# PRINCIPLES OF STYLISTIC ANALYSIS*

GIORGIO BUCCELLATI
*University of California, Los Angeles*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

It is a standard joke among archaeologists that whatever remains functionally unexplained in a given assemblage of material culture comes to be called, and considered, "cultic". Much the same could be said, on the formal level, of the way the term "style" is often used. At its vaguest, style is conceived as some sort of limbo to which anything formally bizarre in culture may be relegated. Only too often style is thus a negative common denominator, applicable to anything which strays from the general understanding of established formal patterns. This derives in part from what I feel is a mistake even in the more sophisticated approaches to the question: style is essentially considered to belong to the level of synchronic analysis. Envisaged within a broader system of binary oppositions, style is then considered to be a node parallel to such other nodes as morphology and syntax (in linguistics) or technique and function (in artifactual analysis). The concept of style described in this paper is just the opposite: style is *not* a *synchronic* notion. Building on this presupposition, style

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*This paper owes much to a seminar on style in archaeology which was offered jointly by James R. Sackett and the present writer at UCLA in 1974. Some of Sackett's ideas, which influenced the formulation presented here, are now found in Sackett 1977 and forthcoming.

will be described as a diachronic system, diachronic in the specific sense that it is neither synchronic nor historical. The system is presented in terms of basic constituents, their distributional range and the factors which condition the various distributional possibilities. While the system is meant as applicable to style as such, i.e., without restriction to language, art, life-"styles" or any other single type of evidence, the typology and exemplification given here will be primarily linguistic (specifically Akkadian) and to some extent artifactual (specifically, from the material culture of ancient Mesopotamia). It should be stressed, however, that the scope of the paper is theoretical and not documentary.

## 2. THE SYSTEM:

### *2.1. Definition:*

Style is considered here a system which may be analyzed (1) on different levels (from its minimal constituent elements to clustering mechanisms and the factors operative in clustering), (2) for different types of cultural assemblages (language, figurative arts, utilitarian artifacts, etc.) and (3) for different segments of the cultural continuum (the works of a given author, a given period, a given area, etc.). In each case, style is considered as a purely diachronic and distributional category. It is defined as follows: *a recurrent selection of relatively idiosyncratic features.*

SELECTION: This word is meant to be neutral with regard to the question of consciousness: we will simply establish patterns of cooccurrence as they are found in the text and as they can be ascribed to the initiative of the author, without concern as to whether the author was actively seeking to establish such patterns, or was even secondarily conscious of their presence. The question of active choice or secondary awareness belongs more properly to psychology than stylistics.

FEATURES: Either a single feature or a cluster of features may be the object of selection. A single morphological, syntactical or lexical item may be sufficiently distinctive to acquire a stylistic value -- thus, for instance in Akkadian the use of the terminative ending *-iš* in an adverbial function, the use of emphasis or the use of a "poetic" word. Clusters of features are even more distinctive, since they exhibit a higher degree of differentiation as a result of the higher number of components: thus a formula may be considered as a lexical cluster, and be specific for a single author or textual assemblage.

RECURRENT: For features to form a pattern, they have normally to be repeated within the same textual assemblage. Use of a single "poetic" word may be insufficient to determine a stylistic mode; only if words of this type are recurrent can such a mode be identified. Such a need for recurrence implies that style is an essentially diachronic category, since time, or a temporal sequence, is the key sorting criterion within an assemblage: repetition implies a staggering of phenomena along a given temporal axis.

IDIOSYNCRATIC: The features are further identifiable on the basis of their distinctiveness within a given assemblage vis-ã-vis other assemblages. Use of a formula becomes distinctive for a given assemblage only insofar as it is not found, at least not with the same degree of frequency, in other assemblages. This too is an essentially diachronic category, since assemblages must by necessity be juxtaposed in time, and their comparison is rooted on precisely such a juxtaposition.

### 2.2. *Corollaries:*

A few additional comments are relevant here with regard to some of the notions advanced in the discussion.

ASSEMBLAGE: The phenomenon of recurrence or repetition, assumed here

as central to the definition of style, requires that explicit boundaries be set for (1) the containment of repetition itself and (2) the contrast with areas outside the boundaries where the same repetition does not occur. Such boundaries will vary, depending on the concerns and the modes of analysis, from a portion of a given text, to a complete text, to an author, a period, a genre, a culture. The term "(textual) assemblage" is used here as a neutral referent for any portion of the data base for which explicit boundaries are set.

SELECTION (CHOICE) AND EQUIVALENCE: The term "selection" given in our definition of style has already been explained as referring to distributional cooccurrence rather than (necessarily) to conscious choice. While this restricted meaning applies rather rigidly to the scope of the present research, I do not mean to exclude the role which "choosing" in fact has in conditioning style. Rather, I wish to stress that selection or choice, where it exists, is not one among stylistic equivalents, but rather one which precedes style. There are in fact no equivalences in terms of style, although there may be stylistic features which are equivalent in terms of other aspects of the situation. Freedom of choice, to the extent that it is present in a given situation, is actually upstream of expression (and hence of style). The factors which condition a decision are many and are derived from a great variety of levels: style, itself a selection, is conditioned by non-stylistic factors, hence it is redundant to speak of a stylistic choice. If I want to buy a car, I have freedom of choice among various types of cars according to specific variables such as power, price, line, color, and if my color preference is white, I cannot say that white is equivalent to black in terms of color -- it is only equivalent in terms of, say, price. Similarly, in linguistic style, *we can speak of equivalents only if we specify the referential point of the equivalence*; otherwise the notion of equivalence (and of the ensuing selection) remains so vague as to lack any true explanatory power. In any case, it is methodologically indispensable to keep the levels of analysis separate, and to de-

scribe formal distributional patterns before suggesting reasons for their choice. In the case of literature, it may be said that an integration of the levels of analysis (linguistic, compositional, psychological, etc.) is properly the task of literary criticism.

PARADIGM OF ALTERNANTS: Intrinsic to the notion of alternation is that there must be a range of alternants among which selection takes place. The alternants form a paradigm or matrix, where the vertical axis may be conceived as representing the constant elements within the alternants, and the horizontal axis the variables. Linguistic examples of this may be found below in 3.2.1, where Akkadian sets of syntactical and lexical alternants are given. Similarly, one may set up an artifactual paradigm for, say, vessels, which might assume the configuration shown in Chart 1:

| | constant | variables | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | generic function | relative size | form ∿ function | physical properties | economic value |
| bowl | containment | medium | scooping | stone | medium |
| goblet | containment | small | pouring with one hand | metal | high |
| bottle | containment | medium | pouring with one hand | clay | low |
| vase | containment | large | pouring with two hands | clay | medium |

This clarifies further the notion of equivalence just mentioned. The items are members of a single paradigm by virtue of the constant (in this respect they are identical), but they are different members of the paradigm by virtue of the variables (in this respect they are equivalent).

DIACHRONIC VS. HISTORICAL: Given the prominent role held by the notion of diachrony in the definition of style which is employed here, it may

be in order to clarify certain aspects of this concept which are often not properly understood. As it was just pointed out in the explanation of the concept of "recurrence", a diachronic system is one in which the key component elements include time as a chief sorting criterion. In this view, the elements can only be seen as juxtaposed along a temporal axis, i.e., with a time interval intervening among them: a style element can be identified as such only because the contrast with other elements takes their reciprocal time interval into account. Notice that a synchronic system, too, is posited in a temporal framework (hence "synchronic" rather than "achronic"), except that in that case the ordering criteria for the system do not build on contrasting time intervals. Notice further that synchrony is also different from contemporaneity, since contemporaneity is really a diachronic concept, meaning as it does a narrow segment of a temporal sequence. Notice finally that "diachronic" is also quite different from "historical", since the latter refers to a comparison of systems, whereas the former is a constitutive criterion in the establishment of a system. Hence "historical stylistics" is not a redundant definition since it refers to the process of growth from one stylistic mode to another.

STYLISTIC AND LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT: It must be remarked by way of clarification that the definition of style given above specifically excludes the phenomenon of linguistic development. The difference may be explained as follows. On the one hand, stylistic development is based on the distribution of (1) idiosyncratic features as they can be found in (2) textual assemblages which are considered diachronically. Now idiosyncracy may be defined in terms of frequency (not only of presence or absence) of a phenomenon; and a diachronic consideration does not exclude textual assemblages which are contemporary, since contemporaneity is a diachronic consideration. On the other hand, linguistic development (1) depends on the recognition of patterns of presence or absence of phenomena and (2) the assemblage boundaries on which it is based are always coterminous with broad and specific geographic and

chronological boundaries. When, for example, there occurs in Middle Babylonian a phonological change /*št*/ > /*lt*/, the phenomenon is total (not just a matter of frequency) and its textual distribution corresponds to a specific area (Southern Mesopotamia) and period (latter part of the second millennium).

## 3. MINIMAL ELEMENTS: STYLISTIC FEATURES:

### *3.1. Definition:*

It has already been stressed that no synchronic description of stylistic features is possible. That is to say, style is not composed of features which are contrasted to say, morphological or syntactical features: it is not as if emphasis or metaphors, for instance, are stylistic in the sense that the tenses of the verb are morphological, or subordination is syntactical. As already indicated, style is not a node in a binary opposition with morphology or syntax. Rather, it is a matrix which superimposes a specific diachronic grid over the synchronic data established (in linguistics) by morphology or syntax. Therefore, it is true to say that every single linguistic feature is potentially a feature within a system of linguistic stylistics, every compositional feature is potentially a feature within a system of compositional stylistics, and so on: these features become stylistic the moment they are used in diachronic distributional patterns which are meaningful in contrasting two or more assemblages. In other words, every stylistic feature must first be described in terms of a synchronic system before its diachronic distribution (stylistic value) can be mapped; on that basis one can then trace in turn a process of historical growth. For example: (1) the Akkadian terminative-adverbial *-iš* must first be described synchronically as part of a case system of nominal inflection; (2) one can then map its diachronic distribution in given assemblages, thereby determining that it has a stylistic value; (3) at that point one can trace the historical growth whereby one iden-

tifies all possible cultural influences which have conditioned, and therefore contribute to explain, the articulation in time of the various moments of that particular phenomenon -- going thus from a study of stylistic distribution to a study of stylistic development. On the other hand, linguistic features which do not exhibit any meaningful diachronic distribution (say, for instance, the alternation singular/plural), are not de facto stylistic, even though there is nothing intrinsic to the system which prevents them from being so (on the specific case of number alternation see below, 5.1).

If, as maintained here, all linguistic features are potentially stylistic, then an inventory of, say, Akkadian stylistic features would in effect correspond to a linguistic description of Akkadian as a whole. Stylistic features would then have to be described synchronically as part of a linguistic system before their stylistic role can be described. Such a synchronic description is obviously not specifically the task of stylistic analysis; yet there are two ways in which it must be taken into account even within the framework of a given stylistic system. First, an inventory must be given of those linguistic features which have in fact come to have a stylistic value. Second, stylistic analysis may lead to the recognition of features which have not been adequately treated within a synchronic framework.

As for the inventory, it should include all those features which are found to be idiosyncratic of given assemblages as a result of a diachronic distribution. In terms of Enkvist's apt definition (see below, 4.1), one will have to define the probability factor of synchronically defined items in terms of their contextual relationships. Exhaustiveness in this respect can hardly be reached unless one delimits sharply the boundaries of the pertinent assemblages, and even then one will have to utilize mechanical means, i.e., electronic data processing to make the task anywhere near possible; this is the field which has come to be defined as stylometrics (on the nature of such means and their availability for Akkadian, see Buccellati 1977 and forthcoming). It is such an inventory which forms the basis for a given stylistic system (as different

from *the* generalized system described here) -- the basis for, say, Akkadian or Shakespearean stylistics.

As for the second point mentioned above, stylistic considerations may in fact serve a heuristic function: certain features which have been neglected within a system of synchronic analysis may be recognized when assemblages become the object of stylistic analysis. Thus the complexity of the Akkadian noun phrase system may be more clearly brought home when contrasted with the fact that Akkadian subordination is relatively inoperative. Description of noun phrase structures and of verbal subordination remain certainly a part of syntax, and it is only upon such a synchronic definition of the features that stylistic analysis can operate. As if through a mutual feedback system, style identifies a feature as being in need of syntactical definition; once so defined, the feature becomes stylistic by being mapped onto a given distributional system of assemblage distinctiveness.

### 3.2. *Segmental Level:*

One type of stylistic features may be defined in terms of segmentation of individual items within an assemblage, e.g., individual texts or artifacts, into intrinsic formal attributes. They are not established in terms of the assemblage as a whole (which is the compositional level described below), but rather in terms of discrete segments. These in turn may consist either of physically contiguous components (e.g., phonemes within continous morphemes or words within bound phrase structures) or of components which, although not contiguous, are tensionally held together within a single string or segment (e.g., discontinous radical morphemes or separate words within a sentence).

#### 3.2.1. *Linguistic Data:*

Linguistic examples of segmental stylistic features may be derived from all levels of the grammatical and lexical sphere. In *phonology*,

"alliteration" is often a stylistic feature: it may be described as a case of discontinuous phoneme clustering, where the cluster is characterized by the identity of the phonemes. (Note that "alliteration" is a poor term since it refers to a graphic, rather than phonological, configuration.)

The alternation presence/absence of markers is the most common source of *morphological* selection. In Akkadian, for instance, mimation has been explained as a positional morpheme, i.e., a marker of the position where a genitival pronominal suffix would occur in a noun phrase (Gelb 1969:144f); almost automatic in the early stages of the language, mimation came to be dropped with increasing frequency, i.e., a selection was made for lack of positional marking, a phenomenon which is properly stylistic.

Syntax, lexicon and discourse analysis are much more fertile sources of stylistic features. An Akkadian *syntactical* feature which lends itself for alternative selections is subordination. Alternate means which are used in Akkadian are coordination and nominalization, and these are on the whole more frequent than subordination. Yet when subordination occurs, it may reach high degrees of complexity, especially in prose. This indicates not only that subordination was productive in the language, but also that it was highly developed in its potential use. A paradigm may be established of alternate syntactical features, as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| subordination | *kīma tammaru...* | "as you see..." |
| coordination | *tammar-ma...* | "you will see and..." |
| nominalization | *ina amārim...* | "in seeing..." |

The components of this paradigm are stylistic features because their selection can be mapped on the basis of assemblage distinctiveness.

A synonym set is the *lexical* equivalent of the syntactical paradigms just considered. Synonyms have closely overlapping semantic ranges, thus they are partially identical in terms of meaning, and as

a result they can easily become stylistic features. As part of the semantic range we may consider the cultural associations which a given word may evoke. In a "paradigm" which might list

| | |
|---|---|
| *erṣetum* | "land, earth" |
| *qaqqarum* | "land, ground" |
| *mātum* | "land, country" |
| *ēperum* | "land, dirt" |
| *pātum* | "land, territory" |
| *ammatum* | "land, terra firma" |

the last word has an arcane connotation which might be rendered in English by using a loan word (Latin "terra firma" for "land as opposed to the sea, and seen from the sea") which is esoteric and thus conveys a special semantic value. These considerations contribute to defining a specific semantic value of *ammatum*; its stylistic value, if any, will have to be derived not from its single appearance in the text, but from its being part of a recurrent selection for similar linguistic features.

Discourse analysis (or "rhesiology") envisages links over and beyond sentence boundaries. At the segmental level, one major example of stylistic feature is meter. The function of meter is to channel expression into predictable corridors, by means of such devices as rhyme or rhythm (based on syllabic quantity alternation or syllable count). In Akkadian, metrical channeling takes the form of syntactic isotonism (see Buccellati 1978). The variety of constraints imposed by meter on discourse provides a rich set of alternants for stylistic definition.

### *3.2.2. Artifactual Data:*

The formal categorization of artifactual data is not as developed as it is for linguistic data, hence stylistic features are not as readily identifiable as linguistic features. At the segmental level the

following considerations may be suggested.

A first distinction may be made between the physical property of an artifact and the attributes resulting from manufacturing. As for *physical properties*, one can distinguish between type of material (metal, stone, etc.), color, weight, texture, etc. The alternation between stylistic features of this type is considerable, since the range of available items is very high.

As for manufacturing attributes, the ones that pertain to the segmental level concern this spatial arrangement. This corresponds to what one calls sometimes artifactual "morphology", and it will be immediately apparent how the morphological attributes may all easily become stylistic features. A classification of such attributes might distinguish between an absolute and a relative level, of which only the former belongs to the segmental level. It includes extreme measurements (such as height, width, diameter), and total measurements (such as are made possible through photogrammetry).

### *3.3. Compositional Level:*

A second type of stylistic feature may be defined in terms of the item (e.g., a text or an artifact) as a whole, still from the viewpoint of an analysis of intrinsic formal elements. I am calling this the compositional level where the term "composition" refers to the overall coordination of the components. Naturally, individual compositional features are to be discerned, but always from the viewpoint of the integrity of the item as a whole.

#### *3.3.1. Linguistic Data:*

Viewed in its unfolding, a text may be conceived as a linear entity: this is held together by the overall notional unity of the message, by the internal substructuring into segmental building blocks, and by the resulting junctures between the latter. These, among others, are what

may be called the most important LINEAR devices of composition.

The term *composition* may be used in a general sense to refer to the internal connective texture of the message, whether in fact there is (1) a *plot* or *story* built, for example, on the contrastive growth of characters and situations or there is simply (2) an *account* of data stated as coterminous. To the first category, that of contrastive growth, belongs typically the modern novel. The closest we come to this in Akkadian literature is perhaps with the "Poor Man of Nippur", where the unfolding of the story is in itself the dominant of the message. But also such texts as "Irra", the "Vision of the Netherworld", the "Descent of Ishtar", or even the "Theodicy" rely on contrastive growth, often in ways which are not immediately apparent and which are therefore all the more effective, if more difficult to detect. For an in-depth compositional analysis along these lines of "Gilgameš", the "Theodicy" and the "Dialog of Pessimism", I may refer to three essays I wrote in Italian a few years ago (Buccellati 1972).

The composition appears as an account or a statement, rather than as a contrastive description with poetic texts such as hymns or with prose texts such as the political oratory of royal inscriptions. Here events which are obviously part and parcel of a given time process are flattened, as it were, within the framework of what is essentially, from a compositional point of view, a synchronic account. The "Sippar" inscription of Hammurapi is a little compositional jewel in this respect -- no matter how worn out by continuous reading in introductory classes.

The unity of a text is often highlighted by compositional devices which bracket or include the "composition" (whether plot or account). The most obvious of these INCLUSIVE devices is what may be called *frame* -- i.e., a notional structure in which the message is embedded, a suprasegmental link which overarches the linear progression of the story from beginning to end (on the notion of frame, see, e.g., Oppenheim 1956:187f and 213). A typical example is the dialog form of the "Dialog of Pessimism", which serves to give an internal unity to what would otherwise appear as a disconnected collection of proverbs and maxims (this notion

is elaborated in detail in Buccellati 1972:83-90). The acrostic may be regarded as a special form of frame, especially when it results in a statement which serves to proclaim the dominant theme of the text -- as in the "Theodicy".

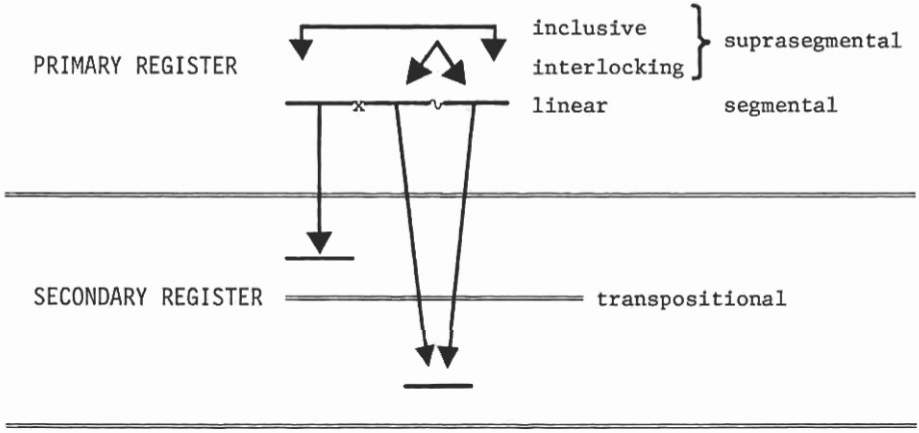
Similar in function to inclusive devices are INTERLOCKING devices, which overarch portions of a given text; in so doing they serve as a tensional factor in binding a composition together and in underscoring thematic developments. One might distinguish two main types depending on whether the structural components which are so linked are contiguous or not.

To the first type belongs the best known of these devices, namely *parallelism*: of two contiguous segments, the second parallels the first in a variety of ways, and with regard to grammatical, semantic or other characteristics. Since much has been written about this particular device, from the viewpoint of ancient Near Eastern literatures (see recently Greenstein 1976), or from a broader and comparative viewpoint (see especially Jakobson 1966), I need not proceed any further here. It may only be worth pointing out that the notion of parallelism refers expressly only to *metrical* (contiguous) segments, and that these normally are verses, rather than, for instance, couplets. There may of course be parallelism also in prose (see for instance the royal epithets in the "Sippar" inscription); here, however, there is no thoroughgoing correlation between rhesiological and compositional structure, so that parallelism is more diffused and generally at a notional level only. The aversion to straddling between verses magnifies even more the role of parallelism in Akkadian poetry.

Another type of interlocking device is that of *repetition*, which may occur between contiguous segments (e.g., two adjacent sentences, one ending and the other beginning with the same word) as well as non-contiguous ones (e.g., a text portion which is repeated verbatim at different junctures, such as a refrain). More subtle, and hence more difficult to perceive but also literarily all the more effective, is the device of *crossreferencing*: a notional theme not necessarily sig-

naled by the same lexical items, is repeated at some distance, and serves as a powerful tensional factor in holding the composition together (for a number of such cases in "Gilgameš", see Buccellati 1972: 2-36, especially 33).

While the devices discussed so far operate on the level of composition viewed as a single and primary register of segmental relationships, there is also a secondary register which does not have a compositional structure of its own, but consists only of compositional fragments: the link between these fragments of the secondary register and the full segmental structure of the primary register is provided by the TRANSPOSITIONAL devices. The graphic rendering of Chart 2 may be useful in portraying the intended configuration.




When Sennacherib says of himself that "he swept over the land of the enemy like a storm" (*gimir mātīšu...kīma imbari asḫup*), he switches registers and invokes a fragment of a different composition (pertaining to a natural phenomenon) into the primary composition, which describes his military exploits. All that is left undeveloped in the second register (i.e., all that is left unsaid about the storm) is present as a

potential composition of its own; the context of the primary register calls for a selection of the pertinent implications -- in this case, for instance, the fierceness, danger, noise of the storm might be the pertinent qualities which apply to the primary register, whereas such questions as the amount of rainfall are in the background. It is proper then of transpositional devices to invoke fragments of other compositions *without indicating fully the range of applicability* (this is true even of complex similes such as those, for instance, found in Homer).

An important element of transpositional devices is that they tend to violate the natural sequence of things: by extracting one compositional fragment from its context, and transposing it onto a different register, the natural identity of the fragment is lost. In our example, only a portion of the notion "storm" is envisaged, and the overall natural context of the phenomenon is explicitly pushed into the background. Such a dislocation of the natural sequence can only take place within given bounds: its effectiveness is proportional to the tensional range *of the dislocation* (*i.e., the farther one pushes away from* the level of banality, the more captivating is the transposition); on the other hand, there must remain a fundamental intelligibility of the proposed linkage between registers. Poetry has been defined as a type of composition which exhibits such features in the extreme (Cohen 1966).

Simile and metaphor are the two most characteristic realizations of such device. Their formal properties within Akkadian are described briefly in an earlier paper (Buccellati 1976), to which I may simply refer here for a preliminary exemplification. For an interesting example of a different type of dislocation in Biblical poetry, see Weiss 1967, especially 419.

### *3.3.2. Artifactual Data:*

Of the primary distinction between physical properties and manufacturing attributes, only the second pertains properly to the *composition-*

al level. Relative spatial arrangement includes such elements as the direction of lines (e.g., whether the profile of a vessel is a continuous curve or is segmented by one or more carinations) or the nature of contact points (e.g., the juncture of a spout to the shoulder of a vessel represents fixed contact, while the fitting of a lid on top of a bowl represents potential contact).

Extrinsic *manufacturing* attributes consist of relationships to non-artifactual dimensions, whereby an artifact is viewed in relation either to human beings (i.e., society), or not. The latter type of relations is generally directed toward energy expenditure -- they are "functional" if the word is taken to refer to technical function (but there can also be a social function, a religious function, etc.). Examples include stationary structures (mostly architectural) and movable items such as tools (a hammer used for pounding), weapons (a bow used to shoot an arrow), vessels (a bottle used to pour liquids).

The stylistic value of this classification is high and is reflected in what is called traditionally the "typology" of artifacts. Typological traits or attributes are normally defined in terms of a given assemblage (e.g., the typology of bronze tools), and practically all of these attributes may serve as stylistic features. Relations which view an artifact within a given social context may be described as ideational or economic. Ideational relations pertain to either the figurative or non-figurative sphere. Figurative (or representational) items include sculptures, figurines or paintings; the internal attributes are traditionally considered part of an iconographic inventory, and as such they provide a wide range of stylistic features. This is similar for non-figurative items, which include ornaments such as jewelry, or decorations such as architectural fixtures. The economic sphere pertains to the degree of general availability of a given item, and the consequent "price" (whether monetary or otherwise) with all the impact this has on matters of social stratification, political influence and the like.

To summarize, all the artifactual stylistic features reviewed here may be mapped graphically onto a tree which reflects the binary opposi-

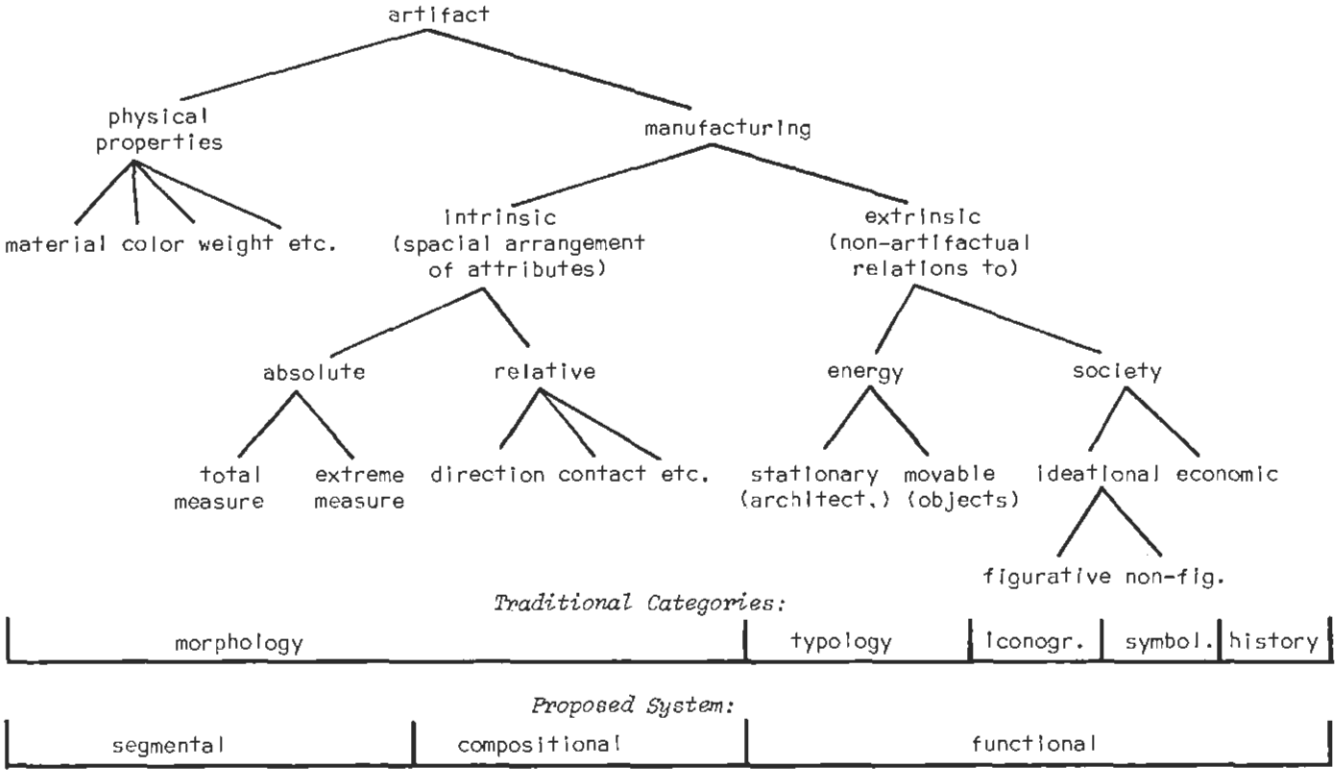

artifact
physical properties
manufacturing
material
color
weight
etc.
intrinsic (spacial arrangement of attributes)
extrinsic (non-artifactual relations to)
absolute
relative
energy
society
total measure
extreme measure
direction
contact
etc.
stationary (architect.)
movable (objects)
ideational
economic
figurative
non-fig.
Traditional Categories:
morphology
typology
iconogr.
symbol.
history
Proposed System:
segmental
compositional
functional

Chart 3

tions described (Chart 3).

## 4. DISTRIBUTIONAL COMPONENTS: STYLISTIC PATTERNS:

### *4.1. Definition:*

Normally, assemblages are identified as stylistically distinctive on the basis not of a single stylistic feature, but rather of constellations of features. Such constellations are here called "patterns". It is intrinsic to our definition of style, and of stylistic features, that stylistic patterns too result from a diachronic contrast of assemblages. These patterns are descriptively defined as configurations of features which can be shown to be assemblage distinctive; the correlation of features into patterns is the result of a diachronic distributional analysis based on contrasting assemblages. Note that the distributional criterion is absolute -- i.e., it is not relative to a noun from which a given stylistic pattern would be considered a deviation; rather, distributional cooccurrence in a given assemblage is identified as such by virtue of its contrast to other (ideally: all) assemblages. This is well expressed in the insightful definition of style given by Enkvist (1964:28), where the style of a text is said to be "The aggregate of the contextual probabilities of its linguistic items." Such a distributional analysis is a most complex task, because the very definition of assemblages is at the same time a presupposition and a result of such analysis. One can only start therefore with assemblages which can be defined as such on the basis of criteria extrinsic to the assemblage itself, and then verify their stylistic gradation in terms intrinsic to it. Thus, for instance, the various works of a given author may be considered a single assemblage on the basis of their common authorship; this is then verified internally on the basis of a distributional analysis of features and patterns. It is also apparent that assemblages will intersect one another in terms of different criteria, in such a way as to make a potential hierarchy of assemblages all the more difficult.

Computerized data bases lend themselves ideally to a thorough analysis of this type, not only because the data are susceptible to much more rapid inspection along traditional lines, but also because electronic data processing allows for an infinitely greater insight into clustering possibilities.

Patterns may be identified as configurations of features from either a single level (e.g., segmental *or* compositional), or, more frequently, from more levels. The most successful stylistic analysis, in descriptive terms, is the one which identifies the most numerous and most complex patterns; in this case, the result will be a finer differentiation into assemblages which will be all the more contrastive, and hence stylistically distinctive. Also, it is clear that, the narrower the assemblages, the more obvious will be the diachronic scalarity and the finer the stylistic patterning. In what follows, only a few simple examples will be given to illustrate patterning at a single or at multiple level(s).

### 4.2. *Single Level:*

Two examples may be quoted for segmental patterning in linguistic assemblages. They are both drawn from syntax. On the basis of a limited sample from the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal, Tiglath-Pileser, Shalmaneser, Sargon and Esarhaddon, it appears that in the case of the latter two there is a much higher incidence of coordination among sentences, in the order of 5 to 1 for Sargon and 3 to 1 for Esarhaddon. Similarly, Sargon exhibits a higher incidence of relative clauses, almost in order of 2 to 1 with respect to the others. A second instructive example pertains to the royal letters of the first dynasty of Babylon. The letters of Hammurapi use consistently the prepositional phrase *ṭuppī annīam ina amārim* as an introductory formula, while the later kings use just as consistently a subordinate clause *ṭuppī annīam kīma tammaru/ā*.

As for artifactual assemblages, one may think of the profile and the ware of vessels, which can be highly distinctive: for instance, the

so-called bevelled rim bowls exhibit a specific type of rim profile and overall proportions, as well as a type of coarse ware, which are characteristic of the Proto-literate period in Mesopotamia.

Compositional patterning for linguistic assemblages may also be illustrated by two examples. The adverb *šanītam* used to introduce a new topic is a marker of transition specific to letters of certain periods: it emphasizes a sharp break in the flow of information, while at the same time providing a carry-over from one stage to the next. The anacolouthon, on the other hand, seems to obtain the opposite effect by introducing a sharp break where there is in fact no boundary between topics. It may be considered stylistically specific in "scientific" literature -- for instance in the *šumma awīlum* type of clause of the laws, where it serves to highlight the beginning of a new section by providing something like a paragraph title.

As for artifactual assemblages, we may for instance point to a general trend in Old Babylonian ceramics whereby vessels with a flattened overall profile (platters or dishes) are rare; instead, the lower range in a typological classification based on profile is more frequently represented by open convex vessels (shallow bowls).

Of other types of single level patterning, besides the segmental and compositional, I will refer here briefly only to two types which are language specific, the graphic and the informational. The first is treated under the heading of palaeography in what concerns the design element of the script, and under the heading of graphemics in what concerns the correlation between graphic symbols and phonology. Thus we speak traditionally of the ductus of a scribe or scribal school, or of the syllabary of a given period or type of texts -- which are in fact stylistic definitions.

By "informational" style, on the other hand, I refer to a patterned selection of specific items of information. For instance, the normal exclusion of a date formula from the standard structure of Old Babylonian letters, or the normal inclusion of a list of witnesses in contracts, may be considered as stylistic determinants in the way in which

information is conveyed. A distributional analysis based on these criteria is possible, is valid, and is in fact common in Assyriological practice.

### *4.3. Multiple Level:*

The most frequent type of stylistic patterning, and the most distinctive and significant, is the one which is based on the correlation of features from many levels.

Literary genres may be regarded as broad textual assemblages. The distinction between prose and poetry is the broadest subdivision in this respect, and it can be defined especially along the lines of discourse analysis (meter), but also, for instance, along the lines of syntax (greater use of emphatic *-ma* after verbs in Akkadian poetry) or lexicon ("poetic" words, such as, for instance, *ammatum*). More narrowly within the range of specific literary genres are such distinctions as the one pertaining to the use of two complex feet in Akkadian hymns, which is excluded instead in other poetic texts, or the other (morphological) pertaining to the wider use of adverbials in *-iš* and *-ūm* in the so-called hymnic-epic dialect. In addition to the segmental features just mentioned, literary genres may also be defined by compositional features. Thus, for example, an inclusive device which is characteristic of contemporary literary texts but is missing in Akkadian is a composition title. An equivalent role is played on the other hand in Akkadian by the notion of frame, which is often signaled by the use of the first line of a composition as a way of referring to the composition as a whole. The *enūma* clauses which are found so often at the beginning of literary and scientific compositions provide an indication of how first lines may in fact have been construed to fit into a given compositional pattern. Stylistic specificity of this type may also be recognized when dealing with non-literary texts such as administrative texts, where the internal structure is signaled for instance by total entries given at the end of a text.

As we progressively narrow down the range of textual assemblages involved, the complexity and distinctiveness of patterning tends to increase proportionately. Thus we go from a literary genre in a given literature to the works of an author, or a single work, or even individual portions of a work which can be portioned off as discrete assemblages.

## 5. CLUSTERING MECHANISMS: STYLISTIC FACTORS:

### *5.1. Definition:*

Having isolated both the components of a stylistic system and their contrastive patterning among assemblages, the last important task is to identify the factors which are at the origin of patterning itself. We gain hereby an insight into the dynamics of the system. The selection of elements and patterns which properly characterizes style does not operate at random; it is rather in response, whether consciously or unconsciously, to given factors which condition the selection itself. These conditioning factors are mechanisms which bring about a certain clustering rather than another, they are, in other words, the reasons or the impulses behind the distributional array described above. Such mechanisms are not intrinsic to the assemblage, rather they operate from without: they arise from the training of the author (or artist, or composer) or from social conditions at the time the work is put together, from economic limitations or political interference. In every case, the ultimate goal of stylistic analysis is to identify these extra-assemblage factors within the context from which they emanate, and then determine how they affect the selection of intra-assemblage attributes on the part of the author. It is quite possible, of course, for stylistic analysis to stop at the level of the *description* of idiosyncratic distributional patterns: this can be in itself quite a complex task, and is in any case a precondition for any further inquiry into the underlying stylistic factors. But it is only such an inquiry which

will ultimately provide a true *explanation* of the stylistic system.

Through such an explanation we come closer to an understanding of the full semiotic range of a given assemblage. The identification of the stylistic factors which bring about the distributional reality of a work provide us with an insight into the semiotic prehistory of the work itself, and thus into its present semiotic power. The more complex is the formal stylistic description of an assemblage, and the more arcane its semiotic range, the more challenging and rewarding will correspondingly be its analysis. Through this process one obtains a critical yardstick for the evaluation of an assemblage. Political or social factors may also be operative behind the selection. Two interesting examples pertain to an alternation which is otherwise very rarely susceptible of stylistic selection, i.e., the number alternation between singular and plural. (1) During the 30's, a courtesy address form using the second plural was introduced into Italian under pressure from the Fascist regime: what resulted was an alternation between this form ("voi") and the traditional third singular feminine ("lei") which was stylistic in distribution. (2) In contemporary American English, a trend may be developing to use the third plural common ("they", "them", "theirs") instead of the third singular masculine ("he", "him", "his") where the statement is non gender-specific: in this way one can omit either what is perceived as a socially sexist choice for the masculine or the awkward pairs "he/she", "him/her", "his/her".

### *5.2. The Secret Kinship:*

The ways in which different stylistic levels come to be integrated in a text account for its literary nature. To put it differently, literary style may be conceived as the interweaving of all other types of style present in a text. The author's creative integration unifies in the work itself all the levels which we have kept, and must keep, separate for the sake of analysis. Integration, as distinct from juxtaposition, means that the connections are from within, that the counterpoint-

al registers blend as of necessity into a unified harmony. This has been captured in a beautiful statement by a Czech poet who dates back to the early eighteen hundreds and is quoted by R. Jakobson (Matejka and Titunik 1976:164):

> "...true poetry -- the more original and alive its world, the more contradictory the contrasts in which the secret kinship occurs".

Much of the modern study on poetry has brought out just what the various dimensions of this "secret kinship" are (see for instance the notion of coupling in Levin 1962). And indeed poetry develops this aspect of expression to the extreme, to a point where the complex internal architecture of the poem is immediately felt as necessary at the very moment in which it is posited freely by the author -- causing, in the words of Valéry (1958:72) the poem to acquire something like an intrinsic regenerative power:

> The poem...does not die for having lived: it is expressly designed to be born again from its ashes and to become endlessly what it has just been. Poetry can be recognized by this property, that it tends to get itself reproduced in its own form: it stimulates us to reconstruct it identically.

The notion of secret kindship, however, applies to all levels of expression. The farther away from poetry, the less secret and necessary may be the bonds; but they are there nevertheless, in however embryonic and imperceptible a fashion, as filaments which hold together whatever the unit of expression may be. Stylistic analysis gives us a handle with which to identify these bonds or filaments, and conceptualize their relationships. The selections which operate at the various levels are a function of a higher selection, a broader system which subsumes all the various stylistic levels. The distributional classes which are recognized as present in a given textual assemblage are not just cumulative,

but rather reciprocally integrated in a unifying structure. In the measure in which we can discern patterns, we can perceive what the architecture of the whole is. From a formalized description of idiosyncratic selections we can reach the point of origin behind it all, the author's preference; we can discover, as it were, the ancestral source from which the secret kinship emanates -- for whatever type of textual assemblage.

Hence, the effort at formalization about which I spoke at the beginning may be seen to serve a vital, paedagogical role. By bringing us back to the locus where the author's idiosyncratic selections take place, stylistic analysis does more than dissect an object of study: it also trains our sensitivity. Formal recognition of patterns, where patterns are not otherwise perceived, generates an active patterning ability. We assimilate, in other words, the same presuppositions which were operative in the initial creative process. Through a mediate, scientific process we acquire an immediate power of perception. We become educated, humanistically.

### 5.3. *The Limit of Expectation:*

The internal structure of the text is declared by the text itself, not by any label outside the text. The code is given with the data themselves, and ultimately any decoding must be possible from within the text; for fruition of the secret kinship to be possible, its inner bonds must be apparent of their own volition at the same time that they remain secret, as if in a transfigured state. The self-declaration of the text is not embedded in any single place, but rather it "happens" at the same time that the text "happens". The text sets its own limits, and the degree of expectation created thereby grows apace with the definition of those limits. Poetry pushes to the extreme this process, which is only adumbrated in simpler texts. The limit of expectation is all the more operative the more complex a text is, and it is especially of these texts that I am speaking now, even though in principle the ar-

gumentation applies to all texts.

Both the notion of limit and that of expectation imply directionality. Reading a text means going from threshold to threshold, each one being a limit to what precedes and to what follows: they are at the same time resolutions of announced limits and pointers to further limits. In this constant thresholding lies the dynamism of a text. The delicate balance which is necessary is one between banality and unintelligibility. Whether the resolution of a limit is obvious, and thus banal, or whether it is too obscure, and thus unintelligible -- in either case the expectation is frustrated. This necessary balancing between extremes is partly the cause for the selections made by the author, selections which make up the many stylistic dimensions of a text. The goal of literary analysis is to disentangle these dimensions, and to indicate how effectively they have been ordered along the creative axis to produce the intended result. The directionality implied in the notion of the limit of expectation is a guide to literary analysis. The overarching question is then: how well are the limits posited, how well are they resolved, and what is their hierarchy? Stylistic analysis, in the distributional sense outlined above, will serve as an apposite tool.

## 6. SUMMARY:

### *6.1. The System:*

The principles of stylistic analysis surveyed here may be summarized in the form of a chart which brings together the essential elements of the system (Chart 4). The basic concerns which underlie the system proposed here are highlighted in the graphic arrangement of the chart: the growing degrees of complexity in the analysis of the data, the discreteness and measurability of the elements which make up the system at its various levels, the rigid distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic level of description. As such, the system appears to be

**Features**

- described synchronically in terms of various levels:

| Assemblage A | | |
|---|---|---|
| segmental | compositional | (...) |
| 1 2 3 (...) | 4 5 6 (...) | |

- described diachronically in terms of assemblage distinctiveness:

[A] compared to [B], [C], [D], ...

**Patterns**

- described synchronically in terms of distribution of features:

| Assemblage A | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 + 2 | 1 + 4 | 2 + 3 + 5 | (...) |

- described diachronically in terms of assemblage distinctiveness

[A] compared to [B], [C], [D], ...

**Factors**

- assemblage intrinsic: coherence, material limitations, etc.
- assemblage extrinsic: aesthetic tradition, socio-economic constraints, etc.

Chart 4

a universal and yet a powerful explicatory model, in that it accounts uniquely for certain major aspects inherent in the data, and it accounts for them in a way that is definite and measurable.

### 6.2. *The Systems:*

Within the generalized description of the system offered above, the goal will always be to obtain a description of specific individual stylistic systems. While *the* system describes style as a generalized field of inquiry, such a system can only exist in concrete embodiments which correspond to specific assemblages. These will be the stylistic system*s*, in the plural, with which we will be specifically concerned in our studies of given segments of literature, art history, and so on. Thus *Akkadian* stylistics will include all the elements which can be shown to be distributionally distinctive of the total assemblage of Akkadian texts as distinct from comparable assemblages (e.g., other Semitic linguistic corpora, other comparable literary genres such as epics, etc.). A fuller inquiry into the factors which condition such distributional selections will give us a deeper insight into the dynamics of that particular system. The boundaries of the pertinent assemblage may of course be drawn however broadly or narrowly one may consider suitable -- hence the possibility of stylistics of Akkadian Wisdom literature, or of the "Theodicy", or of a single tablet of "Gilgameš". In any case, we will be able to set specific parameters within an explicit system of analysis; we will be able, especially, to keep the different levels of analysis rigorously discrete one from the other, and on this very basis to allow for an effective correlation of these same levels. In this way style, far from being an ill-defined limbo, can be assigned its own very specific place in the configuration of cultural assemblages; and stylistic analysis, by articulating explicitly the modalities and conditions of this particular cultural dimension, comes to play a unique and powerful role in our growing understanding of culture.

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