Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica 31(2): 235-277
DOI: 10.47743/saa-2025-31-2-4

From Sippar to Sznak: The Urartian Bronze Lion of Syunik as Another Element of the Assyrian-Urartian Legacy

Roberto DAN[1], Nzhdeh YERANYAN[2]

Abstract. *This study examines the bronze lion from Sznak within the context of Assyrian-Urartian artistic interactions. Through an analysis of its morphology, stylistic elements, and function, the research explores its likely role as a candelabrum support and its ceremonial significance in Urartian elite spaces. A comparison with Assyrian and Urartian lion imagery highlights notable iconographic parallels, particularly with the limestone lion head from Sippar, suggesting Assyrian influence on Urartian visual traditions. Rather than direct imitation, Urartian artisans selectively reinterpreted Assyrian motifs, integrating them into their distinct artistic and ideological framework. This study contributes to the understanding of cross-cultural artistic exchanges in the ancient Near East.*

Rezumat. *Acest studiu examinează leul de bronz de la Sznak în contextul interacțiunilor artistice asiro-urartiene. Printr-o analiză a morfologiei, elementelor stilistice și funcției sale, cercetarea explorează rolul său probabil ca suport de candelabru și semnificația sa ceremonială în spațiile elitelor urartiene. O comparație cu reprezentările de lei asiriene și urartiene evidențiază paralele iconografice notabile, în special cu capul de leu din calcar de la Sippar, sugerând o influență asiriană asupra tradițiilor vizuale urartiene. Mai degrabă decât o imitație directă, meșterii urartieni au reinterpretat selectiv motivele asiriene, integrându-le în propriul lor cadru artistic și ideologic distinct. Acest studiu contribuie la înțelegerea schimburilor artistice interculturale în Orientul Apropiat antic.*

Keywords: Lion, Urartian-Assyrian legacy, Metallurgy, Candelabrum, Syunik Region.

Introduction

The Urartian kingdom, which reached its peak between the second half of the 9th century and the second half of the 7th century BCE, developed a sophisticated artistic tradition deeply connected to its political and religious institutions in the highlands surrounding Lake Van. Among the most iconic images found in Urartian art is that of the lion, an animal imbued with profound symbolic meaning throughout the ancient Near East. The bronze lion from Sznak represents a significant artifact within this tradition, displaying an exceptional degree of craftsmanship and stylistic refinement. Unfortunately, the Sznak lion lacks a clear archaeological context, and there is no evidence to determine whether it was associated with other objects. However, it may have originated from a burial or a hoard of objects, which are not uncommon in the Urartian period, even in this region. A relevant comparison can be made with the Yeghegnadzor Hoard, which similarly reflects the practice of depositing valuable items in caches or ritual contexts. It remains to be understood how objects of this type, belonging to a royal sphere, ended up in this location. From this perspective, the possibility that the Sznak lion was part of a hoard rather than a burial appears more plausible. This study provides a detailed analysis of the Sznak lion's morphology and decorative elements, comparing it to similar representations from both Urartian and Neo-Assyrian contexts. Special attention is given to its probable function as a support for a candelabrum, a hypothesis strongly supported by comparative evidence. Furthermore, the broader historical and artistic processes at play,

[1] ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies
[2] Scientific Deputy Director, History Museum of Armenia

particularly the Assyrian influence on Urartian artistic production, are examined in order to contextualize this artifact within a framework of cultural interactions that shaped Iron Age Near Eastern art.

History of Studies

The bronze lion figurine was discovered in 1951 during earthworks near the village of Sznak (nowdays Syunik), in the Kapan Municipality, Syunik Region, Republic of Armenia, and is currently preserved in the Goris Museum of Local Lore and History. The lion has received relatively little scholarly attention in academic literature. The first publication mentioning it was signed by S.A. Yesayan and A.N. Shahinyan in 1962, approximately ten years after its discovery. This work also includes the first published image of the object. The lion is described as follows: "*The preserved figurine represents a lion with extended front legs (the right one is broken) and folded hind legs. Its massive head is slightly raised, and its mouth is open. The eyelids of the predator are slightly lowered, while the wrinkled nostrils are drawn upward, creating the impression of an enraged yet composed beast. The lion is depicted in a calm but tense posture, further emphasized by its nervously curled tail resting along its back and its ears pressed against its head. The entire figure embodies strength and power, a quality accentuated by its clearly defined musculature. The sculpture is massive, measuring 20 cm in length and 13 cm in height, with a weight of 5.175 kg (considering that one front leg is broken). Since a hole was drilled in the lower part during analysis to determine the metal composition, it can be assumed that the original weight of the figurine was approximately 5.5 kg. In the lower part of the sculpture, there are three triangular recesses, suggesting that the lion was mounted on a stand or was part of a decorative feature of furniture or architectural structures. The figure is solid on the inside, cast as a single seamless piece, and subsequently refined. The well-preserved metal is covered with a noble pale-green patina.*" After an extensive series of comparisons with Urartian and Near Eastern materials, the authors concluded their analysis by proposing a dating between the 7th and 6th centuries BCE**.** Additionally, they provided an intriguing discussion on the Urartian presence in the Syunik region and the origin of the lion figurine: "*However, an especially interesting aspect is the fact that, as is well known, Zangezur (the geographical name of the region, which includes Goris, Kapan, and several neighboring districts of the Armenian SSR) was not part of the Urartian kingdom. The presence of Urartian cultural artifacts in this region highlights the connections between Urartu and the local tribes inhabiting these territories. The lion sculpture under study, in our opinion, is a locally produced artifact, as Urartian monumental artworks were typically cast as hollow objects, a technique that held little importance in Zangezur, despite its rich copper resources. However, the sculpture exhibits a strong influence of Urartian art and culture on the tribes of the Armenian Highlands. These tribes, following the collapse of the Urartian kingdom, together with other groups (including the Urartians themselves), formed a new political entity led by Armenian tribes*"[3]. Subsequently, in 1972, Yesayan published new considerations on the lion figurine, providing its dimensions and a brief description of the object, but without including any images: "*Measuring 20 cm in length and 13 cm in height, the lion is depicted in a seated position, with its front legs extended and hind legs folded beneath its body. The sculptor has successfully captured a tense yet controlled energy, portraying a ferocious but still composed predator, evident in the slight muscular tension and the curved tail resting along its back. This lion sculpture embodies power and strength, features that strongly align with Urartian royal iconography, where lions were symbols of divine protection and sovereign authority. Notably, the Sgnakh lion finds close parallels in another seated lion statue discovered by Barnett in 1964 near Mush at the*

[3] ESAYAN, SHAHINYAN 1962, 205-207/ fig. 4. Translation from Russian into English by the Authors.

Kayalıdere fortress, which, although smaller in size, shares similar stylistic characteristics. Both sculptures are directly associated with high Urartian craftsmanship and are dated to the late period of the Kingdom of Van, approximately the 7th–6th centuries BCE"[4]. Subsequently, the lion figurine received renewed attention in the work of Xnkikyan, which included the first illustration of the object in the form of a drawing[5]. The first photograph of the lion was published in 2007 in the catalogue of an exhibition on Armenian archaeology held in Arles, France. The object is described as: "*Figurine volumineuse de lion assis. Il a les pattes antérieures tendues en avant et les pattes postérieures pliées. Il a une grande tête, une crinière épaisse, la gueule grande ouverte et une dentition forte précisée. Les yeux et les oreilles sont marqués par des reliefs. La queue est longue, enroulée à la patte. Les muscles mis en relief soulignent la force et la puissance de l'animal. À la base, se trouvent des saillies en triangle pour le fixer sur un socle. La figurine servait probablement de décor pour un siège, pour du mobilier ou pour un objet quelconque*"[6]. In a recent study on Urartian lions, the Sznak lion figurine has once again been the subject of comparative analysis alongside a recently discovered limestone lion head from Ayanis and other Urartian-produced lion representations[7].

The Lion as a Symbol in Ancient Near Eastern and Urartian Art

Before delving into the specifics of the Sznak lion figurine and its contextualization within Urartian cultural production, it is essential to first provide a brief introduction to the symbolic and material role of the lion in the art of Western Asia. The lion has long been one of the most potent and universally recognized symbols in the artistic and ideological landscape of the ancient world[8]. In Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and the Iranian plateau, lions were associated with strength, divine favor, and the protection of the ruler and his domain. However, beyond their function as apotropaic guardians, they also served as a metaphor for kingship itself. This is most vividly illustrated in the royal lion hunt scenes of the Neo-Assyrian king Aššurbanipal, where the monarch is depicted engaging in staged lion hunts, demonstrating his dominance over nature and chaos[9]. These highly ritualized acts were political statements, reinforcing the idea that the Assyrian ruler, as the representative of divine order on earth, was uniquely capable of conquering the wild forces of the world. In Urartu, lion imagery carried similar connotations but was adapted to reflect the kingdom's specific ideological and artistic framework. Rather than emphasizing the act of hunting and subjugating lions, Urartian iconography often depicts lions as symbols of divine protection and royal might, frequently integrated into ceremonial and royal objects. Urartian representations of lions are far more static and less dynamic than their Assyrian counterparts, often characterized by rigid, repetitive, and hieratic compositions. This stylistic choice, which emphasizes symmetry and formalized expressions of power, contrasts sharply with the fluidity and narrative dynamism found in Neo-Assyrian reliefs, particularly those depicting royal lion hunts. However, this distinctive Urartian approach to lion imagery would later find unexpected continuity and development in the imperial iconographic programs of the Achaemenid world, where similar formalized and repetitive

[4] ESAYAN 1972, 70.
[5] XNKIKYAN 2002, 145/ illustration 1.
[6] *Au pied du Mont Ararat* 2007, 132, object entry no. 78.
[7] IŞIKLI, ARAS 2016, 433-434/ fig. 4.
[8] On these topics, see, among others, CORNELIUS 1989; WATANABE 2000; WATANABE 2002; COLLINS 2002; STRAWN 2005; ULANOWSKI 2015.
[9] On Assyrian royal hunts, not only from the time of Aššurbanipal, see ALBENDA 1972; 1974; DICK 2006; READE 2013.

compositions became integral to royal art and propaganda[10]. One of the most striking examples of this is the presence of lion heads depicted on bronze royal bowls from Karmir-Blur, which suggests a direct association between Urartian kingship, feasting rituals, and divine authority. These elaborately decorated vessels, likely used in elite and religious ceremonies, highlight how the lion was incorporated into the courtly and ritualized aspects of Urartian rule[11]. The bronze lion from Sznak should be understood within this broader Urartian ideological system. While its function as a candelabrum support, as explored in this text, situates it within elite ritual spaces, its form and expressive features indicate that it also bore a symbolic dimension, evoking themes of protection, power, and divine favor. The carefully sculpted open mouth, visible teeth, and intense gaze enhance the impression of latent strength, aligning this lion with the broader visual tradition of Near Eastern royal iconography.

Morphological and Decorative Analysis of the Lion from Sznak

The bronze lion from Sznak is a small yet finely executed sculpture that stands as an outstanding example of Urartian metalwork, exhibiting both technical mastery and artistic refinement (Figures 1-4). The authors of this study had the opportunity to photograph and measure the object, housed in the Goris Museum of Local Lore and History, on multiple occasions in February 2023 and October 2025. This three-dimensional sculpture, representing a recumbent lion, was created using the lost-wax casting technique, a method that allowed Urartian artisans to achieve remarkable precision in their bronze works. Over time, oxidation has left a greenish patina on the surface. Measurements indicate that the sculpture is approximately 20.3 cm in length, 12.8 cm in height, and about 8 cm in width[12], with a weight of 7.5 kg[13], dimensions that suggest it was not an independent figurine but rather a structural component of a larger ceremonial object. Comparative analysis with other Urartian lions used as candelabrum supports, particularly those bearing the inscription of King Minua, housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, provides compelling evidence that this lion originally served a ritual or ceremonial function[14]. Several elements strongly support this interpretation, notably the presence of three triangular recesses in the lower part of the sculpture, which were evidently used to mount the lion onto a piece of furniture or a bronze shaft, as well as the stylistic similarities with other known Urartian bronze lions. These parallels extend to pose, facial features, and decorative motifs, reinforcing the idea that the Sznak lion was part of a candelabrum or similar ritual furnishing, most likely displayed in an elite or religious setting.

Posture and Anatomical Features

The lion is depicted in a recumbent position (Figure 1), with its front legs (one missing) extended forward and its hind legs folded beneath the body, a posture that exudes both composure and latent strength (Figure 4A). This positioning aligns with other Urartian bronze

[10] On these aspects, see DAN 2023, 207-211/ figs. 116, 119.
[11] On these bowls, see DAN *et alii* 2024.
[12] As reported also in *Au pied du Mont Ararat* 2007, 132.
[13] The weight recorded during the 2023 examination (7.5 kg) differs from the earlier figure reported by Yesayan and Shahinyan (1962), who indicated approximately 5.5 kg.
[14] MERHAV 1991, 270/ fig. 11a; SEIDL 2004, 222/ pl. 3a-c. These types of candelabra could also feature figures other than lions, as evidenced by a candelabrum excavated at Toprakkale bearing the inscription of a King Rusa, which depicts a winged chimera with an anthropomorphic head (HOFFMANN 1960, 896; MERHAV 1991, 263/figs. 10a-d). In some cases, the lions decorating these bronze candelabra could also be made of different materials, as seen in a candelabrum from Altıntepe, which had a bronze structure but featured lions carved in ivory (ÖZGÜÇ 1969, 45/ fig. 43; MERHAV 1991, 263/ fig. 10).

lions used as support elements for ritual furniture or lighting structures. The anatomical rendering reveals a careful balance between stylization and volumetric precision. The body is solid and compact, with softly rounded transitions between the shoulders, torso, and haunches. The dorsal line is slightly convex, and the tail, curved along the right flank, merges smoothly with the back, forming a continuous and harmonious silhouette (Figure 4D). The surface of the torso is intentionally plain, without incised fur details, a feature consistent with Urartian bronze fittings and supports rather than freestanding sculpture. The contours of the shoulders and haunches are gracefully defined, while the symmetry of the limbs and the proportional relationship between head and body emphasize stability and controlled tension, an aesthetic hallmark of Urartian royal iconography. The paws are rendered with notable realism: each toe is separated by deep grooves that define rounded pads, visible especially in the underside view (Figure 4F). This detailed modeling contrasts with the more abstract treatment of the torso, suggesting that the sculptor intended to emphasize the lion's grounded stability and strength. The missing right front paw (Figure 4C) exposes small perforations and a compact metal texture, revealing internal casting channels or the remains of an attachment pin, confirming both the solidity of the bronze and its functional role within a composite structure. The underside of the sculpture (Figure 4E) also shows traces of filing and recesses for the fixing system. Viewed as a whole, the Sznak lion conveys a restrained vitality, less aggressive and more introspective than its Assyrian prototypes, aligning with the Urartian aesthetic of controlled power and divine guardianship. The smooth transitions, compact geometry, and frontal equilibrium place this piece stylistically close to the candelabrum lions from Van and Jerusalem, though its modeling appears slightly more plastic and rounded, perhaps reflecting a later or regionally specific workshop tradition.

Facial Features: Expression and Symbolism

The head of the Sznak lion is particularly expressive, embodying a combination of naturalistic and stylized elements that typify Urartian approaches to feline iconography (Figure 3). The head, proportionally large in relation to the body, exhibits powerful modeling and highly distinctive features. The muzzle is broad and truncated, with strongly bulging cheeks that project forward in a rounded mass. The nostrils are deeply drilled and separated by a sharply incised naso-labial groove forming a trident-like pattern, while the upper surface of the snout slopes gently upward toward the brow. The eyes, almond-shaped and slightly protruding, are symmetrically positioned and framed by thick eyelids. Although no traces of inlay survive, the regular circular sockets suggest that the eyes were originally inlaid, possibly with glass, shell, or stone, to enhance their luminosity and realism. The resulting gaze is intense and commanding, reinforcing the symbolic role of the lion as a vigilant guardian. The mouth is sculpted in a wide, partially open position, revealing meticulously carved teeth and prominent upper canines. The lower jaw is slightly recessed, an artistic technique that accentuates the open-mouth effect without disrupting the overall harmony of the composition. The tongue is visible and gently curled, adhering to the lower plane, an expressive device common in Near Eastern depictions of roaring lions, symbolizing latent energy and divine power. The cheeks and jowls are swollen, defined by curved incisions that create subtle shadow effects and highlight the lion's muscular vitality. The ears, small and rounded, are set far back on the head, pressed against the skull in a pose of alertness. Unlike later Mesopotamian or Anatolian depictions, which emphasize voluminous manes, the Sznak lion shows a smooth transition from forehead to neck. This simplification may indicate a stylized interpretation of a youthful lion

or a deliberate choice to preserve the clarity of the silhouette. A slight dorsal protuberance on the upper rear of the head could represent a schematic mane or an anatomical junction, providing a transition between head and neck. Taken together, these features express a sophisticated interplay between realism and abstraction: the artist avoided excessive naturalism, preferring to convey the spiritual and symbolic qualities associated with leonine imagery in Urartian iconography, strength, divine protection, and royal legitimacy. The Sznak lion's expression, at once restrained and vigilant, captures the Urartian conception of controlled might, distinct from the dynamic and aggressive realism of the Assyrian lion hunts.

Casting Technique and Assembly System

The detailed examination of the underside of the sculpture (Figure 4E) and of the broken front right paw (Figure 4C) provides valuable evidence regarding the production method and the original attachment system of the Sznak lion. The sculpture was cast as a single, solid piece using the lost-wax (cire perdue) technique, with no visible seams or joining lines, confirming a unified wax model. After casting, the underside was carefully reworked: three triangular recesses and a central circular perforation were created to secure the lion onto a separate base or structural element, most likely a candelabrum shaft or a wooden plinth reinforced with bronze fittings. The broken front paw clearly shows the internal metallic core cavity and three small perforations, which appear to have been part of the fixing system or correspond to air vents from the casting process. The fracture surface is clean and reveals the compact and homogeneous grain of the bronze alloy, indicating a well-controlled cooling process. The paw break also exposes traces of ancient metallic residue, possibly from a dowel or pin used to stabilize the figurine, demonstrating that the lion was securely anchored through both mechanical insertion and surface adhesion. The central perforation on the base retains remnants of a circular metallic fragment, suggesting the use of an iron or copper-alloy rod fixed into a mortise or socket of the support structure. The adjacent triangular cavities, with sharp, tool-marked edges, show signs of secondary adjustment by filing and abrasion, confirming that artisans refined the fit after casting. The combination of recesses and a central pin ensured both vertical stability and resistance to rotation, crucial for a heavy object (7.5 kg) intended as a candelabrum support. The metallographic features visible in the exposed sections indicate a dense, low-porosity bronze typical of Urartian workshops of the 8th–7th centuries BCE. The absence of casting bubbles or flaws points to a sophisticated control of the molten alloy. The technical precision and functional complexity of this attachment system suggest that the Sznak lion originated from the same category of elite metalworking ateliers responsible for monumental bronze furnishings from Van and Toprakkale.

State of Preservation and Surface Condition

The bronze lion is exceptionally well preserved, with all major anatomical features intact except for the missing front right paw, broken in antiquity or during recovery. The surface displays a homogeneous green to dark-brown patina, formed through long-term oxidation and burial conditions. Microscopic examination reveals localized encrustations of malachite and cuprite, especially in recessed areas such as the mouth and the underside cavities. The upper portions exhibit light polishing and minor abrasions, probably resulting from ancient handling or modern cleaning. The structural integrity of the bronze remains excellent, with no visible cracks or deformation, confirming the high quality of the original alloy. Overall, the artifact's preservation allows for a detailed assessment of both its aesthetic and technological aspects.

Interpretation and Context

The stylistic and technical features of the bronze lion from Sznak strongly support the hypothesis that it was not an isolated figurine but rather a structural component of a candelabrum or similar ritual furnishing. This interpretation is further reinforced by comparative examples, such as the bronze lions from Van and Toprakkale, which share nearly identical proportions, posture, and facial articulation. In addition to its functional role, the Sznak lion also carried symbolic weight. In Urartian art, lions were more than just decorative motifs, they were emblems of royal power and divine favor. The Urartian kings, much like their Assyrian counterparts, frequently incorporated lion imagery into elite objects, ceremonial vessels, and monumental architecture, underscoring the lion's role as a protector and symbol of sovereignty. The presence of similar lion representations on Urartian bronze bowls from Karmir-Blur, which were used in courtly feasting and religious rituals, suggests that these objects were closely associated with elite ceremonial practices. Considering this broader context, the bronze lion from Sznak can be understood as part of a larger artistic and ideological framework, in which lion imagery played a central role in affirming the divine legitimacy and military strength of Urartian rulers. Its finely executed details and dynamic expression suggest that it was not merely functional but also intended to convey an aura of power and sacred protection.

Comparative Analysis: the Sznak Lion and Other Urartian Lion Representations

The bronze lion from Sznak fits into a broader Urartian sculptural tradition in which lions played a key role in elite and ritual objects, serving as candelabrum supports, shield decorations, and furniture fittings. While sharing a distinct Urartian stylistic language, the Sznak lion exhibits notable variations and similarities with other Urartian lion depictions from major sites such as Van, Jerusalem, Ayanis, Toprakkale, Patnos, Kayalıdere, and Altıntepe. A detailed comparative analysis highlights both regional artistic conventions and the specific features that distinguish the Sznak lion from its counterparts.

The bronze lion from Kayalıdere

The Kayalıdere[15] lion, found as part of a military or ceremonial assemblage, was discovered during the 1965 excavations (Figure 5). Cast using the lost-wax technique, it measures 9.30 cm in length and 6.40 cm in height. The sculpture, made of solid bronze, was found north of the temple stele base, lying in burnt and bricky debris above a stone pavement. The base of the lion displays file marks and a dowel hole filled with black adhesive, suggesting that it was originally affixed to another object, possibly a larger ceremonial or decorative piece. Stylistically, the Kayalıdere lion closely follows the Urartian artistic tradition, sharing strong similarities with bronze throne elements from Toprakkale. Its defining features include a bulging palmette-shaped muzzle, sharp-angled wrinkles on the nose, triangular eyes framed by raised eyebrows, and ear-laps decorated with circular warts. The mane exhibits a stylized flame pattern, while a beveled ridge runs along the back of its head, reinforcing the characteristic symmetry and rigid design found in Urartian metalwork. When compared to the bronze lion from Sznak, both sculptures share fundamental iconographic conventions typical of Urartian art, including a compact and symmetrical structure, a broad snout, an open mouth with exposed canines, and a slightly flattened head. However, the Sznak lion appears more three-dimensional, likely due

[15] BURNEY 1966, 75-77/ figs. 8-9, pl. 9a, 10.

to its function as a candelabrum support, whereas the Kayalıdere lion's attachment mechanism suggests a different structural purpose. Additionally, the Kayalıdere lion features more pronounced surface detailing, particularly in the rendering of the mane and facial wrinkles, indicating a refined approach in line with high-quality Urartian bronze objects.

Bronze Candelabra Lions Allegedly from Patnos Housed in Van and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Among the closest parallels to the Sznak lion are the candelabrum-support lions from Van[16] and Jerusalem[17], both possibly originating from the site of Aznavurtepe (Figures 6-7)[18]. These lions share an almost identical recumbent stance, with extended front paws and tucked hind legs, and size. They are characterized by a broad, symmetrical snout, an open mouth with visible canines, and a compact yet dynamic form. The Jerusalem candelabrum, bearing the inscription of King Minua (CTU B 5-8), provides valuable chronological and contextual insights into the function of such artefacts, much like the Sznak lion. The chronology of these specimens, which are remarkably similar to the Sznak lion, should therefore be placed between the late 9th and the early 8th century BCE.

The Bronze Lion Shield Protome and the Limestone Lion Head from Ayanis

A distinct yet comparable example is the lion protome from Ayanis, built by Rusa (II), son of Argišti (685–645 BCE, which was affixed to a bronze shield (Figure 8)[19]. Despite its different function, the Ayanis lion shares notable similarities with the Sznak lion, particularly in its facial features and expression. Both exhibit a broad snout with carefully incised nostrils, an open mouth with prominent upper canines, and slightly bulging, symmetrically positioned eyes. The articulation of the jowls and cheeks in both lions enhances the impression of muscular strength and vitality, characteristics that are fundamental to Urartian feline representations. However, due to its military function, the Ayanis lion is somewhat more stylized, with flatter relief work and sharper contours, allowing it to be integrated onto the curved surface of a shield. In contrast, the Sznak lion, designed as a freestanding sculptural element, presents a more three-dimensional form, particularly in the articulation of the shoulders, haunches, and paws. These differences suggest that while the same iconographic model was employed across various artistic and functional contexts, the adaptation of the lion motif varied depending on its intended use and artistic conventions. More recently, a limestone lion head was discovered in the Temple Area of Ayanis Fortress (Figure 9). Measuring 22 cm in height, 20 cm in width, and 18.5 cm in depth, the sculpture was found in three fragments and is unique in Urartian art, being the only known limestone lion head of this type. It was originally affixed to a larger structure, likely part of a wooden or stone-bodied statue, emphasizing its ritual or symbolic role within the temple[20]. This lion head shares significant stylistic parallels with the Sippar lion, a Neo-Assyrian limestone sculpture[21], which will be described later in this text. Both lion heads display deeply carved eyes, nostrils, and fangs, with an expression that conveys a blend of ferocity and authority. However, while the Sippar lion was an architectural fixture, the Ayanis

[16] BOYSAL 1961, 204-209 Abb. 1-3; MUSLUBAŞ 1983, Nr. A 817; SEIDL 2004, 222/ pl. 3c.
[17] MERHAV, RUDER 1991; MERHAV 1991, 264, N° 11a; SALVINI 1991; SEIDL 2004, 15, 25, 60/ pl. 3a-b (C.11);
[18] On the site, see DAN 2022.
[19] DERIN, ÇILINGIROĞLU 2001, 162-163/ figs. 12, 21-22; BATMAZ 2013, 244-246/ figs. 8-15.
[20] ISIKLI, ARAS 2016, 436-437.
[21] ISIKLI, ARAS 2016, 439/ fig. 10.

lion was likely a mounted decorative or ritual element, reflecting Urartian adaptations of Assyrian artistic traditions. In contrast, the Sznak lion, though significantly smaller and cast in bronze, shares similar iconographic conventions, such as a broad snout, open mouth, and intense gaze. The key element for the chronological attribution of the shield and the lion protome is the lengthy inscription of Rusa (II), son of Argišti, which adorned the shield (CTU IV B 12-1). This inscription allows for a precise dating to the first half of the 7th century BCE.

The Bronze Lion Head Protome from Karmir-Blur

The bronze protome from Karmir-Blur[22] is a striking example of Urartian metalworking, showcasing the refined craftsmanship and symbolic iconography typical of the kingdom's elite material culture (Figure 10A). This artefact is a *lebes* attachment, features a fierce lion's head with an open mouth, exposed teeth, and a dynamic expression, emphasizing themes of power and dominance. The curved, hollow form suggests it was originally mounted onto a separate structure, possibly a cauldron, rhyton, or ceremonial standard. The lion's facial features are meticulously rendered, with deeply incised nostrils, bulging eyes, and a stylized mane, which closely aligns with other Urartian bronze lion representations, such as those found at Toprakkale, Altıntepe, and Kayalıdere. The body of the protome is decorated with intricate linear and dot patterns, resembling textile or scale motifs, a characteristic often seen in Urartian metal art. The most significant feature of this object is the presence of a short dedicatory inscription (CTU IV B 9-24), which attributes the work to Sarduri (II), son of Argišti (756–ca. 730 BCE). This inscription provides a secure chronological framework, dating the protome to the mid-8th century BCE. This firmly situates the artefact within the height of Urartian royal production, emphasizing its role as an elite ceremonial object, likely used in ritual banquets and royal feasting practices. Compared to the bronze lion from Sznak, this protome is more elongated and stylized, likely due to its function as an ornamental attachment rather than a freestanding sculpture. However, both share the same iconographic conventions, including the fierce expression and prominent snout, reflecting the continuity of Urartian artistic traditions. The protome's placement at Karmir-Blur, one of the most significant Urartian fortresses, further underscores its high-status ceremonial use, possibly linked to royal or temple rituals.

The Bronze Lion from Toprakkale

The throne from Toprakkale, one of the most significant Urartian metal artifacts, features bronze lion figures as part of its decorative and structural elements (Figure 10B)[23]. These lion representations were likely positioned as supporting figures or as symbolic protectors, reinforcing the association between Urartian royalty and divine strength. The bronze lions from Toprakkale, similar to other Urartian lion depictions, exhibit a rigid, frontal composition, with powerfully modeled musculature and stylized facial features. A comparison with the Sznak lion highlights both similarities and differences in Urartian bronze craftsmanship. While both share a compact form, a broad snout, and an open-mouthed expression, the lions from Toprakkale appear more integrated into a larger artistic program, serving as throne supports or symbolic royal guardians. In contrast, the Sznak lion, possibly a candelabrum support, was

[22] HMA N° 2783-79; PIOTROVSKY 1959, 178/ fig. 41; 1960a, 119; 1960b, 109/ Nr. 57-225; 1962, 65/ fig. 37; 1967, 44/ fig. 19; 1970, 96/ fig. 64; 1987, 46/ fig. 45; AZARPAY 1968, 38/ fig. 9; *Armenien* 1995, 104/ Nr. 116; SEIDL 2004, 37, 100/ fig. 72 (F.110); *Urartu* 2018, 170-171.
[23] BARNETT 1950, 31/ fig. 22, pls. II-VIII, XI; SEIDL 1994; SEIDL 2004, 44/ fig. 25, pls. 4-5.

designed as a freestanding decorative element, emphasizing ritual and elite ceremonial use. Despite these differences, both sets of lion figures reflect the Urartian tendency toward hierarchical and standardized representations of power. Although it is not always necessary to correlate an object directly to the foundation of the site where it was discovered, establishing a precise chronology for the so-called Throne of Toprakkale remains challenging. This difficulty is further compounded by the uncertainty surrounding the dating of Toprakkale's foundation, which fluctuates between the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. A recent chronological proposal has suggested dating the Throne of Toprakkale to the 7th century BCE, based on certain characteristic elements of Phrygian artistic repertoire[24].

The Ivory Lions from Altıntepe

Additional Urartian lion representations provide further insight into regional stylistic variations. At Altıntepe, a unique variation appears in the form of an ivory lions, likely used as part of furniture inlay or ceremonial decoration (Figure 11). One of the two lions is depicted in a seated posture, while the other is recumbent. The first lion[25], an intricately carved ivory sculpture, was likely a decorative element in elite furniture or ritual objects. Its refined detailing and carefully rendered features suggest a high level of craftsmanship, aligning with other Urartian luxury artefacts. Unlike monumental stone guardian lions, this piece showcases refined craftsmanship and a highly stylized aesthetic, emphasizing geometric patterning and intricate detailing. The lion features a rigid frontal stance, an exaggerated facial expression with wide eyes, a snarling mouth, and prominent fangs, all contributing to an aura of power and intimidation. The mane is decorated with a stylized diamond-shaped pattern, a motif reminiscent of both Neo-Assyrian and Syro-Hittite artistic traditions, illustrating Urartu's engagement in cross-cultural artistic exchanges. Additional details include a U-shaped wrinkle motif below the nose, distinct from the step-like wrinkles found in Toprakkale examples. The brow and eye region are sharply modelled, extending into a triangular forehead, while the cheekbones project outward prominently, enhancing the lion's three-dimensional form. A rare palm-leaf motif beneath the cheekbones further distinguishes this piece. Compared to the bronze lion from Sznak, the Altıntepe lion appears more geometric and ornamental, reflecting Urartian sculptural traditions favouring hieratic symmetry over naturalism. While both share symbolic associations with power and protection, the Altıntepe example, being in ivory, likely adorned luxury items rather than serving as a structural support like the Sznak lion. This distinction highlights the diverse applications of lion imagery in Urartian art, spanning from monumental architecture to elite furnishings. The second ivory lion[26] shares the same recumbent posture and exhibits similar features to the specimens from Sznak, Van, and Jerusalem, yet it presents a more dynamic and naturalistic rendering. This stylistic shift suggests a possible influence from Syro-Anatolian iconographic traditions, which often favoured a greater sense of movement and anatomical realism compared to the more rigid and hieratic Urartian representations. Despite being carved in ivory rather than cast in bronze, the Altıntepe lions shares the same intense expression and stylized features seen in other Urartian feline depictions, reinforcing the consistent iconographic role of lions in Urartian royal and

[24] BONFANTI, DAN 2021, 24-26/ fig. 11B.
[25] ÖZGÜÇ 1969, 45-47/ figs. 43-44, pls. A1, XXXVII-XLII; SEVIN 1993, 42/ fig. 39; MERHAV 1991, 263/ fig. 10.
[26] ÖZGÜÇ 1969, 42-45/ figs. 29-42, pls. XXXIV-XXXV.

ritual settings. It is not possible to establish a chronological proposal for this specimen, although a dating to the 8th century BCE could be plausible[27].

The Stone Lion Relief from Hişet

One of the most significant discoveries at the Hişet site[28] is a fragmentary basalt lion sculpture (Figure 12)[29], identified in 1974 during the construction of a water canal on the southern slope of the fortress, near the 14th-century Celme Hatun Cemetery. Measuring 2.45 m in height, 1 m in length, and 0.75 m in width, the sculpture is carved from a single block of stone and is considered only the second lion stone sculpture attributed to Urartu, alongside the fragmentary and unfinished lions from Garibin Tepe. Despite the absence of the head, which was already missing at the time of discovery, the torso remains well-preserved. The most striking feature of the sculpture is its stylized mane, which closely resembles bronze Urartian examples. The mane extends broadly between the ears, narrows towards the chin, and is divided by a central line, with symmetrical, carved curls of hair. The chest is not prominently defined, and the front legs are represented as simplified vertical projections, appearing unfinished. Scholarly comparisons have linked the Hişet lion to North Syrian and Assyrian sculptures of the 9th century BCE, particularly late Hittite productions from Carchemish, with similarities in the shoulder articulation. The mane has been compared to reliefs from Boğazköy and Malatya, further situating the sculpture within Syro-Anatolian iconographic traditions[30]. While its function as an apotropaic guardian figure is likely, probably positioned at the entrance jamb of a palatial structure, its exact chronology remains uncertain. Given the rarity of stone reliefs in Urartu[31], and considering the dated rock reliefs (CTU A 12-10) from the reign of Rusa (II), son of Argišti, such as those at Kef Kalesi, a 7th-century BCE attribution appears the most plausible.

The Stone Lions from Garibin Tepe/Alaköy

The lion sculptures from Garibin Tepe, also referred to as Alaköy Fortress, represents one of the few known Urartian stone representations of lions[32]. Discovered through illegal excavations and later transported in the Van Museum, these three-andesite sculptures were originally part of a larger architectural or monumental setting (Figure 13A). The fragmentary remains of two lions heavily damaged, exhibits stylistic features linking it to Neo-Hittite and Neo-Assyrian sculptural traditions. The most defining characteristics of the Garibin Tepe lions include a pronounced brow ridge, deeply set eyes, and a powerful jaw with an open mouth. These features bear similarities to other Urartian lion depictions, such as those from Ayanis, Toprakkale, Altıntepe, and Kayalıdere. When compared to the Sznak lion, the Garibin Tepe sculpture shares the characteristic broad snout, expressive facial modeling, and muscular emphasis typical of Urartian lion representations. However, while the Sznak lion was cast in bronze and likely served as a candelabrum support, the Garibin Tepe lion was carved in stone, with a more rigid and imposing structure that suggests a role as an apotropaic guardian figure. The stone material also allowed for a more geometric and monumental aesthetic, contrasting

[27] On the chronology of the site of Altıntepe see the discussion in DAN 2022, 57-59.
[28] On the site and the lion relief, see DAN 2025.
[29] SEVIN 1993, 565-567.
[30] SEVIN 1993, 565-567.
[31] On the few Urartian sculptures, see SEIDL 1993.
[32] On the site and the stone sculptures, see DERIN, SAĞLAMTEMIR 1998; DAN 2019, 6, 10-11/ figs. 10-12.

with the more detailed and fluid modeling of the Sznak lion. Additionally, the Garibin Tepe lion bears resemblance to the limestone lion from Ayanis, particularly in its frontal posture and stylized features. Like the limestone lion head specimen from Ayanis, the Garibin Tepe sculpture may have functioned as part of an entrance installation or a larger decorative ensemble within a Urartian administrative or religious center. Recently, in 2023, a new unfinished lion sculpture was discovered at the site during regular excavations (Figure 13B). This piece appears to be an unfinished monumental lion in a recumbent position, as indicated by the preserved attachment points of the front paws and the more finely worked rear section. Carved from a single block of andesitic stone, the sculpture exhibits a rough-hewn surface indicative of an incomplete state, but the positioning of its elements strongly aligns with other known recumbent lion figures in Urartian art. The back of the lion, which appears to be the most carefully shaped section, suggests that artisans began working on the overall form before refining the details. The remnants of the front limbs, positioned close together, support the hypothesis that this lion was meant to be depicted resting on its paws, a common iconographic feature seen in both Urartian and Neo-Assyrian monumental art. Comparisons with other Urartian lion sculptures, such as those from Ayanis, Toprakkale, and Altıntepe, reveal notable similarities in scale and form. If confirmed as a lion, this piece would align with the tradition of apotropaic guardian figures placed at palace or temple entrances, where pairs of lions often flanked doorways to symbolize protection and royal power. The presence of multiple such sculptures at Garibin Tepe suggests the possibility that this was part of a larger program of monumental decoration, possibly linked to Ayanis Fortress. The unfinished state of the sculpture raises intriguing questions about the production processes in Urartian stoneworking. Its incomplete nature may indicate a halted project, or it could reflect an *in-situ* carving that was abandoned before completion[33]. The discovery of the Garibin Tepe lion highlights the broader artistic connections between Urartu and its neighbouring regions, particularly the Neo-Hittite and Neo-Assyrian cultural spheres. While clearly influenced by these traditions, the sculpture retains distinct Urartian features, reinforcing the idea that Urartian art, despite borrowing external elements, developed its own unique visual and symbolic language. The dating of the statues from Garibin Tepe remains a subject of discussion. Their unusual proportions and unfinished state suggest a later date, likely around the mid to second half of the 7th century BCE. These sculptures represent yet another testament to the shifts in material culture, iconography, and architecture introduced by Rusa (II), son of Argišti, during the 7th century BCE. They reflect new expressions of Urartian kingship that, for various reasons, remained incomplete or were never fully developed. This perspective also helps explain the scarcity of fully three-dimensional stone sculptures from Urartian sites. Rather than an established tradition, such works may represent an innovative artistic development that emerged only in the final phases of Urartian political dominance in the region.

The Stone Lion Relief from Erzincan

Among the rare examples of Urartian monumental stone sculpture, the lion relief from Erzincan occupies a unique position, both for its iconographic features and its stylistic peculiarities (Figure 14). Carved in high relief on a rectangular basalt slab, the figure depicts a lion striding to the right, characterized by a static and rigid posture. The body is unusually thin and elongated, with short, firmly planted legs, a straight back, and a tail hanging almost

[33] For the chronology and the possible role of Garibin Tepe as a sculpture workshop, see DAN 2019.

vertically downward, ending in a stylized curl. The head is disproportionately large compared to the body and is turned outward, displaying an open mouth, prominent fangs, and a partially visible tongue, conveying a contained yet explicit sense of alertness. The mane is rendered through a series of flame-like incised motifs that cover the neck and part of the chest in a highly stylized and decorative manner. The shoulder area features two superimposed loop-shaped outlines, a distinctive element that enhances the formalized and ornamental character of the composition. The mane culminates at the top in a volute- or spiral-shaped motif stylizing the ear, a feature consistent with other Urartian lion representations. On the lion's rump, three parallel horizontal grooves are carved, flanked by an "M"- or "N"-shaped motif on the haunches, details that directly recall the decoration of the bronze lions adorning the shields of King Rusa (III), son of Erimena, from Toprakkale. This "M"-shaped stylization of the haunch muscles, and more broadly the occurrence of "M"- or "W"-shaped schematizations, find close parallels in certain elements of Late Hittite art and particularly in Assyrian reliefs of the 9th century BCE, where the "W"-shaped treatment predominates[34]. As noted by Akurgal[35], the stonecutter at Erzincan deviated slightly from traditional anatomical stylizations, inverting the conventional treatment of the haunch muscles into an "M" shape and adopting slenderer and horizontally stretched proportions for the body and neck, likely to adapt the figure to the shape and dimensions of the basalt slab. The slab itself, characterized by its considerable thickness, was almost certainly carved on-site. This peculiar rendering results in a composition that, while preserving key Urartian stylistic markers, conveys a more provincial and lifeless impression compared to the more dynamic bronze lions from the royal centres. As Van Loon has emphasized, the Erzincan relief, despite its formal rigidity, shares a close stylistic relationship with the bronze lions from Toprakkale and, more distantly, with the silver horse frontlet from Ziwiyeh, all of which are datable to around 600 BCE. This connection thus supports the idea of a cohesive Urartian artistic style during the 7th century BCE, albeit with regional variations and differing levels of craftsmanship[36]. The Erzincan relief, therefore, offers valuable insight into the diffusion and local adaptation of royal iconographic models within the peripheral areas of the Urartian kingdom, where formal conventions were preserved even as technical execution became increasingly schematic and stylized.

Other Representations of Lions in Urartian Iconography

In addition to three-dimensional sculptures and ceremonial bronzes, lion imagery was a prominent and recurrent motif across a wide variety of Urartian artistic supports, including bronze belts, wall paintings, and monumental stone reliefs. Each of these supports offers a different perspective on the role of the lion within Urartian ideological and visual culture, reflecting both the adaptability and the standardization of this symbol throughout the kingdom's history. On Urartian bronze belts, lions are among the most frequently depicted animals, either in walking or rampant positions. The compositions are generally repetitive, arranged in friezes framed by floral or geometric borders, often associated with other powerful animals such as bulls or mythical creatures. In the vast majority of cases, the lions are rendered with rigid postures, schematized musculature, and standardized profiles, emphasizing symmetry and ornamental regularity over narrative dynamism. This static mode of representation reflects a broader tendency in Urartian art to favour hierarchical and

[34] AKURGAL 1961, 31-32.
[35] AKURGAL 1959, 32.
[36] VAN LOON 1966, 77, 118.

formalized imagery, particularly in royal contexts. However, some exceptional belts, such as those from Kayalıdere, Burmageçit, Nor Aresh, and Yerevan, break this pattern by incorporating more dynamic scenes of lion hunting, clearly inspired by the Assyrian models of Aššurnasirpal II. In these rare instances, lions are depicted mid-attack, with curved bodies, raised tails, and contorted limbs, attempting to replicate the fluid movement and drama typical of Neo-Assyrian royal iconography (Figure 15). These belts, although few in number, suggest that a more narrative and lively artistic tradition was still accessible within Urartu, particularly in its earlier phases[37]. Further evidence of the use of lion imagery in portable artefacts comes from the bronze lion-shaped plaques from Karmir-blur[38] and the plaques from Oshakan[39]. The metal plaques from Karmir-blur show lions in a rigid walking stance, with highly stylized manes rendered through repeated flame-like curls, strong emphasis on the paw joints, and incised decorative patterns along the body (Figure 16A). In contrast, the clay plaques from Oshakan, display more schematic lions framed within dotted borders, combining a strong stylization of details with a simplified, almost heraldic conception of the animal figure (Figure 16B)[40]. Although differing in execution, both groups of plaques reflect a similar approach to lion imagery: emphasizing formal symmetry, symbolic presence, and decorative integration rather than naturalistic depiction. Their stylistic features further underscore the dissemination of royal iconographic models into more popular or provincial contexts. A related but distinct treatment of lion imagery is found in the wall paintings of the Erebuni fortress. Here, lions are depicted in symmetrical compositions, facing one another across the concave sides of a square panel. The influence of Assyrian architectural decoration is unmistakable in the organization of space, yet the rendering of the lions remains distinctively Urartian. Their bodies are highly stylized, with exaggeratedly curled tails, flame-like manes, and flattened, schematic anatomies that suppress any sense of naturalistic movement. The juxtaposition of opposing lions within a geometric frame emphasizes balance and formal order rather than action or aggression, aligning perfectly with the ideological need to present the ruler's power as eternal and unshakeable. In monumental stone reliefs, the use of lion imagery reaches another level of symbolic and architectural importance. At Kef Kalesi, the lions are presented as mounts for winged genii in a ritual context, directly confronting the walls of a fortified city (Figure 17)[41]. Although they preserve some dynamism, these lions are characterized by a notable stylization of form, particularly in the rendering of their manes, which are reduced to schematic flame-like curls, and in the rigid arrangement of their limbs. The associated inscriptions of Rusa, son of Argišti, securely date these reliefs to the final phases of the Urartian kingdom, around the late 7th century BCE. The visual vocabulary employed at Kef Kalesi reflects an advanced stage of the process of artistic schematization, where iconographic meaning takes precedence over any attempt at realism. The progressive evolution from dynamic to static lion imagery in Urartian art is not merely a stylistic phenomenon but must be understood in light

[37] On the Urartian belts and these iconographical aspects, see DAN, BONFANTI 2022b.
[38] HMA N° 2783-192; 2783-193; *Urartu* 2018, 38-39.
[39] HMA N° 2747-117/1, 2; ESAYAN, KALANTARYAN 1988, 136/ fig. 4.
[40] The two plaques with lions from Oshakan were found among the grave goods of Tomb No. 59 in the necropolis, excavated during the archaeological campaigns carried out between 1971 and 1983 under the direction of S. A. Esayan and A. A. Kalantaryan. They consist of small square plaques made of well-fired clay, carefully modelled and decorated in the centre with the figure of a lion within a dotted frame. Both plaques were covered with a thin gold foil, traces of which were still clearly visible at the time of discovery (ESAYAN, KALANTARYAN 1988, 77-80, Colour plate 4).
[41] On these pillars, see BILGIÇ, ÖĞÜN 1964; SEIDL 1993, 559-569/ fig. 3, pl. 98.2; DAN 2015, 31-32, 93.

of changing political and ideological imperatives. The earliest surviving representations, such as those on the Anzaf shield, present lions in active poses, participating in complex narrative scenes of battle and divine hierarchy. In contrast, from the reign of Argišti, son of Minua, onwards, a deliberate trend toward static, hieratic representations emerges, with lions serving less as actors in dynamic narratives and more as timeless emblems of power and divine favour[42]. This transition reflects a profound shift in the conception of kingship and authority within Urartian ideology, where the emphasis moved away from heroic action toward the visual affirmation of eternal, immutable sovereignty. Thus, across belts, wall paintings, monumental reliefs, and portable furnishings such as the plaques from Karmir-blur and Oshakan, the lion stands as a constant yet evolving symbol in Urartian visual culture, a figure whose changing depiction mirrors the broader transformations in the kingdom's artistic language, political messaging, and cultural identity during the course of the 9th to 7th centuries BCE.

The Alabaster Podium of the Temple at Ayanis

Within the main cella of the temple at Ayanis, a monumental alabaster podium was discovered, positioned against the east wall and serving as the central cultic element of the chamber. The structure, measuring approximately 1.75 × 0.75 m, was constructed above the mudbrick floor and supported by wooden beams and rectangular mudbrick blocks oriented north–south. Its surfaces were originally covered with alabaster slabs, 0.18 m thick on the top and sides, forming a continuous decorative casing. Although many panels were found fragmented, particularly those covering the lateral faces, several remain in situ, preserving extraordinary examples of Urartian relief and incised imagery. The podium was adorned with rows of mythological and divine figures, incised on the alabaster surfaces and organized into a highly regular ornamental composition. As Çilingiroğlu describes[43], the decoration was structured by spiral branches of sacred trees bearing cones and pomegranates, which created a grid-like pattern of "windows" framing the figures of winged lions, eagle-headed lions, and hybrid deities. Each figure occupied a discrete panel, emphasizing symmetry and repetition, a hallmark of Urartian monumental design. The preserved slabs (Figure 18) show seven horizontal lines of figures, with five vertical columns forming a coherent narrative register around the podium. Particularly striking are the winged lions, among the finest examples of Urartian glyptic and sculptural vocabulary translated into stone. They are shown in profile, mouths open and tongues extended, with visible teeth and carefully delineated wrinkles around the muzzle and nose, features closely paralleling those of the bronze lion protomes from Ayanis and Karmir-Blur. Their bodies are compact and muscular, the front legs marked by an engraved double contour and the chest defined by an upside-down tulip motif, while the hindquarters combine triangular and ellipsoidal patterns suggesting stylized musculature. The lions' short, upright necks differ from the elongated proportions of other Urartian lions, imparting an impression of tension and energy. The feathered wings rise from the waist area, spreading upward in fan-shaped sections accentuated by incised linear hatching. These iconographic and stylistic features firmly root the Ayanis lions within the canonical Urartian artistic repertoire while simultaneously reflecting local workshop variations. The iconographic context of the podium is equally significant. Alongside the lions, the alabaster slabs depict

[42] On these aspects, see DAN 2023, 207-212.
[43] ÇILINGIROĞLU 2001, 42-44.

eagle-headed lions, winged genii, and divine hybrids, arranged antithetically on either side of sacred trees. This composition, combining vegetal and animal motifs, expresses the Urartian conception of divine order and cosmic protection, a theme also evident in wall paintings from Erebuni and bronze belts from Kayalıdere. The lions, in particular, act as guardians of the sacred space, mediating between the earthly and the divine spheres through their placement around the altar. Their formal parallels with the bronze lion head protome from the Ayanis shield reinforce their symbolic role as emblems of royal power and divine favour. Traces of gilded elements, bronze nails, and inlaid rosettes, originally attached to the front face of the podium, indicate that parts of the decoration combined polychrome and metallic components, possibly featuring gold-plated appliqués of lions and bulls. Although most of these attachments were lost to looting and the later destruction of the temple, the surviving holes and residues confirm a richly embellished surface. The presence of such mixed-media adornment places the Ayanis podium within the broader Urartian tradition of ritual furniture and sacred thrones, such as those from Toprakkale and Van, but adapted here to a stationary altar used for cultic offerings. The overall design thus reflects a fusion of architectural, religious, and artistic functions: the podium not only served as a sacrificial table but also as a symbolic microcosm of the divine world, where lions, genii, and sacred trees coexisted in perfect order. The exceptional craftsmanship of the alabaster carving, together with the iconographic sophistication of the winged lions, makes this podium one of the most significant expressions of Urartian religious art in the 7th century BCE.

Chronological Overview of the Sznak Lion

The bronze lion from Sznak has been tentatively dated to the 8th century BCE based on stylistic comparisons with other Urartian bronze lions, particularly those from Van and Jerusalem, which bear inscriptions of King Minua (r. late 9th–early 8th century BCE). The presence of similar candelabrum-support lions associated with Minua strongly supports this dating. Additionally, the Tanahat stele, attributed to Argišti (II), son of Rusa (late 8th century BCE), provides further evidence of Urartian activities in the Syunik region during this period. However, the dating of the Sznak lion has been debated. Yesayan and Shahinyan (1962) originally proposed a later chronology, placing it between the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, likely due to its stylistic similarities with later Urartian and post-Urartian lion representations. Furthermore, some morphological features of the Sznak lion align with later Urartian productions from the 7th century BCE, particularly the lions from Ayanis and Toprakkale, linked to the reign of Rusa II (r. ca. 685–645 BCE). These later pieces often exhibit a more rigid and standardized composition, a characteristic that may also be observed in the Sznak lion. Considering these elements, the most plausible dating for the Sznak lion remains the 8th century BCE, possibly in the reign of Minua or one of the other rulers of the 8th century, but with some stylistic traits hinting at a continuity of artistic traditions that persisted into the 7th century BCE. The alternative hypothesis proposed by Yesayan and Shahinyan, suggesting a later date in the 7th–6th centuries BCE, cannot be entirely ruled out, though it remains less supported by comparative evidence. Further metallurgical analysis and contextual archaeological data could help refine this chronological attribution.

The Limestone Lion Head from Sippar: a Comparison with Urartian Lion Representations

The limestone lion head from Sippar/Abu Happa, housed in the British Museum, is an outstanding example of Neo-Assyrian monumental sculpture, originally part of the Shamash Temple at Sippar (Figure 19)[44]. This lion head, carved from limestone, was likely affixed to an architectural element and served as a guardian figure within the temple complex. It was designed to embody divine protection, royal authority, and the power of the Assyrian ruler, a role commonly attributed to lions in Mesopotamian and Near Eastern art. This sculpture is distinguished by several notable features, including its deeply recessed eye sockets, which originally contained inlays, possibly made of semi-precious stones or colored glass, to enhance its piercing gaze. The nose is wrinkled, the nostrils are flared, and the whiskers are carefully incised, elements that contribute to its vivid expression of dominance and watchfulness. The mouth is slightly open, revealing finely sculpted teeth and fangs, details that reinforce its protective role. The head bears a cuneiform inscription mentioning King Esarhaddon (680–669 BC) and his father Sennacherib, which firmly links the artifact to Assyrian royal patronage. A crucial aspect of this inscription suggests that the Sippar lion head may not have been originally carved for the Shamash Temple but was instead probably transported to Sippar from Nineveh[45]. The text states that the artifact was presented by Sennacherib to his son Esarhaddon, as crown-prince, in the later 680, raising the possibility that it was originally created for an Assyrian royal or religious context in Nineveh and later relocated to Sippar, likely as part of Esarhaddon's restoration efforts following the destruction of Babylon in 689 BCE made by Sennacherib. This relocation aligns with Assyrian practices of repurposing royal or sacred objects as part of their imperial ideology, demonstrating the political significance of lion imagery beyond its religious function. Despite the differences in material and scale, the Sippar lion shares striking similarities with Urartian bronze lions, included the bronze lion from Sznak. Both sculptures emphasize a broad, powerful snout, an intense gaze, and an open-mouthed expression, conveying strength and vigilance. However, the Sippar lion's facial articulation is deeper and more detailed, with an emphasis on incised whiskers and nasal ridges, whereas the Sznak lion exhibits a smoother, more stylized execution. This distinction reflects the differences in artistic conventions between the Neo-Assyrian and Urartian sculptural traditions, while Assyrian iconography sought to achieve expressive realism, Urartian artisans balanced geometric stylization with naturalistic details. The most significant distinction between the two lions is their function. The Sippar lion was an architectural element, likely positioned at the entrance of the Ebabbar Temple as a guardian and protector, reinforcing both religious and royal authority in a static, monumental setting. By contrast, the Sznak lion was part of a functional object, integrated into a mobile, elite ceremonial setting, possibly illuminating royal feasts or temple rituals. This contrast highlights a fundamental difference in how Assyrians and Urartians deployed lion imagery, the Assyrians favored monumental, propagandistic displays, while Urartians incorporated these symbols into portable, high-status objects used in aristocratic or ritual contexts. Despite these differences, the similarities between the Sippar lion and Urartian bronze lions suggest a shared artistic vocabulary, likely influenced by Assyria's cultural and artistic dominance in the Iron Age Near East. The broad, muscular snout, the flared nostrils, and the aggressive expression found in both sculptures

[44] *Babylonian and Assyrian Antiquities* 1922, 188; HALL 1928, 177/ pl. LIX; BARNETT, WISEMAN 1960, 56-57/ no. 26; LEICHTY 1986, 299; COLLON 1995, 167/ fig. 134.
[45] SEARIGHT *et alii* 2008, 104/ n° 650.

point to a common iconographic tradition, which Urartian artisans may have adapted to their own artistic sensibilities. Ultimately, the comparison between the Sippar lion and the Sznak lion underscores both the universal significance of lion imagery in ancient royal and religious iconography and the distinct ways in which different civilizations, Assyria and Urartu, adapted this motif to their artistic and political contexts. While the Sippar lion stood as a stationary guardian within a major Mesopotamian temple, the Sznak lion functioned in a more intimate, mobile ceremonial environment, reinforcing its role as both a protective symbol and an elite object within Urartian aristocratic spaces. This analysis highlights how the Assyrian and Urartian artistic traditions, though shaped by different cultural priorities, remained deeply interconnected, sharing and reinterpreting visual symbols of power and divine favor across their respective artistic landscapes.

A Scythian Echo of Assyrian-Urartian Iconography?

Among the various comparative elements discussed in this study, two gold lion-headed fittings from Kelermes, attributed to a Scythian context and dated by Galanina to shortly after the third quarter of the 7th century BCE, deserve special mention. (Figure 20)[46]. Despite originating in a mobile, steppe-based cultural *milieu* and emerging in a different artistic environment, the pieces display striking formal affinities with Urartian bronze lion heads and, indirectly, with Neo-Assyrian prototypes. The fittings (Catalogue Nos. 35 and 36), discovered in Kurgan 3/S, consist of elongated gold tubes decorated in repoussé with a powerful composition of lion muzzles, ram heads, and globular vegetal motifs, enriched with inlays of red amber. The lion's broad snout, open mouth, and emphasized canines closely recall the bronze lion from Sznak, the protomes from Toprakkale, and the shield lions of Ayanis. Another two objects, corresponding to No. 91 and 92 in Galanina's catalogue and therefore distinct from the two lion-headed fittings discussed above, represent of decorative terminals in the form of chased lion heads mounted on the crossbars of stools or chairs of Assyro-Babylonian type, serving as golden finials for prestigious furniture elements. Comparable pieces, such as the silver bull's head from a burial near Krivoroj Rog, also belong to this category of luxury fittings, while the ivory lion head from Kurgan 4 at Nartan may represent a later development of the same tradition within the Early Scythian period. These parallels strongly suggest that the Kelermes gold fittings, too, once adorned high-status ceremonial furniture, thus continuing a well-established Near Eastern tradition of emphasizing royal and divine authority through animal-headed terminals[47]. Although the rendering of the lion's face does not strictly follow Assyrian or Urartian sculptural canons, the overall iconographic scheme is unmistakably indebted to Near Eastern royal bestiary traditions. Scholars have proposed various interpretations of the object's function, including that of a belt clasp. However, the most persuasive hypothesis identifies it as part of a ceremonial Assyrian-Urartian-style throne ensemble, adapted into Scythian elite material culture. This interpretation is reinforced by clear formal and decorative parallels with objects from Ziwiye, and particularly Karmir-Blur, where similar pomegranate terminals, rosettes, and vegetal motifs appear in both royal and ritual contexts[48]. It is also worth noting that the globular elements traditionally identified as pomegranates might alternatively be interpreted as opium poppy capsules, another potent symbol within ancient Eurasian ritual

[46] GALANINA 1997, 179.
[47] GALANINA 1997, 155/ pl. 4, 27.
[48] GALANINA 1997, 155/ figs. 31,20; 32,16.17.33; Catalogue 35-36.

iconography[49]. The ram heads, which terminate the fitting, find close analogies in a quiver clasp from the same site, further suggesting an integrated symbolic program rooted in a shared iconographic vocabulary. Thus, while the Kelermes lion fitting displays some local adaptations, such as a more naturalistic and dynamic rendering, its conceptual framework is fully aligned with the symbolic language of royal power and divine protection as articulated in the Assyrian-Urartian world. In this sense, these fittings may be seen as tangible evidence of the transfer and reinterpretation of royal iconography from the urban palatial contexts of the Near East to the mobile aristocratic milieu of the steppe, demonstrating how the visual language of power was appropriated, transformed, and perpetuated in new sociopolitical environments. This hypothesis aligns with broader patterns of cross-cultural interaction linking the Iranian plateau, the South Caucasus, and the Eurasian steppes during the Middle Iron Age. It also underscores Urartu's role not only as a recipient of Assyrian models but as an active agent in their transformation and transmission. Notably, some of the iconographic and stylistic features observed in this Kelermes object, such as formal symmetry, compact dynamism, and hieratic stylization, would later find powerful expression in the imperial art of the Achaemenid world, further attesting to the long-lasting legacy of these visual traditions.

Beyond Imitation: the Urartian Adaptation of Assyrian Royal Iconography

The bronze lion from Sznak and its broader artistic context offer a remarkable lens through which to examine the complex cultural interactions between Assyria and Urartu. These two great Iron Age states, often portrayed solely as military rivals, were in fact deeply interconnected through shared visual traditions, ideological borrowings, and artistic exchanges. While the political tensions between the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Kingdom of Urartu resulted in centuries of conflict, their artistic and cultural spheres were far from isolated from one another. Instead, Assyrian visual and ideological motifs found their way into Urartian court culture, where they were selectively adapted and transformed to suit local needs. The process of Assyrianization in Urartu was neither passive nor uniform. Rather than directly replicating Assyrian artistic models, Urartian artisans engaged in a deliberate process of reinterpretation, filtering Assyrian forms through their own artistic sensibilities and integrating them into a distinctive Urartian framework. This is particularly evident in the treatment of lion imagery, which played a prominent role in both Assyrian and Urartian royal ideology but was adapted in distinct ways within each tradition.

In Assyria, lions were primarily depicted in monumental contexts, particularly in the famous lion hunt reliefs of Aššurbanipal, where the king was shown slaying lions as a symbolic act of dominion over nature and chaos. This visual language reinforced the absolute power of the Assyrian king, positioning him as the sole force capable of subduing the wild and imposing divine order on the world. Additionally, Assyrian temple and palace architecture prominently featured lion sculptures, such as the limestone lion head from Sippar, which functioned as guardian figures at the entrances of sacred and royal spaces. In Urartu, however, lions were not depicted as hunted beasts but rather as symbols of protection, divine strength, and royal legitimacy[50]. Unlike in Assyria, where lion imagery was monumental and static, Urartian artisans incorporated lions into portable, functional objects, such as bronze candelabrum

[49] DAN, BONFANTI 2022a.

[50] At least regarding royal iconography, there are examples of Urartian bronze belts from non-royal or popular production that depict lion hunts following iconographic models clearly derived from the lion hunts of Ashurbanipal. On this, see DAN, BONFANTI 2022b, 97-99/ fig. 15.

supports, shield decorations, and furniture fittings, used in elite and religious ceremonies. This fundamental difference reflects the broader divergence in how Assyrian and Urartian rulers conceptualized their authority, while the Assyrian king demonstrated his power through the conquest and destruction of nature, the Urartian king embodied strength by integrating protective and divine symbols into courtly and sacred spaces.

The bronze lion from Sznak exemplifies this uniquely Urartian approach. Functioning as a candelabrum support, it was likely used in palatial or temple settings, where it both illuminated elite spaces and symbolically reinforced the power of the Urartian ruler and the divine protection of the gods. Yet, despite its clearly Urartian function and execution, the Sznak lion shares notable stylistic features with Assyrian lion representations, particularly with the Sippar lion. Both sculptures exhibit a broad snout, an intense gaze, an open mouth with exposed canines, and carefully articulated musculature, indicating that Urartian artisans were familiar with and influenced by Assyrian sculptural traditions. This cross-cultural influence is not limited to Sznak alone. The candelabrum-support lions from Van and Jerusalem, the shield-mounted lion protome from Ayanis, and the bronze lions from Toprakkale all suggest a shared artistic vocabulary with Assyria. However, despite the clear similarities, Urartian lion sculptures retain distinct features that set them apart from their Assyrian counterparts. Compared to the more naturalistic and expressively aggressive Assyrian lions, Urartian lions tend to be more compact, geometric, and rhythmically stylized, with smoother facial transitions and less exaggerated musculature. The evidence that the Sippar lion may have been relocated from Nineveh to Sippar raises further questions about the mobility of artistic traditions and the ways in which visual symbols were repurposed across the Assyrian Empire. If this relocation did indeed take place, it would highlight how monumental art was not always fixed in place but could be recontextualized to serve new ideological functions, much like how Urartu reinterpreted Assyrian lion imagery within its own artistic tradition. Ultimately, the bronze lion from Sznak, and Urartian lion representations more broadly, provide an invaluable case study for understanding how artistic exchange between Assyria and Urartu functioned in practice. Rather than a one-directional imposition of Assyrian motifs onto Urartian art, the evidence suggests a more fluid and dynamic process of artistic adaptation, in which Urartian rulers and artisans selected, modified, and integrated Assyrian forms to align with their own aesthetic, functional, and ideological priorities. The Urartians, despite being politically and militarily overshadowed by the Assyrians, did not merely imitate imperial visual traditions but actively reshaped them. They adapted Assyrian iconographic models into portable, high-status objects used in courtly and religious settings, allowing them to retain a distinct Urartian artistic identity while simultaneously engaging with the dominant visual language of their time. Thus, the bronze lion from Sznak stands as evidence to the complexity of cultural interactions in the ancient Near East, where symbols of power and divinity were not static but could be reinterpreted, repurposed, and transformed across different political and artistic traditions. It embodies both Urartu's ability to absorb and modify Assyrian artistic elements and the kingdom's unique approach to expressing royal authority through visual culture. Far from being a mere peripheral adaptation of Assyrian art, Urartian lion representations reflect a sophisticated and independent artistic tradition, demonstrating how the kingdom of Urartu asserted its identity while engaging with the broader cultural currents of the Near Eastern world. To conclude this contribution, it is possible to propose, based on the comparisons presented in this text, a dating for the Sznak lion cub to an undetermined moment in the 8th century BCE. This is primarily supported by comparisons with the lion cubs probably

originating from Aznavurtepe, three of which are associated with an object bearing an inscription of Minua. Another aspect that could help reinforce this dating is that the only other epigraphic document from the area attributable to Urartu is the stele of Tanahat, which bears an inscription of Argišti (II), son of Rusa (CTU A 11-3). This inscription attests to Urartian activities in the region and dates to the late 8th century BCE. Moreover, the later productions of the 7th century BCE, often accompanied by inscriptions or characterized by specific morphological and iconographic features, seem to belong to the time of Rusa (II), son of Argišti, or later. This period witnessed significant transformations within the Urartian state, of which only the earliest signs are visible, marking what could be considered the emergence of a distinctly Urartian style. This style progressively distanced itself from its original Urartian model, developing new forms of expression in architecture, iconography, and material culture, although these remained largely undeveloped.

Acknowledgements

The research was carried out with the financial support of the Science Committee of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia, within the framework of the research project "*The Archaeological Heritage of Syunik: Museums, Collections, and Community Engagement*" (25YR-6A001). The authors of this study would like to express their gratitude to the Director of the "Cultural Center named after Gusan Ashot", Ani Arushanyan, Senior researcher at the Goris Museum of Local Lore and History, Vardan Sargsyan and the museum staff Lilya Harutyunyan for their invaluable support. This contribution was jointly conceived by both authors. Specifically, Roberto Dan wrote "*Comparative Analysis: The Sznak Lion and Other Urartian Lion Representations*", "*Chronological Overview of the Sznak Lion*", "*The Limestone Lion Head from Sippar: A Comparison with Urartian Lion Representations*", and "*A Scythian Echo of Assyrian-Urartian Iconography*?" while Nzhdeh Yeranyan wrote "*The Lion as a Symbol in Ancient Near Eastern and Urartian Art*" and "*Morphological and decorative analysis of the lion from Sznak*". The **"***Introduction*" and "*Beyond Imitation: The Urartian Adaptation of Assyrian Royal and Religious Iconography*" were jointly written by both authors. All images were produced by the authors except where otherwise indicated.

References

Armenien. Wiederentdeckung einer alten Kulturlandschaft. 1995. Exhibition catalogue, 14 January – 17 April 1995, Bochum: Museum Bochum.

Au pied du Mont Ararat. Splendeurs de l'Arménie antique. 2007. Catalogue of the Exhibition, Arles: Éditions du musée de l'Arles et de la Provence antiques.

Guide to the Babylonian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum. 1922. London.

Urartu. The Kingdom of Van. 2018. Exhibition catalogue, Yerevan.

AKURGAL, E. 1959. Urartäische Kunst, *Anatolia* 4: 77-114.

AKURGAL, E. 1961. *Die Kunst Anatoliens von Homer bis Alexander*, Berlin: Walter De Gruyter.

ALBENDA, P. 1972. Ashurnasirpal II Lion Hunt Relief BM 124534, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 31: 167-178.

ALBENDA, P. 1974. Lions on Assyrian Wall Reliefs, *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 6: 1-27.

AZARPAY, G. 1968. *Urartian Arts and Artifacts. A Chronological Study*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

BARNETT, R.D. 1950. The Excavations of the British Museum at Toprak Kale, near Van, *Iraq* 12: 1-42.

BARNETT, R. 1976. *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668-627 B.C.)*, London: British Museum Publications.

BARNETT, R. D., WISEMAN, D.J. 1960. *Fifty Masterpieces of Ancient Near Eastern Art*, London: British Museum Press.

BATMAZ, A. 2013. A Lion-Headed Shield from Ayanis: An Identifier of the Urartian Culture?. In: L. Bombardieri, A. D'Agostino, G. Guarducci, V. Orsi, S. Valentini (eds.), *SOMA 2012. Identity and Connectivity: Proceedings of the 16th Symposium on Mediterranean Archaeology, Florence, Italy, 1–3 March 2012*, Volume I, British Archaeological Reports International Series 2581 (I), Oxford: Archaeopress, 243-252.

BILGIÇ, E., ÖĞÜN, B. 1964. Excavations at Kef Kalesi of Adilcevaz, 1964, *Anadolu/Anatolia* 8: 93-127.

BONFANTI, A.S., DAN, R. 2021. From Phrygia to Urartu. The Phrygian Belts Discovered in Toprakkale/Rusaḫinili Qilbani=kai and the Relations between Urartu and Phrygia, *East & West* n.s. 2(61) No. 1: 7-30.

BOYSAL, Y. 1961. Anzavur'da definecilerin meydana çıkardığı Urartu eserleri, *Belleten* 25: 199-212.

BURNEY, C.A. 1966. A First Season of Excavations at the Urartian Citadel of Kayalidere, *Anatolian Studies* 16: 55-111.

ÇILINGIROĞLU, A. 2001 Temple Area. In: A. Çilingiroğlu, M. Salvini (eds.), *Ayanis I. Ten Years' Excavations at Rusaḫinili Eiduruku-kai 1989-1998*, Documenta Asiana VI, Roma: CNR Instituto per gli Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici, 37-65.

COLLINS, B.J. 2002. *A history of the animal world in the ancient Near East*, Leiden: Brill.

COLLINS, P. 2008. *Assyrian Palace Sculptures*, London: British Museum Press.

COLLON, D. 1995. *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

CORNELIUS, I. 1989. The Lion in the Art of Ancient Near East. A Study of Selected Motifs, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 15: 53–85.

DAN, R. 2015. *From the Armenian Highland to Iran. A Study on the Relations between the Kingdom of Urartu and the Achaemenid Empire*, Serie Orientale Roma n.s. 4, Roma: Scienze e Lettere.

DAN, R. 2019. The Urartian Site of Garibin Tepe/Alaköy, Van, Turkey, *Iran and the Caucasus* 23: 1-16.

DAN, R. 2022. Aznavurtepe/Kot Tepe: a 9th-8th Century BCE Urartian Fortress in the Patnos Plain, Turkey. In: R. Dan, R. Francia, M.C. Trémouille (eds.), *Studia Hethitica, Hurritica et Urartaica 1*, Serie Orientale Roma n.s. 33, Roma: ISMEO, 37-73.

DAN, R. 2023. *Studies on the Architecture and Archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire. Dynamics of interaction and transmission between centre and periphery*, Serie Orientale Roma n.s. 35, Roma: ISMEO.

DAN, R., 2025. The Hişet fortress in (V)ostan/Gevaş: An Urartian, Arsacid and Medieval site on the southern shore of Lake Van, *Ancient West & East* 24, 23-42.

DAN, R., BONFANTI, A. 2022a. Opium for the Urartian kings? Some considerations on an inscribed object from Karmir-blur (CTU B 8-28) and on the ašiḫusi building in Urartian architecture, *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 59: 19-37.

DAN, R., BONFANTI, A.S. 2022b. Between Local Traditions and Assyria. New Perspectives on the So-called "Urartian" Belts. In: R. Dan, R. Francia, M.C. Trémouille (eds.), *Studia Hethitica, Hurritica et Urartaica 1*, Serie Orientale Roma n.s. 33, Roma: ISMEO, 75-108.

DAN, R., YERANYAN, N., BONFANTI, A.S., POGHOSYAN, A. 2024. *The Urartian Royal Bowls*, Yerevan: History Museum of Armenia.

DERIN, Z., ÇILINGIROĞLU, A. 2001. Armour and Weapons. In: A. Çilingiroğlu, M. Salvini (eds.), *Ayanis I. Ten Years' Excavations at Rusahinili Eiduruku-kai 1989-1998*, Documenta Asiana VI, Roma: CNR Instituto per gli Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici, 155-187.

DERIN, Z., SAĞLAMTEMIR, H. 1998. Alaköy Kalesi ve Kale'de Bulunan Urartu Heykelleri, *Belleten* LXII/233: 15-24.

DICK, M.B. 2006. The Neo-Assyrian royal lion hunt and Yahweh's answer to job, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 125(2): 243-270.

ESAYAN, S. 1972. On the Issue of the Archaeological Study of Zangezur, *Lraber Hasarakakan Gitutyunneri*, 4: 64-73 (in Armenian).

ESAYAN, S.A., KALANTARYAN, A.A. (eds.) 1988. *Ošakan I. Osnovni Resultati Raskopok 1971-1983*, Akademii Nauk Armanskoi SSR, Archeologičeskie raskopki v Armenii 18, Erevan.

ESAYAN, S., SHAHINYAN, A. 1962, Arkheologicheskiye nakhodki v Zangezure [Archaeological Finds in Zangezur], *Sovetskaya arkheologiya*, 3: 199-208.

GALANINA, L.K. 1997. *Die Kurgane von Kelermes. »Königsgräber« der frühskythisehen Zeit,* Steppenvölker Eurasien, Band I, Moscau: Institut für allgemeine Geschichte der Russischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Zentrum für erforschung Studien der alten Zivilisationen.

HALL, H.R. 1928, *Babylonian and Assyrian Sculpture in the British Museum*, London: British Museum Press.

HOFFMANN, H. 1960. The Rusa Candelabrum, *The Illustrated London News* 19 Nov. 1960, 896.

IŞIKLI, M., ARAS, O. 2016. Ayanis Aslanı. In: E. Dündar, Ş. Aktaş, M. Koçak, M., S. Erkoç (eds.), *Havva İşkan'a Armağan LYKIARKHISSA Festschrit für Havva İşkan*, İstanbul: Ege Yayınları, 431-444.

LEICHTY, E. 1986, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum: Volume VI: Tablets from Sippar, I*, London: British Museum Press.

MERHAV, R. 1991. Secular and Cultic Furniture, Thrones, Footrests, and Tables candelabra. In: R. Merhav (ed.), *Urartu. A Metalworking Center in the First Millennium B.C.E.*, Jerusalem: Israel Museum.

MERHAV, R., RUDER, A. 1991. The Construction and Production of a Monumental Bronze Candelabrum of King Menua of Urartu. In: A. Çilingiroğlu, D.H. French (eds.), *Anatolian Iron Ages. The Proceedings of the Second Anatolian Iron Ages Colloquium held at İzmir, 4-8 May 1987*, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Monograph 13, Oxford: Oxbow Monograph, 75-96.

MUSLUBAŞ, I. 1983. Ilk demir gag uygarliklari, *Anadolu Mediniyetleri* I: 259-303.

ÖZGÜÇ, T. 1969. *Altıntepe II, Tombs, Storehouse and Ivories*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi.

PIOTROVSKY, B.B. 1959. *Vanskoje carstvo (Urartu)*, Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Oriental Literature.

PIOTROVSKY, B.B. 1960a. Bronzovye izdelija s nadpisjami Sarduri II iz raskopok na Karmirblure, In: V.V. Struve (ed.), *Issledovanija po istorii kul'tury narodov Vostoka. Sbornik v cest' Akademika I.A. Orbeli*, Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo vostochnoy literatury, 119-122.

PIOTROVSKY, B.B. 1960b. Urartskie nadpisi iz raskopok Karmir-Blura 1939-1958, *Epigrafika Vostoka*, 13: 105-109.

PIOTROVSKY, B.B. 1962. *Iskusstvo Urartu VIII-VI vv do n.e.*, Leningrad: Izd-vo Gos. Ėrmitazha.

PIOTROVSKY, B.B. 1967. *Urartu: The Kingdom of Van and its Art*, London: Evelyn Adams and Mackay.

PIOTROVSKY, B.B. 1970. *Karmir-blur. Al'bom*, Leningrad: Avrova.

PIOTROVSKY, B.B. 1987. *Tesori d'Eurasia. 2000 anni di Storia in 70 anni di Archeologia Sovietica*, Milano: Mondatori.

READE, J. 2013. *Assyrian sculpture*, London: The British Museum Press.

SALVINI, M. 1991. Una nuova iscrizione urartea, *Orientalia*, 60: 344-346.

SALVINI, M. 2012. *Corpus dei Testi Urartei IV. Iscrizioni su bronzi, argilla e altri supporti; nuove iscrizioni su pietra; paleografia generale*, Documenta Asiana 8, Roma (= CTU IV).

SALVINI, M. 2018. *Corpus dei Testi Urartei, Vol. V, Revisione delle epigrafi e nuovi testi su pietra e roccia (CTU A), Dizionario urarteo, Schizzo grammaticale della lingua Urartea*, Paris (= CTU).

SEARIGHT, A., READE, J., FINKEL, I. 2008, *Assyrian Stone Vessels and Related Material in the British Museum*, London: British Museum Press.

SEIDL, U. 1993. Urartäische Bauskulpturen. In: M.J. Mellink, E. Porada, T. Özgüç (eds.), *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and its Neighbors. Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüç*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 557-564.

SEIDL, U. 1994. Der Thron von Toprakkale. Ein neuer Rekonstruktionsversuch, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, 27: 67-84.

SEIDL, U. 2004. *Bronzekunst Urartus*, Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern.

SEVIN, V. 1993. An Urartian Lion from Gevaş, Van. In: M.J. Mellink, E. Porada, T. Özgüç (eds.), *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and its Neighbors. Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüç*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 565-567.

STRAWN, B.A. 2005. *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 212, Fribourg: Academic Press.

ULANOWSKI, K. 2015. The Metaphor of the Lion in Mesopotamian and Greek Civilization. In: R. Rollinger, E. van Dongen (eds.), *Mesopotamia in the Ancient World. Impact, Continuities, Parallels, Melammu Symposia* 7, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 255-284.

VAN LOON, M.N. 1966. *Urartian Art. Its Distinctive Traits in the Light of New Excavations*, Istanbul: Nederlands Historish-Archaeologisch Institut.

WATANABE, C.E. 2000. The lion metaphor in the Mesopotamian Royal context, *Topoi. Orient-Occident*. Les animaux et les hommes dans le monde syro-mésopotamien aux époques historiques, Supplément 2: 399-409.

WATANABE, C.E. 2002. *Animal symbolism in Mesopotamia: a contextual approach*, Wien: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien.

XNKIKYAN, O.S. 2002. *Syunik During the Bronze and the Iron Ages*, Barrington: Mayreni Publishing.

YESAYAN S.A., SHAHINYAN A.N. 1962. Archaeological Finds in Zangezur, *Sovetskaya Arkheologiya*, 3: 199-208 (in Russian).

YILDIRIM, R. 1991. Urartian Belt Fragments from Burmageçit, Now on Display in Elazığ Museum. In: A. Çilingiroğlu, D.H. French (eds.), *Anatolian Iron Ages. The Proceedings of the Second Anatolian Iron Ages Colloquium held at İzmir, 4-8 May 1987*, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Monograph 13, Oxford: Oxbow Monograph, 131-148.

Figures

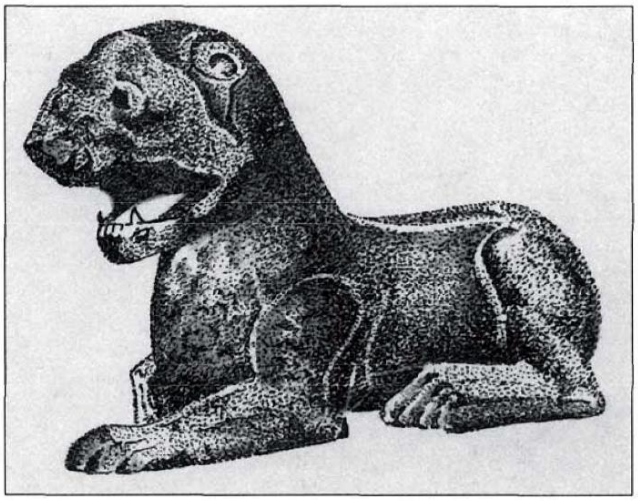

Figure 1. Bronze lion protome, probably from a throne or furniture fitting. Urartian, 8th–7th century BCE. Found at Sznak (Syunik, Armenia). Goris Museum of History and Ethnography
(The image below is taken from Xnkikyan 2002: pl. 1).

Figure 2. Bronze lion from Sznak. General views showing left and right profiles, front and rear perspectives, upper and lower surfaces.

Figure 3. Bronze lion from Sznak. Details of the head from multiple angles showing the expressive modeling and anatomical features: the broad snout with deeply drilled nostrils, open mouth with visible tongue and canines, and small rounded ears pressed backward. The eyes, originally likely inlaid, are framed by thick eyelids, and the cheeks are swollen with lightly incised lines suggesting fur texture.

Figure 4. Bronze lion from Sznak, Goris Museum (Republic of Armenia). Technical and anatomical details. (A) Left flank with the smooth, undecorated surface typical of Urartian bronze fittings. (B) Rear view showing the rounded haunches and the beginning of the tail curl. (C) Broken right front paw exposing small perforations and compact metal texture, evidence of internal casting channels or fixing points. (D) Underside of the torso showing the longitudinal ridge and file marks from post-casting refinement. (E) Central underside recess with triangular cavities and circular perforation used for attachment to a base, still preserving metallic residue of the fixing pin. (F) Detail of the left paw underside showing the carefully modeled pads and deep grooves between the toes.

Figure 5. Bronze lion from Kayalıdere
(adapted after Burney 1966: figs. 8-9. pl. IXa, X and
Van Museum. Online image resource, posted 2 June 2020, accessed 4 November 2025).

Figure 6. Bronze candelabrum-support lions from Jerusalem Israel Museum) (A) and Van (B-D)
(A-B: Adapted after Seidl 2004: pl. 3; C: Source: Wikimedia Commons;
D: Van Museum (sanattarihiplatformu) Online image resource).

Figure 7. Comparative group of Urartian bronze lions. (A) Kayalıdere (Online image resource, posted 2 June 2020, accessed 4 November 2025); (B) Patnos (Aznavurtepe?; Van Museum. Online image resource, posted 2 June 2020, accessed 4 November 2025); (C) Sznak.

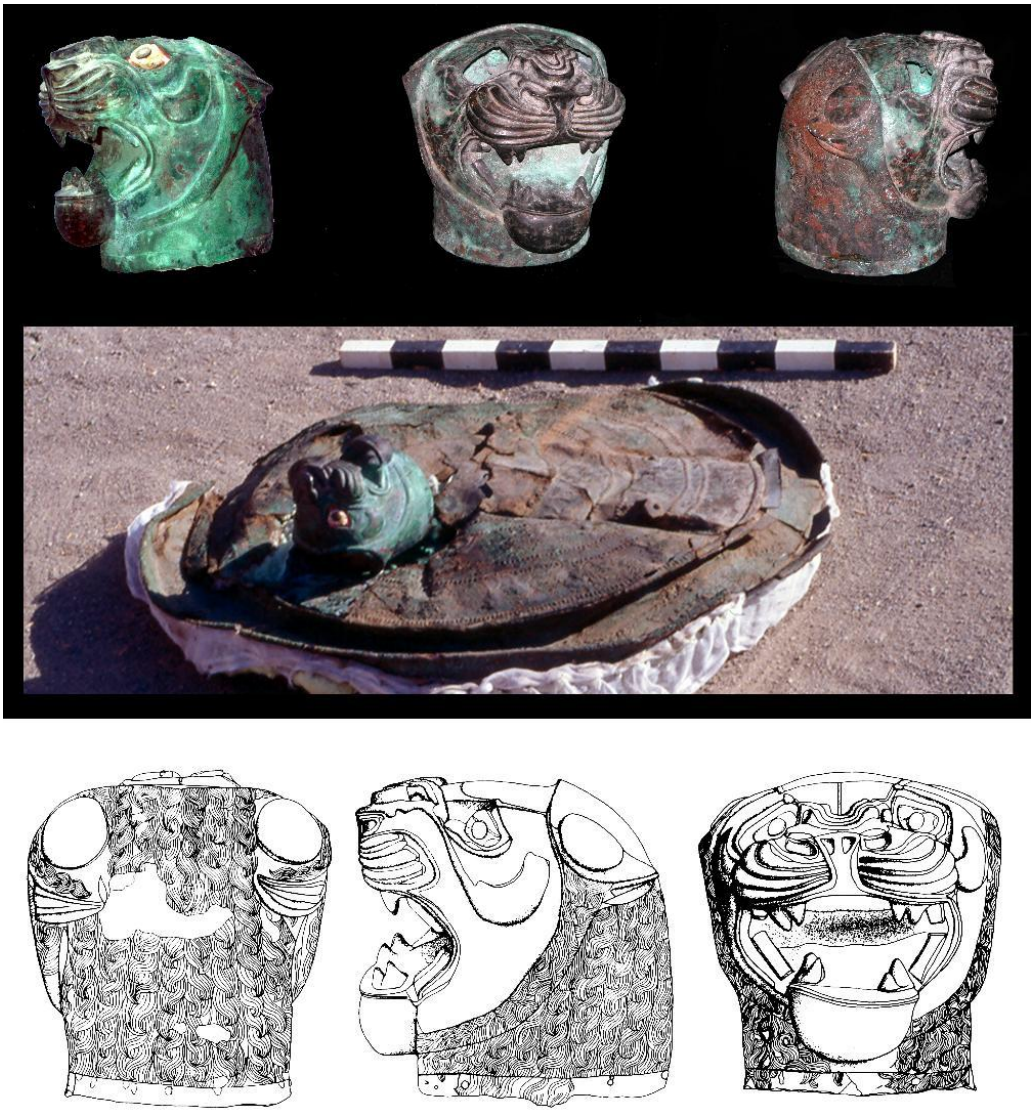

Figure 8. Bronze lion-head protome from the shield of King Rusa (II), Ayanis Fortress (adapted after Derin - Çilingiroğlu 2001: 180, fig. 12; and photo courtesy of Altan Çilingiroğlu).

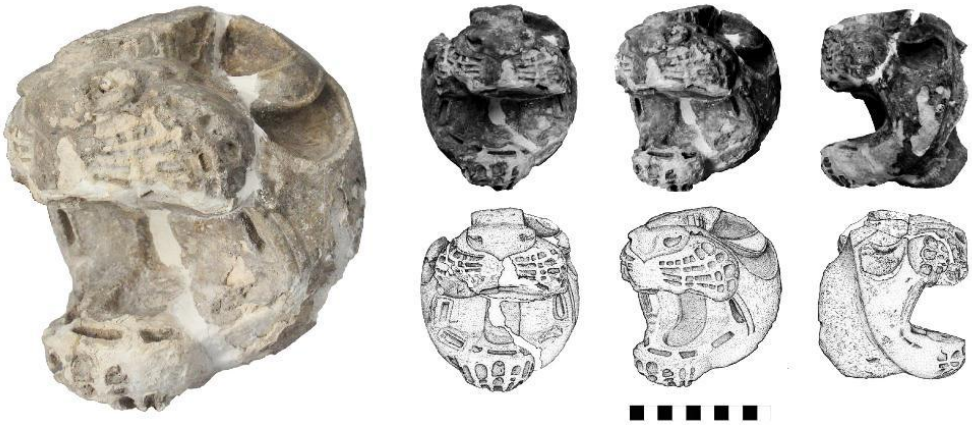

Figure 9. Limestone lion head from the temple area of Ayanis Fortress. Views and drawings of the unique limestone lion head discovered in fragments, reconstructed to its original form (adapted after Işıklı, Aras 2016: figs. 8).

A

B

Figure 10. (A) Bronze lion-head protomes from Karmir-Blur (HMA 2783-79), originally attached to royal bronze vessels (lebetes) (Courtesy of History Museum of Armenia). (B) Bronze lion figures from the throne of Toprakkale (Reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

Figure 11. Ivory lions from Altıntepe
(adapted after Dosseman, Urartian Art, PBase online gallery, available at:
https://pbase.com/dosseman/urartian).

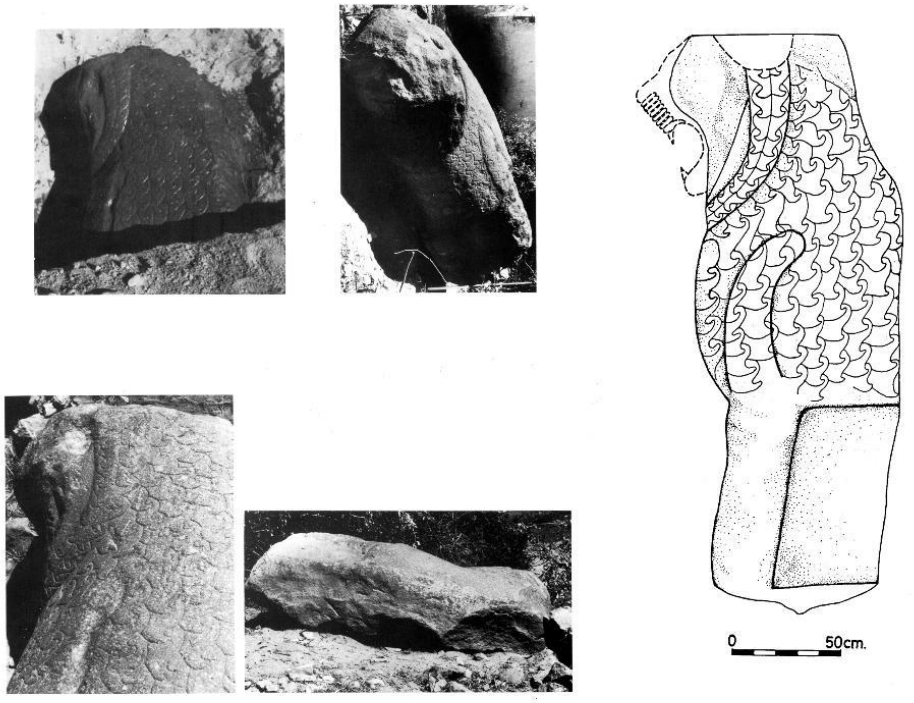

Figure 12. Fragmentary stone lion from Hişet (Van region) (adapted after Sevin 1993: fig. 1, pl. 101).

Figure 13. Fragmentary stone lions from Garibin Tepe (Alaköy Fortress, Van region).
(A) Drawings and photographs of the sculpted andesite blocks representing lion bodies and heads, discovered through excavation and later recovered from illicit digs (Derin, Sağlamtemir 1998: drawings 1-3 and Dan 2019: figs. 10-11). (B) Newly unearthed unfinished lion sculpture found in situ during the 2023 excavation season, showing a recumbent posture in coarse preliminary carving (A photo of the sculpture was published by Arkeoloji Haber on X on 2 November 2025 (https://x.com/arkeolojihaber/status/1851940201557377500, accessed 4 November 2025).

Figure 14. Basalt lion relief from Erzincan.

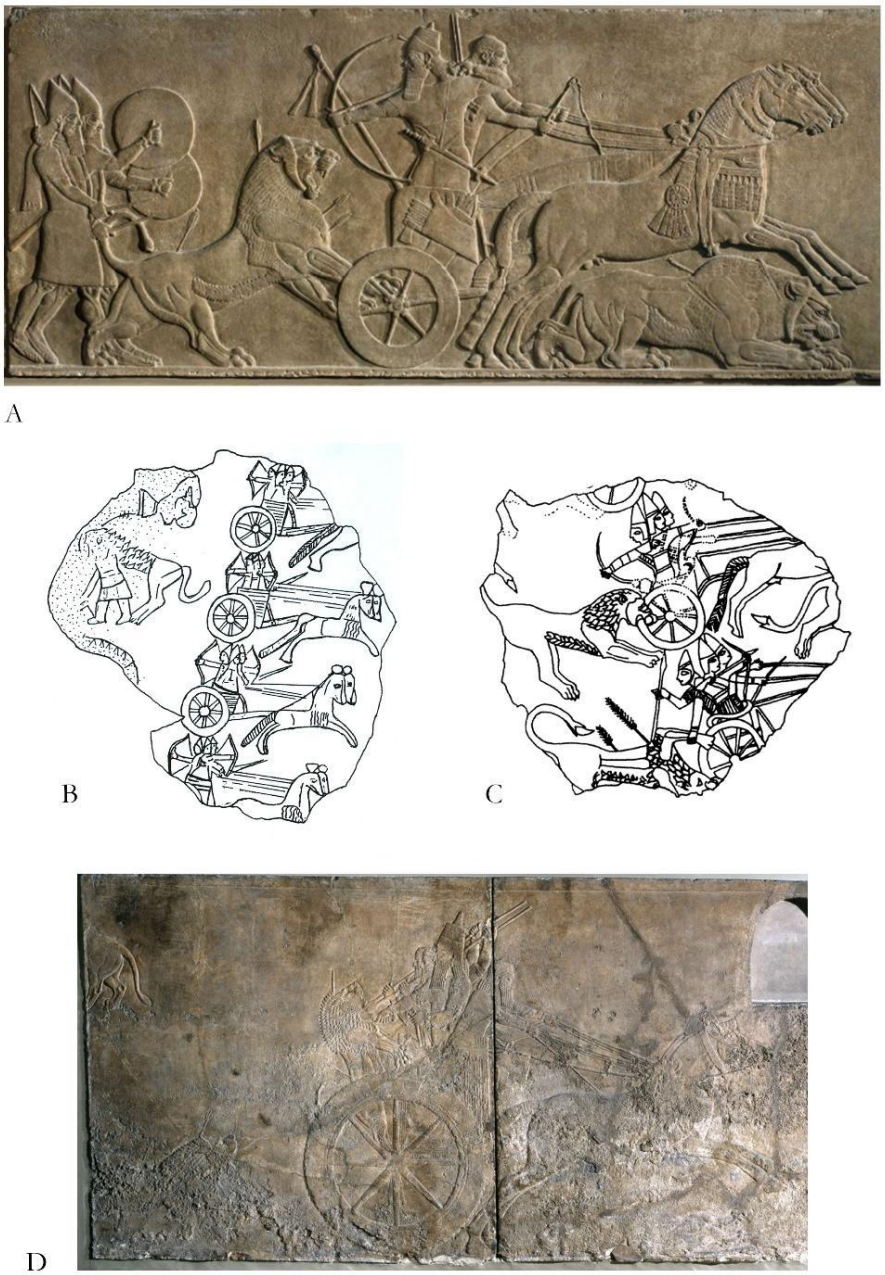

Figure 15. Comparison between Assyrian and Urartian period hunting scenes (not to scale).
(A) Orthostat from the North-West Palace of Aššurnasirpal II at Nimrud (after Collins 2008: 35).
(B) Fragment of the Burmageçit-4 bronze belt (after Yıldırım 1991: 10.8–9).
(C) Fragment of the Kayalıdere-1 bronze belt (after Burney 1966: 78, fig. 10; pl. IX.b; pl. XI.b).
(D) Orthostat from the North Palace of Aššurbanipal at Nineveh (after Barnett 1976: pl. XI).

Figure 16. (A) Bronze lion appliqués from Karmir-Blur (HMA 2783/193), likely furniture or chariot fittings, decorated in repoussé with engraved mane and facial details. (B) Clay plaques from Oshakan (HMA 2747/117.1; 2747/117.2) impressed with the same striding-lion motif, reflecting terracotta imitations of bronze prototypes in late Urartian production
(Photo Courtesy of the History Museum of Armenia).

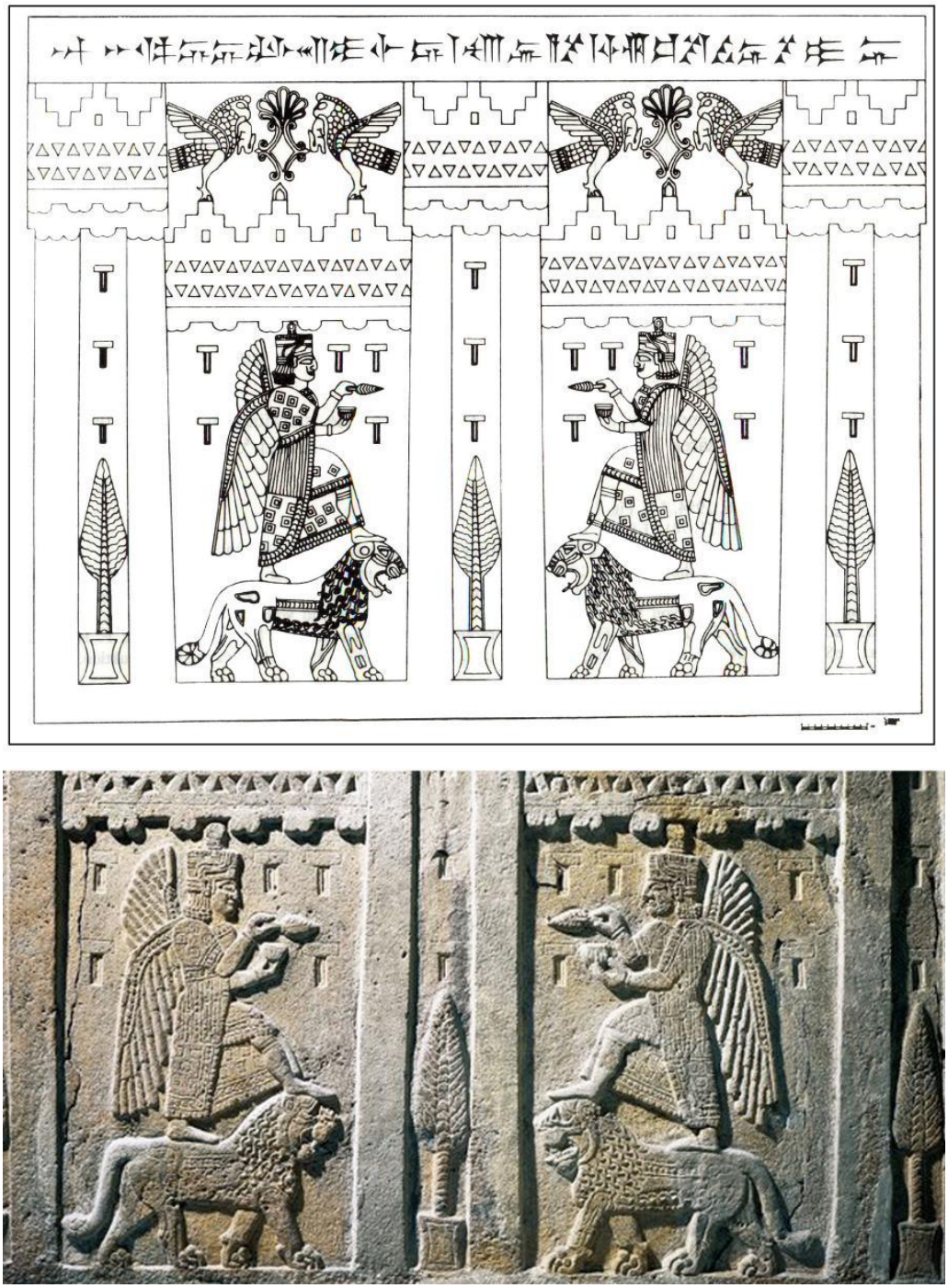

Figure 17. Orthostat reliefs from the pillars of Kef Kalesi (adapted after Seidl 1993: fig. 2).

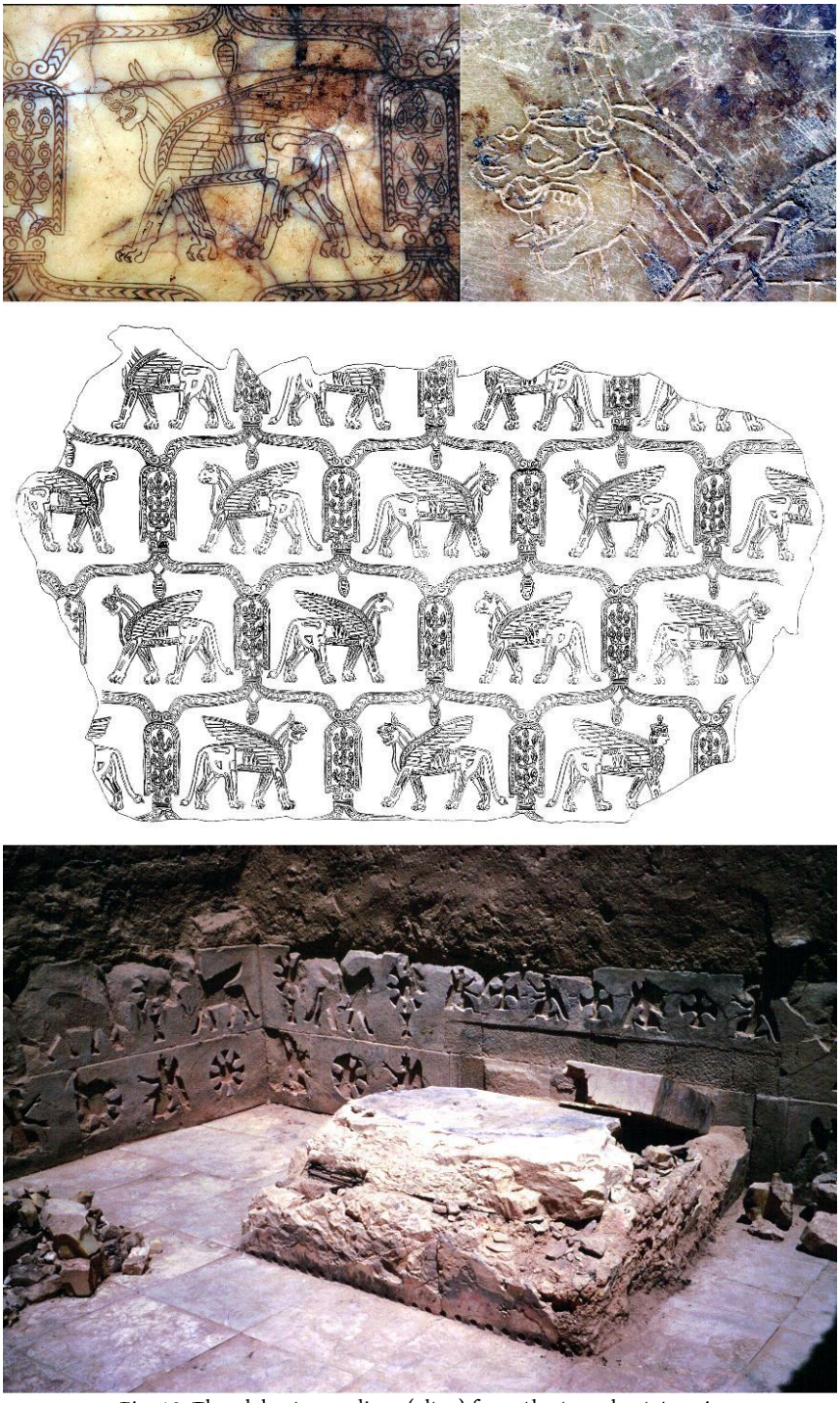

Fig. 18. The alabaster podium (altar) from the temple at Ayanis
(adapted after Çilingiroğlu 2001: fig. 23 and photo courtesy of A. Çilingiroğlu).

Figure 19. Alabaster lion head from Sippar
(British Museum, inv. no. 91678; Reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

Figure 20. Gold lion-headed tubular ornament from the Kelermes kurgan, Kuban region (adapted after Galanina 1997: pl. 4).