

THE HASANLU GOLD BOWL AN ICONOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION OF THE DECORATION AND PARALLELS IN THE ARMENIAN HIGHLANDS

GAYANE POGHOSYAN*

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The article is devoted to the examination of some aspects of the artistic decoration of the gold bowl found at the ancient site of Hasanlu-tepe (Iran). Although the bowl has been studied by many scholars, such as E. Porada and I. Winter and others, the need for conducting an iconographic analysis still persists. The present paper attempts to analyze the iconography and symbolism of the artistic elements of the Hasanlu gold bowl in the context of culture and religion interactions. The comparison of the Hasanlu gold bowl and some excavated artifacts from the Armenian Highlands suggests that the artistic composition of the bowl is a reflection of certain astrological and mythological ideas associated with constellations.

Key words: Hasanlu gold bowl, Armenian Highlands, decoration, astronomy, constellation, iconography.

Introduction

In the framework of the article, the vessel known as the "**Hasanlu Gold Bowl**" from the Tehran Museum of Archaeology is analyzed. The artifact was uncovered by R.H. Dyson Jr. in the debris of Burned Building 1 from the IV period on the high citadel mound at Hasanlu in the southwest of Lake Urmia [Kaputan] [1, p. 93]. The flattened bowl was found along with the remains of three men, close to the fingerbones of one of them, assumed to be the bearer (**fig. 1**). The bowl is a unique specimen of ancient decorative-applied art displaying a high level of technical and artistic mastery. The bowl is allegedly made in the period corresponding to the exposed archaeological layer (1000-800 BC) or earlier. According to Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions, in the IX century BC the area around Lake Urmia was under the rule of Urartian kings. The Boston University archaeologist M. Dante in the "Antiquity" magazine proposed the idea that the three men might be invading Urartian soldiers attempting to grab the golden bowl as a trophy [2, p. 791-804]. Another assumption holds that the soldiers tried to save something important or sacred to them. The analysis of the artistic decoration of the Hasanlu bowl provides some insight into the religious and aesthetic views in pre-Urartian and Urartian artistic thought.

* Researcher at the Department of Fine Arts of NAS RA Institute of Arts, Doctor of Arts, gayanepoghosyan8787@gmail.com. The article was submitted on 05.04.2023, reviewed on 01.09.2023, accepted for publication on 01.12.2023.

Basic Material

The Hasanlu gold bowl was found flattened. It is about 20 cm in height, with a base about 15 cm and a rim about 18 cm in diameter. The bowl is decorated with a low relief hammered from the inside. Following the iconographic principles of the Ancient Near East, the decorative field is structured in a hierarchical arrangement of the main and secondary plots. Some scholars, I. Winter among them, found similarities between Hurrian and Urartian arts. Thus, he identified Hurrian pottery with that from Kura-Araxes culture. As regards parallel comparisons, it would be relevant to mention that the Armenian Highlands were the birthplace of the so-called Hurro-Urartian tribes [3]. In the upper field, depicted are three deities in chariots moving from left to right, and a delegation of three men moving in the opposite direction, facing left (**fig. 2**). The lead deity driving a chariot drawn by a pair of bulls is identified as the storm god [1, p. 93]. The other two chariots are drawn by mules or onagers. The second deity, judging by the solar-disc headdress, is the sun god, and the third one with the horned headgear reminding of a crescent may be identified as the moon god [1, p. 93]. Cult objects with images of horses are quite a common occurrence among archaeological finds in different cultural levels. It is worth to note that, in the mythology of Indo-European peoples, the horse was associated with solar deities [4, p. 666]. In this context, pertinent is Xenophon's mention of horse sacrifices to the sun god in Ancient Armenia [6]. As explained by the renowned orientalist and archaeologist N. Marr, horses were deemed to be creatures of a dual nature signifying life and death, similar to the rising and setting sun [7, p. 133-134]. The images of horses were very popular in the Armenian Highlands in both the Bronze Age and later Urartian period [8, p. 82-96]. Numerous bronze belts best reflect the worship of horses in this area [5, p. 239-248].

The mystery of the images in the Hasanlu gold bowl decoration still waits to be unraveled. This requires a systematic research, including stylistic and iconographic analyses with concurrent comparative study. The ancient Hittite texts and monuments, as well as the Urartian cuneiform inscription on the "Door of Mher" (near Lake Van, present-day Turkey) can serve as helpful written sources for such analysis. The animal sacrifice scene in the upper field of the bowl is of interest in the context of animal sacrifices in the Kingdom of Van as stated in the inscription on the "Door of Mher". The artistic composition of the bowl is deemed to be based on the principle of hierarchical arrangement of the three main deities of the pantheon. Incidentally, most of the cups and bowls known from the Ancient Near East are decorated with scenes of donation or sacrifice and were most likely intended for a sacred drink. In order to be able to identify the divine figures of the Hasanlu bowl, it is essential to understand the features and ideology of the plots depicted in the composition. The latter is obviously arranged from bottom to top and from left to right in the narrative order of the religious images, with the ideological culmination at the top. Yet another assumption is that this ancient iconographic system describes a victorious hero on his way up to deification. The iconography is apparently based

on the ideology of trinity of the Indo-European mythological system: supreme power, physical strength, fertility. The image of the deity with the bull in the front position may be associated with Teshub, or Teisheba of the Urartian pantheon. The initial plot of the iconographic composition allegedly represents a woman holding her newborn baby (a hero or deity). The kind of headscarf the woman wears is mainly known from the Urartian and Hittite sources. The represented female figure is reminiscent of those frequently encountered in the fine art of the Kingdom of Van, one of whose best three-dimensional manifestations is the bronze statue of the goddess Arubaini from Van (History Museum of Armenia). Wearing a headscarf was compulsory for married women in the Urartian Kingdom [9, p. 7]. As regards the typical symbol of the god of thunder [10 p. 42] – the ax in the left hand of the enthroned male figure – it is assumingly to be passed from father to son. It can also be an artistic representation of the famous Hurrian myth “Song of Ullikummi”, where it says that Kumarbi attempts to dethrone Teshub by impregnating the huge cliff amid the cold lake giving birth to the stone monster Ullikummi [11, p. 15]. Although the myth has survived only fragmentarily, it should have ended with Teshub’s victory. According to A. Petrosyan, one of the possible locations of the origin of this myth is the region of Uelikuni/Uelikui, known from Urartian cuneiform texts [11, p. 158]. Connection can be traced between the Uelikuni area and dragon stones – Vishapaqars (Armenian: *vishap* – dragon, *qar* – stone) too [12, p. 149]. The heroic figure fighting with his gloves on against the mysterious half-human creature appearing from the rock in the stylized combat scene is associated with Teshub and Ullikummi’s fight from the Hurrian mythology. In our view, the figure emerging from the rock is the deity Arni mentioned in the cuneiform text on the “Door of Mher” [13, p. 11]. G. Ghapantsyan interpreted the name *Arni* in the Armenian language as *mountain* (*լյանն* [*lyarn*]) [13, p. 16]. Parallels of the bull image right above the serpents’ (dragons) heads can be found in the iconographic compositions of dragon stones in the Armenian Highlands. In the Indo-European mythology it is common that a deity crushes mountains and rocks, kills, like Teshub, his enemy serpent [14, p. 87]. The nude female figure identified as the goddess Ishtar/Shauska is believed to represent the Virgo constellation. Figures, similar to archer, are numerous in the petroglyphs of the Armenian Highlands and on the Urartian seals. The struggle between the good and evil is a popular plot in the myths of various cultures (Mesopotamian Marduk kills Tiamat, Armenian Hayk kills Bel, etc.). In the composition of the Hasanlu gold bowl, the male figures in the upper and lower fields, judging by their headdresses, hairstyle, and facial contours, should be the same, yet performing different actions. A similar figure is seen near the altar too. One of the symbolic elements of this plot is the three swords, or daggers in the middle field. The swords on the bands of the Karashamb silver goblet (History Museum of Armenia) were thought to be trophies [15, p. 152; 16, p. 91], but in the case with the Hasanlu bowl, they are rather sacred objects of ritual donation (this viewpoint was offered by E. Porada in her article). It should be mentioned here that

in the Kingdom of Van, there was a tradition of donating weapons. In the inscription on the “Door of Mher” we can see the word “weapon”, or “sword” in relation to the god Haldi [17, p. 369]. The Urartian cuneiform inscriptions do not contain any information about donating weapons to other deities.

The lion in this iconography is a noteworthy figure associated with the sun. In the Kingdom of Van, the lion was the symbolic animal linked with the supreme god Haldi. In some sources, the figure with the presumed sun disc in the hand, walking the sacred lion, is identified as the goddess Khubaba (Khuba) [18, p. 20]. Yet, in our opinion, the said figure resembles a man rather than a woman to be associated with a goddess. To prove our viewpoint, we refer to the II-I millennium BC belt from the archaeological site of Samtavro, Georgia. In the pictorial field of the belt, an object with outlines of a solar symbol is in the hand of a male figure. In some cultures, the hot summer sun was associated with a lion, symbolizing powerful forces of nature. Thus, in Ancient Babylon, the months of July and August were called months of fire and depicted as a lion [19, p. 61]. In the Armenian tradition, the sun was a young man running across the firmament on the back of a lion. Lion Mher from the epic poem “David of Sassoon” is another instance of lion and sun interrelation in the Armenian Highlands. The Late Bronze Age belts with lions carrying lustrous discs representing celestial luminaries were excavated in Georgia [20, pic. 40]. The comparison of this image with the applied silver-gold lions found in the 9th burial mound of Metsamor (Armenia), dating back to the early I millennium BC, is quite pertinent [21, p. 128]. Thus, the similarity of the outlines and the symbols on the animals’ backs suggests that we deal with the same artistic school. This fragment seems to point towards the altar with swords where some ritual is taking place. Alike scenes were associated with the zodiac sign shifting (such manifestations we can find in the art of Van Kingdom) [22, p. 166-179]. The comparison of monuments of the Bronze Age and the following Urartian period suggests that the composition of the Hasanlu gold bowl represents a sequential order of deities and associated constellations. The motif of two kneeling males with a figure between them is presumed to be an episode from the Mesopotamian “Epic of Gilgamesh” [1, p. 95]. Humbaba appears in Sumero-Akkadian mythology as the appointed by the god Enlil guardian of the Cedar Forest, who was killed by Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu [23, p. 606]. There we notice an allusion to the cult of twin brothers, which was very popular in the ancient world. Some experts argue that the two alike anthropomorphic figures occurring in the rock paintings of the Armenian Highlands symbolize twins [24, p. 166-172]. As a constellation and celestial objects, the Twins are associated with the forces of nature, rain and water in particular, and through that – with the god of thunder. [25, p. 217-218]. As an imaginary presentation of a constellation associated with thunder and storm can be also perceived the figure of the archer in the composition, and thereby compared with the idea of twins. The mythical twin-brothers are regarded as fighters against evil [26, p. 174-176].

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the Hasanlu gold bowl and some monuments of the Armenian Highlands leads to the following conclusions:

- Some iconographic features of the bowl's décor resemble the artistic traditions of the Armenian Highlands, the Kingdom of Van in particular.
- The decoration of the bowl is a reflection of certain astrological and mythological ideas.
- The typological analysis of the iconography can serve as an evidence of the Hurro-Urartian origin of the bowl.

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ՀԱՍԱՆԼՈՒԻ ՈՍԿՅԱ ԹԱՍԸ

ՀԱՐԴԱՐԱՆՔԻ ՊԱՏԿԵՐԱԳՐԱԿԱՆ ՄԵԿՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆ ՈՒ ԶՈՒԳԱՇԵՐՆԵՐԸ ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ԼԵՈՆԱՇԽԱՐՀՈՒՄ

ԳԱՅԱՆԵ ՊՈՂՈՍՅԱՆ*

Հղման համար. Պողոսյան, Գայանե: «Հասանլուի ոսկյա թասը. հարդարանքի պատկերագրական մեկնությունն ու զուգահեռները Հայկական լեռնաշխարհում»: *Արվեստագիտական հանդես*, N 2 (2023): 235-242. DOI: 10.54503/2579-2830-2023.2(10)-235

Հոդվածը նվիրված է Հասանլու-թեփե (Իրան) հնավայրում հայտնաբերված ոսկյա թասի գեղարվեստական հորինվածքի որոշ դրվագների քննությանը: Թեև Հասանլուի գավաթն ուսումնասիրվել է մի շարք գիտնականների կողմից, սակայն թասի պատկերագրական զուգահեռների արվեստաբանական քննությունը, ինչպես նաև մինչ օրս արված ուսումնասիրությունների արդյունքների վերանայումը մնում է արդիական:

* ՀՀ ԳԱԱ արվեստի ինստիտուտի կերպարվեստի բաժնի գիտաշխատող, արվեստագիտության թեկնածու, gayanepoghosyan8787@gmail.com, հոդվածի ներկայացնելու օրը՝ 05.04.2023, գրախոսելու օրը՝ 01.09.2023, տպագրության ընդունելու օրը՝ 01.12.2023:

Հոդվածում փորձ է արվել Հասանլուի թասի գեղարվեստական տարրերի պատկերագրությունն ու խորհրդաբանությունը վերլուծել Հայկական լեռնաշխարհի մշակութային և պաշտամունքային փոխառնչությունների համատեքստում: Քանի որ թասի պատկերագրության քննությունը ներկայացված է տարբեր մասնագետների գիտական աշխատանքներում, ուստի սույն հոդվածի քննության շրջանակում հատկապես կարևորվում են հորինվածքային որոշ դրվագներ, որոնցում առավել ընդգծված են Հայկական լեռնաշխարհի բրոնզեդարյա և երկաթեդարյա մշակույթներին հատուկ պատկերագրաձևերը:

Բանալի բաներ՝ Հասանլու, ոսկյա թաս, Հայկական լեռնաշխարհ, հարդարանք, աստղագիտություն, համաստեղություն, պատկերագրություն:

ЗОЛОТАЯ ЧАША ХАСАНЛУ ИКОНОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ И ПАРАЛЛЕЛИ В АРМЯНСКОМ НАГОРЬЕ

ГАЯНЕ ПОГОСЯН*

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Статья посвящена анализу некоторых элементов художественной композиции золотой чаши, найденной в Хасанлу-тепе (Иран). Несмотря на то, что золотая чаша Хасанлу явилась объектом исследования ряда ученых, однако необходимость проведения сравнительного искусствоведческого анализа иконографии и последующего пересмотра результатов проведенных ранее исследований остается актуальной. В статье предпринята попытка проанализировать иконографию и символику художественных элементов декора чаши в контексте культурных и культовых взаимосвязей. Поскольку рассмотрение иконографии представлено в научных трудах разных специалистов, в рамках данной статьи особое внимание уделяется некоторым художественным мотивам, характерным для культуры Армянского нагорья в эпоху бронзы и железа.

Ключевые слова: Хасанлу, золотая чаша, Армянское нагорье, декоративное убранство, астрология, созвездие, иконография.

* Научный сотрудник отдела изобразительного искусства Института искусств НАН РА, кандидат искусствоведения, gayanepoghosyan8787@gmail.com, статья представлена 05.04.2023, рецензирована 01.09.2023, принята к публикации 01.12.2023.

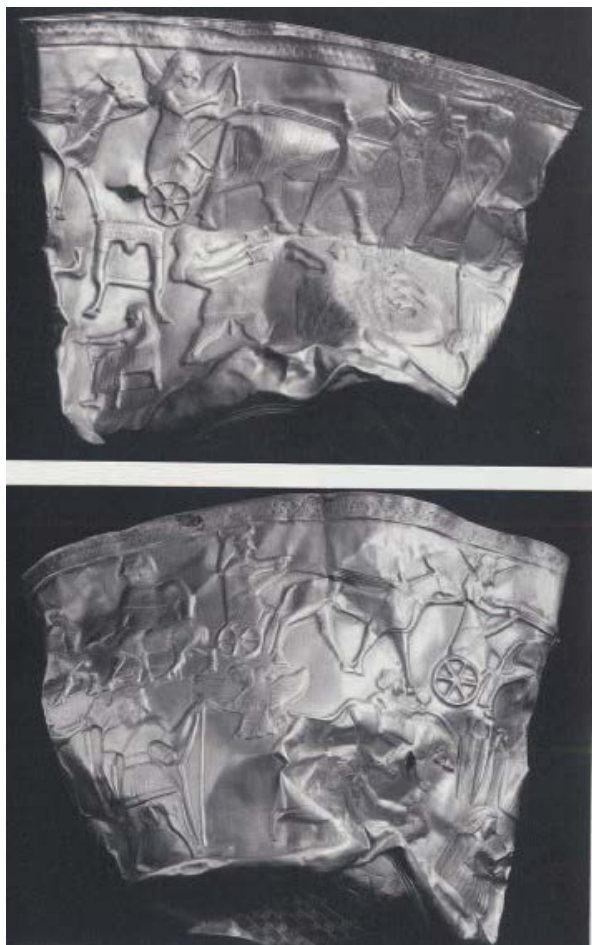


Figure 1. The Hasanlu gold bowl



Figure 2. Iconographical content of the Hasanlu gold bowl