THE BELT OF THE GODDESS: PHRYGIAN TOMBS VERSUS GREEK SANCTUARIES

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It is a pleasure and honour to offer this essay on the occasion of 70th anniversary of Prof. Lyudmil Getov. Although trained as a historian, I attended his lectures in archaeology and later on did a lot of archaeological work. He was the first teacher to reveal to me the wonders of the archaeological exploration, not only of our lands but worldwide.

My work during the last years has been devoted to ancient Phrygia. For several years now I have participated in Gordion archaeological team. Thus, I will be glad to offer some of my preliminary results which are part of a larger project on the bronze objects from the Gordion City Mound.

Bronze belts were among the ceremonial attire in many ancient cultures. They are among the most attractive finds in many areas in the Southeastern Europe and in Eastern Mediterranean. They were discussed both in Phrygian studies and in works on Thracian art and archaeology.

Belts are known and published from the excavated tumuli at Gordion. Phrygian imports or imitations have been found in many Greek sanctuaries. Following their development, I would like to investigate their ritual meaning in both Phrygian and Greek contexts, as well as to demonstrate the interactions between Phrygia and the Greek world.

There is no belt found in the Gordion City Mound in the Destruction Level, i.e. c. 700 BC, or c. 800 BC, according to the recently obtained new C\textsubscript{14} dates. Five complete or almost complete belts and more fragments of hooks, catch-plates and belt buckles were discovered in post-destruction contexts. Seven of the belts and the belt fragments come from the so-called South Cellar. This is a sizable, square structure, near the rear of Building O, belonging to the Middle Phrygian citadel. Two floors and later disturbances have been detected. Initially it was believed that there was one filling of the 5th century BC. Its stratigraphy has recently been reconsidered and earlier deposits recognized. According to the reconstructed section of the cellar by Keith DeVries, the belts should be dated to the late 8th or early 7th century BC.

Probably the most exquisite among the previously published belts are the three ones from Tumulus P, a child's burial at Gordion (fig. 1). The excavators claimed to have found 10 belts in the so-called "Midas Mound", the biggest tumulus containing the richest burial, but they are of another type: composed of open-work rectangular plaques and big studded discs with thick leather backing. Similar to these is the belt found in Tumulus W. Fragments of a belt come from one of the Ankara tumuli. Fragments of belts were found in Bogazkoy. A silver belt was discovered in Tumulus D at Bayındır, in ancient Lycia. There are stray finds of belts, probably from near Afyon. An open-work catch-plate, very similar to the later Phrygian examples comes from
The belts under consideration consist of solid bronze bands with small holes running along both long sides, probably for sewing them to leather or tissue. A set of parallel incised lines also borders both long sides. Often they run along the two edges of the hook. Sometimes the bronze band is covered with geometric incised design. The belt buckle is of a Phrygian fibula type, covering the base of a long hook. It has no functional meaning. It has long been suggested by J. Boardman that the fibulae had initially been used to fasten linen belts and later survived as decorative element of the bronze belts. The catch plate is a rectangular open-work piece with a rounded end, usually riveted to the band. The hook is cut out of the same bronze sheet and comes out of two semi-circular cut-outs. Sometimes it is also decorated with meander or guilloche incised patterns. Compass drawn rosette is found at the base of the hook on some items.

Phrygian belts differ from the Caucasian, Iranian and Urartian belts. The bronze band is usually narrower and lacks decoration with figural scenes. Only for the belts from Tumulus MM and W separate bronze plaques that were arranged on a leather band can be supposed, similarly to some Iranian examples.

Most of the visual representations from the Near East depict belts of the same tissue as the dress, or made of one or several strings, fastened on the front. More visual data is provided by the Neo-Assyrian reliefs. Since 9th and 8th centuries BC a new type of belt has been developed which ends fastened with hooks. However, some similarities in the rounded shape of the belt ends and the fastening can be observed on some Syrian and Hittite representations: an example is the warrior on the relief of the King’s Gate at Hattusa/Bogazkoy. The same features can be found later in the Neo-Hittite representations on stone: on a relief from Carchemish, from the "Royal Buttress", young Kamanis, introduced by his regent Yariris, wears a wide belt ending with a triangular open-work piece, which might be a knitted work as well. A sword is hanging over his belt. It is worth noting that Kamanis is known through his dedicatory inscriptions for the building of Kubaba’s temple and setting her cult statue. Similar to Kamanis’ belts are worn by warriors on another relief of the same time. Narrower belts of the same type can be seen on a relief from Zincirly, worn by musicians, probably in a ritual ceremony. There are tassels hanging along the lower edge of the belts and the pointed ends fit into rings. The tassels might suggest tissue or leather for the whole belt. All these Neo-Hittite representations are dated to the late 9th and throughout of the 8th century BC and defined as being of Assyrianizing style. Other images on Neo-Assyrian reliefs of the 8th century BC, also show hooks that fit into rings on the opposite end and geometrical design of the plate.

Although a genetic relation of these belts to the Phrygian and Ionian ones has been denied, in view of Mita’s political activity in southeastern Anatolia in the late 8th century BC, some con-
tacts and exchange could possibly be considered. The political involvement of Midas in southeastern Anatolia has also been the explanation of the Phrygian type fibula and a belt with rectangular geometric decoration worn by the Tabalian king Warpalawa wears and a on his relief at Ivriz.23

The Near Eastern belts were part of the warrior’s attire, and as such, were also king’s attributes in his representations as a warrior. Weapons are extremely rare in Phrygian tombs and we can hardly associate the Phrygian belts with a warrior’s costume. We cannot doubt, however, their aristocratic or royal contexts. The very few Phrygian representations of human figure are not very informative about this dress accessory.

Greek Archaic sculpture and other representations also suggest belts of tissue or leather, fastened with strings or straps on the front. When a special attention is paid to the representation of the belt, it usually shows plain band with rectangular ends. An ivory statuette of a kouros from Samos displays rectangular belt decorated with lines of bosses running along the edges separated by plain relief lines.24 A wooden statuette of a goddess (?), again from Samos, depicts a more elaborate costume. The female figure wears a high polos decorated with a pattern of rectangles, a shawl and a decorated long skirt. The belt is similar to the one of the above mentioned kouros.25

Entire belts of Phrygian type, or parts of them, were excavated at many Greek, mostly East Greek, sanctuaries: on Samos,26 Chios,27 at Ephesos,28 Miletos,29 Didyma,30 Old Smyrna,31 Erythrai,32 as well as in Delphi33 and Olympia34, not always in well stratified contexts. The best dated seem to be those from the Harbor Sanctuary on Chios belonging to the 7th century BC.35 A number of these belts, as well as some of the Phrygian fibulae, found in the sanctuaries are Greek imitations.36 I would not enter here the discussion on distinguishing the genuine Phrygian imports from the imitations.

A development in the shape of the belts can be followed both on the Phrygian proper items and on those from the Greek temples. The hook becomes shorter and thicker, sometimes riveted to the bronze band.37 The open-work catch-plate becomes finer: relatively large arcs or circles, which provide only between two and four options for fastening, developed into a network of smaller squares and triangles or circles, resembling more a knitted piece (figs. 2–3).38 Then, it was replaced by solid bronze plaques with a greater number of options for fastening.39

Fig. 2. Bronze belt from the Gordion City Mound: B 1605, M6C, South cellar. Courtesy The Gordion Project

Fig. 3. Catch-plate from a belt from the Gordion City Mound: B 1510, M5E, South Cellar. Courtesy The Gordion Project
circular or square holes for the hooks to fit in. A border of embossed dots surrounds the holes and runs along the perimeter of the plate (fig. 4). The catch-plates of the earlier belts are riveted to the band and immovable, while later they are attached by a hinge; the hook becomes also decorated. More often than not a rod, connecting both ends of the belt-buckle, is present. Only one of the earliest Phrygian belts has this type of buckle, while it became frequent in the Greek examples. The explanation of its function to provide a better hold for tightening or loosing the belt can hardly be the only reason for its increasing popularity. The misunderstanding of the purpose of the Phrygian fibula-type buckle is demonstrated by a belt from Ephesos where it is placed in a reversed manner: with the cross bar facing the hook (fig. 5). The end moldings of the belt buckle become ridged rectangular blocks, while on the Greek examples they are hemispherical and button-like. Rectangular buckles are known from Greek sites, but not from Phrygian ones. Openwork D-shaped buckles consisting of two or three concentric wires are also absent from the Phrygian repertoire. Lion’s heads at the terminals of the fibula-type buckle look like an Ionian innovation, unknown in Phrygia. They are worth comparing with the lion’s head in the middle of the fibula bow on the exquisite gold examples from Ephesos (fig. 6).

Except for those from the City Mound at Gordion, all other Phrygian belts of known provenience originate from burials. Some were worn by the deceased, others were obviously grave goods, like the hundreds of fibulae discovered in the richest tombs. They, together with the other objects found in the graves, marked the high social status of the buried: a royal or priestly person.

The evidence for the gendering of the belts is scarce. In Tumulus MM a male in his 60s was buried (not Midas, as originally claimed). Despite the claims for a female child in Tumulus P anthropologically the sex of the dead cannot be determined; most probably it was a boy that was buried there. A young adult, possibly male, was the occupant of Tumulus W. It was suggested that it was a woman buried in Tumulus
D in Bayindir, but this information is not seriously confirmed as the tomb has not yet been published. The cremations in the Ankara tumuli and the tumulus in Kaynarca are beyond gender definition. Among the ‘lesser’ Gordion tumuli (inhumations), belt fragments were discovered in Tumulus S1 and in Tumulus J: 22–29: there is a male skeleton in J; the dead in S is assumed to be male because of the fragments of studded leather belt and two fibulae, while there is no identification data for the scattered bones in S1.

There has been an ongoing discussion about the Phrygian and Phrygian-type belts from the Greek sanctuaries. Some scholars believe that they were part of the clothing of the cult statue. A late Roman copy of an earlier statue of Artemis from the Prytaneum at Ephesos was used as an argument (fig. 7). The belt fastening of the statue is actually different from that of the Phrygian examples; it seems that the Romans had found a functional position for the belt-buckle, very similar to the modern concept of a clasp. The other major difference is that the belt is fastened on the back of the figure. Rosettes, bees and hyppocampi alternate to form the decoration of the belt itself: scholars suggested that a 7th century BC shape of the belt had been preserved but decorated with later synchronous elements.

Recently however, it is accepted that these belts were rather votives than part of the clothing of the cult statue. A number of Phrygian or Phrygian-imitated fibulae were also discovered in the Greek sanctuaries. It has been supposed that not only the belts, but the whole dress or garment was dedicated.

There are not many visual representations of human figures from Phrygia. Most of them depict the Phrygian Mother Goddess, known to the Greeks as Kybele. On a couple of reliefs, dated to the 7th–6th centuries BC, she is represented frontally standing with a long belted dress. However, no details of the belt can be seen. Could they have been fastened on the back, as the Roman statue of Artemis from Ephesos? The goddess wears a high polos with a veil, sometimes tucked in the belt. This costume with a long mantle-like veil can be followed in the 9th 8th century BC Neo-Hittite reliefs from Carchemish, Maraq, Malatya. Similar dress is displayed by the statuettes of ivory, gold and silver, dated to the 7th–6th centuries BC and found in the east Greek cities, as well as by the ivory figurine from Tumulus D in Byindir. It was suggested that they reflect indirectly an earlier Anatolian fashion, possibly through Phrygian intermediaries.

It could hardly be just a coincidence that a winged goddess, a Potnia Theron type, was depicted with a similar belt fastening on a bronze plaque from Olympia, dated to the last quarter of the 6th century BC.

Most of the belts and the fibulae are found in sanctuaries of goddesses: Artemis in Ephesos, a goddess in the Harbour Sanctuary on Chios, Hera in Samos, Athena Pronaia in Marmaria, Delphi, Aphrodite at Zeytintepe, Miletos, a goddess at Old Smyrna. At Didyma, however, Apollo was worshipped together with his twin sister Artemis. Only one of the Samos belts comes from a burial.

It is known from literary sources and epigraphic data that the Greek women dedicated their

Fig. 7. The back side of the Roman copy of a statue of Artemis Ephesia, found in the Prytaneion. After Bammer, Muss 1996: Abb. 95
belts to Hera or Artemis before marriage, or as an offering for a successful childbirth. It has been noted that Artemis received the most numerous dedications of clothes according to the written evidence. In *The Iliad* the belts are special king’s attributes and royal gifts: Agamemnon had a silver belt, and Nestor—a shining one; Bellerophon received a belt from Oineos. Usually their shining surface and red color are emphasized. It is worth noting that the initiates at Samothrace received red girdles. As early as the epics, goddesses and immortal women wore belts whose sexual meaning has long been acknowledged (cf. Circe).

There are no specific indications to claim the Phrygian belt as part of the *panoplia*. As far as our evidence goes, typological parallels between Phrygian and Achaean societies are justified. Mycenaean survivals can be detected in king Midas’ titles: *lavagetas wanax*, carved on a rock-cut façade in the so-called "Midas City". Thus, probably the meaning of the Phrygian bronze belts is closer to the epic texts, than to the later evidence on the common Greek practice of women dedicating belts before marriage. Their use could come closer to the epic sense of a royal gift and sign of distinguish, rather than the panoply. Nevertheless, the above mentioned representations of Kybele from Phrygia and of goddesses (?) (or priestesses) from Ephesos and Bayındır speak in favour of a goddess attribute.

The evidence from the Phrygian burials suggests that in most of the cases the belts were associated with men. Also, that they, together with the fibulae, were special grave offerings of great value and not only adornment of the deceased. The bronze belts from the Gordion citadel are the only ones that do not come from burials. One from the "South Cellar" was found in a pot, three more come from the same spot, one is found in clay under the cellar and two more were discovered in the fill of the cellar. Even if their chronology is different, the concentration of seven belts in one construction could hardly be a coincidence. They can be dated to the late 8th and early 7th centuries BC. Two more fragments from later contexts were discovered in pits. The stratigraphic precision of the rest of the finds is almost impossible: one can only rely on stylistic analysis. A lot of them bear traces from carbonized textiles on both sides: so, they were either put together with the entire dress, or were wrapped in cloth. Bearing in mind the type of the City Mound itself, a royal citadel, I would assume a special ritual deposit (or re-deposit) for the belts from the "South Cellar"; those in the pits could have possibly had a similar fate. Maybe the situation in the "South Cellar" comes closer to that at the Greek sanctuaries.

Similarities between the geometric decorative designs on some of the belts, the patterns on the Phrygian rock-cut façades and on wooden inlayed furniture from the Gordion tombs have long been discussed. They are considered to have been related to the symbolism of Kybele’s cult and the goddess’ role in Phrygian burial custom has been established.

I would suggest that the bronze belts were goddess’ attributes and were worn by the dead kings/aristocrats, put as grave offerings or dedicated as a mark of a special relation to the Mother goddess and her cult. Could they possibly be marks of initiation and their different number—a sign for different stages of initiation? As we know from the Greek literary sources, king Midas was a priest (or considered the son) of the Great Mother-Goddess and founder of her mysteries. The literary evidence for his dedicating his throne in Delphi has often been quoted, as well as the text about Croesus dedicating his wife’s belts at Delphi. Some scholars even suppose that Midas made dedications in other Greek sanctuaries where Phrygian objects were found.

We have no way of knowing who the dedicators at these sanctuaries were, as no inscribed belt has been found, but the concentration of
Phrygian belts and fibulae in East Greek sanctuaries is impressive. The choice of Phrygian objects, imports or imitations, strongly suggest a relation with a goddess of rather Anatolian nature. Artemis is the best Greek ‘translation’ of the Anatolian Mother-Goddess. Most probably both men and women dedicated these objects in Greek sanctuaries.\(^9\) The Greek imitations show that it was not only foreigners who visited the sanctuaries.

It is difficult to answer the question whether these bronze belts were worn in every-day life. Some of them bear traces of repair,\(^94\) thus suggesting that they were either regularly worn or used in recurrent ceremonial occasions. Some of them could have possibly been brand new when laid in the grave. This might have been the case with the three belts in Tumulus P at Gordion, as their catch-plates are firmly attached to the bronze band and offer very few options for adjustment of the length of the belt. Thus, they would have been difficult for a frequent use.

Certain influence of the shape of some of the Neo-Assyrian belts on the Phrygian ones (possibly through the Neo-Hittite intermediaries in southeastern Anatolia) could be assumed. The fastening with a hook, a fibula-type belt buckle and a catch-plate with holes (and not simply a ring at the opposite side) is unique and obviously copied by the Greeks. Following the development of the Phrygian belts, it can be concluded that the Greeks accepted some of the later, more advanced shapes.\(^9\) The Greek inclusion of lion’s heads on the belts and the fibulae supports further their interpretation as associated with the Great Goddess. As it is well known, the Greek iconography of Kybele includes two lions flanking her throne, while these animals were only rarely depicted with the goddess in Phrygia.

Phrygian bronze belts can furnish one more piece of evidence for the Phrygian contribution to Greek art and cult. I would suggest that the Greeks were not just fascinated by exotic foreign accessories, but borrowed some major traits of Phrygian cult symbolism. Phrygian objects and their imitations in Greek sanctuaries betray the Greek way of adaptation of an old Anatolian/Phrygian cult of the Great Goddess.

NOTES

3 A total of 16 inventory numbers, listed in Kohler 1995: 209.
5 Young 1981: TumP 34–36.
6 Young 1981: TumMM 170–180. The finding spot and the size of the nine studded discs and plaques can open again the discussion on their interpretation as belts. The tenth one has another type of buckle and was found on the skeleton.
9 Only one of these originates from a Phrygian urn burial, while the other pieces are unstratified; probably, they also once belonged to grave goods: Boehmer 1979: 7, Taf. 5–6.
11 Caner 1983: G22a–d, Taf. 81.
12 Barnett 1972: 173, Fig. 13; Caner 1983: 199.
15 Calmeyer 1971: 690.
16 For example: Moorey 1967: 84; Seeher 1999: 75–78, there is still a discussion who is represented in this relief; Seeher supposes that it could be Sarrumma, the tutelary god of king Tudhaliya IV.
17 Hogarth 1914: Pi. B.7; Akurgal 1949: 35, Taf XLVIIa. It was previously thought that Yariris was a king and Kaanans’ father. Further research revealed that he was his regent and guardian. J. D. Hawkins dates their works in the late 9th and in the first half of the 8th century BC: Hawkins 2000: 78; Orthmann 2002: 278: first half of the 8th century BC.
20 Hrouda 1965: 47–48, Taf. 7, 20–23; Calmeyer 1971:
Calmeyer 1971: 691.


The rule of Warpalawa is dated c. 738–709: Hawkins 2000a: 429; Muscarella 1967: 83–84; Boehmer 1973: 150–156, the fibula, the belt and the dress are considered Phrygian and a royal gift.

It is dated to the late 7th century BC, or c. 630: Boardman 1978: Fig. 49, dated to the same late 7th century BC; Kopeke 1967: Beilage 45 and on other wooden statuettes from Samos: passim.

It is dated to the late 3rd century BC, or c. 630: Boardman 1978: Fig. 49, dated to the same late 7th century BC; Kopeke 1967: Beilage 45 and on other wooden statuettes from Samos: passim.


Only five teeth were found in the burial chamber: Young 1981: 7, 9; Kohler 1981: 239; Simpson, Spyridowicz 1999: 32, 63; Muscarella 1999: 4.


Özgüç, Akok 1947: 63–69, 70–77, seven spearheads were found among the grave goods, thus a man was supposed; Akkay 1992.


Most recently: Roller 1999: 72–75, Figs. 7–10; Berndt-Ersöz 2003: 146–149.


Boardman 1961/1962; Osborne suggest that the votive at the Harbour Sanctuary display celebration of female sensuality compared to the ‘civic’ cult on the acropolis: Osborne 2004: 5.


Donder 2002: 3; Senff 2003.


Hom. II. 11. 236–237, this is the only occurrence of a silver belt in The Iliad: Bennett 1997: 48, the author compares these verses with the silver belt from Tumulus D in Bayindir.

Hom. II. 10. 77–79; 6.219–220.

The bright "vermilion" color of the belt in Tumulus W in Gordion is emphasized by Young 1981: 208, comments in Bennett 1997: 50.


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