

THE SCULPTURAL QUALITY OF URARTIAN CAST PINS WITH FIGURAL FINIALS

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This article concerns a defined group of Urartian pins, cast in bronze and silver, with finials terminating in one or several small sculpted figures of real or fantastic animals (pl. 1 : 2-10). The tiny size of the figures (1-2 cm high) makes it difficult to evaluate their sculptural quality. It is precisely that which arouses one's curiosity concerning the relationship of these miniature sculptures to the Urartian bronze statuettes of real and fantastic animals.¹ Also, to what extent, if at all, is the miniature sculpture of the pins inspired by a different art-form, namely the two dimensional animal images applied to sheet metal artifacts? I refer here particularly to the mass-produced bronze belts using depictions of hunting scenes and processions of real and imaginary beasts as the major themes of their decoration.²

Nine pins are presented here as representative examples for our discussion, assisted by photographic enlargements as a necessary means to reveal their style and details. The nine pins chosen came from a comprehensive group of pins displayed in the Urartian exhibition held in the summer of 1991 at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem,³ where both the pins and the relevant photographs were available to the writer. These nine examples belong to a larger group of some 40 cast pins, styled with figurative fi-

1 Barnett 1950 : fig. 22, pls. 5-7, 9, 18, 19, 21; Piotrovskii 1967 : 24-36; Merhav 1991 : 246-283.

2 Taşyürek 1957; Kellner 1991a.

3 Zahlhaas 1991 : 184-186, 190-194, nos. 20-42, 46.

nials in animal motifs.⁴ The majority of the pins are published only in line drawings, as shown in pl. 2 : 4,5,⁵ thus greatly reducing the actual number of pins appropriate for our study. Even those pins which are illustrated with photographs are shown approximately life sized, making them unsuitable for our purpose⁶ as pl. 1 may prove.

The figurative repertoire of Urartian pins is limited to a number of motifs of which the 'sphinx', goat, lion and bull are most common. This group of figures have counterparts among the bronze statuettes such as illustrated here in pls. 3 : 2, 4 : & 6, and among the two-dimensional figures appearing in other art forms such as wall paintings and stone reliefs, and incorporated in great numbers as miniature figures in the decorative patterns of sheet metal artifacts.

General observations : Large or medium-sized sculpture from Urartu has not yet come to light. We are thus confined to small sized sculpture of real and fantastic animals as the only sculpture available for comparison with the miniature figures on cast pins. A common characteristic of Urartian animal style is found in the horizontal line marking the back of the figure, and the neck which is held erect. However, a stylistic feature confined to depictions on pins, is the posture of the animals, in an erect position with straight parallel legs, facing front. This position differs from that in bronze statuettes where, aside from portrayals of real and fantastic animals in couchant positions (pls. 4 : 4, 6 : 2) they are shown striding (pl. 6 : 1), sometimes with the head turned to the side.⁷ Similarly striding are the figures in two dimensional representations, on wall paintings or on stone reliefs, while on metal artifacts (fig. 1), they also appear running or fleeing (fig.

4 Yıldırım 1989 : pls. 18, 19, 21, 23, 34; Memişoğlu 1989 : figs. 7, 8; Zahlhaas 1991 : nos. 22-24, 27, 28, 30, 31, 37-41, among which the nine pins discussed here are included. Finales with the figure of a single or a group of birds are not included in the discussion.

5 Yıldırım 1989; Memişoğlu 1989.

6 Kohlmeyer & Saherwala 1983 : fig. 13; Belli 1989 : 83; Zahlhaas 1985 : 37, no. 45; Zahlhaas 1991 : 190-193; Merhav 1995 : fig. 3 : 1-5.

7 Barnett 1950 : pls. 5, 6; Merhav 1991 : 282 nos. 9, 10 (see also 110 nos. 75, 76).

1 : 5-8), sometimes with the head turned back (fig. 1 : 10; fig 1 : 11 is a rare example of the erect position).

The 'Sphinx' (pl. 2 : 1-5) : Five bronze pins with finials terminating in a composite figure of a human-headed winged lion were published to date, two of which are in line drawing only.⁸ The appellation 'sphinx' sometimes attributed to this figure is drawn from the Egyptian Sphinx, which combines a human head and the body of a lion. However, there is no indication here that the Urartian 'sphinx' had a similar significance. The Urartian 'sphinx' is one of many imaginary beings which were believed to possess apotropaic nature, and had assumed great popularity in Urartian iconography. Nonetheless, the 'sphinx' is prominent, in that it is the only fourlegged being that is shown performing the ceremony related to the Sacred-Tree : The theme forms part of the decorative scheme of wall-paintings in the temple compounds at 'Arin-Berd and Altıntepe. With a human torso, the 'sphinx' stands at both sides of the Sacred Tree or symbolic plant, holding bucket and cone⁹ as do other participants associated with this ceremony.¹⁰ The 'sphinx' which is represented in the statuette (pl. 6 : 1)¹¹ and also the human-headed winged bull which is portrayed in a related statuette, perhaps an Urartian version of the Assyrian Lamassu,¹² stand out from the rest of the composite animals when accorded a special status, shown by the wearing a fleecy garment over their human torso, bracelets and pectorals adorning their bodies, and the low feathered headdress with a pair of horns in front, crowning their head. This crown, assigned to the gods of Urartu, is sometimes topped with the divine emblem of the sun-disc,¹³ which is also apparent on the crown worn by the

8 Kohlmeyer & Saherwala 1983 : fig. 13; Zahlhaas 1991 : nos. 30, 31, 38; Yildirim 1989 : pl. 19 : 66, 67.

9 Özgüç 1966 : figs. 14, 27; Piotrovski 1969 : pl. 8.

10 Özgüç 1966 : pl. I, fig. 14; ——— 1969 : pls. 32, 33; Piotrovskii 1969 : pl. 93; Merhav 1991 : 220 no. 22.

11 Van Loon 1966 : pl. IX; Piotrovskii 1967 : pls. 2, 3.

12 Barnett 1950 : pl. VI; Strommenger (u.d.) pls. 198, 220 (human-headed bulls as gate guardians).

13 Piotrovskii 1967 : fig. 44; Zeidl 1991 : 86, nos. 42 and 44, 90 : no. 48; Merhav 1991 : 112-113 nos. 79, 80; Calmeyer 1991 : 314 fig. 3a.

'sphinx' (fig. 1 : 3) and is topping the crown of the 'sphinx' on pin no. 3, pl. 2. A prominent disk also crowns the headgear of the human-headed bull (pl. 6 : 2)¹⁴ -one of three figures set as guardians on the tripod legs of the Rusa candelabrum from Toprak-kale. This composite figure combines the hairy chest and the forelegs of a lion, and may be regarded a kind of sphinx among the many hybrid forms of beasts in Urartian iconography.

Sculpturally, the figures of the human-headed lion (pl. 6 : 1) and the human-headed bull mentioned above belong to the same category. They formed part or a group of sculpted real and fantastic animals which were incorporated in the Throne of Haldi from Toprak-kale.¹⁵ The statuettes display the mastering of the Urartian artisan of casting techniques and his taste for color; the figures were overlaid with gold foil and embellished with colored inlays used for eyes and face (pl. 6 : 1) and for the feathers. Nevertheless, the figures lack vividness and appear rigid and stagnant, features that are characteristic of Urartian art, particularly in its later stages, to which this group belongs. Compared with these, the 'sphinxes' of the pins have an even clumsier look; their bodies are short and their heads relatively large, the feather design of the wings carelessly executed and the facial details crude. They also seem inferior in appearance to the two-dimensional 'sphinxes' in the wall paintings, where attention is paid to details. On the whole, the miniature 'sphinxes' of the pins reveal greater affinity to the schematic miniature figures of 'sphinxes' occurring in decorative patterns of sheet metal artifacts (fig 1 : 1-2). The 'sphinx' in fig. 1 : 3 is an exception which provides a fine example of high quality workmanship on sheet metal decoration characteristic of the early stage of Urartian art.¹⁶

The Goat (pl. 3 : 1a-d) : Three bronze pins have finials which terminate in the figure of a goat (one pin is published in line

14 Hoffman 1961 : 147 f., fig. 1; Merhav 1991 : 262 no. 10d.

15 Piotrovskii 1967 : 27-34, figs. 9-18; Barnett 1950 : fig. 22 - reconstruction of the Haldi Throne.

16 For another early high quality example of a sphinx on sheet-metal decoration see Merhav 1991 : 110 nos. 75-76.

drawing only).¹⁷ The goats are similar in shape and share a common stylistic feature in which the horns curve backwards, unifying with the ears to form a bow-shaped curve. The origin of this peculiar detail can be traced to figures of goats found in the decoration of bronze belts (fig 1 : 5, 6). There, however, the artist was careful to leave a small space between horns and ears, as dictated by realistic portrayal.

When comparing the miniature sculpted goat of the pin (pl. 3 : 1) with the statuette (pl. 3 : 2),¹⁸ the more careful, finely detailed execution of the latter is obvious. Nevertheless, the goat of the pin displays an undeniable sculptural quality, reflected in its massive body with the strong legs, and in particular the plasticity of the hindquarters (pl. 3 : 1c) and the row of ribs along the body.

The Lion (pls. 4, 5) : The single lion, like the 'sphinx' and the goat, was chosen as a motif for finials of cast bronze pins (the few existing examples are published in line drawing only).¹⁹ In addition, there are compositions of lions in groups of two, three, or four, standing in line and facing front (pl. 4 : 1a, 3). This group of pins amounts to 15 specimens - 10 in silver and 5 in bronze.²⁰ (ten of these 15 were published in line drawing only). Another group consists of 3 silver pins with finials in a two-level composition; a pair of lions standing on the backs of a pair of bulls (pl. 5 : 1a-b & 2a-b with one lion missing).²¹

The lions, always depicted with open jaws to represent roaring, are presented in an undetailed schematic style. Their long legs are column-like and their paws hardly modelled; the head is small, the body thin and cylindrical, and usually there is a tip of a tail only. Nothing has remained of the facial features which are unique to the Urartian lion (pl. 6 : 3, 4). In fact, bronze statuettes of lions are few, and sculpted in couchant position (pl.

17 Zahlhaas 1991 : nos. 27, 28; Yıldırım 1989 : pl. 18 : 61 (line drawing).

18 Kohlmeyer & Saherwala 1983 : fig. 21; Merhav 1991 : 279 no. 4.

19 Yıldırım 1989 : pl. 18 : 62-65; Memişoğlu 1989 : fig. 1.

20 Yıldırım 1989 : pls. 23-24 : nos. 76-86; Zahlhaas 1991 : nos. 22, 37, 39, 40; Merhav 1995 : fig. 3 : 1-3.

21 Zahlhaas 1991 : nos. 23-24, 41; Merhav 1995 : fig. 3 : 4, 5.

4 : 4).²² Mention should also be made of the ivory lions in couchant and squatting position that were discovered in Altıntepe, which belonged to a candelabrum tripod, and to a piece of furniture.²³ In addition, there are the heads of lions which form part of composite lions (pl. 6' : 3).²⁴ and lions' paws modeled as furniture leg terminals.²⁵ However, the lion in its complete form in striding position is known to us only in two-dimensional representations, such as wall paintings and stone reliefs in the profile view.²⁶ In this manner lions are depicted in the decorative patterns of metal artifacts such as votive shields²⁷ or in the hunting scenes on bronze belts, where lions are also shown fleeing, sometimes with their heads turned backwards (fig. 1 : 8-10).

Although the lions of the pins are executed in schematic style, less detailed than the lions represented in other art forms, and even less than some of the lions shown on bronze belts (fig. 1 : 10) or votive plaques,²⁸ they are unmistakably Urartian in appearance, typified by their slim body, rounded skull, erect neck and wide-open jaws. On the whole, however, the lions of the pins are closest to the two-dimensional representations on the many bronze belts where they formed a major decorative motif (fig. 1 : 8, 11).

The Bull (pl. 5) : The few bronze pins which terminate in the figure of a bull were published in line drawing only.²⁹ The three silver pins with finials in a two level composition mentioned above, include a pair of bulls with lions standing on them (pl. 5 : 1a-b, 2a-b). These bulls are designed in the same schematic manner as the lions we have described above, with cylindrical body resting on columnar legs. One of the pins (pl. 5 : 1a-b) portrays the bulls with horns curving upwards, as indeed is expected,

22 Burney 1966 : pls. IX-X; Merhav 1991 : 280 no. 5.

23 Özgüç 1969; pls. XXXIV-XLI.

24 Barnett 1950 : pl. 11; Merhav 1991 : 281 nos. 6-8.

25 Özgüç 1969 : pl. 23 : 1-4; Merhav 1991 : 259-261 nos. 6, 7.

26 Piotrovskii 1969 : pls. 11, 13; Calmeyer 1991 : 314 fig. 3.

27 Akurgal, 1968 : 56-57, pls. 38-39a, figs. 21-22; Piotrovskii 1969 : pls. 90, 92.

28 Kellner 1991 : 149 no. 7b, 151 no. 10; 291 No. 1.

29 Yıldırım 1989 : pl. 21 : 70-73.

while the other two pins show the bulls with horns curving downwards (pl. 5 : 2a-b). Although this is a peculiar detail, they are clearly defined as bulls by the wide and heavy nostrils, which is a prominent facial feature of Urartian bulls (compare with pl. 6 : 5³⁰ and fig. 1 : 7).

Statuettes of bulls in striding position have not been found. From the Haldi Throne we know of a few bronze statuettes of couchant bulls (carrying gods on their backs), but their faces, originally a stone inlay, are now missing.³¹ However, a clear and complete view of bulls' heads in the round provide us the bull-head attachments of bronze cauldrons.³² Another sculptural detail is bull's hooves used as furniture leg terminals of bronze and iron tripod stands made for the cauldrons, and were similarly used for tripods of candelabra.³³ It may be said that although both the heads and hooves are stylized, they basically follow the natural form with great attention to details. The bull figure in striding posture, in its entirety, is known to us only from two-dimensional side view representations, on stone reliefs, and on a variety of bronze artifacts of which examples from the early stages of Urartian art exhibit high quality of design and workmanship.³⁴ The bulls on pins, however, like the lions, show the greatest affinity with the schematic style of the bull figures which are repeated in the decorative patterns of the many bronze belts (fig. 1 : 4, 7).

In summary : The sculptural quality of the miniature animals which terminate the cast pins is not of equal standard as the fine example of the goat (pl. 3 : 1a-d) illustrates. However, all figures are characterized by a schematic style which could be considered the three-dimensional equivalent of the two-dimensio-

30 Merhav 1991 : 278 no. 2.

31 Barnett 1950 : pl. XII : 3; Merhav 1991 : 278 no. 3 (head reconstructed with stone inlays).

32 Barnett 1950 : pl. 16 : 1-2; Amandry 1956 : pls. 24-27; Akurgal, 1968 : pl. 36; Merhav 1991 : 238 nos. 31-32, 241 nos. 35, 36.

33 van Loon 1966 : pl. XXI; Merhav 1991 : 236 no. 30a-b, 242 no. 39a, d, 262 no. 10a, 270 no. 11a.

34 Piotrovskii 1967 : figs. 44-45, pls. 21, 22a; Akurgal 1968 : pl. 39b, figs. 50-51; and examples from the early stage of Urartian art : Merhav 1991 : 112-113 nos. 79, 80; Calmeyer 1991 : 310.

nal representations of real and fantastic animals in Urartian miniature art which became the major form of decoration of bronze artifacts. Particularly important for comparison are the figures depicted on bronze belts; although some examples demonstrate a high artistic capability, the corpus of belts as a whole represents a popular product that was mass-produced with stylized, repetitive decorative patterns.

It may be argued that, although the sculpted figures of the pins and the chased figures on the bronze artifacts belong to different art categories, the common denominator of working in miniature brought about the similarity of style. This however, is inconsistent with a small group of pins, with finials made of gold or silver foil which also terminate in miniature animals. These pins reveal a careful and detailed treatment of the figures, resulting in a greater artistic achievement.³⁵ Out of approximately 260 Urartian pins known to date, about 250 are produced by casting in the lost wax process, while the second group, amounting to only 7 known examples, is crafted of gold or silver wrapped around a hard core, a technique which requires a different expertise in gold- and silver-smithing. This is well demonstrated by two gold pins with couchant lions as finials, that are relevant to our discussion as comparisons. The two, worked in detail, (one adorned with granulation) exhibit all characteristics featured in lion statuettes.³⁶

The difference in workmanship and style between the two groups of pins with miniature sculpted figures may stem from their different use and distribution. Cast pins were found in chamber tombs, positioned near the heads of female deceased, implying that that they may have served as hairpins.³⁷ The impressive number of cast pins testifies to their popularity as a common product for which the schematic style, negligent in treatment of details, is most appropriate. The use of a dot pattern or hatching to depict hair and other physical details are peculiarities characteristic of chiselling and punching of sheet metal de-

35 Merhav 1995 : figs. 1, 1-2.

36 Zahlhaas 1991 : 194, 195, nos. 42, 46. (See also no. 47 - a gold piece of jewelry with four recumbent lions); Merhav 1995 : fig. 2 : 1a-c, 2.

37 Ögün 1978 : 667.

coration (compare the dots and hatchings on the figures shown on fig. 1 with those on the pins). The second group of pins, on the other hand, made of noble metals, is small and limited in number. Their heavy and bulky shapes seem more appropriate on garments. They were probably worn by elite people of social status,³⁸ for whom artistic quality would be expected.

A final note is offered here concerning certain details which may seem stylistic and unique to pins, while, in fact, they result from a structural feature or from a technical constraint which influences the style.

a. The uncommon posture of the animals, standing erect with straight parallel legs, seems to be an accommodation to the small element, round or square, which serves as the base for the standing animal, an element consistent in finials of Urartian pins.. The same stance is also evident in the statuette of the goat (pl. 3 : 2), also resting on a round ring as a base.

b. The casting of finials in the lost wax technique may be the reason for the unnatural joints of limbs and figures, such as the joining of ears and horns of the goat in a bow-shaped curve (pl. 3 : 1), or the joining of the tail to the hooves (pl. 5 : 1a), or shaping the tail as a loop (pl. 4 : 3,) and the joining of the lions standing on a platform, ear to ear and leg to leg (pl. 4 : 1a, 3,)), to allow for the easy flow of the molten metal from one figure to the other. The joining together of the legs also occurs in a goat-shaped terminal of a bronze cast pin, not illustrated here.³⁹

38 Zahlhaas 1991 : 184 fig. 21.

39 Zahlhaas 1991 : 191 no. 28.

Acknowledgements

Photographs of objects mentioned in this article are courtesy of :

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem : pls. 1 : 2, 4, 5, 10; 2 : 1a-b; 3a-b; 3 : 1a-c; 4 : 4; 5 : 2a-b; 6 : 4.

Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Berlin : pls 1 : 3, 7, 8; 3 : 2; 4 : 1a, 3.

Prähistorische Staatssammlung, Munich : pls. 1: 6, 9; 4: 2; 5: 1.

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg : pl. 6 : 2.

The Louvre Museum, Paris : pl 6 : 5.

Abbreviations :

BM	The British Museum, London
ISM.	The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
MVF	Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Berlin
PS	Munich : Prähistorische Staatssammlung, Munich
MKG	Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg
HM	Reuben and Edith Hecht Museum, Haifa University.

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Description of the Plates :

Pl. 1

*Pins with figurative finials (see description on opposite page)**

- *1. Ivory pin from Karmir-Blur (Zahlhaas 1991 : fig. 22).
- 2. Bronze, ISM 90.223.491 (h.8.3 cm). 3. Bronze, MVF XIc 5050 (h.8.0 cm).
- 4. Bronze, Ebnöther Coll. Swiss (h. 10.5 cm).
- 5. Bronze, ISM 88.42.155 (h. 11.2 cm). 6. Silver, PS 1971. 1779 (h. 7.8 cm).
- 7. Silver, MVF XIc 5051 (h. 4.3 cm). 8. Silver, MVF XIc 5052 (h. 6.0 cm).
- 9. Silver, PS 1971. 1816 (h. 8.7 cm). 10. Silver, ISM 89.79.59 (h. 7.7 cm).

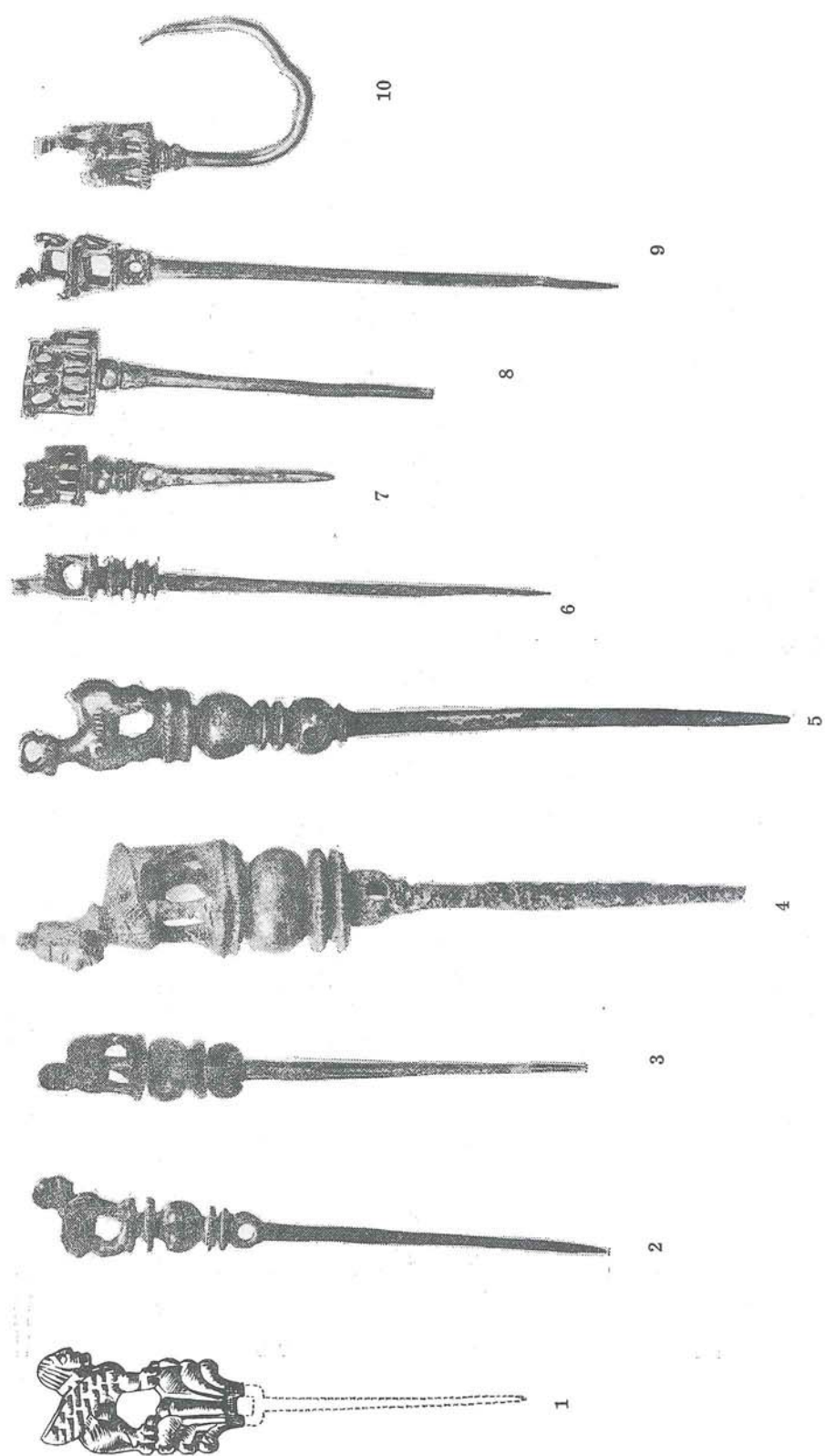
*Pl. 2**Bronze pins with 'sphinx' figure topping finials :**1a-b.* ISM (=pl. 1 : 2). *2.* MVF (=pl. 1 : 3), (Kohlmeyer & Saherwala : fig. 13).*3a-b.* Ebnöther coll., Swiss (=pl. 1 : 4). *4, 5.* Van Mus. (Yıldırım : pl. 19 : 66-67).*Pl. 3**1a-c.* Bronze pin with goat figure topping finial, ISM (=pl. 1 : 5).*2.* Bronze goat statuette, MVF XIc 5029.*Pl. 4**Silver pin finials with lions standing in line :**1a-b.* MVF (=pl. 1 : 7), (*1b.* Kohlmeyer & Saherwala : fig. 13).*2.* PS (=pl. 1 : 6).*3.* MVF (=pl. 1 : 8).*4.* Lion statuette from the Menua candelabrum, ISM 72. 13. 173.*Pl. 5**Silver pins with finials in shape of lions standing on bulls:**1a-b.* PS (=pl. 1 : 9). *2a-b.* ISM (=pl. 1 : 10).*Pl. 6**Bronze statuettes :**1.* 'Sphinx' from Haldi Throne, Toprak-kale, Hermitage 16002.*2.* 'Sphinx' from the Rusa Candelabrum, Toprak-kale, MKG 1960. 61.*3.* Head of a lion from the Haldi Throne, Toprak-kale, BM 91253.*4.* Head of a lion, from the Menua Candelabrum, ISM 72. 13. 173.*5.* Bull-head, Louvre AO 4282.

fig. 1.

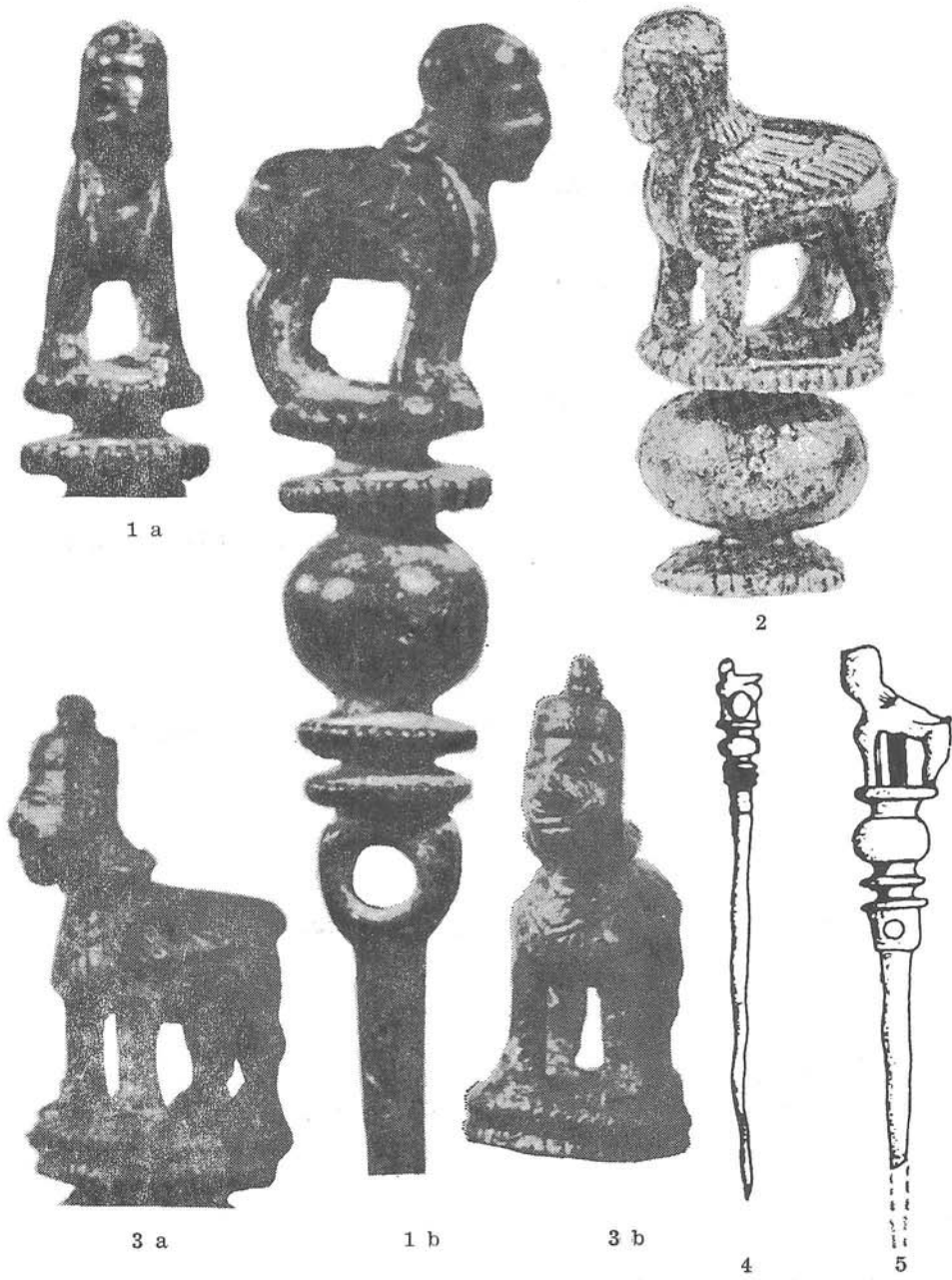
Animal figures on sheet metal artifacts (see description on opposite page).*

- *1, 2. 'Sphinx' figures (Vanden Berghe & De Meyer 1983 : fig. 9).
- 3. 'Sphinx' (HM, unpublished).
- 4, 7. Bulls (Kellner 1991a : nos. 21, 99).
- 5, 6. Goats (Kellner 1991a : nos. 21, 99).
- 8-11. Lions (Kellner 1991a : nos. 53, 435, 186, 68).

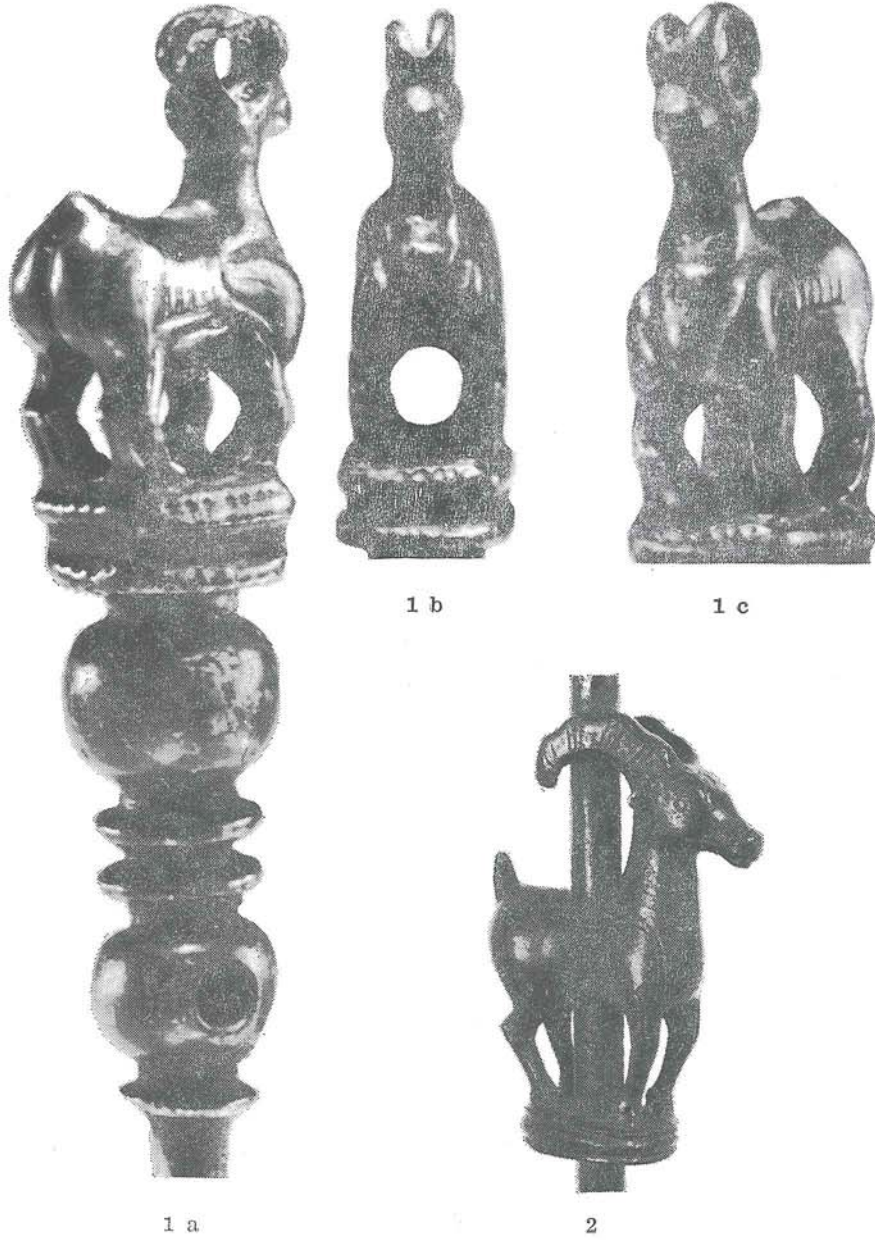
Pl. 1 Pins with figurative finials



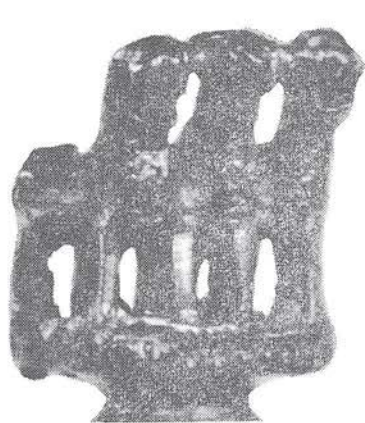
Pl. 2 Bronze pins with 'sphinx' figure topping finials



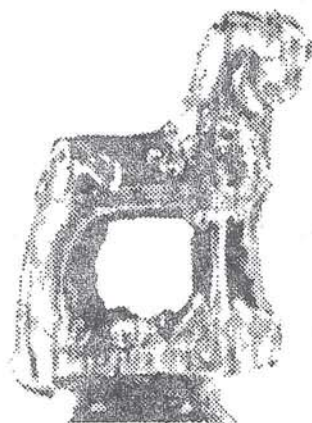
Pl. 3 Figures of goats



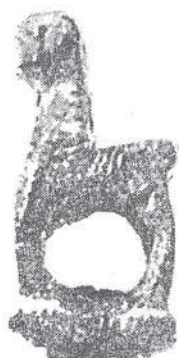
Pl. 4 Silver pin finials with lions standing in line



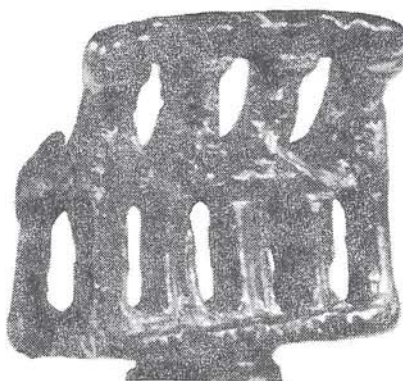
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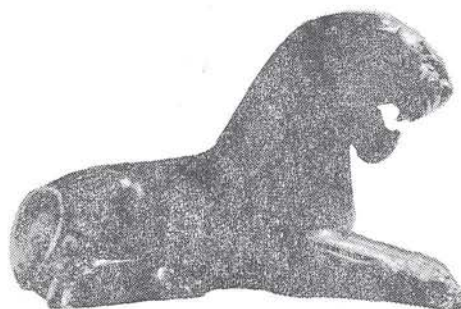
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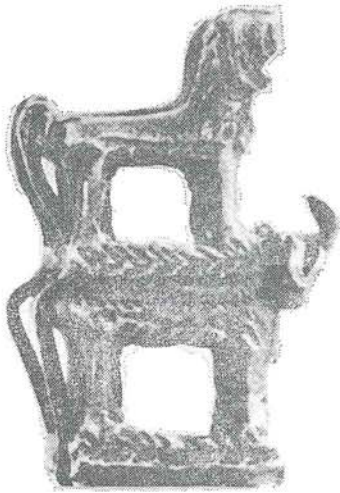


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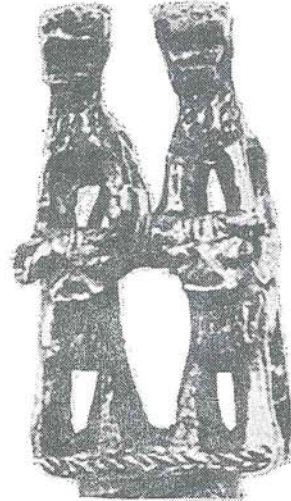


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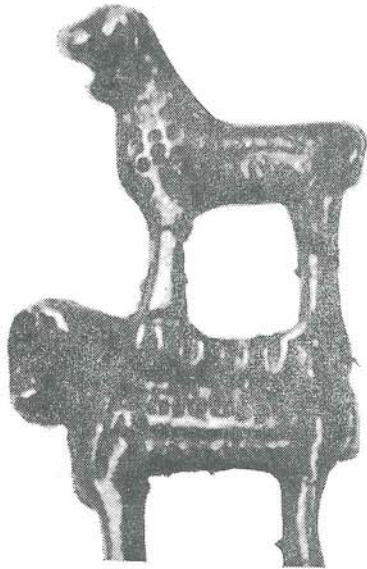
Pl. 5 Silver pins with finials in shape of lions standing on bulls



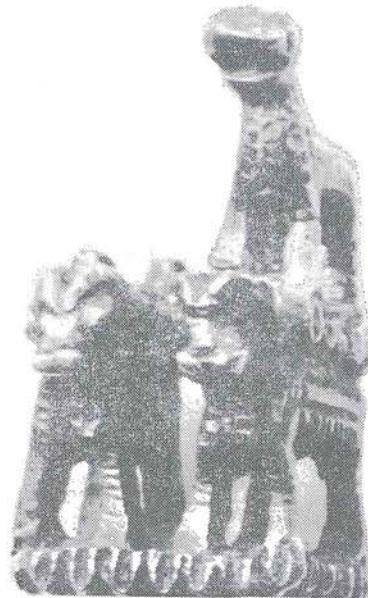
1 a



1 b

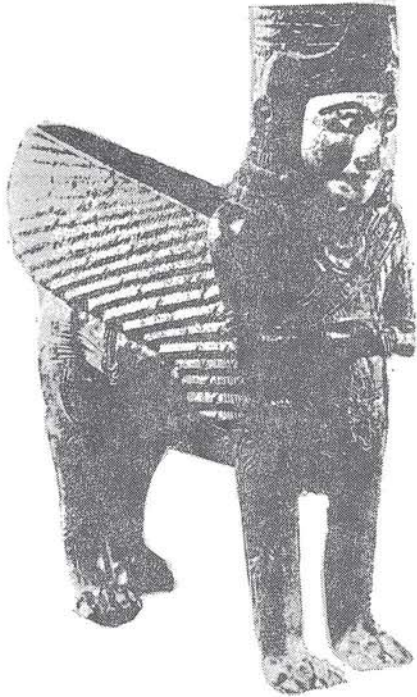


2 a

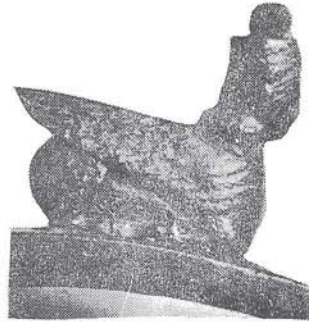


2 b

Pl. 6 Bronze statuettes



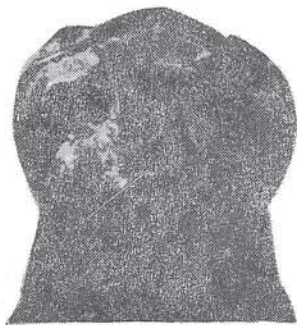
1



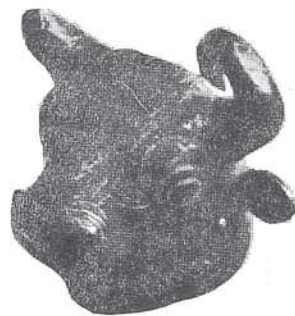
2



3

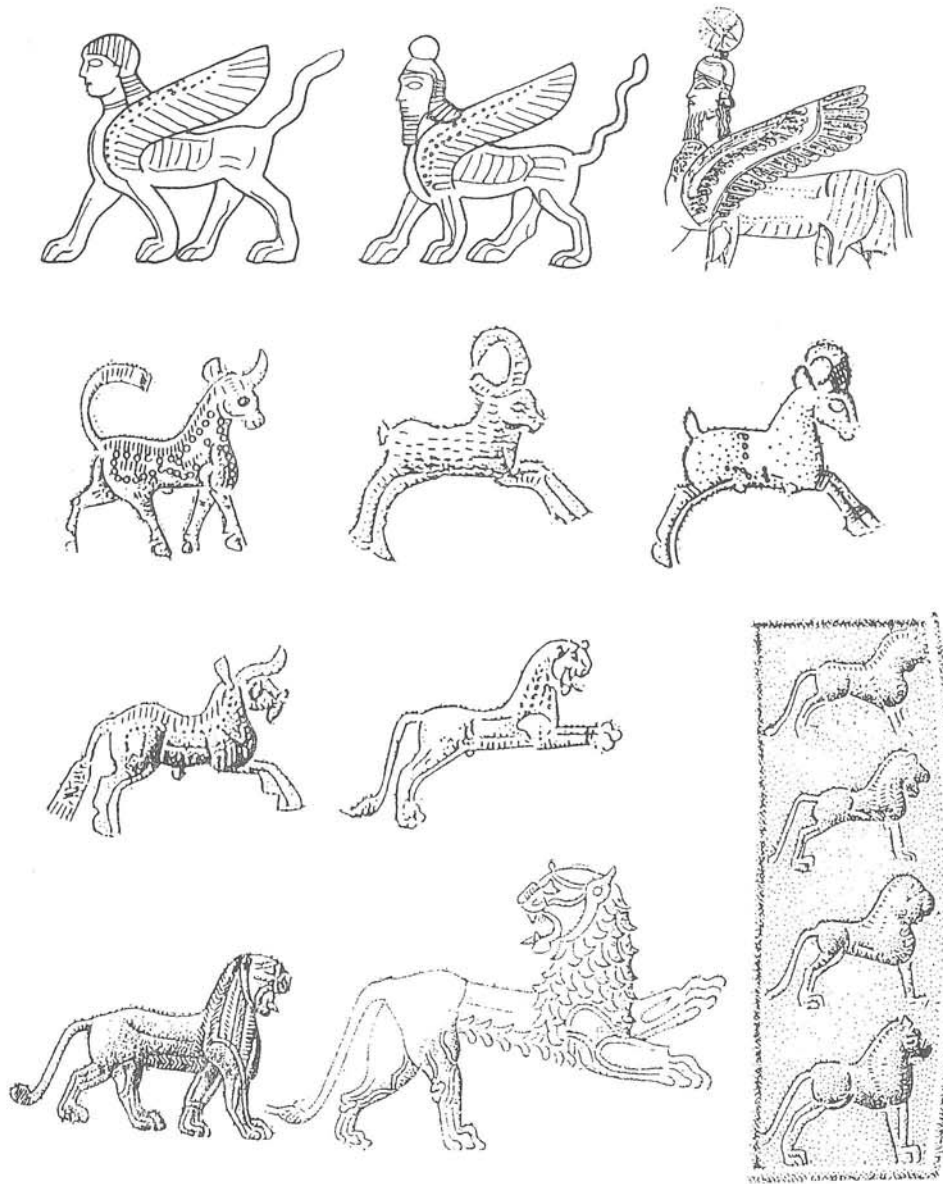


4



5

Fig. 1 Animal figures on sheet metal artifacts



Row 1 = 1-3
 Row 2 = 4-6

Row 3 = 7-8
 Row 4 = 9-11