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HOW AND WHY DO THE DEER AND THE BARS APPEAR ON THE BELTS USED IN THE CAUCASIAN KOBAN CULTURE?

Among the rich and diverse animal representations of the Iranian peoples, over the millennia two animals played an especially important role: one is the deer, which was depicted in various poses, and the other is a four-legged creature, in some cases shown with wings, which can be mostly recognised by its characteristically held tail. (Fig.1–2) This animal, which appears on golden, bronze, and ceramics objects is consistently depicted with a long tail, curling back and most of the time towering above its back. This means of representation has been apparent on wide areas and continuously from the Bronze Age on, in the Caucasian Koban culture, then on the findings of the Scythian, Sarmatian, and in the Alan era the same way as, for instance, on the objects of the Carpathian Basin in the 9th-10th century, the age of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin. The consistent and frequent representation suggests that in addition to the deer that can be easily recognised by its antlers this animal also had a determining and outstanding role in the communities concerned. The meaning and content of the depiction of the two above-mentioned animals had a precise interpretation attached to it for the individuals within the specific communities – it was an especially important symbol also from the social aspect, about which a number of studies were written.¹ However, in the research of this topic, for long decades, researchers did not manage to pinpoint the reasons for the smaller or bigger differences between the representations or to include these in a uniform system. Manuel Castelluccia, in his recently published monograph, in gathering together the Trans-Caucasian plate belts, reviewed the history and the main results of the so-called animal style research,² therefore now I shall not elaborate on that here.

¹ ROSTOVITZEFF 1922; BOROVKA 1928; ANDERSON 1932; HANČAR 1934; 1935; 1952; CARTER 1957; АРТАМОНОВ 1971; 1973; ЧЛЕНОВА 1984; ПЕРЕВОДЧИКОВА 1994; ПОГРЕБОВА 1977; SHER 1988; ПОГРЕБОВА, РАЕВСКИЙ 1997; ВАСИЛЬЕВ 2000; HARDING 2005; БОГДАНОВ 2006; ПЛЕТНЁВА, 2012; LANG 2012; etc.

² CASTELLUCCIA 2017, 84–85.



Fig. 1. Antlered doe on the belt of Tli 350 (1-4a: After TEXOB 2002)



Fig. 2. The bars figure on the belt of Tli 350

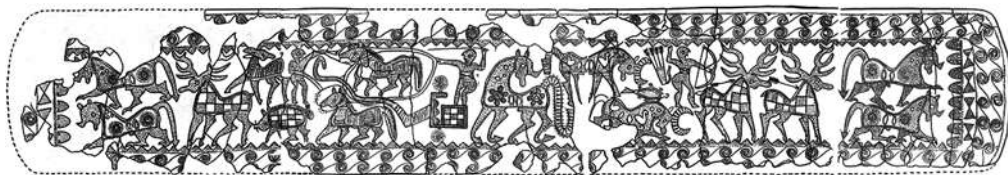


Fig. 3. The belt of tomb No. 350 at Tli

I have also briefly mentioned this issue in my works on hop and the deer.³ The issue became unexpectedly current and a new set of criteria was attached to it during my third study tour in Ossetia, where I was officially invited this time by SOIGSI, thanks to the help of Z. V. Kanukova. With the extremely helpful support I was given there I managed to visit South Ossetia, where, with the assistance of N. K. Gasieva, minister of culture and education, and her first deputy E. H. Gagloeva, I had an opportunity to study the Bronze Age material of the Tli cemetery in the Chinvali museum.⁴ R. H. Gagloity, director of the Chinvali Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, also made it possible for me to view the newly appeared archaeological findings. In Vladikavkaz A. L. Chibirov put a bronze belt in my hand on which I could also study in detail the special and typical depictions of the Koban culture. Therefore, in a short period of time I had a chance to take a good look of the animal representations of the Caucasian Bronze Age – Early Iron Age in several cases and on several object types, whose key characteristics and the species I managed to define with the help of Dr. R. Bozi, archaeozoologist. M. Fekete helped my work with her advice in exploring the archaeological parallels, and M. Castelluccia directly supported my work by sending me his books indispensable in researching the topic.

The completely contradictory opinions and definitions of the research make it impossible to properly interpret the depictions or to explore their cultural background and network of relations. It is obvious that within the frames of a report, as brief as this one, due to the diversified and far reaching scope of this issue, it should be seen as a positive thing if we can manage to make even some progress in the analysis of at least one specific archaeological find, considering the rich material of objects. For this reason, below I will make an attempt to define the creatures depicted on the plate belt found in tomb No. 350 of the Tli cemetery of the Koban culture, which is one of the most typical objects for our examination. (Fig. 3) In addition to defining the species, within the strict limits set by the restricted length of this paper, I try at least to make a rough outline of

³ Szabó 2017a; 2018; 2019.

⁴ Thanks also for the help of Olesia Bekova.

the group which we can assume to show the same animal and to separate those that depict partly similar creatures which relate to completely different species — and thus transmitting a more or less different cultural message while having a different background.

In the cemetery of the settlement of Tli on the south side of the Central Caucasus that may be dated back to the era of the Koban culture, between 1983–1986 and in 1988 B. V. Tehov explored approx. 150 new tombs from the times of the Koban culture, mostly from the 9th-6th centuries B.C., which he published in a summary in 2002.⁵ From the aspect of our examination, one of the most exciting finds, a richly decorated plate belt was in tomb No. 350. The dead body was placed there in a sleeping position, with his legs pulled up, laid on his right side in the rectangular casket with stones in it and sank to a depth of 2.1 m, in which a significant amount of charcoal and pieces of ochre were found. They used grey clay to prepare the bottom of the tomb, on which the dead men lay turned onto his right side, his head pointing towards the west. In addition to the belt made of bronze plate and decorated with a sequence of scenes, the most important bronze objects found next to it: dagger, arcuate fibula, disc with chain and additional chain links, two rings, a shepherd's axe with geometric decoration with the remains of its wooden handle, and a jug with fluting on its side and with zoomorph handles. The excavator dated the group of artefacts to the 7th century B.C.⁶ He observed that both men and women wore belts with the difference that men had ornamented belts that they wore with their clothes designed for special occasions and they were buried with those. The excavator also agreed that one of the most typical finds is the 92.5 cm long and 15.3 cm wide plate belt from tomb No. 350, which is decorated with human figures riding in wagons and hunting between an entwining double spiral line running along its sides.⁷ On the slightly incomplete archaeological finding, the two ends of the set of scenes, running frieze-like on it, are closed by 8 triangles, in pairs turned towards each other at their points, and by the same number of bronze axes of a typical form.(Fig. 3) The set of scenes is divided into two parts in the middle by an animal, turning his head backwards, with its mouth open, and having oval ears, whose highly placed tail, starting in an arch, and turning upwards at the end is longer than its body. There is a narrow ribbon on its neck, there are spots under it and in the middle of its torso and a six-leaf rosetta on its thighs.(Fig. 2) The craftsman of that age clearly indicated that it was a male animal, he represented the stretched ends of his legs unfortunately only roughly, which the excavator defines as flippers

⁵ TEXOB 2002; 2006.

⁶ TEXOB 2002, 17.

⁷ TEXOB 2002,210.

(плавник) based on their triangle form, but considers the animal to be a predator.⁸ To the left of the animal, which can be clearly determined to be feline based on its physical structure and posture, there is a wagon, whose wheels with their pokes imitate the Sun, pulled by two horses, and on its checkered floor plate a man, the driver is standing (wide belt on his waist), holding the rein in his stretched out right hand, and a long cane in his left hand held above his head. The horses are tied to the beam and made to bear a yoke, and the reins run separately from the bits to the driver's hands. The male figure in front of the horses, who is not wearing a belt, leads the wagon by holding the rein in his hands stretched out long. Under his feet a wild boar appears whose body is decorated as a chessboard and behind it there is another animal, defined by the excavator as a roe.⁹ In front of these there is a deer with antlers, with a narrow ribbon on its neck, his body also decorated as a chessboard. Unlike the other beasts, the latter two of the animals do not bear such signs – apart from the antlers – that would indicate expressly their male sex. (Fig. 1) At the left side of the image, two round-headed male predators appear, with their mouths wide open, having highly placed tails, starting in an arch, and pointed at the end. Under the narrow band tied on their necks 3 round-oval patches can be seen, and 2 on their sides, and on their thighs the symbol of the Sun appears in a shape completely similar to the wheels of the wagon. Their legs – though in the original publication it is not mentioned – are clearly ended in strong claws.¹⁰ It is also important to mention that frequently the male genital organs of felines were not depicted in the hidden way as it can be observed in nature, but more visibly as it is apparent in the case of canides, (Fig. 2) not only on the object examined now, but in other cases as well (Tli 363., Sagaredžo 5).¹¹

On the right side of the belt plate, behind the predator's back there are two animals depicted with their heads down, with crescent-shaped horns that are defined as bulls,¹² under the narrow band tied on their necks 3 round-oval patches, 2 on their sides, and on their thighs a waterfowl is standing. Their legs end in hooves, similar to those of the deer. In the image, the antlers of the deer and the moon-shaped horns are filled with dots or with horizontal lines, which is repeated in other cases, too (Lorut 14., Maralyn Deresi 5)¹³ suggesting that the creator deliberately differentiated between the two types of horns.

⁸ TEXOB 2002, 211

⁹ TEXOB 2002, 212.

¹⁰ TEXOB 2002, T. 4.; CASTELLUCCIA 2017, Pl. 102.

¹¹ TEXOB 2002, T. 38.,

¹² TEXOB 2002, 213.

¹³ CASTELLUCCIA 2017, Pl. 87., 98.

According to M. Castelluccia, it is not possible to decide whether it is cattle or a goat in the picture,¹⁴ while he clearly defines animals depicted with similar horns as goats.¹⁵ As opposed to the low-placed tail and straight back of cattle and their two horns pointing to the side, the belt shows male animals of a species with highly placed tail, arched back and frontal type of forehead. These differences are especially prominent, if we look at, for instance, the images on the shield of II. Sarduri, among the especially life-like presentations of Uruartu.¹⁶ According to B. V. Tehov, the archaeological findings indicate that the residents of Tli bred cattle in the 7th-6th century. At the same time, in addition to a number of ram heads it mentions only one single bullhead-shaped dangler found in a child's tomb (tomb No.398),¹⁷ and maybe one more find suggests cattle also (female tomb No.346).¹⁸ In the material collected by S. Reinhold covering the entire area of the Caucasus, there is a similarly insignificant number of such images that may suggest the representation of cattle based on the position of their horns, in addition to the high number of ovine animals.¹⁹ It is obvious that only the achaeozoological examination of the animal bones found in the settlements of the era may provide an accurate picture of farming in the Koban culture, the proportion of the various animal species, but the representations and the cattle bones found scattered in the tombs suggest that the significance of the ovine exceeded that of the cattle by far. This observation further underpins that the craftsman having prepared the belt was not expected in particular to represent cattle on the belt plate, not to mention that with the exception of the horses, all the other animals are wild beasts. Moreover, all of these are such animals that in the specific region were the favourite prey of not only the people but also of feline animals. Nevertheless, an image similar to crescent-shaped horned animals appears only among wild beasts on the plate belt of tomb No. 419.²⁰ There the slender animal with a medium-length tail, based on its antlers starting on the top of its head and, as the image suggests, strongly decorated as it is growing, maybe defined at the best as a type of wild goat, for instance a tur (eg. *Capra caucasica cylindricornis*). (Fig. 4a-b) The wide-spread awareness and significance of the animal, making it easily and clearly recognizable for the whole community at that time by this type of deliberate shaping of the antlers, is well reflected by the fact that even in the area of the remote Hallstatt culture similar images can be

¹⁴ CASTELLUCCIA 2017, 116.

¹⁵ CASTELLUCCIA 2017, Fig. 72.

¹⁶ ПИОТРОВСКИЙ 1955, Рис. 20.

¹⁷ ТЕХОВ 2002, 481.

¹⁸ ТЕХОВ 2002, Т. 13,2., Т. 71,4.

¹⁹ REINHOLD 2007, Abb. 39. A5A., Taf. 202. 24., Taf. 215. 23., Taf. 284. 39., Taf. 470. 11-16.

²⁰ ТЕХОВ 2002, Т. 95.



Fig. 4a. Tur figure on the belt of Tli 419



Fig. 4b. Skull of tur at Rekom

found in several cases, and, on top of that, in the very form used on the Caucasian belts (Tli 322., 419.; Samtavro 289),²¹ a supplement placed between the horns also appears (Kleinklein, Kröll-Schmiedkogel).²²

On the belt plate examined, among the crescent-shaped horned animals a round-headed fish can be seen, with a tail ended in triangle shape, and having six fins, and in front of them a man can be seen who is just about to shoot his arrow and who wears a wide belt. The arrows are aimed at two antlered deer whose bodies are decorated as a chessboard, which is interpreted by the author as a hunting scene.²³ However, it is important to note that the arrows did not lodge into the animals and apart from the antlers no other specific signs of the male sex are shown in the case of these animals, either. The right side of the image is closed with a predator, completely similar in appearance to the closure on the other side. On both sides of the feline, located in the middle of the belt plate and turning left, the animals turning to the outer sides look each other in the eye when the object was worn.

The find found in the Tli cemetery tomb 425., which may also date back to the 7th century B.C., showing some connection with the Urartu²⁴ article, together with the two other plate belts found earlier according to the excavator (N9 40-6 and 215-6), also depicts most the animals that can be seen on the object examined now, but with a lot more detail, almost in life-like quality (lion, fish, rosetta, herbivore, etc.).²⁵ On this belt decorated in three bands we can also see two sets of scenes, separated in the middle on the back, looking right and left, divided by the sun, rosettes, palmettes, etc. The left side is closed with twice three lions with manes, i.e. male lions (*Panthera leo persica*), their highly placed long tails start in an arch, curving upwards at the end, ending in a pointed or more open fur balls. The depiction of the winged animals also shown in three columns in the middle part is completely similar, with a headdress added which often appears on the images of the new Hittite period and the Urartu.²⁶ In two columns it seems an obvious choice to identify the animal as a lion, and the three animals located at the centre line are identified by the excavator as a winged bull. On the right hand side of the belt, following a row of palmette, lions, trees of life, bulls, rosettes, winged lions, cross-shaped decorations, goats, trees of life, and lions appear as far as the last image part, which is so incomplete due to the damage to the object that it is not possible to figure out what could have been there. At the

²¹ CASTELLUCCIA 2017, Fig. 69. Fig. 72D; TEXOB 2002, T. 93.

²² PRÜSSING 1991, T. 117., 121.

²³ TEXOB 2002, 213.

²⁴ TEXOB 2002, 210.

²⁵ TEXOB 2002, T. 100.

²⁶ VAN LOON 1966, Fig. 22., Pl. XXIX.

end of the belt on this side, divided into three fields, the field is closed by two winged horses, and two horsemen wearing pointed Urartu helmets, and goats standing on the branches of the tree of life.

According to J. Curtis, the structures divided to the right and left, the use of space divided horizontally and vertically, and the use of topics related to hunting and travelling, the images of hunters, soldiers, horses, wagons and various wild beasts, often separated by plant or geometric motifs, are included among the characteristics of the Urartu belts.²⁷ He also calls attention to the fact that it is important to distinguish between the trans Caucasian belts and the Urartu bronze belts that use a different technology, and that is affected by the art of the Ancient East, and within that mostly by Assyria, and that often depicts mythical creatures and mythological scenes. On the also fantastic looking Caucasian belts it is not typical to combine the different animals and to depict mystical creatures.²⁸ As opposed to a number of authors, who directly connect the images of the Caucasian region to the animal style of the Russian steppe, he also takes the position, which is becoming increasingly wide-spread since the book of D. Carter²⁹, that the above is a very simplified picture,³⁰ and that the Trans Caucasian art is most likely rather a sub-group within the wider artistic koine of the Eurasian cultures.³¹ M. Castelluccia as a result of his examination in his monograph came to the conclusion that the individual artistic traditions existing in the Caucasus since the Bronze Age survived into the Early Iron Age. The area was strongly affected by Mesopotamia through the Urartu Kingdom, while the effect of the people of the Iranian plateau and the steppe can be felt to a lesser degree. The craftsmen of the Koban culture always decorated their objects according to the local taste and traditions and animals in their immediate environment.³²

Even this short outlook well reflects that the parallels within the cemetery of the bronze plate belt we now examine and found in Tli tomb No. 350 – further reinforcing the opinion of B. V. Tehov – indeed show strong and direct influence of Urartu in terms of the topic, structure and motifs of the images. We can find examples of most of the elements in the artefacts of the new Hittite, Urartu art. Just because of the remarkably strong influence of the Ancient East this time I try to call attention to the details, the greater or lesser differences that may reflect the

²⁷ CURTIS 1996, 118.

²⁸ CURTIS 2017, ix.

²⁹ CARTER 1957, 125.

³⁰ CARTER 1957, 125.

³¹ CURTIS 2017, ix.

³² CASTELLUCCIA 2017, 392.

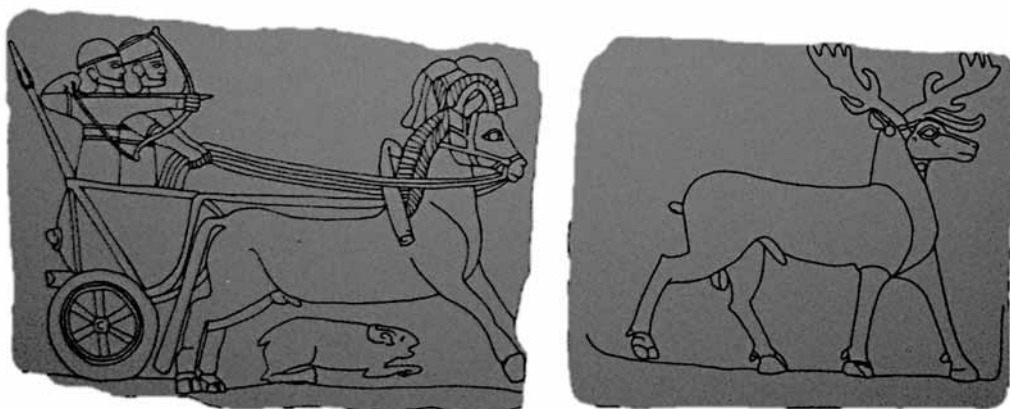


Fig. 5. Stag hunting during the New Hittite period (Karkemis, Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara)

local customs and relations. The representation of the wagon on the plate belt found in tomb 350 is identical in a number of miniscule details – from the arched wagon beam to the separately led harness – for instance to the images on the figurines of the Karkamis-Gazaintep, Aslantepe-Malatya from the new Hittite period, already referred to. This also well reflects that the strong and direct influence of Urartu on the Trans Caucasian art is a lot earlier and transmits elements of wider-scale roots to the north. The belt examined now also shows a deer in front of the wagon, corresponding to the antecedents, which may suggest an interpretation of this scene that is similar to the images serving as examples. However, we must not leave out of consideration some minor differences. The type of the horses and the manner of harnessing them is much more archaic than in the contemporary areas of Urartu. The plate belt shows a small, big-headed, stocky horse, resembling a Tarpan. (Fig. 3) At the same time, on the images of the new Hittite, Urartu steles graceful, tall horses pull the chariots. Moreover, instead of the yoke put on the wither, as applied there, the Trans Caucasian images consistently show a much older neck yoke (Sevan, Astchi blur 14).³³ The figurines depict well visibly the phallos of the deer chased with a wagon and hunted for, in addition to the antlers, which are missing from our belt plate. (Fig. 5) This cannot be accidental, or due to the smaller size of the representation, as in the same place the male sexual characteristics of the predators are well visible. However, behind the deer there is a smaller animal of similar body and leg position, which was defined by the excavator as a roe. It is thought-provoking though that in an otherwise strongly male environment the antlers are missing just from this animal. On the Urartu belts, which may be regarded as the

³³ CASTELLUCCIA 2017, Pl. 104., 108.

immediate antecedents, I did not find images depicting a deer and a roe together. Reviewing the Caucasian material led to a similar conclusion. However, for instance, as J. Makkay has earlier pointed out in the course of the research of the early Iranian relations, on one of the Luristan bronze bits and the Seven Brothers gold-covered silver plate found in Kurgan we can see that an antlered doe is breast-feeding her calf,³⁴ making the sex of the animal obvious for everyone despite the antlers it wears. Therefore, it is justified and substantiated to re-interpret this detail of tomb No. 350: it is not a roe behind the antlered deer, but her calf. On the wagon pulled in accordance with the Urartu antecedents the driver follows an antlered but female deer, whose gender is emphasised by the local artist by showing her calf behind her. The question is raised spontaneously: why didn't the craftsman draw a doe, why did he keep the antlers shown in the antecedents, why was it important to emphasise the female gender by depicting the calf? To find the answer it is necessary to review at least the key characteristics both in time and space, the meanings attached to the various representations of deer, and to distinguish between at least the main groups of those.

The representation and reverence of the red deer and reindeer are apparent as early as from the Stone Age in as wide an area as their habitat covered. However, in the Paleolith and Mesolith material the representation of the red deer is noticeably more frequent, while it was not in the first place among the animals hunted for and it was not the most important food source, as it is proven by the highest proportion of reindeer bones in the Lascaux cave. Probably it was just his rarer occurrence, peculiarity, more spectacular, bigger and more well-formed antlers and body than that of the reindeer why the red deer was chosen for images and rituals. This predominance apparent in the images and findings was inherited in later ages in the whole area where it spread — moreover, due to the change in the climate, it has become almost exclusive.

The female characteristics, fertility, the antlers – refer back to the ancient nature of the sacred notions related to the deer, probably to a period even preceding the cave paintings of upper-Palaeolithic era, when still the reindeer was determinant, when the female had antlers too. The archaeological and environmental data reflect that during the period of warming up after the last glaciation the red deer spreading in a wider circle and reproducing faster took over the leading role and the reindeers were pushed more to the north. The significance of red deer is shown by the fact that they appear in the Neolithic rock paintings of the Italian Alps with people riding on their backs, and in Siberia along the Jenisei an image was found that depicted a person sitting on a deer

³⁴ MAKKAY 2006, 24., Fig. 1., 21.

shooting his arrow and chasing a reindeer. M. Jankovics identified this deer with the huge vapiti, indigenous in Asia.³⁵

The representation of deer and their sacred reverence is far from being restricted only to the steppe zone. In the south eastern part of Turkey, in the area of the historic Upper Mesopotamia a deer can be seen already on the famous columns of the 12 000 years old Göbekli Tepe. After the sanctuary was given up, for millenniums no significant data were found in this region. In this drier southern part traditionally the ibex appears on the Neolithic vessels, which is a species of the wild goat, whose male and female both wear horns, which they do not lose. From the 4th millennium on, the deer appears again on vessels in North Iran (Sialk), and on figurines in Anatolia. (Fig. 6)



Fig. 6. Deer on vessels in North Iran (Sialk, 4th millennium B. C., Iranian National Museum, Tehran)

Data from Mesopotamian sources written later show that in the Sumer mythology evolving from the middle of the 4th millennium B.C. the wild goat and the deer are both created by Enki,³⁶ and Arwi'um, ruling for 720 years according to the list of the kings of ancient times, is specifically named as the son of a doe.³⁷ We can read about Enmerkar, the king of Uruk, the son of Utu, the Sun and — among others — the God of the Dead, reigning at the turn of the 4th/3rd millennium B.C. and his messenger Aratta, who calls his lord as a fierce deer, *who was given birth to by a real Cow in the depth of the mountains*.³⁸ In this context it refers to Innin, the goddess of the sky, the daughter of Nanna the god of Moon,³⁹ who is elsewhere called *the Cow of good voice*,⁴⁰ *the Cow*,⁴¹ or *strong Cow*.⁴² Innin at the same time, as the goddess of Venus, is the third member of the celestial triad, with her father the god of Moon, and brother-husband, the god of Sun. Almost a thousand years later, in the strengthening Gilgames tradition, her mother, the goddess Ninszuna, getting in the foreground, is regarded

³⁵ JANKOVICS 2004, 26., Fig.13.

³⁶ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 51.

³⁷ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 125.

³⁸ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 135.

³⁹ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 147., 419.

⁴⁰ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 319.,

⁴¹ KOMORÓCZ 1983, 135., 147.,

⁴² KOMORÓCZY 1983, 419.

as the lady of wild cows,⁴³ the *True Cow*,⁴⁴ who gave birth to Gudea (around 2144–2124 B.C.). In addition to written sources, in the Sumerian mythology the significance of the deer is reflected the most spectacularly perhaps by the Imdugud relief prepared around 2500 B.C. from a copper alloy, and found in 1919 near Tell-Ubaid, Iraq. On the frieze, which is one of the biggest Mesopotamian metal statues, a lion-headed eagle is standing with his legs on the backside of the two stags under it, looking in opposite directions.⁴⁵ This list, which is far from being exhaustive, well reflects that from the end of the 4th millennium in the Mesopotamian mythology the deer also appears related to the female role. The goddess Innin, through the personality of the lady of all lands, is member of the celestial triad already. The fact that in Mesopotamia, with the exception of shorter periods, in the given geological environment the representation of the ibex is more frequent, and that there is no pronounced local Neolithic precedent of customs attached to the deer, suggests that this phenomenon becoming tangible from the second part of the 4th millennium reached the region from the outside as new elements. The wider geographic environment and the Sumerian sources both point towards the north rather, when, for instance, it is mentioned that the fierce deer is given birth by Innin in the depth of the mountains,⁴⁶ and An, the lady of the barley fields, is said to have arrived from the mountains.⁴⁷ Therefore, in summary, the above-mentioned data show that certain elements of customs attached to the deer that evolved a lot earlier and became wide-spread in a significant part of Europe and Asia developed fully in the area of South Mesopotamia in the 4th-3rd millennium and created a documented uniform system of mythological motifs. The impacts of these then – just like other elements related to farming, metalwork, etc. – radiating concentrically had a wide effect and reaction and spread in the Caucasus the same way as in the steppe or in the bigger part of Europe. In the Aegean area, in the territory of today's Greece as early as from the Bronze Age the sacred role of the deer appeared with more emphasis. The appendices of the burials of the tomb group B of Mycenae from the 17th century B.C. suggest drastic changes: the use of horses, the appearance of the chariots on the gold ring found in tomb IV in the tomb group B dated to a later time, the scene of deer hunting, the appearance of indo-Iranian names- all this indicates the appearance of the Iranian-language aristocracy.⁴⁸ The outstanding role of the deer, which is also reflected in Greek

⁴³ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 432.

⁴⁴ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 275.

⁴⁵ British Museum, London, No.114308.

⁴⁶ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 135.

⁴⁷ KOMORÓCZY 1983, 151-152.

⁴⁸ MAKKAY 2006, 60-67.

mythology, is also proven by a number of data, which were reviewed in detail by Kerényi Károly among the Hungarian researchers, as early as in the 1930's.⁴⁹

In the Ancient East after the Sumerian era data from Asia Minor about deer reduced in the archaeological sites, and it was only from the second half of the 3rd millennium B.C. that the number of such finds increased again noticeably that depicted the deer in the territory of the later Hittite empire, related to the Indo-European people. Their significance is well reflected by the fact that in the age of Alaca Höyük the deer had an important role in the symbols of power found in the royal tombs of the Bronze Age, through the bronze standards on the friezes of the period of the empire and on the bronze vessel of Kastamonu.⁵⁰ (Fig. 7) This tendency continues around the turn of the millennium, in the new Hittite period, on the stone carvings of Karkemis, Arslantepe, and the antlered wild beast appears on a number of bronze figurines, mostly as it is chased.⁵¹ (Fig. 5) The fragmented Hacıbebekli-stele found in the south part of Turkey and the Karasu relief found only 3 km of the Euphrates – on which Kurunta/Tuntija the protective God of nature is standing on the back of a red deer, with the Sun above his head — show even more clearly that these images are not related any more to female fertility.⁵²

From the turn of the 1st millennium B.C. in the north band of the Iranian area, it is well apparent from the entirety of the archaeological finds that the relations towards the Caucasus and the steppe have strengthened. South of the Caspian sea, the famous site of Sialk stands out among the others from several aspects: here the representation of the deer came into the focus again after precedents in the 4th millennium, which indicates that the relations between the southern and northern areas had their transmission centre here over the millennia. The Hungarian research has long assumed a relation between the



Fig. 7. Stag shaped bronze standard from Hittite royal tomb (Alaca Höyük B grave, Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara)

⁴⁹ KERÉNYI 1931.

⁵⁰ MAKKAY 2006, Fig. 23.

⁵¹ YALÇIN, YALÇIN 2018, 97.

⁵² BURNEY, LAWSON 1958.

finds explored here and the objects of the European pre-Scythian era.⁵³ We know small bronze statues depicting antlered game especially from the north-western Gilan region, the sites of Amarlu and Marlik and the deer-shaped drinking vessels, rythons which were a novelty among the object types. The gold findings of Marlik are especially peculiar, where the deer is standing next to the sacred tree on one of the tankards. Researchers quite agree to see these findings as the heritage of Iranian-language speaking peoples migrating from Central Asia at the end of the 2nd millennium B.C. — beginning of the 1st millennium. Through the Cimmerians the Caucasus became an important junction and centre of the migration of peoples from Central Asia towards Europe, well documented in the written sources and the archaeological findings. The natural route of the migrations of the Iranian-language peoples to the south led near the shores of the Caspian sea and over the Caucasus.⁵⁴ As it is shown in the material of the Tli cemetery, here from the late Bronze Age Koban culture a number of well-known archaeological artefacts reflect the outstanding role of the deer.⁵⁵ The interpretation of the material is assisted by a peculiar source, the data of the Nart saga, known by a number of Caucasian peoples, that preserve the traditions of the Bronze Age up to our days.⁵⁶ Ahsartag looking for his sibling met the blind sister of Uarhag on his way, whose husband sat at the same table as the Sun. He healed the blindness of the old woman by mixing a drop of morning dew into the milk of a doe.⁵⁷ The marvellous tree yielding gold apples in the garden of the Narts which have lifeblood and healed the people of all their illnesses, and all wounds (only it did not save anybody from death), was protected from the thieves with a fence built from deer antlers.⁵⁸

Soslan, one of the bravest Nart warriors, was given the honour of killing the deer of the golden hide in the land of the gums which was led with a silk thread thrown on its antlers after his host *performed a ritual – prayed above it, lifting a piece of burning wood to the deer's forehead*.⁵⁹ Some other time, when he went for one of his yearly raids, the deer he wounded ran away, so he collected the drops of blood that fell, and by following the traces he reached a small cottage, where two boys lived who were breast-fed and raised by their mother who was turned into a gold deer in the depth of the mountains. The boys were sad as their mother was dying because somebody severely wounded her with his

⁵³ КЕМЕНЦЕИ 1990, 40., FIG 1.; SZABÓ 2017B; 2018; 2019.

⁵⁴ АБАЕВ 1949; 1972; МАККАЙ 1998; КОЗАЕВ 2011.

⁵⁵ ДОМАНСКИЙ 1984; МАККАЙ 2006, FIG. 22.

⁵⁶ Нарты; Нарты 1991; Нартские 2000.

⁵⁷ Нартские 2000, 48-49.

⁵⁸ Нартские 2000, 51.

⁵⁹ Нартские 2000, 147.

arrow. The curse said that the gold deer can be saved only by that Nart who wounded her and makes her drink the drops of her blood mixed into warm water. Soslan finally managed to save the gold deer and to do magic to turn her into a woman again.⁶⁰ The old and honoured Urizmag told in the council of elders, the nihas, that when he went hunting the Sun shone up in the reed and a fallow deer with a golden hide was standing in front of it, but his arrow was diverted by a mysterious force, which also pushed his sword from his hand.⁶¹ Soslan, who was seeking glory, decided to try to kill the gold deer. However, he was not able to wound the miraculous animal with his weapons either, but followed its traces that led into the mountains, into a cave. It turned out only there that *in the guise of the fallow deer he followed Aciruchs, the daughter of the Sun, who was guarded by seven giants*. Soslan is spared from being torn to pieces by the giants by the image of the Sun and Moon on his back, which tells them right away that he is the fiancé of the daughter of the Sun. However, he managed to afford the extremely expensive engagement gift, the kalim, only with the help of his first wife Veduha, who had died and lived in the country of the dead.⁶² On his way to the country of the dead one of the miracles he finds is when on a high kurgan three tubs are boiling and bubbling, but under them deer antlers were burning instead of wood.⁶³ Then Soslan lived nicely with the daughter of the Sun and he even refuses a girl who at the spring one day offers herself to become his wife in the guise of a doe. This was to his own destruction, though, as the daughter of the Balsag living in the sky, to take revenge for hurting her feelings, orders to kill him with her father's weapon, the miraculous wheel of fortune.⁶⁴ Hamic, the other illustrious Nart, through the white deer he saw in a clearing in the middle of the forest met the Bicent clan living underground, among whom he chooses a wonderful wife for himself whose touch prevents everything from drying out.⁶⁵ At another time the three famous Narts, Urizmag, Hamic and Soslan, chasing the white deer came to the depth of the mountains, where they were captured by giants, who almost ate them up.⁶⁶ The stories of the Caucasian saga reflect that for the Narts the deer leads the heroes following it between the boundaries of the different worlds, thus helping them to reach rebirth, revival and to obtain the sacred knowledge. Naturally, the miraculous deer, be it gold or white, is always a doe. The data of the Nart sagas indicate that the miraculous deer turning

⁶⁰ Нартские 2000, 186-189.

⁶¹ Нартские 2000, 245.

⁶² Нартские 2000, 247-248.

⁶³ Нартские 2000, 255.

⁶⁴ Нартские 2000, 273-274.

⁶⁵ Нартские 2000, 343-350.

⁶⁶ Нартские 2000, 387-389.

backwards also appears on several belt buckles of the Tli cemetery (tombs No. 360., 401).⁶⁷ In a number of other cases the antlered animal is shown in the same object type in a similar position, standing, but his head looking ahead (tombs No. 385., 452., 468).⁶⁸ The same positioning suggests that the underlying meaning of the latter representation did not differ from the previous version. The gender of the antlered deer turning backwards is clarified by the images on the Luristan bronze bit and the gold-covered silver plate found in the Seven Brothers kurgan. Among other things, a common feature of these two representations is that both does are breastfeeding their calves and looking at those.⁶⁹ (Fig. 8a-b) The image here as well proves the accurate observation of nature in each miniscule detail. When feeding, the neck of the calf is bending slightly upwards. The bypass tunnel reflex operates in this position, which allows the milk to get into the rennet. Otherwise, the milk would flow into the forestomach, where it would spoil, causing the inflammation of the stomach and the bowels which may as well lead to the death of the animal. All these demonstrate that the deer turning backwards on the belt buckles of the Tli cemetery is also a doe breastfeeding her calf and thus it is rather the symbol of fertility, revival and rebirth. However, citing the story of Urizmag and Soslan, the plate belt of tomb No. 350 the message of the set of scenes with the antlered does not reached with the arrows and with the wagon and driver added to the image, slightly differs from the above.

During the pre-Scythian era, from 9/8th centuries B.C. the migration of nomad peoples to the west, crossing the area north of the Black Sea, affect most of the European parts, which is proven by a number of treasure troves going as far as Germany.⁷⁰ In the area of the Hallstatt culture not only the eastern harnesses, but also the habits of the elite, similar in a wide circle, and objects bearing oriental characteristics.⁷¹ Here it is especially the decorations on the vessels related to burials where deer has an outstanding role, such as the figurine on the urn of the Gemeinlebarn mound I,⁷² or the animals scratched on the urn of Sopron-Burgtall mound 28.⁷³ The deer can also be seen near the sacred tree, moreover, in the company of the ibex and two winged mythical creatures on the lid with oriental decoration found near the vessels, used to cook sacrificial food and beer in tomb 696 in the Hallstatt cemetery itself.⁷⁴ Further reinforcing these

⁶⁷ TEXOB 2002, T.30,3. T.149,2.; T.74,16., T.158,6.

⁶⁸ TEXOB 2002, T149-150.

⁶⁹ MAKKAY 2006, 24., Fig. 1., 21.

⁷⁰ METZNER-NEBELSICK 2002.

⁷¹ HANSEN 2016.

⁷² PREINFALK 2003, 92., Abb. 43.

⁷³ GALLUS 1934., T.VI.–VIII.

⁷⁴ KROMER 1959, Taf. 126. 1.



Fig 8a. Luristan bronze bit with antlered doe (after MAKAY 2006)

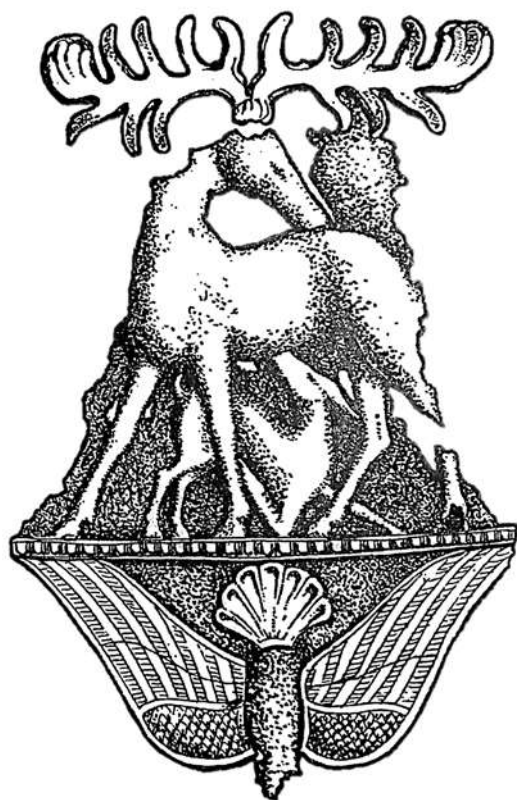


Fig. 8b. Gold-covered silver plate from the Seven Brothers kurgan (after MAKAY 2006)

data, the Strettweg wagon that can also be seen as a hunting scene surely shows that in the belief system of those living here – at the time of the Hallstatt culture — the role of the deer connected to death was already apparent. The Sopron urn is also interesting because — similarly to the representation on the belt plate found in the Tli cemetery tomb 350 — the wagon has a checkered coating. The checkered shroud was well-known as the symbol of death and grief, already in the Ancient Egypt, and it is also often depicted on the huge amphorae in tombs in the geometric age. (The widely-spread depiction of water fowls on animals with moon-shaped horns is also closely connected to the lahansa bird of Hittite burials.)⁷⁵ Therefore, the checkered shroud that can be seen on the wild boar and deer, decorating the plate belt examined herein, further strengthens the possibility to interpret these scenes as ones connected to death and the spirit world, which, all in all, suggests that this object is not a simple ornamental belt, but part of the apparel prepared for the deceased, a burial belt, regarding its function.⁷⁶

According to B. V. Tehov in the images of the Koban culture deer are always seen with a raised head, and characterised by a calm and peaceful atmosphere, as opposed to the Scythian deer which is surging forward and flying with pulled up legs, radiating vivacity and action, which he agrees with.⁷⁷ Unlike most of the Russian authors, he refuses to see any stylistic relations between the two styles of representation.⁷⁸ N. L. Chlenova links the spread of the deer in images to the Saka, who initially started to spread in the nomadic territories of North Iran and lake Zaisan.⁷⁹ In the opinion of V. I. Abaev, which contains contradictions that are difficult to resolve, the deer was the totem of the Scythians, the favourite of the Narts, and the must-have delicacy in the Nart celebrations – the meat of the deer and even its bones were highly respected.⁸⁰ Afsati's bed was made of the antlers of a white deer, it was not allowed to put the skull and antlers of deer on the ground — a stand was built for it or it was put on the top of the sanctuary, like in the cave in the Digor trait, or as it may be seen today in the Rekom. The lack of the so-called "flying" deer among the findings of the Koban culture makes the interpretation of its representation necessary by all means, even if briefly and outlining only the most important factors, to shed more light on the images of the plate belts.

In the Saka areas, as the cave paintings showed, the vapiti used as a riding animal along the river Jenisei inevitably drives attention to the finds of the Altai

⁷⁵ SZABÓ 2019b.

⁷⁶ FEKETE 1985.

⁷⁷ TEXOB 2002, 214.

⁷⁸ TEXOB 2002, 262.

⁷⁹ ЧЛЕНОВА 1984.

⁸⁰ АБАЕВ 1949, 37., 198.; 1979, 11., 14.



Fig. 9. Figure of the stag (Tápiószentmárton, Hungary after KEMENCZEI 1999)

Pazirik, where in the 1st kurgan a horse, wearing a mask with deer antlers, was buried with the dead.⁸¹ At the same place, deer are tattooed on the skin of the dead body called princess.⁸² Also, the so-called deer-decorated stones were set up at an increasing number of places in the steppe from the 8–7th centuries B.C.⁸³ The images on which the Irani steppe peoples, Scythians and their relatives depicted the deer constitute one of the most beautiful collections of archaeological findings from Central Asia to the Carpathian basis. Based on the parallels found in the sites of the Kuban region, Kelermes, Kostromskaya, or Kul-Oba that can be dated back to the 7-6th century B.C., the gold deer of Hungary, Tápiószentmárton (Fig. 9) can also be dated back to that time.⁸⁴ A number of researchers explained the deer bending its antlers to its back and pulling its legs as a wonderful animal escaping from the hunter, pushing off the ground, racing, flying, leading to the new homeland.⁸⁵ The gold deer of Tápiószentmárton (Fig. 9), pulling its legs under itself, is almost an exact replica of the one on the golden plate of the treasure of Ziwiye from the 8th century B.C., which is the earliest piece of this style, which partly suggests that it was created by a craftsman who was a member of the circle of Iranian workshops. On the other hand, the significant time difference between the two finds also implies that there is such a permanent phenomenon in the background of this type of presentation that does not change. It is well apparent that these images all share an important detail of the way the deer holds its leg, which is repeated exactly the same way in many examples, i.e. the hind leg of the deer is hidden from view by the middle part of its foreleg. An

⁸¹ ПОЛОСЬМАК, БАРКОВА 2005, Рис. 3.1.

⁸² ARGENT 2013.

⁸³ KEMENCZEI 1999, 175.

⁸⁴ KEMENCZEI 1999, 174-175.

⁸⁵ ТЕХОВ 2002, 214.; KEMENCZEI 1999.

animal escaping from the hunter, pushing off the ground, pulling its legs under itself, racing, flying never holds his leg this way in nature in any second of his movement. That we have to think of something else, something that is widely visible, is also suggested by the fact that on the golden plate of Ziwiye, apart from the deer, the ibex also holds its legs in a similar way. The posture of the animals may as well suggest that they are resting, but the hind legs are not hidden from view by the middle part of the foreleg when they are resting. All these indicate that the formal antecedent of the position of the legs of the gold deer of Tápiószentmárton and similar images should not be sought in nature. It could have only been a condition caused by a person. For millenniums, when killing sacrificial animals they are tied up exactly this way, by placing the end of the legs on one another in a defined sequence, then binding them. From this aspect it is an extremely important telltale sign that when the animals are tied up, the hind leg is placed under the foreleg, where the middle parts of the legs are pulled on each other – exactly the same way as it is shown in the images of more than two and a half thousand years old. Based on the above, the find of Tápiószentmárton and the animals depicted in similar position may not be linked to the legend of the deer leading to the new homeland and appearing on the Tli bronze objects, but they can be connected to the customs related to the deer sacrifices mentioned in the Nart sagas. This interpretation at the same time provides an explanation of the completely identical position of the legs of the deer and the ibex on the Ziwiye golden plate. At the same time, it is also an exciting and important indication that the examined material of the Tli cemetery lacks such a representation of the deer, which well proves that the examined plate belt reflects the local traditions and customs of the Koban culture from this aspect also. At the same time, it is important to note that the image on the plate belt found in tomb 350 preserved the local traditions in an exceptionally pure form. On a number of more or less similar finds, reflecting an extremely eventful historic period in the 8-6th century B.C., the individual elements appear removed from their original context or meaning, already quite faded. For this reasons, for almost each objects it has to be examined separately which antecedent images the specific representations follow and how closely, and to what extent the cultural and ethnic impacts strongly mixing in the region affected the author.

The southern branch of the Cimmerians, having to escape from the Scythians, after crossing the Caucasus appeared in the area of Urartu at the end of the 8th century B.C., then within some decades ravaged almost the entire Asia Minor, including Gordion, the Phrygian capital. This historic background is not negligible, when in the volume discussing the early Phrygian ceramics, the painted fragment No.186. also shows only the front part of the deer's body,⁸⁶ but

⁸⁶ SAMS 1994, Pl. III.

in the sequence of scenes running along the shoulder of one of the two-handle pitchers (932) an ibex and a deer appears on each side of the seven-branch tree of life.⁸⁷ The exceptionally combined depiction of the two species related to two different geographic areas is indicative by all means, and that this is not a unique case in the region is proven by the vessel in the Museum of Ankara. In addition to the direct parallels between the findings of the Transdanubian region dating back to the last third of the 7th century B.C. and those of Asia Minor, because of the conclusions Vékony Gábor has drawn regarding the place where the gold deer of Zöldhalompusztá was prepared,⁸⁸ the findings of the Tli cemetery may have special importance from the aspect of the parallels in the area of the Hallstatt culture, among them, for instance, the plate belts, and ritual images. In this era, even compared to the Hallstatt cemetery and the area of the Alps, its eastern and northern lowlands, together with the findings with oriental decorations the deer is depicted with more emphasis in the north eastern part of the Balkan and on the oriental-like findings of Italy than in any other European region. I would like to call attention only to some findings, such as the belt plates of Molnik⁸⁹ and Zagorje⁹⁰ dated back to the 6/5th century B.C. and the set of scenes on the dagger sheath of Este from a somewhat later period, where the ibex and the various miraculous creatures at the same time show strong impacts of Asia Minor.⁹¹

From the archaeological findings and the Nart sagas it is well apparent that in the interpretation and assessment of the findings and phenomena related to antlered game the data reflecting the sacred role of the deer may not be handled in one. According to our current knowledge, *the least distinction we have to make is between the phenomena analysed related to (antlered) does or stags*. It is obvious from the data that *only the stag may be hunted, killed and offered as sacrifice, the wounding, not to mention killing an (antlered) doe is a grievous sin*, for which punishment affecting several generations would have been imposed. Soslan was almost torn to pieces by the giants only for shooting his arrow at the doe and following her traces, as the punishment of Agamemnon the wind stopped and his ships set off to siege Troy did not move because he hunted a doe in the grove of Artemis. In addition to the separation based on gender, other types may also be distinguished that do not necessarily have sacred content in all cases, may be grasped in a different way in the archaeological findings, and their meaning is different and point in different directions, moreover, the individual elements do not always appear in a pure form, but mixed, for us.

⁸⁷ SAMS 1994.

⁸⁸ VÉKONY 1972, 29.

⁸⁹ KERN et al. 2009, 20.

⁹⁰ KERN et al. 2009, 24.

⁹¹ KERN et al. 2009, 25. KÖRNER 2010. TURK 2005.

– *The deer, as a hunting prey*, is one of the most important sources of protein supply, which was distributed based on accurately defined rules, as we can read about it in several places in the Nart-sagas. Deer bones can be found in great numbers in the archaeological sites since the Mesolithic era and this animal, very important for survival, is frequently depicted in cave paintings and petroglyphs. Only the detailed archaeozoological analyses will be able to decide whether this interpretation may apply both to male and female animals, and whether hunting was a seasonal act or permanent.

– *The deer, as an offering, is a gift of sacrifice*, a significant part of the findings from excavation sites belongs in this category, the more or less sound remains of bulls observed in the archaeological sites. These may be deer killed in hunts for this reason and buried in ditches, or such animals that were sacrificed on the proper occasions in the prescribed manner. Although it is not always possible to separate clearly in the archaeological material, as opposed to the hunted game, even the killing of the latter is sacral and accurately regulated. The stag of the golden hide which was led with a silk thread mentioned in the Nart saga and apparent on the Kastamonu bowl, was killed by Soslan himself after the proper ritual and praying "lifting a piece of burning wood to the deer's forehead". Based on the ethnographic analogies of the process of killing the sacrificial animal those scenes also belong here that depict the sacrificial animal tied up. It is extremely important that in these cases stags are sacrificed indeed, both regarding the interpretation of symbols and in reality. The body in this case is partly or fully buried, but the ethnographic data rather indicate that the cooked meat played further important role in the feasts. The Nart saga tells that the presentation of the sacrifice could be linked to a determined event not only to a certain date.

– *The deer, as a symbol of power*. Most clearly the bronze standards found in the Hittite royal graves may be categorised into this group in this category, and the well visible penis of the deer found in tomb B of Alaca Höyük makes it clear that in these cases the stags of the noble species are involved. (Fig. 7) The deer found in the royal graves also demonstrates well that the deer here were not linked to some definite dates but the high social position of the deceased.

– *The deer, as the symbol of origin, fertility, rebirth, part of the astral world*, which is often mentioned in the text as the Sacred Cow, which is depicted as an antlered doe turning back and feeding her calf or an animal decorated with the symbols of astral triad. (Fig. 1., 8a-b) In the images, *the deer, as an antlered creature leading the way to the new homeland and helping a passage between the worlds*, is well separated from the above interpretation, which is still similar regarding its meaning. In certain versions of legends it is the escaping, alluring animal turning into a woman, which regularly appears in hunting scenes. This composition appears on the urns of Sopron-Burgstall, Gemeinlebarn, referring to

the meaning of the representation and this way reinforcing it at the same time. My earlier research clearly demonstrates that in these cases the deer appeared related to calendar festivities,⁹² and on the other hand linked to important turning points in life or of the community.

– *The deer, as clothing used in rituals, is part of the guarding-protecting decorations in the settlements.* From the Mesolithic era up to date it includes the head cover of shamans and trophies displayed on buildings with a protective role.⁹³ In the wider sense, this type includes those representations where *the deer, impersonating the ancestors and shamans*, in the scenes of animal fights means the struggle of the ancestors and shaman appearing in the guise of animals in the belief system of steppe peoples. This image is especially popular on the archaeological findings from the Scythian era and the age of the migration of peoples. The role of does leading through the layers of different worlds, its astral meaning, the trophy buried in the Bad Dürrenberg female grave,⁹⁴ the composition of the images on the shaman drums all indicate that in these cases the antlered doe is depicted. Regarding their archaeological connections, these findings may not be linked to the date of killing, they were used for a longer period, put on display at a visible place continuously, or occasionally, for calendar festivities or rituals related to events or turning points important in the life of the individual or the community.

The grouping of the customs and images related to the deer well reflect that in the set of scenes on the plate belt found in Tli tomb No. 350. the deer may be interpreted as the symbol of origin, fertility, rebirth, and as an antlered creature leading the way to the new homeland and helping the passage between the worlds. The plate belt was prepared by such a craftsman who has an accurate knowledge of the images and objects, structural rules of the Urartu bronze belts, and following the style of those still reflected the locally-rooted customs of his own community in the scenes. This tradition system differed from the interpretation of the deer mainly as a prey of hunts in the Ancient East and from the approach of depicting the deer at the steppe peoples as a sacrificial animal with its legs tied.

The set of scenes of the Caucasian craftsman on the burial belt is a part of the guarding-protecting decorations of the apparel used in the burial rituals, and appeared related to the important turning points of human life or festive events. Determining the basic meaning of the images, i.e. the five predators, appearing on the belt in the highest number, seems to be a lot easier after shedding light to the related background. Especially so, as the two animals at the side of the set of scenes are the mirror images of each other, from which the creature on the central line differs only to a minor extent. (Fig. 2–3) Based on the shape of the bodies,

⁹² SZABÓ 219a; 2019b.

⁹³ LITTLE et al. 2016, Fig. 1.

⁹⁴ PORR – ALT 2006, 396.



Fig. 10. Figure of the bars
(Tli 254, after ТЕHOV 2006)

the clawed paws of the animals at the sides and the Urartu precedents it is doubtless that the lions apparent on the objects used there were imitated. Even the rosettes on the thighs of the animal in the middle may also be regarded as elements taken from there. However, it is well apparent that the local craftsman did not simply copy and took over the elements of the images on the objects used as samples, or their structure and within the possible frames, instead of the lion he depicted another animal from his own environment whose character was very similar. Moreover,

just like in the case of deer, transforming it to his own image, dressed it with features and a meaning corresponding to the tradition of his community. The animal he depicted does not have a mane that would represent the gender in addition to the species, therefore to compensate that he emphasised the male sex of the animals, modifying it on the natural image. He showed round-oval patches on the neck and the body, and such are apparent also on the belt from tomb No. 363. On the well-known axe decorated with the heads of three predators, its beak is decorated with round carvings, as if demonstrating the importance of the hide. Based on the antecedents, parallels, the characteristics, and the local natural environment, in my opinion, the predators appearing on the plate belt found in the Tli tomb No.350. may be defined as a leopard (*Panthera pardus ciscaucasica*), in its local name bars. (Fig. 10) This animal, who is on the verge of extinction, about 2.5 m long, and having a dotted hide was the biggest predator in the region of the Caucasus, and the people living there still revere and are scared of its hunting skills, strength and cleverness. And even over the millenniums the same feelings borne out of respect are linked to it, and as the heraldic animal of the Ossete it transmits the same values and has the same guarding-protecting force and role in knitting the community together as at the time of the Bronze Age Koban culture.

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