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Author(s): Leonard W. King

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SOME NEW EXAMPLES OF EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE AT NINEVEH

BY LEONARD W. KING, M.A., F.S.A.

[See Plate XV]

It is a striking fact that during the excavations carried out on the site of Nineveh not many objects have been recovered which show traces of Egyptian influence. Yet as early as the fourteenth century we have evidence of direct intercourse between that city and Egypt, which must have been accompanied by an exchange of products. If Tushratta of Mitanni could send the holy statue of Ishtar of Nineveh into Egypt for the benefit of Amenhetep III, we may be sure that the goddess, with her priests and votaries, brought back with her rich loads of Egyptian furniture, vessels and jewelry. In view of Sennacherib's entire reconstruction of Nineveh, it is not surprising that any remains of the city of Tushratta's age, which may have survived into the seventh century, should have been removed. But on Sennacherib's own palace-mound, in the building of his grandson, the conqueror of Egypt, we might perhaps have looked for some remnants of the sack of Thebes. Strong Egyptian influence may certainly be detected in the carved pavement-slabs from the palace corridors and entrances, with their beautiful papyrus borders. But at Nineveh there has been no find of ivories or bronze bowls as at Nimrûd, where in many cases the influence of Egyptian models is obvious. That Egyptian works of art were imported into Nineveh by the later Sargonids is clear from the records of the Egyptian campaigns; and Shabaka's famous clay sealing, which was found during excavations in the palace-mound some thirty-three years ago¹, evidently secured the cording round a bundle of presents, sent by the Nubian King to Nineveh perhaps on Sennacherib's accession. The comparative scarcity of smaller objects of artistic or archaeological interest at Kuyunjik is evidence of the very thorough manner in which the palace-buildings were sacked before their destruction. Hence the recovery of any new objects of this class has some importance as supplementing our knowledge of Assyrian art during the later period, derived, as so much of it is, exclusively from the sculptured bas-reliefs. Of such objects those must have a special interest which in any way exhibit the play of foreign influence upon native ideals, which was a natural result of Assyrian political expansion.

In the recently published *Supplement* to the Kuyunjik Collection some additional evidence has already been noted of Egyptian influence at Nineveh². We have a couple of

¹ Brit. Mus., 81-2-4, 352; Nineveh Gallery, Case I, No. 32.

² See King, *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets in the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum: Supplement* (1914), Introduction, p. xxviii f.

scarabs, the one dating from a period as early as the eleventh or tenth century and commemorating a visit to Thebes made by some Assyrian merchant or traveller¹; the other, manufactured in Egypt during the Sargonid period and inscribed, like so many hundreds of its class, with the prenomen of Thothmes III². There is also a contract-tablet, recording the receipt of four homers of barley from a well-known Assyrian corn-factor, which the borrower, probably a Syrian or Aramean merchant at Nineveh, has sealed twice with a scarab; this shows the prenomen of Thothmes III within a cartouche, above the *neb*-sign, and between two *nefer*-signs and two uraei wearing the White Crown³. These three examples are evidence of direct importation; and it is surprising that so few scarabs and scarab-impressions have been found. More interesting is the cartouche of blue paste, carved with the garbled form of the Egyptian royal name Seti⁴, since we here have evidence of an Assyrian craftsman deliberately copying an Egyptian original,—and not very successfully, so far as the hieroglyphs are concerned. The cartouche was doubtless employed for inlaying an ivory ornament of the same class as the Nimrûd panel 48-7-20, 20⁵.

Although three of the objects just referred to do not fall under the category of "cuneiform tablets," they were included in the *Supplement* to the Kuyunjik Catalogue inasmuch as they bear inscriptions. But among the objects other than inscriptions, which have been added to the Collection, are a few which, in artistic treatment, betray a strong Egyptian influence. And it is the aim of the present paper to give some account of these, accompanied by photographic reproductions. The first has some novel features, for, either it was the product of an Egyptian artist working for the Assyrian market, or it gives evidence of a very exceptional sensitiveness, on the part of an Assyrian or other Asiatic craftsman, to the influence of Egyptian design and technique.

I. An ivory figure of Ishtar as an Egyptian goddess.

The ivory photographed on Plate XV was found, with one or two other objects of a similar character, in the course of clearing one of the chambers of the "South-West Palace" at Kuyunjik⁶. At first sight it gives the impression of having formed part of the ivory handle of a mirror, but an inspection of the back reveals the fact that it is carved from only a segment of the tusk, the edges having been shaved down so that it could be fitted to a flat surface. If it was the central figure in a larger composition, we may conjecture that this must have taken the form of an inlaid panel similar to those found at Nimrûd. The Egyptian character of the figure leaps to the eye. The wig, the treatment of the ears splayed prominently in front of it, the necklace, and the light diaphanous garment, revealing the figure and with its skirt projecting to the front, are all typically Egyptian, while the hole in the wig was evidently bored

¹ No. 414, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

² No. 627, *op. cit.*, p. 66 f.

³ No. 93, *op. cit.*, pp. xxviii, 17.

⁴ No. 413, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁵ Brit. Mus., Nimroud Gallery, Case F, No. 69.

⁶ It was found in three pieces, now joined together; these bear the Registration Nos., Ki. 1904-10-9, 426, 428 and 429. Ki. 1904-10-9, 427 is another fragment of ivory, probably from the same figure but it does not join and its position in relation to the other three fragments is difficult to conjecture. The three joined fragments are photographed, actual size, on Plate XV. The yellow tints of the ivory have given the figure in the photographs a rather discoloured appearance, which is not shared by the original.

Ivory figure of Ishtar as an Egyptian goddess.

for the insertion of a metal uraeus. In fact, everything about the figure is Egyptian with one exception—the position of the hands. The fact that the goddess holds her breasts at once betrays her Asiatic character.

It is scarcely necessary to point out that this attitude is quite un-Egyptian. Some rude clay figures of the nude goddess, with hands on breasts, are found occasionally in Egypt, but they are either importations or were manufactured in Egypt under foreign influence¹. The type in fact is characteristic of Western Asia and extends also into the Aegean area². For our purpose it is sufficient that in the later period it was the recognized form of Astarte in Syria and Cyprus, while in the Mesopotamian region it represented Ishtar in her character as the goddess of love.

One unique feature of the ivory is that the goddess is here not nude: her light garment covers the whole figure from the neck downwards, a characteristic in favour of Egyptian workmanship. The hands do not contradict this possibility, for it is the attitude only, not the treatment, which is Asiatic. The showing of all four fingers, symmetrically curved, is thoroughly Egyptian and may be paralleled by countless examples, where an open hand is represented supporting a vase, a libation-pot, or the like. It is true that in these cases the thumb is placed conventionally above the fingers, but, given the problem of representing the support of a spherical object with the open hand, the Egyptian method would inevitably be that adopted in the Ninevite ivory³. This convention is in striking contrast to the more naturalistic (and often awkward) treatment of the hand in Assyrian sculpture, and in ivories of the nude goddess from Syria and Mesopotamia, which reflect Egyptian influence, but are obviously of local manufacture⁴. The treatment of the hands on our ivory of the seventh century was afterwards stereotyped, if we may judge from its recurrence upon late, and rather gross, clay figures, possibly of the Seleucid epoch, which have been found at Susa⁵.

¹ Cp. Petrie, *Diospolis Parva*, Pl. XXVI n. 6, *Tanis II (Nebesheh)*, Pl. VII, No. 12; Quibell, *Ramesseum*, Pl. XXX A, No. 6; Capart, *Rec. de Mon. Ég.*, Deux. Sér., Pl. LXV. We may certainly group with these the clay vase in the form of a woman holding her breasts, purchased by M. Naville at Luxor and now at Geneva (*Rec. de trav.* xxi, p. 212 f., Pl. I; and cf. Capart, *Débuts*, pp. 144, 171). The Egyptian predynastic figures do not show this attitude.

² It is still uncertain, whether the nude goddess is to be traced to a Babylonian, Anatolian or Aegean source, and to what extent types, perhaps originally distinct, have been later on assimilated. Among the earliest examples of the type under discussion is that found in the "Second City" at Hissarlik. A useful collection of material is given by Contenau, *La déesse nue babylonienne* (Paris, 1914), but some of his dated specimens require scrutiny.

³ It will suffice to quote two Egyptian parallels: the nude female figure on the handle of a wooden toilet-spoon of the XVIIIth Dynasty in the Louvre (cf. Capart, *L'Art Égyptien*, I, p. 27, Pl. 79), and the male figure carrying a basket of fruit, on an ivory panel, probably of the Saïte period, in the MacGregor Collection (*op. cit.* II, p. 66, Pl. 191). In both cases the hand is half open, but the curve and treatment of the four fingers and their symmetrical junction with the thumb are precisely the same as in our ivory. The figure on the spoon is particularly valuable for comparison.

⁴ Compare, for example, the small ivory from N. Syria, Brit. Mus., No. 37148, Fourth Egyptian Room, Case A, No. 215, or that from Nimrûd, Nim. Gall., Case E, No. 10.

⁵ See Brit. Mus., Nos. 91822-33, Bab. Rm., Wall-Case 35 f., Nos. 969-980.

(To be continued)