



ZIWIYE

ZIWIYE (ZIVIA), name of an archeological site in northwestern Iran at which a trove of objects known as the “Ziwiye Treasure” was reputedly found.

In 1948, the French archaeologist [André Godard](#) (1881-1965) published in a museum catalogue a small group of silver and ceramic artifacts in his and the dealer Ayub Rabenou’s collections that he claimed derived from a site in the region of “Sakkiz” (Saqqez) in northwestern Iran (A. Godard, 1948, pp. 9-14). This was followed by a report in 1949 where he identified the find spot as Ziwiye. A year later, Godard presented as factual data historical and archaeological details about a number of alleged finds there; a summary appeared in 1951, and his wife, Yetta, repeated his reports (A. Godard, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951; Y. Godard, 1950a, 1950b). They claimed that in 1947 peasants from the village of Ziwiye discovered a quantity of artifacts, gold, silver, bronze, ivory and ceramics, within a large bronze container buried in the nearby high, citadel hill ([Figure 1](#)). The villagers cut up the repoussé gold artifacts for local division, and then sold them; some were mentioned and illustrated. These exhibited extraordinary forms and features hitherto unknown: Of gold, a gorget, trapezoidal plaques ([Figure 2](#)), and other gold plaques ([Figure 3](#)), bracelets, discs, animal head protomes, etc.; of silver, trappings, a plaque, ornaments, etc.; many decorated ivory fragments of Assyrian style; and ceramic vessels and other objects. Immediately thereafter, the Godards’ narrative and artifacts were universally accepted by scholars and archaeologists as from Ziwiye (Muscarella, 1988, p. 349, n. 2); also by the plunder-purchasing communities: dealers, museums, auction houses. Further,



at least one dealer family (Rabenou) maintained ongoing digging at the site (Dyson, 1963, p. 34; Goldman's summary, 1989, pp. 1-4).

Within a short time, and continuing for decades, hundreds of more orphaned, unanchored artifacts, including fragments of the "burial" container (Muscarella, 1988, pp. 342-49), attributed to Ziwiye, surfaced in dealers' shops in Iran, the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, subsequently reaching private collectors and museums therein, and also a number of special exhibitions (Amandry, pp. 113-15, 120, n. 2; Muscarella, 1977, pp. 202-5, 210; Goldman, 1974-77, pp. 55, 57-61). [Roman Ghirshman](#) (1973) listed 608 "Ziwiye" objects, adding many to the repertoire. Many of the gold repoussé objects were in fragments, some later joined by museums and researchers.

Although not a single archaeologist, scholar, or museum curator citing the dealer-derived finds was a witness to the alleged discovery, following the Godards' "archaeological" reports they produced a continuous flow of articles, book chapters, and lectures on the archaeological reality of "Ziwiye" artifacts endlessly brought forth. The first to do so was Ghirshman (1950), adding more objects, including an Urartian silver fibula (p. 197, Fig. 23); more, of gold, were added in 1964 (p. 115), and 1979 (pp. III, 5). He continued to publish "Ziwiye" objects for thirty years (see Muscarella, 1988, p. 349, n. 2). Charles Wilkinson (1952, 1955, 1960, 1963, 1967), curator of Near Eastern art at the Metropolitan Museum, was also a fervid proponent of "Ziwiye." And it is a rare museum or private collector worldwide that does not possess objects from "Ziwiye;" there are at least twenty such collections. In addition, many exhibitions of "Ziwiye" material have been featured in museums in several countries (Muscarella, 1977, pp. 202-3).

Aside from not questioning the "said to be" provenience of the artifacts, other issues remained unrecognized: that the many hundreds of "Ziwiye" objects could not fit within the single container that Godard reported contained the artifacts. Godard in 1950 (p. 13) accepted that the corpus was found in the container, but in 1951 (p. 241), he claimed it had no connection with the finds. Also, a number of the artifacts baptized "Ziwiye" are modern forgeries, albeit accorded archaeological importance by most scholars (Muscarella, 1977, pp. 211-12; idem, 2000, pp. 76-81).

The many historical and art historical articles and books by archaeologists contain subjective statements and interpretations, and also disagreements and contradictions about how the find was actually made, by whom, when, and

precisely where on the site the find actually occurred (Muscarella, 1977, pp. 198-99). Ghirshman (1950, p. 181) said the find was made during the Second World War; in 1973 (p. 45) it was 1947; and in 1979 (p. 9) it was 1946. Godard (1950, p. 8) said it was “fortuitement découvert” (discovered by chance); his wife said it was found by a shepherd, who sold the finds to a Jew, who returned and found more objects (Y. Godard, 1950a, p. 331); or it was found by laborers (van Ufford, 1962, p. 25). In 1964, enquiries by the author of three local inhabitants regarding the locus of the find yielded three different loci (it is possible that some derived from a large cave on the citadel).

Ghirshman and Godard, joined by others, argued about which objects actually derived from the site (Muscarella, 1977, pp. 200, 209-10). Dealers and scholars began to claim that a number of the “Ziwiye” artifacts (some forgeries) actually derived from the neighboring site of Qaplantu (Wilkinson, 1967; Muscarella, 1977, p. 76; idem, 2000, p. 76; Sulimirski, p. 17). There were also different interpretations or fantasies proposed concerning the original nature of the alleged find: it represented a royal cache, following the Godards (viz. Porada, pp. 123-24); or a royal tomb of a Scythian king (Sulimirski, pp. 19, 27), and furnished with concubines, horses, a chariot, and attendants (Ghirshman, 1964, pp. 99, 327; idem, 1979, pp. 10-30); van Ufford (1962, p. 101) believed that the king’s wife was buried with him.

Based solely on scattered hundreds of artifacts, the character and cultural identity of “Ziwiye” art and culture(s) have been identified, determined on stylistic analysis of the corpus. Some scholars saw many distinct artistic groups represented: Scythian, Assyrian, Mannean (Ghirshman, 1950, pp. 198, 202; Kantor, pp. 6-14); and Scythian elements (A. Godard, 1949, pp. 171-72; idem, 1950, pp. 11, 44-52, 66-67; Sulimirski; Ghirshman, 1979, pp. 19-26); or Medes (Falkner, p. 132; Barnett, pp. 91, 94). A number of scholars also noticed the Urartian style present on a number of gold objects (Barnett, p. 112; Kantor, pp. 6-8, 10-13; van Ufford, 1963, pp. 30, 36, Figs. 5-8, 13; Ghirshman, 1964, pp. 104-14; idem, 1979, pp. 11-17; Amandry, pp. 117-18; Goldman, 1974-77, pp. 56-57). But to date the culture/polity of the site remains unknown; perhaps only an inscription may resolve the question.

While some scholars challenged the historical and archaeological interpretations, they never doubted the dealer-provided “Ziwiye” provenience. Indeed, an undetermined number of objects were very probably plundered at Ziwiye in about 1947, albeit little else can be asserted. But even accepting that a remarkable discovery occurred there, it is surely not possible to *know* which



of the hundreds of objects sold as from the site actually derived from there, or from a nearby site, or which and how many objects purchased by dealers in Iran and elsewhere were conveniently labeled by them as from “Ziwiye,” witness the forgeries. The plunder itself, and equally the unquestioning scholarly acceptance of unprovenanced, orphaned artifacts as if archaeologically excavated, is a cultural disaster. The only archaeological data we possess for the site of Ziwiye are the finds from surveys and recent excavations.

Two excavations have occurred at Ziwiye. Following surveys there by Robert H. Dyson, Jr. in 1956 and 1960 (Dyson, 1963), he conducted a three-week campaign in 1964 (in which the author of this entry was present). The results unfortunately remain unpublished, but it was reported that three rooms of a mud brick structure were cleared, an entry stairway to the citadel, a number of column bases, and a very thick brick fortification wall; also pottery and minor artifacts, including a decorated bronze fragment, and a bronze socketed arrowhead (Dyson, 1963, pp. 35-37; idem, 1965, pp. 205-7). The second excavation was first conducted by the Iranian archaeologist, Nosratollah Motamedi, beginning in 1976, continuing until 1998; they commenced again from 1999 to 2001 (Motamedi, 1996, 1997a, b, c). Reported from these excavations was extension of the building, which has a large columned hall and several rooms and corridors, extension of the fortification wall, much pottery, a ceramic lamp, two ivory carvings, one decorated in nomadic style (none similar to the “Ziwiye” Assyrian style ivories published by Wilkinson [1972, 1975] and Mazzone [1977]; Goldman, 1989, pp. 11-12, n. 2), minor artifacts, including several socketed bronze arrowheads, and a fragment of an Egyptian blue vessel decorated with a winged eagle (Saurat, 1977, cover and pp. 36-37). Years ago, an archaeologist visiting the site saw both socketed bilobate and trilobate arrowheads and iron tanged examples in the earth removed from the trenches (Derin and Muscarella, p. 194).

A highly significant find was a clay sealing ([bullae](#)) of the Urartian king Rusa II, late 7th century BCE (Seidel, p. 150, n. 8). Sealings of this king have been recovered at other Urartian sites: Toprakkale, Karmir Blur, and [Beṣṭām](#), the latter in northwestern Iran. Rusa II founded all these centers. Its presence indicates some patent contact, at least diplomatic and cultural at Ziwiye — even if being cautious about the number of “Ziwiye” artifacts reflecting Urartian manufacture, especially the unexcavated Urartian fibula. Nothing resembling the plundering and dealer-derived material was recovered in the



excavations. The site had also been destroyed in a conflagration.

Vigorously debated was the date of the deposition (Muscarella, 1977, pp. 207-8). Based on Dyson's excavated pottery, Young (p. 82) dated Ziwiye's *floruit* to circa 675-625 BCE, an accurate archaeological assessment? But before archaeological excavations occurred various chronologies had been proposed for the site's *floruit*. The Godards (A. Godard, 1949, p. 171; idem, 1950, pp. 11-12; Y. Godard, 1950) proposed the late 9th or 8th centuries BCE; Ghirshman (1950, pp. 197-198, 202) dated the site to the late 7th century BCE, to 625 BCE. Most scholars thereafter accepted the chronology of 8th-7th centuries, even the 6th century BCE (Muscarella, 1977, p. 207). Aside from the 7th century pottery and the sealing, other excavated evidence has further delivered an accurate chronology. This is the presence of socketed arrowheads, which do not appear in the archaeological record anywhere until sometime in the 7th century BCE (Derin and Muscarella). The three sets of artifacts manifest that Ziwiye ceased to exist sometime within the last decades of 7th century BCE. Further excavations will determine when the site was built.

See also [GOLD i](#), [FORGERIES ii](#).

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