

Ivory in Light of Cuneiform Sources

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Abstracts

Ivory is one the precious and sought materials in most of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations in Mesopotamia, the Levant and ancient Egypt, and man has excelled in using ivory since ancient times, to produce carved and polished pieces of great artistic value, and ivory carvings are of great importance as one of the materials that show us the amount of Luxury in the Assyrian royal court, as they are included in the inlay of furniture, thrones, chairs and tables, as well as decorative boxes, scales, combs and others, and the Assyrian kings paid great attention to this material and became one of the faces of art in the modern Assyrian era.

Keywords: Ivory, Cuneiform Texts, Ebony, Boxwood, Elephants, Ivory Boxes - Ivory Sofa.

Introduction

Tracing the emergence of ivory in the light of cuneiform texts from the earliest times to the end of the Neo-Assyrian era.

Demonstrate the importance of ivory to the Assyrian state through the cuneiform texts that have been recorded, as they were interested in obtaining it in various ways, whether through trade, gift, spoils and tribute.

The article flows up some Methods like: Historical and descriptive method.

The Designation of Ivory in Ancient Languages:

The use of ivory in Mesopotamia dates to prehistoric times. In the early third millennium BCE, ivory and shell were used for inlay work, and this practice continued, albeit on a smaller scale, in later periods. However, the ivory industry flourished, and its use increased during the Neo-Assyrian era.

The Sumerians referred to ivory in their cuneiform script as ZÚ.AM.SI, which literally means "elephant tusk." The element ZÚ, means "tooth," while AM.SI means "elephant." The Akkadian equivalent for ivory was Šinnu Piru, with the syllable Šinnu meaning "tooth" and Piru meaning

"elephant." In some cases, the Sumerians also referred to elephants as "wild bulls" or "wild bulls with a finger," GUD.AM.SI. Additionally, Akkadian cuneiform texts mention another high-quality ivory designation, Gilamu or Kilamu. Dyed ivory was referred to as Bašlu.

The earliest mention of ivory in written texts dates back to the Neo-Sumerian era (2112-2004 BCE), specifically during the reigns of King Gudea and Ur-Baba. A list of materials donated to a temple mentions two pieces of raw ivory. Additionally, there are several literary texts from the Old Babylonian period that mention ivory, which we will discuss later.

Ivory is also mentioned in political correspondence texts between kings from the Middle Babylonian (Kassite) period. It is also mentioned in exploration texts from kings of the Middle Assyrian period. However, the most abundant texts in this regard are the annals of the Assyrian kings of the Neo-Assyrian period, which mention ivory in their content. In the following, we will review these texts.

Firstly: Literary Texts

The elephant and ivory are mentioned in the tablets of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which dates to the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595 BCE). The elephant is mentioned in the sixth tablet, which describes Gilgamesh's conflict with Ishtar and the killing of the Bull of Heaven, specifically in line 36.

"An elephant... its covering"

Ivory is also mentioned in the eighth tablet of the same epic, specifically in lines 119 and 123, where the luxurious funerary gifts that Gilgamesh placed in Enkidu's grave are described:

"... weight... of ivory"

"... his arm was ivory"

A poetic literary text by a person possibly named (Lu-digira) is a message he sends to his mother by messenger to the city of Nippur where she lives. He describes his mother to the messenger so that he can recognize her, using similes that employ elements of nature:

"She is a marble statue standing on a lapis lazuli base, she is a polished ivory rod"

Secondly: Political Correspondence Texts

Ivory is mentioned in several political correspondences between kings as one of the precious gifts on various occasions, such as political marriage gifts between kings and princes or gifts to strengthen relations, between the kings of Mesopotamia and other kingdoms, or gifts from kings to their wives or sons and others. There are a number of letters of this type that give us an idea of the nature of political and diplomatic relations between the ancient Near East at that time.

In a letter from Amenhotep III, King of Egypt, to the Kassite king Kadashman-Enlil I (1402-1364 BCE), there is a list of gifts that the King of Egypt sent to the Kassite king on the occasion of the latter building a new palace in Babylon. The gifts included:

"An ebony bed inlaid with ivory and gold"

Another letter from the Kassite king Burna-Buriash II (1364-1347 BCE). to the Egyptian king Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton), in which the Kassite king offers one of his daughters in marriage to Akhenaton and asks him to send ivory statues and sculptures depicting scenes from nature and to send a suitable procession to transport the bride. The text includes:

"Let them carve trees of ivory and color them, let them carve from ivory the plants of the desert that are similar to each other and color them, and let them bring them to me".he also asked for animal sculptures made of ivory and gold.

In another text, the beginning and end are missing, but from what remains, we can infer that it is a list of materials that were sent with the Babylonian princess (daughter of Burna-Buriash II) as wedding preparations. The text is heavily damaged, but among the remaining sections are:

"... ivory clasps, an ebony clasp" .

"...9 boxes of ebony and finely worked ivory, and two other boxes of ebony and finely worked ivory called Za "

"... colored ivory oil jars".

Some political texts mention gold and ivory gifts given by King Sin-ahhe-riba to his son Ashur-ahhe-adina on the occasion of his appointment as crown prince. as a token of love. These texts do not relate to external political events but rather to internal political matters within Assyria.

"Sennacherib, king of the universe, king of Assyria, gold and ivory bracelets, a gold crown, a gold necklace, and upper arm rings (zanadu), all those jewels inlaid with lapis lazuli... and red lapis lazuli, I gave to Ashur-ahhe-adina, my son, as a symbol of love".

Thirdly: Hunting and Exploration Texts:

One text from the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595 BCE) that mentions ivory is a list of precious materials brought back by King Sumu-ilum. (1894-1866 BCE) from his two-year expedition to Dilmun. The list was presented to the temple of the goddess Ninkigal. and included metals, stones, wood, and ivory.

Assyrian kings were also known for their hunting prowess, and they often went on hunting expeditions to prove their strength and courage. Ivory was sometimes mentioned in the accounts of these hunts, as it was a valuable trophy that could be taken, one text from the Middle Assyrian period (1350-1077 BCE) describes a hunting expedition by King Tukulti-Ninurta I (1115-1077 BCE) in Harran and the Khabur River region:

"I killed 10 elephants and wild bulls in the land of Harran and the Khabur River region, and I captured 4 elephants alive and brought their skins and the tusks of the dead elephants to the city of Ashur"

In a text belonging to King Ashurbel-Kala (1074-1057 BC), one of the kings of the Middle Assyrian era (1521-911 BC), he inscribed an obelisk known as the Broken Obelisk, in which he describes the news of his campaign on the foothills of the Lebanon Mountains and the hunting trips that included it, it says:

"The gods loved his priesthood and granted him the skill of hunting in the field and. in ships, and he killed... in the great sea... he hunted herds of wild bulls... and the elephants he killed with a bow, and the elephants he captured alive and brought to the city of Assyria".

Another text was found in the city of Assyria for King Tukluta Ninurta II (890-884 BC) for one of his exploratory trips to the regions of the Middle Euphrates and the country of Sukho. On his journey, he passed through Wadi Tharthar, Spar and the Euphrates River. The purpose of the trip was to obtain gifts from the ruler of Sukho. The one called (Ailu-Abni), who recognized Assyrian sovereignty and imposed obligations of obedience and loyalty:

"I received a tribute of 20 mana of gold from the land of Sukho, an ivory sofa, and 3 chests of ivory."

In another passage from the same text:

"3 talents of silver, 20 minas of gold, chairs made of ivory, 18 ingots of lead, purple wood, and a sofa made of purple wood."

The text written on the banquet stele of King Ashurnasir Apli II (883-859 BC), in which he describes his skill in hunting:

"I killed 450 powerful lions, killed 350 wild bulls, killed 200 ostriches and captured 30 elephants in an ambush, captured 50 alive wild bulls and 140 ostriches, and received 5 live elephants as a gift from the ruler of Sukho."

There is a text carved on a lion and a winged bull from the northwestern palace in which this king displays his skill, and it says:

"The gods Ninurta and Nergal, who love me, ordered me to hunt wild beasts. I killed 30 elephants in an ambush and killed 257 wild bulls with a sword and 370 lions."

As stated by King Assyria Nasir Apli II in one of the texts regarding the construction of the city of Nimrud (Kalkhu): -

"I took large quantities of rare woods and made thrones from ebony, boxwood, and pieces inlaid with ivory, silver, and gold...all of them were spoils from the countries over which I imposed my control."

Fourth: Texts of military campaigns

Mesopotamia, like other civilizations, tried to confront the challenges in order to survive by various means, whether peacefully through diplomatic relations, political intermarriages, establishing treaties, etc., or militarily by launching military campaigns to achieve the desired goals, which are often economic goals. We notice the abundance of this type of text in most... Periods of Assyrian history. Assyrian military campaigns became a dominant feature of their history, especially the Neo-Assyrian era.

We mention among them a text found in the city of Assyria, dating back to King Assyria Dan II (934-912 BC), the last king of the Middle Assyrian era, in which this king mentions his campaigns to regain some rebellious areas, in which it states: -

“The gods Ninurta and Nergal, who love me, commanded me to hunt wild beasts, so I killed 120 lions and 1,600 wild bulls with my spear, and I killed 56 elephants.”

In a text by King Edd-nirari II (911-891 BC), the first king of the Neo-Assyrian era, it was broken into three pieces in which it described his campaigns, including a military campaign along the Euphrates and Khabur Rivers, in which it was stated: -

“With my courage and my spear, I killed 24 wild bulls, caught 9 live wild bulls, killed 9 elephants in a fight, caught 4 live elephants in an ambush and 5 elephants in nets, and brought these herds to the city of Assyria.”

Another text, dating back to the same Lamech, begins with glorifying himself and the god Assyria blessing him. It describes his campaign against coastal cities such as Tiro, Sidon, and others. It describes how their rulers submitted to him and offered the duties of obedience and loyalty, that is, tribute, and mentions the materials they presented: -

“.....2,300 talents of silver, 20 talents of gold, 300 talents of copper, 5,000 talents of iron, clothes of embroidered linen, an ivory bed, and a sofa carved and inlaid with ivory...”

As for King Ashurnasir Apli II (883-859 BC), who was interested in urban activity during his reign, including renovating temples, palaces, and ancient cities, he is mentioned in one of the texts about the construction of the city of Nimrud (Kalkho).

“I took large quantities of rare wood and made thrones from ebony, boxwood, and pieces inlaid with ivory, silver, and gold.... I carved this obelisk and stored it in the wall of the city of Kalkho.”

It is also mentioned that he launched a campaign towards the Mediterranean, the purpose of which was to demonstrate his strength and prestige and in which he subjugated the Aramean states in Syria, which he passed through without any notable resistance or clash, from Beit Zamani and Beit Adeni, and this campaign was mentioned in the text: -

“I washed my weapons in the deep sea and offered a sacrifice of sheep to the gods. I received gifts of obedience and loyalty from the seacoast from the people of Tyr (Tyre) and Sidon (Sidon) and from Arvada (an island in the sea), which included gold, silver, potter, copper, brass utensils, and made of clothing.” Of colored linen, great and little monkeys, boxwood, ebony, and walrus ivory, these were the gifts of obedience and loyalty I received from them.”

King Assyria Nasir Apli II mentions in one of his texts that in the year (879 BC) he launched a campaign against the regions of the Upper Tigris, where the state of Beit Zamani was located, which rebelled and killed its Assyrian ruler (Ami-Baal), so he advanced towards them and took from them the duties of obedience and loyalty, and from what was reported in the text:

“I marched to avenge Ami-Baal, and they were in awe of my ruler and my chariots equipped with men and horses.... I seized 2 talents of silver, 2 talents of gold, 100 talents of lead, 100 talents of copper, 300 talents of iron, 100 bronze vessels and copper utensils.... And sofas inlaid with ivory and gold.”

It is also mentioned in one of his campaigns, which was mentioned in the annals of this king, that on the eighth day of the month of September, he left Kalkhu heading to Carchemish, and

when he reached the house of Adinni, he took tribute from them and among the following is what was stated in the text:

"...And I took tribute from it in silver, gold, copper, lead, tables, beds, and chairs of ivory studded with gold and silver..... Then I left it and after I crossed the Euphrates River and upon my arrival at Carchemish, I received tribute from Singara, king of the Hittites, which was 20 talents of silver, gold jewelry and daggers, and 100 talents." Of bronze...beds and chairs of boxwood inlaid with ivory, and purple clothes".

In a text in which Ashurnasir Apli II mentions that he took tribute from Abunu, the ruler of the House of Adeni, it says: -

"I took from them silver, gold, tin, bronze, ivory plates, ivory sofas, ivory chests, ivory thrones inlaid with silver and gold".

He also mentioned that in one of his campaigns against the provinces that rebelled against him, he took tribute from them, which consisted of: -

"I took 3,000 bronze vessels, 1,000 pieces of colored linen clothing, and plates, boxes, and couches of ivory inlaid with gold".

A large stone tablet belonging to King Shalmanu-Acharid III (858-824 BC) was found in the Temple of Nabu in the city of Nimrud (Kalkho). The text dates back to the year 858 BC, in which it mentions his first campaigns against the Aramaic cities, including the fortified city, of Lubarna, It stated: -

"...I destroyed, burned, and demolished the city, and carved a monument therein, and received tribute from Aramu, the ruler of the House of Ajushi, silver, gold, oxen, wine, and a bed of gold, ivory, and boxwood.

In another text from the fortress of King Shalmanu Acharid III, he talks about one of his campaigns that he carried out in the year 856 BC in many Aramaic cities, in which it was stated: -

"...I received tribute from Carchemish and Aramu, the ruler of the House of Agushi, silver, gold, bronze, red-purple wool, elephant ivory".

There is also a text engraved on the bronze strips of the Imkur-Enlil (Balaat) Gate belonging to King Shalmanu-Acharid III, which states: -

"I crossed the Euphrates River and approached the city of Juradu, which is a royal city, and I subjugated Adino, ruler of the House of Dakuri, and presented me with silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, ivory and elephant skins"

In a text dated 842 BC, in which King Shalmanu-Acharid III mentions his second campaign against Babylon, which was in the ninth year of his reign, it says: -

"I went to Babylon and offered sacrifices in Babylon, Borsippa, and Kotha, and I marched toward the Chaldeans and captured their cities, then I marched to the sea called the Maratu River, and I

received tribute in Babylon from Adinu, the ruler of the House of Dakuri, and from Meshalem Marduk, the ruler of the House of Amukani, silver, Gold, ebony and elephant ivory”.

One of the texts written on the Black Obelisk also mentions that this king received gifts from the regions of the Middle Euphrates from the ruler of the country of Sukho called (Marduk-bel-User), and they were precious gifts in recognition of Assyrian sovereignty, and it stated: -

“..... I received gifts from Marduk-bel-Usar from the region of Sokho, silver, gold, gold vessels, ivory, and spears”.

A stone tablet belonging to King Shamshi-Edd V (823-811 BC) was found in the temple of Anu-Edd in Assyria, in which he describes his military campaigns starting from his fourth campaign until the sixth campaign in the year 811 BC, in which he marched towards Kardonyash via Zab River, it was stated: -

“In my sixth campaign, I marched to Kardonyash across the Zab River, crossed Mount Abikha, crossed the Tornat River, captured my brother Adina’s father alive, and captured his sons and daughters, precious stones, and ingots of bronze. And elephant skins and elephant tusks”.

As for King Edd-nirari III (810-783 BC), he mentions that in a campaign he launched in 796 BC against Damascus, he was able to enter it and take from them the duties of obedience and loyalty: -

“I imposed on them gifts of obedience and loyalty, so I took beds made of ivory and chairs made of ivory inlaid with gold and studded with stones”.

There is a stone tablet found by Loftus in 1845 AD in the city of Nimrud (Kalkho) between the northwestern palace and the southwestern palace (i.e., in the palace of Eddnirari III), in which he describes his campaigns, including his campaign against Damascus, which he besieged, subjugated, and took tribute from. In which: -

“I marched towards Damascus and besieged its king and subjected him to me. I seized 2,300 talents of silver, 20 talents of gold, 3,000 talents of bronze, 5,000 talents of iron, linen clothes, an ivory bed, and a sofa inlaid with ivory”.

As for King Tokalti-apla-Ishara III (744-727 BC), he spent most of his years of wisdom subjugating the cities of the Phoenician coast to secure trade and navigation routes. He subjugated Hiram, King of Tiro, and forced him to pay tribute, which included, according to what was stated in the text, the following:

“Iron, elephant skins, ivory, and purple-red woolen clothes.”

This king mentions in his annals that in the third year of his rule, he subjugated the Arab tribes that rebelled and declared disobedience, taking advantage of the internal disturbances and weakness in the Assyrian state. These tribes were settled in the northern valleys of the Arabian Peninsula and were considered a source of threat to Assyria’s foreign trade routes, which prompted the king to lead several campaigns against them, as he mentioned in one of his writings the names of a number of the rulers of those regions, including Queen Zabibah, whom he forced to pay tribute like the rest of the kings, and what was stated in the text: -

“... Zabibah, the Queen of the Arabs, took from her gold, silver, iron, elephant skins, ivory, and colorful embroidered woolen and linen clothes”.

As for King Sharukin (721-705 BC), he mentions to us in his annals that in the seventh year of his reign, the Arab tribes returned to rebellion and refused to pay tribute, so he launched a campaign against them and was able to subjugate them and he recorded this in a text:

“By the inspiration of the god Assyria, in the seventh year of my reign, I crushed the Arab tribes of Thamud who lived in a remote country far in the desert... and who did not recognize any rule... and I ordered the deportation of those who escaped death and settled them in Samaria... And from the kings of the coast and the desert, I received gifts: precious stones, gold dust, ivory, and all kinds of perfumes”.

Sharukin completes the text and mentions that he also took tribute from (Shamsi) the Queen of the Arabs: -

“And from my sun, the queen of Arabia, I received from them dust of gold, precious stones, ivory, ebony, and all kinds of spices”

In one of his campaigns, Sharukin mentions that he headed towards Masir, located on the border between Assyria and Urartu, taking advantage of the Urartians' preoccupation with the king's coronation ceremony because the throne of Urartu was vacant, so he captured all its inhabitants, evacuated them, and reached the palace's treasures and treasures that were recorded in a list, which included ivory. Including: -

“A bed of ivory and a middle of silver, the resting place of the gods, studded with precious stones and gold”.

In the era of King Sen-Achhi-Ariba (704-681 BC), signs of disobedience began in the coastal cities of southern Palestine and Judah, and they refused to pay the tribute imposed on them. Hezekiah, intervened in the affairs of Ekron and captured its pro-Assyrian ruler, so Sen-Achhi-Ariba turned to him. With a disciplinary campaign in 701 BC, a higher tribute was imposed on him than before: -

“...He sent me to Nineveh, my royal city, 200 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver, precious stones, large slabs of red stone, chests inlaid with ivory, chairs inlaid with ivory, elephant skins, and chests of ebony”.

And in a text engraved on the winged bulls and lions that decorated the palace of King Sin-Akhi-Ariba in Nineveh (Tel Quynjaq), specifically in the southwestern palace at the entrance to the sixth hall, Layard copied this text through prints. A clay copies of the text sent to him by Williams, which states:

“...3 luxurious halls built of breccia, alabaster, elephant ivory, ebony, boxwood and 5 columns of sandalwood and cedar wood”.

There are two bulls in front of the entrance to the throne room of the same palace, on which the same text is engraved, in the same text engraved on the winged bulls, King Sin-Akhi-Ariba mentions that he built a luxurious palace in which he used different materials. The palace's

corridors had arched ceilings and were interspersed with windows, and metal doors at the entrances to the palace. The king gives us a list of the names of those materials used in construction: -

“...I built the palace from breccia stone, alabaster stone, elephant ivory, ebony wood, and boxwood, and I built a house for myself equipped with double doors like the Hittite palace”.

He continues in another passage of the same text:

“In the corridors, openings were made for windows, and at the gates, sculptures of alabaster and elephant ivory were placed, and the cornices and arches that crown the doors were decorated with colored glazed bricks, obsidian stone, and lapis lazuli stone”

There is a text written on parts or pieces of a winged bull found at the northeastern end of the Palace of Sin-Akhir-Areba in which it mentions the halls that he built, and it says: -

“I built a stately hall of gold, a stately hall of silver, a stately hall of bronze, a stately hall of stone, a stately hall of breccia, a stately hall of alabaster, and a stately hall of elephant ivory”.

It was stated in a text that was written on the stele of Assyria-Achay-Adina that there had been a rebellion in the city of Sidon against the Assyrian state, and the king of Sidon (Abdul-Malkuti) thought that he could be independent in power. This was at the instigation of Egypt, so Assyria-Achay-Adina turned to them and put down this rebellion. He arrested a servant of Malkuti, cut off his head, and took it with him to Nineveh and took their property, which included ivory:

“As for the servant of my kingdom, King Haidon, who did not fear my greatness, and was not intimidated by my word... I caught the servant of my kingdom like a fish, cut off his head, and took his possessions... and his wealth was gold, silver, precious stones, elephant skins, ivory, and ebony”.

This king mentions in his campaign against Egypt that some of the princes of the states in the Delta region came to him and swore an oath of obedience and loyalty in exchange for keeping them in their positions. Assyria-Achay-Adina accepted the condition that they be loyal and pay the tribute required of them. After completing his mission, he returned to Nineveh, taking the sea-coast road. North, passing by the rocks of Nahr al-Kalb, this text was engraved on the rocks of this area, and it was later known as the Nahr al-Kalb Obelisk, in which it was stated:

“...the gods of Tahraqa, king of Nubia, entered his palace together with their possessions, declaring them as spoils, his queen, his court slaves, and his court officials... studded with coral stones and ivory.”

It is continued in another passage of the same text

"And copper, and tin, and aparo metal, and ivory".

In a text written on three tablets found in Nineveh belonging to King Assyria-Akhei-Adina, he mentions the restoration work that took place in Babylon

“I gathered all my workers from Cardonia, and made them take a basket, a trowel, and make bricks in molds of ivory, ebony, and boxwood”.

After reviewing the various cuneiform texts, we notice that ivory was one of the important materials for the Assyrian state and its kings, who were interested in obtaining it, whether through trade relations, gifts, or taking it as tribute and spoils in military campaigns, especially since Assyria lacked this precious material, and these texts reflected for us the situation. The luxurious economy and state of wealth of the Aramaic and Arab tribes BC through the tribute they paid to the Assyrian kings, and ivory was of course among these precious materials.

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