Concurrent with Assyrian political and military expansion from the ninth through the seventh centuries B.C., there developed a complex pattern of cultural exchange, both in materials and in ideas, with the various regions involved. This was particularly true with regard to the West, where in North Syria the Assyrians met a series of well-developed polities—city-states occupying sub-regions within the larger area bounded roughly by the Euphrates and its tributaries on the East, the Syrian desert on the South, the Amanus to the West, and the Taurus to the North. Because of their strategic locations at important crossroads of communication, these states—which included mainly Guzana/Tell Halaf, Carchemish, Bit-Adini, Arpad, Kummuh, Marash, Sam‘al/Zincirli and Patina (formerly read Hattina)—had behind them a long tradition of mercantile activity and production in art.

The annals of the Neo-Assyrian kings attest to their material interest in the region, noting the desirable raw materials and finished goods available from this direction; while the programs of relief sculpture with which the kings decorated their palaces provide parallel illustrations of the acquisition of booty and tribute.1

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Finished goods were mainly in the form of textiles, ivory and metalwork. In metal and ivory, not only do we have the texts, but also a large accumulation of actual objects found in the Assyrian palaces. Stylistic comparisons between these objects and fixed monuments from North Syria have allowed us to isolate works likely to have come from the region, and even more precisely perhaps, from specific centers within the region, as may be seen in a comparison between an ivory from Room SW37 of Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud with a relief from the Herald’s Wall at Carchemish of the ninth century; or in a second example, of a relief from Zincirli dated to second half of the eighth century, with an ivory from Room SW7 of the Fort.

That the Assyrian kings valued these goods highly is clear from their frequent mention, in particular regarding ivory furniture; and we may assume them to have been used in public display once acquired. Thus, in the garden scene of Assurbanipal, the Assyrian king and his wife are shown using furniture almost identical to pieces being carried off by Sennacherib’s soldiers from a captured citadel in an earlier relief.

In addition, it will be seen from the references to North Syrian booty and tribute taken by Assurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III, that along with finished ivory goods, ivory tusks were acquired from both Carchemish and Patina. These accounts dovetail with actual finds of incised ivory plaques at Nimrud attributed on stylistic grounds to an Assyrian workshop or workshops of the ninth century. Since the long-standing tradition of carving in North Syria goes back at least to the

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4 Cf. Mallowan, NR I, fig. 22; W. Orthmann, Untersuchungen zur späthethitischen Kunst (Bonn 1971), Pl. 28b; M. Mallowan and G. Herrmann, Furniture from SW7, Fort Shalmaneser (Ivories from Nimrud [1949–1963], Fascicle III) (Aberdeen 1974), No. 47; W. Orthmann, USK, Pl. 66d. I have argued for the determination of these sub-groups in Carved Ivory Furniture Panels from Nimrud: A coherent sub-group of the North Syrian style, Metropolitan Museum Journal 11 (1976), 24–54. Further discussion is included in the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, North Syrian in the Early First Millennium B.C. (Columbia University, New York 1973), Ch. IV

5 R. D. Barnett, Sculptures from the North Palace of Assurbanipal at Nineveh (668–627 B.C.), (London 1976), Pl. LXIV; Paterson, loc. cit. (note 1).

6 Published by M. Mallowan and L. G. Davies, Ivories in Assyrian Style (Ivories from Nimrud (1949–1963), Fascicle II), (Aberdeen 1970).