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Eleonora PAPPALARDO, *A Bronze Belt from Kavousi*

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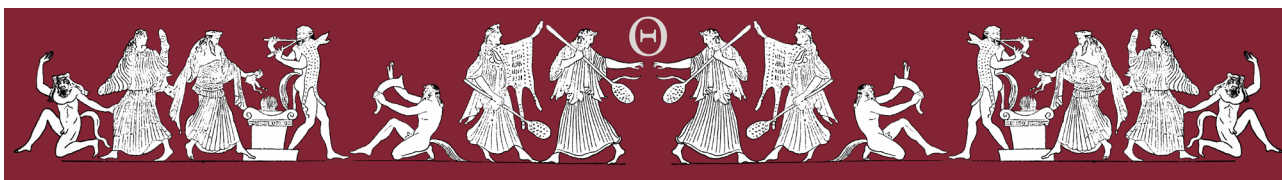
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A BRONZE BELT FROM KAVOUSI

Eleonora Pappalardo

Key words: Kavousi, Crete, Bronze, Belt, Plate, Iron Age, Iconography.

Parole chiave: Kavousi, Creta, bronzo, cintura, lamina, Età del Ferro, iconografia.

Abstract:

This work is aimed to re-analyse figured bronze fragments found in the tholos tomb at Kavousi (Crete) by Harriet Boyd in 1900. Since the time of the discovery, the “Kavousi Bronze Plaque” was at the centre of several studies concerning artistic relationships and reciprocal influences between Aegean, Crete in particular, and Near East in the early 1st millennium BC. Interest was mostly addressed to the rich figural decoration through parallel registers, formed by subjects (lords of the animals, sphinxes, griffins) belonging to the Oriental iconographic repertoire but, contemporaneously, well attested in early Iron Age Crete. The attention focused on the plate’s decorative pattern, which has comparisons from other sites of the island (Knossos, Idaean Cave, Eleutherna, Prinias) made almost neglected the nature of the object itself, fundamental for the reconstruction of its meaning. Through the exam of decorative features, the fragments’ borders and the characteristic distribution of the holes along the plate’s rims, and thanks to systematic comparisons with the contemporary Eastern production, it is possible and plausible as well to reconstruct the “Kavousi plate” as a belt. This would be inspired by a Urartian prototype of 9th/8th cent. BC, later quite spread though neighbour Eastern Mediterranean regions.

Questo lavoro ha l’obiettivo di riesaminare i frammenti in bronzo figurati rinvenuti all’interno di una tomba a tholos presso Kavousi (Creta) da Harriet Boyd nel 1900. Sin dai tempi del rinvenimento, la “Lamina di Kavousi” è stata al centro di numerosi studi relativi ai rapporti artistici e alle reciproche influenze tra l’Egeo, in particolare Creta, e il Vicino Oriente agli inizi del I millennio. Questo per via della ricca decorazione figurata che, disposta su registri paralleli, decora gli ampi frammenti bronzei con soggetti (signori degli animali, sfingi elmate, grifoni) cari al bagaglio figurativo orientale ma, al contempo, diffusamente attestati a Creta all’inizio dell’età del ferro. L’attenzione rivolta al programma figurativo della lamina bronzea, che trova confronti esatti in oggetti di varia natura provenienti da numerosi siti isolani, come Cnosso, l’antro Ideo, Eleutherna, Prinias, ha fatto sì che nel tempo si trascurasse l’importanza della ricostruzione dell’oggetto in sé, rinunciando così ad un tassello importante e fondamentale nella ricostruzione del suo significato. Attraverso l’esame degli elementi figurativi, delle linee di frattura dei frammenti e della singolare disposizione dei fori sulla lamina, e grazie a confronti sistematici con la produzione coeva nel mondo vicino-orientale, si ritiene possibile ricostruire la “lamina in bronzo di Kavousi” con una cintura del tipo originato in Urartu tra fine del IX e l’inizio dell’VIII secolo a.C., e poi diffuso nelle regioni orientali e nel Mediterraneo.

“With the appointment of Prince George as Prince
High Commissioner of Crete, ...
A new era in Cretan Archaeology began”¹.

In the spring of 1900, Harriet Boyd arrived in Crete, just at that crucial period when the excavations carried out in Knossos by Arthur Evans produced astonishing results which improved the general knowledge of Mycenaean past. Nevertheless, miss Boyd’s attention was caught by that “humbled period that followed the Golden Age of Crete” and decided to research Geometric sites. Particularly, her researches were focused on Kavousi, in the northern end of the isthmus connecting Sitia with the rest of the island. After time spent in investigating the area of Vronda, the Archaeolo-

¹ BOYD 1901, p. 137.

gist slightly moved to the extreme north end of the Triphite range raising “like a wall” behind Kavousi: “This peak has long been called “Citadel” (*Kastron*) by the peasants”². Here, as known, rests of structures have been found³, according to Boyd belonging to a local chief and to be connected with the owner of a rich tomb found not far from the *Kastro*, at *Skouriasmeno*⁴.

The tomb had been accidentally discovered 40 years before by a peasant; from that moment, step by step the deposited assemblage was progressively removed: “An antiquity dealer from Heraklion is said to have bought ten vases... a cleaver priest took many swords, vases etc... several villagers claim to have had knives and jars from the same treasure... At length, having removed all the objects which seemed to him of value, the peasant replaced the slab and built his house above it...” (pp. 143-144).

The tholos tomb, then, probably coincided with what Arthur Evans defined a “cave” near Kavousi which, instead, was nothing but the hole under the floor of a peasant’s house. The excavation of the tomb provided astonishing results. It was a well-preserved tholos tomb⁵, built with regular blocks and, surprisingly, it was still housing a small part of the buried goods.

I’ll provide a summary list of the finds, without references to dimensions which are available in the original publication⁶: 1) figured Hydria; 2) barrel-shaped four handled vase; 3) two two-handled amphorae; 4) gold button; 5) blue glass bead; 6) two bronze harrow-heads; 7) two pieces of gold foil; 8) two pieces of blue glass; 9) **nine pieces of thin bronze plate**; 10) nine pieces of thin bronze plate, curved surfaces, with beaded edges, probably parts of greaves; 11) two iron swords; two iron sword-handless; one iron sword-point; two parts of iron sword-blades; one sceptre-handle (?); two pieces of iron and one of bronze; 12) seven iron lance heads, hollow at lower end, in some instances containing bits of the wooden shaft; two iron axe-heads; one stone axe-head; three pieces of silver lead; one bronze hook; many broken pieces of iron; 13) broken vases and many fragments of pottery; 14) several bones of animals, among them a boar’s tusk.

In addition to the above objects which were directly taken from the tomb during the works, three more vases (a hydria and two jugs) coming from the same grave were brought by two villagers who used them to contain oil.

The tomb’s architectural features, as well as the nature of the goods it contained, clearly denote the wealthy status of the owner. Whereas the original grave assemblage cannot be reconstructed, the few rests found by Miss Boyd are enough to provide a picture quite consistent with other Cretan Iron Age high-status burial costumes. The most famous examples are provided by the Knossos North Cemetery or the Fortetsa necropolis where, mostly in association with chamber tombs, assemblages are formed by several kinds of goods often including bronze items, figured objects, weapons and *exotica* along with huge amount of local and imported pottery⁷.

The number 9 of the above list of finds (fig. 1) consists in various bronze fragments that survived the tomb’s plunder which, since the time of their discovery, soon caught attention of scholars interested on Iron Age Crete, mostly for the rich figured decoration. The group of fragments, commonly and generically named “bronze plate from Kavousi”, firstly published by Miss Boyd in the aforementioned article, was subsequently mentioned mostly in dissertations focusing on East-West interconnections⁸. This is for, through parallel register, the fragments are variously engraved with subjects borrowing from Eastern imagery, and precisely:

Horizontal registers

1. 1 Row of walking helmeted sphinxes facing back.
2. 4 Rows of lion slayers (single or flanked by a couple of rampant lions).
3. 2 Rows of helmeted sphinxes walking rightwards.
4. 1 Row of human figures (only the upper part survives)

Square metopes

Couples of symmetrical griffins face to face and facing back sphinxes.

The single scenes are bordered by bands filled with geometric patterns (simple horizontal engravings, oblique dashes, dots, zig-zag).

² BOYD 1901, p. 137.

³ New investigations in the Kavousi area were carried out by the Team of the “Kavousi Project” formed by the University of Tennessee and Minnesota and the Wabash College under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. For an overview of recent investigations see: COULSON 1998; COULSON, HUGGIS, MOOK, TOBIN 1997; DAY 2011; GSELL, COULSON, DAY 1985; 1988; 1991; 1995; HUGGIS 2005.

⁴ BOYD 1901, p. 143.

⁵ Diameter 2.90 m; height 2.20 m; length of the *dromos* 1.70.

⁶ The list of the assemblage items exactly coincides with the one provided by Boyd (1901, p. 145).

⁷ COLDSTREAM, CATLING 1996; BROCK 1957.

⁸ KUNZE 1931, pl. 56e, 5; DE MARGNE 1947, p. 236, tav. 37; BROCK 1957; BOARDMAN 1961, p. 134, fig. 50, a; COLDSTREAM 1977, p. 284, tav. 92a; BLOME 1982, p. 10, tav. 3;

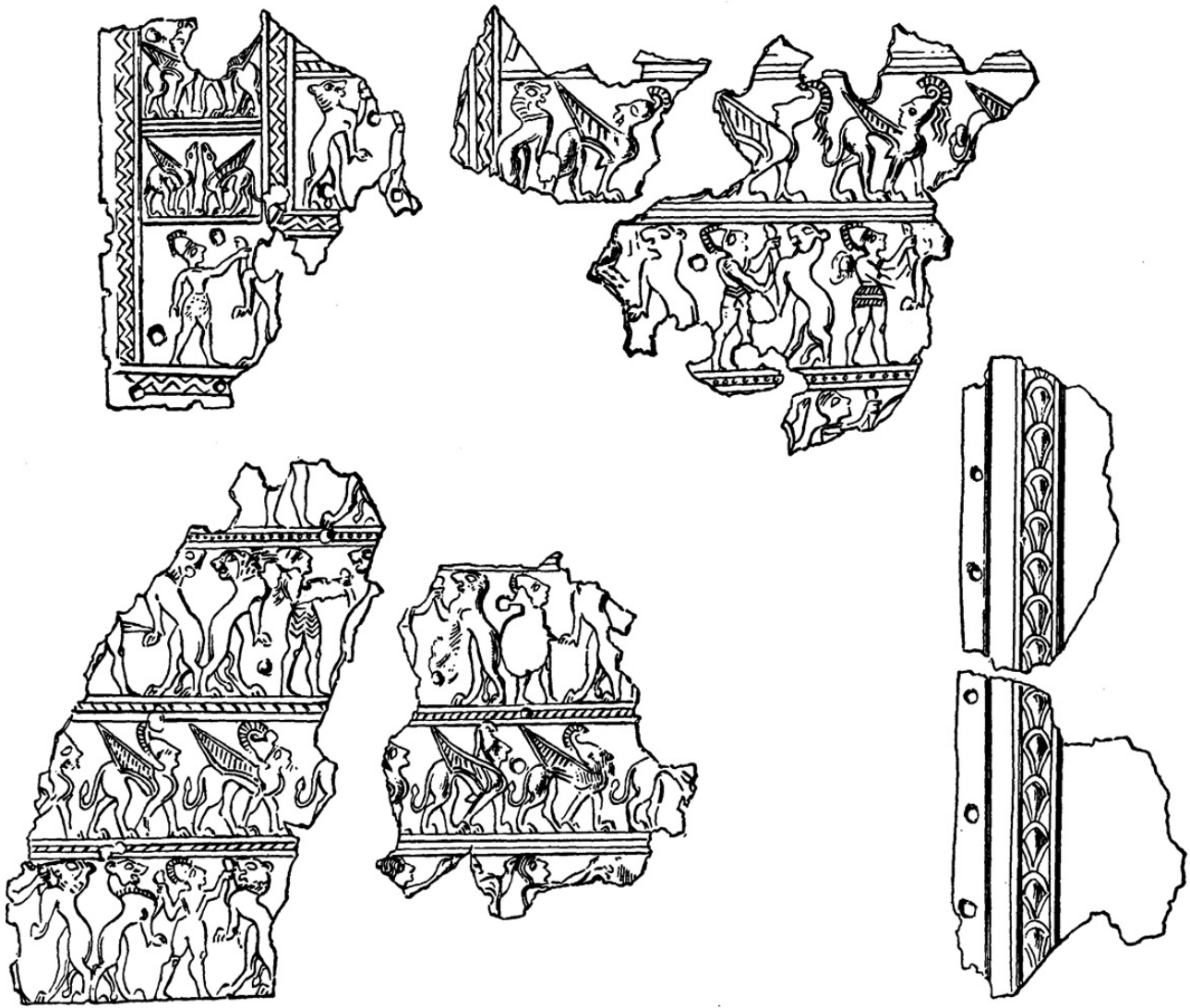


Fig. 1 Fragments of the Kavousi Bronze Plate. After BOYD 1901, fig. 11.

Iconography

The subjects represented on the Kavousi plate (fig. 1) form a recurrent motive in Iron Age Crete, during that complex laps of time, yet started in 9th cent. BC, in which Near Eastern features influenced several aspects of local material culture, particularly craftsmanship, according to a scheme of reciprocal influences, at a more or less extent involving all the Mediterranean regions. Several studies have been devoted to 9th/8th cent. Cretan iconography, focusing both on the choices of precise subjects and on the more general value and meaning of the Oriental imagery's adoption.

The figures on the Kavousi fragments carry images of sphinxes, griffins and heroes grabbing lions. In this last case, it seems that two slightly different subjects are summarized: the "lion slayer" and the "lord of the animals"⁹. The first, as known, was widely spread in Near East, counting numerous examples in North Syrian art¹⁰ where it appears in rock reliefs and ivory carving. The general composition is formed by the male figure grabbing the upraised lion's paw (being the other front leg straight down). In 7th cent. Assyrian art it appears on the palace reliefs of Assurbanipal¹¹ and on stamp seals from 9th to 7th cent.¹².

HOFFMAN 2005, pp. 369-365; MATTHÄUS 2005, pp. 309-312; PAPPALARDO 2001; PAUTASSO 2019a.

⁹ BROCK 1957, p. 198; PAPPALARDO 2001; 2011.

¹⁰ See HOFFMAN 2005, pp. 372-375 for the discussion. Gail Hoffman compares, furthermore, the characteristic scheme of the foot representation on Cretan objects where lion slayer

is represented (thick with upturned toes rendered as if seen from above) common in the representation of Hittite deities. See also MATTHÄUS 2005; PAPPALARDO 2011b.

¹¹ FRANKFORT 1996, fig. 211.

¹² WINTER 2000, pl. V, 1-2, VII, 6-7.

Irene Winter argues that an important difference must be detected between the “narrative” sense of the lion hunt theme (common on royal reliefs)¹³ and the immediate iconic effect rose from the stamp seals, where hero is represented in single hand combat (this characteristic would be consistent with the general function of seals, whose message must be immediate and a meaning-making role yet inherent in the moment of its conception)¹⁴. These, according to Winter, would must be connected not directly with the figure of the king, but rather with the “royal authority” in general¹⁵.

Gail Hoffman argued that some differences in Cretan stylistic composition testify a further step in the general subject’s development. They mainly consist in the rendering of human figure, shown as a warrior rather than ruler/king¹⁶. Furthermore, as known, among the examples of lion-slayer figures in Cretan domain, four bear a couple of lions flanking the warrior¹⁷ (as on two registers of the Kavousi plate) in which “since the warrior turns to grapple with one lion, the second lion is unengaged and often rests his upraised paw on the warrior’s shoulder or helmet”¹⁸.

In commenting the Fortetsa bronze quiver, where two lions flanking a warrior are represented, yet J. Brock assumed that “two different types seem to be confused here: the Gilgamesh lion-tamer type, where the central figure holds in subjection a lion on both sides, and the more realistic lion-slayer scenes where each combatant has to cope with only a single lion”¹⁹. According to Hoffman, instead, it is “consciously conflated”²⁰. On effect, both subjects are yet promiscuous in Phoenician art, being the best example the famous bronze bowl from Nimrud²¹.

The subject of the “Lord of the animals” is commonly seen as a Greek motif partially borrowing from Near East²², where usually the central male figure (identified with a divine or semi-divine personality) is frontally represented holding the upraised legs of two rampant beasts²³. It is possible and plausible as well that lion-slayer can draw on the motif of the lion hunt where the human figure represents the king/ruler while the master of beasts symbolizes a sense of divine control²⁴.

In general, it seems that in Crete the subject has merged both meanings together, generating a new iconography where the human figure wears Cretan dresses (short kilt, pointed and crested helmets). On this respect Gail Hoffman reasonably poses three possibilities in order to try explaining the origin of the Cretan “mix type”: 1- Cretan artists were confused and didn’t realize that “lord of the animals” and “lion-slayer” were different subjects carrying different meanings in Near East; 2- Cretan artists wanted to maintain symmetrical compositions by adding a lion to the scene (clay dish from Knossos Ambelokipi²⁵; cut-out plaque from Knossos North Cemetery²⁶; bronze quiver from Fortetsa²⁷) or, alternatively, by placing the warriors back-to-back as in the diadem from Khaniala Tekke²⁸ was made; 3- lately, as Hoffman herself assumes, Cretan artists of the lion-slayer/master of beasts “consciously joined the two images to make a *new visual statement* (added emphasis)”²⁹, aimed to convey a new message, much consistent in Iron Age Cretan context, that is “warrior slays lion to create order for the community”.

On this respect, the deep differences between Near Eastern and Cretan Archaic societies would come into play and, then, the king became a “generic” warrior; in meantime, the general compositional scheme is maintained (static combat of the king). The new composition could be more easily adapted to the “warrior/leader’s” role in Cretan Iron Age society³⁰.

¹³ HOFFMAN 2005, p. 371.

¹⁴ WINTER 2005, p. 57.

¹⁵ This was, then, used by officials engaged in royal administration (HOFFMAN 2005, p. 371). Extremely interesting are Winter’s arguments about the “real” difference of meaning between the lion hunts in Assurnazirpal II and Assurbanipal reliefs and the lion slayer of seal stamps. In the firsts, in fact “the lions are killed, the ruler is triumphant, and in the end, cultic libations are poured over the carcasses by the victorious ruler. In the combat, by contrast, both the general comparability of height of the two figures and the grappling but not-yet-decisive moment selected for representation (nowhere is the carcass of a lion trampled victoriously under foot, for example) suggest a relative equality of the paired combatants”. WINTER 2000, p. 59.

¹⁶ HOFFMAN 2005, p. 373.

¹⁷ For recent lectures of the subject see PAUTASSO 2019a; PAUTASSO 2019b.

¹⁸ HOFFMAN 2005, p. 373. For a previous dissertation on the type see PAPPALARDO 2001, pp. 162-163.

¹⁹ BROCK 1957, p. 198.

²⁰ BROCK 1957, p. 198; HOFFMAN 2005, p. 374;

²¹ MARKOE 1985, p. 357.

²² PAPPALARDO 2001, p. 163. See also PAPPALARDO 2011, pp. 197-198. As assumed by Hoffman (2005, p. 374), the motif roots both in Bronze Age Aegean and Near East (Evans 1964, pp. 125-126; MARINATOS 1990; MORGAN 1995, pp. 171-180; THOMAS 1999; MARKOE 1985, pp. 86-115; HURWIT 1985, pp. 114-117; CROWLEY 1989; MARINATOS 2000).

²³ As known, this subject has a female counterpart widely spread particularly in both Bronze Age and Iron Age Aegean. The Mistress of animals (*Potnia Theron*) can be represented holding different species of animals (prevailing birds in Early Iron Age). See BURKERT 1987 (in partic. p. 149); CHADWICK 1976, p. 92.

²⁴ HOFFMAN 2005, p. 375.

²⁵ STAMPOLIDIS 1998, p. 135, n. 230.

²⁶ COLDSTREAM, CATLING 1996, fig. 154, 4.

²⁷ BROCK 1957, pl. 169, 1569.

²⁸ HUTCHINSON 1954, p. 217, fig. 2, 2.

²⁹ HOFFMAN 2005, p. 375.

³⁰ HOFFMAN 2005, p. 376.

Another significant element consists in the recurrence of the couple of motives: lion-slayer/lord of the animals and helmeted sphinxes. It happens both in the bronze quiver from Fortetsa and in the Kavousi plate as well, maybe testifying an additional meaning to be detected just in the simultaneous presence of both subjects.

As assumed elsewhere³¹, subjects alone can hardly provide information about meaning and function.

In his critical approach to Panofsky system³², Gombrich argued that iconology must start with a study of institutions rather than symbols, insisting on the necessity of setting the frame within which a given symbolic code is to be read. Recognition of this frames then constitutes an important aspect of decoding iconography; images have an active relationship with other images, not just with the textual sources of their own imagery. Images “may carry different meanings in different sub-spheres of society: political, religious, economic, social, as well as when included in different ‘genres’”³³.

It rests the risk of confining the meaning of an image in the image itself, and of thinking meaning as a static and fix category, passively travelling with the object carrying it. A good example for the shifting meaning of a subject is provided by the sacred tree, variously represented in Assyrian art and often changing its own real sense on the base of a more wide context of use: when it's represented in association with fantastic creatures flanking it, its meaning can reasonably be connected with land richness; nevertheless, when it's placed behind the royal throne its meaning changes and evokes messages connected with royalty and politic display; furthermore, when tree is used on administrative seals, the same motif acts within quite another domain of signification³⁴.

So, images attribute a double nature to the objects transforming them into meaning-makers³⁵. The analysis Gail Hoffman carries out on the lion slayer/lord of animals in Crete raises the importance of the objects behind the images.

About the Cretan artefacts depicting this subject we can certainly state that the major number comes from graves³⁶; one is represented on a bronze quiver, that is a piece of armor; two on gold plates (a diadem and a plaque); three on clay relief dishes and, finally, one on the Kavousi “bronze plate” fragmentarily preserved³⁷.

On the base of what said above, it would be useful to try to reconstruct the original nature of the object found scattered in fragments inside the Kavousi tomb, in order to add, if possible, another element to the work of meaning-making reconstruction in Iron Age Crete. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know if the object was originally integrally deposited inside the tomb or, instead, it was intentionally broken before it was placed as dead good. It must be remembered that along with the few objects escaped from the peasants' looting are fragments of greaves (10) and several pieces of weapons, both useful to the reconstruction of the “Kavousi plate's” nature.

The object

Just the analysis of decoration pattern, distribution of figures, their reciprocal relationships can help to provide a first general view and allows us to try assembling some fragments differently from how they were firstly reconstructed (fig. 2).

Some of the Kavousi bronze plate pieces were yet reasonably be thought as belonging to the same object's portion, others, instead, were kept separated as far they were interpreted as not necessarily belonging to the bronze plate, which was supposedly reconstructed as a wooden box decoration.

Fragments' dimensions have generously been provided by the Heraklion Museum, and are: a) 6.6 x 9.8 cm; b) 4.7 x 4 cm; c) 4.4 x 4.3 and thin fragments measuring d) 2 x 2.6 cm; e) 2 x 1.4 cm; f) 1.8x1.5 cm; g) 0.8 x 1.5 cm³⁸. Quite all fragments are broken all-around, being preserved just a small portion of the lower register's end, making me argue that all measures (in width and length) aren't enough to establish the total dimension of the object, whose original width could be thought between 15 and 20 cm about.

What immediately emerges is the distribution of the figures through horizontal registers ridged, as said above, by slightly different rims (smooth or variously engraved). Some fragments, nevertheless, follow a different criterion in the arrangement of figural patterns: two fragmentary square metopes house, respectively, a couple of griffins symmetrically placed and a couple of facing-back sphinxes. The metopes' right and left rims are different from the rest of borders framing the horizontal registers, being filled with zig-zag band, continuing at the base of one of the main fragments.

³¹ PAPPALARDO 2019a; 2019b.

³² GOMBRICH 1972b, p. 20. In general, see GOMBRICH 1972a.

³³ WINTER 2005, p. 77.

³⁴ WINTER 2005, p. 78.

³⁵ PAPPALARDO 2019b.

³⁶ A fragment of clay tray depicting a lion-slayer comes from recent excavation on the Patela of Prinias, reasonably to be associated with the unpublished one found in the Necropolis.

³⁷ For references see above.

³⁸ I thank the Heraklion Museum staff, in particular Dr Maria Kyrimi, for her kind information about the bronze plate.

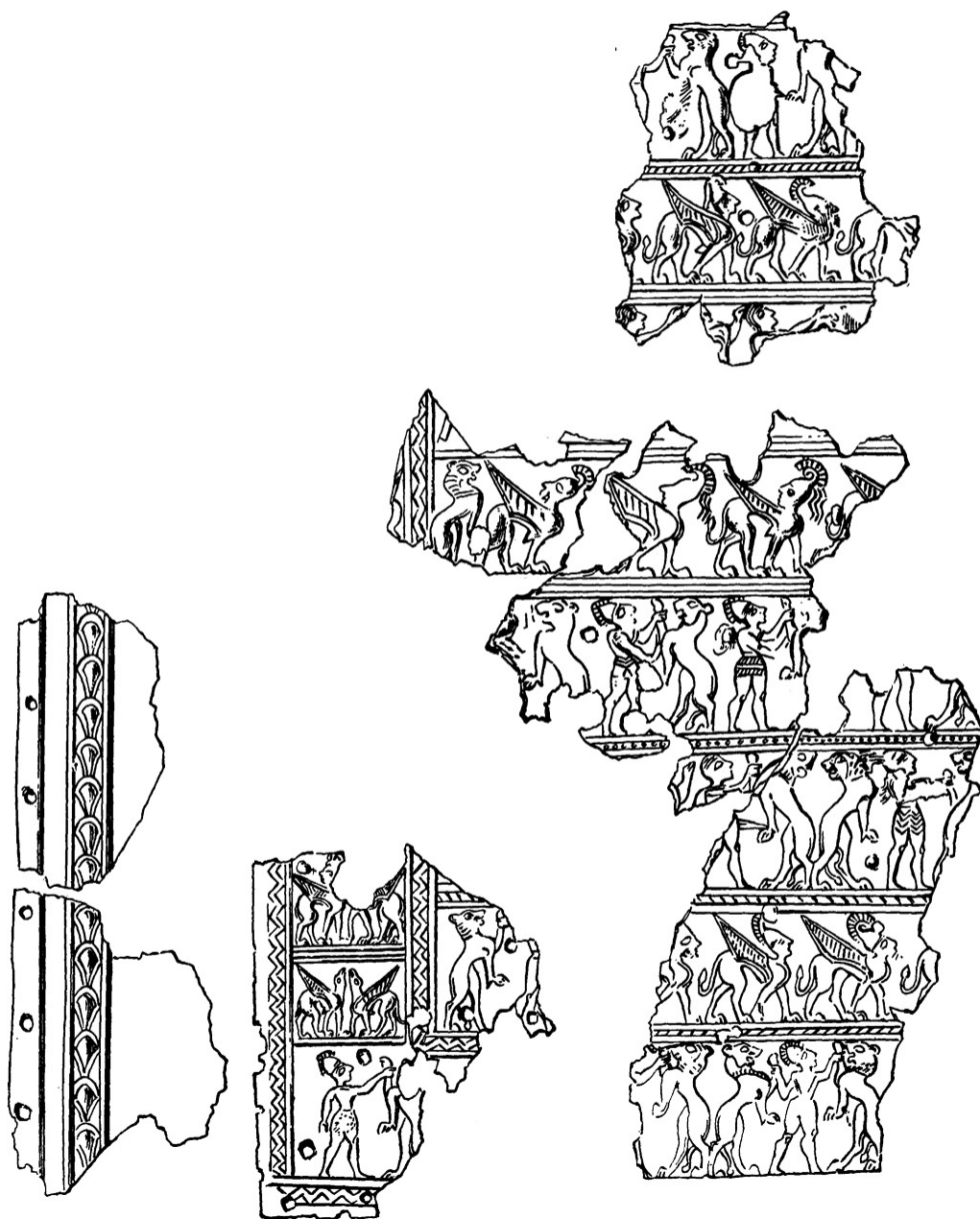


Fig. 2. Personal re-arrangement of the Kavousi fragments.

According to my reconstruction, then, this last would form the bottom of the object, to be placed at the left lower part of the whole plate, and to be furtherly connected (to the left) with both smooth fragments bordered with what seems a chain of papyrus buds (fig. 2).

More complex is the complete reconstruction of the rest of the fragments. The bronze surface is very scraped off but the drawings of Gillieron clearly highlight the use of different patterns in filling the registers' frames. If we were to think that each register had a differently decorated border, then it would have to be restored an almost seven/eight (maybe more) registers plate. This is possible and plausible as well. And it's perfectly fitting with the reconstruction of the bronze plate as a belt.

In particular, the Kavousi plate would fit almost closely with a precise type of bronze/iron belt widely spread through Eastern regions of the Northern near East, in particular Urartu.

Uartian tradition in bronze working was very well known in the Assyrian realm, as the literary sources testify³⁹. In particular, the strong link between religion and weapons brought to the production of unique pieces of art. Uartian craftsmen were skilled in the production and decoration of every part of the armour, including belts.

³⁹ See in general MERHAV 1991 with bibliography.

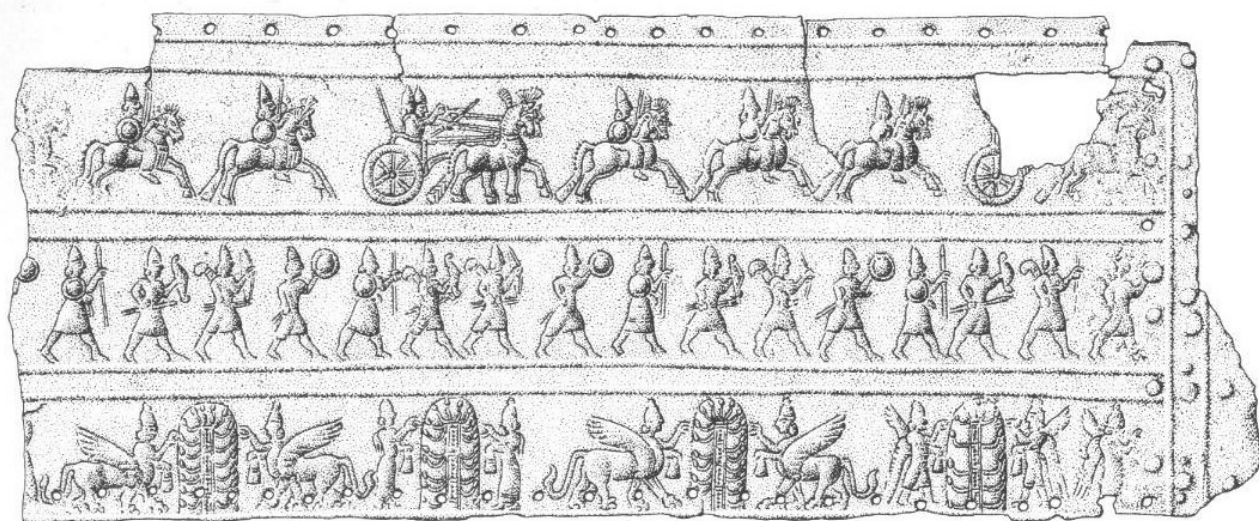


Fig. 3. Urartian bronze belt (2nd group). After KELLNER 1991, fig. 1.

As for the shields⁴⁰, also the production of belts in Urartu followed canonical principles and a common layout. In particular, the wide production of bronze belts allows the distinction into eleven groups, made just on an iconographic basis⁴¹.

Belts were made of thin sheet bronze (or iron) having embossed decoration and their width varying from 9/10 cm to 17/20. They are commonly bordered by holes to fix the bronze plate to a backing of leather or cloth. They usually have embossed ribs repeating the outline of the belt at top and bottom and at the ends, leaving a narrow border which is perforated through the holes. A small ring is often fixed to right end of Urartian belts and is mounted in bracket riveted to the base. Some specimens bring geometric decoration, while others carry rich figured one, freehand drawn and with considerable attention to details.

Urartian belts form a huge corpus of more than 400 items scattered through Museums and private collections all around the world⁴², and several attempts to group them on a chronological (and iconographic) base have been made. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to link each specimen with the original context of find, and so a certain reconstruction of belt's use and meaning is quite far from being done. As said above, in general, the bulk of artefacts has been divided into 11 groups on the base of dimensions and figural organization⁴³ and main difficulties in their study lie in the lack of indications about original places of find and, then production; as a consequence their classification not always allows reconstruction of regional differences, but rather can be referred to some sort of chronological internal development⁴⁴. In the meantime, the small number of well-dated items leaves till today many questions unanswered. So, chronological information is available from a stylistic and iconographic analysis, useful to establish groupings which often makes it possible to appreciate some sort of development and, some time, centres of production. Cross-relationships and stages of development testify that the entire assemblage of belts is closely internally related.

Traditionally, among the amount of material, a group of belts is considered to stay out as the earliest one. It consists in the series in which decoration is disposed onto registers separated by embossed ribs⁴⁵, but often there are no dividing lines, following a rigid organization of the scenes, where processions of mounted horses and chariots with eight-spoked wheels appear⁴⁶ (fig. 3). They are, then, usually based on hunting and warfare, huntsman and soldiers on horseback but also wild beasts. In general, so, animals are recurring theme on these belts, sometimes real but more often fantastic creatures combining elements from different kinds of animals, as proper of Near Eastern art.

⁴⁰ PAPPALARDO 2016.

⁴¹ KELLNER 1991, note 35; CURTIS 1996, pp. 118-136.

⁴² CURTIS 1996, pp. 118-119.

⁴³ For a synthesis of belts grouping see KELLNER 1991.

⁴⁴ Among the more significant studies devoted to Urartian belts are those by HAMILTON (1965), TAŞYÜREK (1975), SALVATORI (1976a; 1976b), KENDALL (1977), TANABE (1982) and EICHLER (1984). Recently a useful book has been

published by KELLNER (1991), based on the exhibition organized at the Prähistorische Staatssammlung in Munich in 1976.

⁴⁵ It has been argued by several scholars (SEIDL 1989, pp. 171-172) that 9th century Urartian art follows principles of the Assyrian one, aimed to re-produce some sort of court-style which, through the ages, gave away to a popular style.

⁴⁶ KELLNER 1991,

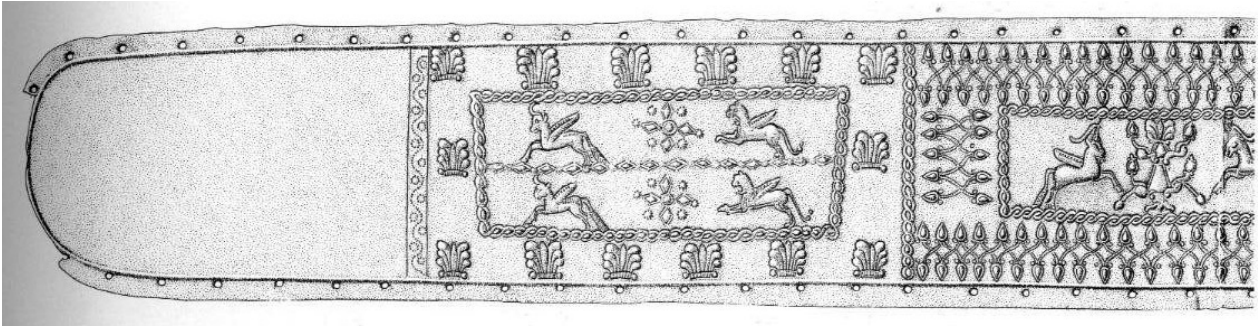


Fig. 4. Urtian bronze belt. After KELLNER 1991, fig. 2.



Fig. 5. Urtian bronze belt. After KELLNER 1991, n. 17.

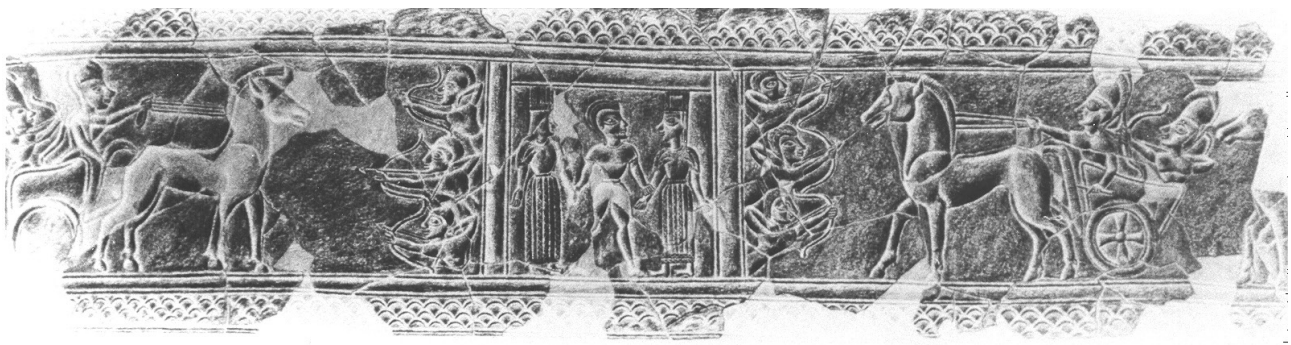


Fig. 6. Fortetsa (Knossos), bronze belt. After BLOME 1982.

The Kellner book⁴⁷ provides a more than exhaustive idea of rich figural and decorative repertoire forming the decoration of Urtian metal belts: in general, some of the belts carrying geometrical or linear decoration come from Toprak Kale and Karmir Blur, while just few figured items come from regular excavations (Kayalidere, Altintepe, Karmir Blur, Metsamor near Yerevan, Ani-Pemza)⁴⁸. For what concerns shape, the belts' ends can be cut off square or slightly rounded.

Some interesting specimens of the first type, particularly useful for the analysis here carried out on the Kavousi bronze plate, come from the cemetery of Nor-Areš near Arin-berd (Erebuni)⁴⁹.

Among these lasts, in particular, a fragmentary specimen coming from grave 150 bears narrow decoration disposed on registers: horsemen, horsemen and foot-soldiers, fantastic creatures flanking sacred trees⁵¹ (fig. 7); the upper register is very badly preserved, but the presence of a lion's head along with running animals could be linked with a hunting scene. What is significant in this (and other) belt, is the peculiar distribution of decoration along the end (only one preserved) where the horizontal registers are interrupted by a metopal arrangement of figures, framed into square spaces bordered by smooth bands. Along the right rim of the belt a rough of holes is aimed to fix the ends plausibly through strips or laces. In several points, furthermore, it is evident that the break of the belt corresponds with the

⁴⁷ KELLNER 1991.

⁴⁸ See CURTIS 1996, pp. 120-121. For a more updated overview, see SEIDL 2004.

⁴⁹ SEIDL 2004, p. 152, br-11, fig. 106.

⁵⁰ MARTIROSIAN 1964, p. 247, pls. 26-27; ESAYAN 1984, p.

134, pls. 26, 82;

⁵¹ the presence of the sacred tree "in a cartouche", flanked by lions, bulls or genies in human form or winged sphinxes bearing offering pails, would be characteristic of the second group of belts according to KELLNER (1991).

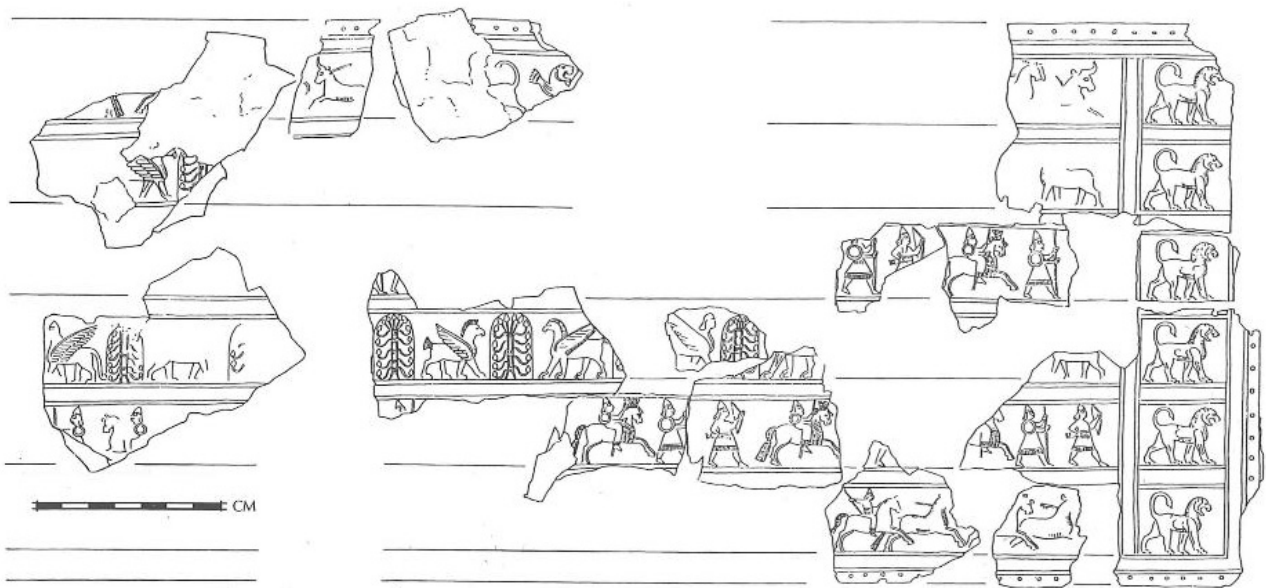


Fig. 7. Bronze belt from Erebuni. After SIEDL 2004, fig. 106.

limit between the figured area and the smooth one, where evidently the bronze plate was more thin (the same can be observed on the Kavousi plate).

The general pattern of figures' disposition in the Arin-Ber (Erebuni) belt (reconstructed for a width of 20 cm), whose main characteristic properly consists in the mixture of both decorative schemes (narrow registers and metopal decoration) would belong to the 2nd group of Urartian belts according to the Kellner classification⁵², differing from the first group for the presence of fantastic creatures and sacred trees, but sharing with it the representations of narrative scenes with chariots and warriors.

On these specimens, chariots often represented seem to completely correspond to the ones reproduced on a bronze fitting bearing the name of Argisti I and according to Kellner, they don't seem to be chronologically very distant from the latter, being reasonably dated to in the first third of 8th cent. BC. Belts belonging to this group generally get a width up to 17 cm. Their width gave rise to assumption that "broad belts" should be regarded as early in comparison with the narrow ones (structurally more similar to the specimen from Fortetsa near Knossos)⁵³ (figs. 4-6), nevertheless, fragments of belt only 8.2 cm wide bear a row of plain and decorated buds reasonably being dated to the time of Išpuni and Menua. So, we can assume that some narrow belts were contemporaneous with the broad ones and their different system of perforation may indicate that they were differently worn (possibly by women also).

In general, belt decoration combining different patterns, parallel registers along the main surface and square panels (single or multiple) in the ends, is quite spread crossing several of the Kellner groupings (see specimens of the 3rd group for example)⁵⁴.

The decorative pattern of the Kavousi bronze plate (according to a scheme based on repetition of figures on symmetrical composition, through narrow registers), the measures of the single fragments, the presence of holes along the rims, the association of figured registers with metopal distribution of precise subjects, seem to demonstrate that what was buried into the rich tholos tomb at Kavousi was a bronze belt (fig. 8). This reconstruction could be furtherly allowed by the presence, inside the same tomb, of nine pieces of thin bronze curved plates, probably parts of greaves, two iron swords, two iron sword handles, seven iron lance heads.

⁵² KELLNER 1991, pp. 144-145, fig. 2

⁵³ See below.

⁵⁴ In my opinion, the association of rows of figures with rectangular framed panels at the belts' ends, is destined to form a "standard pattern". In later groups, the metopes became progressively smaller in comparison with the main scene covering the entire belt's surface, but will persist. On this respect, the interpretation of the belts carrying decoration distributed through registers as the earlier could fit with the natural development process of the Assyrian relief from Assurnasir-

pal till Sennacherib. On the belts also, in fact, metalsmiths seem to leave the rigid organization into registers (well separated through ribs) toward a free use of the surface, in later groups conceived as some sort of "tapestry" where the power of the image, its symbolic value, overcomes the narrative role of the continuous scenes. In any case, the terminal panels at both the belt's ends seem to continue performing the function of bordering the main figural field, housing single images which symbolically evoke the main one.

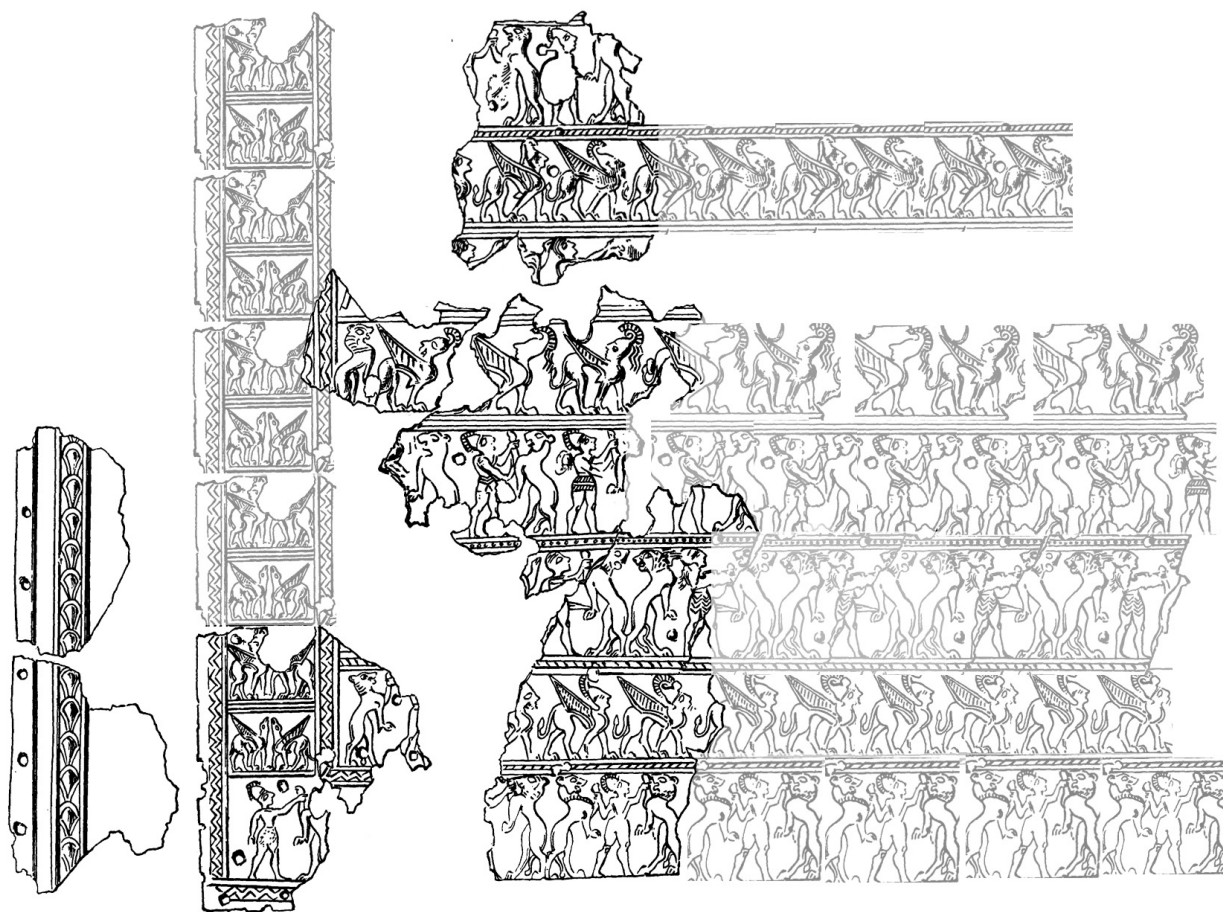


Fig. 8. Bronze belt from Kavousi. Personal reconstruction

The Kavousi specimen wouldn't be the only figured bronze belt found in Iron Age Crete, existing another famous example of better preserved girdle coming from tomb P at Fortetsa near Knossos⁵⁵ (fig. 6).

It is a bronze thin plate 13 cm wide at the centre and 78 cm long. The exceptional decoration consists of a narrative scene in which men armed with bows on horse-drawn chariots attack from both sides a building protected by helmeted archers. Inside the building three figures (probably deities), a man and two women, are holding by hands. Both female figures have smooth long hair, a high *polos*, a long kilt and an over-garment on their shoulders. They are both facing the central male figure, frontally represented except for the head facing right. The building is schematically rendered through the external ridge and the upper architrave, while the archers protecting it from the attack (three on each side) are represented one over the other as in the bird's eye view. From an iconographic point of view, the scene is clearly inspired by Assyrian 1st millennium art, in particular by those narrative reliefs aimed to celebrate the king's performances during war and hunt. Instead, the Triad inside the temple can be viewed as an exquisite Cretan theme, to be linked with local religious spirit practically represented by the Dreros Triad⁵⁶.

The Fortetsa belt comes from one of the richest graves of the necropolis, Tomb P, where a huge amount of imports has been found among which several weapons. In particular, a figured bronze quiver can reasonably be associated with the belt, as well as for its function, for the analogue decoration: a helmeted warrior flanked by two rampant lions is repeated into two registers and helmeted walking sphinxes decorate the lowest one⁵⁷.

The Fortetsa belt has both ends rounded, differently from the Uartian specimen which have just one curved end being the other one straight to facilitate the fastening. In comparison with the Kavousi one, it shows a different principle in distributing decoration, by reserving to the main scene (the divine triad inside the temple) just the central

⁵⁵ BROCK 1957, pp. 197-198, pls. 115, 168.

⁵⁶ An analogue scene is figured on limestone relief from Chania, where instead of three figures inside the temple (protected by archers as well), just one standing female figure is

represented. DAVARAS 1972, p. 12, 28; BOARDMAN 1986, p. 77, fig. 60.

⁵⁷ BROCK 1957, pl. 169, no. 1569.

part of the girdle, determining two possible ways of wearing it: a. the main figurative panel had to be placed on the back; b. the belt was fasten back leaving in front the main decoration.

Narrow belts with rounded ends form the 8th group of Urartian specimen: their chronology is determined through stylistic properties (figs. 4-5).

Whereas tomb P was used through a considerable lapse of time (as plausibly the Kavousi one), it can be assumed that it was housing high-wealth individuals. This was the largest tomb excavated by the authorities in 1933, occupied starting from LPG till LO period. The figured bronze belt was found in (or in relation with) pithos no. 71, unfortunately not preserved⁵⁸. To be linked with the pithos are a oinochoe, a fragmentary aryballos of a globular shape; while, interpreted in association with the pithos, is a domed lid with plastic lion's head knob (no. 1437), reasonably dated in the PGB/EG period⁵⁹. Other finds linked with the no. 71 are a narrow straight iron blade with rounded tip and an iron spear. For what concerns the quiver, instead, it was found "beyond" pithos no.72, a straight-sided pithos carrying an impressive figural decoration dated back to PGB period (850-800 BC)⁶⁰. Two objects catalogued by Brock are doubtfully attributed to tombs 71/72, a javelin and the point of two-edged sword, making plausible that both pithoi were in some way in relation with one another⁶¹.

Referring to the quiver, Bock says: "in particular, the bronze relief from Kavousi, which so closely resembles our quiver not only in subject but also in one or two stylistic details (e.g. the contour at the angle of belly and hind leg on the sphinxes), is regarded by him (Kunze) as Late Geometric".

It is impossible to establish if both belts (the one from Fortetsa and the one from Kavousi) have ever been worn. It seems to be almost explicit the reference to the Eastern cultural domain, evident in the figural choices and, at least, in the nature of the object itself, forming part of the dead's grave goods together with other pieces of armours (both in Kavousi and Fortetsa as well) and exotica.

In many ancient cultures belts had a special symbolic or magical significance, and Urartu was probably no exception⁶². Sometime belts might have depicted particular myths, as proposed by Ursula Seidl⁶³ for a belt in the Museum Für Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Berlin, or sometime the compositions might even be narrative. "We don't know who wore these richly decorated belts, or in what circumstances"⁶⁴.

In the Homeric world, the belt (*zoster*) is often quoted in order to establish special status of heroes and lords, carrying value for what both concerns military domain and socio-political as well⁶⁵. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Nestor wear a belt useful to indicate their leadership within the heroes of the clan (wearing belts themselves)⁶⁶. Belts are often mentioned by Homer as important weapons for defence in fight: the silver belt of Agamemnon protects him during the fight against Iphidamantis⁶⁷; Menelaus' belt protects him from an arrow thrown by Pandarus⁶⁸.

Matteo D'Acunto rightly notes that in the *Iliad* the belt is also mentioned as involved in gift exchanges between heroes' activity: a shining belt had been given by Oineus to Bellerophon, and another one by Ajax to Hector⁶⁹. From a socio-cultural point of view, the presence of belts in Iron Age Crete graves seems to perfectly fit within a generally agreed reconstruction of a new raising aristocratic society. The belt on a small Late Geometric bronze male statue found at Aphrati (Arkades)⁷⁰, was put in relation with the function of the building where it was found which, firstly interpreted as a sacred building, was later reconstructed as an *andreion*, on the base of numerous weapons and food traces found inside it⁷¹.

The interpretation process of the meaning of both bronze belts in late eight century Crete would be long and complex, and to it a separate work has to be devoted. Nevertheless, the diffusion and symbolic value of this attribute is clearly testified by its presence on minor and monumental Greek art, Cretan in particular, involving both male and female figures specially from second half of 7th cent. BC. The so-called Daedalic belt, chronologically subsequent the

⁵⁸ In the note 1, p. 124, Brock says that he was informed by Platon that "there were pithoi bearing the numbers 69, 70 and 71 and that the fragments of these remained on the site until they were collected by Payne". BROCK 1957

⁵⁹ BROCK 1957, p. 125, n. 1439, pls. 107, 163.

⁶⁰ BROCK 1957, p. 125, pl. 77, 163.

⁶¹ BROCK 1957, p. 138.

⁶² On this respect it musts be remembered that the Haldi temple in Musasir, schematically represented on the famous relief depicting its sack by the Sargon's soldiers, was named "house of the shields and belts". PJOOTROVSKI 1966, p. 323.

⁶³ SEIDL 1992.

⁶⁴ CURTIS 1996, p. 119.

⁶⁵ BENNETT 1997.

⁶⁶ D'ACUNTO 2000, p. 305.

⁶⁷ *Iliad* IX, 234-237.

⁶⁸ The arrow is diverted by Athena just toward the most protected point of his armour (*Iliad* IV, 132-139). As well stressed by D'Acunto, in this occasion the belt is named "Daidaleos". D'ACUNTO 2000, p. 306

⁶⁹ D'ACUNTO 2000, p. 307; See in particular VAN WEES 1992, pp. 228-237.

⁷⁰ LEBESSI 1980, fig. 2, plt. 25, 26a, 30.

⁷¹ VIVIERS 1994, pp. 243-249; see the synthesis in D'ACUNTO 2000, p. 301. For recent discussions on Cretan *Andreion* see PERLMAN 2014, p. 188.

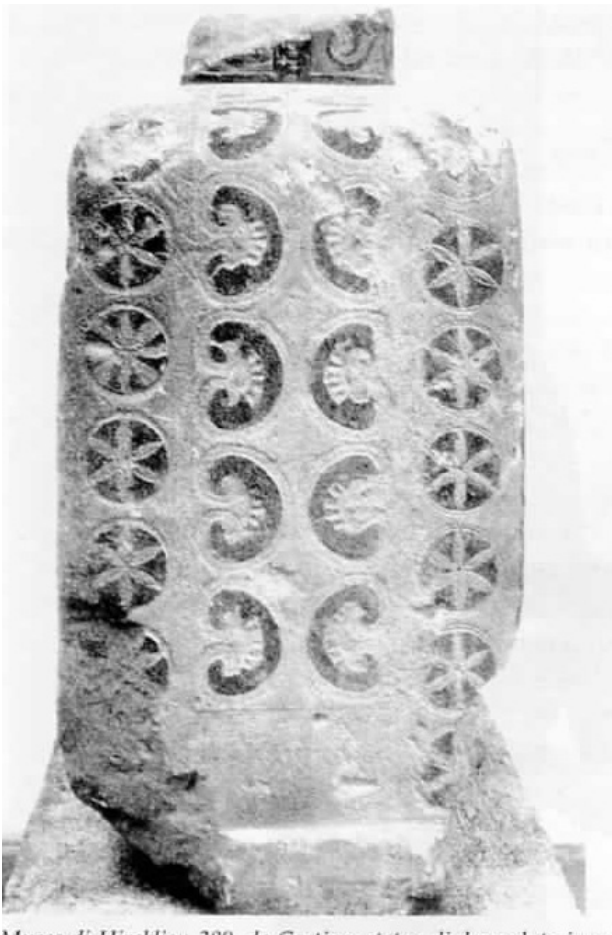


Fig. 9. Seated statue from Gortyn. After RIZZA, SCRINARI 1968, Tav. II.



Fig. 10. Goddess from Prinias. After PERNIER 1914, fig. 23.

specimens found at Kavousi and Fortetsa, seems to confirm the importance of this features through seventh century too. In art, belts were reserved to female deities and naked male figures for whose, as argued by Matteo D'Acunto, has to be ruled out a direct link with Minoan belts aimed to hold the *perizoma*.

In late 7th cent. Cretan statuary, belts assume some sort of standardized pattern: they're quite wide, being characterized by thick and smooth borders, and evidently frontally fastened through some sort of thin horizontal bands, probably representing laces (figs. 9-10). It soon emerges how these belts have a different general shape in comparison with the one from Fortetsa, having this last rounded ends, maybe destined to be fastened on the back leaving the central scene immediately visible.

The type of belt represented on Cretan sculpture, as known, has cut off square ends. The example of Kavousi, in particular, just in correspondence with the end (the left preserved), shows an elaborated system of closing in which the decorated area (square metopes) is interrupted and a smooth section vertically bordered and thickened by a row of buds clearly forms the central hooking, with rows of holes distributed along the rim aimed to house laces for fastening.

The general scheme of the Kavousi belt doesn't seem to be so far from the later specimen on Cretan statues. These lasts have been supposed to reproduce a kind of leather belt where one or more metallic plates had to be applied, sometime decorated⁷². As yet reported, some scholars tried to reconstruct the original material of Cretan Archaic

⁷² D'ACUNTO 2000, p. 311.

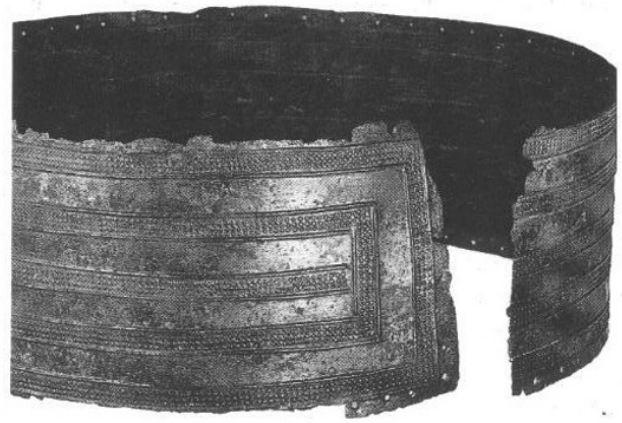


Fig. 12. Urartian bronze belt with geometric decoration. After KELLNER 1991, nos. 15-16.

Fig. 11. Statuette from Samos. After LEBESSI 1983, fig. 1.

belts, just on the base of those represented on sculptures⁷³. Davaras, for example, assumed that the metallic plates could cover a cloth (not leather) strip, while both Floren and Boardman imagined a total metallic belt. According to Guralnick, on a soft back (leather or cloth), metallic, wooden or ivory applique could be applied⁷⁴.

In particular, the lower part of the female seated figure from Gortyn wears a belt decorated with painted spirals and/or volutes⁷⁵ (fig. 9). On contrary, the ladies from Prinias⁷⁶ (fig. 10) show the canonical Cretan belt with a smooth surface. A similar type is worn by the young men statue from Samos⁷⁷ (fig. 11). It is impossible to establish if the square thick borders of the belts

⁷³ D'ACUNTO 2000, p. 311.

⁷⁴ DAVARAS 1972, p. 27; FLOREN 1987, pp. 125-126; BOARDMAN 1991, p. 13; GURALNICK 1989, p. 173.

⁷⁵ RIZZA, SCRINARI 1968, tav. II.

⁷⁶ PERNIER 1914, fig. 23.

⁷⁷ LEBESSI 1983, fig. 1. For a quite complete list of belts worn by Archaic statues see D'ACUNTO 2000.

formed an adjunctive element or, more simply, recalled some geometric linear pattern (fig. 12). If it was the case, we could image a geometric decorated belt not too much different from the one of the Kellner group 10th dated to the very early 8th cent. (bearing the engraved name of Sarduri II).

The presence of bronze belts, both at Knossos (Fortetsa) and Kavousi, is almost consistent with the general social panorama of early Iron Age Crete. As said above, they were associated with *exotica* (clearly viewed as luxury goods, of highly symbolic value)⁷⁸ and various weapons. In both tombs, belts were deposited together with at least another piece of armour (a quiver at Fortetsa, a greave at Kavousi), testifying the important value of the military sphere in the status ostentation.

In recent work, I stressed the importance of not separating images from objects⁷⁹: meaning is always bound up in the historical context and social setting of a give culture and, in the meantime, it can change through the ages, regions and contexts “as different qualities of the bundled materiality come to the fore or recede from attention”⁸⁰.

Object’s meaning must be viewed as the combination of several and different properties, whose value shifts through the ages and different contexts, depending mostly on human-objects engagements.

In analysing foreign object two different processes have to be reconstructed, being the first the one where the things are commodified and lose personality, the other the one where objects are invested with personality and have an impact.

In the case of Crete, a third passage is often offered to scholars: the one in which a foreign object is replaced by a local one, evidently imitating the prototype (being completed the process of total metabolization of techniques, decoration, scale) and re-adapted into a new context, with a new meaning and acting differently.

If one tries to re-analyse the images represented on the Kavousi plate at the light of the object’s reconstruction as a belt, the result is completely consistent with a long series of Cretan objects since long become symbols of early Iron Age Cretan art and contacts with Near East⁸¹.

So, the lecture of the images of lion slayers/lords of the animals, helmeted sphinxes, griffins on the Kavousi belt, as codes of status identification can be re-tried at the light of the nature of the object on which they were engraved.

⁷⁸ KOTSONAS 2006.

⁷⁹ PAPPALARDO 2019a; PAPPALARDO 2019b.

⁸⁰ FELDMAN 2014, p. 339.

⁸¹ For an account of all Near Eastern imports in Crete and

local re-elaborations see HOFFMAN 1997; PAPPALARDO 2001; 2004; 2011; 2011b; 2012. STAMPOLIDIS, KARAGEORGHIS 1998; STAMPOLIDIS 2003; STAMPOLIDIS, KOTSONAS 2006;

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