

URARTIAN BRONZE FINIAL IN THE SHAPE OF A LION DEMON

Urartu, 8th - 7th century B.C.

Bronze

H: 13.6 cm - W: 7.9 cm

Reference: 3252



Reference [3252](#)

This lion demon is solidly modeled and oriented frontally so as to give the most powerful impression. Upward curving horns rise from the massive head. Round, bulging eyes, a prominent, ridged muzzle and wide, open mouth with teeth bared all convey a sense of watchful menace. Two wings of slightly curving Egyptianizing type sprout from the shoulders and flank the head; their thinness suggests that they were made separately and applied to the body after the initial casting.

The finial is relatively flat on the bottom, and a pair of rudimentary paws project from the chest, suggesting that the monster was meant to be depicted seated. Only the front part of the lion demon is preserved: the hollowed socket in the back was for the insertion of the base material (probably a wooden armrest, of which no traces remain due to its organic nature).

Overall, the modeling of the lion is heavy and rather cursory. Instead of concentrating on naturalistic details, the artist chose to emphasize the volumes of the piece to maximize the impression of strength and power. The details that are executed – the solid ridge of the mane, the heavy lids and wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, the stepped ridges of the nose and the palmette-shaped whisker pads – are done so in a manner that is harmonious with the rest of the piece's aesthetic. The only touches of delicacy are on the wings, which are surprisingly light and graceful in comparison, and are ornamented with precise, lightly incised lines outlining the different types of feathers.

The kingdom of Urartu occupied the shores of Lake Van in what is now modern day Turkey and Armenia. Its centralized location at the

crossroads of Asia, the Near East and the West ensured steady contact with a number of different peoples, resulting in a material culture that drew influence from the Hittites, Assyrians, and Phoenicians, among others. In antiquity, Urartu was known as a major bronze producing center, manufacturing various goods – including appliques, armor and cauldrons – not only for local use and enjoyment, but also for export to areas such as Greece and Phrygia.

Modeled finials and protomes in the shape of mythological creatures enjoyed a long period of popularity in Near Eastern art. The composite beasts seen on Assyrian thrones – sphinxes, lamassus, griffins, etc. – are the direct precursors to our winged lion/bull hybrid. A group of Urartian throne elements in the British Museum dating from the 8th – 7th centuries B.C. provides an excellent parallel for our lion, as well as

showing that the practice of decorating furniture with elaborate bronze fittings was well known at the time. The quality of our lion compared to the throne elements mentioned above, which were excavated from the Urartian capital of Topprakale, suggest a more provincial workshop, perhaps closer to the Syrian border: the heaviness of our demon seems to display the influence of Northern Syrian carving and sculpture, rather than the more delicate style seen on the Assyrian palace style bronzes from Topprakale. For comparison, see the 9th – 8th century orthostat reliefs from Tell Halaf, a site on the Turkish-Syrian border.