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# LURISTAN BRONZES II. CHRONOLOGY

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ii. CHRONOLOGY OF LURISTAN AS REPRESENTED IN COLLECTIONS

A few stray Luristan bronzes were acquired by European museums as early as the second half of the 19th century. At that time, however, their origin was unknown and scholars attributed them to various regions and cultures in the Near East. It was not until the late 1920s, when they started to appear *en mass* in the antiquities markets of Tehran, Paris, London, and New York, that it became established that they originated in Luristan. Private collectors as well as museums started building their own collections of bronzes, although reliable information remained scarce. For several decades, one had to depend largely on the study of the objects themselves and on information provided by the antiquities trade.

The first documented Luristan bronze acquired by a European museum, “a master of animals idol,” was purchased in 1854 by the British Museum (Moorey, 1974, p. 7). The first publication about a Luristan bronze in a scholarly journal dates from 1918. It attributed a Luristan horse bit with decorated cheek pieces to Armenia. The item, acquired by the British Museum, came from a Parsee family in Bombay (Read, 1918, pl. A/Moorey, 1974, pl. VIIA). In 1922, Michael Ivanovich Rostovtzeff ascribed a series of idols in the

British Museum and in the Louvre to the Cimmerians or Scythians and claimed that they had been found in Cappadocia (Rostovtzeff, 1922, pp. 11, 40, 56, pl. II, V.3), an unsupported claim that was still accepted as credible as late as 1963 by some leading scholars (Portratz, 1963, pp. 124-25). Large-scale plundering of Luristan graveyards is thought to have started in the late 1920s, and by 1930 Luristan was widely recognized as the source of the bronzes (Potratz, 1963, pp. 124-25; Muscarella, 1988, p. 113). Nevertheless, other attributions continued to be suggested, mainly as a result of the confusion concerning the precise definition of Luristan bronzes or by reliance on dubious information. Most of these so-called Luristan bronzes from other regions are simply not of Luristan style (e.g. Smith, 1952, from Arabia). In other cases, unconfirmed claims of finds of Luristan style bronzes in other regions were at the origin of far-fetched conclusions. An iron sword in Luristan style, for example, which was said to come from the Pontus area of the Black Sea, instigated Ernst Herzfeld to ascribe all swords of this type to the Pontus (Herzfeld, 1941, pp. 134-36, fig. 252), an idea later picked up by Roman Ghirshman. Well aware of the fact that such swords, of which nearly ninety specimens are known, were found in Luristan, he suggested that they were produced in the Pontus but came with the Cimmerians to Luristan (Ghirshman, 1983, p. 29, 76-78, 83-85, pl. I-II; Muscarella, 1989, p. 352-53).

In the late 1920s, when the looting of Luristan graveyards started, the region was still strongly dominated by its tribal structure and the central Iranian government had only a limited control on local overlords. The looting and commercialization of the antiquities trade was a well-organized clandestine business. Local khans controlled the activities and it was dangerous to interfere in their affairs, as it is evident from a report on the looting of a graveyard at Cheshmeh Māhi (Čašma māhi) in 1959, witnessed by Louis Vanden Berghe, and Yolande Maleki (Maleki, 1964; Overlaet, 2003, pp. 31-33, fig. 19-21). Archaeologists like Aurel Stein, eager to excavate in Luristan, were lured away from sites of interest (Demandt-Mortensen, 1993, pp. 72, 74, note 11, pp. 382-84, fig. 6, 443). The information on the place and circumstances of the discovery of Luristan bronzes generally came from the antiquities dealers. At a time when it was common practice for leading art historians like Arthur Upham Pope and archaeologists like André Godard, Roman Ghirshman, Friedrich Sarre, and Ernst Herzfeld to build up private collections of their own, and therefore to be in close contact with the antiquities trade, hearsay information could easily find its way into scientific literature.

Luristan bronzes were already widely sought as collectible from the first years when the looting started. Reports in popular periodicals such as the *Illustrated London News* (9 contributions by Herzfeld, Pope, and Stark between 1929 and 1932) and exhibitions like the famous International Exhibition of Persian Art in 1931 at the galleries of the Royal Academy of Arts at Burlington House, London, further promoted the interest of the general public and scholars alike. Several of the bronzes exhibited at the Burlington House Exhibition were acquired by the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels (Speleers, 1931, pp. 59-60, fig. 26). Museums and private collectors competed in strengthening their collections. With little or no first-hand information available from field research, scholars had to turn to private and public collections to study the Luristan culture. In the first volume of his bibliography on the archaeology of Iran until 1977, Louis Vanden Berghe lists no fewer than 138 publications of 54 private and museum collections (Vanden Berghe et al, 1979, pp. 212-23). It must be clear that the present survey can only indicate tendencies in this research and cannot provide a full survey of all the studies and methodologies used. Many of the earlier and most extensive private collections were later wholly or partially acquired by museums. One of the most important collections, many of whose items were published by prominent scholars, belonged to Mohsen Foroughi (See FORŪḠĪ MOḤSEN ii. ART COLLECTION). He donated some of his objects to the Louvre Museum and the remainder was transferred after the 1979 Revolution from his Tehran residence to the National Archeological Museum in Tehran.

Different approaches can be distinguished in the early studies, each with its own specific merits and flaws. Some studies concentrated on a particular type of object, others on complete collections or on the general chronology.

When Godard published his survey of Luristan bronzes (Godard, 1931), there existed no clear definition of what a Luristan bronze was. His work presented canonical Iron Age bronzes next to general west Iranian and third millennium bronzes. At the time, he ascribed the Luristan bronzes to Kassites who would have retreated from Babylonia to Luristan and would have led a nomadic lifestyle similar to that of the Luristan nomads of his day (Godard, 1931, pp. 13-18). Other scholars such as Ghirshman would later ascribe the Luristan bronzes to Cimmerians. These ethnic and lifestyle attributions all remained unsubstantiated, and although criticized by many (for a survey see Muscarella, 1988, pp. 116-17; Overlaet, 2003, pp. 233-34), were often repeated uncritically in later literature on the subject.

In spite of the above reservations, various detailed studies focusing on specific objects or groups of objects have made it possible to place these objects in a more precise chronological and cultural setting and have enhanced our general understanding of the concept of canonical Luristan bronzes. Particularly noteworthy are Hanns Albert Portratz's studies on Luristan idols (Potratz, 1955), and horse-bits with decorated cheek-pieces (Potratz, 1941, 1941-42, 1966), in which he proposed stylistic and chronological developments that were largely confirmed later by evidence from excavations. The general tendency was to date canonical Luristan bronzes such as idols and horse-bits to the late second and the first half of the first millenniumBC.E. Against this general consensus, Claude Schaeffer in his *Stratigraphie Comparée et Chronologie de l'Asie Occidentale* (1948), proposed a Bronze Age date between 1500 and 1200BC.E. ("Luristan Récent") for all canonical bronzes. He only accepted a minimal continuation into the Early Iron Age to explain the presence of bimetallic weaponry (Schaeffer, 1948, pp. 479-82, fig. 263-67). It illustrates the difficulties involved in stylistic comparative studies in the absence of data from excavations. Nevertheless, when Edith Porada presented another survey of the Luristan chronology based on an art historical analysis, she placed the Luristan bronzes in four stylistic phases, starting before 1000BC.E and lasting until about 600/650BC.E (Porada, 1964).

Luristan antiquities from unknown provenances continued to flood the antiquities markets in large quantities after World War II. There was, however, a growing awareness of the problems associated with the general methodology used by most scholars. For many years, one had depended on the study of individual objects with dubious information culled from the antiquities market. The trade, however, had resorted to various solutions to meet the dwindling supply and the growing demand for Luristan bronzes. As early as the 1930s, bronze objects of other regions and periods had been increasingly sold as objects "from Luristan." Fragments or parts of one and the same object were sometimes sold separately and became dispersed among various collections. One such case concerns the quiver plaques in the Musée du Louvre (former David-Weill collection), and in the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (former E. Graeffe collection). Recognized by Pierre Amiet as of the same style (Amiet, 1976, pp. 84-87, cat. 197), they are in fact part of one large quiver plaque (FIGURE 1), comparable in size and pattern to others whose provenance cannot be verified. The presence in many collections of single decorated cheek pieces of horse-bits instead of matching pairs also indicates that the breaking up of objects was common practice. At the same

time, copies, forgeries, and pastiches were sold as genuine Luristan bronzes to meet the ever-increasing demand. Some of the pastiches were relatively naive. Idols were, for example, systematically mounted on bottle shaped supports with clothing pins (Godard, 1931, pl. LII-LVII; FIGURE 2). It was a simple and easy way of presenting them but it took the evidence of excavated finds to disprove such a combination. Other pastiches were more sophisticated and elaborately deceitful. For example, a metal bowl, exhibited at the 1931 Burlington House exhibition, was mounted on a stand and decorated by adding to it parts of broken-up idols (FIGURE 3; Potratz, 1963, p.144, pl. XLIII; Calmeyer, 1969, p. 138, fig. 145). Among the forgeries, one can distinguish between after-casts, genuine objects to which fake decorations were added to enhance their value, and modern made objects created in the "Luristan style." When studying a fake decorated cheek-piece in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, Oscar White Muscarella was able to trace ten more in various collections and museums which suggests that eight after-casts were made from a set of two original cheek-pieces (Muscarella, 1982).

One of the first scholars to emphasize the extent of these problems was Potratz. He listed a series of bronzes in major museums and collections that he considered to be forgeries or pastiches (Potratz, 1963, pp. 131-45). In his opinion, anything with a unique character that deviated from the already known corpus of Luristan bronzes had to be treated suspiciously, an approach that led him to erroneously list some objects from other cultural areas as forgeries. Inspired by the approach of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* series of ancient Greek pottery, he proposed to start a *Corpus aerum luristanensium*, which would illustrate all Luristan bronzes in public and private collections (Potratz, 1963, pp. 145-47). His already cited studies on horse-bits and idols from Luristan depended largely on such a corpus as he had already started assembling on his own. A more complete and internationally organized *corpus* should in his mind have been the instrument to evaluate new arrivals available on the art market and thus "to close off the Luristan entity from alienation by the growing influx of forgeries" ("...den Gesamtkomplex der Luristania gegen die Verfremdung durch die sich häufende Flut der Falsifikate abzusichern." Potratz, 1963, p. 147). Although his Corpus never materialized, the attention he had drawn to the presence of fakes and pastiches (FIGURE 2) in almost all Luristan collections, even those dating back to the 1930s, could from then on no longer be neglected or minimized. At the same time, however, it was clear that art historical studies alone could never completely resolve the issue, and analytical studies of the metal and its corrosion have since become

important in establishing authenticity (on Luristan copies, forgeries and pastiches, see Muscarella, 1977, pp. 171-78, pl. XI-XIII; 1988, p. 141; 2000, pp. 81-119, 378-419; Calmeyer 1969, pp. 137-42, Abb. 145).

A new methodological approach was used by Peter Calmeyer just a few years later (Calmeyer, 1969). He selected only those bronzes that could be securely dated, either by inscriptions or by typological comparison with Mesopotamian and Iranian excavated finds. It allowed him to make a reliable chronological survey of bronzes dating from the third to the first millennium, placing them within their proper cultural context. In the main part of his book, the author discussed 53 types of objects, considering their date, geographical distribution and cultural origin. Separate chapters on forgeries and pastiches ("Manipulierte Bronzen"), and inscribed bronzes completed his work. While his work went far beyond the scope of the Luristan bronzes, the drawback of his approach was that several groups of canonical Luristan bronzes ("master of animals" type idols, whetstone handles, etc.) could not be discussed as there were none or insufficient datable comparisons available. Nevertheless, by dating specific groups like the spike butted axe heads, of which three from the Foroughi collection with 12th century royal inscriptions had been published only a few years before (Dossin, 1962; Ghirshman, 1962), he was able to define the chronological limits of the canonical Luristan style. Calmeyer's study was one of the first that could also make use of new data deriving from the Belgian excavation project directed by Louis Vanden Berghe. Within a few years, two more catalogues of large collections were published, one by Peter Roger Stuart Moorey on the bronzes in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford (Moorey, 1971), and the other by Amiet on the private David-Weill collection (Amiet, 1976) of which 27 items were donated to the Louvre Museum as compensation for his work (Amiet, 1972; 1976, p. xi). Both catalogues provided an elaborate survey of the complete range of bronzes as known from the art markets. They incorporated the growing information from excavations with the earlier object directed studies, and were able to provide clear distinctions between canonical Luristan bronzes of the Iron Age date, and general west Iranian, Elamite, and so-called Amlash (q.v.) or North Iranian bronzes. Both catalogues thus became essential works of reference for all subsequent publications on Iranian bronzes.

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