

## BRONZE BOWLS WITH CUNEIFORM AND HIEROGLYPHIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM VAN MUSEUM

by OKTAY BELLİ and MIRJO SALVINI

Excavations at Urartian fortresses and burial sites have uncovered hundreds of bronze bowls\*. For example, over ninety-seven bronze vessels were recovered in Armenia, at Karmir Blur (*Teisheba-i URU*) north of Aras River<sup>1</sup>.

Turkish institutions that have purchased the largest numbers of bronze bowls are Van, Elazığ and Adana museums, and the museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. The only example of a gold vessel was smuggled out of Turkey. So far, no ceremonial bowls made of iron have been found and given that iron rusts quickly these would not have been used as wine vessel at cult ceremonies. Bronze bowls were evidently the most widely produced type throughout the period of the Urartian Kingdom.

Almost all the bowls were made by beating. The deep bowls by beating on the upper side to hollow the metal into a convex shape, and the shallow ones by beating on the underside to raise the rims. The motifs, figures and other decorations on the exterior and interior of these vessels are similar to those on vessels of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. The most important distinguishing characteristics of Urartian vessels are their maker's mark and single line inventory inscriptions stating that they belonged to the king's stores.

In terms of shape and size, Urartian metal bowls display considerable diversity. Their forms can be classified for the most part as globular bodied, vertical rimmed, belt-shaped, ribbed and S-profile. As in the civilizations of the ancient Near East, globular bodied bowls are the most common type produced by the Urartians. Ribbed and S-profile bowls emerge at a later date. Vertical rimmed and bell-shaped bowls are rarer than other forms<sup>2</sup>.

Finally, heads of bulls and particularly mountain goats are engraved inside or outside of the vessels. These appear to have been maker's mark. The oldest inscription found on silver or bronze bowls so far, date back to the reign of King Ishpuini (ca. 830-810 BC)<sup>3</sup>. When we consider that inscriptions on metal vessel belonging to Near Eastern civilizations are less common, it is clear how much importance the Urartians attached to metal bowls produced at royal forges and donated to their temples.

Urartian depictions of religious ceremonies show that bronze buckets and bowls were commonly used. In scenes portraying cult ceremonies and funeral banquets, officials are shown holding similarly shaped vessels. In some cases the officials are

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<sup>1</sup> B.B. Piotrovskij, *Karmir Blur* II, Erevan 1952, 16 ff, 55 ff.

<sup>2</sup> O. Belli, Metal Bowls, in: F. Özdem (Ed.), *Urartu: War and Aesthetics*, İstanbul 2003, 271.

<sup>3</sup> O. Belli, Inscribed Metal Objects, in: R. Merhav (Ed.), *Urartu, A Metalworking Center in the First Millenium B.C.E.*, Jerusalem 1991, 45.

pouring holy water or wine from them. Again, in scenes of funeral feasts depicted on bronze belts and votive plaques, we see bowls of this type on tables, which probably contained food<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, these bowls also appear frequently in scenes showing the grafting of trees of life. In these vividly depicted scenes gods and demons, symbolising immortality, hold pine cones in one hand and bowls probably containing holy water in the other.

Hundreds of bronze bowls, and a lesser number made of gold and silver, that have survived to the present day, were produced in the forges of the eastern Anatolian region in the bronze workshops of Erzincan, Erzurum, Harput and Siirt. The modern bronze and brass "healing bowls" are indeed descendants of the Urartian bowls<sup>5</sup>.

#### Bronze Bowl with Cuneiform Inscription (Fig. 1-2)

Van Museum. Inv No. 4.1.78

Diam: 16.8 cm

Radius: 0.1 cm

Height: 4.8 cm

Weight: 309 gr

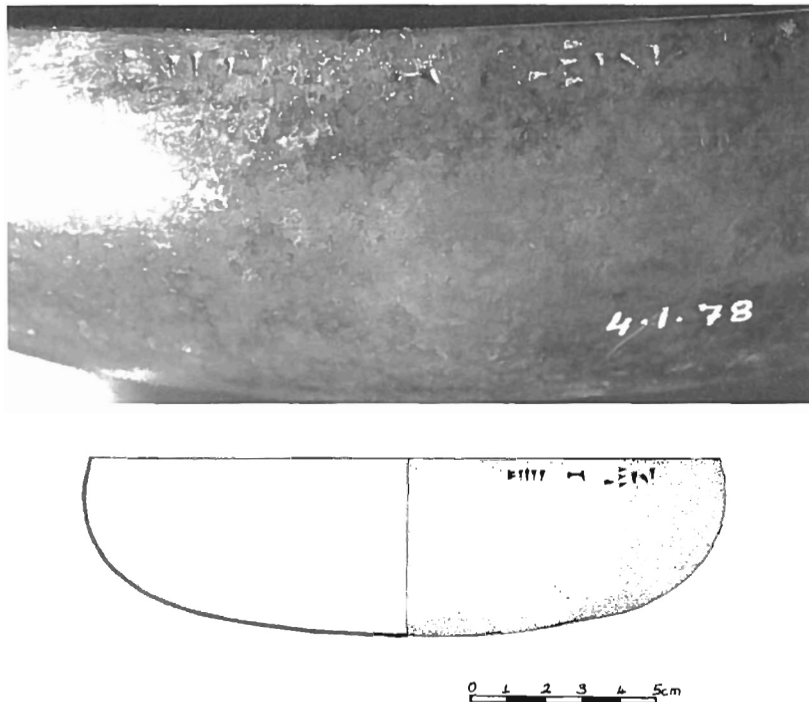


Fig. 1. – Bronze Bowl with Cuneiform Inscription. Archaeological Research Centre in Van of the Istanbul University.

<sup>4</sup> H.J. Kellner, *Gürtelbleche aus Urartu* ("Prähistorische Bronzefunde"), Stuttgart 1991, Taf. 66- 71; U. Seidl, *Bronzekunst Urartus*, Mainz 2004, Abb. 102.

<sup>5</sup> O. Belli - C. Avcı, "Urartian Bronze Vessels in the Van Museum", in: O. Belli - Y. Dağlı (Eds.), *Gündoğ Kayaoğlu Hatıra Kitabı (Makaleler)*, İstanbul 2005, 57.

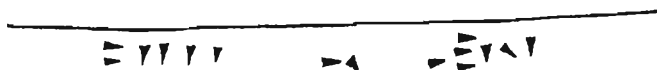


Fig. 2. – The Inscription on the Bronze Bowl.

Found in an illicit dig either at a fortress or necropolis in Eastern Anatolia, its find spot is unknown. It was hammered from bronze and is an example of fine workmanship. The centre of the bowl is without *omphalos* but plain and fractures are visible in some parts due to oxidation. The bowls have been conserved in the laboratory of Historical and Archaeological Research Centre in Van of the Istanbul University Faculty of Letters<sup>6</sup>.

There is no trace of a motif or an animal head as the seal impression of the artisan or workshop<sup>7</sup>. It only bears a cuneiform inscription of three signs on the outer surface, near the rim. It reads: É *TIL-LI*<sup>8</sup>.

The Akkadogram *TIL-LI* is attested for the second time here on a bronze object. It is never to be found on a clay document, tablet or bulla. The other known example is on a horse blinker with the following inscription: *TIL-LI ŠÁ* 'iš-pu-ú-i-ni<sup>9</sup>. Because the Akkadogram *TIL-LI* is referred to two different items like a bowl and a Helmklappe, it cannot be the name of a single object. It is a collective noun, and a *Plurale Tantum*. In order to understand the meaning of this word in the Urartian writing tradition we have to take into consideration the quotations of this word on stone and rock inscriptions, namely on those of Išpuini and Minua, of Sarduri II and of Rusa II. Compare the following quotations from the second volume (Thesaurus) of the Urartian Corpus<sup>10</sup>:

#### *TIL-LI*

A 12-1 I 11 UDU ḫu-ṭu-ni-e UDU ḫ30-e UDU ḫal-di-na-ú-e *TIL-LI* UDU  
ḫal-di-na-a-ú-e KÁ  
A 12-1 IV 2 te-er-du-li-ni a-li i-ni ú-li *TIL-LI* te-er-du-li-ni á-du-nu-si-ni  
'ru-sa-a-še a-ṛli<sup>1</sup>  
A 12-1 IV 3 a-lu-še KÙ TUKUL *TIL-LI* SIKIL ḫal-di-na-ni KÁ-ni ḫa-ú-li-e  
NA<sub>4</sub> 'a-ḫu-li-ni a-li a-še su-nu-ṛe<sup>1</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank conservators Vedat Evren Belli and Tushpa Akar for their careful work.

<sup>7</sup> I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mete Tozkoparan, former Director of Van Museum and Can Avcı and Nihal Ayyıldız who made the drawings.

<sup>8</sup> The former reading was *BE-LI*, but see now the writing *til-li* on the bronze rings of Išpuini from Anzaf newly published by O. Belli - A. Dinçol - B. Dinçol, Bronze Votive Rings with Assyrian Inscriptions found in the Upper Anzaf Fortress in Van, "Colloquium Anatolicum" VIII, Istanbul 2009, 91-124. See also my conference Neuassyrische Schrift und Sprache in den urartäischen Königsinschriften (9.-7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.), Berlin 30.1.2010, at the TOPOI Symposium "Normierung und Emanzipation: Bausteine für eine Kulturgeschichte des 2. Jts. v. Chr. im Alten Orient. Internationales Symposium zu Ehren von Gernot Wilhelm". See also CAD T 411, tillu B: in bīt tilli "Armoury, storehouse for weapons".

<sup>9</sup> O. Belli, Urartu kralı İspuini'ye ait çiviyazılı ve resimli tunç eserler, "Anadolu Araştırmaları" IX, 1983, 325-360: resim 6 on p. 346, Lev. III/2.

<sup>10</sup> M. Salvini, *Corpus dei Testi Urartei* (= CTU), *Le iscrizioni su pietra e roccia. Thesaurus*, Documenta Asiana VIII/2, Roma 2008, 499 and 376. In the Corpus *BE-LI* must be corrected in *TIL-LI*.

A 12-1 V 7 <i>TIL-LI</i>	[UDU] 'D'UTU-ni-e UDU 'D'a-ru-ba-i-ni-e UDU 'Dḥal-di-na-ú-e
A 12-2 I 8 e KÁ UDU 'D <sub>i</sub> -ub-šá-a	'D'a-ru-ba-i-ni-e UDU 'Dḥal-di-na-u-e <i>TIL-LI</i> UDU 'Dḥal-di-na-u-e mru-sa-a-še a-li 'Dḥal-[di(-i)-še]
A 12-2 III 3	[(ku-ul-mu-li-ni a-li-e)] <i>TIL-LI</i> ga-zu-li te-er-du-li-ni ši-si-ni
A 12-2 III 6 KÁ ḥa-ú-li	[(a-li a-lu-še KÙ ku-me-mu)]-še <i>TIL-LI</i> SIKIL 'Dḥal-di-na-ni
A 12-4 I 1'	ku-ul-mu-li-ni a-li-e <i>TIL-LI</i> ga-zu-li-e te-er-du-li-ni š[(i-si-ni bi-di-a-še ši-i-si-e šú-ú-li-e)]
A 12-4 I 3'	mru-sa-a-še a-li a-lu-še KÙ ku-me-mu-še <i>TIL-LI</i> SIKIL 'Dḥal- di-[(i-na-ni KÁ-ni ḥa-ú-li-e)]
A 12-2 III 5 še	[(a-li-e i-ni ú-li <i>TIL-LI</i> )] te-er-du-li-ni Éa-du-nu-si-ni mru-sa-a- še
A 12-4 I 2' <i>LI</i> te-er-du-li-ni É a-du-nu-si-ni)]	a-še e-si ma-nu-li i-šá-ḥi-ni te-er-du-li-ni a-li-e i-ni ú-[(li <i>TIL- LI</i>
<i>TIL-LI</i> <sup>MES</sup>	
A 3-1 7 UDU 'Dḥal-di-na-ú-e	'D'a-na-ap-šá-a GU <sub>4</sub> 2 UDU 'D <sub>i</sub> -du-a-i-ni GU <sub>4</sub> 2 UDU 'D <sub>30</sub> GU <sub>4</sub> 2 <i>TIL-LI</i> <sup>MES</sup> GU <sub>4</sub> 2 UDU <sup>MES</sup>
A 3-1 41 <i>LI</i> <sup>MES</sup>	GU <sub>4</sub> 2 UDU 'D <sub>ši</sub> -e-la-ar-di-e GU <sub>4</sub> 2 UDU 'Dḥal-di-[(na-ú-e)] 'TIL <sup>1</sup> - <i>LI</i> <sup>MES</sup>
A 3-2 5 UDU 'Dḥal-di-na-ú-e	ur-pu-ú-li-ni GU <sub>4</sub> .ÁB 'D'a-ru-ba-ni-e UDU 'Dḥal-di-na-ú-e KÁ <i>TIL-LI</i> <sup>MES</sup>
A 3-2 10 UDU 'Dḥal-di-na-ú-e	ur-pu-ú-li-ni GU <sub>4</sub> .ÁB 'D'a-ru-ba-ni-e UDU 'Dḥal-di-na-ú-e KÁ <i>TIL-LI</i> <sup>MES</sup>
A 9-3 VII 9 G <sup>1</sup> ŠBAN <sup>MES</sup> 40 LIM 7 LIM 9 ME 70	2 LIM 1 ME 14 <i>TIL-LI</i> <sup>MES</sup> gu-nu-ši-ni-e-i 1 LIM 3 ME 32 G <sup>1</sup> ŠGAG.TI <sup>MES</sup>
A 12-1 III 11 ga-zu-li	LÚa-ú-e-i-ṭi <sub>5</sub> -ni zu-ma-gi a-šú-li ku-ul-mu-li-ni a-li <i>TIL-LI</i> <sup>MES</sup>

*til-le*

A 3-11 Vo 8 [na-ši] *til-le* SIG<sub>5</sub><sup>MES</sup> bi-bu 'SIG<sub>5</sub><sup>1</sup> na-[ši]

Beginning in the chronological order we find that in the bilingual stela of Kelišin (CTU A 3-11) the Assyrian [na-ši] *til-le* SIG<sub>5</sub><sup>MES</sup> bi-bu 'SIG<sub>5</sub><sup>1</sup> na-[ši] (Rev. 8) corresponds to Urartian 'na-ḥu-ni ú<sup>1</sup>-ri-iš-[ḥi] / [ga-zu]-li ni-ri-bi ga-zu-li na-ḥu-n[i] (Obv. 8-9), the subject being in both versions Išpuini, son of Sarduri. "I. son of S. brought fine arms (and) fine herds".

Thus Ass. *til-le* (or *til-li*) corresponds to Urartian uriš[ḥi]. The Urartian word urišḥi is attested in another stone inscription by Išpuini and Minua (CTU A 3-12, line 14: ú-ri-iš-ḥi-i-e) [A] and on bronze objects (ú-ri-iš-ḥi, ú-ri-iš-ḥí, Éú-ri-iš-ḥi, ú-ri-iš-ḥí-i [CTU B<sup>11</sup>]), where it alternates with the sumerogramm NÍG/NÌ.GA) "property"<sup>12</sup>. The niche inscriptions of Meher Kapısı (CTU A 3-1) and of Yeşilalıç (CTU A

<sup>11</sup> CTU Vol. IV, forthcoming, with the inscriptions on Bronze objects (= B).

<sup>12</sup> M. Salvini, SMEA 22, 1980, 185f., SMEA 43, 2001, 252, 266.

3-2) mention animal sacrifices to the “arms of ḫaldi” ḫaldi=na=ue (ḫal-di-na-ú-e) *TIL-LI*<sup>MEŠ</sup>, and the same is found in the temple inscriptions of Rusa II: CTU A 12 I 11 // A 12-2 I 8.

The other important context is attested in the Annals of Sarduri II, CTU A 9-3 VII 9; in a list of the goods 2114 *TIL-LI*<sup>MEŠ</sup> gunuši=ni=ei “weapons of the battle”<sup>13</sup>, beside 1332 bows and 47970 arrows. The association speaks clearly in favour of the translation “arms”, but it remains generic, perhaps has a collective meaning.

The third most recent context is that of Rusa II's temple inscriptions. We read in CTU A 12-1 IV 3 “whoever removes pure arms, arms pure from the Gate of Ḫaldi” (a-lu-še KÙ TUKUL *TIL-LI* SIKIL ḫal-di-na-ni KÁ-ni ḫa-ú-li-e). We have here a chiasmus, in which TUKUL and *TIL-LI* are synonymous, as well as KÙ and SIKIL “pure, holy”. Urartian gazuli (ga-zu-li, ga-zu-li-e), “good/fine” corresponds in its turn to SIG<sub>5</sub>, Ass. *damqu*, in the bilingual of Kelišin<sup>14</sup>. The temple inscription by Rusa II refers to the arms (*TIL-LI*<sup>MEŠ</sup> ga-zu-li “fine arms”<sup>15</sup>). Moreover it is interesting to note that the duplicate from Armavir has the Urartian word kumemuše instead of TUKUL (a-lu-še KÙ ku-me-mu-še *TIL-LI* SIKIL: CTU A 12-4 I 3')<sup>16</sup>.

All these references prove that É *TIL-LI* means literally “house of the weapons, arsenal, and armoury”. The bowl evidently belongs to the É *TIL-LI*, but because a bowl is not a weapon, it is clear that the meaning of É *TIL-LI* must be a more generic one: a stock, a deposit for precious objects. In this sense the above quoted correspondence between Ass. *til-le* (or *til-li*) and Urartian uriš[ḫi] can be explained with the help of the short inscriptions on bronze items. (ḿsar<sub>5</sub>-du-ri-e) É ú-ri-iš-ḫi (B 9-19) and (ḿsar<sub>5</sub>-du-ri-e) É ú-ri-iš-ḫu!<sup>17</sup> (B 9-20) and É ú-ri-iš-ḫu-si (passim) on bronze bowls from Karmir-blur could be the exact correspondence of our É *TIL-LI*.

### Single Handled Bronze Bowl with Pictograms (Fig. 3-5)

Van Museum: Study material

Diam: 48 cm

Radius: 0.3 cm

Height of the rim: 5 cm

Actual weight: 2.570 gr.

Like the other bronze bowls, it was beaten from a single sheet of bronze. Wide and upright rimmed, its bronze contains a high percent of zinc, which makes it brighter than the other bronze bowls and which is the main reason for its usage, as it does not rust.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Gišbe-li qarābi “Waffen des Kampfes”, in Assyrian texts, quoted by W. von Soden, AHW Vol. I, 120, s.v. bēlu II.

<sup>14</sup> UKN p. 394, HchI p. 183, W.C. Benedict, “The Urartian-Assyrian Inscription of Kelishin”, JAOS 81, 1961, 362 ass. r. 8, 372 ur. r. 9.

<sup>15</sup> M. Salvini, SMEA 44, 2002, 339; CTU A12-1, 2, 4 (p. 565-575).

<sup>16</sup> For all those duplicates see the synoptic table in CTU Vol. I, 583 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Possible abbreviation for É ú-ri-iš-ḫu-si-e “treasury”.

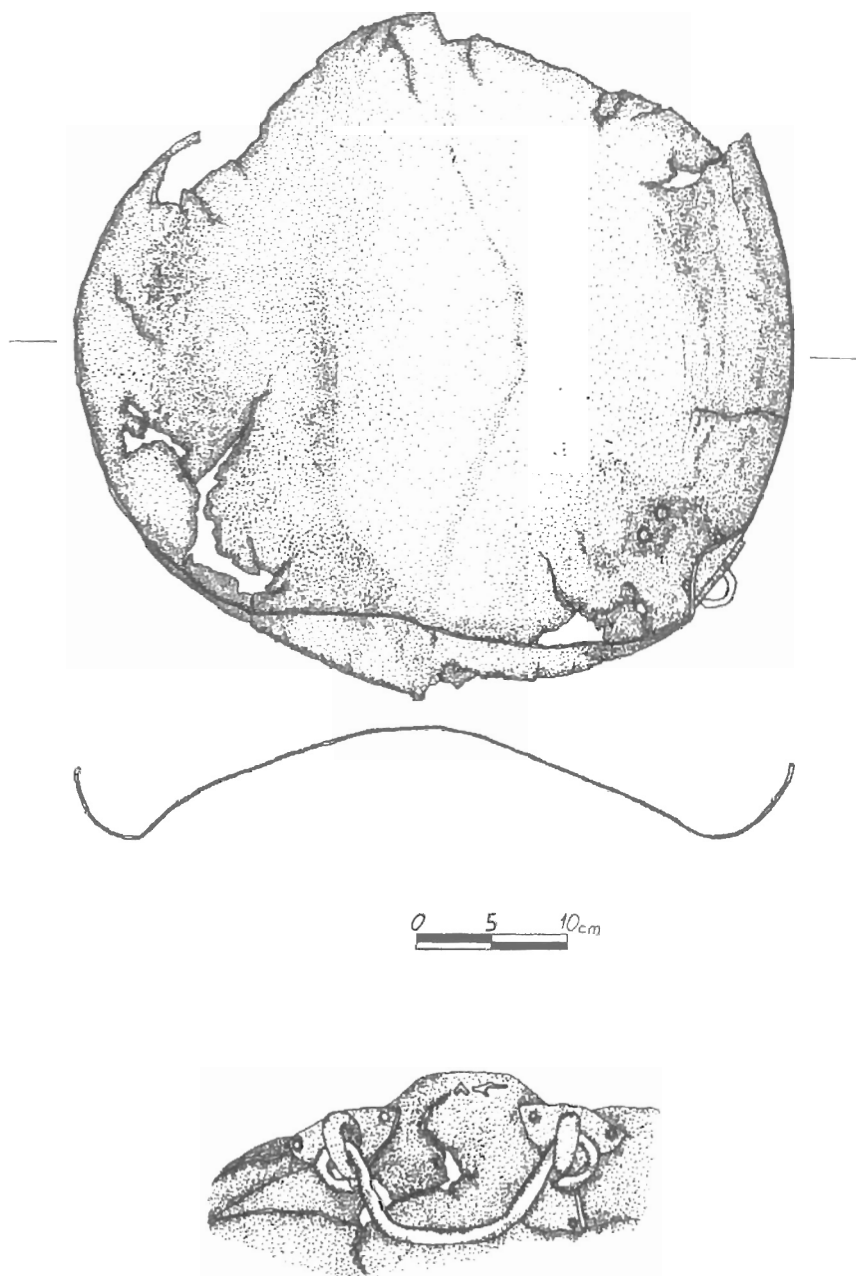


Fig. 3. – Single Headed Bronze Bowl with Pictograms. Archaeological Research Centre in Van of the Istanbul University

Although it was shaped from a thick bronze sheet, the rims were broken due to oxidisation. It must have originally weighed 2.700- 2.750 g. Fortunately, the handle is in situ. Roughly “T” shaped, it was cast and then riveted on the bowl. Similar “T” shaped handles are also observed on cauldrons and buckets dating to the 8th and 7th centuries B.C. The handle has a round section and its terminals were shaped in the form of an animal’s head, which is presumably a stylised panther. That it has a

single handle, indicates that it was hung onto a wall rather than used for storage. As the similar single handled bowls used in the palaces and as votives in the temples in particular, it is dated to 7th cent. B.C.<sup>18</sup>

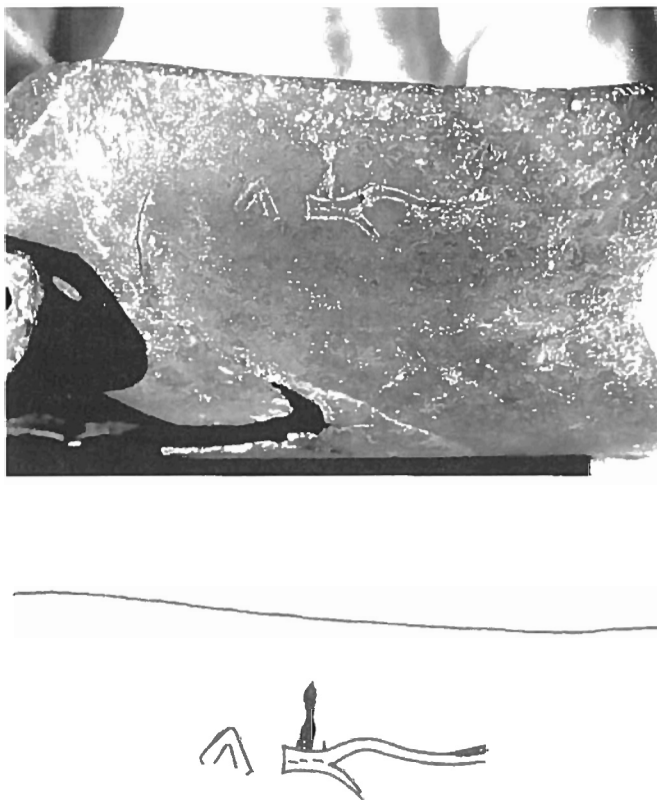


Fig. 4. – The Pictograms on the Bronze Bowl.

The most interesting feature of the bowl is the presence of two pictographic signs between the handles and on the rim. One of the incised signs resembles an upturned “V” and the other seemingly a ploughshare. The latter is similar to a pictogram of a plug incised on the cheek piece of a helmet<sup>19</sup>, which is also of unknown provenance.

<sup>18</sup> O. Belli - C. Avcı, “Urartian Bronze Vessels in the Van Museum”, in: O. Belli - Y. Dağlı (Eds.), *Gündağ Kayaoğlu Hatıra Kitabı (Makaleler)*, İstanbul 2005, 58.

<sup>19</sup> H.J. Kellner, *Urartu ein Wiederentdecker Rivale Assyriens*, München 1976, Nr. 144, Abb. 46; U. Siedl, *Bronzekunst Urartus*, Mainz 2004, 53, Abb. 16d, Taf. 7d.

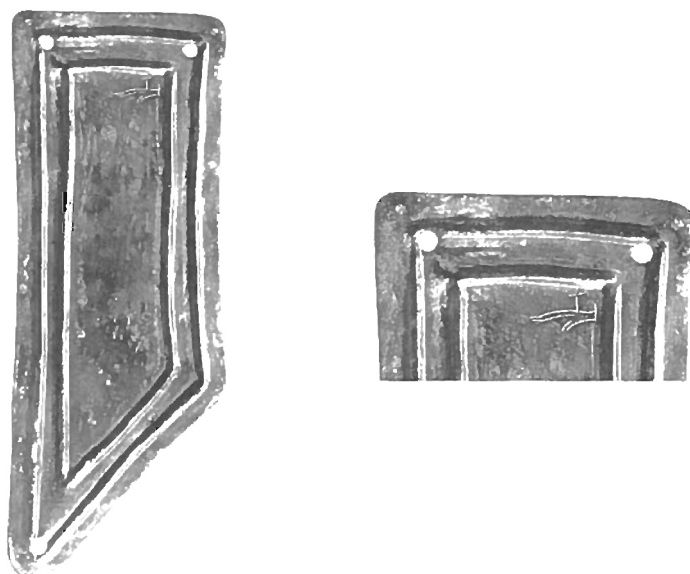


Fig. 5. – Cheek piece of a Bronze helmet with a Plug Shaped Pictogram.

It is not easy to understand the function of those pictograms. One possible explanation is that they were a kind of mark identifying the owner of the objects. Their function is not similar to the figures of lions or towers carved in the bronze bowls from Karmir-blur, which are in association with short cuneiform inscriptions indicating the property of a king. There is no univoc connection between a sign and a specific kings name.

*Oktay Belli*  
*İstanbul Üniversitesi*  
*Avrasya Arkeoloji Enstitüsü*  
*TR – 34459 İstanbul*

*Mirjo Salvini*  
*ICEVO – CNR*  
*Via Giano della Bella, 18*  
*I – 00162 Roma*