

PATTERNS OF ELITE INTERACTION: ANIMAL-HEADED VESSELS IN ANATOLIA IN THE EIGHTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES BC

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Written sources provide sparse but valuable information about Phrygian contacts with other peoples east and west. From Assyrian cuneiform documents of the last decades of the eighth century BC King Mita of Mushki, known to the Greeks as Midas, emerges as a troublemaker on the northwestern fringes of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, engaging in alliances with Urartu and the Neo-Hittite kingdoms. The defeat and subsequent integration into the Assyrian Empire of several independent principalities in southeast Anatolia and North Syria, and advances of the Assyrian governor of Cilicia into Phrygian territory seem to have persuaded Midas to make conciliatory moves and improve his diplomatic relations with the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Muscarella 1989, 149–50; Mellink 1991, 622–24; Hawkins 1994; Wittke 2004, 48–51, 106–30). Close connections between Phrygia and the kingdom of Tuwana, later Tyana, to the north of the Cilician Gates are attested by the finds of Phrygian alphabetic inscriptions in the area (Mellink 1991, 625–26). Looking west, contacts between Greeks and Phrygians in this time period are of a more legendary nature. Herodotos (*Hist.* 1.14.2–3) reports that King Midas sent his throne to Delphi, the first foreigner to make a dedication at a Greek sanctuary. Midas is also said to have married a woman from Aeolian Cyme (Heraclides Lembus 37 Dilts; Pollux 9.83).

Looking for manifestations of these contacts in the material record, archaeologists have identified Near Eastern imports and influences in Phrygia, and Phrygian as well as Phrygian-inspired objects in Greece (Sams 1993; Muscarella 1989). Somewhat puzzling is the apparent lack of Greek material at Phrygian sites; for example, only very little pottery of the Greek Geometric period has been excavated at Gordion (DeVries 2005, 37–43, figs. 4–3, 4–6; Kerschner 2005, 122–23, pl. 10, 1). Foremost indicators for Phrygian-Greek contacts are the bronze belts and fibulae of Phrygian type found in the Greek cities of Asia Minor. Recent excavations at Ephesos and Miletos have brought to light many belts and fibulae made by local Ionian workshops in imitation of Phrygian prototypes (Donder 2002; Klebinder 2002). Actual imports from Phrygia that may have reached the west before the end of the eighth century include an elaborate bronze fibula with a separately made lock plate from the sanctuary of Hera on Samos (Jantzen 1972, 48–49 B 1513, pl. 44; Ebbinghaus 2006, 208–9, fig. 6).¹ This object finds close parallels among the fibulae from the so-called Midas Mound Tumulus at Gordion (Young 1981, 156–162, pls. 76–77). A similar fibula is worn by Warpalawas, king of Tuwana, on the rock relief at İvriz, a further indication of this king's alliance with Phrygia (Caner 1983, 173–74, pls. C, 67).

The present paper focuses on animal-headed vessels in the form of beakers and buckets (or *situlae*) as one facet of the contacts between Anatolia and the Near East in the eighth and seventh centuries. It is

argued that this class of material provides tangible evidence for the inclusion of the Phrygian elite and perhaps also some Greeks from Asia Minor into a network of diplomatic exchanges centered on the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In a paper delivered at the Assyriology Congress in Istanbul in 1987, Oscar Muscarella drew attention to some of the questions raised by the two animal-headed *situlae* from Gordion (Muscarella 1998). In the following, these issues are addressed in a broader context.

1. BUCKETS AND BEAKERS FROM GORDION AND SAMOS

Two bronze *situlae* with the heads of a lion and a ram, respectively, have come to light in the Midas Mound Tumulus at Gordion (figs. 1, 2; Young 1981, 121–23, pls. III–IV, 62–63; Öztürk 1992, 142–43, 214 nos. 121–22).² This royal tomb is now dated to ca. 740, which means that rather than for the historic Midas/Mita, it was built for one of his predecessors (DeVries et al. 2003). The animal-headed vessels are sizeable containers hammered of thin bronze sheet and equipped with an inner liner, as was common practice for such vessels in the Neo-Assyrian period. Their heads are carefully modeled and the eyes inlaid.

Very similar vessels are depicted on the reliefs of the palace that the Assyrian king Sargon II (721–705 BC) built for himself at his new capital city Dur-Sharrukin, modern Khorsabad, in the last decades of the eighth century. Here, lion-headed *situlae* occurred both in procession scenes and in the context of a banquet (Botta and Flandin 1849, pl. 162; Albenda 1986, pl. 144). The latter representation points to one, and perhaps the

most basic, function of such buckets. They were used to draw liquid from a cauldron, and to distribute it among the participants of the banquet (fig. 3; Botta and Flandin 1849, pl. 76; Albenda 1986, pl. 123). The lion's head of the *situla* from Gordion appears to be a three-dimensional version of the lion's heads depicted on the reliefs; indeed, the stylization of the Gordion head fits well into the canon of Assyrian art. Because of the impact of Neo-Assyrian culture on neighboring regions, however, it cannot be excluded that the vessel was made outside of Mesopotamia, for example in northern Syria, the place of origin of two cauldrons with siren attachments deposited in the same tumulus (Young 1981, 104–10, pls. 51–57).³ The ram-headed *situla* from Gordion has the ears placed behind the horns in a highly idiosyncratic fashion, but it is otherwise closely related to ram-headed vessels of terracotta found at Assyrian sites, including Ashur, Nineveh and Nimrud (ancient Kalhu; Curtis 2000, 195–99, figs. 1–20).

The circumstances of their deposition indicate that the function of the two *situlae* from the Midas Mound Tumulus was basically the same as that of the lion-headed buckets featured in the Assyrian court banquets. Analysis

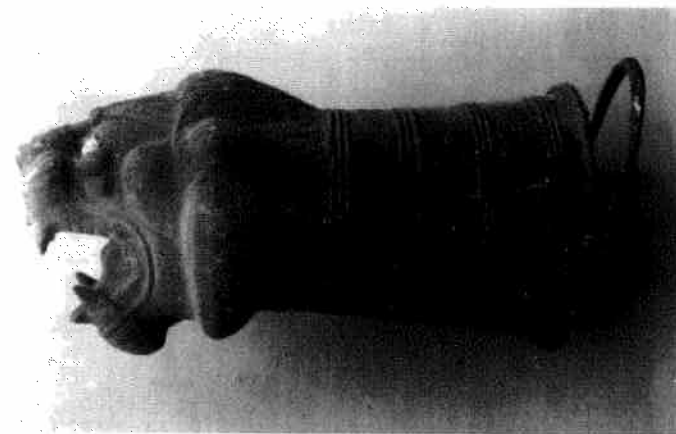


Fig. 1. Lion-headed *situla* from the Midas Mound Tumulus. Photo courtesy of Gordion Archives.



Fig. 2. Ram-headed *situla* from the Midas Mound Tumulus. Photo courtesy of Gordion Archives.

of organic residues from the interior of the *situlae* revealed that they had contained a mixed fermented beverage of grape wine, barley beer and honey mead – a potent potion likely prepared in the large cauldrons that were present in the burial chamber (McGovern 2003, 279–98). In addition, the impressive banqueting set included five pairs of small cauldrons with ring and bucket handles, several jugs, two ladles and more than one hundred drinking bowls, all of bronze (Young 1981, 110–47, pls. 58–73). The two *situlae* were recovered wrapped in textile behind one of two wooden serving stands; they were probably suspended in linen bags from nails in the wall above (Young 1981, 101, 121, fig. 66, pl. 44c). The stands, whose fronts were covered with intricate inlay, were thought to be screens by the excavator (Young 1981, 176–81, pl. 44a–b), but each had a top shelf with three openings for the insertion of vessels. The small cauldrons and ladles were found nearby. Elizabeth Simpson has suggested that “the *situlas* may also have been used with the screens, perhaps as dippers to fill the small cauldrons, from the three large cauldrons found alongside the tomb’s south wall” (Simpson and Payton 1986, 45–46). On the eastern periphery of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the seventh- or early sixth-century bronze bowl from the Neo-Elamite tomb at Arjan in western Iran depicts two ram-headed vessels set in a pot stand – albeit of a different type (Majidzadeh 1992, 136, fig. 1; Alvarez-Mon 2004, 209–211, fig. 3).

To the west of Phrygia, two animal-headed containers of bronze have been excavated in the sanctuary of Hera on the Greek island of Samos. The smaller, damaged vessel is a *situla* with the head of a calf, which used to be mistaken for a bull but may be recognized by its budding horns (fig. 4; Jantzen 1972, 71 B 275, pl. 73).⁴ It is of lesser size and quality than the specimens from Gordion, and was probably manufactured somewhere on the periphery of the Assyrian Empire, not least because a calf is not yet attested for animal-headed vessels from Assyria (Curtis 2000, 201). The larger vessel from Samos preserves no traces of a handle,

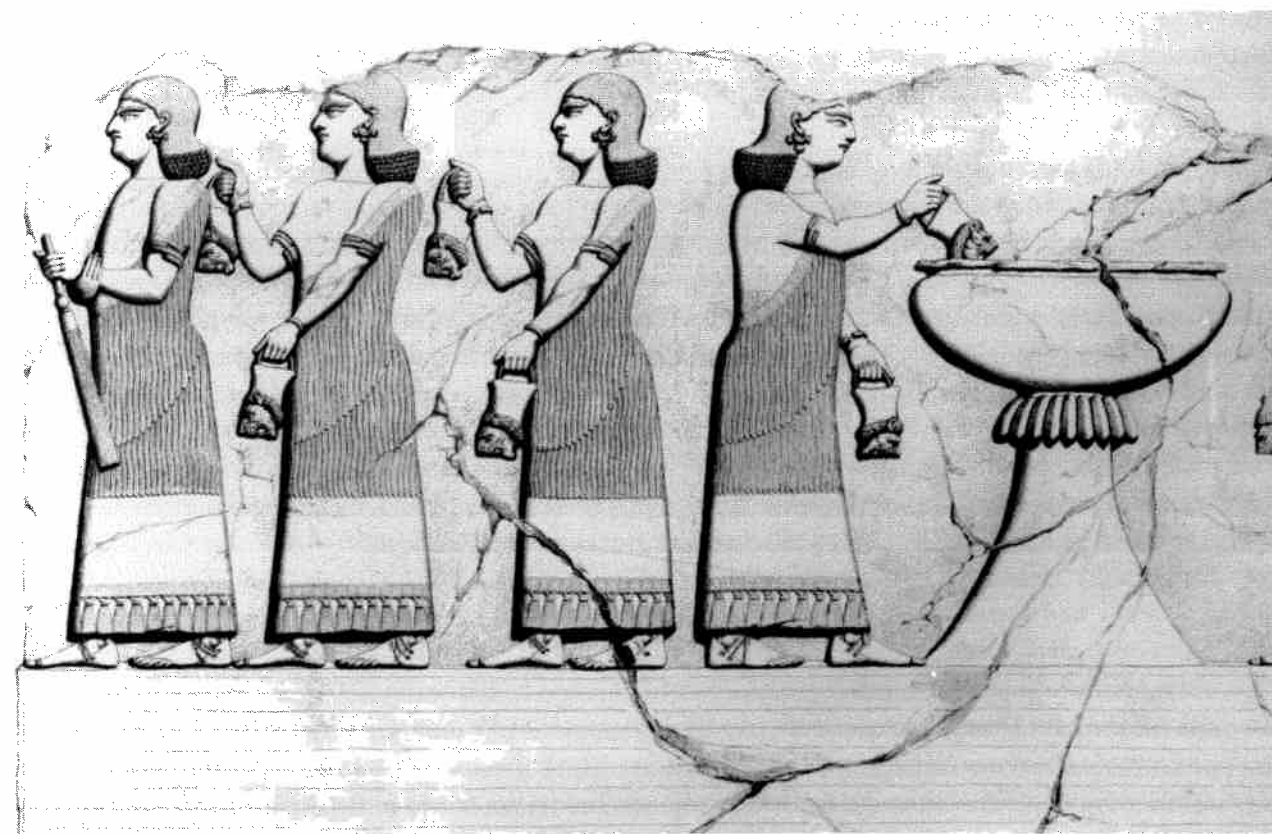


Fig. 3. Khorsabad, Room II. Servants with lion-headed *situlae*. Botta and Flandin (1849, pl. 76).

and is best classified as a cup or beaker. Instead of terminating in a simple animal's head, it is janiform, with the upper part of a lion's head embossed on opposite sides (Kyrieleis 1986, 189, pl. IIc).⁵ The facial features of the lions are coarsely rendered and bear some similarity to Neo-Hittite sculpture. Both vessels from Samos conform to standard Neo-Assyrian production techniques; they are hammered of sheet metal and equipped with an inner liner.

The beaker and *situla* recovered in the sanctuary of Hera were brought there as votive offerings, either by a Greek or by a foreigner. They provide no indication of any practical use they may have fulfilled within the sanctuary, or of the purpose they might have served in a Greek context prior to their dedication. The example of somewhat later, locally produced animal-headed vessels, however, allows us to draw some conclusions that may be relevant also for the earlier period. The most important piece of evidence is a bull- or cow-headed bronze beaker dated to ca. 600 BC, which follows a new bent type of Iranian origin (further discussed by Ebbinghaus 2006, 215–16, fig. 12). Both the style of the animal's head and the fact that the vessel is single-walled and cast suggest that it is a product of local Samian workshops. It is inscribed *chaire o hierou* ("cheers, oh Priest!"), which implies that it served as a drinking cup on the occasion of ritual banquets, an integral part of the cult of Samian Hera. May we infer similar uses for the calf's head *situla* and the lion-faced beaker?

Situlae and beakers with the heads of rams, gazelles and lions are also known from northern Syria, Urartu and western Iran (Tuchelt 1962, 57–64, pls. 7–9; Calmeyer 1979; Muscarella 1988, 24–26 no. 5; Curtis 2000). The finds from these regions include examples of terracotta. This indicates that their use reflected longer-standing traditions and was not restricted to elite contexts, unlike at Gordion, Samos and Veii in Etruria, where another lion-headed bronze vessel of eastern origin was found (Sciaccia 2003). Which factors promoted the wide diffusion of animal-headed vessels during the Neo-Assyrian period, including their spread to more distant lands? The following sections aim to answer this question.

2. IN SARGON'S PALACE

The contexts in which animal-headed containers are depicted on the walls of Sargon's palace at Khorsabad are quite informative. The reliefs preserve two representations of banquets; in both, lion-headed cups and *situlae* constitute the main elements of the drinking set. The banquet in Room II is most probably a victory feast celebrating Sargon's campaign in the east, illustrated in the frieze in fig. 3 (Botta and Flandin 1849, pls. 52, 57–67, 76; Albenda 1986, 81–82, pls. 110, 113, 116–123; Stronach 1995, 180–85, fig. 12.3). The banquet in Room VII is shown above and may be understood as following upon the excursion of the king and his

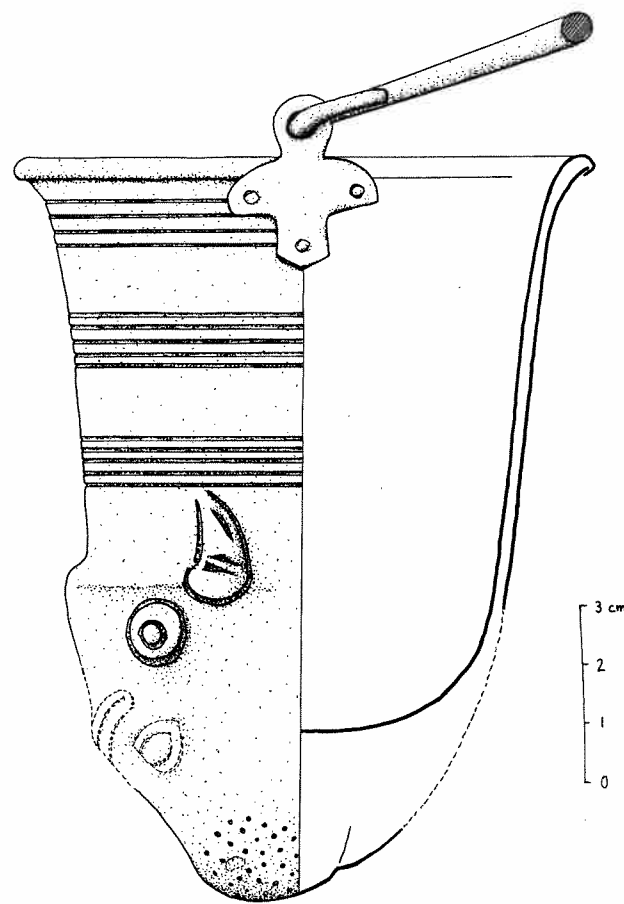


Fig. 4. Calf-headed *situla* from the sanctuary of Hera on Samos. Drawing by author.

retinue in a royal park (Botta and Flandin 1848, 108–14; Albenda 1986, 80–81, 104–5, pls. 85–90). It seems that the relevant scenes represented feasts for court and military officials hosted by the king – who apparently did not participate – on two different occasions. Accordingly, each feast is likely to have highlighted a different aspect of Sargon's kingship, with lion-headed vessels felt to be appropriate for both. The pictorial record is complemented by written documents from the Assyrian court. These attest that lion-headed vessels could be employed as drinking cups at banquets for foreign tributaries as well as in religious rituals; they could even hold the drink provided by the king for a god (Deller 1985, 328–34, 344; Stronach 1995, 182).

A letter mentions a lion-headed silver vessel that was sent to the Assyrian king, probably Sargon II, together with other items of precious metal that may have constituted gift, tribute or booty (Deller 1985, 331). The reliefs at Khorsabad confirm the secondary function of animal-headed containers as items of exchange. On Facades L and N and in Room VI, lion-headed *situlae* are among the objects presented to the king by Assyrian attendants and foreign tributaries (Botta and Flandin 1849, pls. 10–11, 16, 30, 103; Albenda 1986, 63–66, 71–73, pls. 16, 43, 47, 55, 66, figs. 35, 63, 85). The attendants carry vessels, furniture and chariot equipment, which might represent the contributions of Assyrian provincial governors, in analogy to the tribute brought by the representatives of vassal states (Bär 1996, 229). In any case, the objects are highly appropriate as gifts to the king, since they consist of the essential furnishings of the royal court, and, on Facade N, more precisely the furnishings of the royal banquet. Besides lion-headed buckets, the vessels include a relatively large lion-headed beaker without handle, which was possibly destined for the use of the king himself (Deller 1985, pl. 30b). The lion's head as an emblematic finial recurs elsewhere on the reliefs, for example on jewelry, fly whisks and weapons, while furniture such as stools and tables incorporate lion's paws and, more rarely, heads (Botta and Flandin 1849, pls. 22–23, 159, 161; Albenda 1986, 93–95, pls. 50, 139, 143). This iconographic choice reflects the traditional notion of the lion as a prime symbol of royal power. Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) and Ashurbanipal (668–627 BC) displayed royal prowess in the lion hunts carved on the walls of their palaces at Nimrud and Nineveh; the walls of Sargon's palace at Khorsabad were emblazoned with the figure of a hero grasping a lion (Magen 1986, 29–36, pls. 1–4; Albenda 1986, 52–53, 101–102, pls. 15, 17, figs. 7–8).

Two groups of foreign tributaries bring lion-headed *situlae* at Khorsabad. The tribute bearers on Sargon's reliefs are quite standardized in their dress and goods (Bär 1996, 243). Accordingly, their respective countries of origin are hard to identify – with one exception. At least one of the *situla*-carrying groups may be assumed to hail from Anatolia, most likely Phrygia, because of the large fibula of Phrygian type attached to the coat of one of its members (fig. 5; Botta and Flandin 1849, 106 bis; Albenda 1986, pl. 69; commented by Muscarella 1998, 150–52). If this identification is correct, it leaves us with the fairly puzzling scenario of members of the Phrygian elite bringing owls to Athens, as it were – that is animal-headed *situlae* to the Assyrian court, while they themselves used imported vessels of this type. In any case, the representation at Khorsabad does not imply a special connection between Phrygians and animal-headed buckets. Such *situlae* were also associated with tributaries from other lands, most prominently a Zagros people on the Assyrian-style bronze coffin allegedly from Ziwiye. The members of the relevant delegation carry city models, wine skins, animal horns and *situlae* with what appear to be the heads of a lion and a gazelle (Muscarella 1988, 342–49 no. 473).⁶

Proceeding under the assumption that Sargon's reliefs illustrated what actually happened – although as he cautions, that need not be the case – Oscar Muscarella (1998, 155–56) has wondered whether the Phrygians brought *situlae* to Sargon's court because "they gave the Assyrian king what he wanted and expected." Even if the reliefs do not depict real events, their iconography must have been plausible. Maybe no Phrygian ever presented a lion-headed *situla* to Sargon. From an Assyrian point of view, however, Phrygia seems to have belonged to the circle of states that acknowledged Assyria's superior power by sending a certain range

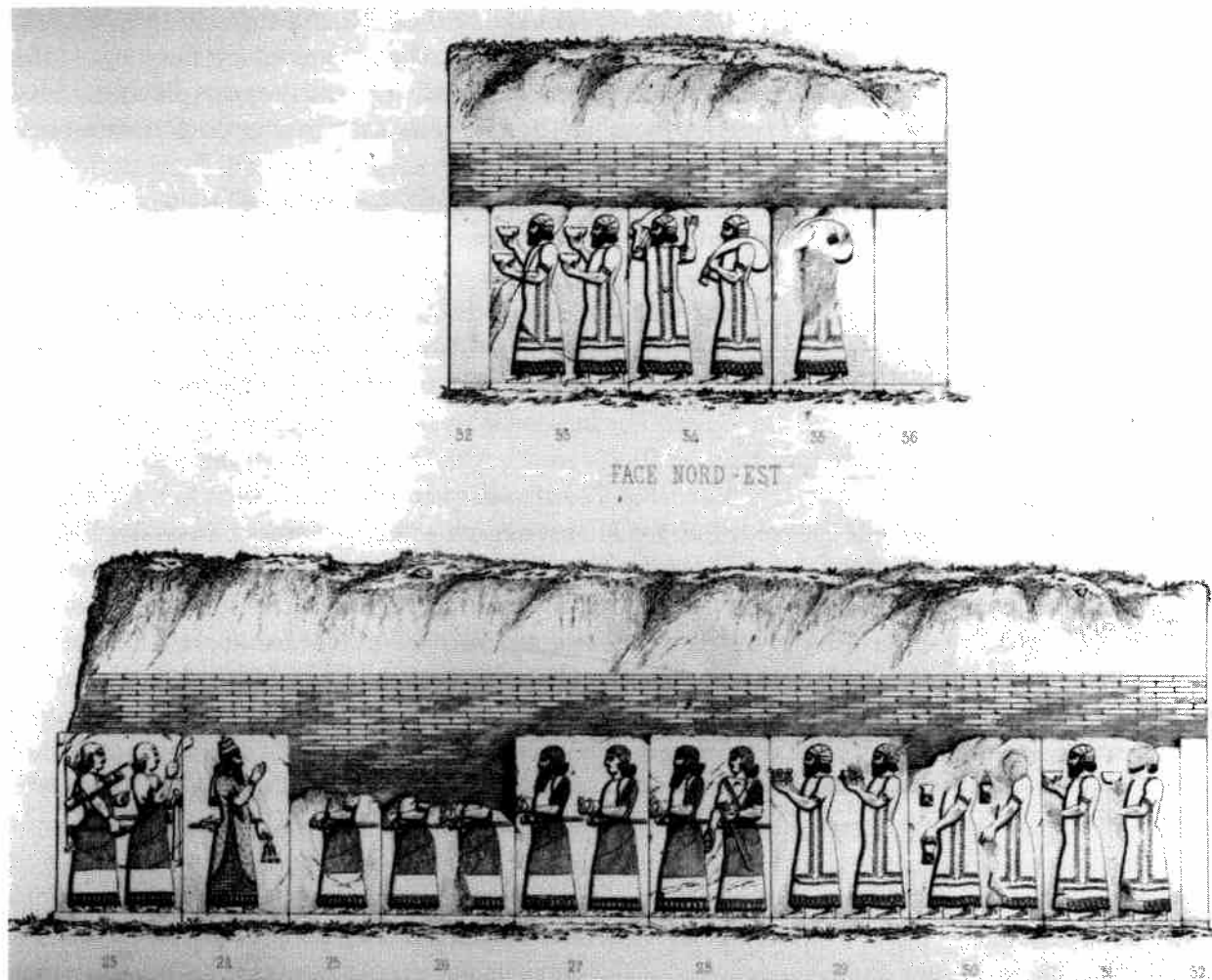


Fig. 5. Khorsabad, Room VI. Tributaries with lion-headed *situlae*. Botta and Flandin (1849, pl. 103).

of gifts to her king. Gifts and especially tribute often reflected local availability of raw materials and sought-after resources as well as local traditions of craftsmanship, but the overall impression conveyed by the offerings in the tribute scenes at Khorsabad, as later at Persepolis, is that of internationally acknowledged trappings of elite lifestyle. The wide diffusion among local elites of these items – witness the animal-headed *situlae* from Gordion – leaves no doubt that we are dealing with more than just artistic convention or lack of imagination on the part of the craftsmen responsible for the carving of the reliefs. In fact, animal-headed vessels were present not only at the court of Sargon II and one of Midas' predecessors, but at other royal courts, as well. The ram-headed vessels on the above-mentioned Neo-Elamite cup occur in the context of what appears to be a royal banquet (Alvarez-Mon 2004). A gazelle-headed vessel of bronze engraved with an Assyrian-style presentation scene, moreover, reinforces the conceptual link between animal-headed vessels and gift giving (Tuchelt 1962, 59 no. 12, pls. 8–9; Calmeyer 1979, 196 B4, fig. 3).

3. BRONZE AGE PRECEDENTS

There is good evidence from the Bronze Age for the use of animal-shaped vessels as standard gifts in diplomatic exchanges. As the information available for this period is comparatively rich, it is briefly reviewed

in the following paragraphs, in order to render some depth to the scenario proposed for the Iron Age. Zoomorphic vessels were very much at home in Bronze Age Anatolia. Numerous terracotta vessels in the form of standing animals and animal's heads have come down to us from the Assyrian Colony period (Tuchelt 1962, 28–33, 46–49, pl. 3; Özgüç 2002). In the Old Hittite and Hittite Empire periods, the tradition of animal-shaped vessels standing on all fours continued with several pairs of large, bridled terracotta bulls from Boghazköy and elsewhere (Haas 1994, 534). Preserved metal vessels include the silver cups with the *protomai* of a stag and a bull formerly in the Norbert Schimmel collection (Muscarella 1974, nos. 123–24) and the bull-headed cups found with other metal vases near Kastamonu in the Black Sea area (Emre and Çınaroğlu 1993, 676–78, figs. 1–4, pls. 126–29).⁷ In contrast to the animal-headed vessels of the Aegean, the Anatolian head and *protome* vessels did not have a second outlet. They were cups to be drunk over the rim rather than *rhyta* for the pouring of liquids.

The Minoan and Mycenaean *rhyta* in the form of an animal's head were basically zoomorphic funnels. This and in some cases also the findspots suggest that many served to pour libations in a sanctuary or funerary context (Tuchelt 1962, 36–45; Koehl 1981 and 2006; Petit 1984). The ritual function of their Anatolian counterparts emerges clearly from surviving texts. Hittite *BIBRI* are listed in inventories of cult equipment and were used by the royal couple to drink in honor of a deity, or perhaps literally to imbibe the deity associated with the particular animal (Tuchelt 1962, 49–55; Carruba 1967; Haas 1994, 520–23, 525–26, 530–38, figs. 100, 107–8, 110–11; Güterbock 1998). The bull-headed cups from the region of Kastamonu, for example, may have been used “to drink” the Storm God. An association with cult is also suggested by relevant finds from the Levant. In Ugarit, a lion-headed terracotta cup was dedicated to the god Reshef (Zevulun 1987, 96–98 no. 5c, fig. 9). At the same time, however, rulers from the same areas engaged in the exchange of animal-shaped vessels as diplomatic gifts.

The earliest evidence for such vessels circulating as diplomatic gifts between rulers in Syria, southern Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Iran comes from texts found at Old Babylonian Mari, which refer to gold and silver cups with the heads of bulls, calves, deer, gazelles, ibexes and lions (Dunham 1989). The Amarna Letters include a letter of the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I (ca. 1355–1320 BC) to the pharaoh, which records a stag and a ram *BIBRU* of silver among the greeting-gifts sent to Egypt (Moran 1992, EA 41, 39–43). Pictorial evidence for the exchange of zoomorphic vessels is provided by the wall-paintings in the tombs of officials of the 18th Dynasty at Egyptian Thebes. The tombs of Useramun, Mencheperresonb and Rechmire show Aegeans (*keftiu*) bringing bull-headed and bull-shaped vessels of various materials, as well as lion- and griffin-headed specimens of gold (Vercoutter 1956, 311–21, 357–39, pls. 37–41, 61; Wachsmann 1987, 55–61, pls. 26b, 27–29, 32, 34–37, 40–41, 55–58; Laboury 1990, 96–100 pl. 25; Dziobek 1994, 91–92, pls. 20–23, 92–93). Animal-headed vessels are also shown among tribute and booty from Syria (Wachsmann 1987, 57–59, pl. 53; Zevulun 1987, 98–99). An actual example of an Anatolian vessel presented to an Aegean ruler may be preserved in the stag-shaped silver vessel from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae; the spout on the back betrays its Anatolian origin (Koehl 1995). A number of ram-headed cups from the Uluburun shipwreck attests the exchange of such vessels at a somewhat lower level (Bass et al. 1989, 7–8, fig. 12).

In essence, the zoomorphic vessels of the Bronze Age were banqueting utensils for kings and gods, their practical purpose being heavily overlaid or replaced by symbolic considerations. An ivory inlay from Canaanite Megiddo depicts animal-headed vessels within the sphere of the banquet, a gazelle's and a lion's head cup are placed atop a large jar that stands behind the throne of a ruler and is framed by two cupbearers (Zevulun 1987, 100–101, fig. 11).⁸ Their shared basic function as drinking utensils meant that specimens received from abroad could be employed by their new owners, although local customs may have called for minor modifications. It has been suggested that the hole drilled in the proper right nostril of the Anatolian stag vessel from Mycenae might result from an attempt to transform the object into a *rhyton* appropriate for its new Aegean context (Koehl 1995).⁹

4. CONCLUSION

It was precisely their inherent function as banqueting utensils that made the animal-headed vessels highly suitable as prestige gifts. Gifts were often given in the context of a banquet, and communal consumption of food and drink was – then as now – a prime occasion for expressing wealth and social standing through the provision of foodstuffs and the display of sumptuous furnishings and banqueting equipment. The efficacy of the latter would be enhanced significantly if it included rare gifts from abroad (or at least imitations thereof), reflecting diplomatic contacts and recognition by foreign powers. In the case of zoomorphic vessels, their iconography could be exploited further to enhance intended statements, as for the lion-headed beakers and buckets at Sargon's court.

Although it cannot be determined with certainty where in the Near East the Iron Age fashion for animal-headed vessels began, it is quite clear that they became a standard gift in the Assyrian-dominated court culture of the eighth century. This, in turn, further promoted their spread in the Near East and, to a lesser degree, in the Mediterranean. The Phrygians encountered animal-headed *situlae* through their contacts with North Syria, Assyria or Urartu. Assyria is an unlikely source for the *situla* and beaker from Samos, which probably reflect Samian exchanges with North Syria, Cilicia or even Phrygia. The vessels from Gordion and Samos illustrate how these foreign objects could be employed to fulfill particular local purposes, at the funerary feast for a Phrygian king and in a ritual meal in honor of a Greek goddess. Some two centuries after Sargon II, lion-headed beakers in the Neo-Assyrian tradition made their last appearance at the Greek symposium. Equipped with a handle in the Greek fashion and decorated in the Attic red-figure technique, these vessels still betray their eastern pedigree in the overall form and the inner liner replicated in clay (Hoffmann 1962, 13–14, nos. 18–19, pl. 4).

NOTES

- 1 The fragment of an oversize fibula of Blinkenberg type XII 3 from Samos mentioned in Ebbinghaus (2006, 208) may also have come from Phrygia.
- 2 Ankara, Museum of Anatolian Civilizations 18505 (lion): height 22.5 cm, rim diameter 11.3 cm; 12508 (ram): height 20.5 cm, rim diameter 12.5 cm.
- 3 As noted by Sams (1974, 191), the raised cheeks of the lion occur similarly in Neo-Hittite sculpture.
- 4 Samos Heraion B 275; height as restored 12.7 cm, rim diameter 9.8 cm.
- 5 Samos Heraion B 2519; height 17.2 cm, rim diameter 12.5 cm. Compare beakers with triple ram's heads (Curtis 2000, 198 no. 11, fig. 16; Seipel 2001, 200, 204–5 no. 116).
- 6 At least one animal-headed *situla* has been recognized also among the vessels brought by unidentified tributaries on the reliefs of the Assyrian provincial palace at Arslan Tash in North Syria (Albenda 1988, 20–23, figs. 8, 29; Curtis 2000, 195).
- 7 For examples made of clay see Sevin (1993).
- 8 A new lion-headed vessel from Tell Hazor has been connected with royal feasting by S. Zuckerman (lecture at Harvard University, 3/15/2005).
- 9 Koehl (1995, 62–63) suggests that the pierced nostrils of the Anatolian animal-shaped vessels of terracotta constitute firing rather than pouring holes, and that the *BIBRI* “standing on all fours” were emptied with the help of drinking tubes.

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