



BELTS I. IN ANCIENT IRAN

i. In Ancient Iran

Our knowledge of the early history of garments and accessories, including the belt, is rather restricted. Before the production of metal belts in Urartu we have no extant examples; our only sources are representations in art from two regions in Iran: Susiana, Elam, and adjacent districts (Fārs, Luristan), on one hand, and northeastern Iran (cf. E. Porada in *EIr.* II, pp. 549-60), on the other. A large proportion of these representations is found on seals and sealings that do not show much detail (P. Amiet, *Glyptique susienne*, MDAFI 43, 1972; H. Pittman, *Art of the Bronze Age*, New York, 1984, pp. 52-65).

From this material it seems that the belt underwent a development in Iran similar to that in Mesopotamia (P. Calmeyer, in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* III, 1957-71, pp. 689-93 s.v. Gürtel). During the third millennium b.c. garments were frequently made with waistbands of the same material that functioned as belts: They included the well-known short kilt apparently of mesh ("Netzrock"; probably from southeastern Iran: Porada, p. 555, pl. X, 7), the zigzag-patterned long skirt (from Susa: P. Amiet, *Elam*, Auvers-sur-Oise, 1966, p. 183 fig. 134 A-B), and the full-skirted sheepskin garment (*ibid.*, pp. 190f. fig. 141: the ends of the belt are fastened in a hump at the back).

From the early second millennium there is no evidence for belts. An important change must have occurred in this period, for after about 1500 B.C. (*ibid.*, pp. 248, 308f., figs. 213, 232: from Susa) all Middle Elamite monuments with sufficiently detailed rendering show belts of different textures from those of



the garments (ibid., pp. 418-21 figs. 318; Porada, p. 550 fig. 26k: in all these instances the upper and lower garments, as well as the belts, are of different materials). As in Mesopotamia, the otherwise naked bull-man always wears a broad belt (Amiet, pp. 309 fig. 232C, 376 fig. 248, 396f. fig. 299; Porada, p. 550 fig. 26k). Such belts often follow the body's contours closely, suggesting flexible materials: leather or textiles.

Numerous human figures on the so-called "Luristan bronzes" and other objects from the art market have been collected by B. Goldman ("Origin of the Persian Robe," *Iranica Antiqua* 4, 1964, pp. 133-52). Most of them must represent inhabitants—and sometimes deities—of southwestern Iran, but the garments are the same as in neighboring Babylonia (Goldman, figs. 1, 6, 14, 23-26), Assyria (ibid., figs. 7-11, 27-28), and Syria (ibid., fig. 2). The varied types of belts were thus probably also derived from those regions.

Neo-Elamite belts are narrower and sometimes decorated with a zigzag or rosettes (Amiet, pp. 540 fig. 413, 566 fig. 431; Porada, pl. XII, 18-19). They also sometimes hold daggers (Amiet, p. 531 fig. 407: the form of the dagger's hilt is similar to that of later Persian ones). There are also Babylonian parallels for all these features (F. Wetzel et al., *Das Babylon der Spätzeit*, Berlin, 1957, pls. 43-44: genii and a ziggurat on the belts of two deities), but it is also possible that this new fashion of decorating belts was connected with a sharp change that had taken place in the northwest in the early first millennium b.c.

There, in and around the ancient kingdom of Urartu, bronze was used to cover (and protect?) the inner belt, which was apparently of leather or woven textile; the metal was hammered into a continuous strip of sheet bronze between ten and twenty cm wide and provided with numerous small holes along the edges, so that it could be sewn onto the more flexible inner material. Very often these strips were decorated with ornaments or figures, either repoussé or chased. Two leather belts plated with silver from the Early Dynastic cemetery at Ur (L. Woolley, *The Royal Cemetery*, Ur Excavations 2, 1934, pp. 51f. fig. 4, pl. 13b, 156f. fig. 35) may have been forerunners of this use of metal sheathing. Similar belts are shown on a silver and bronze fragment and statuettes with belts from Hattuša (R. M. Boehmer, *Die Kleinfunde von Boğazköy*, Berlin, 1971, nn. 546ff.) and Susa (*MDAFP XXV*, Paris, 1934, pp. 208f. pl. X 4, 5). The numerous first-millennium examples come from the region between Transcaucasia (J. de Morgan, *Mission au Caucase I*, Paris, 1889, p. 116 figs. 17-19, 23, 27; idem, *La préhistoire orientale III*, Paris, 1927, pp. 276f.; R. Virchow, *Über die culturgeschichtliche Stellung des Kaukasus*, Berlin, 1895, pls.



II-III; A. M. Tallgren, *Eurasia septentrionalis antiqua* 5, Helsinki, 1930, pp. 165f.; B. A. Kuftin, *Archaeological Excavations in Trialeti* [in Russian] I, 1941, pl. XXV), where several styles of decoration occur, and Assyria (A. H. Layard, *Nineveh and Babylon*, London, 1853, p. 180), where they also seem to be depicted on the reliefs. Urartu (modern Armenia, eastern Turkey, and Iranian Azarbaijan) must have been the production center of these metal belts. Several styles of decoration can be distinguished: a “court style” (M. N. van Loon, *Urartian Art*, Leiden, 1966, pp. 121ff. pls. XXXf.), actually the style of the royal fortresses (H.-V. Herrmann, “Frühgriechischer Pferdeschmuck vom Luristantypus,” *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 81, 1966, pp. 107f. nn. 81-83; G. Azarpay, *Urartian Art and Artifacts*, 1968, pp. 47ff.), one example of which has been excavated at Qūšči near Lake Urmia (R. W. Hamilton, “The Decorated Bronze Strip from Gushchi,” *Anatolian Studies* 15, 1965, pp. 41ff.: explained as a rim, because of a faulty reconstruction; see P. Calmeyer, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* III, s.v. Gūšči); several local styles; and a distinct group of narrow strips with ritual scenes (for a corpus of Urartian belts, see H.-J. Kellner, in *Prähistorische Bronzefunde*, Mainz, 1988; cf. E. O. Negahban, *A Preliminary Report on Marlik Excavation*, Tehran, 1964, fig. 55). This last group is related to Scythian art. A prominent example must have belonged to the hoard alleged to have come from Zīvīa (Ziwiye) in Iranian Kurdistan; the gold strip of this belt was cut into pieces by plunderers and reconstructed by P. Amandry (“A propos du trésor de Ziwiyé,” *Iranica Antiqua* 6, 1966, pp. 113ff.). The decoration of these belts consists of prancing animals and fabulous creatures contained within compartments created by a network of vegetal motifs. Amandry has shown that a “sacred tree” originally formed the right end of the strip and, when worn, would have functioned as the central motif in front.

P. R. S. Moorey, who has treated the general development of metal belts (“Some Ancient Metal Belts. Their Antecedents and Relatives,” *Iran* 5, 1967, pp. 83ff.), has collected the scanty evidence for the western Iranian local styles of decorated belts. One group, with coarse repoussé decoration (pp. 87f.), has Caucasian connections, although the pieces are said to come from Luristan and Kōrvīn. Another group is related to repoussé reliefs on circular pins from Sorḵ Dom in southern Luristan (pp. 89ff., esp. n. 78); it seems possible that it belongs to the end of the second millennium. A third group is characterized by animals with bodies patterned in geometric designs (p. 90 with nn. 85-86). There is also a strip that is certainly genuine but with a relief of doubtful authenticity (p. 86 fig. 1, pl. lb), as well as another piece, of outstanding workmanship (R. Dussaud, “Ceinture en bronze du Louristan avec scènes de



chasse,” *Syria* 15, 1934, p. 187 fig. 1, pl. XXV), that is related to a 10th/9th-century group of metal vessels from the region between Zālūāb and Sorḵ Dom. None of these objects comes from a controlled excavation.

Under the domination of the early Achaemenids another change in costume seems to have taken place. There are no more metal strips or plaques, either properly excavated or from the art market, except for those found together with objects of undoubtedly Achaemenid inspiration at Pazyryk, far from Iran (G. Azarpay, “Some Classical and Near Eastern Motifs in the Art of Pasyryk,” *Artibus Asiae* 22, 1959, pp. 313ff.). A belt made of silver-gilt plaques, from the de Walden collection (Moorey, 1967, pp. 91ff. pls. I-II), has been shown by Moorey to be a modern forgery (“Some Ancient Metal Belts”—A Retraction and a Cautionary Note,” *Iran* 7, 1969, p. 155). The change is, however, clearly reflected on the monuments, especially the facades of royal tombs (see P. Calmeyer in *EIr.* II, p. 576 fig. 43) and the gold plaques from the Oxus Treasure (ibid., p. 579 fig. 45): All Iranian peoples represented, with the exception of the Persians, wear basically the same costume of trousers and overcoat, though there are variations in the styles of these garments and especially in those of the headdresses. But all these “many sword-bearing peoples of the East,” as Aeschylus describes them, have their overcoats girdled with a narrow belt from which the typical short sword, the *akinakes*, is suspended; the belt is fastened by a button at the side (ibid., p. 576 fig. 43; fourth figure from the right on the bottom line). Often one end of the belt is seen hanging down from the waist in front (p. 575 fig. 41). It is apparently this Median, or war, dress of Darius III that is described by Curtius Rufus (3.3.7), who says the belt is “knotted as a woman’s” and “golden,” probably referring to the color, not the material. In contrast to these western, northern, and northeastern Iranian peoples the Persians of Fārs (p. 575 fig. 41: left side) and the Susians, probably Kissians, from Susiana (p. 574 fig. 38) wear not trousers, but wide, flowing robes, perhaps made from single pieces of cloth, girdled with belts of soft material, a style that they seem to have inherited from the Elamites. This Elamite-Persian outfit is worn by the king on formal occasions, as on the Persepolis reliefs and in the gate hall at Susa (p. 575 fig. 40). There and elsewhere the short, broad dagger that belongs to this costume is held by the belt in the same simple way that was depicted in Babylonian, Assyrian, and Sumerian reliefs from the third millennium onward.