THE URARTIAN BRONZE HOARD FROM GIYIMLI

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Urartians, who appear with the name "Uradian" in the Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions after the 13th century B.C., had established a kingdom in Eastern Anatolia, Turkey, with its capital Tushpa (modern Van) in the beginning of the first millennium B.C. This kingdom became stronger from the 6th century B.C. onwards and expanded to Soviet Armenia and to Lake Urmiah in West Iran in the east, to the Euphrates in the west and to northern Mesopotamia in the south. The Urartians usually lived in fortresses situated on high elevations, built great palaces and temples, and also constructed dams and irrigation works to water their territory. They were continuously in conflict with the Assyrians and around 585 B.C. they disappeared from historical records.

It is a known fact that "bronze plaque working" was the most developed among the minor arts of the Urartians. Their belts, offering plaques, horse trappings and jewellery are decorated with figures which reflect a highly detailed craftsmanship.

In the summer of 1971 in the village of Giyimli (Hrikania) of the town Gürpınar, Villayet Van, during the construction of the village mosque, the villagers found approximately 3000 bronze plaques while destroying an Urartian building for its stone material. These objects, which should be dated to the Urartian period, consisted of offering plaques, belt fragments, horse frontals, pendants etc., and were immediately sold to the antique dealers for very low prices. In the summer of 1972, under the directorship of Prof. Dr. Atil Erez of the Faculty of Letters, University of Istanbul, systematic excavations were undertaken on the finding spot called "Serterliep." Although not very many objects were unearthed during the excavations they threw light on the problems concerning this bronze hoard.

It has been determined that the majority of the Giyimli bronze were sold outside of Turkey. The author is working on the bronzes of Giyimli origin scattered in museums such as Adana, Ankara, Van, Istanbul, Gaziantep, and in the photo archives of the Prehistorische Staatssammlung, Munich, created by its director Dr. H. J. Kellenbenz, and is preparing his post-doctoral work on these bronzes. These bronzes, which are thought to enlighten the unknown aspects of the Urartian kingdom, are to be published in the near future, as a complete corpus.

It is necessary to give some technical information regarding the bronze plaque working of the Urartians before discussing some examples of the Giyimli bronzes.

BRONZE PLAQUE WORKING

The studies concerning bronze plaque working of objects such as belts, helmets, quivers and shields of the Urartian land, which was rich in copper ores according to the Assyrian sources have helped archaeologists to understand better the techniques of manufacture. In bronze plaque working, after the bronze was casted and hammered into a sheet it was probably rolled, since our studies have revealed that the bronze plagues such as belts have a uniform thickness as well as a smooth surface. After this process, the sheet bronze was cut into the desired dimensions before the decoration took place. Although these stages in bronze working cannot be determined with certainty, it is very probable that there was such a sequence. The figures found on bronze plaques such as for belts are usually several centimeters high, they were probably stamped from behind with a hammer, using carved stamps (dies) while the metal was still hot. Repeated figures of the same dimensions as well as hammer marks on the belts seem to confirm this assumption. Next, a chisel with a cutting edge or with a sharp point, moved along with a hammer, was employed for the principal contours and details of the figures, as attested by the chisel marks on the objects. One can safely argue that the lion, goat, horse etc. were applied with these techniques. In some cases decorative motifs such as rosettes, palmettes, "tree of life" etc. were produced in the same way. On the other hand, one also observes that raised surfaces of larger figures and circular shapes were hammered from behind by means of a blunt tool or a wooden hammer, after having been sketched on the surface of the metal while it was heated to a red heat. The contours and details then were rendered by tracing from outside.

Studies and experiments in bronze plaque working and that they had also influenced the arts of their neighbors, especially the tribes living in Transcaucasia.

THE OFFERING PLAQUES OF THE GIYIMLI HOARD

The Giyimli bronze hoard contained a large number of figured bronze plaques which are called "suffering or votive plaques" by the author. Although some of these were for legs or for belt segments they were later reused as offering plaques, probably to decorate a temple. They usually came in square, rectangular and oval shapes and contain one or more figures. In some cases, a standing deity in a long decorated gown, wearing a single-horned helmet and two quivers was depicted on the back of animals such as a bull or a lion, with a male or female worshipper in front of him.
An example of such a scene appears on a plaque dating to the mid 7th century B.C., now in the Van Regional Museum. The deity figure standing on a lion has been identified as the God Haldi, the main deity in the Urartian pantheon. This scene, which also bears hieroglyph signs, shows typical Urartian features. Similarly composed scenes on silver pendants have been found in Gropitop and Toprakkale, East Anatolia and in Karmir Blur, Armenian S.S.R.

Another plaque in the Gropitopol Museum depicts again a god standing on the left and facing a female figure on the right. He is wearing a similar one-horned helmet with a tassel on the top and a long gown with elaborate designs. With his left hand he is holding a pomegranate with its fruit hanging down, and with his raised right hand he is making a gesture of benediction to the female figure. The pomegranate is still considered to be a symbol of fertility in Anatolia today. This feature probably indicates that the deity represented on this plaque is the fertility god. The head of the worshipping female figure, on the other hand, is covered and she is wearing a long dress and handling the square shaped object, a standard, to the deity.

On another plaque, a similar Haldi figure is shown seated on his throne which is resting on a crouching lion, facing right. He is dressed in a long, decorated gown, wears a single-horned helmet, and is probably holding a war helmet in his left hand while stretching his right hand forward. On this plaque, which can be dated to the 6th century B.C., on the basis of its stylistic features, the upper jaw of the lion figure is shown as a circle like those of the lion figures on the shield of the Urartian king Rusa (625-585 B.C.). On the other hand, the rendering of the deity’s mouth by five horizontal lines is an interesting feature which reflects another stylistic characteristic of the last phase of the Urartian period.

Among the offering plaques from Gropitopol, besides these characteristic Urartian objects, are numerous plaques with figures characterizing a “degenerated art form.” For example, on a plaque with its upper edge cut in a row of cresentations, probably reflecting towers or bastions of the Urartian fortresses, a woman in a long dress is depicted holding a standard in her hands. Her mouth is again rendered by five horizontal lines between her nose and chin, and she is accompanied by a goat whose front half is shown to the left of the female figure. She probably represents a worshipper bringing her sacrifice to the temple.

On another plaque which is 11.5 cm long with a curved lower right border, there is a male figure in a long, elaborately decorated dress, carrying a standard and walking to the right. His head is covered with a flat hat and he has almond-shaped eyes and a large nose. The joints of his arms resemble those of a puppet.
Studies of the figures of these plaques have shown that the Urartian artists were also influenced by the arts of the neighboring lands. An interesting example is the rectangular plaque measuring 8.8 x 7.7 cm., which probably originally belonged to a belt, judging from the punch-holes along its edges. Two standing figures are facing each other and are dressed in long gowns. The figure on the right is holding a standard in his right hand while the other figure is reaching toward it. The different workmanship of their headdresses clearly shows Iranian influences. Figures with similarly worked headdresses appear on painted pottery and on some seals found in Necropoli B at Tepe Sialk. It would be a fair assumption to think that the Urartians who had expanded to Lake Urmiyah during their most powerful stage were influenced by the arts of this region, which find their reflection especially in this scene.

Another two-figured composition can be seen on a plaque of careless workmanship. The standing figure on the right and the seated figure on the left flank a table with crescent-shaped breads on top of it. Although such compositions are very rare in Urartian art, they appear frequently in the late Hittite centers such as Karatepe and Zinciri (Sam'al). The same plaque also bears a star motif in the upper left corner, and a star in a crescent in the upper right, motifs which are also to be found in Assyrian art, especially on the seals dated to the Late Assyrian Period.

As mentioned before, many of the Glykini offering plaques are reused belt segments. One piece is a particularly good illustration of this fact. A belt fragment originally decorated with three horizontal registers of incised animals has a later vertical figure of a woman incised upside down over the registers. Each register has an alternating lion-bull scheme. The female figure dressed in a long gown is holding a stylized wheat or barley sheaf in her right hand. Other interesting features of this figure are her almond-shaped eye and the rendering of her mouth by seven horizontal lines.

Another large group of plaques among the Glykini objects seem, with their highly stylized figures and faces, not to belong to Urartian art. An example showing a two-headed figure en face was made by means of dots hammered from behind. The figure raises a stylized axe in each hand. The mouths and noses were done by a straight-edged chisel, again employed from behind. A similar plaque from the same group has five faces rendered on face side by side. A different type of stylized human face can be seen on another plaque which was hammered from behind in relief.

7 Belt ornament showing Iranian influence.
8 Plaque from Glykini with Late Hittite and Late Assyrian characteristics.
9 Reused belt segment showing the figure of a woman incised upside down, over three registers of animal figures.
10, 11, 12 Plaques from Glykini of which the designs were hammered from the back.
Analysis of this Giyimlî material has increased our knowledge of Urtanian dress, religion, traditions and the influences in these areas from outside. It can easily be pointed out that the Urtanians were generally wearing Assyrian types of clothing, i.e., men were dressed in knee-length tunic with a decorated mantle on top of it. It is also apparent that the Urtanian women usually covered their heads and wore long dresses in religious ceremonies. Another interesting feature of the male representations is that they are depicted beardless, which probably shows that the Urtanians did not employ the beard tradition in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.

As for the religion, studies have revealed that the Urtanian deities were always depicted with single-horned helmets and that square or crescent-shaped standards were used in religious ceremonies. Goats, sheep and bulls were their favorite sacrifices. All these objects discovered above show that the contemporary Late Hittite, Persian, Cappadocian, Phrygian and Aramean art had also influenced the art of the Urtanians. Considering various stylistic features of the figures on the offering plaques from Giyimlî, we may assume that the majority of these objects were made during the 7th century B.C.

**BELT FRAGMENTS**

A second important group of objects in the Giyimlî hoard consisted of belt fragments. On these belt plaques appear similar decorative scenes as found on other known typical Urtanian belts: horses, warriors in chariots, hunting horsesmen, chariots, as well as rows of bulls and lions and mythological scenes. On a belt fragment now in the Adana Regional Museum, which is to be dated to the mid-8th century B.C., on the basis of a close relationship with the figures on the helmet of the Urtanian king Sarduri II (ca 760-750 B.C.), are depicted horsesmen and warriors in chariots. Another belt piece in the same museum shows in horizontal rows bulls and lions hunted from chariots.

Another, also in the Adana Museum, utilizes the same hunter motif, but repeats the figures in six horizontal registers, aligning each type of figure in neat vertical rows. The circular rendering of the upper faces of the lions makes it possible to date this object to the period of the Late Urtanian Style ("Kilideșor Style"), namely to the late 7th century B.C. A composition of bull hunting by chariot, to be dated to the same period, can be seen on another belt piece in the same museum.
Suggested Reading

Erzen, A.
1974


Kollner, H.-J. (editor)
1976
(Exhibition catalogue of the Prähistorische Staatssammlung, Munich.)

Taşyürek, O. A.
1975
The Urartian Belts in the Adana Regional Museum, Ankara.


1977

OTHER OBJECTS

Besides the offering plaques and belt fragments, the Giyimli hoard also contained other bronze objects such as pendants (“mithra”) with figurative decoration, horse frontlets etc. A crescent-shaped pendant, with only its right half preserved, now in the Adana Regional Museum, bears a “tree of life” with a lion figure on its right. Another lion figure facing left is placed on the curved end of the pendant, separated from the central composition by means of two horizontal lines. Again the rendering of their upper jaws is an important clue for the dating of this pendant to the Middle Urartian Style, i.e., to the mid 7th century B.C.

DATING OF THE GIYIMLI HOARD

The studies done by the author concerning the date of hundreds of objects from the Giyimli hoard may contribute to the solution of the Urartian problems. It has already been pointed out that one of the belt fragments can be dated to the mid 8th century B.C. (Fig. 14). The rendering of the upper jaws of the lion figures on the offering plaques in the Van Regional Museum (Fig. 2), as well as on the pendant in the Adana Regional Museum (Fig. 17) indicates that these objects should be dated to the period called the Middle Urartian Style by E. Akurgal, i.e., mid 7th century B.C. On the other hand, on the basis of the stylistic characteristics of the figures on the objects, one can assume that the majority of the Giyimli bronzes were manufactured at the end of the 7th century B.C. Among the objects already discussed, the offering plaque with the enthroned figure of the God Haldi on a crouching lion illustrated in Fig. 4 is of great importance because of its stylization. The rendering of the lion’s upper jaw as a circle, a characteristic which is peculiar to Akurgal’s Late Urartian Style (“kūbischer Stil”) is an indication for its dating to the Late Urartian Period, namely to the late 7th century B.C.

But the rendering of the god’s mouth by five horizontal lines, as already seen on other human figures with three to seven lines, is an important clue for its dating to the 6th century B.C.

Although some of the figural plaques discussed do not seem to represent the typical Urartian art on the basis of the characteristics of their figures, they must be Urartian (Figs. 10-12). Similar figures which show a highly “degenerated art form” also appear on bronze plaques in Italy and Sicily dating from the 8th century B.C. On the other hand, while the belt pieces with their original decoration date to the 7th century B.C., the later figures on the same pieces indicate a dating between 600 and 585 B.C. Consequently, we may assume that the bronzes in the Giyimli hoard cover a period from 750 to 585 B.C. It is an interesting fact that the majority of these bronzes were made during the decline of the Urartian Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

The discovery of more than 2000 various bronze plaques of the Giyimli hoard stored together in an Urartian dwelling may indicate some kind of invasion. It is highly possible that these objects were stored in this find spot to preserve them from an anticipated invasion during the decline of the Urartian Kingdom (ca 585 B.C.). Presumably, they were buried under the destroyed building after the invasion was over.