

Partibilities in the Iron Age Polity of Urartu

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Introduction

How were subjects constituted in ancient societies? Anyone who discusses identities in antiquity and prehistory needs to reflect on this question, and this book is interested in collective identities in antiquity. Between the workshop that was at the origin of this volume and its final publication, the idea of a coherent collective identity has made an unexpected career. So-called populist politicians from the United Kingdom to Hungary, from the Turkish to a former United States' president, base their programmes mainly on an imagination of past collectives that are described as unmingled, unitary and homogeneous to the point of an implicit ethnic purity. We have every reason to re-think critically what collective identities are, and what constructions of past collectivities have to do with a false nostalgia. I will do so here by starting with one of those basic elements. This is the question of by whom (or what) such collectivities are made up, and how they are constituted.

Traditionally, collective identity has been conceived as an unproblematic if not desirable aspect of social groups, serving their successful integration, function and reproduction. Émile Durkheim expressed this in his "Rules of Sociological Method" by referring back to the Aristotelian principle that "the whole does not equal the sum of its parts"¹. The famous frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' "Leviathan" graphically expresses this conviction of an organic integration of people into a collectivity, enshrined in the notion of a 'body politic'². But who

are the people whose relationality within a larger whole is so essential for a political unity? A 'body' that is based on a consciousness of commonality, a collective identity? All ideas about collective identity depend to some extent on how a community conceives of its constituent elements. In most cases, we assume implicitly that a coherent subject is at the base of such identities, an individual with a mind of her own, with specifiable rights and duties within a larger whole.

This is, however, too simple a concept. The relation between politics and subjects has been fundamentally altered by Louis Althusser's writings on ideology. He claims that "ideology has the function [...] of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects"³. Althusser elaborates on the double meaning of subject, as *sub-iectum* and as a subject with intent. Individuals are subjects of the state by being 'interpellated' or hailed through its various institutions. But how does a state carry out this hailing? Who is the actor responsible for the state's interpellation and how do people react individually to it?

When we turn to the historiography of antiquity with this question, we frequently find an underdeveloped idea of governmentality and the actors who are tied to the governmental apparatus. Often, sources do not leave much more than a vague impression of a mass of followers under more or less powerful rulers whose deeds are known to us through royal inscriptions, monumental statues or buildings, and other material re-

1 DURKHEIM 1982, 128.

2 See BREDEKAMP 2003.

3 ALTHUSSER 1971, 171.

mains. In that case, interpellation is reconstructed as invariably successful, and rulers are often conceptualised *post factum* as cunning manipulators. An instructive case is Mirjo Salvini's Urartian history and his description of the early king Išpuini's deeds:

*"I consider the most important political act of Išpuini to be the introduction of the state cult of Ḫaldi in Urartu [...]. Such a religious-political reform might have had the purpose of forging an ideological unity among the mountain tribes under the new dynasty"*⁴.

According to this understanding, Išpuini was a cynical politician who created a religion in order to pursue his own long-term political goals, perhaps similar to Lenin or de Gaulle, or other more or less far-sighted modern politicians. Salvini implicitly surmises that the main problem confronting Urartu was the forging and maintenance of a collective identity, and that Išpuini was a shrewd Machiavellian political actor who devised an ingenious ideological state apparatus to achieve these goals. The subject as intentional and free actor is the ruler, the subject as *sub-iectum* an uncritical population. Adam T. Smith, writing about the political constitution

of Urartu, generalises from this state of affairs that "in the case of early complex polities, the subject has been discouragingly undertheorised"⁵.

But what does Smith mean here by "subject"? Does he think that individuals are "turned into subjects", as Althusser elaborates in detail? Today, raising the question of the subject implies at the same time a questioning of ontologies, an important issue raised in recent ethnological and archaeological writings, to which I come back later⁶. We can no longer assume – as Althusser did – a coherent subject as the background of our interpretation. Rather, anthropologists have become increasingly aware that Western individuality and subjectivity are historically contingent concepts that cannot be universalised because they are positioned at the convergence of enlightenment philosophy and the extremes of a capitalist world system. What are past or present alternatives to this notion, and what is their impact on the historical construction of collective identities as elements of past polities? We need to think beyond Althusser's theories and Smith's starting point for political analysis when reconstructing the emergence of past collective identities. Already the notions of the 'individual' and the 'subject' need to be questioned, and this is what I aim to do here.

Partible Personhood and Dividuals

Reflections on the constitution of personhood and persons have a long tradition. An obvious reference is Sigmund Freud and his well-known division of the Western self into Id, Ego and Super-Ego⁷. This conception has a complex historical background in the philosophical tradition that reflects on the formation of subjects as a series of Hegelian '*Entäußerungen*' ('externalisations'). However, here I am concerned with conceptions that are outside of this eurocentric paradigm. Of particular importance for such a topic is research conducted in South Asia and Melanesia, more precisely in India and Papua New Guinea. Constructions of personhood have led Marilyn Strathern, Mark Mosko and others to identify what they call a 'dividual' as distinct from the western 'individual' and an associated possibility of a person's 'partibility'⁸.

'Dividuality' refers to constructs of personhood that see a person's connections with other people, objects, ideas

and so on as primordial, whereas the internal consistency of a person, his or her mind, spirit and body are thought of as secondary. We can abstract from the concrete example of the social and think of the difference between 'dividual' and 'individual' in more general terms as an assemblage of entities and relations among them. Relations contribute fundamentally to the shape of entities, and entities circumscribe the range of possible relations. Western thought regarding social spheres bestows the main weight on entities as persons and considers relations among them as subsidiary. But other lifeworlds start from the opposite premise and take relations (between people) as primordial, while the connected 'parts' – persons – are of secondary importance. This latter view makes the isolation of subjects as stable entities much more doubtful than Western thought claims. According to Strathern, the social worlds of Papua New Guinea are based on such relational

4 "Die wichtigste politische Tat Išpuinis ist m. E. daher die Einführung des Staatskultes des Ḫaldi in Urartu [...]. Eine solche religiös-politische Reform könnte den Sinn gehabt haben, die unter der neuen Dynastie vereinigten Bergstämme ideologisch zusammen zu schmieden" (SALVINI 1995, 40).

5 SMITH 2003, 182–183.

6 E. g. DESCOLA 2013; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2002; in archaeology: HARRIS 2013.

7 Also see contribution of Hans-Peter Hahn in this volume.

8 STRATHERN 1988; MOSKO 2010.

priorities, leading her to elaborate on this fundamental difference via the notion of ‘dividuality’⁹.

This way of thinking dissolves our ideas of person-specific histories: the ‘me’ is not necessarily culturally constructed as a continuous entity from birth to death. Ideas of personhood that start from the ‘dividual’ conceptualise people as internally differentiated and constantly changing. There is a flux of elements entering the person through relations with others and other elements that can exit the person at various times as gifts, body fluids such as blood or semen, speech and in other ways. ‘Dividuality’ means that a person contains components of a whole community and that they are never firmly possessed by any single person.

The intellectual background to these insights is Marcel Mauss’ famous “Essai sur le don”¹⁰. Annette Weiner’s elaboration of Mauss’ idea into so-called ‘inalienable possessions’ as well as an ensuing dialogue between Maurice Godelier and Marilyn Strathern turned into a highly influential direction in cultural anthropology, the ‘New Melanesian Ethnography’ or NME¹¹. Weiner describes “inalienable possessions” as a process where person A bestows a gift on person B. This implies that an immaterial substance of the object stays behind with the original donor, whereas the material gift produces a link between giver and taker. The same happens when the receiver passes the object on, and extended gift giving creates chains of links throughout a whole social group. The ambivalence of the word ‘*teilen*’ in German describes this process very well: we share with someone else (*mit jemandem teilen*), at the same as we part from something (*teilen* as in *aufteilen*, *zerteilen*). Where English language makes a sharp distinction between sharing and separating, German is incapable of doing so (when abstaining from context in the form of prefixes).

Partibility describes a dynamic that is often intimately connected with issues of ‘dividuality’. A ‘dividual’s internally heterogeneous components are linked to many different externalities, among them people. Such relations are condensed in things, and a person can scale

down, so to speak, the size of the community they incorporate by temporarily distributing a few of these via gift giving to others. This, however, also leads to further entanglements¹².

We learn from these examples that personhood is culturally specific and open to historical change. This recognition forces us to admit that notions of individuality and subjectivity cannot be generalised across cultures and time periods, much less universalised. The main philosophers of modern subjectivity, from Descartes to Kant and Hegel, have produced a Eurocentric philosophy that is not necessarily valid beyond specific historical and spatial limits. This much was already formulated, albeit not elaborated, in Michel Foucault’s oft-cited last sentences of the “Order of Things”:

“As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea”¹³.

The recognition of a historicity of subjectivity has important consequences for any further inquiries into presumed past collective identities since the ‘individual’ as an essential constituent part of subjectivity, and thus of our traditional notion of social collectives, is based on this Eurocentric background. Research on the historically specific constitution of personhood is a condition for the possibility of talking about past identities. I now discuss a few archaeological cases where this issue has been addressed before turning to a specific case from ancient Western Asia.

Subject, Individual and Personhood in Archaeology

The Melanesian world of the ‘dividual’ and partibility has great attraction for archaeologists because of the central importance played by the materiality of the gift.

Post-processually oriented archaeologists who do research on the British Neolithic have resorted especially frequently to the notion of ‘dividuality’ when interpret-

9 STRATHERN 1988.

10 MAUSS 1925.

11 WEINER 1992; GODELIER 1999; GODELIER / STRATHERN 1991; MOSKO 2010.

12 FOWLER 2004, 26.

13 FOUCAULT 1989, 387; “man” is the English translation of “l’homme” in the original.

ing barrows and other kinds of monumental constructions. A whole group of prehistoric archaeologists seems to be so pre-occupied by the explanatory potential of ‘dividuality’ and partibility¹⁴ that critics have complained about the ‘Melanesian flavour’ of northern European prehistory¹⁵. One of the apparent assumptions is that there are some parallels between the societies living in today’s Papua New Guinea and the groups who populated northern European islands a long time ago, so that immaterial elements such as concepts of personhood¹⁶ can be inferred to have been similar as well. According to Matthew Spriggs, the reasoning that legitimates these parallels is a classical ethnographic analogy¹⁷. He sharply criticises it as inadequate because of deep-reaching historical changes on the source side of the analogy that cannot be generalised to other places and times. One of the proponents of a ‘dividuality’-based reconstruction of European prehistory, Julian Thomas, argued that Melanesia does not serve as an analogy in the traditional sense but that the idea of the ‘dividual’, derived as it may be from the Melanesian ‘case’, is a theoretical abstraction that can be applied to many cultures independently of the place where it was first recognised, a line of argument I follow here¹⁸.

The mobilisation of these concepts as interpretive devices is not restricted to British prehistory¹⁹. John Chapman has argued that the fragmentation of things or whole bodies and their re-articulation in new and different ways in the prehistory of the Balkans are to be interpreted similarly²⁰. He has analysed fragmented burial gifts from the late Mesolithic to the Copper Age and beyond, interpreting their breakage and wider distribution, but also the connections that the spatial distribution of broken pots provided, as an effort at ‘enchainment’ that linked people together through the fragments.

More recently, the historicity of subjectivity and personhood has entered discussions in archaeologies of formally hierarchised (state) societies. Anna Simandiraki-Grimshaw argues that re-arranged skeletons in Minoan burials are to be interpreted as a ‘zonation’ of the physical body that translates into partibility in the literal, material sense, while the Minotaur and other beings reflect such views in the world of hybrid beings²¹. Pamela Geller lays out similar arguments when interpreting a

Maya royal tomb at Dos Hombres (Belize), referring to Melanesian ethnographic discussions and in particular to Marilyn Strathern’s work²². Chris Fowler’s overview of personhood constructions in cultural anthropology and archaeology²³ is by far the best available overview of archaeological cases and their pitfalls, the latter consisting mainly of simplifications and de-historicisations.

When searching for similar tendencies in the literature about ancient Mesopotamia, one finds that notions of personhood are sometimes raised but addressed in a fairly cursory manner. One exception is the work of Gebhard Selz, who has written about the complexity of what he calls a “logic of substances” in third-millennium Mesopotamia²⁴. The sculpture of a person, in the form of so-called ‘*Beterstatuetten*’, is both a re-presentation as well as a living entity in itself. This understanding of the Sumerian world does not conform, however, to the above-mentioned archaeological correlates for ‘dividuality’ and partibility in the form of fragmentation. Rather, identity (between a person and its representation) can go hand in hand with difference (the image has a life in and for itself). Zainab Bahrani discusses the Akkadian term ‘*šalmu*’ from the later periods in Mesopotamia and argues that it does not mean ‘statue’ (the usual translation) but rather another appearance of a person²⁵. Physical body, image and name are different aspects of one and the same person. This implies that ancient Mesopotamians would have considered Western notions of personhood as partible, since we consider a person and the image of a person as two separate but corresponding entities. One may conclude from this that partibility as an element of ‘dividual’ notions of personhood is potentially tied to other facets of personhood that are ‘in-dividual’.

In the remainder of the paper, I try to apply some of these ideas to the early 1st millennium BCE kingdom of Urartu in eastern Anatolia. This attempt may appear speculative. However, I think we make a fundamental historiographic mistake if we assume that the people whom our histories imagine have the same structure of personhood and self as we ourselves do. Aggrandisement, egoism, desires for privacy and many other elements that enter our narratives in silent ways project a kind of modern personhood into the past that is dangerously close to our own subjectivities.

14 E. g. BRÜCK 2006; BUDJA 2012.

15 SPRIGGS 2008, 543.

16 I use ‘personhood’ to denote the social construction of people as varyingly positioned between western individuality and Melanesian ‘dividuality’. When I refer to ‘subject’, I do so in the Althusserian double sense of the word.

17 SPRIGGS 2008.

18 THOMAS 2004, 119–148.

19 E. g. HARRISON-BUCK / HENDON 2018.

20 CHAPMAN 2000; CHAPMAN / GAYDARSKA 2007.

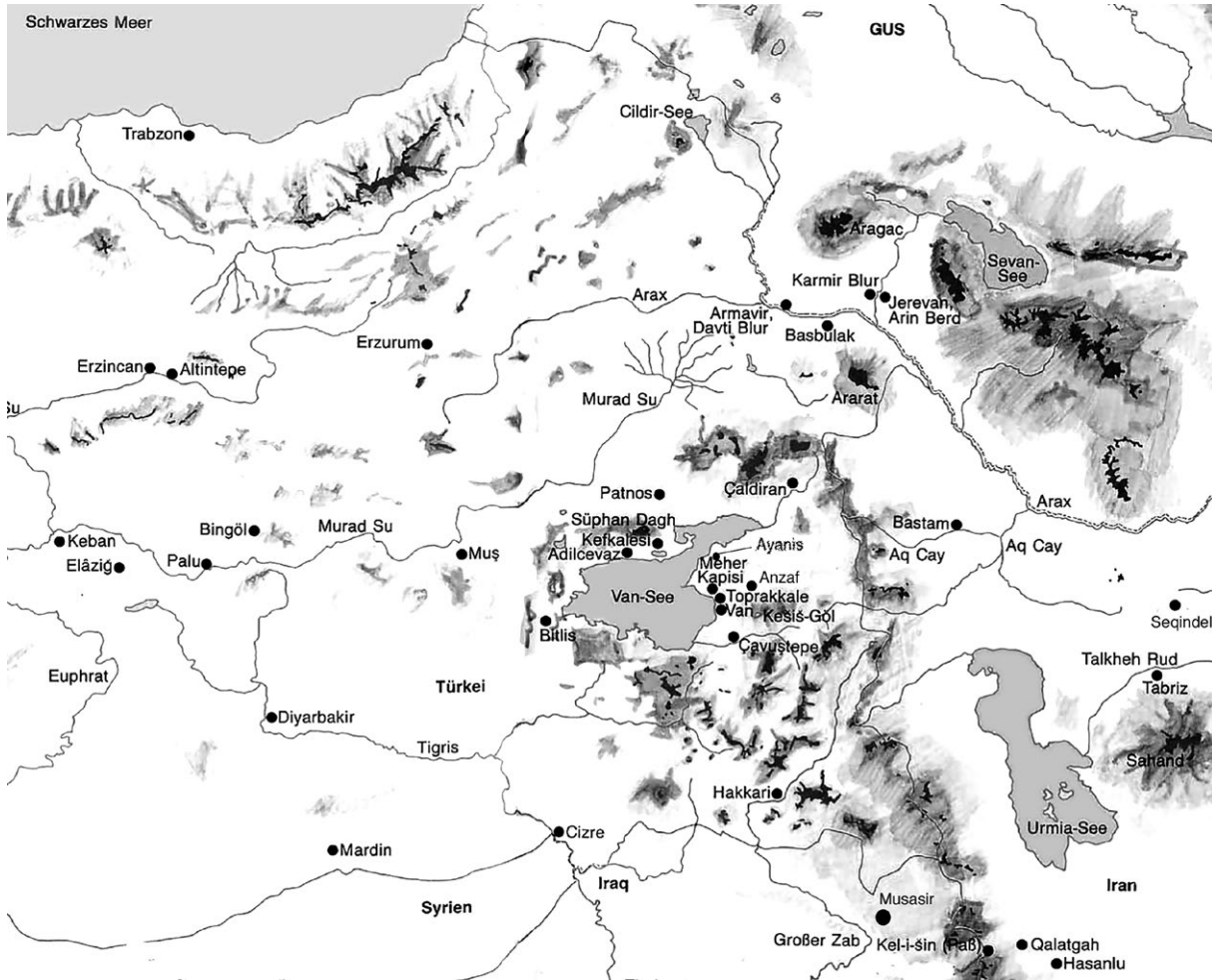
21 SIMANDIRAKI-GRIMSHAW 2015; SIMANDIRAKI-GRIMSHAW 2010.

22 GELLER 2014.

23 FOWLER 2004.

24 SELZ 2002; SELZ 2004.

25 BAHRANI 2003, 121–148.



1 Map of Urartu.

Urartu and the Problem of Personhood

Urartu is an eastern Anatolian kingdom that existed from roughly 830 BCE to sometime around 640 BCE. Its geographic centre was located in eastern Turkey, reaching into western Iran, in the north to present-day Armenia, Azerbaijan and in the south and southwest into northern Iraq (fig. 1). In the more than 200 years of its existence, the polity of Urartu developed into a serious political and military opponent of its mighty southern neighbour Assyria²⁶. The topography of Urartu is radically different from Assyria, since the area – the rough mountains linking the Taurus and Zagros chains – is characterised by rugged valleys, deep gorges, steep slopes and three large endorheic basins with lakes. These

are Lake Van with the capital Tušpa directly on its eastern shores, Lake Sevan in northern Urartu with several large Urartian cities on its southern shore, and Lake Urmia in the east. The climate in the region is particularly harsh. Winters often last up to six months, impacting significantly communication between settlements, with potential consequences for political cohesion²⁷.

Urartu's history is known to us through a small number of annalistic royal texts, building inscriptions and accounts from one of its main enemies, Assyria. According to Salvini's useful and concise history, an early phase, co-occurring with the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire, can be dated to the second half of the 9th century

26 SALVINI 1995, 63–109.

27 ZIMANSKY 1985, 9–31; due to global warming, winters have become significantly shorter in recent times.

BCE, followed by further conquests under kings Argišti and Saduri II in what is today Armenia²⁸. The later kings and the dynastic sequence are under discussion after a recent find of inscriptions at the Keşiş Gölü, an artificial lake and dam established by a king Rusa whose exact dynastic position is open to discussion²⁹.

Excavations of Urartian sites involve almost exclusively fortresses with their daring architecture pitched on steep rocky outcrops³⁰. Only a few living quarters have been excavated, most notably those at the foot of the Late Urartian fortress of Ayanis³¹. Interest in Urartian material culture other than its architecture focusses on the large-scale and aesthetically elaborate bronze production³². Bronze objects include armour such as helmets, quivers, shields and spears, bronze belts, horse gear and parts of furniture. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of this toreutic material is from the art market, hampering any serious analysis not only of the chrono-spatial distribution of these artefacts but also of their decoration: an unknown number of the published items could be fakes³³.

Urartian iconography, like that from other regions of ancient Western Asia, includes many creatures made up of different body elements of animals and humans. Such hybrids are testimony to imaginations of a world whose forces cannot be integrated into modern materialism or idealist rationalism. What interests me in connection with partibility as a potential element of Urartian life-worlds is the iconography of the many Urartian bronze belts. Hans Jörg Kellner has published a whole volume on the belts with detailed drawings of their decoration³⁴. The belts – which are too numerous to have been just the possession of a small elite – display scenes of hunting, castles with gates, women being served a meal, and battles. Most striking is the large number of hybrid beings. They consist of the parts of birds, lions, bulls, snakes, scorpions, horses, goats, and fish. Only the tail of some animals, such as scorpions, has been included in the hybrids. For others, such as lions, head, torso, tail, and paws were combined with parts of other animals³⁵. Mostly, these hybrids are not shown as parts of scenes but rather are displayed in jumping poses, isolated and without relations to other beings. Not only do we find

many different kinds of hybrid beings engraved and embossed on bronze belts, but a single belt may also display varying numbers of different hybrids (*figs. 2 and 3*).

The variety of such hybrids is bewildering. There is one early analytical attempt at producing a systematic collection of these figures that, however, does not reach beyond a catalogue³⁶. General accounts about Urartu, its history and religion address the multiplicity of these beings variously as ‘genii’ and ‘monsters’. Ralf Wartke calls them “mythical beings that cannot be characterised more closely”³⁷, providing in addition a tableau of 12 of them derived from decorations of bronze belts. Orhan Taşyürek concurs with this attribution and speaks of “mythological figures” and “fantastic creatures”, as do Antonio Sagona and Paul Zimansky³⁸. Other similar terms are ‘*Fabelwesen*’³⁹ or ‘*Mischwesen*’⁴⁰ (hybrids), while Oktay Belli calls them “dragons”⁴¹.

An issue of interest is whether there are rules underlying the assembly of animal parts into a hybrid. Such rules are important, as Urartu’s neighbour Assyria had its own set of hybrids. In the early decades of the Urartian state, a fundamental influence from Assyrian culture is manifest, from the use of cuneiform writing to specific kinds of armaments such as chariots. Assyrian hybrid beings, depicted on wall reliefs and hidden under house floors as terracotta or bronze figurines, were strongly canonised into compositions that could be named, such as *lamassu*, a mix of a bull, a human and a bird that had a protective function, or the bird-lion *anzu*, among others. While an Assyrian origin for some of the hybrid figures seems to be clear, there are only approximately a dozen separate Assyrian hybrid beings that have specific names and each a clear, often threatening character, such as *lamaštu*, the malevolent demon who brought child bed fever and other ills to mothers and infants⁴². These ‘canonised hybrids’ with names and predefined functions in ritual life can be set apart from the Urartian “Gewimmel von *Mischwesen*”⁴³, as Ursula Seidl points out.

One way to identify potential compositional rules of the multifarious Urartian beings is a systematic statistical analysis. Yue tried this with the 449 belts and belt parts catalogued by Kellner⁴⁴. Not all of the belts contain

28 SALVINI 1995.

29 ROAF 2012; SEIDL 2012.

30 See SMITH 2003; FORBES 1983; KLEISS 1983; SMITH 1999; SMITH 2000. SMITH 2003, 180–181, claims that pre-Urartian fortresses were situated higher up and in even less accessible terrain.

31 STONE / ZIMANSKY 2001; STONE 2012.

32 MERHAV 1991; SEIDL 2004.

33 MUSCARELLA 2002, 146–156.

34 KELLNER 1991.

35 CURTIS 1996.

36 EICHLER 1984.

37 WARTKE 1993, 128 fig. 65.

38 TAŞYÜREK 1975; SAGONA / ZIMANSKY 2009, 337.

39 KELLNER 1991, 3; 20–22.

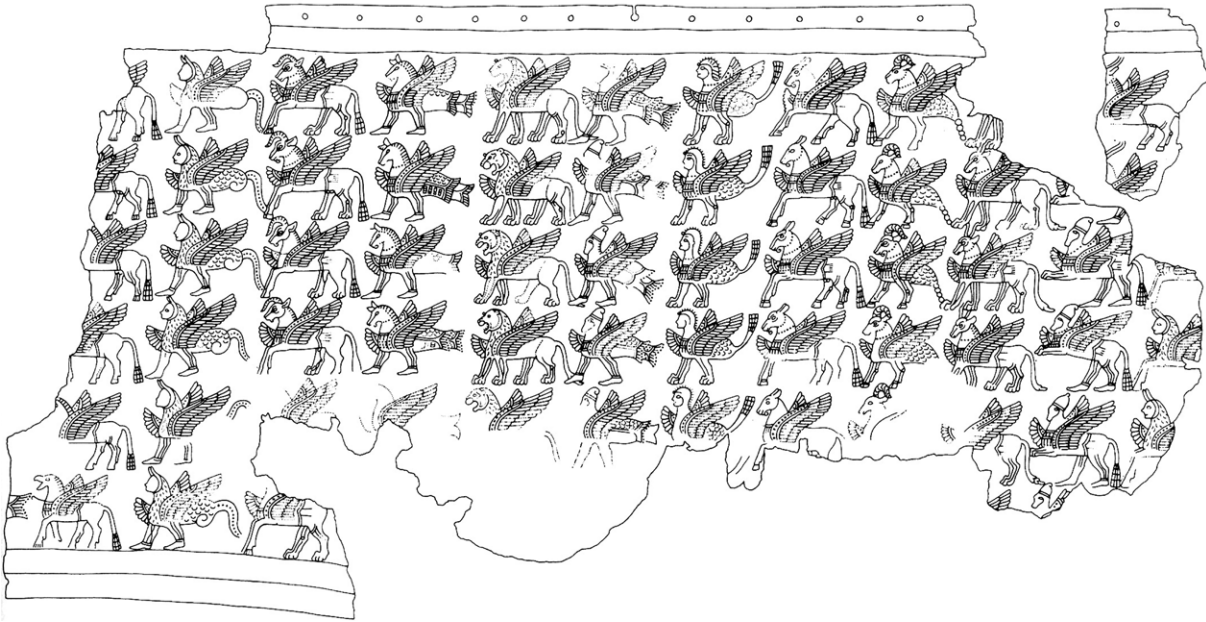
40 SEIDL 2004.

41 BELLI 1999.

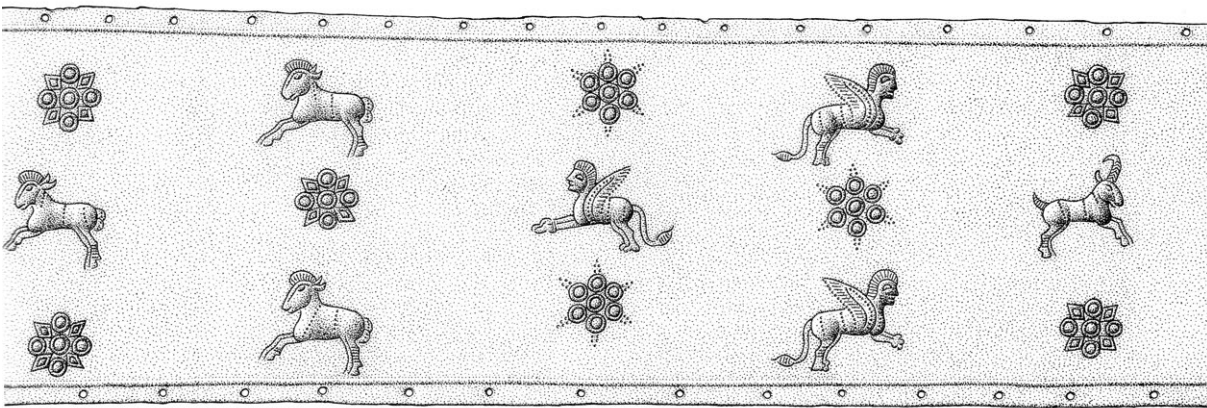
42 WIGGERMAN 1992, 164–188.

43 “throng of hybrids”: SEIDL 2004, 205–206.

44 YUE 2014; KELLNER 1991.



2 Fragment of an Urartian belt, depicting a series of different hybrids on an embossed, broad bronze strip.



3 Belt with three rows of hybrid beings, likely from Iranian Azerbaijan, now in *Staatliche Kunstsammlung Kassel*.

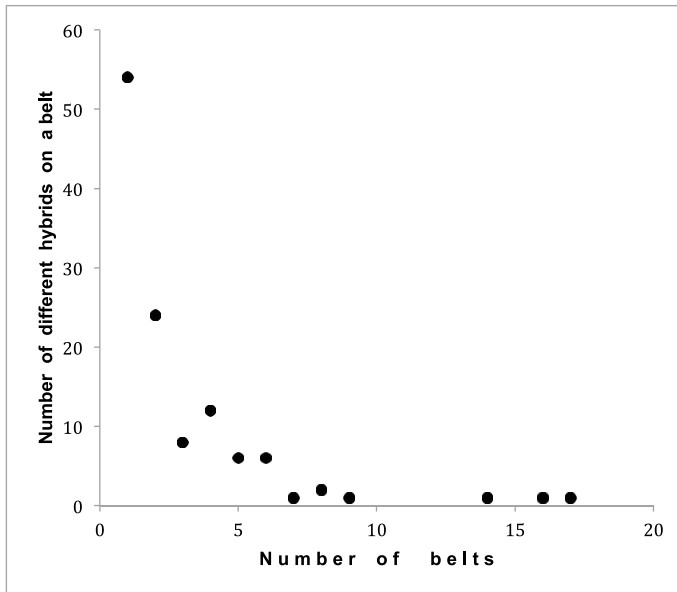
hybrids, and among the 103 that do, some display a large number – up to seventeen – of different types of hybrids (fig. 4). However, it is rare to find more than six different hybrids on one belt, and there is a clear preference for one hybrid or two in alternating rows or columns.

A more detailed analysis reveals that among the 103 belts with hybrids, there are 154 different ways to compose these mixed beings. What are the ‘necessary’ parts of such creatures? Reviewing the available publications, it would seem that head, torso, and two or four

legs are required. Where the torso is not human, the figures invariably have a tail. With this basic insight, we can look for further regularities. If the Urartian’s took over specific composites with defined functions, such as the Assyrian *lamaštu* or *pazuzu*, there should be identifiable re-occurring assemblages of the same body parts. However, analyses of the data from Kellner’s published corpus do not lead to a clearly interpretable inter-species grammar, a set of fixed rules for the constitution of hybrids (tab. 1)⁴⁵.

45 Kellner’s illustrations are not always clear enough to unequivocally specify what kind of animal is depicted on the belts. This may also be due to their state of preservation. Admittedly, the basis for such an analysis is seriously compromised because of the mis-

sing provenance of most of the belts. Once there is a sufficiently large sample of excavated belts, the analysis should be redone, using only well stratified material.



4 Frequency of numbers of different hybrids on belts (after YUE 2004, tab. 1).

Animal head	winged			horned		two-legged		snake's tongue	
	ct.	ct.	proportion	ct.	proportion	ct.	proportion	ct.	proportion
Lion	36	26	0.72	10	0.27	10	0.27	10	0.27
Human	34	34	1.00	n.a.	n.a.	20	0.58	0	--
Horse	25	21	0.84	4	0.16	10	0.40	0	--
Bird	17	16	0.94	2	0.11	12	0.70	0	--
Goat	12	9	0.75	n.a.	n.a.	5	0.41	0	--
Bull	10	9	0.90	n.a.	n.a.	5	0.50	1	0.10
Snake	3	3	1.00	3	1.00	1	0.33	3	1.00
Unclear	17	16	0.94	2	0.11	8	0.47	2	0.11
SUM	154	134	0.87	21	n.a.	71	0.46	16	0.10

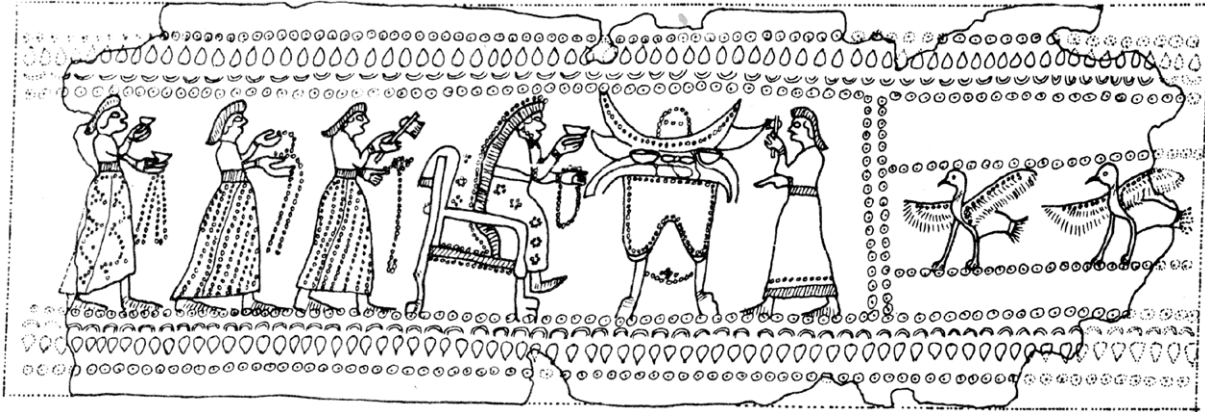
Tab. 1 Hybrids, organised by their heads, and four kinds of associated body parts (each attribute counted separately, proportions do not add up to 1.00).

Table 1 is organised by the frequency of the head of a specific animal/human type, and proportions of some associated body parts are listed (wings, horns, two-leggedness and snake's tongue). In the sample, lion heads surpass humans in frequency, and they are followed by horses, birds, goats, bulls, and snakes. It is interesting to note that bulls' heads occur much less often than do lions, even though bulls in what we would consider to be their natural animal state are depicted frequently⁴⁶. Generally, 'wingedness' is an important attribute of the hybrids on belts, as nearly 90% display wings (figs 2; 3). Lion heads are proportionally least likely to be combined with the potential for flight

in the form of wings (tab. 1). Two-leggedness, as opposed to four-leggedness, is most frequent among bird-headed beings, and only in the second place among human-headed composites. Among four-legged animals, the front and back legs are often different, mainly distinguished as hooves or paws; seldom, single legs are also depicted in a human form⁴⁷. It may not be astonishing that snakes' tongues are associated with snake heads. Otherwise, they occur most frequently with lions' heads. The same is true for horns, even though here the Mesopotamia-derived habit of depicting gods with horns prevents a clear counting of occurrences.

46 KELLNER 1991, Cat. Nr. 12; 13; 19; 27; 56.

47 SEIDL 2004, 156 fig. 31.



5 Fragment of an Urartian belt, depicting a scene of a woman feasting, currently in Adana Museum.

Torso	Heads						
	Lion	Human	Horse	Snake	Bull	Bird	Goat
Lion/Bull/Horse	0.78	0.44	0.56	0.33	0.60	0.29	0.55
Human	0.03	0.03	0.04			0.06	
Snake	0.03	0.03	0.08	0.67	0.10	0.06	0.18
Bird	0.17	0.38	0.24		0.20	0.35	0.09
Fish		0.13	0.08		0.10	0.24	0.18
	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
n	36	32	25	3	10	17	11

Tab. 2 Proportions of different torso types associated with heads; high proportions bold-faced.

The relations between head and torso of the animals do not reveal clear rules either (*tab. 2*). There is a tendency to combine the torso and head of the same type of animal, though not for humans and goats. The identification is often rendered somewhat difficult by the lack of specificity of the torso. There are also cross-species preferences such as the connection between a human head and a bird's body, as well as between birds' heads and fish bodies.

What are we to make of this zoo of hybrids, this seemingly unlimited recombination of body parts into 'monsters'? Is this just playfulness, an aesthetic interest in the pastiche, as sometimes asserted in interpretations of the iconography of these belts⁴⁸, or is an unspecific reference to 'mythology' sufficient for their understanding?

Hybrids appear not only on belts but also on other objects such as shields, furniture parts and horse gear. Significant for my argument are two objects. One is a well-known and often-discussed shield from Yukarı Anzaf that can be dated to the time of the co-regency of kings Išpuini and Minua in the late 9th century BCE⁴⁹,

i. e. to the early Urartian period (*fig. 6*). The shield with a fragmentary inscription referring to Țaldi depicts on its outer register a row of at least 14 deities, twelve on one large piece and two more on a separate fragment⁵⁰. All gods but the first, the main god of the Urartian pantheon, Țaldi, stand on the backs of other beings. The second and third deity, likely the weather god Teišeba and the sun god Šiuini, stand on a lion and a bull respectively. The following gods, however, stand on hybrids that invariably have four legs and wings. Belli describes the hybrids in detail, while Jakubiak tries to connect some of them to Assyrian prototypes as well as to depictions on Urartian belts⁵¹. Here, I will not go beyond a brief and generalised comparison between the shield's iconography and that of the belts.

The shield depicts a dynamic scene in narrative detail, showing not just gods riding on composite beings but also chaos among fleeing foreign soldiers, Assyrians according to Oktay Belli⁵². Attacked by the gods, Țaldi's spear, lions and vulture-like rapacious birds, the Assyrian army's cavalry is in complete disarray. Riderless

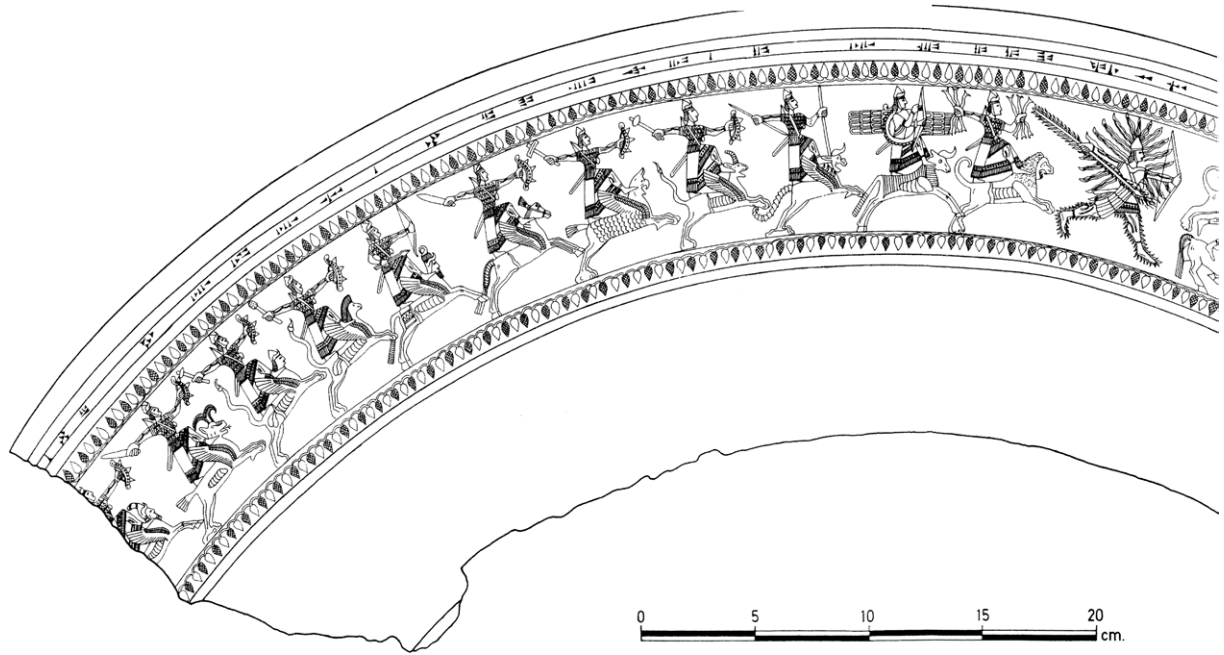
48 BERNBECK 2003, 296.

49 SEIDL 2004, 84; 121–122.

50 See BELLI 1999; BERNBECK 2003, 286–29; SEIDL 2004, 84–86; KROLL et al. 2012, 28–31.

51 BELLI 1999; JAKUBIAK 2011.

52 BELLI 1999.



6 Fragment of shield from Yukarı Anzaf (attacked enemies – likely Assyrians – are to the right of the depicted part of the shield).

horses cross each other, lions seize enemies by the neck while others drop from war chariots. At the bottom of the shield, broken off in its present state and difficult to interpret, are Urartian soldiers fighting against Assyrians as well. The organised attack row of beardless deities provides a stark contrast to the Assyrian chaos, with each deity standing on a four-legged being, holding a small spiked shield or another mostly defensive weapon in the left hand and an attack weapon such as a club, arrow or spear in the right. The deities can be assumed to be male, and they are all anthropomorphic except for their horned helmets. They stand on the backs of animals or hybrids, the left foot on the withers and the right on the *sacrum* part of the back, with all but the first and third deity wearing identical clothes. Uniformity is underscored by the posture of both hybrids and animals. They are all in a jump/attack mode, hind legs on the ground and front legs up, a pose that was very fashionable in Urartian imagery. Their posture of predation is stressed further in the case of most hybrids and the lion carrying the god Teišeba. They have their mouths open as if hissing, even when the head is that of a bird or a goat. Jakubiak attempts to assign meanings to body parts of the Anzaf hybrids, such as ‘dynamism’ for the birds’ wings and ‘dignity’ for the body parts of lions, as-

sociations that I do not find convincing, as they are tinged by Eurocentrism⁵³.

Overall, the hybrids on the shield are in conformity with some but by far not all of those we encounter on Urartian belts. The shield’s hybrids are all four-legged and display two generalised aspects: support (of the deities) and predation. While the shield limits itself to hybrids as predatory beings, some of the belts also contain scenes or indications of scenes where hybrids are shown as prey. The dangers they encounter can be in the form of humans⁵⁴, animals, humans riding on animals, but also other hybrids; in the latter case, the predators are almost always two-legged creatures with the body and tail of a bird, in the pose of shooting with bow and arrow⁵⁵.

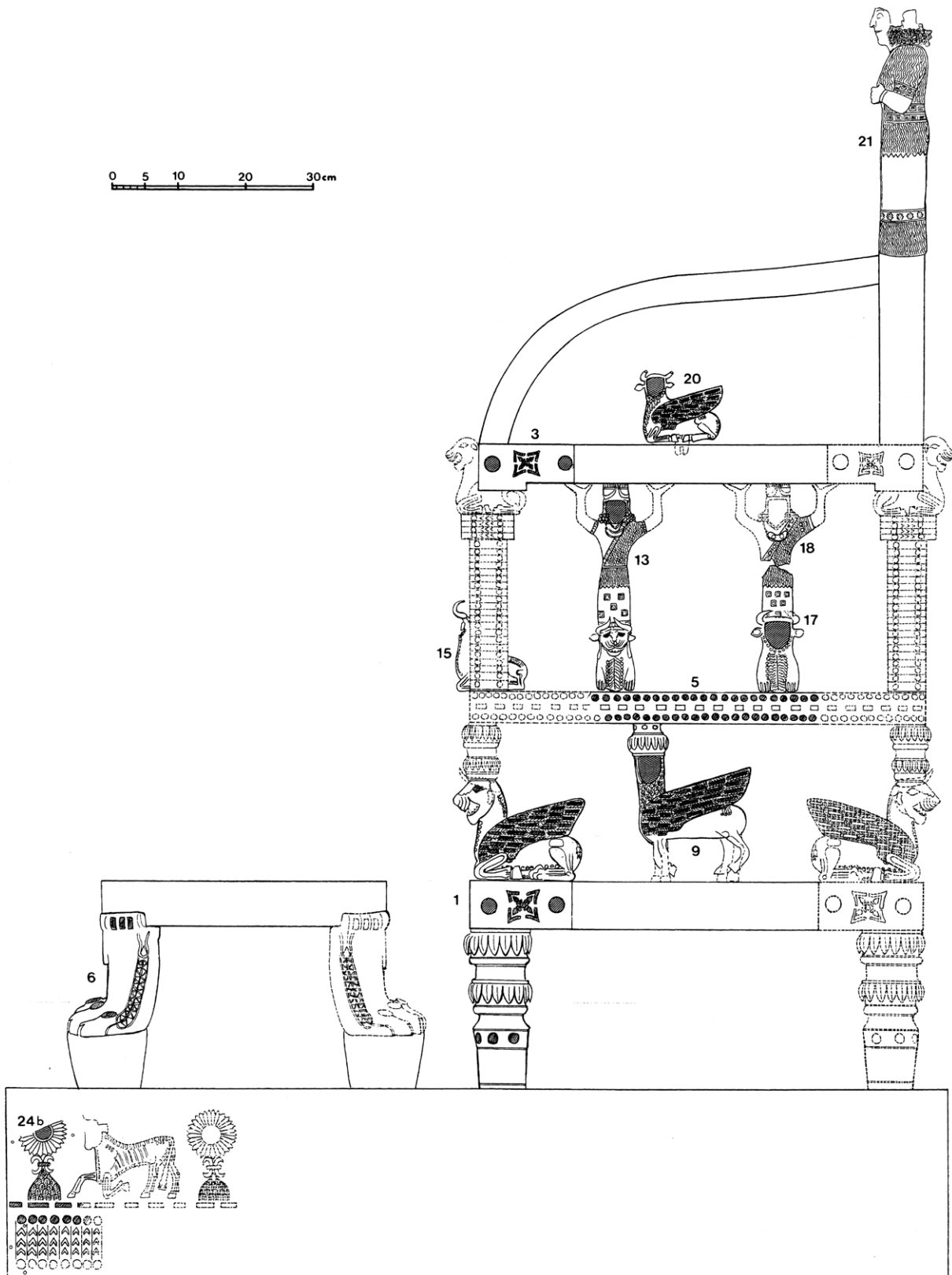
The second object with imagery of hybrids from the official realm belongs to the sphere of political representation. This is a throne the parts of which were found in the 19th century at Toprakkale near Van (*fig. 7*). Various attempts to reconstruct the original piece of furniture have been synthesised recently by John Curtis⁵⁶. A horned lion with bulls’ feet, an eagle-headed four-legged creature, but also a *lamassu*-like hybrid are all part of the throne. Apart from the composite beings, it is important to note the multiple materials that were used for these figures. Their faces were mostly made of stone inlay, the visible sides of some

53 JAKUBIAK 2011, 72.

54 Whether anthropomorphic imagery always denotes human beings is unclear when considering the small detail of the horns as the distinguishing element between deities and humans.

55 E. g. TAŞYÜREK 1975, fig. 18; KELLNER 1991, No. 70; 73; 82; 164.

56 CURTIS 2012.



7 Reconstruction of a throne from Toprakkale.

of the wings of the creatures as well, and the bronze but not the inlay parts were originally covered with sheet gold⁵⁷. The figures are not only ontologically composites but also in a material sense; for the throne itself, the same obtains as the bronzes were most likely a support for wooden arm rests and the seat. A similar preference for complex inlays and the mixing of different materials can be observed in the decoration of the temples at Ayanis and Toprakkale⁵⁸.

The presence of hybrids on the shield from Anzaf, on the belts and the throne can only mean that hybrids were an integral part of both public and private lifeworlds. The Anzaf shield was found in a context that is clearly connected to Yukarı Anzaf's temple and belongs to the sphere of official religion⁵⁹, while bronze belts have only very rarely been found in contexts of temple complexes.

Discussion

It thus seems certain that Urartian lifeworlds included an understanding of bodies – including the human body – as an assemblage of parts that could be variably severed and recombined. This idea was pervasive, and the freely emerging entities likely had no specific malevolent or benevolent powers associated with them. However, judging by the Anzaf shield and many of the belts, the theme of predation seems to be associated with them. Their other side, rarely depicted on belts but evident in the depictions on the throne and the shield, is support for both deities and king. The available imagery and its context suggest a hierarchical positioning of composite beings as below the realm of the gods and the king⁶³. This brings me to a further issue that renders the interpretation of Urartian imagery even more complex. As mentioned, there are quite a number of warriors depicted on shields, helmets and other bronze items. However, Urartian culture is aniconic when it comes to the figure of the king and the main god. Apart from the Anzaf shield, there is, to my knowledge, no other rendering of the main god, Țaldi. A very few miniature objects such as seals depict the king, and only in late Urartian times. This stands in stark contrast to Assyrian habits

Instead, they occur mainly in burials and seem to be connected to 'private' possessions⁶⁰. The fragments of the Toprakkale piece of furniture are unfortunately largely without context, although three were excavated by Hormuzd Rassam⁶¹. The reconstructed throne clearly belongs in the realm of political representation. If we consider the Anzaf shield, the throne from Toprakkale and the belts together, the conclusion can only be that bodily hybridity was a widespread idea in Urartu in both elite and commoner circles. A further element of interest is the apparent lack of compositional rules for these hybrids. Therefore, a purely mythological interpretation, similar to those advanced for the demons and *genii* of the Assyrian world, does not do justice to the evidence⁶². Resorting to a simple explanation as an expression of visual pleasures alone is insufficient as well.

where the king is central to the bulk of palatial reliefs, wall paintings and bronze objects, and where the god Aššur hovers over many such scenes.

What is the reason for this specifically Urartian reluctance to represent king and god? The difference is overly clear when we compare Assyrian and Urartian stelae. The shape of these monuments of public display, monoliths with a rounded upper end, was certainly taken over by Urartians from Assyria. But instead of symbols of the gods and an image of the king in profile, we find exclusively cuneiform writing on these stones, carried out in an aesthetic effort that produces a distribution of signs with left and right flush ends of lines. Cuneiform calligraphy might have been a replacement for bodily representations.

On the one hand, we find in Urartu an unending multiplicity of bodies in the world of belt wearers, and on the other hand a situation that can almost be described as a taboo on representing the bodies of ruler and god on objects open to public view. Lower-level people, one might assume, were open to the world of 'dividual' entities, and in times of war they were wrapped in a world of partible hybrids, while a small courtly elite

57 SEIDL 2004, 64.

58 IŞIKLI et al. 2015.

59 BELL 1999, 24–28.

60 DE BRESTIAN 2005, 30–31.

61 BARNETT 1954; CURTIS 2012.

62 WIGGERMAN 1992; NAKAMURA 2005.

63 Closer investigation of all available imagery would be needed to include potential changes within the 200 years of Urartu's existence. It would seem that an institutionalised religion played an essential role in early Urartu and was perhaps relegated to a less prominent rank towards the end of the Urartian kingdom (BERNBECK 2003).

around the king was kept away from this universe of ‘dividual’ ontology. Was ‘dividuality’ a threat to the powerful? If we take a cue from the Melanesian cases mentioned above, royal personhood might have been constructed differently from that of others, in a way that is so far unknown to us.

Just as important as a potential distinction in the kinds of actions undertaken by Urartian hybrids in different socio-political realms is a wider question: how were subjects conceptualised in a world where ontological boundaries between species of the human/animal kind are ambiguous and not always essential? Anthropomorphism certainly played a role in Urartu. After all, deities on the Anzaf shield are anthropomorphic, and a goodly number of the belts contain scenes of men in battle or hunting or women feasting (fig. 5). Imagery of lions, bulls, horses and other animals underscore this ‘realist’ side of an Urartian lifeworld. But a partial anthropomorphism should not be equated with anthropocentrism. In this cosmology, deities, the hybrids serving them and humans are not strictly separate but co-occur, often on one and the same image. The Anzaf shield is the most spectacular example, unifying human beings – the Urartian army and the fleeing and disorganised Assyrians – with an army of deities and ferocious hybrids. This co-occurrence should give us pause when conceptualising the Urartians as ‘subjects’, in the way Adam Smith invokes them. How would a political system function when the constituent entities were ‘not’ subjects in the western sense, that is, not coherent and ultimately ‘individual’ entities? Clearly, Urartian bodies were thought of as divisible, fragmentable and recomposable. But that de- and recomposed status does not appear in all spheres of life. Hybrids are mostly predatory, and their gestures and poses locate them in the realm of attack and furthermore in a universe gendered male⁶⁴. However, these ontological references exclude Urartian elites. The bronze belts as the main indicators for such ontologies are decidedly excluded from the temple armouries where the king’s weapons were hoarded⁶⁵.

How can we comprehend such worlds that do not correspond to our ontological (pre-) conceptions? The work of Philippe Descola can give us a decisive clue here. Based on his anthropological research, he distinguishes between four different types of ontologies, which he develops out of the two parameters of *physicalité* or the visible physical world and *intériorité* or the assumed interior of such physically perceived entities. Physical dif-

ferences of beings can be equated with internal similarities. This results in animistic ontologies where entirely different animals and other phenomena may be assumed to have the same human-like internal constitution. On the other hand, the parallelisation of physical and internal similarities produces a totemic ontology: a totemic clan’s members are all thought to have the same inner structures but differ fundamentally from members of other clans. Physical differences and differences in the interior are anchored in analogistic ontologies. Here, a complex worldview consists in restoring a multiform externality and extreme internal diversity by bringing them together via external analogies. Finally, modernity turns physical similarities – including human beings who are viewed as physically part of the universe of animals – into fundamental internal difference, producing a strict boundary between culture and reason as produced by human *intériorité* and nature as the remaining universe that is characterised by the constitutive lack of such cultural interior⁶⁶.

These distinctions bring us back to an important difference between the hybrids from Assyria and Urartu. It is not just that Assyrian hybrids are ‘canonised’, for the Assyrian composite bodies obviously stem from an analogical ontology: terms such as *lamassu*, *girtablullu*, *mušhuššu* or *uridimmu* denote both a specific physical being with a fixed set of rules for interspecies composition and a type of agency that is protective of or aggressive towards specific parts of the world. The Assyrian world equates differentiated external, physical characteristics with specific, but variable internal ones. Urartian hybrids, even if not bound to particular compositional rules, would be more easily comparable to those from Assyria if there were texts that could enlighten us about the function of the Urartian ‘*genii*’, ‘monsters’, ‘sphinxes’, ‘centaurs’ or whatever other vocabulary has been used to describe them. Since such sources are missing, we must rely on the imagery itself to investigate the powers of these beings. They are almost invariably shown in an attack posture, and if we take that positioning as a sign of their *intériorité*, then a host of physical differences in the form of a multitude of hybrids goes along with strong internal similarity. According to Descola’s categorisation, Urartian imagery would thus point us to an animistic ontology, and one that is particularly potent in the sphere of predation and war. However, this is not to be understood as exceptionless: this ontology has spots of exclusion such as deities and the king.

64 Broad belts are supposedly associated with men, narrow ones with women. It is an open question whether this conclusion can be sustained when more secure archaeological evidence is available. Broad belts show scenes of war and hybrid animals, while narrow

ones often depict women feasting and/or a castle with an open door.

65 SEIDL 2004, 46; DE BRESTIAN 2005.

66 DESCOLA 2013, 232–246.

The consequences for any interpretation of the relations between Assyria and Urartu, if confirmed by further materials, would be significant. A simple comparison of two ‘empires’, opposed to each other and vying for hegemony in the Taurus-Zagros arc, would have to take into consideration the conditions under which this competi-

tion was happening. This would be particularly important for deportations, as people forced into foreign regions would have to adapt to more than just a different ecological and material culture environment. They would have to somehow integrate themselves into an ontologically different universe.

Conclusions

This analysis of Urartian depictions of hybrid beings is based on the assumption that a ‘zonability’ of bodies, combined with de- and recomposabilities, is an indication for an ontology that includes notions of partibility and ‘dividuality’. Bialecki and Daswani note that “individuality and dividuality take on different degrees of importance that are also culturally specific”⁶⁷. I would add, based on the Urartian case that degrees of importance of these poles vary even within a polity and depend on specific situations. Where Melanesian personhood is always in the making⁶⁸, personhood in Urartu might change according to the context in which a person finds him/herself. Situations of predation, and by exten-

sion of war, are prone to greater partibility than quotidian life. In these male-connoted contexts, a person was to a great extent co-constructed by forces outside himself. This may have been subjectively perceived as supportive to the fighting effort, while the retreat of individuality also may have helped to increase the discipline of a military body. If this interpretation stands up to further scrutiny, it also means that processes of identity formation cannot be assumed to have worked in a way similar to western societies. Such processes may not even have been unitary for one social and political entity, since the Urartian king was exempted from such ontological switches.

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67 BIALECKI / DASWANI 2015, 273.

68 WAGNER 1991.

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Fig. 1: After WARTKE 1993, inside cover. – Fig. 2: After KELLNER 1991, 35 pl. 13,51. – Fig. 3: After KELLNER 1991, 47 pl. 33,111. – Fig. 4: Data from YUE 2014, tab. 1. – Fig. 5: After KELLNER 1991, 67 pl. 69,262. – Fig. 6: After BELLI 1999, fig. 17. – Fig. 7: After SEIDL 2004, fig. 25. – Tables: Author.

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Abstract

Partibilities in the Iron Age Polity of Urartu

Past societies did not necessarily conceive of single members as individual subjects as western modernity does. Anthropological research has revealed various kinds of partible or ‘dividual’ personhoods. Drawing on these insights and their application to prehistoric Euro-

pean cases, I propose that the Iron Age state of Urartu in eastern Anatolia (Turkey) displayed tendencies towards partibility. Material evidence for this interpretation consists of the multifarious hybrids depicted on Urartian bronze belts.

Zusammenfassung

Partibilitäten im eisenzeitlichen Gemeinwesen von Urartu

Einzelne Mitglieder antiker Gesellschaften wurden nicht unbedingt als Subjekte im Sinne der westlichen Moderne konzipiert. Die Kulturanthropologie hat verschiedene Arten von aufteilbaren oder ‘dividualen’ Persönlichkeitsvorstellungen erschlossen. Basierend auf diesen Einsichten und deren Anwendung auf die euro-

päische Prähistorie schlage ich vor, dass es auch für den eisenzeitlichen Staat Urartu in Ost-Anatolien (Türkei) Tendenzen zu einer solchen Partibilität gibt. Materielle Hinweise für eine solche Interpretation fußen auf einer Analyse der vielfältigen Hybridwesen, die auf urartäischen Bronzegürteln dargestellt sind.