The ARCANE project

Meeting of the Transversal group TG02 „Glyptic and Art History"

Pilsen, Czech Republic, November 27 – 28, 2006

1) Summary (up to 1 page)

In 2006, the ESF has decided to fund a project of archaeological exploration and interpretation entitled „ARCANE – Assorted Regional Chronologies of the Ancient Near East" (2006-2011, www.arcane.uni-tuebingen.de). The purpose of this major project, on which 128 scholars from about 25 countries are working, is to put at the disposal of the academic community a viable chronological tool for classification of archaeological materials found in the Near East and dating to the third pre-Christian millennium, when such essential traits of the human civilization such as permanent administration and the state, writing, or verbal and visual arts emerged there.

The project team comprises twelwe Regional and three Transversal groups. The meeting proposed was that of the TG02 Transversal Group „Glyptic and Art History". While the Regional groups base their approach on studies of archaeological evidence with respect to the geographical coordinates of its findspots, the Transversal groups focus on materials occurring throughout the entire region. These may provide indepedent control sequences for the particular archaeological-material series of the singular regions. The foci of effort of the three Transversal groups are a) written materials, b) art-history objects and c) data obtained by means of natural sciences, especially the C-14 dating method. The coordinators of the TG02 Group are Petr Charvat (University of West Bohemia, Pilsen, Czech republic) and Holly Pittman (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, U. S. A.).

The meeting, which took place on the premises of the University of West Bohemia at Pilsen, Czech Republic, fulfilled a threefold purpose.

First and foremost, its participants reviewed the state of the field and assessed the range and quality of archaeological material that will constitute the basic material of their work.

Second, but no less important, they defined an approach to the problem, defined by a common strategy of this group. This strategy might be subsumed in a few words – to put together a reliable chronological sequence of third-millennium art material, based on the spatiotemporal development of the period´s art style(s).

Third, and perhaps most important, they worked together on the compilation of a Keyword List for description of finds of both glyptic and art-history material.

2) Description of the scientific content of and discussion at the event (up to 4 pages)

Monday, 27th November 2006

Morning: Welcome words by the authorities of the University of West Bohemia, profesor Ladislav Cabada, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, and Ivo Budil, Vice-Dean for Research and for Foreign Relations of the same Faculty.

Afternoon: Introducing the topic: Marc Lebeau outlined the current developments within the ARCANE project. In spite of the various twists and turns of its fate, the project is working and the project team overcame the initial uncertainties. It is now clear that all members of the project team will work on its assignments with dedication and determination.

To this the participants reacted by subsuming their own strategies of approach to the Project, as well as sketching out the contributions they are about to make towards its goals.

Jean-Paul Thalmann then reviewed the current state of the ARCANE database. He showed the state in which it it is now working, and demonstrated the individual steps by which the database is to receive its contents. He also showed how the database will document all categories of material culture.

The operational principles of the work with the database: the first step consists of the collection of data and this will be followed by the development and employment of the processing tool. Later on this will make possible the retrieval of individual artifacts and synopses. It is of primary importance to include only data relevant to any of the keywords used, as otherwise they will not be retrievable. Inventories of whatever kind are to be preferred to synopses, especially when objects found in situ are concerned. Data from the individual sites will be recorded by members of site team who will export them to the site/excavation Director. He or she will check all serial numbers of the site and import all data into the "integrated" standalone. Only then the data will be finally exported and send to Team Leaders of regional groups. Regional Group team leaders will use the "integrated" standalones, while the topic coordinators will use the "individual" standalones according to their particular topics. The same procedure will then take place on a regional level from where the data will be exported and sent periodically to database managers. The basic description will not be duplicated in the fields for specific description. Coordinators of transversal groups shall be in contact with coordinators of those regional groups in charge in order to avoid duplication of entries. The automatic check is impossible at this stage and thus it must be done by hand. It was suggested that the "artificial inventory" items added by transversal groups will be numbered 500-900 while those added by the regional groups will bear numbers between 001 and 499.

Additional features of the "modus operandi" presented on the ARCANE website were introduced, including three levels of security, access to the data and scientific/technical validation. It was stressed that the final deadline for imports into the database is firmly fixed to December 31, 2007. There are more suggested guidelines available on the ARCANE website in the form of a downloadable document. Access to the database will be restricted between the years 2008 and 2010.

Various ways and means of encoding glyptic material were illustrated next with respect to materials from Tell Beydar. Up to now, a key site for this particular region and period was Tell Brak. The problem of assigning dates of glyptic finds was commented upon in a case of a single sealing dated ED at Beydar and Akkadian at Brak. In other cases, components datable both to ED and to Akkadian turn up on one and the same seal. Changing of style and glyptic clearly depends on the level of society: the upper strata take over new styles and new emblems more rapidly while the "middle class" continue using the old patterns and old icons.

In the course of the meeting the presentation of the database was commented in detail and in depth. The three main phases were widely discussed. Data collection will be followed by the processing at the regional level and finally by the interregional comparisons and syntheses. The organization of the material will be hierarchical consisting of six file-types, i.e. site, complex, unit, inventory, pottery, object, supplemented by bibliography. The database files for pottery and objects must be related only to the inventory, not to sites and complexes. The database will include additional files as well as semi-processed documents (i.e.

synopses). Data processing at the regional level will result in analytical tables. The main output of the database will consist of regional syntheses, regional periodizations and regional typologies presented in synthetic tables. The next step will be data processing at the inter-regional level. Final results will consist of general syntheses, general periodizations and general typologies. Bibliographical entries will be automatically generated and thus it is absolutely necessary to follow the written instructions and fill all the required items.

General structure of each ARCANE entry is the same and consists of following items – registration, header, specific or additional description and graphic document. The registration includes the ARCANE serial number, excavation registration and inventory number. The ID number will be automatically generated. The header must contain categorized data for searching and cross-indexing and will be entered from pre-defined lists. The specific and additional descriptions will be written in a form of free-texts fields. For graphic documents only raster (not vector) illustrations in normalized formats will be used.

Resorting to examples provided by practical tasks of archeology, the participants then discussed the particular features of various questions and topics involved. They also reviewed some of the menu lists offered to the users of the database, and assessed them as to their completeness and practical use.

Tuesday, 28th November 2006

Morning: This time was dedicated to the compilation of the Keyword List for the description of both art-history and glyptic finds. It was decided to create a unified descriptive system suitable for all finds of this category. Both Jean-Paul Thalmann, and Petr Charvat with Holly Pittman, presented their proposals to the final solution of the problem. Comparing both approaches to the evidence, the participants decided to unite both proposals into one single file which would contain all the descriptors found to be relevant to, and valid for, the purpose of the project. The ensuing product is to be submitted to discussion by the regional groups, and then, its final form will become a part of the ARCANE database software.

Afternoon: Summation of the debate on the meeting's issues, by Holly Pittman, Petr Charvát and the rest of the participants. It has been decided to proceed to to creation of a Keyword List covering all art objects. After completion and full discussion, this Keyword List will become one of the major tools for analysis of the relevant material.

3) Assessment of the results and impact of the event on the future direction of the field (up to 2 pages)

The results of this session are of considerable importance. First and foremost, the decision to subsume all art objects in one single descriptive system will markedly enhance the efficiency of our work, and will provide a unified device under which all the art material could be not only found, but primarily studied, analyzed and assessed. Within this file, all art objects shall be easily retrievable, and available for analysis and interpretation.

Even more important is the compilation of the Keyword List for description of art objects. In view of the working of the database, the need for an efficient device, enabling its users to retrieve all the described features of the material quickly and efficiently is imperative. Two proposals for such a Keyword List were submitted, one detailed including features of composition and style, the other simpler, leaning

primarily on iconography.The participants decided to merge both approaches by insertion of the simpler list into the more complex one. This procedure did not go forth without effort, but ultimately, a unified Keyword List was produced and submitted. This was first assessed in depth by the two Coordinators of the group, and after review by the database managers, it will be sent to the regional groups for discussion. When all the work on the Keyword List is finished, and comments by regional groups included, the Keyword List will be ready to become operative.

When this happens, the Keyword List will become one of the devices by which the ARCANE database will operate.

4) Final programme of the meeting.

<u>Monday, 27th November 2006</u>

10.30 – 12.00 Welcome words by the authorities of the University of West Bohemia
13.00 – 15.00 Introducing the current developments within the ARCANE project, by Marc Lebeau;
15.00 – 18.00 The current state of the ARCANE database, by Jean-Paul Thalmann.

<u>Tuesday, 28th November 2006</u>

9.00 – 13.00: The compilation of the Keyword List for art finds, based on proposals by Jean-Paul Thalmann, Petr Charvat and Holly Pittman;
14.00 – 18.00: Summation of the debate on the meeting's issues, by Holly Pittman, Petr Charvát and the rest of the participants.

Petr Charvat
Department of Near Eastern Studies
Philosophical Faculty
University of West Bohemia
Sedlackova 15
CZ-301 00 Pilsen, Czech Republic