

# FIVE URARTIAN BRONZE VESSELS FROM BİTLİS-AHLAT MUSEUM

Ali ÇİFÇİ\* - Bilcan GÖKÇE\*\*

The Kingdom of Urartu was a dominant force in eastern Anatolia, Transcaucasia and north-western Iran between 9-6 centuries BC and our knowledge of Urartian art has been increased as a result of excavations and illegal activities. The materials that have been acquired by museums, and published artifacts, show us the richness of Urartian art and reveal its developmental stages and have enabled us to establish parallels between Urartian and contemporary civilisations.

Metal artefacts are a ubiquitous feature of Urartian culture and in recent years, there have been many publications dealing with this aspect of Urartian society. Unfortunately, a great majority of Urartian metalwork is hard to provenance as there has been a great deal of looting at Urartian sites over the years. However, professional excavations at sites such as Ayanis, Yukarı Anzaf, and Çavuştepe have nevertheless thrown much light on to Urartian metalworking.

In this article, five bronze vessels held in the collections of the Bitlis-Ahlat museum will be examined, in order to see what they may reveal about the

manufacturing techniques that Urartian smiths employed in the production of bronze vessels.

Along with many other metal artefacts the bronzes were found at the sites of Toprakkale, Altıntepe, Kayalidere, Çavuştepe, Karmir-Blur and Giyimli, and subsequently, this led some scholars to think of Urartu as a major "metalworking center" and that the production of metal artifacts was closely associated with the state.



Figure 1: Bitlis -Ahlat Museum Inv. No:1478  
Height 4 cm., / Diameter 17.5 cm.

The first group of bronzes under discussion here are three broad and shallow bowls (Fig. 1-3). They are generally in a good state of preservation and have thin walls, with the third bowl showing slight rust damage on one side (Fig. 3). The common feature of these bronze bowls is that the same casting techniques have been used to produce them and they are almost identical in both manufacture and shape.



Figure 2: Bitlis-Ahlat Museum Inv. No: 1458  
Height 3.5 cm. / Diameter 19.5 cm.

The second group of bronzes consist of a deep bowl and vase-like vessel (Fig. 4). The former has approximately a quarter of its body missing due to rust damage and it is hemispherical in shape, widening out at quite a sharp angle towards the rim. The latter features a large hole caused by rusting, and part of the neck is also lost (Fig. 5). However, two thin, raised bands of decoration can be seen on the neck which flares outwards to the rim of the vessel. Just below the rim there is a cruciform-shaped handle, which has been attached to the vessel with three rivets (Fig. 5).

The shape of these vessels and the techniques employed in their manufacture, are characteristically Urartian. Some of the bronze metal vessels are that held by Van Regional Museum were studied by Başaran, Belli and Merhav show similar manufacturing techniques and forms<sup>1</sup>.



Figure 3: Bitlis-Ahlat Museum Inv. No: 1198,  
Height 4.5 cm. / Diameter 17.5 cm.

It is known that various metal vessels were widely used by Urartian society in their religious and social life. For example, in his annals, Sargon II gives a detailed description of many silver and bronze examples that formed part of the booty taken from Urzana palace and the Haldi temple, after he conquered the city of Mušašir in 714 BC<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, although Sargon II listed these items in his annals, he left little information in regard to their style and the techniques employed in their manufacture.

However, in examples of Urartian art seen on monumental reliefs<sup>3</sup> and decorated metal objects (such as belts<sup>4</sup>, quivers<sup>5</sup>, votive plates<sup>6</sup>, helmets<sup>7</sup>, horse harnesses<sup>8</sup> and vehicle parts<sup>9</sup>) metal

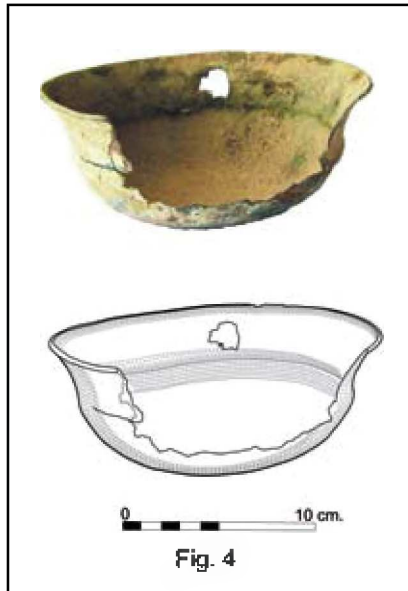


Figure 4: Bitlis-Ahlat Museum Inv. No: 1198  
Height 7 cm. / Diameter 15 cm.

vessels are frequently depicted and these depictions provide us with useful insights into widespread use in ceremonial and everyday life, and also provide us with a clear picture of how they were made and the various forms that they took. Often, these depictions show wide and shallow, bell shaped bowls, jugs, pots and cauldrons. It is evident that some of the bowls are decorated with thin bands, fluted motifs, inscriptions and animal heads. Incised and repousse decoration can also be seen and as we will see below, some of these decorative techniques feature on the metal artefacts under discussion in this paper. Also, on these depictions we can see bowls, dishes, and jugs being used in banquets, parades, religious rituals and ceremonies. In this latter respect, it is clear that metal vessels were used as containers for libations, offering vessels and that they held water, wine and food.

However, there are no inscriptions on the above mentioned vessels, which is unusual, as many Urartian metal artefacts

often bear the name of Urartian kings. For example, we have many bronze utensils that are inscribed with the names of the Urartian kings Išpuini (830-810 BC)<sup>10</sup>, Menua (810-786 BC)<sup>11</sup>, Argišti I (786-764 BC)<sup>12</sup>, Sarduri II (765-734 BC)<sup>13</sup>, and Rusa II (685-645 BC)<sup>14</sup>. Obviously, such inscriptions are very useful when it comes to dating Urartian metalwork.

Archaeological excavations carried out at the sites of contemporary Anatolian civilisations in Phrygia, Neo-Assyria and Lydia also reveal the widespread use of various types of metal pots (e.g. omphalos, vessels, bowls) and examples have been found at such notable sites as Gordion<sup>15</sup> (Yassihöyük). Also, Neo-Assyrian art has been a very useful source of information as regards to the manufacturing techniques that were employed in the production of bronze vessels that show some similarities to those used by the Urartians<sup>16</sup>. In addition, similar vessels and bowls made of bronze were recovered in north western Iran at the site of Hasanlu<sup>17</sup>, Marlik cemetery<sup>18</sup>; in North Syria at Zincirli (Sam'al), Tell Halaf and Tell Fakhariyah<sup>19</sup>, which indicate extensive use of these types of utensils across Iron Ages societies of Near East.

As to the date of the vessels discussed here, it is hard to be certain in this regard, as their provenance is unknown. Nevertheless, similar examples found during excavations at other Urartian sites strongly suggest that the above vessels were widely used in Urartu during the 8-7 centuries BC. Such finds reveal that Urartians had good access to, and were in control of metal ore sources and thus were able to produce numerous metal artefacts.



Figure 5: Bitlis-Ahlat Museum Inv. No: 922  
Height 15 cm. / Diameter 8.5 cm.

In conclusion, excavated artefacts and museum collections clearly demonstrates the extensive use of bronze by Urartians. The manufacturing techniques and decoration of the vessel, which has a cruciform shaped handle attached by bronze rivets (Fig. 5) reveals the richness and diversity of the metal artefacts that were produced by Urartian metal workers. In addition, the vessels under discussion here also provide us with evidence of the existence of skilled artisans in Urartian society. The richness and diversity of the metal artefacts that were produced by Urartian metal workers show their extraordinary skills. In addition, given the visual arts as well as archaeological data and the kingdom of Urartu shape bowl is common among metal vessels were used. Indeed, the bowl shaped vessels commonly used in the art of Near Eastern civilizations, especially the contemporary Assyrian. Although, the vessels in the Bitlis-Ahlat museum are not well preserved, they nevertheless demonstrate the importance of bronze

utensils in the religious and secular life of Urartian society.

## ÖZET

M.Ö. 9.-6. yüzyıllar arasında Doğu Anadolu, Transkafkasya ve Kuzey Batı İran Bölgesinde egemenliğini sürdüren Urartu Krallığı'nın sanatı hakkındaki bilgilerimiz, gerek bilimsel gerekse kaçak kazılar sonucunda ele geçirilen eserlerin değerlendirilmesi sonucunda gün geçtikçe artmaktadır. Ele geçirilen ve yayınlanan bu sanat eserleri Urartu sanatının zenginliğini gösterdiği gibi, çağdaşı çevre bölgelerin sanat eserleri ile paralellik kurmamızı sağlamaktadır. Urartuluların dinsel ve sosyal hayatında yaygın olarak kullanılan bu kaplar komşu bölgelerin metal kapları ile de paralellik kurmamızı sağlaması yönünden önemlidir. Bumakalede Bitlis-Ahlat Müzesi'nden 3 çanak, 1 kase ve bir çömlekçik çalışılmıştır.

## NOTES

- \* Ali ÇİFÇİ (M.A), University of Liverpool, School of Archaeology, Classics & Egyptology, 12-14 Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 3WZ, ENGLAND a.cifci@liv.ac.uk
- \*\* Arş. Gör. Bilcan GÖKCE (M.A), Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Arkeoloji Bölümü 65080 - Zeve Kampüsü/Van/TÜRKİYE gokcebilcan@yyu.edu.tr
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- 1 Başaran 1981:81-89; Merhav 1991b: 200-225; Belli 2004: 268-273.

- 2 See the lines 352-405 of Sargon Campaign, Thureau-Dangin, 1912: 49-65.
- 3 Bilgiç-Öğün, 1964: 70-79, Fig. 2
- 4 Kellner, 1976: 79, no. 155; Kellner, 1991a: 69, pl. LXX, no. 279; 67, pl. LXVI, no. 256, no. 261, pl. LXIX, no. 262.
- 5 Calmayer, 1991: 125, 132, no. 17a-b.
- 6 Taşyürek, 1978: 210, 211, Fig. 22; Taşyürek, 1980: 213, Fig. 12, pl. IX:20; Hori-Miyashida-Ishida, 1982: 71,75, no. 69; Işık, 1990: 16,17, Fig. 1; Merhav, 1991a: 306, Fig. 1.
- 7 Seidl, 2004: Fig. 29 (Argišti I), Fig. 30 (Sarduri II), Fig. 31, Fig. 32.
- 8 Seidl, 2004, Fig. 64, Fig. 82, Fig. 85, Fig. 90.
- 9 See pictorial example of Toprakkale, Piotrovskii, 1967: 51, Fig. 34; Kellner, 1991b: 164, Lev. 2-3.
- 10 Merhav, 1991b: 200, 201, pl. 1.2, Fig. 17, 27.
- 11 Merhav, 1991b: 225, Fig. 28, 29.
- 12 Van Loon, 1966: 113.
- 13 Van Loon, 1966: 113.
- 14 Van Loon, 1966: 113.
- 15 Young, 1981: 143-147, 233-236, pl. 8:A-K, pl. 9:A-G, pl. 10:A-J.
- 16 Barnett, 1961: pl. XXVIII, XXX, CV; Madhloom, 1970: pl. XXXIX, XLVI/1.
- 17 Dyson, 1965: 298-203; Muscarella, 1988: 31, 32 no. 11, 13.
- 18 Nigahban, 1983: 10, 11, 66, Fig. 6, 7.
- 19 Fugmann, 1948: 136, 137, Fig. 186, 187; Meyer, 1965: Fig. 92; Howes Smith, 1986: 30, 31, no. 3,7.

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