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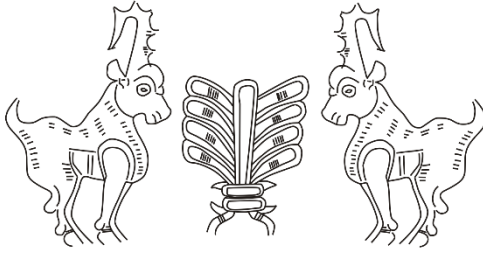
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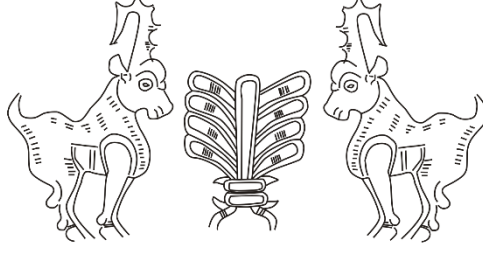
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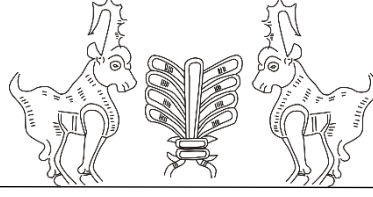


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A GROUP OF URARTIAN PERIOD METAL OBJECTS FROM MARDIN MUSEUM

Esra KAÇMAZ LEVENT*

Abstract

This study presents an examination of five belt fragments and one votive plaque housed in the Mardin Museum collections. These bronze objects of unknown provenance were acquired by the museum by purchase, and conservation work on the objects was undertaken by museum staff prior to this study. Belt fragments belong to medium-width belts and the votive plaque has a square form. Materials that these objects were made from, and the decoration techniques employed for the depictions on them are in line with the characteristics of Urartian metal objects. Likewise, motifs and figures depicted on the belt fragments and the votive plaque parallel classical examples of Urartian art. Depictions include decorative motifs such as rosettes, the rhombus motif, braid and double circles, and figures such as horsemen, lions, bulls, gods, and mythical creatures. Stylistic analysis of figures and compositions on these belt fragments from Mardin Museum in comparison to belts from museums, private collections, and archaeological excavations, help us identify these artifacts as products of 8th – 7th c. BC Urartian palatial style. The votive plaque examined here dates to the 8th – early 6th c. BC.

Keywords: Urartian, Belt, Votive Plaque, Bronze, Mythical Creature, Religion.

Mardin Müzesi'nden Bir Grup Urartu Dönemi Metal Buluntu

Öz

Çalışmada Mardin Müzesi'nden 5 adet kemer parçası ve 1 adet adak levhası değerlendirilmiştir. Bronz yapımı olan eserler müzeye satın alma yoluyla kazandırılmıştır. Onarım çalışması yapılmış olan eserlerin buluntu yerleri ve durumları ile ilgili veriler bulunmamaktadır. Kemer parçaları orta genişlikte kemer grubuna aittir. Adak levhası ise kare formludur. Eserlerin üretiminde kullanılan malzeme ile eserler üzerindeki süslemelerde uygulanan teknikler, Urartu'nun diğer metal eserlerinde uygulananlarla aynı özellikleri gösterir. Kemer parçaları ve adak levhasında işlenmiş olan motif ve figürler Urartu sanatının bilinen klasik özellikleri arasında yer alır. Bu süslemeler arasında rozet, saç örgüsü, göz motifi, iç içe daireler, süvari, aslan, boğa, tanrı ve mitolojik yaratık figürleri yer alır. Mardin Müzesi kemer parçaları süslemeleri ve ölçüleriyle çeşitli müze ve koleksiyonlarda sergilenen kemerler ile kazılardan ele geçen örneklerle karşılaştırıldığında, stil, bezeme ve kompozisyon açısından MÖ. 8.-7. yüzyıl Urartu saray sanatının özelliklerini yansıtır. Adak levhası ise MÖ. 8. yy. ile MÖ. 6. yy. başlarına tarihlendirilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Urartu, Kemer, Adak Levhası, Bronz, Mitolojik Yaratık, Din.

* Asst. Prof., University of Batman, Faculty of Science and Letters, Archaeology Department, Batman/TURKEY, E-mail: esrakacmazlevent@gmail.com. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2489-9527. I thank the Director of Mardin Museum, Gani TARKAN, and the Assistant Director of the Museum, Archaeologist Süleyman BAYAR, for granting me permission to examine and publish these artifacts; and I thank all museum staff for their kind assistance during this study. And finally, I thank Dr. G. Bike Yazıcıoğlu for providing editorial assistance with English translation and proofreading.

Introduction

The Urartian Kingdom with its core area in Lake Van Basin dominated a vast region from the Kura Basin in the northeast and the Urmia Plateau in the east to the Euphrates River in the west and the Taurus Mountains in the south between the 9th and the 6th centuries BC. Throughout their dominion, the Urartu established a homogeneous cultural style that is manifest in certain categories of archaeological remains. The Urartian Kingdom succeeded in overcoming the climatic and topographic challenges of this landscape and they advanced in many areas of social life. The ingenuity of Urartian architecture and metallurgy were among the kingdom's most significant accomplishments, which improved living conditions in this hostile landscape. As a matter of fact, Urartu's achievements in metallurgy paved the path for the kingdom to become a superpower in the region.

Using the metal-rich deposits of this mountainous region to the best of their advantage, Urartians excelled in ironworking, but they also manufactured various items out of bronze, silver, and gold, such as belts, votive plaques, jewelry, cauldrons, helmets, shields, quivers, and horse trappings. Past and ongoing archaeological excavations at Urartian centers have yielded a great number of metal artifacts. In addition to scientific excavations, illicit excavations have also brought to light many Urartian metal artifacts that are exhibited in various museums and private collections in Turkey and around the world. Within the known corpus of Urartian metal artifacts on display in collections in Turkey and abroad, bronze belts and bronze votive plaques have a special place due to the highly skilled workmanship and artistic details they exhibit.

This article focuses on five bronze belt fragments and one bronze votive plaque, which were purchased in 2010 by Mardin Museum. Conservation and restoration of these artifacts housed in the storage facilities of the museum had been completed prior to this study. In the following pages, first a typological and stylistic analysis of these artifacts is presented, followed by an evaluation of materials and production techniques, and functions and areas of use. This study aims at the presentation of these previously unpublished artifacts to scholarship and the promotion of archaeological studies at Mardin Museum and in Mardin region.

Belt Fragments

Belt Fragment No. 1 (Inv. No. 2010-6099 (A) E: 1701) (Fig. 1)

Belt fragment No. 1 (Inv. No. 2010-6099 (A) E: 1701) belongs to a belt of medium width. The belt is 9.4 cm wide, its preserved length is 10.2 cm, and the fragment weighs 31.24 g. The fragment has oxidized spots, it is broken on both sides, and a large portion of the actual belt is missing. Three string holes are visible on the upper end of the fragment and three string holes are visible on the lower end, where the third hole is partially preserved. The figure of a god standing on a bull is depicted in the large panel, which is bordered by a cable pattern. The bull is depicted with realistic anatomical details. The god figure wears a fez-like cap with a pom-pom that is decorated with vertical lines and his facial details are highlighted. Two wings protruding from the back of the figure are shaped like quivers. The deity is dressed in a tunic with a round neck and short sleeves, reaching down to the knees with tassels at the hem, and he wears a cloak that reaches down to the ankles. The cloak is fashioned like a shawl, fringed with tassels, and it is thrown over the left arm and goes down the back. The surface of the cloak is decorated with vertical lines. The standing deity is posed with the right hand raised in sacred salutation and the left hand holding an ax. The iconography of this figure identifies him as the

god Teisheba. This panel is framed by a cable pattern filled in with alternating double circle and rhombus motifs. A narrower panel is seen on the left side of the panel with Teisheba. This panel is also framed by a cable pattern consisting of two parallel lines and alternating double circle and rhombus motifs. Four mythical creatures are depicted in a vertical row inside the panel. The fragment is broken off at the neck of the figure at the top, so the head of the first figure is missing; and the area where the head of the third figure is depicted is damaged. The mythical creatures that are well-preserved have the head of a human, a bird's body with wings, and lion's feet.

Belt Fragment No. 2 (Inv. No. 2010-6100 (A) E: 1703) (Fig. 2)

Belt fragment No. 2 (Inv. No. 2010-6100 (A) E: 1703) is 10.3 cm wide; its preserved length is 18.0 cm, and the fragment weighs 90.41 g. Based on its width, the fragment can be identified as belonging to a broad belt of medium width. String holes on the upper and the lower ends of the fragment are placed symmetrically and the terminal of the belt with string holes is also preserved. An interesting detail on this fragment is a patch that was attached with rivets in antiquity to mend a broken section at the bottom end of the belt. The surface of the belt is divided into three friezes separated by two horizontal cables fashioned as braids. The three friezes are decorated with identical and symmetrical figures. A vertical row of rosettes divides the scenes in the friezes in groups of two figures. Accordingly, the rosettes along the terminal of the belt on the left are followed by mythical creatures and horsemen, and the pattern repeats with rosettes and mythical creatures, again. Horsemen are depicted with a pointed helmet and their facial details are emphasized. They are dressed in a one-piece tunic that reaches down to the ankles. The tunic has a round neck, short sleeves, and a belt at the waist. Horsemen are posed holding the horse's bridle with the left hand and shooting a lance backwards with the right hand. Horses are depicted galloping with anatomic details fully fleshed out. The crest and the browband of the horses' harnesses are detailed out. Mythical creatures to the left of the horsemen are composite beasts with the head of a bull, a single horn, a tail, and wings. These mythical creatures have a lion's hindlegs and a bull's forelegs. The mythical creatures on the right side of the rosettes fall in the category of winged horses. In all mythical creatures, the wing feathers and body hair are indicated by lines.

Belt Fragment No. 3 (Inv. No. 2010-6097 (A) E: 1699) (Fig. 3)

Belt Fragment No. 3 (Inv. No. 2010-6097 (A) E: 1699) belongs to a medium-width belt. The belt is 10.2 cm wide, its preserved length is 19.2 cm, and it weighs 72.6 cm. String holes along the upper and the lower ends of the belt are placed symmetrically, but the lower part of the left terminal and mid-section of the lower end are broken and missing. The surface of the belt is divided into three friezes by double bands in relief. The composition of the figures and motifs in all three friezes is identical. In each frieze, a pattern of four vertical rows of rhombuses is placed as a spacer in the terminal field on the left. From left to right, this multiple rhombus pattern is followed by a rosette motif, a bull figure, a flower-like pattern consisting of rhombuses and double circles, and a mythical creature. Bulls are depicted galloping with realistic anatomical features. Mythical creatures have a human head, a lion's body, and the wings and tail of a bird. These creatures are also depicted galloping with the front feet raised off the ground. Mythical creatures in all three friezes have the forelegs of a lion. While the hindleg of the mythical beast in the upper frieze has the form of a lion's legs, those in the middle and the lower frieze have the hindlegs of a bull. In both bulls and mythical creatures, ribs, abdominal muscles, wing feathers, and the tail are indicated by incised lines.

Belt Fragment No. 4 (Inv. No. 2010-6098 (A) E: 1700) (Fig. 4)

Belt Fragment No. 4 (Inv. No. 2010-6098 (A) E: 1700) is 10.5 cm wide and belongs to the group of medium-width belts. The preserved length of the fragment is 28.7 cm long, and it weighs 196.74 g. The fragment belongs to the mid-section of a belt that is broken and missing on both the left and the right side. String holes are present on the upper and the lower ends. Additionally, the belt has vertical cracks in various sections, which have been repaired in antiquity with the use of rivets. The surface of the belt is divided into three friezes that are separated by two parallel horizontal bands in relief. The same pattern of figures and motifs is repeated in all three friezes. From left to right, each frieze begins with a triple pattern of rhombuses and double circles followed by a mythical creature, an ornamental spacer consisting of a flower-like arrangement of rhombuses and double circles, a lion figure, a quadruple pattern of rhombuses and double circles, another mythical creature, and a triple pattern of vertical rhombuses. The first mythical creature on the left has a human head, a bird's body, human feet, and a scorpion's tail. This figure wears a polos-like headdress adorned with vertical stripes, and it is depicted shooting an arrow forward. The lion figures that follow the ornamental spacers are depicted galloping. The lions have almond-shaped eyes, the mouth is wide open in a growl, and the tail is curved in an upward arch. Following the second spacer pattern are mythical creatures with a human head, a lion's body, and wings. They are depicted galloping with a polos-like headdress decorated with vertical stripes. The tails of the figures are parallel to the hindlegs. In the terminal field of the belt on the right, a god figure on a lion is depicted in a single panel. The lion figure is seen roaring with a wide-open mouth and with realistic anatomical details. The god figure is depicted in profile, standing on the lion with one foot on the animal's back and the other foot near the head. The figure wears a polos on his head and his facial details are emphasized. This deity is dressed in a round-necked short tunic adorned with tassels at the hem, reaching down to the knees, and a long cloak with tassels, reaching down to the ankles. His garments are decorated with vertical stripes. He is posed with the left hand raised in sacred salutation and with the right hand holding on to a ball-headed staff. The two wings protruding from the back of the figure are shaped like quivers. The iconography of this deity identifies him as the god Haldi.

Belt Fragment No. 5 (Inv. No. 2010-6095 (A) E: 1059) (Fig. 5)

Belt Fragment No. 5 (Inv. No. 2010-6095 (A) E: 1059) is from a medium-width belt that is 9.5 cm wide. The preserved length of the fragment is 12.5 cm, and it weighs 36.36 g. Only a small portion of the belt is preserved, in which animal figures arranged in vertical rows are observable. Two lions are seen on the left followed by four bulls. The lions are partially preserved with only the heads and the front part of their bodies visible. They are galloping with wide-open and roaring mouths. Anatomical features are fully detailed out and the manes are indicated with lines. The bulls in the second row are also depicted galloping with fully detailed anatomical features. The bulls' horns are curved backwards. The tails are parallel to the hindlegs, and they terminate in a wide tassel. As in the lion figures, the bulls' ribs and body hair are detailed out with lines. In the terminal field on the right, four lion figures are depicted inside a panel framed by a cable pattern that consists of dots inside two parallel lines. The lions inside the terminal panel are depicted walking with fully detailed anatomical features. The mouth is wide open in a roar, and the mane and the ribs are indicated with lines. The tail is curved upwards in a wide arch and it terminates in a widened bulb. The fragment can be identified as belonging to the right end of the belt, because punched holes, rivets and the belt buckle can be seen along the right edge.

Votive Plaque

The square votive plaque with inventory number 2010-6754 (A) E: 6965 is on display in Mardin Museum (Fig. 6). The plaque measures 7.2 x 7.2 cm and weighs 23.7 g. A god figure seated on a throne is depicted in the center of the plaque. The deity's facial features are detailed out and he is depicted wearing a fez-like headdress adorned with vertical lines with a pompom on top. He is dressed in a short tunic adorned with vertical lines, reaching to the knees. His right wrist is adorned with a bracelet with the right hand raised in sacred salutation and he holds a string of beads in his left hand. A crouching lion is depicted under the god's feet in front of the throne. The lion is roaring with a wide-open mouth and its anatomical features are depicted in full detail. The god's right foot is depicted resting on the lion's neck. This central figure is surrounded by circles that are encircled by dots. The edges of the plaque are damaged and partially missing. Additionally, the surface of the plaque is corroded. The iconography of this deity identifies him as the god Haldi.

Materials and Production Technology

The five belt fragments and one votive plaque in the collections of Mardin Museum presented in this study are all made from sheet bronze. Embossing, incision, and punching techniques were used for applying the decorative designs on these metal artifacts. In fact, traces of molds used in embossing for creating the raised designs are visible on the reverse side of the objects. Punching or piercing technique was used for creating the perforated string holes along the edges of the belts. Additionally, decorative details of the embossed motifs were highlighted by linear incisions. Most probably, the contours of the motifs were accentuated with the use of burins with pointed tips. Examples of burins are known from excavations at prominent Urartian sites such as Ayanis¹ and Yukarı Anzaf fortresses. The burin from Yukarı Anzaf is about 7.0–7.5 cm long and it weighs about 21–25 gr. This object has a square cross-section with a blunt end and a pointed tip (Belli 2007: 422-423). These objects provide an archaeological correlate from Urartian sites for metallurgical tools, which we hypothesize to have been used in the final stage of production of the belts and the votive plaque presented here.

The Urartian belt fragments from Mardin Museum presented here belong to the group of medium-width belts.² Votive plaques in Mardin Museum are represented by a single example which has a square form. In the examples of belt fragments where the outer edges are preserved, perforated string holes with regular intervals are observable framing the decorated area. These holes were used for sewing the belts to woven or leather garments. Rivets are punched into the pierced holes in two of the belt fragments from Mardin Museum. In fact, the use of rivets punched into the pierced holes along the upper and lower ends and the short edges of belts is documented at other Urartian sites, as well (Çilingiroğlu 1997: 122; Özdemir – Özdemir – Kılınç 2019: 57). Since most of the belt fragments studied here are very partially preserved, it is not possible to know how their buckles were formed. The belt buckle is preserved in only one example, in which it is made by casting technique and attached near the mid-section of the right end of the belt. The two ends of the belt would have been joined by clasping this buckle to a corresponding part attached to the left end of the belt. There are no string holes or rivet holes on the votive plaque.

¹ The form and dimensions of the burin found at Ayanis Fortress excavations are not indicated in the published report (Çilingiroğlu – Sağlamtimur 2003: 467).

² This study follows H. J. Kellner's published typologies in Kellner 1991a; 1991b.

Functions and Areas of Use

The prevalence of belts from excavated Urartian sites bears witness to the fact that this accessory was in fashion during the Urartian Period. Belts and belt fragments are known from archaeological contexts at many Urartian sites: Çavuştepe (Erzen 1978: lev. XXXIV/b), chamber tomb at Ayanis Fortress (Çilingiroğlu – Erdem 2010: 6-7), Karmir Blur (Piotrovsky 1952: 37, pl. 19; 1970: fig. 84), Kayalidere (Burney 1966: 78, fig. 10), Giriktepe Palace (Balkan 1964: 242), Tomb 2 at Murat Tepe Mound (Özdemir – Özdemir – Kılınç 2019: 54-63), Patnos (Balkan 1964: 235-243), Urn 1 at Dilkaya Mound (Çilingiroğlu 1988: 264), a tomb at Gushchi (Barnett 1963: 198 fig. 48), the largest tomb at Erzincan/Altın-tepe (Özgüç 1969: 6), Iğdır Necropolis (Barnett 1963: 177, figs. 30-31), Tombs I, II, and III at Nor-Aresh (Barnett 1963: 195, fig. 41, 197, fig. 46, 198, fig. 47), rock-cut tomb at Adilcevaz (Bilgiç – Öğün 1974: 32), urns at Van/Altın-tepe Necropolis (Sevin – Özfirat – Kavaklı 2000: 424), tombs at Liç (Öğün 1973: 66-67), and Suçatı tomb (Karaosmanoğlu 2018: 51-56). Additionally, there are many examples of unprovenanced belts originating from illicit excavations, housed in museums and private collections in Turkey and abroad (Kellner 1991a, 1991b; İgit – Göktaş 2018; Kuvanç 2018; Belli 2004; Seidl 2004). The use of belts in the Urartian Period is also documented in depictions of human figures and gods and goddesses in objects of figurative art (Gökce 2016). While fewer examples of belts are known from excavated Urartian settlements, most of the belts are found in mortuary contexts. In tombs, belts were deposited as funerary gifts accompanying the deceased. Belts are not attested in excavated temples or sanctuaries at Urartian sites, which indicates that belts were not deposited as votive offerings (Çavuşoğlu 2005: 95). It has been proposed that, “the figures and symbols depicted on the belts suggest that, in addition to their use as funerary offerings, belts were used as items of personal adornment in daily life, as accessories of soldiers’ armors, and as objects imbued with mystical powers in religious ceremonies and cultic rituals” (Ulusman 1991: 43; İgit – Göktaş 2018: 991). It is also commonly accepted that belts served as signifiers of social status and rank. Accordingly, we may envision that, belts with rich and complex figurative depictions and inscriptions were used by high-status individuals, while uninscribed belts with simpler designs were used by individuals belonging to lower classes. The group of belt fragments from Mardin Museum are partially preserved and their original dimensions are not clearly discernable. There is no information on the findspots or the original archaeological contexts of these objects. Due to the lack of such contextual information, it is not possible to state with confidence how and where these objects were used in antiquity. Nevertheless, the rich and complex decorative programs of these examples from Mardin Museum suggest that these belts were prestige items used by high-status individuals either as accessories for garments or they were deposited as funerary offerings for high-status individuals, like many examples of Urartian belts.

In archaeological studies of the Urartu, votive plaques constitute an important category of figurative art objects. Unlike Urartian belts, votive plaques are not a widespread type of portable material culture at Urartian sites and cemeteries. The earliest finding of votive plaques date to 1971, when a hoard of bronze plaques was discovered by illegal excavations in the vicinity of Serdar Tepesi, which is located 250 m southwest of the Giyimli (Hırkanis) Village in the Gürpınar District of Van Province (Erzen 1974: 193). The plaques from Giyimli were scattered to various museums and private collections in Turkey and around the world. In addition to the many examples originating from Giyimli, isolated examples have been unearthed by archaeological excavations at several Urartian settlements: Erzincan/Altın-tepe (Kellner 1991c: 288), Norşuntepe (Kellner 1991c: 288), Karmir-Blur (Kellner 1982: fig. 1.2), and Armavir-Blur (Kellner 1982: fig 2). Scholarly opinions about the areas of use and functions of votive plaques vary. Taşyürek (1978: 202) has suggested that votive plaques were left as votive offerings to

gods/goddesses at temples and sanctuaries. Ögün (1984: 67), on the other hand, regards these objects as funerary offerings. Belli (2004: 248) has proposed that these plaques were appliques on garments serving as amulets. Based on the religious and cultic imagery on these plaques, Biber – Çavuşoğlu (2010: 67) have also proposed that they may have been used as objects imbued with mystical powers that were attached to the doors or walls of domestic structures. Just like the belts, the votive plaque from the Mardin Museum is unprovenanced and there is no information about its original archaeological context. Therefore, it is not possible to identify what purpose this object may have served in antiquity. Nevertheless, based on the religious symbolism of the depiction on this plaque, it is plausible to suggest that this object was either deposited as a votive offering at a sanctuary or it was used as a funerary offering in a tomb.

Conclusions

The metal objects from Mardin Museum presented in this study consist of five belt fragments and one votive plaque. All studied objects are manufactured from bronze. Materials that these objects were made from, and the decoration techniques employed for the depictions on them are in line with the characteristics of Urartian metal objects. Belt fragments in this collection belong to medium-width belts and the votive plaque has a square form. In these regards, all five belt fragments and the votive plaque show close typological and stylistic similarities with currently known examples of Urartian belts and votive plaques. Motifs and figures depicted on the belt fragments and the votive plaque parallel classical examples of Urartian art. Depictions include decorative motifs such as rosettes, the cable pattern, rhombuses, and double circles, as well as figurative depictions of horsemen, lions, bulls, gods, and mythical creatures. Lions and bulls bear witness to the fauna and the natural environment of the period; horsemen are informative of military technology; and deities and mythical creatures are reflections of the belief system of the Urartian Period. Additionally, the cable pattern and various combinations of rhombuses and double circles are used as decorative elements and spacers between figures in the friezes. When compared with Urartian belts from excavations, museums, and private collections in terms of their dimensions and the style and composition of their figurative depictions, belt fragments from the Mardin Museum collections studied here can be identified as the products of the 8th – 7th centuries BC Urartian palatial style.¹ Votive plaques of the Urartian Period are generally dated based on the stylistic attributes of their depictions, and accordingly most of the known examples date between the 8th century and the early 6th century BC. Along parallel lines, we may date the votive plaque from the Mardin Museum to this broad temporal period. Bronze belts have been found at many excavated sites and cemeteries within the geographical boundaries of the Urartian Kingdom that ruled over Eastern Anatolia, Armenia, and northwestern Iran from the 9th century BC onwards. It is generally accepted that belts were in common use in Urartian society. It has been proposed that the narrow belts were used by young women who wore long garments, while medium-width and broad belts were used by more senior women and men (Çavuşoğlu 2014: 53; Karaosmanoğlu 2018: 54). Based on the figurative depictions on the medium-width belts from Mardin Museum, we may suggest that the examples presented in this article were used by men rather than women. In conclusion, we hope that this examination of the belt fragments and the votive plaque from Mardin Museum will promote the further study and publication of archaeological material culture remains in the region.

¹ For comparable examples, see Kellner 1991a, Çavuşoğlu 2014.

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Figure 1

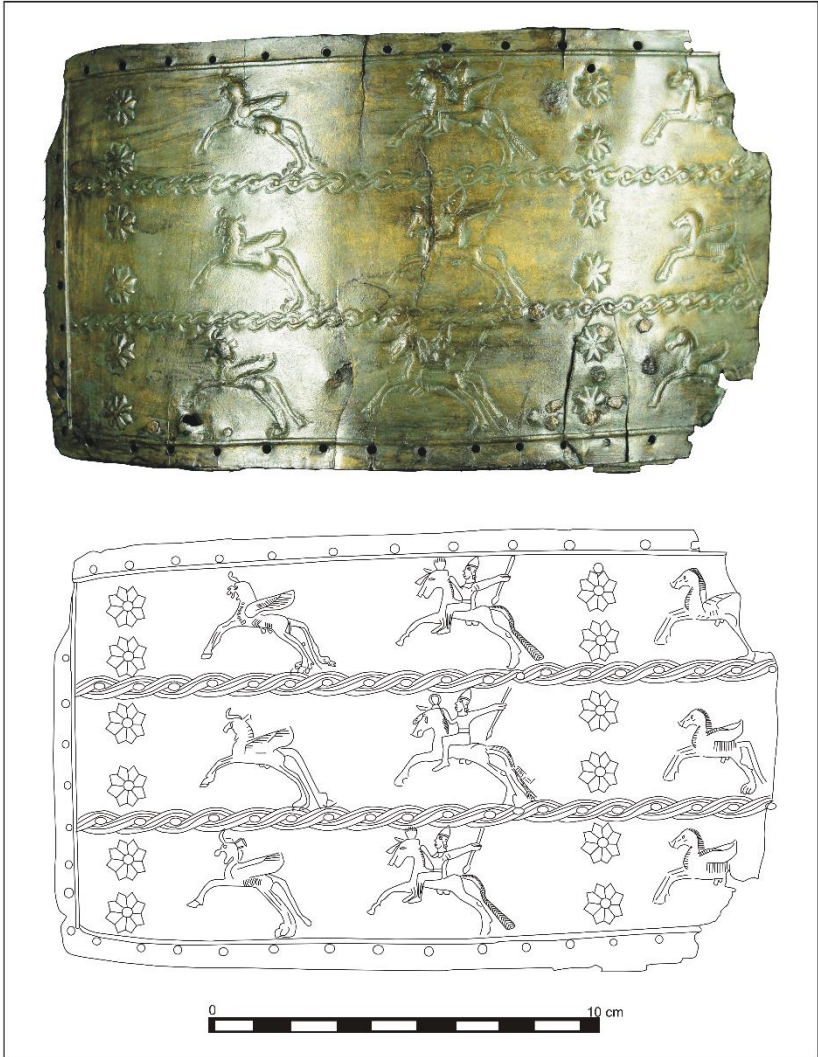


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

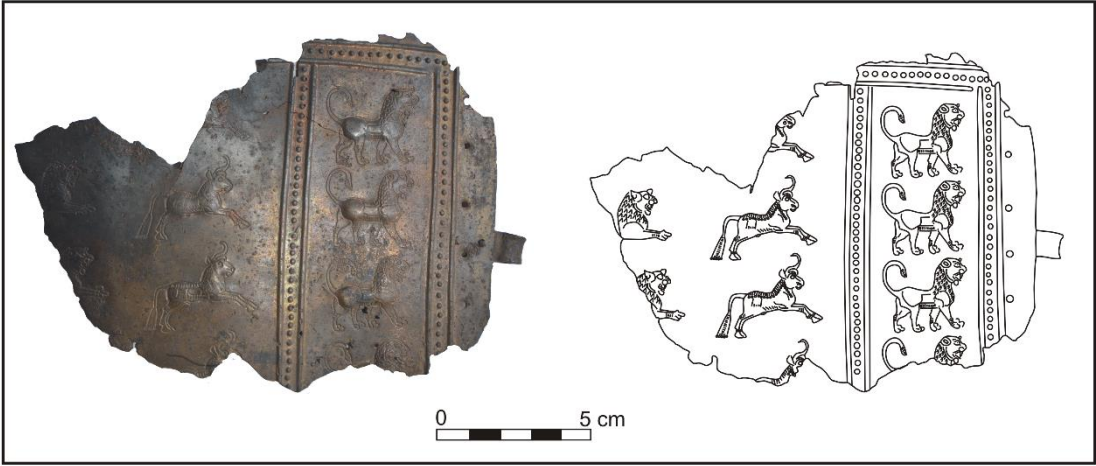


Figure 5



Figure 6