

A STUDY OF IVORY AND BONE PLAQUES FROM ZIWIYE IN THE SANANDAJ MUSEUM

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This article introduces a small group of ivories held in the Sanandaj Museum, which were discovered in 1997 during the seventh season of Nasratolah Motamedi's excavations at Ziwiye, northwest Iran. An investigation of the decorative, figurative, and stylistic characteristics of these pieces reveals a strong Neo-Assyrian influence, with close similarities to the palace reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, as well as the influence of Assyrianizing Urartian art. These extensive cultural influences on Mannaeen art can be seen in terms of political and economic relations with the two regions.

Keywords: Ziwiye, ivory and bone plaques, Sanandaj Museum

Introducing the Ivories

The archaeological site of Ziwiye in northwestern Iran, named after the adjacent village, became renowned in 1947 thanks to a large number of objects found there by locals and, shortly afterwards, by antiquities dealers. The first actual archaeological excavations at the site were undertaken by R. Dyson in 1956 and 1960,¹ and another eight seasons of excavation were carried out by Nasratolah Motamedi in 1976–1978 and 1994–1998. Excavations were continued by Simin Lakpour for four seasons from 2000 to 2004. These excavations brought to light a large number of artefacts in poor condition, which underwent restoration by Husseini and Arabshahi in the Sanandaj Museum. Unfortunately, Motamedi and Lakpour have so far not published reports of their work at the site, and therefore information on the precise archaeological context of the materials is not yet available.

Since 1947, the materials attributed to Ziwiye have been the subject of numerous studies because they are remarkable works of art in a variety of styles. Amongst the distinct artistic styles that have been distinguished are Scythian, Assyrian, Mannean, Median and Urartian. The circumstances surrounding their finding, including the place and time of the discovery, and how and by whom the discoveries were made, are discussed in a variety of art historical and archaeological articles and books.

The authors of these studies, however, often contradict each other, and their contributions are mostly based on subjective statements and interpretations. Godard² regarded the Ziwiye finds as a treasure hoard hidden in one of the Mannean fortresses destroyed by Sargon during his campaign of 714 B.C. He argued that the metal objects were probably made locally under Assyrian influence in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. and that the motifs of Scythian character were actually Mannean creations. As a collection of Assyrian, Scythian and Mannean artefacts, the treasure supports the claim that thanks to years of commercial relations, the Scythian style shows Mannean contaminations, which in turn manifest late Luristan influences with Assyrian admixtures of the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., as first recognized by Falkner.³

Four sets of objects, or distinct groups—Assyrian, Scythian, local,⁴ and *assyriennes à elements scythes*—were distinguished by Ghirshman and accepted by Frankfort⁵ and Sulimirski.⁶ Ghirshman,⁷ however, offered an alternative point of view on both the style and date of the findings, attributing the hoard to Scythian princes who had amassed it during their reigns, which according to Herodotus lasted 28 years. On this basis, the Ziwiye treasure would be genuinely

¹ Dyson 1963.

² A. Godard 1950: 51–73.

³ Falkner 1952: 129, 132.

⁴ Ghirshman 1950: 181; Ghirshman 1954: 106–107.

⁵ Frankfort 1955: 205.

⁶ Sulimirski 1954: 298.

⁷ Ghirshman 1950: 64, 73.

Scythian in style and could not be dated later than 675–625 B.C. Barnett⁸ assumed that the Ziwiye treasure was pre-Achaemenid and, based on comparisons with objects from the site of Zincirli, dated it to the seventh century B.C. With some modification, he suggested that the deposition represents “not a Scythian but a Median chieftain’s burial ca. 600 B.C.”⁹

Helene Kantor published a gold plaque depicting winged creatures and emphasized its Urartian influences; in fact, she saw much of the treasure as “products of an Urartian tradition”, minimizing, or even eliminating, the designation “Mannaean”.¹⁰ Porada compared the Ziwiye coffin to two bronze coffins with decorated vertical strips used for burial in a Neo-Babylonian tomb at Ur,¹¹ while another coffin of the same shape but with undecorated strips was found at Zincirli, now in southeastern Turkey. Porada asserted that in the Ziwiye material there is a combination of several artistic styles, such as Assyrian, Urartian and Scythian, and that this combination arose in the Median era. She also proposed that the Assyrian dignitary in the engraving on the coffin was represented in an ivory statuette from Ziwiye.

Additional studies and publications of the ivories include:

1950: Godard¹² presented twenty-four ivories found by plunderers in a bronze coffin;
 1952: Wilkinson¹³ published the ivories acquired by the Metropolitan Museum;
 1960, 1963: Wilkinson¹⁴ continued his publications, presenting two more ivories;
 1975: Wilkinson¹⁵ added thirty-seven ivory fragments from the Abegg Collection;
 1976: Ishiguro¹⁶ published two ivories from his collection.

Various craft traditions associated with Assyrian, Urartian, Scythian and local cultures are reflected in the iconography and style of the carved figures on the ivory and bone plaques.

Here we will review seven ivories and two fragments of a bone plaque that were recovered during the seventh season of Motamedi’s excavation in 1997. They are divided here into four groups based on their iconographic features:

- 1- Ivory plaques with bull and lion hunting and battle (Figs. 1, 2 and 3).
- 2- Ivory plaques with supernatural spirits (Figs. 4 and 5).
- 3- Bone plaque with horseman (Fig. 6).
- 4- Ivory plaques with unrecognizable scenes (Figs. 7 and 8).

Group 1, Fig. 1

Fig. 1 is part of a long, horizontal narrow strip, broken at the ends. The relief carving is particularly fine, with delicate incisions on the clothing. The chariot, which is being drawn towards the right, is fitted with a large eight-spoked wheel in eighth century B.C. Neo-Assyrian style,¹⁷ and the cab is ornamented with squares and cross hatching arranged vertically and horizontally, while the edge of the side is undecorated. The harness and the front of the cab, above the wheel, find comparisons in Assyrian sculpture from the ninth century B.C. to the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.).¹⁸

Three men are in the chariot; one faces left and drives an axe into the head of a wild bull behind the vehicle. He is assisted by two fully armed, bearded soldiers wearing Assyrian garments, who attack the bull from the rear. The horns of the animal sweep forward and upward, as if ready to gore its enemy; the head is lowered and neck bent, the forelegs almost appear to be collapsing. The locks of hair running along its neck and back end in tiny spiral curls. The tail continues the line of the back and then rises and bends back over the body, ending in a tuft of long, wavy locks terminating in little spiral curls. The second individual in the chariot is the driver, who faces right, holding the

⁸ Barnett 1950: 56, 62.

⁹ Barnett 1956: 188.

¹⁰ Kantor 1960: 6–8, 10–13.

¹¹ Porada 1965: 147.

¹² A. Godard 1950.

¹³ Wilkinson 1952.

¹⁴ Wilkinson 1960: pl.30; Wilkinson 1963: fig. 16.

¹⁵ Wilkinson 1975.

¹⁶ Ishiguro 1976: Nos. 120, 147.

¹⁷ Hrouda 1965: pl. 26: 3.

¹⁸ Barnett and Falkner 1962.



Fig. 1 Photo and drawing of bull hunting plaque (photo and drawing by author)

reins and a whip. The third individual also faces right and holds a fully drawn bow aimed toward a wild bull in the front of the chariot, with the same features as the one just described. It is moving to the right, but its head is turned back towards the left. The two horses show the usual Neo-Assyrian triple-tasselled ornaments on top of their heads, necks and shoulders, and their backs and sides are partly covered by decorated saddles. Their tails are bound around the centre. They are linked to the chariot by means of a strap with a loop. At the right of the scene is a lion hunted by three soldiers, all of them in Neo-Assyrian clothing. The first wears a helmet with ear-flaps, holds a spear in his right hand, and has a convex shield with teeth with his left hand. The second holds a dagger in the right hand and grips the lion's mane with his left hand. The third soldier has been attacked by the lion. The lion is facing right and standing on its hind legs, the paws outstretched on either side of the third soldier's body. Another lion in front of this group has been broken away, leaving behind only its tail. Almost the same scenes of royal wild bull hunting is depicted in the palace reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud (883–859 B.C.) in the southeast corner of the throne room (Room B), where the king is represented shooting arrows,¹⁹ and on a Urartian bronze belt.²⁰

The features of the horned bulls have parallels on Urartian objects, such as horse trappings inscribed with the name of Menua²¹ (810–785/78 B.C.). At the centre of a bronze chariot is a disk with the name of Išpuini²² (c. 830–810 B.C.); a god or a divine character stands on a similar bull. More of the same type of bull can be seen on other examples of Urartian metal arts. On a bronze shield from Karmir-Blur inscribed with the name of Argišti I (ca. 786–746 B.C.),²³ similar bulls are represented in a circular frieze. In both hunt scenes, the dying and dead bodies, animal and human, are placed beneath the belly of a galloping horse. This motif of the fallen enemy under a horse or another animal is frequent in Neo-Assyrian reliefs and also occurs in Egyptian, Neo-Hittite²⁴ and Urartian art.

Group 1, Fig. 2

Fig. 2 is part of a long narrow strip, broken at the ends and poorly preserved. This scene is not complete, but the preserved part consisted of a relief frieze depicting a lion hunt in which the chariot is drawn to the left. Almost the same lion hunting scenes are depicted in the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud in three separate wall decorations in the southeast corner of the throne room (Room B) and immediately adjacent to the bull hunt. Two are now in the British

¹⁹ Cohen and Kangas 2010: fig. 5.6.

²⁰ Kellner 1991: pl. 7/19.

²¹ Merhav 1991: 73, pl. 26.

²² Merhav 1991: 76, pl. 29.

²³ Van Loon 1966: pl. 24.

²⁴ Van Loon 1966.



Fig. 2 Photo and drawing of lion hunting plaque (photo and drawing by author)

Museum,²⁵ the other in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.²⁶ The same scene of lion hunting has also been represented on an Urartian bronze belt.²⁷ Albenda notes that in the usual representations of the royal hunt, “the Assyrian king stands erect in his chariot, accompanied by a charioteer, and faces forward as he prepares to release the arrow from the drawn bow. The action of the entire scene moves in a single direction, from left to right, unhindered by the fallen lion which may crouch beneath the bodies of the galloping horses or turn back in a futile attempt to ward off certain death”.²⁸

Five lions are depicted, and the remaining portion suggests that three men are in the chariot. One faces left holding a spear in his right hand and with his left hand he pushes back the head of the lion standing on its hind legs attacking the chariot from behind. The second man, the driver, faces right holding the reins and whip. The whip is the same as those depicted in Assyria in the ninth to seventh centuries B.C.²⁹ The third man is facing right and aims a fully drawn bow toward another lion. The cab of the chariot is decorated with squares like the chariot in Fig. 1, and it is linked to the chariot by means of a strap with a loop. Beneath the chariot and the horse’s feet, a lion lies dying on its back. In front of the chariot, another lion is standing on its hind legs facing left, both paws outstretched to attack. At the right of this group are two men, one facing left and attacking another lion, with a spear raised in his hand above his head. The other is facing right to attack another lion. He has a spear in his right hand and a convex shield with teeth in his left hand. He probably also has a sword hanging from a sword belt.

This scene of royal hunting in a chariot has older roots in Near Eastern motifs;³⁰ hunting wild animals and killing human enemies can be seen in the early first millennium B.C.

Group 1, Fig. 3

Fig. 3 is a part of a long, narrow, poorly preserved panel with broken ends. This scene is incomplete and damaged but evidently depicted a royal battle and hunting. It consists of a combined relief frieze depicting warriors in a chariot attacking enemies on the left and a lion hunt to the right. Three men are in the chariot, one facing left holding a shield in his right hand and trying to parry away several

²⁵ Layard 1849: 66.

²⁶ Meyer 1956: 57.

²⁷ Seidl 2004: pl. BI.

²⁸ Albenda 1972: 168–169.

²⁹ Hrouda 1965: pl. 31: 2.

³⁰ Albenda 1972: 169.

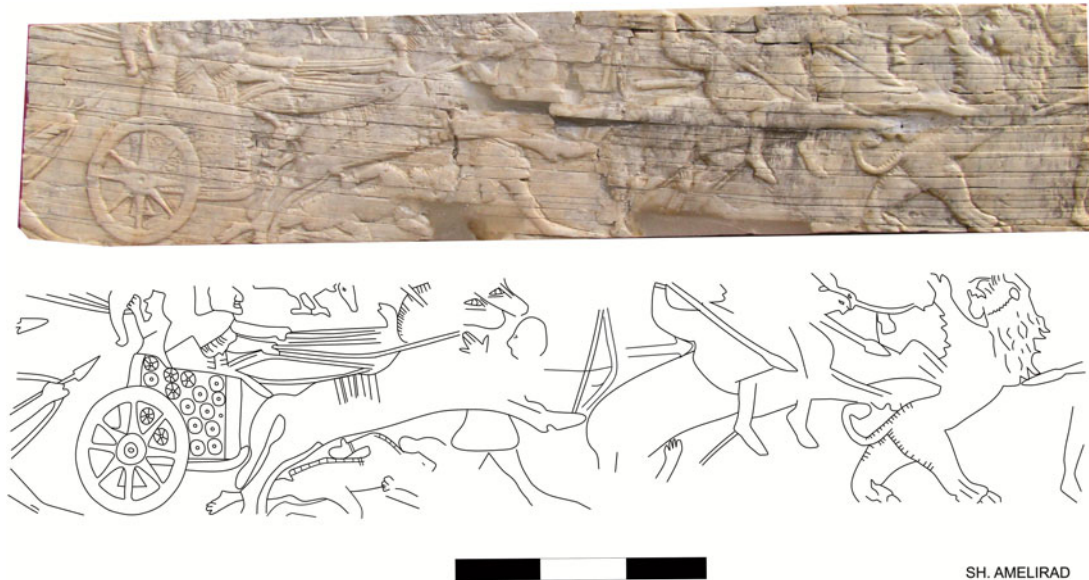


Fig. 3 Photo and drawing of battle plaque (photo and drawing by author)

enemies. Only some small sections of the enemies' equipment remain on the left side of the panel. The second man in the chariot faces left and seems to aim a fully drawn bow toward attacking enemies on the left. The third drives the chariot, holding the reins with both hands. The chariot is fitted with large eight-spoked wheels in the eighth century B.C. Assyrian style³¹ and has a long decorative element above the horses' backs. The cab is decorated with rosettes. A fallen enemy is under the chariot, and another is being over-run by the chariot horses. He wears a short kilt and has an arrow in his left hand. Another enemy has fallen under the horses but only part of his hand remains.³² In the middle of the scene there are two horsemen with spears stabbing an enormous lion standing on its hind legs and turning its face to the left, with outstretched paw. Above the scene an eagle flies between the chariot and horses. Eagles represented on Assyrian reliefs are generally identified with the god Ashur, who supports the king in battle and "asserts the divine power behind the king's success in battle against his enemies".³³ The lions in this scene may signify these defeated enemies. The first scene of this ivory is the same as that in the relief of Ashurnasirpal II in Room B of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud.

As noted by Albenda, the presence of a deity watching over the Assyrian king's victory is of the utmost significance: the god's acknowledgement raises the king's status from heroic, and therefore still human, to divine.³⁴ A similar scene on another ivory plaque from Ziwiyé is published by Wilkinson.³⁵

Group 2, Fig. 4

Fig. 4 is a fragment from a horizontal rectangular panel. The right and left sides are broken and the surface is severely damaged. Two supernatural spirits are shown facing right. The first is a winged, human-headed bull wearing the horned turret crown of a divinity surmounted by a disc in the centre and two antennae at the sides, which could be rosettes as in examples on Neo-Assyrian

³¹ Hrouda 1965: pl. 26: 3.

³² Depiction of fallen enemies on the ground beneath the horses of war chariots was common in Assyrian and Urartian scenes, and it seems that the artists wanted to show victory and power by presenting fallen enemies and also insulting them. The scenes of fallen enemies can be seen on an Urartian belt exhibited in the Van Museum

(Çavuşoğlu 2005: fig. 1/a), and in reliefs from the Neo-Assyrian Period, in the palace of Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud (865–860 B.C.), from panels 8 (top), 9 (top), 10 (top) and 11 (top) in Room B (Cohen and Kangas 2010: fig. 6.10).

³³ Albenda 1972: 178.

³⁴ Albenda 1972: 176.

³⁵ Wilkinson 1975, fig.15.

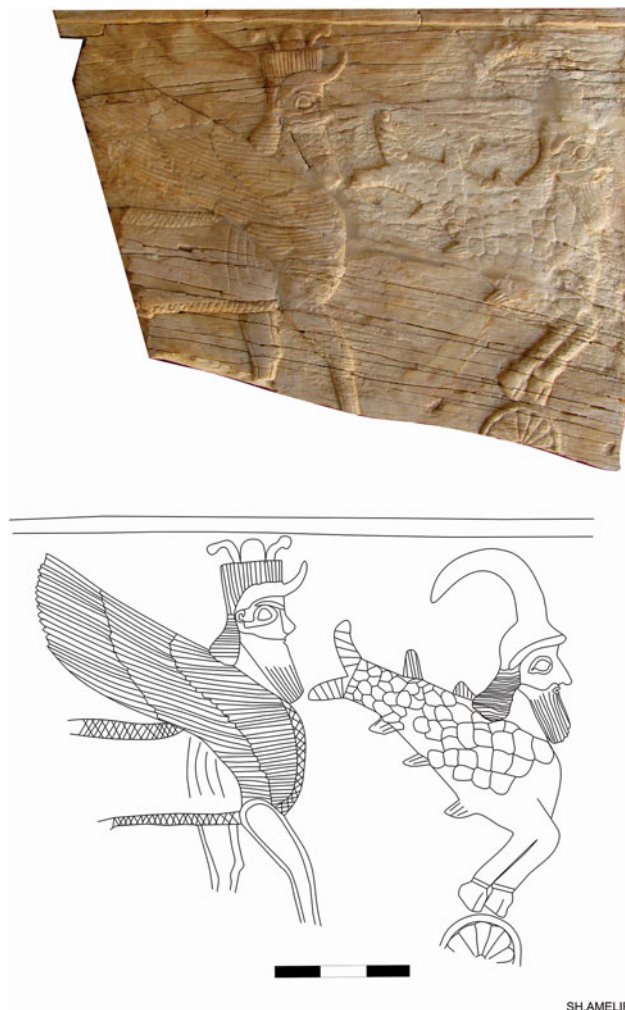


Fig. 4 Photo and drawing of supernatural spirits plaque (photo and drawing by author)

ivories.³⁶ His hair is shoulder-length, and he has a moustache and a long spade-shaped beard. He has a wing in three sections of long parallel feathers, and cross-hatching on the chest, back and stomach. Many ivories and metal objects of Ziwiyeh show similar depictions of the human-headed winged bull, the most familiar of the Assyrian hybrid creatures, often depicted in palace gateways.³⁷

The second figure is a combination of merman and goat-fish (the Greek Capricorn), human-headed with a fish body, goat legs and goat horn. It is somewhat unusual amongst Ziwiyeh iconography, and no similar figure can be recognized from neighbouring cultures. His hair is shoulder-length, and he has a moustache and long spade-shaped beard. Beneath his feet is a rosette, of which only the upper half has survived. The goat-fish creature is represented in Babylonia from Neo-Sumerian to Hellenistic times, and the Mesopotamian creature *suhurmašu*, carp-goat, is attested on a *kudurru*.³⁸ In Neo-Assyrian art, mermen were associated with the water god Ea and used for protective magic.³⁹ Since there is no precise parallel for this figure, and according to these comparisons this plaque cannot belong anywhere else, it should be considered as belonging to a local style group, probably made by a local craftsman.

³⁶ Herrmann, Laidlaw and Coffey 2009: pls. 33 and 35.

³⁷ Kantor 1960: 7.

³⁸ Black and Green 1992: 93.

³⁹ Black and Green 1992: 132.



Fig. 5 Photo and drawing of convex ivory panel (photo and drawing by author)

Group 2, Fig. 5.

Fig. 5 is a fragment from a horizontal, strongly convex panel. Fragments are missing from both ends. The panel shows a winged griffin and bull set back-to-back within the curving branches of a stylized tree. The griffin on the left is almost completely preserved, except for part of its face. It has a lion body, legs, paws, and tail between the hind legs, and the head and wings of an eagle. It also has a cloth-like kilt in front. The griffin is not like the common griffin-demons well known in Neo-Assyrian period, rather, it is more like the sphinxes on other related Ziwiyé objects. Kantor believes that this kind of kilt can be traced back ultimately to the lengthened mane that hangs down in front of the forelegs of some Egyptian lions of the New Kingdom. Outside of Ziwiyé this feature is found in North Syrian orthostats and small objects, and on a bone comb from Gordion.⁴⁰ The tree is similar to scroll shapes on Neo-Assyrian plaques and on further ivories from Egypt, Syria, Malatya,⁴¹ Carchemish⁴² and Zincirli.⁴³

Group 3, Fig. 6

Figure 6 shows fragments from the top and bottom of a bone panel; the middle part is missing. The surface is flat and the carving crudely incised. It is perhaps part of a battle scene involving a horse with horseman and a separate chariot. The horseman wears a belted tunic and a band around his hair, and he wields a spear. The horses are decorated with incised semi-circles on the neck and rosettes on the forehead and the tail. Their manes are depicted using short parallel lines. The chariot is drawn to the left, and part of the connection with horse's equipment is visible. A similar male figure to the one

⁴⁰ Kantor 1960: 7.

⁴¹ Woolley and Barnett 1952: 200, pl. B.60a.

⁴² Vieyra 1955: pl. 77.

⁴³ Unger 1932: pl. 17.



Fig. 6 Photo and drawing of bone plaque (photo and drawing by author)

depicted here can be seen on a belt fragment from Ziwiye kept in a private collection and published by Ghirshman.⁴⁴

Group 4, Fig. 7

Fig. 7 is fragment from a vertical, rectangular ivory panel in two registers, broken at the top, bottom and left side. The surface is flat and the carving is crude. Zigzag borders separate the registers. The upper register shows a section of the fringed hem of a long garment and a foot oriented to the left. The lower register preserves only the upper part of a courtier facing left. His left arm is bent at a right angle. He has shoulder-length hair, a rather large nose, and a pointed hat. He wears a garment with short, fringed sleeves. There is no comparable figure on the Ziwiye ivories and no parallel in neighbouring artistic productions.

Group 4, Fig. 8

Fig. 8 is a fragment of an ivory panel with the left and lower sides broken off. The surviving part shows a zigzag border at the top. All that is left of the scene is the upper section of a bearded man with straight hair who carries a fringed quiver over his left shoulder and seems to wear a tiara on his head.

Conclusion

These ivories from Ziwiye show strong influences from Assyrian art and in many aspects emulate Assyrian monumental art, in which battle and hunting scenes were common.⁴⁵ Middle Assyrian and early Neo-Assyrian kings, including Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1077 B.C.), Adad-Nirari II (911–891 B.C.), and Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884 B.C.), were fans of wild animal hunting. This subject

⁴⁴ Ghirshman 1950: 20.

⁴⁵ At first glance, it could appear that the same debt is owed toward Urartian art too. This is understandable, considering

the employment of Assyrian military technology in the Urartian culture (Barnett 1982: 336–337), which is obviously reflected in the depiction of war inspired scenes.



Fig. 7 Photo and drawing of ivory plaque (photo and drawing by author)



Fig. 8 Photo and drawing of ivory plaque (photo and drawing by author)

has been treated by Mallowan and Davies,⁴⁶ who state that Assyrian-style ivories are typically decorated with “subjects and persons familiar from the [Assyrian] palace bas-reliefs and other stone monuments executed between the ninth and the end of the seventh century B.C.”

The depictions on the Ziwiye ivories combine scenes familiar from the palace reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, though there are some differences in details such as the wild bull depicted in the bull hunting panel (Fig. 1), which belongs to the Urartian tradition. The same combination is also recognizable in the representations of mythical creatures from Assyrian art. On the whole, the iconographic features (winged bull, fish-goat man and griffin) in the Ziwiye ivories show that the local craftsmen of Ziwiye borrowed motifs and designs from their neighbours. Besides the ivories, there are two crudely carved bone plaques carrying scenes without parallels inside or outside the assemblage, which could be “local” copies of an Assyrian scene, carved in a local style at a local workshop. Godard⁴⁷ dated the Mannaeen local style from the ninth to seventh centuries B.C., and Ghirshman⁴⁸ believed that the local style was Median and was related to the Luristan style. This is also acknowledged by Kantor.⁴⁹ But where were the ivories made? Kantor proposes that “the Ziwiye ivories, and the relative metalwork, are more faithful to Assyrian canons than the group”⁵⁰ represented by a gold appliqué from Ziwiye kept at the Oriental Institute Museum of Chicago, which shows Assyrianizing elements. Wilkinson⁵¹ suggested that they could be made in Mannaeen lands, but by Syrian craftsmen, and this was also mentioned by Van Loon.⁵² Nevertheless, the presence of minimal stylistic elements of Urartian origin is undeniable, and this circumstance reminds us of Herrmann’s⁵³ proposal that a group of Assyrianizing ivories from Nimrud, identified by Barnett as ‘North Syrian’ style, were in fact made in Urartu (Helmuth Kyrieleis’ hypothesis). Moreover, Barnett established that the Urartians studied Assyrian strategies, technologies and culture for military reasons and, together with these, they also assimilated artistic and stylistic notions.

Based on these arguments, the Ziwiye ivories can be dated to the eighth or seventh century B.C., and it can be suggested that they were manufactured in Mannaeen lands by locals or employed neighbouring craftsmen because, despite the strong linkage to neighbouring traditions, they did not slavishly copy them but adapted them to serve their own purposes and meanings.

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⁴⁶ Mallowan and Davies 1970: 8.

⁴⁷ A. Godard 1949: 171; A. Godard 1950: 11–12; Y. Godard 1950.

⁴⁸ Ghirshman 1954: 111.

⁴⁹ Kantor 1960: 10.

⁵⁰ Kantor 1960: 9.

⁵¹ Wilkinson 1963: 284.

⁵² Van Loon 1967.

⁵³ Herrmann 2012.

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دراسة لوحات العاج والعظام من زوييه في متحف سننداج
بقلم: شلير عاملي راد

تقدم هذه المقالة مجموعة من قطع العاج المعروضة في متحف سننداج والتي اكتشفت في عام 1997 خلال الموسم السابع من حفريات نصره الله معتمدي في زوييه. أدت دراسة الخصائص الزخرفية والتصويرية والأسلوبية لهذه القطع إلى اكتشاف تأثير آشوري حديث قوي مع تشابه وثيق مع نقوش قصر آشوربانيبال الثاني في نمرود بالإضافة إلى تأثير من فنون أورارتو الآشورية. ويمكن رؤية هذه التأثيرات الثقافية الواسعة النطاق على الفنون المناينية (الأذربيجانية) من خلال العلاقات السياسية والاقتصادية مع المنطقتين.