

## **The Impact of Neo-Assyrian Art on Mannaeen Societies of Western and North Western Iran**

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### **Abstract**

The artifacts belonging to the Mannaeen culture that are preserved in major museums worldwide display symbolic images indicating hidden values and meanings derived from their common beliefs and traditions. An analytical study of the reminiscence of the symbols used in these objects reveal the influence of religion and ritual traditions in Mannaeen societies and their deep relations with the Neo-Assyrian culture. In this research, by examining and analyzing the most prominent symbolic images such as the sacred tree, winged gods, mythological creatures, Ishtar goddess on golden plaque, earthenware, ivory plaques and other objects found in Ziwiye, Hasanlu and Qalaichitepes as well as ivory objects with pictures of battle scenes, chariot riding and formal ceremonies found at Mannaeen sites, we try to take a closer look at the impact of the Neo- Assyrian art on the Mannaeen art and culture.

**Keywords:** Mannaeen Culture, Neo-Assyrian Art, Artifacts, North West Iran.

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## **Introduction**

Iran's north western regions have always been a settlement hub for varying tribes, thanks to their favorable environment, rich mines, and their proximity to important routes. During the first millennium B.C, Mannaeans were the mightiest tribes of this region. Report on military expedition of Shalmaneser III, the king of Assyria, in 843 BC is the first written record to mention the term Manna (Lukenbill, 1926: 235). Based on the Assyrian and Urartian written sources, along with archaeological studies of the Mannaeans regions, such as Ziwiye, Qalaichi, and Hasanlu, the State of Manna was neighbor to Urartu Land on the north (in the outskirts of modern Oshnavieh and Solduz Plains), while on the eastern and south eastern banks of Urmia Lake, it shared the border with Urartu (MollaZadeh, 2009: 50). In the west, there were Assyrian States, which resembled the borderline heights of Iran and Iraq, in the fact, that Manna bordered Parsua, GizilBunda, southern and eastern heights (Levine, 1973: 2) and surrounding QizilUzan Valley (Lanfranchi, 1990: 12). The capital of Manna was the city of Izirtu (Mollazadeh, 2009: 50) and they had a monarchy. Their domain was divided into numerous states, each administered by a local governor and the nobility who were tribal chieftains of Manna and played a key role in political affairs (Diakonoff, 1992: 167). The presence of the Manna in political sphere coincided with the formation of Assyrian Empire and in Assyrian kings' annals, there are some references to their wars and political dealings. The Mannaeans were craftsmen and artists. An artifact from their settlements such as Ziwiye, Qalaichi, and Hasanlu indicates cultural, social, artistic, ritualistic, and religious patterns and impact of their

culture on neighboring tribes, especially the Assyrians.

## **Review of Fine Arts from Neo-Assyrian Era**

The neo-Assyrian era provided an appropriate setting for the activities of artists who were involved in the formation of the Assyrian Empire in line with politicians through depicting mental and cultural aspects. In this age, apart from architecture, novel works could be seen in the realm of fine arts. The main themes of the art in this era were ceremonial rites, rituals, battle of heroes against mythical creatures, and wild animals. Also, Assyrian high reliefs show scenes of social life, wars, and military expeditions, which appear less in fine arts. In Neo-Assyrian art, depictions of women are limited and are often in relation with goddesses and social scenes, and elegance in depictions, details, and particular way of men's makeup and clothing are among its other aspects. In neo-Assyrian fine arts, ivory works with images of mythical creatures, sacred animals, and pictures of plants and humans are significant, in which the influence of Egyptian, Syrian, and Phoenician cultures can be seen. In Assyria, dishes, weaponry, and jewelry were made of metals and had religious and symbolic motifs. Many of these works entered Assyria as spoils of war, and transferred cultural and artistic themes. Seal-making was another neo-Assyrian era's industry. Stamp seals gradually took the place of cylindrical ones, examples of which have been obtained in Bactria (Balkh) (Sarianidi, 2000: 22). They have animal and geometrical images (they were crafted in linear, drilling, and cutting methods) (Majid Zadeh, 2002: 224), along with plant, sun, star, and mythical animals images.

Sculpture did not prosper much in neo-Assyrian era. Few statues, remaining from this era, are rigid and inflexible, often in the form of gods and kings who are standing with their hands crossed against chests. These were used in temples to keep dishes (Mortage, 2006: 65).

There are some individual royal figures, remaining from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, the most complete of which belongs to Ashurnasirpal II. Moreover, many talismanic figurines have been obtained which had been in the shape of standing men or hybrid creatures (man-fish, man-lion) or powerful animals in order to ward off diseases (Green, 1983: 87).



**Fig. 1** Three Pieces of Clay Statues obtained From Nimrud, British Museum, London (Green, 1983: 87)



**Fig. 2** Inlaid Ivory Plaque, Recovered from Nimrud, British Museum, London (Parrot, 1961: 153)

### A Survey of Fine Arts in Mannaeen Societies

Cultural works, recovered from important Mannaeen regions such as Ziwiye, Qalaichi, and Hasanlu IV that had been built during the Iron Age III (800-500 BC), possessed technical and thematic closeness, indicating

dynamic and powerful societies, whose craftsmen and artists were familiar with mental and ritualistic concepts as well as artistic principles of their neighbors and had cultural exchanges with them. In the objects retrieved from these regions, different kinds of Urartian, Assyrian, and Scythian cultural elements can be seen, which sometimes came from adjacent civilizations and sometimes were intermingled with local art of this region. In these works, animal elements play an important role and are linked to the Scythian art in this regard. In Scythian works, animal depictions were the main element of adornment and by presenting these images the artist aimed at inducing real image of the animals, illustrating different states of animals in one scene (Rice, 1993: 40), whereas Mannaeen art used various types of combined images of animal-human in a mythical way, which also differs from the Assyrian art in some technical and conceptual aspects. The use of inlaid technique can be seen in ivory and golden Mannaeen works, which had been common in the art of Urartu, Assyria, Northern Syria, and Phoenicia at the same time. Having its own specific characteristics in the Mannaeen regions, this art has been called the local art or the Zagros Style by some scholars. Its characteristics include modeling the nature and presenting a lively and free style in presenting animal and human depictions. Mannaeen earthenware is another indicative work of this tribe, the common format of which is wide-lipped jugs (Marcus, 1996: 54) with varying colorful images or delicate carved embellishments with triangular designs. In general, the main themes of the Mannaeen art can be attributed to the use of lively colors in order to depict mythical icons as well as novel combinations of gods,

animals, trees of life, lotus, and geometrical designs.



**Fig. 3** Pictured Glazed Brick, Bukan, Collection, Japan (Hasanzadeh & Mollasalehi, 2011: 4)

### **The Influence of Neo-Assyrian Culture on Artistic Themes of Mannaeen Societies**

Practical arts and decorative designs, depicted on artifacts, are the most important tool to transfer culture along with artistic and conceptual traditions among ancient nations (Mortezaei, 2012: 47). When studying Mannaeen works, the deep influence of Assyria, as a result of their widespread cultural connections with one another, can be seen. The region of Ziwiye in Saqqez is one of the most important Mannaeen regions, west of Iran, which due to its unmatched treasure and a sturdy castle atop its hill has gained global popularity. Works from the Ziwiye treasure, which were accidentally recovered in 1943, involves numerous golden, silver, ivory, and earthenware objects of high value, which indicates different styles of the Mannaeen art. The region of Qalaichi in Bukantown is one of the most important centers of the Mannaeen settlement too; based on archaeological evidence as well as the discovery of a small inscription, called Izirtu, most likely this had been the capital of Manna. Among the findings of Qalaichi, pictured glazed bricks are an appropriate source to know mental and cultural elements of the intended societies. Hasanlu Hill was among the important ancient regions of north western Iran, being a political and

economic center in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. In the central Hasanlu hill, ten eras of settlement (from the seventh millennium up to the Sassanid era and the early Islamic period) have been identified. One of its important works is an Urartian castle, constructed after the destruction of Hasanlu IV in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century and during the eighth invasion of Sargon (714 BC), it was captured by the Assyrian and given to the Manna. The Manna settled in this region during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and their earthenware resembled those of Ziwiye, ZendanSoleyman and Qalaichi regions. They were retrieved from layer IIIB of Dayson Stratigraphy as well as IIIA (Mollazadeh, 2009: 96). Glazed tiles were used in interior decorations of Hasanlu buildings, in accordance to Assyrian style (Dayson, 1960: 120). Moreover, some golden, ivory, earthenware, and bronze works have been found in this region, which were often indicative of local art, also showing the influence of Urartian and the neo-Assyrian art.

### **Sacred Tree in Neo-Assyrian Art**

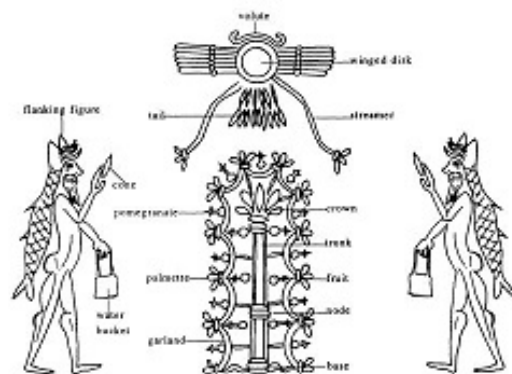
Trees had a close link with ancient people, showing up in their art. Depiction of tree became common since the fourth millennium BC in cultural works of Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Indus (Parpola, 1993: 163).

"Sacred tree" or the "tree of life" in the Mesopotamian art originates from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC and the early Assyrian era. This image appeared in artistic works during the time of Tukulti-Ninurta, the king of Assyria and gradually entered cultural and civilizational centers of the Near East. In this era, the image of tree appeared on royal works and could be seen in wall depictions, like the throne room and the throne of Ashurbanipal II in Calah, as the

central image. The trees of the neo-Assyrian era resemble the early Assyrian samples, while simultaneously differing from them in their presentation of details. Generally, the Assyrian trees have a trunk with a crown shaped like palm fronds, which is placed on a stone base and is surrounded by a network of horizontal and crossing lines, having a margin of palm fruits, pine cones, or pomegranates. In more embellished examples, the tree trunk is often attached to itself on top, in the middle, or at the base, connected with several small circles on right and left of the trunk. On both sides of the sacred tree, animals, humans, or mythical creatures often face each other (Fig. 4) and the winged circular disc (the sun?) can be seen on the top of the scene (Ibid: 164). In written Assyrian sources, there is no mention of the sacred tree's meaning and it is impossible to have an absolute interpretation of its *raison d'être* in artistic designs. Winter was the first scholar to use an interpretation of the existing symbols such as the sacred tree in his interpretation of the famous relief in the Calah Palace, where he defined the king as the regent of Assyria from god (Winter, 1976: 113). In these depictions, tree is clearly a symbol of the divine ruler and the king is the agent of the Assyrian god, under the surveillance of the winged god. What is more, in many neo-Assyrian images, the king has been depicted as a human character alongside the sacred tree, and if the tree is a symbol of god, the king is the symbol of powerful understanding and manifestation of that god in human (Paarpola, 1993: 165). Thus, in the neo-Assyrian art, tree has two concepts: first, the symbol of a divine creator, the creator of the universe, and in close connection with king; and, second, it can indicate the king, himself, as a complete man,

which emphasizes the high position of the king as the only ruler of the empire.

Another source to search for the meaning of the sacred tree is legends and myths, related to Mesopotamian gods which were in relation with trees and have been depicted in some works. The most famous of these is the epic of Gilgamesh, who during his travels encounters the plant of life and finds in it the secret of immortality.



**Fig. 4** Definition of Different Parts of an Assyrian Tree (Paarpola, 1993: 166)



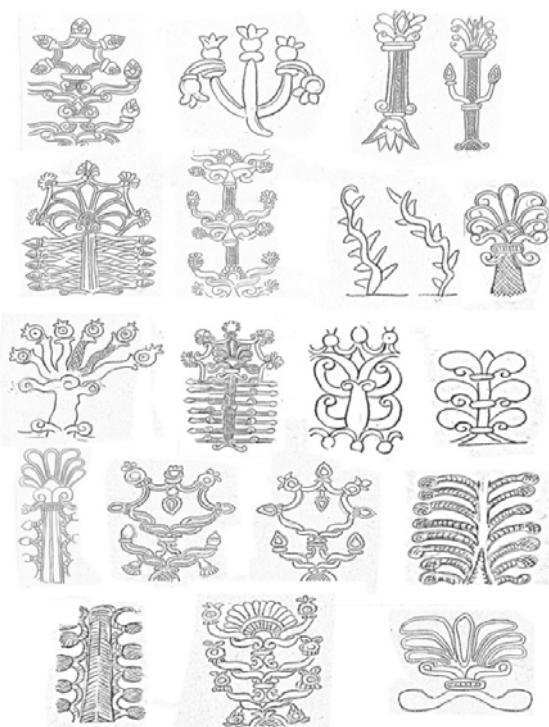
**Fig. 5** Cylinder Seal Design with the Image of Sacred Tree and the King as Divine Mediator (Gorelick, 1978: 39)

### Sacred Tree in Mannaean Art

In objects gained from Mannaean regions, particularly Ziwiyeh objects, there are several images of sacred trees, which have been depicted in some differing styles to show significant variety. The image of stylized trees with ringed and entangled designs was first used in Mitanni art, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, thence to enter Middle-Assyrian art. In the neo-Assyrian art, trees stand at the center of the scene, often being palms, and



sometimes pomegranates and vines. In the Mannaean art, however, trees have more complex shapes, sometimes depicted without a trunk and in combination with pine cones, pomegranate fruits, and lotus flowers individually, and sometimes along with mythical creatures, antelope, and horned bull, with each combination having its own symbolic concept (Fig. 6).



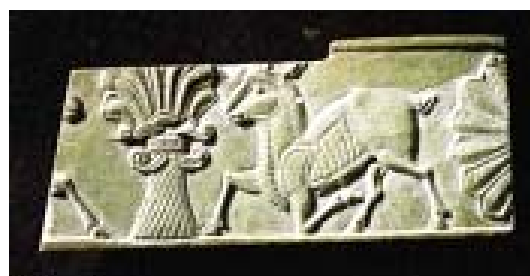
**Fig. 6** Design of different Sacred Trees in Mannaean Art (Drawn by the Author)

A common design in the Mannaean art was the image of two antelopes beside a palm tree. Sacred trees derived from palm trees in the Assyrian art too, playing a talismanic role in some representations. They had been depicted on the reliefs of important and bedroom and close to the gates, protecting them. In the neo-Assyrian culture, the palm tree by itself is the symbol of abundance and possesses the concept of femininity and fertility (Collins, 2006: 103); therefore, it is related to goddess Ishtar. In Assyrian reliefs of Nimrud, the sacred tree has been carved individually or alongside a

god who is keeping the container of the sacred liquid in his left hand and is holding a conical fruit in his right one. In Assyrian texts, these containers which were kept by mythical gods were called "mu-lila", and pine cone was a purging of sins. Antelope in ancient era had diverse meanings like natural useful factors such as the power of fertility and manliness (Black & Green, 1992: 87).

Also, in the Assyrian culture, some deities often appear that have bodies of fish.

Fig. 8 shows the sacred palm tree with a complicated combination of intertwined branches, leading to pine cones. Here, it induces the concepts of sacred feminine and masculine forces, purification, holiness, and dualism, and in the neo-Assyrian art similar examples can be seen, too. Therefore, given the cultural exchanges between the Manna and the Assyrians, the image of the antelope (meaning the masculine force) alongside the palm tree (meaning the feminine one) may be a symbol of eternal force of birth in the Mannaean culture.



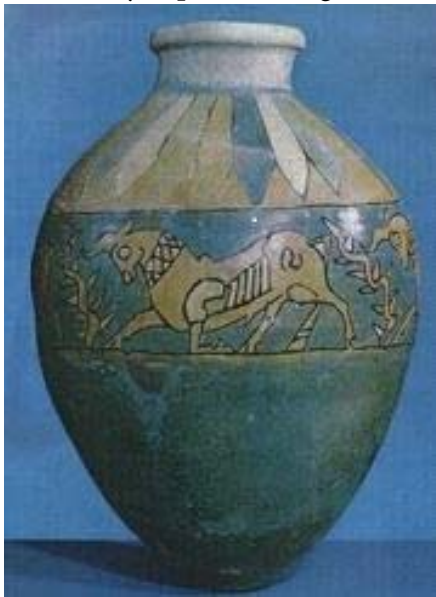
**Fig. 7** Ivory Tree, Iran Bastan Museum (Archival Image)



**Fig. 8** Ivory Piece showing two Antelopes in front of the Sacred Tree (Wilkinson, 1960: 65)

Some sacred trees of Ziwiye's golden tablets have structures completely abstract

and compound. These plants lack any trunk and only possess thick branches, leading to lotus. They stand on small a hemisphere, which has circular designs and may be a symbol of sacred seeds as well as fertility. On the end of these plants of twigs, there are lotus buds, either closed or half-open. Lotus flower in Assyrian and Phoenician culture is the symbol of resurrection, rebirth, and generating forces of nature (Cooper, 2013: 391). In the Iranian mythology, lotus was the symbol of Nahid and in religious narratives of ancient Iran it was the feminine symbol of cosmos (Vakili, 2016: 297). Thus, its combination with the sacred plant might be a symbol of generating forces of nature, which are protected by supernatural guards.



**Fig. 9** Earthenware Pictured Jug, Metropolitan Museum (Paroda, 1965: 147)

From Ziwiyeregion, a jug has been recovered that has the repetitive image of a kneeling bull in front of the sacred plant. While having a theme, common with cultural works of the neo-Assyrian era (the tree of life), and the plant is unique in its design style, indicating the local Mannaeen art (Fig. 9). This tree has been depicted very schematically and only with oblique lines.

Bull in first millennium BC was a symbol of masculinity, fertilizing forces, kingship, and earth in most of Near-Eastern civilizations (Cooper, 2013: 322). It has been depicted on this jug as well as an ivory piece with the neo-Assyrian art style (Fig. 10). The presence of bull, as the symbol of masculinity, and the sacred plant with the concept of life-giving is associated with generating forces of life alongside each other as well as its holiness in the Mannaeen culture.



**Fig. 10** Ivory Piece of Neo-Assyrian Era, recovered from Nimrud (Mallowan, 1949: 23)

### **Gods and Mythical Creatures in Mannaeen Art**

Mannaeen works are full of mythical creatures and wonderful gods. The former are sometimes derived from adjacent national cultures and sometimes local. The golden chest piece necklace of Ziwiye is one of the finest works of the Mannaeen culture, being full of cultural elements. On it, two parallel scenes show a scene of revering the tree of life (the symbol of center of life and immortality) by a group of zoomorphic gods and sacred animals. In each part, images on the left resemble those of the tree's right side, which have been placed similarly in their own place. Images on the top differ from those of the bottom, except for four small (Scythian) lions that are depicted similarly on both top and bottom of the scene (Fig. 11).



**Fig. 11** Golden Chest Piece Necklace of Fig Ziwiye, kept in Iran Bastan Museum (Parrot, 1961: 45)

On the top part of the chest piece necklace, the depicted creatures are from right to left: a ram standing on two feet, a winged sphinx, a winged bull-man, a winged dragon, a small Scythian lioness, and another Scythian animal (probably a rabbit), and the same combination has been exactly repeated on the other side of the tree.

**Sphinx:** The winged sphinx which stands on its paws in works, attributed to it, resembles the late Middle-Assyrian examples and the winged lion has a Mesopotamian origin. This deity has pointed ears and a lion's body. Andre Godard believes that it is Tiamat, a mythical dragon (Godard, 1950: 25). The deity has a wonderful tail (of feathers), resembling a winged lion. Assyrians used winged lions, Gryphon, and even Musrussu, i.e. the Babylonian dragon, in their art. The latter can be seen in the seals, belonging to the late 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> BC, which is an influence of Babylonian culture and kept on in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, until the time of Adad-Nirari III (Madhloom, 1970: 10). Lions are depicted with sharp noses; however, in these examples along with other examples, retrieved from northern Iran and the Achaemenid art, lions have flat and even faces, distinguishing the Iranian art from the Assyrian one (Razmjo, 2005: 12). In the bottom of the chest-piece

necklace, the first animal to approach the tree of life is a bull, which had been depicted in Mesopotamia and Assyria too, resembling its winged variety here. Its design can be seen in the era of Ashurnasirpal II on the king's regalia in the Nimrud Palace. The next creature, depicted beside it, is a winged being, half-human and half-animal, which is crowned and has lifted its hands towards the sky while walking, in form of supplication or prayer.

The motif of the bull-man, keeping a winged disc, is rooted in northern Syria; however, the closest pattern for this design here are cylinder and stamp seals, belonging to the era of Sargon II and after it. After the bull-man, a winged griffin has been depicted, the example of which exists in Cylinder seals in the Middle-Assyrian style (Fig. 12). A similar design can be seen on a cylinder seal, belonging to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, more precisely dated 882 BC.

These griffins have a Phoenician style background, which is repeated in the rams coming after them. The motif of the winged lion with a ram head can be frequently seen on the ivories of northern Syria as well as Phoenicia, too.



**Fig. 12** Image of the Winged Lion on Cylinder Seal from Middle-Assyrian Era (Porada, 1993: 578)



**Fig. 13** Image of the Babylonian Dragon, Musrussu, on Ishtar's Gate (Frankfort, 1970: 93)



**Lamassu:** The bull-man is another Mannaean deity who has got a long, rectangular beard and a horned hat with horizontal lines, similar to the crowns of Assyrian bull-men in the Nimrud Palace (Godard, 1950: 29) (Fig. 15). A glazed brick, recovered from Qalaichi region shows a winged bull-man with sharp pointed beard and a horned headdress likewise the Assyrian examples. Lamassu in the neo-Assyrian art has been used in order to protect the gates and evil forces. In the golden tablet of Ziwiye, kept in the Metropolitan Museum, it is depicted beside the sacred tree as its guardian.



**Fig. 14** Glazed Brick with the Image of Lamassu, Iran Bastan Museum (Image by the Author)



**Fig. 15** Image of the Horned Hat of Ashurbanipal II in Nimrud Palace (Parrot, 1961: 87)



**Fig. 16** ApkalluDeity Depicted on an Assyrian Relief (Majid Zadeh, 2001: 178)

**Apkallu:** It is another deity, seen in Mannaean images, called Apkallu in the Assyrian culture. In Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian mythology, it is one of the seven divine creatures, created by God Enki, to whom bestowal of ethical values, industry, and art of civilization (such as alphabet, law, temple, city-building, and agriculture) to human has been attributed (Atac, 2010: 150). These deities have eagle heads, long wings, and human bodies. In Assyrian depictions, they appear as the king's advisors (Lindsay, 2005: 250). The golden tablet of Ziwiye shows an Apkallu, similar to the art of the neo-Assyrian era, while it carries a conical fruit (as a symbol of purification) and the container of the sacred liquid, called Mu-li-la in Assyrian.



**Fig. 17** ApkalluDeity on the Golden Tablet of Ziwiye, Metropolitan Museum (Wilkinson, 1963: 274)

**Winged-Humanis** another mythical image on Mannaean ivory pieces and glazed bricks. They can be compared to their Assyrian counterparts and are called *Apkallu* in the Akkadian culture, similar to the winged deity with eagle head, being related to God Enki. The *Apkallus* are often depicted beside the sacred tree, carrying sacrificial animals and *mu-li-la*, which was used for purification or fighting evil forces (Fredrick, 1940: 25).

An ivory piece, discovered in Ziwiye, shows this deity on a simple background with convex edges. The difference of this deity from the Assyrian examples of Nimrud is in the clear depiction of wing edges, which has been exaggerated more (Sheikhi, 2015: 98). It wears Assyrian garments and a horned headdress. In the destructed part, the deity was probably carrying a *mu-li-la*, and behind his head a small part of a sacred tree can be seen.



**Fig. 18** Assyrian Relief with the Image of a Winged Deity from Nimrud Palace (Parrot, 1961: Fig. 9)



**Fig. 19** Ivory Piece from Ziwiye, Louvre Museum (Godard, 1950: 87, Fig. 76)

Another image of Mannaean winged gods can be seen on glazed bricks of the Qalaichi region. They can be compared with Assyrian works and the ones in Nimrud. Their design, while having its own specific features, is very similar to the mentioned regions. Fig. 20 illustrates the picture of a kneeling winged man, a similar image of which can be seen in a wall painting from TilBarsip (the Assyrian town) (Hasanzadeh & Molasalehi, 2011: 411). The deity of TilBarsip holds a lotus flower in hand, which specifies the nature of the unknown object in the hand of the Qalaichi deity.



**Fig. 20** Glazed Brick from Qalaichi, Tokyo Museum (Parrot, 1961: xv)





**Fig. 21** Wall Painting from TilBarsip Palace  
(Hasanzadeh&Mollasalehi, 2011: 411)

Among ivory findings of the Assyrian style, there is an ivory plaque in Hasanlu with the image of a bearded man who holds an animal beneath his left arm and carries a staff in his right hand. He is wearing a fringed short-sleeved garment, after Assyrian style (Winter, 1999: 166). Some scholars regard it as the picture of a high-ranking person or an Assyrian ruler. Also, it can be the image of a wingless protecting deity who carries the symbols of power (staff) and plenty (animal). Similar instances can be seen in stone reliefs of the walls of North-western palace in Nimrud, dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC (Collins, 2012: 152).



**Fig. 23** Relief of a Winged Deity (Ibid)



**Fig. 23** Eight Ivory Pieces from Hasanlu,  
Metropolitan Museum (Collins, 2006: 31)



**Fig. 24-25** Glazed Bricks from Rabat Region, Ancient  
Iran Museum (Hozhabri, Nobari, Afifi, 2009: Fig. 25)

In addition, another type of winged creatures can be seen on glazed bricks of Rabat region who have human heads and torsos (either female or male), lion body, and

long wings (Fig. 24 and 25), depicted in blue, yellow, and brown on glazed bricks in a stair-like form. In case of a work which has a woman's head, there is a completely-similar instance, attributed to Assyrian art in the Barkat private collection. Due to its rareness in other Assyrian regions as well as the Mannaean style, used in its design, it may belong to Mannaean culture or might indicate its influence on Assyria (Fig. 26 and 27).

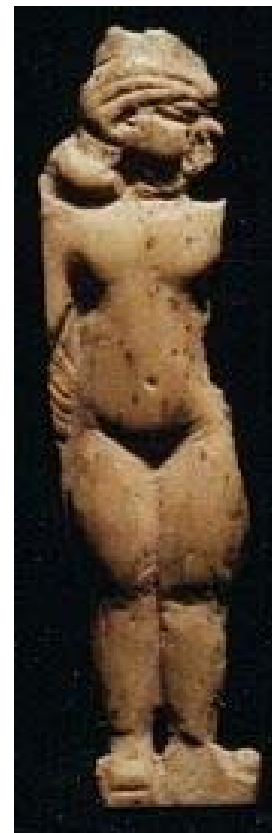
Fig. 25 demonstrates the image of this deity with the head of a bearded man, showing the male variety of this deity, which makes it unique. Hybrid creatures with human heads, lion bodies, and long (eagle?) wings were common in the culture of Near-Eastern regions of the first millennium BC, known as griffin, guppert, and gryphon. The oldest sign of this deity belongs to Egyptian art of third Millennium BC with a human head and a lion body, which in some rare instances it has got wings too (Taheri, 2012: 13). In Ziwiye works, especially the ivory tablets, gryphons are depicted beside rosette flowers. Gryphons were guardians of the temples and may be the symbol of dominion over the sky and earth, the kingly power, religious support, and a fearful and superhuman power (Ibid, 22).



**Fig. 26-27** Glazed Bricks Attributed to Neo-Assyrian Era, BarkatPrivate Collection, USA

**Goddess Ishtar:** Naked female bodies in most ancient Near-Eastern civilizations, such

as Mesopotamia, are connected with the concept of fertility. In the neo-Assyrian era, powerful goddesses such as Ishtar and Inanna were being worshipped. In Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian culture, Ishtar was the goddess of war, fertility, and love, being revered from 3500 BC up to early years after Christ (Parpola, 2004: 29). Among Ziwiye works, a small ivory figurine in form of a naked woman has been recovered. It is depicted from front, yet her head has been turned right in profile. Her face is damaged and vitiated, yet she wears a striate and conical headdress. What is more, on her left side, the remains of a striate surface can be seen which might have been her wings. In this case, it is a figurine of goddess Ishtar, who during the neo-Assyrian Era had a high position among the gods. Discovery of her figurine among Mannaean works may indicate her holiness in Mannaean societies.



**Fig. 28** Ivory Figurine in the Form of a Naked Woman, Iran Bastan Museum.





**Fig. 29** Goddess Ishtar on a Stone Tablet, Ziwiye, Louvre Museum, France.

in Iran's Bastan Museum and have some examples in the Urartian and Assyrian art.



**Fig. 30** Decorative Ivory Piece as a Table Foot, Iran Bastan Museum

### **Ceremonial Designs in Manna Civilization**

Written reports and Assyrian reliefs indicate the performance of ceremonial and royal rituals. In the Mannaean art, only some small ivory pieces present an image of official and ceremonial meetings, e.g. a piece retrieved from Ziwiye shows a steward serving the ruler. The first person on the left is a steward who carries an unknown object in his hand and behind him, there is another steward. Of his garment, only a shawl that is hung from his waist and a short kilt in the style of Assyrian soldiers can be seen. In front of him, there is another steward with long garments of high officials, an Assyrian round cap, and a wide shawl, who is leaning forward presenting something to a high-ranking personage (probably to the ruler) and only his nose and long, rectangular, Assyrian beard are visible. He is wearing a long garment with wavy oblique lines and square-like designs in the style of Ashurbanipal era (7<sup>th</sup> century BC). This work has an Assyrian theme, which can be seen in stone reliefs and wall paintings of Assyrian palaces (Sheikhi, 2015: 20). In this piece, a decorated table can be seen, all peripheries of which have been embellished with small and square-like pieces that are probably made of ivory. In it, there is a serrated ornament, whose real sample is kept



**Fig. 31** Ivory Piece, a Ceremonial Design, Ancient Iran Museum (Godard, 1950: 89, Fig. 78)

Another piece is the statue of a man with Assyrian beard, whose hands are bended on each other as a sign of respect (6.5 cm long and 2.6 cm wide) from the Ziwiye region (Fig. 32). On this man's clothes, there are some gaps for bejeweling. Adorned Mannaean works are often rough and crude. It seems that they have been adapted from somewhere or that they were the first experiences of their makers. This work does not possess high delicacy and construction degree and cannot be considered a unique and free statue. On the contrary, given its relative small dimensions as well as the connection of the upper parts of its head and feet to flat surfaces, they could have been a decorative part of a royal throne (Fig. 33). Assyrian thrones are full of ivory decorative elements with different shapes such as pictured tablets,

polypetalous flowers, circular designs, and small statues in the shape of standing men. No work has been found in the Ziwiye region from the probable throne; however, there are many decorative ivory pieces among its findings, which given their similarity with the obtained depictions as well as the Assyrian ivory examples, may be a part of it.



**Fig. 32** Ivory Figurines, Iran Bastan Museum (Image by the Author)



**Fig. 33** Royal Throne of Sennacherib (Parrot, 1961: 112)



**Fig. 34** Royal Throne of Sennacherib (Parrot, 1961:112)

### **Influence of Neo-Assyrian Art on Mannaeen Seals**

Among the findings of Changbar, Qalaichi, and Hasanlu cemeteries, some stamps and cylindrical seals have been retrieved which were of the Assyrian style. Fig. 35 illustrates a cylinder seal with the image of two winged deities kneeling in front of a sacred tree. They have long wings towards both up and down directions. Both of them are wearing round headdresses and carry a conical fruit (perhaps pine cone) near a palm tree.

The winged disc as a deity appears in the Assyrian art, too. Behind these deities there are two other (sacred) plants with long stems and a sun-like design, which can be a manifestation of the god, Shamash. All images of this seal are framed with a strip that has a zigzag design. In terms of the theme and the construction technique, this work is thoroughly close to the neo-Assyrian art. A similar seal is being kept at the Macropolio collection in USA, dating back to 900-750) BC (Fig. 36).



**Fig. 35** Cylinder seal, Macropolio Collection, USA (Teissier, 1983: 178)



**Fig. 36** Cylinder, Changbar, Saqqez, Iran Bastan Museum (Image by the Author)

Fig. 37 also demonstrates a cylinder seal, discovered from Changbar, Kurdistan with the image of a bird-like deity with a bearded man's head, hunting a deer. He is wearing a round headdress and is hunting a quadruple animal (probably a deer) with spear. This seal is also in Assyrian style and another example of it can be seen in Macropolio Collection.



**Fig. 37** Cylinder, Changbar, Saqqez, Iran Bastan Museum (Image by the Author)



**Fig. 38** Cylinder Seal, Macropolio Collection, USA, (Teissier, 1983: 179)

Among other seals with the neo-Assyrian style, there is a stamp seal with a scorpion design from the Chang barregion. The image of scorpion has been first seen on wheel-made pottery of stone copper layers of Southern Sialk Hill (Ajourlu, 2013: 3). Apart from Sialk, prehistoric regions of Bakun, Bampur, Hassanpur, Tel Belis, Jiroft, Tel Shogha, Tel Timuran, Shahdad, Espidezh, Damin, and Nal in Iran (Janbazi, 2012: 27) as well as Samarra (5500 BC) and Jamdat Nasr (3100-2900 BC) in Mesopotamia contain pottery with abstract images of scorpion (Janbazi, 2012: 27). Fig. 41 is similar to the seal from the Kuyunjik Palace. Apart from Changbar and Hasanlucemeteries, the Assyrian style seals have been also retrieved from the cities of Qazvin, Western Gilan (Chelleh), Kashan (Silak B), Zanjan, and even

Southern Bakhtar (Derakhshan) (Moocheshi & Talayee, 2010: 85).



**Fig. 39** Stamp Seal with Scorpion Design, Iran Bastan Museum (Image by the Author)



**Fig. 40** Drawing of Stamp Seal with Scorpion Design, British Museum (Searight, 2008: 138)

## Conclusion

The period between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC coincided with the formation of Assyrian Empire in Mesopotamia and the beginning of cultural and social evolutions in the region. During this time, the Manna was one of the most powerful tribes settling in north western Iran that, seeking to protect the interests and environmental resources of their own realm, brought Assyrians and Urartians into political conflicts, which by itself paved the way for cultural and artistic interactions. Works, recovered from Mannaeen regions of Ziwiye, Qalaichi, and Hasanlu contain the most cultural common grounds with Assyrian works. Given its iconographic and comparative semiotic analyses with the neo-Assyrian culture, it can be a symbol of eternal force of birth and fertility in the Mannaeen culture. Among Mannaeen mythical creatures, the Apkallu, that can be seen sometimes with an eagle head and sometimes with the head of a bearded man, while he is purifying or fertilizing the sacred tree, are frequently depicted on golden tablets of Ziwiye and

cylinder seals of the Changbar region and resemble the Assyrian examples a lot. What is more, identification of a female figure, as the goddess Ishtar who was among the most powerful deities of Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian culture, being an embodiment of war, love, and fertility, may prove her importance and holiness among Mannaeen tribes, too. The influence of the neo-Assyrian art on Mannaeen handicraft, such as ivory pieces and tablets, can be seen clearly. Using the pattern-oriented comparison of these two cultural areas with one another, the main function of some of the unknown pieces that are kept in museums today are determined. The small ivory figurine of a man with his hands on each other is an example and can be part of royal throne's decorations in the neo-Assyrian style. Generally, ivory pieces of the Assyrian style in Mannaeen regions possess the characteristics of Assyrian works, belonging to the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, particularly to the era of Sargon II, who made widespread assaults on western areas of Iran. Seals with neo-Assyrian style have been recovered from a vast expanse from Azerbaijan to Khuzestan. The designs on the seals, studied in this article, which have been obtained from Ziwiye, Hasanlu, and Changbar, are influenced by the Assyrian culture, having religious and symbolic themes. Considering widespread political and commercial interactions between the Assyrians and the tribes residing in Iran along with the absence of signs of local Mannaeen art, they might have been imported. Generally speaking, ethnographic analyses of archaeological Mannaeen evidence show that religion was playing a significant role in this age and while having its own specific characteristics, shared deep common grounds with the culture of the Assyrian Empire. In this era, generating

forces of nature in most depictions were hallowed with concepts of birth and fertility such as the tree of life and hybrid gods and as Mannaeen societies were mixed in the Median Empire in later centuries, they entered the Achaemenid art and culture.

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## تأثیر هنر آشور نو بر جوامع مانایی غرب و شمال غرب ایران

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### چکیده

امروزه آثاری که با عنوان میراث اقوام مانا در موزه‌های مهم دنیا نگهداری می‌شوند، نقوش نمادینی را به نمایش می‌گذارند که بیانگر ارزش‌ها و معانی پنهانی برگرفته از باورها و اعتقادات رایج در جامعه آنان بوده و مطالعه تحلیلی، بازشناسی نمادهای به‌کاررفته روی این آثار تأثیر مذهب و سنت‌های آیینی را در جوامع مانا و پیوند عمیق این فرهنگ را با فرهنگ آشور نو نشان می‌دهد. در این نوشتار سعی شده تا با بررسی و تحلیل شاخص‌ترین نقوش نمادینی چون نگاره درخت مقدس، ایزدان بالدار و مخلوقات اساطیری و الهه ایشتر که روی لوحه‌های زرین، آثار سفالین، لوحه‌های عاجی و مهرهای به‌دست‌آمده از محوطه‌های زیویه، حسنلو و قلاچی و همچنین قطعات عاج با تصاویری از صحنه‌های جنگ، ارباب‌رانی و مراسم تشریفاتی به‌دست‌آمده از محوطه‌های مانایی، تأثیر مذهب در هنر مانا و نیز تأثیر عمیق فرهنگ و هنر آشور نو در فرهنگ و هنر مانا مورد مطالعه قرار گیرد.

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