



IVORY

IVORY AND ITS USE IN PRE-ISLAMIC IRAN. Prior to the 1st millennium B.C.E. ivories are not commonly documented from excavations in Iran. Whether this reflects an actual unavailability of ivory and hence ivory carving, or is a result of the incompleteness of archeological recovery, is unknown. In Mesopotamia ivory carvings have been excavated at a number of sites dating to the 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C.E., and in Anatolia especially from the 2nd millennium B.C.E. In Iran, ivory beads are reported from excavations from early 2nd millennium B.C.E. at Tepe Hissar (Ḥeṣār) IIIC in northeast Iran, but remain to be analyzed. During the Middle Elamite period in the 2nd millennium B.C.E., a small number of ivory artifacts occur in Elam in southwestern Iran. At Susa there are four small sculptures, a headless clothed female, a kilted male figure, and two female heads. From nearby Chogha Zanbil (see C|OĠA ZANBEL) from the 13th century B.C.E. derive mosaic fragments, forming an inlaid panel of a winged female and caprids flanking trees. Elephant bones (but no tusks, as has erroneously been reported several times), were recovered from Haft Tepe, 15th-14th centuries B.C.E.

As in Mesopotamia, ivory artifacts are more commonly excavated in Iran in the first millennium B.C.E. The largest and best-known collection from Iran is the corpus recovered from the citadel site of Ḥasanlu in northwestern Iran; its ancient name and ethnic and linguistic background remain unknown. The site was destroyed ca. 800 B.C.E., an event that sealed all the contemporary artifacts, thus dating them. Among the thousands of excavated disparate artifacts manufactured from many materials were hundreds of carved and



sculpted ivory fragments, and a smaller number of sculpted wood fragments, the latter preserved because they had burned to charcoal. All had been housed and utilized in several large, manifestly elite structures, but most derive from the second storey of the largest and richest, named Burned Building II, which may have been a temple. Not one piece was recovered intact; all had been broken or shattered by the collapse of the structure's walls, ceilings and roof.

Four cultural styles of carving were recognized. (1) Outstanding in quantity and in cultural significance was a distinct "local style" corpus depicting scenes carved in relief on plaques and other forms, depicting battle scenes involving cavalry, chariots, and foot soldiers, a besieged city; and genre events, the hunt, royal ceremonies, processions, animals. Also recovered were statuettes of male and female deities, some standing on animals, and animals in the round. (2) Another stylistic group consisted of carved plaques depicting animals (no humans) elaborately and concisely executed. Based on stylistic and parallels with Iranian metalwork known outside of Hasanlu, these ivories are associated with another, separate Iranian workshop. They (or their craftsmen) were imported into Hasanlu from another Iranian polity.

Also recognized were two well-known non-Iranian ivory groups. (3) One is an Assyrian assemblage of plaques that included representations of an Assyrian king at sacrifice and other classic Assyrian-style motifs. (4) The second foreign group consists of units of the classic north Syrian style corpus that include here *pyxides* (lidded boxes), statuettes, animal figurines, and handles. These foreign-made, expensive ivory artifacts were luxury items that probably came to Hasanlu, not as a result of commercial trade, but as royal gift exchanges (which often reflected state treaties and marriages)—certainly the presence of royal Assyrian plaques indicate close cultural and political relations with that powerful western polity.

The source of the raw ivory at Hasanlu remains unknown, but probably it also arrived from the west via Assyria, via either trade or gifts. Based on carving details, one recognizes that several workshops, or perhaps just several individuals, functioned at Hasanlu, and also that the same craftsmen carved the ivories and the few wood sculptures preserved. These workshops/individuals were aware of and adapted both Assyrian and north Syrian iconography, very clear in the warfare representations.

Not one ivory artifact was recovered in its original functional locus, and only comparanda can help determine their precise function. These suggest that



most of the plaques, and possibly some of the animal statuettes, probably decorated furniture, beds and chairs, or boxes. The statuettes of deities, sometimes standing on an animal, which feature identifies them as deities, were apparently freestanding; they surely had been situated in sacred areas.

In the 1970s Iranian archeologists excavated a number of fragmentary ivories at Ziwiye, a mound in northwestern Iran, some 130 km southeast of Ḥasanlu; only a few examples have been recorded. Plaques with depictions of birds, animals, rosettes, and human figures were reported. There is also a large number of very fragmentary ivory objects scattered in many museums and private collections in a number of United States and European museums and collections that over many years have been claimed (by dealers and curators, followed by scholars) to have derived from a plunder at Ziwiye in 1947. Most examples consist of carved plaques depicting Assyrian- or Assyrianizing-style scenes representing hunting, ceremonial, and heraldic animals, also animal and human statuettes. However, not one of this large corpus had been excavated, and it is therefore impossible to establish with archeological certainty which may have been plundered and acquired at Ziwiye, or even at other sites in Iran, or even that all derived from Iran (given the absolute lack of reliability of dealers' and curators' claims). At least two plaques from this corpus reflect a style that indicates they may have been carved in Iran; one depicts a royal figure accompanied by a parasol-bearer receiving individuals (Godard, 1950, figs. 91, 92; Muscarella, 1980, pp. 205, 208, 174). The chronology of the use of the excavated Ziwiye ivories is 7th century B.C.E., based on a sealing of the Urartian king Rusa II recovered there; some may have been carved slightly earlier.

Judging from cemetery sites and one mounded site, Luristan produced both ivory and bone carving in the 2nd and 1st millennium B.C.E. At Sorḳ Dom there are a number of artifacts published (Schmidt et al., 1989, pp. 363-69). As bone carved in the form of sculpted flat- or round-headed pins, also buttons, small animal sculpture, a few incised decorated plaques, and small decorative objects. However (*pace* Schmidt et al., 1989, pp. 368 ff.) the carved and sculpture objects published in Muscarella 1981 are ivory, not bone (nos. 25, 26, 27: hippo ivory; nos. 28-30: elephant ivory). Bone carving for small objects existed at Nuš-e Jān during the Median period.

From the Achaemenid period there is evidence of ivory carving both from excavations and site destructions. At Susa a number of ivory fragments, along with other material, including two Greek sherds, were recovered in a pit dated



to the Seleucid period (but its chronology is unclear). Among the fragments (consciously broken and discarded by an enemy?) are examples of Achaemenid workmanship: a female head, possibly a female statuette, and eight double-sided combs, some with classic Achaemenid canonical representations on their frames. Other ivory fragments recovered in the pit derived from western workmanship—Syria, Egypt and Greece; and the cultural background of other fragments remains unidentified. Little can be said from the fragmented nature of the find regarding functions except for the combs, also that for some furniture decoration seems to have been involved. The inscription DSf of Darius I, celebrating the building of his palace (OPers. *hadiš*) at Susa, boasts that its costly prestige goods were brought from afar (l. 23), including ivory (OPers. *piru* from Akk. *pilu*; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 197): “the ivory which was fashioned here was brought from Ethiopia [q.v., OPers. Kūša “Kush”] and from India and from Arachosia” (ll. 43-45).

A masterfully carved ivory akinakes scabbard depicting in relief a classic Achaemenid court-style rampant feline holding a stag was excavated on the Oxus river in Tajikistan; whether locally made or received from the Achaemenid heartland cannot be determined.

Persepolis itself (sacked in antiquity) yielded not many artifacts, including a few fragmented ivories that make up part of a human and an animal head, hands, and a bird head. Achaemenid-period material in the Louvre, acquired from the collector Clot Bey, who purchased them in Egypt in the early 19th century, include wood and ivory combs (a few surely Achaemenid), and a number of Achaemenid-period sword chapes. If indeed they had been locally recovered in Egypt (aside from having been purchased there), they could have been either locally made or imported.

Ivories thereafter in Iran seem to be non-existent from excavations. From the Parthian period there is the well-known group of ivory rhytons from the early Parthian site of Nisa in Turkmenistan. Representations of furniture, couches, stools, and chairs are known from coins and reliefs; that some parts were made of ivory is known from examples recovered at Nisa. Similar furniture representations continued into the later Sasanian period; bronze furniture remains exist but are rare.

For the ivory plaques of later date found in Afghanistan, see [AFGHANISTAN viii.](#), BEGRĀM, KABUL MUSEUM.



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