

Phoenician bronze lion's head protome found in Huelva

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ABSTRACT:

The authors are disclosing a leonine bronze protome assigned to furniture decoration. Its formal features and finding site allow its relation to Sector A of La Joya Necropolis (Huelva, SW Iberian Peninsula). Stylistically

it can be ascribed to western Phoenician naturalist-figurative art, Phoenician colonial or, should it have been manufactured in Huelva, Phoenician emporial-colonial.

KEY WORDS: Phoenician Metallurgy, Phoenician Furniture, Bronze Lion Head Protome, La Joya Necropolis (Huelva).

RESUMEN:

Los autores dan a conocer un prótomo leonino de bronce asignado a decoración mobiliaria. Sus características formales y el lugar del hallazgo permiten relacionarlo con el Sector A de la necrópolis de la Joya

(Huelva, SW de la Península Ibérica). Estilísticamente puede adscribirse a un arte fenicio naturalista-figurativo occidental, fenicio colonial o, en caso de haber sido manufacturado en Huelva, fenicio empórico-colonial.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Metalurgia fenicia, mobiliario fenicio, prótomo de león de bronce, necrópolis de La Joya.

1. CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE FIND

The bronze lion protome presented herein was found by chance in 1970 by Mr. José Manuel Martín Díaz among the earths extracted from a ditch during the course of urban remodelling works in the city of Huelva, SW Iberian Peninsula. The finding site is next to the hill where sector A of the La Joya Necropolis is found, perhaps where the former foothill was located (fig. 1). This circumstance and the characteristics of the piece permits its ascription to the necropolis itself, most likely making part of the hoard of a sumptuous tomb.

Unaware of its historical value, the father of the protagonist of the find proceeded to separate the protome from a metal stem to which it was attached. The stem was discarded and the protome was subjected to abrasive cleaning methods and painted with glitter. Then, in 2007, nearly forty years later, after assessing its similarity with the lions of the cart's hubcap from grave 17 of La Joya Necropolis, Mr. Martín Díaz proceeded to arrange its admission to the Huelva Museum.

2. DESCRIPTION

Leonine bronze protome in acceptable conservation, lost wax cast, hollow, 5.6 x 6.6 cm in size, 0.5 cm of average wall thickness and a weight of 146.4 g (fig. 2). The absence of pores shows a correct cast.

Stylistically it can be ascribed to a naturalistic-figurative art, highlighting key anatomical details, well proportioned, with no concessions to idealizations or excesses. The mane, in relief, offers a semi-discoid front extension and two lateral curvilinear prolongations above the eyes continuing down with a rear flange. The mane hairs are hinted by an incised or engraved lattice. Prominent and pointed ears directed backwards. Eyes

differentiated by peripheral projections. Perforations in the eyeballs would plausibly lodge a couple of ornamental beads of glass or precious metal. Prominent snout with two depressions recreating the nostrils. The whiskers and a few hairs over the snout are marked by incision or engraving. Open jaws and lolling tongue. Protruding and well differentiated fangs and the rest of the teeth marked in saw-shape by incision or engraving on the gums. Four holes at the rear end, roughly distributed according to the cardinal points, would hold the rivets or nails which supposedly would attach the piece to the discarded stem with a wooden core (fig. 3).

3. METALLURGICAL ANALYSIS

Transcription of the report with the results of the metallurgical analysis (Table 1) issued by Prof. Sarel Shalev (University of Haifa).

As for the method and instrument it is X-Rays Fluorescence Analysis (= XRF) and the machine used was a portable NITON XLt. The analysis is of the

uncleaned and untreated surface with penetration depth of circa 1.5. micron. The beam size is 8 mm in diameter and the collection time used was 90 seconds (30 seconds to each area of the X-ray thermodynamic scale). In this measuring protocol we could see all metal elements with a limit of detection of circa 0.05 Wt%.

Table 1

| Mo | Mo Error | Zr | Zr Error | Pb | Pb Error | Se | Se Error |
|-------|----------|-------|----------|--------|----------|--------|----------|
| <LOD | 0,006 | 0,001 | 0,004 | 11,048 | 0,118 | <LOD | 0,02 |
| As | As Error | Zn | Zn Error | Cu | Cu Error | Ni | Ni Error |
| <LOD | 0,191 | <LOD | 0,081 | 75,052 | 0,173 | <LOD | 0,041 |
| Co | Co Error | Fe | Fe Error | Mn | Mn Error | Cr | Cr Error |
| <LOD | 0,032 | 0,777 | 0,043 | <LOD | 0,04 | <LOD | 0,027 |
| V | V Error | Ti | Ti Error | Sb | Sb Error | Sn | Sn Error |
| 0.024 | 0,011 | 0,153 | 0,016 | 1,313 | 0,057 | 10,976 | 0,106 |
| Ag | Ag Error | Pd | Pd Error | Ru | Ru Error | Nb | Nb Error |
| <LOD | 0,468 | <LOD | 0,016 | <LOD | 0,008 | <LOD | 0,004 |
| Bi | Bi Error | Au | Au Error | | | | |
| 0,172 | 0,034 | <LOD | 0,068 | | | | |

The metal is made of a good leaded tin bronze. The base metal is copper (75.05% Cu) alloyed with tin (10.98% Sn) and lead (11.05% Pb) and small traces that do not affect the metal properties and therefore are impurities of antimony (1.31% Sb), bismuth (0.17% Bi) and iron (0.78% Fe). All the impurities could be part of the metal or part of the surface corrosion or the conservation treatment of the object. Note as well that the absolute amounts of the alloy are measured on an uncleaned and treated surface of the object so they are quantitatively reflecting the corrosion more than the original metal. The

amount of Pb could also be affected by the tendention of this element to segregate during the solidification process of the cast and therefore could be well varied in the cast areas. Having said all that we could see very clearly that this is a typical metal for bronze casts with lead and tin for reducing the melting point of pure copper and increase the metal fluidity in order of better filling the casting mold. The total absence of zinc (Zn) point to a metal alloy earlier than Roman period (circa 0 BCE or AD). From Late Roman time and on we will see Zn as alloy or traces in most cases.

4. FUNCTIONAL PARALLELS

In general, the zoomorphic protomes of cart wheel hubcaps conform their body with a disk fitting the center of the wheel and show a cross perforation to fix them with a pin. This design, exemplified in carts like the one from La Joya Necropolis and the Vecchia Roma Gregorian Etruscan Museum of the Vatican (fig. 4), does not correspond to the work presented, certainly closer to the protomes used in furniture decoration: chairs, thrones, footstools, stools and beds. Some functional parallels can be traced, perhaps not coincidentally, in protomes of lions, bulls and rams of Assyrian and North Siryan furniture. A bronze bull protome (fig. 5), assigned to a throne, was found among other furniture remains in the "Room of the Bronzes" at the North-West Palace of Nimrud (Layard, 1853a, 199; Curtis 1988, 85 and pl. 74). Similar elements are the bull protomes of the seat of the king Bar-Rakib, an Assyria vassal, in a Aramean relief from the palace of Sam'al (Zincirli) exposed at the

Vorderasiatische Museum of Berlin (fig. 6.1),¹ the ram protomes of the seat of Ashurnasirpal II in an Assyrian relief from the aforementioned North-West Palace of Nimrud at the the British Museum (fig. 6.2), and the lion protomes of a table carried by Sargon II's servers in a relief from Dur Sharrukin Palace (Khorsabad) at the Louvre Museum (fig. 6.3). Assyrian chronicles refer the seizure of luxury furniture by tax or conquest and of enormous interest is the fact that in a relief of the palace of Sennacherib at Kouyunjik ram protomes furniture (fig. 6.4a-b) appear in the booty carried by Assyrian soldiers while looting a city considered to be Phoenician by Barnett (1957, 145-7). Consequently, although Assyria had craftsmen capable of producing this kind of furniture, among which Syrians and Phoenicians specialists could be considered, other furniture came from the looting and taxing of different cities.

5. FORMAL AND ARTISTIC PARALLELS

The formal and stylistic features mentioned coincide with models of oriental lions spread throughout the Mediterranean reaching the Iberian Peninsula. Although with different functionality, its closest parallel is found in the lion protomes of the cart hubcaps from tomb 17 of La Joya Necropolis, with which it shares the general artistic style, the technical quality and certain formal characteristics. Amongst these not only the standardized open mouth, lolling tongue and prominent teeth, but also other less common features such as the mane

in relief with three projections, a semi-discoid front and two curvilinear laterals. Neither do ear and mouth morphology differ considerably. There is a discrepancy in that the perforation of the eye sockets, plausibly to host a noble material to remark the eyeballs in a striking way, are not present in La Joya lions. This recourse, well suited to embellish luxury furniture, is not such for a wheel in motion. Another piece of high quality, exquisite taste and same artistic style from La Joya Necropolis is a jug with a deer protome and an equine head and neck

1 - We appreciate this reference from Álvaro Gómez Peña.

shaped handle from tomb 18 (fig. 7.1). Perhaps, these items were manufactured in the same workshop. Without pondering the potential variations determined by different labs and techniques (emission spectroscopy for La Joya materials: in Escalera, 1978, 227-30), two records of the jug show tertiary bronze (77.42 and 76.61% Cu; 12.86 and 6.2% Sn; 8.14 and 6.85% Pb) whose composition is not significantly far from the protome under discussion. Different results offer three determinations of the hubcaps (86.03, 84.43 and 84.24% Cu; 12.4, 12.4 and 11.6% Sn; 0.8, 2.0 and 2.4% Pb), revealing an important deficit of lead compared to previous cases. However, if we consider the undisputed artistic and technical knowledge required for the establishment of these works it is likely that the craftsman of the hubcap would have alloyed a low amount of lead intentionally so that the hardness required for his objective would not be reduced.

We are neither considering other bronze objects from La Joya of similar quality and style but with no outstanding zoomorphic representations, nor some others from various sources such as the deer protome jug of La Zarza de Alange or Mérida (fig. 7.2), very close to the one from La Joya mentioned above, or the bulls and full body deer

decorating thymiatherium lids (Jiménez Ávila, 2002, 403-5 and pls. XXXVI-XXXVIII). From a stylistic point of view, far away are the bronze lions' protomes of the Lázar Galdiano Museum (Datasheet in Perea, 2002), those from the bed of El Torrejón de Abajo (Jiménez Ávila, 2002, fig. 184 and pl. XLIX) or the tubular of the ancient Vives Collection now at the Hispanic Society of America (Jiménez Ávila, 2002, fig. 196).

A curious feature to remark is the lattice representation of the mane hairs, suggestively shared by a winged lion of the engraved decoration from the tray of El Gandul (Fernández Gómez, 1989, fig. 3), another one from the openwork decoration of a thymiatherium lid from La Lagartera (Jiménez Ávila, 2002, pl. XXXVI) and several incised decorating ivory combs of common origin from La Cruz del Negro Necropolis and the Hera Temple at Samos (Aubert, 1979, CN.1, CN. 3, S. 1 and S. 3 of the catalog) (fig. 8). As for the layout of the three loops of the flattened mane on the forehead and temples, it is considered by Jiménez Ávila (2002, 345) as a characteristic of lions from both Etruria and the Iberian Peninsula but absent in Asian and Greek lions.

6. CHRONOLOGY

If, as it seems plausible, the piece comes from Sector A of La Joya Necropolis we must place it within the chronological limits of same which, in traditional pottery dating, can be established between the late eighth century BC and before the end of the seventh century BC. The absence of archaic Greek pottery in this sector

of the necropolis, present in the later Sector C and its habitat since the late seventh century BC coinciding with the arrival of Minor Asian Greeks to Huelva, secures this date as the *terminus ante quem* for the protome. The inferred chronology is also consistent with the one given to this kind of metalwork in the Iberian Peninsula.

7. MANUFACTURING PLACE

Although we ignore the location of the workshop where the item was made, most authors think that bronzes of these characteristics correspond to local production rather than to imports. Three reasons aim at Huelva itself: 1) La Joya Necropolis is the site having provided a greater amount of ornamental bronze; 2) the habitat shows bronze metallurgy since precolonial or rather emporial-precolonial times (González de Canales, Serrano and Llompart, 2004, 145-54 and pls. XXXVII-XXXVIII and LXIII-LXIV), and 3) had wealthy elites who could afford to pay these fine works of high artistic quality, thanks, among other products desired by the Phoenicians, to the silver available. As for their

architects, we fully share the view that identifies oriental or, more specifically, Phoenicians toreutic artisans settled in the West (Jiménez Ávila, 2002, 13-4 and 91). For this reason, rather than "Orientalizing" or "Tartessian" art we should perhaps speak of western Phoenician art, colonial Phoenician art or, in the hypothetical case of workshops in Huelva, of emporial-precolonial or emporial-colonial art according to the dating of the object. In the latter case it should be noted that the chronological distance between the establishment of the Phoenician-indigenous emporium of Huelva and the founding of the first colonies themselves may be shortened by recent findings in the island of Cadiz.

8. SOME NOTES ON THE SYMBOLOGY OF THE LION

There is a vast literature on the iconography of the lion, its connection to deities and royalty, its symbolic character and its inclusion in the mythical creations of Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, Greece and Egypt, with phenomena of partial or total syncretism. This happens in the use of the lion as a symbol of power and prestige (gates of Boğazköy and Mycenae, royal property and emblems), in the embodiment of some gods (the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet is "the lioness" and the lion appears to be linked to the sun god Re, whom it comes to personify), or the submission of the strength of the lion by the god, hero or ruler (Gilgamesh and Heracles wearing a lion skin, Tutankhamun hunting ducks with a lion chained to his feet, lions accompanying

the ancient Anatolian goddess Cybele, Ishtar leaning her foot on a lion in the palace of Zimri-Lim in Mari or, like the Hittite sun-goddess Hebat and her son Sharruma at the sanctuary of Yazilikaya, who are standing on a lion). This iconography, which spread over much of the Mediterranean Basin and was adopted by culturally diverse indigenous societies, could not lack in oriental repertoires which, through Phoenicians hands, reached the Iberian Peninsula (Blázquez Martínez, 1974) where it would be fully assumed with all its attributes and expressions among which, hypothetically, Belen and Cruz Ceballos (2002) envisage the irascible and warlike nature of Astarte.

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FIGURAS



Figure 1: Location of the find over a map of the city of Huelva indicating the proto-historic habitat and sectors A and C of La Joya Necropolis.



Figure 2: Several images of the lion protome.

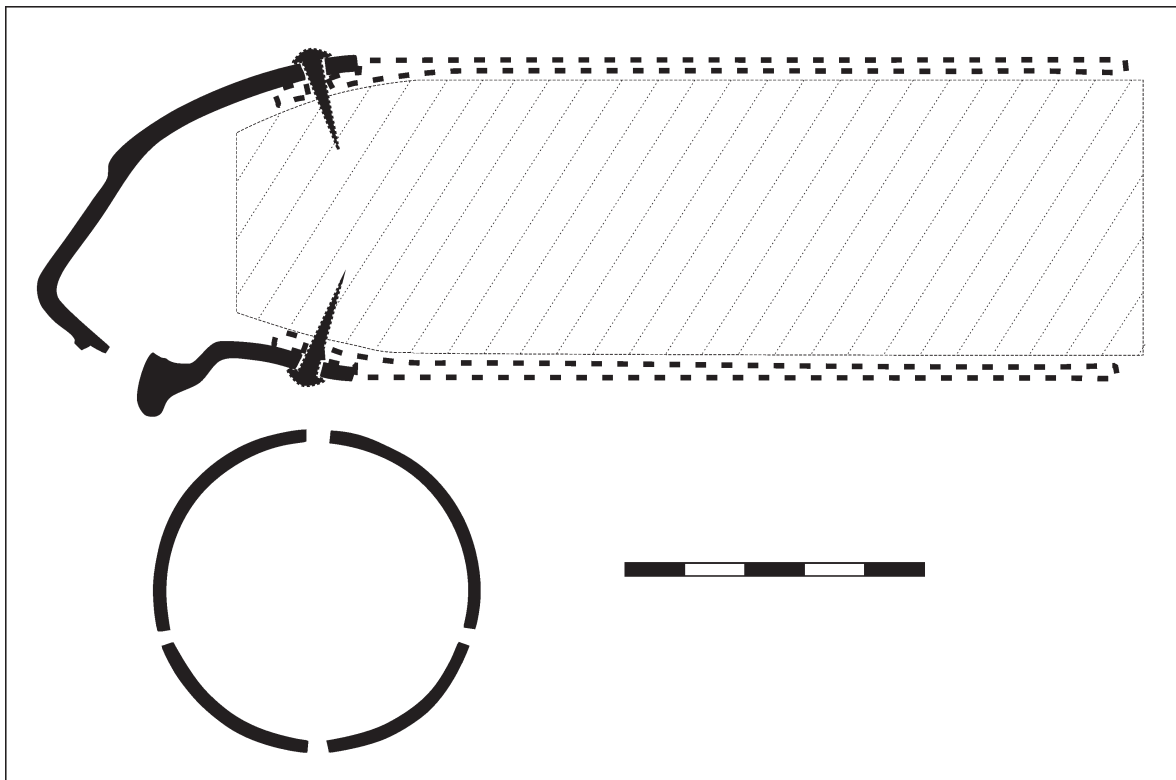


Figure 3. Sections of the protome and idealization of the metallic stem with wooden core to which it was supposedly attached.

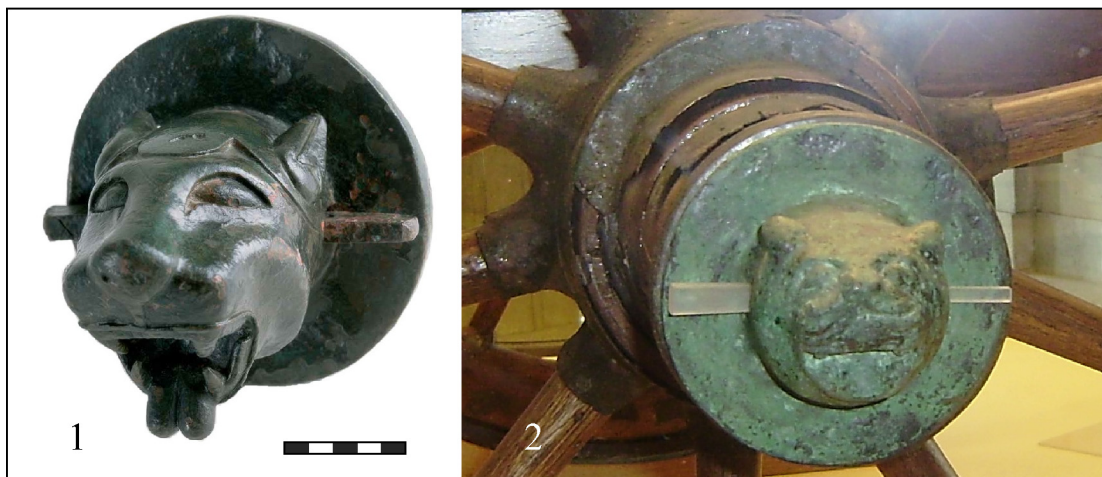


Figure 4: Cart hubcaps: 1) Tomb 18 at La Joya; 2) Roma Vecchia.



Figure 5: Bull protome assigned to a throne (Curtis, 1988, fig. 74).

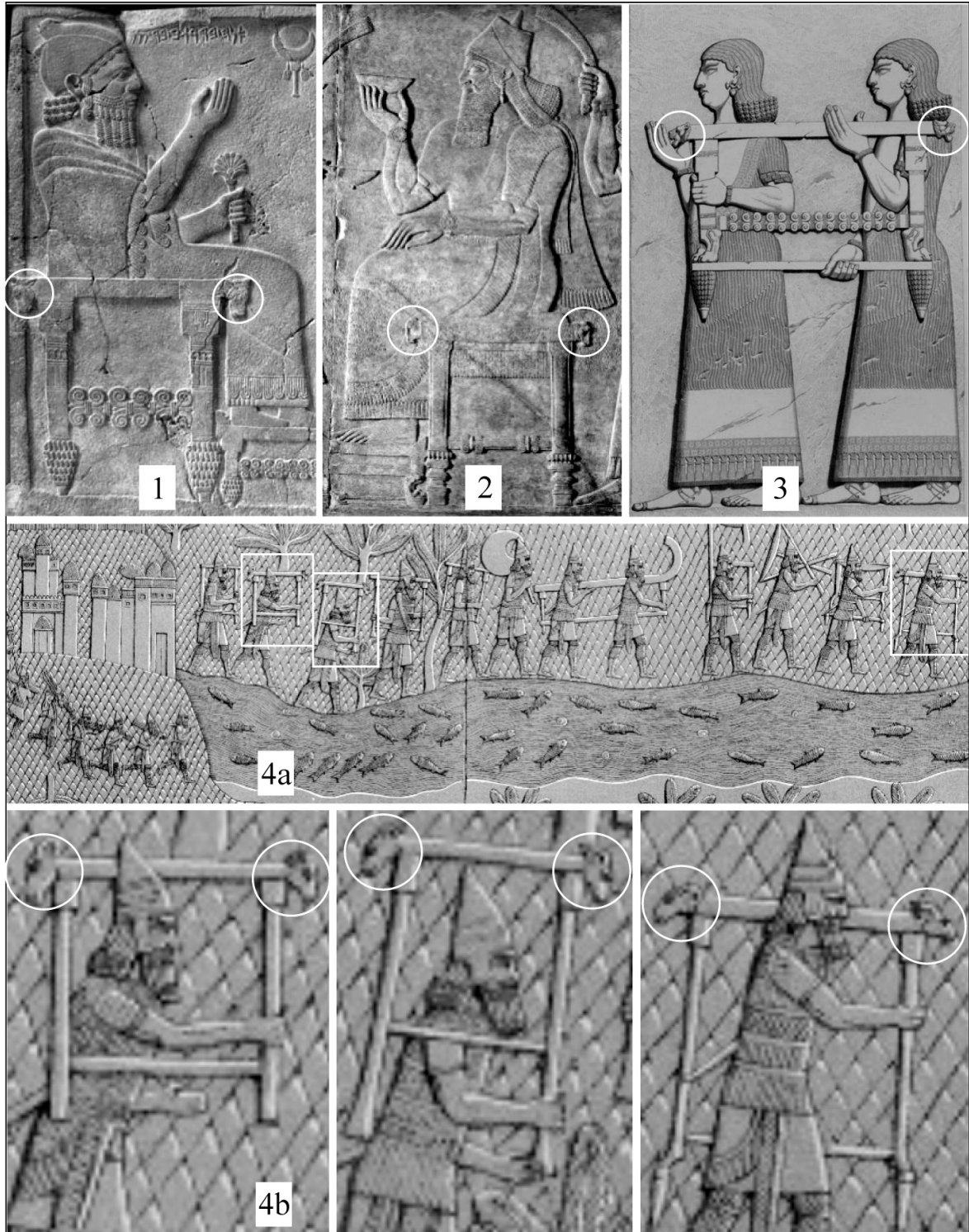


Figure 6: 1) Relief of Bar-Rakib; 2) relief of Ashurnasirpal II; 3) relief of Sargon II (Botta 1949, I, pl. 22); 4a-b) relief of Sennacherib (Layard 1853b, pl. 40, original lost).

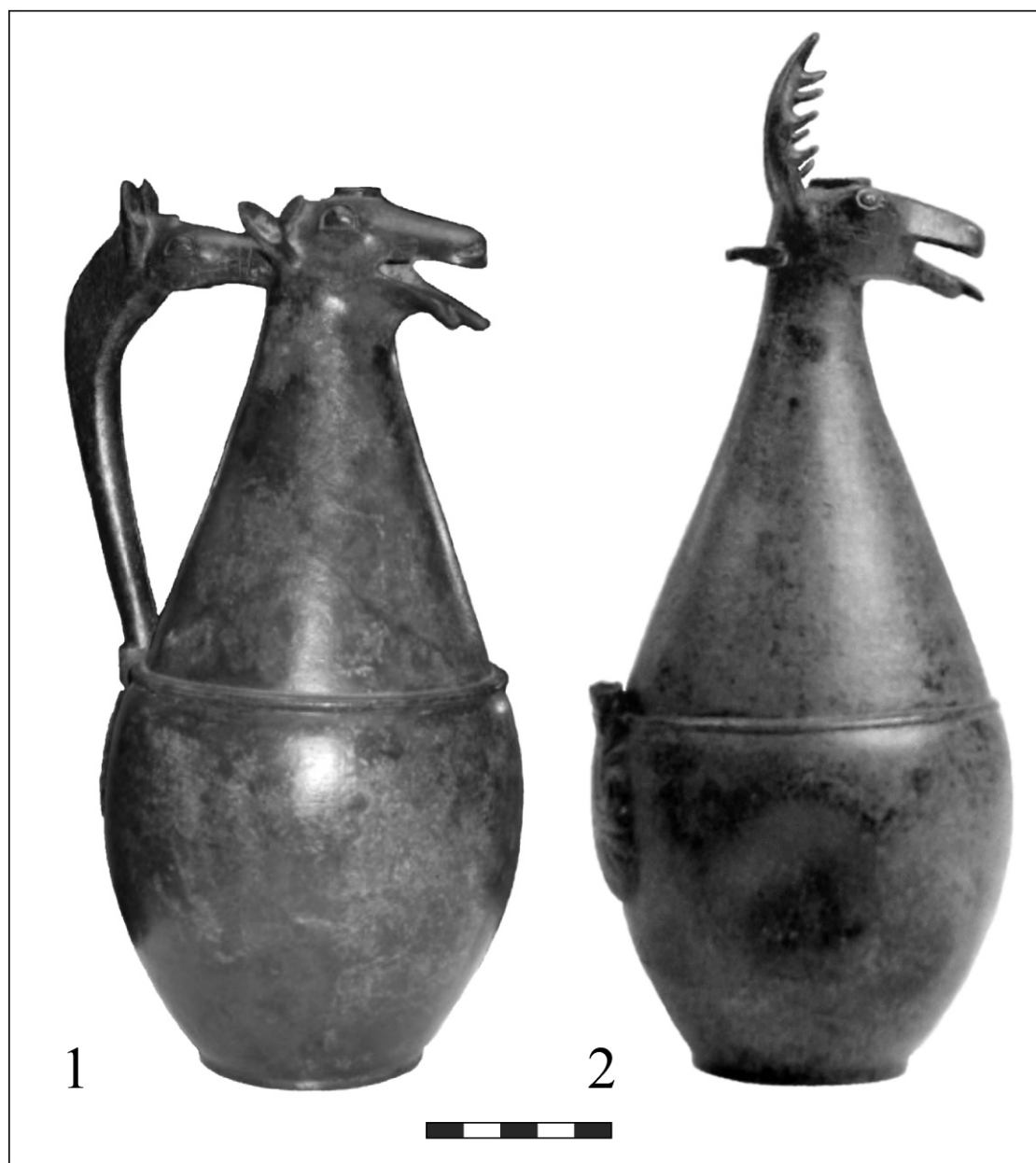


Figure 7: Bronze jugs: 1) Tomb 17 at La Joya; 2) La Zarza de Alange.

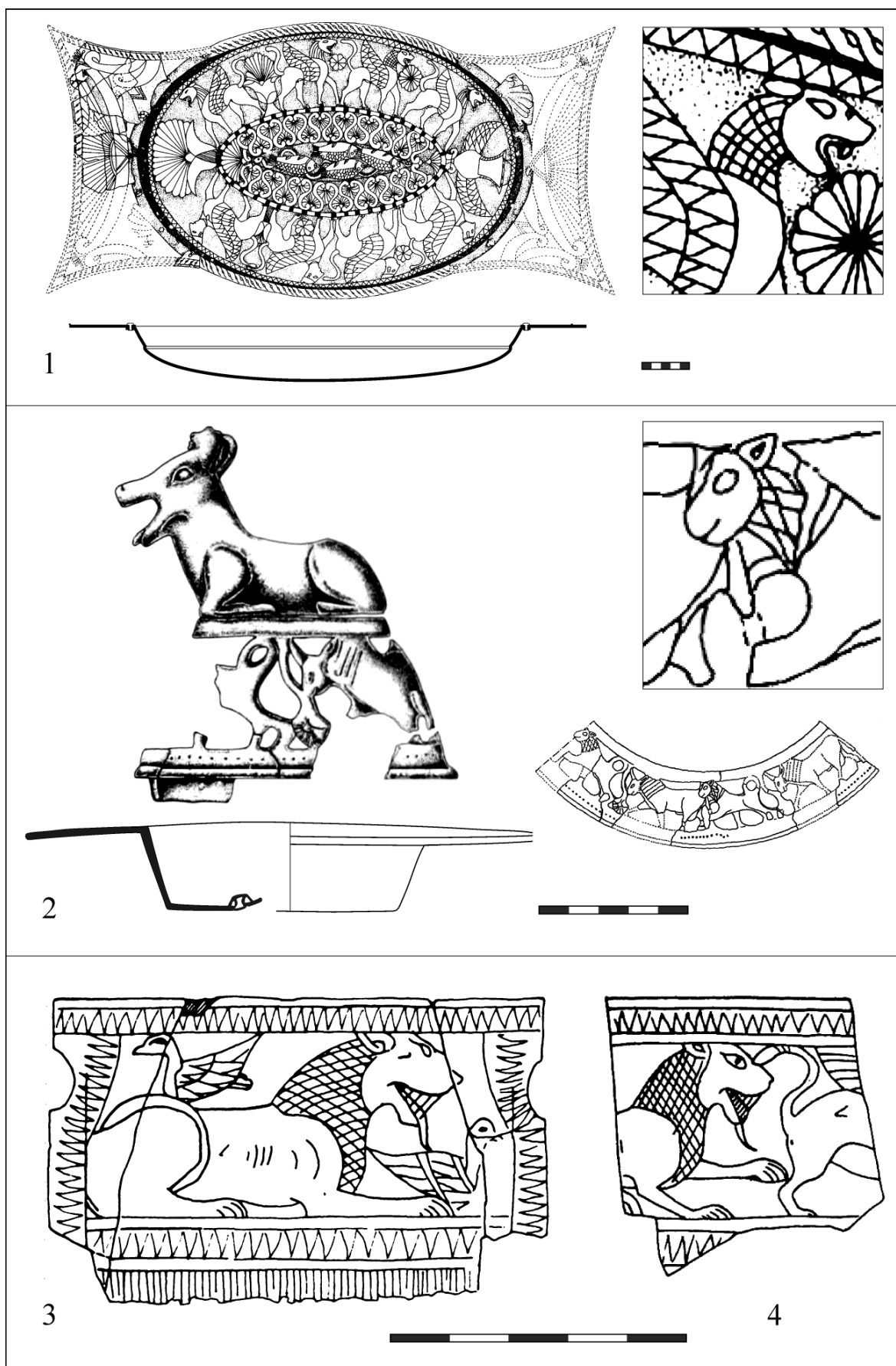


Figure 8: Lions with lattice mane: 1) tray of El Gandul (Fernández Gómez, 1989, fig. 3); 2) thymiaterium of La Lagartera (Jiménez Ávila, 2002, pl. XXXVI); 3) ivory combs from La Cruz del Negro Necropolis and 4) of Heraion of Samos (Aubert, 1979, CN. 1 and S. 1 of the catalog).