

**S. Rebecca Martin, *The Art of Contact: Comparative Approaches to Greek and Phoenician Art*.** Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. 320 pages, 38 color, 59 b/w illus. ISBN 9780812249088 (cloth) \$59.95.

Exploring the relationship between theory, method, and interpretation, *The Art of Contact* provides a critique of commonly employed classifications, heuristics, and critical terminology whilst introducing several new methodological approaches and conceptual tools for the study of Greek and Phoenician art history. In equal measures challenging, provocative, and inspirational, Martin's volume will undoubtedly evoke a plurality of reactions amongst its target audience (principally art historians, classicists, and classical archaeologists). By means of a highly selective examination of Greek and Phoenician artistic traditions and interactions during the first millennium BCE (with an emphasis on the fifth to second centuries) Martin highlights the pervasiveness of primordialism and its continued influence on scholarly perceptions and interpretations of ancient art whilst advocating a greater awareness of the relationship between theory and the writing of art history. Though Martin unavoidably opens herself to accusations of selection bias by eschewing tradition and presenting a series of geographically and chronologically diffuse case studies in preference to a sustained analysis of a specific place, time, or category of artefact, this approach does not undermine the volume's value as a catalyst for future research and as a much-needed challenge to scholarly presumptions and prejudices. Arranged in roughly chronological order, the volume is divided into five thematic chapters. Each chapter explicates the strengths and weaknesses of a particular model or methodology by outlining the most contentious interpretive issues (specifically, those pertaining to genre, chronology, and context) and by critically evaluating the efficacy of related scholarly terminology.

Chapter One comprises an overview of the theoretical landscape and a discussion of the most important terminology and concepts commonly utilised by classical art historians (principally: Hellenization, Orientalizing, culture, material culture, cultural contact, and art). Martin uses these preliminary discussions to introduce her main claims and assertions and to outline the potential ramifications of adopting her approach when studying and interpreting ancient art. Central to the chapter is an analysis of the nebulous term 'culture'. Martin defines culture as a dynamic structuring system within which, to varying degrees, participating individuals have shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviours that help them to understand and interpret the world around them and which are transmitted inter-generationally through learning. Although this definition can be criticized for not placing enough emphasis on phenomenology, Martin is careful to ensure that human experience and agency are never overlooked in her analysis. She therefore considers culture as consisting of shared practices which are uniquely fashioned by historical circumstance and by subscribing members. Ultimately, Martin concludes that the study of culture is dependent on both observation and theorizing and thus her work sits comfortably

alongside that of other postprocessualists. The chapter also questions a number of key academic assumptions regarding material culture, art, and ethnicity, including: that human-made objects should necessarily be considered as generators of either identity or culture; that material culture *must* be studied through the relationship between artefacts and social relations; that art and ethnicity are related and recognizable in style; that it is possible to identify a particular artistic style or tradition that can be correctly termed ‘Phoenician art’; that contact with the Phoenicians necessarily explains the social changes that occurred in Greece during the latter half of the first millennium BCE; and, finally, that Hellenization was a gradual, but inevitable outcome of the interactions between Greeks and Phoenicians.

Chapter Two opens with a discussion of the different approaches to the study of cultural and artistic interactions and provides an outline of what Martin considers to be the inherent flaws and limitations of previous methods for defining and classifying arts produced and disseminated by contact. Through juxtaposing the divergent ways in which *kouroi* and Hellenistic picture mosaics have habitually been framed and interpreted, Martin highlights the double standards that underpin Orientalizing and Hellenization as conceptual models (studies of the former tend to emphasize the location of manufacture and methods of display as the most crucial factors for understanding cultural or social function, whilst studies of the latter stress the importance of origins and style of motif). Dismissing the widely held belief that *kouroi* and picture mosaics should be considered as purely Greek artistic forms, Martin argues that a much greater emphasis should be placed on analysing an object’s socio-historical context when trying to understand the messages it conveys. Accordingly, she posits that it was a desire by Greek aristocrats to emulate the royal and elite art of Egypt which encouraged the emergence of *kouroi*. Furthermore, she proposes that the adaptations Greek artisans made to Egyptian artistic styles and motifs were not intended to emphasise ethnic differences but rather to ensure that *kouroi* better reflected the societal values of Archaic Greece. Likewise, Martin considers Hellenistic picture mosaics to be indicators of elite status which transcended ethnic and cultural boundaries, and which denoted membership of an elite, pan-Mediterranean community rather than simply a symbol of Hellenic culture. The final third of the chapter is devoted to Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi and is primarily concerned with demonstrating the importance of moving beyond the oppositional models promoted by Orientalizing and Hellenization. Martin closes the chapter by concluding that sarcophagi, *kouroi*, and picture mosaics are best interpreted as material expressions of a pan-Mediterranean elite *koine* which were neither deliberately or consciously cultural, were not intended to promote an “Eastern” vs. “Western” dichotomy, had a limited scope and relevance, and were historically and socially specific in their intent.

In Chapter Three, Martin examines the ways in which essentialism has shaped scholarly perceptions of different Iron Age people groups. In particular, she argues that race was, and still is, one of the primary reasons why scholars consider the

classical Greeks to be exceptional in comparison to their eastern neighbours. The opening half of the chapter charts the ways in which racial and colonial modes of thinking influenced the construction of Greek and Phoenician identities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE. In line with recent anthropological studies, Martin considers ethnicity as being self-ascribed and so interprets both Hellenism and Phoenicianism as conscious collective identities which, although not completely synonymous with either, drew inspiration from social (artistic, linguistic) and ethnic (religious, kinship) identities. Subsequent sections explore the influence that concepts such as ethnicity, race and racism, essentialism, exceptionalism, and orientalism have exerted on classical scholarship. Although presenting a useful critique of how these terms have been approached and utilized in classical scholarship, the damning assertions that art historians typically engage in discourses which are largely uninterested in Near Eastern arts, and, secondly, that an unwavering attachment to essentialism – specifically race – has encouraged classicists to resist any modification to the ways in which ancient identities are thought to have been formed, will undoubtedly mean that these sections prove contentious. Having outlined the ways in which the modern terms ‘Greek’ and ‘Phoenician’ are associated with several problematic essentialist ideas and with modern racial modes of thinking, the chapter considers the representational strategy ascribed to each group and discusses what is implied or understood when art is classified as either ‘Greek’ or ‘Phoenician’. Following the work of Marian Feldman, Martin warns against classifying objects according to catch-all terms to avoid assigning the imperfect evidence to deceptively coherent theoretical categories such as find-spot, style, or iconographic tradition. Martin closes the chapter by concluding that it is impossible to talk about a ‘Phoenician’ artistic tradition prior to the early Persian Period (c.530 BCE), when, for the first time, there was a greater sense of collectivity amongst the Phoenician city-states.

Expanding upon this conclusion, Chapter Four explores the link between the emergent sense of collectivity between the Phoenicians, which Martin believes found expression in the cultural and artistic traditions of the late-sixth/early-fifth century, and the rise of the Achaemenid Empire. Referencing both monumental art (including inscriptions, stone statues, orthostats, and friezes) and more portable art (principally a selection of images and motifs found on various Phoenician coinages), Martin explores how the political domination of the Achaemenid Empire gave rise to the advent of Phoenicianism. The examples which Martin selects for discussion are those which she has identified as illuminating elite and royal self-presentation and, in the case of monumental art, for which there is also a fair degree of certainty regarding their intended context of display. With regards to monumental art, Martin’s concludes: that the Early Persian Period gave rise to several types of monumental object that were particular to the Phoenicians; that the Phoenicians combined different styles, iconographies, and types in a manner which was unique; that during the Hellenistic Period the extent and ways in which the Phoenicians emulated Greek

artistic forms and styles varied between the city-states; and, finally, that the occasional incorporation of the term *Phoinix* and its cognates into theophoric names during the fifth to second centuries is indicative of a burgeoning recognition of an identity that was broader than traditional civic ones. Adhering to the view that civic coins were intended to construct and control value (both tangibly in economic terms and ideologically using symbolism) Martin proposes that the Phoenician city-states initially minted coins as a way of increasing their authority and power. She therefore posits that the Phoenician city-states expressed their power in economic, religious, and political terms through the appropriation, recombination, and creation of iconography. The complexities surrounding the emergence of Phoenician coinage are understandably glossed over with Martin simply concluding that many of the same conditions which led to the creation of the Athenian owl were present in Phoenicia. However, the exact nature of these conditions is left unstated and thus it would have been helpful if the author had provided more detail to substantiate this point. Additionally, if, as the author proposes, the earliest coins were used primarily for payments to and by the state, who was the audience of the ideological imagery? Martin closes the chapter by concluding that much of the iconography found on Phoenician coinages was a combination of traditional motifs and a variety of reinterpreted and reimagined foreign symbols and designs.

The last chapter is an extended critique of two of the most pervasive post-colonial heuristics, hybridity and middle ground theory. Focusing on the 'Alexander Sarcophagus' and the so-called 'Slipper Slapper' group, Martin challenges the widely held belief that the eastward spread of Greek culture effectuated by the campaigns of Alexander the Great resulted in the gradual erosion of a uniquely Phoenician identity. The first half of the chapter, a discussion of the Alexander Sarcophagus, highlights the shortcomings of hybridity theory whilst encouraging a change in approach for studying artworks produced in cultural contact zones. Identifying several problems that arise when allowing taxonomic interests to drive scholarly research into 'Greek' and 'Phoenician' art - primarily that it characterizes them as fundamentally pure and eclectic respectively whilst creating a demand for descriptive language for artefacts that cannot be neatly classified - Martin stresses the need to distinguish hybridity as something specific and not merely as a synonym for interaction or acculturation. She therefore recasts the Alexander Sarcophagus as an example of 'Sidonian art' which follows the customs and traditions of Persian-era funerary sculpture and which embodies the Sidonian identity of the patron who commissioned it rather than as an object which was intended to promote the ethnic or political ideologies of either Persia or Macedon. From here, Martin moves on to discuss Richard White's middle ground theory and apply it to the 'Slipper Slapper' statue group recovered from Delos. The statue, which had been commissioned by a citizen of Beirut, is unique in that it depicts an odd trio of subjects: Aphrodite holding her sandal, Pan holding onto her, and Eros flying overhead and grasping one of Pan's horns. According to Martin, this unusual grouping of mythological characters can easily be explained if

the statue is understood as a Phoenician, or at least Beirut, interpretation of Greek art and myth. Martin therefore considers the Slipper Slapper stature, like the Alexander Sarcophagus, to be the result of a close collaboration between a Greek artisan trained in one of the sculptural workshops of fourth century Greece, and a wealthy Phoenician patron who commissioned and paid for the work. Martin's conclusion that the production of both items required the coalescing of Greek artistic traditions, manufacturing techniques, and iconography with Phoenician art, patronage, and religious symbolism, is highly persuasive. Chapter Five closes by briefly exploring how these new interpretations can help to refine what is, and indeed is not, defined as 'Phoenician art'.

In sum, the volume represents a robust challenge to the interpretation of objects using sociological or anthropological theories, specifically those pertaining to material culture, and as such will undoubtedly polarize opinion. Martin's championing of an innovative approach, and her position that social processes should be considered the primary generators of identity and culture, are intended to generate discussion and to encourage a renewed interest in how art produced in contact can be studied and understood. In this regard, Martin is largely successful as her book will certainly elicit a strong reaction from those interested in the art history of the first millennium. At times, however, Martin's overly polemic and confrontational language, her unduly pessimistic view that classical art historians are simply interested in monumental architecture and ceramic wares, her dismissive conclusion that classicists have done little with the great amount of data they have collected, and her damning assessment that Greek art history remains both essentialist and chauvinistic, means that she runs the risk of alienating readers who would otherwise be sympathetic to her arguments. Furthermore, there are a few occasions when Martin does not rigidly adhere to her own methodology. For instance, despite warning against trying to align inscriptions with events recorded in other historical sources (p.99), this is precisely what she attempts to do in her subsequent discussion of the Eshmunazar II inscription (p. 106) thus undermining her own position that trying to identify the historical context of an object or inscription using etic sources is a fruitless exercise. Overall, however, the positives far outweigh the negatives and the volume will undoubtedly provide a valuable contribution to the fields of classics, archaeology, and art history. Whilst some of Martin's arguments are more convincing than others, all invite further consideration and thus serve to reinvigorate debates over the classification and interpretation of ancient art. In the opinion of this reviewer, Martin has produced a volume which will serve as significant catalyst for future study and for this she should be applauded.

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