

# Luristan Collector

## What We Learn from Pin Heads

Illustration

This module serves to collect pictures of Luristan items or other pieces of information that I run across while working on the Hyperscript. I might eventually put them in the context of the existent module but until such a time occurs, I just give brief explanations here. I'm especially interested in anything that possibly provides some more material for my [new view](#) of the meaning of the Luristan "Master of Animal" (MoA), or better **Master of Gods**, bronzes.

Bruno Overleat, who does not believe in my interpretation, advised me to look at the pins from **Surrkh Dum** and see what I could make of them. Surrkh Dum was a place where early archaeological excavations took place, refer to [this article](#) or to [Muscarella's book](#) (on p. 122) for details.

Unfortunately I could not find pictures of "good" bronze pins from Surrkh Dum, just small and mostly heavily damaged / corrode stuff so I looked for pins in general. Pins, together with horse bits and to some extent jewelry, are the other types of bronze objects parallel to the MoA figures. I was aware of that but had no reason to look at the iconography closely before I had my epiphany. So let's look at pins in general

After a quick search of the Internet, I realized that one could classify pins as follows:

1. Pins showing some specific scene relating to the MoA iconography
2. Pins showing something else, often as singular objects.

Let's start with an example of the second type:



Woman giving birth. A fertility symbol (?)

Source: Louvre, Paris

This is (of course) seen as a fertility symbol in classical interpretations. Well, "a symbol is something that represents something else by association, resemblance or convention, especially a material object used to represent something invisible". as we [learned long ago](#).

There is not much that is invisible here. I would, for example, consider the graffiti on the left to be a fertility symbol. It is also the sign for "woman" in [early cuneiform](#), an apparently easy to read script..

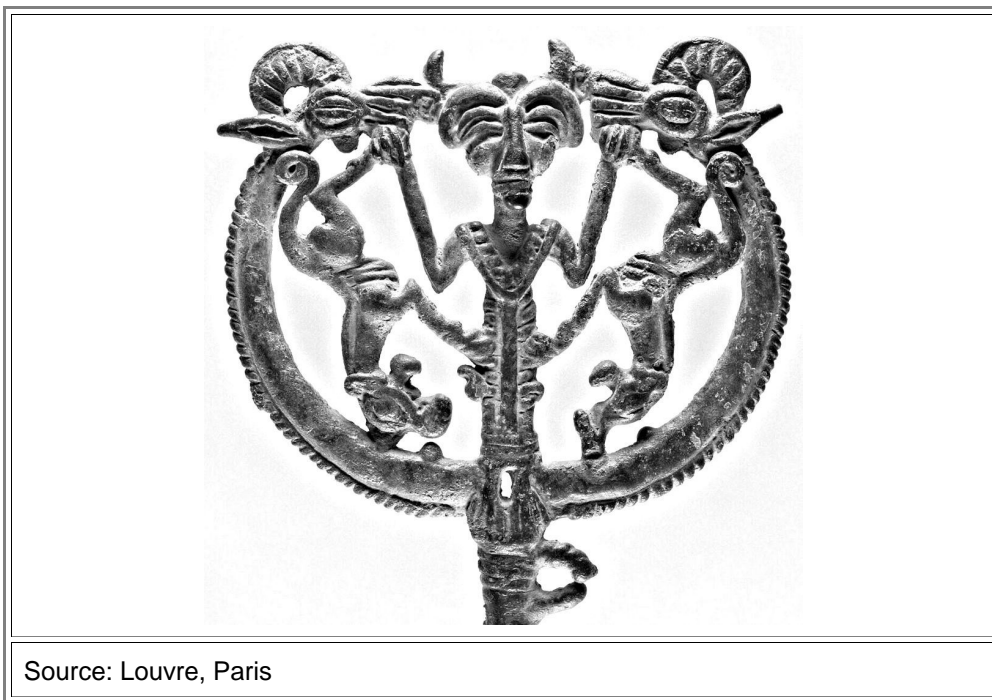
The needle might be just a fertility symbol with no deeper meaning. Or it might be something else; we will probably never know for sure. Can I interpret it within my hypothesis? Certainly. Assuming that the Luristan bronzes show parts of the then prevailing Luristan creation myth, we might witness the special moment when humans were created by the final gang of godheads in the natural way. No more coming into existence by breathing life into a clay figure (Adam), by coming out of the stomach ("rib") of Adam (Eve), by hatching from the eggs Leda laid after her encounter with Zeus (e.g. Helena), or by escaping the head of Zeus (Athena). That's behind us. The pin shows how some goddess gives a regular birth to a human (possibly also a god or demigod). The birth-giving goddess is flanked by two

animals, probably Ibexes, certainly not the MoA “dragons”. The way the goddess is shown, while still very “Luristan”, is quite different from the rendering of the MoA.

And so on. But before I get too deeply into fancy speculations, let's look at the mainstream kind of needle.

Here is a first example. It allows to start a list of similarities and differences to the MoA figures

1. We still have “animals” (=spirits, gods, demons...) breathing life into a humanoid (or biting his ears, whispering something into his ears, or ...)
2. The “animals” now include the ibex and not just “dragons”-
3. The central figure , the "master", is quite different from the classical MoA. Here it has horns and no “hat” and the facial structure is different. The figure also wears some kind of clothing.
4. There are more than 2 animals. Often we have two dragons shown “upside down”
5. Special symbols (“flowers”) appear (but not yet in the example below).



- The ibexes at the ears are rather stylized but easily identified by their horns and ears. Remember that we have [lots of Ibex figures](#) all by themselves, just as we have the “dragon “ figures. We must conclude that the Ibex symbolizes some god, spirit, demon,... just like the “dragons”. The snout of the Ibexes has a rather peculiar shape. One might just as well interpret the lined structure as an attempt to illustrate the “wind”, the breathing of life into the head of the guy.



- Similar to the one above but the horned guy does not have a body. The nature of the beasts he keeps at bay (barely!) is unclear. The hump on their heads might be horns / antlers



- Same as above, except here are no horns / antlers on the best(s). The heads of both types of animals are identical and highly stylized.



- A (happy) female (?) holding off the beasts. Three things are unusual: First, the beasts have ibex horns and highly stylized heads. Second, there seems to be another head at the base of the pin head.. Third, snake-like beasts (heads on the ring) are also going for the humanoid's head.



Source: British museum

- A "master" has subdued the beasts. Should be "dragons (no horns)" but they have a muzzle instead of the usual toothy mouth.

For the "pinhead" pictures following, I will just give you my thoughts based on the list above.



**A pinhead with an (apparently) iron needle inserted**

Source: Alamy; no dirties given

- Horned guy, dressed and with head wear (?). Four "regular" dragons, one set upside down. The ear nuzzling animal has the same head as the "dragons" but the body of a snake (?). The master holds the ear suckers but does not keep some at a distance. Rather strange.



Source: Pinterest; no details given

- Quite similar to the one above except that the horned guy here keeps the “dragon – snake” at a distance.



Source: Pinterest; no details given.

- Dressed humanoid, no horns, possibly female. “Dragons” have the ears ad a snake-like being with a muzzle does something on the head. The humanoid's arms are strange and tickling the bellies of the beasts (?). Strange but there is an obsession with deity-animals breathing down the neck or somewhere of humanoids.



Source: Pinterest; no details given

A horned female in a kind of mini skirt holds to highly stylized "dragons" at bay that are going for her ears. Almost a classical "Master of Animals. Here we encounter the symbols mentioned above in the form of discs made by concentric rings. What they mean is unclear. However, the heads of the "dragons" (and the tails) are highly stylized and quite similar to the discs. So the concentric rings symbol might mean "dragons"? The frame of the pin head is adorned with horned animal heads. One would guess at bulls heads but we might have Ibexes here



Source: Harvard Museum

- A two-tier pinhead showing two “chapters” of the creation myth (I posit!). The lower part shows the well-known MoA or what I have called “victim of animals. According to my hypothesis we see the creation of a humanoid by (dragon) gods, spiritual beings etc. breathing life into a clay figure, The upper tier is quite unusual since it shows *three* humanoids, two of which are riding on the dragons. The humanoids are looking serene and are obviously in command of the beasts. The lower part of the upper tier is actually quite similar to the lower tier except that the humanoid has been replaced by a disc-like symbol on which the central guy is standing. This is the second disc symbol we encounter.

Next I present pin heads featuring Ibexes and related symbols.



- We have a female humanoid, showing not only breasts (as usual) but also a vulva. She holds the fore-feet of the dragons. The beasts are unusual since they don't feature the usual toothy maw of the dragons but the muzzle of the ibexes. Disc symbols with concentric rings appear and the lower body of the female seems to feature ibex horns instead of legs. The ripped extensions from below the breast of the female to the beasts are unclear (to me).



- A humanoid with huge Ibex horns has completely subdued the (upside-down) beasts. Disc symbols appear. Rather strange.



- A female (?) humanoid with (donkey) ears and huge Ibex horns. The “Ibex goddess”? The beasts are not going for his head ears but are facing away from the humanoids, a rather unique feature. Many disc symbols.



- Similar to the ones above; beasts facing outwards. The humanoid now is upside-down symmetrical with Ibex horns on top and bottom. No disc symbols, though.





● Another variation of the styles seen above.

▣ Finally, another rather unusual one. A horned humanoid with two ibexes going for his head / ears. The humanoid is not fending off the animals with his arms but holding up two rings (or curls of her hairdo?).



## What Does it All Mean?

### The "Animals"

For starters, we have two kinds of special animals. They appear quite frequently by themselves, no humanoids attached. [This link](#) provides for many examples. The two animals we call "dragon" and "Ibex". The dragon one is definitely not a real animal, the Ibex is, at least in many if not all renditions. Here are typical examples from my [collections](#) .



Left / middle we have the dragon and the Ibex in full splendor. On the right we have one half of an Ibex with a humanoid head. It is not a human head because it still has Ibex ears. This is one of some Ibexes with some supernatural attributes.

What do these animals signify? Well, the dragon for sure is an imaginary being. That can only mean that it symbolizes some mythological entity. A spirit, a demon, a god or a demigod,... Take your pick. Is this speculation or "the truth"? Well, some speculation is unavoidable at this point. After all, the old Luristan might have been visited by aliens from outer space that happened to look like dragons, and that is what they illustrated. I hope you find that just as unlikely as I do but it is not entirely impossible. We are talking probabilities here. The "animals = god" hypothesis is just far more likely than the alien hypothesis.

I will use the denomination "god" from now on, leaving open what kind exactly we might have. Substitute spirit, demon, whatever you like, but we must agree that we look at something supernatural.

What about the Ibex? I'm rather sure that it symbolizes a god too. Why should the old Luristan make all these finials of Ibexes if all the show is an Ibex? The humanoid one also points in this direction. The way the Ibex appears on the pin heads, finally leaves no doubt about its mystic significance. So we equate have Ibex = god.

### The "Humanoids"

In the center of almost all finials / pin heads we have one or more humanoid heads, sometimes with parts of a body attached. Some of those heads may actually portray a real human, but many if not most do not. Look at the tiny selection below and my comments. They and plenty more can be found [here](#) or [here](#).



An example of the (mostly) single head on the what I called "victims of animals" finials. The animal is almost always the dragon god, and it seems to bite into his earlobes. The nose and the ears are far too large for a human head. The guy is in pain or not yet with it. May or may not wear a hat



A typical "master of animals" finial with a head on top and a second head in the middle of the sculpture. The top head has the oversized nose but rings for earlobes. The guy smirks and feels obviously in control. The middle head is stylistically rather different from the top one. The top head always wears some kind of hat



A type of head never found on a finial but on pin heads. Elaborate hairdo or wearing a wig. Ears not recognizable



A female head with horns. Horned heads are never found on "classical" finials. They obviously are not human heads

I will not claim that there are different classes of heads, depicting different being from a selection of godheads and humans. Artistic freedom and conventions over a time span of many centuries can produce quite different renderings of the same thing, after all. I'm convinced, however, that most of these heads depict humanoid gods up to the final level of perfectly human god. Many old religions have an evolution of the god figures form mystic forces shown as mystic animals (or mountains, trees) to humanoid figures. One major religion still prominent nowadays makes a big deal about the son of a (humanoid) god being truly human.

All in all I do believe that the evidence for non-human and thus humanoid heads is convincing. That does not rule out that the person the artist had in mind was actually quite human. Mighty rulers (like the Pharaohs in Egypt) were quite human but revered as God by their subjects. For the art work we are considering here, it is only important what the artist *believed* he was sculpting; objective reality had nothing to do with it,.

### The Actions

We may classify four typical actions displayed in the bronzes:

1. None. That is true for all the pure animal finials. They are static even so the animals look like being up to something.
2. The dragon-god animals doing something with the head of the humanoid. That is true for what I called the "victim of animals" finials.
3. Humanoids "mastering" the dragon-god animals. That covers the top part of the typical "master of animals" finials
4. What is left are Ibexes doing something, mixtures of the above, and new things like giving birth.

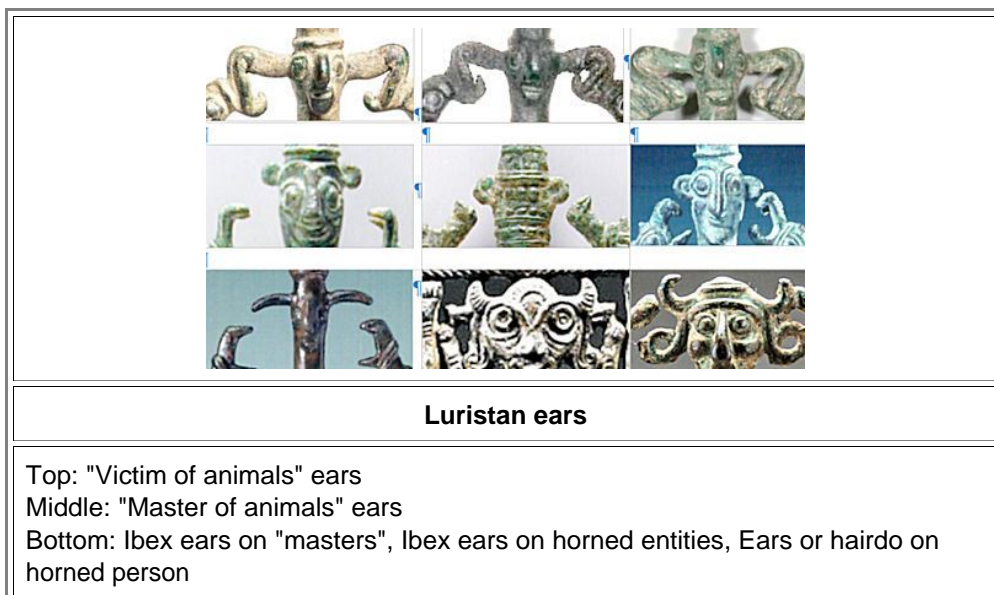
Let's look a bit more closely at these points.

1. The animals only" sculptures are made in the style of the victim / master of animal. Just insert a person in the center and there you are. The animals are quite obviously intent on doing something but the receiver of their attentions is missing. We know, of course, from all the other finials that this missing part is a humanoid head. So why did the Luristan artists of old make a kind of unfinished sculpture? We can only speculate. Maybe people recognized it anyway for what it symbolized? There are are many pure crosses around in Christianity besides the ones with Jesus nailed to it and everybody knows what it means. Same effect for less money. Maybe they were used for a ritual and some token from some (sick?) person was put in the space between the mouth of the animals, to regain health or be blessed?

We shall never know for sure.

It is also quite curious that we have dragons and ibex pair sculptures in comparable numbers while we find (almost) exclusively dragons on victims / master finials. The two animal gods are thus obviously not interchangeable but confined to certain jobs and areas of influence / responsibility. Look at the Egyptian or Greek ensemble of gods to get the idea.

2. There are many "victim of animals" finials; a collection can be found [here](#). The straight-forward interpretation is that the humanoid is attacked by the dragon-god. It's vicious moth with large teeth is open and clearly goes for the ears of the person. The ears are very unlike human ears (or Ibex-like ears found on some humanoids heads see below) They are also unlike the ears found on the master of animals which typically re depicted as rings. Here are some examples taken at random form the collections in this script:



I think it is obvious that these ears are symbols for something else. They huge elongated ears on the “victim” might just be symbolizing real ears to emphasize the attack of the dragon god for humanoid flesh. Then they might symbolize the breath coming out of the dragons gods mouth. The ring-like ears of the “master” may demonstrate that ears are orifices to the body, suitable for getting the breath of life inside. Or they symbolize something else. Heads with Ibex ears might show that we look at the Ibex-god in its humanoid manifestation or some minor god beholding to him (or her?).

One more point needs to be made. If the finial shows nothing more but a humanoid being attacked by some vicious mystic being, you don’t need exaggerated ears. Just showing a normal head between the maws of the beast would certainly make the point.

We have the “ears” covered. But what, exactly is the dragon-god doing? Biting into the ears? Breathing life into the humanoid figure through the ears? Telling the humanoid the joke about the rabbi and the priest? Or telling him what to do and what not to do? Come to think of it, the latter almost automatically goes with the “breathing life into...” interpretation. No god so far has created humans without some ulterior motive. The bible is quite clear about this,. God wanted somebody to praise and admire him, to singe hymns him to him and to be totally beholden to him. A sycophant, in other words, or an intelligent but domesticated pet. Not somebody who eats from the tree of knowledge. God wanted a nincompoo and not a physicist.

3. The major action displayed in the top part of the “master” finials is the subjugation of the dragon god by the humanoid. There is no doubt about that. It also goes with all the other “Master of Animals” found almost everywhere in the antique world, use [this link](#) for a review.

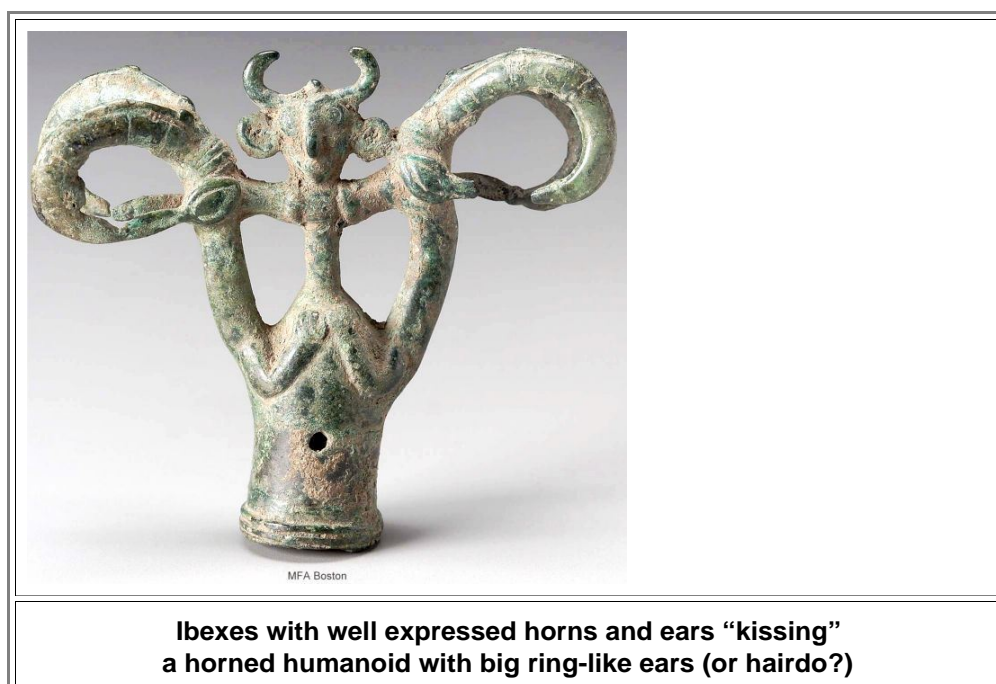
However, the denomination “master of animals” in the Luristan case is a misnomer. It should be at least “Master of Demons” or, to make it as strong as possible. “Master of God”. And why not? Rebelling against god was common place in antiquity. Mostly the humanoids or humans lost the first round (e.g. Prometheus or Eve) but they survived and did well on the long run. I’m Eve’s son after all, and I am a lot more powerful than the God who created Eve but could not, for ample, win in a battle where the opponent used [chariots of iron](#).

No actions seem to take place in the lower part of the "Master" finials.

4. What other actions do we have? Scrolling through the pictures in this module we find:

- A woman (Goddess?) giving birth to a human with relatively normal if somewhat ring-like ears. She is flanked by non-aggressive Ibexes
- A humanoid with thoroughly defeated dragon-gods (holding then upside-down) but with Ibexes doing something to his / her ears or head.
- Two animals (Ibex and dragon on snake-like body) doing something to humanoids ears / ears.
- Humanoids with Ibex horns doing something (in particular keeping dragons at bay).

Note that we have pretty much no Ibexes with the finials, but lots of them with the pin heads. Note also that in some of the pin heads the Ibexes do something with the ears / head of the humanoid. After you noted all that, note in particular that the Ibexes are certainly not doing anything aggressive, like biting into the ears of the humanoid. Ibexes don’t bite, they crush you with their horns. And indeed, the snout of the Ibexes are not full of big teeth but are rather harmless muzzles. Not suitable to bite you but rather to kiss you or to blow breath into you. And that is what one can see with some of the sculptures, here is a particular interesting example:



- Those Ibexes are not biting the horned and ring-eared humanoid, they are rather kissing it. And they are not going for the ears but for the neck in this case. Taking into account what they do with their arms, one can't help but perceive that they "pulling out" the humanoid from the "deep".

▀ We have another sculpture quite similar but more elaborate:



- We have fully expressed horned female with a hairdo featuring curls (?) and wearing a skirt. She is obviously pregnant with what looks like a girl. Ibex heads on a snake-like body are nudging her hands, while a second set of fully expressed ibexes nudge the throats of the other Ibexes. What does it mean? Maybe the Lady is about to give birth and is helped by the Ibex-god? Once more we might be seeing an episode in the creation of humans.

▀ We also have a similar sculpture with dragons:

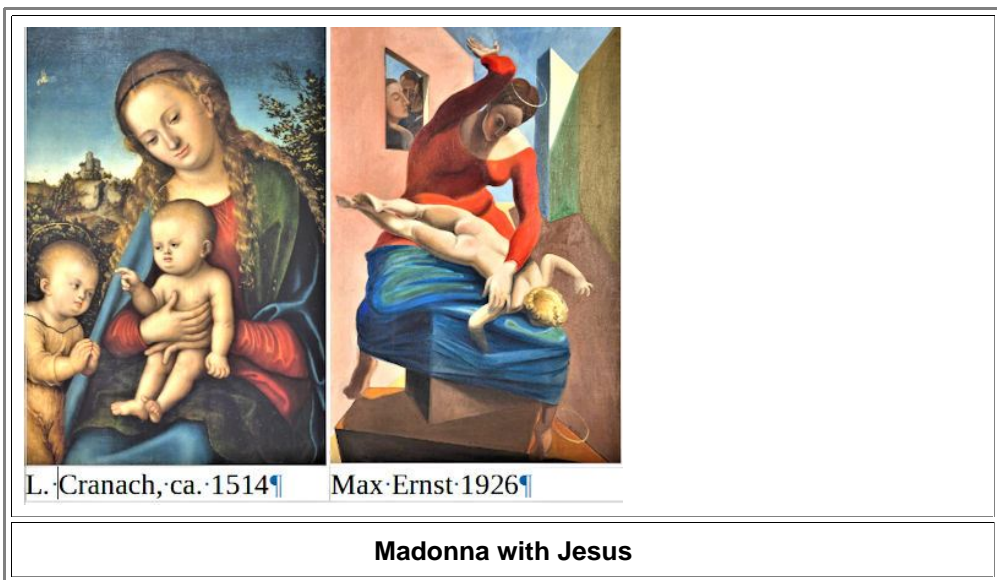


Dragons doing what?

- Quite definitely the same kind of humanoid head. Also quite definitely no aggression the part of the dragons. What are they doing? Guess yourself.

### Chicken, Symbols and Whatnot

- ▶ The chicken heads are very prominent on the fully expressed master of animal finials. They are absent from the “victim” finials and also form the early “master sculptures. Pin heads, horse bits, jewelry and all the other Luristan bronzes also never show the chicken. We must note that chicken heads almost always come together with a central head, sort of at the belly of the top master figure. That probably means something. I’m not aware of any convincing explanation for the meaning of the chicken heads. In my speculation they symbolize domestication. Either the humanoid god domesticated the animal world, or the humanoid got domesticated by his creator, an animal-god. I discussed this already at some detail [here](#). I’m leaning towards the second interpretation since only a domesticated human(oid), and only an Eve, forbidden to figure out how to avoid being pregnant all the time by eating the apple, had good reasons to rebel and to eventually become the master of her god. Same for the humans created in the Babylonian myth “[Enuma Elish](#)” They were created to serve the gods as slaves, doing the dirty work. However, your speculation might be as good as mine; I just don’t know it.
- ▶ Besides the chicken heads exclusively on the fully developed “master” finials, we have:
  - Variations on the bottom part of finials, depicting the bottom part of a dragon or other animals.
  - More than one master piled on top of each other for some finials.
  - Disc shaped symbols for something on pin heads (almost never on finials).
  - Pieces of clothing or belts on the humanoids or animals- Variations of the base of the finials
- Parts of these variations of a theme might just be due to artistic freedom or changes of the prevalent taste during the centuries. Luristan bronzes have been made for more than 400 years (1200 BC – 800 BC) and how much the style can change in 400 years is shown by the picture below.



Finally, three last peculiar feature of the Luristan bronzes should be mentioned:

- While the general style of Luristan bronzes is specific enough to be immediately recognizable, certain expressions are specific to certain objects. Chicken heads only occur on finials, Ibexes never are seen on finials, and so on. This statement holds for all bronzes (i.e. the horst bits, the jewelry, ...) and the iron mask swords.
- The typical Luristan bronze objects are distinctly different from the stuff in neighboring cultures.
- Luristan bronzes (and iron mask swords) were never found outside Luristan. Considering their beauty and uniqueness, this is rather strange, in particular since recent digs in [Saruq al-Hadid](#) (Dibai) showed that Luristan weapons were exported south over large distances.

The Luristan bronzes and stuff are still a big mystery, a might thorn in the backside of archaeology. I do believe that there systematic study might produce some rewards. I also believe that my amateurish efforts here might hold a kernel of truth here or there. I do not believe that all of my rumblings are true, though. As ever so often in archaeology and history, new insights will have to await new discoveries. As long as political situation is what it is, it si not likely that we will see that any time soon.