earlier) comes also from Egypt, in the fondly humorous portrayal in turquoise-glazed faience390 of the ubiquitous hippopotamus which inhabited the Nile (fig. 81).391 One of the main reasons for the twentieth century popularity of this small object (which is available in reproduction in some major Museum shops) is the ridiculous but charmingly poetic notion, presumably of the ancient Egyptian craftworker, to decorate this ponderously heavy animal with delicately drawn lotus flowers, butterflies and birds, which, no doubt

390 Faience in the context of ancient Egypt is a totally different material from the so-called faience of Medieval and Renaissance Europe. See Appendix, “Faience, Egyptian Faience...”
391 There are several examples of this to be found in major Museums, and it has become, also, a popular piece that is excellently reproduced for sale in Museum shops. Lloyd’s example is the piece on loan to the Brooklyn Museum, New York, U.S.A.
in real life would have been his companions in the waters of the Nile. Iconic it may have been, in ancient Egyptian times, but if there were any attached symbolism, then it surely must have been one of light-hearted familiarity with a well-known creature of the river. But there may also have been a cautionary association, because such a heavy animal could easily upset a small river boat, and it would need to be avoided in the water. (And there is an even earlier example of the hippopotamus, in coarse, unglazed terracotta, dated to 3500 BC which, even though it is comparatively crudely made, still conveys a feeling of authenticity and liveliness that must have come from intimate contact with the beast in everyday life.)

These two examples of Egyptian artefacts were made apparently for widely differing purposes. But it is reasonable to accept, on the evidence of each piece, that their makers possessed creative and imaginative perceptions of a high order. The Senusret head provides a sensitive and perceptive portrait of a man burdened with a personal sense of responsibility in his role as Pharaoh. Unlike the remote, godlike and unemotional portrayals of Old Kingdom Pharaohs, the Senusret portrait bust conveys intense humanity that reflects the cares and worries of the political upheaval and instability of the times of the early years of the Middle Kingdom period in Egypt. Semiotically it provides us with signals about the state of the nation at that time. The faience hippopotamus also provides evidence of the creative insight of its maker, but on an entirely different level. Both are extremely realistic but both have the capacity to symbolise the circumstances which have influenced their production. The hippopotamus reflects the riverine, agricultural and hunting life of the Egyptian peasant. The animal, which was hunted for food, its hide and its ivory, was a familiar and common sight, and by all accounts, a well-liked creature that did not pose a threat to life. Like the impressive majesty of the Senusret head, this everyday creature is celebrated simply and acutely. Both are evidence of the ability of the craftworker to translate physical and non-physical concepts into iconic and symbolic pieces which bear semiotic messaging. But while the

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392 Lloyd, The Art of the Ancient Near East, op. cit., p. 115; the carving is dated to c.2,000 BC.
Senusret portrait leads the viewer to ponder the meaning of the troubled face of the pharaoh, the hippopotamus would seem to be little more than a delightful and decorative observation on a well-known creature. Could it have been a toy for a child? Unlike other animal life, such as birds, cats and beetles, the imagery of the hippopotamus was not used, apparently, in either tomb embellishments or in jewellery.

Two more examples can be studied for both iconic and non-iconic symbolism. But their iconicity or lack of it is heavily influenced by the circumstances of usage. These are from China; the thunder-pattern (fig. 13 a), and the dragon (fig. 52). When these motifs have been used only as decorative space-fillers, the patrons and the marketplace become the arbiters, and these motifs could have been used in some circumstances as attractive embellishments upon artefacts with little, if any, regard for possible original symbolic content. This would have been so, especially when they were used on porcelains, textiles and lacquers made specifically for the export trade to Europe from the end of the sixteenth century.

In the proto-historic dynasty of the Shang, however, iconic and non-iconic symbolic motifs were used to embellish the bronze food, drink and ritual vessels made at the behest of the aristocratic patronage. The Dao-die animal-mask image was carried out in bas-relief with heavily embossed eyes on the moulded bronze vessels. As suggested earlier, it is said by some to have been associated with warnings about the dire consequences of gluttony and the over-imbibing of alcoholic liquors; vices to which the ruling classes of the Shang were apparently prone. It could be postulated therefore that this imagery falls into the category of iconic symbolism.

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393 Sullivan, *The Arts of China*, op. cit., p. 37; Also, Wen Fong, ed., *The Great Bronze Age of China*, op. cit. pp. 2 - 3; Despite the symbolism on the bronze wine and food vessels the Shang excesses were one of the factors, apparently, that led to the downfall of the dynasty when the house of Zhou overran the Shang domains, and set up a power base that was less brutal, and was, to some extent, philosophically based. on the tenets of what later became Daoism.
Others believe that the Dao-die mask, the dragon, phoenix and various animal motifs were symbolic pictorialisations of natural forces. Ma Chengyuan writes;

“...The bronze decoration characterised by the animal mask motif is a description and a pictorialisation of...imagined forces of nature. The principal motifs, such as the dragon and the phoenix, are symbolic, representing such ideas as those recorded in the ‘Kaogongji’ of the fifth century BC;...‘Water by the dragon, mountains by the roebuck, fire by the circle’... This is the earliest documentation of the pairing of natural forces with types of decoration... In general these images are primeval conceptions that suggest the barbaric...”

Ma Chengyuan also quotes an army commander’s interpretation of the imagery of nine ‘ding’ (tripod vessels) said to have been made in the more ancient times of the Xia dynasty, (in the Erlitou culture, c. 1,900–1,600 BC);

“...creatures of distant regions were depicted... All the myriad creatures were represented to teach the people about spirits and evil forces... The creatures were thus the spirits of distant mountains, streams and other forms of nature ... Like a shamanistic talisman the decoration (contained potency that) could avert evil and attract good fortune...”

Like the other animal motifs, the Shang Dao-die mask imagery is an artificial and non-iconic symbol, with every varied rendering of it unique to the particular vessel on which it appears (figs. 13 a., d., 46, 47, 52, 53). The sometimes bovine or ram-like head, in all its variations, with horns, almost always without a lower jaw, and with hypnotically

glaring and protruding eyes, does not represent apparently anything other than some fearsome and imaginary, composite creature, and in its many variations it could well have been the inventions of the various craftworkers who made the moulds for the bronze-castings. It is interesting to note, also, that in the bronze “hu” (fig. 13 a.) the thunder-pattern has been used as a fine incised linear texture within such features as the horns of the imaginary animal heads. (And this device appears frequently in other Shang bronze vessels.) Could this somewhat insistent all-over space-filling be construed as evidence that plain surfaces were not appreciated? In these versions of imaginary animals there is no realistic pictorialisation of any essential ideas connected with gluttony or the mysterious powers of natural forces in either descriptive or analogous ways. The symbolic meanings were no doubt artificially applied by conventional consent, ritual and oral communication. But this does not alter the fact that many of the variations in expression, detail and style of the mask, and other animal motifs, are powerfully poetic, and provide splendid and monumental embellishment for these bronze vessels. How much potency or iconicity was believed to reside in the imagery is not known.

The Shang artisans used this socially accepted symbolism, not only because it was no doubt demanded by their patrons, the ruling houses of Shang, but also for their own artistic and aesthetic purposes, and the many and rich variations of the animal themes show this. As creative originators they have used the Dao-die mask, along with the other animal motifs, as vehicles for highly ordered and suitable embellishment of the bronze forms which, by the standards of any era, are monumentally powerful, if brutal, achievements. The standard of jade-carving at the time was also at an extremely high level, as was the making of the ceramic moulds for the bronze-casting, and this flowering of superb craftsmanship was no doubt due to appreciative patronage which was prepared to give the makers rewarding conditions of work, and house them in close proximity to the palaces of the rulers and the centres of the culture.
The Dao-die imagery, however splendid, appeared less frequently as part of the Zhou dynasty iconography. Private and orgiastic group drunkenness was prohibited by the Zhou and was declared punishable by death. The result was a decrease in the number and types of wine vessels, although they were still used for banquets and for the ritual use of wine in sacrificial ceremonies to the ancestors. So, although there is no proof, it would seem that if indeed the Dao-die mask had been a meaningful symbolic warning during the Shang, its use was no longer necessary. Also, the rise of many schools of philosophic thought was permitted and developed during the Zhou which would have diminished to some degree, at any rate among the ruling classes, the need for potent shaman-based imagery, other than the use of it for purely decorative or conventional ceremonial purposes. During the first period of the dynasty, however, the Western Zhou aristocracy displayed bronzes lavishly in the temples, according to Ma Chengyuan. The iconography of the Zhou bronzes developed into more urbane, abstracted and curvilinear motifs which appear to be more concerned with elegant decoration than with symbolism, and this is not surprising because there was a great development of literature, and the visual imagery of artefacts must have taken a lesser role in the messaging and the spread of ideas. Certainly, at the end of the Zhou period, when private patrons were commissioning bronzes for their own use, the imagery on many bronzes became increasingly figurative, but it was narrative and descriptive of the lifestyle of the patron, and did not carry, apparently, any natural or artificial symbolism (fig. 54). Neither did the Dao-die mask follow a diffusion model, through bronzes being traded to other outlying societies. This was no doubt due to the fact that any contacts with Asian nomad groups to the west and north of the conquered territories were limited by desert and mountainous regions. And in any case large and heavy bronze vessels were hardly suited to the nomad way of life. After the Shang had moved south through comparatively easy
country, and had conquered the peoples of the Wei and the Huangho valleys whom they enslaved or slew in great numbers, they settled into becoming a slave society. Their bronzes and their imagery were not exported, but were made, possessed and used by the Shang aristocracy for their own celebratory, ritual and funerary purposes.

Imagery such as the spiral or thunder-pattern, the cloud-scroll and the ling-zhi motifs are different from the Dao-die mask in their roles as conventionally understood symbols (figs. 13 a., 85 b., 107, 108, 113) 398 They are natural and iconic symbols, and are many-varied and descriptively stylised pictorialisations of thunder-storm, clouds and the fungus of immortality. Unlike the Dao-die mask they have been used to decorate the artefacts of China, including those exported to other countries, throughout many centuries.399 But it is doubtful whether there was any idea that these iconic images had any latent potency once they were exported from China. There are many variations in style, technique and form. For the Chinese, at least in ancient times, they were known representations of thunder-storm and rain-clouds which brought fertility to the land and a consequent abundance of crops.400 The ling-zhi motif was also well-known. It represents a hallucinogenic fungus which was believed by the Daoist mystics to bestow immortality. The styles of the first two motifs varied from the typically Shang rectilinear schematisation on the ancient bronzes, to the freer and elegantly curvilinear manifestations in the inlaid bronzes of the late Zhou, and the subsequent whorls of cloudy spirit-worlds in the coffin-paintings of the Han. Throughout the whole of Chinese history and mythology these motifs have appeared continually on artefacts in many media, as repetitive space-fillers, and in many cases the stylising has overlapped. In the case of the ling-zhi and the clour-scroll, and the lappet form, there is often

398 Frequently it is difficult to differentiate the imagery of cloud forms from the forms of ling-zhi, the fungus reputed to bestow immortality. This genus of fungus has been, to quote Yang Yang, characterised “in myriad representations” in Chinese art, varying from “repetitive cloud and wave patterns to trefoil motifs. And Bartholomew discusses the ling-zhi emblem and its similarity of form to the ubiquitous cloud-form ruyi or wish-granting sceptre. And Yetts discusses the thunder element as an archaic, decorative (but incomplete) symbolic version of the ancient Chinese character for “lei” (thunder). Yang Yang, Imperial China, the Living Past, op. cit., pp. 82–83; Also, Yetts, Symbolism in Chinese Art, op. cit., pp. 4–5; Also, Terese Tse Bartholomew, Myths and Rebuses in Chinese Art, San Francisco, U.S.A., Asian Art Museum, 1988, pp. 2–4.

399 Yetts, ditto, pp. 4–5.

400 Medley, A Handbook of Chinese Art, op. cit., p. 38; Also, Yetts, ditto, op. cit. pp. 4–5.
ambiguity in their rendering and it can be difficult to distinguish one image from another. Although it is assumed that in many cases they were used because of their supposed, traditional symbolic meaning, it is possible that to some extent they had become devalued into conventional and accepted embellishment. Were these motifs robbed of some of their symbolic potency during the Qing rule (1,644–1,912 AD), despite the fact that their continued use indicates that pressures of Imperial convention and strict sumptuary laws dictated their inclusion for their symbolic, historical and iconic associations? (fig. 74).\(^{401}\)

It is apparent that on Imperial and Court robes imagery such as these, and also the “twelve emblems”, were vehicles for the display of Imperial splendour and authority, but they also displayed the incredible virtuosity of the craftworkers.\(^{402}\) The political upheavals of the twentieth century have no doubt taken away any remaining symbolic potency, and the motifs today fill the role of historical evidence of past splendours and ancient beliefs and mythologies. But it would be difficult to believe that they have lost totally their symbolic and iconic power among the great mass of the population in general.

Cloud-scroll motifs and stylistics related to landscape imagery that are remarkably similar in character and treatment to those in Chinese iconography seem to appear quite suddenly, in the mid fourteenth century AD in Persia. The Jala’ir, patrons of art and literature, centred in Tabriz, encouraged the production of one of the major art-forms of Persia; book illustration. Although this art-form developed its own unique and regional style, there were also strong influences from Chinese iconography. The Mongols, who at the time ruled China and most of the rest of Asia, re-opened the Silk Roads and trade and culture moved freely between East and West.\(^{403}\) In the diffusionary flow Chinese

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\(^{401}\) Medley, ditto, p. 102; also, Yang Yang, *Imperial China, the Living Past*, op. cit., pp. 137–138.


stylistic elements, such as the manner of depicting rocky landscape, trees and clouds, appears to have entered the vocabulary of the Persian manuscript illuminators. But in these instances the clouds, (which in some instances take on a form similar to the lingzhi, as they also did frequently in China) do not bear any symbolic meaning, but are simply imported pictorial motifs, adopted from a foreign culture, and adapted into suitable forms in the narrative manuscript paintings. It is interesting to note that at this time also, in book illustration in Persia, landscape painting developed as a theme in its own right, where previously it had only been a somewhat stylised background for human activity and the depiction of legends and historical events.\textsuperscript{404} Chinese landscape painting as a genre must be considered as a possible and remarkable influence. The artists were now painting to some extent in the Chinese manner, with a greater degree of naturalism than had been evident in earlier Persian painting. The whorls and spirals for water and clouds reflect this, and the style used for rock-painting recalls the “magic mountain” forms in Chinese landscape painting of the Song and the Yuan.\textsuperscript{405} The thunder-pattern, however, used in various forms as a decorative space-filler for fifteen hundred years in China, did not become incorporated into the Persian iconography.\textsuperscript{406} This function was fulfilled by variations of the Islamic arabesque and by variations of other entwined vine-like plant forms (figs. 103, 10, b).

Along with the thunder-pattern, the dragon in many versions, is one of the longest-lasting and one of the most common images used on Chinese artefacts. Although, as Margaret Medley states, the Dao-die mask can also be read in some instances as two facing, profile dragons (fig. 46), it nevertheless has an entirely different set of symbolic meanings from that of the dragon. Lévi-Strauss surveys this ambiguous and universal phenomenon, which he discusses as “split-representation”.\textsuperscript{407}

\textsuperscript{404} dico, p. 51, pls. 14, 15.
\textsuperscript{405} dico, pls. 16, 18.
\textsuperscript{406} dico, p. 14; from the Sarai Albums, Tabriz, mid 14th C; pp. 51 and following pages, pls. 15, 17.
Along with landscape imagery such as trees and clouds, the dragon also appears in some Persian book illustration, painted in a style that is not dissimilar to the dragon motifs on Chinese Yuan blue-and-white porcelains, of the fourteenth century AD.\textsuperscript{408} And this is not surprising because these porcelains, decorated in the brilliant cobalt beloved by the Persians (and brought into China originally for the decoration of Yuan porcelains), were exported along the reopened Silk Roads, from China to Western Asia. Like the landscape motifs, the dragon was used in Persian book illustration as an element in a pictorial narrative. It did carry symbolic meaning but unlike the beneficent symbolism of the Chinese dragon, the mythical animal in the Jala’ir landscape painting of Shiraz is a creature of evil, and is illustrated in mortal combat with heroes of Persian mythology.\textsuperscript{409} It is depicted as an enemy, a symbol of evil that has to be vanquished by a hero. This is essentially a Western concept, but in the Persian Jala’ir paintings it is depicted in Chinese stylistics, and using Persian myths and legends as the subject matter.\textsuperscript{410}

In Chinese artefact decoration the dragon is most frequently seen as a painted or carved image on porcelain, lacquer, jade, embroidery, or woven into silk. Although through the centuries it has varied a great deal in style, the dragon is rendered in romantically ‘realistic’ forms, and is seen frequently chasing the flaming pearl of wisdom through the heavens. Fitzgerald discusses this:

"... If a mythical creature can be described as ‘realistic’... the physical features and the scaly skin of lizards and alligators have provided a believable realism for the visual representation of the dragon concept as a living creature. And regarding the ‘flaming pearl of wisdom’, it is difficult to separate the myths that surround the beginnings of China and its Emperors from historical fact..."\textsuperscript{411}

The earliest known representation of the mythical dragon appeared on Shang bronzes, c. 1,600–1,130 BC, as mentioned previously. This suggests that the idea of the mythical

\textsuperscript{408} Yang Yang, \textit{Imperial China, the Living Past}, op. cit., pp. 122–123.
\textsuperscript{409} Ipsiroglu, \textit{Masterpieces from the Topkapi Museum}, op. cit., pls. 18, 21.
\textsuperscript{410} \textit{dito, pl. 21, 'Bahrain Gür's Combat with the Dragon'; Shiraz, 1,370 AD.}
and beneficent dragon, bound up with most ancient ideas on water and the fertility of the land, had been in the oral, and possibly ritual, heritage of the people even before it was depicted on the Shang bronzes. According to one legend, one of the earliest mythical emperors, Fu Hsi, had the body of a dragon and the head of a man, and whose miraculous birth resulted from his mother stepping in the footprints of a giant. His successor, Shen Nung, was also claimed to have been conceived miraculously, through the influence of a heavenly dragon upon his mother. The dragon is an artificial and non-iconic symbol because its form is not analogous to the ideas that it is supposed to symbolise. If, however, it is associated with the alligator of the Yangtse, mentioned earlier, then a connection can be seen with water and its adaptability to live both in water and on land. Also the theme of disastrous floods in both the Yellow and the Yangtze Rivers recurs constantly in ancient histories, and has given rise to myths of heroic acts which connect Yu, the mythical founder of the first, Hsia dynasty, with the control of these waterways. Thus the connection between the Emperor and the dragon image is a very ancient one indeed, but it is a cultural and therefore artificial linkage of ideas with the physical imagery. The additional concepts of fertility, and the ability of the dragon to rise up from the watery depths and make rain-bearing clouds in the heavens is also symbolic messaging which has been artificially attached to the image.

Although the imagery of the dragon has survived for so many centuries in China as a symbol of these ideas, its use seems to have been only occasional in European Chinoiserie of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, purely as a decorative motif without meaning other than the fact that it was an exotic motif and therefore fashionable. The Western dragon, seen as sinister and the embodiment of evil, occurs


in mythology that is older than China’s contacts with Europe during the Chinoiserie period. It is a mythical creature with entirely different symbolism from that of the Chinese dragon, and this is discussed later. This difference may be one of the reasons why the Chinese dragon was not as popular as other motifs used in Western Chinoiserie.
Symbol and Embellishment

There is some evidence in the Upper Paleolithic epoch, of artefacts which bear marks that could be categorised purely as aesthetically conceived embellishment for their own sake, but of course there is no proof that this is so.\textsuperscript{414} It cannot be proved that ordered markings on Paleolithic mammoth-tusk plaques have any associated symbolism. But it could be postulated that, like some marks on Australian aboriginal artefacts, they are diagrammatic expressions of tribal lore, or of significant sites in the tribal territory. In the case of the ostrich-eggshell fragments found at Paleolithic sites in India, it must be assumed that the incised marks were made purely for aesthetically conceived decorative purposes (\textit{fig. 27})\textsuperscript{415} Some of the pieces of eggshell had been cut into roughly circular discs, some pierced, apparently for beads. If this is the case the marks do not assist in the functioning of the beads unless they were connected with some ritual or behavioural activity. To work the very thick and strong ostrich shell at all was a considerable achievement. (Today a hammer and saw or a power tool would be used to break and cut the shell.) Some of the engraved linear marks have been thought to relate to plant or animal forms, but the specimens are so small (the largest measures 18 mm) that these theories about the figurations must be open to question until more corroborative evidence is found.

Beads and pendants appear to have been made by most ancient humankind, even from Neanderthal times. Bahn cites several such finds at places very distant from each other, in Russia, China, Germany, Hungary, France, Czechoslovakia, Spain and Australia. Many are modified natural objects such as animal teeth, shells, fossils, and bone which have been perforated or grooved. Many lie around the found skeletal remains of humans as though they had been attached to headdress or clothing. Whether these ornaments had any symbolic significance such as band affiliations, identification, ritual icons, or

\textsuperscript{414} Leroi-Gourhan, \textit{The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe}, op cit.
whether they are simply further evidence of humankind’s deeply felt and ceaseless desire
to embellish and decorate is not known.\textsuperscript{416}

Relative to the consideration of ordered markings and their possible purposes it is
interesting to consider some interpretations made by Collingwood about some parietal
markings made at Paleolithic sites, which he refers to as “non-representative”. He
deduces that they may be patterns and tracings of dances and ritual movements connected
with religious or magical rites. He says:

“...these patterns produce a powerful and very peculiar emotional effect, which I
can best describe as a mixture of voluptuousness and terror...”

If his apparently subjective response and consequent deductions could be proved then it
would follow that these patterns and marks are not analogous symbols, yet by their very
nature they were able to evoke a strong response from the viewer. But there is no way of
knowing whether that response was of the same kind that might have been intended by
the makers of the marks. If Collingwood’s deduction that these are diagrammatic
representations for the purpose of recording or teaching the movements of the people
involved, then quite clearly they represent learned cultural conventions, and as such, fall
into the category of artificial symbolism. Collingwood also suggests that:

“...the strange curvilinear designs which were so characteristic of pre-Christian
Celtic art in the La Tene period fall also into this category...”

He reasons that they are therefore eligible to be regarded as a means of manipulating
those involved into pre-ordained states of mind and movement and are, therefore, a
primitive brain-washing technique. He also makes the suggestion that the spirals, mazes

\textsuperscript{416} Bahn, Vertut, \textit{Images of the Ice Age}, op. cit., pp. 71–74; also, Pfeiffer, \textit{The Creative Explosion}
op. cit., p. 204.
and plaits observed in the imagery of later cultures are descended from these primitive ceremonial signposts.\textsuperscript{417}

If the ancient Chinese Neolithic ceramics of Yang-shao, Pan-shan and Kansu are examined in the light of this kind of argument there may be parallels here, to some extent, with Collingwood’s proposals. In Andersson’s earliest published theories about the magnificently controlled marks, consisting of serrated, spiral, chequered and curvilinear motifs he concludes that they are symbolic, and says:

“...the designs of the mortuary urns are full of symbols, most of them, and possibly all, signifying a vitalizing power offered for the benefit of the dead...”

Andersson also observes that it is only on those urns found in burials that red pigment is included in the decoration. He suggests that the red colour may have had symbolic significance perhaps related to blood (fig. 24).\textsuperscript{418} In a much later paper, published in 1981, Huber discusses at great length the possible symbolism and stylistics of the motifs on these Neolithic ceramics, and their spread through other regions in Neolithic China. Her survey, surprisingly, excludes anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figuration from the body of works which she justifies in this statement:

“...non-representational art that was to flourish for more than millennium...
Anthropomorphic (and zoomorphic) designs...more likely than not, had totemic or other meanings...yet they are of no intrinsic importance to the painted pottery styles which could as well have done without them...”\textsuperscript{419}

Does she infer that, as decorative motifs, they do not bear any relationship to the physical forms of the pots on which they appear? Or does she regard their appearance on the pots as fortuitous and not connected with them in any symbolic or formal sense? Huber

\textsuperscript{417} Collingwood, \textit{The Principles of Art}, op. cit. p. 55.
champions the integrity, apparently, of non-representational "abstract designs", sees them as self-satisfying phenomena, and declares:

"...The designs with which the Neolithic artists were most deeply concerned are entirely geometric in nature, and in that sense, abstract. The spiral, the single most important geometric design, dominating the entire history of the painted ware, may indeed have been originally suggested by observation of natural phenomena, but it is never any particular phenomenon that is the subject matter of these spiral designs. It is to the contrary the far more profound and compelling wonder of the symmetry of moving forms that is their exclusive subject matter and their meaning...If the designs are altogether unhampered by cryptic or iconographic intent, they are not thereby to be misconstrued as idle-mindedly decorative. Their subject matter is no paltry thing...and this...spiral configuration was sustained through a millennium...420

It would be impossible to discover the point at which a motif or an image ceases to be representative or symbolic of a specific phenomenon and becomes nothing more than an abstract decorative motif or embellishment that survives solely on the merit of its intrinsic and autonomous self and/or its formal relationship to the object on which it exists. An intermediate stage of formulation needs to be identified which would demonstrate the steps of its devolution from representation or recognisable symbolism to an abstract motif, the sole reason for the existence of which was purely internal to itself. As it is, so-called "idle-minded" decoration or embellishment can appear on an artefact for some reason that may not be connected with either the form or the decoration, is external to both, and yet, as Huber demonstrates, can survive through a thousand years.

Other examples of abstract motifs can be cited which may have had their origins in the generic phenomena of weaving or matting. They are the chequered panels on funerary urns found at Pan-shan, dated to c. 2,500–2,000 BC (fig. 24). The universally accepted evidence in ancient cultures is overwhelming that weaving, plaiting, rope-making and matting preceded the invention of fired clay artefacts, and it is possible that they were the

420 ditto, pp. 5–6.
matrices in which the early clay vessels were pressed. The copying of familiar impressed marks with painted marks is not a great leap. As a parallel to this Huber makes the point that the spiral, in itself, is a compelling form that is repeatedly seen in plant life. It copies the linearity of vines and fibres. But in either of these two cases it is problematical to suggest that such motifs are, as she says, "unhampered by cryptic or iconographic intent". We cannot know what, if any, symbolic references or iconographic meanings were or were not inherent in the original use of such forms. And the additional questions of semiotic messaging are not focussed upon by Huber.

As observed earlier, the links between Paleolithic and Neolithic image-making appear to be tenuous at best, and to argue continuous traditions of mark-making in any region from earlier to later epochs cannot be substantiated. Factors of food supply, disease, and genealogical survival could affect the probability of generations-long settlement of a community in any given region. In the Near East, for instance, the drastic climate changes from the last millennia of the Ice Age to the drier, warmer climate of the Neolithic must have been instrumental in changing the conceptual bases of a community's behavioural patterns. And it is not known exactly how much population movement there was as the last Ice Age receded. The degree to which nomadism was a factor in exchange of ideas and artefacts at the end of the Paleolithic is questioned by some anthropologists.

As already quoted in the chapter, Diffusion and Local Invention, Wobst points out that:

"...Paleolithic man had to walk and carry his necessities on his back whenever he wanted to move...in the absence of skis, sleds, the wheel, boats, draft animals and beasts of burden..."\(^{421}\)

There is the likelihood, however, that Paleolithic groups, over periods of hundreds or thousands of years, could have migrated slowly across quite vast distances in the pursuit of game, taking portable artefacts with them. And this is even more likely during the long period of the onset and eventual recession of the last Ice Age when conditions

changed for flora, fauna, and for game. Caves, shelters and artefacts could have been used, decorated and abandoned, only to be discovered by later groups. On this basis it could be argued that there was a diffusion of ideas and image-models, but the time spans over which it could have happened are enormous, and there is no evidence to date of continuous linkages from Western sites such as those in France or Spain to others cited above, such as Anatolia, Palestine, Mesopotamia or India. So, to what extent Neolithic imagery was a continuous development from the physical imagery of the Paleolithic is not possible to determine. And to what extent embellishment for its own sake was an adopted idea or one of local spontaneity cannot be proved either. Neither is it possible to determine the sources of concepts and imagery, such as the spiral or weaving patterns, which are common to regions that are far apart, or those that have been carried in a more or less continuous link through generations; the ideas and imagery about birth, death, survival and after-life. Is it more probable that these concepts were the result of what Jung might call inbuilt race-memory or the collective unconscious, or did they arise solely out of local deductive intelligence, invention and spontaneous generation?

To quote again the example of the Susa A ibex imagery, there are few images in the area which link it directly with earlier Paleolithic or Mesolithic art even though, in other regions, the ibex image does feature frequently on cave walls, along with other animals which would have been hunted as game. As stated previously, because of the extreme and highly successful stylisation of the ibex figuration on the Susa goblets it is reasonable to deduce that the image is at an advanced stage of schematisation, possibly developed from earlier, more innocent and more naturalistic, descriptive imagery (fig. 4). It appears

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422 Mellaart, The Neolithic of the Near East, op. cit., pp. 94, 110, 162, 164; Rock engravings are cited, however, of a bull, deer and an ibex, at Beldibi in SW Anatolia; also engravings of stylised ibex in the Panlanli caves in the Taurus Mountains west of the Euphrates River.
to be a "shorthand" version, disciplined superbly, and in a highly sophisticated way, to fit the beaker forms of the Susiana culture. But it is not possible to tell whether such imagery was used as a meaningful symbol, understood by those who made, used or commissioned it, or whether it was the result of the superb creativity of those who decorated the goblets, and was therefore carried out purely as a glorious piece of embellishment.

In the case of this and other artefact imagery the argument for meaningful symbolism takes for granted that the maker had a prior reason for making such visual imagery that could have been external to his or her own creative impulses. It is accepted theory that most artefacts were made and decorated as a result of external demands by society, regardless of the maker's taste or predilections. Much art and image-making was a direct result of patronage and commission, but there is no reason to believe however that the maker of the goblet design was not in full accord with either the subject matter or its style. Fischer discusses this when he poses questions about humankind’s universal acceptance of, and satisfaction in, the making of and the passive sharing in, another’s expressive output in music, literature, theatre and visual art. He perceives that his as an archetypal and universal urge, and evidence that:

"...man wants to be more than just himself...He is not satisfied with being a separate individual...He wants to refer to something that is more than 'I', something outside himself and yet essential to himself...to unite his 'I' in art with a communal existence; to make his individuality social..."423

This is an interesting proposition because it presupposes an awareness in the individual of the possibility of improvement through personal enlargement. And the urge for personal enlargement through the identification of common social goals is not far from the climate in which the Greeks, during the sixth and fifth centuries BC, developed their ideas about the pursuit of wholeness or perceived perfection. That is the kind of concept

which makes it possible to believe, as the Greeks did, that it was worth striving for the attainment of the “ideal”; the transforming of disordered miscellany into a rationally ordered and perfect whole. Fischer argues that:

"...what a man apprehends as his potential includes everything that humanity as a whole is capable of. Art is the indispensable means for this merging of the individual with the whole..." 424

The sharing of any kind of expression in this context therefore suggests that, at every level, there is an abiding sense of partaking in the partly comprehended life-experiences of someone-else without being totally committed or totally identified with them. For the creator and maker of art imagery the unconscious and the conscious drive to enlarge, express and communicate ideas in visual form is also part of the basic human desire to be more, or better, or more complete in relation to identified externals. For the potential maker of imagery, however, participation in someone else’s forms of expression is not necessarily enough; it is the making by oneself that also matters. It can provide the maker with some degree of satisfaction and self-fulfillment. But the perceived quality of the expressive imagery that may be produced is, in this context, beside the point. And whether the imagery happens to be laden with symbolism or is simply the evidence of the sheer delight of making visual marks for their own sake, is also beside the point.

While Fischer postulates that there is, in the making of, or participating in art, a deeply felt need to achieve wholeness, it must also be evident that as far as the maker of visual imagery is concerned, there are two other conditions which apply to the making of imagery (apart from the need to satisfy the patron or consumer). The first is personal satisfaction in the visual realisation of physical and non-physical concepts, as discussed above. The second condition is something that is apparently innate; the urge to make marks whether or not they seem to relate to existing group ideas. In other words visual

424 ditto, pp. 8, 9.
marks may be invented before the occasion arises for the need of specific visualisation of a concept that has come to exist within a community’s psyche.

Gombrich also addresses this when he warns of the temptation to assume that all artefact motifs were originally conceived as symbolic, or that there was a purpose other than that of space-filling in an ordered way. Gombrich writes at great length on the ordering of motif and figuration. Like Fischer, he sees this activity of making art, or partaking in it, as one of humankind’s most basic urges. Within this discipline of ordering he sees three major classifications; pictorial, symbolic and abstract. But some imagery of course might be included in more than one classification.

By far the major part of artefact imagery falls into the last classification; abstract. Within this huge category are included banding and bordering which may consist only of linear and geometric forms, which, because of their context, may be perceived to be systems of ordered space-filling and form-defining. Furthermore, as referred to earlier, Huber has regarded the abstract design (in the case of the Chinese Neolithic ceramics) as fundamentally more important than any iconic or symbolic figuration. But the origins and the eventual status of a mark can fall into totally different categories. The borderline between abstract mark-making and the classifying of a mark as symbol can be blurred because it is possible to cite examples where original symbolic imagery has been schematised and devalued to such an extent that they almost cease to be recognisable, or to have any symbolic meanings, and where they live on solely as decorative devices which may make the artefacts that carry them more saleable and more acceptable in the market place. Despite this loss of original internal symbolism the ordering of abstract and often repetitive marks will no doubt still provide guidelines to semiotic significances in terms of the circumstances in which it was made, and in terms of the people for whom it was made.

Such an example is observable in one period of Greek art; the body of vase decoration dated to the “Dark Age” (c. 1,100–900 BC) (fig. 28). Sometimes labelled the “impoverished style” (because it reflects visually the post-Mycenaean impoverished state of affairs) it relies solely for decoration on simple banding and concentric circles. Abstract and non-symbolic, it points its semiotic finger to the social, economic and political breakdown of post-Mycenaean Greece into fractured and small locally ruled communities. The vase makers and decorators still had their ability to make well-proportioned forms and critically placed imagery, but impoverishment meant the lack of rich centralised patronage which could afford decoration that required a considerable amount of time, labour and expertise. In time, as the country gradually regained prosperity, more complex decoration returned, and during the next period, the Geometric, ceramic decoration once again achieved a high standard of sophisticated ordering (fig. 50).  

Further examples of the devaluation of the symbol into meaningless embellishment come from Europe in the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. European patrons and decorators had found a new world of fantasy in the imagery of Chinese and Japanese goods that were imported in huge quantities through the trading centres of Lisbon, Amsterdam and London. These prestigious objects, sought after by those who could afford them, carried the traditional iconographies of China and Japan, and included such imagery as plum and cherry blossom, pine-trees, willows, bamboo, fishermen, pagodas and pavilions and “fairy” mountains. When they were brought to Europe by the East India Companies they encouraged the intriguing fantasies about utopias in the unknown and mystic East, and these were fed and augmented by travellers’ tales, true and false, of exotic lands and peoples in the little known world of the Orient. Although these motifs were redolent of centuries of symbolism for the Chinese, they were understood only as charming decoration and exotic motifs by the West. So great was the prestige of the imported Oriental imagery that a demand for imitations was created among those who

could not afford the imported originals, and an enormous market demand was created for copies. The demand was so great that for at least three hundred years the motifs and styles were imitated and innocently parodied by Western craftworkers, designers and decorators, in a kind of international visual currency of delightful and fashionable embellishment. The original layers of symbolism traditionally attached to the imagery in China and Japan were largely unknown in Europe. The craftworkers in Europe made their imitations often with materials, tools, techniques and comprehension that were quite unlike those of the East. The transplanted imagery therefore became progressively transformed and less like the imported originals in either symbolism or style (fig. 94). The original symbolic meanings of the imagery were lost (or never known) because they were alien concepts for a European culture; only the surface charm and decorative potential of the imagery was of any use to the European markets. Therefore the imagery was devalued, often vulgarised and debased, and became solely decorative embellishments demanded by the unquenchable marketplace demand.

Much of the Chinoiserie imagery was so far away in style and spirit from the original that the West even created its own "Oriental" imagery for an ignorant and eager market. The famous "willow pattern" is a case in point. Both the so-called "mythical" story and the illustration were inventions of the English porcelain manufacturers and decorators in response to the craving for "Chinese blue-and-white" with exotic scenes. The illustration is usually credited to Thomas Minton, who designed it around 1780. He was an engraver of designs for the making of transfers (decals) for porcelain decoration.427 Many variations of the original design have since been made, but the supposed

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427 Savage, Porcelain Through the Ages, op. cit. Minton was apprenticed to Thomas Turner of the Caughley Porcelain Works, and had been previously at the Worcester Porcelain Works.
accompanying “myth” has varied little and is still in circulation, in the late twentieth century! And the final irony is that it was subsequently taken to China and copied for export back to the West! In this example there is not only a loss of symbolism, but a devaluation of original motifs such as willow trees, bamboo, the bridge over water and the pagoda, into decorative embellishment that the marketplace demanded. There is also the deliberate creation of a new myth that gathered around the “Willow Pattern” to accompany the scene, and thus it gave it more marketability.

The successful imitation and invention of Chinese hardpaste porcelain in Europe in 1709 by Böttger in Dresden, and its subsequent production in other centres, is a side issue in this discussion of symbol and embellishment, but it was fundamental to the attempts to produce even better imitations of embellished Oriental porcelain than the potters of faience and delft ware had managed to achieve.428 The invention of porcelain with its unique characteristics affected both the form and imagery of the Western imitations and created a whole new genre of ceramic wares that were frequently moulded from silver shapes, and embellished with a sometimes hilarious mix of European Rococo and what passed for Chinese or Japanese imagery (figs. 82 a, b.).

**fig. 84a** Jenny Orchard, Australia “Neo-Deco, Decon.” c 1984
Pot Aust

**fig. 84b** Patsy Hely, Australia, brown and black jug
Pot Aust

**fig. 83** Elizabeth Fritsch, England; left, c 1975; right, ethnic pot, 1972

**top: 82a** Covered tureen, Lowestoft, England, c 1770
Pot Coll.

**below: 82b** Dish, Worcester, England, c 1755
EBW Porc Be Mus
The total loss of symbolic meaning in the products of Chinoiserie is in direct contrast with the long survival of symbolic meanings attached to these motifs, and others, in their country of origin, China. For instance, the ubiquitous dragon and the thunder-pattern are age-old concepts which have survived from the Shang. The concept of longevity which is symbolically attached to the peach, the faithfulness of the pine-tree which keeps its leaves during winter, the courage of the friendly plum blossom which blooms before the snow disappears, and the strength of the bamboo which bends before the storm and so survives; ideas like these are concerned with basic human behaviour and attitudes in the social and philosophical contexts of China. They fit the Platonic idea of poetic transcendence in the visualisation of concepts, and draw strength from this quality. Symbols that survive within the contexts of their origins are more likely to survive as carriers of meanings than those which are transported and adopted by others. But the degree of loss of meaning must be related proportionally to the degrees of similarities or differences between the adoptive cultures and the cultures of origin.

If a symbol retains its meanings, this fact in itself, does not preclude changes in the stylistics used for its depiction. Over the centuries stylistic changes to motifs have occurred constantly. In fact these changes often refresh, stimulate and keep alive the symbolic life of the motifs. Images can be redrawn and remain potent, often in more condensed versions, that might perhaps better suit a current stylistic preference. When technical virtuosity comes to dominate an image, however, there seems to be some loss of potency in its symbolic content, and this was discussed in the previous chapter, Symbolism, Icon and the Transfer of Potency. As discussed earlier, if the exquisite craftsmanship of some Qing imagery is compared with similar imagery of the earlier Yuan and Ming dynasties, it can be postulated that the imagery of the latter two is more potent and achieves a more powerful and imaginative visuality than was frequently achieved during the Qing. Qing versions of the same motifs are characterised by the hypnotic entanglement of the viewer with the sublimely skilful intricacies of craftsmanship. Good examples of this can be found among such well-used imagery as
the dragon, peach-blossom, lotus, chrysanthemum, ling-zhi, cloud scrolls and the Eastern Seas motifs. And this seems to apply to their use in all media; jade, ceramic, weaving, embroidery and lacquer. In the simpler imagery of earlier dynasties there was less entanglement for the viewer with intricacies of technique and workmanship and usually a more direct connection with the ideas involved in the imagery.

Sullivan discusses the early dragon imagery in China and suggests that it is its essentially dramatic and energetic style that has helped it to survive through centuries and become integral in Chinese iconography. He writes;

"...the vital rhythms that are fundamental (in Chinese art)...animate the creatures...that crawl over the surface of the sacrificial bronzes of the Shang dynasty; they govern the sweeping coils of the jade dragon of the Zhou..."\(^{429}\)

Gombrich also agrees with the phenomenon of powerful simplicity, and discusses it in terms of "sophistic oratory" in speech-making, and quotes Cicero on the difficulty of "plainness of style"\(^{430}\). It could be postulated here that the closer the image comes to succinct simplicity, or an elegant and symbolic encapsulation of a concept (using the term "elegant" in the scientific sense), the greater chance it might have of becoming successful in terms of its transference and adoption into foreign cultures. But this is not always so, as the examples of the thunder-pattern and the Chinese dragon show. They did not transfer to any great extent into foreign cultures. But this fact probably has more to do with lack of cultural significance than with the nature of their style\(^{431}\). But as a general principle it can be a credible theory if Gombrich's thought that "unity is superior to multiplicity" is considered.\(^{432}\)

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\(^{431}\) The exceptions were the use of forms similar to those of the dragon, the cloud-scroll or the ling-zhi, in manuscript illustration in fourteenth century Persia.

The idea of embellishment for its own sake, therefore, tends to be dismissed in favour of imagery that is directly symbolic or socially meaningful. But it can be argued that the pure delight and satisfaction gained in the making of marks for no other purpose than that of the maker pleasing him- or herself, can also be perfectly justifiable. (This was discussed in the previous chapter, in connection with Huber and her analytical thesis on Chinese Neolithic ceramics.) This idea was also addressed in an Australian Broadcasting Commission interview with Fuller, where he refers to Ruskin on the subject. He says:

"...what Ruskin used to say was that...the ornamental aspect of work was the way in which...the ecstatic dimension entered... (and) ornament was the sign of the workman... Ruskin could place a particular importance on ornament because he saw it, not as something added, as a sort of excrescence on the thing that is made, but the saw the ornamental aspect of the work as being affirmative of the creativity of the individual who made it..."

Fuller also said that it is in ornament that we go beyond mere function and necessity. He maintained that:

"...ornament is the token, the sign of an individual's celebrating and enjoyment in his or her work...but we cannot go back to richly ornamenting everything...good ornament isn't just based at one end in the individual's expressivity. At the other end it is based in the affirmation of collective values...the shared symbolic order of the community as a whole..."\textsuperscript{433}

Comments such as this tend to bring us back, in a circular argument to some extent, to the symbolic, or at least the semiotic content that is inherent in a great deal of artefact imagery. The delight or satisfaction of the mark-maker is an external phenomenon that is, by its very nature, unpredictable and difficult to quantify, but both Ruskin and Fuller recognise that it does exist and is fundamental in the activities of the craftworker and his or her role in artefact making

\textsuperscript{433} Fuller, \textit{The Naked Artist}, op. cit.
Perception and Intervention

It is a fact that in the process of viewing an image, cognition is increased when the image is seen repeatedly. Within the state of familiarity there is a component of reassurance for the viewer. The viewer has had the opportunity to recognise the image and to see something in it with which his or her perception has already come to terms. At the first viewing cognition will have been achieved at several levels. Repeated viewing provides opportunities for further assessment of content, style, context, technical skill, and the success or otherwise of the visual representation of the idea. Opportunities are also provided for the absorption of semiotic intelligence which may be available. Gombrich mentions familiarity in terms of the necessary selectivity which the viewer's eye brings to visual perception.

As often happens, the image on an artefact is repeated in an orderly way for perceived decorative purposes. It may be within a banding zone for instance, or it may be within repeated panels. When it occurs the process of re-cognition happens as a part of the act of anticipatory visual perception of the repeated image. And the relationship of the image with the form of the artefact upon which it has been made, also becomes part of the perceived image.

Unlike some artefact imagery of the twentieth century, there does not seem to have been any attempt by ancient makers of imagery to revolt against the concept of attempting to fit an image to a functional form in a way that is perceived to be aesthetically acceptable. (Of course in many examples it can be seen that the artist/craftworker was less than successful in achieving this; the skill and vision of the maker must always be paramount determinants.) But any judgement of this kind by a viewer also reflects semiotically the state of the perceptual attitudes of the viewer, who inevitably brings the prejudices,

experiences and conditions of his/her society and times to bear upon the cognitive and perceptive process. It does not seem possible for any image, or any artefact imagery in particular, to be viewed objectively without prejudicial influences of some kind. There will always be external input which will necessarily subjectify a viewer's perception, and this fact must be taken into account in the assessment of any imagery.

To return to the situation of revolt against, or acceptance of, design principles; there is no evidence to suggest that artefact-makers of ancient times consciously sought to oppose any concepts, that may have existed, of attempting to fit the image to the form. At the same time there is ample material evidence in artefacts themselves to show that there existed either a conscious or unconscious urge to make a spatial or proportional relationship between the imposed image and the form on which it was placed. This is evidenced even in artefacts such as, for instance, the early Neolithic ceramics of the U'baid culture of southern Mesopotamia, of the Halaf culture of the region between north-east Syria and north-west Mesopotamia, and those of Anatolia. In order to make this point more strongly, a phenomenon of the twentieth century can be considered, when something totally new was invented by potters in England.

It has been a basic tenet in Western art, at least since the times of the early Renaissance, that there was merit in the avant garde and the new, which might alter existing stylistic concepts, and bring new and possibly better ideas into the culture. But if we look at the twentieth century we can observe that there have been faster, continual and even more radical challenges and attempts to overthrow conventional style, content and technique in favour of something new, and to present the conventionally unacceptable as the new acceptable iconography. This has also applied to traditionally held concepts in artefact-making. One of these revolutionary ideas has been associated with the conventional concept of the necessity of fitting an image to a form. Fitness to form has been seen as a

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conventionally assigned and accepted concept in our culture. Some, however, have doubted this convention and have become dissatisfied with it. It has been challenged and thrown out by these dissidents in favour of something new. Deliberate efforts have been made by the makers of artefacts to question and tear down strongly held beliefs and theories, including those of the Bauhaus which had been accepted as fundamental in good design since the second decade of the twentieth century. (Of course it is possible to point to earlier artefacts in the nineteenth century which are infamous in their total disregard of fitness to form and purpose, but these tend to have been unthinking and profit-oriented aberrations resulting from the unfortunate state of the profitable mass production of artefacts during the Industrial Revolution; they were not philosophically based events, unless one accepts the making of money as a philosophical concept.) The first group of craftworkers to do this were potters, all ex-students of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper in London. Possibly the most outstanding and influential of these to make the challenge was Elizabeth Fritsch, when she played deliberately with the perceptual processes of the cognition of a ceramic form (fig. 83). Jars with conventionally expected silhouettes that were assumed at first glance to be round, had been unexpectedly flattened to some degree, and they were decorated all over with totally flat and repetitive geometric motifs which further contradicted the three-dimensional forms. Other potters, including Alison Britton, adopted this iconoclastic approach and subsequently, it has become internationally popular, and along with infinite numbers of variations, has acquired acceptability as the new convention. It was carried to extremes in the U.S.A. and in Japan. And some years later, in Sydney, Jenny Orchard, Patsy Hely and others continued and developed ideas in the same conceptual area, and produced what appeared to be outrageously distorted forms in everyday artefacts such as teaset, and proceeded to

437 This is an example of Havelka's theories on reality and creativity, as discussed in the chapter, "Reality and Intervention".

decorate them with imagery that could be regarded as conventionally unsuitable (fig. 84a and b). Of course the intended result has been the jolting of established conventional perceptions, a refreshment, and a move from the jaded taste for Japanese/Chinese folk-oriented rusticity in ceramics which had been prevalent in the Western world since the craft renaissance movement after the second World War.439

Is it possible to infer by this comparison that the makers of ancient artefacts were not as self-conscious of their role as makers of significant imagery as those of the second half of the twentieth century? It is reasonable to ask this when it is remembered that the twentieth century perpetrators of “anti-design” and “anti-art” theories, unlike the craftworkers of previous centuries, have been producing objects which were not commissioned prior to their making. They have been made in the hope that eventually they might be sold. Consequently there is a pressure on the makers to produce new, intriguing, and even more eye-catching images, and to use even cleverer techniques as a means of catching the prospective purchaser’s eye, and to improve the chances of selling by holding exhibitions and attracting favourable comment from the art critics. The market-place is cast, in this set of circumstances, in the role of a major interventionist. This is not to say that the craftworkers in question are not seriously concerned, also, with trying to do what has always been the norm in the cultures of the Western world; to experiment and to put pressure on, and query, the parameters of technique and conceptualisation. In modem times lack of assured patronage places the artefact-maker in a situation where it is not only tempting but imperative to try to create the “new” and the tantalisingly unfamiliar in the hope that it may become a potential headline-maker, and therefore desirable to possess. (And in possessing whatever is newest or most avant garde the purchaser sees prestige accruing to him or herself, as a participant in frontier thinking.) But this phenomenon of non-commissioned art and the pressures of the market-place did not become widespread until the seventeenth century, even though the

439 There is further comment on the post-war circumstances of artefact-making in Part IV, and in the Appendix “A Very Brief Background...”
concept of questioning the perceptual limits had been a motivating factor in the West since Cimabue.\textsuperscript{440} Certainly until the late seventeenth century image-making was more or less under the control of the patron, when new techniques and new imagery promised greater prestige and social acclaim for the patron, and so the artist and artefact-maker were encouraged to enlarge the perimeters of conceptualising, but always within the taste perceptions of the patron.

As far as can be judged the makers in Neolithic and post-Neolithic epochs made most artefacts to order; as they were perceived to be needed in the community, or as they were ordered by those who were wealthy or powerful enough to commission and pay for their making. Patronage was an influential factor in dictating style, materials and content. This kind of interventionist factor influenced the maker of artefacts to produce familiar and acceptable imagery to the taste of the patron, but it cannot be said too often that the craftworker’s interpretation has always been the final arbiter in the visuality of any imagery.

To return to the role of the viewer as interventionist; unlike the situation with a painting, a mural or a piece of sculpture, whose “market” is the viewer, the user is the “market” for an artefact, and in this role becomes the interventionary, who can become closely and even intimately connected with the artefact. With jewellery, ceramics and textiles the user/wearer is in even more intimate and physical contact. With objects such as tools and functional artefacts of daily and intermittent use there is also this factor of close physical use and scrutiny. Touch as well as sight can intervene in the critical appraisal of their success as functioning objects. There is little occasion therefore for the maker to be able to use physical distance as a ploy to influence the viewer’s perception of form and the image, as can happen with, for instance, a mural or a painting. Gombrich cites the case of a fresco painted by Botticelli in the fifteenth century where the written page of a book

is included. The artist has used the pattern of written words instead of real words because the viewer is at a distance from the work and can recognise the general look of writing without being distracted from the subject-matter of the fresco by real words and their inevitable associations. In this kind of situation all that is required is the visual recognition of a general definition. The painter has deliberately taken advantage of the viewer's perceptive capabilities. Most artefacts cannot be treated like this, because their original reason for being lies in the requirement that they have, at some time, physical contact or close proximity with the viewer/user. Consequently this influences the imagery and figuration that may be fashioned into them or placed upon them. But if the maker of an artefact wishes to present an image which is a general interpretation of a visual perception, rather than a mimetic representation, he or she has recourse to at least one method; that of schematic simplification. And this is different from Botticelli's method of painting the pattern of the written word. There are good examples of schematic simplification in the beakers of the third millennium BC from the Susa A site, and which have been discussed earlier. For instance, the top borders on two of the beakers consist of representations of long-legged, long-necked water birds (fig. 56). They have been reduced to simple, nearly vertical linear marks repeated in horizontal bands at close intervals around the top zone of the outer circumference of the beakers. The first impression for the viewer is of more or less evenly drawn, vertical and angled lines in sets of five-line units. But closer scrutiny reveals that each set of lines does in fact present the viewer with a brilliant, stringently simplified and schematic representation of a water-bird image. By contrast, in the Botticelli painting, no amount of close scrutiny could turn the marks, which provide a general definition of writing, into specific words. It will only reveal meaningless marks which, at a distance, do signify a recognisable phenomenon when the viewer intervenes and applies what Panofsky would have labelled the third stage of cognition (which was discussed in the chapter, Mythologies and Signs).

The reduction of a realist bird-image to linear interpretations, which could not conceivably be reduced further without losing recognisability, raises a question. Was the reductive drawing carried out with a particular aim in mind, and if so, what? The five-line unit, when repeated in this fashion, is transformed from schematic but illustrative representation to an almost abstract and geometrically ordered banding which serves primarily as a decorative agent, and declares the top zone and the lip of the beaker as separate from the lower zones of the exterior surface. It is also a well-organised portion of the formalism of the imagery as a whole. Given that it is accepted that humankind since at least the Paleolithic times has made marks which may or may not have contained messaging, it is to be accepted that the plain surface of an artefact was frequently seen to be improved with the addition of marks of some kind. And if those marks were not placed haphazardly, but were ordered into repetitive, spatial or proportional relationships, then the artefact, presumably, has been perceived as an improvement on the unadorned original.

The ordering and repetition of imagery that is idiosyncratic to the decoration of artefacts frequently signifies that the craftworker and/or the patron has understood the likely interventionist perceptions of the viewer/user. If this apparently innate sense of ordering marks and motifs had not existed as a constantly recurring phenomenon in artefact imagery, then is it reasonable to suggest that artefacts would not have been categorised as some kind of “art” at all, even though separated out as “applied”, “decorative”, and therefore “minor”? Painting and sculpture do not employ repetitive ordering and regularising for the same purposes; repetitive ordering in painting and sculpture is a compositional construct which is frequently disguised and which need not necessarily affect the form of the expressive figuration of the work. In the case of architecture, murals and mosaics the use of repetitive motifs as borders and panels

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442 Repetitive imagery is integral in the decoration of the beakers of fourth millennium BC Susiana, (see fig.4), and it also features extensively in architectural decoration, as in one example from Greek temple architecture, the Ionic capitals and the south wall of the Erechtheion, the Acropolis, Athens, late fifth century BC.

443 Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, op. cit. The whole work is, in fact, devoted to discussing the various aspects of this phenomenon.
achieves the same ends as it does in artefact decoration, and it is tempting to suggest they should be allied, in this sense, to the category of artefact.

Although numbers of Neolithic artefacts exist which are decorated with what can be better described as pictorial rather than ordered figuration, these are not as common as the ordered variety. From available evidence the tendency is for a greater number of artefacts from earlier stages in a society’s development to be less schematic and ordered than those made in later times. As discussed previously much Neolithic decoration seems to have been invented as “short-hand” versions of familiar imagery, and transformed into ordered schema. But where pictorial figuration rather than ordered decoration is the main motif, there are many examples from many eras. For example, the delft and faience wares produced in Europe from the sixteenth century on, frequently feature pictorial figuration, sometimes framed or enclosed within a panel, or with subsidiary, repetitive motifs used as enclosing or defining borders (figs. 82. a., b.). There are some notable examples, also, in much earlier times, such as the funerary lekythoi of fifth and fourth century BC Greece, whose commissioned narrative figurations were naturalistic but idealised and mythologised versions of the deceased and the gods (fig. 50 b.). In many cases these decorations, which are mostly linear, coloured drawings rather than paintings, were carried out by painters who were well-respected and sought after, and whose participation would have been perceived to have added prestige to the deceased and to the mourners who commissioned the work. Other examples include the Chinese Qing dynasty polychrome “famille” group of ceramics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Categorised by a dominant colour, such as for instance, “Famille Rose” (reds and pinks) or “Famille Noir” (black), “Famille Verte” (green), they tended to feature

illustrative scenes heavily reminiscent of scroll paintings of the period (figs. 85a, b.). Has the patron played an interventionist role and stated preferences for particular subject-matter and colour schemes? Like the Greek lekythoi paintings these scenes, which followed the stylistics and manners of the times, were nevertheless enclosed within decorative borders and panels, often with ordered repetitive motifs. A third group are the Faenza majolica ceramics (17th to 19th C), where the technical expertise of the ceramic decorators was such that they attempted to copy, within the limitations of ceramic colours and firing techniques, well-known paintings or prints, often by well-known Italian masters (figs. 2, 3). 445 A few pieces, such as vases, were painted without restrictive panels or borders, however, but most were enclosed within, for instance, the bordered cavetto of a plate or shallow bowl. 446 In all of these examples the perceived stylistics of the times dominate and play an interventionist role in the final look of the imagery, within the limitations and possibilities of available materials and techniques.

The intended use of an artefact is also frequently a tyrant that intervenes over the form and the decoration that is chosen. Use can dictate preference in form as well as style, ordering and subject matter. The lekythoi quoted above are a good example of this. The white lekythoi were made to hold anointed oil for libations at the stèle of the deceased, and the long-necked amphora form, with cup-shaped pouring lips were well suited to their purpose of decanting oil. So also were the small cups which fitted into the pouring lips and which were used subsequently to hold much smaller amounts of the anointed oil which had become extremely expensive. Of course other solutions could well have been found in the designing of both form and decorative motif, but choice is, in itself, a signifier with Barthesian usefulness, as discussed earlier.

445 Margaret Medley, The Chinese Potter Oxford, U.K., Phaidon Press, 1976, Chapters 9 and 10; also, Alan Calger Smith, Tin-glazed Pottery, op. cit.; the delta, Isaac, and lustre wares of Europe and the Near East are the main theme of this work.

446 There are many examples in the Collection of the Historical Museum, Faenza, Italy; also, Papafava, Serie Faenza, op. cit.
To refer again to spatial, proportional or schematic ordering of surface-marks, the eye accepts repetition as an agent of order, and re-cognition through repeated imagery is a welcome event. It acts as a reassurance and a confirmation for the viewer/user of the status quo. Within the practice of ordering and simplification there lies a basic urge, discussed in great depth by Gombrich, to decorate, embellish and cover surfaces with markings which are ordered into anticipated and repetitive regularities. Right throughout the entire history (and pre-history) of artefact-making the outcome has been that the idea-content of the visual mark, and any attendant associations, have often been subordinated, if not totally sacrificed, to the demands of order and repetition and to what has been perceived as the enhancement of an artefact. Even the recognition value residing in the original subject of the imagery can become subsidiary to what is, according to Gombrich, a deeply held urge in the human psyche to make, above all, decorative and embellishing marks which are disciplined into order of some kind.

The fact is that this hierarchical positioning of ordered marking over recognisable figuration was common practice from Neolithic times. As has been proposed previously, artefacts were made as need demanded them, and this fortifies the theory that the buyer/user/viewer had, inevitably, a strong interventionist influence on the character, style and content of the image that was ultimately placed upon the artefact. But in the long term it was no doubt the craftworker and the decorator who were the final arbiters in the detail and flavour of the ordering of the imagery. It was the one freedom available to the maker. The time given to the making of an artefact was the maker’s opportunity to arbitrate and intervene, and perhaps, through his or her perceptive potential, to create something that was a little different and therefore unique to the maker, while still satisfying the expectations of the client.

Whatever category of style or technique there may be in the form or decoration of an artefact, however, semiotic signalling is always present, whether the imagery is

recognisable, pictorial representation or whether it is totally abstracted into geometric or schematic ordering. And whether artefact imagery is being appraised for content, style, technique, material, or as archaeological or anthropological evidence, the interventionism of the maker, the buyer/user/viewer, and the social influences under which they act, are always present, and must colour the nature of visual perception.
The Artefact and Baudrillard

In the art historical discourse of the late twentieth century Baudrillard has been regarded as an important and influential proponent of critical theory and has addressed the topic of objects and signs, both ancient and modern. He has discussed their place, purpose and significance within the consumer society. Whether any of his comments are also relevant to the sources and conditions of image-making in ancient societies and to their artefacts which are used as examplary material in this thesis is worth considering.

Questions, rather than assumptive theories, might be the only result, but nevertheless it does seem to be an area that needs discussion. Baudrillard is concerned with what he refers to as the

"...antique object, in the twentieth century as that of a “talisman”, a “fetish”, a “symbol of eternal transcendence...”  

He sees that the “antique object” is, in the twentieth consumer society, a sign of wealth, and is mythologised in the sense that the owner of it identifies it, not with any functional use it may have had, but as a symbol of values other than those that belong naturally to it, which were the reasons for its making and existence in the first place. It is a sign, he suggests, that the twentieth century owner of it finds his modern possessions inadequate, however useful or prestigious they may be. He seeks to add to his mode of living the “antique object” as a “cultural sign” which enhances

"...that phantasmic core of reality upon which all mythological and individual consciousness feeds...that sublime phantasm of authenticity... They are less objects of possession than those of symbolic intercession, like ancestors...”

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449 ditto, pp 35–42.
450 ditto.
But this phenomenon is not necessarily unique to the wealthy of the twentieth century. The “antique object”, or artefact, which was originally made and used for a specific purpose, might also have had cultural and mythological significations for the owner in those ancient times. To some extent it was similar, in the “phantasmic” role it played, to the role of the “antique object” in the twentieth century; it helped to identify its owner, and possibly enhance his or her place in the hierarchy of society. Whether it still maintained its usefulness as a purely practical artefact, with a specific, understood function to perform, it could thus function in non-material ways by enabling its owner/user to be identified and linked with the cultural as well as the physical parameters of the life of that society. Of course, many ancient artefacts were also made solely for a mythological role, such as the Tell Asmar statues (figs. 43, 45 a., b.). Others were apparently intended mainly as mythological symbols but were made under the metaphorical guise of having a specific and practical function, such as the offering stand from the Royal Graves of Ur (fig. 101), which, it is believed, held a receptacle for incense. But the figure of the goat on hind legs is also seen as possibly representing the god Tammuz who was referred to in a hymn as “the Leading Goat of the Land”, and symbolising virility and fertility, (the goat, no doubt having more prestigious connotations attached to it than those in the twentieth century!). And this was further compounded by the interment of some objects with the deceased, apparently in an effort to mirror his or her earthly life and to maintain status in the after-life. Other artefacts, intended originally for practical use, developed eventually into objects whose new purpose was symbolic and integral in the mythological structure of a society. Imported coloured-stone mace-heads found at Tell Agrab, a third millennium site in central Mesopotamia, provide such as example. The rarity-value of such stones identified them as special, and ceremonial symbols of kingly power and authority, but their symbolic significance grew out of the mace’s original practical function as an efficient weapon for

451 See the quotation from Lloyd, in Part III of this thesis, in the chapter on The Tree of Life.
subduing adversaries, and thereby achieving dominance and power. An axe of the Shang dynasty in China is another example. No doubt carried originally by the conquering chieftain or king for the practical purposes of battle, it became a symbol of power which bestowed upon the carrier of it an aura of superiority. Eventually the axe became elaborated, decorated, and made in semi-precious jade, for symbolic and ceremonial purposes, so that it reached a point of uselessness in terms of its original purpose, and became solely an object of significance and for ceremonial use. Other examples with such twofold purposes can be seen also in body ornaments ranging from kingly and priestly costume and regalia to simple, decorative beads and pendants.

When ancient objects such as these are found, collected and cherished in the twentieth century they are still performing roles of phantasy and mythology, but these have changed from the phantasmic roles in the original society of their making. In the twentieth century they become borrowed symbols of authenticity and perceived distinction in society for the new owner. As Baudrillard maintains they are objects of intercession and borrowed ancestry, and this is the crucial difference; unlike objects which gather additional significances in their own society, they are alien to the contemporaneous culture of the modern society to which they have become attached. They bring with them a sense of the mystery and strangeness of the ancient culture to which they had belonged, and with this, a sense of separateness and potential superiority. But as Baudrillard states, they also indicate that there is a sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo, and that the twentieth century buyer of such objects feels a sense of inadequacy which may perhaps be overcome by the owning and display of such ancient items.

The collecting of ancient artefacts, however, is not unique to the twentieth century, or even to the modern era of the last two hundred years. For instance, the generals and the

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453 ditto, pp. 101–103.
454 Wen Fong, ed., The Great Bronze Age of China, op. cit., pp. 75–77, 80, 81, pl. 2.
aristocracy of Rome acquired objects and fragments of architecture, either directly or indirectly, from Greece. They created private galleries of art which no doubt served to enhance their prestige and to build around themselves auras of social mythology, mystery and superiority. These exotic pieces, in themselves, were perceived to be superior; Rome was besotted with the glory of Greek art and architecture, and to possess some fragments of them was to borrow some of their aura for the Romans themselves. And there was a similar passion for collecting, cataloguing and displaying ancient objects among the connoisseurs of China during the Tang, Song, Ming and Qing dynasties. But in the case of Chinese collectors there were the added mythologies of ancestor reverence and worship.

Another example of second-hand prestige was found in an Egyptian tomb. It is a gold bracelet dated to c. 890 BC, but it is mounted with a Mesopotamian cylinder seal carved out of lapis lazuli which has been dated to 2,300 BC (fig. 86). As the writer of the exhibition catalogue says:

"...the cylinder (seal) quite clearly, is not Egyptian, but comes from Mesopotamia, ancient Iraq. It is dated by means of stylistic and iconographic features to approximately 2,300 BC and the reign of Sargon of Akkad. How this piece reached Egypt we shall never know; for Shoshenq II, buried some 1,400 years after the seal was made, it must have had an exotic appeal..."  

This assumption places both the acquisition and the wearing of the seal as part of a gold bracelet in the same category as other "antique objects" which Baudrillard claims are "cultural signs", "talismans" and "symbols of eternal transcendence". The original use of that cylinder seal in Mesopotamia is believed to have been purely functional and practical, as a means of identifying a merchant’s goods which were packaged and tied, and then sealed with a pad of damp clay over the ties that secured the package. The seal, with its

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Fig. 85b. Porcelain plate with enamels, landscape scene, early 18th C from "West Chamber" drama. China.

Fig. 86a. Teapot stand "Famille Verte" 17-18th C China.

Fig. 86b. Gold bracelet, with lapis lazuli cylinder seal from Mesopotamia, c. 2300 BC; funerary jewel, Shoshunu II, Egypt, c. 900 BC.
carved motifs was then rolled across and impressed into the soft clay. The carved imagery on the seal was a kind of trademark, probably unique to one merchant, and the breaking of the stamped clay seal would have been a sign that the goods had been tampered with. But it is likely that there was also hierarchical or prestigious signification in the cylinder seal in its original role, and this would have lain in the choice of the semi-precious material used, of the subject matter, and of the standard of the craftsmanship of its making. And the fact of its very existence designated its owner as belonging to the merchant class of his community. The seals are understood to be unique and personal to one merchant, because to date no two cylinder seals have been found that are identical.

To return to the collecting activities of the aristocracy of the Song dynasty in China, it is recorded that many treasures and records were destroyed or disappeared when the Northern Song capital of Kai-feng was burnt down by the encroaching Mongols, but some catalogues of collections survived which list “antique objects” that date back to the Zhou dynasty. These are evidence that there were some notable collections of “antique objects” among the aristocracy. In China, however, there is an added complication in the deconstructing of cultural signs. Since before the lifetime of Confucius the Chinese were heavily influenced by the ideology of ancestor worship and filial piety. This reverence for the departed could also be read as a dominant reason for the collection and preservation of ancient artefacts. It would be very difficult in fact to ignore this and assume that the major factor in the acquisition of antique objects among the Chinese aristocracy was only a desire for self-aggrandisement and what Baudrillard labels as “authenticity”. And the same reasoning would apply to the keeping of artefact memorabilia in the twentieth century, where it signifies links with family history and respect for the departed, such as family treasures that are handed down from one generation to another, and which may or may not have any market or prestige value attached to them.

Baudrillard proposes that:

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“At the stage of artisanal production objects reflect the contingent and singular character of needs... and... the system of needs has become less integrated than the system of objects; the latter imposes its own coherence and thus acquires the capacity to fashion an entire society.”

By “the stage of artisanal production” he seems to be referring solely to the skill and the maker without any reference to the reasons a) why the object (artefact) was perceived to be needed in the first place, and b) what were the conditions and extent of the patronage that controlled the production of the object (artefact) and c) what was the role of the craftworker and his or her talents and perceptions. And he suggests that the coherence imposed by the system of objects is responsible for the development of ethos and mythology within a cultural group. This kind of theory, although posited in the twentieth century, does not necessarily belong uniquely to the present era. At the “artisanal” level of object production in virtually all pre-industrial revolution societies, and even as far back as Paleolithic cultures, the need for the production of a specified artefact which would fulfil a specified need was the prime condition which made the artefact a desirable end-result of a particular making process. Some artefacts however, even in ancient cultures, led a double life. The primal need was the matrix for production. And to all intents and purposes this primal need was the only reason for the production of the artefact. But frequently it was not as simple as this. Just as, in the twentieth century, the object/artefact acquires an encrustation of other significations which usually have little or nothing to do with the artefact’s original functional purpose, so many artefacts produced in ancient cultures also appear to have acquired accretions which related to power, to socio/political or economic status, to wealth, to expertise or special perceived attributes of the consumer. And the consumer was, frequently, also the patron or commissioner of the artefact.

The main difference between objects of ancient cultures and those of the twentieth century consumer society seems to lie in the fact that, in the former, the production of the artefact

was the immediate satisfier of an existing, primal need. But it also could have been the answer to a simultaneous and sophisticated second-level need for social signification. In the twentieth century there are additional factors, those of advertising and publicity, of propaganda and indoctrination, which are interposed between the object and the potential consumer, and Baudrillard also discusses this. These intermediary forces are interjected because, in many instances, a perception of real need for the object (product or artefact) does not exist in the first place, in the minds of those who are regarded by the makers as potential consumers. Frequently the object is made before the need is perceived by the potential user, and it is produced on the strength of predictions and market surveys which have convinced the maker that the potential consumer will be educated, by means of advertising, publicity campaigns and other merchandising strategies, to discover that he, she or they discover that they have a need for the object. The producer of the artefact and his agents develop, by means of psychologically based argument and presentation, a state of mind within the potential consumer which predisposes him/her to perceive other needs that are extraneous to the basic need for which the product is designed. It is through these imagined, second-level, external needs, often unconnected with the product itself and usually non-physical in character, that the consumer becomes interested in acquiring the object, supposedly, for its original purpose. Examples of this are common, and include messaging that suggest, for instance, that the object (product or artefact) will not only be efficient and satisfy a practical need, but that it will also enhance the consumer’s prestige, self-esteem, sex appeal or popularity, or some other desirable non-physical goal in society.

There were, no doubt, in some circumstances in ancient cultures, intermediaries such as priestly counsellors who promulgated the perception of a need for artefacts which would be relevant to the maintenance of power or status quo. But this kind of interception does not equate with mass propaganda and advertising campaigns of the twentieth century
which fling out drift-nets of dream-world desires aimed at entangling and enticing the prospective consumer. One example in ancient times which might fit this category is the collection of thousands of “eye idols” found at Tell Brak, which are discussed in an earlier chapter. They could well have been the product of such a campaign of mass indoctrination. By acquiring these votive icons and housing them in the temple, the population, it is thought, believed that the icons were constant surrogates for the supplicants’ prayers and supplications to the gods of the temple. But in this case, these ancient artefacts did not have another external function, except that of indicating that the population as a whole was obedient to the dictates of the kingly or priestly rulers.459

So, to summarise, the major difference between the ancient and modern situations is that an artefact in ancient cultures was the subsequent answer to a perceived need, (and that could also include the need for the advertising of power and prestige), and that, possibly, it acquired other extraneous areas of usefulness and significance after it was put into use. But of course there are the exceptions, as the above examples show; (in China, Egypt and Rome). The product in the twentieth century is frequently made (or planned) before the primal need for it exists in the mind of the consumer, and it is “sold” to the consumer as a necessary purchase through the temptations of acquiring extraneous advantages through the medium of the product/artefact. Whether any kind of similar intent or perception existed within the psyche of those who ruled and manipulated the populations of ancient times can only be guessed at.

Baudrillard sees, in the object’s “capacity to fashion an entire society” the possibility that it can be the cause of the development of a set of expressions which emanate directly out of the object and its use; in other words, a jargon, or a group of “technemes” which can become eventually a new segment within an existing language.460 The most obvious example of this in the late twentieth century is the jargon connected with the computer,

which has already slipped into general daily use. Is this relevant also to the artefacts of ancient cultures, in Mesopotamia of the third millennium BC for instance? This would be difficult to prove because the surviving fragments of the language of third millennium BC Mesopotamia seem to have been largely concerned with the use of artefacts in trading and in religious practice, and therefore were the current language of the merchant and priestly classes. How much of this written language entered into the lives of the mass of people cannot be gauged, although it could be assumed that the language of the ruling classes must have had some bearing on the use of the language by the general populace. But it is possible to deduce that any specialised language of the merchants or priestly classes would, as Baudrillard says, have induced “categories of persons” who undertook the policing of social meanings, and controlled the significations they engendered.461 Possible examples of such specialised language connected with artefacts could include Egypt’s Book of the Dead, or the fragments of two messages which have been deciphered at the foot of statues found at Lagash in Mesopotamia (c. 3,000 BC) which read… “It offers prayers…” and “Statue, say to my king (god)…”462 But while such simple statements as the latter two can hardly be labelled as specialised jargon they do fall within the category of language that appears to have underpinned an economic and socio/religious order and hierarchy.

461 ditto, pp. 16–17.
462 Lloyd, The Art of the Ancient Near East, op. cit., p. 100. These statues from Lagash are similar to those found in the temple at Tell Asmar, discussed in the chapter: “Mythologies and Signs.”
Part III. EXAMPLES OF DIFFUSION AND LOCAL INVENTION

Introductory Notes

Diffusion is an identifiable, but abstract and intelligible concept which alters with every practical application of its functioning nature. Apart from its basic meaning of sending forth, or spreading abroad, there is no recognisable feature by which to identify it, because it changes with every circumstance and with every condition of its functioning.463

The idea of local invention has been discussed earlier, and it has been shown that this is more difficult to identify than diffusion, because in many cases the concept of an act of alleged local creativity can only be proved by the lack of evidence to the contrary. Some of the aspects of artefact imagery, which are the themes of earlier chapters however, offer clues for the solving of this problem. These include materials, techniques, stylistics and contextual information.

The concept of diffusion is demonstrated in the present study by the transference of artefact imagery that can be seen to have taken place as a result of one or more of three different, but potentially interrelated circumstances; necessity, coincidence and intent. Each of these three conditions can also be split into three sub-groups: trade, conquest and migration. These are the changing events by which the concept of diffusion can be recognised.

The first circumstance, necessity, embraces social situations which existed as far back as anthropological and archaeological studies have been able to track the spatial distribution and the movements of cultural groups of hominids. The basic necessities, which were

the springboard for the diffusion of ideas and objects, were the demands of genetic survival, food-finding and gathering, the need for shelter, the apparent and eventual need for spiritual and intellectual exploration, and the urge to pass down encyclopaedic tribal knowledge to future generations. These demands and needs are accepted as the matrices in Paleolithic cultures for the making of marks, incisions, figurative drawing and painting, modelled bas-reliefs, sculpture and decorated artefacts. And as we have seen, these have been discussed at length by both Leroi-Gourhan and Pfeiffer. It is accepted theory that much of this most ancient imagery was generated locally, even though the imagery created by cultural groups, remote from each other in both time and space, appears to be remarkably similar. It is accepted, however, that a certain amount of exchange and transfer of ideas and/or artefacts must have taken place also because one of the needs, genetic survival, was found to be enhanced by inter-marriage with outside groups, and thus opportunities were opened up within these circumstances of necessity, coincidence and intent, for ideas and imagery to flow from one group to another.

The necessary demands of food-gathering and preparation were also prime causes of imagery diffusion. The conscious and intelligent intent to develop tools that were increasingly efficient for these purposes apparently led to the search for more suitable materials, for rocks which would split to finer, harder-edged cutters and scrapers. The evidence that there was a widening repertoire of materials that were used indicates that Paleolithic humankind obtained suitable rock materials and shells from 250 kms. (166 miles) to 1,000 kms. (650 miles) away from the sites where they were found. This was achieved either by intentional travel and search, or by coincidental or intentional contact with other groups in exchange or barter systems, or by temporary (seasonal?) migration. The possibility of the forceful acquiring of another group's artefacts is not ruled out either, but there is no proof of this. All that surviving evidence shows is that some artefacts found at Paleolithic sites have been made of materials that are foreign to the
find-sites and must therefore have been transported, either as raw material or as artefacts, to the find-site for reasons of trade, conquest or migration.464

In Neolithic and post-Neolithic urban cultures of Western Asia well-organised systems and trading processes developed which dealt not only with raw materials but also with manufactured tools and other objects which inevitably carried with them imagery and ideas from the exporting community. Trade was a fundamental factor in the development of prosperity and sophistication. The earliest civilisations are evidence of this. The towns of Çatal Huyuk and Haçilar in Anatolia were involved from at least the sixth millennium BC with the trade routes from the obsidian mines in the east at Lake Van to the Mediterranean ports in the south, which, in turn, exported shells. From north to south on the Mesopotamian trade routes that followed the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers, trade and urbanisation developed from at least the fourth millennium BC. Greenstone from Syria has been found at the site of Arpachiya near the Tigris. The culture centred around Halaf in north-west Mesopotamia traded in pottery, foodstuffs, sheepskins, wool, linen and woven garments. Halaf pottery has been found in Cilicia at the north-east corner of the Mediterranean littoral. Sophisticated hierarchical societies grew up with complex and well-ordered systems and beliefs.465 The fact that interrelationships and the diffusion of ideas seem to have been largely responsible for these developmental changes has also been discussed. Trade was the major peaceful means of transference of artefacts (and that included any associated imagery and concepts), from one society to another. Transference, in fact, cannot be avoided when trading transactions take place, and it has continued right through the centuries.

It is difficult sometimes to distinguish between the circumstances of coincidence and intent. In the case of either military or cultural conquest both intentional and coincidental

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diffusion can occur. In the twentieth century, with the opportunities for fast travel and the instant communication of ideas and ideologies, the patterns of diffusion become distorted and confused, and difficult to sort out. The slower and simpler methods of contact and communication in ancient cultures are more easily traced and therefore offer clearer models.
The Silk Roads

The Silk Roads offer one of the clearest demonstrations of the practical means which facilitated diffusion between cultures that were far apart, either in time or geographical distance. The passage of artefacts of all kinds, and the ideas that accompanied them, offers exemplary material that is well documented. It is demonstrated here by a brief summary of the development of the Silk Roads, from their inauguration as relatively protected trade routes at the end of the second century BC; (110 BC, according to Ssu Ma-Ch’ien).466

The Silk Roads possibly transferred more imagery and ideologies between cultures and civilisations, over a timespan of more than fifteen hundred years, than any other specific pattern of trading. A number of books have been published about the findings of archaeologists and their subsequent deductions about the importance of the organised trade that was carried on along the Asian routes known as the Silk Roads.467 By about 110 BC the Han Emperor Wu Ti had established armed guardposts which served as night refuges along the ancient nomad tracks that led from East to West across the middle of Asia. Despite many vicissitudes, traders, ambassadors and Buddhist monks travelled these routes, carrying artefacts, imagery, ideologies and religious concepts. Trade goods, as well as human contacts, were major carriers of imagery and ideas in both directions, but silk, as filament and fabric, was a major commodity, which thus gave its name to the trade routes.468 The extreme length of the routes, and the time it took to travel from one end to the other, encouraged bartering and trading along the routes at the guardposts, some of which grew to be trading towns. The diffusion of imagery and

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467 J. E. Vollmer, E. J. Keall, E. Nagai-Berthrong, Silk Roads, China Ships, Canada, Royal Ontario Museum, 1983, pp. 1-4. Other works which discuss archaeological finds along the Silk Roads include those of Sir Mark Aurel Stein, written in the early years of the 20th C as a record of his expeditions on behalf of the British Museum.

468 This name, “Silk Roads”, or Seidenstrassen, was coined for the trade routes across Asia by Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen in the nineteenth century; also, ditto, Silk Roads, China Ships, op. cit. p. 1.
ideas, however, was not solely between the Eastern and Western extremities. The artefacts and imagery of the tribal nomads who roamed the Central Asian steppes, arid zones and mountainous regions along the way also found their way via the Roads into China, Western Asia, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.

"...Rugged terrain, unpredictable weather, salt swamps, deserts, high icy mountain ranges, and bandits took heavy tolls of the cargoes and profits... Risks were high, but rewards were phenomenal...successful ventures repaid their backers...even a thousandfold return on invested capital..."469

Once the thirst for Oriental exotica grew in the markets of the West, from Roman times on, only those who had the wealth to pay the inflated prices could afford the goods. Nevertheless, as the leaders of society, their tastes were emulated by the less wealthy, and a market demand was subsequently created both for locally and foreign made imitations of expensive imports. There are outstanding examples of such market-fed artefacts which adopted the imagery and stylistics of goods that were carried along the Silk Roads, and selected examples of these have been discussed in various contexts in this thesis. For instance, in the late first millennium AD the Islamic potters invented painted, white-glazed earthenware in an attempt to imitate imported Chinese porcelain. From the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries delft wares of the Netherlands, and the majolicas of Italy, France, England, Spain, Germany and Austria were developed using techniques similar to those of the Islamic potters, in order to produce local and cheaper copies of the Oriental pieces (see Appendix: Faience, Egyptian Faience..., and (figs. 2, 3). All these were European attempts to provide the eager markets of the West with wares that approximated the sought-after, expensive and fashionable Chinese porcelains, but at lower prices. Chinese porcelains were imported in vast quantities by both the Silk Roads and by sea, and were avidly collected by Royalty, aristocracy and the wealthier sections of society. The result was that the taste for porcelain and Chinoiserie

469 ditto, p. 26; also, p. 3. "... The greatest profits were to be gained by concentrating...commerce in as few hands as possible. Such monopolistic practices enabled merchants to inflate prices at will..."
became universal in Europe, and created a demand for anything which looked even vaguely Oriental. Chinoiserie is one of the prime examples of what can happen when the artefacts and imagery of one culture are coveted by another. Ceramic industries were developed all over Europe, (and some continue to flourish today, at the end of the twentieth century). Imagery that might have borne symbolic meaningfulness in its place or time of origin is adopted and adapted for its surface stylistics purely as fashionable embellishment that, as Baudrillard sees it, serves a new purpose, that of enhancing the prestige and the lifestyle of the consumer; (see the chapter, The Artefact and Baudrillard).

That such long, arduous and terrifyingly dangerous routes across the vastnesses of the Asian continent were used for over a thousand years is extraordinary. As kingdoms and empires in Asia rose and fell, the overland trade along the Silk Roads was taken up by successive powers in the caravan city societies which had developed as a result of the enormous profits to be made from the trade. In some periods silk represented 90% of the goods carried, but porcelains, lacquers, jades, carved wood and curiosities also bore the imagery of centuries of Chinese culture into the West.\textsuperscript{470} In turn, Western ideas techniques ans stylistics were transferred to the Orient. Hellenistic stylistics in architectural detail, in clothing and in facial features, which had been adopted in the Alexandrian province of Gandhara for early Buddhist imagery, travelled to China with Buddhist missionary monks (fig. 89). The calm and unemotional features of the "ideal" face that had originated in Greek classicism, the Hellenistic inspired drapery, and the decorative treatment of hair were all used in the early imagery of Buddha.\textsuperscript{471} The famous "blood-sweating" horses of Ferghana (now in eastern Iran) were an early import into China during the reign of Emperor Wu Ti, who was responsible for the opening of the Silk Roads. They were greatly prized by the Emperors for their magnificent size, strength and muscle power, and terracotta models of them (glazed with Western-type lead

\textsuperscript{470} ditto, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{471} ditto, pp. 8, 32, 53; The himation, the garment used as the typical dress of the philosopher in Greek sculpture, and the later Roman toga are also seen to have influenced the early stylistics of the Gandharan clothing of Buddhist statuary; also, Jessica Rawson, \textit{Chinese Ornament}, op. cit., pp. 34–39, 49, 50–53.
Fig. 87 Amphora; original influence from Greece. With three-colour lead glaze on earthenware. Glaze influence from Western Asian sources via the Silk Roads. Dragon-head handles. 8th C AD China

Fig. 88 Porcelain jar with freely drawn birds, flowers, plants and leaves, enclosed in lotus panels, cloud-collar forms and ogival panels. Background filled with arabesques. 14th C China
Fig. 89. Hellenistic column capitals and drapery, and border (left). Life of Buddha, stone panel at Hadda, Gandhara, 2-3 CE AD.

Fig. 90. Top two rows: Eight Buddhist emblems; lower two rows: Eight Precious Things emblems.
glazes) were included, along with models of Heavenly Guardians and courtiers, in the figure groups in imperial tombs during the Tang dynasty. The grape-vine, alfalfa and other plants were also introduced from the West during the periods of the Han to Tang dynasties, as were acrobats, and the techniques for lead-glazing earthenware. The Chinese adopted three-colour western-style lead glazes on the earthenware tomb figures mentioned above and on domestic earthenware (fig. 87). In a nice twist of history, these yellow, green and brown mottled glazes of the Tang dynasty were imitated centuries later, on pots made and found in the Near East, in Cyprus, dated to the thirteenth century. Overland trade diminished during the Song dynasty, but when the Mongols had vanquished the Song, and conquered China and most of Asia, the Silk Roads were once again used widely. Pure cobalt (known as Mohammedan Blue) was imported into China from Persia and was used by the Chinese potters who had embarked on drastic changes from the restrained imperial taste of the Song dynasty styles to more exuberant and richly decorated blue-and-white porcelains which were more to the taste of their Mongol overlords. Persian motifs and stylistics which included the empanelling of free-flowing plants and flower imagery were also adopted by the potters in China during the Yuan dynasty (fig. 88).

Not only were goods traded from the Western and Eastern extremities of the routes, but, as mentioned above, the Roads opened up opportunities for Central Asian principalities and states to ship local goods to foreign markets. They were also in a strong position to impose duties and taxes on goods passing through their territories. The flow of artefact imagery and its attendant ideas and techniques became, therefore, very complex. During the first millennium AD there were various power shifts for the control of the lucrative East-West trade that was carried also by sea as well as by land. In the early centuries the Silk Roads trade was controlled at various times by Rome and by the Arabs.

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472 itto, pp. 12, 65, 68–70.
473 ditto, p. 79.
474 ditto, pp. 26–30; "...No individual caravan traversed the entire route. Merchants transported wares in stages from one marketplace to the next, where they traded or sold them to other merchants..."
in the West, by China in the East, and in Central Asia by the vast and powerful, post-Alexandrian empire of Parthia which was ruled from the Mesopotamian city of Ctesiphon. But eventually Asian nomadic tribes, the Kushans, came from the north to dominate the region west from the Tarim Basin, and to protect and profit from the trade routes as far west as Merv, south-east of the Caspian Sea. The shifts in power throughout the centuries seriously interrupted the overland routes, and eventually large-scale international trading collapsed.475 When the Han dynasty had finally fallen in 220 AD China was split for four centuries into small states, and this had inhibited the organised and free flow of goods, and much of the trading which survived was assisted locally by small communities.

So the size of the trade fluctuated with the changing fortunes of the Asian powers as they fought for control, but there was a general continuation of trading patterns over the centuries, despite the vagaries of power struggles, and an awareness grew in all cultures of the different worlds that existed outside their own. The trade caravans were useful to travellers because they offered a degree of safety to missionaries, pilgrims and others. Buddhist monks set up religious communities at trading centres, and these also offered not only protection and sanctuary along the way but they facilitated the spread of Buddhism, and its imagery and stylistics, over vast distances throughout Asia and China.476

Just as the wealthy of Rome had succumbed to the luxury of silk from China, the aristocracy of Tang China imported, collected and commissioned imitations of artefacts, imagery and techniques from the West. Persian and Greek forms, motifs and stylistics appeared in gold and silverware, on the elaborately wrought backs of mirrors, on early porcelains and in stoneware ceramic forms (figs. 87, 106).477 Some of the most

475 ditto, p. 29.
important evidence for the diffusion of ideas and imagery comes from the sculptures, funerary objects and silken banners found in the Buddhist cave sanctuaries along the Silk Roads. And Graeco-Roman stylistics are obvious in the sculptural remains at the Afghanistan monastery site at Hadda, dated to the third century BC. The drapery of the Buddha figure is unmistakably Hellenistic, as is the smaller figure by its side (fig. 89).

The complex of nine hundred caves at Dunhuang, explored by Sir Mark Aurel Stein in the early years of the twentieth century, is one of the most significant and splendid Buddhist sites on the Silk Roads. Situated east of the Tarim Basin and at the northwest extremity of the territories of Tang China where the Silk Roads enter Chinese territory, the Caves were an important pilgrimage site from the third to the tenth centuries. The influences on the imagery here came from India, Central Asia and China.

As stated above, the stylistics of Hellenistic Gandhara were established in Buddhist imagery in Afghanistan, through which would run some sections of the Silk Roads. So, by the end of the second century BC, when the ancient nomad routes across Asia had been made comparatively safe for trading by the armies of the Han Chinese, there was already an established stylistic flavour for Buddhist imagery, which mingled with Indian influences. When Buddhism spread to the Far East along the Roads into China, and eventually into Korea and Japan, it took with it this diffused mixture of iconographical motifs, subject matter, mythology and styles.

The wall-paintings in the Dunhuang Caves indicate this diffusion. Motifs and figuration are evident from Daoist mythology, and from the sensual style of fourth century Indian Gupta art. Sullivan writes that there is an obvious input also from Western and Central Asia in the inclusion of:

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478 Vollmer, ditto, p. 54; also, Jessica Rawson, *Chinese Ornament*, op. cit., p. 52.
“...dappled deer and flower-sprinkled ground...and the inclusion of the 'linear'
Chinese manner....frozen into a flat decorative pattern...”\textsuperscript{479}

Sullivan also describes the transference of the concept of the bodhisattva into China:

“...The Buddha receded far beyond the reach of mortal man...and the adoration of
a personal god demanded a more approachable deity. So there came into existence
the bodhisattva (the one destined for enlightenment)...the most popular one was
Avalokitesvara (the Lord who looks down in mercy), who on his translation to
China as Kuan-Yin, became identified both with his female reflex, Tara, and with
the ancient Chinese mother-goddess...”\textsuperscript{480}

The making of such iconic figures, stele and murals of Buddhist iconography in cave
sanctuaries and temples increased the spread of this mixed iconography, which was
transformed, in time, into stylistics that were increasingly Sinicised. The Eight Buddhist
Emblems became, for instance, popular decorative motifs in Chinese textiles, lacquer,
cloisonne, jade and ceramics.\textsuperscript{481} They were used, and sometimes mixed with, the Eight
Daoist Emblems in decorative panels and borders, as a result of the absorption of aspects
of Daoism into Chinese Buddhism, and as a result the boundaries between the two
iconographies seem to have become blurred or insignificant (fig. 90). The degree to
which they carried significant symbolic purpose for the patrons or users of the artefacts
on which they appeared cannot be precisely known. Did they come to be used, like much
other artefact imagery, simply because they were conventionally acceptable motifs within
the context of the culture of the time? Like much of the apparently symbolic imagery used
on Chinese artefacts throughout the various dynasties, protocol and etiquette and the
favoured religion of a given dynasty also influenced the inclusion of specific motifs such
as these.

\textsuperscript{479} Sullivan, \textit{The Arts of China}, op. cit., pp. 116–118.
\textsuperscript{480} ditto, pp. 105–106.
\textsuperscript{481} Medley, \textit{A Handbook of Chinese Art}, p. 92, pl. 12i, p. 95, pl. 13e.
In Central Asia the motifs and the stylistics of the Sassanians, who overcame the Parthians and dominated the Silk Roads after the fourth century AD, found their way, not only to the West, into Coptic iconography (fig. 93), but also to China, and some Tang dynasty imagery reflects this. So although the Silk Roads went through many vicissitudes throughout the first millennium AD, they survived, and were one of the longest lasting means by which ideas and imagery were transferred from one region to another. During the changing fortunes of the Silk Roads, goods were also carried by the Romans and Arab sea-traders to the East via the coast of India. The Arabs, for instance, carried proto- and early porcelains from the late Tang dynasty potters to Egypt, and many sherds of these have been found at Fostat (old Cairo). Sherds of these earlier proto-porcelains, or Yueh ware, were found in the 1930’s (fig 91), and finds of late Tang dynasty and early Song porcelain were uncovered between 1964 and 1972 (fig.92).

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fig. 92 Porcelain sherds, incised celadon, late Tang, China; found at Fostat, Egypt BMFEA 47

fig. 91 Early porcelain (Yeh Yao), incised and carved, cloisonné, sherds found at Fostat, Egypt BMFEA 45

fig. 93 Coptic woven cloth; horseman, 4th-5th c. AD CoptEex Push Mus
Silk: Fabric, Technique and Imagery

The export of porcelainous ware in huge quantities did not commence until the second half of the first millennium AD. Some of the early porcelains reached the Courts of Islamic Egypt and Western Asia during the ninth and tenth centuries AD. But trade goods such as silk (with its attendant imagery) was exported from China to the West in great quantities from the end of the second century BC. The fabric weaving centres of Damascus in Syria, and Dura-Europos (a fortified market-town at a crossing of the Euphrates in northern Mesopotamia), received both woven silks and unspun filament from China. The Romans were major customers in the West for this fabric which, to them, appeared to be mysterious and miraculous with its apparent delicacy, strength, and shining surface. The demand was so great among the wealthy that the Roman treasury was drained by the high purchase price of silk. It was not possible for Rome to trade directly with China for silk at the times when they were not in control of the western end of the landroutes. They were denied direct access to the Silk Roads by the various Western Asiatic kingdoms who dominated the western ends of the routes, and acted as monopolistic middlemen, charging exorbitant prices for this much prized commodity. And they had been inhibited from trading by sea, initially, until they discovered from the Arabs the secret of the monsoonal wind patterns. The trade until then had been dominated by the already well-established Arab sea-traders who knew how to cope by sailing with the monsoon winds at predictable times of the year. But this kind of difficulty did not deter those in Rome who could afford the silk. Apparently the delights

484 Medley, *The Chinese Potter*, op. cit., pp. 41–42.; also, Capon, *The Chinese Exhibition*, op. cit., p. 39, fig. 48. True hard-paste felspathic porcelain was not developed until the late Tang dynasty, but even as early as the late Shang (c. 1,200 BC) some types of so-called proto-porcelain were being made. But there seems to be a difference of opinion about the nature of some of these early pieces. Medley labels one piece as 'glazed earthenware', (p. 42), while Capon lists it as proto-porcelain (p. 39). There seems to have been a slow development from earthenware to increasingly finer clay bodies which would tolerate higher firing temperatures, resulting in the production of stonewares, proto-porcelains, and by the second half of the first millennium AD, the achievement of what is generally known as hard-paste porcelain which, when potted thinly enough, achieves translucence.


487 ditto, p. 23.
of silken underwear instead of the usual linen, and the diaphanous and seductive outer
garments had the rich of Rome mesmerised, to the extent that, in 14 BC the Senate
apparently issued bans against men “disgracing themselves with the effeminate delicacy
of silk apparel”. But sheer silk fabric had been made briefly also, at an earlier date, in
the Mediterranean region, probably during the mid-fourth century BC. Aristotle (384 –
322 BC) describes what appears to have been a well-known silk industry, based on the
filament retrieved from the cocoon of one variety of the Bombyx moth on the Greek
island of Cos. The activity was carried out by women, one of whom, Pamphile, he
credits with the invention of sheer silk fabric. Pliny also quotes Aristotle, but
loosely, and is obviously hazy, according to Willetts, about the nature and the process of
what was, by his lifetime (23–79 AD), just an imprecise memory about the notoriety of
the transparent gauziness of the silken garments which left nothing to the imagination.
And also according to Willetts, Pliny’s comments about the thread which “enables the
Roman matron to flaunt transparent raiment in public” were, it must be assumed, about
the thread that was, by Pliny’s time, imported from China, and not the product of local
silkworm varieties.

In Syria silk was imported into the already well-established spinning and weaving
centres. Here, too, silk jolted traditional ideas about fabrics and the techniques of
spinning and weaving. In the West silk was treated in the Western way, with techniques
that had been developed for wool and linen. The filament was spun before weaving,
supposedly to give it extra strength, just as the yarns of wool and linen had to be treated.
The Chinese did not spin the silk filament, however; it was unnecessary because the silk
filament of the cultivated moth is continuous and unbroken, and exceptionally strong, (its
tensile strength is, apparently, stronger than that of steel). It is therefore unlike wool

488 ditto, p. 24.
490 Pliny, Natural History, Book II, paras. 25–27.
492 Vollmer, Silk Roads, China Ships, op. cit., p. 16.
or linen yarn which is made of short fibres that need to be twisted (spun) together both for strength, and to make a continuous thread for weaving. So the Western weavers spun and then wove the Chinese silk filament with Western techniques and patterns. Some fascinating and thorough research has been done with the silk and other textile fragments found at Dura Europos. Proof that the original silk filaments were from China (although at least one was of Indian origin) has been shown by analysis of the filament, which, under the microscope, was demonstrated to be of a different width and structure from that produced by other varieties of silkworm-producing moths, some of which were to be found both in India and China. And because of the use of the Western linen and wool-based tradition of spinning the yarn before weaving it has been possible to identify silk fabrics woven in the West from those woven in China. This has helped archaeologists in the charting of the transfer of materials and imagery from China to the West.

The rich brocades and satin-weaves that were woven with imported silken filaments, but often with Western Asian and Early Christian motifs, were adopted by the Byzantine Court along with the imported and richly figured silks from China. And the mosaic murals, which record in the basilicas, the sumptuous silken garments worn by royalty and dignitaries, reflected the radiance of silks, because they glittered also with reflected light from the uneven surfaces of the richly coloured, and silver and gold tesserae. All this radiance, of silken fabrics, mosaic and the brilliance of Byzantine gold, filigree and

493 The filaments of wild silk, unlike those of the cultivated silk moth, are broken because the moth has erupted naturally from the cocoon and thus has broken the filaments in the process. It is necessary for these, therefore, to be spun for strength and continuity of thread. But this spun thread is characterised by knops (noiles or uneven lumps), which, in the twentieth century, (if not in earlier times), are regarded as aesthetically desirable in the high fashion industry.

494 Pfister and Bellinger, Excavations at Dura-Europos, IV,-2, op. cit., pp. 3, 53-54, pl. XXXIII, figs. 263, 265.

495 ditto, There are various silk-producing moths. They produce a variety of so-called wild silk filaments which are thinner and therefore weaker. These produce fabrics that are not as strong as those produced from the cocoon of the moth which the Chinese cultivate, the Bombyx Mori, which is cultivated artificially. When the cocoons of any of the various moth types are collected in the wild, the filament has been broken by the emerging moth, and has to be artificially rejoined for weaving. This produces a fabric which has distinguishing knops in the weave, which is also called wild silk, or tussah.

jewels, with which according to the evidence of the mosaic murals, the Court and the priestly hierarchy adorned themselves, must have bedazzled the eyes of the humble who came in supplication and worship. The Byzantine Emperors, who were regarded as the lords of heaven as well of the earth, truly seemed to belong to the heavens, so rich, glittering and apparently unearthly was their attire and their ambience.\textsuperscript{497} From this time on the motifs used in the weaving of brocades and tapestry by Western weavers mingled imported Chinese iconography with that of Western Asia, Europe and Early Christianity.

The secret of the silk filament and its production was fiercely guarded in China. Silk was a major, Government-organised industry and provided rich export earnings and employment for millions. But eventually, in the sixth century AD the secret of silk was learned by the West. There are several legends about how this major piece of information came to be leaked out of China, but the two best known concern a Chinese princess, and monks. The princess, who came to the West to be married, is said to have carried silkworm cocoons in her headdress. The other story tells of monks who travelled to the West and carried silkworm cocoons in their hollow walking sticks.\textsuperscript{498} The Emperor Justinian is credited with setting up, in 552 AD, the first silk producing industry in the West, and from this time on the West was able to produce its own silk, and there was an inevitable dwindling of importation from China.

Like the export of any goods on a significant scale, the trading of woven silk fabrics from China to the West was responsible for the diffusion of design ideas, motifs, and techniques. Transferred imagery included all-over diaper-patterns, the phoenix image, the ambiguous cloud-scrolls and/or ling-zhi motifs, real and imaginary animals, so-called “magic or fairy mountains” and landscapes peopled with horsemen.\textsuperscript{499} The Western vocabulary of motifs was enlarged enormously by this. Until the advent of Chinese

\textsuperscript{498} Vollmer, \textit{Silk Roads, China Ships}, op. cit., p. 33.
\textsuperscript{499} Sullivan, \textit{The Arts of China}, op. cit., p. 89.
silks, some Western fabric designs had consisted of geometrically based border motifs such as those of the meander genre, the intertwine, the ribbon, as well as motifs which related to late Hellenistic mythology and styles, and to Christian iconography. But there is an interesting exception to this general influence from China. It is the body of Coptic linens and woollens of fourth century Egypt which bore portraits of Greek gods, mythical creatures, animals, and early Christian saints. This particular body of textiles appears to have absorbed its influences more from Syrian and Iranian than from Chinese stylistics, if the evidence of surviving textile fragments is an indicator. The known relics include the animal-style, centre-balance and mirror-imagery stylistics of Syrian and Sasanian art. Even when Coptic figuration features leaping or running horses, or riders confronting lions (which were extraordinarily similar to Sasanian motifs) or when motifs showing dancing girls or animals were woven into the textiles, the character of the design is curiously static (fig. 93).

The free-flowing, linear character of many Chinese woven and embroidered silk designs appears to have been inherited from nomad animal styles (see next chapter). Its influence, on existing evidence, appears to have liberated European fabric design, and extended the horizons of its designers, weavers, embroiderers, and of its patrons during the Chinoiserie period. But Chinese motifs were mingled indiscriminately by the Europeans with those of Islam, and were perceived as new and fascinatingly different decorative motifs, but they were imitated solely as fashionable decoration, and were totally devoid of any of their original symbolism.

The diffusionary situation between China, Islam, Asia and Europe had come to be extremely complex. From the late seventh century Islam had dominated much of Asia and the lands around the Mediterranean. The iconography of Islam, which was, as stated earlier, a conglomerate of regional styles, subject-matter and techniques, had been

infected with Chinese-inspired motifs and styles, especially during the decades of the Mongol rule, and they too had become factors in the development of a distinctive Islamic style of imagery. This imagery was applied not only to fabrics, but also to metal, glass, ceramic and architecture, and it was this conglomerate Islamic imagery which mingled, in Europe, with stylistics imported directly from China, to become what is known as Chinoiserie (fig 94).
Fig. 94. Majolica dish painted in blue, Portugal, early 17th C; imitating Chinese 'kraak' porcelain.
The Animal Style

From most remote times groups or clans moved over ancient tracks across Asia, from the far north-eastern sub-Arctic wilds, to the Western regions around the Black Sea. Hunter-gatherers followed the seasonal shift of game animals and wild plant foods. Many of these early movements have been impossible to track precisely. It is thought, however, that before the second millennium BC specialist groups of herders had become separated off from settled agricultural and urbanised societies as they followed seasonal and greener pastures for their herds. There was a long period of mingling and confrontation with other settled pastoral societies by these nomads, and there tended to be a development of a distinctive culture and iconography. With them went their artefacts which were, of necessity, portable. Inevitably, through casual contact, barter, intermarriage and conquest, artefact imagery and its attendant ideas, styles and symbolic significances were interchanged between groups and were diffused gradually across great distances. Because of the nomadic nature of these tribal peoples, it can be observed that their imagery and stylistics often cross paths with other tribal groups, as did their wanderings across the wilds of Asia. In eras and regions for which there is archaeological evidence, typological studies provide proof of theories of the significant movements of imagery. Styles, materials, techniques, motifs, idea-content, and regional variations of these, are the material evidence provided by objects frequently found as grave-goods and abandoned treasure.502

In more recent times, in the first millennium BC, a group of nomads whose homelands were in the Altai and Baikal regions of Eastern Asia, buried their chieftains or their heroes in elaborate tumuli. The manner of burial and the artefacts which accompanied the deceased provide fascinating evidence of a body of imagery which has become known as the Animal Style, which is also the label given to some of the art of other nomadic peoples...

of the Asian steppes. At three different times, 1865, 1927 and 1947–1949, Russian archaeologists have excavated barrows in Siberia near the border of Outer Mongolia which have been dated to around the middle of the first millennium BC. These are in the High Altai mountains, at sites in and around Pazyryk, and at about 1,600 metres altitude. By a fortunate freak of climate, and because of the particular structure of the burial mounds, the dry, windswept and snowless cold in the mountains had created a permafrost situation which preserved for more than two thousand years, perishable materials such as the bodies and burial goods in the nomad graves. Animal and human remains, skins, furs, wood and textiles, and even the tattooed skin of a human have given indubitable proof of the sophistication of their imagery and their craftsmanship.

In its more realistic representations the Animal Style of the Altai nomads has several distinctive features both in content and style. The major theme illustrates one animal attacking another and weaker creature. The fundamental theme is basic survival (fig. 95). The lifestyle of the various Asian nomad groups was one of attack, plunder and even cannibalism. Earlier, around 1,900 BC, nomads were the first to teach themselves the skill of riding horses as well as using them as draught animals for pulling sleds and chariots. This new skill gave them an unbeatable advantage over other tribes. The horse became an essential and central part of their lifestyle. Horse trappings and other associated artefacts, along with clothes, and wall-hangings that lined burial chamber walls, became the major vehicles of their art and their innate desire to enhance and decorate their lives, but in a portable way (figs. 95, 96 a., b.).

The horses, whose remains were found in the frozen chieftain burials at Pazyryk in the Altai Mountains were not the small Mongolian breed, but were a bigger, stronger and much prized breed from Western Asia, similar perhaps to the breed of "blood-sweating”

503 ditto, pp. 30–42.
504 Zavitukhina and Barkova, Frozen Tombs, op. cit.
horses of Ferghana, which were imported into China for the Emperors from the late second century BC. Evidence of grain rather than grasses in their stomachs further indicated the value placed on these animals. Their trappings, also frozen and in a remarkable state of preservation, also verify this. The richly embroidered and appliqued felt saddle-cloths and the handsome gold, bronze and carved wood furbishings were superbly conceived and crafted.

The frozen burial finds have been invaluable because they have provided incontrovertible evidence of a distinctive nomad style of imagery, which has originated in much local invention and creativity, although the term "local" in this case refers to a specific lifestyle, the nomadic, rather than to a geographic region. It was now possible to see that there existed an oeuvre which was separate and different in many ways from other art styles of Asia even though the name, Animal Style, indicates that it had affinities with the arts of the nomads of Central and Western Asia.506

Both the idea-content and the style were unique to Asia in their era of making. But aspects of both appear in later centuries, not only in the art styles of other nomadic groups, but also in the iconographies of the Chinese and the Western civilisations. The outstanding quality of the Altai Animal Style is its inherent rhythmic energy and dynamism. This imagery has been appliqued and embroidered on richly coloured horse felts and wall-hangings (figs. 95, 96 a., b). Some of the attacking animals resemble lions, wolves and bears; the unfortunate prey is usually a goat or a deer-like creature. But some of the attacking animal figurations are totally imaginary; winged birds with animal heads, and four-legged and winged creatures with eagle-heads. The latter are generally described as griffins. In the struggle for survival which is a common theme, the hind legs of the crouching animal victim are shown to be twisted in a way that is totally impossible anatomically. The hindquarters are so grotesquely twisted that they

succeed in giving a very graphic impression of wild and desperate movement (fig. 95). But the overall imagery of the combination of the two creatures, has been carefully composed and counterbalanced. The great leap of the attacker is shown in an energetic, curvilinear dynamic, and the major muscles of hind leg and chest are frequently emphasised and indicated by a spiral, or what is known as the ‘dot-and-comma’ motif (fig. 95). The whole effect is of enormous rhythmic power. Another more static, but nevertheless curvilinear image appears on appliqued felt hangings, also found in the barrows (figs. 96 a., b.). One image is thought to be concerned with the illustration of the “Great Goddess” who is shown holding an iconic Tree of Life, and granting audience to a mounted rider (fig. 96 a.), and in another hanging felt there is a part-human, part-animal creature with reindeer horns fighting off what Rice asserts is a “lion-gryphon” (not illustrated). (fig. 96 b). Although some of the imagery is of mythical or imaginary creatures, much of the conceptualising of the imagery in the grave-finds is extraordinarily realistic, and has come, no doubt, from the experiences of daily life, and from the nomads’ close contact with animals, both wild and domesticated. Because of these inclusions of such imagery in richer burials it provides evidence, not only of the existence of chieftain or elite status within the tribal group, but also of tribal beliefs in something beyond material existence; of beliefs in some kind of magic, shamanism and possibly, of life after death.

The nomads’ attempts at visualising parts of animal anatomy is fascinating. If Animal Style imagery is looked at as a whole it can be seen that there is certainly a fresh, simplified and almost naive quality in the characterisation of the various creatures. The looseness of style has allowed the craftworker to express the dynamism of the subject in hand. But some of the aspects of the simplification must also be acknowledged as being the result of the limitations imposed by the nature of the materials and techniques used. Embroidery and applique on woven wool and felt present the artist with limitations as

507 Rice, Ancient Arts of Central Asia., op. cit., p. 34 and following pages.
well as opportunities. It is not known whether the extremely simplified schematising of complex animal anatomy, such as the visualising of major muscles, is the result of a highly sophisticated sense of reductive realism, or whether they are the rationally descriptive marks of a craftworker who was incapable of representing muscularity in a totally realistic way. Whatever the cause, the simple “dot-and-comma” and associated spiralled and curvilinear motifs were extremely apt, and they were adopted into the later imagery of other cultures. The spiral motif as an indication of muscle appears even as far west as the Celtic La Tene culture, in France, and in the later imagery of the Vikings. In these two cultures surviving examples appear on artefacts made of metal, wood and stone.508

Archaeologists have put forward opposing theories which concern the possible symbolic content of the Animal Style figurations. Besides the obvious depiction of life-and-death struggles, which reflect nomadic life, the so-called fighting animals are thought by some, including Laszlo, to represent totemic ancestors.509 Another theory, according to Laszlo, puts forward the idea that, on a woven rug found at Noin-Ula, the eagle-like creature is not attacking, but mating with, an elk.510 Laszlo relates these two creatures to a stag and an eagle in the much later Hungarian Migration Period mythology of the first millennium AD. He also points out that in the even later Romanesque mosaics in Venice, there is also one attacker-and-prey scene in which he claims that the attacking leopard and lion both represent Sin, while the preyed-upon animal is a stag which represents the soul thirsting for Christianity! Evidence, but not conclusive proof, is offered for these theories,511 although Laszlo does quote Siberian sagas about the fights of animal ancestors, but he claims that these have never been used (as far as is known) as pictorial imagery, unless

509 Laszlo, *The Art of the Migration Period*, op. cit. p. 94, for example, “…the wolverine is the ancestor of the Huns…”
such imagery as the eagle-griffin and the elk or ibex motif (fig. 95 ), are taken into account.

In discussing the same topic Focillon writes:

"...Asiatics were the missionaries of Christianity...the barbarians too played their part in the Orientalization of European art...(and were) in contact with, and transmitted, elements of remoter origins from beyond the steppes..."512

Early Christianity adopted the Asiatic concept of winged creatures as symbolic figurations for ideas connected with the unearthly. Focillon quotes an example held in the Musee de Cluny, from St. Germain des Pres:

"...a capital with the fauna of the steppes, reanimated in stone, the wild beast and its prey...

and quotes other examples in churches at Moissac (St. Pierre), Toulouse (St. Sernin), Chartres Cathedral and in England, Canterbury Cathedral where a winged goat playing a stringed instrument graces a column capital.513

If any of this evidence is to be believed, and there is no apparent reason why it should not be, then they are prime examples of the diffusion of ideas as well as imagery, not only from one culture to another, but from one epoch to another. On the other hand the Jungian theories of archetype, universal imagery and the collective unconscious must be considered also as possible fundamental sources.

Other theories which stem from age-old myths of animal ancestry suggest that the stag (or the antlered doe of the reindeer) has been favoured in Animal Style imagery in nomadic

513 ditto, p. 51, pls 30, 32, 102, 144.
tribal groups over many periods because there have existed local underlying legends which also represent the stag (or doe) as the primeval mother.\textsuperscript{514} Her attacker, in whatever form, as a griffin, lion, tiger or eagle, is claimed to represent the male ancestor. This kind of symbolism, although varying widely in stylistics, seems to have been related to oral mythologies concerned with the origins of humankind. It is not surprising that symbolic imagery based on hunted and hunting animals should have become favoured motifs for the decorating of horse trappings in societies and tribal groups whose survival and way of life was intimately involved with the hunting and herding of animals. Neither does it seem surprising that animals, both real and imaginary, were developed to figure symbolically in their mythologies.

The point at which such imagery ceased to have any direct or conscious symbolic links with these beliefs would be difficult, if not impossible, to discover. The demands of the market-place (or the wealthy patron) would have determined their use eventually, whether or not they carried any relics of meaningful symbolism. This would have been the case even to the point where the imagery was abstracted totally, and came to represent nothing more than commonly used, conventionally acceptable and saleable decoration.\textsuperscript{515} At this low point, where the original set of images has become totally devalued into meaningless embellishment, however, there is still interpretative value to be gleaned from the imagery, in terms of semiotic signification, as well as recognition of whatever aesthetic values may be perceived.

When oral mythologies have travelled from one nomadic group to another it is difficult, also, to detect whether particular imagery has also travelled with the mythologies, or whether there has been a local choice of suitable imagery in the adoptive society, which is coincidentally similar. It is conceivable that similar circumstances and ways of life could have been the matrix that might have invented, locally, imagery that was similar to that

\textsuperscript{514} Laszlo, \textit{The Art of the Migration Period}, op. cit., pp. 97, 98.
\textsuperscript{515} ditto, pl. 111, (the gilded bronze belt mounting from Kseszhely).
which was produced for the original mythology. The close, daily relationship between a nomadic society and the animals that were part of its survival patterns and its culture, must have made this possible.

Sources of Animal Style imagery do not seem to have originated solely in the nomad homelands of the Altai Mountains or the Lake Baikal region. As suggested earlier there are affinities and similarities in style and subject matter with the art of the nomads of the Central and Western regions of Asia; among them the Scythians and the later Sarmations. Phillips, in fact suggests that the Animal Style originated with the Scythians whose influence reached as far as Pazyryk. The name, Scythian, can however, be misleading because it is applied both to nomadic groups of people whose homelands were in Western Asia, but who ranged across vast areas of Asia, and also to certain characteristics and stylistics in the artefact imagery of a variety of Asian nomadic tribes, and whose territories ranged at various times from north of the Black Sea, to the Caucasus in the south, and to the east across northern Iran and Central and Eastern Asia, into regions known as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkestan and Tjadjikistan.

From the seventh century BC the Animal Style and its motifs were affected by Scythian contacts with Greece, and the decoration of tombs and artefacts became a complex mixture of both nomad styles and motifs, and those of Greece. Phillips records that a Scythian fourth century tomb at Kul Oba in the Crimea has:

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517 For example, the Greeks, in the seventh century BC, had regular trade (and therefore cultural contacts) with the Scythians north of the Black Sea for wheat which was imported into Greece. There is evidence in this situation of stylistic transference in both directions, and there was a body of soldiers known as Scyths, attached to the Greek armies who were famous for their supreme skill in archery.; Boardman, The Greeks Overseas, op. cit. pp. 248–9, 252, 254–262; also, Phillips, The Royal Hordes, op. cit., pp. 53, 60, pl. 43, 80–81, pl. 86; examples of Scythian imagery include a ceremonial bronze axe, from Uzbekistan, with silver inlay imagery of a wild boar attacking a tiger which in turn, attacks a wild goat, pp. 69–60, pls. 42, 43, 44; also, p. 64, pls. 55, 56; two gold plates indicating Graeco-Scythian stylistics, found in the Kuban Basin, Caucasus; one shows a winged panther attacking a goat, the other, an eagle is killing a hare; and pl. 58, shows a gold scabbard from Kul Oba, Crimea with an eagle-griffin and a lion attacking a deer, in Graeco-Scythian style, which is also evident in the silver vase with two griffins attacking a goat, and a lion and lioness attacking a stag, p. 69, pls. 69, 70.
“...burial chambers vaulted with Greek stonework. With the king’s skeleton and those of a male and female attendant were a gold-plated scabbard, three vases, one of silver, one of silver-gilt and one of electrum, and many smaller objects of gold, all them Greek work but adorned with figures to suit Scythian taste. Some pieces of ivory veneer from the inside of the king’s coffin were covered with beautiful Greek drawings of scenes from Greek myth. Objects of Scythian origin were few...”  

Which leads one to wonder if this work by Greek craftworkers was involved in some way with the trading arrangements for Scythian wheat which the Greeks imported as their prosperity and population increased on the arid and mountainous Greek mainland. 

By the late first millennium BC the regions east of the Caspian Sea were known as Soghdia, Bactria, Chorasmia and Ferghana. Ferghana had become the subsequent home of the Yueh-chi nomads, driven west by the aggressive and conquering Hsiung-nu and Wu-sun nomads. The overall pattern of nomad life was one of constant change, fighting, conquering and subduing of neighbours. It is easy to see therefore how styles and motifs could not avoid influential intermingling during the first millennium BC, and to see how the Animal Style became almost universal across Asia, affecting the imagery of all those groups who came into contact with them, through conquest, trade or migration. In some imagery, made during the ninth to seventh centuries BC, it is difficult to separate out some of the Altaian, Scythian and Assyrian and Iranian content, and this directly reflects the nomadism of the epoch.

The nomadic nature of these Asian peoples was not confined to movements westwards. There had been pressure, from at least second millennium Shang times, from the nomads to the north and west of China, to look south and east for greener pastures in regions that were to become, in later times, what was known as the territories of China. By the time

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518 Phillips, ditto, pp. 54, 64, 68-71.
519 Boardman, Greek Art, op. cit., p. 155.
fig. 97a. Gold bracelet from the 'Oxus Treasure'. This would originally have been encrusted with gems. The popular griffin figure appears again; the wings and oddly
their distinctive imagery had developed these savage mounted horsemen were battling with the Chinese on the northern frontiers. The Chinese, in desperation, had to abandon their chariots and copy the nomad methods and weapons of war. Besides affecting their methods of fighting the Chinese were also brought into contact with the cruelly vigorous Animal Style in horse trappings, small bronzes and textiles.\(^{520}\) This was while, far away to the south:

"...the aristocracy of metropolitan China were indulging in music, dancing and other delights in the comfort and security of their great houses..."\(^{521}\)

It is interesting that these new concepts in imagery and style came into China during the latter part of the first millennium BC, when the imagery on Chinese artefacts had already reached a high level of sophisticated stylistic urbanity. The art of the Warring States period (480–222 BC) had become largely abstracted into extreme curvilinear and abstract elegance. According to Sullivan:

"...the ancient symbolic creatures such as the Dao-die...were refined into a vocabulary of decorative art that was to provide an inexhaustible reservoir of abstracted designs for the craftsmen of later dynasties..."\(^{522}\)

Into this stylistic evolution came the cruder characteristics and realistic motifs of the nomad Animal Style, and provided a new element of energetic toughness. It can be seen as fortunate because the delicate curvilinear counter-balances of late first millennium BC imagery were in danger of becoming effete and trivial. (A similar danger affected the much later art of Europe in the Rococo of the late eighteenth century AD, and in China, effete and trivial virtuosity affected much imagery of the Qing in the late nineteenth century AD.\(^{523}\))

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\(^{521}\) ditto, p. 56.

\(^{522}\) ditto, p. 68.

\(^{523}\) As, for instance, the eighteenth century paintings of Boucher in France, and in China, some of the vase-painting of the late Qing dynasty.
In the West the Animal Style affected the imagery of mythical creatures such as the griffin. Among the earliest examples of griffin imagery, however, are those depicted in the mural from the palace of Zimri-Lim, at Mari in Syria, and dated to c 1800 BC. This would appear to be too early for the development of the so-called Animal Style and, unlike the creatures of the nomad Animal Style these griffins are totally static. It is later that the energy and rhythms of the Animal Style appear in Near Eastern and Greek imagery. The winged and savage beast is featured, for instance, in the aigrette of gold (fourth century BC) which was found in the Oxus Treasure, and in the gold armlet of confronting horned eagle-griffins of either Persian or Bactrian workmanship, also found in the Oxus Treasure. The same feeling of wild energy is also apparent in the griffin-eagle head (a cauldron-handle) from Ziwiye of the seventh century BC (fig. 97).

They all share similarities of style and technique that strongly suggest common origins or influences. The eagle-griffin heads of the armlet are similar also to those in Greek iconography. Examples of these can include a seventh BC bronze cauldron-handle (fig. 68 b.), a seventh century bronze shield plaque (fig. 68 d.), bas-relief griffins on a seventh century BC pithos (fig. 68 c.), and winged griffins hunting a deer, carved on a Mycenaean ivory pyxis which is of a much earlier date, the fourteenth century BC (fig. 68 e.). Dot-and-comma marks, which are assumed to represent major musculature, feature in both the aigrette and the armlet from the Oxus Treasure. Wings are also common to both the aigrette and to the armlet. Both bear the decoratively disciplined characteristics of the authoritarian Persian and Assyrian styles as well as the energetic and wild ferocity of Altaian imagery, both superbly carried out in the metal-working

526 ditto, p. 72; A site southwest of the Caspian Sea.
527 The dot-and-comma device for the description of major musculature is discussed earlier in the chapter “The Animal Style”.
techniques of Scythian craftsmen. Whether these representations of mythical beasts were symbolic of oral mythologies is not known. The high standard of craftsmanship, the precious materials and the complex, labour-intensive techniques used suggests that they were special objects made for, or intended for presentation to patrons of wealth and status. The imagery chosen could well have carried, therefore, the vestiges, at least, of symbolic power, political and military might, and heavenly authority.

The highly disciplined treatment and textural compactness of animal manes and bird feathers which reflects Assyrian influences, does not appear in the art of the Altaian nomads whose looser, freer, and more naturalistic renderings are, according to Rice, more akin to the style of western Siberian imagery. But the idea of mythical, winged, composite creatures, whether bird- or animal-headed, and whether two- or four-legged, is common almost universally throughout Asia, from the Scythian homelands north of the Black Sea to the Altai Mountains in the north-east. They are usually labelled as griffins, or eagle-griffins.

The eagle-head on winged humans is well-known from the shallow bas-relief wall sculptures from Assyrian palaces. Barnett describes those at the Nimrud palace as winged, eagle-headed deities shown anointing a Sacred Tree. He suggests the possibility that it is a sort of maypole decorated with symbolic leaves, representing the god Ashur, patron god of Assyria. Hooke links the eagle motif, when it is accompanied by a serpent, with birth and creation mythology. It is interesting to observe that the stance and depiction of these figures is almost identical with those of other winged, but human-

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531 Dorman, Harper, Pittman, *Egypt and the Ancient Near East*, op. cit., pp. 92, 106–109; large segments of these from the palace of King Ashurbanipal at Nineveh can be seen in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; and bas-relief segments from the north-west palace at Nimrud of King Ashursirpal, at The British Museum, London, U.K.
headed deities in other segments of the palace walls. Does this suggest a prescribed, rigid style that has been conventionally assigned to this category of mural imagery, or is it evidence, perhaps of the personal predilections of the sculptors? In practical terms a standard format for the human body in certain poses would facilitate the necessary employment of several artisans on such huge assignments, while keeping a unified look to the whole. To what extent this symbolism is connected with or an influence upon the use of the eagle-head in the imagery of the artefacts such as the Oxus Treasure armlet, with its total mixture of bird and animal anatomies, is the kind of evidence which fortifies knowledge of the complex and fluid situation in the first millennium BC. From the east of Iran through Asia Minor, to the Mediterranean and the Aegean conquest, trade and migration was widespread. Empires, kingdoms and power shifts came and went right across Asia, and it is in this millennium that the diffusion of imagery becomes increasingly difficult to track. Even if the mythological symbolism of the eagle, from more ancient times, such as that described by Hooke, had been lost through the centuries, the imagery of the eagle had become established in the first millennium BC and achieved, apparently, a wide level of acceptability. It was used frequently as the head of the mythical griffin, and especially in Greek art, from the eighth century BC Orientalising period on.\(^{534}\)

\(^{534}\) Boardman, \textit{Greek Art}, op. cit., p. 49.
The Bull

It is a matter of surprise that the image of the bull has not apparently entered into the iconography of the nomadic tribes of Asia. Neither is there any sign that the wild and curvilinear energy of the Animal Style had any influence on the visual imagery of the bull in Western Asia. The bull motif itself is widespread in regions of Western Asia. And as early as the seventh and sixth millennia BC the bull featured in the presumed mythologies of Anatolia.535 The imagery was used, apparently for ritualistic or religiously based purposes, also in Mesopotamia, Crete and Persia. In Anatolia, during the sixth millennium BC, the remains of bull’s horns have been found, ritually placed in rows, in a room thought to have been intended as a shrine. In the Mesopotamian myth of Gilgamesh, Anu, the Bull of Heaven is sent down at the request of his daughter, the goddess Ishtar, “to wreak havoc among the people of Erech”, in order to avenge her against Gilgamesh the king, who rejected her amorous advances.536 And Gilgamesh’s half-human companion, Enkidu, is depicted on cylinder seals as a bull-headed man.537 On a cylinder seal, dated probably to the third millennium BC, the goddess Ishtar is depicted attempting to stop Gilgamesh and Enkidu from killing the Bull of Heaven (fig. 67). There is also the magnificent bearded bull’s-head which ornaments the sound box of the lyre found in the royal graves of Ur, with its superb realism in carved wood, overlaid with sheet gold and inlaid with ivory and carved lapis lazuli.538 And, in the same style as the bas-relief murals of winged humans in the palaces of Assurnasirpal and Assurbanipal, at Nimrud and Nineveh, there are the deeply carved bas-reliefs of “winged bull-gods” who guarded the entrance to the throne-room in the eighth century palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad.539

538 Lloyd, ditto, pp. 80–91.
The bull and associated myths are deeply embedded in the Minoan culture of Bronze Age Crete, and in the second millennium BC the bull featured prominently in the imagery of the culture. Bull-jumping was apparently a popular sport, and appears in this context in mural imagery and in small bronze sculpture. The bull is the main subject matter of the imagery on two gold cups found at Vapheio in the Peloponnese. They are made with a plain sheet of gold inside, and encased in another sheet of gold which is rich with all-over realistic decoration in repoussé technique. The topic on one cup is full of action; one netted bull, another impaling a hunter, and a third leaping away in a rocky landscape. The second cup shows bulls grazing peacefully in what Powell calls a lyrical landscape, and one is being tied by its hind legs while it follows a cow. The extraordinary realism and free-flowing style and the technique are regarded as being totally Minoan, and it is assumed that they were made by Cretan craftsmen, who by all accounts, had a considerable reputation as goldsmiths. (Unlike Greece and Egypt, Crete did not have any gold deposits, but had trade links with the Mycenaean of mainland Greece, and with Egypt, and it is thought that Cretan goldsmiths had workshops in Memphis.) This evidence also adds weight to the belief that they had brought the tradition and knowledge of metal-working with them when they migrated, possibly, from Asia Minor. This theory is further strengthened by the fact that Troy, situated in the northwest corner of Asia Minor, was a renowned centre of metal-working, and in particular of gold, by the end of the third millennium BC. Other evidence lies in the fact that the Minoans had made their ceramics on a fast potter's wheel since at least 1,900 BC, and this technique had been used in the Near East since at least the middle of the third millennium BC, and its invention is credited to Mesopotamia by some.

540 Higgins, Minoan and Mycenaen Art, op. cit., frontispiece.
543 Boardman, Pre-Classical, op. cit., p. 18.
The bull plays a major role in the version of the Greek myth, where the Cretan tyrant king Minos demanded an annual sacrifice of twelve Athenians to the the minotaur, the bull-headed monster believed to live in the labrynthine cellars of the Knossos palace, but who was killed subsequently by the Greek hero Theseus. In a painting on a sarcophagus found at Hagia Triada, and dated to c. 1,400 BC, there is a bull bound up and ready for sacrifice at a ceremony that is taking place in front of an altar. The wall behind the altar is shown to be decorated with bulls’ horns. And a large stone sculpture of a pair of bull’s horns carved in exactly the same style is to be found outside the Palace of Knossos. In a fresco fragment from the palace there is a representation of the shrine, surrounded by hundreds of people, that features similar stylised bull’s horns. When it is remembered that the Cretan palace architecture is remarkably similar to a nineteenth century palace in Western Anatolia, and that it is proposed that the Cretans had migrated from Western Asia, it is not surprising that such a long-lived and universal West Asian icon as the bull became a dominant image in Minoan art. It would appear to be a classic example of the migration of an image, and possibly of some at least of its associated symbolism. According to Powell, the bull was a symbol of fertility to the farmers of Mesopotamia. All this, and in particular the Minoans’ supreme skills in metal-working and pottery, makes a strong case for the migration theory.

At a mound called Marlyk, near the southwestern tip of the Caspian Sea, a group of gold cups were found in tombs not far from what is assumed to have been a temple. They are dated to around 1,000 BC. The decoration has been made with an extremely high relief repoussé technique, and the style is extraordinarily naturalistic. One cup features winged bulls, walking or dancing on their hind legs. Rice discusses their links with other regions

545 ditto, p. 54.
546 ditto, p. 44.
547 ditto, p. 46.
to the east of the Caspian Sea, and sees that the bull continues to be used in Iran as a decorative motif, with or without associated symbolism. According to Rice:

“...the basic characteristics of these cups, notwithstanding their links with Assyria and Urartu, foreshadow the Achaemenid style...”

In the old south Mesopotamian capital of Babylon, c. 600 BC, in the brief period of Babylonian renewal before the Persians came to dominate the region, the crenellated walls of the “Procession Street” were built of glazed and coloured brick, as were the pylons of the Ishtar Gate, and walls and pylons were decorated with bas-reliefs of bulls, goats and dragons. Now reconstructed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, they also provide evidence of the craftworkers’ extensive technical skill and knowledge of colour and glazing. (According to the records of the Oriental Institute, Chicago, the glazing of ceramics had been known in Mesopotamia since 3,000 BC, and glass technology since 2,400 BC.)

In the middle of the first millennium BC, when Iran came under the rule of the Persian (Achaemenid) dynasty, the ruler Darius I built the great palace complex at Persepolis (c 500BC) which included the throne-hall (“The Hall of a Hundred Columns”). Called the Apadana, its prime function was the housing of new year festivities and ceremonies which was attended by representatives of the many tributary communities ruled by the Persians. Its huge decorative columns had capitals with twinned bull-heads, and some featured man-headed bulls. At Susa, also in the southwest of Iran, similar capitals occur, but on columns which appear to have been influenced also by Greek Ionic fluting and volutes.

548 Rice, Ancient Arts of Central Asia, op. cit., p. 68, pl. 57.
551 Du Ry, Art of the Ancient Near and Middle East, op. cit., pp. 140-145.
552 Lloyd, The Art of the Ancient Near East, op. cit., pp. 244, 248, 249; pls. 207, 208, 209. One example of the twinned bull-headed capitals is held in the Louvre Museum, Paris.
The high degree of proficiency in metalworking, which had been evident in most ancient Sumer had either survived or had been renewed, and was still practised in these Achaemenian times, as is shown by superbly crafted bowls, rhytons and small iconic sculptures in gold and silver. This expertise in metal working, and the tight and decorative style which arose largely out of technique, can also be seen in the smooth "almost metallic finish" of the Susa column with the bull-man capital. In the opinion of Lloyd it is a good example of the influence of metal-casting techniques on the image-makers of the day. It underlines the tremendous influence that techniques and materials have on the visualisation of an image.

Whether the bull was used continuously as an official, monumental and iconic image in the various regions of Western Asia, from Neolithic Anatolia (Haçilar and Çatal Huyuk, c. 6,500-4,500 BC) has not been proved. But the fact is that, according to the fortuitous finds of archaeology, it was an acceptable image, which appeared constantly, with or without associated symbolism, right through to the first millennium, in widely separated areas from the Aegean to Iran. This is not surprising because, from the most ancient times of the trading towns of Çatal Huyuk and Haçilar in Anatolia down to the Achaemenid period in Persia, there were trade routes, from the obsidian sites of Lake Van and Ciftlik, and the tin/silver mines of eastern Anatolia down the Tigris and the Euphrates river valleys to southern Mesopotamia. These were the routes of the diffusion, not only of artefacts and their imagery, but also of religious, cultural and stylistic concepts. And added to this there was continual migration of peoples from one region to another, and inevitably confrontation and conquest, and both of these patterns of group activity were instrumental in carrying myths, motifs and stylistics from one region to another.

Therefore, while there is no incontrovertible proof that the bull as a symbolic image has diffused from most ancient Anatolia, it would be difficult to theorise that in all the cases

cited above it has been a product of purely local invention. While the concept of the bull as a generic and symbolic image is a likely case for diffusion, the variations in its visualisations from region to region and from one epoch to another can only be interpreted as those of local invention, born out of the local circumstances of a culture, the choice of materials and the availability of local skills.
The Griffin

It is to the credit of the makers of artefact imagery that they were able to combine aspects of human, bird and animal life into convincingly powerful creatures of imagination in their efforts to express symbolically the deeply held collective awareness of unseen powers and of metaphysical concepts. There are many examples of composite creatures in the artefact imagery of almost all ancient cultures. The connection is obvious between ideas of superhuman powers that might reside unseen beyond the earth, possibly in the heavens, and control humankind’s condition, and the attempts at visualisation of these metaphysical concepts in the form of bird-heads and wings for the purpose of group communication. There are winged lions, winged panthers, winged horses, but one of the most pervasive of all the mythical creatures is the griffin. This is discussed in the earlier chapter on The Animal Style. During the first millennium BC the griffin is a recurring motif. In its many variations of winged animal with bird or animal head, or bird with animal head, it appears in the artefacts produced in cultures right across Asia, from the Altai mountains northwest of China, to the Aegean islands, the mainland of Greece, and as far west as Etruria.

The earliest one known is dated to 1,800 BC and appears in a large mural fragment from the palace of the king, Zimri-Lim, at Mari, north-east Syria. Phillips cites several examples from a tomb in the Crimea. This kind of bird-animal-human imagery is found on the artefacts made by the Greeks for Scythian taste. A gold ornamental plaque of a highly stylised crouching stag has on it a chased and repousse griffin which confronts an ass and an attacking lion. A gold plate has a winged panther attacking a goat, and a gold scabbard has a winged lion. These are dated to the fourth century BC, as is a vase of parcel-gilt (mentioned above in the chapter on the Animal Style) found at Kul Oba which also features winged eagle-headed griffins with the bodies of lions. In the latter,

particularly, Phillips points out that both Greek and Oriental influences are evident, and the Greeks, as mentioned earlier, had absorbed Near Eastern imagery into their own iconography at least three centuries earlier.556

During the eighth and seventh centuries BC the griffin, along with other motifs such as the palmette and rosette, had spread from the Greek coastal settlements of Ionia, into the islands of the Aegean, and across into mainland Greece. And a Western Asiatic and more curvilinear style, the Orientalising, accompanied these motifs and overtook the Greek Geometric style, opening the way to the greater realism of the Archaic and Classical styles (fig. 68 a.). Griffins, however, were not the only winged creatures which appeared during the Orientalising period. Winged horses are also introduced into vase paintings, illustrative of narrative incidents from the Greek mythology of gods and heroes. On two terracotta kraters reputedly from the Cycladic island of Melos, four winged horses pull the chariot of Apollo.557 On a terracotta plate found at Thasos Bellerophon rides the winged horse, Pegasus (the child of the winged Gorgon), and does combat with the Chimaera, a composite creature with a lion’s head, a snake for a tail and a goat’s head and horn for a wing. And also from Thasos come press-moulded tiles (antefixes) two of which show Bellerophon on Pegasus, and a third shows the Chimaera.558 There is competition for the griffin, also, in the Sphinx of Greek myths which appears frequently from the Orientalising period on.559 Was the apparent similarity of this serpent-tailed, lion-bodied image to that of the Egyptian Sphinx due to

556 ditto, p. 69.
557 Yalouris, Greek Art of the Aegean Islands, op. cit., pp. 122, 123. It is interesting to note that although the horses are drawn with the curvilinear characteristics of the Orientalising style, the method of indicating four horses abreast is not dissimilar to that used in the earlier Geometric style. Boardman, Art and Architecture of Ancient Greece, op. cit., p. 141, pl. 65.
558 Yalouris, ditto, p. 208.
559 Graves, The Greek Myths, vols. 1 & 2, op. cit.; # 34.3, # 106.1, # 123.1; tales involving the Sphinx occur in several variations of the Greek myths. Unlike the Egyptian Sphinx, the creature was feared, and described as being female and partly lion-bodied, which associated her with Thebes whose emblem was a lion. In one version, according to Grimal, she was regarded as an evil monster who, at the gates of Thebes, asked two riddles of passers-by, and devoured those who could not answer them. Oedipus answered the riddles, and “...the mortified Sphinx leaped into a ravine and was dashed to pieces on the rocks...” P. Grimal, “Greece: Myth and Logic”, ed., Larousse World Mythology, London, U.K., 1984, Hamlyn, p. 168.
cultural contacts through Greece’s long-established trading relations with Egypt?560 And if so, what caused the symbolism attached to the creature by the Greeks to be so different from that of Egypt, which related the lion-bodied, human-headed creature to kingly authority and to the sun-god?561 Is the physical similarity purely fortuitous? Winged and/or half-human, half-animal creatures have existed in the iconography of some cultures, such as that of Sumer, since the fourth millennium BC.

Griffins are painted on a seventh century BC Orientalising amphora from Rhodes, with sphinx, birds, deer and goats (fig 19 a.). On a huge Cretan pithos (already mentioned in the chapter on The Animal Style) both animal-headed and bird-headed griffins are empanelled on the neck, flanking two figures who are reputed to be Zeus and Hera (fig. 68 c.). But on the shoulder of the pithos there is also a border of winged horses which gallop over the supine bodies of men.562 Griffins are painted on a seventh century BC Orientalising oinochoe or wine jug from Rhodes, with sphinx, birds, deer and goats (fig 19 a.).563

Unlike the sphinx there is no mention of the griffin as a figure in Greek mythology, and there does not seem to be any evidence that the symbolism connected with it in Western Asia travelled with the physical versions of the griffin image to Greece. Any possibility can be ruled out, that the artefacts found in Greece which bear griffin imagery might actually have been made in Asia. In the case of ceramics there is a long history of developmental strings of imagery, decoration, forms and techniques in the Aegean islands and the mainland which stretches back (but not continuously) to Mycenaean times.564 And an analysis of the nature of the clay bodies used vouches for their Greek origin.

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560 Boardman, The Greeks Overseas, op. cit., pp. 9–10, 15; also, Bray and Trump, A Dictionary of Archaeology, op. cit., p. 216. While the Greek sphinx has a female head, the Egyptian sphinx has either a male or animal head, and is believed to represent not only the guardian of the Gates of Sunset, but also the guardian of tombs and temples.


562 Yalouris, Greek Art of the Aegean Islands, op. cit., pp. 132–133.

563 ditto, p. 149.

Typological studies of the technique and styles of “black-figure” painting, (as on the oinochoe mentioned above), which developed during the Orientalising period also provides evidence for Greek sources.

Griffin-heads were also used in gold jewellery made in the Greek islands of the Aegean. Six gold rosette dress ornaments have been found, and they have three-dimensional heads rising either from the petals or the centre. These are the heads of bulls, lions and griffins. They are dated to the seventh century BC and were found on the island of Melos. They are very small objects, less than two inches in diameter (4.1 cm), and include some exceedingly small granulation which might suggest a connection with the craftworkers of Etruria (figs. 98 a., b.). Although found on Melos, and identified as Rhodian, it might be useful to look briefly at seventh century goldsmithing of somewhere such as Etruria, and ask about Greece’s trading connections with the Etruscans. By the seventh century BC, the Etruscans, who are generally accepted as having migrated from Asia Minor, had developed rapidly into what Anderson Black describes as:

“...a nation of jewellers and goldsmiths...and, in the four hundred years that (the Etruscan civilisation) flourished, produced jewellery of unparalleled beauty...the workmanship is quite amazing, fine repousse, filigree work and granulation executed with a skill and precision that has never been equalled to this day...”

The Etruscans are credited with producing the most minute granulation on gold jewellery; that included beads, pendants, fibulae and ear-rings. On one fibula that is only two-and-a-half inches long (6.4 cm), the granules of gold are less than one two-hundredths of an inch (less than 3 mm) in diameter. They are draped in strings around three-dimensional rows of hollow-cast horses, bulls, lions and sphinx. The Rhodian rosettes are so closely similar in style and technique to some Etruscan pieces that it would seem

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Gold Six-petalled rosettes with granulation. Fig. 98a has raised lion head; fig. 98b has raised griffin head. Rhodesion workshop, Orientalising style, 630-620 BC. Greece GAA 18 NatMus

Fig. 99 Cycladic jug, Orientalising style, c675 BC. Greece
Gk A Dev
remarkable if there had existed an unconnected and isolated goldsmithing activity of equal
excellence in the island of Rhodes at that time, (even though the rosette form itself is
regarded as a motif that migrated from the Near East to Greece during the Orientalising
period).\textsuperscript{568} When it is remembered that Greece was importing copper and iron from
Etruria, and that both the Etruscans and the Greeks were importing gold, it would be
difficult to believe that there was not a certain amount of diffusion of ideas and contact
about techniques and the use of gold in jewellery between the two peoples whose
common interest was trade. The Greeks, by the sixth century were also magnificent
craftsmen in their own right, and were influencing the Etruscans in both imagery and
technique. As a result the Etruscans eventually shifted emphasis from the difficult,
expensive and time-consuming granulation technique to that of filigree, which was
quicker, and therefore less costly to produce.\textsuperscript{569} And during the Archaic and Classical
periods, the Greeks were importing gold from southern Italy and southern Russia, and
according to Anderson Black, Greek craftsmen were working for both the Etruscans and
the nomad chiefs.\textsuperscript{570} And so the real source of these gold rosettes with their griffin
imagery might be difficult to prove.

Among the most outstanding uses of the griffin motif are decorative attachments for
bronze cauldrons (\textit{fig. 68 a.}), and mentioned above in the chapter on The Animal Style).
Five examples were found in the Heraeum on the island of Samos, and dated from the
late seventh to the early sixth century. They once decorated the shoulders of popular
dedicatory bowls which were set on tripods in the temple.\textsuperscript{571} A griffin-head was also
modelled as a three-dimensional spout on a ceramic jug that is dated to the late
Orientalising period (\textit{fig. 99}). It is an amalgam of beast and bird characteristics, while
the neck of the jug is painted with an all-over pattern that could be said to represent

\textsuperscript{568} Yalouris, \textit{Greek Art of the Aegean Islands}, op. cit., p. 153; A Rhodian diadem, with sphinxes and
rosettes, found on Kos, is said to be a type which originated in Assyria.
\textsuperscript{569} Anderson Black, \textit{A History of Jewels}, op. cit., p. 63.
\textsuperscript{570} ditto, pp. 68–69.
\textsuperscript{571} Yalouris, \textit{Greek Art of the Aegean Islands}, op. cit., pp. 176–177.
feathers or scales. It could not be mistaken for an eagle-head even though the influences of Assyrian imagery were widespread in the Greek islands. The eagle as a symbol of all-powerful and personal majesty that was so appropriate for the Assyrian status quo was hardly appropriate in a democratic Greek context, and does not seem to have migrated to Greece with the other West Asian motifs. The magnificently detailed and unusual griffin suckling her young forms an incised and hammered cutout blazon for a shield. This was made in Crete, apparently, is dated to the late seventh century BC, and is one of several blazons found at Olympia (fig. 68 d.).

The rise and development of metal-working techniques, first in Minoan Bronze Age Crete of the second millennium BC, and later, by the seventh century BC in Etruria and by the sixth century BC in the Aegean islands and in mainland Greece, can reasonably be connected with Troy and its reputation as a major and long-established centre of metal-working. The fact that there were trade and migration patterns between Asia Minor and the Aegean region from Mycenaean times seems to imply that Troy was an important, original source of knowledge and skills in metal-working for the peoples of the Aegean.

572 Boardman, Greek Art, op. cit., p. 49, pl 44.
573 ditto, p. 52.
The Tree of Life

The superimposition of oral myths and legends one upon the other, from time immemorial, makes the task of trying to discover sources for the origins of the concept of the Tree of Life virtually impossible. Innumerable variations of the visual image of the concept seem to occur, or are claimed to occur, in almost every culture and epoch.

One of the problems with this very common image is that it is frequently not possible to tell whether, in its use as an artefact image, it has been intended as a bearer of mythical and symbolic meanings or whether it was simply a visual representation of a familiar and valued object in the natural world. In some regions, in the arid regions of Western Asia, for instance, trees were precious and had to be cultivated with great care. They were often grown and tended in highly organised and irrigated garden systems, as in Persia, Babylon and in later Iran. In this situation it is not difficult to see how the concept of a tree would accumulate ideas about preciousness, fecundity, the supply of food, and its importance for the reasonable survival of the community. As a corollary it would be associated with concepts of unseen, and therefore heavenly powers of creation and growth.

As discussed earlier in the chapter Image and Order, there are few, if any, marks in Paleolithic parietal or portable art which might be identified as representing trees. It would seem that the tree was not added to the vocabulary of visual imagery until after the Neolithic lifestyle and the development of agriculture had provided the foundations for urbanised and highly organised lifestyles. It then took its place as a stylised motif, with animal, human and bird life. There does not seem to have been any earlier naturalistic or stylised representation of the tree which could have acted as a precursor.

In the cultures of Western Asia the tree begins to appear in the first half of the third millennium BC, but only as incidental imagery which barely indicates a landscape
scenario for a herdsman and his bull. This is on a carved steatite bowl from Khafaje, Mesopotamia (fig. 100).\textsuperscript{574} The offering-stand, the “Ram caught in the thicket” found at Ur, and discussed earlier in the chapter on The Artefact and Baudrillard, has a representation of what could be seen as a tree. It has a central post or trunk, with forked branches near the top, and on which the ram, or goat, rests his forelegs (fig. 101). Lloyd suggests:

“...the gold and lapis goat clearly has more than mere decorative significance. For the Sumerians the goat was the personification of virility; and this figure, with the emblems of vegetation...must symbolize dual aspects of fertility, animal and vegetable. There is a contemporary hymn in which Tammuz himself is apostrophized as ‘Leading Goat of the Land’...”\textsuperscript{575}

This symbolism may be connected with universal mythologies surrounding the disappearance of a god or goddess of vegetation (a descent into hell), and his or her subsequent reappearance in the Spring, and the rebirth of vegetation.\textsuperscript{576} It is extraordinary that there does not seem to be any previous representations of the tree which might have led up to this extremely powerful imagery. But this lack of evidence may be, of course, one of the misfortunes of archaeology, where vital evidence, if any exists, has not yet been found.

From Finland to Western Asia there seems to have been an ancient belief that the sky was supported by one or more columns. Throughout the ages upright stones and mountain tops have been regarded as the bearers of the heavens, and cult-centres have been built on high places. Among some Germanic peoples there is a long-standing custom of raising a monument on very high ground, made from a single tree-trunk, and the Saxons called it the “giant column”. The sky-supporting column has been identified as a great tree, a great oak, whose branches spread across the sky. Cult-centres were also built in woods

\textsuperscript{574} Lloyd, The Art of the Ancient Near East, op. cit., pp. 88, 90.
\textsuperscript{575} ditto, pp. 89, 94–95.
\textsuperscript{576} Grimal, Larousse World Mythology, op. cit., p. 83.
below, Fig. 100: Steatite bowl with tree motifs, Mesopotamia, c. 2500 BC. AAMB Brit Mus

right, Fig. 101: Tree motif, “Ram caught in the thicket”; offering stand, c. 2800-2600 BC. Uruk, Mesopotamia. AAM Brit Mus

below right, Fig. 102: Pair of dragons chasing through clouds. Tomb decoration. 11th C. China. Ch Orn
and forests where one tree, or one kind of tree, might be endowed with sanctity, and given the title of the Tree of Life.\footnote{A. Sauvageot, “Finland-Ugria: Magic Animals”, Larousse World Mythology; ditto, pp. 424–425.} In northern Europe the oak and the ash trees were endowed with sacred significance, and in ancient Greek theogony the laurel, and groves of laurel, were sacred and served as shrines apparently, before the building of temples of wood and stone was developed to house the local deities. And the leaves of the laurel were used for the crowns of victory for the athletes in the games at Olympia. The goddess Athena, daughter of Zeus, was invited to become the patron of Athens when she struck the ground with her spear and brought forth an olive tree which was believed to symbolise peace and long patience.\footnote{Grimal, Larousse World Mythology, op. cit., p. 130; also, Graves, The Greek Myths, vol. 1, # 16 c., d.; Grimal’s version says that there was competition between the god Poseidon and Athena for the honour of becoming the patron deity of Athens. Poseidon struck the ground with his trident and brought forth salt water, while Athena produced the much more useful olive tree. Graves’ version has Poseidon claiming possession of Attica by thrusting his trident into the acropolis at Athens where a well of sea-water gushed out, while Athena, at a later time, came and planted the first olive tree by the well. Judgment by the gods was handed down in favour of Athena.}

It would probably be difficult to find a culture, which at some time, did not use a tree of some kind as a visual symbol for ideas and myths connected with the mysteries of creation, life, death and after-life and fertility. The dynastic Egyptians used a stylised form of a tree as one of the many symbolic amulets. In the palaces of Assyria there are Sacred Trees in the bas-relief sculptures which are anointed, tended and watered by the winged deities referred to earlier. And in the earlier chapter Animal Style a fragment of felt from one of the frozen tombs of Pazyryk is recorded which describes what is believed to be The Great Goddess, shown holding, what is called by Rice, a Tree of Life and granting audience to a rider (fig. 96 a.).\footnote{Rice, Ancient Arts of Central Asia, op. cit., pp. 38–39.} The Chinese endow various trees with significant symbolism. The peach represents longevity, the pine is constancy in friendship (it maintains its greenery throughout the winter), the plum shows courage (it is the first to bloom before the winter snows have gone). And in Christian theology the cross of the crucifixion is referred to as the Tree, and it carries with it age-old ideas about death and rebirth, or resurrection. The problem with much of the symbolism associated
with the Tree is that, before the myths and legends of a culture were written down, they had existed in pre-literate ages, passed down by word of mouth, and were no doubt varied to suit the audience of the time and place. And as one group or society overcame or filtered into another, the myths of both became inextricably mixed. But despite the many and often confused symbolic meanings, the concept has a commonality that suggests it is an image of archetypal significance, perhaps analogous with the concepts of birth, growth, fruitfulness, decay and death. The infinite number of variations and differences also suggest that the physical representations of the concept of a tree are frequently of local invention, unless diffusion from elsewhere can be proven.

One of the most clearly visualised of the Tree of Life symbols is that of Yggdrasil in Nordic mythology. It is an ash tree of fantastic size and amazing characteristics. The whole world lies in the shadow of its branches, its topmost branches reach the sky while its roots go deep into the earth. Miraculous dew falls upon it and gives it perpetual life and it is always green. One of its roots goes down to Urd's well, the Fountain of Youth that is guarded by a group of goddesses, the Norns, who rule the course of time and the destinies of men. The other name for the tree therefore is the Tree of Destiny. Another root goes down to Niflheim, land of ice and snow and source of all the rivers of the world. A third root extends to the abode of the giants, where there is eternal frost, and reaches the fountain of Mimir, which is the fountain of wisdom. Through this triple origin, the universal Tree is connected with the three worlds of gods, giants and men. It is also connected with the past (which is known to Mimir) and with the future, through the Norns. Birds and animals of all kinds dwell in various parts of the tree, but at the top there is an eagle, and at the base, a dragon or serpent who gnaws away at the roots.580

When discussing trees in the migration imagery of the first millennium BC Laszlo quotes a Siberian prayer which addresses the tree as an object of sacred veneration:

"...Thou hast raised my white cattle, hast tended to my black cattle, hast taken care of my birds and crows, and hast kept together the fishes of my dark waters..."581

The inference is that by this time, if not earlier, the ecological importance of the tree was not only being recognised, but was also being used as a symbol of deity and power.

As early as 1897 Philpot discussed the worship of the Sacred Tree in religion and myth, and attempted to trace its origins and connections with gods, demons, tree-spirits, oracles, Paradise, May celebrations and Christmas. She writes:

"...most, if not all races...have regarded the tree as the home, haunt or embodiment of a spiritual essence...this belief has left innumerable traces in ancient art and literature, has largely shaped the usages and legends of the peasantry, and impressed its influence on the ritual of almost all the primitive religions of mankind...the tree...(is) closely connected with spiritual potency..."582

As with any artefact imagery the many expressive forms of the Tree are both limited and expanded by the processes which make the visual expression communicable. And they will bear the imprint of the society's predilections, and reflect to some extent the nature and talents of the maker. And therefore, as stated previously, any form of expression must be a distortion of the original concept.

581 Laszlo, Arts of the Migration Period, op. cit., p. 105.
The Dragon in China

It is very curious that ancient cultures of both the Asiatic East and the European West developed awesome and imaginary creatures, sometimes with wings and usually with fish-, lizard- or snake-like scales and forms, often breathing fire, and generally referred to in ancient lore as dragons. The ubiquitous dragon-image is surrounded by many questions. For instance, is the dragon an example of diffusionary imagery? Did the concept and the imagery spread right across the ancient world as a result of trade, migration or conquest? Was it the result of locally inventive genius, born out of local needs and circumstances? Or can it be recognised as archetypal imagery, and therefore common to all humankind, but expressed in regional and temporal variations?

From time immemorial it would seem that the mysteries of the cosmos and elemental phenomena have been the themes of mythic tales which purport to explain or rationalise them. Their subsequent physical realisation and expression through artefact imagery has frequently taken the form of imaginary and symbolic creatures such as the dragon, who could be capable of bringing the viewer/user into desired states of comprehension, fear, awe, worship, humility, acceptance or obedience. Universal awareness of the unknowable, and the desire to understand the cosmic mysteries, has produced myths, legends, beliefs, and ultimately imagery in totally unconnected societies, that bear remarkable similarities to each other in their essentials. And this is even though they may have been created spontaneously, in geographic isolation, within the collective consciousness of any given society.

The dragon, however, is different. Its imagery has appeared from most ancient times in both the East and the West, but the concepts associated with it in the two regions are totally opposite. In Western cultures the dragon-image has varied between monstrous underwater serpents and fire-breathing land creatures, all with malevolent intent. They have symbolised evil, misfortune and punishment while the heroes who fought and killed
them have personified courage, truth, justice and goodness. Even before Christianity incorporated dragon imagery into its literature, the dragon was an inbuilt factor in Western mythology as part of a didactic, moralising intent.

The earliest known dragon-imagery, however, seems to be Oriental and to come from the ceremonial bronzes of Shang China. Mostly portrayed as either wingless, or occasionally with minimal flame-like wings, it has similar characteristics to those of lizards, snakes and alligators (fig. 102). Rawson points out that the early features of the dragon, a long sinuous body, the short bottle horn and the large head are reproduced in the character for long (lung) which is the Mandarin Chinese character for dragon. If these are the sources of the physical characteristics of the Chinese dragon, the conceptual leap which linked the dragon-image to potent symbolism related to climatic and geographical conditions, was still enormous. There must have been dire reasons in the first place for the creative development of such an awesome and magical monster who might be able to help to control or improve the forces of nature. In discussing the heading “Dragons and Fish” in the catalogue of the Emperor’s Hui-tsung’s art collection (Song dynasty, 1,101–1,125 AD) Sullivan comments upon the attitude of the “man in the street” to the dragon:

“...the dragon was a benevolent and generally auspicious creature, bringer of rain and emblem of the Emperor. To the Ch’an Buddhists he was far more than that. When Mu Ch’i painted a dragon suddenly appearing from the clouds, he was depicting a cosmic manifestation and at the same time symbolising the momentary, elusive vision of truth that comes to the Ch’an adept. To the Taoists, the dragon was the Tao itself, an all-pervading force which momentarily reveals itself to us, only to vanish again and leave us wondering if we had actually seen it at all...”

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584 ditto, p. 93.
Sullivan goes on to quote a description of a dragon by a Japanese writer, Okakura:

"...coiled in the unfathomable depths of the sea, he awaits the time when he slowly rouses himself... He unfolds himself in the storm clouds...his claws are in the forks of the lightning, his scales...glisten in the bark of rain-swept pine trees. His voice is heard in the hurricane..."586

The fact that there are alligators in the Yangtze River, which hibernate, and arouse themselves in the Spring when the beneficial rains are due, seems to provide readymade evidence that there may be a connection between the alligator and the Spring storms. It is a short leap of the collective imagination to identify and mythologise such a coincidence, especially when it is remembered that China's agricultural population has, through the millennia, been at the mercy of major climatic disasters of drought, storm and flood. The desperation felt at the helplessness of humankind in such circumstances must have assisted in the invention of a superhuman creature who could rise to the clouds and the heavens to intercede. The rising of the dragon to the heavens was a constant idea; Siren quotes a comment about the dragon from Ching Hao's Pi Fa Chi (10th C AD):

"...the (old pine-tree) in the middle was the largest. The bark...was overgrown with green lichen and covered by scales. It rose to the sky like a coiling dragon, trying to reach the clouds..."587

The first emperor Fu Hsi, shrouded in uncertain and much edited mythologies of pre-Shang times, is supposed to have been human down to the waist, and serpent from there down, as also was his female companion Nu-kua.588 The connection of the emperor with the dragon-image seems to go back into antiquity, and through many dynasties, up to the overthrow of the Qing, the Dragon-Emperor has presided at the Spring rituals to bring on the fertilising rains. He was suitably attired in gorgeous robes heavily

586 ditto, p. 179.
embroidered with symbols of religion, power and majesty, and the dragon was a dominant motif (fig. 74).

While the use of the dragon throughout the centuries as a symbol of the emperor is constant, it is not always exclusive to the Emperor, and there are innumerable examples which it is impossible to include here. Rawson states:

"...further symbolic qualities accrued to the dragon...the dragon represented both the forces of *yang* and creation, and controlled both the heavens and the rain...At some stage the dragon came to symbolise the emperor... However, this symbolism was far from exclusive; dragons could be used on buildings, dress and utensils that were in no way connected with the emperor..."\(^{589}\)

Rawson goes on to cite examples of stone carvings from the tomb of the Emperor Wudi (1st century BC) and the tomb of the Emperor Gaozong and his consort, of the Tang period (7th–8th centuries AD).\(^{590}\) She also discusses other uses of the imagery. She cites the use of the dragon as one of the animals of the four directions, or the four compass points, and known as the *si shen*. They were the tortoise (entwined with a snake) or Black Warrior of the North, the Red Bird of the South, (similar to the phoenix),\(^{591}\) the White Tiger of the West, and the Green Dragon of the East. She records that one of the earliest uses of these creatures to symbolise the directions of the heavens is on a lacquer casket dated to the late fifth century BC which has a tiger in the West and a dragon in the East. In four panels of a tomb tablet of the Northern Wei (385–535 AD) the animals of the four directions (including the dragon) are shown. In 130 BC, at the Han capital of Chang’an, the emperor Wudi, (founder of the Silk Roads trade) set up an altar for a new cult of the Supreme Unity, Taiyi. At ceremonies to Taiyi formal poems were sung or recited, and Rawson quotes a portion of one of these:

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\(^{589}\) Rawson, *Chinese Ornament; the Lotus and the Dragon*, op. cit., pp. 94–95.
\(^{590}\) ditto, p. 95; also, dragon motifs also appear as crudely carved mirror-images on a wooden lintel, in the ruins at Niya; Marc Aurel Stein, *Serindia*, Oxford U.K., 1921, Vol. I, facing page 227, Vol. IV, pl. XVIII.
\(^{591}\) ditto, p. 99.
"... The chariot of the divinity is made of clouds. It is drawn by winged dragons; innumerable are its feathered pennants..."592

The examples continue, on and on, in metal, ceramic, jade, lacquer and textiles. The varying styles of their rendering provide evidence of their dating. For example, the three-clawed dragon, for instance, hardly appears in the decoration of porcelain after the Yuan dynasty (1,279–1,368 AD); it is overtaken by the five-clawed dragon. The dragons depicted on the porcelains and in the embroideries of the Wan-li period of the Ming (1,573–1,620 AD) feature a strange full face that resembles somewhat the face of a bat. Throughout the centuries the dragon developed from the simple outlines of the Shang dragon to incredibly complex figurations embroidered on the Imperial robes, or painted in polychrome on the porcelains of the late Qing.

Unlike the phoenix, the tiger and the deer the dragon appears only rarely on the Western imitations of Chinese porcelain. This may have been because the dragon-associated symbolism in the West bore no relation to beneficent symbolisms of China, and the evil connotations of the Western dragon image were hardly likely to be popular in the eighteenth century drawing-rooms of Europe. The Chinese dragon is probably one of the most outstanding examples of imagery that, while visualising intercessionary means for coping with universal problems, has almost always been of purely local genius and invention. The one possible exception to this is the use of flames which sometimes seem to be ambivalent substitutes for wings. Rawson suggests that this may be an influence from the Near East.593

592  ditto, pp. 90, 91.
593  ditto, p. 96.
The Dragon in the West

The symbolism that is associated with the plethora of dragon imagery in the West is so utterly different in most respects from that of the dragon imagery of China, that it seems astounding that two such differing sets of concepts should be visualised in forms that are similar in many ways. There are a few basic ideas in common, such as superhuman power, the ability to live both in water and on land, and the common use of physical features such as a writhing snake-like body, scales, fire-breathing, wings, and "horrible talons" (as they are described in Beowulf). Some of these attributes may be due partly to the fact that in virtually all ancient cultures there has been the use, for symbolic purposes, of the snake. Often known by the name, serpent, its characteristics have been blended with elaborated forms over the centuries that have been efforts to visualise superhuman and metaphysical powers.  

Neither in the West nor the East does the dragon imagery seem to appear until the host societies have achieved urbanisation and social complexities. This could suggest that the imagery was developed in situations where there was a need to organise communally, and to clarify and visualise long-held superstitions, fears and beliefs. In both regions the dragon has acquired the status of public symbolism, which suggests that they were used as a means of setting up or confirming orthodoxies, and of controlling and influencing public concepts of behaviour, belief and morality.

The Chinese dragon-imagery group embodies positive, beneficent virtues and characteristics, whereas the Western dragon-imagery represents anti-social behaviour, such as violence, terror, greed and brutality. This visual expression of social evils forces the development and expression of opposite concepts, of courage, honour, high moral virtues and values in the form of a hero, king, saint or god of some kind who is a

594 Oxford Concise English Dictionary: the word 'serpent' is derived from the Latin verb 'serpere' = to creep.
champion of social good. The personalisation of these abstract and philosophical concepts have made them easily comprehensible and memorable. The hero (good) fought the dragon (evil) and thus provided subject matter for mythic poems and tales that were recounted orally, and were known and remembered as moralising tales among the populace that demonstrated good and evil behaviour patterns before the invention of writing.

The ancient Saxon-English epic poem, *Beowulf*, is a prime example of this. Probably composed in the eighth century AD, it enfolds other Nordic tales and legends within the tale of *Beowulf*, that are equally concerned with morality and the social good, and that were inherited from the dim, unrecorded past of Northern European oral mythologies. The heroic nephew of a Swedish king, Beowulf, epitomised the virtues of courage and integrity and superhuman strength in his battles with the three monsters of evil intent.

"...Seamen...report that he has the strength of thirty men in the grip of his hand..."595

The *Beowulf* epic is an interesting mingling of Christian and pagan mythologies that have a common purpose, that of showing how good must conquer evil even though the price may be very high, even the death of the hero. The creatures that symbolise evil are called by different names at various times throughout the epic; the term “dragon” appears to be interchangeable with “worm”, “serpent”, “demon”, “sea-monster”, and sometimes they are described as half-human. For example, in one of the peripheral legends that is included in the Beowulf epic two of the terms are used in one sentence, to describe the same creature:

"...(Sigemund’s) sword drove through the prodigious Worm so that the blade stuck in the rock opposite and the Dragon was annihilated..."596

596  ditto, pp. 17-19, 29, 103.
Neither is there much distinction between sea-creatures, reptiles and dragons, in the efforts to create terror and loathing in the minds of the audience for these symbols of evil:

"...swarms of reptiles in the water, and strange dragons groping in the depths, while monsters, serpents and fierce brutes...make disastrous forays..."\(^{597}\)

These various "hideous monsters" with "horrible talons" and "loathsome claws", whilst pagan in origin, fitted very well with the messages of morality and the triumph of good over evil that were also central to the aims of Christianity. By the eighth century AD the Nordic invaders had settled well in England, and Saxon society was sophisticated, cultured and Christianised, and apparently at ease with the mingling of ancient pagan myths with those of Christianity. Constantly, throughout the saga of Beowulf the moralistic vocabulary and the language of Christianity is used. The vanquishing of the monster Grendel's avenging mother by the hero Beowulf is claimed to be God's victory:

"... For God brought about the victory...the holy and omniscient ruler of the sky settled the issue in favour of the right..."\(^{598}\)

But ancient pagan powers were also brought in to help in the struggle to banish evil. On his return to the land of the Geats, Beowulf recounts his fight with Grendel the monster:

"...(Grendel) dangled an enormous and extraordinary glove secured with weird clasps and made with demoniac skill from the skins of dragons..."\(^{599}\)

At the end of the epic Beowulf, a virtuous king for fifty years, battled with another dragon, who wrongfully guarded an ancient treasure, but the old king was mortally

\(^{597}\) ditto, p. 47.  
\(^{598}\) ditto, p. 63.  
\(^{599}\) ditto, pp. 76, 107; Note 18; an enormous glove is the characteristic property of the trolls in old Norse legends.
wounded, and in revenge, the dragon was killed by a kinsman of Beowulf. The dead monster is described as:

"... the weird and loathsome Worm... Fearful, glittering, scorched with fire, the Dragon measured fifty feet where it lay..."  

To conclude, it must be assumed that, on the above evidence, the dragon imagery of the East and the dragon imagery of the West were both products of local genius and invention. But there is yet another version of the dragon image which can be seen to have been the result of the mingling of Western concepts with Eastern imagery, and that is the dragon featured in Persian manuscript illustrations of the fourteenth century AD, and these were discussed earlier in the chapter on Symbolism, the Icon and the Transfer of Potency.

600 ditto, p. 98.
The Arabesque

The prohibition, by some sects of Islam, of the representation of the human figure in Islamic art severely limited the subject repertoire in the designing and decorating of artefacts. Geometric and interlaced geometric forms, plant forms, and decorative versions of the Islamic script became major motifs which gave to Islamic imagery a continuous unity over the centuries that was not experienced in the art and imagery of other cultures. But although it has the sameness of characteristics that is easily recognised whether in architecture, metalwork, textiles or ceramics, there is an incredible richness and variation on these three themes. Much of the richness comes from the absorption into Islamic imagery of the local art and stylistics of the many provinces and regions which were taken over to become part of the Islamic empire. Lane writes that the progress of Islamic art was linked closely with the fortunes of the dynastic families of various regions who contended for control of Islam. As centres of power moved from city to city, the craftworkers followed the patronage, taking imagery and techniques from one region to another. This is one of the explanations for the uniformity of style and imagery at any given time (and also the valid excuse for the difficulties encountered when attempts are made to sort and classify Islamic imagery, especially in ceramics!)

One of the most persistent and ubiquitous motifs in Islamic art that appears under the heading of plant forms is the arabesque, which Lane proposes is a degeneration from the Sasanian palmette, and which he calls the “split-leaf” or “half-palmette”. (But does this not present a problem when it is considered that the palmette motif is essentially static and centre-balanced, while the arabesque is essentially dynamic, assymetric and flowing?) Linear, and based on plant forms such as the palm-leaf and the vine, it is capable of endless variation from free naturalism to precisely stylised repetition, and has been used not only as a motif in itself, but as a border and as a space-filling unit. Potters

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have been using it on Islamic ceramics since at least the ninth century AD.602 Despite the fact that the arabesque does not actually exist in nature, it has acquired a “natural” look which makes it seem believably real until it is examined closely. It is a flat, curvilinear leaf-like, and often complex finial that provides a visual climax to stems and tendrils that might otherwise seem inconclusive in their indeterminate wanderings over the surfaces of tiles, manuscripts, ceramics and metal forms (fig. 103). In common with many other motifs the arabesque can be seen to be bold, raw and vigorous in its early archaic development in the ninth century. But as techniques, and familiarity with its form and possibilities, are explored it becomes more finely drawn and complex, to the point where, by the late thirteenth century AD, sheer virtuosity drowns its earlier life and vigour.603

It has to be seen as a local invention, in the sense that it has not been imported from anywhere outside the Islamic empire. There does not appear to be any symbolic meaning attached to it. As a usefully decorative motif, it spread, with the redevelopment of the overland trade routes across Asia at the time of the Mongol domination of Asia and China,604 and was used extensively by the Chinese on porcelain from the fourteenth century on.605 During the Mongol reign in China (1,279–1,368 AD) the Chinese potter adapted to the less rigorous demands of Mongol patronage, and to their taste for vigorous and rich decoration. Zones of richly drawn plant forms were under-glaze painted in brilliant cobalt blue, imported from Persia, and, mingling with the recognisable plant and flower forms, was the arabesque, which continued to be a useful background and border decoration, and is evident during the Ming and the Qing dynasties. (fig. 104). 606 So the arabesque, for the Chinese, was an imported motif originally, and is evidence of diffusionary activities.

602 ditto, p. 6, pls 5B, 8A, 12B, 25 A, B
603 ditto, pl. 96B.
605 ditto, p. 35, pl. 22.
Fig. 103 Dish, lustre-painted; with arabesque motifs, Rayy, Persia. Late 12th C AD. E 1s A

Fig. 104 Dish, underglaze blue porcelain; with arabesque motifs. Ming dynasty. China YPS

Fig. 105 The chaitya arch: used in the gold Bimaran reliquary (above) height 6.5cm; and in stone panel with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, height 10.1 cm. Gandhara 2nd-3rd C AD. Ch Orn Brit Mus
In Islamic imagery the arabesque is also used both as a textural background space-filler and as a decorative unit in its own right. Although it appears, fairly crudely drawn, on some thirteenth century Syrian ceramics, it seems to have been used to a much greater extent from the early twelfth century on by the potters of Persia, who developed the image into one of great refinement, variation and delicacy (fig 103). Where the arabesque is used as a decorative unit in its own right it is treated in the same way as other units; that is, they are contained within borders, or in panels that are frequently geometric.

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607 Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery*, op. cit., pls. 54C, 56C, 82.
608 ditto, pls. 55A, B.
609 ditto, pls. 38B, 52A, C, 53B, C, 56B, C.
610 ditto, pls 52A, 53B, 54C, 56B, 67A, B.
The Cloud Collar, the Lotus and Ogival Panels

These three methods of the decorative empanelling of freely drawn plant-like and flower-like motifs are generally regarded as being essentially Chinese, (see Rawson and Medley) and are seen as having played a prominent role in the ornamentation of Chinese porcelain. Often, the lines of demarcation between these three systems of enclosure become blurred, however, and this is now discussed in an effort to determine how much, if any, of their intrinsic character and stylistics is a product of local invention by the Chinese, and how much can be seen to have been influenced by outside sources.

The sources of the three appear to be very complex, and Rawson suggests that the ogee form, which has some relevance to all three, originated in Buddhist architectural decoration in India, even as early as the third century BC. This is the chaitya arch which, in examples from later Gandharan stupa decoration of second to third century AD, has an archaic form of a double curvature that is the essential characteristic of the ogee form (fig. 105). This was to develop into increasingly elaborate panels in Chinese ornament after the introduction of Buddhism. There is a bowl of gold, which was found near X’ian and dated to the seventh-eighth century Tang period. Its sides have two rows of continuous ogival repousse panels bordered by half-palmettes, and which enclose finely chased or engraved animal, bird and plant forms. Rawson suggests that this kind of vessel may have been inspired by lobed and panelled silverware, imported into China from Persia by the Toba (Turkish) people who ruled part of China as the Northern Wei dynasty from 386–585 AD (fig. 106). Sullivan discusses the waning of the domination of bronze design in silver and gold objects, and maintains that under Near Eastern influence silverworking was emancipated. He writes:

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611 Rawson, *Chinese Ornament, the Lotus and the Dragon*, op. cit., pp. 48, pl. 1, 51.
612 ditto, pp. 50, 51, fig. 26.
fig. 106 Gold pedestal bowl with equal panels. Iranian inspired form, but figuration of deer, birds, flowers is in Chinese idiom. Tang dynasty, 8th C AD.
"...What is astonishing about this (Shosoin) collection is the triumphant confidence with which the Chinese craftsman...has mastered foreign forms and techniques... Many of the shapes, such as the stem cup, foliated bowl and flat platter with animal designs in repousse...are of Persian origin..."\(^{614}\)

The significance of the appearance of the lobe and the ogival panel from the time of the Northern Wei has to be seen in the context of the Silk Roads trading and the transference of goods, and therefore of iconography and stylistics, from West and Central Asia into China.\(^{615}\) Bronze and silverworking in Western and Central Asia had been a highly developed inheritance not only from the Hellenistic period and the days of Roman domination, but to a greater extent from the earlier metal-working traditions of the nomadic tribes of Asia, such as the Scythians and the Sassanians. Rawson agrees that while works associated with Buddhism were a major channel for the carrying of Western styles to the borders of China, the Silk Roads trade in goods was also responsible for the transference of Western styles and designs. She quotes one example; a chalice found at Datong, the Northern Wei capital. It has complex bas relief and chased vine-scroll decoration which was unknown in China before the fifth century AD but which was a popular motif in Palmyra.\(^{616}\)

The foliated or bracketed edge, which first appeared in the moulded porcelains of the Song period (960–1279 AD), can be seen to have derived from Tang silver forms, such as mirror-backs and foliated dishes (fig. 107).\(^{617}\) From a craftworker’s point of view there seems to be a sound reason for such an edging to have been developed in silver. The edge of a thin sheet of metal is vulnerable to dinting and bending. The rolled and foliated shaping of the edge gives greater resilience and strength to the form, and there is less likelihood of distortion from careless handling. But there seems little point, apart


\(^{615}\) Rawson, *Chinese Ornament, the Lotus and the Dragon*, op. cit., pp. 57, 65, fig. 43.

\(^{616}\) ditto, pp. 39–40, fig. 15.

\(^{617}\) ditto, p. 78, fig. 58, p. 102, fig. 83.
Fig. 103a Lustre-painted wares. Persia (Rayy); late 12th century
x. Ht. 7\(\frac{3}{4}\) in. Godman Collection
b. Dated 575/1179 A.D. Ht. 5\(\frac{1}{2}\) in. British Museum
c. Diam. 11\(\frac{1}{4}\) in. Victoria and Albert Museum. (pages 57, 58)

Lustre-painted wares. Persia (Rayy); late 12th–early 15th century
x. Vase in form of woman and child. Berlin State Museum
b. Ht. 7 in. Washington, Freer Gallery
c. Diam. 14 in. Cleveland Museum of Art. (pages 57, 58)
from decoration and taste preferences, in using such a complex edge that, in porcelain, is vulnerable to chipping.

To add further to the difficulty of tracking the origins of the ogee, pointed and double-curved forms which are similar to the petals of one species of lotus, have been used as a rosette motif in a Buddhist ceiling painting in the Dunhuang Caves, that is dated to the Sui dynasty (581–618 AD) (fig. 109 a.). Although many-petalled, this form has something in common with the nature of the later ogival panel (fig. 108).618 And in the Yuan period, the centre of one porcelain dish has been decorated with concentric ogival panels in what could be read as a petalled flower form. Although some of these motifs can be read also as discrete lappet forms and, possibly variations of the lingh-zhi motif, the whole figuration can be perceived also as a stylised version of the lotus flower (fig. 107).619 A further complication is the use of the double curve in the halo forms around Buddha and Bodhisattva figures, which Sullivan calls “flame mandorlas”, but which might be traced back to the original chaitya arch mentioned above. Many variations of this form developed in China and Korea, behind such figures as the Sakyamuni, Amitabha and Maitreya.620 (They are universal also in the sacred imagery of South East Asia, but consideration of this region’s imagery is outside the scope of this present thesis.)

The increasingly complex ogivally shaped panels that were used first in Tang silver and gold, and later on porcelain, were tightly and decisively drawn, but within them the Chinese decorator enclosed a plethora of freely conceived flowers, plants, animals and birds, many drawn from China’s mythology and symbolism. But it is not known to what extent these images continued to contain such significances. Apart from ceremonial use,

618 ditto, p. 70, fig. 48a; p. 27, fig. 9; the lotus species with the pointed petal form is, according to Rawson, *Nelumbo nucifera*.
619 ditto, p. 27, fig. 9, p. 103, fig. 86.
620 ditto, p. 65, figs. 43a, b; also, Sullivan, *The Arts of China*, op. cit., p. 111, fig. 115, p. 114, fig. 118; Kim Chewon and Kim Won-Yong, *The Arts of Korea*, London, U.K., Thames and Hudson, 1966, p. 110, pl. XVII, where the mandorla is referred to as boat-shaped; p. 148, pls. 76, 77; here, the mandorlas are referred as haloes; also, Sullivan, *The Arts of China*, op. cit., p. 111, fig. 115, p. 114, fig. 118.
Fig. 107 Four foliated artefacts, in silver, laquer and porcelain 10th, 14th and 15th C. China — Ch. On
and in imperial palaces, Rawson suggests that it is doubtful whether, by the fourteenth century, they were any more than merely pleasing, acceptably conventional and marketable ornamentation. But the interplay of opposites, of tightly disciplined and controlling forms (male?) and loose naturalistic and meandering figurations (female?) produces a harmonious whole in Chinese ornamentation that brings to mind one of the most fundamental concepts in the culture; the balancing harmony of the yang and the yin.

It is interesting that the concept of controlling figuration within disciplinary empanelling is a characteristic also of Islamic iconography and is common in the various media of imagery. Geometric panelling in the forms of the hexagon and the eight-pointed star, are used extensively in architectural tile and mosaic decoration, in bronzes and in ceramics. On a shallow dish from Samarkand, Persia (c. 800–1,000 AD) there is the use of a four-petalled lotus (or are they ogival panels?) as a decoration of the cavetto. From available evidence it would appear that there is a tendency for panelling to become more curvilinear in character in the eastern Islamic regions which had closer contacts with China and its stylistics. But this supposition needs further investigation. As stated earlier, the migratory movements of craftworkers who followed the regional shifts in Islam, in power and therefore in patronage, as well as the patterns of trade across Asia between east and west make it difficult sometimes to identify origins and influences. Crowe suggests that the petalled motif on the Samarkand bowl, mentioned above, might well be a lotus mandala, based on original Buddhist designs. All of these

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621 Rawson, ditto, pp. 12–14.
623 Lane, Early Islamic Pottery, op. cit., fig. 19A
considerations point to a long tradition of the transference of ideas and imagery between the West and China in a complex interchange that fluctuated constantly over the centuries.

The highly stylised lotus panel on vertical, mei-ping and globular vase forms in Chinese porcelain came to be used extensively during the Yuan and Ming periods, and during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it was adopted in Iran (figs. 88, 108, 109 b.). Rawson proposes that some of the imported motifs imitate Chinese imagery so precisely that they must have been based on items imported from China. In fourteenth century manuscript illustrations from Persia, for instance, a number of Chinese motifs and stylistics have been included, such as cloud scrolls, magic mountains, dragons, tree and landscape forms.

The cloud collar is one of the most distinctive of the decorative enclosures on Chinese porcelains. According to Medley and Hobson it is referred to as the “ju-i” pattern, “lappet”, “lambrequin” and “ogival panel”. Rawson doubts one theory; that it is so named (yun jian) after a garment with a similar outline which was worn over the shoulders, and consisted of four lobed and pointed sections joined at the neckline. She maintains that there is no evidence of its use in textiles before the Yuan period, whereas the lobed panel was used as a decorative motif on artefacts as early as the Tang dynasty. It is a multi-lobed ogival panel with a pronounced ogee curvature at its peak, and a short concave neck or trunk. Joined to others, it frequently hangs down over the shoulder of a vessel (hence its labels, “lappet” and “lambrequin”), and encloses freely

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626 Medley, Yuan Porcelain and Stoneware, op. cit., 1974, figs. 41, 45A, B, 46.
627 Rawson, Chinese Ornament, the Lotus and the Dragon, op. cit., p. 147; also, Charleston, World Ceramics, London, U.K., Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd., 1968, p. 88, fig. 260, p. 96, fig. 284, p. 91, figs. 262, 263.
630 'lappet' = flap, or fold, ear-lobe; 'lambrequin' = short length of fabric draped over a mantel or window-frame; The Concise Oxford English Dictionary
631 Rawson, Chinese Ornament, the Lotus and the Dragon, op. cit., p. 133, fig. 119, p. 134, figs. 120, 121.
fig. 108. Detail, lotus panels on neck, cloud collar on shoulder, Yuan porcelains, 1279-1368 AD. China

fig. 109a. Lotus panel ceilings of Buddhist cave temples, Dunhuang, Gansu province, China; top, Sui dynasty 581-618 AD; below, early Tang dynasty 7th-8th C AD. Ch Orn

fig. 109b. Lobed and curvilinear panels, from the Anthology of Iskandar Sultan, Shiraz, Iran; 1410-1411 AD. Ch Orn Brit L
drawn flower, plant, animal and bird forms. Rawson points out that many of these seemingly true-to-life botanical representations have the appearance, at first, of authenticity but on closer inspection they can be seen to be non-realistic but imaginative allusions to specific natural forms.632

A Chinese porcelain jar of the Yuan period exploits all three methods of empanelling, as well as the arabesque; lotus panels on neck and high shoulder, cloud collars on the swelling of the shoulder, and a clever positive/negative border of hanging and upstanding cloud collar forms at the base. Around the middle of the jar there are eight-lobed ogival panels which enclose birds, water and dry-ground plants, and flowers. The background spaces are filled with curling, linear and closely packed vine-like stems, with arabesques, and the whole motif can be read as a variation of the classic scroll (fig. 88).633

While it can be said that the cloud collar in itself, is essentially a Chinese invention, it is, nevertheless, closely related to the characteristics of the ogival form. And it is possible that this, as claimed above, had its beginnings in early Indian and Gandharan architectural motif of the chaitya arch. The lotus petal panel appears to have been a local Chinese invention. When it is transferred to the West, and copied during the Chinoiserie period, on Islamic and on European tin-glazed earthenware imitations of Chinese porcelains, and in furniture details, it loses its original elegance and becomes a coarser, more aggressive and unsubtle shape (figs. 94, 110, 111). As Rawson says:

“... The details of the panels, being less familiar to the European potter than to the Chinese, are executed with rather less precision than on the Chinese prototype...”634

632 ditto, pp. 14, 103, fig. 86.
633 ditto, p. 128, fig. 114.
634 ditto, p. 12, fig. 4.
Fig. 112 Yuan porcelain, 14th C, China. Fig. 113, c.1765, England

Fig. 110 Lambeth delph (earthenware tin glazed) 17th C, England
Fig. 111 Suggested development of thunder-pattern motif

Top left: From Shou vein.

Top right: Identified with 雲 in Po in Tu, V, 3.

Middle left: Identified with 雲 in Po in Tu, V, 3.

Middle right: Identified with 雲 in Po in Tu, V, 3.

Bottom right: Cited in Shou vein in Zhou pm, II, 65. Also found in an inscription on a Chou vessel reproduced in a Japanese publication, Collections of Chinese Bronze Antiques.

Note: In Shou vein is given as the "ancient script" form of 回 "to revolve".
And in illustrations in fourteenth century Iranian literature, of thrones and other pieces of furniture, Rawson writes:

"...the position of the two...panels suggests that they were not entirely familiar to the artist...giving the impression that the artist had traced or copied them from another source..." 635

In manuscript and album illustration, and in carpet and ceramic decoration, however, many elegant variations are to be found in Turkey and Iran, from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, and are freely acknowledged to be of Chinese origin (fig. 109 b.). 636 During the Chinoiserie period in Europe there is considerable use of the ogival panel, and Rococo variations of it, in porcelain decoration, are in evidence in pieces from Sevres and Worcester (fig. 111). 637

635 ditto, pp. 158–161.
636 ditto.
The Seas Motif

In Chinese art the earliest visual expressions known at present, of land and water in context are featured in an impressed tomb tile from the Han dynasty, and in the handscroll “The Nymph of the Luo River” by Gu Gaizhi (Ku K’ai-chi, 345–c. 406 AD). Lakes and waterfalls are popular themes, written about by the Tang poets, and in the surviving Song dynasty copy of the Tang scroll, “Emperor Min Huang’s Journey to Shu” there are waterfalls, rivers and bridges, painted in great detail in a highly sophisticated and complex mountain landscape. But the manifestation of the ocean and waves does not appear on porcelains, according to available evidence, until it is used as a stylised and decorative border both on porcelains and in textiles. The continuous flowing rhythm of waves and water make it ideal for this purpose. Such an edging border, on porcelain, with a wider cavetto border or scroll pattern below, and a central panel featuring birds, animals, plants, flowers and trees, came by the Yuan dynasty, to be an almost standard system for the decoration of porcelains (fig. 112). But its use originally, was symbolic. It is supposed that it represented the Eastern seas, over which no one had ever been able to travel in order to reach the Blessed Isles. These were the islands believed to be inhabited by the Immortals of Daoism. Many rich men and emperors launched unsuccessful expeditions to reach the fabled isles, but there were stories of strange islands that disappeared in the clouds; no doubt mirages brought about by the climatic conditions on the ocean. But they remained a tantalising concept, and this probably led to the use of ocean waves as a decorative and referential symbol, and one that is without doubt, of Chinese origin in both its concept and stylisations.


The Thunder Pattern

The thunder pattern, so called, can be traced much farther back than it is possible to trace any of the ogival panel motifs. Its origins are clearly Chinese; it appears on the cast bronzes of the mid to late Shang dynasty, as a well-developed and stylised manifestation of spiral forms. Called lei-wen by the Chinese, it is classified as a background element in the fourth and fifth styles of the Anyang bronzes. According to Sullivan this name comes from its supposed resemblance to the the archaic form of the character lei, or thunder. Yetts draws up a table showing cloud and thunder characters in ancient scripts and in primitive (Shang and Zhou) ornamental motifs (fig. 113). Besides its association with the idea of thunder, and therefore storm-clouds, it is also used in association with Dao-die mask and dragon forms:

"... The bands of ornament of the body of the vessel are composed of repetitive patterns of tight spiral motives that are ultimately derived from the tao-t’ieh and dragon designs of the Shang and early Zhou period bronzes..."

In a discussion of regional styles Wen Fong considers the varying characteristics of the thunder pattern, but does not necessarily link the spiral or thunder pattern with the Dao-die mask and dragon motifs. But he makes an interesting point with regard to two vessels, and to one in particular. He considers that there is a dramatic example of the use of the thunder pattern as a contrast to the strong delineations of cicada forms and the Daode-die mask which epitomises the interacting of yin-yang forces, in a hu from the Shaanxi province:

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641 Wen Fong, ed., *The Great Bronze Age of China*, op. cit., pp. 31, 32, fig. 6, Nos. 21, 24, 53 and detail, p. 182.
"... (it shows) a further clarification of the main features of the tao-tie mask against the background spirals... a masterly exercise in the subtle interplay of positive and negative images..." 645

It might be an interesting exercise to explore the relationships, if any, between the Chinese thunder pattern and the use in Japanese, and in later (18-19th C) European iconography, of background-filling patterns in ceramics and textiles which tend to be labelled as "brocade patterns". This would require a good deal of further research, and the limitations of space preclude it from this study. But in a brief survey of the porcelains produced at Meissen, Sevres and Worcester, despite the evidence of widespread use of pictorial scenes and floral motifs which were close if not direct imitations of Chinese and Japanese designs, it would seem that the Japanese brocade patterns, and variations of them, were used in preference to the Chinese thunder pattern for background and border-filling. 646

645 Wen Fong, ed., The Great Bronze Age of China, p. 31.
646 Sandon, The Illustrated Guide to Worcester Porcelain, op. cit., figs. 48, 49; also, Watney, English Blue and White Porcelain of the 18th Century, op. cit., figs. 1D, 51C, 66D.
Part IV. DIFFUSION AND LOCAL INVENTION: an Australian example

Experiments in Earthenware and Porcelain

This section deals briefly with a group of artefacts and their imagery, made by myself between 1968 and 1992, in Sydney, Australia. Because I am the craftworker involved it would seem useful for me to relate these works to some of the issues which have been discussed in this thesis, because I can provide experiential and primary source information. It is unavoidable that this will be to a great extent, subjective, and possibly blind to some of the issues which an outsider might perceive, but my relationship with the issues discussed in the thesis is close, personal and the result of more than thirty years of being involved with my own and other craftworkers' artefacts. I am concerned to demonstrate with specific examples of ceramic artefacts the ways in which the craftworkers in Australia are deeply involved in the causal circumstances of two fundamental issues in the Australian culture; diffusion and local invention. To achieve this it is necessary to summarise very briefly the historical situation of artefact or craft-making in Australia, and this will help to place my own work contextually, theoretically and historically, as a craftworker in the second half of the twentieth century.

It is possible to observe in the Australian situation many processes of diffusion and local invention. They have been integral in all areas of the birth and development of non-aboriginal culture and society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Total dependence upon the imported concepts, ideas and goods, which came as cultural and material baggage with European migrants, diminished progressively with the discovery and development of local resources, both material and mental. The inevitable adaptation of imported and inherited techniques and skills to suit the peculiarities and nature of Australian circumstances and indigenous materials has generated, in some areas of artefact making in particular, characteristics that can be claimed to be of local Australian invention.
The situation after World War II, and the artefacts and their imagery which developed out of it, provides a clear example of this in Australia’s adaptive response to the international renaissance in the Western world of the making by hand of individual artefacts.\textsuperscript{647} It resulted, in Australia, in the blossoming of much creative effort that produced artefacts which, while philosophically and stylistically based in English, Japanese and Chinese traditions, were recognisably Australian. The particular group of artefacts to be studied here is my own adaptive and inventive work in earthenware and porcellainous clays. Diffusionary influences and the deliberate adoption of concept, style, material and technique have mingled intimately with the necessities of circumstance and the creative solutions achieved through local invention.

The state of mind in the post-war Western world together with the increased facility for fast communication allowed and encouraged the rapid transference internationally of cultural concepts which encouraged a kind of renaissance in the ideas of the nineteenth century Arts and Craft movement. Australia was also affected by this diffusionary spread, and the late nineteen fifties and the sixties was a time of cultural awakening, and with it came the urge to explore and experiment in greater depth the circumstances and the raw materials that were available in Australia. But local invention was underpinned by the diffusion of ideas from overseas. In the area of ceramics the most fundamental of the influencing concepts at the time derived from one outstanding craftworker, the English potter, Bernard Leach, who returned to England in 1922 after working for eleven years as a student and potter in Japan. His dedication to Japanese, Chinese and English folk ceramic traditions, and to the William Morris Arts and Crafts ethic, spread quickly throughout the Western world after the end of World War II. It was hungry for a new start, a new emphasis on the importance of the development of the individual, and this led to a fresh look at the dignity and self-fulfilment of hand-work in the making of artefacts. The role of the individual craftworker and the importance of the input into an object of

\textsuperscript{647} For an official detailed account of this movement see Grace Cochrane, \textit{The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History}, Kensington, N.S.W., Australia, New South Wales University Press, 1992.
individual talent and decision-making seemed to offer a richer and more rewarding
approach to post-war life. Leach’s role was germinal. At the outbreak of World War II
he had already published a book containing his credo, philosophical attitudes and
working methods, but it was not until after the War that it gained international
readership.648

The twentieth century saw the collapse of many autonomous or discrete areas of
ideologies in iconographic imagery, largely as a result of the development of immediate
and global mass communication and transport. At the end of the century, in the Western
world, it is sometimes not easy to recognise imagery that is specifically expressive of a
given society, culture, place or time. And yet despite this it is still possible to identify,
through technique or material, or perhaps through the resonance in an artefact and its
imagery that is difficult to define, signs that might be peculiar to a particular country,
society or region, and this can apply to ceramics and their imagery.

While I was living and working in London during the nineteen fifties I trained in ceramics
at the Camberwell School of Art which was completely dedicated to Bernard Leach’s
beliefs and aesthetic. The influences upon my ceramic work were centred upon the
Bernard Leach credo, and an amalgam of Japanese mingei, or folk pottery, Chinese Song
dynasty ceramics and English traditional pottery.649 On my return to Australia additional
training followed similar aesthetic principles.650 My subsequent work was limited by the

became a basic text and credo for potters, not only in Australia, but around the Western world. By the
nineteen sixties it was contemporaneous and sympathetic with the movement in the Western world
which was experimenting with simpler alternative lifestyles. Many turned their backs upon
materialistic mass-consumerism, explored ancient philosophies, and rediscovered the spiritual
satisfactions of making the necessary artefacts of life by one’s own hand.

649 Early in the twentieth century the Japanese, Soyetsu Yanagi (writer, critic and subsequent Director of the
National Folk Museum in Tokyo) drew attention to the aesthetic of the traditional artefacts produced by
village craftworkers in Japan. The resulting exhibition and literature has had an incalculable
international influence on the perceptions of craftworkers, critics, connoisseurs and scholars. The
exquisite porcelains and stonewares of the Song dynasty in China, however, were produced to satisfy the
refined predilections of Imperial patronage, and in the twentieth century have been rediscovered, also,
and evaluated as some of the most significant of Chinese artefacts. The English pottery tradition was,
like the Japanese, a simple cottage industry which is seen to have achieved, between the thirteenth and
the seventeenth centuries, great stature in simplicity.

650 In the late fifties and early sixties the only tertiary training in ceramics consisted of a one-day a week
course at the East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School) under one of Australia’s most
notable potters, Peter Rushforth. Studies comprised training in earthenware and stoneware techniques.
Porcelain clays were not available.
available kiln to the firing of the lower temperatures of earthenware. But there were only two earthenware clay bodies which were readily available in Sydney; one which was primarily intended for brick and pipe work, coarse, with a triple geologic origin and therefore unpredictable at times in its firing behaviour, and the other, a somewhat nondescript white clay body made for commercially mass-produced and moulded objects.651

At the completion of training I joined a group of four other potters who made the decision to invest some time in experimentation, with the aim of producing earthenware bodies more suited to our needs for studio pottery-making. Eventually, despite considerable success, three members of the group ceased to experiment, and I continued on my own.652 A great deal of further experiment and testing produced a translucent, almost porcellainous-like clay material, which could be thrown on the wheel, but which was still within the lower firing range of earthenware, around 1,100 degrees C.653

It would seem that this achievement provides a useful example of several issues that have been addressed in Part II of this thesis.654 For instance, the role and the intervention of the craftworker were central, the philosophical direction of the ceramics was heavily influenced by diffusionary factors from older, foreign cultures, and the final imagery of the forms was governed by the nature, potential and limitations of local Australian clay materials. This range of experimental work in the development of translucent porcellainous material fired at low, (and therefore economical) earthenware temperatures, was an invention which arose out of local circumstances, limitations and needs.

651 The first was Chullora clay, from a clay bed in south-west Sydney, and was not intended originally for studio pottery work; it was dug primarily for the making of bricks and pipes. The second was a featureless but tolerant, good-tempered clay body with a wide firing range, but it lacked throwing strength as it had been made specifically for moulded mass-production.

652 Two reverted to the production of stoneware. One died tragically, and the fourth moved from Sydney to live in the country.

653 Terms and practices vary, but as a general rule earthenware is fired between 1,060 and 1,100 degrees C, stoneware between 1,220 and 1,280 degrees C, and porcelain from 1,280 to 1,320 degrees C.

654 Examples of this oeuvre were exhibited from 1973 to 1975 in Sydney at Gallery 16, and Bonython Galleries, and in Canberra at the Macquarie Galleries.
As the craft movement developed and expanded in Australia there was a parallel increase in the range of available clay bodies suitable for the individual studio potter. In Sydney many varieties of earthenware, stoneware and porcelainous clay bodies became available, and some were also imported from interstate and overseas, and provided opportunities for an explosion of creative experimentation among studio potters. It would be difficult to unravel intentional and unintentional influences in the fast stylistic and technical development of ceramics in Australia. Inevitably it was heavily influenced by diffusionary ideas, promulgated by incoming journals, visiting experts and by the effects of overseas study by local potters. But with clay work, perhaps even more than with work in other media, the exigencies and peculiarities of local materials, and the sometimes unpredictable results of firing procedures, make it inevitable that many ceramic artefacts can be seen as the products of local invention, of much trial and experimentation, as well as the result of diffusionary influences.

These comments apply to a large extent to my own work in ceramics. My earliest work was largely based in the English earthenware tradition, but it was also informed by the Japanese mingei aesthetic of simple and direct forms, of earthy colour and matt and semi-matt glazes. Over several years I developed glazes that used locally available Australian rocks and minerals which had their own peculiar characteristics. A similar situation existed when I embarked in 1967 on the six-year development of the translucent low-temperature porcelainous clay bodies and their accompanying glazes. With the exception of one material which had to be imported, all other minerals and clays were of Australian, and therefore, local origin. The final result was artefacts which were uniquely Australian, although, once again, they could not be seen to be totally divorced from international contexts (fig. 114). I was influenced to some extent by the unique small and quiet ceramics made by Lucie Rie, in London.655 I was also influenced by some of the minimally conceived bowls and small porcelain and stoneware pieces of the Song dynasty

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655 Along with many artists, architects, designers and craftworkers, Lucie Rie left Europe during the Nazi regime. She settled in London, U.K., and developed in the 1950s, an oeuvre that was unique, arising out of the Modernist movement in Europe, and unlike the mainstream of ceramics which followed the Bernard Leach aesthetic and philosophy. John Houston, ed., Lucie Rie, London, U.K., 1981, Crafts Council.
in China. I had made the decision to invent glazes which interfered as little as possible with the alabaster-like quality of the fired clay, and this was a philosophically based approach. Born no doubt out of a current climate, in the 1960's of minimalism, the aim was to achieve in these small artefacts, a sense of silence, tranquillity and simplicity with a minimum of interference with the material and whatever purity of form that could be achieved. It was a reaction and an antidote to the headline-making forms, the large and the roughly-textured, and to cleverness for its own sake, which tended to dominate the taste perceptions of the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies. Two solo exhibitions of these ceramics were organised in 1973, one in Sydney and one in Canberra, Australia (fig. 114).656

When satisfactory readymade porcelain bodies eventually became available to the studio potter I became interested in the transference of the low-temperature oeuvre into the higher temperature range of hard-paste porcelain. This was mainly because the hard physical slog that was involved in producing one's own clay bodies without mechanical aids was no longer attractive.657 But because the newly available porcelain bodies were compounded for a higher temperature range (1,280–1,300 degrees C), there was the need, once again, to spend a great deal of time developing a new range of glazes that were

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656 The first was at Gallery 16, Sydney, N.S.W., and the second was at the Macquarie Galleries, Canberra, A.C.T., Australia.

657 The firing of the low-temperature porcelain materials was much more economical in time and cost and was a major bonus that had to be balanced against the time and hard physical labour involved in hand-making one's own clay bodies.
fig. 115: Porcelain bowls, thrown and altered form and lips; grey-green glaze inside, unglazed outside; 1290-1300 BC; by Joyce Warren; exhibited at Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, Australia, 1991.
held aesthetic as my preference, and under the influence of my earlier training in overseas concepts, I opted for simplicity and quietness in both form and glaze. The glazes that resulted bear unexpected similarities to some of the Chinese celadons of the Song dynasty (fig. 115). Clearly the earlier influences and the continued appreciation, on my part, of these ancient ceramics must have directed me, unconsciously, towards a preference for this kind of glaze character, even though my firing techniques were quite different from those of the potters of the Song dynasty.658

In this instance diffusion and local invention are entangled, and are so closely intermingled that it would be impossible to separate them. But in the actual making of the ceramic forms in porcelain there appears to be a clear case for local invention, which, as is often the case, arose as much out of pragmatism as the urges of creativity. Again the role of the craftworker is integral in the development of the final form and image of the artefact. The immediate and unpremeditated decision-making necessary during throwing and glazing is to be seen as the factor which directs the ultimate imagery of the artefact. The nature of most porcellainous materials makes them difficult to throw on the potter’s wheel, but I was deeply involved with the aesthetic disciplines of the thrown form. It was necessary for me, therefore, to depart from the traditional norms that apply to thrown forms and invent a set of concepts which suited not only the clay material and my chosen technique, but also my philosophical preferences with regard to the visuality of the pieces. The result was an attempt to express the intransigence of the porcellainous clay but within the throwing discipline. The convention of the perfect circularity of a thrown bowl became an arbitrary and unnecessary stricture. Forms were allowed, therefore, to settle when they would, into a subtler, non-circular imagery. And the form and the glaze became, for most objects, their sole decoration.

After some success had been achieved by 1990 with this oeuvre, there were further explorations into the possibilities of additional embellishment that might enhance and

658 And despite the fact, also, that the Australian component materials differ chemically from the Chinese, and a great deal of experimentation was necessary.
cohabit satisfactorily with the given forms and glazes. I collaborated with Guy Warren, the painter whose work, over the many years of our marriage, has influenced my own attitudes and perceptions. He commenced experiments using his own mature and painterly vocabulary of marks and style (fig. 116). He adapted existing two-dimensional style and imagery, also created new subject-matter, and experimented with these within the limitations of ceramic technology, and the colour and the shapes of my ceramics. The results were exhibited in various places in Australia from 1989 to 1993; at Wollongong University Long Gallery in 1989, at Macquarie Galleries, Sydney in 1991 (fig. 117 a., b.), at B.M.G. Fine Art, Adelaide, and von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle in 1992, and again at the Long Gallery, Wollongong University in 1993 (figs. 118 a., b.). Further exhibitions are to be held in Canberra and Armidale, in 1994.

In all these cases it can be said that there has been a certain degree both of external influence and local creativity. At some levels the two factors can be separated clearly, but at others the intermingling is dense and convoluted. Despite this, however, the overall result is a body of work that can be seen as uniquely Australian; a marriage of diffusion and local invention.

659 The outside influences and the personal poetic inventiveness in Guy Warren's own work in painting, watercolour, drawing and printmaking is exceedingly complex, and is outside the scope of this present study. See Nick Waterlow, "Guy Warren", Art and Australia, Sydney. Australia, March, 1978.
fig. 116 Paintings by Guy Warren, late 1980s: (above) "Wingman and Mist", acrylic on canvas; (below) "Wingman and Cliff", watercolour on paper.
fig. 117a: Portion of exhibition at Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, 1991; Porcelains by Joyce Warren; some pieces painted by Guy Warren.
fig. 117b. Undecorated bowls, Macquarie Galleries exhibition, 1991; (left), thrown, moulded and altered; grey-green glaze inside and outside. (right), thrown and altered, grey-green glaze inside, unglazed outside.

fig. 118a. Undecorated beakers with deep turquoise-blue glaze, and bowl (below) painted by Guy Warren; exhibited Long Gallery, University of Wollongong, 1993.

fig. 118b.
fig. 118b. Various porcelains, painted by Guy Warren, at
Pr. Colls: UW Coll Kaw Jap
CONCLUSION

In this exploration of artefact imagery and its nature and sources, it has become overwhelmingly apparent that strength, conformity and authenticity, as well as local invention, experimentation, poetic imagination and insight inform this vast area of human activity. Many artefacts and their imagery have come to be shaped and honed down to an ultimate form that is exquisitely elegant because there is no superfluity in it. They bear the evidence of pragmatic and aesthetic refinement by generation after generation of makers and users. And many bear the evidence of external, diffusionary influences. Frequently the humblest and most ubiquitous artefact (such as an axe-handle, a pot or a scythe) is eloquent testimony to humankind’s talents for fulfilling needs and solving problems while at the same time envisioning and expressing something of the inner life of a community.

The foregoing exploration of arguments, questions and propositions has been necessary to demonstrate the complexity of this vast and varied oeuvre which, at first glance, appears to be nothing more than practical answers to the basic needs of humankind. But the complexities of the human society that have developed over many thousands of years in many different regions and circumstances can be traced in the development of artefacts and their imagery. It has been demonstrated that craftworkers can be seen to have been intimately involved with, and responsible for much of the fascinating succession of ever-increasingly sophisticated conceptualisations expressed in some of these; humankind’s most basic tools of mental, spiritual and material survival.

The highly personal, intimate and sometimes self-fulfilling relationship of the craftworker with his or her materials and techniques has been seen to have been crucial in the determining of the imagery of an artefact. The experience, also, of using an artefact can be intense and intimately personal, and the maker of an individual, handmade artefact is often aware of this. And in fact, the maker can also be the user of an artefact, and therefore its most severe critic. The artefact and its imagery can enter into the fabric, both
of the maker's life and the life of those who use it, in a non-physical way that is not
dissimilar to the way in which a religious icon or a myth can become associated with the
life of the individual and/or the community. It is a common experience that opinions
of, and reactions to, an artefact and its imagery can be emotionally charged because, not
only is its proficiency or otherwise being tested while in use, but its imagery can
intervene and communicate to the individual user, also, in pervasive and subtle ways that
may not even be apparent to the user. These aspects of artefacts and their imagery
have been approached throughout this present study. It has also been demonstrated that
the nature and the source of artefact imagery are frequently the result of universal
commonalities in regions far apart in time and distance, and that they can also resonate in
the cultural shifts of a community.

Inevitably the reader may see that there are still many issues and aspects to be explored
and argued. And as new theoretical ideas are proposed by others in other places, these
might be applied, also, to this overwhelmingly vast and fascinating topic, the artefact and
its imagery.

660 Mallowan, Early Mesopotamia and Iran, op. cit., p. 48; Bahn, Vertut, Images of the Ice Age, op. cit.,
p 184.
APPENDIX

Kandinsky and Brook on ‘‘Art’’

There seems to be some degree of similarity between Kandinsky’s description of what he calls “art for art’s sake” and those activities which, in his various writings referred to below, Donald Brook labels as “art works”. Kandinsky describes “art for art’s sake” as “...a neglect of inner meanings...this vain squandering of artistic power...art without aims...(or) power for the future”. Donald Brook argues that “art works” are not necessarily “art objects” because they are “design work, craft work, skilful performance...offering themselves to appraisal in terms of...criteria appropriate to the institutions to which they are most appropriately assimilated”. Brook’s assertion is that “voluntary actions...have non-voluntary and involuntary components, the manifestations of which are available for appraisal as art objects or art works”, (see quotation below).

Where an art work is trans-institutional, that is, it serves “any or all of the institutions (of society) it can become,” (to quote Brook,) “art, and that is something else.” If this kind of argument is suggesting that there can be, in an artwork, some involuntary or non-voluntary component which the artist has not necessarily perceived or included consciously, then this might be interpreted as the kind of art work that Kandinsky might have claimed as “art” that does have “inner meaning”. Kandinsky links this with the concept of spirituality. He does not at any point question the validity of this concept, and sees it as an essential reality and a necessity “...a tiny star in a vast gulf of darkness...”

Spiritual manifestations, whether they occur in major, monumental art or as decorative motifs carved on a knife-handle or painted on the surface of a bowl, can be recognised,

often unexpectedly. But recognition of them as such depends upon appraisal. In the
case of ancient and prehistoric objects it is only possible to guess at contemporaneous
appraisal of them. But it is valid for the twentieth century viewer to bring current
perceptive and cognitive mechanisms to bear on the objects, and to appraise them within
an appropriate art-critical context of the late twentieth century. This is common practice in
the case of so-called “fine arts” and, where there is written criticism already in existence
that is contemporaneous, it may or may not be taken into account.

It is impossible sometimes to separate the metaphysical and non-physical or spiritual
content of imagery from the physical. Along with ritual behaviour and movement (or
dance), visual imagery was the non-verbal expression in pre-literate cultures of
humankind’s activities, needs, aspirations, fears, failures, achievements and tribal
memory. This conclusion is drawn from evidential, circumstantial and typological
studies in archaeology and anthropology. In many cases these conclusions cannot be
proved, but they are solidly based assumptions and inferences which are accepted
generally until they come to be disproved by yet undiscovered evidence to the contrary.

The following quotations are from Brook’s paper, “Experimental Art”:

“... People engaged in art activities before there was a clear concept of art, and
before there were such material institutions as art galleries, just as people made
‘Freudian slips’ and personal contracts before there were any institutions of
Psychology or of Law...”.

“... An experimental artist who is dispositionally uninterested in the crafts or in
design will return, time after time, to unspecific modelling. He or she will
perpetually ‘raid the inarticulate’ holding open a route for mechanisms, chance and
accident to work through the hand and mind toward the generation of new
models...”

“... Either there is a phenomenon that we shall call art, importantly distinct from
craft skills and from design processes, that must be properly and separately
conceived, or there is not. If there is, then it is important to know this, whether or not the phenomenon is, as the writer believes, of fundamental importance to the development of human culture...” 663

In his paper, “A New Theory of Art” Brook suggests classification of ‘artefactual art objects’ as ‘ART WORKS’ and writes:

“... ART OBJECTS are PUBLICLY PERCEPTIBLE THINGS originating either naturally or artificially, that are given a TRANSINSTITUTIONAL ROLE. In this role they are subjected to an appraisal of their APTNESS FOR USE as new HYPOTHETICAL OR PRESCRIPTIVE MODELS of the world or some part of it. ART WORKS are artefactual art objects made explicitly for this transinstitutional role. As artifacts they are necessarily the manifestations, consequences and residues of voluntary actions. Voluntary actions, however, have NON-VOLUNTARY and involuntary components or concomitants, the manifestations (etc.) of which are available for appraisal as art objects or as art works. By contrast, the manifestations (etc.) of voluntary actions are considered to be works of design, craft or skilful performance. All of these (design work, craft work, skilful performance) are institutional in character, offering themselves to appraisal in terms of the restricted range of criteria appropriate to the institutions to which they are most appropriately assimilated.

Meritorious design works, craft works and skilful performances are regarded as ACHIEVEMENTS of their authors in a somewhat different sense from that in which the word is applied to artists (i.e. authors of art works). Artists can, by definition, only succeed non-voluntarily or by fortuitous association with involuntarily generated art objects...”664

In another paper, “What Art Is” Brook writes:

“... Some skills are what might be called skills of habitual execution, such as taking shorthand or riding a bicycle. Some skills are skills of design in which the performer knows in general terms what it is that he or she wishes to do, but does

not at the outset know how to do it. Art...differs fundamentally from exercises or products of skill of both kinds in that it is not intentional. Art is not something that people make or do, whether by habitual knack or by a mysterious facility in design. Making art is not an action...the notion of art as contrasting very strongly with craft is not a modern outrage, but on the contrary, a very old and persistent doctrine. It has been intuited for millennia that people cannot make real art intentionally, on demand, because there is a significant sense of respect in which nobody knows even what it is; much less do they know how to set out to make it... Whatever is intentionally made or done is in principle fully understandable in terms of appropriately rich concepts related to skill; principally concepts of expertise, of craftsmanship and of design. Now, if art were, as has often been claimed, only an exalted degree of one of these things, or these modes of production – high skill, fine craftsmanship, brilliant design etc – then the very word ‘art’ would lack an application to any distinctive kind of thing or process. It would be strictly superfluous... But... ‘art’ is not a superfluous word...it does have application to a particular kind of thing...It is the unintended and incidental product of some action or piece of behaviour that was itself... undirected...it was toward some in-principle statable goal such as painting a bowl of fruit, or astonishing a patron... Not only artists make art; and action taken under a faulty theory of art –such as the institutional theory–may even be counter-productive, by virtue of the emphasis it places upon recondite skills of medium manipulation or of social engineering... Art, I suggest, is the original and continuing source of language, and hence all our knowledge of the world;...we should have no language and no knowledge if we were not able to pick individual objects and events out from the general flux of the world and refer to these things..."665

Faience, Egyptian Faience, Majolica (Maioliche) and Delft Ceramics

With the exception of Egyptian faience ware, these classes of ceramics are virtually similar in materials and techniques. Egyptian faience will be dealt with separately.

By the ninth century AD Chinese earthenware, stoneware and early porcellainous wares were being imported by land and sea into Persia, and by the tenth, into Egypt. No-one in the West knew how to achieve the particularly fine and hard qualities of the Chinese porcelains which were greatly sought after, collected and prized by those who were wealthy enough to afford them. As a result a market demand developed for locally made imitations which would be more affordable. With only the knowledge of earthenware and its techniques at their disposal the potters of the burgeoning and fast developing Islamic empire devised an opaque white glaze (usually made white with tin oxide) with which to coat their buff earthenware, in order to give a white ground on which to paint blue and, later, polychrome decoration. This kind of ceramic was extraordinarily popular and developed into a distinctive and separate oeuvre that was produced right across Islam, with regional variations, from eastern Persia, through to the south of Spain. The technique was copied and adapted by the Italian potters in the north-east of Italy. But during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries especially, a white ground was achieved, also, by laying a thin coating of white clay over the terracotta, painting a decorative motif upon it, and then glazing with a clear, transparent glaze. There were rich clay deposits south of Bologna between the mountains and the coast and pottery making flourished at many places. By the thirteenth century the town of Faenza had become a major centre and the wares were imported all over Italy and into other European countries, notably France. The term “faience” comes from the French identification of the ware with the town of Faenza. The demand all over Europe for these ceramics was so great that potters from the Faenza region emigrated to France, Germany, Holland and other countries. By the fifteenth century splendid lustred wares (again, an invention by the potters of Islam) were made in Spain and were much sought after in Italy. They were imported there via the
island of Majorca, hence the additional name attached to white-glazed wares, of majolica, or in Italian, maioliche. By the sixteenth century the town of Delft in Holland had grown to be a successful centre for this kind of imitation Chinese ware, and the wares also came to be known as Delft ware, especially the blue-and-white.666 Because of the cousinly and close trading relations between England and the Netherlands, English potters, from 1,550 on, made delft ware in response to the huge market demand. Savage suggests that it was probable that the first painters to engage in the making of delft in England were of Dutch or Flemish extraction.667 All these variations, majolica, faience and delft, have become historically important, and are collected by museums and connoisseurs for increasingly large sums of money.

Egyptian faience, or Egyptian paste as it is more accurately called, has a totally different composition both in body and glaze. It contains little or no clay and varies, as do many ceramic bodies, from potter to potter. It is mainly composed of silica (ground quartz), alumina, calcium, magnesium and alkalies, and during the course of firing it throws a glaze coating on to its surface. The composition is too short and brittle to be thrown on the wheel, but it has been used quite extensively for tile-making for mosques, and for other hand-moulded objects by both the Persian potters and, centuries before them, by the Egyptians. One of the best known examples from Egypt is the group of small modelled hippopotamuses which have a turquoise glaze (and mentioned earlier, in Part II). When copper is added to the highly alkaline composition of the paste body a turquoise glaze is formed naturally on the surface. It was used for beads and for inlay as a cheap substitute for the turquoise that was mined by the Egyptians in the Sinai region.668 It is still used in the twentieth century for the same purpose.


Brief Background to the Craft Renaissance in Mid-Twentieth Century Australia

The resurgence in Europe, after World War II, of cultural pursuits which had been either obliterated or held in abeyance, reverberated right round the Western world. Activities in all areas of culture increased and there was rebirth and a new interest in the philosophies of the nineteenth century Arts and Crafts movements. It was seen as one of the ways to re-humanise, and to encourage the individual to re-discover him or herself in a world where old conventions and values had been torn up, and people had been left with a profound urge to re-discover themselves and establish a new order. Demobilised members of the armed forces were given opportunities to re-train, and Art Colleges and Universities found themselves with intakes of mature students with considerable life-experience, who were often cynical and keenly critical of established concepts. Out of this wave of hypercritical studying old conventions were queried and new innovative ideas flowed, and helped to produce a kind of mid-century renaissance. Australia was also part of this, and in the nineteen fifties and sixties there was a development of artefact-making by individuals, (often trained in the arts), and within the context of the studio and the art gallery. Like the Arts and Crafts movement of the nineteenth century it was of necessity a movement largely in the middle classes, and the individual craft objects were frequently perceived as aspirants to the label of "art" or at least as special objects, by virtue of the fact that they were made by hand by a known craftworker. In the consumer economy most other artefacts that related purely to utilitarian usage (from the most basic teaspoon in plastic to tools of complexity) were made industrially and mechanically to predesigned formats, and are therefore outside the scope of this study.

In the nineteen sixties and seventies the craft movement in Australia grew at an extraordinary speed, as it was doing internationally. At one time, for instance, there were around 30,000 known potters or pottery students working in Australia, many of whom were women. It is interesting that, although many other women became involved
with other media such as textiles, the absorption in clay work seemed to be an unconscious echo of age-old practices in ancient cultures in many parts of the world, where women had been, frequently, the makers of clay pots. After World War II women who availed themselves of birth control, and who could afford new mechanical aids to do the drudgery of house-keeping, found themselves with time on their hands and the opportunities to develop their intellectual and creative potential, and explore beyond the limits of the household. Craft societies were established or re-invigorated. Potters' societies and workshops sprang up, and courses were floated at technical colleges. There was a new and rapidly increasing demand on unwilling and conservatively minded suppliers of clays, minerals and kilns to provide equipment and materials that were now suited to studio work rather than to industrial production.

The craft movement in Australia became affiliated in the late 1960s with the international movement, entirely through the dedicated work of volunteer craftspeople. Eventually government funding was made available to assist in the development in all fields of cultural endeavour. This established a funding bureaucracy which also became concerned with the politics of cultural activities. It was Janus-headed therefore; a huge financial burden as well as an administrative aid for the growing complexities of craftwork in Australia. As hundreds of graduating craftmaking students from art colleges spilled over into the elite world of galleries and exhibitions it became obvious by the mid-eighties that the craftworker would have to find a new niche that would go at least some way towards providing a living income, which limited government funding schemes could not hope to provide. There was a change in direction, therefore, and many craftworkers sought to design commissioned work for commercial sponsors. At the present time there appear to be two kinds of artefact-making by the individual craftworker. One is the commissioned and deliberate designing of artefacts for an assured market. The other is the making of individual artefacts for gallery exhibition purposes, in the hope that critics in the press will write in their journals and appraise the objects, and that members of the public will
adopt the role of connoisseur and patron, and buy. My work in porcelain is in the latter category.669

669 An official history of the craft movement in Australia was published in late 1992; Grace Cochrane, The Craft Movement in Australia; A History, op. cit.
GLOSSARY

*clay body* – a compound of clay with other minerals which render the original clay more suitable for the purposes of the potter and the intended glazing and firing techniques. Most purchased clays are already compounded to provide materials for specific needs and purposes.

*earthenware* – an imprecise term used generally by potters for clay bodies that achieve a satisfactory vitreous quality at temperatures from about 1,060 degrees C to about 1,100 degrees C. It is usually agreed that porosity of this material, after firing, should be about 7 or 8%. It is necessary therefore to cover this kind of body with a glaze that should not craze or allow moisture to seep through. Earthenware can vary in texture and surface quality from extremely fine to coarse, and can vary from white through buffs to terracotta reds and browns. These colours are due to accrued inorganic impurities such as iron oxide and manganese.

*stoneware* – an imprecise term used generally by potters for clay bodies that achieve a satisfactory vitreous quality at temperatures from about 1,220 degrees C to about 1,300 degrees C. It is usually agreed that porosity of this material, after firing, should be about 3%, and a glaze is required to render it impermeable. The texture of stoneware can vary from extremely fine and smooth to rough with added coarse particles. Like earthenware its colour can vary greatly as a result of impurities. After firing it is a harder, more stone-like material than earthenware, hence its name.

*porcelain* – an extremely fine-grained clay body that is totally vitreous, with nil porosity. It is not necessary to cover this material with a glaze for reasons of permeability. Porcelain is usually glazed for either practical or aesthetic reasons; for colour, texture, reflective gloss and ease of cleaning. Porcelain may or may not be translucent. Industrial porcelains are not. Studio and domestic artefacts frequently are translucent, especially if the object is thinly potted, around 2 to 3 mm in thickness. Firing temperatures vary from 1,280 degrees C to 1,320 degrees C. Industrially made domestic porcelain, from Germany, however, is fired to around 1,400 degrees C.
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