

Sample Research Project in the Context of a Freshman Writing Course

Prepared by Steve Tollefson, College Writing Programs, UC Berkeley, 2005

Includes Final Research Paper, Annotated Bibliography and Reflection on the Process

Internalizing Dead Kings and Ambiguous Art

Marian Feldman has been a member of the UC Berkeley faculty for the last seven years and is currently Assistant Professor in the Near Eastern Studies Department. She has published two articles, two reviews, and is in the editing process of her first book. The publications reveal Feldman's process of internalizing her academic interests by the stylistic differences between the articles. In her professorial career thus far, Feldman has donned various roles as art historian, archaeologist, professor and writer. This paper provides insight as to how Feldman's personality and different aspects show through in her writing and by changes in her writing over the course of her publishing career thus far.

As I enter my first college class, my attention goes to Professor Feldman, a tall, slender woman in a loose pearl blouse with black dress pants. The combination of her graceful stance and scholarly presence distinguishes her already from the chaos of the lecture room. The calm demeanor spreads through the room as she gradually turns the lights down low, signaling the beginning of lecture, and gives life to the art historian's companion, the slide projector. Her slow and steady speech is punctuated by inflections at nearly every other word and reflects her scholarly presence. She picks her words carefully and you can sense the moment's thought before each. Her precisely chosen words make each one valuable as I frantically try to catch them all. Feldman incorporates her elevated vocabulary in daily speech and lecture, requiring that I form my own vocabulary list: *mélange*, *koine*, *cache*, *lingua franca*, etc.

In spite of being intimidated by Professor Feldman's scholarship, the fellow human being, Marian Feldman, shows through at times. She does not hesitate to admit "When did those excavations take place?" or "Who was that guy who ruled Babylon? I never remember that one." At one point she might exclaim, "Well, it doesn't matter anyway" followed by a signature chuckle. She welcomes corrections or additions by students, and some questions

lead her to guiltily admit, "You caught me. I was trying to avoid that one because, well, we just don't know."

And her witty personality emerges at breaks in the steady speech. These breaks in seriousness reveal her comfort with the topic where she jokes about it and prove a constant reminder that she is only human. Such comments appear at least once throughout the lecture. She introduces Cyrus the Great with the side comment, "you can see he's going places" and explains, with a childlike thrill offset by her choice of vocabulary, "then all kinds of machinations happen—really quite exciting!" And in discussing Alexander's conquests, she slides in, "You can only do that kind of foolhardy thing when you're 22. When you're older, you're not that stupid or reckless." In a recent lecture, she acknowledged a fault in art history with a sense of humor saying,

Keep in mind that when we interpret the paintings, we are interpreting the re-creations, which have been meticulously re-created based on the same paintings we are comparing them to. So there is no surprise we find many trends and similarities between the two!

The title of a recent lecture about Tutankhamun entitled "Tutankhamun, International Man of Mystery" again reveals how she adds a personal and humorous touch. It makes ancient history more welcoming to readers and listeners, and of course reveals her lighthearted personality.

Feldman's academic focus is as dichotomous as her personality. Feldman's research has brought her to the point where history and art meet: interpreting art in a historical context. When she writes about art, it requires an eye for identifying "what is going on": the angles and colors involved, and understanding that certain artistic displays have a universal meaning. And writing the analysis involves two parts. The first is listing observations, the basics. The second is translating visual observations into meanings. Feldman refers to knowledge of history to give meaning to the art piece. When she is writing, the art analysis comes straight from her, whereas writing about the historical context is based on other resources and requires little if any personal input. Even writing the most basic art

analysis therefore becomes a research paper, yet Feldman accepts this saying, “When analyzing art, the words are stilted” and it is

Hard to find the right words...but it becomes second nature writing...analyses. You get to a point where it’s just another analysis and you know all the compositional elements to look for.

Feldman has written two articles: “Luxurious forms: Redefining a Mediterranean ‘international style,’ 1400-1200 B.C.E.,” in 2000 for The Art Bulletin and “Ambiguous identities: The ‘Marriage’ Vase of Niqmaddu II and the Elusive Egyptian Princess,” in 2002 for The Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology. Both articles cover the topic of art during the Late Bronze Age (1400-1200 BCE) in the Near East, not coincidentally the subject of her doctoral dissertation. The two articles differ in their organization, audience, and mood. These differences reflect Feldman’s change as a writer and art historian over the course of two years. Her writing style becomes clearer as the material and writing becomes more familiar to her. Feldman conveys the information to the varied audiences by adjusting to the audiences’ knowledge-level. These articles in addition to two book reviews written by Feldman reveal how her identity as the writer changes with audience and with writing experience: art historian, archaeologist, casual, scholarly, trying too hard to present information and feeling comfortable with her writing and knowledge of the Near East.

Feldman’s first reaction to my having read her first publication, “Luxurious forms,” is “You read that!?” Her exclamation reveals nothing but shock. “Most of the people I asked to read it, didn’t understand it,” Feldman explains and as I give a minor agreeing nod, she gives an apology as if directed to anyone who ever read it.

The article is not as hard to read as she makes it out to be, and it is a rather a good example of how she combines history and analysis. Feldman is straight-talking in the thesis: “I propose that each tradition manifests subtly idiosyncratic signification within the multidimensional social and political network of its use” but the talk

definitely doesn’t strike the reader in a straight path (Feldman Luxurious 7).

It is easy for the reader to spot the main ideas in this article, but understanding them is a different ballgame entirely. The long-sentences and elevated vocabulary makes the content stuffed with words but hard to comprehend as an idea. The thesis is hard to understand because of the many “loaded” words: longer and more abstract Latinate that makes up the bulk of the sentence’s meaning. The speech lacks the concreteness and clarity that Feldman demonstrates in her later publications. In this article, she writes, “Artistic expression mediates human relations by articulating specifics of meaning derived from the symbolic or cultural significance attributed to the works” (Feldman Luxurious 9). The series of prepositional phrases seem like afterthoughts built off of the main idea and make it hard to read even when the diction is easier to understand.

The language employed in “Luxurious forms” is written for a specifically art-conscious audience: readers of The Art Bulletin, a magazine published for serious art historians. Feldman admits the major role that the audience plays in her writing:

I have to change my language and angle depending on who will read the article. For The Art Bulletin, I had to provide information about the Near East, its history and the archaeology. Obviously, when I wrote for The Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology, I didn’t have to go into the history but I had to define art terms.

Feldman as scholar of art and history is an interpreter who translates information into the language of art or the language of archaeology. Feldman’s art vocabulary goes undefined throughout “Luxurious forms”: “an unfinished ivory **pyxis**” or an “**amphora**-type vessel” or “female form in **repousse**” (Feldman 10, 18, 14).

In contrast, she explains knowledge that is basic to archaeologists, such as chronology and regions of the Near East: “A word must be said about chronology, that is, the sequential ordering of historical events” and

This closely knit world extended from the Aegean (present-day Greece), to Egypt, Anatolia (Turkey), Cyprus, the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan) and Assyria and Babylonia in Mesopotamia (Iraq) (Feldman Luxurious 13, 10)

In the later article, “Ambiguous identities,” published in The Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology, she spends less time on history than the previous article and archaeological terms are not defined at all. Rather the art analyses receive the greatest attention as they are least familiar to the audience, archaeologists. Feldman explains to the audience the process of the art analysis in the introduction so that they understand how she plans to support her argument.

Feldman’s organization scheme changes dramatically between the formats of the two articles. In “Luxurious forms,” Feldman approaches arguments in an organization scheme that is difficult to get into. The main idea of this article is Feldman’s argument that an “international style” existed during the Late Bronze Age that grew out of the communications and “elite” culture of the five kings who ruled separate kingdoms throughout the Near East.

There are different pieces of information found throughout the article: background history, data of archaeological finds, formal art analysis, argument, and conclusion. Instead of writing them in that order, Feldman writes each as separate entities without any linear progression whatsoever. She starts with a section devoted to the ancient city of Ugarit that seems irrelevant when it is then followed by a completely different discussion of Near Eastern politics. Readers become possessed by the demand, “What does this all mean!?!” and finally Feldman ties the isolated pieces together in a conclusion that ends the article as soon as the reader understands Feldman’s argument:

The completely hybridized tradition creates a ‘supraregional’ koine connected to an idealized kingship network of palaces throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The complimentary themes of rulership, domination, and fecundity draw on long-standing traditions of the network’s constituent

participants... In this way, the luxury goods, which may have circulated as greeting gifts, served as a vehicle for identity formation and maintenance within a community of royal elites (Feldman Luxurious 28).

If the reader can make it through 23 pages of Near Eastern history, archaeological findings, and analysis, the reader is sure to be enlightened with this paragraph. It is understandable why Feldman could find few who made it through the entire piece. The organization scheme delays gratification, requiring that the reader muddle through the challenging diction, and then remember the bits and pieces of information until page 23!

The “Luxurious forms” article eventually reaches the reader though it gets to a rough start and follows a complex path. Feldman’s tone changes between analysis and historical background, adding to the choppiness and stilted quality in this article and her personality hardly shows through the didactic diction. Feldman admits to the stiffness of her publication in her shock of my daring attempt to read it. She says, “Bad writing,” writing that doesn’t strengthen the argument or compel the reader to keep reading, “is because you don’t know what to say.”

Feldman has published two primary articles, the aforementioned “Luxurious forms” and “Ambiguous Identities,” and is currently in the editing process of her first book, Diplomacy by Design. They all involve the same topic: The international artistic style that developed in the eastern Mediterranean from 1400-1200 BC due to the diplomatic relations between kings of different regions. Feldman is of course aware of this topical déjà vu but slyly responds, “But now I know what to say.” According to Feldman, with each publication, the writing and the writing process become smoother and more focused. Although not yet published, Diplomacy by Design is expected to be the compilation of the last 10 years of research and the “result of the internalization of my dissertation.” It is this internalization of the topic that has made the writing “better,” according to Feldman, in that the topic is “familiar...part of me.”

In “Ambiguous Identities,” Feldman discusses the identity of a woman on an alabaster vase found on the eastern Mediterranean

coast whose Egyptian style reflects the ambiguous “international” style and diplomatic relations in the Near East. Instead of the complex organization scheme of her first paper, this paper, divided into five sections, is much more straightforward. The five sections are entitled: “Introduction,” “Niqmaddu’s ‘Marriage Scene’,” “Diplomatic Relations and Interdynastic Marriages,” “Ambiguity and Status in the Extended Amarna Period,” and “Discussion and Conclusion.” The topics are presented in a linear sequence, starting with Feldman’s introduction of the issue at hand: “the woman’s identity” on the Ugarit “Marriage Scene” vase “in light of diplomatic marriages and political negotiations” (Feldman *Ambiguous* 78).

Feldman gives a nine-page artistic analysis with visuals followed by a discussion of the political situation during the period to provide the reader with an artistic and historical context for her argument. The essence of her argument lies in the fourth section, where Feldman makes a convincing argument by discussing all theories of interpretation and gracefully disproving each. She includes a concession, only to state that these theories are unsupported by archaeological evidence and based on old assumptions. At this point she suggests her own theory: that the lady is not Egyptian but simply created in an Egyptian style in concordance with the “international style.”

Logically, the article ends with a “Discussion and Conclusion” section in which Feldman gives the strongest arguments for her case. Feldman’s organization makes much more sense and makes arguing the point more successful. Topics are much more focused and presented clearly in a linear progression, covering one idea within the topic at a time. Feldman ends the article asking the archaeological community, “Why couldn’t Niqmaddu play off a Syrian girl for Egyptian?” Even though she maintains her elevated diction, this article is definitely easier to follow, revealing that she is more comfortable with the topic, and able to bring in more style to the writing (Feldman *Ambiguous* 94).

Feldman’s two book reviews reveal how she can take on a different approach in writing, namely in tone. In the a review of a volume entitled The Synchronisation of Civilizations about applying

dates to the Ancient Near East, Feldman points out that chronology is not her specialty yet her diction and tone is very casual and critical for not being very familiar with the topic. She writes,

The volume offers something of a mixed bag... contributions take on a strange flavor being for the most part proposals for research not yet conducted (sometimes with a less than subtle call for funding) (Feldman *Synchronisation* 867)

The organization is very mechanical and linear, like in “Ambiguous identities”: she states the problem of chronology in the Near East, defines techniques of dating, and ends with the review mixed with her opinion. The review reveals her personality in her frustration with chronology issues and with the inconclusive quality of this volume in her comments that people “may feel disappointed at the lack of substantive results presented” and that

The general Jack of results presented and the expansive scope of many of the projects without supporting specifics lend a slightly unreal feel to the work, as if the symposium participants were asked to compile research wish-lists irrespective of feasibility... one is left wondering precisely just what sort of research agenda is being proposed... (Feldman *Synchronisation* 868)

In contrast, Feldman’s review of the book Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant is much more diplomatic, though the book was equally frustrating to her. This review was written two years prior to the Synchronisation review, and stylistically seems to be a transition phase between her first article, “Luxurious forms,” and the Synchronisation review in that the organization is clear but the tone is not as casual. Feldman comes to this book with her specialized knowledge that that sea trade played a crucial role in the formation of the “international style” during this time. And because of her background interest in the international trade during the period, Feldman states that if the author described exchange and “diplomatic gift giving,” it “would have further enriched the interpretative discussion of the second part” (Feldman *Seagoing* 660).

Had Feldman not been the reviewer, this idea might have been overlooked and so it shows how her specific knowledge has an influence on the review. Feldman believes that as a reviewer it is important to ask, "What would I want to know as the reader?" Thus Feldman begins the review stating that, "Wachsmann brings to the work a detailed knowledge of ships and seafaring" and ends with, "notwithstanding these comments, Wachsmann does an admirable job of marshalling a wide range of evidence from disparate fields of study" (Feldman Seagoing 660-1). As for "these comments," Feldman makes justified complaints that

Several interpretative digressions would perhaps be better placed as appendices, as they are sometimes hard to follow and could benefit from greater synthetic analysis... complications of using visual evidence for documentary purposes, which Wachsmann readily acknowledges, result in some interpretations with which readers may disagree... a useful supplement would have been a diagram of a ship with its parts clearly labeled to facilitate comprehension (Feldman Seagoing 660-1).

Perhaps it was because Feldman disliked this article so much (as she admitted) that she walks a delicate line, trying not to let her personal opinion show through but at the same time giving a critical review of the book with evidence to support claims. The organization of this review is standard, including summary, praises, and complaints in a straightforward path.

Feldman recently gave a lecture for the Archaeological Institute of America about paintings and palaces in the Near East and Aegean. The audience being more intellectual than her Near Eastern Studies 15 class, she reads from a script nearly identical in organization and diction to her first article. She speaks stiffly in the familiar intonation pattern but the words are mechanical and require strict concentration, as if mentally translating a foreign language. And nothing seems relevant, between an explanation of technology, painting technique and history of political relations. Forty minutes of trying to focus suddenly leads to an "Aha!" moment as Feldman gives the meat of the lecture in one long sentence. And then,

Feldman, without warning, attaches the anticlimactic "Thank you" to her revelatory statement. One might think this a regression of style on Feldman's part, but the purpose of this lecture was to introduce Feldman's new direction of research: Middle Bronze Age painting. Thus it seems that the stilted writing is very much correlated to Feldman's comfort with the topic as she recently consummated her research of Late Bronze Age trade goods in Diplomacy by Design, so she begins the "internalization" process again with a new topic.

Feldman has only been publishing for seven years, but already she has demonstrated versatility in writing between the reviews and articles. In this period, Feldman has made her writing more readable through the "internalization" of the topic. Marian Feldman's skill at switching modes from lecturer to writer to reviewer as well as from art historian to archaeologist is apparent in her writing as well. It should then be no surprise that Feldman can switch caps in a flash like the odd numbered baseball team that needs another player. The intimidating academic of ancient Near Eastern art history, with her pointer and lengthy explanations of how the Assyrians employed propaganda is no sooner followed by a break in her elevated speech and standard pattern of annunciation and intonation, "What we see is that... the Assyrians are exacting and asking for tribute in the way of 'The Godfather'," and suddenly this professorial female art historian becomes an Assyrian-Italian mobster threatening, "By giving an offer they can't refuse."

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Works Cited

- Feldman, Marian. "Ambiguous identities: The 'Marriage' Vase of Niqmaddu II and the Elusive Egyptian Princess." Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology 2002: 75-99.
- Feldman, Marian. "Luxurious forms: Redefining a Mediterranean 'international style,' 1400-1200 B.C.E." The Art Bulletin, vol. 84, No. 1, Mar. 2002: 6-28.
- Feldman, Marian. Rev. of Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant, by Shelley Wachsmann. Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 120, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 2000: 660-661.
- Feldman, Marian. Rev. of The Synchronisation of Civilisations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Second Millenium B.C.: Proceedings of an International Symposium at Schloss Haindorf, 15th-17th of November 1996 and the Austrian Academy, Vienna, 11th-12th of May 1998, ed. By Manfred Bietak. Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 122, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 2002: 867-868.

Annotated Bibliography

- "AHMA Participating Faculty: Marian Feldman." University of California Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology, homepage. UC Regents. 2005. 26 Mar. 2005. http://ls.berkeley.edu/dept/ahma/faculty_feldman.html
This website provides is a link off of the homepage for the University of California Graduate studies group in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology. Marian Feldman is a faculty member involved. The site provides brief background information on Feldman as to when and where she received her doctoral degree and what she has published.
- Feldman, Marian. "Ambiguous identities: The 'Marriage' Vase of Niqmaddu II and the Elusive Egyptian Princess." Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology 2002: 75-99.
This article is for an archaeologist audience. Feldman, Professor of Near Eastern Art History, discusses the ambiguous artistic implications of an "international style" in the context of an Eastern Mediterranean vase. She argues that the ambiguity is representative of the ambiguous political relationships between the five great kingdoms of the Late Bronze Age, using evidence of art analysis and historical archaeological evidence.
- Feldman, Marian. "Luxurious forms: Redefining a Mediterranean 'international style,' 1400-1200 B.C.E." The Art Bulletin, vol. 84, No. 1, Mar. 2002: 6-28.
Written for an audience of art historians, the article discusses the "international style" found spread through out the Near East during the Late Bronze Age. Feldman argues with the help of archaeological evidence, knowledge of the political situation at the time and with her own art analysis of various archaeological finds, that there exists this "international style" brought about by an international court culture.

Feldman, Marian. Rev. of Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant, by Shelley Wachsmann. Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 120, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 2000: 660-661.

Feldman reviews this book based on her background knowledge of trade during the Late Bronze Age that contributed to the spread of an “international style,” addressed in other articles. She provides fairly objective statements on Wachsmann’s success, while suggesting possible improvements that would make the piece more accessible to the reader based on her own experience, as one concerned with the implications of ships on trade and less familiar with the technical aspects of seamanship.

Feldman, Marian. Rev. of The Synchronisation of Civilisations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Second Millenium B.C.: Proceedings of an International Symposium at Schloss Haindorf, 15th-17th of November 1996 and the Austrian Academy, Vienna, 11th-12th of May 1998, ed. By Manfred Bietak. Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 122, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 2002: 867-868.

Marian Feldman bases this review on her in-depth knowledge of the Late Bronze Age and the various chronological debates that surround it. Feldman is less experienced with the technical aspects of chronology as she briefly describes the processes of absolute and relative dating, but reveals her interest in the topic when she critically analyzes the failures of the book to provide any concrete solutions to the problems.

Feldman, Marian. “Tutankhamun, International Man of Mystery.” American Research Center in Egypt, Northern Chapter. Notes of lecture by Nancy Corbin. 17 Apr. 2005.

<http://home.comcast.net/~hebsed/feldman.htm>

This is a report of a lecture given by Marian Feldman and recorded by Nancy Corbin of the American Research Center in Egypt. In this report, Feldman again describes the “international style” of the Late Bronze Age in regards to the archaeological remains found with Tutankhamun of Egypt. Corbin reports on the lecture without adding comments

Reflection

This project at first seemed very daunting: a semester-long project, research, and interviewing a publishing professor at Berkeley. Actually, on my first day of class, I was unaware of the topic of this class and though it seemed interesting, I considered dropping the class because I was intimidated. Instead this paper has become a major learning experience for me and I think it is an excellent class for a freshman.

I had not done research before to this extent and found it very helpful. I learned about the many resources that are available here and how to search through these resources. I had no idea there were so many online databases and I have since been referring to them for other classes. In fact, many of the research skills I learned in this class, I have already applied to other classes! I have also learned a lot from some of the negative aspects of research. I did not organize my information very well and ended up misplacing material throughout the process of writing, though eventually recovering it all. It made writing a little bit hectic and I will remember to organize or maintain folders in the future instead of a stack of papers.

When I read the articles, I had no idea what to look for, so I treated them as if I was analyzing them. Then I picked out topics that interested me; as in the differences between writing art analyses and essays. Unfortunately, when I later sat down to write the paper, I had many more questions that I wished I had asked Professor Feldman at the interview. Another regret is that I did not write an outline for the paper before doing the interview, because then I could have gotten more information about a specific area rather than a range of information and using only one thing she covered. The interview itself went well in that I felt relaxed, in conversation with her as I was able to discuss the topics with a background knowledge in art history and ancient archaeology.

The major fault in the interview is that I did not use a recorder and I frantically wrote down only key quotes. As you can see, I learned a lot from the paper by my mistakes. But I feel that learning about research and interviewing is so valuable and I would much rather learn how to do it properly as a freshman undergraduate rather than when I am publishing or writing a master's thesis!

As for actually writing the paper, I had trouble with organization (as always) and how to present the information. My greatest revelation is that someone who reads this profile might care or understand very little about the archaeological topics that Professor Feldman writes about, though I enjoy it. Based on this revelation, I had to ask myself, why am I writing this? This question is monumental for me, not just because of this paper, but in all the papers that I write because I often lose sight of it. In fact, my style of writing, in which I just write straight through without an outline, reflects my tendency to just want to convey information without organizing my thoughts. Furthermore a lot of my thoughts occur in my head, as in this paper when I would justify my analysis, but suddenly realize I had not explained this process in the paper and the reader might not arrive at the same place I did.

The "Profile" paper is a great idea, a challenge and very intimidating, but I have learned priceless skills from working on it. I now have a model process of how to write a research paper, which will serve me in the future. I am very proud of this paper, regardless of the grade that it gets because of the dedication I put into it and the learning experience that I have received from it.

