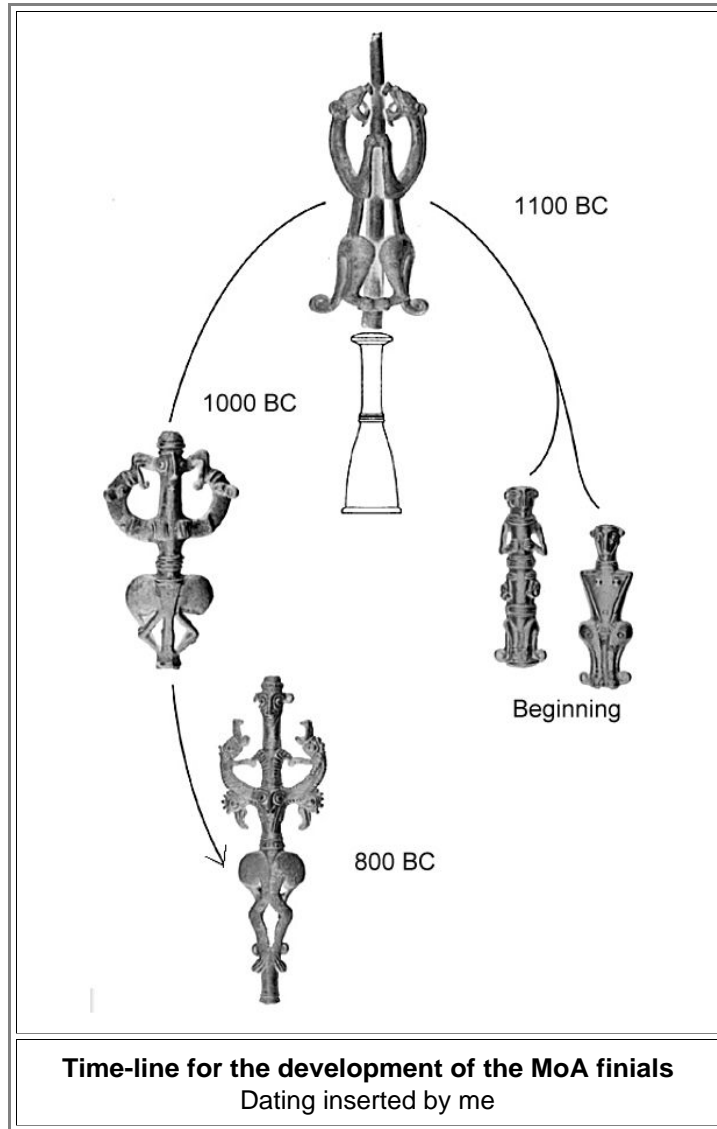


Master of Animals Finials from Luristan

Introduction

There must be several hundreds "Master of Animals" (**MoA**) from Luristan around. Just google it and you will see more than a hundred. Alternatively, look up the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), search for "Luristan" and you get another 100 or so. Here I will offer my thoughts (and a lot of pictures) to the development of these pieces of art and what they might have meant to the old Luristanis.

The first thing to notice is that the standard MoA had forbears that look similar but are something else. We can't do better than to look at the genealogy supplied by Bruno Overlaet¹.



The second thing to notice is that I wrote this module originally with a specific interpretation in mind of what these figure mean. Some time after this I changed my mind for, what I think, are very good reasons. My new interpretation is rather uncoventional and does not meet the approvla of, e.g., Bruno Overlaet. Here it is anyway:

[New interpretation](#)

The starting point is the obvious need of the old Luris for "finials". A **finial**, according to Wikipedia, is "an element marking the top or end of some object, often formed to be a decorative feature". The "Kreuzblume" (German word) on top of the tall Gothic church towers is a finial, and so are the holy / patriotic/ decorative things on top of the pope's

staff, flagpoles, war standards and bed posts. What kind of stick the Luris decorated with their finials, and why they put them into graves, we don't know. The MoA finials are too small for war standards; at best they could have adorned a kind of scepter, a walking stick, or a house altar. Or something else. So we start with something simple: the "tube man". Here are a few:



● To say it once: These bronze objects might be fakes, and they might be from 800 BC, or 900 BC , or ... and not from 1100 BC or earlier as assumed above. There is no way of telling their precise age or if they are genuine. So I'm speculating up to a point. I might be partially or completely wrong - but there is also no way of telling either. The message is that the line of arguments I'm making here does not critically depend on these details.

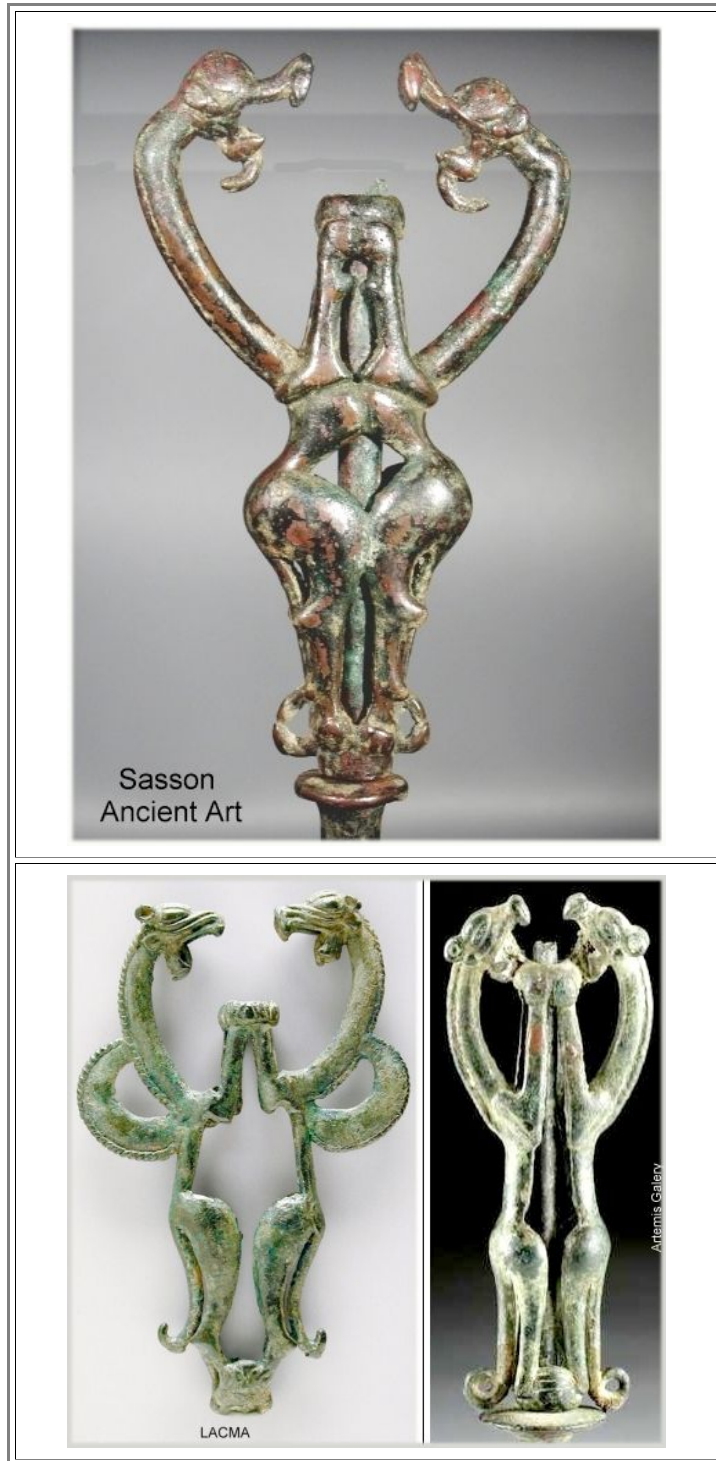
▀ Next the early Luris make some "animals only" finials. They come, broadly speaking, in two varieties. Animals you must be afraid of or more docile kinds. The dangerous animals are often not real animals but some demons or whatever, modelled after some of the more dangerous real beasts. Like these ones, for example:



Dangerous animals, sometimes called "lions" or "dragons"

The upper one is one of mine

● Here are a few more of the same kind:



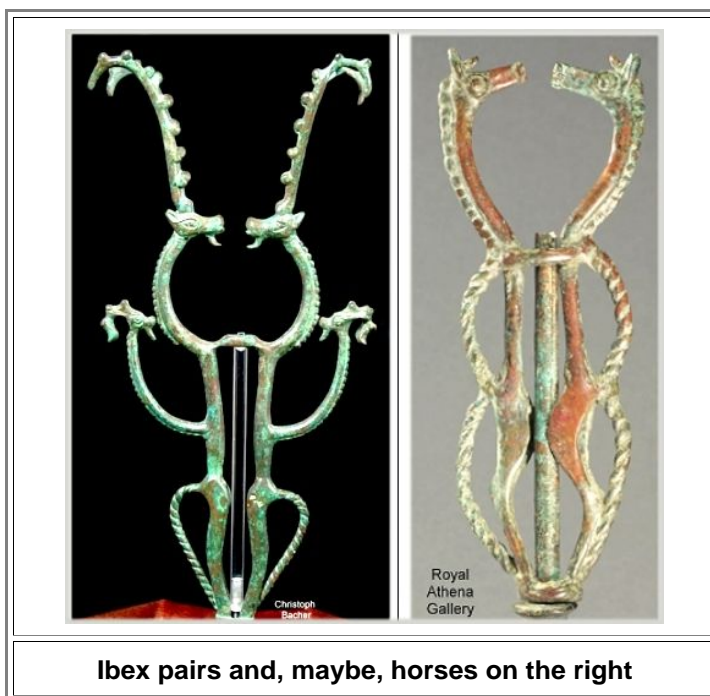
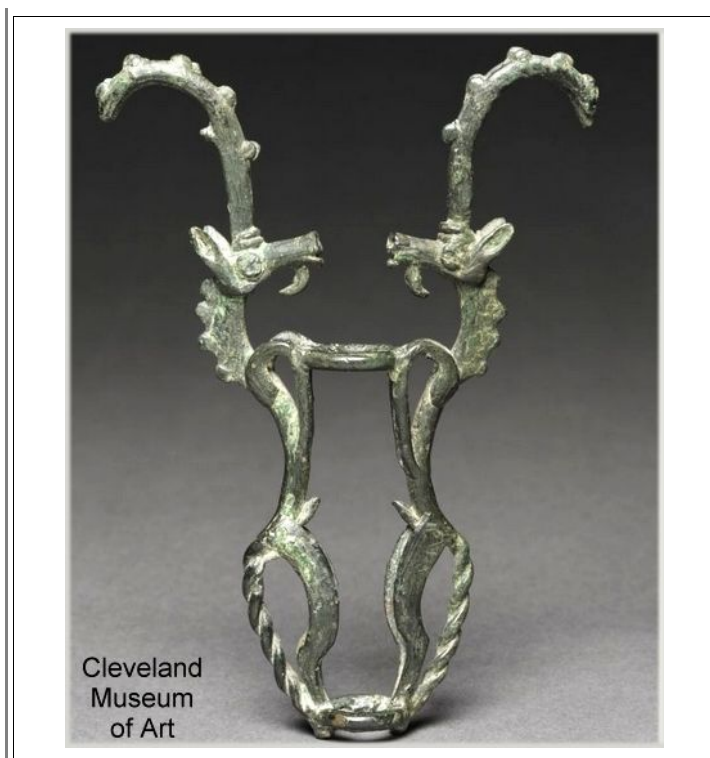
▀ Then we have the "nice" animals, typically *ibexes*. An ibex is a kind of wild mountain goat with impressive horns that lives in high mountains. Here is one:



Ibex

● Below you see how the old Lurians perceived their Ibexes:





● Plenty more "animals only" and "victims of animals" finials can be found in [this link](#).

▀ You needed to stick these animals on some tube as shown for some examples. So take a (slimmed down) tube-man for that and you get your Master of Animals!

Well - No!!! What you got, at least in some cases, is the exact opposite: The "**Victim of Animals**". Just look at this object from my collection:



Victim of Animals

- The animals - clearly the vicious beasts from above - are biting off his ears. They are eating him. And he is suffering, just look at that face. The arms you see belong to the animals. They are holding him captive. Definitely no master here. There are plenty more examples, here are just a few:





Enter humans. First just the head, then parts of the upper body.



Full-bodied victim

None of the guys looks very masterful. No wonder - they are being devoured by brutal beasts. Typically the beasts are after his (or her) ears. That's a bit strange but they had little choice - all heads must be roughly on the same level, after all. But note that in one of the finials the beasts (Possibly ibexes) bite the guy in his neck. Note also that the guy has a full body including arms in the last picture. That might be seen as the last stage before he starts to defend himself by gripping the beasts at their necks.

● However

To my own surprise, there is also a completely different way to interpret the meaning of these "victims", [see here](#).

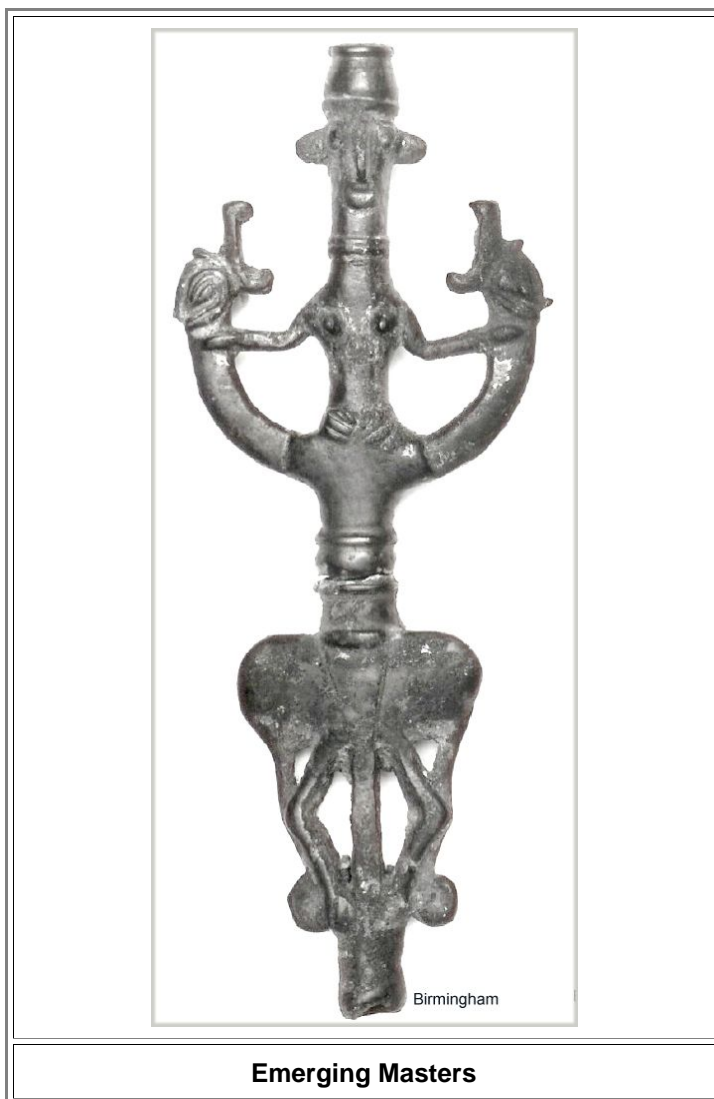
▀ All that's needed now is the central figure using his arms for holding the beasts at bay. That's what we get. Here are examples:





Emerging Masters

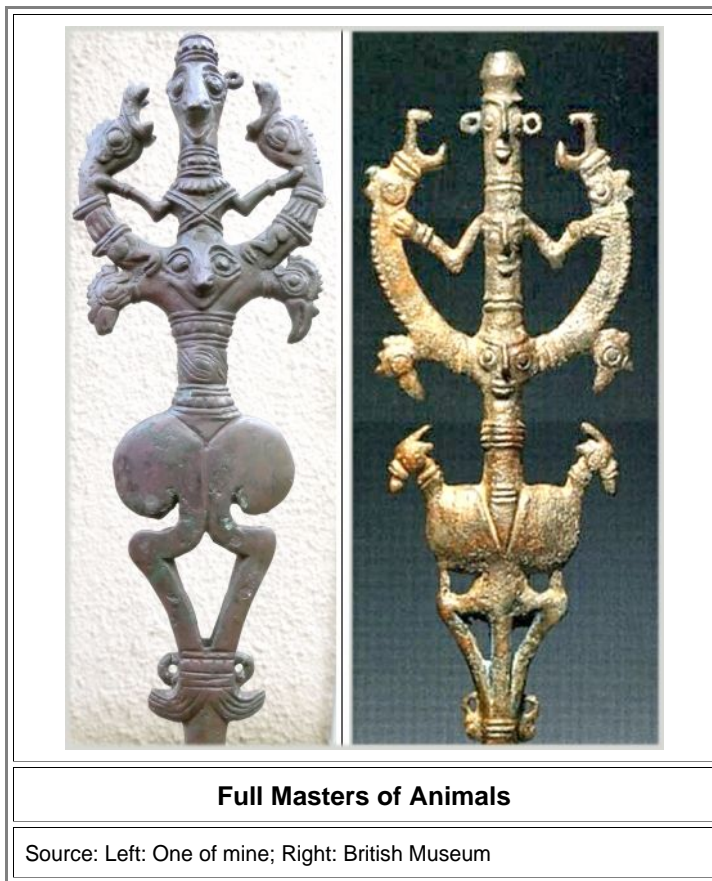
▀ We have early masters of Animals here. And this includes at least one female Master or better Mistress, see below.



Emerging Masters

● The faces do no longer express suffering; they look rather masterly now. In contrast, the beasts are suffering. Their snouts are open, perhaps because they still want to snap for the ears but more likely because they are suffocating.

The figures are still rather tube like. And there are no **chickens** yet. However, we have on occasion a second face on the body of the figure. Right were his (or her) stomach would be. Maybe this indicates "You are no longer going to eat me. I'm going to eat you (or your products like eggs, milk, wool, piglets, meat)". We have one more step to go for the fully developed Master of Animals as shown here (and in [this link](#))



● What is the meaning of the chicken heads always there? We wouldn't ask this question if it would be a noble eagle or falcon head. But chicken?

▸ I believe that this signifies complete mastery over the beasts: its **domestication**. First I feared you, then I stood up to you, killed and ate you, and now you are my pet and I am your god. You live with me and yield to me in all respects. "(Domesticated) chickens arrived in the Middle East starting with Iran at 3900 BCE, followed by Turkey and Syria (2400–2000 BCE) and into Jordan by 1200 BCE" says an Internet source, so the Luris might have had chickens running around. They also must have had dogs, pigs, cows, sheep and goats, so why use the lowly chicken on your finial? Well, bronze dogs couldn't be told from wolves, and cows, pigs, sheep and goats have broad heads that do not go well with the flat figures. So we take chicken.

Well, not always. There seem to be a few MoA finials around that feature other domestic animals in addition to the chicken. One with goats is shown above on the right, and a wildly overblown one with chicken, lots of heads and cows is shown below. Note that the cows also subdue the once fearful beasts.



Cows strangling the beast

Source: Wiki commons; used to be part of the collection of the Harvard museum

● Here is another one with goats:



MoA with goats

Source: Barakat Galery

● If these MoA finials are not fakes, they certainly strengthen my argument.

▀ That's it. Let's summarize:

- The "Masters of Animals" are predated by "Victims of Animals".
- Masters appear in two stages: Partial mastery (hunting, killing, eating); no chickens attached
- Full mastery by domestication. Chickens (always) plus other domesticated animals (rare) are attached to the beasts.

Once more: This might all be BS; I agree. However, I have not found anything "better" in the literature so far. In fact, I have not found anything that explains the role of the chicken or recognizes the victim of animal finials. I can't claim that I have read everything published to Luristan bronzes but I believe that not much will turn up by further reading.

● So far so good. Now you may want to look at my radcally new interpretation:

[New interpretation](#)

- 1) Bruno Overlaet: LURISTAN BRONZES - THE FIELD RESEARCH Encyclopædia Iranica , online edition, 2016. [This link](#) opens a copy of the paper
- 2) No, I'm not religious at all and I don't know the Bible by heart. Aber man hat halt eine gute Schule besucht...
- 3) After a time, Zeus developed an unbearable headache, which made him scream out of pain so loudly it could be heard throughout the earth. The other gods came to see what the problem was. Hermes realized what needed to be done and directed Hephaestus to take a wedge and split open Zeus's skull. Out of the skull sprang Athena, fully grown and in a full set of armour. Due to the way of her birth, she became the goddess of intelligence and wisdom.
Source: https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/The_Myths/Birth_of_Athena/birth_of_athena.html